

## Marketing Communication Strategies For Distance Learning Uzaktan Öğretim İçin Pazarlama İletişimi Stratejileri

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### Abstract

Education is now a global product with institutions worldwide competing for students and finding ever more creative ways to satisfy student needs and preferences. Highly developed and competitive organization in the market of educational services, owing to an effective and flexible system of accumulation and utilization of scientific, business, financial and information resources. Impact: Formation of a qualitatively new learning culture in the framework of the involved institutions enhanced by technology and revealed in three dimensions: a universal self-organized student, existence of a working network of professional development and research of faculty; and the appreciation of the phenomenon of continuous learning. Universities and other educational institutions interested in introducing or disseminating educational and consulting services using up-to-date Web-technologies are welcome to collaboration.

The marketing of education is a controversial issue. Although the opinions on the signification of the educational institution as a product and the students as the customers still remains arguable the transformation of the instruction process as a student-based model requires the utilization of the marketing opportunities are used. Teaching has been increasingly developed as a learner-centered model, shaping the process as a life-long learners experience to match their existing knowledge and skills is crucial.

**Keywords:** Distance Learning, Marketing Communication, Promotion

### Öz

Eğitim günümüzde küresel bir ürün olmakla kalmamış, artan oranda eğitim kurumunun hizmet sağlama ile öğrencilerin seçenekleri de artmıştır. Yüksek rekabet oranına sahip olan eğitim sektörü, bilim ve iş dünyasını bir araya getiren esnek bir sistem arayışındadır. Bunun sonucu olarak yeni ve söze dayalı bir eğitim kültürünün oluştuğunu, bunun yeni teknolojilerle desteklenerek boyut kazandığını söylemek mümkündür. Bu açıdan baktığımızda evrensel bir öğrenci tipinin bu öğrenciye hizmet sunacak öğretim görevlisi ve araştırmacının yetiştirilmesi zorunluluktur. Bu zorunluluk günümüzde web teknolojilerinin de eğitim ile uyumlu hale getirilmesini adeta dikte etmiştir.

Eğitimin pazarlanması hala tartışmalı bir konu olarak durmaktadır. Çünkü geleneksel eğitim modelinden öğrenci merkezli eğitim modeline geçmek, kurumlara fırsatlar kadar tehditler de sunmaktadır. Ancak yeni öğrenci tipolojisi eğitimi hem yaşam boyu bir hale getirmekte hem de öğrenen merkezli olmaya zorlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada yukarıdaki başlıklara ilişkin değerlendirilmeler yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uzaktan Öğretim, Pazarlama İletişimi, Promosyon

### Introduction

The 21st century is an era of sudden changes in the social, economic, political and cultural values. As an element of the society, education is affected by those changes as well. Distance and online education is a result of this growing inquiry.

As being a mankind, education is basic and very important right one of the human rights in the world for all of us. The human right to freedom from discrimination in all areas and levels of education, and to equal access to continuing education and vocational training, the human right to information about health, nutrition, reproduction and family planning, the human right to education is inextricably linked to other fundamental human rights-- rights that are universal, indivisible, interconnected and interdependent including: The human right to equality between men and women and to equal partnership in the family and society, to work and receive wages that contribute to an adequate standard of living, to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, to an adequate standard of living, to participate in shaping decisions and policies affecting ones community, at the local, national and international levels (<http://www.pdhre.org/rights/education.html>).

Notions of lifelong learning and a knowledge society coupled with the revolution in digital technologies have enabled education and education processes in ways previously unimagined. The harnessing of technologies for learning has also fostered greater transparency in education processes in accord with the "market" perspective supporting a standardized (Marginson and Considine, 2000, p.177), non-discriminatory approach to education which can meet professional requirements and is offered to all qualifying students on the same basis (Parker, 2005). It is not our intention to contribute to the debate concerning whether it is appropriate to regard students as customers, or whether education can or should be regarded as a product. We acknowledge that this debate is the subject of much contention. However, higher education has evolved with the 'new economy' and warrants being considered within a competitive framework. As commonalities in degree and postgraduate programs increase allowing for qualifications to become portable worldwide, competition between suppliers of higher education is increasing. (Demiray et al., 2007, p.162)

### **Education Is Service**

One of the main defenses is that education being a service can not adopt marketing strategies meant for a manufactured product. Marketing educational services is more about building trust and commitment,

more about making students loyal alumnus. Relationship marketing is essentially establishing, developing and maintaining successful long term relationships with students.

Marketing strategies and distance learning are correlated because they deal with the creation of a product that cannot be copied by anyone else, and with creating an atmosphere of nurture for students' right from the enquiry stage. For the student, any educational institution is attractive if it has the right mix of pricing, academic experience, and credibility. If a college is able to provide services beyond these parameters, it has earned the loyalties of any student enrolled with it.

