

**FACTORS INFLUENCING FOREIGN STUDENTS'
CHOICE OF INSTITUTION (UUM) -
INTERNET MARKETING
AND
WEB SEARCH BEHAVIOUR**

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**UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA
2009**

FACTORS INFLUENCING FOREIGN STUDENTS'
CHOICE OF INSTITUTION (UUM) - INTERNET AND WEB SEARCH
BEHAVIOUR

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Business Management in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science (Management), UUM

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ABSTRAK

Ianya adalah penting bagi Institusi Pengajian Tinggi memenuhi permintaan pihak yang memerlukan dengan menganggap sumbangannya sebahagian dari industri perkhidmatan. Institusi Pengajian Tinggi di Malaysia adalah destinasi baru yang kian mendapat tempat di pasaran global. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan secara empirikal hubungan di antara pemasaran internet dan perilaku pencarian jalur lebar terhadap pemilihan institusi pengajian tinggi oleh pelajar luar negara. Kajian ini melibatkan responden daripada kalangan pelajar luar negara yang sedang mengikuti pengajian di Universiti Utara Malaysia. Sebanyak 288 borang soalselidik yang diterima pakai mewakili 96.97 peratus nilai menjawab keseluruhan telah diperolehi melalui metodologi kajian soal selidik secara rawak. Penggunaan kaedah ujian hipotesis dengan skala Likert lima titik telah digunakan untuk mengutip data. Data juga telah dianalisa dengan menggunakan analisa korelasi dan regresi berganda. Hasil penemuan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan positif di antara pemasaran internet dan perilaku pencarian jalur lebar terhadap pemilihan institusi pengajian tinggi yang membawa maksud hipotesis diterima pakai. Analisa regresi menunjukkan bahawa perilaku pencarian jalur lebar mempengaruhi pemilihan institusi pengajian tinggi bagi pelajar luar negara dengan menyumbang sebanyak $r=0.477$, $p<0.01$ varian berbanding pemasaran internet. Implikasi secara praktikal, penambahbaikan dan kajian masa hadapan juga disertakan dalam kajian ini.

ABSTRACT

It is important that Higher Education Institutions recognized themselves as contributing in the service industry to meet with the increasing demand of their stakeholders. In competing globally, Malaysian institutions are becoming popular destination for overseas studies. This study attempted to empirically identify the relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour towards their choice of institution. The study involved foreign students who were studying at Universiti Utara Malaysia (Northern Malaysian University). A total number of 288 valid responses were collected through questionnaire-based survey method representing a total of 96.97 per cent response rate. Hypotheses testing method were employed, and self-administered questionnaire with five-point Likert scale was used to collect the data. Data were analyzed through Pearson correlation and multiple regressions analysis. The results were there is a positive relationship between internet marketing and web search behaviour with foreign students' choice of institution (UUM), hence hypotheses are accepted. Regression analysis indicated that web search behaviour explained more variance in foreign students' choice of institution at $r=0.477$, $p<0.01$ in comparison to internet marketing. Practical implications, recommendations and future research were offered in this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise be to Allah of His Perfection, none has the right to be worshipped except Allah and Allah is the Greatest. He who sent His Messenger Muhammad with guidance and the religion of Truth, may peace and blessings be upon him.

I would first express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Mr. Shamir Sivaraj Abdullah, for his assistance, encouragement, guidance and opportunities that he provided. He is known among his students as a person of knowledge and practicality, caring and above all his nature able to translate or explain a difficult subject in a layman manner. I know I cannot thank him enough for his continuous dedication into teaching which I find both interesting and admirable. Thank you sir for giving me the chance to pursue this paper with you.

My heartfelt appreciation to Prof. Dr. Habshah Bakar, Tn. Hj. Mohamad Zainol Abidin Adam and Tn. Hj. Mustafa Zakaria for your guidance and moral support.

To all of whom have helped and support me in their respective capacities that made this term bearable if not easier, for me.

To my loved ones: Umi whose love and advice is invaluable; my dearest husband whose strength and patience have yield me to become a better person; my darling children who kept me going; my sister whose been my pillar; my brothers for their pillow punch therapies; and my dearest friends (Mama Hasnah & Abah Bani, Nora, Melissa, Kak Zee, Wana, Elley, Irfa and Aza) who shared numerous and countless moments that are unique.

~ Thank You ~

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Of The Study

In recent times, Higher Education face substantial changes as demands for generated outcomes and knowledge-creation have increase tremendously. Institutions contribute to the population, economy and country that evolve in the terms as being in a 'service industry'. Higher education institutions as many service industry are competing in a consumer environment where 'economic rationalism, or neo-liberalism, assumes that the market delivers the best outcomes because consumers purchase rationally; they know their interests better than any regulating body' (Gomes and Murphy, 2003). Mazzarol (1998) earlier on examined the nature of services and highlighted that international education execute the same service capability as any other to market their contributions.

In the past decade, according to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) there are 1.2 out of the 2.7 million students (45% total amount of all foreign students) who are studying abroad with major players like United States, United Kingdom and Australia ranked first amongst the most popular destination countries for overseas studies. The reason was clear, they were able to attract students from different countries, establish a diversified market and generated their countries' economic landscape. For instance Australia first introduced a full-fee system in 1986 and opened its market for public

universities and private education. In the year 2000 the overseas students generated \$3.7 billion for Australian's economy where 153,372 international students who were studying inland and 34,905 students who were enrolled in Australian offshore (DEYTA, 2001 from Gomez and Murphy, 2003). On the other hand, in response to the 1997 financial crisis, UK government launched an initiative to attract 50,000 international students to UK by 2005 to win market share from its major competitors, the US and Australia (Russell, 2005) through its "Education UK" brand.

