

The Relevance of Marketing Activities for Higher Education Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

The higher education (HE) sector is experiencing continuous growth (Durvasula et al. 2011) and projections point that potential demand for HE worldwide will expand from 97 million students in 2000 to over 262 million students by 2025 (Bjarnason et al. 2009). One of the noticeable trends in the education sector throughout this growth has been what some have called global marketization (Marginson and van der Wende 2007; Naidoo and Wu 2011). The term “marketization” refers to the facts that as the HE market has become progressively more competitive, many HE institutions (HEI) have started to engage in strategic marketing and design marketing activities with the aim of increasing the number of applicants to their universities (Angulo et al. 2010; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006).

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The increasing emphasis on marketing in HE necessitates a stronger focus on accountability and measurement of the effect of marketing activities on the desired outcomes, such as students' preference for a particular university and ultimately student university choice. It is surprising therefore, that studies have not paid sufficient attention to the effect of the marketing activities on student choice (Chapleo 2011). University marketing activities involve significant costs and studies examining their effectiveness can provide valuable insights to university administrators. It is with this objective in mind that the current study focuses on the impact of traditional advertising, internet marketing, and relational marketing activities on student choice.

We compare the results across three different developed economies—Canada, France, and Sweden. Marketing activities can have different impact on HEI performance variables, such as student choice, depending on the context of the study, and the peculiarities of the HE market across countries. In the literature on HE marketing there is a general assumption that HEI in developed countries have a highly market-based approach when recruiting students and designing marketing activities. One of the reasons for this is that they compete not only domestically, but also on the global market for students. However, this literature is disproportionately based on studies conducted in UK, USA, Canada, and Australia, countries in which the use of marketing techniques and in some cases even aggressive promotional campaigns is becoming more common (Durvasula et al. 2011; Rogers 1998). It is unclear to what extent findings from those countries can be generalized to all developed economies. In particular, European countries with different university traditions and HE models (i.e., France and Sweden) might not be “marketized” in the same way as in UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. In addition as stated by Maringe and Foskett (2010), the global HE market is not homogeneous and is in fact diverse in many dimensions about what it means to be a university. Furthermore, to our knowledge, HE marketing literature in France and Sweden as well as in Canada has not studied the effectiveness of marketing activities on student choice. It is therefore, important to understand the extent to which marketing activities of HEI can have different impact depending on the context of study. This type of study will inform HE administrators as to which marketing activities are critical to invest in.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, we provide an overview of the HE marketing literature in Canada, France, and Sweden. Then, we develop the conceptual framework for the study based on the literature of

marketing impact on the performance of organizations, placing emphasis on the HE context. Next, we present the methodology, including the countries' context, the sample and analytical methods. We then present the results and conclude with a discussion of major findings.

OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING LITERATURE IN CANADA, FRANCE, AND SWEDEN

Table 2.1 includes a review of some relevant literature related to HE marketing in Canada, France, and Sweden. Studies on Canadian HEI have focused on marketing strategy implementation and international student recruitment. For instance, Naidoo and Wu (2011) study marketing strategy implementation from a HE administrator perspective to attract international students. Bolan and Robinson (2013) focus on the role of the marketing concept, segmentation, and targeting in Ontario universities. Page (2000) studies the role of university ranking in attracting students to the university. Chen (2008) studies the integration of Canadian HEI in the international environment and which international marketing activities can increase awareness. Additionally, extant literature in the Canadian HE sector has also studied the role of branding and communications in HEI. Belanger et al. (2014), as an example, focus on the relevance of social media marketing for student recruitment. Lavigne (2005) study the most preferred communication tools by HE administrators.

In France, extant literature has concentrated in the role of socialization agents in motivating students to pursue HE studies. For example, Bonnard et al. (2014) study the role of parents in educational choices, and Brinbaum and Guegnard (2013) study how second-generation immigrants decide about pursuing HE. Additionally, others have focused on the process of entrepreneurial choice of prospective students in determining the choice of a university (Ilouga et al. 2014). Delmestri et al. (2015) study the role of branding in home and abroad France, and Pilkington (2012) centers on the internationalization, reforms, and present situation of the French HE system.

In Sweden, literature has followed a similar pattern compared to France. For instance, literature has focused on the role of entrepreneurial choices and university choice (Daghbashyan and Harsman 2014). Literature has also focused on building alumni networks (Ebert et al. 2015) or links and collaborations among university, industry, and government (Ozols et al. 2012a, b).

Table 2.1 Selected HE marketing literature in Canada, France, and Sweden

<i>Country</i>	<i>Selected relevant literature</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
Canada	Bélanger et al. (2014)	Effectiveness and efficiency of social media marketing strategies applied by Canadian universities in institutional branding and students' recruitment
	Bolan and Robinson (2013)	Development of marketing practices (marketing concept, branding, targeting, positioning) at five Ontario universities focused on student recruitment and strengthening university's identity
	Chen (2008)	Internationalization (integration into international environment) and international marketing (activities aimed to increase awareness) of HE that are determined by segmentation
	Lavigne (2005)	The description of past managerial decisions in the field of communication and the use of specific financial resources for different forms of marketing communication vis-à-vis external and internal environment resulting into highlighting of the most preferred communication strategies by university management
	Mun (2008)	The description of marketing communication campaign without any effectiveness comparison of different marketing communication activities. The focus is on the university preferences in marketing communication
	Naidoo and Wu (2011)	Analysis of significant strategy implementation factors and their use in the field of HE in order to recruit international students as well as the right level of use of business principles from strategy implementation
	Page (2000)	The level of importance of university ranking in student recruitment and the relative impact of university ranking on students' choice
	Trilokekar and Kizilbash (2013)	Improvement of internationalization of Canadian universities in order to recruit foreign students supported by valuable lessons from the Australian universities
France	Bonnard et al. (2014)	Parents as an important environmental factor influencing students' expectations about future earnings and consequently students' decisions about the educational choices in the context when parents consider education as a kind of investment

