

The “Custrac Model”: Its Generic Practicality with a Twist in the Ghanaian Education

Samuel Affran^{1&2}, E. N. Gyamfi^{1&3} & S. Odonkor^{1&3}

¹ Livingstone International University of Tourism Excellence & Business Management, Zambia

² Department of Marketing, Procurement and Supply Chain Management, Winneba

³ Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, Accra, Ghana

Correspondence: Samuel Affran, Department of Marketing, Procurement and Supply Chain Management, Winneba, Livingstone International University of Tourism Excellence & Business Management, Zambia. E-mail: saffran@uew.edu.gh

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to promulgate the “custrac model” that proposes how the Ghanaian university management through its relationship officers can attract fully qualified and competent students globally. Following a survey technique, data were collected from 500 respondents from the top five Universities in Ghana. Analysis was done using SmartPLS 3 to perform partial least square regression analysis on the structural equation model. Findings revealed that customer attraction is constructed on loyalty and further enhanced by satisfaction. The study focused on few respondents from only five public universities in Ghana, thus, inhibiting the generalization of the findings. Practically, the “custrac model” suggests that the university management should align their strategic relationship marketing stratagems in developing competitive and market-driven programs having in place a strong quality assurance directorate to attain customer attraction. The proposed “Custrac model” in this study shoots up our intellectual understanding of strategic relationship marketing.

Keywords: “Custrac model”, strategic relationship marketing, SmartPLS3, Ghana, universities

1. Introduction

Most Ghanaian universities are confronted with the issue of attracting fully qualified and competent students (Gyamera et al., 2021; Kwegyiriba & Mensah, 2021). The issues are quite the same in other parts of Africa (Rotberg, 2020). Higher institutions in this part of the world are finding it very difficult to entice students (Calhoun et al., 2021) to pursue academic programs of their choice (Kuranchie et al., 2021). Empirically research shows that about 75% of students are fascinated and tend to attend university with the state of art facilities (Gbadegesin et al., 2021) provided. Physical infrastructure (Eberle et al., 2021) is also viewed as an attractive force most often than not. Building an active website (Otto et al., 2021) with swift institutional information delivery (Swift, 2021) tends to attract a good caliber of students. The strength of the faculty (Bowker, 2021) cannot be left out as it serves as a conduit for attracting students. Statistically, the evidence further shows that student enrolment keeps on tumbling by 2% each academic year (Uriegas et al., 2021) notwithstanding the effort made by the university management. Prominent among these causes is that: first, most of the universities are bankrupt when it comes to relationship construction with their current and prospective students (Dixon et al., 2021). Second, most programs run are contemporary, not relevant. Third, facilities or edifices are not student-friendly (Classens et al., 2021) in some of the universities. Structures are put up without bearing in mind the students’ coziness (Shaikh, 2020). They think only about the university and just to make the environment beautiful (Cage & Howes, 2020). The university management has forgotten that a (Balinado et al., 2021) good product or service cannot sell unless it meets customer satisfaction. In this case, the student’s needs and wants should be the focal point when designing an academic program within the parameters of the university (Gupta, 2021). The students’ needs should be and must be a top priority of the university (Lee, Jeong, & Cho, 2021) in order not to pave a way for any form of dissonance. It’s upon this note that the researcher has taken the trouble upon himself to promulgate the “custrac model” underpinned by the cognitive dissonance theory that tries to suggest how the university management through its relationship officers can attract fully qualified and competent students on the bedrock of satisfaction.

To achieve this height structural examination was conducted to ascertain the indirect mediating relationship that exists between relationship marketing stratagems, student satisfaction, and student loyalty disposition. The study was subsequently guided by this research question: How do student satisfaction indirectly mediate the relationship between strategic relationship marketing stratagems and student loyalty disposition? The conceptualization of “custrac” model contributes to the relationship marketing literature. This work also responds to the current academic discourse on (Ali & Anwar, 2021) the need for researchers to investigate the strategic intent of relationship building on institutional student attraction. To end with, the research findings are tailed with discussions and implications for theory, practice, and recommendations for future research.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