In 2007, according to Japan Education Ministry and university groups, three of their universities have gone bankrupt and nearly a third of the nation's 707 four-year universities were unable to fill all of their openings. Takahiro Okamoto the education attaché in Japanese embassy in London stated that each university is trying to create their unique selling point and are trying to recruit as many foreign students in order to survive the global competition among universities (www.Guardian.co.uk). Hence, Higher Education needs to look for ways and proven methods to recruit students.

Usage of the internet is becoming very common and according to internet experts, higher institutions should be taking opportunities on the potential of their web sites (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002; Weindruch, 2006; Thomases, H., 2007; Antil E.J., 2008;). Internet marketing has been seen as appealing to international market for their ease of access and as platforms for institutions to market themselves to prospective students worldwide. For that reason, collective information gathered from UUM foreign students on UUM web site marketing will further shed light for future Internet Marketing prospect within the industry.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

1.2.1 Internationalization of Malaysian higher education

In order to achieve Malaysia aspiration to be the region's hub in international education, Malaysia through its National Higher Education Strategic Plan Towards 2020 is targeting 100,000 foreign students by 2010. The main aim for the plan is to identify the marketing scenario in Malaysia for institutions of higher learning. According to Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, the previous Higher Education Minister the plan aims to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to higher learning in the country (Bernama.com, January 23, 2007). Through the marketing effort of the ministry, Malaysian's Higher Education are recruiting students from abroad whilst serving local demand as well as focusing on its core strategies in wooing more international students.

The foreign students are mostly from Middle East, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Yemen who are pursuing degree and post-graduate courses. Recruiting them will contribute in supporting economy through foreign exchange and in adding international dimension to Malaysia's institutions. A mark increase can be seen with the total of foreign students studying nationwide. In 2005 there were 40,525 foreign students and in 2006 it increased to 44,390 students (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2007). In 2007, Malaysia has achieved 40% of its target where a total of 52,000 foreign students were studying at 206 institutions locally. However in 2008, the Ministry of Higher Education has retargeted the number of foreign students to

80,000 as having 63,000 foreign students from 150 countries studying at local institutions.

Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) in their study of international students mobility reported on the low volume of international students' recruitment by English-spoken countries is due to the increasingly competitive market with traditional source countries such as Singapore and Malaysia aiming to attract hundreds of thousands of overseas students, and other nations likewise developing targeted recruitment strategies, including China. Singapore's education blueprint a part of its 'Global Schoolhouse' ambition managed to woo more than 16 of the world's leading school to set up campuses in Singapore (economictimes.indiatimes.com, December 10, 2007).

Singapore has taken years of remaking and branding its educational system before introducing it globally. However in 2005 Britain's Warwick University abandoned plans to set up a campus in Singapore and to worsen conditions, in 2007 University of New South Wales closed after only four months due to poor response. Since the half end of 2007, the financial crisis has hit countries especially major economies of the world including Malaysia and that year, Malaysia's two households names University Malaya and University Sains Malaysia has fallen out of Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) – Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking (www.topuniversities.com).

Last year (2008) the Malaysian Higher Education Ministry laid out plans to battle the financial crisis, increased graduate employability and intensified efforts in attracting foreign students (Staronline.com, October 29, 2008). The ministry, public and private institutions likewise could minimise costs especially on transportation, logistics and booth rent on education fairs around the world and pull their resources into improving best practices such as increasing the standard of performance to enable local universities into THES-QS. In turn they could consider the effectiveness of web site and internet marketing for obvious reason that the existence of the institutions lays solely in their yearly enrolment of students.

1.2.2 Development of higher education marketing and usage of web site as marketing tool: potential for further research.

With the increasing importance of knowledge, greater demands bring greater competition in the future. Higher Education have greatly influenced the implication of generating and supplying 'best graduates', 'highly potential employees' and 'future leaders' to function in the real world. Up and coming transformation is seen among well established universities which a merely 'world-class' university can no longer sustain itself with the ever increasing competition and emerging education market elsewhere. Business community, local community, parents and prospective students alike are seeking to meet their needs. Hemsly-Brown (2006) in her literature research on higher education marketing in a competitive global marketplace highlighted that higher education marketing is still at a relatively pioneer stage with relatively a small number of research from an exploratory and strategic perspective. This reality makes

international students' preferences a very interesting subject to study, focusing not only on higher education institutions involved in internationalization strategies, but also on national, regional and local governments interested in promoting their territories as education destinations (Cubillo et. al., 2006).

Internet Marketing needs to be realized since the first connection higher education may have with prospective foreign students will be online. Universities and business alike view the Internet's far reaching capabilities as a way of competing globally (Tsichritzis, 1999 from Gomez and Murphy, 2003) and offer opportunities for continued growth (Melwar and Smith, 2003). Moreover, Ngai (2003) on his literature review of internet marketing research also pointed out that a minimum number of internet marketing research was done on higher education and professional service. A total of only 2 out of 270 IM articles from 46 journals within 14 years (1987-2000) were done on distance learning through internet. At a global footage, internet will remain relevant and Internet Marketing research has the potential to develop more in the future. By mastering internet marketing, local institutions will have a competitive edge and survive further in the marketplace. All these research are crucial and it is imperative that Malaysian Higher Education need to keep up with ongoing trends and preferences of foreign students if they want to move with the pace of globalization.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following are the specific objectives for this research:

- To investigate the relationship between internet marketing (communication, web site selling and web site content) and foreign students' choice of institution (UUM);
- To investigate the relationship of foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution (UUM);
- To investigate the relationship of foreign students' internet marketing and web search behaviour.

