

Factors Affecting the Success of Marketing in Higher Education: A Relationship Marketing Perspective

Abstract:

The current study examines the conceptual foundations and drivers of relationship marketing ideologies and their marketing applications in the tertiary education sector. Towards these objectives, a series of semi-structured interviews have been conducted among students of leading tertiary education institutions in New Zealand. Results of the study suggest that Education providers (EP) service-oriented behaviours, trust, commitment, as well as their infrastructure are enhancing student satisfaction and loyalty in tertiary educational institutions. The study suggests that higher education providers (HEPs) should commit themselves to customer-centric service-oriented tactics and actions, must earn customers' trust and build loyalty from their marketing practices. **Based on the research findings,** a conceptual model of relationship marketing in higher education is proposed. The current study contributes to marketing theory by reviewing and summarizing the key drivers of relationship marketing and discussing their applications in the formal tertiary education sector. The study also provides suggestions to tertiary education marketers in terms of the priorities for developing and maintaining profitable customer relationships in this changing world and offers an agenda for future research.

Keywords: *commitment, higher education, service orientation, relationship marketing, tertiary education, trust, universities*

Factors Affecting the Success of Marketing in Higher Education: A Relationship Marketing Perspective

Introduction

(Egan, 2003) notes that relationship marketing (RM) is “*the major trend*” in marketing, and probably the most controversial discussion topic in management literature during the last decades of this century. Prior research in diverse streams of marketing including service marketing (Bitner, 1995; Harrigan et al., 2018); industrial marketing (Levitt, 1983); online marketing (Sheth, 2017; Steinhoff et al., 2018); customer loyalty (Payne & Frow, 2013; Verma et al., 2016); and customer value management (Christopher, 1996; Frow & Payne, 2009) contribute to the body of knowledge on RM. RM is defined as “*an integrated effort to identify, maintain, and build up a network with individual consumers and to continuously strengthen the network for the mutual benefit of both sides, through interactive, individualized and value-added contacts over a long period of time*” (Shani & Chalasani, 1992). This definition emphasizes the need for businesses to build long-lasting relationships with customers for mutual benefit. Developing strategies for sustainable long-term trust-based relationships is essential for the success of service industries (Lee & Trim, 2006). Marketing of higher education is no exception. The current study examines the growth drivers of relationships and their applications in the marketing of higher education services. This study considers students, industry and various community associations and society as a whole as customers of educational services, as purchasers/consumers of HEPs’ knowledge products in various forms (teaching, research output in various forms, and disseminated intelligence in the form of reports in journals, magazines, books and multi-media sources). This study focuses mainly on the key product of higher education providers (HEPs), namely competency development interventions (including training, graduate courses, post-graduate researchers, and executive short-courses) for tertiary students.

The rapid development of public and private higher educational institutions coupled with increasing competition, high tuition fees and limited government funding exert pressure on universities and higher educational institutions to embrace market-oriented relationship management strategies (Gordan et al., 2012). Universities realize that strong relationships with all stakeholders, including students, will help them to face the marketplace challenges, cope with the ever-changing environment, and capitalize on the opportunities these changes present. Towards this objective, universities have employed multiple online communication channels including websites, emails, and social media channels to engage with their students. For example, all the eight universities in New Zealand have Facebook channels with followers varying from 32,000 (Lincoln University) to 213,000 (University of Auckland). The Facebook pages of these institutions provide further contact details including websites, telephone numbers, and private text messaging facilities should a potential student want to contact them for details. Of particular significance during the Covid-19 pandemic in New Zealand, was higher education providers' HEP's response to the Covid-19 lock-downs by engaging with both national and international students via virtual and online learning forums (Leo et al., 2021).

Current literature on RM pays little attention to the international education market and even less to relationships between higher education providers (HEPs) and other stakeholders up and down the value chain. Most studies on RM have focused on a broader view of the topic such as theorizing relationship marketing ideologies (Brown et al., 2019; Grönroos, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994); differentiating RM from traditional marketing concepts (Grönroos, 1994, 1997; Gummesson, 1997, 2017; Sheth, 1995, 2017); identifying the antecedents and consequences (Sheth, J. N., & Parvatiyar, 1995); integrating core marketing concepts including service quality, customer value (Abeza et al., 2020; Payne & Frow, 2013); and satisfaction and loyalty (Hillebrand et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2013; Wang & Kim, 2017). Although current literature has proven the role of relationship marketing ideologies in modern

marketing theory and practice, clarity is required in terms of identifying the strategies that may be successful in building and maintaining relationships between service providers and their customers. Moreover, current literature in relationship marketing are mostly generic in nature and very few focuses on a specific industry in the service sector. For example, in the context of higher education, very few works have identified the need of implementing customer relationship management strategies to achieve student satisfaction (Helgesen, 2008; Oluseye et al., 2014; Smorvik & Vespstad, 2020). Recently, (Khanna et al., 2021) identified the importance of faculty's caring behavior in enhancing student satisfaction and overall learning experience. These studies (Abdelmaaboud et al., 2021; Darawong & Sandmaung, 2019; Khan & Hemsley-Brown, 2021) highlight the significance of enhancing student satisfaction and loyalty in higher education institutions. However, further clarity is required in terms of the best practices of RM within higher education sector. The current study aims to address this research gap by proposing successful relationship marketing strategies higher education sector.

The significance of the study is multifold. Firstly, this work extends the current understanding of RM by identifying the critical factors of successful relationships in the tertiary education sector. This paper identifies four key constructs of educational provider-student relationships in the tertiary education, and examine the role of these factors in developing and maintaining profitable relationships between HEPs and its consumer base (focus on tertiary students). Secondly, based on the primary data collected from the market, a conceptual framework of relationship marketing in higher education is proposed. The conceptual framework outlines the key drivers and associated dimensions of successful relationships in higher education sector. Even though, the proposed conceptual model is focused on the customers perspectives in the tertiary education sector, the proposed factors and relationships can be generalized to alternative service sectors. In line with well-established theories of the relationship marketing, this study identifies activities essential to generate consumers

perception of value, leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Besides the academic implications, the study provides valuable implications to the marketing education practices. The study examines the RM practices of tertiary EPs and provides suggestions to develop and maintain successful relationships between tertiary EPs, its prime stakeholders, amongst others, student communities.

In short, the current study provides insights to address the following research questions.

RQ1: What is Relationship Marketing (RM) as it relates to higher education providers?

RQ2: What are the critical success factors of RM in the context of higher education?

RQ3: How do these factors impact the marketing of higher education?

