

Virtual Tour as Digital Branding Tool in the Political Economy of Higher Education: Case of Virtual Tour 360

UPNVJT

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ABSTRACT : *In the growing trends of digitalization and increasing use of the Internet of Things (IoT), online branding and marketing are necessities in any form of industry. Even the Higher Education industries have this same outlook to succeed, even more so in the era of globalization where competition expands in the international arena. Universities are required to obtain some degree of internationalization in their daily operations. University's ranking and accreditation system, both domestically and globally, requires international students in the institution's teaching and learning activities. Therefore, the ability to promote globally is essential for higher education institutions. This paper thus attempts to analyze the correlation between a university's digital branding and internationalization in attracting international students. The ability to attract international students is crucial to university's non-monetary competition, making them leaders in the intellectual achievement's competition.*

Furthermore, this paper briefly attempts to analyze one of UPNVJT's online promotion tools, the VTour 360 UPNVJT, and how it is used as UPNVJT's means of global branding and marketing. This paper will be using a quantitative method, combined with the methodology of branding and marketing in its correlation with international students' enrollment. References on the use of Virtual Tours as a means of branding and marketing for higher education institutions are still minimal. We expect this research could complement what little of the said topic is and could further emphasize the urgency of using Virtual Tour as a means of higher education internationalization and tools of the political economy of higher education institutions.

KEYWORDS –Virtual Tour, Digital Branding, Political Economy, Non-monetary Competition, Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT

I.INTRODUCTION

Education has always been a powerful tool to alleviate poverty and promote development by upward socioeconomic mobility. Several pieces of research on the relationship between income equality and social mobility have found that countries with higher levels of income inequality have a lower level of social mobility[1]. This relationship means that people with more social mobility throughout their lives are more likely to have more income than those with less social mobility, thus enabling a broader gap in income inequality. Good quality education can effectively fight poverty and economic inequality by being a forceful driver of social mobility. In doing so, increasing spending on education is a must because the redistribution of public

resources is vital for a longer-term impact on the promotion of social mobility[2]. Increasing spending on education creates more opportunities for those who have difficulty accessing good quality education. In its Briefing Paper of September 2019, Oxfam has emphasized that it is enough to improve the quality of education and equalize the opportunity of education[2]. To discuss allocation and redistribution of resources, even in the education sector, is highly political-economy, which means that the education sector, as a part of a knowledge-based economy, is prone to the policy changes' influences and inseparable from various forms of competition.

One of the critical factors for policy changes in the education sector is the increasing effect of globalization. Higher education institutions, in particular, are one sector of education that has been trying to seize the benefit of globalization by issuing policies related to internationalization. This policy change has significantly expanded international relations among higher education institutions and has thus created a sense of competition amongst universities, not just domestic competition but also global competition. University competition is recognized as a non-monetary competition because the subjects in the competition are not monetary but correlate indirectly to the political-economic arrangement of higher education institutions. A non-monetary competition conducted by universities is a form of competition of symbolic goods such as prestige, recognition, or distinction between one university and the others[3]. These symbolic goods are crucial for universities as they represent the degree of intellectual achievement. The competitiveness of these symbolic goods is thus strengthened by various rankings and accreditations that would measure universities' popularity and quality amongst themselves.

Rankings and accreditations vary domestically and globally. International recognition became substantial in the more globalizing context; thus, universities seek to be affiliated with international rankings and accreditation. Ranking institutions provide services of analysis and insight of global higher education sectors. Rankings can be used to distinguish and compare universities, degree programs, locations, and graduate employment rates, among other things. Each rating is based on unique comparative data based on a range of characteristics and measures, including teaching quality, research quality, staff-to-student ratio, student satisfaction, and more [4]. Some of the global banking institutions that have been prominent in the last five years are QS Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Times Higher Education (THE), Webometrics, and many others. Slightly different from ranking, accreditation aims at equalizing a professional qualification or registration with a professional body, such as actuarial science, accounting, medicine, and engineering. Depending on the institution or degree, a national education (government-run organization) or an independent accreditation agency may conduct rigorous checks to ensure that particular education institutions fulfill a particular set of requirements. When an institution or a degree program gets accredited, it is seen as an official seal of approval, indicating that the degree program meets and conforms to the highest quality standards [4]. These accreditation organizations measure practical requirements such as student to faculty ratio, research output, international exposure, and international student body and standardize curricula, syllabi, and even graduates' competence. Some global accreditation organizations are ASEAN University Networks Quality Assurance (AUN-QA), Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), and many others.

