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Review Article

## IS THE IMPACT OF PROMOTION IN THE SELECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY DURING THE ENROLLMENT FOR UNDER-GRADUATE STUDIES?

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### Abstract

Education is the key factor in the economic development of a country. The educational system must be in accordance with the chosen strategies for economic and social development, so it can effectively react in time to the tendencies of the job market. Recently, the increase of the academic offer has developed a strong competition among different institutions of higher education. The application of marketing activities in general, and especially promotional efforts, has greatly increased its visibility. The institutions with greater activity in promotional campaigns are in a better position in the market, and as a result they are able to maintain a better communication with the potential students who aim to enroll their studies.

This research paper is based on the research of the market of students, who decide and choose the university where they will enroll on their chosen field of study. In this regard, this paper elaborates on the theoretical framework and practical elements of promotion, as well as their impact in the decision making of students about the university where they will enroll their studies. This research is conducted in a couple of cities and universities, in order to better understand the impact of promotion in promotional campaigns for the selection of the universities among students.

Furthermore, the research paper concludes with concrete recommendations on the promotional strategies that should be applied in order to attract a greater number of students from other competitor universities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

**Keywords:** Marketing mix, promotion, marketing strategies, universities, student

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### 1. Introduction

Higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia has recently faced an increase in academic offer. This has created genuine competition between higher education institutions. However, according to the latest data, the interest of young people in further education continues to decrease, which is influenced by many factors such as: the decline of the country's economy, unemployment and poverty along with negative political developments in the country. This is confirmed by the latest data published by the Statistical office of the Republic of North Macedonia, according to which the number of registered students is decreasing permanently from year to year.

The causes of this situation, in addition to economic and social factors, should be sought in higher education institutions which, in order to be competitive in the market, must pay more attention to communication with stakeholders.

This communication is best achieved through marketing instruments and especially through promotion. Promotion is a marketing element that deals with communicating with stakeholders, reputation and activities undertaken in order to create an image, which is usually reflected in advertising. (internet, print, audio or video), public relations, personal-direct sales and special promotional activities of education in order to market the institution to the general public. (Harris 2009; Gibbs 2002; Kotler 1999)

Based on this, higher education institutions always need to communicate as effectively as possible with the market and the public in order to attract a larger number of students, to build and gain the

loyalty of the alumni, attract donations, meet requirements by constantly correcting offers, improve inaccurate or incomplete information about their institution as well as many other positive changes.

### **1.1 Purpose of study**

The purpose of this research is to analyze in general the marketing applied by the higher education institutions in the country and in particular the impact that promotion has on university selection as well as identifying which of the promotion activities has the greatest impact on student selection. In order to carry out the research, the following hypothesis was tested in the paper:

Ho: Advertising is the dominant promotional element compared to other promotional elements.

### **1.2 Literature review**

Various scholars have pointed to the fact that higher education is undergoing major reforms. Researchers in this field ((Whyte, A. 2001, Mok 2003; Mouven 2002; Reindfleish 2003), emphasize that higher education institutions face many challenges and pressures, such as changes in educational policies, cuts in state funding, university mergers, competitions to attract as many quality students as possible, and many other problems.

Higher education institutions should be aware of these changes and their orientation should be in meeting the demands and needs of the market as an absorber of their product. (Adequate profiles and students equipped with knowledge and skills for the job market) and meeting the needs and desires of current and potential students.

Orientation of universities, in terms of study offer should be appropriate and oriented towards the needs and requirements of the market, as well as potential students.

From the point of view of marketing and other economic disciplines, promotion in commercial function has its own specifics. According to Kotler (2010), the mix of promotion consists of the specific combination of advertising, public relations, personal sales, sales promotion and direct marketing instruments used by the institution to convincingly communicate value to customers and build relationships with them.

Kan and Qureshi (2010) have analyzed the impact of different promotion variables on student enrollment in private universities.

Through the interview method, those from the collected data analyzed the impact of promotion variables on increasing the average number of students enrolled in private universities, where they found that the four promotional variables that have had an impact are visibility / environment, public relations, publicity and advertising (in electronic and print media) and that the implementation of the promotional strategy is crucial in increasing people's awareness about education and the role of private universities in society.

Research on the 'absorption' of information by relatives and friends is also important. According to researchers Casser and Du Toit (2002), the family has a major influence on the decision to pursue studies and that discussions with relatives and friends serve as an important source of information in choosing a university. According to them, the main source of effective information is to obtain information directly from the university website.

