

# The Influence of Digital Communication Technology on University Branding: An Understanding of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) from Students' Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning (ODL) refers to flexible educational opportunities regarding access and various knowledge acquisition methods. In the era of digital communication technologies, ODL offers flexible, self-directed learning techniques and comprehensive and engaging learning content. Most students at the Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) Universiti Utara Malaysia are working adults, meaning students would have to balance their employment and studies. It is a competitive industry, with each institution endeavouring to provide exceptional services to its stakeholders. The objectives of our study are 1) to understand students' perceptions of PACE, particularly in ODL, and 2) to explore the motivation for students' value co-creation, particularly in ODL. This study employed a qualitative method approach, namely, focus group discussions. The informants were current students from various learning centres (e.g., UUM Sintok, KL, JB, etc.). Our findings discovered four main themes for the perception of ODL students: communication engagement, service-dominant mindset, student experience, and knowledge sharing. Meanwhile, the motivation for students' value co-creation in ODL is mainly because of attitude, active participants, facilities, satisfaction, brand loyalty and brand image. Our study provides some insights into value co-creation and how to position PACE's reputation in the minds of its stakeholders. As such, our findings were significant for PACE to communicate its corporate branding, and students may be more inclined to study at the university.

**Keywords:** *Open and Distance Learning (ODL), digital communication technology, university branding, distant learning students, Malaysia.*

## INTRODUCTION

Education 4.0 (EDU 4.0) is a new paradigm in academia and universities, aligning with the demands of "Industry 4.0," the fourth industrial revolution. It focuses on digital technologies, personalised data, open-sourced content, and global connectivity. This approach revolutionises learning, covering childhood schooling, continuous workplace learning, and improving the overall quality of life. Unlike traditional classroom-bound learning, EDU 4.0 offers ubiquitous learning accessible from anywhere with an internet connection.

Previous studies have highlighted the positive impact of digital communication technology on teaching and learning. Rahimi, van den Berg, and Veen (2015) posit that digital technology empowers students to engage in cognitive activities by creating personalised learning environments and fostering greater autonomy throughout the learning process. Licorish, Owen, Daniel, and George (2018) further emphasise the ability of digital technology to enhance motivation, engagement, and classroom dynamics through real-time performance feedback and adaptive teaching strategies. However, Cochrane (2014) underscores the need for extensive technical and pedagogical support to integrate digital technology effectively for educators and students. Heinonen and Strandvik (2021) argue that education innovations, particularly online learning, are crucial service innovations in the post-COVID-19 era.

Open and distance learning (ODL) offers flexible educational opportunities with diverse knowledge acquisition methods. It promotes self-directed learning techniques, flexibility, and comprehensive, engaging learning content. Numerous higher education institutions in Malaysia, including Open University Malaysia (OUM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), offer ODL programs. Typically, universities develop a 'teaching and learning' platform, self-instructional materials (SIMs), and a student support system for ODL programs. However, student support systems for ODL programs in most public universities are often inadequately defined and addressed, leading to ineffective handling of student issues and complaints.

The Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) caters primarily to working adults, requiring students to balance employment and studies. Institutions strive to provide exceptional services to their stakeholders in this competitive industry. Our study examines how PACE can embrace digital communication technology and transform teaching and learning from conventional methods to future-oriented approaches like ODL. Our objectives are twofold: 1) to understand stakeholders' perceptions of PACE, particularly in ODL, and 2) to explore the motivation for stakeholder value co-creation in ODL.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Open and Distance Learning (ODL)*

Education 4.0 (Edu 4.0) has changed the teaching and learning landscape. Nowadays, education focuses more on the use of technology. Several research studies have shown that in the future, education will evolve to rely more heavily on digital communication technologies (Bonfield, Salter, Longmuir, Benson, & Adachi, 2020; Mukul & Büyüközkan, 2023). Teaching and learning activities use more digital communication tools than before (Adziz & Ismail, 2023; Ishak & Mansor, 2020). Open and distance learning (ODL) is one of the digital communication technology platforms in teaching and learning, as well as communication between educators and students. ODL can be defined as “*any learning activities within formal, informal, and non-formal domains that are facilitated by information and communication technologies to lessen distance, both physically and psychologically, and to increase interactivity and communication among learners, learning sources and facilitators*” (Bozkurt, 2019, p. 267).

