

Comparison of commercial management practices in higher education institutions based on the differences between the marketing and admissions managers and the students in the process of choosing a professional career perception*

Comparación de las prácticas de gestión comercial en las instituciones de educación superior a partir de las diferencias entre las percepciones de directores de mercadeo y admisión y del potencial estudiante en proceso de elección de una carrera profesional

Comparaçãõ de práticas de gestão comercial em instituições de ensino superior com base nas diferenças entre percepções de diretores de marketing e admissão e o potencial estudante no processo de escolha de uma carreira profissional

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F. Recepción: 10 mayo 2017

F. Aceptación: 15 junio 2017

* **Cómo citar:** Ariza-Ruiz, R.F., Rojas-Berrió, S.P., Robayo-Pinzón, O. J. (2017). Comparison of commercial management practices in higher education institutions based on the differences between the marketing and admissions managers and the students in the process of choosing a professional career perception. *Revista Libre Empresa*, 14(2), 13-31 <http://dx.doi.org/10.18041/libemp.2017.v14n2.28201>

Abstract

This research is aimed to evaluate through the perception of two different points of view, if the good practices of commercial management made and released by Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are related to the choice of a professional career. The research method had an initial phase of observation and collection of information, in order to design a survey with mirror questions that was evaluated, one with both marketing and admission managers of institutions, and the second one with last secondary grade students in the process of choosing a career. The survey yielded results that show that making good commercial management practices, where the potential students can identify tangible attributes like the Institutional Accreditation evaluated in this measurement, are factors that add into the student's college choice and that generate effective tuition of the admitted students. In addition to these results, it shows that marketing managers of HEI should implement or reinforce good management commercial practices in the field of recruitment of their potential students.

Keywords

Services Marketing; Business Management; Higher Education Institutions – HEI; Students; Undergraduate programs; marketing and admission managers; Good Practices; Recruitment activities.

Resumen

Esta investigación tuvo como fin evaluar a través de la percepción desde dos puntos de vista diferentes, si las buenas prácticas de gestión comercial hechas y divulgadas por las Instituciones de Educación Superior (de aquí en adelante IES) tienen relación con la elección de una carrera profesional. El método de investigación contó con una fase inicial de observación y recopilación de información para posteriormente diseñar una encuesta con preguntas espejo que se evaluó, una con los directores de mercadeo y de admisión de las instituciones y otra con los estudiantes de grado undécimo en proceso de elección de carrera profesional. Las encuestas arrojaron unos resultados que confirman que realizar buenas prácticas de gestión comercial donde el potencial estudiante identifique atributos tangibles como la Acreditación Institucional evaluada en esta medición, son factores que suman en la elección universitaria del estudiante y que generan matriculas efectivas de los admitidos. Adicionalmente de estos resultados se muestra que los directivos de marketing de las IES deben implementar o reforzar las buenas prácticas de gestión comercial en el ámbito del reclutamiento de sus potenciales estudiantes.

Palabras clave

Gestión y Marketing de Servicios; Gestión Comercial; Instituciones de Educación Superior – IES, Estudiantes en proceso de elección de programa de pregrado, Directores de mercadeo y admisión, Buenas Practicas, Actividades de Reclutamiento.

Resumo

O objetivo desta pesquisa foi avaliar através da percepção de dois pontos de vista diferentes, independentemente de as boas práticas de gestão de negócios feitas e disseminadas pelas

Instituições de Ensino Superior (a seguir designadas “IES”) estar relacionadas à escolha de uma carreira profissional. O método de pesquisa teve uma fase inicial de observação e coleta de informações para depois projetar uma pesquisa com perguntas espelhadas que foram avaliadas, uma com os diretores de marketing e admissão das instituições e outra com alunos da décima primeira série em processo de escolha de carreira. As pesquisas produziram resultados que confirmam que a realização de boas práticas de gerenciamento de negócios, em que o aluno potencial identifica atributos tangíveis, como a Credenciamento Institucional avaliada nesta medida, são fatores que se somam na escolha universitária do aluno e que geram matrículas efetivas das pessoas admitidas. Estes resultados mostram que os gerentes de marketing das IES devem implementar ou reforçar boas práticas de gestão comercial no campo do recrutamento de seus potenciais estudantes.