1.4 Research Questions

- Is there any relationship between internet marketing (communication, web site selling and web site content) and foreign students' choice of institution (UUM)?
- Is there any relationship between foreign student's web search behaviour (online information and information sharing) and their choice of institution (UUM)?
- Is there a relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour?

1.5 Significance of the Study

It is known that foreign students enrich the study experiences of local students which are a valuable commodity towards a global market and that knowledge sharing strengthens the foundation for global interactions and relations. In order to foster into the international education market, Malaysian government and institutions have put up initiatives, incentives and infrastructure developments to foster educational excellence. One way to offer convenience is through internet where both prospective students and institutions benefit from freedom of time; added value; customers' satisfaction; promotes two-way communicative marketing; lower operating costs; possible ways for growth opportunity; and represent a cheaper market research.

The findings of this study are very useful for the university in order to understand the requirements or expectations of prospective students. Even though most marketing studies done in U.S.A., U.K. and Australia where most universities are more popular worldwide, this study is hope to shed light in terms of higher education internet marketing to enable comparison from previous studies done.

Lace (2004) argued that previous studies shown little evidence of measurement of effectiveness to monitor web site effectiveness in terms of marketing communications, stating its opportunity for further research. By asking UUM foreign students' feedback, the study analyse which internet marketing factors and web

search behaviour that are likely to influence their decision-making and how university's web site can influence their decision. Consequently, this particular research will also benefit online marketers on improving any possible opportunities that could arise from students' assessment of the university's web site. This study could likely represent an advantage for UUM to optimize fully on internet technology which has significantly broadened reach and means in increasing efficiencies. Throughout the undertakings UUM could achieve their goals by continuously focusing important factors that may contribute to their overall delivery in the perspective of their customers – their students.

1.6 Research Scope and Limitations

a) Scope: The scope of this study is to investigate which UUM internet marketing features have influenced foreign student's decision to study in UUM.

b) Limitations

1. Generalization and sample: The study is undertaken on foreign students who have enrolled themselves in UUM rather than those who had viewed and examined the web site before making their decisions. UUM foreign students being subjects of this study however present an important factor of UUM internet marketing and it may be representative of the general population on UUM web site marketing as a whole. In addition, the study is undertaken as a case study where the researcher is a student that could provide potential for significant bias.

2. Users: It is assumed that the subjects of this study might have referred to UUM web site prior to registration and that their response based on facts as well as preferences may present user assessments of UUM web site.
3. Instruments: Base on the knowledge of the researcher, although the study may be proven theoretically and tested using different tools in marketing or information systems literature, this is the first time it is formally used for UUM Web site from the foreign students' perspective only.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. It will begin with an overview of the research. The chapter contains problem statement, research objectives, research contents, significance, scope and limitations of the study. The second chapter will highlight literature review, higher education marketing developments, foreign students' decision making, developments of internet marketing and relevant research. Chapter 3 contains the theoretical framework, research methodology, data collection and techniques of data analysis. Chapter 4 will be the data analysis, findings and discussions. Finally, chapter 5 contains conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The overall purpose of this study is to gain feedback from UUM foreign students on UUM Internet Marketing through its web site predominantly from the users' perspectives. First the review highlights on the nature of marketing for higher education and higher education marketing towards international market. A summary of established researches that were done and students' decision making in selecting foreign higher education follows. The key objective is to establish variables involved in internet marketing in increasing efficiency of traditional marketing functions.

2.1.1 Commercialization and internationalization of higher educational institutions

Veblen (1957) was the first who noted that higher education shifted from religious or state supplied utility towards more of a business-oriented commodity (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001). What emerged during the early 1960s was the thinning line between commercial money-making activities and educational value. Values that scholars are truly dedicated to higher learning were forced on the methods of market place where it goes beyond bureaucracy and corporate culture. Forces that are uncontrollable such as economic forces, the need to reduce universities high expenditure, the need to raise

money as institutions grew larger, the need for better equipped and various demands of career prospects. Governments were reducing support for higher education in the 70s. Waves of change began in mid-1980s driven by the declining population and increasing costs that initiate Higher Education to take further steps in developing marketing. USA was experiencing influx of international students, the reductions of scholarships and US Congress enacted that states were given authority to tax international student living expenses.

The UK government was facing higher costs for subsidising international students and introduced full-cost fee for overseas student in 1980. Then its education system adopted active recruitment policy and was catering international students owing to their universities reputations. Australia follow suit when its federal government initiated reforming its higher education system and introduced full-fee cost that allowed commercialization. UNESCO researches suggested that the rapid and overall expansion of higher education was seen between 1999 and 2004 where the number of mobile students worldwide increased from 1.75 million to 2.5 million (Inter Press News Agency, 2006).

Mazzarol et. al. (2003) explained the above as the three waves of globalization in the international education industry which started in 1980s. It began with students travelling to host countries to study in their chosen institutions. The second was through the establishments of export channel and integration. Finally, the recent approach is the creation of branch campus in foreign markets and the development of virtual/distance learning which proves that higher education landscape has profoundly

changed. The underlying above developments are the changing interests of governments, institutions and individual students, which are increasingly being influenced by global competition and markets (Sirat and Kaur, 2007).