Most of Malaysia's public universities are advancing the development of undergraduate and graduate ODL programmes. However, without an appropriate student assistance service, offering solid and complete online platforms to assist in synchronisation

and synchronisation teaching and learning in the ODL environment is insufficient. It reflects the evolution of technology. Communication between educators and students needs to employ digital communication technologies and technology development (Mohamad et al., 2018; Bonfield et al., 2020; Loh et al., 2023). The quality of support services has a direct influence on student engagement and academic success, especially for students with special needs is the quality of the support services (Genc & Kocdar, 2020). Besides, all Malaysian higher education institutions are required by MQA to provide several relevant remedial assistance services, including technical online platform features, to assist ODL students (Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), 2019). Hence, it is essential to understand how communication using ODL influence students' teaching and learning process.

### *Digital Communication Technology and Student Engagement*

COVID-19 has compelled educators and students to embrace digital communication technologies in teaching and learning. Samat, Awang, Hussin, and Nawi (2020) noted that many universities turned to digital tech as part of government initiatives during the pandemic. However, challenges like limited university support and internet issues, especially in developing countries, were identified in other studies (Aboagye, Yawson, & Appiah, 2021; Ag-Ahmad, 2020; Samat et al., 2020). Several studies have highlighted the benefits of digital communication technology in education. For instance, Web 2.0 tools like Kahoot and Mentimeter increased student engagement, particularly among digital natives (Saidon, Abu Bakar, Sharipudin, & Zainal, 2021). Dollinger, Cox, Eaton, Vanderlelie, and Ridsdale (2020) found students had a positive attitude toward online learning platforms, deeming them suitable for diverse generations.

Despite the pros and cons of online education, differing opinions exist. Bali and Liu (2018) emphasised online education's practicality and cost-effectiveness, extending access to more students. Universities are encouraged to offer training, workshops, and streamlined digital communication platforms for teaching and learning (Chung, Subramaniam, & Dass, 2020). Moreover, universities should enhance online learning platforms, offering more advanced options like flipped classrooms and learning management systems (LMS) (Ilias, Baidi, Ghani, & Razali, 2020). In light of these considerations, our research aims to encourage PACE's stakeholders, including students, to embrace ODL as part of their communication platforms for teaching and learning.

### *Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) and Co-creation*

In marketing research, service-dominant logic (S-D logic) is an essential perspective that provides a service-based interpretation of exchange (Kamboj, 2019; Pires et al., 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). S-D logic emphasises service as the primary goal of exchange and offers a theoretical framework for understanding how businesses, consumers, and other stakeholders co-create value through service interactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Value co-creation is coordinated through firm-initiated communication and interaction with consumers to drive consumers' intention to create value for brands (Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger, Leung, & Sharipudin, 2021; Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger, Leung, & Ting, 2021).

The core idea of S-D logic suggests that customers co-create value with the organisation as active participants and collaborative partners in relational exchanges (Grönroos, 2008; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008). This involves customers expressing their experiences and opinions on brands and offerings, providing

feedback to companies for improvement and participating in product development processes (Heinonen et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2015; Tajvidi et al., 2021). Consequently, S-D logic positions customers as value co-creators and implementers of value creation with brands (Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019; Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Organisations can benefit from a co-creation strategy that necessitates an organization-wide, service-dominant mindset, including establishing a new reference frame of value (i.e., human experience) centred on co-creation. This reference frame favours collaborative, dynamic, contextual, and fruitful human interactions facilitated through engagement platforms. This approach generates reciprocal value through productive and meaningful encounters.

This study aims to identify the factors and process dynamics of value co-creation in the context of higher education services, particularly in ODL. Partnerships in service businesses such as hotels, institutions, associations, and universities are highly relevant. Based on the above discussion, we employed S-D Logic as an umbrella theory to understand stakeholders' perceptions of PACE and how stakeholder value co-creation may enhance perceptions (e.g., brand image, attitude, satisfaction, and loyalty), particularly in ODL.

## METHODOLOGY

In this section, we discussed the methodology applied to collect the data for this study. Traditionally, research methodologies have been divided into qualitative and quantitative categories, resulting in a significant gap among researchers, particularly in the social sciences (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Quantitative research aims to determine how much of anything there is. It's a term that refers to items with a numerical value, whereas qualitative research investigates how people feel or think about a particular topic or institution. Our study employed qualitative research to accomplish the research objectives. It could be argued that qualitative research allows for a detailed description and analysis of a research topic without limiting the scope of the study or the types of replies provided by participants (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

Our study applied focus group discussion (FGD) for data collection. In general, we drafted the questions beforehand. Then, additional investigation was carried out by asking other connected questions to investigate more in-depth information and for researchers to cover study objectives related to data. Besides, the flexibility of this approach allows for the discovery or development of material that is essential to participants but may have yet to be considered relevant by the researchers earlier, especially when contrasted to organised interviews (Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, our research employed a qualitative focus group discussion (FGD) method.