Palavras-chave

Gestão e Marketing de Serviços; Gestão comercial; Instituições de Ensino Superior - IES, Estudantes no processo de escolha de um programa de graduação, Diretores de Marketing e Admissão, Boas Práticas, Atividades de Recrutamento.

1. Introduction

Knowledge in society is considered a key factor of growth, especially when you have as basis the higher education to create new features in the technological advancement in developed economies (Bugliarello, 1996; Coenen, Moodysson, Ryan, Asheim, & Phillips, 2006; Cummings, Rosentraub, Domahidy, & Coffin, 2005; Etkowitz & Leydesdorf, 1998; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Markman, Siegel, & Wright, 2008; Mayer, 2007; Ostrander, 2004; Perry & Wiewel, 2005; Sábado & Botana, 1968).

In society, it is generally believed that higher education is a valuable long-term investment, however the process of college selection is difficult and complicated both for students and their families, as it is a very important decision, with implications for the rest of their life; therefore, the student must identify the steps to follow in order to make the more convenient selection of a college to get associated with (Agarwala & Mehta, 2006).

Likewise, higher education has become more diverse and competitive in this century. Prospective students have a wide range of options to choose Higher Education Institutions (HEI) from, public or private, for-profit entities, technical communities and vocational schools, or virtual colleges that offer only online programs (Han P. 2014).

Over the past 40 years, the HEI, have been dabbling in commercial management exercises, through marketing practices in order to adapt itself to changes in the environment, in spite of how debatable may be that higher education institutions perform this kind of exercises (Han P, 2014). Due to the current high level of competition for student retention, the HEI must establish, maintain and develop strategic promotion models that include the customer, based on a marketing mix (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

However, as stated by Bejou D., Bejou A (2012), higher education does not describe the institutions as a “seller” or their future students as “clients”, but it shows that there is a business relationship, any time that there is a delivered service and a consumer receiving it and, therefore, a transaction. In this scenario, and in spite of the commercial nature of the recruitment of students, there is still an understanding that a college degree is more than a commodity (McQuillan 2014).

The HEI face many challenges, and the most critical possibly is the recruitment of students, and the additional management of successful enrolment and retention of students of qualified academic level (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012). These challenges have led to a balance, determined in part by the HIES, so they can advance and make changes both internally and externally. In order to achieve its commercial goals they must practice and adopt principles of a sharing government, in order to create work teams to have a shared management with the collaboration of faculties, academic and administrative staff, and students to work together and achieve the institutional mission (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

The challenge of commercial management in higher education lies in the intangible nature of the same education (Anctil, 2008). In this sense, the benefits of education are not immediately available after purchase. Therefore, the commercial management of higher education requires the identification of an institution’s tangible value attributes; all this in the context of the educational offer of a HEI (Anctil, 2008).

It is understood, and it is expected, that in the commercial management of HEI by means of good practices, there is a partnership between the institution and the student in which both contribute to the success of the results (Huang I.Y., Raimo V., Humfrey C, 2014). To identify the segments of the target market by the HEI, leaves room for good practices in commercial management (Han P, 2014).

When market segmentation is applied to higher education, it allows to colleges administrators to identify groups of students who are more likely to enroll in their institutions, to which all those activities of recruitment must be directed to by means of different communication techniques, provision of information and services tailored to the needs of different groups of students, in order to generate admission’s reservations by commercial management of the HEI, and to encourage the enrollment of the future students (Han P, 2014).

Anctil (2008), states that the efforts of marketing in many HEI have become highly organized and tightly controlled strategies, as new marketing units were established to create, maintain and promote the image of the Institution. Bejou D., Bejou A (2012), mention that successful companies not only try to make individual sales, but they establish a relation with every client with duration and continuity across time in order to reproduce repeated sales more known in this area as repurchase, which usually uses suitable strategies of customer relationship management (Khashab, Gulliver, KYRITSIS, & Alsoud, 2014; Pember, Owens, & Yaghi, 2014; Petrella, 2008; Seeman & O’Hara, 2006).

