

## THE IMPACT OF PROMOTION IN THE SELECTION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KOSOVO

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this research is to find out the main promotional significant factors influencing students' decisions in choosing private institutions of higher education.*

*Healthy student enrollment is very crucial for each educational institution. There exist an inseparable connection between the university image and the successes of its students. A positive university image is what attract students and retain high-quality staff that can improve further the university success. Therefore, by identifying factors that strongly influence the decision of the students to determine the institution they will be studying, it will strongly help universities to strengthen their promotional communication with the aim to inform or convince the target audiences of the relative merits of a product, service or brand. In this way, educational institutions aim to harmonize requirements with regard to supply and implement necessary strategies with the goal to achieve the desired results.*

*This research will identify the relationship between student decision process and promotional activities of private higher education institutions. The primary research data will be collected through a structured questionnaire that will be used for analysis purposes. Therefore, the study tries to find out the most important factors that have an impact and influences students' decision.*

**Key words:** *Attracting New Students; Higher Education Institutions, Marketing Evolution; Promotion; Quality of Services*

**JEL Classification:** M31; D83; I23

### I. INTRODUCTION

For decades, universities have begun to apply “promotion” in their activities, a concept that has made universities recruit a special art. Higher education universities in Kosovo are very armed with a series of technological expansions, social media and good old-fashioned modification - as a brilliant marketing package (Beka & Ciani, 2015). Of course, marketing strategies, like any other field knocking on the door of development have changed enough recently. If in the last thirty years universities are enrolling students based on reputation and word of mouth, this is not enough today. The world is moving too fast and the changes that are occurring in the education global market, obliges universities to strengthen their marketing plans, directions, strategies, advance education settings, hire the best professors, implement innovations and the most advanced technological and study programs (Radu, 2016). In this line, Mihaela (2016) states that there exist more than 20.000 universities across the world and competition between higher education institutions become intense each year. The university focus is not being to recruit as much students as they can, but to recruit the best talented students. In order to survive from this aggressive rivalry, each university has a chance to win these battles. This chance is called marketing (Radu, 2016).

Universities nowadays deliver consistent, clear and authentic messages to their future students after a good analysis and assessment of their potential. However, before universities start building a message and sharing it with the targeted audiences, they firstly should find their strengths and emphasize them. By identifying the strengths, they undertake efforts to create the right message and promote it to the right audience (The Science and Design of Educational Assessment, 2001).

Various factors are part of a student's decision-making process such as programs and scholarships offered, financial aid, parental thoughts and desires, proximity to home, campus environment and so on. Furthermore, students use different sources of information about the institution they are interested for. Family members, friends, university websites, college brochures, campus visits and other resources may all influence the choice a student makes (Kinzie et al., 2004, p. 36). Such knowledge helps universities in understanding their population and at the same time provide them easily with possible marketing strategies, which may attract new potential qualified students.

Thus, each factor carries a different priority for students in making their college choice.

### 1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Marketing is increasingly being regarded as a “critical mission” process in higher education institutions and worthy of significant investment. Such statement comes because of the implementation of marketing mix (4P) on educational institutions activities with greater emphasis on interactivity and social networking. Therefore, the objectives of this research paper are to:

- Identify the level of promotion usage in private higher education institutions in Kosovo.
- Identify positive and negative advantages when implementing promotion in university activities.
- Provide recommendations to private higher education institutions in Kosovo; how to overcome the challenges and minimize deficiencies based on the results of the research.

### 1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

The research project will try to give answers to the following research questions:

1. Which types of promotion are mostly used in private higher education institutions in Kosovo?
2. How do these promotional elements (mix) influence the choice of selecting the university to study?
3. What should private higher education institutions in Kosovo undertake to be more successful in developing and expanding the promotion?

In addition, as the hypotheses that this paper will test will be:

**H1:** Application of promotional strategies positively influence the decision of the students to determine the institution they will be studying.

**H2:** Promotional elements (mix) affect the attractiveness of students to study and select higher education institutions.

**H3:** Promotional activities differentiate and are used depending on the nature and interest of the institutions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is the main critical component of the human development by providing advanced skills, which are essential for every labor market. Considering this fact, students' choice and decision making in higher education has gained superior importance since higher education has become market-oriented and very competitive (Tian et al., 2009). According to Shazi and Aqila (2015), education is a continuous process that always has been changing as per the needs of society. That is why such unpredictable, diverse and dynamic environments make the student decision making process even more complex. Through high education, individuals advance and expand even more their knowledge and skills and express their thoughts clearly by increasing their understanding of the world and community. Additionally, despite the university choice, students take a very significant care when selecting courses too because during their study years one's future career is being built. While making such decisions, individuals evaluate several possible alternatives offered by the market (Gati and Tal, 2008).

