

# **Recommendations from the Ph.D Research Work on Marketing of Higher Education Institutes in India- A Study of the Selected Management Institutes**

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## **Abstract**

*Extensive studies have been conducted on quality parameters of higher education institutes in India. Recent times have witnessed the huge growth in numbers of the management education institutes in India. To keep afloat in this competitive market, management institutes devise and work on various strategies to provide quality teaching and value added qualifications. Majority of the surveyed institutes try to enhance the value/marketability of their management programme through various products/services, in the form of new courses/related program or enhancement of the current management programme. This prompted the study on, "Marketing of Higher Education Institutes in India: A Study of the Selected Management Institutes". Fifteen samples i.e. Six and Nine Management Institutes from the Eastern and the North-Western Zones respectively, were selected for the study. The major parameters of the study included verifying the ongoing marketing plans and policies of the surveyed institutes imparting management programme; marketing mix elements that the institutes are following/gearing up in order to provide quality enriched services, design and work on the marketing strategies and achieve the competitive advantage and to identify measures for improving present marketing scenario of higher educational institutes, imparting management programme.*

**Key Words:** marketing, management, institutes, service, mix, publicity

## **Introduction**

The process of evaluating the service offering as well as the target audience, to whom the exchange offering is directed to, is the process of marketing. In simple words, marketing is the art of

demand creation and the process of pursuing existing as well as potential customers.

Literatures surveyed on the marketing plans and policies, revealed that extensive studies have been conducted on quality parameters of higher education

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institutes in India. Recent times have witnessed the huge growth in numbers of the management education institutes in India. To keep afloat in this competitive market, management institutes devise and work on various strategies to provide quality teaching and value added qualifications. Majority of the surveyed institutes try to enhance the value/marketability of their management programme through various products/services, in the form of new courses/related program or enhancement of the current management programme. Tie-ups with national and international organizations of repute have also helped in the overall value additions by the higher education institutes in general and the management education institutes in particular. No such extensive literature is available which deals with the marketing aspects of higher education institutes, providing management education programme. Some studies do reveal the need for marketing of management institutes without dwelling on the marketing strategies that institutes are following or need to follow. This fact, prompted the study on the theme, "Marketing of Higher Education Institutes in India: A Study of the Selected Management Institutes".

A descriptive study has been conducted in the selected institutes of the two zones i.e. Eastern Zone and North-Western Zone of the country. Fifteen samples were selected for the study; six management institutes from the Eastern Zone and nine management institutes, in the North-Western Zone. Samples were

selected purposively from the list of management institutes approved by the AICTE, as on 31.07.2007. Data from all the fifteen institutes have been obtained and used for analysis. The major parameters of the study included ongoing marketing plans and policies of the surveyed institutes imparting management programme, marketing mix elements that the management institutes give importance to and design their overall services accordingly and to identify measures for improving present marketing scenario of higher educational institutes, imparting management programme.

Data have been collected through questionnaires on the marketing strategies being adopted by the surveyed management institutes, in the two Zones of the country. The questionnaire brought focus to the relevance of the various elements of marketing mix viz. product, place, promotion, price, people, physical evidence and process, in designing the overall marketing strategies. These elements play their roles in students'/ stakeholders' pre-purchase and post-purchase evaluations, which form important parts in marketing of higher education institutes. In addition, websites and resource centres of the surveyed institutes were scrolled through and visited, in order to figure out the marketing plans that the surveyed institutes adhered to. Another method of data collection i.e. informal communication with the students' consulting agencies of the respective regions and the local citizens, were also adopted.

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**Table 1  
Marketing Mix Elements with Related Factors**

<i>ELEMENTS</i>	<i>FACTORS</i>
Product	Programme, Courses, Demand, Competitiveness, Collaborations
Place	Location, Industrial Development, Environment Stability
Promotion	Institute Information, Type, Attributes, Activities
Price	Total Course Fees, Fee Payment Options
People	Administrators, Teachers, Students
Physical Evidence	Buildings, Classrooms, Computer labs, Libraries, Student lounges, Seminar Halls, Hostels, Canteens, Transportations, Banking
Process	Admission Procedures, Teaching Methods, Technology, Level of Student Involvement in Class & other activities

*Source: Compiled from Literature Survey*

Observations revealed the ongoing measures of the surveyed management institutes and also the marketing-mix elements, that the institutes are following/gearing up in order to provide quality enriched services, design and work on the marketing strategies and achieve the competitive advantage. Most of the surveyed institutes in both the Zones, have described their new value added initiatives, through bulletins, news-ads, brochures, websites etc., which again have not percolated very deep or have failed to cross the competitive hurdles imposed by other institutes, with the same bent of practices. There are again, a third group of institutes, which constitute a small population which

have not taken any direction/steps for proper value-additions and are satisfied with the courses/programme that they been offering from the beginning.

### **1.1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the backdrop of the findings from the analyses and observations, the following actionable points are recommended.

1. Students differ in the benefits they seek from the management programme. Thus, understanding the behaviour of the target population and the criteria they use, to exercise choice is crucial. This

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implies the importance of marketing orientation, which can be applied to the conceptualization, design and delivery of the programme, thus satisfying the needs and wants of the students.

