

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL MARKETING IN PROMOTING INCENTIVES FOR CANDIDATES OF ENTRANCE EXAM TO STUDY IN ELECTRONIC UNIVERSITY, ELECTRONIC BRANCH OF ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Examining the effect of educational marketing on motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch) is a key factor to attract students and discover the benefits of education virtually. This article focuses on examining the effect of educational marketing on motivating candidates of entrance exam to continue education in Electronic Branch of Islamic Azad University. Tuition is the most important source of income for many universities. Attracting students mean getting a university to the required finance resources, in order to carry out future activities. In addition, according to the relationship marketing theory, establishing a long-term relationship with students is a competitive advantage for universities because the cost of attracting new students is far greater than maintaining current students. In this study, there was firstly examined the factors influencing motivation of candidates to enter virtual universities using conceptual study and literature review and then there was obtained a structural equation model. Then there were two questionnaires among students of Electronic Branch of Islamic Azad University to survey the model and relationship

between its variables. This research is available sampling method with regard to its unlimited statistical population. The Kerjcie and Morgan Tables were used to determine sample size. Finally, SPSS software was used to analyze the data and conduct regression statistics test. The research results provide useful information and insight for officials of Islamic Azad University because they can benefit them for appropriate marketing to maintain current students and motivate new students to continue their studies in Electronic Branch Islamic Azad University.

Keywords: Marketing, educational marketing, motivation, entrance exam candidates

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, marketing has been developed to show items other than commodities such as marketing of educational services. By changing direction of the world's activities towards services, marketing managers should raise their awareness about new marketing methods and types of services including marketing of educational services. Educational services include activities that are necessarily intangible and they are offered from a person to another one, without resulting to own something. Competitive environment of organizations is becoming more complicated more than before, so that speed of changes in most organizations is far more than speed of their responsiveness and adaptation. Continuous changes have created a new imbalance for organizations. In the meantime, only organizations can survive that maintain their competitive advantage. According to scholars of the field, maintain competitive advantage and survival of organizations is possible by helping marketing management and identifying factors affecting marketing success (Tajabi et al, 2015: 3). Nowadays, it can be said that in many developed countries, more than 78% of employment is occupied by service jobs and 75% of their gross national product is provided through services. In the next 10 years, services will account for 90% of all new jobs. Service jobs not include service industries such as hotelling, airlines, banks etc, but include services such as education and training (Haghtalab, 2010: 2). Educational marketing contains a collection of efforts that are conducted to predict, design, explain and guide educational needs of staff, designing programs to meet the needs and encourage individuals and members of organization to accept education. Educational marketing tries to properly recognize educational audiences and potential customers and then build and strengthen their belief in education. When educational manager considers education issue from marketing perspective, he will manifest insights differently from traditional ideas (Alwani, 1989: 8). There are many disagreements about the need for marketing strategies for educational institutions. One of the controversial issues is to consider students as consumers and

consumers. Opponents of educational marketing believe that considering students is not appropriate, but even shameful. They believe that entry of marketers to the field of education causes concern and disregard in this area (Holbrooke, 2005), which will lead to serious economic and social problems. Opponents of educational marketing argue that educational-business institutions have a greater emphasis and concern for organization's performance about social values (Nguk, 2007: 324). The reason for opposition to educational marketing is the misunderstanding that is generated by the concept of marketing. Marketing is usually associated with profit-minded, and thus the main objective of educational institutions is to obtain financial benefits, not social services (Gerald, 2008: 116).

Special features of educational marketing have been developed by theoretical section of education. Therefore, we have pointed out the matter that it is not possible to determine boundary between student's academic results and performance of teachers or quality of curriculum. In reality, it is difficult to decide what deterministic factor is. One of the important features of educational marketing is variety of educational services that can be transmitted from a person to another person, from an institution to another institution, from a country to another country and from a period to another period. Two types of educational services are never alike, even if the subject is studied in a particular school. In particular, similar educational services that are repeatedly provided are not the same (Glawa et al., 2015: 241). However, marketing education and marketing mix of each institution or university are different and require more examination. This research studies factors affecting motivation of applicant students for entrance into the electronic unit of Islamic Azad University. The research results indicate that the effect of educational marketing on motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University virtually.