2.1.2 Malaysian higher education changing landscape

Malaysian higher education institutions experience enormous changes. The 1980s global recession and the 1997 currency crisis have affected the government decision in loosening its grips and liberalize higher education. During the 30 years, Malaysian higher education move towards liberalization of educational policy, privatization and corporation of public universities, twinning programs explored at local colleges, foreign universities set up campus locally (transnational education), and in 1996 the government announce of making the country as an education hub for Asia. On the same year besides the launching of Multimedia Super Corridor, the Private Higher Education Act was passed, allowing for the privatisation and liberalisation of higher education on a bigger scale.

This led to the reformation of educational institutions management and governance that has gone increasingly business-like and marketized. In response to these changes, effectiveness and potential benefits of using marketing theories and concepts which have been affected in the business world, are gradually now being applied by many universities with a view to gaining at competitive advantage, and gaining larger of the international market (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

Malaysian Government has increased their marketing effort to woo international students and in 2007 Malaysian Higher Education had undertaken various international educational fair and visits especially to Dubai and China. In December 2008 the Malaysian senate was told that the number of Indonesian students in the country stands at 9,348 followed by China with 9,081 students and Iran with 5,531 students. The government efforts of locating offices for promoting education sector were also set up in Vietnam, Indonesia and Dubai.

2.1.3 Higher education marketing research

Veblen (1957, cited by Bok, 2003) argued that universities were losing its purpose and blamed universities presidents and bureaucratic helpers “are an anathema and should be discontinued by the simple expedient of wipping him off the slate” and ever since, customer metaphor is (seen) inappropriate to describe student’s relationship to universities (Svensson and Wood, 2008). A highlighted concept signified to separate higher education from marketing concept wholly.

Levy (2002) clarified that his (with Kotler) journal article on marketing concept which was introduced in 1969, stand to correct that marketing is basically grounded in two principles that create exchanges, that govern providing and acquiring: first, scarcity where one cannot have everything due to limitations which creates the

necessity to make choices and second, reciprocity where it requires a return, all the while having the necessity to make the product available somewhere and the need to communicate about it. When undertaking marketing activities, benefits are exchanged between customers and organizations.

Attempting research on Higher Education marketing from marketing literature and contributions of internet marketing lies in what exists within global society as well as global business on this day and age. Higher education very existence as producer and supplier for 'knowledge society' and 'global business' is in actual fact subsists by consumer driven and market values (Mazzarol 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Mazzarol et. al., 2003; Russell, 2005; Lowrie and Willmott, 2006; Sirat and Kaur, 2007; Ferrer-Balas, 2008; Mok, 2008 and Freeman, 2008).

There is insufficient research or articles written on higher education in international markets (Mazzarol, 1998; Bourke, 2000). Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) argued that previous research and books written on Higher Education marketing draws its conceptualisations and empirical frameworks from service marketing and that business concepts and theories originated from UK and US from the 80s are also used. Eagle and Brennan (2007) on the other hand highlighted that marketing theory and practice have much more complex conceptions of the customer, particularly where the exchange process is lengthy and involving, concerns an intangible service with uncertain outcomes, and involves the customer in the production process.

Due to the nature of higher education itself which differs from marketing practices on retaining customers, labelling “students as customers” is also complex because of their functional ‘repurchase’ or ‘loyalty’ customers (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Gibbs and Knapp, 2002). James (2001) described this (Higher Education evolution), based on empirical findings and from their interviews with academics staff implies that there is a significant emerging trend that many believe a consumerist pattern of thinking among students and that the students’ expectations are based on ‘value for money’.

Universities especially in English speaking countries are marketing themselves ever more aggressively due to the changes in global environment. Recently, there have been detailed research reports from the UK (e.g. the British Council, the Observatory on Higher Education) and Australia (e.g. IDP Education Pty. Ltd) seeking to provide International Student Mobility (ISM) forecasts over the next two decades (Sirat, 2008) in regards to the declining of international students in U.S.A, U.K. and Australia as reported by Verbik and Lasanowski (2007). The report on global ISM patterns and trends emphasized the importance of attracting international students, in terms of potential short- and long-term gains for institutions and countries. For this reason, most research done on higher education marketing recognized that institutions need to compete in the climate whilst maintaining the interest of their stakeholders¹.

¹ Kotler and Fox, 1995 suggest 16 different publics as higher education stakeholders: parents of students, prospective students, current students, faculty, administration and staff, alumni, local community, business community, general public, trustees/regents, foundations, suppliers, competitors, accreditation organization, legislature and government agencies and mass media.

With the recent unpredictable environments, students and parents are more likely to be critical and analytical in choosing the place of study due to stricter admission processes - impact of September 11, worldwide outbreaks of infectious diseases, disaster issues, decrease world food supply, to the recent financial crisis and political unrest which has phenomenal impact on global economy. The market forces and trends in consumer behaviours have significantly change that governments and institutions are likely to anticipate to these changes. The attempts by governments to enhance the quality of higher education through the encouragement of market forces is based on an assumption that students are, or will become, informed consumers making rational choices of higher education courses and institutions (Hermsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

2.2 Internet Marketing

Philip Kotler defines marketing as ‘satisfying needs and wants through an exchange process’. Chartered Institute of Marketing (www.cim.co.uk) define marketing as ‘the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements’. Every five years American Marketing Association revisits the definition to reflect on the state of the marketing field and in October 2007 it came up with a new definition ‘marketing as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large’. One theme remains common – meeting needs and exchanging benefits or values. On the other hand, internet marketing is simply defined as achieving marketing objectives through applying

digital technologies (Chaffey et. al., 2006). Rust et. al. (1996, cited by Marthur et. al., 1998) stated that the use of the internet for marketing activities is derived from its general use as an information distribution system in the digital age, combining digital communications technologies and digital computer technology.