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Selected relevant literature</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
	Brinbaum and Guegnard (2013)	The activities of second-generation immigrants in France concerning postsecondary choices, access to tertiary programs, dropout, and transition to the labor market, compared to those of students of French origin
	Delmestri et al. (2015)	University branding with focus on visual brand presentation home and abroad
	Fernex et al. (2015)	The performance changes according to allocation of time to different university and extra-university activities in order to determine the best number of compulsory school learning hours during the semester
	Ilouga et al. (2014)	The process of an entrepreneurial career choice
	Pilkington (2012)	The evolution, internationalization, reforms, and present situation of French HE system in the context of overwhelming Europeanization trends
Sweden	Daghbashyan and Harsman (2014)	Impact of universities on graduates' entrepreneurial choice; Link between the choice of university and a further entrepreneurial choice of a prospect student
	Ebert et al. (2015)	Opportunities and challenges for building alumni networks; description of goals, strategies, barriers, and successes of building an alumni program in an environment without a previous tradition
	Eka et al. (2013)	The extent to which management of university and the contents of courses should be based on business principles
	Isaksson et al. (2015)	Role of universities in providing lifelong learning and distance education
	Isaksson et al. (2013)	Methods for measuring university sustainability
	Karlsson et al. (2014)	Quality management processes in contemporary universities in changing environment considering external societal demands and internal university norms
	O'Connor and Goransson (2015)	HRM and gender stereotypes in West European university management
	Ozols et al. (2012a, b)	Activities, responsibilities, links, and collaboration of three entities: university, industry, and government

Research has also focused on some key factors in university management such as quality processes (Karlsson et al. 2014), gender (O'Connor and Goransson 2015), and sustainability (Isaksson et al. 2013, 2015).

The current literature on marketing of HEI in Canada, France, and Sweden has paid attention to relevant aspects such as marketing strategy, branding and communications, network development, entrepreneurial aspects, and the role of external factors in university choice. To our knowledge, literature in these contexts as well as in other contexts in the world has not paid theoretical and/or empirical attention to the role of marketing activities in motivating students to choose a university. Also, although there are HE marketing studies in Canada, France, and Sweden, those studies are in general focused on the domestic context under study and do not attempt to provide cross-national comparisons. Our study builds on the current HE marketing literature to provide a framework of the impact of marketing activities in Canada, France, and Sweden and attempt to make cross-national comparisons of the effectiveness of marketing activities on student choice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE IMPACT OF MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As a starting point to explain the linkages between marketing activities and student choice (which we treat as a performance outcome of HEI) we take the study of Gupta and Zeithaml (2006). The framework developed by these researchers focuses on the impact of customer metrics on the financial performance of organizations. In essence, the framework links “what firms do (for example, their marketing actions), what customers think (for example, unobservable constructs), what customers do (for example, behavioral outcomes), and how customers’ behavior affects firms’ financial performance (for example, profits and firm value)” (Gupta and Zeithaml 2006, p. 718–719). We adapt Gupta and Zeithaml’s (2006) framework to the HE context in order to understand how university marketing activities along with other relevant variables affect behavioral outcomes (student choice). Figure 2.1 shows a visual representation of our conceptual framework.

How Marketing Activities Affect Student Choice

Universities have a diverse range of marketing activities to choose from in order to attract new prospects. Those include advertising (e.g., TV, radio, outdoor, print); relational marketing such as open houses, information

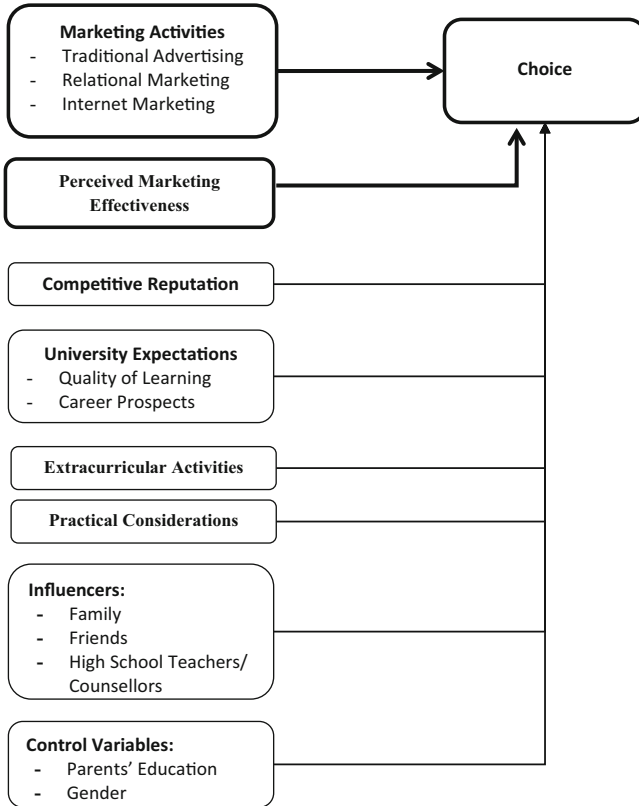


Fig. 2.1 The impact of marketing activities on student choice across developed economies

sessions, interaction with alumni, or visits to high schools; internet marketing through websites, blogs, or social media platforms; public relations, or other initiatives designed to have a marketing impact (Maringe 2006; Simoes and Soares 2010; Sojkin et al. 2012; Rust et al. 2004; Wilkins and Huisman 2011; Willis and Kennedy 2004). In what follows we elaborate on how traditional advertising, relational marketing, internet marketing, and perceived marketing effectiveness may impact student choice.

