

An evaluation of marketing strategy and advertising media of University of the Assumption

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ABSTRACT

In any business environment, marketing is very vital in becoming a customer-centric service industry provider. Capitalizing on activities that draw interest to target markets serves as a gateway for shaping and creating a value proposition to the public. Essentially, an appropriate marketing mix also applies to the higher education institution. The use of various marketing tools has evolved not only in the corporate world but also in the education industry in response to globalization's changing needs. This study's main objective is to evaluate the marketing communication strategies, particularly the advertising media efforts of the University of the Assumption. A total of 683 parents, students, and alumni from basic education to graduate school served as participants of the study. Results reveal that social media is the most and highly preferred advertising medium, and the internet is the most effective influence among the different marketing communication strategies of UA. This indicates that the key success for reaching prospective students is using digital space or online presence. Practical implications of the results can be inputs to established advertising plans that policymakers and authorities of the institution can adopt as part of the UA's overall marketing strategy.

Keywords: marketing strategy, marketing tools, advertising media, internet, social media

INTRODUCTION

Education is now a global vehicle for the development of human civilization and the progress of every nation. It is the cornerstone and the root of all great achievements as it continues to mold the world. As the education industry continues to grow, tight competition has been imminent today in the modern era. Boosting enrolment through migration of traditional marketing efforts to

creative and innovative ways has been a pressing concern. Schools change processes in management on how to respond in their external environment. There were efforts in strategizing their position in the educational arena through marketing (Zancajo, 2017).

Marketing strategy for universities is essential to maintain and further develop their position on the market of education, securing high quality of teaching for both graduates and employees' satisfaction. As defined by the American Marketing Association (2012), marketing is the act or process that a company uses to communicate and promote its brand while delivering value and reaching out to potential customers, clients, partners, stakeholders, and society. Similarly, with Kotler's (2000) definition, marketing is "meeting needs profitably," where selling is not the most important part but the process of knowing the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself. Therefore, modern marketing orientation should focus more on clients' demands and needs while meeting organizational objectives. Higher education institutions should be marketed more and managed more like corporate brands (Schüller & Chalupský, 2012). Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006) and Maringe and Carter (2007) state that university managers and academics have to consider marketing not as an alien concept imported from the business world but as both a viable philosophy and strategy for developing a higher education sector that meets the needs of home-based and international customers. This managerial function is mainly characterized as with high priority in operating educational institutions (Fosket, 2002). It is believed that the survival of many schools has something to do with how they retain the increase of the school's market share of students as clientele being a service industry (Davis & Ellison, 1997).

In the 21st century, competition among universities in the Philippines has intensified rapidly. Educational institutions find efficient ways to attract students. Students have a wide range of options to choose from different universities all over the country. Parents, irrespective of their socio-economic condition, seek a more solid return to their educational investment, exercise choice, and propel change by moving their children to schools that are more responsive to their needs and where they can see them get a quality education. To overcome this alarming competition, educational institutions need to make drastic changes and shun the traditional belief that students will always accept what schools produce. HEIs shall adopt a new entrepreneurial management style based on proactive and market-oriented student recruitment practices (El Nemar et al., 2018).

HEIs mostly focus on providing services in how other market subjects are treated whereby the buying decisions of students as customers nowadays are based on available information, including images that are mainly evident on various marketing strategies (Shanka, Quintal & Taylor, 2006; Švandová, 2013). Having a strong marketing orientation is needed by universities gaining the ultimate total customer satisfaction for the intended markets to continuously patronize their products and services in greater quantities and frequencies over rivals (De Asis, 2003). Just like in other industries such as tourism and health, higher education should also be seen as a service industry through a marketing lens. Fundamental concepts and principles such as customer value – also participation, engagement, satisfaction, and segmentation are of high importance for schools (Uncles, 2018).

Undeniably, educational marketing becomes an important managerial function for a school to survive in a present competitive market. A school should be grounded on its ability to convey an effective image for parents and stakeholders. Marketing is

considered a holistic management process (Foskett, 2002) to improve effectiveness by satisfying parents' needs and desires rather than just selling products and services or clients' persuasion to buy a specific educational program (Oplatka & Brown, 2012).