Considering that positioning in higher education fields means that HEI have certain characteristics compared with other institutions with which it competes, positioning can be a business strategy to develop marketing plans and recruitment, which implies the development of corporate image, market segmentation, and a communication addressed to markets of interest (Maringe, 2006).

The institutional image of a HEI helps to create a positive vision that can attract prospective students to enroll (Pampaloni, 2010). A positive image of a school or university is a valuable intangible asset that makes the institution stand out in the saturated market and obtain the attention of part of the prospective students and their families (Han P, 2014). The purpose of colleges and universities is not only to frame a clear image in the mind of prospective students, but also to enhance the construction, management and change of their institutional image (Anctil, 2008).

As analyzed, Štimac & Šimi (2012) it is evident that HEI requires changes in its commercial management, which must be characterized by the knowledge limits in the development of competitive capacities, in order to innovate the investigation, bearing in mind the reality of an increasing competition among service providers of higher education.

Williams Jr. & Omar (2014) identifies the need of HEI commercial management to be more studied, therefore, the need to provide information to realize an investigation that provides information to identify the role of the brand, which can later serve as platform of service for the growth of the institutions.

HEI no longer can rely on realizing passive approaches for student's recruitment and retention as the support of former students. Each institution must participate aggressively in marketing by means of a strategic management in order to maintain quality students through activities of recruitment and retention (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

To do recruitment activities to associate students in an HEI is becoming an important issue for schools and especially for the universities, since competition in higher education market has intensified. To know the possible reasons for which a student chooses to assist to a certain institution, is essential for the development of effective marketing and recruitment strategies, that implement the HEI commercial management (Han P, 2014).

Universities and educational institutions should strengthen the diversity of its students through the development of initiatives and the availability of resources for students' recruitment and retention, making special efforts to attract students in fields or areas of interest to its academic offerings since, eventually, they turn into spokespersons of the institutional ideas and, finally, play a vital role in the promotion of the institutional interests (Agarwala & Mehta, 2006).

To reach out potential students and capture their attention, there should be institutional presence in the virtual media (Han P, 2014). A survey of 256 schools and universities identifies Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as the most popular online social media, adopted

by admission offices to communicate and connect with potential students/Lead (Noel-Levitz, 2012). To maximize the effectiveness of social networks tools, these should be integrated with other marketing plans to get the specific purpose results (Hayes, Ruschman, and Walker, 2009).

To understand the process a student goes through to choose an HEI has some implications for higher education. A large amount of research has identified the factors that influence the decision making of students, the most significant are associated with institutional features that allow administrators and recruiting agents to develop an appropriate marketing mix to segmentize and attract future students who possess similar attributes to those that are more likely to attend their schools. The HEI can apply commercial management practices in the students' recruitment in order to provide a better understanding of the behavior of election of university (Han P, 2014).

In his literature review, Han P (2014) suggests that HEI must provide tangible indicators in areas such as: academic attributes of the institution, campus appearance, social life, alumni and current students that highlight the benefits of attending this college. Also, parts of these attributes to attend the HEI are aspects such as: job placement rate, acceptance of graduate school's rate, and the average intake of student's rate.

To learn how institutional characteristics, affect the students' decision-making process, in an admission process, can assist administrators in higher education to develop more effective marketing strategies in a HEI. For its commercial management, it is relevant to know what future students understand and expect from their institutions, such as factors of the environment, financial aid (tuition), accommodation (distance from home), programs offered (careers) and campus, as important institutional attributes (Han P, 2014).

Given the previous considerations and bearing in mind that, in first instance, the used scientific literature analyzed theoretical models of marketing in higher education, it was considered to evaluate the good practices and enact strategic models to deepen in the commercial management applied in HEI.

In second instance it was considered to carry out a good-practices analysis through recruitment activities developed in HEI and see if these generate positioning in the mind of the students in their process of choosing an HEI and the image that this student perceive Ivy (2008). In order for the student to identify tangible characteristics of the institution through the recruitment activities that distinguishes it from the specific characteristics of the competitors (Han P, 2014).

Likewise, in third instance, the aim of this investigation was to of compare the existing relationship between the commercial management implemented in HEI and the most relevant factors of decision by the student to enroll. The above bearing in mind that there is no evidence of previous studies in this subject in Latin American.