Education is a service and students are the prime focus of the institution. Marketing literature has identified intangibility, perishability, inseparability, and heterogeneity as the four characteristics of services. Education services constitute core and supporting services. Teaching and learning that occur in the class are examples of core service because it is critical to a successful learning experience. A number of supporting services include real-time information about courses, student advising, online registrations, orientation, student accounts, help-desk, complaint handling, and feedback in a friendly, trustworthy and timely manner. Students regularly come into contact with the staff associated with these services during their stay at the institution

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Some online universities consist of normal classes mixed with an online program. The largest of universities that can be studied online is The University of Maryland University College. They provide the most

choices and services to its students. UMUC provides about 70 different degrees and certificates online. They have a comprehensive variety of student services and counseling that can be accessed completely online. Online universities provide many new innovations and open a completely new door to many who wouldn't have had the chance to get degrees in the past. It doesn't matter where you live or what job you hold presently universities with programs online allow you to study part-time at your convenience. It provides you with the flexibility of working in your own home and working around your schedule. It has proved to be beneficial for many (<http://www.articlesfair.com/articles/8625/1/The-New-Door-of-Online-Universities/Page1.html>).

Institutions market themselves as student focused, but in reality most SRMs are designed to focus on products rather than on students. Institutions need to better engage students with collaborative learning experiences, empowering students and making them feel they are an integral component of the value-creation process. The merging of Web 2.0 technologies with SOA (service-oriented architecture) provides opportunities to develop faster, cheaper and more flexible student centered services to meet the needs of all students. One of the strategies available to the institution is to leverage the social dimension of Web 2.0, harnessing the collective power of students to custom design services using technologies such as blogs to syndicate their posts, wikis as collaboration tools, and mashups to assemble Web components and data (Shaik, 2008).

### **A Marketing Myth as A Metaphor**

There is continuing debate as to whether concepts derived from the business world can readily be transferred to public service organizations such as universities, hospitals, and libraries. It is argued that conventional organizations are funded differently, have different objectives, and operate in a different environment. But while in the past libraries might have been slow to respond to outside influence, they are now as active as their business counterparts in adopting a strategic marketing and commercial outlook. Examples of this activity are the growing interest in marketing techniques, the revamping of services, and the production of corporate videos. At the same time, librarians are also more concerned about having a good reputation and a positive public image.

Satisfying the customer is the primary concern in the marketing process. Users will only come back for more service if they are satisfied; if they are not, they will find a different resource. Thus, the ethos of the organization should value satisfying the customer, and everyone should have a role to play in rendering maximum satisfaction. A library has to have sufficient understanding of existing and potential users to create superior value for them. This value comes through increasing the benefits to the users. One way to do this is at a customer orientation, which requires that the library understand value to the customer as it is today and as it will evolve over time.

This makes marketing more than just finding customers for the available information sources, services, and technologies. It makes marketing a partnership with the user, who becomes a central part of the total service efforts (<http://www.sla.org/content/Shop/Information/infoonline/2002/nov02/whatsmarket.cfm>).

## **Marketing Strategy Is Integrated Marketing Communications**

### **IMC Literature**

Integrated marketing communications as concept and as a field of praxis is has been around little more than a decade. However, neither scholars nor practitioners have reached an agreement on definition, measurement or on the implementation of the concept. According to Kitchen and Schultz (1999), there is a little progress towards understanding IMC beyond 'one voice, one look' perception. Another debate however has been on who should lead the integration process (Kliatchko, 2005). Perhaps if there is one cohort that has been widely affected by these discussions are advertising and public relations agencies. It is a fact that, on tactical level clients expect integrity of a kind in their marketing communications efforts primarily from their agencies. Question remains, to what extent advertising and public relations agencies perceive, understand and (willing to) implement IMC on their clients' behalf.

Since early 1990's, scholars have been doing extensive research on IMC and its perception by advertising and public relations agencies throughout the world. Kitchen and Schultz (1999) stated that such research is valuable in order for establishing a basis for more

'robust' development of IMC. Besides, a longitudinal research effort over certain period of time would help scholars to overcome to criticism (Cornellisen and Lock, 2000) that IMC is a 'management fad', and helps theory development (Swain, 2004).

Today it is clear that IMC is not fuzzi. On the contrary, it is evolving to a paradigm. Nevertheless, one can conclude that its development stage varies by country or marketing culture where IMC cultivates (Kitchen et al., 2004).

The researchers indicated that IMC had been arrived to South Korea and accepted as a 'new form of marketing communications strategy' (Kim et al., 2004). Further evidence suggested that both advertising agencies and clients were already implementing IMC. Lastly, research results revealed that there were some changes in IMC landscape just as has been happening in English-speaking countries.

Kallmeyer and Abratt (2001) conducted a similar research on perception of IMC amongst South African advertising agencies. Researchers found similarities between their study and American (Schultz and Kitchen, 1997), and New Zealand (Eagle et al., 1999) studies. Scholars indicated that the differences were minor rather than substance between those three studies (Kallmeyer and Abratt, 2000).

Kitchen et al. (2004) in their study on perception of IMC derived from UK advertising and public relations executives revealed that agency practitioners know IMC. Further findings in the research indicated that consumers' needs became a driving force in IMC implementation. The researches also pointed out that major weakness of IMC was its measurement. This finding has been widely debated in IMC literature by various scholars.

