



EDUCATION MARKETING: CREATING THE COMPETITIVE EDGE FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education is a service and all educational institutions without any exception are service providers. Marketing is fulfilling customers needs profitably. If we analyze our crucial national needs required for a long term and long lasting progress and prosperity, realistically speaking there is only one choice: Superior quality higher education. All other factors come after this factor. But despite having almost 124 centers of higher education in Pakistan, none of them consistently rank in the top universities / institutes of the world. The reason is obvious: Quality.

Looking at the mass market including services, we see that quality enhancement is always a competitive factor and winning competition is a marketing factor. Thus if we want to rank high on quality, the marketing factor in higher education has to be built in. In this connection the most important aspect of higher education is related to research and publication. This aspect on its own adds credibility to the institution particularly in qualitative terms. Research needs funding and funding is not available to educational institutions on its own. There comes the role of industry. Industry is a profit oriented sector in financial terms. Thus the centers of higher education need to improve quality in higher education competitively to fulfill the demand of the industry in profitable terms.

In this paper marketing of education will be discussed for quality enhancement so that the quantitative output can be measured competitively.

Key words: Education Marketing, Service Business, Branding of Universities

EDUCATION AS A SERVICE BUSINESS

Today's managers need to create tomorrow (Drucker 1981). This applies to all kind of products and services including education. In India Indra Gandhi established Silicon City Bangalore in mid seventies. Today India is the second biggest software exporters in the world. China planned industrialization in seventies and eighties. Today China is one of the major exporters in the world.

Education for sustainable development has come to be seen as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities. Building the capacity for such futures-oriented thinking is a key task of education (UNESCO 2008). This key task cannot be done by the government alone. That's why more and more educational entrepreneurs are venturing into this business. The list of private sector universities in Pakistan as well as in any other country is increasing exponentially. Thus

education has become service business. Reforming education is the first step in re-forging our unique social compact. The best way to begin tackling growing social inequality is by reshaping education so as to give more people the skills they need to meet the new standards. The nature of work has changed, but the nature of education hasn't.

All activities are business. And all businesses have their objectives. Some businesses are for profit while others are not for profit. Some are charitable as well, which run on charity. Education is a very unique kind of service business in which its customers are the raw materials turned by the universities into finished products. Throughout the period of students stay at the university they remain university's customers and when they pass out they become its products. Gone are the days when education used to be too sacred for getting a media promotion, but no more. Today, education is one of the most prospering service business. In continuation of this statement if we open the website of different universities, we see a lot of education related lucrative offers and incentives. In addition to that many universities advertise in print as well as electronic media while inviting applications for admissions. In doing so sufficient promotion is also done voicing the salient attributes of the concerned university. The use of knowledge in increasing in all spheres of life and thus today's worker is more a knowledge worker than anything else. The switch to knowledge work as the economy's growth area and the large scale movement to new technologies mean above all that productivity will increasingly be determined by the knowledge and skill that workers put into their task. And productivity, in the end, always determines the ability to pay and the level of real income (Drucker 1986a). As Peter Drucker has said that if you progress make the activity profitable. No one is ready to work without money for an indefinite period. But it is equally true that business should not be for profit alone, it must have its societal role as well. And no business including health is more society oriented having substantial contribution than education. While the private sector universities make profit their contributory roles for the society must be appreciated.

In developed countries of the world universities are ranked by different bodies and authorities. The ranking is mainly based on academics. However, other factors including facilities, Faculty, liaison with the industry, research contribution etc. are also considered. The judgmental parameter for students while taking admission is the ranking. Thus higher the ranking higher the students turnout. In Pakistan HEC has given four categories to universities, but their judgmental parameters require revision demanding the addition of more qualitative factors. It is customary that services demand both in quality and quantity increase with time. Take the example of postal services which when could not meet customers' demand has become obsolete and overtaken by courier services. The government schools in Pakistan are another example. Now hardly there is any parent who want to send his children to the government schools. Services must be kept updated if one wants that success must continue.

