Significance of Specific Marketing Tools on Student Enrolment in Private Universities in Bangladesh

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Abstract
The purpose of the study is to investigating the critical marketing tools considered by students when deciding to make private higher education institutions their institution of choice. The study draws data from all the twenty-five private higher education institutions in Bangladesh. Independent variables under study are: public relations, advertising, and direct marketing; the dependent variable is student enrolment. Self-administered questionnaires were given to students representing at least 5% of the student enrolment and representing all gender, study disciplines and levels of study from each university. Descriptive data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Chi-Square test of significance). Statistical program for social sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. The study has implications on the way private higher education institutions market, manage and sustain the quality of educational provision. The study therefore provides private institutions with useful and practical insights on what students want in their institution of choice. This will assist these institutions in strategizing in order to sustain or gain competitive advantage and to maximize on the increasing demand for private education. The study recognizes the critical role played by private universities in improving access and recommends Asian governments who face financial and resource constraints to fund and expand public universities to encourage private higher education as a meaningful and viable way to improve access and provide higher education opportunities to potential students. The study recommends that universities top management should incorporate a greater market orientation into their strategic planning and frequently revise marketing communication tools to determine their effectiveness in order to have a competitive advantage and gain a big market share.

Key words: marketing communication tools; student enrolment; private universities.

1.0 Introduction
Bangladeshi universities are operating in different markets than they did a decade ago; their overall marketing orientation and survival is determined by how well they reposition themselves as distinct academic entities to increase student enrollment in the competitive academic environment created by technological changes and globalization.

Globalization has driven universities to venture into new technology-up to date MC tools and sophisticated ways of packaging programs to potential students who have become techno-savvy, sophisticated and enlightened consumers, Armstrong (2001). Despite the availability of information at the click of a button and MC tools used, many students and parents still have limited enrolment information about universities. Documents provided for prospective students fail to give sufficient information about the university therefore raising the question on how effective some MC tools are in terms of increasing student enrolment, Hawary and Batayne (2010).

Acknowledging that no one MC strategy will work with prospective students, universities seek to individualize the process, use and integrate all forms of MC, Kimmel (2005). To date, there is poor understanding of the role/use of effective MC with customers in attracting and maintaining prospective
and present customers in higher learning institutions Ngome, (2010). This study therefore endeavors to fill the study gaps by focusing on the effect of selected MC tools on student enrolment in private universities in Bangladesh.

1.1 Objectives of the study
1.1.1 General objective
To determine the significance of selected marketing tools on student enrolment in private universities in Bangladesh.

1.1.2 Specific objectives
   a) To establish whether advertising influences student enrolment in private universities.
   b) To determine whether public relations influences student enrolment in private universities.
   c) To examine whether direct marketing influences student enrolment in private universities.

1.2 Hypothesis of the study
H₀ There is no relationship between advertising and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between advertising and student enrolment.
H₀ There is no relationship between public relations and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between public relations and student enrolment.
H₀ There is no relationship between direct marketing and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between direct marketing and student enrolment.

2.0 Literature review
2.1 Theoretical review
2.1.1 Communication theory
Harold Lasswell's communication model expounds the "Who" is the Source; "Says what", the message; and "To Whom" the destination. Communication involves a planned exchange of deliberate communication between a sender and receiver through pre-determined channels of communication to create a desired response and generate feedback, Malan and L’estrange (1991).

It’s critical for a university to analyze its target market and publics to determine each group’s communications needs, what response it wants from each group and appropriate MC tools to use. A combination of MC tools is better placed for effectiveness to create an impact and desired response to increase student enrolment, Mok, (2000). Different elements are used for different publics. Indeed, some publics, like prospective students, are so important that a number of promotional tools will be targeted at them for recruitment purposes. Open days, international higher education exhibitions, conventions, direct mail and advertising are but a few of the tools the universities employ to inform, remind and persuade prospective students to select their institution.

Successful student recruitment is the beginning phase of a successful, modern enrollment management plan for a university. Marcomm Wise (2006) opines that MC is a systematic relationship between a business and its market. MC entails all strategies, tactics, and activities involved in getting the desired marketing messages to intended target markets, regardless of the media used. MC tools mix includes advertising, sales promotion, and public relations, sales promotion and direct mail, Maringe, (2004). MC elements provide information and consultation that are important components to add value to a product or service.
Marketing communications helps to define an organization’s relationship with its customers. This emphasizes the strategic importance of such communication and its long-term effect on consumers. Communication models act as predictive guides, but in the end it is important to recognize the autonomy and unpredictability of consumers.

