

Investigating Effective Components of Higher Education Marketing and Providing a Marketing Model for Iranian Private Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Purpose-The purpose of this paper is to study and identify the effective components of higher education marketing and providing a marketing model for Iranian higher education private sector institutions.

Design/methodology/ approach- This study is a qualitative research. For identifying the effective components of higher education marketing and providing a marketing model the thematic analysis was used. First all the themes related to higher education marketing from the research references were collected and was analyzed by template analysis and thematic network methods.

Findings-The results of thematic analysis revealed that there are 2 dominant themes, 13 global themes, 40 organizing themes and 503 basic themes related to higher education marketing. The relationships between these themes are provided as a marketing model for Iranian private sector higher educational institutions.

Originality/value-There are few studies of higher education marketing in the Iranian higher education market. This study provides useful information about effective components of higher education marketing and marketing models.

Keywords: higher education, marketing, thematic analysis, private higher education

1. Introduction

Development of education and higher education is one of the main indexes for evaluating the economic, social, political and cultural growth of countries. During the last few decades the role and structure of higher education has significantly changed throughout the world (Teichler, 1988). Increasing access to higher education has always been the strategy for human resource development in Iran. For the same reason the first private university, Islamic Azad University, was established in 1982 after the Islamic revolution in Iran. Today there are 4.5 million students studying at 2515 universities and higher education institutions in Iran (Iran's scientific information, 2012). The extension of private higher education and reduction in applicants for education is the reason of increasing competition in higher education market for example; the number of applicants of further education has fallen 22.5% over the last 12 years while the statistics indicates growing in the number of institutions at the same period. In such circumstances which students are facing a wide range of options, private higher education institutions have no other choice but to resort to marketing ideas (Ming, 2005). This article tries to create an insight to educational marketing and provide a proper model for marketing private higher educational institutions specifically Islamic Azad University to assist them in developing effective marketing strategies. So the research questions are:

- 1) What are the components of marketing higher education?
- 2) What marketing model is applicable for Iranian private higher education institutions?

1.1 Higher Education in Iran

Higher education mainly includes the trainings leading to the academic degree in Iran. The active educational institutions in Iranian higher education system according to the information from the website of The Ministry of

Science, Research and Technology:

- Public Sector

Supplying trained and skilled human resources is the duty of the Ministry of Science Research and Technology however other ministries and executive agencies participate in training skilled human resources in Iran. By transferring the medical education in 1985, to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education all duties and responsibilities of the Ministry of Science Research and Technology were transferred to the new department. At present in addition to universities and higher education institutions related to the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME) other educational centers educate students by permission of the above ministries. For example in order to straightening technical and vocational education and training skilled manpower needed for industries like mining, agriculture and. Elmi-Karbordi University was established in 1992. This sort of education and training is organized by collaboration with executive agencies, departments and ministries which employs students.

- Private Sector

In order to increase public participation in higher education services and reducing the financial burden of the government, private sector established higher educational institutions including:

- Islamic Azad University

The first private university after Islamic revolution established in 1982 in Iran. This university has a total of 408 active branches in over 110 cities in the country and some educational centers overseas.

- Nongovernmental and Nonprofit higher educational institutions

The experience of Islamic Azad University and private sector interest to participating in higher education led to the approval the regulations for university establishment in 1985. Now there are 340 educational institutions working in this part of educational system.

- Distance Learning

Payam-e-Noor University was established in 1987 with this aim to upgrading the scientific and cultural condition of the country. This university made education possible for employed or household applicants. The main aim of this university is to provide suitable education opportunities for people who live in remote areas of the country with a reasonable cost.

1.2 Educational Marketing

The history of private education institutions throughout the world demonstrate that although the development of these institutions began in the late 80's (Levey, 2010) but in countries such as USA, Japan and Latin America these institutions have a long working background. For example until the late nineteenth century higher education in USA was generally dependent on the private sector (Chronister, 1980; Thelin, 2011).

Private sector participation in higher education in South East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Philippines is clearly evident. For example about 90 percent of students in these countries enrol in private higher educational institutions (Altbach, 1999). Altbach et al. (2009) stated that private sector had the highest growth among the different sectors of higher education in Central and Eastern European countries after 90's and the fall of Soviet Union.

The private sector of higher education in Africa has improved in comparison to other sectors of higher education and such a rapid growth has been seen in Latin American countries. In most of these countries the number of students who enrol in private sector of higher education is about one-third of total registration for education (Kinser et al., 2010).