Faced with an unavoidable harshly competition in the market, universities are forced to find out the more competitive promotional strategies in order to attract new applicants. To be successfully, high education institutions recognize the needs & wants of their targeted audience (students) and deliver the desired satisfactions better than competitors (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). That is why considering such circumstances; universities must seek some new alternatives to differentiate themselves from opponent institutions. It is more than important to find out what really attracts students and ensure that students' expectations are meet after they enroll. University activities such as brand management and an operative strategic planning nowadays entail more than traditional promotion. By presenting and managing a specific and clear brand message, universities experience a competitive environment in recruiting new applicants and building loyalty to its academic and administrative staff, alumni, students and parents (Shah, 2010). In this way, universities are able to provide effectively those qualifications, which satisfy students' needs by developing the right programs with the right price policies (Ivy, 2008). In the programs offered, universities also consider and give a relevant importance to four basic marketing components (four Ps of marketing). This positioning model is used to further improve universities actions as academic services (product), tuition and financial aid (price), marketing and communication (promotion) and delivery system of academic services (place).

Higher Education System in Kosovo functions through public and private higher education institutions (colleges, institutes, professional schools and academia). The only institutions that are functional and free to exercise their activities on the market are only the accredited institutions that offer study programs leading to a title or diploma (Baliqi, 2010). Most of high private educational institutions in Kosovo have created special and safe environments with special campuses, with a large number of classrooms for lectures, amphitheatres in the classroom portions, and possessing ample space of international models, wealthy libraries with books of all different fields, laboratories with necessary equipment and computer cabinets. Facing such competitive world,

high education institutions are investing much more time and money in their promotional activities. By focusing on students' interests and needs, universities use several promotional techniques in order to promote themselves and communicate with their target audience (Williams, 2010). With the aim to recruit new applicants and make aware the population of what institution offers to that competitive market, universities use online and offline channels. Some of offline channels used are television ads, newspapers and magazine advertisements. While the most used online channels types are search engine optimization, SEO, email, video marketing, blogging, social media, network marketing and internet ad. The selection of channels for interpreting the message to the audience should be done in a very careful manner since it plays a key role to the recipients of the message (Hussung, 2016). However, the main weight falls on the message and its formulation. The message should be close to the core values, brand, reputation, university history, and of course positioning to make a difference. The combination of these elements can lead to recruit more students that are talented and develop further the performance of the university activities.

University selection by students is a part of "consumer behavior" which clearly identifies how individuals or groups choose. According to Kotler and Fox, 2009, students choose university based on needs and motives, information gathering, assessment of alternatives, decision-making and evaluation after selection (Principles of Marketing, 2009). Students seek to select the best university, which maximally satisfy and fulfill their needs and wants. In order to get the necessary data they need, students seek different sources of information. Kotler, 2008, classified sources of information as personal sources (family, friends, and teachers) and non-personal sources (advertisements, prospects, and mass media). After receiving the necessary data, students evaluate current alternatives in the market. The process of evaluating alternatives includes decreasing the choice until one or two remain. Audience evaluates the potential university based on a number of attributes such as programs, cost, equipment, processes, academic and administrative staff and location. In addition, students complete the whole process of decision making by choosing the desired university.

Finally yet importantly, educational institution should understand the main promotional factors, which affect deeply the student's decision-making process when making a university selection because each factor carries a different priority for students in making their college choice. Such understandability help universities to implement attractive marketing strategies, which may recruit new potential qualified students.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is a process of gathering information and research data with the aim of making decisions within an institution, business or organization (Kallet, 2004). The main purpose of this research was to find out the main significant promotional factors influencing students' decisions in choosing private institutions of higher education.

This study was built according to the method of data collection (primary and secondary data). Starting with secondary data, there was done a very detailed review of existing literature from published books, scientific articles and journals (officially and unofficially data). While the primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire (quantitative analysis). The reason for using primary data is "their originality and security". Moreover, the statistical tools and Excel were used for further analysis of data.

### **IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES**

This section of the project characterizes the systematic presentation of the data gathered by survey with the aim to find out the main promotional significant factors influencing students' decisions in choosing private institutions of higher education.

#### **4.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

A structured questionnaire containing 17 questions was sent to the first year bachelor' students in private higher institutions in Kosovo. In order to gather the necessary information, contact via the internet and direct contact were used. Students were visited at their universities and were voluntarily asked to be part of the survey. Exactly 1003 valid individuals responded questions of the structured questionnaire.