Some research done, give importance to promotion, in particular advertisements on TV and official university websites, as a primary and publicly available source of data (Veseli T, 2015).

### **1.3 Research Methodology**

The study was conducted at several universities in the Republic of North Macedonia by random selection at three public universities: Ss. Cyril and Methodius University-Skopje; "St Kliment

Ohridski" University - Bitola, University of Tetova - Tetovo, and five private universities such as: South East European University-Tetovo, International Balkan University-Skopje, International Vision University-Gostivar, European University -Skopje, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje.

The research was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2019 – 2020.

Primary data have been used to conduct this research.

During the drafting of this questionnaire, attention was paid to the length, wording of the questions, the way of coding and then the way of processing the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts:

The first part includes general data about the student such as gender, the university in which he / she are studying and the chosen faculty or direction;

The second part is the part where the characteristics of the institution are analyzed which has been important during the selection of the university which consists of 13 questions;

The third part, which includes the impact of university offers on the promotion of the academic institution, consists of 11 questions.

The questions are designed in the structural sense as escalating questions. They are easy to answer and enable easier data processing. As usual, the Likert Scale was used, where respondents provided their answers.

## 2. Empirical Results and Analysis

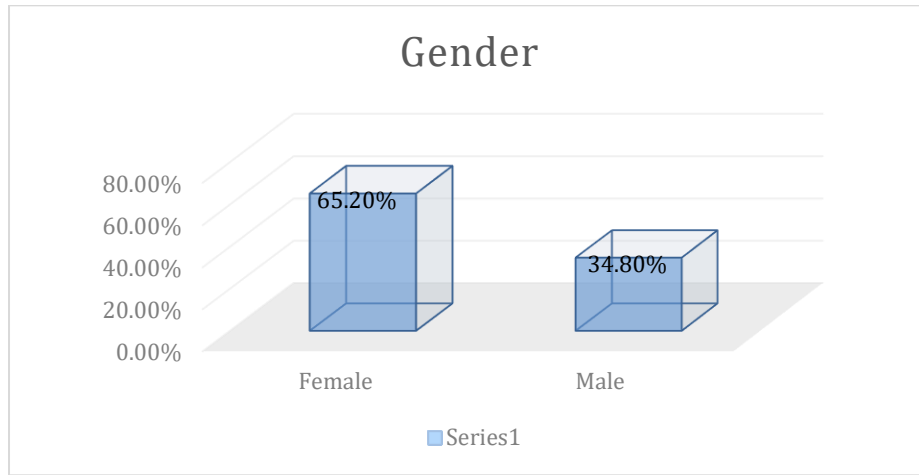
This section presents the results and empirical analysis of the processing of questionnaires completed by students enrolled in the first year of study, in order to understand the importance of marketing and the impact of promotion during their selection.

### 2.1 Participation of students in research

A total of 402 students from different universities participated in the research, of which 262 were female or 65.2% and 140 male or 34.8%.

<i>Gender</i>		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	262	65.2	65.2	65.2
	Male	140	34.8	34.8	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

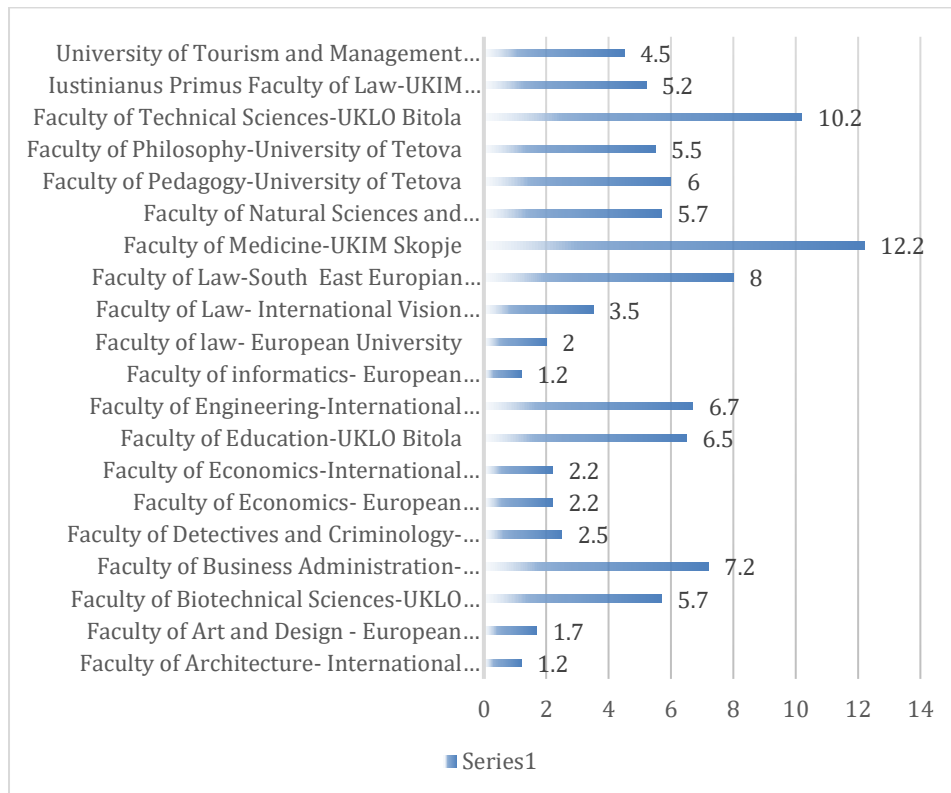
**Graph. 1** Participation of students by gender