Indeed, various marketing forms are being strategized to recruit students successfully (Foskett, 2002). However, analysis of how marketing efforts are being actualized is very important for the institution to identify, contribute to the increase in enrollment, which is being omitted in the marketing plan. This will bring in awareness and a thorough understanding of the administration of the appropriate incorporation of marketing mechanisms on its operations. This prompted the researchers to evaluate the existing marketing procedures used by the University of the Assumption (UA) to suggest future directions in promoting the school.

Educational institutions like UA have been continually revisiting their marketing plan to develop new school approaches. In evaluating existing marketing efforts, the views of the main stakeholders are essential inputs. Strategies are to be adjusted based on the needs of the institution and the wants of the customers. Responsiveness of higher education institutions on the preferences and demands of diverse major stakeholders should be high in terms of harmonizing them with their expectations (Uncles, 2018). A set of seven marketing-mix tools in planning market relationships: program, price, place, promotion, processes, physical facilities, and people are recommended to use by universities in an integrated manner (Filip, 2012).

Over the years, there has been a number of different concepts used by organizations to market products. One is the "production" perspective, where buyers are assumed to go for available and affordable products. Meanwhile, the "product" approach is based on the assumption that buyers will purchase

products that offer the best quality and features. On this aspect, the organization should focus on product development and improvement (Evans, 1995). The selling perspective also prevailed where consumers are assumed to buy when there are activities such as advertising and marketing are being carried out (Kotler & Armstrong, 2002). However, for Kotler and Fox (1995), marketing perspective falls under the main task of an institution where the focus is on the determination of the needs and wants of target markets to satisfy them through the design, communication, pricing, and delivery of programs and services in accordance to the stakeholders' needs.

Theoretically for Lumby (1999), marketing efforts should be responsive to desires and needs, particularly of parents and children. The focus of schools shall be on their satisfaction and shall be of high importance. Davis et al. (1997) suggest that schools are encouraged to follow several conceptualizing marketing perspectives. These are (1) marketing research and analysis of the environment; (2) formulating a marketing plan and strategy, (3) implementing the marketing mix; and (4) evaluating the marketing process. Practically, these stages are expected to be implemented as well as the needs of the stakeholders. In this light, the researchers tried to conduct an evaluation of what the UA has in terms of educational marketing. It is necessary to review the current marketing plan by evaluation to develop an improved and refined one eventually. From the conceptualization of a marketing plan, being the core of the marketing process, marketing aims and positioning of the organization are being formulated (Kotler and Armstrong, 2002). This study aims to provide feedback and responses in various marketing activities conducted by the administration useful for planning.

Given this background at hand, this study attempted to evaluate the existing marketing communication strategies being

adopted by the University. Identified marketing efforts were analyzed, which effectively boost students' enrollment and attract potential clientele. Specifically, it sought answers to the following objectives: (1) to determine the preference of stakeholders regarding advertising media adopted by UA; (2) to determine the most effective influence among the different marketing strategies; (3) to identify the highest criteria for choosing UA, source of information and preferred billboard features; (4) to determine the duration and time preference of the randomly selected respondents in watching TV, listening to the radio; (5) to identify the newspaper the respondents read and (6) determine stakeholders' time duration in using their social media accounts. The school can frame new and appropriate marketing tools to improve the existing marketing plan from the results and recommendations. Through this assessment, the services can be more effectively and efficiently delivered while meeting clients' needs and demands. The substantial information resulted from this study can be very vital elements in refining the existing marketing plan.

METHOD

This study used the descriptive method of research, which was carried out at the University of the Assumption. Parents and students enrolled in the University for the academic year 17-18 served as participants of the study. From the total number of 683 respondents, 269 were parents, 24 students responded from Graduate School, 149 students came from College, one hundred 141 and 93 students were from Senior and Junior High Schools, respectively.