Internet has two unique features ‘it is both a market and a medium’ (Ngai, 2003) which transcends national boundaries and stage a new set of international marketing where organizations connect with their potential and existing customers. Among the benefits marketers choose to seize this tool are:

- 1) Powerful method/tool in reaching customers;
- 2) Communicate information and transaction across borders;
- 3) Commercial lead to increase in use and revenue;
- 4) Payments done ‘virtually’;
- 5) Provide value added and convenience to customers;
- 6) Events are experienced or knowledge shared on real-time or as they happened;
- 7) Minimize cost – reduced time in customer service, online sales and distribution of marketing communications;
- 8) Enhance corporate image and brand;
- 9) Interactive, responsive and better public relations; and
- 10) Feedback from customers on products/services.

According to Chaffey et. al. (2006) there are four types of web sites. Higher education falls into the category of ‘service-oriented relationship-building web site’ where it provides information to stimulate purchase and build relationships. The internet offers a means for geographically remote students to access university and course information (Veloutsou, Paton, and Lewis, 2005). The information is provided through web site and sales are done offline. Higher education internet tools that are mostly used are world wide web and electronic mail or e-mail. Other internet tools may also be used such as blogs, newsgroups, telnet, FTP (file transfer protocol), Gophers, Archie and WAIS.

Table 1.0: World Internet Usage and Population Statistics (2008)

World Regions	Population (2008 Est.)	Internet Users Dec.31,2000	Penetration (% Population)	Users Growth 2000-2008	Users % of Table
Africa	975,330,899	4,154,400	5.6 %	1,110.0 %	3.4 %
Asia	3,780,819,792	114,304,000	17.2 %	469.0 %	41.3 %
Europe	803,903,540	105,096,093	48.5 %	271.2 %	24.8 %
Middle East	196,767,614	3,284,800	23.3 %	1,296.2 %	2.9 %
North America	337,572,949	108,096,800	73.1 %	128.3 %	15.7 %
Latin America/ Caribbean	581,249,892	18,068,919	28.6 %	820.7 %	10.6 %
Oceania/ Australia	34,384,384	7,620,480	59.9 %	170.2 %	1.3 %
World Total	6,710,029,070	360,985,492	23.5 %	336.1 %	100.0 %

Source: Internet World Stats – www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm; Miniwatts Marketing Group

Note: (1) Internet usage and world population statistics are for December 31, 2008. (2) Demographic (Population) numbers are based on data from US Census Bureau. (3) Internet usage information comes from data published by Nielsen Online by the International Communications Union, Gfk, local regulators and other reliable sources.

From Table 1 above, the internet users are growing at an average of 42% yearly between 2000 and 2008. According to Internet World Stats by Miniwatts Marketing Group, as of 31 December 2008, the internet is estimated to have 1.574 billion users. In 2008, the web site statistics showed that most internet users are from Asia with an average of 39.3% followed by Europe and North America. Asia users are consistently growing and mostly from China (253.0 millions), Japan (94.0 millions)

and India (60.0 millions). The top three languages used in the internet is English (452 millions), Chinese (321 millions) and Spanish (122 millions). These figure shows that there is tremendous growth of internet users yearly. In relation to higher education marketing online, Eduventure a research and consulting for higher education in US stated in their study that 84 % of students use the college's own web sites to research for schools (Lawlor, 2007). Gray et. al. (2003) on the study of international education branding, concluded that the world wide web and print media were perceived to be the most important sources of university information in all three Asian markets (Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong). Thus signify the relevance of internet marketing through web site for higher education.

Hofacker (2001) proclaim the phenomena that businesses are performing many different marketing activities to describe internet marketing. He suggests that there are four main internet marketing activities: communicating, selling, providing content and providing a network function. Some organizations tend to undertake two or more styles of marketing activities which might contribute to sales. For instance a web site is not only used to provide information on the product and services but also used to sell which in turn intersperse with marketing communication about the product. This study will only touch on Business to Consumer Internet Marketing by taking the first three activities (communication, selling and content) which are discussed below.

2.2.1 Communication

Internet provides communication without physical form that can transfer information worldwide at a high speed. Internet gives added value and flexibility in marketing communication (Rowley, 2001; Lagrosen, 2005) at a lower cost of time and money (Rowley, 2001; Samniego et. al. 2006). Staudt and Taylor (1965; cited by Hoey, 1998) identified that marketing effectiveness depends significantly on communications effectiveness because any marketplace is “energised” by information flows. Internet is used as a communication tool and its roles in communication are (Hofacker, 2001; Rowley, 2001; Chaffey et. al. 2001):

- worldwide connectivity through a standard protocol;
- convey important information or interesting information;
- provide promotional messages through one-to-one and/or micro marketing; and
- establish relationships via interactive media.