This study is reinforced by “cognitive dissonance theory” which “assumes that individuals continuously strive to maintain a balanced cognitive system.” Thus, the priority of every consumer is to minimize the under hidden discord after the purchase and consumption of a good or service. Concerning this study, the theory seems to suggest that students tend to strike a cognitive balance to attain institutional satisfaction before they could be attracted to any university of their choice. It is therefore likely for the student to remain attracted to such a university if the satisfaction rate is quite high after the consumption of the institutional service delivery. In a situation where the student is dissatisfied with the services, it will become impossible to remain loyal to the university. If the cognitive dissonance, along with its switching intentions decreases in the course of a business relationship, then an explanation as to why long-term business relationships develop can be provided by the cognitive dissonance theory. We would like to reiterate that this theory, presupposes that strategic relationship marketing stratagems used in this study should exhibit these potentials of creating satisfaction thus reducing dissonance in the mind of the students. Effectively, it should possess the ingredients to attract fully qualified and competent students consistently. These stratagems should be in the position to elicit positive responses on what the university management has to do to achieve the research objective. These strategic resources should provide the foundation to develop the university’s capabilities that can lead to superior performance over time. This study capitalizes on the rulebooks of cognitive dissonance theory to further our understanding of strategic relationship marketing stratagems on how to attract students in the context of Ghanaian education. A critical look at some of the scholarly works revealed that certain dimensions of institution service quality can equally be viewed as strategic relationship marketing stratagems (Zahia et al., 2021) thus having the ability to attract students thus reducing dissonance, but it’s (Kirim, 2021) sustainability remains questionable. Some scholars share the opinion that accessibility in terms of the ease of contact and the approachability of university management (Brown, 2021) to a large extent can be used to attract more students. Buchs et al. (2021) also argued that the scholarly competence displayed by the university tends to enhance some cognitive soundness thus attracting more students. Assurances by the university workers to the entire student body could also resolve some imbalances which help achieve the students’ expectations (Scharoun & Muratovski, 2021). An appeal was made by (Nyakurerwa, 2021) that personnel of the university should show courtesy to their clientele at any given moment. Supported by (Kenfack & Öztüren, 2021) politeness and respect by the university staff are key ingredients to institutional attractiveness thus boosting the confidence for the students to remain loyal to the university. Considerations and friendliness of frontline workers (Haigler, 2021) are also critical in drawing prospective students. Other scholars are of the view that the communication platform is of great importance (Akova & Kantar, 2021; Decuyper & Landri, 2021; Ewing, 2021; Durnen, 2021).

Other literature (Ahakwa, Yang, Tackie, & Bankole, 2021) suggests that the university should adopt a media channel that is multi-versatile reaching diverse target audiences concomitantly. Credibility on the part of university management is viewed to be crucial for top quality services in the higher education setup (Tight, 2021) whereas reliability (Alshurideh et al., 2021) cannot be compromised in every given space. Davids (2021) posits that responsiveness is a nonnegotiable instrument when it comes to student institutional preference, whereas employee’s knowledge and gallantry, and aptitude to inspire confidence are imperative (Shuh, 2021) when it comes to student guarantee in the university setting; factors such as tangibles (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials) and security are of great importance for attracting prospective students (Camilleri, 2021). Pflüger (2021) postulates that understanding the students’ needs and wants can position the university competitively and reduce cognitive dissatisfaction. It is therefore critical to note but yet to be conceptualized (Fitzpatrick, 2021) in the higher education sector. Aesthetically, the general look of the university environment, its public image (Steimer, 2021) perceptually energizes the students’ predilection while conformance and international standardization (Li et al., 2021) is a prelude by which students accept a university as a choice for study. Budur et al. (2021) viewed sacrificial behavioral tendencies exhibited by the university