**Source:** Authors calculations

The research was conducted in 8 universities, i.e 20 faculties of universities that gravitate to the Republic of North Macedonia where the participants were students from 9 faculties registered in public universities and students from 11 faculties registered in private universities.

**Graph. 2** Participation of students in percentage by universities, ie faculties



**Source:** Authors calculations

## 2.2. Reliability test – Alpha Cronbach’s

The reliability test is performed to verify whether our data meet the conditions for verifying hypotheses. The test was performed through Alpha Cronbach’s.

Question group	Number of variables analyzed	Alpha Cronbach’s
Characteristics that influenced during selection	13	.849
Promotional activities	12	.892

The above results show that in the first group of questions on the characteristics that influenced during the selection of universities we have .849 Alpha Cronbach’s whereas in the second group of questions in promotional activities we have .892 level of Alpha Cronbach’s.

With this we consider that our data have a high level of reliability and are acceptable to proceed with the next analysis.

## 2.3 Analysis of characteristics that have effects during selection of university

Regarding the large offers of programs offered by the Institutions, we can see that students appreciate this practice to the maximum as over 60 % of them have answered that it is important or very important. The quality of education is a very important factor where students appreciate, the quality or quality of education is a very important factor where students appreciate, as over 75% answered that it is important or very important.

Academic infrastructure such as libraries and laboratories are a prerequisite for factors that students greatly appreciate, as most of them over 60 % have stated that it is important or very important.

