The 4 Cs Model
A New Approach to Marketing Education in Lebanon

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Abstract: The number of students is continuously increasing despite the high cost of higher education institutions in Lebanon. To accommodate this problem, many universities established not a few years back, tended to this issue of high cost and made education affordable to many, by either providing students with lower rate-per-credit or scholarship funds. Alongside this phenomenon, there exists the matter of considering higher education institutions as businesses having students as their clientele. In order to constructively adapt to these types of changes and in an attempt to reshape education, this paper proposes a model called the 4Cs model, which will be streamlined along the basic 4 Ps in marketing. The 4 Cs include: Competitiveness, continuity, connectivity, and creativity. As for the 4 Ps, they are: Product, price, promotion, and place. Later came along people, physical evidence, and processes. The purpose of this paper is to propose to higher education administrators this new model; the mindset of which helps educators to adapt in today's evolving learning conditions. Understanding the factors of this model will help universities make better decisions to better meet the demand of prospective students. Survey research was the methodology used to conduct this study. The study used questionnaires to collect instructor responses, and data was collected across six different regions within Lebanon.

Keywords: 4 Cs, 4 Ps, Higher Education Administrators.

Introduction

In the past, academic institutions regarded "information" as the core substance to be offered to their students. The demand for this market was easily predefined, due to the predictability of its supply. With time, academic institutions have flourished as businesses and organizations with diverse requirements and demand. In order to align higher education institutions with businesses and bridge the gap between the academic and professional environment, marketers and administrators started to create unique positioning strategies to better serve students. They started incorporating principles of marketing into the education field (Ramachandran, 2010).

In recent years, the higher education sector has been influenced by a marketized approach (Ramachandran, 2010). Such an approach is a must due to the increased competitiveness in the market, and the inception of affordable private higher education institutions. Moreover, information is no longer the only product, for there are other products and services provided by Higher Education institutions. To be explained in precise, the pull-push strategy, which also molds the demand and supply in student needs, has created a necessity for the existence of a marketing model-which will be introduced later in this paper. Nevertheless, not all marketing theories can be applied to the higher education sector, for any faulty simulation to the commercial sector can render higher education efforts obsolete. Furthermore, the new crave for using theories to attract appointed target markets in an academic or higher education institution can be harmful if universities failed to accommodate culturally, continuously, competitively and creatively.

Initiatives to reach prospective students and their parents made professional bodies, academic groups ,quality assurance agencies, and the corporate sector curious to research and get to know the market better, in order to help parties make informed decisions about numerous programs and institutions (Ramachandran, 2010). One of these initiatives is embodied in this paper, for its purpose is to study and analyze the higher education market in terms of competitiveness, continuity, connectivity, and creativity; dimensions that will be considered as the pillars of the proposed 4Cs model.

The Need for the Study

After screening the market, the newest perception for a fair path for higher education institutions is to conform to its market competitiveness, continuity, connectivity and creativity. Each higher education institution cannot survive without a competitive edge that it creates for itself. Second, the continuity of the university programs to keep on projecting a positive image years and years into the future is also vital. Third, an institution's connectivity is essential for it lets its students feel the sense of belonging that each graduate longs for. Finally, creativity in a university helps it gain the necessary competitive edge and agility which help it position itself in the market. All the above variables will

guide a higher education administrator to focus his or her efforts on combining this innovative marketing mix in higher education.

Literature Review

In every institution, the need for management and marketing is urgent. Being a very critical institution, an academic one needs a carefully crafted plan to reach out to the icons of the future of our country: the students. Students are the center to all transactions in a higher education institution. According to Nicolescu (2009), in order to satisfy the consumers, organizations have to find out who these consumers are. Therefore, concepts such as market segmentation are used to identify target markets. Secondly, the organizations have to identify what consumers need and want, with products to be marketed using the basic marketing mix activities: product, price, distribution and promotion, also called transactional marketing (Hemsley – Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