In the following, there are examined concepts of marketing services in the field of educational marketing. In the next section, the research hypotheses are presented considering marketing mix and based on previous studies. The next steps include data collection method, sample size, statistical population, sampling method, questionnaire validity, questionnaire reliability and data analysis method. Data analysis results are presented. This paper follows by presenting the proposed strategies for motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University, Electronic Branch. Conclusion and the research final hypotheses form the next section.

Research Background

Educational marketing for university can include educational advertising package, quality of educational services, ability of graduates, method of receiving and amount of educational

expenses, which all of them can influence the motivation of exam candidates to continue their studies at a particular university. Therefore, the present research aims to investigate the effects of educational marketing on motivation of candidates of entrance exam for continuing education at Islamic Azad University, Electronic Branch. The board of directors of American Marketing Association confirms the new definition of marketing. According to this definition, marketing is process of planning and implementing the concept of goods or services, price, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to initiate exchanges that meet objectives of individuals and organizations. According to Cutler and Fox, educational marketing shows analyzing, planning, implementing and controlling specific programs aimed at ensuring voluntary exchange of market value to achieve organizational goals. Marketing involves designs and management of educational institution, so that the needs and expectations of the target group are met. Marketing also involves using an effective tool to determine value, communication and distribution of products and educational services for serving, motivating and informing the community. Marketing is a social and managerial process that individuals and groups gain what they need and desire through creating and exchanging products and values. Marketing is a kind of organizational function, and at the same time, it is a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to the customer and for maintaining relationships between organizations and interest groups. The purpose of this type of marketing is to manage relationships through effective communication between schools and clients (Glawa et al., 2015: 173).

Quality of Educational Services

More than anything else, providers of educational services should be competitive people. This is the key to success of educational marketers. When customer is present in the environment, he expects to be provided with services. Customers may be satisfied or dissatisfied with delivery system, so you should always keep in mind that customer is an integral part of services. Satisfying and retaining students depends only on the way that teachers provide their best service for students. In the present time, this is not natural resources and wealth that distinguishes a prosperous society from other non-advanced societies, but it is the accumulation and creation of knowledge resources that create such a division. Education has never been considered as an important tool as today. Individuals are looking for special benefits in educational services that are provided for them. For this reason, it is important to meet different needs and demands of individuals effectively and marketing orientation should be used for conceptualization, design and delivery of educational services (Kalenskaia et al., 2013: 317).

If universities focus their educational activities on practical implementation needs of knowledge, it is very important to meet the needs from viewpoint of quality of educational services. Education quality is a prerequisite for competition between universities. To a great extent, it depends on quality of human resources. Enhancing potential of teachers and professors is one of the main directions of higher education development. The first major step to develop programs of improving quality is to identify perceptions and expectations of recipients of services or goods about their quality. Today, many leading organizations have found that their business has become more important and effective due to customer role. On this basis, customer is a main axis that is considered in organizations, day to day; so that there is a growing number of companies that have chosen customer satisfaction as main measure of their performance (Shafiei & Mir Ghafouri, 2008: 58).

Graduates' Skill Ability

At present, developing unemployment crisis in the community is a serious that has caused concern among most families and authorities of the country. Meanwhile, the massive flood of university unemployed graduates has added to the crisis. Failure to employ and plan for this vulnerable group will result in irreparable damage to the country. Unemployment of university graduates is one of the biggest economic problems in our country as the main axis of development and economic progress of the society. The lack of consideration of higher education system to the community needs is one of the causes of unemployment crisis of graduates, while skill is considered as the basic need for a university graduate to work and accept special responsibilities in the community; that is, an individual, in addition to his mental, physical and educational abilities, as well as behavioral qualities such as personality, attitude, motivation and individual values, should also acquire technical, human and perceived skills during the course of his education (Entezarian et al, 2011: 65).

Many losses have been incurred on various companies that require university graduate specialization and have forced them to spend a lot of time and money on employment graduates. The most important issues that companies have been involved include high educational costs for new graduates (at least 16 months), high education time, prolongation of projects due to lack of specialized staffing skills, increasing wastes, damaging new devices and facilities due to lack of training and skills in working with the devices (Zarghami, 2001: 4). Considering ability to work at universities and improving their capacity at education centers and universities is a kind of marketing to attract students' attention to choice and motivation of choosing that university or training center.