As rankings and accreditation became evident in recent years, more symbolic goods competitions between universities became increasingly visible. In order to gain more prestige and recognition, universities allow themselves to be ranked and accredited by various international ranking institutions and international accreditation organizations. One of the critical indicators of those rankings and accreditations is the degree of internationalization which can be measured by the number of international student body enrolling in the university. The more international students enrolled means that the university has reached its international prestige and recognition, allowing international students to get to know the university and thus become part of the academic society. Universities must introduce themselves through branding, promotion, and marketing tools to reach a certain degree of international recognition. In a globalized and digitalized society, digital branding has found its urgency. Therefore, universities competition in terms of digital branding, promotion, and marketing activities have become integral parts of the political economy of higher education. Thus, in its development, competition between universities on digital branding became powerful tools of non-monetary competition that could determine one's intellectual achievements and market stratification. Universities have to focus on their

goals as upward socioeconomic mobility, and their digital branding means to thrive in the global recognition competition.

Based on the considerations above, it can be seen that universities are now focused not only on their core business process to provide good quality education but also to focus on escalating and upgrading their digital branding to achieve global recognition. This paper thus attempts to analyze the correlation between a university's digital branding and its ability to attract international students as one of the primary indicators to thrive in a non-monetary competition, making them leaders in the intellectual achievement competition. Since this paper aims at analyzing digital branding and marketing, this paper uses a quantitative method of observation by comparing universities on Webometrics ranking. Universities compared in this paper are universities on Webometrics' Top Ten Global Universities, Top Ten Asia's Universities, and Indonesia's Universities. The comparison will further analyze the best practice on digital branding using the virtual tour feature and how it correlates to international students' enrollment. There are various elements of digital branding, but this paper will only seek to compare virtual tour features as tools of promotion and other essential procedures to be understood by international students. This paper will also briefly assess the University of Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur (UPNVJT) virtual tour feature, called the Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT, and its effectiveness as a digital branding tool. References on the use of Virtual Tours as a means of branding and marketing for higher education institutions are still minimal. This paper is expected to complement the topic of higher education's political economy through digital branding and could further emphasize the urgency of using Virtual Tour as a means of higher education internationalization.

II. UNIVERSITY'S DIGITAL BRANDING

In 2020, the Gartner technology research institute stated that the world would enter a new era called the Internet of Things (IoT). Everything will be integrated with the internet, ranging from cellphones, watches, refrigerators, cars, and many other things. This phenomenon also occurs in education sectors, more notably in higher education. Conventional marketing is rapidly displaced by more modern ways of marketing, known as digital marketing. Consequently, digital marketing is used more and more as practical means of higher education promotion and marketing tools. Digital marketing has brought universities' promotions to a broader range of viewers across nations, allowing international students more information and more choices. University's core business process to provide good quality education thus taking off in a much broader scope of competition with the advent of digital marketing. University certainly has competitors like any other industry, where more students equal income, and more income means welfare. In this business sense, better university education quality and marketing are guaranteed to attract more students. As mentioned before, the more recognizable a university's quality globally, the more prestige it will attract, attracting more qualified prospective students.

Public relations have shifted its attention to marketing, and branding is the most important marketing element. Public relations professionals have advised university executives to improve "brand experience," "brand awareness," "brand attachment," and "brand architecture" to improve its marketing strategy. University's branding aims to present a consistent visual identity for the institution and analyze the value of education through brand tracking. Higher education institutions increasingly utilize branding to reach out to teenagers and parents by raising "brand awareness." The amount of money spent on university marketing to develop branding traits has multiplied in recent years because being associated with a particular university brand is a powerful kind of symbolic and frequently translates to obtaining economic capital for graduates. Therefore, the university's branding is about gaining and sustaining product loyalty from its students and graduates. Declaring that one has graduated from a top university confers prestige, and maintaining that prestige becomes vital [7]. The higher the rank and higher accreditation a university holds, the more prestige it is to enroll in it.