The student, at some point, is not the only stakeholder. We have employers, society, the parents, the government and other funding bodies, quality assurance agencies and other regulating authorities and professional bodies. Furthermore, providing positive results for the needs and wants of the targets above can be a challenge, especially since the products of such organizations are in the form of services. Globally and locally, the marketing concept in the higher education sector is not new. For many years, marketers and managers have tried to concoct the perfect marketing mix "that an institution can use to produce the response it wants from various target markets" (Ivy, 2008). For the university to get the desired response, it has to focus all the Ps (primitively set as the 4 Ps model) on its achievable competitiveness, continuity, connectivity, and creativity, molding them into an adequate organizational behavioral scheme. Later in this paper, a matrix will be introduced for the first time, explaining how the Ps can counterpart the Cs proposed and create a beaconed path to higher education stakeholders.

To begin with, the 4 Ps will be briefly defined and subdivided into analytical categories encompassing the 4 Cs respectively. The proceedings of each marketing mix component are the criteria of the 4 Cs matrix, which will aid higher education administrators in their decision making processes.

Product: is what is sold in the process. There is controversy concerning this issue in higher education because the products to some are the graduates, and to others they are the degrees. It was agreed that the companies could not be the customers for they are not paying for the degrees, so the graduates are not the products.

Competitive Product
In a competitive environment, two or more institutions compete for the same products or services, but it is the quality that counts. If this product or service creates more working opportunities, and has more prestige, it would definitely increase the higher education institution's competitive edge; thus rendering the product in a competitive zone, and always ready for improvement and enhancement. Furthermore, as the number of degree choices grows and prospective students have a wider variety of universities from which to choose, the need for universities to differentiate themselves from their competition is self-evident, resulting in the role of marketing in student recruitment increasing in importance (Taylor &Darling, 1991; Canterbury, 1999;Nicholls et al., 1995).

Continuous Product
Continuity is when the university aims at becoming immortal in terms of remembrance, to keep on being remembered for its achievements in comparison to other universities. Having a continuous product means maintaining the quality of services provided. This way, the academic institution will differentiate itself from the rest. This differentiation can be in the form of an elite accreditation, or very active alumni gatherings that ensure continuity in the services once given in the past.

Connected Product
After the competitive edge is attained, the connectivity with the students should be sustained. In a learning environment, most learners create a bond with the instructors and campus that is at some points inexplicable. Students interact with the connectivity present on campus (that which the university provides). Had this connectivity been absent, the product or service will lack identity in the present and future. Another form of connectivity is that which is tangible in nature, such as Wi-Fi and social media. For example, when students walk into a classroom that is connected to the internet and fully equipped for direct student interaction, they are experiencing state of the art connectivity. It is worth mentioning, nonetheless, connectivity with the services provided by the university is not only in question here. There exists the connectivity of the outcomes of tuition, when students graduate and report back under the name "alumnus". Had alumni members felt connected in college days, they will definitely feel the sense of belonging and commitment to their Alma Mater. Further connectivity issues can be captured in higher education when pinpointing globalization, which created an international context to education. Many commentators, such as Scott 1998 and King 2004, describe higher education as globalized, in the sense of globalization as 'the widening, deepening, and speeding

up of all kinds of world-wide connectedness.' Due to this latter concept, there exists the representation of diverse groups within the university. In order to retain connectivity, interactions may be implemented such as informal discussions, daily interactions in residence halls, campus events, and social activities (Gurin et al., 2002). With this type of communication, the formally diverse groups will dilute the impact of racial/ethnic differences and, therefore, stay connected.

Creative Product
A smooth swift from the connected to the agile is what is needed. Agility is the characteristic of the organization or the institution that reacts fast to impending threats. Furthermore, when a university cooperates and incorporates creativity in its strategic plan, then it is said it has reached agility in its strategic implementation. An agile institution is the one that adapts well to most of the changes around it. In terms of private institutions, the products and services provided are diverse and in continuous change to the extent that "many educationalists are cautious when they are presented with new ideas from other disciplines and agonize over whether to accept imported wisdom into their practice."(Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

Price: In considering the price of the university or higher education institution, we are considering mostly the incomes from the student tuition fees. They are what students pay in exchange for services provided by university throughout the academic year. They are also subject to fluctuations according to demand on tuition in the university.