workers reduce academic stress, improving satisfaction, and reducing dissonance thus very vital for attracting students. Shahzad et al. (2021) posit that professional skills have a direct positive relationship with university service quality. Reputation and credibility were argued by Kazemian et al. (2021) as an antecedent of educational service quality. Khan et al. (2021) also concluded that the concept of satisfaction remains very imperative for practitioners and academic researchers in the educational sector. A Series of attempts have been made by scholars (Hopkins, 2021; Smart, 2021) to quantify and expound institutional satisfaction, yet there appears to be less harmony (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2021) regarding its designation from the educational perspective. It is seen as a post-purchase behavior (Marques et al., 2021) for evaluating an individual judgment concerning a specific service. Alam et al. (2021) argued its importance to institution service delivery. Carlisle et al. (2021) are also of the view that the future needs of the students are shaped by their current expectations. It is found that student satisfaction has a direct positive relationship with the choice of institution (Budiyanto et al., 2021) and that the individual satisfaction level is deferential between expected and perceived performance. Other Studies (Fook et al., 2021; Javed, 2021) show that the ambiance of the institution may have an indirect impact on student satisfaction. Cus et al. (2021) argued from a different perspective that faculty strength and the managerial philosophy adopted by university management positively affect student satisfaction. Hilda et al. (2021) found out that security, value for money, and courtesy of university staff define student satisfaction while Diaz et al. (2021) discovered that convenience of location, prompt service, safety, and security, and friendliness of employees of the university are critically important. Buabeng-Andoh (2021) specified that employee attitude is likely to influence students' satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is proven to be an empirical outcome of relationship marketing in the service industry but (Buabeng-Andoh, 2021) is yet to be ascertained in the higher education context. Imperatively, the customers are superior to any other thing and their satisfaction is paramount. Ali et al. (2021) stated that it is an assessment of alteration between prior expectations about the product and its actual performance. Boateng et al. (2021) also concluded that is how clienteles respond to the state of gratification, and magistrate the satisfaction level. Gbadegesin et al. (2021) also viewed it as a reaction of the student toward a state of the nirvana and decision of the student about that fulfilled state. Christian et al. (2021) also viewed it as the anticipation before patronizing a product or service concerning quality. Chen et al. (2021) it is a pre-consumption verdict or hopes while Yapanto et al. (2021) opinioned it to be a result of the acquisition in which students relate to cost and rewards with the foretold significances. Based on these reviews the “custrac model” is projected and hypothesized below:

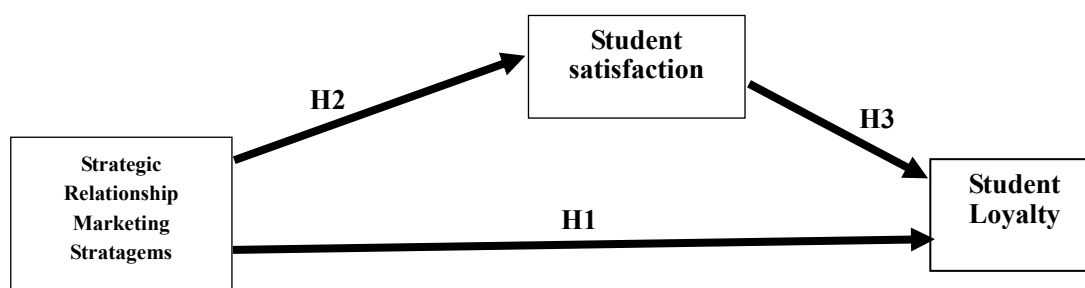


Figure 1. The proposed “Custrac model”

The “Custrac Model” is based on the assumption that customer (student) attraction is constructed on loyalty and further enhanced by satisfaction.

H1: SRM stratagems have a direct positive relationship with student loyalty.

H2: Student satisfaction has an indirect positive inclination on student loyalty and the institution’s SRM stratagems.

2. Research Method

Premised on the quantitative approach the study is purposed to develop a model that suggests how the Ghanaian university management through its relationship officers can attract fully qualified and competent students consistently. Structure examination was carried to ascertain the mediating effect of student satisfaction on strategic relationship marketing stratagems and student loyalty disposition. Descriptive and hypothesis testing was used to untangle research questions Zina (2021). The research strategy was a cross-sectional survey using a close-ended questionnaire as the instrument. The questionnaire was structured as follows: Section A of the research instrument collects demographic information such as gender, status, name of institution, years of

working in the university. Section B of the questionnaire draws data about the strategic relationship marketing stratagems through a five-level Likert scale within which number 1 indicates strongly disagree and number 5 indicates strongly agree. The last section collected data on strategic relationship marketing outcomes (student satisfaction and student loyalty disposition). Analysis was done using SmartPLS 3 to perform partial least square regression analysis on the structural equation model of the purpose of the study. The findings were used to formulate the “custrac model.”