THE SERVICE CULTURE: CUSTOMER FOCUS

When Soviet Union failed and its different factions were exposed to the outside world it was found that the quality of their products was very substandard and as a result could not compete with that of Europe of US. When we talk of any successful product available worldwide we see two things about it: First the quality of the product and second the promotional campaigns from time to time. How the product or services of any brand is crucial in its success. That's why a lot of brand ambassadors are being used to promote brands. This trend has been adopted by private sector universities who promote corporate executives who studied with them.

Services are intangible, perishable and people oriented. They always have a human factor and therefore always have a culture. This culture is influenced by societal norms. Research has shown that while only 10% of the staff of the average manufacturing company directly influence the consumer, the comparable figure in a services company is 90% and not uncommonly 100% (Irons 1991). Some people believe in policing the educational institutes. But I agree with Drucker on this issue. Drucker (1986b) says that the best thing to do with policing costs is not to police. In marketing the task is to create a satisfied customer. In education marketing the satisfied customer is a knowledgeable customer. The cost of learning, the physical infrastructure all are left behind if the quality of education is superior and to the satisfaction of the customer, the students or their parents.

When we say Education is a service business there have to favorable and unfavorable responses. While the favorable responses can be build upon, the unfavorable ones need to be improved. But before that they need to be diagnosed first. Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) identified three major areas for service organizations: Employee response to service delivery system failures, employee response to customer needs and requests and Unprompted and unsolicited employee actions.

We discuss these three aspects with our reference of education.

1. Employee response to service delivery failure: In the context of education service means imparting lectures in the classroom, completing project assignments, knowledge assessment (examination), announcing results and awarding degrees. It has been observed that more than 50% of the teaching staff are either fresh or having less than 3 years experience. In private sector this percentage reaches as high as 80%. It is obvious that teaching is not an easy job and more so in specialized field of higher education. Clearing concepts and imparting gainful knowledge needs study beyond textual contents. Teachers having no or less than required experience can not impart the desired level of knowledge to the students. Thus the basic objective of the customer fails. It has been observed that awarding degrees takes more time than the students desire. The private sector universities charge exorbitant fee for awarding degree in a convocation. Time consumed between pass out and awarding of degree is a point of frustration for a sizeable number of students. How this basic requirement fulfillment failure is tackled by the employees in general and management in particular will affect the reputation of the university.
2. Employee response to customer needs and requests: Customers need is good education and a respectable degree enabling them to get a job in a reputable organization. They also expect that the university should play a role in their job placement. It is a misconception that the students want an easy degree. Had this been the case well reputed universities would not have been flooded with admission applications while fake universities give lucrative offers for awarding degrees. How this need is fulfilled is the decision making factor for the customer.
3. Unprompted and unsolicited employee actions: This is basics of marketing. In our culture we learn ‘how to refuse’ and fabricate as many reasons as possible to refuse certain request. We need to change our culture towards marketing oriented approach. Problems and difficulties need to be prevented by taking preempting measures.

For all service business, from supermarkets to airlines, the challenge is to create a service environment in which technology is servant not master. (Irons Ken, 1991). Saying customers first do not suffice, if it is not practiced. The reason of failure of PTCL and KESC (Karachi Electric supply Corporation) is their inability to focus on customers needs and expectations and how they are fulfilled. Same goes for the postal services as well. People are less interested in low cost as compared to the promptness in services delivery. In Pakistan banks have issued numerous credit cards to even people of low income group who failed to honor the repayment plan. As a result the customers went into bad debt and efficiency of banks employees became a question mark.

The service culture needs customer focus 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For this purpose call centers play a very important role. If we can get people involved on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis, we can encourage them to see themselves as a real part of the organization – in both its success and stumbles (Peters and Austin, 1985).