Competitive Price
In general, competition in prices is evident in almost all universities. They aim at adjusting prices for the first stakeholders in the education business, the parents. Parents seek to know if they can afford the university they are applying for before taking any decision. At times, they also weigh the university's perceived value before applying. Therefore, the choice of university is highly related to its competitive price. As for the university, its basic pricing strategies rely on the economy, university expenses, faculty retention costs, etc. That being said, universities will have the option of several pricing strategies which will keep each at a competitive edge.

Continuous Price
As noted earlier, it is the demand in the market that dictates the price of tuition fees of students. However, in Lebanon, the same prices have not been stable due to the economic situation. They became subject to slight percentage increases, especially in private universities that are expanding and investing in larger locations and facilities. The continuity of prices is somehow impossible if it is expected to stay the same. If a university plans on expanding and developing, its tuition has to cover the expenses, hence the impossibility. In other words, in order to remain continuous and consistent in pricing, a higher education institution can outsource its financial aid program, as one suggestion, or it can enhance its research department to retain funding for future investments.

Creative Price
Pricing has always been conventional and defined in terms of cash in the past, and in recent times, the credit card. A decade ago, the even more creative term for non-pricing in higher education institutions is the free model, which is in the form of massive open online courses called MOOCs. These courses have radicalized price strategies, allowing students to rethink tuition options. In more details, the following section will explain more about these courses in an attempt to highlight how creative pricing can be in higher education.

Promotion: entails all the mechanisms that universities can use to provide the market with information about its offerings. According to Ivy (2008), promotion tools are: advertising, publicity, public relations and sales promotional efforts. There are different ways to reach the target markets or publics.

Competitive Promotion
Many universities are competing in terms of advertising. In most cases, they are using online advertising such as web sites to promote services to prospective students. They are animating web sites and making them user friendly, in very competitive approaches. Furthermore, social media advertising is highly apparent and common as well. It was viewed as such by the Sunday Business Post, when it stated that online chat and customer feedback information can be shared easily on social networks and read by friends and fans. Then, Facebook and Instagram substantially appear to channel the higher education institution's message through interactive photos and conversations.

Continuous Promotion
Continuous promotion is a must in higher education. Most universities have an image to maintain in terms of quality and accreditation. When we speak of average universities, they are mostly seeking continuous promotion for expansion purposes, to gather up money for future investment. This might be viewed as a generalization; however, prestigious universities have seized primary expansion and now rely on funders and research endorsements.

For all universities, continuous promotion is becoming a norm. It is for the well-being of the university to have such type of promotion. This way, the university would be working on retaining the students it already has, and would project positive involvement of its graduates. Enache (2011) stated that even after graduation, contacting the former student will allow the university to assess the success of the educational program. More than that, the former student can become a future funder.

Creative Promotion

Creativity in promotion in higher education institutions is the sole task of marketers and advertising experts who do their magic and come up with creative ads to attract the target market: the students, in some cases, the parents. Coming up with slogans, such as "Affordable Quality Education", makes it easy to identify the target market: low to average income students. Therefore, creative promotion is important in a competitive environment, and the more continuous it is the better.

Place: is the fourth P in the marketing mix. A typical university regards this P as the distribution methods for teaching. The traditional ways of distributing knowledge are face-to-face synchronous methods. However, there has been development of alternative modes of tuition. According to Ivy (2008), no longer are students confined to the classroom and their lecturer to get the input they need to meet the requirements of the course.

Competitive Place

In a market with increasing competitiveness, the methods of distribution of the knowledge have to experience a nature other than the face-to-face. Asynchronous methods have shown high performance and efficiency in the higher education sector, and so they were applied. As mentioned earlier, there exists now access to lectures and support materials via virtual learning media. Furthermore, the existence of the MOOCs (massive open online courses) has helped in the delivery process, creating more space for competitive advantage in higher education. However, some administrators might view online courses, especially free ones, a threat that should be addressed.

