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## **SERVICE MARKETING FOR ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AT UNIVERSITIES: A STUDY IN VIETNAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Service marketing, widely applied in business, is increasingly being adopted in the field of education, particularly in higher education. This is essential in the context of commercializing higher education and global education competition. This study delves into understanding the application of service marketing in education at universities. The research results reveal that the university has utilized all service marketing tools in its educational service marketing activities, including product, pricing, place/distribution, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process, to enhance enrollment and elevate the university's brand in the context of autonomous enrollment and comprehensive quality enhancement and branding efforts. Additionally, the study identifies the strengths and limitations in the university's educational service marketing activities.

**KEYWORDS:** Marketing, education, university

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### **1. Introduction**

Service marketing, widely applied in business, is increasingly being adopted in the field of education, particularly in higher education. This is essential in the context of commercializing higher education and global education competition. In Vietnam, several studies have shown the importance of applying service marketing in higher education, enrollment, building and developing the university's brand, especially in the context of autonomous enrollment, financial autonomy, enrollment competition, and the pressure of restructuring training organizations to meet social demands.

The University is not exempt from these influences. The university faces numerous pressures and challenges during its development. The university must implement various measures such as restructuring, improving teaching quality, renewing programs, and strengthening enrollment. Based on these circumstances, this paper examines the current activities of the university over the past five years using the

perspective of service marketing. The study aims to propose solutions to strengthen the university's educational service marketing activities, partly addressing the pressures the university faces and suggesting ideas for building and developing the university in the current context.

## **2. Content**

### ***2.1. Fundamental Issues in Educational Service Marketing***

Philip Kotler defines educational service marketing as follows: "Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with the target market to achieve the organization's goals. Marketing is about designing, delivering an organization's offerings to meet the needs and desires of the target market effectively and using price, communications, distribution, motivation, and service for these markets", Kotler and Fox (1995).

Marketing tools help organizations meet customer needs and provide necessary values to customers. The marketing mix concept indicates that strategies are implemented and executed using certain tools and techniques, such as product, price, place, promotion, and communication. These are collectively called the "4Ps". However, Palmer (2001) pointed out certain limitations of this model when applying marketing tools to services in general and educational services, especially higher education. These limitations stem from the nature of educational services, which go beyond the four Ps.

Building on this, Kotler and Fox (1995) proposed a new marketing mix model specifically designed for educational organizations, particularly higher education. This model includes seven marketing tools (marketing 7Ps): Program/Service Offering, Distribution/Place, Pricing/Cost, Promotion and Communication, Process, Physical Evidence, and People. This model overcomes the limitations pointed out by Palmer (2001). Aside from the model proposed by Kotler and Fox, many authors have introduced various marketing mix models for services. While the components of marketing mix models are similar, they are categorized and named differently. In this study, the author uses the model proposed by Kotler and Fox as the theoretical framework to investigate the activities of the University based on a marketing perspective.

### ***2.2. Current Status of University Educational Service Marketing Activities***

#### **Training Programs**

Program Structure: The university has established comprehensive training programs, teaching plans, and study plans for undergraduate, master's, associate degree, and vocational programs. These programs are developed according to current regulations and listed in the Ministry of Education and Training's program catalog. The

university's program structure focuses on long-term regular education (undergraduate level).

**Program Development Process:** The university ensures a systematic, tight, and reasonable process for developing training programs. When creating programs, the university forms a Program Development Committee and assigns tasks to each committee member. The committee drafts a report, which is then presented to the Faculty's Council for Science and Training to gather opinions from experts including researchers, lecturers, management staff, employer representatives, administrators, and former students. These suggestions are collected, processed, and refined to gather meaningful information for program development. After approval from the Faculty's Council for Science and Training, the program is submitted to the university's Faculty's Council for Science and Training and the Rector for review and issuance. The university's training programs are developed with reference to reputable domestic and international universities' programs. Once programs are issued, they are detailed in semester and academic year training plans. Information about training programs, training plans, schedules, etc., is posted on the university's website, in learner handbooks, and student handbooks.