Traditional advertising is used by universities in order to build university brand awareness and brand associations (Chapleo 2011;

Keller 1993) and affect expectations about HEI through information (Anderson and Sullivan 1993: p. 322) therefore impacting students' choice. The competition on the HE market is becoming stronger every year, partly because of some demographic declines in many European countries and because of a trend toward globalization of the HE market. In recent years, many universities have engaged in activities intended to raise their brand awareness and differentiation. We observe this trend also in the HE marketing literature, where building a HE brand is a topic that is increasingly attracting attention (Chapleo 2011; Chauhan and Pillai 2013; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007; Lowrie 2007). Advertising in mass media like radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, billboards, public transport, career expo fairs, and exhibitions have been adapted by HEI with the intention to increase the public's awareness about the institution, create a positive image, and consequently to influence student choice. All these arguments suggest that traditional advertising may be a key variable influencing student choice.

Relational marketing activities are expected to build closer ties with prospective students and may create emotional attachment. HE marketing scholars have called for more attention toward relationship marketing (Arnett et al. 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006; Moogan 2011), since it can prevent some misunderstandings leading to satisfaction decline, such as addressing students' information needs, quality issues, and student expectations. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) call for an appropriate relationship with students to create loyalty. Arnett et al. (2003), Klassen (2002), and Moogan (2011) suggest that relationship marketing should start within the recruitment process, continue with retention of students (Angulo-Ruiz and Pergelova 2013), and finish with alumni relations in order to attract future potential students. Relational-based marketing activities will allow potential students to have a first-hand idea even before entering the university that they are about to choose; and relational marketing through face-to-face encounters may provide potential students with a higher sense of affiliation with the university, which at the same time may motivate them to choose it.

Internet marketing, embodied especially by websites, blogs, or social media platforms has the potential to create a positive impact when HEI communicate with their target audience. While the traditional marketing communications activities in HE are frequently standard mass media advertising and direct mail, e-documents, e-newsletters, and the use of digital technology are becoming increasingly important in HE marketing

(Moogan 2011; Opoku et al. 2006). Prospect students tend to use heavily websites, social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook. Thus, internet marketing may have a positive impact on potential students' choice of university. According to a study by Sojkin et al. (2012), the most often used information source by prospect students was the internet, especially university web sites and forums, followed by university brochures and handbooks. Opoku et al. (2006) note that the increasing competition for students and the desire for program recognition have led universities to allocate more efforts and resources to communication on the internet.

Perceived marketing effectiveness. In addition to examining the direct impact of marketing activities on university choice, in this study we add the effect of perceived marketing effectiveness. Marketing effectiveness pertains to the effect of marketing efforts, such as pricing, promotion, and advertising, on consumer behavior. We introduce this variable to the HE marketing literature following research on consumer psychology. This approach is based on the contention that “perceived marketing efforts play a more direct role in consumer psychology than actual marketing efforts” (Yoo et al. 2000, p. 200). Therefore, consumer behavior in general, and student choice in particular, may be better explained when considering the perceived qualities of products/services as well as students' subjective perception of advertising and promotion activities by HEI.

Following the principle of cognitive consistency, people value harmony between thoughts, feelings, and actions (Hawkins et al.1995). Adapted to our study context, this means that to the extent that prospect students have more positive beliefs about the activities of HEIs, they will be motivated to adapt their behavioral tendencies accordingly, resulting in higher likelihood of choosing the HEI. Thus, positively evaluated marketing activities and positioning of HEIs may result in corresponding behavioral outcome such as choosing the HEI.

Other Factors Affecting Student Choice

Besides these marketing-related factors, students' choice can be determined by other factors such as competitive reputation and image, students' expectations from university, extracurricular activities that university offers, location of the university building and campus, and social influencers.

Competitive reputation reduces uncertainty by viewing the HE institution as more reliable. The reputation of a HE institution is the consequence of

perceptions by the external stakeholders (Deephouse 2000; Fischer and Reuber 2007) in comparison to other institutions of similar type (Deutsch and Ross 2003; Fombrun and Shanley 1990). Following this logic, reputation requires that an institution be judged comparatively, and it represents external audience's beliefs formed not only in the present, but also in the past (Reuber and Fischer 2005). The reputation helps to reduce uncertainty of future service performance (Jha et al. 2013), something that is essential in credence services, where the quality of the outcome cannot be evaluated beforehand. In the HE marketing literature, reputation, and image of the institution have been argued to have a significant role in prospect students' decision to choose a university (Simões and Soares 2010; Briggs 2006; Willis and Kennedy 2004). According to Petruzzellis and Romanazzi (2010) and Hesketh (1999) students are no longer passive choosers, but are becoming increasingly involved in calculating anticipated rates of return on the investment they made. Therefore, program and price-related information are considered as being critical for decision-making and university value is perceived as a significant positive influencer of university choice (Petruzzellis and Romanazzi 2010). The education at HEI with worldwide recognition is one of the most reflected factors by future prospects and students are mostly looking for educational services of high quality and qualifications that are widely recognized and can help them to enhance their career (Mpiganjira 2011). Depending on cultural and social background, in some countries the university reputation plays the most important role when future university students choose their HEI. Kim (2011) says that Korean students consider the ranking of the university very critical when they choose a graduate school, but Sojkin et al. (2012) found out that university rankings are important only for 13 % of Polish university students and prospects. Veloutsou et al. (2004) state that the university and the department's reputation are two of the top three themes for which students collect information. All these arguments are indicative that competitive reputation may be a key factor affecting student choice.

