

A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF EVENT MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION WITHIN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the role of marketing events in the higher education area in reference of the expanding significance of event marketing. This study was carried out in Tier 2 and 3 cities of Western India. The sample size taken was a group of 200 students who are studying in various Universities, in different discipline, from the tier 2 and tier 3 cities of western India. Simple random sampling technique was applied and primary data collection was done through a structured questionnaire. The influence of Event marketing on Higher education was analysed through application of linear regression. It was found that Event marketing has a significant effect on the selection of educational institutions for higher education made by students. This implies that existing institutions and those, which may be opening in future may use Event marketing techniques to lure students and to enhance their revenue. Similar studies may be applied to other parts of India and elsewhere in the world.

Keywords: event marketing; higher education; linear regression; marketing

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, there have been significant changes in higher education's standing, governance, organisation, and policy in recent years. Most nations are experiencing socio environmental changes like privatisation, diversity, decentralisation, internationalisation, and heightened competitiveness in higher education. These modifications affect how higher education institutions function in the present and are thought to be the main causes behind the marketization of higher education (Maringe, 2006)

The goal of the current study is to discuss the scope of the event marketing principles that can be used in higher education. It does so by starting with the fundamental premises of application of marketing, which is that it seeks to meet consumer requirements. The study begins by briefly examining some of the key marketing concepts and strategies as they were created for the commercial sector and then moves on to a consideration of how they may be used in higher education.

This section will provide a brief introduction of few important general marketing methods and concepts in order to enable a more thorough analysis of how various event marketing concepts relate to the higher education sector.

Marketing executives and advertisers have started to rethink established, mass media-based strategies of influencing customers. For influencing customers and boosting brand effect, they

are becoming more and more interested in alternate brand touchpoints. Event marketing has emerged as one of those options.

Although event marketing is a quite recent concept that first appeared in the 1980s, its roots may be traced back more than a century to philanthropy and sponsorship (Taylor, Cunningham & Reeder 1993). Formally, it is described as "the technique of advancing the objectives of an organisation and its five brands by connecting the organisation with a certain activity" (Shimp 1993, p. 8). Such an activity may be owned by the firm, or it may be owned by a third party and supported by the company through funding schemes [3] (Kotler & Armstrong 2010, p. 505). In contrast to the first scenario, when the firm actually arranges the event, in the second scenario, the firm offers financial or in-kind support to a 3rd party in exchange for raising awareness of the event. Various types of events can be held, such as incentive/reward programs, conferences, open days, product launches, publicity events, product sampling, so-called "created" events, press conferences, road shows, contests, expositions, charity fundraisers, corporate recreation, trade shows, and product attractions (Wood 2009). Recently, new types of events have emerged under the heading of "unconventional communication," like pop-up shops and street events (Brioschi & Uslenghi 2009). For example, the "Diesel Black Friday" event was held in numerous cities in Italy, when Diesel actors dressed as bank executives and bank directors distributed "Diesel Black Money" in the form of a coupon good for 30% off at Diesel stores.

With an event in the U.K., that included cricket competitions, DJ music, grills, drinks, and the special appearance of game icons, Vodafone brought cricket to the streets. Due to media coverage and word-of-mouth processes, these new event formats aim to reach a wide audience while costing less than advertising. Obviously, the more innovative and unique an event is, the more probable it is that a larger audience will share it (Uslenghi & Brioschi 2009; Rinallo 2011).

In general, event promotion can assist businesses in accomplishing their corporate goals (such as raising public recognition, enhancing their reputation, and getting involved in the community), marketing goals (such as achieving target markets and increasing sales), media goals (such as creating visibility, generating positive publicity, and countering negative publicity, and enhancing advertising campaigns), as well as individual goals (such as management interest) (Pope 1998). How to evaluate the success of event marketing is still up for debate (Gupta 2003; Sneath, Finney & Close 2005; Martensen et al 2007). Study on this subject is limited and inconsistent, particularly in comparison to advertising, since the findings are contradictory (Gupta 2003). Experts in MARCOM are now researching event marketing in the context of the persuasion strategy and its ability to increase brand recognition. (Sneath, Finney & Close 2005; Martensen et al. 2007)

Event marketing is one alternate type of communication that has gained more popularity and is expanding (Schmitt, Rogers & Vrotsos 2003; Miller & Washington 2012). According to Miller & Washington (2012), the United States spends \$37 billion on event marketing each year. Even in a slowly improving economy, a recent survey predicts that event marketing

expenditure would increase by 7.8% in 2012 after expanding by 3.6 in 2011. (Mosaic Experiential Marketing & Event Marketing institute2012).

Despite the popularity of event marketing and ongoing efforts to assess its effectiveness (e.g., Martensen et al. 2007, Wood 2009), many organizations remain skeptical about the effectiveness of events in influencing marketing results and, more importantly, how they may do so. According to Gupta (2003, p. 119), "even though less has been examined regarding its capacity to express a more complex, specialized statement or contribute to other components of brand equity," event marketing has been seen as helpful in boosting awareness for corporate images.