Literature Review

Conceptual foundations of Relationship Marketing Paradigm

Relationship marketing (RM) is a well-honed, three-decade-old concept first published in Harvard Business Review in 1983 (Levitt, 1983). Over the last three decades, it has become one of the burning topics in marketing literature, particularly during the 1990s. RM has its origin in industrial (Levitt, 1983) and services marketing (Grönroos, 1993; Gummesson, 1997). During the post-industrial era, researchers started developing frameworks and theoretical models focusing on the dyadic relationships between sellers and buyers (Bonoma & Johnston, 1978; Frazier, 1983; Möller & Halinen, 2000). The key driver of this change was the inadequacy of conventional, microeconomic perspective of marketing focusing on the interaction between demand and supply (Bush et al., 2007). Research works enhancing marketing channel relationships (Anderson & Narus, 1984; Heide & John, 1990, 1992), building and managing industrial networks (Hakansson, 1990; Hakansson & Wootz, 1979; Johanson & Mattsson, 1985) are examples of this shift in research focus.

Prior literature suggests changing the business's priority from transaction-based, product-oriented and seller-focused strategies, to more customer-focused and relationship-oriented strategies. (J. Sheth et al., 1996) posit that the scope of RM should be limited to those collaborative activities aimed to serve the needs of the final consumers. However, other scholars/researchers promote a wide overview of RM approaches in the prior literature (M. Christopher et al., 1991; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), ranging from internal functions and approaches, to a series of stakeholder value management activities. Table 1 presents a few of the conceptual definitions of RM available in the marketing literature. This study here applies the definition of Morgan and Hunt (1994) and refers to all activities that help a business to establish, develop and maintain successful relational exchanges between its stakeholders including suppliers, buyers, internal (e.g. employees) and external stakeholders (e.g., competitors).

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

Growth of the service sector in the late 1990s fueled a paradigm shift in marketing. Service marketing researchers argued that existing conventional marketing strategies (4Ps) were unable to conceptualize the relationship that should exist between service providers and service consumers. According to the literature, the conceptual foundations of relationship marketing discipline are developed from primarily three schools of thought (Bush et al., 2007; R. Palmer et al., 2005; Payne & Frow, 2017). These include 1) the Nordic School of Thought; 2) works of Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMPG); and 3) the Anglo Australian School. Understanding these three schools of thoughts would help readers to conceptualize the relationship marketing discipline and its underlying constructs. Therefore, a brief review of the contributions of the three schools of thoughts that led to the evolution of relationship marketing principles is presented in the following sections.

The Nordic School of Thought

Nordic School of Thought (NST) primarily discussed the concept of service as a process or means of improving quality of relationships, stimulating customer loyalty and extending the customer life cycle value (Grönroos, 1993, 1994; R. Palmer et al., 2005). The Nordic School of Thought suggested three core processes, through which business relationships are to be managed. These include i) the interaction process; ii) the dialogue or communication process and iii) the value process (Grönroos, 2004). Gronroos identifies the interaction between service providers and stakeholders, in particular customers, as the core of relationship marketing process. Gronroos, (2004, p.102) suggest that “*management of interaction between customers is the core of relationship marketing as the exchange of product is the core of transaction marketing*”. So, according to this tenet by Gronroos, businesses have to align resources, competencies, technology and systems to interact with their customers, users and other stakeholders to achieve RM success. Adept marketers actively engage with customers’ value-generating processes. using dialogue or interactive communication processes to manage all interaction processes. Palmer and colleagues (Parmer et al., 2005) echo this, by reporting that the customer value generation process is a key process in RM. RM’s strategic intent is to create additional value over and above the value of transactions of goods and services for all stakeholders – including customers. Scholars assert that businesses must align their resources (people, technology and service elements) and unique competencies in the internal value generation process (Grönroos, 2004). Customers have to perceive and appreciate the value they have received through their ongoing relationship with the supplier or service provider. Therefore, the customer value process and the sought-after outcome of perceived customer value, are to be effectively communicated before and during the interaction process of relationship to achieve RM success (Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2017; A. Palmer & Bejou, 2006).

Works of the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMPG)

The Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMPG) researches the nature of the business to business (B2B) relationships in Europe, UK and Scandinavia. Centred in industrial relationships, the IMPG's in-depth case studies conceptualize RM through interaction (Turnbull & Valla, 1986a, 1986b) and network models (Catoiu & Tichindelean, 2012; Gummesson, 1997; Turnbull et al., 1996).

The Interaction RM (IRM) model considers the relationship as the unit of analysis and key measure of RM success, rather than sales or transactions. According to the IRM model, the relationship is not a dichotomous variable and may exist in a wide variety of forms between buyers, suppliers and other firms involved in the business (P. Turnbull et al., 1996). Development of any relationship strategy depends on the business, its relationship with the stakeholders and its overall relationship portfolio and position in the network structure. According to IMPG, the basis for the relationship is *resource inter-dependency* (including financial resources, network position, brand image, and technologies) (P. Turnbull et al., 1996). Businesses interact for mutual benefit and to enhance their resources through the B2B relationship. The ability of the managers to develop and maintain long term relationships with suppliers and customers determines their ability to compete successfully in the market (Möller, 2013). The IMPG's research contributes to the consideration of factors including technology, trust, commitment, power/influence in building and maintaining business networks (Hakansson, 1990; Turnbull & Valla, 1986b).

The Anglo Australian Approach (AAA)

A group of academics based in the UK and Australia, contributed substantially to the conceptual foundations of the RM body of knowledge (Buttle, 1996; Christopher et al.,

1991; Christopher, 1996). These studies provide clarity regarding key RM constructs, including customer relationship management (CRM), service quality management (SQM) and customer lifetime value (CLTV). To ensure success in pursuit of strategic marketing and business goals, Christopher et al. (1991) identified six potential stakeholder groups important to RM efforts. The six stakeholder groups include customer markets (existing and new), internal markets, referral markets (refer consumers and employees), influence markets (media, unions, governing bodies, government), recruitment markets (future employees and alliances), and supplier/alliance markets (raw products and support services). Customer markets (*new and existing*) refer to direct buyers and final consumers. According CRM and CLTV theory, the goal of marketers is not just getting customers, but to retain them for future business, as managing current customers costs less to sustain than acquire new ones (M. Christopher et al., 1991). Six markets model states that relationship with each of these markets should be built and maintained appropriately, to develop and deliver an optimum value proposition to the customers.

In summary, the three schools' (NST, IMPQ, and AAA) contribution to RM, guide marketers' thinking about what the Higher Education Providers (universities in particular) could do to improve their RM efforts. Our study focusses on students – both existing and new customers – as consumers of knowledge products AND employers as the main “users” of the end product – namely qualified, graduates.

Research Methods

Scholars suggest that qualitative studies are most suitable to explain detailed and in-depth narratives about emotions, attitudes, and experiences (Thomas et al., 2012). As the objective of this study is to examine the emotions, attitudes and experiences of tertiary students in New Zealand in detail, researchers adopted qualitative research methodologies in this study.