Kitchen and Sever (2008) investigated the perception of IMC among Australian advertising and public relation circles. The research findings indicate that advertising agency executives tend to view the concept as similar to process used to 'unify promotional messages'. On the other hand, PR agencies perceive integrated marketing communications as 'a strategic business processes. The findings thus point to a major variance between the two groups. That is while advertising agencies view IMC as a tactical tool, for PR agencies IMC is a strategic pathway. This finding does

have a comparative value. In a study which was done six years ago, 'one voice' emerged as a peculiar finding. Findings of this research over half a decade later indicate that perceptions of IMC have not been changed much amongst advertising and PR circles. Obviously, reasons behind this finding should be analysed and can be a subject of another study.

### **Goal and Importance of IMC in Education Market**

The education systems have been globally improving during the mid 90s, when the internet services were introduced and adopted information, communication and educational technologies for develop teaching and learning processes with an aim of providing world-class or an excellent 'on-click' education on demand to the learners. With the growth in the internet technologies, online delivery of programmes became more popular worldwide. Format of online delivery of programmes through the Internet is quite effective for learners placed geographically at distant places.

As with any other new phenomenon, this online communication for education brought new set of emotional, physical and psychological issues.

The teaching and learning through this new medium exposed the learning community to such experiences where the teacher and students normally do not see face to face each other. The electronic communication occurs through synchronous and asynchronous means like e-mail, discussion forums, list-serves, electronic chat, bulletin board systems, WebCT, web-based, internet-based etc. Thus the virtual classroom faces issues like humanizing, roles, norms, ethics, privacy and socio-psychological. Virtual Learning System has emerged an alternate the number of aspirants of education, specifically higher education, overloads delivery system of education as the conventional system. The numbers in virtual learning has also increased many folds over a short span of two decades. The emergence and developments in virtual learning methodologies has brought certain theoretical and pragmatic approaches to the field (Demiray, 2007, p. 278).

Marketing strategies and distance learning are symbiotic. Since education is essentially a service and deals with human beings. Hence student enrollment and retention are very critical aspects for a college to consider.

Everything in the our cosmos today takes to be marketed well; even education, hence marketing strategies and distance learning move manus in manus. In order to create a lasting impact on the psyches of the mark audience, educational establishments offer distance learning programmes require being a cut above the residual. Education is a service and any service takes to be marketed well to be attractive to the consumer, who in this cause is an educatee Marketing strategies and distance learning are symbiotic, since education is essentially a service and business deals with human existences. Hence educatee enrollment and holding are very critical facets for a college to see. The net is rife with dotcoms looking to do quick profit, which are posing a serious menace to the more serious academic establishments looking at providing quality educational experience to its pupils. Many universities have not only set outed offer online versions of their on-campus programmes, but are also working on creating a virtual campus for its online pupils. Today the educatee is out shopping for classes and establishments; he or she is tech understanding and enrolling in a particular course of study is just a clink away for him or her. A good treat of colleges today are adopting different marketing strategies and distance learning has gone an especially volatile marketplace. Many colleges are using web founded advertisements and promotional materials aggressively for marketing their classes; the net being a relatively cheaper advertisement medium, has taken over the other traditional mediums like black and white and TV.

Pop-up advertisements email and streamers are, however, mainly mass marketing tools and are largely ineffective. What education takes right now is human relationship marketing? Human-human relationship marketing is essentially establishing, developing and maintaining successful long term human relationships with pupils. Education being a service cannot espouse marketing strategies intended for a manufactured ware.

Marketing educational services is more about edifice trust and committedness, more about making pupils loyal graduate. Marketing strategies and distance learning are correlated because they treat with the creative activity of a ware that cannot be copied by anyone else, and with creating an ambiance of foster for pupils' right from the inquiry phase. For the edu-

catee, any educational establishment is attractive if it has the right premix of pricing, academic experience, and credibility.

If a college is able to furnish services beyond these three parameters, it has cleared the truenesses of any educatee enrolled with it ([http://www.journal-a-day.com/Culture\\_And\\_Society/307845-survival-of-the-fittest-marketing-strategies-and-distance-learning.html](http://www.journal-a-day.com/Culture_And_Society/307845-survival-of-the-fittest-marketing-strategies-and-distance-learning.html)).

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), according to The American Marketing Association, is "a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time." Marketing Power Dictionary Integrated marketing communication can be defined as a holistic approach to promote buying and selling in the digital economy. This concept includes many online and offline marketing channels. Online marketing channels include any e-marketing campaigns or programs, pay-per-click, affiliate, email, banner to latest web related channels for webinar, blog, RSS, podcast, and Internet TV.

Offline marketing channels are traditional print (newspaper, magazine), mail order, public relations, industry analyst relations billboard, radio, and television. A management concept that is designed to make all aspects of marketing communication such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing work together as a unified force, rather than permitting each to work in isolation. In practice, the goal of IMC is to create and sustain a single look or message in all elements of a marketing campaign.