Event marketing is a subfield of marketing that focuses on creating, planning, and executing events to promote a product, service, or brand. The academic study of event marketing covers a wide range of areas, including lifestyle marketing, interactive marketing, public relations, relationship marketing, and marketing communications. These areas are studied in order to create and execute successful events that will drive the business forward and achieve their marketing goals. Indeed, the evolution of event marketing was covered by Schreiber and Lenson in their practitioner-focused work on lifestyle and event marketing from 1994. This did not, however, appear to inspire others to carry out research or publish in the area. The paucity of academic research in the disciplines of experiential and event marketing, according to McCole (2004), is a sign of the divide between academia and business. McCole (2004) urges for a stronger alignment of marketing theory with practise in these fields.

The purposes of this study is to explore the influence of event marketing strategies on students' decision to select the higher education institution, who are conducting such events.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to acquire a competitive edge, several higher education institutions are now applying event marketing theories and approaches that have proven successful in industry (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Temple & Shattock, 2007).

The concept of event marketing has been practiced for more than a century (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). Companies hold events to foster unique and distinctive interactions with their target audiences. Participating in the event allows customers to interact directly with the businesses or brands. Event marketing, according to Behrer and Larsson (1998), is a commitment to organise communication surrounding sponsored events. Additionally, an event is a form of activity that assembles participants in location and time to experience a produced atmosphere (Karlsson and Palmer, 2007). Event marketing is "The sponsorship and branding of a specific event such as a workshop, seminar, exposition, trade fair, artistic presentations, business anniversaries and similar such events," as per Kotler and Keller (2009:46). Additionally, according to Nufer and Bühler (2015), event marketing is an experience-related, interactive marketing strategy that enables businesses to communicate with their target audience through specially organised events. On the other hand, businesses have discovered

the value of interacting with customers through events that could help them retain their present clients and attract new ones (Yu et al., 2015).

The effectiveness of event marketing has been assessed in a variety of ways, including discounts, free samples, sales promotions, charity alliances, enjoyable events, or sponsorships that give brand or company customers the impression that they are not only watching an advertisement but also winning favour (Drengner et al., 2008).

It is important to highlight the fact that all activities give customers with experiences and are effective sense-drivers in terms of raising value. Because of these positive and distinctive experiences, customers can interact with the business, the product, the brand, etc (Martensen et al., 2007).

Events such as community events, hallmark events, fairs and festivals, expositions, tourism, meetings and conferences, retail events and athletic events are included in the various areas of event marketing (Karlsson and Palmer, 2007). Meetings and conferences are described by Goldblatt (1998) as "mainly instructional seminars that offer networking opportunities to both organisation members and corporate members."

The features of event marketing are as follows (Tafesse, 2016):

- 1) High audience involvement
- 2) Novelty
- 3) Experimental richness
- 4) Transiency

Based on the aforementioned ~~traits~~ factors, it can be argued that event marketing activities are a crucial tool for establishing connections and fostering memorable experiences with participants. According to Daniel et al. (2012), event marketing initiatives should include the following characteristics:

- Events must be relevant and interactive. - Participants at the events should receive some promotional freebies.
- The plan must be adaptable. - Concentrated usage of communication channels is recommended. Finally, the organisation should stress the event's facilities (accessibility, free parking area, the menu etc).

Events are thought to be a useful point of contact for stakeholders (such students) and higher education institutions, who are utilizing the latter to achieve their marketing goals (Khanna et al., 2014)

However, the competition started to get more intense as a result of the growing impact of privately held higher education institutes and a worldwide community of institutions (Palmer et al., 2016). Higher education institutions aspire to rely less on government funding and are exposed to a wide range of additional influencing variables (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009). As a result, higher education institutes have been obliged to create new communication strategies

in order to approach interesting groups of stakeholders, such as future students (Thuy and Thao, 2016; Bowden and Wood, 2011). The transition in the higher education industry is symbolised by the fact that HEIs are now compelled to use a professional approach in their marketing campaigns and that students are now merely seen as "customers" (Tavares and Cardoso, 2013).

However, HEIs have only recently realised that events are frequently seen as a valuable point of interaction with students in order to strengthen their relationship with the institution (Shields and Peruta, 2018).

According to a study by Lestiana et al. (2020) on the role of event marketing and image of university on students' decisions to attend Sumbawa University of Technology, students' decisions to pursue higher education were positively impacted by the perception of institutions and marketing events.

While some studies have explored the impact of marketing on higher educational institutions, but only a few studies were found relating Event Marketing to educational institutions. This along with region of study, i.e. Western India, makes this study significant.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

I. Region, Population and Sample Research

The regional scope of this study was Tier 2 and 3 cities in western India. The sample size was 200 students who have been pursuing higher education from affiliated universities in the western India. The sample selection was done through simple random sampling.

II. Variables of Study and Hypothesis Formulation

Event Marketing

Fitri (2018) define event marketing as a sort of advertising in which a business or brand is associated with an occasion or where themed activities are used to both engage potential customers and advertise goods or services. According to Sukoso (2014), event marketing is a sort of advertising that is used to draw attention and is intended to leave a lasting impact on customers. Fitri (2018) lists the following as the event marketing measuring dimensions:

- 1) Involvement: An involvement of visitors who visit the event is only limited to the audience of emotions, namely the formation of emotions and positive impressions on visitors to the event that is held.
- 2) Attitude: The event's organiser expects that attendees would have a positive mindset and be enthusiastic about attending.