In order to utilize a web site fully, service providers are expected to communicate on their products and services that keenly introduce the benefits to the consumers. Through the web, service providers can target a broad range of information at customers, and customers can then select the information of interest to them (Mathur et. al., 1998). The type of information depends on the type of nature of the consumer decision. This is especially true due to the nature of higher education being intangible, unable to perceived before experienced and geographic barriers that students will base their decision through ‘indirect mechanisms of service evaluation’

(Cubillo et. al., 2006). Many prospective students and parents rely on market of what the higher education perceived as quality and personal relevance.

The customers will usually seek for clear and accurate information and representation since they cannot see or feel the offers. The university's web site needs to have clear graphic representations and is visually accurate. The more clear and accurate the web site, the more it will reduce the probability of losing its potentials. Gomez and Murphy (2003) highlighted that trust in the information cannot be established until consumers trust the site, and trust in fulfilment requires prior trust in the site and its information. To lower the dissonant, a two-way communication can be provided to support the web site such as staff's e-mail, fax or a toll-free telephone number that the customers can relay for fast response. Other supporting aids are multiple-language options, chat room, bulletin board and Frequent Asked Questions (FAQs) through the web site. This will enhance the competitive edge for the business (Chai and Fun, 2003).

A web site is also dependent on the stage of development of Web presence (Rowley 2001). Early applications during contact, a web site is an additional channel which marketing communication is delivered where the web lists and illustrates the products or services as well as giving information and reviews for prospective customers. During this stage the content of the web site is emphasized as a support for print media. Further development, the organization will receive inquiries and exchange information with consumer that may lead to sale. The organization must understand the types of online relationships with customers to develop a model in order to match

business's objectives (Collin, 2000; Hofacker 2001; Rowley 2001). In the technology environment, communication is critical – accuracy and timeliness of information and speed of response are important to successful relationships (Aziz and Yasin, 2004).

Organizations can better manage their customer through the adoption of World Wide Web by communicating and by targeting the right customers with the right products and services available. Their second priority was able to adopt customer loyalty through engaging service deliveries. Even though the location and product space increases, the targeted market minimize with the increase in the need to selling and branding. The goal was to treat each customer uniquely and individually. World Wide Web was able to create two-way communications and created feedback which in turn results to new demands.

Customers demand for many possible reasons such as product or service quality, quicker introduction, quicker response and greater flexibility which lead to faster distribution channels. It becomes meaningful to organizations by focusing customers in sustaining lifetime profitability. However, customers demands likely to change overtime and an organization's portfolio may serve current customers whilst attract new customers. The value that the customers have towards the organization's product and service is important to measure of how well the business is doing. As Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) highlighted that the centrally important principle of marketing is that all marketing activities should be geared towards the customer.

2.2.2 Selling

Service providers use marketing to motivate positive results and by using the internet it could increase their organization's competitive advantage. Internet may be used as a complement to existing traditional media. Internet selling has the advantage to sell at 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. A popular marketing maxim "If it doesn't sale, it isn't creative" does not bring meaning that the web site has to be creative. It proposed a way that business needs to communicate and offer value to the user. There are basically two sides of a coin, controllable stimuli or factors which is the marketing mix that e-marketers are eager to comprehend or uncontrollable stimuli or factors which have major effect on consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions.

The marketing mix is a set of controllable marketing tools that an institution uses to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that the university can do to influence the demand for the services that it offers. (Ivy, 2008).

The **product mix** for higher education dissolves more than what the university's has to offer, it comes with package and benefits to both satisfy students' needs and wants. Naude and Ivy (1999) and Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) justified this stating on an earlier work by Levitt (1980) where variety of choices in education having three separate and distinct levels – the core, tangible and augmented product. The core being buying benefits in terms of employment, status, lifestyle and etc. The second level include physical layout of the campus, the library, laboratories and sporting facilities and the third augmented level consist of intangibles such as library

membership for graduates, students loans and finance, an employment or placement service, etc.

As far as **pricing** through web site, it is more transparent and visitors tend to compare what is already available to them. The number of literature references of the price as an input influencing the online consumer's behaviour is limited (Constantinides, 2004). The pricing element is important because 'pricing element not only affects the revenues that a university derives from its enrolment, but also affects students' perceptions of the quality' (Ivy, 2008). Pricing for higher education comes in terms of scholarships (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2004) tuition fees and payments arrangements (Ivy, 2008). LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999; Russell, 2005) show evidence that "price, quality, want satisfaction, corporate image, along with affective and social responses are strong drivers of value in a business education setting".

In regards to **place** or location for marketing mix, prospective students are concerns with the physical place of study by considering geographic proximity, city and the physical layout of the university. Otherwise, internet brings the business closer to the customers. Developments of alternative modes such as distance learning and virtual learning media are growing significantly making 'place' between HE and students immaterial. Ivy (2008) stated that place is the distribution method that the university adopts to provide the tuition to its market in a manner that meets, if not exceeds, student expectations by making alternative modes such as virtual learning media as an example. Another way is institutions adopting branch campus model, especially due to falling higher education resources, institutions will need to be very clear about

their choices of location, alliance partners and marketing positioning (Mazzarol, Soutar and Seng, 2003). Based on the Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) study on international students mobility, Malaysia has been seen to cater foreign students as well as Australia, Singapore and China.