3. Results and Discussion

The research proposed the “Custrac” model, where “custrac” means “customer attraction”. It is based on the assumption that customer (student) attraction is constructed on loyalty and further enhanced by satisfaction. Practically, management in all spheres of businesses should concentrate its strategies on achieving satisfaction and loyalty concomitantly. Contextualizing it in the Ghanaian education sector, it postulates that the Ghanaian university management through its relationship officers can attract fully qualified and competent students through a conscious loyalty scheme further enhanced by satisfaction packages. Subjectively, exponents of this model think that students are attracted to universities that satisfy their needs promptly and appropriately. This means that the entire strategic relationships marketing stratagems that university management deploy through its relationship officers should be driven towards addressing students’ needs and wants. Consequentially, the attraction rate will escalate when students’ expectations are exceeded. Drawing inspiration from the analysis it could be seen that 11% of the changes in student loyalty disposition can be attributed to changes in strategic relationship marketing stratagem (SRMS) and student satisfaction. The results further show that a unit change in SRMS will reduce student loyalty disposition by 6.7%, which means that as SRMS increases, students’ loyalty decreases. Thus, the relationship is inverse. However, student satisfaction mediates positively on the connexion between SRMS and student loyalty, 7.7% of changes in student satisfaction can be attributed to changes in SRMS, and a unit change in SRMS will cause a 27.8% change in student satisfaction while a unit change in student satisfaction will cause a 34.4% change in student loyalty outlook. It implies that the indirect link of student satisfaction is very important in increasing student loyalty. The model for the analysis is impressed by the linear equation $CL = 0.11 - SRMS (0.06) + 0.344 (CS)$ Equation 1: Model 1 $CS = 0.077 + 0.24 (SRMS) \dots$ Equation 2: Model 2 $CL = 0.11 - SRMS (0.06) + 0.344 (0.077 + 0.24 (SRMS))$ $CL = 0.11 - SRMS (0.06) + 0.026488 + 0.08256 (SRMS)$ $CL = 0.136488 - 0.06 (SRMS) + 0.08256 (SRMS)$ $CL = 0.136488 + 0.02256 (SRMS) \dots$ Equation 3: The Regression Model. The results in equation 4 indicate that student satisfaction is very important for creating a positive relationship between strategic relationship marketing stratagem and student loyalty. The regression model explains that in the situation where there are no changes in the university’s SRMS, student loyalty will increase by 0.136488 or approximately 13.6%. However, a unit change in SRMS will cause a 0.02256 or approximately 2.3% change in student loyalty if only student satisfaction (competitive market-driven course and vibrant quality assurance directorate) are instituted by the university. The “custrac model” is shown in Figure 2.