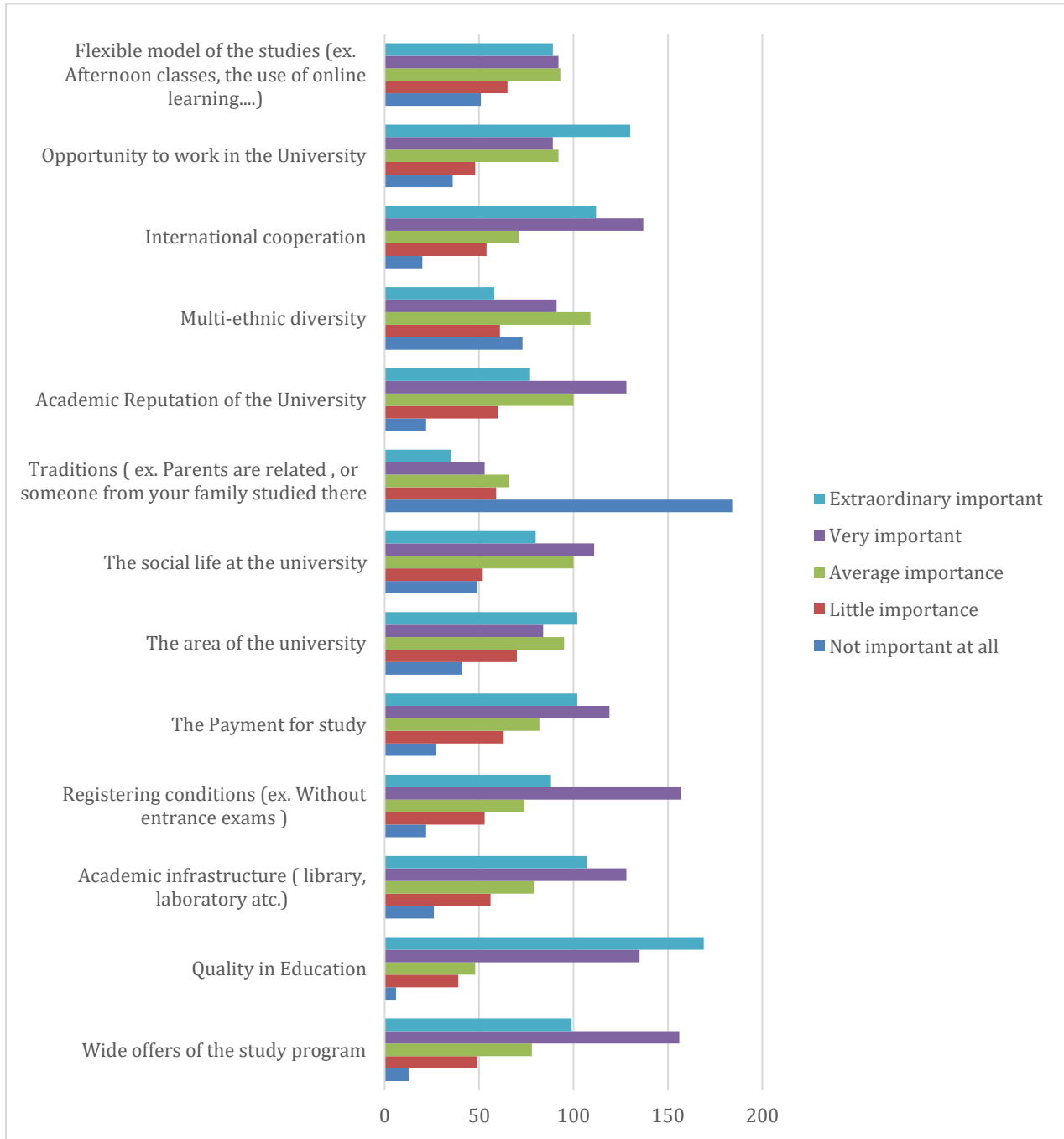
Conditions of acceptance are highly valued by students as the best practice of universities, where over 60% of them are rated as important or very important.

Study payments and the location of the University are rated relatively the same, but of high importance to students, as well as the social life at the University.

Regarding the aspect of tradition, they say that it is not very important to select the University in this aspect, although a percentage considers it important, most do not consider it as such. The reputation of the University is considered high by students and over 50% have stated that it is important or very important. Multiethnic diversity is another factor that attracts students, as well as the opportunity to be employed.

International agreements or even the flexibility of studies are another very important aspect for students.