In particular, the researchers conducted 19 semi-structured deep interviews among students of a leading tertiary institution in New Zealand. It has been recommended that qualitative studies require a minimum of 12 interviews to reach data saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Guest et al., 2006). Therefore, the current study's sample of 19 respondents deemed sufficient for the qualitative analysis and the scale of this study. The students were selected based on their enrollments to graduate and post graduate business degree programs there. Random sampling methods were employed. Interview invitations were sent to 50 randomly selected students from the registration database of the institution. Out of fifty email invitations sent, 19 students confirmed their willingness to participate in the data collection process. Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to identify and assess the role of key drivers of relationship marketing in higher education. These interviews helped the research team to examine how students develop meaning, knowledge and understanding about customer relationship management strategies in higher education marketing (Gainsbury et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2012). In line with ethical requirements, all interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder with the signed consent of all participants. Recordings were manually transcribed, coded for further data analysis. Transcripts were analyzed for suitable themes using NVivo (Version 12). The interviews were conducted in natural, informal settings. Participants were given opportunities to talk freely about various topics including the selection of an educational provider, program selection, pre-enrollment expectations, the brand reputation and image of the education institution, nature of interaction and engagement, and overall learning experience(s). The study developed four broad questions about relationship marketing strategies to manage the interviews:

1. What are the various ways in which tertiary educational institutions are in touch with their students?

2. What are the positive and negative learning experiences, as identified by students, from their studies?
3. Do students trust their educational provider and why/why not?
4. How satisfied are the students with their educational providers in terms of the services they have received over the entire value chain?

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>

Findings

Figure 1 presents the results of our thematic analysis using NVivo 12. The four themes identified include: 1) *trust*; 2) *commitment*; 3) *service quality*; and 4) *technology adoption*. The following sections explicate four themes and their implications in the marketing of tertiary education services.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

Role of trust in higher education marketing

Trust refers to the sellers “*confidence in exchange partner’s reliability and integrity*” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust as an integral component of successful marketplace relationships is well evidenced in the RM literature (Chenet et al., 2010; Moorman et al., 2006; Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002; Verma et al., 2016). Extant literature submits various positive characteristics and dimensions associated with trust. These include benevolence, competence, integrity, fairness and helpfulness (Clark et al., 2017; C. L. Wang, 2007; Yoganathan et al., 2015). When firms exhibit these qualities, they will be perceived to be more trustworthy. In a buyer-supplier relationship, customers trust that firms will be competent enough to perform the job effectively and will perform the specific tasks in the right professional standard (competence trust) and will respect the promise they made to them (contractual trust).

The current study finds that three dimensions of trust mediate the relationship

between service-oriented behaviours and customer loyalty (Brown et al., 2019; Palmatier et al., 2006). These include *contractual trust*; *competence trust*; and *goodwill trust*. Contractual trust refers to the student's belief that the educational institution will respect the terms of the learning agreement and will deliver the quality education they have promised. Competence trust, on the other hand, refers to the student's perceptions and confidence regarding the abilities of the educational institutions to deliver the promised services efficiently and reliably. Finally, goodwill trust indicates the students' belief that universities act in goodwill and will not exploit student's vulnerabilities even when given the chance. General service-related research suggests that the higher the customers' goodwill trust about the brand, the higher will be their cooperation and overall satisfaction in the exchange relationship (Manzoor et al., 2021; Şengün & Wasti, 2011). Table 3 presents some verbatim comments of the key themes as identified from the content analyses, in the three constructs of *contractual trust*, *competence trust*, and *goodwill trust*.

<INSERT TABLE 3 HERE>

Commitment in the higher education marketing

Results indicate that three dimensions of commitment which are *normative*, *affective*, and *continuance* commitment, are found to be significant. Normative commitment refers to the feelings of reciprocity and obligation in relationships (Bansal et al., 2004; Gruen et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2010). While affective commitment indicates student's affectional attachment with the institution (Bansal et al., 2004; Shum et al., 2008); and 3) continuance commitment refers to the state of attachment students cognitively experience after realizing the benefits sacrificed or losses incurred if the relationship with the institution were to end (Gilliland & Bello, 2002). The results from current study suggest that all three forms of customer commitment have a positive influence on students' overall satisfaction and resulting

loyalty towards their institutions (Bansal et al., 2004; Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015; Fullerton, 2014; Hsiao et al., 2015). Student interviewees express high levels of reciprocity and obligation in their current relationship with their educational providers. According to Interviewee F (a domestic business student): *“I got heaps of help from my teaching and office staff and I am enjoying my time here. All of the teaching staff has gone above and beyond in their jobs... and if you are having a personal problem, they are there to support me.”* The affective commitment represents institutions’ identification with and loyalty towards its stakeholders (Jones et al., 2010). According to (Gruen et al., 2000), affective commitment also refers to the extent to which customers are psychologically bonded to service providers. A senior business student interviewee (recipient of Prime Minister’s scholarship) declared: *“I don’t think I would have this opportunity to travel and study in Vietnam with a scholarship if I were in any other university. The scholarship information and application were sent to me by one of my lecturers and I am forever grateful for those amazing opportunities”*. Several interviews provided evidence related to the continuance dimension of commitment, also known as calculative commitment refers to the cost-based attachment in relationships (Bowden, 2011; Gilliland & Bello, 2002). For example, international students interviewed were aware of the high costs of education while studying abroad and all of them wanted to remain with the same educational providers due to high switching costs and longer course completion periods, which may cause them to incur higher overall fees. Table 4 presents the commitment dimensions identified from the analysis.

<INSERT TABLE 4 HERE>

Service orientation in the marketing of higher education

Higher Education providers’ (HEP) service orientation is found to be critical in influencing tertiary students’ satisfaction and loyalty. The results suggest that the depth of

customer engagement, interactivity, personalization, and collaboration indicate an educational provider's service-orientation in the HE sectors. Table 5 presents the key themes identified regarding the service orientation of higher educational institutions. Most respondents opined that their engagement via online learning management systems (e.g. Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard), emails and social media helped them to prepare for assessments in line with teachers' expectations. For tertiary education providers, conversations facilitated by online group/discussion forum (e.g., ZOOM, MS Teams, group chats, listservs) and other online document sharing platforms, enhance student's learning through interaction – often immediate and in real-time. More than 50% of the respondents agreed that correspondence they have received through emails, social media, and mobile apps (e.g. WhatsApp) was very helpful in meeting their needs. Table 5 offers insight into students' perception of engagement, interaction, personalization and collaboration as indicators of service quality.

<INSERT TABLE 5 HERE>

Role of Information Technology in higher education marketing

The current study finds that the available IT-infrastructure and support services offered by their respective EPs impact significantly on students' level of satisfaction with their HEP. Nearly 33% of the students were concerned about various IT issues such as Wi-Fi access in classrooms and campuses, access to various learning software on their home computers (e.g. SAP, SPSS, Leximancer, EndNote), adequate computer terminals at the library and classrooms, and inadequate or slow responses from the IT helpdesk in case of any technical issues. The study identifies information technology infrastructure as a mandatory resource for enhancing customer value and satisfaction in the higher education context. For example, improvements in the firm's service orientation is highly dependent on their adoption to the information

technology infrastructure. State of the art internet access on campuses, reliable computer-assisted learning systems, responsive websites, and other online learning management systems help students to develop confidence in the reliability and integrity of their HEPs. Our study identified high levels of student appreciation for those courses and faculties who have used social media for student interactions and communication, and in contrast dissatisfaction with inadequate or poor communication. Refer Table 6 for the student perception toward Information Technology services in their current HEP, ranging from library services to online teaching aids and e-books.

