

The Role of Effective Marketing Strategies in Increasing the Competitiveness of Higher Educational Institutions Based on the Experience of Highly Rated Universities and Ways to Improve Them

Makhmudov Fakhridin Umarovich

Researcher, Department of Branch Economics at Tashkent University of Applied Sciences,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: Faxriddin.maxmudov.1984@gmail.com

Abstract- This article analyzes the role of marketing strategies in enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Drawing from the practices of top-ranked universities, it examines strategic management approaches, digital branding, international partnerships, and the application of the AIDA model. The study evaluates the impact of various strategies through comparative analysis and provides practical recommendations for improvement.

Keywords: Marketing strategy, higher education, competitiveness, AIDA model, digital branding, rankings, strategic management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are emerging in modern society as institutional actors that not only provide knowledge, but also directly influence economic and social development. Marketing approaches are gaining special importance among the management mechanisms that are being formed within the framework of their own identity, strategic position and relations with the external environment. In the conditions of a market economy, the segmentation of demand for educational services, the complexity of factors influencing consumer decisions, and the expansion of information technologies require new approaches from higher education entities.

In such conditions, universities are striving for sustainable development by building their brand value, actively participating in digital communication platforms, and establishing consistent relationships with stakeholders. Factors such as position in rating systems, international accreditations, cooperation networks, and infrastructural capabilities are becoming important criteria for determining the image of higher education institutions in the external arena.

At the same time, principles such as quality, trust and sustainability, which are expected by students, parents, employers and other interested groups, enrich marketing activities and make them a deeper strategic element. Through openness in management, value-based communication and sustainability-oriented planning, higher education entities can strengthen their position and enhance their role in the socio-economic system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of the existing scientific literature on the use of marketing strategies to increase the competitiveness of higher education institutions shows that universities are now acting not only as providers of knowledge, but also as active economic and social institutions that promote themselves through market laws. The sources analyzed in the framework of the study are enriched with scientific basis and empirical evidence in the following areas.

First, the competitiveness of universities is largely related to their position in regional and economic systems. Christoph [1] characterizes universities as centers of regional innovation and knowledge production, emphasizing that their marketing strategies should be formed in accordance with these economic tasks. This point of view is also supported by the research conducted by Guo et al. [2]; they showed that promoting universities in international rankings through state initiatives is a means of strategically entering the competition.

Approaches to ratings, however, have a two-pronged analysis in the literature. Hazelkorn [3] draws attention to the limitations of ratings in expressing the internal potential of universities. He suggests considering rankings not only as external indicators, but also as a tool for assessing internal quality and management processes. This approach is also supported by Sharifov [4], who showed that universities can strategically plan internal reforms through rankings.

Digital transformation and human capital management are also important topics, and scientific approaches to this issue have been analyzed in depth. Kravchuk [5] wrote about the impact of digital technologies on social mobility and

internal management in modern universities. García Álvarez-Coque et al. [6] empirically analyzed the contribution of top universities to regional economic development and proved that their digital infrastructure provides a strategic competitive advantage.

Approaches to university management have been analyzed in the literature, especially through the “research-driven management” model. Research by Modise [7] discusses the transformation of research portfolios into a strategic resource in university management. Fichtner and Petrova [8] interpreted the university as an institution adapted to the ecosystem, analyzing its entry into competition through external cooperation and innovative potential.

The relationship between ratings and institutional capacity was analyzed in depth by Dembereldorj [9], who noted that ratings not only increase competition between universities, but also transform their internal policies. Lepeyko et al. [10] studied the adaptation to international trends based on MBA and Executive MBA programs and showed the direct impact of international accreditation on competitiveness.

Regarding the formation of an academic career and the achievement of international indicators, the analysis conducted by Freeman [11] is relevant. He showed important internal and external factors that determine the international position of the university based on the experience of doctoral students. These results are consistent with the concept of "World-Class System" put forward by Hazelkorn [12] and justify the need to determine the comprehensive sustainability of the entire higher education system.

Marketing and technology integration approaches are directly related to the results of the analysis. Dwi and Rifai [13] have highlighted strategies for preparing graduates for digital technologies and market demands. Syaiful and Umar [14] have analyzed in depth strategic marketing tools aimed at creating a digital brand, strengthening customer trust and increasing loyalty to the university. Finally, the AIDA model proposed by Kabir [15] is used to analyze the effectiveness of university marketing by assessing the attention, interest, desire and action stages in the mind of the customer (student).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a conceptual analysis method based on a qualitative approach to assess the impact of marketing strategies on competitiveness in higher education institutions. The main focus was on revealing the interrelationships between marketing and management strategies, and determining their practical effectiveness. As part of the analysis, the theoretical foundations were empirically enriched through models and graphics developed on the basis of international experience - including the AIDA marketing model and strategic impact assessment. Using visual indicators and systematic analysis tools, the level of effectiveness of each strategy was determined and their role in management was studied in depth.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The use of marketing strategies to increase the competitiveness of higher education institutions is becoming an important direction of modern management approaches. In the increasingly competitive global education market, universities are viewed not only as knowledge-providing organizations, but also as entities that manage strategic resources, create brands, and actively participate in economic transformation. In this context, the scientific sources analyzed in the study allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the role of marketing concepts in the strategic development of universities and the mechanisms for their practical application.