While I talk about Education marketing I do talk about marketing our educational institutions internationally as well. In this global village we need to look beyond Pakistan to emerging economies. Peng, Wang and Jiang (2008: 921) say that in international business institution matters. And an institution is defined as the humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction. Scott (1995: 33) defines institutions as regulative, normative and cognitive structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. The point is that when the entire world is looking outside for growth and prosperity we look inside and create ourselves as dwarfs. History of nations proves that if you want to grow you have to expand beyond your boundaries. Earlier this was limited to products only, now the service area has entered into this stream as well. The service of education has not seen the boom yet like other services like market research, transport etc. But I am sure the coming era is the era of internationalizing education as a business.

Quality Competence: The basic success ingredient

Someone said, quality is never an accident. It is the result of hard work and diligent efforts for a prolonged period. If someone is dreaming success without giving due importance to quality he should be ready for a big shock. Competence in education is the result of quality assurance. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education was formed in Hong Kong in 1991. Today it has more than 150 member organizations (Woodhouse 2006).

When we talk about quality we talk about credentials. Credentials come with quality and are established over time. If you fail to deliver what you promise you can not build your credentials. Credentials are the collateral you put up to guarantee the performance of your brand (Ries and Trout 2007). Unless you take care of the credentials of your institutions credentials can not be established.

We understand that things requiring wider acceptance and usage are promoted widely. The spread of education is the need of the time and quality parameters are the essence in its spread. Education is the foundation of prosperity. With education we can use new technologies, and knowledge can be spread for increasing productivity. Creating and spreading knowledge are the responsibility of higher education centers. To provide students to the higher education centers primary education and secondary education must receive the top priority. In the Millennium

Development goals achievement of universal primary education is the second goal after poverty alleviation. Although nations are working on Millennium goals, but still more than 600 million people will still be living at poverty level in 2015, mainly people from Asia and Africa. If we go a little deeper we see that the root cause of poverty is lack of education depriving people of productive employment. Corruption, conflict, and bad governance are other reasons for lack of proper education to nations. The best investment around, by far, is professional school. Whether it is engineering school or medical school, law school or library school, business school or architecture school, graduation from one of them increases a person's lifetime earning power by a substantial multiple of the investment, that is of the cost of his or her education (Drucker 1986c).

Quality Assurance is effective only if it is built to serve the needs of higher education. The QA system should be closely associated to measures to develop institutional capacity for evaluation, planning and improvement (Lemaitre Maria Jose', 2006).

While marketing creates competition, it is the quality that helps marketing to compete at the market place. If quality is not competitive, marketing can not alone break the ice no matter how much effort and money is spent on the program. Take the example of public and private schools. There are total 230,519 public sector schools in Pakistan having almost 32 million students enrolled. (Government of Pakistan 2005). Total number of students in these public schools are 135. Despite the fact that public schools offer almost free education to all and private schools charge fee in a wide margin covering different strata of the society, public schools are getting deserted in enrollment while the private ones are prospering. The objective in both the cases are different. Public schools want to help the population while private schools extend their services in developing more knowledgeable students of the society. In public schools customers expectations of quality is not met and therefore they are getting deserted. Even the poorest member of the society prefers their children to get admitted in a private school, because he knows, the child will come out as a better and knowledgeable citizen from the private school. One is a judged by its scholastic failure, the other its scholastic success. The poor performance of many high schools argues Marshal and Trucker (NA) reflects the absence of either performance standards or incentives for attaining them.

The quality benchmark is always fixed by the customer and not by the seller or provider. The education sector must provide the quality that the industry or market demands and not what the university think they should teach. The growing reality is that the business graduates without technical background are not successful in a technical function. For example a simple MBA cannot be a successful production manager or even finance manager. One has to be technically sound to lead the function. Quality is about passion and pride. Quality is about people. The heart of quality is not technique. It is a commitment by management to its people and product (Peters and Nancy. 1985).

While mentioning quality English language is of paramount importance. English has become an international language and the business and office language as well. A graduate having weak English will create a bad impression at the employers level. It is very essential that all universities ensure at their level that before they are awarded the university degree in any discipline except other languages, the student must be well conversant in English language.