Connective Place

We speak of "connective" when markets are communicating properly among each other. It is the time of globalization and cohesiveness. All distribution channels should stay linked for the information to stay consistent and updated, aiding, in turn, in the creation of a highly reliable teaching environment. For example, instructors teaching different courses of similar course content can share ideas and help the students get a concept of how other instructors approach the same notion or lesson.

Creative Place

Under this category, higher education can only experience the uniqueness of its creative channels when it follows the trends of what technology is offering. For one example, massive online courses have served as good channels and are good choices for agile institutions to think "out of the box" for a change. After all, the purpose of the institution is not only selling knowledge, but exposing its students to as much as they can retain to become better learners and survive in the workplace. Being accomplished and well-educated reflects the university's image and will ultimately define its future success.

Methodology

As it is widely known, many factors are affecting the decision making process of higher education managers/administrators in terms of price, products, promotion etc. The point behind this consistent analysis of these variables is seeking a position in the HE (higher education) market on the short and long runs. In this study, the consideration of the 4Ps is expected; however, considering the 4Cs model is still in question. It is expected, in this research, that letting the influence of the 4Cs stream though the decision making process of higher education institutions will allow such institutions to position themselves fairly and successfully in the market, through weighing their decisions based on a proposed matrix combining the 4Ps and the 4 acclaimed Cs.

As mentioned above, the hypotheses that will allow the conceptualization of the 4 Cs model to go through are:

Hypothesis 1: Competitiveness (first C) of universities urges higher education managers to act upon improving their marketing mix.
Hypothesis 2: Continuity (second C) of standards urges higher education managers to rely more on quality assurance in the context of continuous quality improvement (CQ) and business continuity planning (BCP).
Hypothesis 3: Connectivity (third C) of the university with its students at all levels urges higher education managers to become more student-centered and nurturing of a motivated environment.
Hypothesis 4: Creativity (fourth C) and agility of universities will help higher education managers to deal with threatening external factors.

In Lebanon, we have a large amount of management and marketing instructors who are part-timers in different universities across all campuses. I have chosen my sample of instructors from LIU, the Lebanese International University, for it is convenient and effective. This sample choice will not affect the validity of the study for part-time instructors are exposed to different across different campuses of different universities in Lebanon. The instrument used for this study is a survey, the face validity of which was established by experts in the university I work in. Furthermore, the instrument used is an instructor assessment survey administered to all part-time marketing and management instructors in all Lebanese International University campuses across six different regions in Lebanon.

Results and Discussions

The survey was made up of 22 questions; however, only four will be discussed in this paper, shedding light on the significance of the proposed hypothesis of the 4 Cs model.
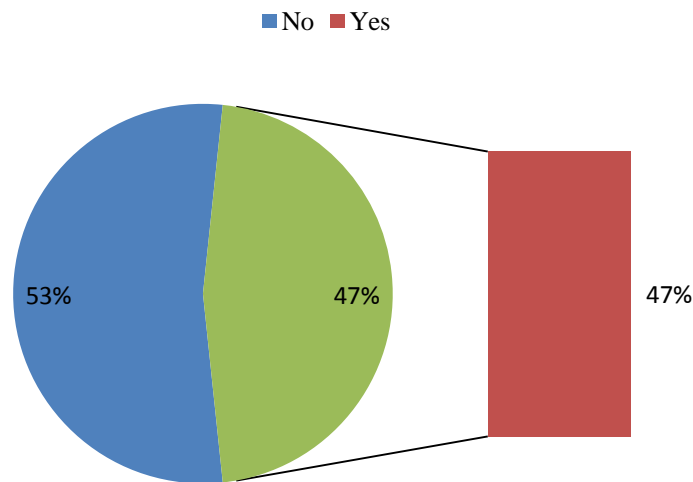