In this line, the central aim of the research is the following: to compare the commercial management practices in HEI from the differences between the marketing and admission managers' perceptions and the potential students in the process of choosing a career. Thus, the research question was: which are the differences between the marketing and admission managers' perceptions and the potential students in the process of choosing a career regarding commercial management practices in the IES?

Literature review

HEI are entities in which the students seek a high-quality academic training to have a higher level of education in their lives. For this reason, the commercial management marketing strategies of a HEI according with recruitment activities should be directed to generate expectations in students at the time of enrollment in the institution (Šimi & Štimac, 2012).

Higher education marketing invites to deepen the strategies to implement in commercial management (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006) and strongly promulgate them so in the mind of students and general public the image of a HEI is promoted (Ivy, 2008), with the construction of a competitive market segmentation, taking into account the trends of the market.

As mentioned in Bejou D., Bejou A (2012), the outlook for higher education is quickly and unpredictable, constantly changing, which is why HEI should react quickly and strategically to implement recruitment activities in actions such as those indicated in the source:

- To attract and retain qualified and diverse students
- Absence of strategic plans
- Demographic and cultural changes
- Inadequate marketing and brand management
- Global issues faced by students, faculty, technology, and accreditation.

Challenges of higher education are to create a new environment for HEI, and to adapt in managing the opportunity to thrive, as its greatest challenge starts from recruitment, retention, persistence and graduation of qualified and diverse students, identified from their enrollment process (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

Singleton (2009), mentions that it is very important to review the used mechanisms for making a better commercial management, based on professional guidance and advice to the applicants, as a tool for better understanding of HEI academic offerings and to ensure consequently that the applicants' decision is based on a marketing strategy to make a successful admission.

From an academic point of view, students are products developed by teachers, however, from the service point of view of an institution, students are considered as customers, which expect to receive high-quality perceived from a fast service, to the fulfillment of his academic formation (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

Private HEI quality service has become the key objective to educational private providers of educational services, as they are playing an increasingly important role (OECD, 2010; Peter, J., Waterman, 1986). It is possible to observe that decision making of students in the process of choosing a HEI is focused on the pre-purchase stage, based on several disciplines, Cardoso, R, M. Portela. Sa (2008).

The perception of personal satisfaction of the future student through the made promises, increases the expectations to close the deal and, at the same time, promotes benefits and rewards for the institution, keeping it actively engaged with the retention of students, which is repeated each time a student is enrolled for classes, generating repurchase (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

In fact, in this study Singleton (2009), analyzes that as result of the academic offer variety in the market, a proposed review of commercial management mechanisms in HEI is needed, carrying out marketing and recruitment of students activities as tools to support decision-making by the students in their admissions process.

For commercial management in IES it is necessary to carry out a thorough and analytical study, which can provide at least a model to follow in order to position the institutions based on the service provided as a valuable proposition that guarantees this commercial management as an institution's strategy for admissions Williams Jr. & Omar (2014), all this marketing management, well monitored, will guarantee to be competent, more when it is necessary to bear in mind the increasing demand for higher education service providers Šimi & Štimac (2012).

Simões & Soares (2010), cites (Briggs and Wilson (2007), to mention that commercial management done through effective practices and the targeted recruitment of students give as a result their effective uptake, where it is very important to have a mix of integrated marketing communications, provided by HEI to students so they can have a deep understanding of the sources of information for a well-informed and appropriate decision.

In HEI commercial management, recruitment is the first stage of contact between students and HEI, the beginning of a relationship where promises are made, during this phase the institution begins the marketing of its university and programs, by delivering all the benefits both for students and their families. This phase's purpose is to build a desirable satisfaction of the applicants and to recruit in compliance with the institutional requirements of having students with the necessary high academic level to apply for admission. The recruitment phase only ends when a full orientation, admission registration and financial validation (enrollment) to all the new students is completed (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

To (Briggs and Wilson (2007), all commercial management made through effective practices and focused on the students, results in a true and efficient communication under the specific marketing parameters designed and available with all relevant information.

In the management of registration stage, it is very important that HEI orientates actively the new students through information such as the whole record of his admission, planning of his academic load, financial aid, location of suitable housing and everything concerning their social development (Bejou D., Bejou To, 2012).