### *Data Analysis Method*

Data analysis is a critical aspect of qualitative research, involving systematically examining and interpreting qualitative data to derive meaningful insights and conclusions (Saldana, 2013). It entails identifying patterns, themes, and relationships in the data pertinent to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In qualitative research, data analysis is often an iterative and interactive process that facilitates a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

This study employed thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data collected from the research participants. Thematic analysis is a method that involves identifying and examining patterns and themes within qualitative data. It consists of categorising and coding the data into themes, sub-themes, and patterns, then synthesising these themes and patterns to uncover the underlying meaning and significance of the data (Saldana, 2013). Thematic analysis is frequently used in qualitative research involving fewer participants, allowing for more in-depth data exploration.

The outcome of thematic analysis is a rich and detailed picture of the experiences, perspectives, and phenomena being studied. It can be used to generate new knowledge and understanding about a particular phenomenon and explore and understand the experiences of individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis is deemed the most suitable data analysis method for this research.

#### *Focus Group Discussion (FGD).*

The primary qualitative data serve to conceptually frame relevant constructs for evaluating the theoretical research framework and proposed hypotheses, ensuring measurement scale validity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with informants from organisations involved in distance learning or adult student education. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are a qualitative research method for gathering data through group interactions. They involve a small group of participants with shared characteristics engaging in structured discussions to explore their experiences, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs on specific topics. FGDs are particularly valuable for exploring complex or sensitive subjects where group dynamics may influence individual perspectives.

To conduct an FGD, we recruited informants meeting inclusion criteria, ensured a clear understanding of the study's purpose, and employed structured discussions with predetermined questions. Informants were encouraged to freely share their thoughts and experiences, with equal speaking opportunities. Techniques like probes, prompts, and follow-up questions were used to clarify and expand on responses. We employed purposive sampling to address the research questions, selecting informants from organisations involved in distance learning or adult student education. Data from FGDs were qualitatively analysed, yielding rich insights into participants' experiences and perspectives.

The selection of informants was pertinent to compare the differences in practice among organisations with varying objectives and stakeholders. Henceforth, the data would provide varied frames of reference and units of analysis in approaching the same issue. The informants related to PACE's nature of business, and it intends to cater from an organisational perspective. The informants were recruited and approached through the use of networking by the study's researchers. Regarding FGDs, the informants were current students from various learning centres (e.g., UUM Sintok, KL, JB, etc.) and potential students. This study involves structured questions and brainstorming activities among the informants. Meanwhile, the sampling evolved through snowballing and gathered informants with the necessary criteria as the researchers added sampling based on the data at hand (Foley et al., 2021).

During the conversations, the informants shared their backgrounds, interests, work, and organisation affiliation, offering valuable insights into value co-creation in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The session began with an overview of participants' backgrounds, interests, careers, and organisational involvement, following McCracken's (1988) recommendation to foster a comfortable environment for fruitful responses. All informants

provided insights into ODL and their experiences. Interviews were recorded in .mp4 format using smartphones and transcribed in Microsoft Word. Due to the predominantly Malay content, materials were initially coded, and selected nodes were translated to English during data analysis. We followed the logical flow of issues discussed in the research background and literature review. We reviewed each transcript for relevance to stakeholders' perceptions of ODL and motivations for stakeholder value co-creation. After data collection, we comprehensively reviewed recordings and articles based on specific terms to explore the topic further. Coding frames were structured around themes identified during analysis. Data analysis utilised ATLAS.ti9 software to examine common findings and visualise themes. The research focused on macro-level structures and events, interpreting data in the context of cultural meanings and studies, unveiling new perspectives. Key topics were derived from the literature, and interview content was structured to varying degrees. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyse, and report spoken conversation patterns and organise and describe the data. Emergent codes were integrated into the coding frames, with researchers' observations confirmed and refined during each coding session.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study follows the research background and literature review. After data collection, transcripts are reviewed for relevance to (a) stakeholders' ODL perceptions and (b) motivations for stakeholder value co-creation. Following data collection, each transcript is carefully examined using keywords for a thorough exploration. Data is categorised using coding frames derived from analysed themes. ATLAS.ti software is employed for in-depth analysis, organising information, using "Queries" to identify trends and a unique "Networking Map" for summarisation. The study constructs an inductive thematic structure for presenting findings. The interpretive analysis explores macro-level experiences and structures, relating data to cultural definitions, identifying constructs among texts, and revealing new insights to address thesis issues. Three focus group discussions with 15 participants adhered to the recommended sample size guidelines (Francis et al., 2010; Saunders et al., 2018). The informant list, referenced by assigned numbers and affiliations, is provided in Table 1 for study reference.