Customers need information about the features of the product or service, its price and how they can access it, to make informed purchase decision. Thus, if customers are able to get the necessary information about the product timely and adequately, they may feel that they are buying quality product or service. This means having good and effective marketing communication channels adds value to the product or service of the company as customers have confidence in the choice of products and services over competitors.

The nature of the education service industry (intangibility of the service) and the challenges for educational institutions pushes universities to pursue holistic marketing approach to effectively interact with customers. In service setting, MC tools are especially important because they help create powerful images and a sense of credibility, confidence, and reassurance. It’s vital to evaluate the effectiveness of all the MC elements and how to use the effectively to generate desired results, (Perreault and McCarthy 2002).

The primary goal of MC is to affect the perception of value and behavior through directed communication. MC in HEIs has emphasized the need to adjust objectives and strategies to changing marketing and communication realities. In the rapidly changing and highly competitive world of the twenty-first century only strategically oriented MC can help businesses to move forward, (Schultz and Kitchen 2000).

Marketing units must step into the life of prospective students from their early stages of planning for HEIs. They must share elements which prospective students may use in order to identify an appropriate program to study and an institution that offers it. Importance of using authentic resources and the benefits of obtaining information from current students, alumni, and counsellors available in institutions must be emphasized. Prospective students must be informed how and why personal aptitude, interest, ability, and resource should be evaluated before choosing the program, regardless of its popularity and prospectus.

2.1.2 Promotion and the hierarchy of effects model
AIDA is an acronym for: Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action. According to AIDA model, marketers should begin by winning attention or gaining awareness, creating interest, inspiring desire and precipitating the action or purchase in the prospects in order to enable its products to be adopted by the target market, Kimmel (2005). Before potential students decide to enroll with a university, they have to be aware on the existence of the institution and the programs it offers. Awareness is expected to generate interest which in turn will lead to the potential students to apply and enroll with a university.

Under the hierarchy of effects model, the buyers purchase decision is proceeded by steps such as conviction about product benefits, preference for the brand, liking for the brand, knowledge relating to the benefits and features of the product, after an awareness of the product has been gained. Students use different media when searching to choose universities they wish to enroll with thus they make use of the media for their specific needs. Basic implication of these models is that the function of persuasive communication should be handled deftly at every stage of three buyers’ adoption process.

Porter (1985) argues that MC tools can create competitive advantage, boost sales and profits, while saving money, time and stress. MC wraps communications around customers and helps them move through the various stages of the buying process. The organization simultaneously consolidates its image, develops a dialogue and nurtures its relationship with customers. This 'Relationship Marketing'
ements a bond of loyalty with customers which can protect them from the inevitable onslaught of competition. The ability to keep a customer for life is a powerful competitive advantage.

2.1.3 Student enrolment processes
Decision making is broadly seen as a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices by prospective students. Models of decision making have been developed around what is commonly called the purchase behavior of consumers. Purchase behavior is generally seen as encompassing a series of stages including need arousal, information search and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and the post purchase feeling, Kotler (2003). Chapman et al (1984) was amongst the first to apply buying behavior theory to education suggesting that in selecting an institution or subject of study, students and their parents will pass through a number of uniquely definable stages. The stages include;

2.1.3.1 Pre-search behavior
This stage involves early thoughts about their future where students passively register the existence of information about HE to which they are exposed. Crucially, institutions need to capitalize on this early decision making as some of the lasting attitudes and views are often developed during this stage. Maintaining an institutional presence in the passive minds of choosers may be a useful strategic option for institutions seeking to develop their recruitment markets.

2.1.3.2 Search behavior
At this stage, applicants have already made a short list of potential providers and begin using a variety of sources of information to make up their minds while looking for data relating to a wide range of decision criteria. The key for institutions here is to know when this happens among groups of students and to maximize information opportunities to facilitate the search process.

2.1.3.3 Application stage
Students at this stage submit their applications to the selected institutions. Dealing with applications as swiftly as possible, and developing strategies to keep applicants “warm” during the time between an offer and registration are considered the vital marketing activities related to this stage. “In a market . . . those that are seen to provide a high standard of customer care and respond quickly to communications will undoubtedly gain an advantage” Sargeant (1999).