Educational Promo Packs

Training pack consists of a set of educational elements that is prepared based on curriculum objectives of a curriculum, training duration or learning area. Preparing the curriculum was initially proposed as a strategy for promoting individual learning and enhancement of learner skills, but due to diversity of media platforms and educational contents, increasing the number of students in classrooms as well as paying attention to individual needs and differences, developing a training package and inclusion its different components were considered, in order to achieve high quality and up-to-date learning. From this point of view, the offered definitions for training in each country vary in accordance with goals and policies of its educational system (Baho, 2013: 79).

Sending and distributing unwanted and intrusive promotional packs will cause distraction and discontent audiences. Consumers' satisfaction and advertising goals are the concerns of advertising firms and brokers. As a result, addressee of the message should be identified and content of the message should be provided is in accordance with his request and at the place he or she searches at his/her desired time. The Internet as a comprehensive medium has many of these capabilities (Mohammadian et al., 2010: 9).

When complexity or involvement of a product is high, customers process propaganda actively and spend more time and efforts on the product-related information. Advertising can reach its maximum impact on products with little involvement. Repeated advertising, even very little intangible effects can make bigger differences between various brand names. Centers should use appropriate tactics and advertising styles in their propaganda programs, according to life cycle of their goods and services (Mohammadian, 2007: 12).

These definitions may include educational centers and universities, and these centers can offer their benefits and services as promotional packages to familiarize and attract students with facilities, qualities and services of their considered university.

Receiving Method and Training Costs

Cutler believes that similarity between business and educational institutions is originated from the fact that training and teaching students in educational institutions relies on financial resources that are provided from tuition or other resources, and institutions are forced to provide money for educators' rights and implementing their programs. If all educational institutions are government-owned, they will be run by a central system and there will be no need for competition. In fact, competition is seen between private educational institutions. When education is considered as a business, in fact, each educational institution is trying to get more customers to finance its needs. Institutions have inevitably operated and get more customers to

finance their required funds. Institutions have inevitably survived in a complex and changing environment, as well as competing with each other to get students and financial resources (Opplata, Fosket, Hamilcie & Brown, 2002: 253).

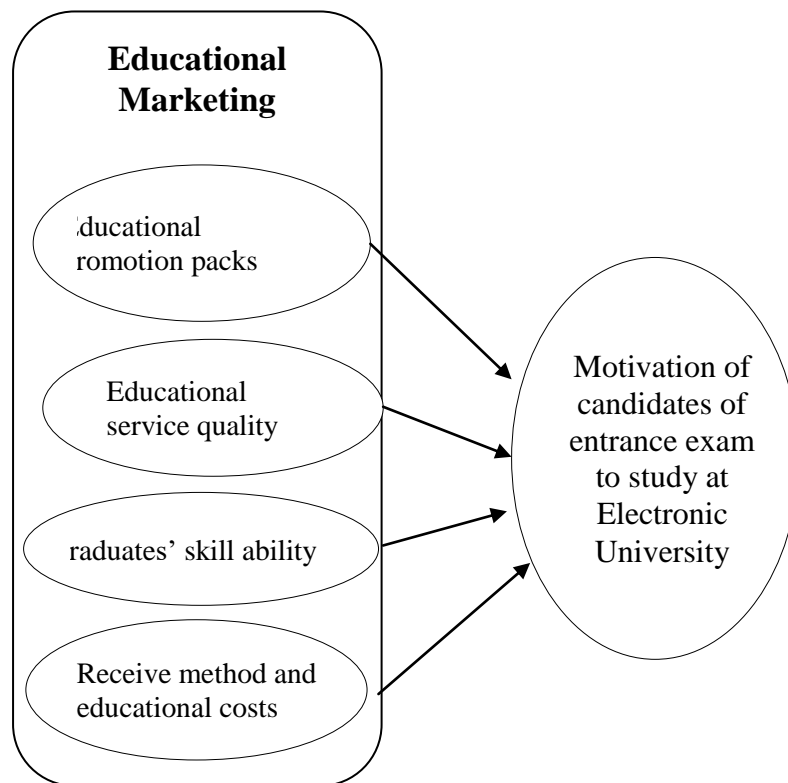
Type of payment is very important for students; that is, which institution or university collects costs in cash, and which institution can receive costs through check, installment or student loan, and therefore, it can be a marketing factor for the educational centers. Table 1 shows the studied components of the present research with previous studies.