< INSERT TABLE 6 HERE >

Implications to HEP's Marketing

The current study identified three drivers and its associated dimensions of relationship marketing in higher education. Figure 2 presents the major drivers of relationship marketing in the Higher Education industry. The proposed theoretical model is intended to act as a framework for higher education marketers working towards developing long term relationship with its current and potential student markets. Based on the findings, the current study propose that a firm's service-oriented behaviors directly influence their customers' intensity of trust and commitment. This study also proposes that customer's commitment mediates the relationship between consumer trust, satisfaction and loyalty.

<INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

The current study proposes that successful relationships in higher education begins with implementing student-centric service-oriented strategies. Student support services, libraries, councilors and advisors may play important and significant roles in understanding and delivering

varying student needs in their learning process. Also, service-oriented firms should provide their customers, a major role in the design and delivery of the services. In the context of higher education, new courses and programs are to be designed according to the changing student needs and demands. Considering the delivery of courses, students are more likely to enjoy and value collaborative learning methods where they could contribute more towards overall classroom learning, rather than being passive recipients of knowledge.

This study supports the tenet that all three dimensions of trust have a positive and significant effect on students' commitment and their overall satisfaction with HEPs (Al-alak, 2006; Clark et al., 2017; Sultan & Wong, 2013). Higher education providers should be careful in building and enhancing its stakeholders', particularly its learners' trust. Implementing transparency in their academic and administrative procedures can be regarded as a first step. As more students perceive the delivery and evaluation of courses fair and transparent, their contractual trust in the HEP increases. Student's perception towards the HEP's academic and administrative capabilities including workshop spaces, laboratory facilities, teaching facilities, provision of high-quality academic staff, and diverse, relevant course offerings etc. help them to earn competence trust. To enhance competence trust, efforts must be taken by the marketing/Public Relations (PR) to disseminate their institution's success stories through various channels. For example, social media channels can be effectively used to share impactful success stories. TEI's accreditation at the national or international levels published on institutions' websites help to enhance students' goodwill, trust and satisfaction levels. Another approach to raise students' trust in HEPs, is to invest in and improving community relationships and closer links with industry. Sharing information related to successful internship projects, faculty's community engagement (e.g., receipt of external grants, sponsorship of community events) may help HEPs to enhance their stakeholder trust.

According to RM theory, customers' commitment indicates buyers'

“psychological attachment” towards the provider/supplier firm (Gruen et al., 2000). Consistent with previous studies (Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018; Vivek et al., 2012), the current findings indicate that trust leads to consumer commitment in the relationship exchange process. According to Brown et al. (2019), commitment represents the highest stage of attachment that exists in a relationship. As students’ trust in their HEP increases, their psychological bond towards the educational institutions also increases, which in turn produces a more satisfied and loyal student base, which in turn leads to retained students (further studies at post-graduate level) and positive referrals and eWOM. The current study identified and differentiated three forms of commitment among tertiary level students in New Zealand. Universities and other tertiary education providers can increase these commitment levels by many means. For example, any initiatives aimed to motivate students to stay on board would increase the normative commitment levels. For example, faculty’s efforts to clearly communicate the course objectives, assessment structure and their expectations from the course help the students perform well in classes. Design and delivery of challenging, inspiring and engaging courses may lead to increased student commitment in their programs. HEPs efforts to enhance opportunities for and wellbeing of their learners may lead to increased affective commitment from their student communities. Providing internship and other industry-based learning opportunities, arranging career workshops and campus placements, provision of academic / professional recommendations in job applications, are all examples of initiatives that may lead to affective commitment.

Any success in the HEP’s marketing initiatives depend on their willingness to adopt and use state of the art information technology resources. Multiple sources report on the demand for new delivery formats, to deliver on consumer demands and compete with alternative flexible solutions offering choice and pivoting how tertiary students want to learn, such as massive online open online courses (MOOCs) on platforms such as Udemy, Coursera, Kadenz at a fraction of the cost of traditional tertiary education. Even pre-COVID 68% of 11,000

prospective students surveyed by Pearson (ICEF Monitor, 2022) expressed a preference for non-degree programmes and perceived a qualification from” a vocational college or trade school were more likely to result in a good job with career prospects than a university degree” (ICEF Monitor, 2022). An additional complication is the soaring demand for online learning and alternative short-period credentials (ICEF Monitor, 2022), that takes weeks or months, rather than years. According to (Zineldin, 2000), relationship marketing efforts without the efficient application of technologies is neither regarded as a paradigm shift nor an effective business strategy. Technology changes the way businesses do their job and has a significant impact on developing relationships and providing services in the economy (Rust & Espinoza, 2006). Investments in IT infrastructure will help the institutions to achieve its relationship marketing objectives including enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty, reduced customer complaints and enhanced productivity and efficiency. For example, semantic web technologies including mobile devices and its applications enable marketers to personalize their product offerings and services (Steinhoff et al., 2018). Information systems including social media, websites, email and mobile applications help the education providers to enhance engagement, interactivity, personalization and collaboration in their service offerings. In a report by Salesforce.com on Marketing Higher Ed (2022) 67.29% of the 107 interviewed students indicated that they expect TEI’s marketing communications to be personalized, but almost 72% are less than satisfied with HEPs level of personalization. Research indicates that unfortunately, most educational institutions are still employing these resources as an institutional newsfeed rather than an interactive, two-way dialogical communication tool (Linvill et al., 2012). Social media such as Facebook and Twitter may be effectively used to provide useful information for current and potential students who are seeking valuable information. The adoption and efficient use of IT resources are essential for the high-quality delivery of educational services which ultimately enhance students trust in their EPs, and overall satisfaction. Information systems must be

efficiently and effectively used for the design and delivery of their services. A tertiary institution's on-campus and off-campus student interaction and engagement efforts help them to connect more closely with students and understand their changing needs and requirements. With the advancements of technology, educational providers can interact with their student communities seamlessly via multiple channels including social media, mobile apps, and emails. Same as any other market, student consumers are unique in their demands and educational requirements. University's efforts in delivering personalized services are critical in gaining students trust and loyalty.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the knowledge gap that exists in terms of applying RM strategies to HED or tertiary education service providers. Although a plethora of studies has examined the factors affecting student satisfaction in the past, very few address the theoretical foundations of these RM practices. The study has identified four driving forces, namely service orientation, trust, commitment, and effective adoption and use of information-sharing technology that may help to establish a successful relationship between educational providers and student communities. It is to be noted that the first three drivers can be classified as philosophical orientations while the fourth success driver is often regarded as a resource. Building upon earlier works in RM, the current study also contributes to the service marketing literature by delivering a validated conceptual model of RM in higher education. The proposed model identifies a series of strategic actions to enhance student satisfaction and loyalty towards their educational providers. Even though prior research has pointed out the significance of service orientation in marketing, there were little discussions regarding the roles of engagement, interactivity, personalization and collaboration in enhancing student trust and commitment. The current study examined the influence of these drivers on trust in and commitment towards students' HEPs. RM ideologies signal a paradigm shift in marketing by changing the focus from conventional

