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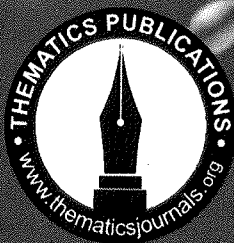
ISSN 2277-3002

THEMATICS

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

A PEER-REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

Vol 1 • Issue 4 • Oct 2012



Shivakumar Deene
Chief Editor

S. S. Kanade
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THEMATICS JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

ISSN 2277-3002

Vol 1. Issue 4. Oct 2012.

Available online at <http://www.thematicsjournals.org/TJBusMgt>

CONTENTS

MARKET ORIENTED STRATEGY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY, AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT

Dharmini J. Mehta

168 - 173

A STUDY OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GANDHINAGAR DIVISION

Kirtilal G. Judal & Rajendra V. Raval

174 - 178

A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY ON MANAGEMENT OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT & NON-GOVERNMENT YOUTH CLUBS IN GUJARAT

Maheshkumar U. Daru & U. T. Desai

179 - 180

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND LEAN

Debaprayag Chaudhuri & Sadhan K. Ghosh

181 - 188

MARKET ORIENTED STRATEGY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY, AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT

Dharmini J. Mehta

Market orientation refers to the organization wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future needs of customers, disseminating intelligence horizontally and vertically within the organization and organization wide action or responsiveness to market intelligence. It comprises three core themes: a customer focus, co-ordinated marketing, and profitability (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Thus market orientation starts by analyzing what potential customers- who constitute a market-require and at what price, and then attempts to systematically direct the efforts of the organization towards meeting the requirements of customers (Leader and Kyritsis, 1989).

Distance education (DE) is an exchange process between the two viz; open university or institute of distance education and the students (Bandhu, 1995a). Market oriented distance education requires provision of wide range of services necessary for different students, at convenient place, at affordable cost and promoted through right promotional media. Since distance education is catering to the educational needs of different students, it is viewed as a centre of different faculties working together. It is in this context a need has been felt to work out the level of market orientation in distance education i.e., whether the institute has properly addressed educational requirements of target clientele with different demographic and educational background or not.

Objectives of the Study:

Within the framework of Market Orientation in BAOU, following are the objectives of the study:

- To know whether target customers of distance

education are satisfied with its product adequacy and suitability.

- To find out the level of satisfaction among target group with regard to place effectiveness of distance education.
- To know the utilization of various promotional tools in distance education.
- To assess the responsibility of prices in distance education.
- To develop a suitable market oriented strategy for ensuring better services to students.

Target Customers:

Distance education intends to cater the educational requirements of students who are qualified but do not stand any chance due to limited number of seats in traditional system or; who need vocational training, professional updating and cannot attend a campus based training/professional course or; who wish to pursue lifelong learning opportunities which may not be available in the traditional colleges/universities or; who desire to acquire university level qualification but cannot do so because they: i)lack educational qualification required for entry to traditional colleges/universities, ii)have family commitment especially with young children who cannot go to the colleges/universities, iii) are in full-time employment and cannot or choose not to give up their jobs, iv) live in institutions which they cannot leave, and v) prefer to study independently.

Public Image and Distance Education:

Images are the perceptions and beliefs of an institution, the values of the institution and its courses/ programmes, formed by receivers. Receivers of image

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and individuals who are members of loose individualized groups such as students and prospects, including parents of the both students and prospects and general public (Kangal 1999). Performance indicator for the distance education institutions in terms of popularity of programmes, number of students opting for different courses and successful delivery of academic and administrative components are sensitive to public image.

The four Ps of marketing decision (Product Adequacy and Suitability, Price Reasonability, Place effectiveness and Promotion Adequacy) are largely controllable by the distance learning centers and are hence considered predetermined. In distinction, public image processes are less controllable by the distance learning institutions. Public image creates goodwill, which increase the brand equity. Brand equity of IGNOU is very high vis-à-vis other distance teaching institutes of the country especially the institutes like one under reference (BAOU). Public image has gone very high in case of IGNOU because of its established student support services, high quality of learning material and set admissions and examinations timetable.

BAOU is still fighting because of dual system for basic freedom on account of academic and administrative control and strong perceptual differences of the traditional system administration towards the distance education.