Figure 1: Student Retention

In Figure 1, a percentage of 53 have answered with a No signifying their ideal perception of how universities compete. This interpretation contradicts with the hypothesis on competitiveness. A counter percentage of 47, which is close to half the population, have agreed with the statement above giving perspective to the hypothesis.
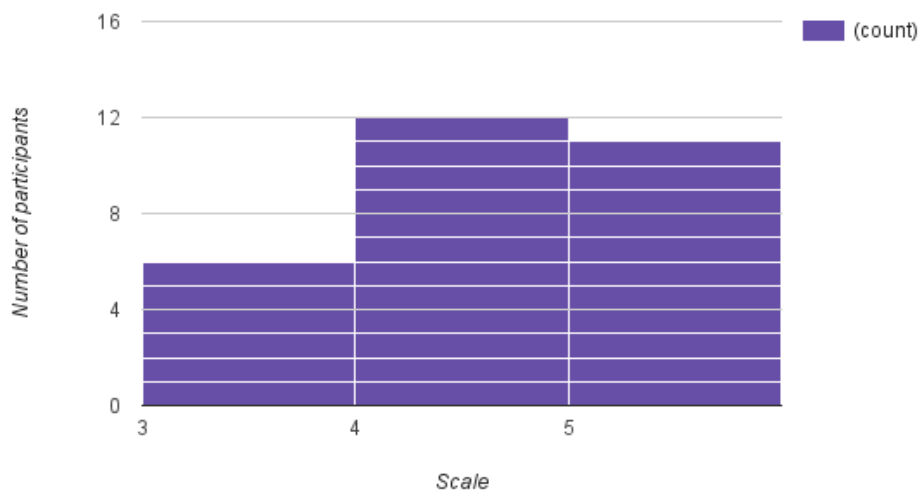

Figure 2: Continuity versus Quality Assurance

As observed in Figure 2, only 20% of the population at hand has no stand to the concept of universities having successful quality assurance programs and aiding in their survival and continuity. The rest of the participants have agreed to this statement rendering the concept of development and continuity a significant variable for effectiveness.
As for quality assurance and its impact on a universities future, hypothesis 2's significance is highlighted with emphasis on one of the 4 Cs in this paper's model. No points of disagreement on the part of participants were observed, which brings support to the hypothesis being tested.
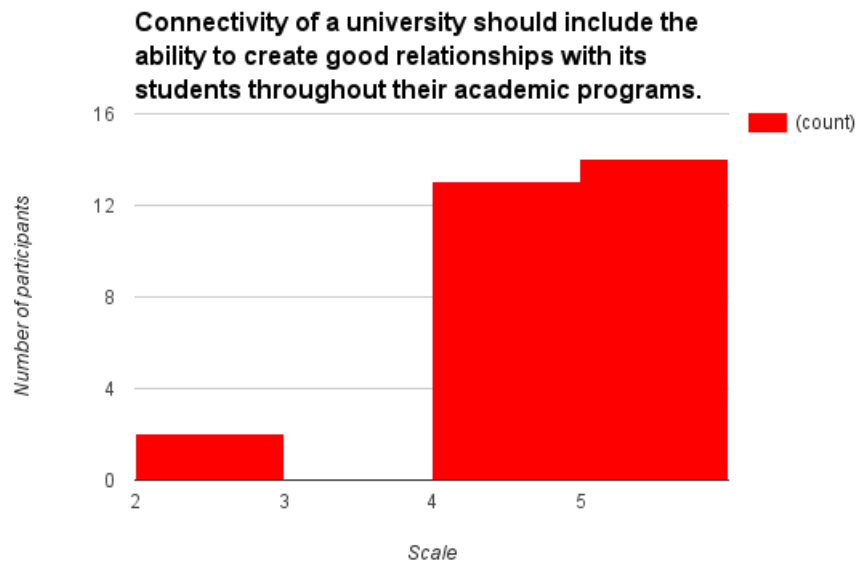

