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Bio statement —

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Title and Abstract

Title BRANDING SCIENCE: A STUDY OF TRADEMARKS IN PORTUGUESE ACADEMIA

State-of-the-art.

Branding is a strategic communication practice employed by innovative players in market competition. This is an activity usually associated to business firms. However, as non-firm actors and not-for-profit organisations in contemporary national systems of innovation are increasingly enrolled in commercial activities the question emerges: how well spread is this form of appropriability? What can it tell about the structure and dynamics of economic innovation? Innovation studies traditionally focus on technological innovation, with considerably less attention being devoted to non-technological aspects. This has been the case with the phenomenon industry-university linkages. The role of complementary assets (such as marketing know-how and distribution capacity) in this knowledge circulation complex is still poorly understood. Surely the value of trademarks is not lost in this process for researchers and educators, who are traditionally very aware of the benefits of social esteem and peer-ranked reputation.

Abstract

Creative and inventive activities tend to be assessed through patented output. As academia becomes further engaged in collaboration in the international arena and in relationships with industry, it would seem logical to extend protection to most intellectual assets, including names and imagery to distinguish institutions nationally and abroad. Empirical evidence shows that organizations that use one form of IPR also use other forms. In this case trademarks may constitute a complementary tool through which to capitalise innovative activities. If that is so there is a clear opportunity for measurement. This paper attempts to exploit this opportunity.

We present a preliminary study that aims to analyse if and how trademarks (TMs) are being used by the Portuguese research system (Universities and Public Research Institutes). Mapping and measuring branding behaviour may reveal entrepreneurial intent and new ways to leverage R&D investments (from marketing of inventions to new technologically-based spin-offs). We combine this information with other correlates of innovative capabilities such as education enrolment and R&D budget so as to understand propensities to trademark among such non-firm entities.

Methodology. We built a database containing TM registrations by 36 higher

education and research institution located in Portugal between 1986 and January of 2013. Several variables (GDP, R&D expenditures, scientific output, etc.) are used to predict TM applications.

Preliminary Results and Interpretation. In Portuguese academia, TMs seem to follow economic growth fluctuations. There was increase in 2005 which was followed by a sharp drop between at the onset of the current economic crisis. A comparable trend had been observed for European-based TM applications, rightfully suggesting that TM applications follow closely the economic cycle and therefore represent a good and immediate proxy for market trends. In a long run perspective we observe an increase in overall R&D funding in Portugal. TM applications appear to have trailed this trend, yet leading this R&D funding budget decline by one year. We find no clear association between R&D funding and TM applications. A comparison between scientific output and TM applications by institution seems to suggest a moderate positive correlation between scientific output and TM applications. Considering the size of our database, this might be quite the satisfactory adjustment. If we are to utilize TMs as a proxy for economic growth, it seems relevant to analyse TM applications from a sectoral point of view. The majority of TMs lay within service product classes, with particular emphasis in Education and Science & Technology Services as well as IT Services & Development. Research Institutes tend to file more heavily for Instruments. The observed trends seem bend towards “High Information Intensity Services”, whereas among industrial goods, there is a relevant incidence on low-tech product areas.

A number of finer-grain patterns emerge. The vast majority of Research Institutes maintain their TMs active. Most higher education institutions seem to opt for registering TMs as “combined” (figurative plus word marks), whereas Research Institutes, seem to opt largely for “word”. Finally, most TMs seems to have been registered in Portugal, but Research Institutes favour Community trademarks whereas Universities seem to favour an “all-or-nothing” approach, i.e. either Portuguese or International registration.

Conclusions. Ideas, leading to scientific discoveries, leading to new ideas, can generate varieties of IPR evidence. Portuguese TMs seem to follow the economic cycle and likely represent a good leading indicator for market trends. This seems to be so in regard to University and Publish Research Organisations. Most TM registrations lay within “high.tech” service categories, but “low-tech” good classes also stand out. We believe it is safe to say that, as academia becomes more engaged in international collaborations and in relationships with industry, it might further invest in protecting all IPR assets, including TMs. We hope this study will contribute to our understanding of how and why the most innovative form of non-firm actors in national systems of innovation are active in non-technological innovation.

Implications for Policy. In Portugal, an intermediate European economy, the vast majority of patents are requested by and granted primarily to academic organisations. To promote innovation, both private and public sectors are investing “soft innovation” capabilities. Policy analysis must understand why is that and learn how to support that move.