### **Pricing Policy for University Educational Services**

The university's pricing for educational services is a reasonable financial amount (sufficient for sustainability, development, and accepted by learners) that the university charges for its educational activities, calculated per student for each major, level, degree type, training class, and defined supplementary training, also known as tuition fees.

The current tuition fees for regular undergraduate students at the university adhere to the regulations stipulated in Government Decree No. 49/2010/ND-CP and Government Decree No. 86/2015/ND-CP dated October 2, 2015.

### **Distribution Policy in University Educational Service Marketing**

**Establishing Enrollment and Training Channels (Educational Service Marketing Channels):** Direct enrollment channels involve the university directly conducting enrollment and training activities at its main campus. This includes direct enrollment and training for regular undergraduate programs, credit transfer from colleges to universities, dual-work-and-study programs, and master's programs. Indirect enrollment and training channels are facilitated through local intermediary institutions. The university has established partnerships and collaborations for credit transfer programs, master's programs, and dual-work-and-study programs with intermediary training institutions such as vocational schools, community colleges, and adult education centers in provinces such as Phu Tho, Son La, Thanh Hoa, and Ha Giang.

### **Selection of Training Formats and Methods**

Training Formats: To meet learners' needs, the university offers diverse training formats, including regular programs, standard programs, high-quality programs, dual-work-and-study programs, credit transfer from vocational schools to universities, associate to bachelor's degree credit transfer, second degree programs, and international partnership programs. However, challenges exist with enrolling high-quality programs, and there is a lack of short-term training options, especially those focusing on soft skills for students.

The university frequently organizes exchange sessions and meetings with businesses to promote its image and provide career advice and job opportunities for learners. The university also conducts job counseling programs to enhance job-seeking skills and effectiveness for final-year students.

### **Training Process**

The university has established and issued a system of regulations regarding the training process. This system follows a logical management structure, avoids content overlap, and consistently adapts to the practical situation of the university. These documents, along with other legal documents, have been widely disseminated throughout the university via internal communication channels and the document management system on the university's website. Subsequently, each department comprehends and applies these regulations to their faculty, staff, and contract workers. These regulations are seen as guidelines for faculty, staff, and students to fulfill their assigned tasks and contribute to the successful execution of each academic year. However, conducting interviews with relevant parties to assess the effectiveness of the management document system has not been realized.

### ***2.3. Solutions to Enhance University Educational Service Marketing Activities***

#### **1. Promoting Marketing Awareness in the Supply of University Educational Services to All Individuals and Units Involved**

Each lecturer and staff member should understand and internalize the concept of "customer-centric marketing."

Organize ideological and political education activities for all faculty, lecturers, and staff throughout the university. This aims to instill a new philosophy in modern university education and marketing in the supply of university educational services.

Conduct ideological and political education activities for learners to help them clearly understand their roles, responsibilities, and positions in the chain of university educational services.

## **2. Identify the Right Target Customers (Service Recipients) and Their Needs**

Regularly monitor, grasp, and update the country's economic and social development policies, trends, and global educational developments.

Establish an information system to survey, understand, and evaluate learners' needs in all stages of the university educational service supply process (before, during, and after training).

Regularly conduct surveys, research, and assessments of labor demand from organizations and businesses.

## **3. Strengthen University Educational Service Marketing Activities by Enhancing the Implementation of Marketing Mix Policies**

Diversify and innovate educational programs/services to enhance learners' potential and fulfill the country's workforce needs.

Utilize price as a competitive advantage in the supply of university educational services.

Diversify training methods and formats.

Innovate and enhance promotion and communication activities for relevant stakeholders and communities in various provinces.

Improve the quality of lecturers and the supporting staff system for teaching activities.

Continue investing in and modernizing facilities and educational support systems to meet both national and international standards.

Innovate the university educational service supply process.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has evaluated the current state of higher education service marketing activities at the University through the analysis of the seven mixed marketing policies that the institution is implementing. From this evaluation, both advantages and limitations within the marketing activities have been identified, forming the foundation for proposing strategies to enhance the higher education service marketing efforts of the University. These strategies include effectively communicating the spirit of higher education service marketing to all faculty, staff, and students, accurately identifying target customers, and providing specific solutions related to the mixed marketing policies.

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