Universities must build brand awareness, conventionally and digitally, to attract prospective students. Digital marketing can help universities acquire valuable information on the prospective student. This information is crucial to determine branding strategies towards targeted viewers, namely those prospective students, to encourage students to enroll. Of course, universities need an excellent digital branding strategy in marketing their brand. More than that, good digital marketing can create a strong foundation for a university's

digital branding. These are some advantages that make digital marketing so important for universities, according to SEVIMA [5]:

1. University's information will be spread widely and quickly. Information about the university will spread more widely, even faster than expected, domestically and globally using digital marketing. As mentioned earlier, more and more people search for anything on the internet with the help of search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, or Amazon. University is easily discoverable using these search engines platforms, thus making them more recognizable.
2. Save on promotion costs. By utilizing digital marketing, the university will save costs of promotions to be redirected to other facility's upgrades. Upgrades, in turn, will be beneficial for the university's improvements and developments, whether on the education quality or branding strategy.
3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) & Searchability on the Internet. University can maximize SEO, which is the easiest and cheapest digital marketing method. SEO can help the university be easily recognizable and searchable on the internet with specific keywords. It is pertinent for universities to have an up-to-date website first to use this strategy. SEO is about a website's quality and highly informative content. Most viewers will definitely visit the website first to learn about the targeted university before applying. It is preferable if the website is viewer-friendly, meaning that the website contains guides and pieces of information that prospective students can easily understand.
4. Active Across Social Media Platforms. There is research from eMarketer that it turns out that the education sector is one of the top industries globally that must use social media as part of a digital strategy. Another reason is that the university's main target is people aged 18-24. Social media is the best marketing platform for your university: a medium interaction with prospective students. With social media, too, prospective students will feel very close. You need to create content that students are close to and with. Make prospective students feel close to your university. Of course, to run social media, you need particular strategies. Therefore, Social Media Marketing has become a popular marketing tool today.
5. Create Digital Advertisements. Creating a digital advertisement for a university is relatively easy because it has clear targeted viewers. University needs only to advertise by utilizing paid marketing tools on the internet, such as Google Adwords, Facebook Business, and others marketing tools. Digital advertising allows the university to collect data on prospective students to enroll if the digital campaign is right on target. In addition, the university also needs to create landing pages, attractive banners, and several other marketing components. Digital advertising also helps the university increase brand awareness and is easily assessed. Ads can also be tailored to the university's objectives. In essence, digital advertising is more relevant than conventional advertising because it is more effectively targeted.
6. Create a World-Class Website. Creating a website with a world-class design is also a must. 80% of students will be influenced to apply to a university by looking at the quality of its website [6]. University needs to create a user-friendly, visually attractive, and responsive website. In short, a website with an attractive user interface and a satisfying user experience is essential. In addition, the university needs to enter SEO keywords on the website so that search engines will easily recognize them. Other essential elements that need to be considered are improving site speed and navigation structure.
7. Take Advantage of the Campus Search Platform. Utilizing a campus search platform is the most trending method at the moment. This trend emerges from the needs of high school or vocational high school graduates looking for information about universities on platforms like this. Campus search platforms provide complete details about universities and majors (study programs), making it easier for prospective students to find the desired major and campus.

It can be summarized that there are specific and various advantages in using digital branding for universities. In a more digitalized and globalized world, like other business ventures, universities needed to adapt to an up-to-date branding and marketing method. By adapting to a more digitalized environment, universities will be able to project themselves globally. One element of digital branding and marketing that has been more widely used these recent years are the virtual tour feature. Virtual tours have become more effective in delivering brand awareness as it offers the more attractive life-like feature.

