Factors Affecting the Jordanian Students' Selection Decision Among Private Universities

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Abstract
This study aims at defining the role of the marketing factors in affecting the Jordanian student choice of a private university. Through asking a random sample consists of 25 females and 25 males about the factors according to their point of view, the financial cost has the most significant effect on their selection of the universities, but between females this factor was not significant word of mouth and university branding has higher degree in influencing the students choice of the university among females.

Key words: Marketing factors, word of mouth, university branding.

Introduction
Higher education law in Jordan requires from the student either the Jordanian or foreigners, the presentation of a formal proof on getting a certificate of success in high school. The process of selection of specialty to be studied by a student at the university, depends on several factors such as; tendency profile, the rate of marks in the high school, labor market requirements, number of years of study to desired specialization, and the financial ability (Embo Saiedi, 2010). Furthermore, and especially in the Eastern communities, as (Kubilius and Yasumoto, 2006), parental attitudes have the greatest effect on students choice across all variables. But the most critical and complex decision is the selection of university in which he or she, will study in. In fact, there are many kinds of factors which will have an impact on the decision to select the university, where these factors can be stored into categories including: personal factors, social factors, economic factors, educational factors, and marketing factors. This study will focus on the role of marketing factors, in influencing the Jordanian student's choice of a private university that students will study in.

The Higher Education in Jordan
The higher education sector in Jordan includes public universities and private universities. Jordan is a leading country in the region in establishing private education institutions, and this is because of the limited absorptive capacity of public universities, given the number of general
secondary education graduates (Issa, 2000), in addition to the requirements of public universities to be a new student, he or she will had obtained a high grade in the general secondary examination, to be accepted to study there. All these facts have increased the number of private universities in Jordan, which now numbers more than twenty divided between Jordanian universities or branches of the Arab and foreign universities.

From here we can say that the Jordanian student finds himself/herself in front of many options controlled by a variety of factors when choosing a private university.

**The most important factors influencing the student choice of a private university**

In this regard many researches in the literature have discussed this phenomenon. Hassan and others study had pointed out that factors such as; the age, father's income, university's reputation and location, facilities may influence the student choice (Hassan et al, 2008). In other research by (Wagner and Fard, 2009) the most important factors ranking according to their importance are: cost of education, value of education, degree (content and structure), family, friends and peers, physical aspects, facilities and resources, and institutional information. Some previous studies in this area have addressed, that these factors have the greatest influence on student's university choice, for example (Nicole, et al 2003) pointed out that the most important factors during the period from 1978-2000 were, academic reputation of the university, the availability of desired major and total cost of attending university. Parents/guardians, friends and guidance center materials were rated as most important in the university research process in the year 1994, and in a survey conducted in the year 2000 the most important factor was the family input and finance-related impact. In a field study conducted by the Academic Publication Council, Kuwait University, a questionnaire was distributed on a sample of 800 students (male and female) from UMM AL Qura University in Saudi Arabia, where the results of data analysis indicated an agreement between the student's answers, that a university degree provides safety from the unknown future, and gives better options for employment, and raise as much as the holder in the Saudi Community. However, female students added some of the factors influencing their choice of the university such as; love of science and the situation of the convenience of the family. Also, most of male and female students added another factors such as; love of the city where the university is located, and the availability of desired fields, and the desires of parents.

**Problem statement and questions**

The problem of this study takes the following formula:" marketing factors play a significant role in Jordanian student choice to a private university". This problem will be discussed through the following questions:
1. What is the role of "university branding"?
2. How word of mouth (WOM) can influence the Jordanian student in his or her selection to a particular private university?
3. What are the main marketing factors affecting the Jordanian student choice of a private university?
Methodology

Type of the study

This study has been completed in accordance with the descriptive analytical approach, in order to give the ranking of the factors affecting the Jordanian student’s choice of a private university according to the importance of each factor.

The study population and sample

The community of this study is the high school graduates for the current academic year 2010 who getting admission to private universities in Jordan, while the study sample consists of 25 male students and 25 females students from 3 Jordanian private universities.

Data Collection

The secondary data has been collected from the related studies and books; internet was also used for this purpose. The primary data was collected through asking several questions for each member of the sample. These questions were:

- Why did you choose this university?
- Have you ever read the ads or brochures recommending the reputation of the university, and its scientific status between the universities?
- Do you receive the advice of relatives or friends or any of the former graduates to choose this university?

The answers of these questions have been receiving by: meeting them face to face, and by telephone conversation.

Data Analysis:

In their answer of the first question, the students indicated all the factors that prompted each of them to choose a university. Then, the researcher extracted the marketing factors from the factors mentioned earlier. In order to achieve credibility and realism of these answers, he directed the second and third questions. And by calculation the frequencies of the marketing factors, was reached on the results of the study.