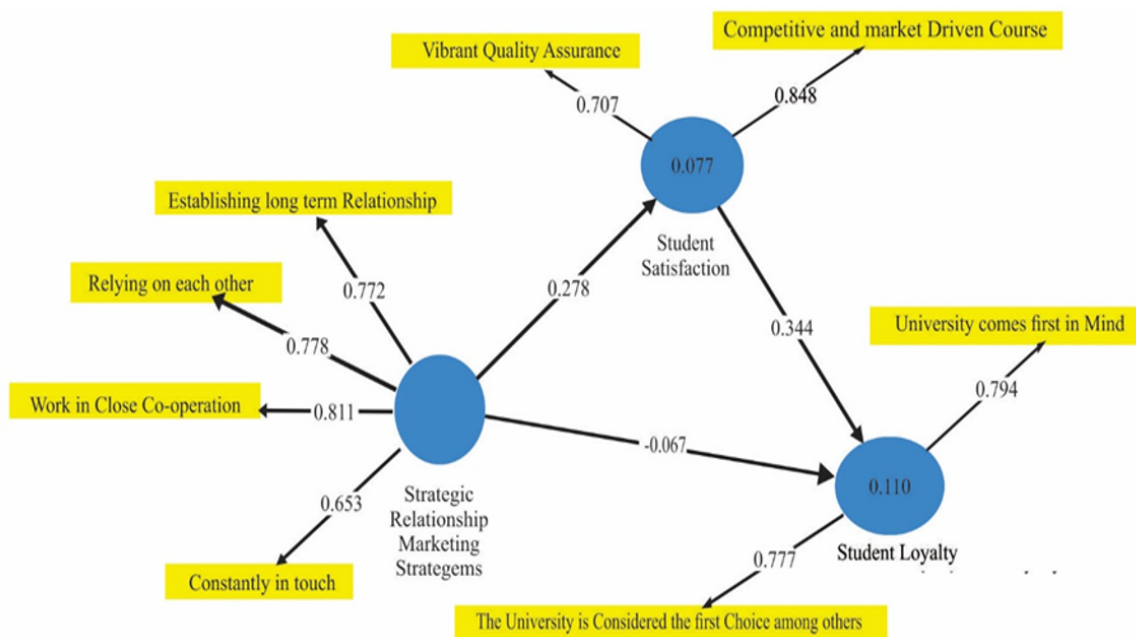


Figure 2. The “custrac model” as per the result which rightly affirms the proposed model

3.1 The Quality Criteria of the “Custrac Model”

Specific elements were selected, tested, and measured in the analysis to affirm the quality of the model. The Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability are both measures of reliability; however, the Cronbach’s Alpha indicates the reliability of each construct in isolation while the Composite Reliability indicates the reliability of the construct as part of the model as a whole. It can be observed that student loyalty (0.379) and student satisfaction (0.367) are not very reliable as they are standalone but as part of the model, they have very high reliability (0.763 & 0.756) respectively. On the contrary, strategic relationship marketing stratagems are very reliable both in isolation and as part of the model (0.754 & 0.841) respectively. Similarly, the rho_A values (0.380, 0.385 & 0.779) respectively in table1 being less than 1 means that the factor model in Figure 2 is valid. It further implies that each construct is significantly explained by its factors. Also, since the AVE values (0.617, 0.609 & 0.571) respectively are greater than 0.5, means that for each of the three constructs, the factors correlate positively with each other in the construct. Therefore, the respective four factors of strategic relationship marketing stratagem, the two factors of student satisfaction, and the two factors of student loyalty do not linearly predict each other.

Table 1. Reliability and validity of the “Custrac Model”

	Cronbach’s Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
student Loyalty	0.379	0.380	0.763	0.617
student Satisfaction	0.367	0.385	0.756	0.609
Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems	0.754	0.779	0.841	0.571

3.2 Discriminant Validity

This is to test whether underlying constructs are related or unrelated. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion in Table 2 shows that student Satisfaction and Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems varied significantly from student loyalty. This confirms the values AVE and composite reliability which shows that the factors influencing the constructs do not linearly predict each other and its construct had high reliability. Also, the f-square values indicate that student satisfaction and Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems are very important for ensuring student loyalty. Finally, the HTMT being less than 0.9 indicates there is a true correlation between student loyalty, student satisfaction, and Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems. In conclusion, the three constructs are unrelated hence the model is good for policy and resource allocation

Table 2. Test of Independence of the constructs in the “Custrac Model”

Measurement	Constructs	student Loyalty	student Satisfaction	Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems
Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Student Loyalty	0.786		
	Student Satisfaction	0.325	0.781	
	StrategicRelationship Marketing Stratagems	0.029	0.278	0.756
F-Square	Student Loyalty			
	Student Satisfaction	0.123		
	Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems	0.005	0.08	
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	Student Loyalty			
	Student Satisfaction	0.855		
	Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagems	0.117	0.504	

3.3 Significance of the “Custrac Model” and Hypothesis testing

The results in Figure 3 are the t-value that measures the size of the difference relative to the variation in the sample data. The t-value is the calculated difference represented in units of standard error hence the greater the magnitude of t, the greater the evidence against the null hypothesis. The t-statistic determines the significance of the relationships in the model because it measures how many standard errors the coefficient is away from zero. Generally, any t-value greater than + 2 or less than – 2 is acceptable. However, the higher the t-value ≥ 2 implies the relationship is significant. It can be observed in Figure 3 that all the relationships between the constructs and the factors influencing each construct have t-values greater than 2. This implies that both null hypotheses are rejected and the alternative accepted. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between student loyalty and strategic relationship marketing stratagem. Also, student satisfaction significantly influences the relationship between student loyalty and strategic relationship marketing stratagem.