Public image has strategic implications for marketing of distance education that are multi-fold. Good images are about values that promote consumer franchise; they last long and to an extent buffer the institutes against market vagaries. At the same time, damages to image take long to recover. The time element of public image affects the marketing efforts of the firm far into the future. Images are about specificity of perception, about institutional values, about information on institute operations. They need lot of efforts to change. Specificity of perception is important, give that image buildings involve investment. Value judgments obtained through images may be useful inputs drawn by students in affective reasoning that influence learning attitudes, learning behavior.

Distance Education Mix:

The present study is a case study of BAOU. It is based on secondary data while analyzing the extent of market orientation in distance education. An effort has been made conceptually analyze the level of 'Product Adequacy and suitability', 'Price Reasonability', 'Place Effectiveness', 'Promotion Adequacy' in distance education on the four marketing Ps in BAOU.

Table-2: programme-wise and marketing mix-wise market orientation in Distance Education of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University.

QUESTIONS SR. NO	PAS-MA	PAS-BA	PR-MA	PR-BA	PME-MA	PME-BA	PA-MA	PA-BA
1	4.00	4.57	4.33	3.86	4.33	4.57	4.33	4.71
2	3.66	3.29	2.00	3.00	3.66	4.71	4.33	4.43
3	4.00	4.57	4.33	2.86	4.33	4.86	3.33	3.86
4	4.33	4.43	2.00	3.00	1.67	3.86	5.00	3.43
5	4.66	4.14	4.33	4.14	3.00	4.43	4.00	4.43
6	4.33	3.29	3.33	2.86				
7			4.33	4.43				
8			2.00	2.57				
TOTAL	24.98	24.29	26.65	26.72	16.99	22.43	20.99	20.86
GRAND MEAN	4.16	4.05	3.33	3.34	3.40	4.49	4.20	4.17

- PAS (product adequacy and suitability)
- PR (price reasonability)
- PME (place managing effectiveness)
- PA (promotion adequacy)

Measurement of Market Orientation in Distance Education:

Market orientation in distance education has been measured on the basis of surveys conducted by Sharma (1991), Sharma (1994), Gupta (2000) and Sharma and Gupta (2001) pertaining to 'Place Managing Effectness' (PME), 'Promotion Adequacy' (PA) and Price Reasonability (PR). A five point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to students of BAOU pursuing M.A, B.Com and B.A. Programmes during their personal contact programmes. Student were asked to assign 5,4,3,2 and 1 point for 'Strong Agree', 'Agree', 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree' with each statement revealing market orientation in distance education. Out of total respondents, only 55% filled the questionnaires properly. Market orientation in distance education has been worked out on the basis of simple arithmetic average.

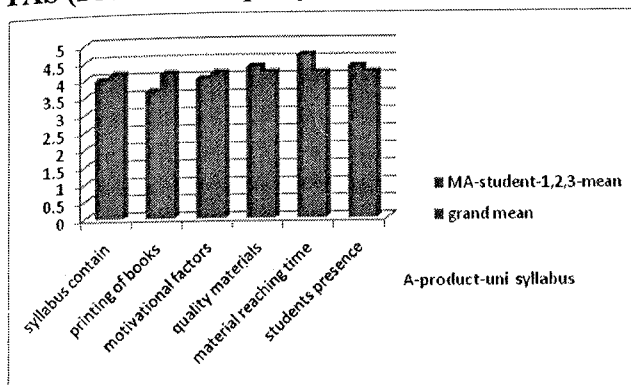
Product Adequacy and Suitability in Distance Education:

Here market orientations means that all major product decision should begin with an understanding of the needs of the target costumers. The subject matter, type of course, the level of programmes (under-graduate, postgraduate, diploma and certification courses), nature and methods of presentation are the main aspects of 'Product Adequacy and Suitability' in distance education. The variables falling under PAS in distance education (Sharma 1994) are:

- Competence of faculty in writing study materials.
- Quality of teaching during PCP.
- Class duration.
- Class Management.
- Image Perception.
- Study materials according to syllabus.
- Reference of study materials.
- Printing of study materials.
- Teaching aids.
- Faculty of PCP.
- Guidance and counseling in Directorate.
- Focus on important questions.