III. UNIVERSITY'S VIRTUAL TOUR FEATURES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S ENROLLMENT

Virtual tour 360 technology is one of the ways multimedia may be used as an information medium. Virtual tours can place the user in a picture and allow them to freely access virtual settings made with a 360⁰ point of view [8]. A virtual tour comprises a series of photographs taken from a panoramic viewpoint and then stitched together to create the most realistic image possible. With a 360⁰ perspective, virtual tours allow viewers to freely explore the rooms of a building, examine images, and enjoy the view from a particular position [9]. According to Osman, Wahab, and Ismail, a virtual tour is a technology that immerses the viewer in an image and allows them to improve situational awareness and see, capture, and analyze virtual data. Users can take a virtual tour of the area to learn more about the area [10]. Virtual tours are now commonly used as promotional and informational media. Museums, tourism regions, universities, real estate, historical sites, parks and breeding areas, public locations such as the White House and the Taj Mahal, and hotels and motels are among the most well-known virtual tour destinations [8]. Virtual tours represent a product or service in addition to a showcase of a business [11].

Certain crucial aspects must be present in virtual tours to produce effective branding and marketing [12]. Virtual tours must include a variety of content on the webpage that supports virtual terms, such as asynchronous combinations (which record a video about campus exploration led by a tour guide or supporting explanations), synchronous combinations (which hold webinars or campus tours directly through social media platforms), or direct Q&A services. Virtual tours must be flexible enough to be accessed anywhere and anytime, including scheduled activities and essential information for visitors. Virtual tours must include human faces, particularly those who play critical roles. Lastly, virtual tours must demonstrate the value of the campus, the most prominent of which would be environmental safety and friendliness, which would be the deciding factor for prospective students.

This paper, in particular, seeks to compare virtual tour features' best practices done by various universities classified as Top Ten Universities according to Webometrics ranking. It is interesting to see a comparison based on Webometrics classification as this specific institution aims to rank the promotion of website publication and its global performance and visibility [13]. This classification is selected for its relevance with the general idea of digital branding. For the comparison, this paper compares the use of virtual tour features of universities in the Top Ten World's Rank, Top Ten Asia's and Middle East's Rank, and Top Ten Indonesia's Rank at the time this paper is written, which is written June to November 2021. This comparison uses several indicators that would be the best present in a virtual tour as effective branding and marketing tools. Those indicators are the availability of the virtual tour itself, the interactiveness, the availability of guided tours and explanations, the availability of scheduled tours, and the availability of live chat features. After comparing the virtual tour features, it is interesting to analyze the number of international students enrolled in those universities.

As shown from Fig. 1 below, all of the universities in the Webometrics' Top Ten World's Rank have utilized virtual tour features as digital branding and marketing tools. Those virtual tour features are equipped with tour guides and explanations of each location presented in the virtual tours, scheduled campus tours, and live chat feature. However, on the availability of interactive features, only seven out of ten universities' virtual tours provided this feature. The University of Washington, University of Toronto, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison did not provide an interactive feature on their virtual tour features. Continue to Table. 1, it is observable that these Top Ten Universities have a pretty large international student body. The average international student body ratio to the total student body ratio of these ten universities is 20.93%. This number will drastically differ from the percentage of the Top Ten Asia's and ME's rank, even more so from the Top Ten Indonesia's. Eight out of ten of the Top Ten World's rank are located in the United States. This rank can mean that universities in the United States are more adaptive in maximizing virtual tour features as a digital branding tool that further supports their obtaining international students.

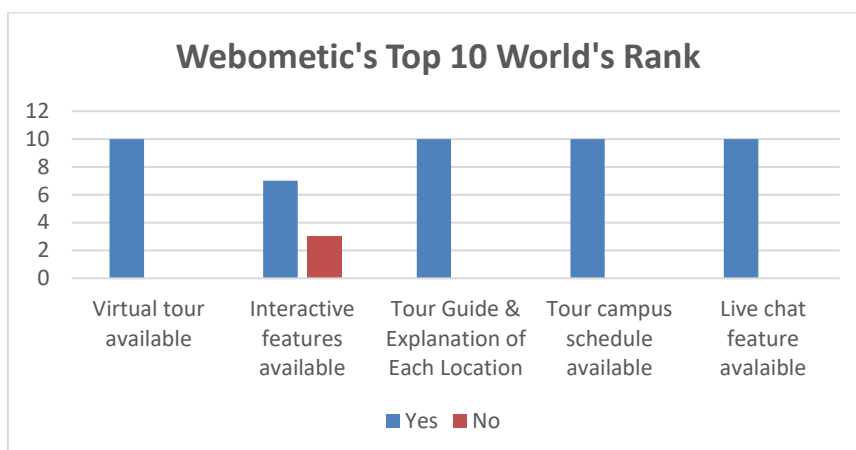


Fig. 1 Virtual Tour Features Comparison of Webometrics' Top 10 World's Rank (Author's Construction as of 11 September 2021)