2.1.3.4 Choice decision
This marks the acceptance of the offer by the student. Because acceptance is often non contractual in education, students tend to make multiple offers. Institutions which maintain dialogue with those it has offered places help to seal a psychological bond between the applicant and the institution.

2.1.3.5 Registration
Finally, the applicant turns up for registration, but often some turn the offer down after a few days in the institution. This equates with the early post purchase feelings applicants often have at the time of committing themselves to the institution. Many universities put up exciting fresher’s weeks with a variety of support services marketing to the needs of students as far as possible. Clearly a sound grasp of the above ideas is a necessary the first step in developing a recruitment strategy that allows the institution to compete favorably in the recruitment market. Seeking to know the reasons students choose the institution provides a solid foundation for building this understanding and for positioning the institution strongly in the competitive recruitment market.

2.2 Empirical literatures
Umashankar (2001) in his study on antecedents and consequences of market orientation in higher education institutions; concluded that, market orientation in the higher education context has not received a great deal of attention. Annually, colleges and universities compete for outstanding students, academic prestige and resources. According to Brown and Oplatka (2006) in their study on Universities
in a competitive global marketplace; they examined how marketing framework has influenced various aspects of HEI management and its implication to dealing with student issues. Institutions need to know their competition, establish a respected image, develop a marketing communication plan and identify the needs of various marketing segments. In their findings, in a study on ‘Universities in a competitive global marketplace by Hemsley and Oplatka (2006): found that the role of marketing units in developing a mature market which is strong enough to demand quality HE products is emphasized.

Sevier (2000) in his study on the use of the recruitment funnel by universities, asserts that the series of contacts to potential students include the use of direct mail, the World Wide Web, campus visit programs, telemarketing, and special events help to move a prospective student from initial contact to matriculation. Sevier, in his findings on the use of student recruitment funnel, opines that colleges must have a clear understanding of which consumers make up the target markets, their interests, their levels of financial need, and how they weigh different college-choice variables and what marketing communication tools are used to access university information. Students today (Gen Y) expect almost instantaneous answers to their questions, and they want to be treated uniquely. The relationship between recruitment and financial aid is becoming stronger, student behavior and thinking: students’ choice of university; information sources that prospective students use when making their choice; and their loyalty to and degree of satisfaction with the institution they want to enroll in.

The possible impact of marketization of education on academic staff and students has been explored by Murphy and Richard (1998) in their study on marketing universities: A Survey of student recruitment activities at 200 colleges and universities gave direct marketing the highest ranking in achieving institutional advertising goals. The study extended and clarified the literature on the use of direct marketing by institutions of higher education by applying the principles of responsive advertising and the use of direct marketing by colleges and universities.

Murphy and Richard found an increasing reliance on marketing concepts in HEIs and its implication to stakeholders. Marketization has opened several opportunities to the HE sector to build strong relationship with the students and the community as partners in their endeavor to provide quality education and significantly increase student enrolment. It remains to be seen whether HEIs will observe good educational management practices, draw strengths from the government and other regulatory bodies, develop market intelligence and adopt strategic marketing techniques and respond to challenges that confront them, or merely succumb to the pressure of market forces.

2.2.1 Public Relations

Kotler (2003) argues that educational institutions need effective communications with their markets and publics. Educators usually use catalogues and bulletins describing their institution and its programs. HEIs communicate about themselves by their very existence, whether or not they have a formal communications program. HEIs use controllable marketing tools that an institution uses to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that the university can do to influence the demand for the services that it offers. MC goes beyond attracting more applicants. Universities may assume that if they only had enough students, their problems would go away. Yet they may also need to attract the good will and financial support of alumni, foundations and other donors, a task that cannot be accomplished by promotion alone.

According to Athiyaman (1997) in his study on linking student satisfaction and service quality perceptions: the case of university education, suggests that, despite hundreds of publications on consumer satisfaction and service quality, little work has been done to clarify the conceptual basis of these constructs; theorists in the area of service quality argue that the popular press does not differentiate between these two constructs. Athiyaman clarifies the relationship between consumer satisfaction and perceived service quality using a scenario specific to higher education. A model of perceived service quality that could be used in higher education institutions and that a responsive HEI has a vital interest in learning about its images/repute in the market place and making sure that these images accurately