A successful integrated marketing communication plan will customize what is needed for the client based on time, budget and resources to reach target or goals. Small business can start an integrated marketing communication plan on a small budget using a website, email and SEO. Large Corporation can start an integrated marketing communication plan on a large budget using print, mail order, radio, TV plus many other online ad campaigns. Reasons for the growing Importance of IMC there have been many shifts in the advertising and media industry that have caused IMC to develop into a primary strategy for

most advertisers ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integrated\\_Marketing\\_Communications#Goal\\_of\\_Integrated\\_Marketing\\_Communications](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integrated_Marketing_Communications#Goal_of_Integrated_Marketing_Communications)). These are:

- From media advertising to multiple forms of communication (including promotions, product placements, mailers...)
- From mass media to more specialized media, which are centered around/on specific target audiences?
- From a manufacturer-dominated market to a retailer-dominated market. The market control has transferred into the consumer's hands.
- From general-focus advertising and marketing to data-based marketing.
- From low agency accountability to greater agency accountability. Agencies now play a larger role in advertising than ever before.
- From traditional compensation to performance-based compensation. This encourages people to do better because they are rewarded for the increase in sales or benefits they cause to the company.
- From limited Internet access to widespread Internet availability.

The primary goal of IMC is to affect the perception of value and behavior through directed communication. The development and diffusion of IMC is closely associated with fast technological advancement and of a rapidly globalizing and deregulations of markets and individualization of consumption patterns. This has emphasized the need to adjust objectives and strategies to changing marketing and communication realities. From this point of view, communication has to move from tactics to strategy. In the rapidly changing and highly competitive world of the twenty-first century only strategically oriented IMC can help business to move forward. It is a matter of common interest for academics, professional schools and practitioners on strategic and tactical levels to close the gap in order to move IMC from tactics to strategy.

This can be achieved by international research and reconsidering educational programs regarding management, marketing and marketing communications. (Holm, 2006)

Like all other organizations, universities face a classic dilemma when developing marketing strategy. On the one hand, operational cost efficiencies arise from providing a single, undifferentiated offering to all served. With the other, when the market served is heterogeneous (and it usually is) and higher costs accrue from a variety of offerings targeted to the unique needs of the various targeted segments, comes greater student satisfaction and enhanced market success. Consequently, a university must select a marketing strategy that maintains an appropriate balance between its ability to effectively meet the needs of specifically targeted students and its ability to operate efficiently. Again according to Lewison, D. M. and Jon M. H. (2007, p. 18-19) the diversity of undergraduate and graduate student markets has increased significantly over the last decade. This variation in student demographics, psychographics and behavioral characteristics has contributed to the "age of individualism" in which the "customers as individuals" theme has become a dominant force in defining the higher education marketplace.

Supported by new technologies, extensive globalization, more socialization, and a keen sense of entitlement, the notion of students as individuals has become a market trend that can only be harvested by carefully crafted marketing strategies and activities based on clearly delineated and profiled segments of the market. The evolution of market segmentation structures is clearly shown by the growth of the idea that consumers need to be viewed as separate, discrete and distinct entities, evidenced by the sequential segmentation of mass markets into market segments, market niches, micro markets, and individual markets. Clarity of market definition and strategy is becoming more and more important in the emerging knowledge-based economy that defines the higher education industry. The intangible and perishable nature of the typical university offering adds to the need to have an identifiable target market and an actionable strategy to reach it. The suggested strategy-making processes incorporate many well-tested concepts and practices.

These procedures allow institutional marketers within the higher education setting to consider alternative ways of identifying target markets and selecting market coverage strategies. With clear understanding

of their market structures, academic institutions can develop compelling themes that knit together otherwise independent activities, and focus the energies of their marketers on the university's desired position in the marketplace. Careful market delineation allows universities to excel in definite areas that set them apart from other institutions of higher learning, and therefore provide selected student populations a unique learning value.

In addition, the above market delineation process support two key marketing abilities: market sensing and customer linking. Market sensing capabilities help institutions to detect change amongst various student populations and provide better opportunities to anticipate possible changes. Customer linking is enhanced by careful market structure delineation, in that it enhances the ability of the university to establish close and collaborative relationships with both current students (higher retention), as well as prospective students (better recruitment). Strong student linkages allow the university to recognize and respond to changes in student needs and preferences.

The market segmentation process is a highly adaptable framework. In addition to student recruitment, it can be used to segment and classify: donors relative to fund rising; employers relatively to student placement; participants relative to trainings; and alumni relative to involvement. Building and maintaining relationships is greatly enhanced if the university has a strong program of market delineation, assessment and selection.

#### **Relationship Marketing Theories and Implementations: From Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to Student Relationship Management (SRM)**

As the name implies, CRM is managing the long lasting relationship with customers often coupled with the use of information technology (IT). It is favorable to have an established relationship between companies and their clients increase chance of being the first choice if consumers want to have same or similar service or products again. This eventually leads to "brand loyalty". A loyal customer is happy customer and such customer will be a voluntary ambassador of a brand. Thus, corporations are moving away from mass marketing to relationship building strategies and education institutions can benefit from this ex-

perience. (Shaik, 2005). In education, the primary use of technology-backed CRM in marketing and promotion is to field feedbacks from students who have learned of the educational institution through advertising, word-of-mouth referral, Internet search, or other means (Hitch and MacBrayne, 2003). A model for effectively supporting e-learning (<http://ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&id=1016>).