acquisition and transaction-oriented activities, to retention and relationship building activities. In service industries such as tertiary education, customers play an important role in the brand's provision of services. As student- educational provider relationships grow, institutions will be able to acquire new customers through positive word of mouth referrals, references and promotion from existing satisfied customers. This is quite evident in the higher education sector where services are provided for relatively short periods of time. Student satisfaction depends on the quality of service they would receive from HEP, as well as their own derived levels of trust and commitment.

The current study addresses the call for synthesizing the diverging business relationship practices by proposing a conceptual model identifying the critical success factors of RM in higher education. Researchers expect that the conceptual relationships proposed may remain valid for other service industries, and in particular knowledge products (architects, engineers, medical experts) even though it is primarily proposed for the higher education sector. The current study calls for more empirical studies to validate the proposed relationship value model in service marketing. Future empirical studies examining the characteristics of these relationships under various business contexts are expected to provide more clarity in this regard.

References

- Abdelmaaboud, A. K., Peña, A. I. P., & Mahrous, A. A. (2021). The influence of student-university identification on student's advocacy intentions: the role of student satisfaction and student trust. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 31*(2), 197–219.
- Abeza, G., O'Reilly, N., Finch, D., Séguin, B., & Nadeau, J. (2020). The role of social media in the co-creation of value in relationship marketing: a multi-domain study. *Journal of Strategic Marketing, 28*(6), 472–493.
- Al-alak, B. A. M. (2006). The Impact of Marketing Actions on Relationship Quality in the Higher Education Sector in Jordan. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 16*(2), 1–23.
- Anderson, J. C., & Narus, J. A. (1984). A Model of the Distributor's Perspective of Manufacturer Working. *Journal of Marketing, 48*(Fall), 62–74.
- Bansal, H. S., Irving, P. G., & Taylor, S. F. (2004). A three-component model of customer commitment to service providers. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 32*(3), 234–250.
- Bennett, R. (1996). Relationship formation and governance in consumer markets: Transactional analysis versus the behaviourist approach. *Journal of Marketing Management, 12*(5), 417–436.
- Berry, L. L. (1983). Relationship Marketing. In L. L. Berry, G. L. Shostack, & G. D. Upah (Eds.), *Emerging Perspectives on Service Marketing* (pp. 25–38). American Marketing Association.
- Bitner, M. J. (1995). Building service relationships: It's all about promises. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 23*(4), 246–251.
- Bonoma, T. V., & Johnston, W. J. (1978). The social psychology of industrial buying and selling. *Industrial Marketing Management, 7*(4), 213–224.
- Bowden, J. L.-H. (2011). Engaging the Student as a Customer: A Relationship Marketing Approach. *Marketing Education Review, 21*(3), 211–228.
- Brown, J. R., Crosno, J. L., & Tong, P. Y. (2019). Is the theory of trust and commitment in marketing relationships incomplete? *Industrial Marketing Management, 77*, 155–169.
- Bush, R. P., III, J. H. U., & Sherrell, D. L. (2007). Examining the Relationship Marketing, Marketing Productivity Paradigm. *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 6*(2), 9–32.
- Buttle, F. (1996). *Relationship Marketing: Theory and Practice*. Paul Chapman Publishing.

- Catoiu, I., & Tichindelean, M. (2012). Relationship marketing - theoretical consideration. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica*, 2(14), 655–663.
- Chenet, P., Dagger, T. S., & O'Sullivan, D. (2010). Service quality, trust, commitment and service differentiation in business relationships. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(5), 336–346.
- Christopher, M. (1996). From brand values to customer value. *Journal of Marketing Practice: Applied Marketing Science*, 2(1), 55–66.
- Christopher, M., Payne, A., & Ballantyne, D. (1991). *Relationship marketing: bringing quality customer service and marketing together*.
- Clark, M., Fine, M. B., & Scheuer, C. L. (2017). Relationship quality in higher education marketing: the role of social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 27(1), 40–58.
- Darawong, C., & Sandmaung, M. (2019). Service quality enhancing student satisfaction in international programs of higher education institutions: a local student perspective. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 29(2), 268–283.
- Egan, J. (2003). Back to the future: Divergence in relationship marketing research. *Marketing Theory*, 3(1), 145–157.
- Frazier, G. L. (1983). Interorganizational Exchange Behavior in Marketing Channels: A Broadened Perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 47(4), 68.
- Frow, P. E., & Payne, A. F. (2009). Customer Relationship Management: A Strategic Perspective. *Journal of Business Market Management*, 3(1), 7–27.
- Gainsbury, S. M., King, D. L., Hing, N., & Delfabbro, P. (2015). Social media marketing and gambling: An interview study of gambling operators in Australia. *International Gambling Studies*, 15(3), 377–393.
- Gilliland, D. I., & Bello, D. C. (2002). Two sides to attitudinal commitment: The effect of calculative and loyalty commitment on enforcement mechanisms in distribution channels. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 30(1), 24–43.
- Gordan, A. C., Apostu, T.-N., & Pop, M. D. (2012). Engagement Marketing: the Future of Relationship Marketing in Higher Education. *Marketing: From Information to Decision*, 170–184.
- Grönroos, C. (1993). From Marketing Mix to Relationship Marketing: Towards a Paradigm Shift in

- Marketing. *Management Decision*, 32(2), 1–3.
- Grönroos, C. (1994). Quo Vadis , Marketing ? Toward a Relationship Marketing Paradigm. *Journal of Marketing*, 10, 347–360.
- Grönroos, C. (1997). Keynote paper From marketing mix to relationship marketing - towards a paradigm shift in marketing. *Management Decision*, 35(4), 322–339.
- Grönroos, C. (2004). The relationship marketing process: Communication, interaction, dialogue, value. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, 19(2), 99–113.
- Gruen, T. W., Summers, J. O., & Acito, F. (2000). Relationship marketing activities, commitment, and membership behaviors in professional associations. *Journal of Marketing*, 64(3), 34–49.
- Guilbault, M. (2016). Students as customers in higher education: reframing the debate. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 26(2), 132–142.
- Gummesson, E. (1997). Relationship marketing as a paradigm shift: some conclusions from the 30R approach. *Management Decision*, 35(4), 267–272.
- Gummesson, E. (2017). From relationship marketing to total relationship marketing and beyond. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 31(1), 16–19.
- Hakansson, H. (1990). Technological Collaboration in Industrial Networks. *European Management Journal*, 8(3), 371–379.
- Hakansson, H., & Wootz, B. (1979). A framework of industrial buying and selling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 8(1), 28–39.
- Harrigan, P., Evers, U., Miles, M. P., & Daly, T. (2018). Customer engagement and the relationship between involvement, engagement, self-brand connection and brand usage intent. *Journal of Business Research*, 88, 388–396.
- Heide, J. B., & John, G. (1990). Alliances in Industrial Purchasing: The Determinants of Joint Action in Buyer-Supplier Relationships. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27(1), 24.
- Heide, J. B., & John, G. (1992). Do Norms Matter in Marketing Relationships? *Journal of Marketing*, 56(2), 32.
- Helgesen, Ø. (2008). Marketing for higher education: A relationship marketing approach. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 18(1), 50–78.