Table 1. The investigated cases in the present research with previous studies

	Delavar, 2014	Hamidzadeh et al, 2014	Hamidzadeh et al, 2014	Esmailpour et al, 2013	Hosseini Chegini, 2012	Allahyari, 2012	Alipour et al, 2011	Christine et al, 2014	Steamach et al, 2012	Mogan, 2011	Hikins et al, 2010	Hang et al, 2010	Mutkieteen et al, 2008	Huang et al, 2007
Service quality	*					*		*	*					
Information technology	*									*				
Social activities	*										*			
Physical facility	*													
Communication marketing	*													
Customer-orientation	*	*	*	*	*	*					*		*	
Entrepreneurial marketing		*	*											
Competitive advantage	*	*	*			*			*		*	*	*	*
Opportunistic		*	*						*					*
Educational marketing				*				*	*	*	*	*	*	
Marketing mixes	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Brand					*	*			*					
Cost and payment method	*						*	*	*					
Promotion							*			*			*	
Skill							*	*	*	*				
Advertising							*	*						
Costumer loyalty	*							*						
Risk taking		*												

In this research, we examine the existing models on impact of educational marketing for motivating candidates of entrance exam. Then we provide a model for reviewing and recognizing the impact of factors such as quality of services, skill level, promotional package and how to pay tuition, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The research conceptual model



On the basis previous research that has been used as a theoretical basis to develop the research conceptual model, the research hypotheses are as follows:

1. Graduates' skill ability affects motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch).
2. Quality of educational services affects motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch).
3. Educational promo packages affect motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch).
4. Method of receive and amount of tuition affect motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is applicable objectively; it is descriptive and survey research in terms of controlling variables and method of data collection.

Data collection tools in this study include two questionnaires: the first one is the standard questionnaire of Valrand motivation academic achievement (AMS), and the second is educational marketing questionnaire. Kerjci and Morgan tables were used to determine the sample size.

Standard questionnaire of Valrand motivation academic achievement (AMS): academic motivation scale is the translation of English sample of academic motivation scale (AMS) that was originally designed in France, under name EME. This scale has been developed based on the theory of self-determination by Deci and Ryan. It contains of 28 questions, which each question includes six options. Then academic motivation is classified based on the obtained points, so that scores between 28-70 determine levels of poor academic motivation, scores between 70-112 show levels of moderate level motivation and scores more than 112 are considered as very good academic motivations. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire were performed in all qualitative and quantitative validity, qualitative and quantitative content validity.

Educational marketing questionnaire: this questionnaire was provided by the researcher. In order to evaluate the questionnaire validity, there have been considered views a number of professors. According to descriptions and tips of the professors, some questions have been removed, added and moved. The questionnaire reliability has been confirmed using retesting method and calculating Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.82$) as well as doubling ($r = 0.68$). The questionnaire reliability was also measured by two common standard criteria of Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.88$) and doubling ($r = 0.73$). Also, in the conducted study by Weissani et al (2012), the Cronbach's alpha for internal, external and obsessive motivation subscales was 84%, 86% and 67% respectively.

The research statistical population includes students of Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch) at different educational levels. With regard to the lack of availability of all members of the statistical society, by sampling formula of uncertain society, there were considered 384 people as sampling, which there was used the convenience sampling method.

RESULTS

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to examine normal distribution of data. The results are presented in Table 2. According to the obtained statistics of Smirnov-Kolmogorov as well as level of significance, it can be inferred that there is a significant difference between the expected

distributions (normal distribution) with the observed distribution for all variables. Therefore, the variables are distributed abnormally, so in accordance variables' distribution, we should use nonparametric statistics to test the hypotheses.

Table 2. Test of normal distribution of variables

	Kolmogorov value	Sig	Error level probability	Result
Graduate skill ability	3.764	0.000	0.05	Abnormal
Educational service quality	3.411	0.000	0.05	Abnormal
Educational promotion packs	6.628	0.000	0.05	Abnormal
Receive method and educational costs	4.195	0.000	0.05	Abnormal
Motivation to study	3.224	0.000	0.05	Abnormal

To investigate the effect of independent variables on motivating candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch) we use regression analysis because distribution of the data is abnormal. Table 3 shows results of analyzing the test data.