CRM becomes even more important because as commonalities in degree and postgraduate programs increase allowing for qualifications to become portable worldwide, competition between suppliers of higher education is increasing. (Demiray et al., 2007, p.162). This could be a "unique selling proposition (USP)" for an educational program which substantially differentiates it from its global competitors. Imagine a prospective student asks this question to himself or herself: Why would I choose you? For a tertiary institution of which is equipped with educational version of CRM, student relationship management service (SRM), the answer is easy: "We do listen and alter the program according to what you need and really want. We always value your opinion and listen to you".

#### **Word-of-mouth in IMC**

Despite WOM's reemerging role in marketing communications, and relatively sufficient number of books published on the subject; the academic researches and publications on WOM is still limited. The researchers have begun to investigate WOM and its effectiveness. As consequences of scholars' interest to WOM, scholarly papers have begun to appear on viral marketing, buzz or digital consumer networks (Sun et al., 2006). However, there is a growing effort from practitioners of researching different aspects of WOM. It is a fact that mass media is highly fragmented in today's world. Thus, traditional mass media advertising's function of disseminating messages over wider audiences is looming in the horizon. So much so that according to Nielsen's global survey, word-of-mouth or aka "buzz" accounted as the most powerful selling tool over the traditional advertising ([http://www.nielsen.com/media/2007/pr\\_071001.html](http://www.nielsen.com/media/2007/pr_071001.html)).

In another study which is conducted by 'Doubleclick.com', reveals that consumers listen of whom they respect as "subject expert" and value their opinions when making a purchase decision. Interestingly, the-

se “influencers” are widely refers to internet and they embrace emerging media([http://www.doubleclick.com/insight/pdfs/dc\\_influencers\\_0612.pdf](http://www.doubleclick.com/insight/pdfs/dc_influencers_0612.pdf)). Furthermore, research findings indicate that even for a major purchase such as car, “influencers” rely much more on websites than dealerships. Growing number of formats and applications on the internet refers to number of online WOM vehicles, including but not limited to: e-mails, postings on public internet discussion boards and forums, usenet newsgroups and listservs, consumer rating websites or forums, blogs, video blogs, social networking and individual websites (Brooks, 2006). Consumers and prospects are often congregate in these platforms and share sheer amount of information and experiences they had on an issue or brand ([http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com/files/uploaded/whitepapers/nbzm\\_wp\\_CGM101.pdf](http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com/files/uploaded/whitepapers/nbzm_wp_CGM101.pdf)). This is called as ‘consumer-generated media’ or CGM. Companies which are envisioned of creative use of available internet tools use blogs as a launch pad for their new campaigns.

Nike’s Art of Speed adverblog set a good example of such a utilization of emerging technologies ([http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com/files/uploaded/whitepapers/nbzm\\_wp\\_TrustMedia.pdf](http://www.nielsenbuzzmetrics.com/files/uploaded/whitepapers/nbzm_wp_TrustMedia.pdf)).

Niederhoffer et al., (2007) investigated the effect of consumer-generated media on new product launch. Their findings indicate that for the top 10 percent of new product launches, buzz was significant. Riegner (2007) investigated the impact of web 2.0 on consumer decision. The researcher aimed to reveal the possible effects of consumer-generated media and how this new form of consumer communication will affect and reshape the coming era of marketing. The researcher points that findings indicate web 2.0 will shake off old fashion internet advertising. The scholar also indicated that when newly emerging internet savvy generation of whom are now at ‘social clicker’ stage, enters adulthood stage internet will be much more vibrant environment. Smith et al., (2007) set out to understand the nature of the social networks and connecting with them in ways that encourage WOM messages movement and characteristics of effective individuals. Scholars reported that moderately and highly connected individuals love to tell people about something new they have learned were approximately equal. The researchers also reported

that influencers tend to pass along information that they consider both unique and trusted. Casalo et al., (2007) in their study that investigates participation to brand communities on consumer trust and loyalty. Scholars reported that findings supports their axiom of consumer’s or prospects’ participation to brand communities enhance their loyalty to brand regardless of the nature of the information they gather out of such communities. The researchers findings can be grouped under three headings:

- Virtual brand communities can affect their members’ behavior.
- Virtual brand communities may help to identify the needs and desires of particular individuals or groups.
- Active participation in virtual brand communities may favor higher levels of consumer loyalty to the brand around which the community is developed.

In a similar study on value of participation in virtual consumer communities, Shang et al., (2006) investigated the effects of consumer’ lurking and posting behaviors in virtual consumer communities on specific brand loyalty. The researchers indicated that the causes and effects of lurking differed. Lurking contributed to brand loyalty more than posting did, and the primary purpose of lurking was to look for information regarding product function or performance rather than satisfying consumers’ affective needs. Graham and Havlena (2007) studied what they called “missing link” between traditional advertising and WOM in internet. Scholars’ reports that brand should redouble their efforts in using advertising to grow brand advocacy through the integration of online and offline branded consumer contact points.