If businesses are interested in selling their products or services online, they must have the right kind of advertising and marketing that will allow the product or services to sell. In order to best achieve advertising or **promotion** effort is to understand the characteristics of interactive marketing communication. Among the characteristics of interactive marketing communications is from 'push to pull' (Hofacker, 2001; Chaffey et. al., 2006). Traditional media such as television are 'push media' encouraging a one-way information. On the other hand, internet serve as a 'pull media', where the web encourages customers to search, browse, find, select, compare and evaluate. This may mean that organization may have less control, however through internet marketing, a web site can portray a 'push' to consumers. IM can stimulate visits by optimizing search engines and online directories (Kiani, 1998; Rowley, 2001; Constantinides, 2004). Some customers go directly to the web site by typing the web address. The goal is to achieve effective promotion, visibility and easy accessibility to attract visitors to the site.

There are two types of web sites - a flat ad and the marketing site, where a flat ad contains such information on a brochure (e.g. phone numbers, products or services, email address) and marketing site is designed for customers-initiated online communication (Hofacker, 2001). In comparison, within a short term the marketing

site is able to 'pull' customers and encourages sale, while its long term goal is to establish relationships. Promotional activities for marketing communications includes (Rowley, 2001):

- to increase sales;
- to maintain or improve market share;
- to create or improve brand recognition;
- to create a favourable climate for future sales;
- to inform and educate the market;
- to create a competitive advantage, relative to competitor's products or market position;
- to improve promotional efficiency.

Both online and offline marketing communications mix can be use to attract students' and parents' attention and create awareness (Roberts, 2003; Chaffey et. al., 2006). Other than search engines, other techniques are used for marketing communication mix. Online public relations such as Higher Education Ministry can be a one stop centre to represent the country of origin for prospective students. Some institutions promote discussion such as alumni community, bulletin posts, community channel e.g. Facebook, or blogs. Online partnerships provide affiliate marketing such as www.studymalaysia.com which also displays interactive advertisements of private institutions and sponsorships. Offline communications techniques are also used in conjunction to internet, to benefit traffic flow. Some offline marketing tools are university's prospectus, word-of-mouth, exhibitions, banners or universities' collectibles. As with other forms of advertising, web objectives should be integrated

into overall marketing communication goals (Hofacker, 2001). These goals vary depending on the nature of the product and services. On the other hand, the message sent will depend on the nature of the consumer decision (e.g. purchase intention vs. post-purchase behaviour).

2.2.3 Web content

As far as higher education students as customers are concerned, the focus of previous researches is comparing the issues and factors identified by students in making choices through print communications and e-communications (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Moogan et. al. 2001; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). The study of potential higher education students in searching information and decision making are stimulated by increase competition for overseas students. Thus signifies the need to study students' perception on the contents of the university web site and clarify areas of improvements on web site contents. Content is defined as the design, text and graphical information that forms a web page (Chaffey et. al., 2006). Content is the key element in attracting and retaining customers to a web site. Web site content can also represent service quality that may influence online consumer's behaviour (Chai and Fun, 2003; Constantinides, 2004).

Students seek information that allows them to imagine studying in their chosen course (Gomes and Murphy, 2003) and increasingly, the internet offers a means for geographically remote students to access university and course information

(Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis, 2005). A content-rich web site encourages return visits especially if information is packed with useful information and provides relationship building. University's web site provide benefits for prospective students, parents, visitors, alumni and donors by posting relevant and/or up to date information such as academics and programs listings, admissions and registration information, payments and financial aids, campus maps and support services, career and health services, news and publications, safety and security to sports and recreation.

Sharing information in a creative way represents the most significant change implied by new marketing channel and it is a very important factor in the sales process. Therefore e-marketers need to understand the abilities in targeting the consumers by improving the flow of information that will assist in creating a successful relationship. By providing sufficient or extra related information, the visitor will prolong their time at the web site. This is a state where customers are having a peak experience in reading and if the web site is 'sticky' enough and that the web content is able to induce this state, it will increase the consumer learning about the site, the firm's and increase memory recall for this learned information (Collin, 2000; Hofacker, 2001). This will then lead to customer further participation and interaction and increase the probability of purchase behaviour.

Visitors tend to scheme rather than read so effective web structure and user friendliness will capture their interest. A resource based web page serves the interest of the visitors by providing easy site navigation and easily accessible information or add-a-link feature for users to search university's news and updates, public seminars

and conventions, and university's calendar. This will create a university community atmosphere. The importance of such a service (university's) is highlighted by the presence of many stakeholders and their interests, either social or economic (Petruzzellis et. al., 2006). Not only that students are seeking for knowledge but at the same time seek for social expectations (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Russell, 2005; Cubillo, 2006).

It is crucial to also dictate message into the consumer mindset through visual layout or format or aesthetic function of the webpage. It is important that marketers understands what motivates internet consumers and that web site layout design and information content are important for effective web sites (So et. al., 2005; Singh et. al., 2006). The overall web site should be consistent and basically have a unified look. There are various ways in setting up layout and adopting artistic principles to attract prospective customers. Hofacker (2001) mentioned three classic ways:

- “front door” metaphor to create a perceptual whole where images, graphics and visual elements will blend in a single, overall impression;
- the “bar and menu” style where visitors get to sub-pages through shortcuts and that web designers places menus, typefaces and space in a rhythm that the pages are related to each other creating a comfort factor and a sense of familiarity; and
- the “runner and main page” format where two screen divided into two section that contains a site menu and the main section includes the logo and other links which the artistic principle is that the visual displays needs to be balanced.