Students' expectations from HEI such as career prospects (Gray et al. 2003; Mai 2005; Wiese et al. 2010), vision of a high-status occupation (Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides 2010) and quality of teaching (Chapman and Pyvis 2006; Wiese et al. 2010) have been considered relevant influencers on the decision to select a university. According to Girasek et al. (2011) the first-year Hungarian students consider high income as one of the most important factors in the decision of studying at the university. The student's career is the most important motivating factor for Afro-Caribbean students (Ivy 2007). The working-class students are

directly concerned with the employment value of their university education (Lehmann 2009). Baharun et al. (2011) found that the quality of education is the most important factor of HEI choice in Malaysia. The highest importance in university choice for the quality of teaching has been recorded in Pretoria, South Africa by Wiese et al. (2010) that was followed by career prospects. Overall, research suggests that students expect from HEIs a potential to increase their future work opportunities (Brinkworth et al. 2009; Jimenez and Salas-Velasco 2000; Rochat and Demeulemeester 2001; Montmarquette et al. 2002).

Extracurricular activities as, for example, clubs, sport activities, and social networking events are considered as strong impactful factors in some cultures, for example, Slovakia (Chebeň and Chebeň 2002). The situation can vary according to the cultural background of potential students. Tinto (1975) recognizes the critical role of student integration in the academic life; in effect, extracurricular activities will allow prospect student to have future integration. Ivy (2007) found out that Indian and “other” Asian students were most strongly associated with academic and social university motivators. A study in Poland found that clubs, sport activities, and social networking events are among the most important factors in university choice (Sojkin et al. 2012).

Practical considerations such as the location of HEI are in some countries and for some prospect students one of the most important factors in decision-making. Simões and Soares (2010) found out that geographical proximity is the most important choice factor for a HEI in Portugal. Jepsen and Montgomery (2009) say that the distance is a highly statistically significant factor in deciding of non-traditional students (older students, working students) whether to enroll in community college, and in which school to choose. To attract these students the community college sometimes deviates from the state university model and prefer many scattered small schools to one giant school. According to Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides (2010), the choice of HEI and field of study is influenced by proximity of HEI to the place of students’ residence. Other practical considerations that may affect student choice are speed of application process, tuition fees, and scholarship opportunities and financial aid. For some prospects these considerations may be relevant when choosing and selecting a university with a practical viewpoint in mind. However, we need to point out that these considerations may have no influence when students are choosing a university based on quality and reputation of the HEI.

Social influencers such as family, friends, high school teachers and counsellors may have a considerable impact on HEI choice (Maringe 2006). The opinions of parents are strong contributors to the instrumental and utilitarian perception of the university (Lehman 2009). In Poland and in China, parents help to decide the future of their children and family opinion is the most influential factor when Polish students decide about their HEI (Sojkin et al. 2012; Lee and Morrish 2012). Ivy (2007) found out that college students of differing ethnic origin have different motivations for going to university. He states that the influence of the family was most important among Pakistani and African students. Whites were least likely to be influenced by their families, unlike Asian Pakistani and African college students who were strongly influenced by family to apply.

We also include the role of demographic and socioeconomic factors in our conceptual framework. In particular, we control for gender and parents' education as those variables are oftentimes included in HE studies (e.g., Menon 1998, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

Context

In this study, we compare the impact of marketing in HEI across three developed economies: Canada, France, and Sweden. The universities in this study are comparable in terms of their international orientation and emphasis on learning quality.

Canada is one of the four English-speaking countries (along with the USA, UK, and Australia) where the HE market is well established as a global phenomenon, and for which the extant literature provides evidence of marketization of universities (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006). Canada, thus, represents well the English-speaking countries and the high competition in HE in those countries. In Canada, there is no federal ministry of education; the provinces and territories are responsible for all levels of education including universities. Canadian universities generally receive the authority to grant degrees from provincial legislation, and are autonomous in academic matters.

France is one of the eight countries that have captured more than 70 % of the world's international students (Maringe and Foskett 2010). The university system in France includes 83 major state-funded public universities. The HE system in France is divided into Universities and

Grandes Ecoles. Universities in France are generally public and provide free education (only entering fee around 300 EUR is required) and no entrance exams are needed to be a university student.

The university system in Sweden includes 35 major state-funded universities that receive significant government funding, as well as 18 private educational institutions, which have their own private foundations and approval from government to provide HE (Ebert et al. 2015). The universities in Sweden are not governed by state or by project, but mainly *laissez-faire*. In this model, the state does not control universities in Sweden, but Academia, industry and state are separated and interact together (Ozols et al. 2012a, b). Universities in Sweden are supposed to take a more active, self-governing role, which in turn is believed to lead to increased efficiency, higher transparency, better student focus, and higher quality.

Sample

The unit of analysis comprises first and second-year university students enrolled in a business related program. Therefore, we analyze the impact of marketing from the perspective of university students. Students in the first two years of university have fresher memories of the process they experienced when choosing a university, which is in line with current HE research that is also based on data from current freshmen and sophomores (e.g., Menon 1998, 2004; Menon et al. 2007).

The analysis is based on data from three universities, one from each country under study. The programs students were enrolled in are comparable across the three HEI and are focused on management and commerce. For the purposes of this research, we use a data set comprising 548 responses and after accounting for incomplete entries, we have 451 complete responses from all universities (163 responses from the university in Canada, 212 from the university in France, and 76 responses from the university in Sweden).

In Canada, data come from a university in Alberta, founded in 1971 and granted the university status in 2009. The university under study evolved from community college to university (offering four-year baccalaureate programs). The data from France comes from a university that was founded in 1875 with the active support of the Catholic Church. Nowadays, the University is a major player of French HE system with 24,540 students, six faculties, 20 colleges and institutes. Data from Sweden comes from one of the largest business schools in terms of the

number of students. Their learning programs are characterized by high quality, an international profile, and close ties to the industry.