A questionnaire was used as the major tool for gathering data. The instrument was validated and verified by the UA Research and Planning Office. It was structured following a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "5" being the most preferred and "1" being

the least preferred and some mixed questionnaire consisting of closed as well as open-ended questions at the latter part. It was floated through the endorsement of the External Affairs and Media Office.

For ethical consideration, respondents were informed of the aims and scope of the research through a consent form. Respondents were reminded that their participation is voluntary and can withdraw or pull-out the answered instrument anytime. Additionally, all gathered information was treated with the utmost confidentiality. Upon retrieval of the questionnaires, data will be collated and prepared for analysis. Descriptive statistics were utilized to present participants' responses by frequencies and percentages in tabular form. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23 was used for the statistical analysis and computation of the collected data.

RESULTS

The results of the study are organized into seven sections according to the problems stated.

Table 1
Number of Respondents

Respondents	Frequency	Percent (%)
Parents	269	39.4
JHS students	93	13.6
SHS students	141	20.6
College students	149	21.8
Graduate students	24	3.5
Missing	7	1.0
Total	683	100.0

As seen in table no. 1, out of the 683 respondents, 269 are parents, 24 are students from Graduate School, 149 are students from College, 141 are students from Senior High School, and 93 are students from Junior High School. There are seven missing values due to incomplete or unanswered items on the questionnaire.

Table 1.1
Age in years and gender

Age Bracket in Years	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
12 to 16	79	68	147
17 to 20	102	109	211
21 to 25	14	20	34
26 to 30	2	11	13
31 to 39	8	64	72
40 to 50	29	113	142
51 and above	13	22	35
Missing	247	407	654
Total			683

As far as gender wise segmentation is concerned, there are 247 males, of which the majority is between 17 to 20 years old, and the least of male respondents falls between the 26 to 30 years old bracket. In addition, there are a total of 407 female respondents, of which the majority is between 40 to 50 years old, and the least of female respondents falls between the ages of 26 to 30 years old.

Table 1.2
Parents as graduates of UA

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	178	26.1
No	487	71.3
Total	665	97.4
Missing	18	2.6
Total	683	100.0

Table 1.2 shows that the parents of the respondents are mostly not a graduate of UA having a total of 487 respondents or 71.3 percent, while the rest (178 respondents' parents) are all graduates of UA.

Table 2
Preference of stakeholders on advertising media

Advertising Media	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Billboards	3.66	1.03	Moderately preferred
Brochures	3.47	1.02	Moderately preferred
Posters	3.69	1.01	Moderately preferred
Print ads	3.58	1.07	Moderately preferred
Radio ads	3.04	1.18	Preferred
TV ads	3.63	1.26	Moderately preferred
Social media	4.23	1.01	Highly preferred

Based on Table 2, the most highly preferred advertising media is social media, with a mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation equal to 1.01. Coming in second is the posters with a mean of 3.66 and 1.03 standard deviation. At the third rank is the billboard having

a mean of 3.66 and 1.03 standard deviation. Moving on to the fourth is TV ads with a mean of 3.63 and 1.26 standard deviation. Rounding out the seven advertising media is the Print Ads with 3.58 a mean and 1.07 standard deviation, while Brochures have a 3.47 mean and a standard deviation of 1.02. Meanwhile, the radio ads got the lowest rates with a mean of 3.04 and 1.18 standard deviation.

Table 3
Most effective influences of the different marketing strategies

Marketing Strategy	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Recruitment talks in school outside UA	3.70	4.25	Moderately effective
Announcement during Mass in Malls	3.08	4.13	Effective
Announcement during Mass in Churches	3.31	4.12	Effective
Corporate giveaways such as umbrellas, pens, mugs, fans	3.43	3.92	Moderately effective
Recognition of top feeder schools	3.74	3.74	Moderately effective
Campus tour in UA for prospective students	3.92	3.70	Moderately effective
Internet (website, social media, email)	4.25	3.43	Strongly effective
Inter-school competition and events hosted by UA	4.12	3.31	Moderately effective
Participation in civic and religious events such as Coronation of the VDLR, Christ the King commemoration, Independence day celebration, etc.	4.13	1.02	Moderately effective

Among the nine influences of the different marketing strategies of UA, the internet (website, social media, email) was the most effective, with a mean of 4.25 and a standard deviation of 3.43. On the other hand, announcements during Mass in malls and churches got the lowest ratings. Moreover, all the rest of the marketing strategy are verbally interpreted as “Moderately effective.”