Table 1: List of Informants – Focus group discussions

<b>Focus Group A</b>	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Participant 3</b>	<b>Participant 4</b>	<b>Participant 5</b>	<b>Participant 6</b>
Informant ID	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
<b>Focus Group B</b>	<b>Participant 7</b>	<b>Participant 8</b>	<b>Participant 9</b>	<b>Participant 10</b>	<b>Participant 11</b>	
Informant ID	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	
<b>Focus Group C</b>	<b>Participant 12</b>	<b>Participant 13</b>	<b>Participant 14</b>	<b>Participant 15</b>		
Informant ID	P12	P13	P14	P15		

Based on the existing literature, key themes were identified around which interviews were structured to varying degrees. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) in spoken conversations and organise the data. ATLAS.ti9, a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), was used to highlight

relevant concepts. Emergent codes were integrated into the coding frames, and the researcher's observations were confirmed and enhanced during each coding session. The following coding frames were developed for each research question in this study. To systematically organize the data and make sense of the analysis, the primary researcher listed the cumulative frequency of codes in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Cumulative frequency of codes – Perception towards ODL

No	Code	Frequency Percentage = n%
1	Customer Engagement	24.4%
2	Human experience	19.8%
3	Flexibility	14.7%
4	Relevancy	13.8%
5	Service-dominant mindset	12.9%
6	Knowledge sharing	12.9%
7	Affordance	3.4%

#### *Perception Towards ODL*

##### *a) Customer Engagement*

The study found the customer or student engagement was the most important theme on the perception of informants towards the ODL at 24.4% of the cumulative frequencies. Student engagement with their university is critically important for a variety of reasons. For P6, despite of learning via ODL, the informants believe that PACE needs to provide a support staff to engage the students.

In my opinion, in order to form a good connection between the university (PACE) and the students, PACE need to allocate a liaison officer who will not only respond after the occurrence of a problem but also know the progress of each lecture held and feedback if there are any recent changes before the lecture is conducted.... (P6)

A number of students experienced difficulties especially when dealing with PACE's staff. For instance,

Based on experience, it is easier to deal with lecturers than UUM itself. If the lecturer is from another institution, it is very difficult to get input. Cooperation between PACE is difficult to get feedback at an immediate rate. (P1)

Similarly, informant P12 agree the good relationship between both students and PACE is important to foster better relationship.

In my opinion, in order to form and maintain a good relationship between PACE and students is to provide better service and have good communication with the students, and know the needs and wishes of students... (P12)

The university's responsibility is to always make plans to ensure the welfare of students and the public. The university management should always strive to improve the quality of services and provide appropriate initiatives to face the challenges of the new norm environment... (P14)

Student engagement is vital for academic success, personal growth, career readiness, and university retention, especially during PACE's transition to an ODL system. Addressing these issues and fostering active student engagement with the university can optimize the college experience and pave the way for future success.

*b) Human Experience*

Human or student experience, accounting for 19.8% of cumulative frequencies, is a significant theme among informants. The university experience can vary based on factors like the institution, program of study, location, and individual goals. In the context of PACE, various factors influence the student experience, including the role of lecturers or instructors.

In my experience, the instructor has personally tried to solve various problems during the lecture and also information on important matters is obtained through the initiative of the students. (P10)

Meanwhile P3 stated that initiative and teaching skills were important to portray good student experience especially at PACE.

The atmosphere of university learning has actually started to be felt from the start of ODL studies again due to the initiative and teaching skills of the lecturers. (P3)

Another important factors that could lead to student experience was system capability at PACE. It could be argued that the capability of ODL system can vary widely depending on the specific platform, software, and technology being used.

Therefore, there is a need for an efficient system by PACE in providing smooth lectures to students so that the university's goal of producing great graduates can be implemented. (P3)

The ODL system should have to effectively deliver high-quality education to students. ODL system should also have robust communication tools to facilitate interaction between students, instructors, and peers. These might include email, instant messaging, discussion forums, video conferencing, and other collaboration tools.