Communication may prove to be one of the most important factors in efficient commercial management, so that it is able to tell its proposed value to students, and at the same time they can identify the differences that HEI have made them know previously by means of their recruitment activities, in order that the decision making is based on the analysis of all possible variables that may have been known in the pre-purchase stage Maringe (2006) and Twigg (2002).

Maringe (2006) and Twigg (2002) indicate that commercial management involves communicating the value proposition and aggregate values, by means of a marketing mix (web pages, brochures and other materials) made by universities to help the student in their decision making, based on previously analyzed factors. For instance: the website Simões & Soares (2010) is considered as one of the most important factors in the final decision.

In agreement with (Briggs 2006 and Briggs and Wilson 2007), is absolutely determining to make an excellent use of integrated marketing communications with effective and centralized practices, such as those already mentioned of students recruitment in the process of election through digital media such as websites.

(Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012), consider that within the commercial management strategies of HEI for achieving a successful enrollment, 4 phases of great importance should be considered:

Exploration

Phase of meeting between buyer and seller, where the seller is the one who raises the expectations of the buyer by making promises about the quality of the product or service offered in order to achieve a perception of potential benefits and rewards received through the purchase (Bejou D., Bejou To, 2012).

Expansion

This phase must be successful as it sets and builds a reliable relationship between buyer and seller, based on the seller's actions to improve the quality of the relationship with ethical direction, so the purchase can expand, in other words, it may result in additional sales or references to new customers through word-of-mouth (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

Commitment

At this stage, the primary target is to increase customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, due to the fact that the seller is the one who should be encouraging to the buyers, by means of a positive speech, so they can perceive and be convinced of the benefits and rewards that they will receive with the purchase (Bejou D., Bejou A, 2012).

Continuation or dissolution

The buyer can choose if he (or she) wants to continue or end the relationship. He must confront his original expectations with the current reality and compare it with his initial experience. If the buyer chooses to continue, the expansion pattern and commitment must be higher still. However, if the seller has not been able to preserve the buyer's satisfaction and loyalty is because the benefits perceived initially are no longer the same and the relationship must have a different seller or to be dissolved (Bejou D., Bejou To, 2012).

The principles of communication state that existing relationships between students and a HEI go through predictable phases, during which the maximizations of satisfaction in each phase generate periods of great joy and long term relationships of mutual benefit that can be cultivated and sustained (Bejou D., Bejou To, 2012).

For the previously mentioned reasons, inside the HEI there needs to be awareness of the competitive capacities that must be implemented to compete on the educational services market and be able to innovate in commercial management strategies to guarantee to be one step ahead of the competitors of this area Štimac & Šimi (2012).

(Han P, 2014), exemplifies that Newman (2002) did a study with a sample of 1000 randomly selected universities and the results revealed that the most common marketing activities carried out by HEI were basically planning strategies, advertising, commercial management and destination marketing.

It is important to note that this research will address this objective, considering the potential differences in factors of choice as: demographic position Griffith and Rothstein (2009), socio-economic status Singleton (2009), economic cost Nürnberg, Schapiro and Zimmerman (2012), and academic attributes, Han P (2014), among others.

Huang I.Y., Raimo V., Humfrey C (2014) describe how it is necessary to improve the understanding of the control mechanisms used by the HEI in order to maintain, or even increase, the number of students, to satisfy the institutional aim to attract students, colleges administrators come to the conclusion that universities classification is the most important indicator during the admission process in a competitive market.

It is believed that a better accreditation classification of a HEI is one of the most important selection factors, based on the academic quality and reputation of an institution. The rankings are popular among professionals, students and their families and many of this future student use the ratings to assess institutional quality and make their decision (Ancitil, 2008). A decrease in the classification results is automatically reflected in a lower enrollment rate (Han P, 2014).

The institutions should be directed to potential students who possess certain characteristics that are similar to those that are more likely to enroll in their institutions, one of the critical components in the choice is the socio-economic situation, the family income plays an

important role in the college selection decision due to the tuition cost, so it is very important to let know all the financial aid information to low-income students (Han P, 2014).

Lillis and Tian (2008), conducted a case study of a private university and found that registration and location were the two most influential factors in the college decision. One of its important findings was that the selection of college of students who were sensitive to its costs was interrelated with the financial support of the institutions.