**Graph. 3** Importance of characteristics during selection



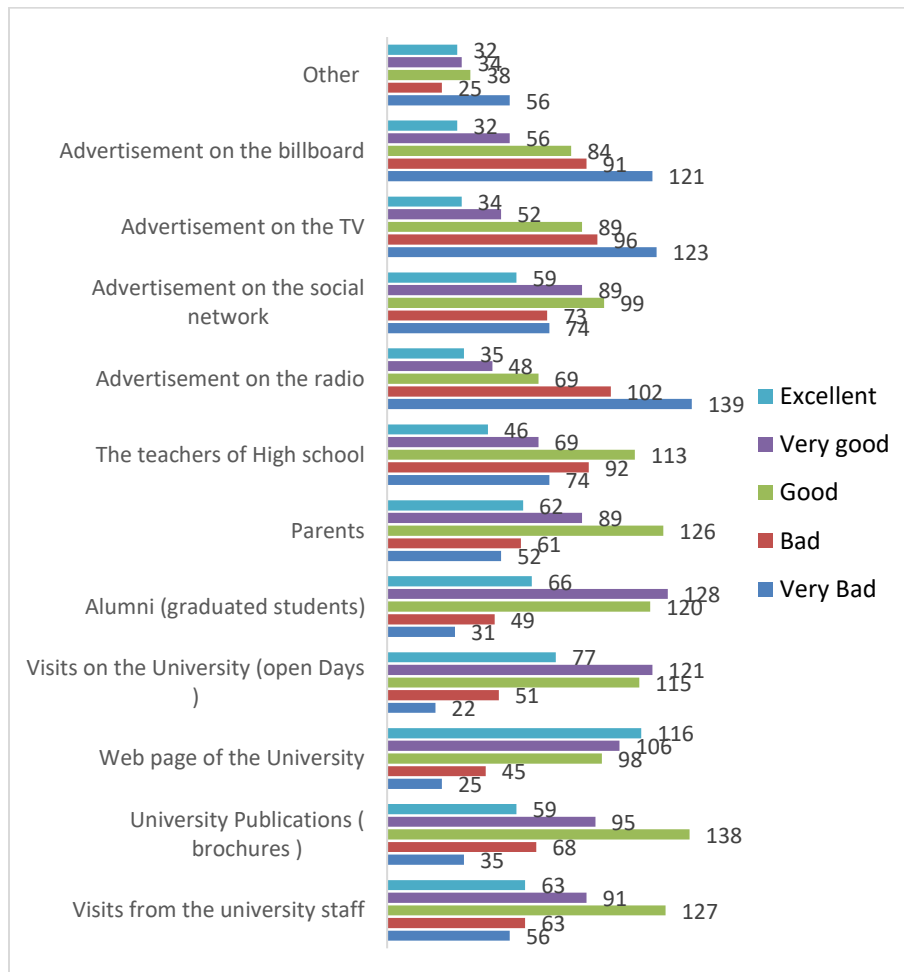
Source: Authors calculations

### 2.4 Analysis of promotional activities

Taking into account the analysis of all promotional activities, it turns out that the visits by the University staff are considered relatively important, where close to 50% of students positively evaluate this aspect, and also in relatively equal evaluation have the form of promotion that is University brochure. The University website is considered a good form, as over 50% of students have rated it as very good or excellent, and also graduate students or Alumni has been highly rated by students.

In terms of parents, students rate it less, where close to 40% rate it very well or excellently, while high school teachers have a lower grade where close to 30% rate it very well or excellently. Radio, television or billboard advertisements are not so much appreciated, while those on social networks ave a higher positive rating in relation to this.

**Graph. 4** Promotional activities



Given the above figure we can conclude that Advertising is not the most dominant element compared to other elements of promotion, hereby the research hypothesis is not proved. From the table it can be clearly seen that advertising in some of its categories such as radio advertising has

very few points, or more precisely 35.4% of all sieges are very bad. Although the percentage of answers for excellent advertising is high in some categories such as advertising on social networks with close to 16%, still it seems that the choice of students is more influenced by alumni, visits by university staff and open days, respectively with very high scores excellent.

### 3. Conclusion

From the findings in this paper, we can conclude that universities in the Republic of North Macedonia apply mixed marketing and that the elements of the same, as in this case the promotion also affect the selection of the university.

Based on the average of respondents' responses and analysis of mix marketing elements, or thirteen factors that can be categorized or grouped according to "mixture - mix" 7P, which consists of: product / service, price, location, promotion, processes, physical evidence and people, not including promotion (as it is treated separately), in choosing the university most affect: the quality of education, the offer of study programs, admission conditions, academic infrastructure and employment opportunities.

In terms of promotion, based on the average for each answer, the most effective way to get more information about the faculty or university is: Alumni, visits by university staff, university brochures, university website, and open days at university, high school teachers and advertising.

From the examination for each element of the promotion shows that the advertisement is not the most dominant promotional element compared to the other elements of the promotion. Hence, the research hypothesis is not proved.

### 4. Recommendations

The Republic of North Macedonia is in an unenviable situation in all spheres of its economic and political development which resulted in an increase in the number of unemployed graduates, emigration of young people, declining birth rates and many other factors which significantly reduced the interest of young people to pursue higher education. Taking into account all these institutions of higher education, it is necessary to apply marketing strategies and specially to change their communication strategies with potential students in order to contribute to improving the current situation.

Based on the findings of this research, universities should change their communication strategies in order to complete the requirements, needs and desires of potential students also:

- To make the most of social media advertising, Tv, radio to send the necessary messages to the target groups and to ensure that the message fits the audience;
- By offering study programs required in the job market;
- Implement as high quality as possible direct marketing which has to do with communication with potential students and key actors with more influence on decision-making through presentations of academic program offers in high schools, organizing open days, etc.;
- To organize more public relations activities, as long as they are considered reliable and not to focus so much on promotional materials in printed form;
- Pay attention to the service of current students as well as alumni.



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