Higher education in the world has been affected by many changes regarding to supply and demand for educational services and higher educational institutions are in a condition which forced them to look for a solution to solve their problems. Changes in higher education in the public and private sectors have been investigated by many researchers such as Maringe and Gibbs (2009) and Levy (2003, 2006). These changes have increased the competition in higher education market and lead to development and expansion of the private sector educational institutions.

Maringe and Gibbs (2009) found that higher education has become a commodity in European knowledge based societies which can be sold by using marketing tools.

Contemporary marketing can be defined as a managerial and social process so that groups and individuals that have a need or demand can get what they want by creating and exchanging products, services, ideas or rights

with other groups and individuals (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Marketing is a managerial process which needs planning, analyzing, resource allocating, monitoring and investment to provide customer needs (Brassington, 2006). Marketing clears the organizational objectives, policy integration and effective utilization of resources with the aim of achieving customer satisfaction.

Theories and concepts which were applicable in commercial marketing gradually have been used by some universities to gain competitive advantage. Marketing application in providing educational services is known as Educational Marketing (Wonder & Gyure, 1991).

Higher educational marketing means that managers of educational institutions should ensure that their strategic plans cover the educational needs of their customers with a reasonable cost (Further Educational Funding Council, 1998).

2. Methodology

Qualitative research in social science has significantly increased. For obtaining useful and meaningful results in qualitative researches data should be analyzed systematically but there are few analytical tools in this area. The growth in use of qualitative analysis is encouraging but the need to developed analytical tools still exists (Braun & Clark, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001).

2.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis is a common and general skill in qualitative analysis. In fact, thematic analysis is the first method that a researcher should learn. This method provides basic skills for most qualitative analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Boyatzis (1998) introduces it not as a specific method but as a proper tool for different analytical methods. However Braun and Clark (2006) believe that the thematic analysis should be considered as specific method which flexibility is its feature. Thematic analysis contains a wide range of skills and methods. In thematic analysis process, according to the aim and questions of the research, proper analytical methods can be used.

2.2 The Nature of Theme

One of the basic discussions in thematic analysis is "Theme". The methodological literature does not refer to this concept and mostly it is mentioned as a pattern which indicates an interesting point about the research and is recognized by common sense. Theme indicates important information about the data and research questions and it somewhat shows the concept of existing pattern in data collection (Braun & Clark, 2006). Theme is a pattern which can be found in data and at least, it describes and organizes the observation and at most it interprets the aspects of phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1988). Theme is a repetitive and diverse feature in the text which researcher believes it represents specific understanding about research questions (King & Horrocks, 2010).

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Investigations have showed that educational marketing is a new marketing subject in many countries and there wasn't significant research literature in this area in Iran so all the collected themes used in this research were obtained from the following sources:

- Research papers published in scientific websites such as Emerald, Science direct and Elsevier.
- Books related to marketing and educational marketing: Marketing higher education, Theory and Practice by Marinage and Gibbs (2009) and Marketing Management by Rosta et al. (2012)
- Universities strategic planning and marketing strategies from their website such as Khorasghan Azad University Strategic planning (2010-2014), UM Malaysia strategic planning (2011-2015), Marketing program of Mc Person collage (2010-2014)
- Doctoral dissertations in Educational Marketing such as: Understanding student choice of university and marketing strategies in Syrian private higher education by Al-Fattal (2010) and A higher education marketing perspective on choice factors and information sources considered by South African first year university students by Wise (2008).

In this research, for answering the research questions, Template Analysis and Thematic network method is used:

- Template Analysis seeks for highlighted themes in different levels in a text and categorizes them into basic themes, organizing themes and global themes.
- Thematic network draws the different level themes like a web network which the highlighted themes and the relationship between them are clearly shown (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

2.4 Reliability of Research

To assess validity of the research, global themes, organizing themes and basic themes were selected according to the research questions and literature from research references. Besides a group of experts were asked to give their comments and guidelines on the extracted themes. Reliability of the research was calculated by Holesti method with the equation 1.

$$PAO = 2M/(n1+n2) \rightarrow PAO = (2*485)/(503+485) = 98\% \quad (1)$$

Where PAO is the reliability of the research, M is the number of agreements in themes in two phases of the theme coding, n1 is the number of themes in first phase of theme coding and n2 is the number of themes in second phase of theme coding (coding reviewed by experts). Value of PAO = 98% shows that the result of research has a high reliability.