Operationalization of Variables

Table 2.2 provides information about the operationalization and specific measurements for each of the variables used. Some of the variables under analysis are constructed using multi-item measurement scales; therefore, we used the mean of all items or the result of exploratory factor analysis as the variable in the subsequent regression analyses (Ramani and Kumar 2008). We also estimated Cronbach's alpha to verify the reliability of the constructed variables.

Choice

Since the students in the sample have already chosen a university, we measure this variable using two items related to the perceived quality of the university as a choice factor. Quality is one of the critical factors of university and post-university success (e.g., Chapleo 2011; Chapman and Pyvis 2006); therefore capturing student choice based on quality is a good proxy of what the actual choice may be for prospect students. In particular, we ask for the level of agreement with choosing the university "because of the quality of programs" and "reputation/ranking."

Perceived Marketing Effectiveness

We measured this variable by asking students whether marketing in general and advertising in particular influenced their decision to choose the university. We also asked about how appealing and informative the HEI advertisements were.

Marketing Activities

We measure three marketing efforts: traditional advertising, relational marketing, and internet marketing, which were rated in terms of their importance in the decision to attend a university. Traditional advertising was measured using four items: radio ads, billboards, TV ads, and print ads. For relational marketing we used the following items: open house, career expo day, information session on campus, face to face interaction with alumni, and university visit to high school. In the case of internet marketing, we employed a single item related to internet, which is in line with Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007), Drolet and Morrison (2001), and Rossiter (2002, 2005, 2008) who suggest that the predictive validity of

Table 2.2 Operationalization of variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
Choice	Two items were used. I chose this university because of ^a – The quality of programs – This university reputation/ranking	Used the result of exploratory factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.5, explained variance = 0.72. Cronbach's alpha = 0.62
Perceived marketing effectiveness	Four items were used – This university's marketing efforts influenced my decision to apply ^a – This university's advertisements had an effect on me when choosing a university ^a – How appealing are this university's advertisements? ^b – How informative are this university's advertisements? ^b	Used the result of exploratory factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.67, explained variance = 0.50. Cronbach's alpha = 0.65
Traditional advertising	Four items were used ^c . How important were each of the following communication methods in your decision to attend a university? – Radio ads – Billboards ads – TV ads – Print ads	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.75
Relational marketing	Five items were used ^c . How important were each of the following communication methods in your decision to attend a university? – Open house – Career expo day – Information session on campus – Face to face interaction with alumni – University visit at your high school	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.65
Internet marketing	One item was used. How important were each of the following communication methods in your decision to attend a university? – Internet	Interval scale, from 1 not important to 5 very important.

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
Practical Considerations	Four items were used ^c . Rate how important the following factors were to you in evaluating a university/college to attend? – Distance from home – Scholarship opportunities/financial aid – Tuition fees – Speed of application process	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.66
Career prospects	Three items were used ^c . Rate how important the following factors were to you in evaluating a university/college to attend? – Desired program of study – Diversified choice of majors – Future career prospects	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.57
Quality of learning	Four items were used ^c . Rate how important the following factors were to you in evaluating a university/college to attend? – Class size – Quality of teachers – Learning environment – Access to professors and advisors	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.69
Extracurricular activities	Three items were used ^c . Rate how important the following factors were to you in evaluating a university/college to attend? – Extracurricular clubs and activities – Sports – Student social networking events	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.70
Competitive reputation	How would you rank the reputation of this university compared to each of the following? Five institutions were provided to students to make comparisons. Scale used was 1: much better to 5: much worse	We first reversed original variables to have 1: much worse to 5: much better. Then we summed scores given to each of the comparisons. The total score ranges from 5 to 25 points. We used the standardized value

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
Family	Three items were used ^c . How important were the following influencers in making your current university choice? – My parents/guardians recommendation – Family members other than parents – University attended by family member	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.60
Friends	Three items were used ^c . How important were the following influencers in making your current university choice? – Friends recommendation – University friends have graduated from and/or currently attending – Encouragement from work colleagues/boss	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.65
High school teachers/ counsellors	Two items were used ^c . How important were the following influencers in making your current university choice? – High school counsellors recommendation – High school teachers	Mean value. Cronbach's alpha = 0.73
Parent's education	What is the highest level of education of your mother/legal guardian?	Ordinal scale from 1 to 5: High school or less; diploma/certificate; bachelor; master; doctorate
Gender	Gender	0: male, 1: female

^aFrom 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"

^bFrom 1 "not appealing/informative" to 5 "very appealing/informative"

^cFrom 1 "not important" to 5 "very important"

single-item measures is comparable to that of multiple-item measures and encourage the use of single-item measures where appropriate.

Competitive Reputation

Students were asked to rate the reputation of the university they are currently enrolled in compared to each of other five HEI in the geographical area. We used a 5-point scale from 1 (much better) to 5 (much worse). In order to compute the measure of reputation, we reversed the scale and summed scores given to each of the pair comparisons; the score used ranged from 5 to 25 points. We introduced in our regression model, the standardized value of competitive reputation.

University Expectations

We included two variables. For career prospects, we employed three items focused on program of study, choice of majors, and future career prospects. For quality of learning we used four items: quality of teachers, class size, learning environment, and access to professors and advisors.

Extracurricular Activities

Three items were used to reflect sports, social networking events, and extracurricular clubs and activities.

Practical Considerations

The items here cover practical issues such as location, tuition, speed of application process, and scholarship opportunities / financial aid.