First of all, the position of universities in the macroeconomic and regional context was considered as a factor that directly affects their overall competitiveness. Christoph [1] described universities as regional centers of knowledge production and showed that their position in the economic system is of decisive importance in the formation of marketing strategies. This approach is also supported by empirical research conducted by Guo et al. [2]. They proved that increasing international rankings through state initiatives can strengthen the external position of a university.

Rankings remain one of the main factors of prestige and competitiveness for universities. However, Hazelkorn [3] criticizes the limitations of this rating system and suggests considering them as a strategic tool. The external image created through ratings will only yield sustainable results if it is formed in harmony with the internal potential and academic quality of the university. Such approaches play an important role, especially in achieving international indicators [4]. In this regard, rankings are becoming not just a means of self-expression, but also an important indicator of strategic management. The sustainable development of universities in a competitive environment depends on the effective management of their internal resources - especially human capital. Digital transformation is leading to strategic changes in this direction. Research by Kravchuk [5] shows ways to enhance social mobility using digital solutions in human resource management. This, in turn, makes the university a reliable and flexible organization for

students, researchers and partners. Garcia Alvarez-Coque et al. [6] analyzed the practical aspects of this transformation through the regional socio-economic impact of top universities.

The presence of effective governance and systematic decision-making mechanisms is of great importance in these processes. Modise [7] highlighted the change in management philosophy through the development of research portfolios in universities. Fichtner and Petrova [8], describing the university as an institution integrated into an innovation ecosystem, emphasize the importance of external cooperation and a systemic approach to achieving competitiveness. At the same time, Dembereldorj [9] argued that rankings cause inter-institutional competition, but they can also stimulate internal reforms.

Universities enrich these systemic reforms by adopting international trends. Lepeyko et al. [10] analyzed the adaptation of Ukrainian business education to global standards, the formation of MBA and Executive MBA programs, and the impact of international accreditation on competitiveness. This approach is also presented by Freeman [11] in the context of factors shaping academic careers for doctoral students. In both cases, factors that determine the international position of the university – accreditation, publications and partnerships – play an important role in the strategic development of the university.

Strategic stability achieved through systematic approaches will only produce comprehensive results if it is consistent with public policy. The concept of a "world-class system" put forward by Hazelkorn [12] deserves special attention in this regard. According to this model, not a single university, but the entire higher education system should be ready for competition. This approach is especially relevant for developing countries and requires systemic coherence of public policy.