2.5 Analyzing the Research Data

According to the marketing definition presented by American Marketing Association in 2004, marketing is creating, providing a value and managing customer's relationship. In this research the mentioned references were studied carefully with this aim to find the themes relating to:

- Creating and providing a value to customers
- Customers relationship Management
- Marketing models used by universities

First, all the themes related to creating and providing value to customers were extracted from about 66 references containing research papers, university strategic plans, universities websites and doctoral dissertations. Then the basic themes were reviewed and repeated themes were omitted from the list. The same thing was done with themes related to Customer's relationship management and Marketing models used by universities. In Table 1 global themes related to research questions and their abundance in the research references are shown:

Table1. Global themes of the research

Research questions	Global theme	Abundance
What are the components of marketing higher education?	Universities educational planning's	54
	Costs & students financial issues	60
	Place of the university	14
	Universities facilities & services	53
	University promotion	32
	Universities processes	39
	Universities staffs & faculty members	18
	Creating relationship with customers	53
	Customer satisfaction	16
	Higher education marketing models	Marketing mix model
Jackson university choice model		21
Chapman university choice model		32
Higher education student choice model		57

As it is shown in Table 1, 52% of global themes of the research are related to the components of marketing higher education and 48% of the global themes are related to marketing models used by universities. It shows that references of this research emphasis more on components of marketing higher education.

2.6 Components of Marketing Higher Education

As it was mentioned before, private sector higher educational institutions are in competition for new students' enrolment. Components of higher education marketing have been studied by researchers such as Naude and Ivy (1999). In this research all the themes related to components of higher education marketing were studied and

according to thematic analysis, components of higher education marketing are shown in Figure 1. Literature review and research references have revealed that the effective components of marketing higher education are: Universities educational planning's, Costs and students financial issues, Place of the university, Universities facilities & services, University promotion, Universities processes, Universities staffs & faculty members, Customers relationship management and Customer satisfaction.

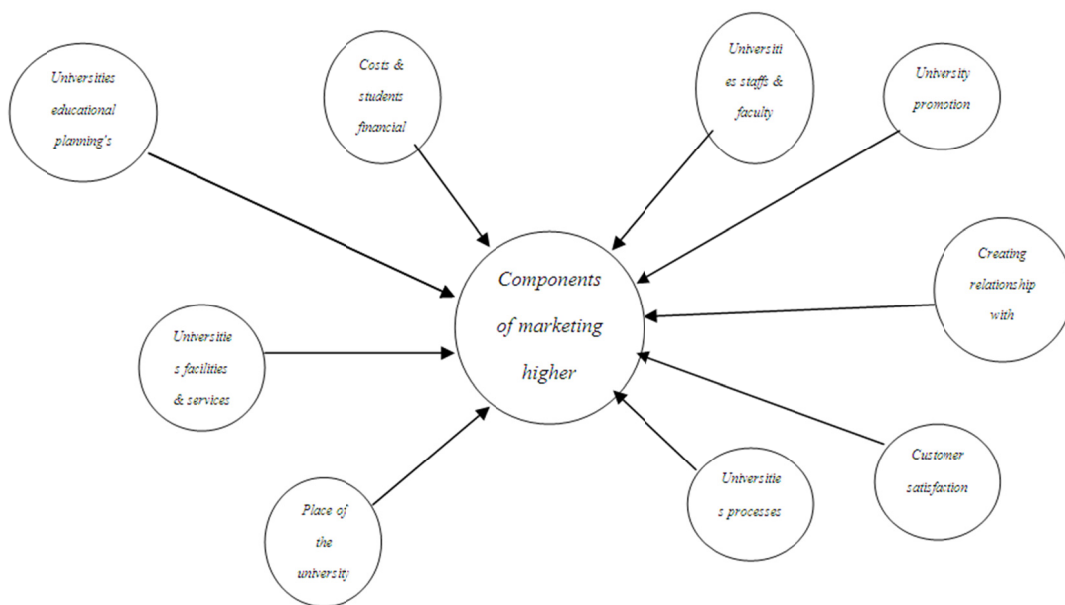


Figure 1. Thematic Network related to components of marketing higher education

In Table 2, global and organizing themes related to creating and providing value to customers and managing relationship with customers is shown. Among these components educational costs and students financial issues are the most abundant.