My opinion is that the cooperation between PACE and students is a bit less responsive as my experience is that when you need some information it takes a bit of time... to maintain a good relationship the PACE needs to be effective in terms of disseminating information and speeding up the online response... (P5)



ODL system should also be able to deliver a wide range of multimedia content, including videos, interactive simulations, and other engaging materials. Hence, it will keep students engaged and motivated throughout the learning process.

I fully encourage learning through ODL because it is seen to be very effective in terms of time suitability and flexibility of learning for students who continue distance learning who are already working... it is certainly fun if you get the chance if you get the experience of studying at a university and it is easier to discuss. (P6)

If ODL is to be implemented, in my opinion a study period of 10 semesters is necessary and I suggest that ODL be complete but have the option of lectures at the university in the middle of the study period and the final semester of study to give experience and memories of studying at the university. (P2)

*c) Flexibility*

The majority of informants, 14.7% of cumulative frequencies, highlighted the importance of ODL's flexibility. It extends to scheduling, as many programs offer the option to start at various times during the year, allowing students to align their studies with their preferences, rather than being restricted by a fixed academic calendar.

For P5, the flexibility of ODL and students can come to university to experience university life in the middle of the study or final semester.

If ODL is to be implemented, in my opinion a study period of 10 semesters is necessary and I suggest that ODL be complete but have the option of lectures at the university in the middle of the study period and the final semester of study to give experience and memories of studying at the university. (P5)

Students have an opportunity to customise their teaching and learning. ODL allows students to choose from various courses and programs tailored to their individual interests and goals. This can help students create a more personalised learning experience that meets their unique needs and preferences. For P1 and P4, ODL is suitable for them since most students are working adult students and it is easy for them to juggle between study and work.

I fully encourage learning through ODL because it is seen to be very effective in terms of time suitability and flexibility of learning for students who continue distance learning who are already working... however, is certainly fun if you get the chance and the experience of studying at a university and it is easier to discuss. (P1)

The existing time period for ODL is seen as very practical where meetings are held once a month for 4 hours for each study. I support all studies conducted in ODL. (P4)

ODL also allow students to access course materials, lectures, and other resources from anywhere with an internet connection. This means that students can study from home, at work, or while travelling, giving them the flexibility to fit their studies into their daily routine.

Ideally, ODL should be fully implemented as most students have work constraints that cannot be avoided. So, it is quite difficult for the student to do a physical visit to the university. In addition, the location of the main campus is quite far from other campuses. (P2)

In line with the development of technology, in order to make it easier and a win-win situation for both the public and students, online learning is very useful and flexible, from a cost-effective point of view, and reduce the expenses for students as well as the cost of lectures that are hired in each state compared to now online based at UUM, Sintok. (P5)

*d) Relevancy*

Informants emphasised the importance of ODL's relevance, accounting for 13.8% of cumulative frequencies. ODL's relevance varies depending on student's individual circumstances and goals. It offers a valuable path for students to acquire new skills and knowledge to bolster their career prospects, with programs often focusing on practical skills and real-world applications. For instance, P5 believes ODL is particularly beneficial for working adult students.

It is a more practical concept because physics students only have the opportunity to learn the theory and wait after studying to practice it, but ODL students who are mostly or maybe all of them are working can directly practice the lessons they receive. (P5)

Meanwhile, another informant stated that the ODL will help them improve their technology skills.

For me, UUM and PACE are quite good in implementing online learning because ODL learning improves my skills in using today's technology... if given the choice of PJJ, I will choose to study online and it provides a new experience in seeking knowledge without boundaries...(P1)

ODL opens opportunities for students to learn and find out about IT technology in line with the IR4.0 era. But in terms of image and attitude in my opinion, when PACE was placed directly under UUM, the service and attitude of the staff on duty was better than now when PACE was placed under the management of a subsidiary. (P12)

In my opinion online learning and teaching provide opportunities for the new generation with better learning and communication activities regardless of time and place. (P14)

Overall, ODL can be highly relevant to students who want to pursue education in a way that fits their individual needs and goals.

*e) Service-Dominant Mindset*

Service-dominant mindset was one of the themes emerged from this study with 12.9% of the cumulative frequencies.

A good service-dominant mindset can also contribute to students feeling supported in their academic and personal endeavors. Staff and faculty who are willing to go the extra mile to help students can make a significant impact on their success and well-being.