No	Name of University	International Student	Percentage of Student Body
1	University of Washington	7,831	16.6%%
2	Cornell University	5,322	22.6%
3	John Hopkins University	5,233	20%
4	Yale University	2,775	20.7%
5	University of California San Diego	8,792	23.2%
6	University of Toronto	21,943	26,2%
7	University of Wisconsin Madison	6,304	14,5%
8	Pennsylvania State University	7,526	16.1%
9	New York University	14,306	27.6%
10	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich	7,733	39.8%

Table 1. Comparison of Number of International Students of Webometrics' Top 10 World's Rank (Author's Construction as of 11 September 2021)

Different from Fig. 1, Fig. 2 shows that not all ten of the universities in the Top Ten Asia's and Middle East's rank have been utilizing virtual tour features as their tool of branding and promotion. Sun Yat-Sen University and Central South University have not yet used virtual tours. As in the availability of interactive features, only the University of Tokyo, Tel Aviv University, Tohoku University, and Beihang University provide this feature. As in the availability of scheduled campus tours and live chat features, only the University of Tokyo provides these features. The most completed virtual tour features are present only in the University of Tokyo's virtual tour features. This completion means that the only University of Tokyo is fully utilizing virtual tour features as a promotion tool.

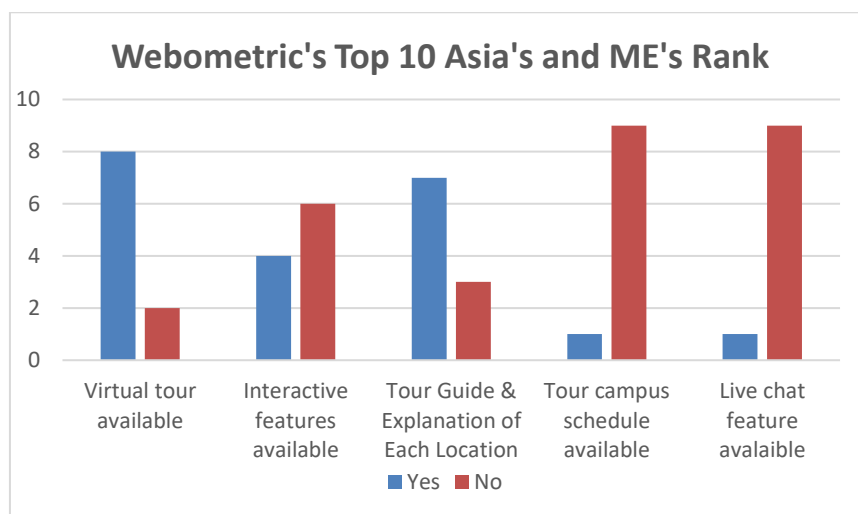


Fig. 2 Virtual Tour Features Comparison of Webometrics' Top 10 Asia's and Middle East's Rank (Author's Construction as of 11 September 2021)

As mentioned before, the percentage of the international student body to total student ratio in universities in the Top Ten Asia's and Middle East's rank differ pretty significantly compared to universities in the Top Ten World's rank. Based on Table 2, the average percentage is only 8.1%. It can further be observed that the University of Tokyo utilizes virtual tour features to the fullest, holding the highest percentage with 13%. This percentage indicates that there is a strong correlation between digital branding the international student's enrollment. In order to attract more international students, universities needed to maximize the utilization of digital branding through virtual tours. The ability to engage with viewers, in the case of higher education, is prospective students, is essential. This ability allows viewers to create connections and a sense of belonging to persuade them to register and enroll in the university. Universities in the Top Ten Asia's and Middle East's ranks and the Top Ten Indonesia's ranks need to upgrade their virtual tours by inserting this feature.