2. Management institutes have to understand the basic service package i.e. the management programme, consist of three elements: the core service, the facilitating service and the support service. The core service is the reason for being in the market i.e. to equip people with knowledge, skills and abilities, to manage organizations. Faculty expertise and the accumulated experience at the institute represent the core resource for supplying this benefit. To avail the core benefit, additional services in the form of facilitating services are required. A registration and admission service, counseling service, class schedules, course materials, course structures, canteens, student lounges, library facilities, lap-tops/computer centres, classrooms and classroom facilities are the facilitating goods that help to exercise the core benefit by the aspirants. Lastly, the support services, which are also auxiliary to the core benefit, are used to enhance the value of the core product and to differentiate the service offer from other competitive offers. An efficient placement cell, high quality residential facilities, good network

of exchange relationships with business organizations, add value to the service offer by adding utility derived from the total management programme.

3. An excellent basic education package, along with the facilitating and the support service elements, may be made ineffective, by the way students are handled or student interactions are managed. How the whole service offer is perceived, forms an integral part of the total product. The basic service product and the elements that go into the service perception, form what has been termed as the augmented service product. Three distinct elements which along with the basic offer go into the creation of the augmented service product as components of the perceived service processes are:

- i) Accessibility of the service, which would depend on,
  - ✓ The number and skills of the persons associated with providing the core, facilitating, and supporting service.
  - ✓ Office hours, class and seminar schedules, time used for other services.
  - ✓ Exterior and interior of offices,

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- classrooms, facilities.
  - ✓ Tools, equipments, study materials etc.
  - ✓ The number, quantity and aptitude levels of students involved in the learning process.
- ii) Interaction of the service organization with the customers, would depend on
- ✓ Interaction with resource faculty, their expertise, skill, attention and attitudes.
  - ✓ Interaction with other service interfaces (admission, evaluation, students inquiries, students welfare office, office staff, hostel wardens, reception-attitudes and willingness of response, accurate answers).
  - ✓ Interaction with the physical environment (space, cleanliness, maintenance, noise levels).
  - ✓ Interaction with accessory service system (waiting line for admission, results, inquiries, payment receipts etc).
  - ✓ Interaction between students and,
  - ✓ Interaction of the various subsystems with each other (faculty, facilities, office personnel, other service departments).
- iii) Consumer participation in the service offerings, would depend on
- ✓ Knowledge level of the students to identify their need or problem, and to exercise choice options offered by the institute
  - ✓ Awareness of the time and flexibility dimensions offered to the students
  - ✓ Preparations and willingness to share information and feed back
- In planning the total management package offer, the focus of the concern is not on the course alone, the package has to be seen as a total offer along with its facilitating and supporting services. From the interactions with the different

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stakeholders, it has been verified that consumer perceptions are also effected not only by the core service, but also by the facilitating, supporting and augmented service offerings. This can play a great role in the creating/developing the total products and positioning them.

4. Promotion of management institutes has tended to rely heavily on the component of publicity, rather than on mass media advertising, partly due to the inbuilt psychological barrier and partly due to the misunderstanding roles of the tools of advertising. But growing competition and the threat of losing market shares has awakened many institutes to adopt the mass media tools like institute advertising as well as service offer promotion. The survey derived and recommended many guidelines for the use of promotion of management institutes, some of which are summarized below:

- i) Create clear, simple messages
- ii) Emphasize service benefits
- iii) Make realistic, attainable promises
- iv) Build on word-of-mouth communication and referrals
- v) Provide tangible clues
- vi) Develop continuity in advertising

5. The statistical findings realize the fees charged by majority of the surveyed institutes, in both the Zones, as average in the industry. The stakeholders of the different institutes, in both the Zones, do agree to the fact that, values derived from the total programme at the institutes are optimum to the fees charged. Normally, the survey clarified the opinion that heterogeneity of services and differential pricing considerations, make price a less important determinant of consumer choice. So, management institutes can try to bring in the uniqueness of the total product offerings, which can increase the total value outlay and charge a price for it. Different management institutes, in both the surveyed Zones, can use differential pricing considerations, for:

- i) Different types of value added courses in the management programme
- ii) Completely new value added programme, and
- iii) Provision of value added facilitating and support services

6. Addition of various value added courses/programme, in/with the main management programme, can be a good source of growth for the institute and can capture the varied interests of the stakeholders. But proper survey has to be made by

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the institutes themselves, as to what sort of value additions (in the basic management package, in facilitating service, in support service) will cater to the needs and desires of the different stakeholders of the regions e.g. CSR activities carried out by the different organizations, are gaining momentum and its importance, is rising. But, only a few management institutes have actually taken up the CSR activities, on a continuous basis. Discussions with some company officials have also underlined the importance of CSR activities, for all organizations, where management institutes also come into the ambit/domain. Some other institutes, outside the study purview, have adopted the CSR activities on a regular scale, and have immensely gained from it, in the form of project allotments, final placements of its students, better promotion of the institute and fund disbursements by various bodies/agencies.