Table 4
Highest criteria for choosing UA

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Catholic Education	4.47	0.90	Very high
Curriculum	4.31	0.87	Very high
Extra-curricular activities	4.15	0.93	Above average
Facilities	4.16	0.91	Above average
Faculty	4.12	0.91	Above average
Parents or one of them graduated from UA	3.34	1.41	Below average
Incentives from the government (ESC grant)	3.83	1.24	Average
PAASCU accreditation	4.24	1.01	Above average
Scholarships and grants	4.11	1.11	Above average
Others	3.53	1.66	Average

The findings in Table 4 highlight the Catholic Education and Curriculum of the University of the Assumption as the highest criteria in choosing it as an educational institution. Moreover, the Extra-curricular activities, facilities, faculty, PAASCU accreditation, scholarships, and grants are all verbally interpreted as “above average.” Meanwhile, the lowest ratings fall into the Incentives from the government (ESC grant).

Table 4.1**Source of information about UA**

Source of Information	Frequency	Percent (%)
Brochures	127	18.6
Billboards	140	20.50
Television	16	2.3
Radio	7	1.0
Newspapers	4	.6
Email	16	2.3
Website	125	18.3
Social Media	200	29.3
Telephone call/text	22	3.2
UA student	342	50.1
UA alumni	182	26.6
UA Parent	196	28.7
Others	42	6.1

Table 4.2**Reading of billboards you see on street**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	188	27.5
Sometimes	437	64.0
Not at all	28	4.1
Total	653	95.6
Missing	30	4.4
Total	683	100.0

Table 4.3
King of billboards

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Funny	98	14.3
Long text	13	1.9
Simple	162	23.7
Creative	361	52.9
Short text	128	18.7
Straightforward	203	29.7
Informative	395	57.8
With images/pictures/icons	360	52.7

As gleaned in Table 4, the largest source of information about UA comes from the UA students having 50.1 percent of the total data. On the other hand, newspapers got the lowest rating of 0.6 percent of the total data.

Meanwhile, Table 4.2 shows that 64 percent of the total respondents read billboards “Sometimes” and highly prefer a billboard feature that is informative, creative, and with images/pictures/icons (see Table 4.3). Nonetheless, they do not want billboards with long texts and funny features.

Table 5
Time of watching TV

Time	Frequency	Percent (%)
Morning	76	11.1
Afternoon	103	15.1
Evening	435	63.7
None	54	7.9
Total	668	97.8
Missing	15	2.2
Total	683	100.0

Table 5.1
Duration of watching TV daily in hours

Duration in Hours	Frequency	Percent (%)
1-3	467	68.4
4-6	131	19.2
More than 6	40	5.9
Total	638	93.4
Missing	45	6.6
Total	683	100.0

Table 5.2
Time of listening to the radio

Time	Frequency	Percent (%)
Morning	244	35.7
Afternoon	39	5.7
Evening	50	7.3
None	336	49.2
Total	669	98.0
Missing	14	2.0
Total	683	100.0

Table 5.3
Duration of listening to the radio daily in hours

Duration in Hours	Frequency	Percent (%)
1-3	393	57.5
4-6	15	2.2
More than 6	7	1.0
Total	415	60.8
Missing System	268	39.2
Total	683	100.0

As reflected in Table 5, the majority or 63.7 percent of the total respondents watch TV during the evening, and 68.4 percent of them watch from an average of 1-3 hours daily.

Likewise, in Table 5.2, the majority or 35.7 percent of the respondents listen to radio during the morning, and 57.5 percent of them listen for an average of 1 to 3 hours daily.

Table 6
Type of newspapers read

Type of Newspaper	Frequency	Percent (%)
Local	230	33.7
National	167	24.5
None	272	39.8
Total	669	98.0
Missing System	14	2.0
Total	683	100.0

Based on the above findings, 39.8 percent of the respondents are not into newspapers. However, few read local newspapers with a rating of 33.7 percent while the rest (24.5 %) were reading national newspapers.