Figure 3: Connectivity and Student Programs

In Figure 3, a good relationship with the students creates connectivity and understanding of the student demands. The students will perform better and get acknowledgment for their efforts with the correct guidance from their respective universities. This conception has been agreed upon by a very high percentage of the sample: 84%. Academic programs will be more effectual with student-oriented behavior and decision making. The above statement is in support of the hypothesis on connectivity, making the observation of high significance.
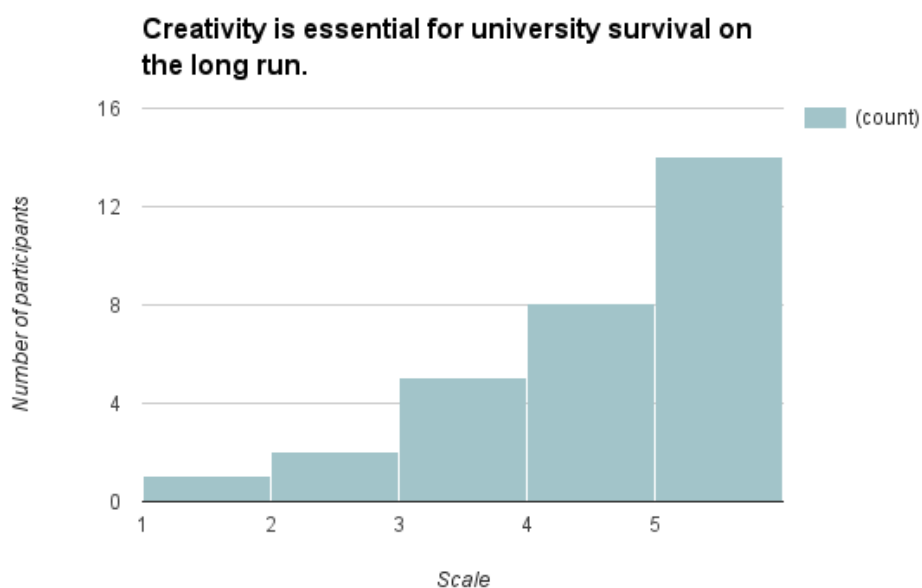

Figure 4: Importance of Creativity

In Figure 4, 70% of the sample has supported the statement on creativity being essential for university survival on the long run. A university has to innovatively cope with new advances in technology and education. In this sense, creativity in the education field is a must because external factors can affect university performance had it been ignorant of them. The observance of such high consent supports hypothesis 4.

Conclusion

According to the data analysis of the survey in this study, the most Cs in the model supported were continuity and creativity. As for the rest, discrepancy was shown in observations. Higher education managers/administrators are expected to use the model grid (Figure 5) to guide them in their decision making process. The grid has the four Cs and the marketing mix (4 Ps), creating future schemata for the manager/administrator.

Model Grid	Product	Price	Promotion	Place
Competitiveness				
Continuity				
Connectivity				
Creativity				

Figure 5: Model Grid

For example, in the above table and after choosing the criteria of interest, the following decision is subject from this choice: the manager has chosen to create emphasis on the product by competing with other universities through advertising and maintaining a bond with the students. According to the 4 Cs model, the fourth C which is characterized by being creatively agile has captured my attention for "this mindset lead to the investment of resources in designing and redesigning the levers required for rapid reconfigurability." (Richard, 1997). As we move across the model's matrix, and higher education managers chose from the given, they have to be flexible enough to choose from the components of the matrix in order to position the institution accordingly. They must have encompassed their SWOT analysis and set forth a plan for future implementation and development.

As a result: This results in specific action to position the organization ahead of time for continuous change, rather than wait for external events to force it. It involves a general recognition at all levels of an organization of the need to compete for tomorrow as well as for today and for all employees to take personal responsibility for the organization's success (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). According to Bolman and Deal (2008), the organizational design naturally allocates responsibilities, and then creates rules, policies, procedures, systems, and hierarchies to coordinate the diverse activities into a unified one. And this is the role of higher education administrators and managers in higher academic institutions, to use the 4Cs model to reach innovativeness, proactivity, and agility in terms of continuous change.

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