Influencers

The role of family (three items), friends (three items) as well as high school teachers and counsellors (two items) were considered.

Control variables -Parents' education and gender (0, male and 1, female) were used.

Statistical Method

We employed ordinary least square regressions with robust standard errors for all observations in our data set and for specific university-country of analysis. In order to provide a parsimonious test of the marketing impact, we specified three models. In the baseline model, we included the effect of university expectations, practical considerations, extracurricular activities,

competitive reputation, influencers, parents' education and gender on student choice. In the second model, in addition to the variables included in the baseline model, we included marketing activities. In the full model, we included perceived marketing effectiveness in addition to all the variables included previously.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix are presented in Table 2.3. From a bivariate correlation perspective, perceived marketing effectiveness, relational marketing, quality of learning, extracurricular activities, career prospects, competitive reputation, and parents' education are positively and significantly correlated with choice.

The Effect of Marketing Activities on Student Choice Across Developed Economies: Testing the Conceptual Model

The empirical results of the models are presented in Table 2.4 and are organized in terms of findings that include the data set comprising responses from all universities under study and findings based on responses for each university/country.

For the baseline choice model, the findings indicate that practical considerations (-0.24 , $p < 0.001$), quality of learning (0.289 , $p < 0.001$), extracurricular activities (0.15 , $p < 0.01$), competitive reputation (0.116 , $p < 0.05$), family (0.072 , $p < 0.10$, one-tailed test), gender (0.165 , $p < 0.10$), and parents' education (0.077 , $p < 0.10$) have significant effects on choice. In the second model, relational marketing (0.27 , $p < 0.001$) has a significant and positive effect on choice. In the full model, perceived marketing effectiveness (0.135 , $p < 0.01$) has also a significant effect on choice. Traditional advertising (-0.026 , $p > 0.10$) and internet marketing (0.042 , $p > 0.10$) do not have a significant effect on choice. Competitive reputation, quality of learning, and parents' education have consistent significant effects on choice across all models.

The R-square of the models improves with the inclusion of the marketing variables. R-square of baseline model is 0.126 and it increases to 0.176 when we include marketing activities in the model, which further increases to 0.19 when perceived marketing effectiveness is added into the model.

Table 2.3 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix ($n = 451$)

	Mean	s.d.	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
1. Choice	-0.039	1.012	-3.289	1.677	1															
2. Perceived marketing effectiveness	-0.014	0.991	-2.693	3.169	0.168***	1														
3. Traditional advertising	1.662	0.735	1	4.25	0.052	0.271***	1													
4. Relational marketing	2.418	0.885	1	4.8	0.25***	0.202***	0.441***	1												
5. Internet marketing	3.692	1.235	1	5	0.006	0.081	0.112*	0.064	1											
6. Practical considerations	2.791	0.926	1	5	-0.075	0.106*	0.363***	0.191***	0.032	1										
7. Quality of learning	3.713	0.801	1	5	0.205***	0.057	0.12*	0.143**	-0.042	0.43***	1									
8. Extracurricular activities	2.689	0.977	1	5	0.127**	0.109*	0.234***	0.322***	0.055	0.28***	0.158***	1								
9. Career prospects	4.047	0.769	1	5	0.098*	0.129**	0.125**	0.118*	0.16***	0.295***	0.386***	0.133**	1							
10. Competitive reputation	-0.034	1.006	-3.235	1.746	0.162***	0.042	-0.045	-0.024	-0.072	0.098*	0.347***	-0.028	0.138**	1						
11. Family	2.405	0.984	1	5	0.077	0.027	0.186***	0.172***	-0.078†	0.175***	0.241***	0.043	0.041	0.052	1					
12. Friends	2.07	0.901	1	5	-0.054	0.131**	0.238***	0.029	0.099*	0.228***	0.096*	0.042	0.079†	0.036	0.356***	1				
13. High school teachers/counsellors	2.099	1.036	1	5	0.015	0.138**	0.273***	0.317***	0.002	0.234***	0.196***	0.201***	0.086†	0.072	0.274***	0.38***	1			
14. Gender	0.585	0.493	0	1	0.04	0.053	0.071	0.124**	0.143**	-0.049	-0.132**	-0.023	0.032	-0.128**	-0.079†	-0.046	0.04	1		
15. Parents' education	2.497	1.11	1	5	0.138**	0.047	0.021	0.074	-0.111*	-0.124**	-0.072	0.147**	-0.123**	0.062	0.055	-0.047	-0.02	0.05	1	