7. After the Enron Imbroglia, teaching and practice of ethics in management education has acquired an important feature, adopted by some of the surveyed institutes. Some other surveyed institutes have still not woken up and realized the importance of ethics in their management curriculum. Ethics in management education should not be an option, but a necessary course, according

to most of the professionals, which can be used, not only for building up the minds of the students and develop their careers, but also betterment of the working culture of the institute and thereby, create a good name and standing in the society and amongst all the stakeholders, which is ultimately profitable for the institute and its stakeholders in the long run.

8. Creation of entrepreneurship mindset has not been given much importance by the surveyed management institutes. For proper growth and development of the management graduates, the management institutes need to stimulate the entrepreneurial mindsets of their students and encourage innovative business start-ups. Entrepreneurship courses should be introduced and given due importance to develop the entrepreneurial capacities and mindsets. The institutes should try to build tie-ups with such organizations or agencies, which can foster a culture that is friendlier to entrepreneurship and to the growth of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This can to a large scale, help in raising the level of employment of the region. Finally, it is bound to help the total positioning of the institute.
9. Designing the marketing strategy is an important aspect, which the institutes cannot reject. Keeping in

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view the various features of management education viz. intangibility, perishability, inseparability, people based, high contact consumer service etc., designing any marketing strategy needs to be unique in itself, as it is organization and situation specific. The basic questions/points that need to be answered/adhered to, for building a specific marketing strategy model are described overleaf, in Table 2.

10. Referral marketing can play a very effective role in building the image of the institute amongst the external stakeholders i.e. potential students and the public, at large. Implementing the recommendations stated above will definitely give rise to the satisfaction of the users of the service. This will ultimately result in increasing the reputation of the institute, resulting in good customer relationship management.

**Table 2**

**Questions/Points for Building Strategic Marketing Model for Management Institutes**

What business are we in?	Are we in the business of creating new knowledge?
	Are we in the process of synthesizing old knowledge with new ideas and concepts?
	Are we in the business of developing professional skills?
	Are we in the business of creating special skills or penetrating people for a specific vocation/career?
Who are our customers and what benefits do they seek?	Reputation of the institute in the business world
	Number of applicants keen to apply for the programme
	Coalitions with reputed national & international organizations with frequent exchange programme
	Past success rate of placements
	Faculty expertise and interests
	Width of value-added specializations offered
	Infrastructure facilities
	Importance of extra-curricular activities
	Fees and Loan facilities provided

Build up strong service differentiation, which can generate a clearly focused organizational and product image in the
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	customer's mind
How can we build or defend own competitive position?	Marketing of management services be localized and offer the consumers a more restricted choice <i>eg. opening up a new course/ programme in oil and petroleum management will be far more practical to be opened and marketed in the management institutes of Assam, than in other places of the Zone</i>
	Developing and encouraging new and inquisitive thoughts and ideas should be one of the motto of the institutes. Development of such service should follow the pre-emptive approach i.e. offering before the need really becomes apparent.
How should we offer new service offers that help or strengthen the competitive position ?	Development of systematic organizational processes at the institutes for generating and testing new course package concepts and weeding out the old and unprofitable services

**Source: Compiled from Field Survey and Literature Review**

## **1.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. The study has been conducted for a limited number of samples owing to constraints of access to the management institutes and difficulties in collecting data from the stakeholders.
2. The internal stakeholders of some surveyed institutes did not know or part with, information, regarding some aspects of the actual marketing strategies framed by the institute.
3. No specific guidelines were found, which can actually help all the management institutes to improve

the qualitative aspects of their recognitions and degrees awarded. As such, different rankings of the same institutes by different agencies, adds to the chaos of the students in the selection process.

## **1.3 SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

1. More in-depth studies can work out the marketing strategies that an individual management institute can design, based on the elements of both the internal and external environment analysis i.e. SWOT Analysis.
2. Separate studies are possible to analyze the position of the management institutes in terms of

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the cost-benefit ratio analysis of the various marketing-mix elements, which have been implemented or are still on the planning dais.

3. A study can be conducted exhaustively employing case-study method to explore the detailed marketing strategies of the successful management institutes, round the world and the best practices adopted.
4. The study encompasses the survey of the management institutes, who are already established and have got the AICTE recognition. Further studies can be done for the newly established management institutes, which have just started their management programme or for those institutes, which are still on the planning board; design the total marketing concepts and the marketing-mix elements that they would need to follow, while framing their marketing strategies.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Suitable marketing of the management institutes is the call of the hour. It should start from re-designing/planning, adopting and practicing the various marketing plans and policies, which got shaped from the value based usage of the different marketing-mix elements. This will definitely help the institutes to capture the opportunities of the environment and exercise the strengths. Additionally, it will also help in the recognition of the weakness(es) of the institutes, in concern. This will help the institutes to frame/re-frame the marketing

strategies and act on it. Implementation of such practices will guide the institutes in overcoming the weakness (es) from becoming threat(s).

Thus, it can be concluded that adopting the best marketing strategies will definitely encourage the institutes to put forward into practice the best service package, consisting of all the three value-based services i.e. the basic services, the facilitating services and the support services. This will definitely give impetus to the institute and the society to move forward in the desired direction.

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