Table 3. Regression test

Independent variable		Coefficients	B Standard	Test value	Sig
Graduate skill ability	R	.816	.816	920.243	.000
	R ²	.666	-	-	-
	F	367.675	-	-	-
	Sig	.000	-	-	-
Educational service quality	R	.807	.807	789.113	.000
	R ²	.652	-	-	-
	F	345.664	-	-	-
	Sig	.000	-	-	-
Educational promotion packs	R	.829	.829	717.790	.000
	R ²	.687	-	-	-
	F	811.613	-	-	-
	Sig	.000	-	-	-
Receive method and educational costs	R	.580	-0.580	144.489	.000
	R ²	.336	-	-	-
	F	93.537	-	-	-
	Sig	.000	-	-	-

As seen in Table 3, F-statistic value is significant at $\text{sig} < 0.01$ for four independent variables, so the overall effect will be significant at confidence level of 99%. In addition, coefficient of determination (effect and anticipation) of the independent variables was 0.66, 0.65, 0.68 and 0.58 respectively. Accordingly, among the four studied variables, educational promo pack has the highest coefficient of explanatory to motivate candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch). Then variables of graduates' skill ability, qualities of educational services and receive method and training cost are ranked from second to fourth, in terms of coefficient of explanatory variables.

DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Developing information and communication technologies has led to develop virtual organizations. Virtual university is one of the leading and expanding organizational areas in this field. Identify and improve performance and factors affecting development of these universities can make their role more effective.

In this article, there was studied the impact of educational marketing on motivating candidates of entrance exam to continue study at Islamic Azad University, Electronic Branch. For this purpose, there was examined effect of four factors that anticipated they are effective in this area. The four factors were: graduates' skill ability, quality of educational services, promotional packages and receive method and training cost. Results of the data analysis showed positive effects of the factors on improving incentives candidates of entrance exam to study at Islamic Azad University (Electronic Branch). Accordingly, the following application suggestions are offered:

With regard to dealing with cases such as intense competition between universities, higher education institutions, interest of students and parents at the cost of higher education and other cases, Islamic Azad universities should use marketing tactics to open new gateway of how to perform ads.

Each year, number of online universities and colleges is increased, which attracts the attention of people who probably had not noticed previously scientific service institution. Managers of Islamic Azad Universities and higher education institutions should change their traditional views on an educational service provider and move toward market and customer-orientation in particular.

Managers of Islamic Azad Universities can take advantage the relationship between educations with satisfying potential needs for attractive education. Director of the universities and higher education institutions should not neglect the potential needs of people. Managers must recognize these needs and show effective communication to resolve them.

Higher education institutions, especially Islamic Azad Universities should know that the satisfied customers are their most important assets, so business strategy should be accordingly determined and allocation of resources should be based on maintaining status of client assets.

Managers of Islamic Azad Universities should encourage companies with sufficient capital to support the universities and they should enter on the market as a partner with long-term trends. Lack of the required tools and equipments as well as obsolete laboratories are important factors in innovation chain that are closely associated with leaving the universities of the market. For the university administration, removing these anomalies is an urgent task.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There might be unwanted factors in any research that make limitations to the research; hence, some of the unwanted variables are not under researcher's control. These factors must be determined and the researcher must show his knowledge about the influence of these factors on the research results. In the present study, there were some limitations such as:

1. To study the variables the survey (questionnaire tools) has been used; while it was better to use observation and/or interview for some factors. The questionnaire is a tool by which the understandings and attitude of any person is investigated; whereas, the reality might be different with respondent's answers.
2. There are two issues must be considered regarding the nature and generalization of the research: firstly, there might be some practical behaviors like other survey researches that are mostly dependent on environmental conditions. Furthermore, intervening variables might affect the supposed relations among variables that are considered in this study.
3. Some other important limitations to this research include: reluctance of some of the respondents to answer the questionnaires, not enough carefulness of some of the respondents in answering the questions, the possibility of bias in answering the questions by some of the respondents.

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