BRANDING OF UNIVERSITIES

Our universities need to be entrepreneurial in nature. Entrepreneurial connotes, creativity, innovativeness and risk taking. In an entrepreneurial university each professor is responsible for obtaining their own research funds. As a result research groups grew up as ‘quasi firms’ with many characteristics of the business firms, except for the profit motive (Sarfraz 2006). Entrepreneurship will add branding to their names. A well chosen name can give a company a decided marketing edge over comparable competitors and that the branding effect of a strong corporate name can be especially important for service companies. Why? Because in services the company name is the brand name. But a well chosen name can’t save a company whose service is poor. The quality of the service determines the success of the image. If you don’t satisfy customers, the name won’t help. But of course, if you combine good performance with a good name, you will generate the most powerful branding effect for your service (Berry, Lefkowitz and Clark (1988). How many people can recall any logo or brand identity of any university of Pakistan instantly as compared to some established local consumer brand (e. g. Tapal).

When it comes to marketing, many companies confuse cause and effect. But developing a loyal customer base can take many years. And short term thinking only sabotages the process. We recommend another approach: strategic marketing investment. Companies can gain a marketing advantage over more established rivals by treating marketing expenditure the same way they treat capital outlays: as investments that drive revenues over time. It has been observed that most of the universities offer most of the programs. Specialization is lacking. I see this is going to change if they want to succeed. It is seen that in the coming years universities will be more specialized as some of them are, like engineering universities, medical university, business university and so on. It is not a matter of competence, it is a matter of choice. I do not say what they can not do, I say what they should not do, rather must not do if they want to have a strong branding. In the coming years there will be hardly any university offering medical, engineering and business education at the same time. This will improve the quality of education which is the need of the time. Each institute needs to draw a positioning map which is not as easy as it is perceived. Confusion exist most of the time (D’Aveni 2007) the same way that is drawn for any brand. For this purpose the institute should define the market, the students that can be the potential market for them, choose the fee structure that suits your market offering primary benefits like offering of programs and courses. Plot positions and draw the expected price line. Finally interpret your positioning map. Franchising the brand name is also an opportunity. Universities may give franchise to the training institutes and consulting houses, thus offering mutual benefits. Brand extension is another opportunity. Beaconhouse School management are already doing so through Educators. Service product branding of ‘O’ and ‘A’ level education and Cambridge University as a brand name for these products are well known. This system of education is gaining popularity in Pakistan very fast particularly during the current decade. Once again because of the deteriorating standards of our education system and high standard of their system. Not surprisingly if we look into the fee structure of ‘O’ and ‘A’ Level in some schools it is much higher than the fees of MBA or M Phil.

Are the old universities getting perished? Has their life cycle ended? Are they being replaced with universities having more progressive outlook. Is IBA Karachi declining and losing to LUMS? Is some engineering university losing to GIK? Can branding need to be revisited by IBA? This is food for thought and requires another research paper.

A teacher is a knowledge worker. Knowledge workers have to have autonomy, and that entails responsibility. Learning, teaching and innovation on a continuous basis have to be built into the knowledge workers job (Drucker 1999). For education a good teacher is a celebrity. His name can be utilized for the promotion of the university. He can also be utilized for audio and video recording of his lectures. His classroom lectures may be made available in CDs. Lectures may also be made available at any university's website. This will on the one hand elevate the teachers reputation increasing his personal worth, on the other hand it will also bring additional students to the university. Creating differences is the name of the game. Each university should have its own way of creating its brand differences. The most effective one is its logo or symbol. Examples of brands with strong words mark include certain consumer products like Coca Cola, Mercedes star etc. In education sector the widely recognized ones are once again for schools like Beaconhouse, Educators and City Schools.

THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

With the invention of printing press, the printing revolution changed institutions, including the educational system. In the decades that followed, university after university was founded throughout Europe (Drucker 1999). The computer and Internet revolution started during late last century. And look how it captured the office automation. In Pakistan during the last couple of decades more than 50 universities have been granted charter. Through the evolution process they have to come up to a benchmark. With education marketing this benchmark will enhance every time a comprehensive assessment is done. We have to create our own competitive edge in education to meet the Western universities.