The tuition charge has been dramatically increased in the past few decades, but financial aid and payment alternatives have also increased (Kinsler and Pavan, 2011). To reduce the negative impact of the increase tuition charges in college choosing, some HEI adopt a “high tuition- help policies of high-impact “(Monks, 2009).

Griffith and Rask (2007), found out that the economic net cost of tuition is a key factor in university choice for students who need financial aid, Nurnberg, Schapiro and Zimmerman (2012), identified that tuition net price in HEI was one of the key factors in the inscription decision. In 2013, more than 40% of the students rejected their institutions admission at their first-choice option, and enrolled in another place since they did not receive financial aid (Eagan *et al.*, 2013).

Many private universities have great economic dependence on its admissions fees, as their most important source of income (HiltonsmithY Draut, 2014). The economic recession has had a great impact on the domestic economy, and the ability to pay college tuition (Fischer, 2011; Selingo, 2013). For all this, to achieve the success of the enrolment and attract enough high-academic quality school's students that are willing to pay a tuition, has become a difficult task for many HEI Han P (2014).

Nürnberg, Schapiro and Zimmerman (2012), analyzed accepted students by a prestigious university, and identified like Griffith and Rask (2007), that those students who could pay the full price of tuition because of their wealth and high-income, preferred selective HEI, even if they were offered help because of their merit or less selective institutions.

An additional way designed by HEI to recruit and attract more students, is focused in all those who showed a high academic level during his high school education. It is the option of grants accepted by part of the students as the most important alternative to cover the economic cost of their studies in their university period (Avery and Hoxby, 2004).

Also in Singleton (2009) we can see the existence of some components in selection time, that combine selection behaviors such as socio-economic or demographic characteristics. As Simões & Soares (2010) It can be outlined that the geographical proximity can be one of the highest relevance variables at the final decision time, since students bear in mind the distance of his city of origin to the university as part of their choice, due to the fact that this factor may involve an additional cost of travel, to support their maintenance and rent housing preferably near the university campus (Griffith and Rothstein, 2009). This is confirmed based on various studies on the belief that distance from house to university

plays an important role especially for financial considerations in the process of electing HEI (Turley, 2009).

Having compared the commercial management strategies, recruitment activities and decision factors in enrolling in a HEI, it has been analyzed and checked with qualitative and quantitative models as described in the Table 1 by different authors.

Table 1.

Methodological Perspective

Author	Methodological Perspective
Ambler and kokkinaki (2002)	They conducted in-depth interviews in marketing and finance to 24 companies' senior managers in UK, representing all sectors of activity, to discuss their commercial management and marketing performance evaluation practices, among other things. Collected marketing measures are based on this instrument qualitative study (administered by the same questionnaire) built for a large-scale quantitative study in the United Kingdom.
Agarwala R., Mehta MN (2006).	A questionnaire that covers all implementation stages in foreign students who came to colleges. Applied since first contact with students -during the initial recruitment meeting-, to the final point of admission.
Shrivastava <i>et al.</i> (1998) (Srivastava and Reibstein 2004).	They have developed a based-on marketing value approach with key areas that deliver value for shareholders: assets based in value market behavior for shareholders. Where a major shareholder value should be the ultimate goal of any marketing activity. A later version of the chain includes the following elements: The marketing actions → market based assets → market performance and financial performance.
(Rust <i>et al.</i> 2004b).	A corresponding chain is seen in the marketing chain, where productivity is an effect chain model referred to marketing actions to the overall company value: tactical marketing actions → impact on customers → impact on the market → financial impact → business impact → value.
Keller and Lehmann(2003), Franzen (1999)	We find the same elements that in brand value chain, focused on how brands create value: marketing program for customer's investment → mentality of brand performance → value for shareholders. It has also worked in a similar categorization of the effects. In the brand value chain mental response.

Source: The authors

Methodological strategy

Given the nature of the problem, this research was of pragmatic character. The type of study was correlational, with a non-experimental and cross-sectional design, where two questionnaires addressed to the focus group were used as instruments. In the following section, the sample design, the instruments and the information processing are described. It is important to indicate that this research an analysis was conducted bearing in mind both HEI marketing and admission managers and last secondary grade student's perspectives about commercial management practices in HEI, as good practices application by means of recruitment activities for the improvement of results in students' capture.