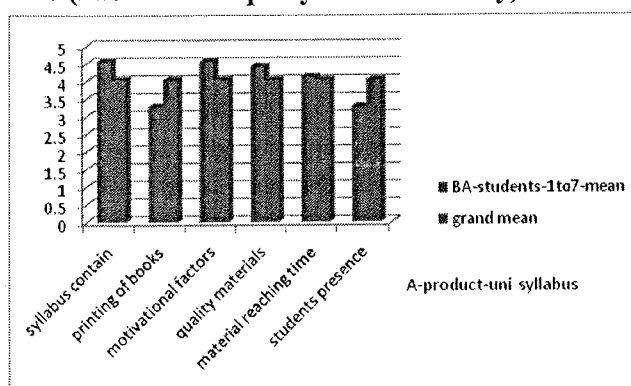
- Teaching quality at par with regular students.
- Relevance of the topic.
- Motivation of learning.
- Need based programme.
- Quality of study material.
- Supply of study materials.
- Overall acceptability of study material.
- Presence in the class.
- Regularity and punctuality of students.
- Personal attention to the students.
- Overall happiness of class teaching.

PAS (Product Adequacy and Suitability):



MA students are highly satisfied in three questions with 4.66, 4.33, 4.33 and medium level of satisfaction with 4.00, 4.00 points in the PAS (product adequacy and suitability) aspect of distance education (DE) which contains total six questions, only in one question with 3.66 points exhibited dissatisfaction towards the product mix in DE (table - 2). PAS in DE has arrived at 4.16 which is above average and indicates the satisfaction of respondents towards the quality of study materials and personal contact programme (PCP).

PAS (Product Adequacy and Suitability):



BA students are satisfied with four questions out of six (4.57, 4.57, 4.43, and 4.14) and dissatisfied with two questions (3.29, 3.29). Its grand mean is 4.05. Here above average indicates the satisfaction of respondents.

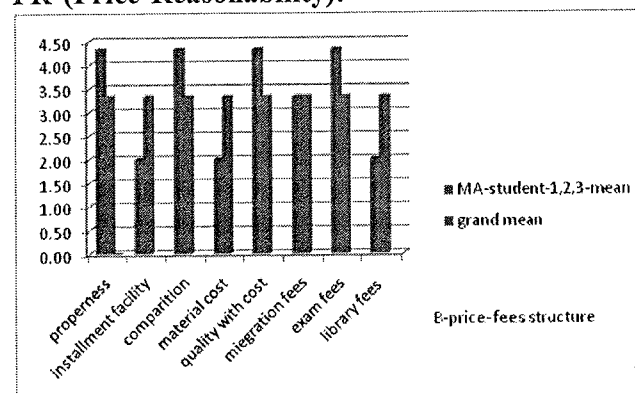
Price Reasonability in Distance Education:

Market orientation demands delivery of superior products/services at reasonable prices. Price of distance

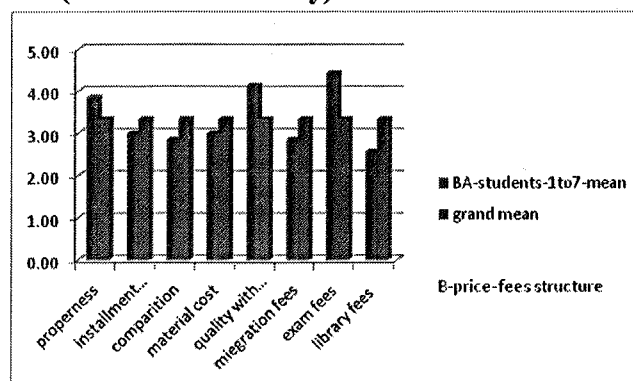
education comprises admission fee, cost of study material, examination fee and entrance test fee and other costs. The various aspects of 'Price Reasonability' in distance education covered by Sharma and Gupta (2001) are:

- Amount of admission fee.
- Total price paid.
- Payment and installments.
- Difference between admission fee of distance education and regular course.
- Admission fee and course value.
- Cost of study material.
- Cost of study material and its quality.
- Difference between examination fee of distance and regular course.
- Migration fee.
- Other expenses.
- Nearness of examination centre.
- Hostel accommodation during PCP and examination.
- Rent paid during PCP and examination.
- Availability of subsidized food during PCP stay.
- Simple correspondence.
- Simple admission process.
- No corruption in the Directorate.
- Simple official procedure.
- Study material distribution.
- Facility of library.
- Library fee.
- Refund of library fee.
- Books in the library.
- Good books in the library.
- Competence of faculty of the Directorate.

PR (Price Reasonability):



MA students have accorded below average mean score (2.00, 2.00 and 2.00) in three questions on five point likert scale towards price reasonability aspect of DE. (table -2) among the various questions students are highly satisfied (4.33, 4.33, 4.33, 4.33, 3.33). The overall value of the students of price reasonability at 3.33 it is hereby concluded that target group of DE to be satisfied with its cost structure.