The literature on direction of effects of WOM has two streams. This is because scholars who studied the subject in large grouped under two main titles. The first stream approaches the WOM from negative effects perspective. Supporters of this perspective operate from conventional wisdom that “bad news travels fast.” Perhaps abiding by this phrase, much of the WOM-effects literature has been intensified on this assumption (Argan and Sever, 2008; Richins, 1983; Anderson, 1998).



Bailey (2004) in his study investigated the effects of corporate complaint sites on consumers' attitude towards organizations. The research findings indicate that individuals shape their attitudes based on negative information they are exposed to in corporate complaints websites. The research results further indicate that organizations should not neglect the negative information that appears in such websites. Although there is a need that companies should respond to complaints that appear in consumer complaints website, they should do so by facilitating a communication in their official company websites.

The research findings also indicate a need for regular checking of consumer complaint websites as well. Coombs and Holladay (2007) point to the amplifying effect of negative WOM. Scholars added that it occurs during and after a crisis situation. However, researchers underline that low level crisis may have a limited effect on company reputation. Moreover, the ability of crisis response strategies to mitigate anger may be much more beneficial to organizations than their power to protect its reputation. In academic studies on WOM, the considerable amount of attention has been given to topics such as reasons and circumstances under which consumers spread negative WOM. Yet, the economic implications of negative word-of-mouth have not been investigated deeply. Goldenberg et al., (2007) studied the effects of negative word-of-mouth on firms' revenues. The researchers found that even the numbers of dissatisfied consumers are small; effect of negative WOM on firms' profit can be detrimental. In another study that compares positive and negative WOM, scholar reports and interesting finding. The researchers found that number of people producing positive WOM is bigger than individuals who produce negative WOM, and the occurrence of positive and in some cases negative WOM is positively related to market share (East et al., 2007).

Academic research articles directly linked with WOM and movie preferences are even more limited. One of the early studies on the effect of the positive and negative WOM on movie appreciations reports that negative WOM has a significant effect on movie preference (Burzynski and Bayer, 1977). The researchers found that the negative WOM is so affective even in some cases respondents reported that they redeem their tickets immediately after being exposed to negative information on a movie. The studies on the

source of negative information for movies skew toward movie critics in most cases. A study on critics and their effects on box office revenues found that negative WOM hurt box office performance more than positive one (Barusoy et al., 2003). A study on WOM for movies and its dynamics and impact on box office revenues revealed that the word-of-mouth activities are the most active during a movie's prerelease and opening week, and that WOM is more of a component to other information sources than a substitute. Another study on online movie reviews and their impact on movie sales revealed that online WOM has a great impact on movie preference. The study also revealed that not all WOM is equal. Consumers need to distinguish between "true" and "honest" opinions from all kind of false or misleading feedbacks on the web. Perhaps one may wonder how similar the online information is to occur in real life. The ample evidence suggests that the degree of similarity can be very high (Dellarocas et al., 2004).

Use of word of mouth in education has largely gone under-studied. However, some studies on how students do use WOM on their course choice are now getting into the scope of researchers. For instance, Sever (2009) indicated that WOM is important for course choices, yet students do not interested with instructor's background or abilities. Rather, they seek informat about assignments and grading policies in courses. They make their decisions based on such information, and they value physical WOM over virtual one. As for the source of information is concerned, senior students are the most valuable 'information source' followed by electronic information pieces.

### **Virtual Advertising**

There is a growing view that due to message clutter, old forms of 30 or 60 seconds commercial reels are quite likely to be replaced with a new form of virtual advertising. In order to fully grasp reasons behind this wind of change, we need to refer to various definitions of the term. Perhaps the most down to earth definition of virtual advertising would be of "now you see it, now you don't". This may seem as rather a vague approach. In fact, it is not, because number of scholar did come up with "operational" definitions that are far from portraying the term in its context.

There is an ongoing debate on where virtual advertising should be placed. In other words, is it a new

and innovative form of advertising? Or, is it a new way of using advertising media in a creative way? Carat North America's chief executive David Verklin defines the virtual ads as "the Harry Houdini of the media business" (<http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/99/10/biztech/articles/01adco>). There are other, yet more descriptive definitions of the term. Burgi (1997) defines the virtual advertising as "real time video insertions into television broadcast, and employs the same technology that was developed for the guidance system of smart bombs". Lieber (1995) approaches virtual advertising from benefits sought point of view. Scholar defines the benefits of virtual advertising as an opportunity for having a permanent space that advertiser can have their logo or advertisements visible during telecast of a sports game. Turner and Cusumano (2000) defines the term as a novelty advertising medium which presents a potential of telecasting a different signage message to every intended market at a premium price. Thus, sponsors will have a chance of earning enormous revenues. So far, definitions and views on virtual advertising given here may likely to help shape perception of which virtual advertising or signage is free from external assaults. Sponsors who are ready to pay extra fees to virtual forms of advertisements are mostly driven by a unique motive; that is despite other forms of sponsorship telecasting, virtual ads cannot be ambushed by their archenemies (Lefton, 1997).

The sponsors, who are willing to pay this fee, try to gain some benefits (Payne, 1998). The benefits, which the sponsors want to obtain, can be given as follows; increasing the organization/brand awareness, strengthening the image, increasing the market share, increasing the sales volume and etc. (Argan, 2004). In certain circumstances, million-dollar sponsorship activities can not be protected and become the victims of ambush marketers' activities (Ettorre, 1993). Besides, non-sponsor and mostly the direct competitor firms engage pre-planned marketing activities. These kinds of marketing activities are known as ambush marketing.