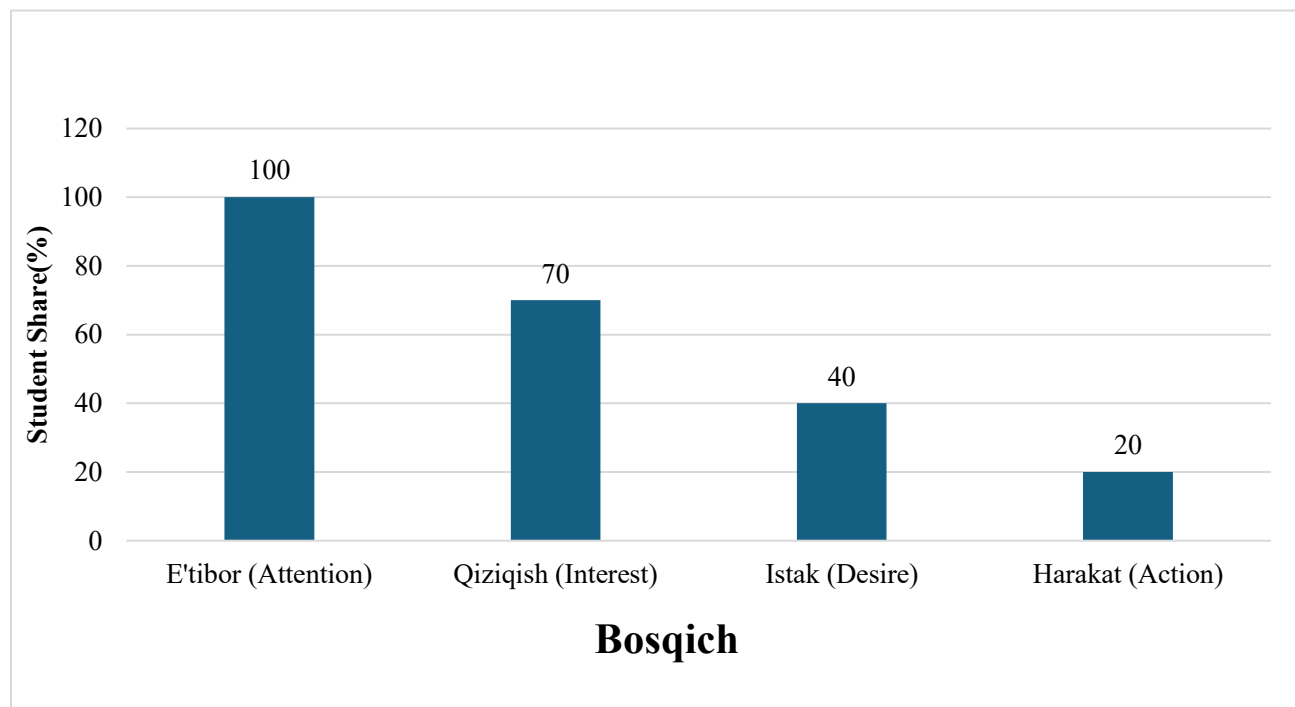


Fig.1. Marketing Funnel – AIDA modeli

The AIDA model in Figure 1 is a convenient and effective tool for evaluating the marketing strategies of higher education institutions. This graphic shows the psychological stages of the student attraction process step by step. In particular:

- Attention stage – the starting point of marketing activities, which is when universities try to reach the student audience through their own brand, external communication and advertising. As the graphic shows, 100% of the audience is addressed at this stage. This includes websites, banners, social media campaigns, promotional events.

- Interest stage – at this stage, the interested audience is 70% of the total. This means that 30% of potential students who initially attracted attention did not connect with the marketing content or lost interest. This is related to the brand identity, academic programs and the quality of the information provided.
- The number of students in the Desire stage decreases by up to 40%. This stage is associated with the formation of internal motivation to study at the university, and the university should stand out with its competitive advantages - the quality of teachers, international partnerships, scholarships, infrastructure and campus life.
- In the Action stage, only 20% of the audience takes real action - registering, submitting documents or taking tests. This is an extremely low conversion rate, indicating the need for significant updates between the "Interest" and "Desire" stages to increase marketing effectiveness.

Thus, it can be concluded based on the graph that universities should focus their marketing strategies not just on advertising or external appearance, but on the effectiveness of communication at every stage. In particular, the audience losses observed at the 'Interest' and 'Desire' stages can be reduced through interactive content, personalized consultations, criteria-based offers, and information personalization [15].