Theoretical Background

University branding:

In this age of increased competition resulting from multiple factors such as globalization, economic and cultural opennessness, and the spread of multinational organizations and many others, organizations are seeking now to make their names and products and services more bright, and they are focusing to publishing their attractive attributes in order to attract new customers, maintaining the current customers, and even attracting skilled potential employees. And this can
be done by a technique termed "Organization Branding". The definition of organization branding, it is a long-term strategy to make the organization the focus of customers, current and potential and other relevant stakeholders (Sullivan, 2004). Organization branding contributes in the formation of a positive mental image of potential customers, employees, and even on the level of the society as a whole.

The private universities can be listed under the profit-organizations. Therefore, the tools of branding are being increasingly used by universities to enhance their reputation and to help them succeed in the competitive world of higher education (Colyer, 2005), and this drives the education seekers to register in this university, because they have became of the fact that they will reap a lot of benefits in terms of; high quality of education, physical facilities and the good chance in the job market. Other researchers have defined organization branding as the total organizational efforts to communicate to current customers and potential customers (Lloyd, 2002).

Universities can use many devices in university branding; for example, Eastern Michigan University publishes logos on its website, and other for example:

**Bus Signage, 'Super King''**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Of the best Med Eastern Colleges five years in a row</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eastern Michigan University: Education first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coke Trucks Signs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Of the nation's Best forensics Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EASTERN Michigan University Education First</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Of 4 Polymers and Coatings Programs Nation Wide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EASTERN Michigan University Education First</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** see these universities’ homepages.

Branding aims to help the university to differentiate itself from others and to keep its name in the minds of people. Brand represents a promise from the university to provide significant benefits to the students, (Kotler, 2003) reported two kinds of benefits: rational and emotional, rational benefits include reputation, academic excellence, research status, links with industry, and employment record. While emotional benefits include location, quality of life, personality, culture, and empathy.

University branding provides the following benefits:

1. The same set of core message to each of the university's stakeholders.
2. Established set of brand guidelines.
3. Reduced costs (time and money) through collaborative activities.
4. Improved social awareness.
5. Attracting the greatest number of students.

Word of mouth and its impact

Word of mouth can be defined as "unpaid form of promotion in which satisfied customers tell other people how much they like a business, product or service" (www.entreprenur.com). Also, word of mouth can be defined as; advertising that occurs when people share information about products or promotions with friends (Lake, 2010).

Word of mouth is spoken statement that describes the benefits of buying a good or using a service, from existing customers to their friends, relatives, neighbors and it can strongly contribute in the assessing of organization attractiveness (Berthon, et al, 2005). Also, word of mouth has the greatest impact on the customer behavior than any other marketing device, because the potential customer in this case will be a good listener to his friend or relative (Torrington, 2008).

Finally, we can say that word of mouth is one of the tools that serves the activity of organization branding, and it can be more influential than neutral print sources such as which had customer reports.

Data Analysis

For answering question number one, the factors affecting the Jordanian student choice of private university were as shown in table one:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>The Rank</th>
<th>Chi-Square test (P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university reputation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scientific status of</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents desire</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university location</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The financial costs</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from former</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous information</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The availability of other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can note that the most important factor affected the participants choice of the university was the financial costs, and the least factor was the parents' pressure. Also, males give more attention to the cost than females, while females seemed more influence by former graduates. All the results of Chi-Square test show significant differences between males and females according to the selected factors.

Table 2 below shows only the marketing factors and the importance of each one:
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Statement</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Chi-Square test (P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Have you ever read the ads or brochures recommending the reputation of the university and its scientific status between the universities?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you receive the advice of relatives or friends or any of the former graduates to choose this university?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that 13 females have been influenced by the university branding and 17 by word of mouth, while, only 9 males were influenced by university branding, because 16 of them did not read the published information in the news papers or any other device. Also, 10 males from the 25 have affected by word of mouth which means that they consider the financial cost to be the most important factor in their choice of the university. All the results of Chi-Square test show a significant difference between males and females according to the selected questions.

Recommendations

This study presents the following recommendations for the private universities in Jordan:

1. In order to increase their brand, private universities in Jordan have to adopt the technique of scholarship for the outstanding students.
2. Discounts for brothers, may lead to increase the demand on a particular private university.
3. Provide opportunities and infrastructures for the exercise of extracurricular activities for students, such as swimming pools, football, and any other sports or hobbies; inevitably contribute to an increase of demand on the university.
4. Using technology in the teaching applications, such as computers, internet, and networks with other universities, in order to exchange information and new knowledge with the peers of other universities, and that would lead to increase university branding.
References

Academic Publication Council, Kuwait University.