United States has an extensive adult education system but it is relatively underused. It has been reported that only 15% of all Americans take courses in any given year. By comparison, roughly one quarter of the Canadian work force enrolls in adult education courses every year, while in Japan, adults study almost constantly in night school or through correspondence courses (Stone 1991). In 1999, European ministers of education decided that if Europe was to make an educational mark in the world it should have a more continentally consistent system of higher education (Woodhouse 2006.). In Pakistan out of 124 universities 87 offers PhD program. Total number students enrolled during 2004-05 were 2148 or 25 students per university. (Government of Pakistan 2005). This includes all disciplines from natural sciences to IT and business management.

Frontline and semiskilled workers whose performance more and more directly determines companies' competitiveness receive the least training. Managers and professionals who are already well educated receive the most. As Drucker (1986d) said that the description of the nature of management will not be complete that fails to take automation into account. He further clarifies that automation will not inundate us in a sudden flood but will seep in gradually though steadily. Today we are living in a high tech environment and everyone has an easy access to all kinds of technology. Therefore technology can not be the competing tool. It must be something else. Clark (1989) says that if there is a hidden thread connecting these principles, it is that knowledge workers are the only corporate assets that last. They embrace machines and engender new systems, which they ultimately outgrow. In the industrial sector the concept of technology fusion has come into play. In education sector this concept needs to be developed. When we talk about the fusion concept in a product, an electric car is produced. Another example may be media design, a concept that involves the fusion of audio and video hardware and software with the creativity and artistry in a virtual reality movie. Digital audio tape is yet another example.

While being competitive does not mean that it should be at all costs. There has to be some ethics in that too. As Bob (2007), a senior consultant on education says that ethics is no more prevalent the way it used to be. Personal efforts to advance and succeed seem to justify dishonesty. Hard work is often overtaken by creative falsehoods. One cannot trust resumes. Plagiarism is very common in research papers. He mentions cheating practices by the university management in student loans, purchasing of books etc. and remarks that these practices damage the image of a university and higher education suffers.

Competing also includes against adversity and odds. Foreign universities are coming to Pakistan. HEC has signed contracts with 15 foreign universities. Are we ready for the competition? Have we prepared our action plan? The world has become a global village. We have to act globally. No one is going to protect us even if they want to. There are international pressures as well and this pressure is going to increase. It is very imperative that we remain alert on domestic as well as international front. We need to make our priorities clear, we need to be competitive at an international level, globally. Those who refuse to do so will be eliminated from the scene.

CONCLUSIONS

Khan (2007) advocated Home School to be attached with Primary and Middle Boards for school education. He advocates that like doctors and lawyers teachers should also be registered in the name of Home Schools. Each Home School will be permitted to enroll a number of students. The class timing will remain flexible based on mutual convenience. The students will be able to appear in the Primary Board exam for class V and Middle Board Exam for Class VIII. In continuation to this suggestion we propose the following for higher education: M.Phil/Ph.D classes may be held for specific disciplines in a combined class. As evident from the earlier statistics that one university enrolls (figure from completion and dropouts are not available) 25 students for all the disciplines, assuming 5 or less students per discipline for one university which appears to be unfeasible for the institution. In the combined class concept the number university in the same city or town would offer their students for these combined classes. Such classes may be held at a central location under the supervision of HEC's Regional office. While this action will share the cost, it will also encourage more students to complete their courses since on an individual basis all the universities may not be in a position to complete the course and hence dropout may result.

Universities need to focus on limited disciplines to excel in their performance. This will establish their brand name in less time and efforts. They need to outreach and vocal in their offerings and competitiveness. While doing so quality parameters must be looked into for effectiveness of their campaign. Campaigns should also include inviting students from other than Pakistan.

Universities should have their campuses in major cities of the country. This will increase the competitiveness and thus improve quality. They should liaison with the Government of Pakistan and also with Governments of other selected countries and foreign agencies who could help in having foreign students in Pakistan. With aggressive marketing and right connections this will become feasible.

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