No	Name of University	International Student	Percentage of Student Body
1	University of Tokyo	3,873	13%
2	Kyoto University	2,715	12%
3	Tel Aviv University	1,597	7%
4	Sun Yat-Sen (Zhongshan) University	3,386	6%
5	Tsinghua University	3,240	6%
6	Hebrew University of Jerusalem	812	5%
7	Tianjin University	3,283	12%
8	Tohoku University	1,780	10%
9	Central South (Zhongnan) University	1,647	3%
10	Beihang University	2,159	7%

Table 2. Comparison of Number of International Students of Webometrics' Top 10 Asia's and Middle East's Rank (Author's Construction as of 11 September 2021)

As shown in Fig. 3 below, the last comparison is made on universities in the Top Ten Indonesia's rank. Unlike universities in the Top Ten World's rank, no universities have implemented a complete virtual tour feature. The most exclusive features are found only in the virtual tours of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and IPB University (IPB), although UGM lacks the interactive feature and IPB lacks the scheduled campus tour. Later compared with the information in Table 3, it is evident that these universities' minimum utilization of virtual tours dramatically affects their ability to attract international students. The average percentage of the international student body to total student body ratio in universities in the Top Ten Indonesia's rank is 2.5%.

This percentage is considered a minimal number compared to the Top Ten World's rank at 20.93%. This condition can mean that the internationalization of universities in Indonesia needs many improvements and that digital branding is not yet used as the primary internationalization strategy.

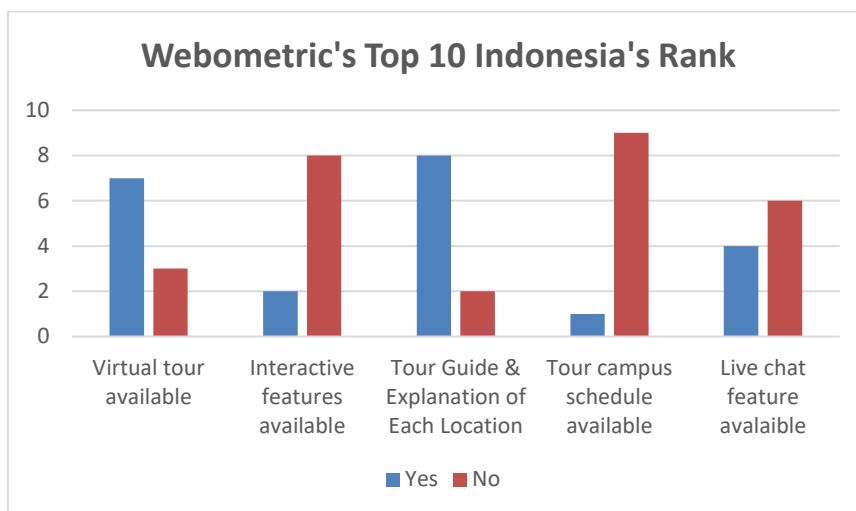


Fig. 3 Virtual Tour Features Comparison of Webometrics' Top 10 Indonesia's Rank (Author's Construction as of 11 September 2021)

No	Name of University	International Student	Percentage of Student Body
1	University of Indonesia	2,350	5%
2	Universitas Gadjah Mada	1,187	2%
3	IPB University	675	3%
4	Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology	681	4%
5	Brawijaya University	507	1%
6	Airlangga University	547	2%
7	Telkom University	184	1%
8	Institut Teknologi Bandung	300	2%
9	Binus University	612	4%
10	Universitas Sebelas Maret	277	1%

Table 3. Comparison of Number of International Students of Webometrics' Top 10 Indonesia's Rank (Author's Construction as of 11 September 2021)

As for UPNVJT itself, although not included in the Top Ten Indonesia's rank, modest virtual features are present, called Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT. This existence is considered better than Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS), Brawijaya University, and Universitas Sebelas Maret, which have not been equipped with virtual tours as branding tools. Although present, much more is still needed to improve the Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT. A few crucial improvements needed to be done using a bilingual system in the virtual tour feature. Although the website has already been equipped with a bilingual system, the virtual tour feature has not. Other improvements needed to be done to increase its ability to engage viewers. Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT lacks the availability of tour guide and location's explanation, scheduled campus tour, and live chat feature to allow viewers to create connection and a sense of belonging that would persuade them to enroll in UPNVJT.