Sample design

This research involved two subjects of assessment and measurement, the first one was the marketing and admission managers of HEI, and the second one was potential students in process of choice of a professional career. The first were selected under the criterion of being experts in the field, with more than 10 years of experience in higher education in Colombia and, specifically, in the implementation of commercial management in HEI. There is a total of 30 persons in Colombia that comply with these characteristics, of which 16 answered the form. Therefore, the sample design was chosen by convenience.

Concerning the potential students choosing a professional career process, the last secondary grade student fairs realized in the first half of 2017 in Bogotá and departments of Colombia as the Atlantic Coast, Cundinamarca, Meta, Tolima and Huila among others, were used; the sampling was non-probabilistic and a total of 690 properly completed forms were received.

Instruments

For HEI marketing and admission managers a semi-structured questionnaire was used, which its dimensions and investigation axes corresponded to the aspects approached in the previous literature of the topic, besides investigating other considered relevant aspects by experts per their experience. For the students, a closed questionnaire was designed from the questions that turned out to be relevant as commercial management practices by marketing managers, both by thanking what was derived from previous literature, and what was derived from their experiences and trajectory.

Information processing

For the first group and the semi-structured questionnaire, a processing and analysis of information technique was used according to Delphi Method (Fefer, De-Urioste Stone, Daigle, & Silka, 2016; Qureshi, Bhatti, Rasli, Yasir, & Zaman, 2014). Two rounds of expert's analysis were performed in order to achieve consensus, the questionnaire is annexed.

With the obtained results, an estimate of the variables' weight with the highest reported incidence was made, those which are the most important factors with the greatest impact and influence in the director of marketing and admission decision to implement the aforementioned recruitment activities in HEI commercial management.

The second instrument, addressed to potential students in process of choosing a professional career, as indicated by the Delphi Method, was designed with the most representative mirror variables of the expert's survey and was applied again to certain number of potential student, questionnaire is annexed.

In this order of ideas, to fulfill the investigation goal, the quantitative results obtained from both instruments (potential students and marketing and admission managers) were statistically processed, initially by comparing the independent samples averages by means of T-test, so that the test variables to compare equal variances by means of homogeneity of variances test were obtained.

Results

Results obtained regarding the implementation of good practices in HEI commercial management from the perception of both polled populations make possible to infer:

That most relevant variables, with highest qualification have no significant differences from both Marketing and Admissions Managers and potential students in process of choice points of view, these are: Institutional Accreditation and Academic Quality. Other relevant variables were: Physical Infrastructure, Commercial Management Good Practices, contact with the student, Tuition Charge and City Relocation.

In contrast, variables like Social Networks and Word of Mouth showed significant differences between the group of marketing and admission managers and potential students, being that these choice factors are very important for the first ones whereas not so much for the second ones.

The overall results of the measurement of each variable are presented in the following Table 2.