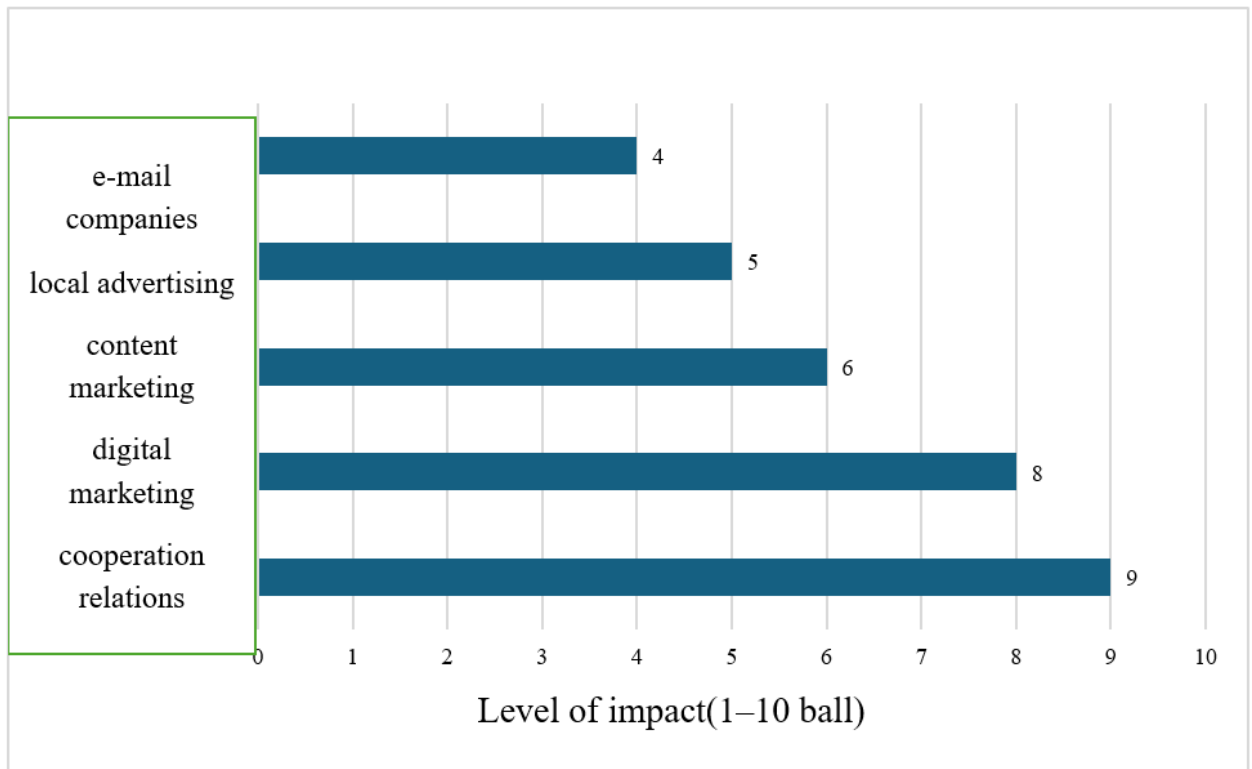


Figure 2. The impact of marketing strategies [14]

The following bar chart compares the relative effectiveness of key marketing strategies used by higher education institutions. Each strategy was rated on a scale of 1 to 10, examining their impact on student engagement, trust, and brand loyalty.

- Partnerships (9 points) – This strategy was the most effective in attracting students by developing relationships with foreign universities, industry, and international organizations. Through these relationships, universities demonstrate their innovative and practical strengths, which connect academic offerings to the real market.
- Digital branding (8 points) – Increased attention to the university is generated through active participation in social networks, content marketing, consistency of brand visuals, and online reputation. This tool is especially relevant for students of generations Y and Z.
- Content marketing (6 points) – a strategy to inform potential students and provide them with valuable knowledge through university-created information, blogs, articles, and videos, although it is moderately effective, needs to be combined with other methods.
- Local advertising (5 points) – it is possible to reach a regional audience through banners, media, and outdoor advertising. However, this method attracts a much more limited audience compared to digital strategies.

- Email campaigns (4 points) – it is possible to maintain contact with students through automated mailing tools. However, the impact of this strategy has decreased at present, and it is necessary to harmonize it with other strategies.

From this comparison, it can be concluded that universities should give priority to high-impact strategies when developing a marketing strategy, but without denying other tools, and should integrate them in a comprehensive manner. It is also necessary to take into account the dependence of each strategy on the target audience and the contextual factors in its implementation.

Finally, modern universities are unlikely to achieve long-term sustainability unless they integrate their marketing strategies with digital tools. Dwi and Rifai [13] highlight the preparation of graduates for market demands in relation to financial technologies. Syaiful and Umar [14] analyze the mechanisms of digital brand building, trust building, and loyalty formation. These cases are complemented by customer loyalty models studied in the service sector by Kabir [15] and show that they can be applied in the context of higher education.

These results indicate that higher education institutions can gain a competitive position in the global education market if they integrate their strategic development with digital transformation, systemic management, international integration, and modern marketing approaches.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study deeply revealed the importance of marketing strategies in the strategic development of higher education institutions. The analysis showed that digital transformation, brand creation, participation in international rankings and the development of partnerships are among the main factors in increasing the competitiveness of universities. In this regard, the approach based on the AIDA model has proven itself as an important theoretical and analytical tool for analyzing the step-by-step effectiveness of the marketing process.

Also, empirical indicators assessing the relative impact of various marketing strategies, especially partnerships and digital branding, confirmed their high effectiveness. This situation necessitates viewing marketing not just as a communication tool, but as an integral element of management. As a result of a systematic, integrated approach, higher education institutions are achieving high efficiency not only in attracting students, but also in building long-term brand value.

Universities can strengthen their positions by focusing not only on their external image, but also on approaches based on internal management, scientific potential, human capital and international standards. This, in turn, increases the readiness of the entire higher education system to compete globally.

The following practical suggestions were developed from the analysis:

1. Strategic integration - marketing policy should be formulated in harmony with the general development concept of the university.
2. Active use of the AIDA model - theoretical analysis of the stages of student engagement and development of specific strategies for each stage increases efficiency.
3. Strengthening digital marketing potential - it is necessary to actively engage a young audience through content marketing, social networks and brand platforms.
4. Expanding international cooperation and academic ties - the prestige, credibility and innovative potential of the university are precisely related to these factors.
5. Developing a rating approach based on internal potential - it is necessary to evaluate the activities of the university not only based on external indicators, but also based on internal quality and transformation indicators.

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