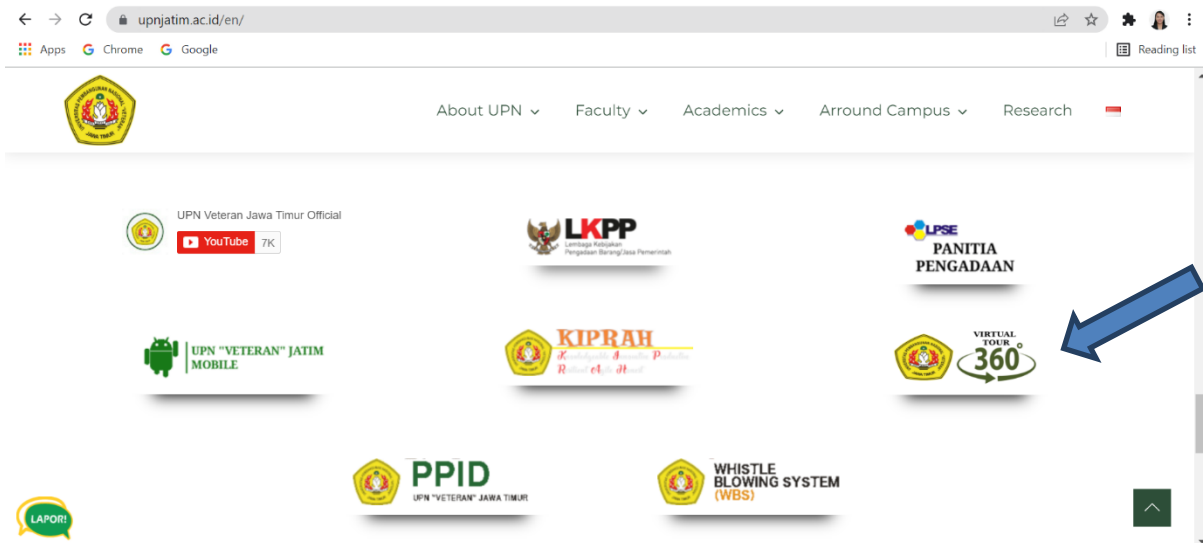


Fig. 4 UPNVJT's Homepage Containing Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT



Fig. 5 Virtual Tour 360 UPNVJT Exploration

IV. CONCLUSION

From comparing universities in the Webometrics' Top Ten World's rank, Top Ten Asia's and Middle East's rank, and Top Ten Indonesia's rank, it is clear to see the correlation between digital branding and international student's enrollment in a higher education institution. Furthermore, there is an indirect connection between digital branding and non-monetary competition—the more prominent the branding, the more international students enroll. The more international students enrolled, the other internationalization process brought forth more prestige, recognition, and distinction towards the university. Universities in the Top Ten World's rank have a high percentage of international student to total student body ratio at 20.93%, followed by universities ranked in Asia and the Middle East at 8.1%, and universities ranked in Indonesia at 2.5%. Further analysis showed that universities' prestige, recognition, and distinction in Asia, the Middle East, and Indonesia is still low compared to their fellow Western counterparts. A significant disadvantage for universities in Asia, the Middle East, and Indonesia is the non-English language used as the first language. Specifically, in using virtual tours as a digital branding tool, universities in Asia, the Middle East, and Indonesia have not maximized this feature entirely. A few key points of improvement needed by universities in Asia, the Middle East, Indonesia, and UPNVJT are the application of the bilingual system and engagement ability of the website and virtual tour features. Of course, universities in English-speaking countries did not have the same language difficulties, but in the internationalization processes, international language use is a must. The use of

international language is also vital for engagement ability. The ability to engage with prospective international students will allow them to feel welcomed create a connection and a sense of belonging, which will benefit the student's enrollment.

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