The first table represents the demographic characteristics of participants included in the survey such as gender, age and nationality.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants**

Descriptive statistics			
		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	478	48
	Male	525	52
Age	Less than 20	398	40
	21-24	445	44
	25-27	110	11
	More than 27	50	5
Nationality	Republic of Kosovo	945	94
	Republic of Macedonia	15	1
	Republic of Albania	37	4
	Republic of Serbia	6	1
	Other	0	0

**Table 2. Promotional information techniques about university**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Electronic media	298	30
	Written media	62	6
	Newspaper ads	27	3
	TV commercials	85	8
	Advertising tools (billboards, etc.)	123	12
	Visit made at university	89	9
	Information gathered from friends	6	6
	Pre-graduate praises	88	9
	Official site of the University	83	8
	Heard about teaching staff reputation	85	8
	Total	1003	100

From the results obtained and presented in fig.1, around 31% of students were informed about university through electronic media while 9% gathered information from written media. Only 3% of respondents were informed from newspaper ads while 9% got data from commercials on TV. Around 12% of participants were informed through advertising tools while 9% got informed by the visit made at university. Exactly 6% gathered information from their friends while 9% gathered data about university from pre-graduate students. Near of 8% of students were informed from the official web site of university while 8% of participants assembled information about the staff reputation of the university.

**Table 3. The importance of the following factors while making the university selection**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Personal choices	250	11
	Parents' wishes and desires	300	14
	Teachers' recommendations	79	4
	University price and payment plan options	154	7
	Employment opportunities after graduation	272	12
	University's international status	50	2
	Scholarships available	93	4
	Administrative services at the University	55	2
	International professors and faculty reputation	121	5
	Programs offered	47	2
	Quality of teaching	77	3

University campuses	114	5
Possibility of studying in another language	65	3
Location of the University	123	6
University technology available	111	5
Dormitories	253	11
University image	45	2

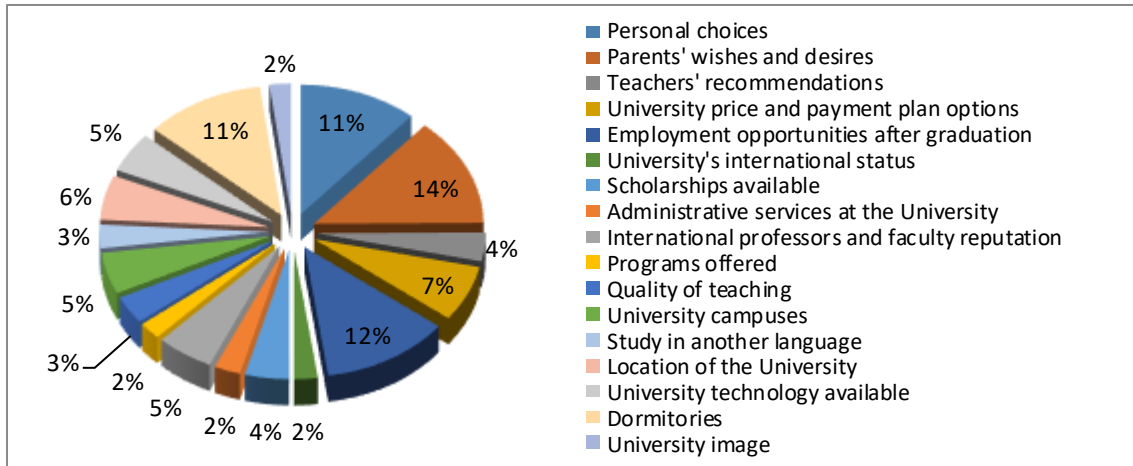


Fig. 1

From the results obtained and presented in fig.1 and the distribution of the respondents' responses, around 11% of students agree that personal choice is the most important factor in selecting the university. Around 14% consider parents' wishes and desires as the most important factor on choosing the university while only 4% agree that teachers' recommendation plays a significance role in the process of decision making for the university. Approximately 7% agree that university price and payment plan options is the most influential factor in choosing the university while near of 12% of participants selected employment opportunities after graduation as the main important factor influencing the decision. Only 2% selected university's international status while 4% agree that scholarships is the main influential factor on taking such decision. Around 2% chosen the administrative services at university while 5% of students selected the international professors and staff reputation. Near 2% of participants selected programs offered and 3% agree with the quality of teaching option. Around 5% chosen university campuses as the most dominant factor on choosing the university, 3% consider studding in another language as the most powerful factor on deciding for university while 6% selected the location option. Approximately 5% chose the university technology, 11% of student's selected dormitory factor and only 2% of respondents carefully chosen the university image factor.