- Hillebrand, B., Nijholt, J. J., & Nijssen, E. J. (2011). Exploring CRM effectiveness: An institutional theory perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(4), 592–608.
- Hollebeek, L. D. (2013). The customer engagement/value interface: An exploratory investigation. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 21(1), 17–24.
- Johanson, J., & Mattsson, L. G. (1985). Marketing investments and market investments in industrial networks. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 2(3), 185–195.
- Jones, T., Fox, G. L., Taylor, S. F., & Fabrigar, L. R. (2010). Service customer commitment and response. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(1), 16–28.
- Khan, J., & Hemsley-Brown, J. (2021). Student satisfaction: the role of expectations in mitigating the pain of paying fees. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 0(0), 1–23.
- Khanna, M., Jacob, I., & Chopra, A. (2021). Marketing of higher education institutes through the creation of positive learning experiences—analyzing the role of teachers’ caring behaviors. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 0(0), 1–20.
- Kim, W. G., Leong, J. K., & Lee, Y. K. (2005). Effect of service orientation on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention of leaving in a casual dining chain restaurant. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 24(2), 171–193.
- Lee, Y. I., & Trim, P. R. J. (2006). Retail marketing strategy: The role of marketing intelligence, relationship marketing and trust. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 24(7), 730–745.
- Levitt, T. (1983). After the sale is over... *Harvard Business Review*, 61(September-October), 87–93.
- Linville, D. L., McGee, S. E., & Hicks, L. K. (2012). Colleges’ and universities’ use of Twitter: A content analysis. *Public Relations Review*, 38(4), 636–638.
- Mattsson, L. G. (1997). “Relationship Marketing” and the “Markets-As-Networks Approach”—a Comparative Analysis of Two Evolving Streams of Research. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 13(5), 447–461.
- Möller, K. (2013). Theory map of business marketing: Relationships and networks perspectives. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(3), 324–335.
- Möller, K., & Halinen, A. (2000). Relationship Marketing Theory: Its Roots and Direction. In *Journal of Marketing Management* (Vol. 16, Issues 1–3).

- Moorman, C., Deshpande, R., & Zaltman, G. (2006). Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 81.
- Mora Cortez, R., & Johnston, W. J. (2017). The future of B2B marketing theory: A historical and prospective analysis. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 66(January), 90–102.
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20–38.
- Oluseye, O. O., Tairat, B. T., & Emmanuel, J. O. (2014). Customer Relationship Management Approach and Student Satisfaction in Higher Education Marketing. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 6(3), 49–62.
- Palmatier, R. W., Dant, R. P., Grewal, D., & Evans, K. R. (2006). Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Relationship Marketing: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(October), 136–153.
- Palmer, A., & Bejou, D. (2006). The Future of Relationship Marketing. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 4(3–4), 1–10.
- Palmer, R., Lindgreen, A., & Vanhamme, J. (2005). Relationship marketing: Schools of thought and future research directions. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 23(3), 313–330.
- Parvatiyar, A., & Sheth, J. N. (2000). The domain and conceptual foundations of relationship marketing. In J. N. Sheth & A. Parvatiyar (Eds.), *Handbook of Relationship Marketing* (pp. 3–38). Sage Publications.
- Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2013). A Strategic Framework for Customer Relationship Management. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(4), 167–176.
- Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2017). Relationship marketing: looking backwards towards the future. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 31(1), 11–15.
- Rust, R. T., & Espinoza, F. (2006). How technology advances influence business research and marketing strategy. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(10–11), 1072–1078.
- Schoenbachler, D. D., & Gordon, G. L. (2002). Trust and customer willingness to provide information in database-driven relationship marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(3), 2–16.
- Şengün, A. E., & Wasti, S. N. (2011). Trust types, distrust, and performance outcomes in small business relationships: The pharmacy-drug warehouse case. *Service Industries Journal*, 31(2), 287–309.
- Shani, D., & Chalasani, S. (1992). Exploiting niches using relationship marketing. *Journal of Consumer*

- Marketing*, 9(3), 33–42.
- Sheth, J. (1995). The Evolution of Relationship Marketing. *International Business Review*, 4(4), 397–418.
- Sheth, J. (2017). Revitalizing relationship marketing. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 31(1), 6–10.
- Sheth, J. N., & Parvatiyar, A. (2002). Evolving Relationship Marketing into a Discipline. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 1(1), 1–16.
- Sheth, J. N., & Parvatiyar, A. (Eds.). (1995). Relationship Marketing in Consumer Markets: Antecedents and Consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23(4), 255–271.
- Sheth, J., Parvatiyar, A., & Sheth, J. N. (1996). Relationship Marketing: Paradigm Shift or Shaft? *Annual Meeting of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1–21.
- Smorvik, K. K., & Vespestad, M. K. (2020). Bridging marketing and higher education : resource integration , co-creation and student learning. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 30(2), 260–270.
- Steinhoff, L., Arli, D., Weaven, S., & Kozlenkova, I. V. (2018). Online relationship marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*.
- Thomas, S. L., Lewis, S., McLeod, C., & Haycock, J. (2012). “They are working every angle”. A qualitative study of Australian adults’ attitudes towards, and interactions with, gambling industry marketing strategies. *International Gambling Studies*, 12(1), 111–127.
- Turnbull, P., Ford, D., & Cunningham, M. (1996). Interaction, relationships and networks in business markets: An evolving perspective. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, 11(3–4), 44–62.
- Turnbull, P. W., & Valla, J. P. (1986a). Strategic planning in industrial marketing: An interaction approach. *European Journal of Marketing*, 20(7), 5–20.
- Turnbull, P. W., & Valla, J.-P. (1986b). *Strategies for international industrial marketing: the management of customer relationships in European industrial markets*. Taylor & Francis.
- Veloutsou, C., Saren, M., & Tzokas, N. (2002). Relationship marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(4), 433–449.
- Verma, V., Sharma, D., & Sheth, J. (2016). Does relationship marketing matter in online retailing? A meta-analytic approach. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(2), 206–217.