Ambush marketing, a promotional strategy non-sponsors use to capitalize on the popularity or prestige of an event or property by giving the false impression that they are sponsors. Ambush marketing is becoming a threat to the very involvement of sponsors and is influencing their relationship with sport

(Wolfe et al., 1997). It has reached the point where some corporations now eschew almost all sponsorship invitations. Whereas once *ambush marketing* consisted merely of Olympic-themed advertisements or promotions, it now includes more insidious forms of advertising, such as corporate logos on athletes' bodies (McDonald and Davidson 2002) and virtual advertising. The aim of the ambush marketing is to gain some benefits with confusing the minds of the consumers. Another important subject is the impact dimension of the ambush marketing. Whether ambush marketing was an "immoral" or "illegal" practice, few researchers have actually debated this question. Predictably, event owners and official sponsors have regarded it as immoral because it threatens their ability to sell events or recouping investments made in these (Payne 1998; Crow and Hoek, 2003).

The direct and indirect competitors of the official sponsors often employ the ambush marketing strategies. Among the several common ambush strategies, it is possible to see following techniques; sponsoring the broadcast of event (Meenaghan, 1996; Doust, 1997; Crow and Hoek, 2003), sponsoring subcategories within sport events (Doust, 1997; Kendal and Curthoys, 2001), purchasing advertising time and place around sport events (Doust, 1997; Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001), engaging in major non-sponsorship promotions to coincide with sport events and other ambush marketing strategies (Meenaghan, 1996; Doust, 1997). A company other than the event sponsor sponsors the broadcast of the event, usually because the media audience for most events is much larger than the on-site audience; the "ambusher" is seeking a perfectly legitimate sponsorship opportunity in its own right. The benefits of this approach are obvious when one considers that the media audience for most events is much larger than the on-site audience (Doust, 1997). The Fuji versus Kodak case in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics is perhaps the most celebrated legal ambush. While Fuji was a worldwide sponsor of Olympics, its competitor, Kodak, became "sponsor" of ABC television's broadcasts of the games and the "official film" supplier to the U.S. Track team (Meenaghan, 1996).

According to Meenaghan (1994) several strategies to counter ambushing can be identified: Among the counter strategies towards ambush marketing, these are the most known techniques; linking event and

broadcast sponsorship, anticipating potential competitive promotions, exploiting the sponsorship rights secured and resorting legal action. Another aspect of virtual advertising in these days is 'search engine advertising'. The term "search engine marketing" describes an ever-changing host of activities including site optimization, the management of paid listings, submitting sites to directories, and developing online marketing strategies for businesses, organizations and individuals – all tactics to increase page rankings on search engines (Search Marketing for Higher Education, 2008). The most important point for search engine marketing is to know what students are looking for when they start searching a tertiary institution or a program. It is vital for institutions to understand keysearch criteria of their prospects, so that they align their pages on the web and give the right key search terms to their page carriers so if a potential 'client' surfs on the net he or she will be come across with their pages.

### Size and Scope of Global Online and Distance Education Market

Today, higher education faces strenuous pressure. In our so-called global village, modernity and postmodernity opened the door for major advances in technological communication between peoples across national and cultural boundaries. Educational systems around the world are under increasing pressure to use the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to teach students the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st Century. Organizations today are looking beyond the automation of traditional training models to new approaches to knowledge transfer and performance support that are better aligned with business goals and deliver measurable results. By focusing on the specific business objective, rather than the learning technology, an opportunity exists to fundamentally re-think how we design and deliver learning programs.

The e-learning market in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) alone is currently estimated at \$14 million and is expected to increase to \$56 million by 2008. In the Arab Gulf (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman, in decreasing order of edu-economic importance) total spending on e-learning was estimated at \$72 million in 2004. This figure is well

below the average in the much of the world, but it's growing at a 27 percent compound average rate. Online education spending in the Arab Gulf region will thus reach \$240 million by the end of 2009, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE representing about 80 percent of the total. With its large student population, Saudi Arabia dominates in academic e-learning; while the UAE leads in business e-learning services. E-learning now receives more attention in the Arab world than ever before (Guessoum, 2006).

### A Marketing Case of Turkish Distance and Online Education System

The geography where Turkey is located has the potential to attract prospective students from both the East (Middle East, Turkic Republics in Asia, etc.) and the West (European countries). Turkey has strong ties with many Middle East and Asian countries. Religion and similar cultural aspects create a bond among the countries mentioned and Turkey. Creating programs solely designed for these countries will attract many students. On the other hand, interest for Turkey increased in European countries within the context of possible EU membership. On the other hand, dense Turkish population living in Europe (such as Germany, Belgium, France, Austria, and Netherlands) denotes a lucrative market. Over the years, those people created a distinct culture that has its own characteristics and needs. Higher education institutions are such as Universities, Faculties, Institutes, Higher Schools, Vocational Higher Schools, Conservatories, Research and Application Centers (Türkiye Eğitim İstatistikleri, 2006).