Table 2.
Total results of the measurement of each variable

		Group Statistics					Levene's Test Equality of Variances		t-test for measure equality					
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference Lower	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
												Lower	Upper	
Good practices in commercial management	Marketing Manager	17	4.2941	0.84887	0.20588	0.049	0.825	0.082	693	0.934	0.01683	0.20424	-0.38417	0.41783
	Lead	678	4.2773	0.83132	0.03193			0.081	16.779	0.937	0.01683	0.20834	-0.42318	0.45684
Recruitment Activities	Marketing Manager	17	4.5682	0.87026	0.21107	0.193	0.660	0.660	693	0.021	0.45107	0.19530	0.06762	0.83452
	Lead	678	4.1372	0.79348	0.03047			2.115	16.674	0.050	0.45107	0.21326	0.00046	0.90167
Contact with the student	Marketing Manager	17	4.4706	0.62426	0.15141	0.615	0.433	1.545	693	0.123	0.32162	0.20820	-0.08716	0.73040
	Lead	678	4.1490	0.85245	0.03274			2.076	17.530	0.053	0.32162	0.15491	-0.00445	0.64769
Social Networks	Marketing Manager	17	4.1176	0.48507	0.11765	13.081	0.000	1.673	693	0.095	0.41558	0.24848	-0.07228	0.90344
	Lead	678	3.7021	1.02106	0.03921			3.351	19.747	0.003	0.41558	0.12401	0.15669	0.67448
Institutional Accreditation	Marketing Manager	17	4.4118	0.61835	0.14987	0.053	0.819 0.053	-0.792	693	0.429	-0.13543	0.17101	-0.47120	0.20083
	Lead	678	4.5472	0.69816	0.02681			-0.889	17.039	0.386	-0.13543	0.15235	-0.45681	0.18594
Academic quality	Marketing Manager	17	4.7647	0.43724	0.10605	5.565	0.019	0.019	693	0.187	0.22636	0.17138	-0.11013	0.56285
	Lead	678	4.5383	0.70292	0.02700			2.069	18.139	0.053	0.22636	0.10943	-0.00342	0.45613
Tuition Changes	Marketing Manager	17	4.0588	0.96635	0.23437	0.003	0.960	-0.819	693	0.413	-0.17274	0.21098	-0.58698	0.24150
	Lead	678	4.2316	0.85650	0.03289			-0.730	16.636	0.476	-0.17274	0.23667	0.23667	0.32742
City relocation	Marketing Manager	17	4.0588	0.74755	0.18131	6.863	0.009	0.887	693	693	0.23581	0.26576	-0.28597	0.75760
	Lead	678	3.8230	1.08893	0.04182			1.267	17.747	0.221	0.23581	0.18607	-0.15550	0.62713
Physical Infrastructure	Marketing Manager	17	4.3529	0.60634	0.14706	1.199	0.274	-0.291	693	0.771	-0.05561	0.19110	-0.43082	0.31959
	Lead	678	4.4086	0.78184	0.03003			-0.371	17.361	0.715	-0.05561	0.15009	-0.37178	0.26055
Word of Mouth	Marketing Manager	17	4.9412	0.24254	0.05882	27.649	0.000	4.857	693	0.000	1.35563	0.27914	0.80758	1.90368
	Lead	678	3.5855	1.14949	0.04415			18.432	38.808	0.000	1.35563	0.07355	1.20885	1.50442

Source: The authors

Discussion

HEI commercial management is imperative and must be done continuously (Williams Jr. & Omar, 2014). To specify the mechanisms to carry out an assertive academic offer communication (Singleton, 2009), highlighting HEI factors and tangible attributes (Anctil, 2008) (Han P, 2014), in order that the value proposal captivate potential students (Williams Jr. & Omar, 2014).

The management goals of commercial management that are drawn must not be only quantitatively measured, the qualitative perception, measured through quality of service, also shows a lot (OECD, 2010), this research in contact with the student variable measurement reaffirms that a good service generates a high satisfaction experience, which can motivate to generate a new enrollment, and biannual repurchase (Bejou D., Bejou To, 2012).

In sum, the results allow to conclude that, from the point of view of both approached populations, in first instance, HEI must define marketing strategies to implement commercial management, as it has been proved that carrying out good-practice activities show that interaction in academic events, especially for HEI, these spaces are ideal to make themselves known to their potential students through authentic moments of truth.

In the second instance, HEI can contribute associatively to their college choice success, guaranteeing at the same time potential students to fulfill their expectations for construction of their life project (Agarwala R., 2006, Huang I.Y., Raimo V., Humfrey C, 2014).

In that vein, from the initial approach and literature review carried out for this project, it was evident that factors such as accreditation, Academic Quality, Tuition Charges, contact with the Student, among others (Han P, 2014, Anctil, 2008) are related to HEI selection process by students; future research could examine how the set of these elements conform the aspirational integrality of choice, and the more factors, such as those mentioned HEI have, the more attractive for the potential student it can be.

At the same time, there is an invitation to assess additional aspects with variables of interest for potential students, such as internationalization programs, double degree or housing facilities among others. It is relevant to indicate that for the higher-education field, commercial management must continue to be made and investigated since, as was previously commented, the implementation of good practices that generate content, and managed in academic environments, create moments of truth motivating potential students to make the right HEI choice.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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