Table 7
Frequency of using social media accounts

		Never	Weekly	1 hour a day	2-4 hours a day	4-8 hours a day	More than 8 hours a day
Twitter	Frequency	303	66	63	97	45	30
	Percent	44.4	9.7	9.2	14.2	6.6	4.4
Facebook	Frequency	19	50	146	217	151	92
	Percent	2.8	7.3	21.4	31.8	22.1	13.5
Google+	Frequency	126	151	183	110	35	25
	Percent	18.4	22.1	26.8	16.1	5.1	3.7
Youtube	Frequency	53	111	136	185	97	59
	Percent	7.8	16.3	19.9	27.1	14.2	8.6
Instagram	Frequency	241	66	102	95	68	35
	Percent	35.3	9.7	14.9	13.9	10.0	5.1
LinkedIn	Frequency	535	30	16	6	1	1
	Percent	78.3	4.4	2.3	.9	.1	.1
Pinterest	Frequency	469	60	36	13	8	3
	Percent	68.7	8.8	5.3	1.9	1.2	.4
Tumblr	Frequency	507	40	24	6	4	3
	Percent	74.2	5.9	3.5	.9	.6	.4
OTHERS:	Frequency	1	4	5	9	1	6
	Percent	.1	.6	.7	1.3	.1	0.88

With reference to the findings in Table 7, Facebook tops the most used social media for “more than 8 hours a day” with 13.5 percent, followed by Youtube with 8.6 percent, Instagram at 5.1 percent, Twitter at 4.4 percent, Google at 3.7.

However, the respondents disclosed their rating for LinkedIn, Tumblr, and Pinterest as the highest rank of social media accounts that are “never” used.

DISCUSSION

There were several findings in this study that the University can use to improve, modify, and adopt new marketing strategies

along with the other traditional marketing tools of UA in promoting and attracting potential students.

Tables 2 and 3 revealed that the most and highly preferred advertising media are social media and the most effective influence of the different marketing strategies of UA is the Internet (website, social media, email). Hence, the findings indicated that the internet could be the best tool for universities to promote and attract potential students and stakeholders. Therefore, UA should focus more on utilizing the internet to achieve its marketing success. Moreover, these findings are supported in the book of Chaffey (2009,p.702) entitled "Internet Marketing: Strategy, Implementation, and Practice," which likewise states that marketing through the internet provides comprehensive, practical guidance on how companies can get the most out of the web to meet their marketing goals.

However, people tend to focus on word-of-mouth marketing, such as suggestions or referrals from friends and relatives. This is evidenced by the findings shown in Table 4.1 that the largest source of information about UA comes from the UA students themselves. Social media got only the second rank out of the thirteen sources of information given in the research instrument. From this, we can infer that UA and its students maintain a good and successful long-term relationship. Though in some cases, social media interaction has been influential on how clients decide on purchasing decisions (Khan, 2013). This caused implications on how some business entities strategize in using the appropriate marketing tool for advertising. For UA, the traditional social networking of people still applies.

The item on the newspapers got the lowest rating in the source of information of UA. It can be inferred that neither students like reading newspapers nor the University invest in a newspaper

advertisement. This is further supported by Table 6, where 39.8 percent of the respondents do not read newspapers. However, few read local newspapers with a rating of 33.7 percent while the rest (24.5 %) were reading national newspapers. Similarly, the same findings were seen in the study of Teenagers, H., & Media, C. (2009), in which they found out that print media, specifically newspapers, started to decline and people, especially the young generation, claim to get a tremendous volume of news that are readily available online.

Furthermore, the next findings revealed that the University is a Catholic institution dedicated to the formation of morally upright and socially responsible catholic future leaders, which is the highest criteria in choosing it as an educational institution. Its curriculum, PAASCU accreditation, scholarships and grants, extra-curricular activities, facilities, and faculties got an “above average” rating in the criteria for choosing UA. By and large, it can be deduced that the respondents were mostly satisfied with what the University offers and that service quality and student satisfaction directly impact the student’s loyalty and patriotism.