PR (Price Reasonability):

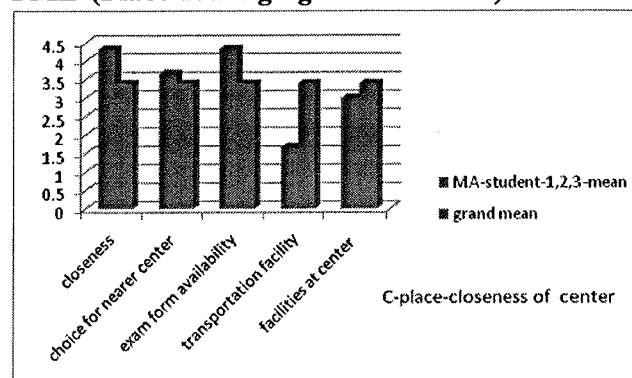
BA students are satisfied with five questions out of eight (4.43, 4.14, 3.86, 3.00, and 3.00) and dissatisfied with three questions (2.57, 2.86, 2.86) its grand mean is 3.34. Here above average indicates the satisfaction of respondent.

Place Managing Effectiveness in Distance Education:

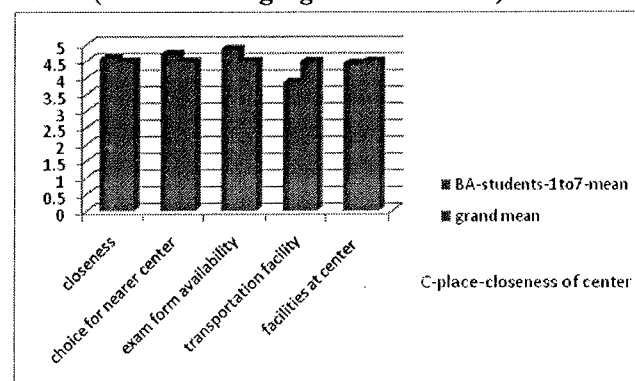
The products/services should be offered at the right places which are easily accessible in order make the physical distribution outlets of an institution market oriented. Going to the doorsteps of the target groups by opening entrance test centers at the place convenient can ensure place effectiveness in distance education of the students. The various issues under place mix in distance education as covered by Sharma (1991) are:

- Approachability.
- Nearness.
- Admission through convenient centres.
- One visit admission at the centres.
- Nice arrangement during rush hours.
- Examination forms easily available at the centre.
- Examination at convenient places.
- All fairness during examination.
- Effective supervision during examination.
- Alert movement of the invigilators.
- Personal contact programme (PCP) at the convenient places.
- Convenient timing of PCP.
- Transport easily available.
- Conducive PCP environment.
- Good lighting arrangement during evening classes.
- Canteen facility during PCP stay.
- Clean drinking water during PCP.
- Easy access to PCP faculty after class work.
- Faculty of the Institute available at the centres.
- Readily availability of the Institute's staff at the centres.
- Due attention to complaints at the administrative office and centres.
- PCP Director's keenness in its proper functioning.
- Convenience during examination stay.

- Socializing arrangement during PCP.
- Good arrangement during admission.

PME (Place Managing Effectiveness):

Except one question all the questions highlighted MA student's satisfaction towards place managing satisfaction in DE (table- 2) in two questions center's closeness and exam form availability has accorded highest mean value (4.33, 4.33) with regards to various aspects of place mix in DE. The overall operations of BAOU with regard to place management in terms of average mean arrived at 3.40 which are again above the average level of satisfaction.

PME (Place Managing Effectiveness):

BA students are satisfied with four questions out of five (4.86, 4.71, 4.57, and 4.43) and dissatisfaction with one question (3.86). Its grand mean is 4.49. Here above average indicates the satisfaction of respondent.