Student Decisions

The decision, according to Hanum & Hidayat (2017), is the choice between one course of action and two or more others. Consumer decisions relate to how people, groups, or organisations select, acquire, use, and evaluate products or services, concepts, or experiences to meet their requirements and satisfy their aspirations (Lestari, 2015). Consumer decisions are

made over time, going through the same stages that every decision-maker does. The process of evaluating and choosing among many options while keeping in mind certain interests and arriving at a desirable option is referred to as decision-making. Students have given thought to both the positive and negative effects that continuing their study at the chosen university will have on them in the future.

This choice is a result of a problem-solving process that has both immediate and long-term effects on their life. Purchase decisions cannot be separated from the characteristics of the consumer (consumer behaviour), and as a result, every consumer has distinct buying habits. The indicators employed in this study (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016) are:

- a. Brand selection
- b. Product Selection
- c. Payment Method
- d. Time About Purchased.
- e. Payment Method

Formation of Hypothesis: The Influence of Event Marketing on Student Decisions to higher education in area of study.

According to Putri et al, (2016) identifying the target market and outlining the goals of the event are the first steps in effective event marketing. This gives customers an engaging experience. Researchers are drawn to studying event marketing because it is important as a strategy and a component of marketing communication. Event marketing can keep audiences engaged by presenting marketing messages in various attention-grabbing formats. According to research by (Mujahadah & Suryawardani, 2018), event marketing significantly affects consumers' decisions on which products to buy. In light of prior theories and research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Ho: Event Marketing has no significant effect on the Student Decision to join Higher Education in Tier 2 and 3 cities of western India

III. Data Analysis Technique: Validity and reliability testing are conducted prior to the questionnaire being made available to the students. A traditional assumption test comprised of a normality test and a heteroscedasticity test was performed following the collection of the data. The simple linear regression and hypothesis test will be conducted after the conventional assumption test has been passed

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondents in this study were active students of the Class of 2022. A questionnaire distributed consists of multiple items measuring the constructs of Event Marketing and Students' decision to join higher education in area of scope of study. The students' sample were from following disciplines:

Subjects	Count
Economics	30
Computer Science	45
Agriculture	25
Psychology	23
Biotechnology	17
Engineering	28
Financial Markets	32

Data was checked for Normality and Homogeneity using data analysis tool and Chi-square test formula in excel. Linear regression was performed to find out the influence of event marketing on student's decision to choose the higher education.

Correlation Matrix

	EM	SD
EM	1	0.6
SD	0.6	1

*EM-Event Marketing, SD-Students' Decision

Regression Output

Residuals

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-7.7007	-1.7647	-0.0127	1.6712	11.4730

Coefficients

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	10.24626	0.9463	18.524	< 2e-16 ***
EM	0.341204	0.04863	3.06	6.25e-05 ***

Signif. Codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 3.029 on 198 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.36077, Adjusted R-squared: 0.3575

F-statistic: 25.94 on 1 and 198 DF, p-value: 8.248e-05

An indicator of how well the model fits the actual data is the R-squared value. It appears as a percentage of variance. The linearity of the relationship between our predictor variable (speed) and our response or target variable is measured by the R square.

Standard Error. It is another goodness-of-fit measure that shows the precision of your regression analysis - the smaller the number, the more certain you can be about your regression equation.

The Significance F value gives an idea of how reliable (statistically significant) the model is. If Significance F (p value for F-statistic) is less than 0.05 (5%), which is true in our case, this means the model arrived at is statistically significant.

The regression equation with above output can be written as follows.

$$SD = 0.341204 * EM + 10.24626$$

The above analysis leads to rejection of Null Hypothesis (p value of F is less than 0.05) and hence indicates that there is a significant impact of Event Marketing (EM) on Student Decision to join higher education (SD).

CONCLUSION

According to research on marketing events and its influence on choice of educational institute taken by students, the following can be ascertained:

Event marketing influences students' decisions to pursue higher education in a good and important way. In other words, prospective students are more likely to pick higher education to pursue their studies if marketing events are held more frequently and better by educational institutions. These institutions have been successful in planning marketing events that will have an impact on students' decisions to attend these schools and will give influence and an impact to every group that participate in the event.

Implications

The theoretical ramifications of this study demonstrate the use of theories that account for the impact of marketing activities on students' decision to enrol in a certain institution. Additionally offering empirical backing, the findings of this study have the potential to enhance those of earlier investigations. The practical ramifications of this study can inform educational institutions on the value of marketing events in attracting more new students. It is anticipated that educational institutions that will operate in the future will be able to uphold and enhance their positive public perception through the holding of events that will draw the community's attention, particularly future students.

Future Scope of Study

A similar study can be conducted in other parts of country as well. More educational institutions, covering wide courses may be covered and the results can be matched with current study. Impact of event marketing can be reviewed while accounting for other types of marketing techniques as well.

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