...the lecturers who teach us are also one of the reasons why I chose UUM because they are very friendly and responsive when asked questions. (P2)

Based on experience, it is easier to deal with lecturers than UUM or PACE itself. If the lecturer is from another institution, it is very difficult to get input. Cooperation between PACE is difficult to get feedback at an immediate rate. (P3)

Meanwhile, a university's reputation can be significantly influenced by the level of service provided to students. When students have a positive experience, they are more likely to recommend the university to others and contribute to a positive reputation for the institution.

Therefore, there is a need for an efficient governance system by PACE in providing smooth lectures to students so that the university's goal of producing great graduates can be implemented. (P5)

The university's responsibility is to always make plans to ensure the welfare of students and the safety of the public. The university management should always strive to improve the quality of services and provide appropriate initiatives to face the challenges of the new norm environment. (P14)

When university staff and faculty have an excellent service mindset, it can contribute to higher levels of student satisfaction. Students who feel supported and valued by the university are likelier to have a positive experience and feel engaged in their studies.

In my opinion, in order to form a good connection between the university (PACE) and the students, the administrator places a liaison officer who will not only respond after the occurrence of a problem but also know the progress of each lecture held and feedback if there are any recent changes before the lecture is conducted. (P11)

The university needs to provide teaching staff who have the skills and abilities in the ODL learning process and allow the teaching staff to choose teaching techniques that they feel are appropriate in the ODL learning process. (P4)

For P10, a good service mindset can also contribute to higher student retention rates. It could be argued that when students feel connected to the university and its staff, they are more likely to stay enrolled and complete their degree programs.

My perception at the moment is PACE is not consistent with the planning of the student's study mode because it often changes the study mode that was originally planned as online learning, this matter hinders the wishes of friends around who were initially interested in continuing their studies if it was carried out by ODL. Right now, I still show loyalty to UUM because I feel comfortable continuing my studies at this university. (P10)

As a result, an excellent service-dominant mindset is essential for PACE as it can contribute to positive outcomes for students and staff. By prioritising student needs and experiences, staff and PACE can create a supportive and engaging learning environment that benefits everyone involved.

#### *f) Knowledge Sharing*

Knowledge sharing was one of the themes, with 12.9% of the cumulative frequencies. The informants perceived the importance of knowledge and information sharing for teaching and learning. Some of the informants believe that using technology can be helpful tool for sharing knowledge with students. This can include using online resources, videos, and interactive tools to help students learn.

In order to maintain good relations, PACE needs to provide a special platform so that the communication process can be carried out more formally and smoothly in addition to using Whatsapp, telegram and Facebook page. (P10)

It could be argued that some informants feel disappointed regarding communication and knowledge sharing between PACE and students. For instance, P5 and P1 stated the lack of engagement and response between PACE and students.

...as a learning center, PACE's engagement with students is very low. Students experience problems in getting information about lectures and other aids that are necessary during lectures. (P5)

.... the cooperation between PACE and students is a bit less responsive, as my experience is that when you need some information, it takes a bit of time... to maintain a good relationship, PACE needs to be effective in terms of disseminating information and speeding up online response... (P1)

Students have different learning styles, so it's important to use a variety of teaching methods to engage them. This can include lectures, discussions, group work, and hands-on activities.

In my experience, there are instructors who give interactive and creative lectures that have helped me better understand the lesson to be delivered... (P11)

The ODL method needs to be specifically explained to students who want to continue their undergraduate studies because it will give new inspiration to students that the ODL method is more efficient for students who have time constraints and a long distance from the university to continue their studies. (P5)

Depending on the student's level of understanding and the lecturer's teaching and learning (P&P) method. How the approach that will be used to attract students to stay until the end of the ODL class determines the quality of a student other than the differentiator from the exam. (P15)

Table 3: Cumulative frequency of codes – Motivation of value co-creation towards ODL

No	Code	Frequency Percentage = n%
1	Attitude	23.7%
2	Active participants	21.1%
3	Facilities	15.8%
4	Brand Image	13.2%
5	Satisfaction	13.2%
6	Loyalty	9.2%
7	Collaborative partners	3.9 %

### *Motivation of Value Co-Creation Towards ODL*

#### *a) Attitude*

The study found that informant's attitude was the most important theme to motivate informants to involve in value co-creation towards the ODL at 23.7% of the cumulative frequencies. The attitude of informants towards ODL can vary depending on a number of factors, such as their prior experience with online learning, their motivation to learn, and their personal circumstances. Some of the informants mentioned the quality of the students using ODL as their teaching and learning similar with the conventional way.