Table 2. Global and organizing themes related to the first question of research

Research questions	Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Abundance
What are the components of marketing higher education? Themes related to creating and providing a value to customers	Universities educational planning's	Variety of academic courses	19
		Curriculum structure	12
		Student exchange program	4
		Quality of teaching	13
		Possibility in choosing teaching method	6
	Costs & students financial issues	Marketing approach of the university	6
		Cost of education	15
		Cost of living	9
		Financial aid or discount in tuition fees	10
		Availability of scholarship	8
		Employment perspective	8
		Availability of part time job while studying	4
	Place of the university	Location of the university	9

	University and dormitories attractiveness	5	
	Universities educational facilities	21	
Universities facilities & services	Access to computer facilities	5	
	Sport facilities	9	
	Creation the technological parks in university	2	
	Providing good quality services to students	16	
	University reputation	15	
University promotion	University safety	7	
	Student union activities	7	
	University promotion by others	3	
	Job search for graduates	5	
Universities processes	Deploying learning organization elements	8	
	University research approach	15	
	Quality of university management	11	
	Faculty academic reputation	14	
Universities staffs & faculty members	Empowering faculty and staff	4	
	Creating relationship with prospect students through press	7	
Themes related to customers relationship management	Creating relationship with prospect students through website	13	
	Printing booklets about the university	7	
	Creating relationship with prospect students through visiting the schools	4	
	Creating relationship with prospect students and their families through open days visit from university	8	
	Participation in scientific conferences	5	
	Reporting the university output	4	
	Reporting the research output	2	
	University participation in social activities	3	
	Customer satisfaction	Introducing universities abilities	8
		Identifying student needs	4
		Providing consultancy services	4

2.7 Higher Education Marketing Models

Marketing models are used by universities for planning their marketing strategies. In this research, themes related to marketing models used by universities and universities marketing strategies were studied and four models of marketing higher education were identified. As it is shown in Table 1 about 48% of the research themes are related to marketing models and among these models Marketing Mix model is the most abundant one. In some cases the models were similar to each other but were introduced by different names. The thematic analysis of themes related to marketing models is shown in Figure 2.

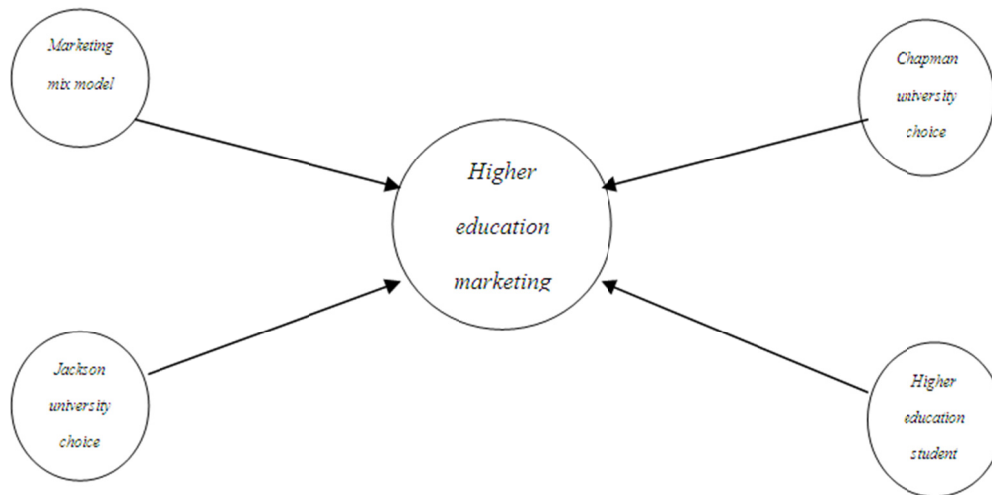


Figure 2. Thematic network related to marketing models

In Table 3 global themes and organizing themes related to marketing models are shown. Thematic analysis of marketing models describes the important factors in marketing higher education. Many researchers have studied marketing strategies and proposed marketing models such as Kotler and Fox (1995) who proposed Marketing Mix model for higher education marketing.