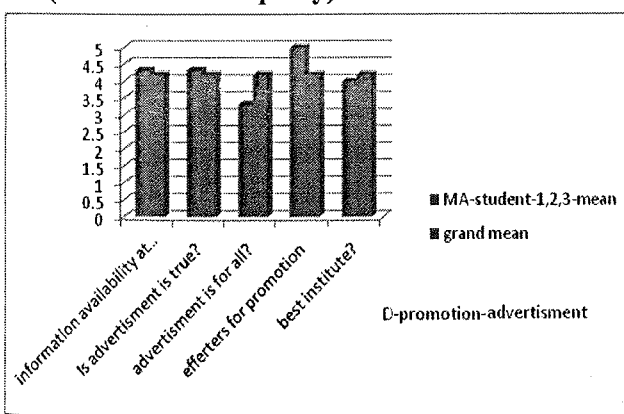
Promotion Adequacy in Distance Education:

An institution should adopt an approach by which the wider expectations of the customers can be met and different promotional tools should be employed to assist the target clientele (Bandhu 1995b). The 'Promotion Adequacy' in distance education refers to effective communication between distance teaching institution and its distance learner so that, special attention is given to supply the information on time to the existing and prospective students about the time and place for different academic activities in comparison to regular courses and also academic facilities and cost of study including admission and

examination free etc. The promotion mix variables in distance education as covered by Sharma, Bandhu and Gupta (2000) are:

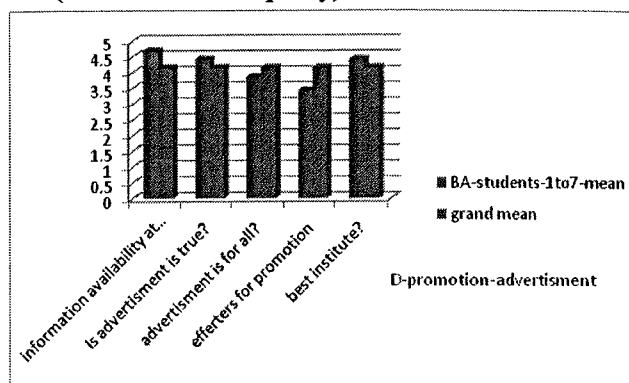
- Sufficient information before admission.
- Fair and honest information.
- Timely availability of syllabus and information brochure.
- Sufficient and timely guidance and counseling.
- Information study materials.
- Pre-admission satisfaction about the course value.
- Behaviour of officials of the Directorate.
- Fair information from teachers of the Directorate.
- Competence of directorate's teachers.
- Competence of PCP faculty.
- Favourable attitude of friends and relatives towards Directorate.
- Pre-admission objective analysis of the course.
- Favourable attitude of the Director towards complaints.
- No scope for complaints.
- Adequate and timely advertisements.
- Advertisements in widely circulated newspapers.
- Highly motivated and happy PCP teachers.
- Happiness of the Directorate's officials.
- Institutes teaching staff happiness.
- Timely correspondence by the Directorate.
- Adherence to schedulable of PCP and dispatch of study materials etc.
- Recommendations for admission by many people.
- Comparatively best Institute in the region.

PA (Promotion Adequacy):



Among five questions four questions answers (5.00, 4.33, 4.33, and 4.00) have expressed MA student's highest satisfaction towards promotion mix in DE (table- 2). This aspect of DE has obtained "below average" scores from one question (3.33). The overall operational efficiency of BAOU in disseminating right, timely, adequate and fair information to its existing and prospective target group is though provoking (4.20).

PA (Promotion Adequacy):



BA students are satisfied with three questions out of five (4.71, 4.43, and 4.43) and dissatisfy with two questions (3.86, 3.43). Its grand mean is 4.17. Here above average indicates the satisfaction of respondent.

Strategic Action:

The overall market orientation in DE University of Ahmedabad as measured through 5-point Likert Scale on the bases of response generated from M.A & B.A students towards product adequacy and suitability, price responsibility, place managing effectiveness and promotion adequacy.

Although market orientation in distance education has secured above average mean value on orientation scale. Still there are few aspects of 4 p's of marketing mix which have generated poor response from the sample questions. Following issues need strategic action like printing of books (3.66) in product adequacy, instant facility (2.00) in price reasonability transportation facility (1.67) in place managing effectiveness and information for all possibilities (3.33) promotion adequacy have secured below average mean scores from majority of the respondents. Thus in order to take these aspects up to 5-point orientation scale, utmost attention and careful planning in an integrated concept of student oriented marketing strategy must be undertaken.

As per B.A students analysis following are the below average points which indicates the dissatisfaction of respondents like (3.29, 3.29, 2.57, 2.86, 2.86, 3.86, 3.86, 3.43). As per this points following areas need improvement in unit like printing of books, students pressure, fees installment facility, minimize or nullify migration fees and library fees, improve or start transportation facility, information for all facility and maximize university efforts for information delivery for batter result.

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