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.10$

Table 2.4 Impact of marketing on student choice across developed economies

Independent variables	All universities			University in Canada			University in France			University in Sweden		
	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)
Perceived marketing effectiveness			0.135** (0.132)			0.324** (0.304)			0.011 (0.013)			0.188† (0.168)
Traditional advertising		-0.026 (-0.019)		0.049 (0.039)		-0.072 (-0.057)		-0.07 (-0.053)			-0.213 (-0.145)	
Relational marketing		0.27*** (0.238)	0.261*** (0.229)	0.137 (0.115)	0.103 (0.085)	0.159† (0.141)	0.153† (0.136)	0.188 (0.204)	0.188 (0.195)	0.188 (0.204)	0.179 (0.195)	0.179 (0.195)
Internet marketing		0.042 (0.051)	0.034 (0.041)	0.037 (0.045)	0.013 (0.015)	0.008 (0.011)	0.009 (0.013)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)	0.004 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)
Practical considerations	-0.24*** (-0.219)	-0.25*** (-0.228)	-0.25*** (-0.228)	-0.039 (-0.033)	-0.062 (-0.052)	-0.076 (-0.065)	-0.232*** (-0.227)	-0.257*** (-0.251)	-0.258*** (-0.254)	-0.461*** (-0.45)	-0.487*** (-0.475)	-0.449*** (-0.438)
Quality of learning	0.289*** (0.226)	0.282*** (0.223)	0.287*** (0.227)	0.594*** (0.331)	0.553*** (0.313)	0.45** (0.256)	0.258* (0.187)	0.259* (0.188)	0.277* (0.202)	0.271† (0.241)	0.353† (0.313)	0.357† (0.317)
Extracurricular activities	0.15** (0.144)	0.08† (0.085)	0.08† (0.077)	0.075 (0.061)	0.036 (0.03)	0.008 (0.007)	0.034 (0.038)	0.032 (0.036)	0.027 (0.031)	-0.053 (-0.053)	-0.046 (-0.046)	-0.077 (-0.077)
Career prospects	0.061 (0.046)	0.048 (0.036)	0.028 (0.022)	0.011 (0.007)	0.02 (0.014)	0.01 (0.007)	0.116† (0.106)	0.10 (0.091)	0.091 (0.084)	0.024 (0.018)	-0.039 (-0.029)	0.006 (0.004)
Competitive reputation	0.116* (0.114)	0.12* (0.119)	0.111* (0.11)	0.133† (0.12)	0.135† (0.125)	0.126† (0.117)	0.173* (0.151)	0.172* (0.148)	0.163* (0.142)	0.366*** (0.334)	0.333** (0.304)	0.232† (0.212)
Family	0.072† (0.071)	0.058 (0.057)	0.053 (0.052)	0.067 (0.063)	0.08 (0.075)	0.068 (0.063)	0.022 (0.024)	0.012 (0.013)	-0.01 (-0.011)	0.166† (0.165)	0.105 (0.104)	0.144 (0.143)
Friends	-0.049 (-0.044)	-0.028 (-0.025)	-0.039 (-0.035)	0.062 (0.051)	0.009 (0.008)	0.076 (0.064)	0.064 (0.045)	0.03 (0.021)	0.045 (0.03)	0.164† (0.191)	0.21† (0.243)	0.185† (0.214)
High school teachers/counsellors	-0.019 (-0.02)	-0.075† (-0.077)	-0.082† (-0.084)	0.016 (0.015)	-0.027 (-0.027)	-0.038 (-0.038)	-0.052 (-0.06)	-0.079 (-0.091)	-0.091 (-0.106)	0.041 (0.044)	0.01 (0.011)	-0.019 (-0.019)
Gender	0.165† (0.08)	0.085 (0.041)	0.075 (0.036)	0.042 (0.019)	-0.018 (-0.008)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.102 (-0.058)	-0.123 (-0.07)	-0.163† (-0.092)	0.434† (0.19)	0.425† (0.186)	0.456† (0.199)

(continued)

Table 2.4 (continued)

Independent variables	All universities			University in Canada			University in France			University in Sweden		
	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)	Baseline choice model (Beta)	Choice model (Beta)	Full choice model (Beta)
Parents' education	0.077† (0.084)	0.084† (0.092)	0.076† (0.084)	0.09 (0.083)	0.12 (0.112)	0.05 (0.047)	-0.01 (-0.013)	-0.000 (-0.000)	-0.013 (-0.017)	0.084 (0.093)	0.118 (0.13)	0.121 (0.134)
Constant	-1.403*** 465	-1.763*** 457	-1.522*** 451	-3.52*** 170	-3.579*** 165	-2.608*** 163	-5.44 219	-861† 216	-842† 212	-988 76	-1.038 76	-1.298 76
RMSE	0.963 0.126***	0.931 0.176***	0.925 0.19***	1.058 0.161***	1.041 0.186*	1.005 0.241***	0.824 0.123***	0.821 0.146***	0.818 0.155***	0.727 0.392***	0.734 0.409***	0.729 0.425***

Standardized coefficients are between parentheses. Robust standard errors employed. RMSE is the acronym for root mean square error; this index ranges from 0 to infinity, where 0 corresponds to the best model

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$

^aOne-tailed test

Country-Specific Findings: Canada, France, and Sweden

In the Canadian sample, of all the marketing efforts studied, none of them has a significant effect on choice. Perceived marketing effectiveness (0.324, $p < 0.05$) however has a significant effect on choice. Quality of learning (0.45, $p < 0.05$) and competitive reputation (0.126, $p < 0.10$, one-tailed test) have also a significant effect on the decision to choose a university. We performed an additional analysis to find which variables affect perceived marketing effectiveness since this variable shows a significant effect on choice. Our results reveal that traditional advertising (0.437, $p < 0.001$), quality of learning (0.309, $p < 0.05$), and parents' education (0.245, $p < 0.01$) have a significant effect on perceived marketing effectiveness in the Canadian sample. Table 2.5 provides estimates for this additional analysis.

In the sample from France, relational marketing (0.159, $p < 0.10$) has a significant effect on choice. Neither traditional advertising nor internet marketing have significant effects on choice. Practical considerations (-0.258 , $p < 0.001$) and quality of learning (0.277, $p < 0.001$) significantly affect choice. Competitive reputation (0.163, $p < 0.05$) also has an effect on choice. Career prospects (0.116, $p < 0.10$, one-tailed test) is significant only in the baseline model.

In the case of the university in Sweden, practical considerations (-0.449 , $p < 0.01$) and quality of learning (0.357, $p < 0.10$) have a significant effect on choice. Competitive reputation (0.232, $p < 0.10$, one-tailed test) also has a significant effect on choice. Friends (0.185, $p < 0.10$) and gender (0.456, $p < 0.10$) have also significant effects on students' choice. Family (0.166, $p < 0.10$, one-tailed test) has a significant effect on choice only in the baseline model.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the current study, we set out to examine and compare influences on students' university choice across three developed markets with a special emphasis on the role of marketing activities. Our results present interesting implications for HE administrators. Despite a spike in competition and an increase in marketing activities for many universities, extant literature has been largely silent on what the effect of marketing activities is on students' university choice. The findings from our study point to relational marketing activities, such as face-to-face meetings and open

Table 2.5 Additional analysis for the university in Canada.