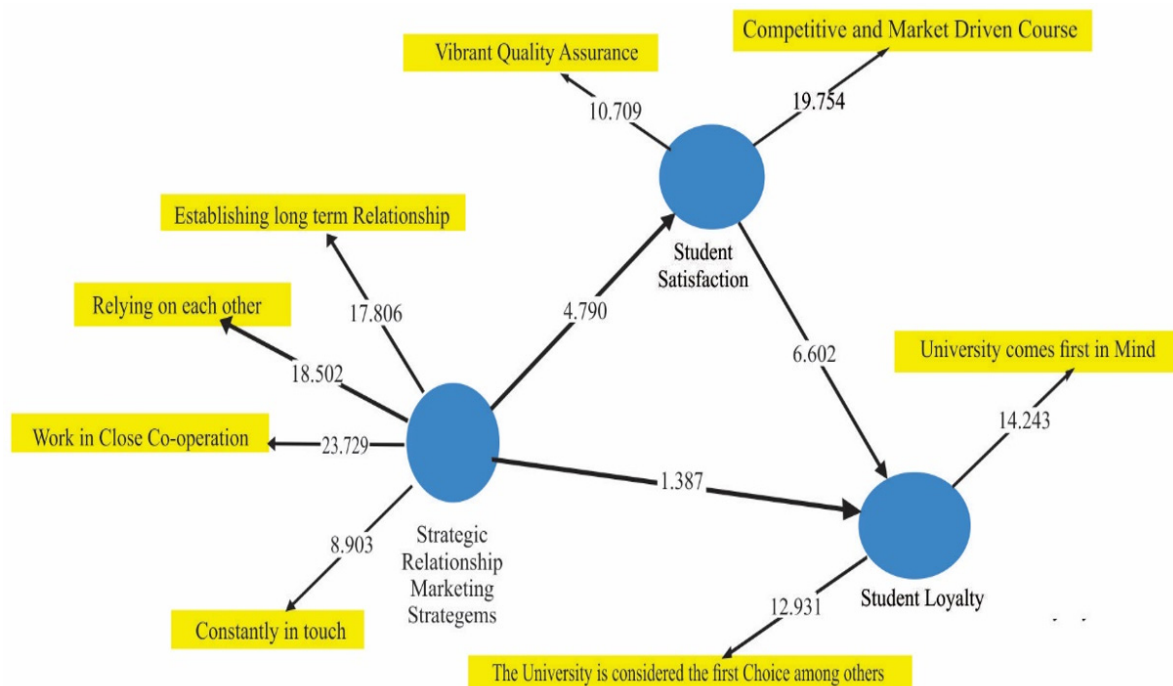


Figure 3. The Significance of the “Custrac Model”

3.4 Predictiveness of the “Custrac Model”

It can be observed from Figure 4 that student satisfaction and strategic relationship stratagems can predict 5.8%

of student loyalty while strategic relationship marketing stratagems also predict 4% of student satisfaction. It suffices to conclude that customer satisfaction is very important for improving student loyalty due to its strong link with strategic relationship marketing stratagems.