I believe the quality of graduates produced through the ODL mode is on par with physical students because the modules used are the same in addition to the scoring system used is also the same. (P4)

...through the ODL mode, quality graduates like physical students can be produced and sometimes may be of better quality than physical students. (P5)

While, other informants posited that the advantages of using ODL in their teaching and learning especially for working adults' students.

I fully encourage ODL learning because it is seen to be very effective in terms of time suitability and learning flexibility for students who continue distance learning who are already working... therapy is definitely fun if you get the chance if you get the experience of studying at a university and it is easier to discuss. (P1)

For me, UUM and PACE are quite good in implementing online learning because learning through ODL improves my skills in using current technology... if given the choice of PJJ, I will choose to study via ODL and it provides a new experience in seeking knowledge without borders... (P7)

*b) Active Participants*

Based on our analysis, active participation was second most frequent cited in our study with 21.1% of the cumulative frequencies. It seems like active participation between PACE management and its students is crucial for the success of both parties. Informants stated that PACE should encourage active participation with their students.

In my opinion, in order to form a good connection between the university (PACE) and the students, there is a need to station a liaison officer who will not only respond after the occurrence of a problem but also keep track of the progress of each lecture held and feedback if there are any recent changes before the lecture is conducted. (P5)

Meanwhile, there is important for PACE to have proper discussion with the staff as well as lecturers and provide a proper teaching facility.

In my opinion, the university needs to have a specific discussion with the teaching staff about the aids needed to give lectures more effectively. (P11)

Some of the informants also believe that PACE needs to discuss with staff and lecturers how to actively participate in teaching and learning process.

*Pada pendapat saya, pihak universiti perlu membuat satu perbincangan khusus bersama tenaga pengajar tentang alatan bantuan yang diperlukan bagi memberi kuliah dengan lebih berkesan. Capaian server keatas. (P5)*

However, some of concerns from the informants on the implementation of teaching and learning via ODL. It could lead to the lack of active participation in class between students and lecturers.

...the quality is different when compared to students who study online and physically... studying through ODL found that the relationship between friends and lecturers is seen as a bit less compared to studying physically... the quality can be said to be the same because in the end we will still have to complete all assignments and face exams same... (P7)

*c) Facilities*

Next, we found that the availability of facilities, representing 15.8% of the cumulative frequencies, motivates informants to engage in value co-creation in ODL. ODL is an educational system enabling remote learning. Universities must offer facilities to support effective learning and access to resources, as much of the teaching and learning relies on technology.

The university gives students access to sufficient online reference resources by granting licenses to access journals, articles, publications and others for the purpose of learning and completing their assignments. This is because while undergoing ODL, the main reference source found in the library cannot be accessed. (P3)

In regards to ODL, ICT infrastructure is a vital in order to ensure the teaching and learning process going smoothly. For example, PACE needs to provide adequate ICT infrastructure, including computers, internet connectivity, and technical support, should be provided to enable students to access the online learning platform and other relevant resources.

Apart from the internet network, the university also needs to ensure the readiness of lecturers involved in ODL. The university needs to provide an internet network for lecturers to ensure there are no online interruptions during classes and also appropriate teaching materials to be used in ODL learning... (P9)

High-speed and stable wifi / data facilities that do not interfere with the T&L process, studios, quality laptops and systems to facilitate student access such as Urox (notes, slides, modules, assignments and exams). (P15)

The requirements that need to be there are things like access to technology, especially the internet and other technologies need to be 'stronger' so that the teaching staff can upload teaching materials and conduct the learning that will be delivered smoothly. (P12)

PACE should provide an online platform that enables students to access course materials, submit assignments, interact with instructors, and participate in online discussions. Informants urged PACE to provide a reliable facility that can assist them in teaching and learning. The facility needs to worth with the tuition that they pay.

...provide adequate learning facilities... study fee rates that are appropriate to the platform and facilities provided... provide training opportunities that can be used by every student... (P1)

*d) Brand Image*

Brand image was emerged as the theme for informants as one of the factors for value co-creation with 13.2% of the cumulative frequencies. It might be argued that brand image is an

essential element for any organisation, including universities. It refers to how the institution is perceived by its stakeholders, including students, faculty, alumni, and the wider community. A strong brand image can help universities attract more students and enhance their reputation.