<i>University in Canada</i>	
<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Perceived marketing effectiveness (Beta)</i>
Traditional advertising	0.437*** (0.371)
Relational marketing	0.078 (0.069)
Internet marketing	0.06 (0.076)
Practical considerations	0.031 (0.028)
Quality of learning	0.309* (0.187)
Extracurricular activities	0.021 (0.018)
Career prospects	0.019 (0.014)
Competitive reputation	0.018 (0.018)
Family	-0.006 (0.006)
Friends	-0.2* (-0.179)
High school teachers/counsellors	0.04 (0.041)
Gender	0.012 (0.006)
Parents' education	0.245** (0.246)
Constant	-2.718***
N	163
RMSE	0.899
R ²	0.308***

Standardized coefficients are between parentheses. Robust standard errors employed. RMSE is the acronym for root mean square error; this index ranges from 0 to infinity, where 0 corresponds to the best model

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$

^aOne-tailed test

house events, as the only significant marketing variable affecting choice. Another important influence on choice is competitive reputation of the university. This is a variable that consistently remains significant for all countries under analysis, along with quality of learning. University administrators are therefore advised to direct more efforts into enhancing and communicating the image of the HE institution as a reputable university offering high-quality learning environment.

Our findings from the three countries under analysis present nuanced understanding about the relative importance of different variables in different contexts and suggest that we cannot generalize findings from one developed country to another. It is therefore important to take into consideration the specificities of the context. From the marketing variables, relational marketing was more important in France, while perceived marketing effectiveness had a highly significant impact on choice in Canada. Practical considerations such as location and speed of application process had a significant negative effect in France and Sweden, probably reflecting the relatively higher importance of university reputation in those countries.

As mentioned earlier, in this study perceived marketing effectiveness shows a significant effect only in the sample from Canada. Perceived marketing effectiveness indicates the subjective evaluation of the impact of marketing activities in the decision to choose a university. The fact that perceived marketing effectiveness was significant in Canada is a signal of the relevance of HE marketing in some developed economies, particularly in English-speaking countries, where marketing efforts to attract students have been in use for a long time. In other developed economies, such as France and Sweden, perceived marketing effectiveness was not found significant. A potential explanation for this lack of significance may be related to the level of participation in marketing efforts, and more specifically traditional marketing communications. In countries such as France and Sweden, HEIs may not be as engaged in marketing efforts as HEIs from English-speaking developed economies. Future studies need to look at differences within developed economies with a more nuanced approach given that studying HEIs from developed economies as one group can provide misleading results.

From the results of perceived marketing effectiveness in the sample from Canada, it seems that there is a group of students who chooses a HEI based partly on the subjective perception of the effectiveness of marketing, among other aspects. In our additional analysis, traditional advertising, quality of learning, and parents' education showed a significant impact on perceived marketing effectiveness. Interestingly, traditional advertising

and parents' education do not have direct effect on student choice but only indirect effects through perceived marketing effectiveness. From these findings, HEI can focus on traditional marketing communications to deliver a message of quality of learning.

In our study, practical considerations show a negative impact on student choice. This is likely because our "choice" variable was measured with reference to quality and reputation, that is, implicit in the measurement is the assumption that prospect students will take into account the perceived reputation of the HEI. Therefore, the negative sign of practical considerations on university choice needs to be interpreted with caution. Other research has found that practical considerations variables, such as location of the HEI, are important when choosing a university (Simões and Soares 2010; Jepsen and Montgomery 2009). Different segments of the prospect students will have different criteria when choosing a university, and for some such considerations may have a positive impact.

Surprisingly, internet did not have a significant effect on student choice. This finding is interesting given that other research has found that internet is the most often used information source by prospect students (Sojkin et al. 2012). One explanation for our finding is that information on the internet and online communication with prospect students is expected and is becoming the norm, and thus does not contribute differentially to forming student choice.

The variables most strongly and consistently associated with university choice in our study are quality of learning and competitive reputation. It is well known from the services marketing literature that for credence services, where the quality of the outcome cannot be evaluated beforehand, the organization's reputation is essential as it helps in reducing the inherent uncertainty about future performance (Jha et al. 2013). In this sense, our findings join others (Natale and Doran 2012) who have critiqued the increasing emphasis on marketing communications at the expense of focus on the quality of the educational experience. Our study points to the need to maintain high-quality learning environment and reputation of the university and focus marketing efforts on communicating this image to prospect students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH LINES

It is worth noting that our study is a cross-country comparison of influences on university choice within the respective national markets; as such the results cannot be applied directly to international marketing activities

of those universities. Future research can assess the effect of international marketing activities/budgets designed to attract international students to the universities under study. Such a work would provide valuable insights to university administrators, as many developed countries have embarked on a global competition for international students and studies on success factors for international marketing strategies are scarce (e.g., Naidoo and Wu 2011).

In addition, in this study we use data from one university in each country. Future research can broaden the scope and compare multiple universities in each country to improve generalizability of results. This study also uses survey data to measure the effectiveness of marketing activities. Future research can use dollar amount of investment in marketing activities to assess the impact of marketing activities. The current research focuses on three developed countries—Canada, France and Sweden. An avenue for future studies is to include more developed countries in the analysis and provide more insights about the generalizability of the impact of marketing in HE in the developed world.

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