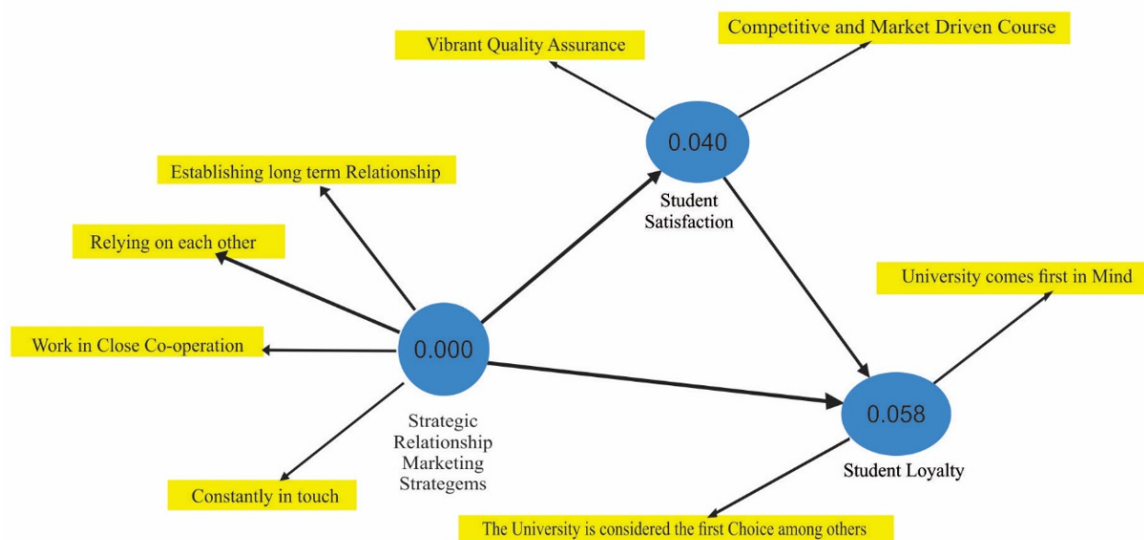


Figure 4. Predictiveness of the “Custrac Model”

4. Conclusion

The following marketing implications can be inferred from the analysis; it can be observed from the “Custrac Model” that among the empirically adopted strategic relationship marketing stratagems (trust, competence, communication, service excellence, conflict handling, commitment, and bonding) statistically, bonding and service excellence variables were determined significant for the “custrac model.” Thus, university management through its relationship officers may adopt these strategic relationship marketing stratagems of building strong institutional bonding with its students by establishing long term relationships (0.772), relying on each other (0.778), working in close cooperation (.0811), keeping in touch constantly (0.653) which are consistent with (Nisar et al., 2021; Laplume et al., 2021) but strongly disagreed by (Naudé & Nagler, 2021). Having these stratagems in place may not necessarily capture the potential students because it is shown that they may have an inverse relationship with the student loyalty disposition (Naudé & Nagler, 2021). Meaning it did not guarantee that students will have the university in mind as their preferred choice (Tariq et al., 2021). The practical implication is that sheer bonding (Affran et al., 2019; Affran, 2019) strategies employed by the university management tend to lose their efficacy (Liu, 2021) when they are known by the student body. Thus, the supposed decreasing effect of student loyalty disposition is as a result of the students being aware of the institutional bonding strategies meted to attract them. The point is that these strategies are to be kept secret on the blind side of the students (Raciti, 2021). It loses its potency (Ndichu et al., 2021) as soon as they get to know. Per the “custrac model” the university management has to position these stratagems on achieving service excellence that responds to student needs by introducing (Cox, 2021) competitive and market-driven courses (0.848), coupled with (Suleiman et al., 2021) a vibrant quality assurance directorate (0.707) for persistence and continuous monitoring. The “custrac model” has therefore affirmed the notion that students can be attracted to the university (Fraser & Mancl, 2021; Nurmukhanova et al., 2021) when the university has in place competitive and market-driven courses: 0.848) The advice is that: management should establish long term relationship with the students, management should consider and involve students in long term strategic decision, management should work closely with the student body during the implementation of long term strategic decision and management should constantly get in touch with students both current and past during policy formulation and evaluation. However, introducing competitive and market-driven programs driven with a vibrant quality assurance directorate were considered to be the more effective means of attracting fully qualified and competent students consistently. Therefore, for policy formulation and resource allocation, the university management needs to dedicate resources to step up the quality assurance directorate and also introduce more competitive and

market-driven courses if it has any intention of attracting fully qualified and competent students. Confined only in Ghana, researchers can explore further the concept of strategic relationship marketing and come out with a workable framework. The model can also be tested in other business jurisdictions.

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