Regarding billboards, which ranks as the third-most preferred advertising media of UA, most respondents want them to be informative, creative, and image-filled. The more exposure in outdoor advertisements like billboards, the more crowds will look after the University. The same is true in Television advertisements that rank as the fourth most preferred advertising media of UA, where findings revealed that most of the total respondents watch TV during the evening at an average of 1-3 hours daily. On the contrary, radio advertisement got the lowest rate in choosing the most preferred advertising media of UA where results showed that the majority of the respondents listen to radio during the morning at an average of 1-3 hours daily. Perhaps, the University should somehow plan strategies in line with these peak times. Social media

was reflected to be the highly preferred advertising media of the respondents. This result supports the fact that online communication provides a quick connection without any geographical constraints of the target group of clientele and allows direct communication with consumers. The further exploration of its possibilities in a higher education setting is seen as a cost-effective promotion tool if applied (Stefco, 2014 et al.) (p.114).

Finally, turning to the emerging and leading rise of social media, the study revealed that Facebook is the most used social media application in which respondents tend to use their Facebook accounts for “more than 8 hours a day”. It is followed by Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, and Google. Similarly, with Todi's (2008) findings, social networking websites gained rapid prominence over the years, and it was recorded in 2008 that Facebook is the 6th most used website on the internet world and boasts an extremely large global user base (p. 11). It is significant to consider social media as the top priority in crafting marketing tools for the University.

Limitation of the Study

This study focused on evaluating the marketing strategies and advertising media of the University of the Assumption. The researchers used survey questionnaires to students from Graduate School, College, Junior and Senior High School, and their parents.

Moreover, the Grade School pupils were excluded from the survey. This study is limited only to selected respondents, but it can be extended to the other students inside and outside of UA as a matter of the future scope of the study.

Conclusion

Studying and evaluating Universities' marketing strategies has become even more important nowadays, in this era of information and technology because clients have become more cautious, demanding, and selective. Identifying the students' and clients' perspective on the Universities' marketing tools and what medium and tools that information are more effectively and efficiently expressed is one great step towards achieving its marketing success.

This study concludes that clients rely upon more than one medium in obtaining information about the University. Along with the traditional marketing tools, they heavily rely on modern marketing tools. On a large scale, this finding indicates that the internet and social media might be the best and most effective advertising tool suited for the University of the Assumption, so the authority and administration should consider when creating a strategic and advertising plan.

Following the findings of the study, it can be concluded that adopting the most effective marketing strategy and advertising media can mean boosting student enrollment and gaining a competitive advantage among competitors.

Recommendations

In this digital age, one problem that we won't likely face is communicating to the public because there are a plethora of mediums present. The role of marketing strategies cannot be ruled out in educational institutions. While there are a lot of tools and mediums in advertising Universities, implementing them is the real challenge.

With the advancement of the internet and the increase in its users, the University of the Assumption must maximize it to increase and boost student enrollment. As the students indicated that they are highly exposed to social media, television, and billboard marketing, UA should consider these advertising media in developing their strategic marketing plan. Perhaps, they could try investing in online advertising and maintain a well updated and informative website. They could also place an advertisement on television and billboards to reach millions of people every day.

Moreover, UA must continuously improve its curriculum and high-quality services, including its facilities, to enhance the student experience and satisfaction. The regular review of the existing marketing plan shall also be considered. The assessment shall help the offices concerned in improving areas that could help boost student enrollment. There should also be priorities to be set as to what marketing efforts the University should focus on. This shall be based on the present needs of the stakeholders and target group of clientele. Lastly, the cycle of innovative marketing shall always be a pressing concern. The market environment never stops evolving. Therefore, the management is expected to respond to these changing needs in accordance with how marketing is being defined in the present time. A research that will cover the role of complete marketing mix tools can be explored as a continuation of this evaluation to integrate all marketing strategies being used by the institution and how consumer preferences information is translated into marketing plans by the school management.

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