Table 3. Global and organizing themes related to marketing models

Higher education marketing models	Marketing mix model	1. Program	54
		2. Price	48
		3. Promotion	32
		4. People	28
		5. Prospectus	9
		6. Prominence	21
		7. Place	14
		8. Physical facilities	37
	Jackson university choice model	1. Preference	8
		2. Exclusion	6
3. Evaluation		7	
Chapman university choice model	1. Student Characteristics	6	
	2. Significant Persons	4	
	3. College Efforts to Communicate with Students	8	
	4. College Characteristics	14	
Higher education student choice model	1. Need recognition	11	
	2. Information search	16	
	3. Alternative evaluation	8	
	4. Decision & enrollment	12	
	5. Post enrollment evaluation	10	

3. Conclusion

Analysing the components of higher education marketing revealed by the research, allowed us to design a model for marketing higher education institutions in Iran that is presented in Figure 3.

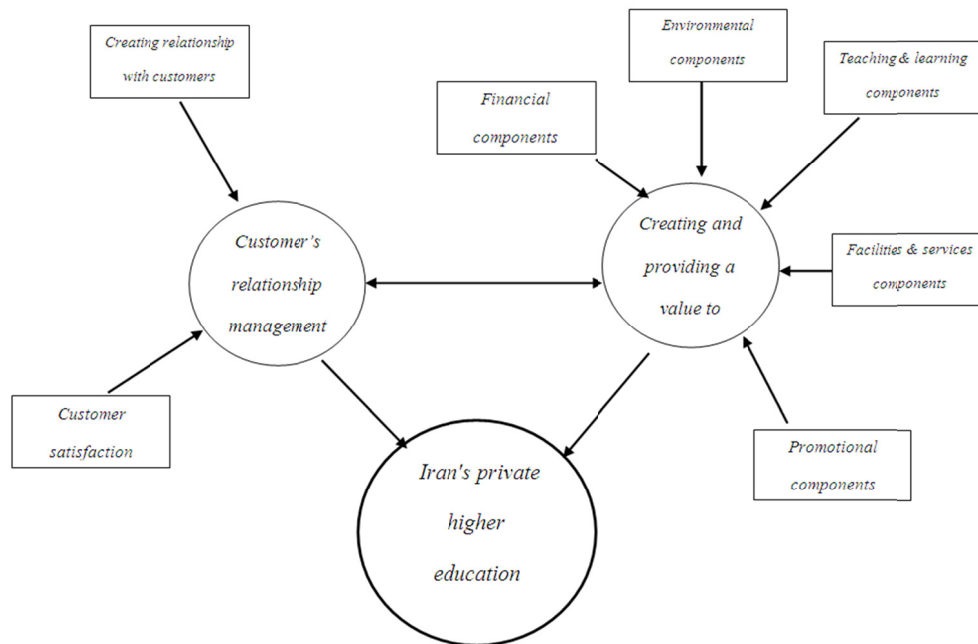


Figure 3. Marketing model for Iran's private higher education

As it is shown in the model, with a view to marketing higher education in Iran, universities should focus on creating and providing value and managing its relationship with its customers. According to the presented model, universities have to develop their marketing strategies by considering the following main components:

- Financial components which contain all the factors related to financial status of a student like tuition fees, cost of living, scholarship, financial aid or discount in tuition fees and ...
- Environmental components which contain factors related to location of the university, attractiveness of the university and ...
- Teaching & learning components that include factors related to Universities educational planning's like variety of academic courses, curriculum structure, quality of teaching and ...
- Facilities & services components including universities educational facilities, access to computer facilities, university sport facilities and quality of services providing to students.
- Promotional components which include all the universities features and activities in presenting itself to society like the university reputation, university safety, student union activities and ...
- Customers relationship management which means communicating with prospect students in any way and by any means like press, printing booklets, meetings, radio and TV interviews, participation in scientific conferences, universities open days meetings and ...
- Customer satisfaction component identifies the needs of students and tries to make the customers satisfied with the received services.

4. Recommendations

Due to the importance of higher education marketing the following recommendations are given:

- The proposed marketing model has been developed basing on the data analysis of this research so it is recommended to design a questionnaire for testing the validity of the model and to study the relation between the variables of the questionnaire.
- It is recommended to use other research methods such as Case study, Hermeneutic method and Grounded

theory for higher educational marketing.

- It is recommended to held conferences and seminars about marketing higher education in the country and invites successful university managers in the field of educational marketing form other countries to share ideas and use from their experiences.
- It is recommended that university managers take marketing courses to shape their view to their job as an educational service provider.

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