- Wali, A. F., & Andy-Wali, H. A. (2018). Students as Valuable Customers. *Paradigm*, 22(1), 1–16.
- Wang, C. L. (2007). Guanxi vs. relationship marketing: Exploring underlying differences. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(1), 81–86.
- Wang, Z., & Kim, H. G. (2017). Can Social Media Marketing Improve Customer Relationship Capabilities and Firm Performance? Dynamic Capability Perspective. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 39, 15–26.
- Yoganathan, D., Jebarajakirthy, C., & Thaichon, P. (2015). The influence of relationship marketing orientation on brand equity in banks. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 26, 14–22.
- Zineldin, M. (2000). Beyond relationship marketing: technologicalship marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 18(1), 9–23.

| Author | Definition | Focal point |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| (Berry, 1983) | "a strategy to attract, maintain and enhance customer relationship" | Customer management |
| Ballantyne (1994) in (Mattsson, 1997) | "an emergent disciplinary framework for creating, developing and sustaining exchanges of value between the parties involved, whereby exchange relationships evolve to provide continuous and stable links in the supply chain" | value of exchange in logistics |
| (Grönroos, 1994) | "relationship marketing is to identify and establish, maintain and enhance and when necessary also to terminate relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties involved are met, and that this is done by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises" | Business as a network of relationships |
| (Gummesson, 1997) | "Relationship marketing is marketing seen as relationships, networks and interactions" | network of relationships |
| (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) | "establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" | network of relationships |
| (J. N. Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2002) | a subset of marketing aimed to increase customer's commitment to the organization through the process of offering better value continuously at a reduced cost. | Customer retention |
| (Veloutsou et al., 2002) | Relationship marketing represents a strategic response by firms to gain competitive advantage based on the belief that appreciation of the interdependence among market players and mutual effort based on trust and commitment would allow firms to remain competitive | Gaining competitive advantage |
| (Bennett, 1996) | Consumer relationship marketing is the organizational development and maintenance of mutually rewarding relationships with customers achieved via the total integration of information and quality management systems, service support, business strategy and organizational mission to delight the customer and secures profitable lasting business | Customer management |
| Parvatiyar (1996) in (Mattsson, 1997) | RM is the process of co-operating with customers to improve marketing productivity through efficiency and effectiveness | Customer management |

Table 1: Popular relationship marketing definitions

| Variables | | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Gender | Male | 8 | 0.42 |
| | Female | 11 | 0.58 |
| Age | 20 years or younger | 2 | 0.11 |
| | 21 - 29 years | 8 | 0.42 |
| | 30-39 years | 6 | 0.32 |
| | 40 - 49 years | 3 | 0.16 |
| | 50 years and above | 0 | 0.00 |
| Marital status | Married | 8 | 0.42 |
| | Unmarried | 11 | 0.58 |
| Ethnicity | European | 9 | 0.47 |
| | Indian | 8 | 0.42 |
| | Chinese | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Maori | 2 | 0.11 |
| | Others | 3 | 0.16 |
| Occupation | student | 16 | 0.84 |
| | white-collar worker (desk jobs) | 3 | 0.16 |
| | Blue collar worker | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Business owner | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Others | | 0.16 |
| Education | High school or less | 0 | 0.00 |
| | 2- 3-year college | 11 | 0.58 |
| | University graduate | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Postgraduate or more | 8 | 0.42 |

| | | | |
|---|---|----|------|
| Household income | Less than 50,000 | 6 | 0.32 |
| | 50,000-80,000 | 7 | 0.37 |
| | 80,000-100,000 | 6 | 0.32 |
| | 100,000 and more | 0 | 0.00 |
| Student status | Full time student | 17 | 0.89 |
| | Part time student | 2 | 0.11 |
| Student role | Freshman | 6 | 0.32 |
| | Sophomore | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Junior | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Senior | 13 | 0.68 |
| The rationale behind higher education | Student type lifestyle | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Professional advancement | 11 | 0.58 |
| | Family expectations | 0 | 0.00 |
| | Better chances to find a job | 10 | 0.53 |
| Awareness of about educational provider | Websites | 4 | 0.21 |
| | Social media | 2 | 0.11 |
| | Travel agents | 4 | 0.21 |
| | International centre of the University / educational provider | 4 | 0.21 |
| | Staff and lecturers of the university / higher education provider | 11 | 0.58 |

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

| Theme | Evidence |
|-------------------|--|
| Contractual trust | <p data-bbox="987 316 2040 384">“I am very confident that my university is keen about our professional advancement.” “I am satisfied by the way they have been treating us” Interviewee G, (domestic, graduate)</p> <p data-bbox="987 411 1944 480">“I came here to complete my studies in one year. Now I am nearly there as I have expected.” Interviewee J (postgraduate, International)</p> |
| Competence trust | <p data-bbox="987 507 2056 608">“My institution is performing above my expectations in terms of teaching, academic and other administrative services and I am really happy to be here.”. Interviewee S, (domestic, graduate)</p> <p data-bbox="987 635 1951 703">“Course coordinators and administration staff are super friendly and supportive”. Interviewee J (postgraduate, International)</p> <p data-bbox="987 730 2029 831">“ I am going to complete my studies in Germany, only because INST (name of the institution) helped me organize the transfer programs for me” Interviewee H, (domestic, graduate)</p> <p data-bbox="987 858 2056 1007">“All of our lecturers were very competent in what they were doing. Most of my teachers have gone above and beyond. That’s not just about schooling, but even after class hours, if you got a personal problem that may affect your studies, they are there to listen to us were very supportive” Interviewee G, (domestic, graduate)</p> |
| Goodwill trust | <p data-bbox="987 1034 2040 1134">“being an A-category educational institution in New Zealand, I trust in their capabilities to provide the highest quality education possible for me”. Interviewee J (postgraduate, International)</p> <p data-bbox="987 1161 1962 1230">“Overall my friends and family got a positive image towards INST (the name of the institution)”. Interviewee H, (domestic, graduate)</p> <p data-bbox="987 1257 2040 1326">“Our agents recommended this INST (name of the institution) due to its overall ranking in New Zealand. We are very satisfied so far” Interviewee A, (International, post graduate)</p> |

Table 3: Student’s trust in educational institutions.

| Theme | Evidence |
|-------------|--|
| Normative | <p><i>“I got heaps of help from my teaching and office staff and I am enjoying my time here. All of the teaching staff has gone above and beyond in their jobs... and if you are having a personal problem, they are there to support me.”</i> Interviewee F, (Domestic, Graduate)</p> |
| Affective | <p><i>“I don’t think I would have this opportunity to travel and study in Vietnam with a scholarship if I were in any other university”.</i> Interviewee S, (Domestic, Graduate program)</p> <p><i>“I am going to complete my studies in Germany, only because INST (name of the institution) helped me organize the transfer programs for me”</i> Interviewee H, (domestic, graduate)</p> <p><i>“The scholarship information and application were sent to me by one of my lecturers and I am forever grateful for those amazing opportunities”.</i> Interviewee S, (Domestic, Graduate program)</p> |
| Continuance | <p><i>“I would like to enroll again for this course even though I failed two times in the past. Transferring my credits to a new institution and finishing up my studies there would simply a waste of time”</i> (Interviewee S, postgraduate, International)</p> <p><i>“I don’t have money to start again at a new institution, otherwise, I would have gone long time ago.”</i> (Interviewee K, International)</p> |

