

Original Article (Mixed)

Investigating and explaining of the Effective Factors on the Marketing Agility of Educational Services in Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of the current research was to investigate and explain the factors affecting the marketing agility of educational services in Iran. According to the purpose, the research method was applicable, and in terms of the implementation method, it was mixed (qualitative-quantitative of sequential type); in such a way that the first step was a systematic review of research literature (library studies) to identify factors affecting the marketing agility of educational services in Iran, and the second step was to use the Delphi method, relying on the opinion of experts, to examine and adjust the factors revealed in the first step. The research population in the first step consisted of domestic and foreign research published in reliable databases in the 30-year period ending in 2023, and the sampling method in this section was purposeful. The statistical population in the second step consisted of academic experts and experienced managers of the Ministry of Education. In order to select the sample in this stage, the purposeful sampling method was used. Also, the analysis method in the first step was to analyze the content of relevant research indexed in reliable scientific databases; and in the second step, Delphi analysis using the questionnaire tool; and the research findings showed that there are 7 factors and 24 components regarding the marketing agility of educational services in Iran are effective: dynamics and adaptability (4 components), technology (3 components), culture of change (3 components), organization management (5 components), information and communication management (2 components), dynamic environment (4 components) and resource competence and empowerment (3 component). At the end, a comprehensive dendrogram of the factors, components and measures of marketing agility of educational services in Iran was presented, and appropriate solutions were proposed.

Keywords:

Marketing agility,
Educational services,
Educational
marketing,
Dendogram,
Service marketing.

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Extended abstract

Introduction

Among the organizations and companies that provide services, research shows that educational services activists, like a significant number of production and service industries, do not have the ability to respond to the diverse needs of society and dynamics in providing educational services to their clients. As a matter of fact, with the changing of the type of skills needed in the labor market, many learners do not see a match between what they learn in the formal body and the informal body of the educational system and what are the required and basic skills of the present age. Managers and researchers have realized that the traditional approaches and actions are no longer responsive, and the organization and the surrounding environment as well as the market and customers should be looked at in a new way. Therefore, the current environment has prompted marketers to use agile methods to shorten time, increase flexibility, and intensify competition in order to quickly coordinate and adapt to the market (Khan, 2020). Current conditions require a transition from traditional marketing to an agile one, and marketing agility is an example of a dynamic capability that has a significant impact on conventional capabilities that leads to superior financial performance (Vaillant & Lafuente, 2019).

In fact, with the increase in competition between educational institutions to attract the audience, it has become necessary to apply marketing principles to gain success and achieve organizational goals (Chiramba & Maringe, 2020); Therefore, one of the approaches that can be used to face this unstable and unpredictable environment is the use of agility in the field of service marketing (Tabataba'i-Nasab et al, 2019). Agile marketing is a new approach in marketing that focuses on rapid development, and is considered as a key priority to achieve marketing excellence.

Regarding the wide challenges facing the field of educational services such as increasing pressures on governments and reduction of government budgets in recent years, increase in the number of graduates, declining population pyramid, increasing unemployment and employment crisis for young people: especially educated ones, change in expectations, competition, changing needs of the market, responsibility and accountability to people in the society, evolution in traditional education and trend towards new education and applicable research, and considering the upcoming challenges in the field of education and learning and the changes and developments of the current society of Iran, which is typically in a transition stage, needs to be agile in providing educational services in accordance with the wishes and needs of customers in the way of surpassing competitors, dealing with threats and using the opportunities created more than ever; therefore, the current research is trying to answer the question: what are the factors affecting the marketing agility of educational services in Iran?

Theoretical framework

Educational marketing agility

In today's competitive era, companies need to be proactive in order to measure and invest in opportunities and not lose values. In order to achieve this agility, companies must identify their capabilities and avoid myopia of capabilities (Battistella et al, 2017). Meanwhile, marketing agility has been identified as a factor that enables companies to identify the opportunities and respond quickly to market changes; and as a result, to effective dynamic competition (Vaillant and Lafuente, 2019). Marketing agility in the academic system (as a service provider) is the ability to recognize and respond to environmental opportunities and threats with ease, speed and skill. Intra-organizational partnership to produce science, inter-organizational cooperation to distribute and disseminate wealth creation for universities, organizational speed and precision to respond faster to the needs of academic stakeholders,



flexibility, response to demand and culture of academic change and development are the capabilities of agile universities.

Research methodology

This research is applicable in terms of its purpose, descriptive-analytical in terms of its nature, and in terms of methodology, it is among mixed researches (qualitative-quantitative of sequential type); which have been done through 2 steps: the exploratory approach and systematic review of past literature (library studies relying on the review and revision of domestic and foreign researches) to identify the factors affecting the marketing agility of educational services in Iran, and also using the Delphi method relying on the opinion of experts familiar with the research topic to review and possibly adjust the factors affecting the marketing agility of educational services in Iran, related to the first step. The population of this research, in the first step, is valid domestic and foreign research related to the research topic in a 30-year period ending in 2023, and the sampling method in this part is non-probability of a purposeful type; and the statistical population in the second step is a group of academic experts and managers experienced in the field of the Ministry of Education (as a Delphi panel). After identifying the factors affecting the marketing agility of educational services in Iran in the first step, the analysis of distributed Delphi questionnaire was analyzed in the second step with the mean difference of opinions and Kendall's correlation coefficient.

Research findings

The identification of the most important factors of marketing agility led to 397 measures in the form of 86 components, which after a comprehensive review of the identified measures and components, finally 7 main factors were considered as the main categories, and 30 components resulting from the review and integration of the components of the previous stage as main codes, and the initial 397 measures (which were reduced to 148 after removing the similar, mergeable and unrelated items) as sub-codes. In the Delphi analysis, the results of W. Kendall's correlation test for five repetitions (all measures) with values higher than 0.5 showed the homogeneity of opinions and confirmed the accuracy of the received information.

Conclusion

The findings of the research, after performing two steps of content analysis and Delphi analysis based on receiving the opinions of experts in different rounds, showed that the agility model of educational services marketing in Iran can be based on 7 factors and 24 components, including dynamism and adaptability (4 components), technology (3 components), change culture (3 components), organization management (5 components), information and communication management (2 components), dynamic environment (4 components) and resource competence and empowerment (3 components). The findings of the present research are aligned with the results of Hoseini et al, (2023), Foltean et al, (2022), Kalaignanam et al, (2021), Vagnoni and Khoddami (2019), Zhou et al, (2019), Battistella et al, (2017), Golmohammadi et al, (2021), Arjmandi et al, (2019), and Khavari et al, (2019).

Based on the research results, the following suggestions are presented:

- Managers of educational service centers should evaluate the current status of marketing their services and, while analyzing the gap, gain an understanding and awareness of the status of their marketing style.
- Creating a suitable database of all the components identified in this research in order to use them optimally in the organization and help managers to make decisions in dynamic situation.
- The performance evaluation of the activities and employees of the educational services department (marketing and non-marketing) should be included in the agenda of the managers



so that, while knowing the existing strengths and weaknesses, the need assessment for the necessary training should be done in a practical way in order to improve skills (multi-skilling) of human resources, the possibility of better utilization of employees in suitable jobs will be provided.

Interested researchers can pursue the following research in future research:

- 1- Conducting research similar to the current research in a wider society to improve the generalizability of the findings of this research;
- 2- A study based on the application of other research methods, including the methods under the qualitative research strategy to deepen the findings;
- 3- Comparative study of the findings of the current research model with other existing models at the level of leading countries in the field of marketing agility of educational services.