The University system consists of nearly 100 universities (25 of them established by foundations and private sector) and non-university institutions of higher education including police and military academies and college too (<http://web.deu.edu.tr/buca/fenbil/cogtech/education/turkey/system.html>). Each university consists of faculties and four-year schools, offering bachelor's level programs, the latter with a vocational emphasis, and two-year vocational schools offering pre-bachelor's (associate's) level programs of a strictly vocational nature. Anadolu University in Eskişehir offers two-year and four-year programs through distance education.

In 2000, Bilgi University, a foundation university, started its web-base MBA program and continues it successfully. Since 2000, distance education has been made between Istanbul University and Harran University by means of videoconference and broadcasting. Istanbul Technical University also provides teaching in different campuses by means of videoconference system (Ruzgar, 2004, p.25-26).

Anadolu University is one of the national universities in Turkey which locates in Eskisehir. The university has established in November 6, 1958 and started distance education service in 1982. They house 12 faculties, 7 schools, 4 vocational schools, 9 institutes (4 graduate schools, 5 institutes) and 28 research centers and units and hold with approximately 1,075,200 students. Distance Education System of Anadolu University has 3 faculties with 1,050, 000 students. 40% of students who attend their education are those who attend Anadolu University, and now, Anadolu University is considered one of the ten mega-universities of the world which provide the distance education system.

From the beginning, the university has produced different types of learning materials for distance education students. Today, students are supported by Web based e-books, self quizzes, voiced books, video streams, etc. Human resources gained invaluable expertise in developing materials on very different types of media. From preparation of the script to shooting video components, from to preparing exams can be done very effectively and in a short time (Ulukan, 2007).

Among courses offered by Distance Education System in Anadolu University (OEF), courses for teacher' preparation is significantly important. After establishing the Basic Education Law (Law No, 1739), it is the national goal to enhance the access to primly education, updating curriculum and teachers training. As seen in the report by the World Bank (2007), the disproportional availability of skilled teachers is serious problems in Turkey primarily and second Education. Anadolu University has opened courses for the purpose of teacher training in response to this national demand.

Distance Education System, which covers throughout nations with 73 bureaus and advanced technology,

provides many teachers in disadvantaged regions with opportunities to pursue higher knowledge and skills. Anadolu University also opened many courses at the past time for Turkey Army, Polices and Teachers in response to demands by Ministries.

Thus, Anadolu University has the significant role of Education in Turkey, both for citizens and the nation. Even though other universities also provide some distance educational programs, Anadolu University is posed as the center of Distance Education and is expected to lead distance and open education filed. Anadolu University is only a university which has fully autonomy to implement the distance education and collaboration with other universities.

In Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Anadolu University offers an MA program in Business Management to Cypriot and Turkish citizens. The courses are conducted by the faculty members of Anadolu University. SUNY-Cortland offers an undergraduate diploma in English Language.

Yet in Turkey, only institutional level initiatives are taken by various universities. Regarding the issues that Anadolu University deal with, Latchem et al. (2006) points out that 'there are still many issues to consider; how to prepare the learners for self-managed, collaborative, technology-based learning; how to train faculty in the new technologies, methodologies and research practices; how to persuade politicians and administrators to write legislation and bills that will support open education; how to improve the technological infrastructure and services'.

## Conclusion

Technology has become the backbone of the online and distance education programs. Like in all service needs, students shop around alternative education service providers. So much said on service nature of education, though as in any service, it has components that are unique to it. Comparing a bank and a university would set a good example, and will underline why education is rather different than any other service.

In a bank, customers' ultimate goal is to get the best interest rate at a lowest possible charge. If we agree that this is the core of the service that a retailer bank

provides to its customers; we should as well mention about peripheral service components of which many of the bank customers would be happy and satisfied, if such services are delivered to them. No bank customer would say no to free investment advice, honestly managed pension funds or perhaps free safety vault service for their precious items.

Wire transfer service accompanied with a reasonable charge or low interest rate credit card with lost and theft replacement attached to it is welcomed by customers. We should take a moment and contemplate that what else can make us a 'happy customer'. Honest and sincere customer service delivered in a timely fashion. It would be nice to have access to bank manager at different when necessary. Last but not least, privacy and water tight security of our investments are among our demands from a bank.

In a university, on the other hand, students want to have a reputable certificate, diploma or a degree that will help them to settle into their dream job. This is the core concept of tertiary education. As for peripheral services, students look for programs that suits to their personal needs and wants. For instance, the expectations of sociology and medical students are not quite similar as in bank example. For sociology students, socializing and issues related to societal subjects would be more relevant. Naturally sociology students would require funds so that they can utilize the society as a laboratory. For medical students, advanced laboratories with latest tools and technologies would be the priority. After all, the pillars of reputation for a university are built upon quality of academic knowledge they produce. The most prominent difference between these two services is that in the bank we demand money as form of interest payments. In the university education, we pay money in the form of tuition and fee at various proportions depending upon the university.

Consequently, managing the communication of an education institution is managing its daily communication routine as well as managing and enhancing its reputation.

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