Table 4: Student’s commitment towards higher educational institutions

| Theme | Evidence |
|-----------------|---|
| Engagement | <p><i>“One of the best things I like here is the quick email responses I have received from my teachers”. Interviewee S (graduate, domestic).</i></p> <p><i>" Both pre-recorded lectures and live Zoom meetings were super useful."</i> Interviewee J (postgraduate, International)</p> |
| Interactions | <p><i>"They were always willing to help me check the drafts of the works before the online submission”</i></p> <p><i>"The online forums very helpful. My tutors immediately responded to our posts"</i> Interviewee S (graduate, domestic student).</p> |
| Personalization | <p><i>" Because of the good relationships I have with my teachers and staff, I got two internship opportunities emailed to me without having to work out of our way”.</i> Interviewee D (Graduate, domestic).</p> <p><i>“My lecturer gave me the choice of learning I needed. He was happy to give live classes as well as pre-recorded online tutorials like I wanted."</i> Interviewee H (Graduate, domestic).</p> |
| Collaboration | <p><i>“When we shifted to online learning during the Covid-19 lockdown, my professor set up a Facebook group for our course which was very helpful for all of us to get in touch with him as well as with my mates. He even shared all course announcements on the Facebook page so that I didn't miss any deadlines”.</i> Interviewee P (postgraduate, domestic).</p> <p><i>“I really enjoyed working with other students on class activities in Moodle course pages."</i> Interviewee J (Postgraduate, International)</p> |

Table 5: Student’s perception towards Service Quality

| Theme/s | Evidence |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Library services | "Library website was quite handy. All required information was available online whenever I checked it" Interviewee K (Domestic, Postgraduate) "I could easily make learning support appointments via library website", Interviewee S (Domestic, Graduate) "All the references for my research were found from our library website, which has access to many databases", Interviewee J, (International, postgraduate) |
| Video Conference tools | "During the covid lockdown, all my teachers were using either Zoom or Teams. Online learning was fun", Interviewee Q (Domestic, Graduate) " My classes were mostly online, and the professor was mostly using Zoom. The case study discussion via breakup rooms were fun", Interviewee E, (International, postgraduate) |
| Learning Management Systems | " All course materials were available on Moodle. All classes were recorded and available online. That helped me a lot", Interviewee D (Domestic, Graduate) "Yes, lecturers have given various activities via forums and quizzes in our course page (Moodle)." Interviewee R, (Domestic, Graduate) "We have submitted all course assignments via online droboxes", Interviewee J (International, Postgraduate) |
| Email | "Most lecturers were very responsive to our email queries", Interviewee A (International, Postgraduate) " Whenever I have had questions, I normally ask my teachers via email", Interviewee D, (Domestic, Graduate) " Some lecturers very quick in replying to our emails. Some would respond in a day or two", Interviewee F, (Domestic, Graduate) |
| Wi-Fi | " I think Wi-Fi is very good at our campus. I could check emails and course documents due to the free internet. Even most class activities I was emailing my teacher instead of paper-based submissions." Interviewee S, (Domestic, Graduate) "Yes, I agree, Wi-Fi is very important for Universities. I used school Wi-Fi everyday while I was at the campus", Interviewee D, (Domestic, Graduate) " I can't think about studying without WIFI at the Uni.", Interviewee P, (Domestic, Postgraduate) |
| IT resources | " It's very helpful to have full access to MS office while I had studied from home. I could complete my course works due to the free access provided by the Uni", Interviewee F (Domestic, Graduate) "SPSS software installed at the library and computer labs were quite helpful. Even we were given free access to SPSS throughout the lockdown periods.", Interviewee S (Domestic, Graduate) " E-books links provided by the lecturers was cool. Didn't need to spend too much on textbooks. Even libraries offered free access to my textbook chapters", Interviewee J (International, Postgraduate) |

Table 6: Student's perception towards IT Infrastructure

Figure 2: Relationship marketing drivers in higher education

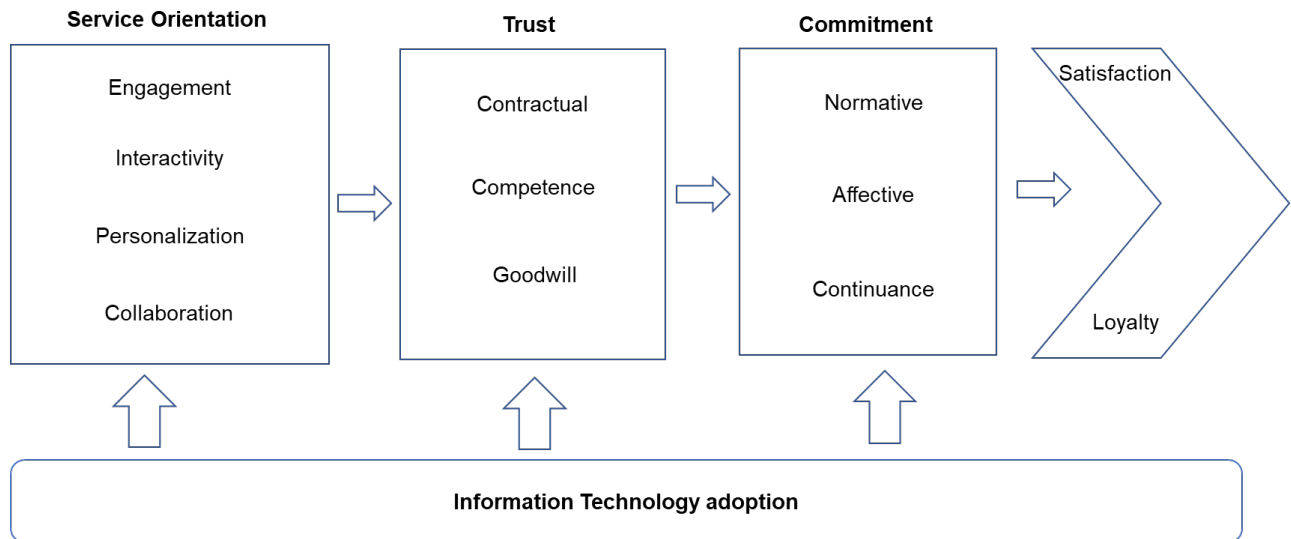


Figure Captions

Figure 1: Thematic analysis results

Figure 2: Relationship marketing drivers in higher education