I choose UUM is because of the image of UUM that produces graduates with high leadership in addition to being a university that is recognized and has an excellent record in producing graduates. (P5)

In terms of brand image towards the PACE and ODL, some informants believe that the quality of the students are the same with the conventional method, and they think it is the time for PACE to start implement the ODL.

I believe the quality of graduates produced through the ODL mode is at par with physical students because the modules used are the same in addition to the scoring system used is also the same. (P10)

In my opinion, it is the time for the university to implement ODL widely because my perception of the university is getting higher in terms of image satisfaction and loyalty. (P11)

For P6, PACE offers affordable tuition fee to the students as compared to other universities.

...make a comparison regarding the fees and make a comparison with other university whether it is one of the most expensive fees or the lowest... one of the main reasons for financial ability to attract interest in study. (P6)

#### *e) Satisfaction*

The findings found that the informant's satisfaction was the factor that motivated informants to be involved in value co-creation towards the ODL with 13.2% of the cumulative frequencies. PACE needs to consider several factors since student satisfaction is one of the main focuses for informants in this study. A number of issues or problems experienced by the students can have an impact on students' satisfaction towards PACE.

...as a study center, PACE's engagement with students is very low. Students experience problems in getting information about lectures and other aids that are necessary during lectures. (P5)

Although this can be solved with the initiative of the students, it will be a problem for the group of students who are not creative in finding alternatives in solving the problem. (P11)

My 5 years of experience in dealing with PACE is a bit disappointing. However, I am still satisfied with the management of PACE. It's just that, to be more student-friendly and productive, it is necessary to appoint a Customer



Relations Officer to answer phone calls that are often not answered and to answer questions posed by students. (P15)

Another issue that needs to be solved by PACE is the inconsistent decision by the management. It will make students dissatisfied and give negative word-of-mouth among students and the public.

My perception at the moment is that PACE is not consistent with the planning of the student's study mode because it often changes the study mode that was originally planned as online learning, this matter hinders the wishes of friends around who were initially interested in continuing their studies if it was carried out by ODL. Right now I still show loyalty to UUM because I feel comfortable continuing my studies at this university... (P4)

*f) Brand Loyalty*

Loyalty was the last theme that emerged from the study with 9.2% of the cumulative frequencies. Brand loyalty refers to a customer's strong attachment and commitment to a particular brand. In the context of universities, brand loyalty can be defined as a student's preference to attend a particular institution over other options based on their perception of the university's brand. In our study, we refer to students' loyalty towards PACE.

I chose UUM because I am a staff member and UUM encourages their staff to continue their studies at UUM. Since I work at UUM, it makes it easier for me to come and study and be able to use facilities such as the library and so on. In terms of the course offered, it is suitable for my job duties. (P13)

As a UUM staff, of course UUM is my choice in addition to the courses offered which are very interesting. In addition, it is very easy for me to find reference materials and attend class. (P12)

The perception in terms of my loyalty has also increased because I no longer think about other study centres and if I have the opportunity to continue my studies, I will still choose UUM as my study centre... (P5)

## CONCLUSION

The findings from this analysis describe stakeholders' perceptions and motivations concerning Open and Distance Learning (ODL), particularly at the Professional and Continuing Education Center (PACE). This study has two research objectives: 1) to understand stakeholders' perceptions of PACE, particularly in ODL, and 2) to explore the motivation for stakeholder value co-creation in ODL.

For the first objective, the findings summarize stakeholders' perceptions of PACE and ODL within six main themes: Engagement, Human Experience, Flexibility, Relevance, Service-dominant mindset, and knowledge sharing. Regarding the second objective, our study reveals seven main themes that motivate stakeholders to value co-creation in ODL: Attitude, Active Participation, Facilities, Brand Image, Satisfaction, and Brand Loyalty.

This research contributes to the existing knowledge in Service-Dominant Logic and value co-creation within higher education services, benefiting industry players, particularly in ODL. Furthermore, aligning with the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB), EDU 4.0 aims to elevate the Malaysian higher education system on the global stage. MEB outlines 10 Shifts to enhance the quality and efficiency of the higher education system, and implementing ODL at PACE aligns with these objectives. Additionally, this initiative supports Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, by contributing to the government's efforts to provide quality education to future generations. Our primary focus is PACE, and our findings provide insights on value co-creation and enhancing PACE's reputation, potentially improving corporate branding, and attracting more students to their centre.

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