Table 4. Students employed in universities

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	320	32
	No	683	68
	Total	103	100

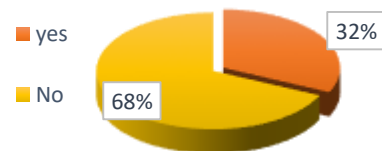
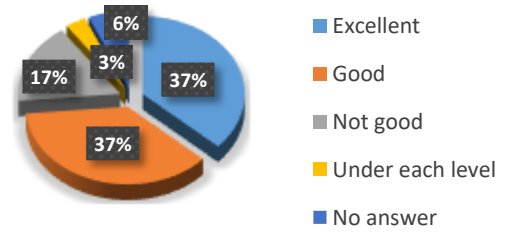


Fig.2

From the results obtained and presented in fig.2 and the distribution of the respondents' responses, around 32% of respondents declared that yes, they are employed on university while 68% claimed that they are not employed on university.

**Table 5. Student assessments for university services**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Excellent	369	37
	Good	369	37
	Not good	167	17
	Under each level	33	3
	No answer	65	6
	Total	1003	100

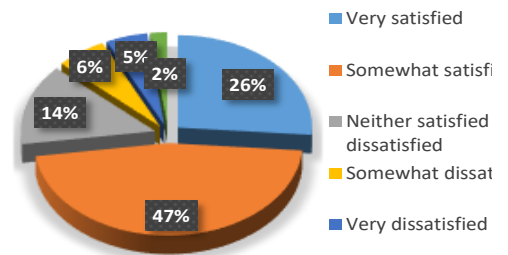


**Fig.3**

From the results obtained and presented in fig.3 and the distribution of the respondents' responses, approximately 37% of respondents claimed that universities services are excellent, 37% argued that services are good; around 17% consider university services as not good, 17% agree that services are under each level while only 3% have no answer toward this question.

**Table 6. Student satisfaction for opportunities given by the university (fairs, internships, study abroad, etc.)**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very satisfied	258	26
	Somewhat satisfied	459	46
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	145	14
	Somewhat dissatisfied	65	6
	Very dissatisfied	54	5
	No answer	22	2
	Total	1003	100

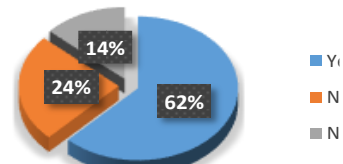


**Fig.4**

From the results obtained and presented in fig.4 and the distribution of the respondents' responses, 26% of respondents are very satisfied with opportunities given by university while 46% are somewhat satisfied with this statement. Around 14% of respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with university opportunities offered to them while 6% argued that they are very dissatisfied with this statement. Only 5% of respondents are very dissatisfied with this statement while 2% have no answer at all regarding to this question.

**Table 7. If you can choose again, would you still choose your university?**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	625	62
	No	243	24
	Not sure	135	13
	Total	1003	100



**Fig.5**

From the results obtained and presented in fig.5 and the distribution of the respondents' responses, around 62% of respondents claimed that if they can choose again, they would still select the same university while 24% argued that no; they will not do the same choice again. Only 13% of respondents answered with no sure option to this statement.

## V. CONCLUSION

Education is not “luxury” that only rich countries can afford, but an absolute necessity for all countries, especially for the poor ones. Kosovo is a perfect example of this since “globalization” in this country has a crucial role in supporting and developing the intellectual and cultural base of society where as a result;

- Educational institutions have increased their enrollment and program bids by becoming progressively fragmented within the country.
- Advances in technology are becoming a pillar for dynamic changes.
- All private higher education institutions are continuing to modify marketing with the aim to give a greater emphasis on interactivity and social networking.

From the questionnaire realized with the competent people for this study in a hand, and from the secondary data gathered and completed in the adequate form in the other hand, the results substantiate the hypothesis mentioned in the beginning of the paper. Based on the data presented earlier on the tables and figures, it's already clear that the elements of promotional mix have a positive impact on student' decision process for selecting the university they want to study. Furthermore, it was also proven that promotional activities differ and are used depending on the nature and interest of the institutions. Students react to different forms or ways to educational education due to their preferences on the one hand and the image of universities on the other. Each university has its own image created based on the location, quality, and nature of the study program (three year and four year studies, with common international programs), achievements of graduate students, available technology, program requirements, various tuition costs as well as the conduct of academic and administrative staff. Moreover, universities try to offer very good services to their students and such thing has been claimed by respondents too who agree that even if they were previously aware of the university services offered, again they would not do any other selection. Actually, students are very satisfied with university' opportunities given to them.

In today's era, universities practice promotional activities as a focus for attractiveness -through which the message is send to the client in a communicative-informative form. By the very nature of the use and the great positive effectiveness are placed the electronic media and the main advertising tools (advertisement, billboards, etc.) are the most appealing tools which students get informed and communicate with university. Despite this, there are many other factors, which affect in a very high degree the student decision process. According to the data collection, the main factors that influence the decision making to study are parental opinion, guaranteed employment after graduation, possibility of dormitory accommodation, university payment options, university location, personal choice and available scholarships.

The gained results found out that promotional activities play a very significant role on students' decisions when choosing private institutions of higher education.

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