Constantinides (2005) study showed results reviewed from academics paper that web site design, presentation quality, style or atmosphere were considered as aesthetics elements of the web site content.

Marthur et. al. (1998) stated the importance of information search and highlighted that the internet is able to reduce the risk in consumption of service by added value to the information search. Organisations should be extra cautious of online risks such as time risk, security risk and risk of privacy. If the site is overloaded with graphics or unrelated information, unsecured line transactions or personal information revealed to public, these would damage the credibility of the organization. According to Wu (2002) their empirical study regarding consumer behaviour and internet marketing found that high degree of Internet Marketing involvement depends on three important perception need factors: safe and trust factor; knowledge and understanding factor; and effective factor.

The marketing goals will be met if the web site information survives to the last state (purchase decision). The five stages of the human information processing of a web site are: exposure; attention; comprehension and perception; yielding and acceptance; and retention (Hofacker, 2001). This is practiced on page design and content design in order to improve web site usability. The stages is summarised as figure 2 below:

Table 2.0: A summary of the characteristics of the five stages of information processing described by Hofacker (2000)

Stage	Description	Applications
1. Exposure	Content must be present for long enough to be processed	Content on banner ads may not be on screen long enough for processing and cognition
2. Attention	Users eyes will be drawn towards headings and content, not graphics and moving items on a web page (Nielsen, 2000)	Emphasis and accurate labelling of headings is vital to gain a user's attention. Evidence suggests that users do not notice banner adverts, suffering from 'banner blindness'
3. Comprehension and perception	The user's interpretation of content	Designs that use common standards and metaphors and are kept simple will be more readily comprehended
4. Yielding and acceptance	Is information (copy) presented accepted by customers?	Copy should refer to credible sources and present counter-arguments as necessary
5. Retention	As for traditional advertising, this describes the extent to which the information is remembered	An unusual style or high degree of interaction leading to flow and user satisfaction is more likely to be recalled

Source: Chaffey et. al., (2006, pg. 333)

Similarly, Rowley (2001) based on relevant literature review proposed four stages where the impact of web presence on the role of strategic marketing communications is dependent on the stages of development of web presence:

- (1) Contact - by emphasizing web content;
- (2) Interact – applications which feature information exchange with customers and trading partners;
- (3) Transact – transactional applications is made available emphasize trust and confidentiality;
- (4) Relate – allowing consumers access to organizational databases or relevant databases between businesses.

2.3 Consumer behaviour on internet and students web search behaviours

Fishbein (1963) conceptualisation framework model, which is also called the Expected-Value Theory of attitude, is perhaps the most well-known model for relating attitude to behaviour (So, Wong and Sculli, 2005). Based on this theory and the consideration on the control on behaviour exerted by the social and physical environment, different models and extensions were introduced which resulted to the proposed Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). This theory explains the relationships between beliefs, attitudes, intentions and actual behaviour (Meor Ahmad, 2004) and it assumes that consumer choice of behaviour is based on conscious thinking leading to the most desirable outcome (So, Wong and Sculli, 2005).

According to George (2004), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). TPB includes perceived behavioural control to perform certain behaviour as a factor influencing intention (George, 2004; So, Wong and Sculli 2005). George (2004) pointed out that many different studies used TPB in information systems literature and that TRA and TPB are used as basis on internet purchasing behaviour. Shim et. al. (2001, cited by So, Wong and Sculli, 2005) showed in an empirical study that attitude towards internet purchase would positively predict intention to use the web for product information search which would affect purchase intentions. Thus signifies that the relationship between attitude towards internet purchase and purchase intentions is mediate by a variable – web searching behaviour (Shim et. al., 2001; cited by So, Wong and Sculli, 2005).

In order to determine online purchase or usage behaviour, Wu (2002) stated the key factor in deciding the success of Internet Marketing is user involvement. He stated that there are three online consumer behaviour response factors: (1) search, (2) information processing, and (3) decision/persuasion, which is the type of involvement generated and the situations confronted and these characterizes how the consumer will behave under different involvement conditions. Vazquez and Xu, (2008) noted that recent researches focus on motivational and attitudinal studies and that recent online consumer behaviour literature has attempted to develop basic frameworks linking intervening constructs such as online information search with purchase intention.

Gomes and Murphy (2003) in their study of prospective students' use of information search in their decision-making process. This includes the use of web in gathering information and e-mailing to respective institutions. This is because, 'students seek information that allows them to imagine studying in their chosen course'(Gomes and Murphy, 2003). Moogan et. al. (2001) stated that students may search for information internally from within their memory and/or externally where they will research the educational-market by whatever means present to them.

Trust in information cannot be established until consumers trust the site, and trust in fulfilment requires prior trust in the site and its information (Gomez and Murphy, 2003). This is especially true when there is a geographic and cultural differences between consumer and organization (Gomez and Murphy, 2003; Hemsley-Brown, 2006; Nagaraj et. al., 2008). In lowering students or consumers adoption on

technologies perceived risks, Gomez and Murphy (2003) have discussed consumer and organizational diffusion of innovations. Wong, Chan and Leung (2005) explained that information diffusion is from both side to perform co-sharing information which involves information competency and information sharing. McKean (1999; cited from Wong, Chan and Leung, 2005) defined information competency as the way that companies manage and process the information they have gained and Anderson and Narus (1990; cited from Wong, Chan and Leung, 2005) defined information sharing as formal and informal sharing of meaningful and timely information in order for the companies to understand customers' needs, wants and desires.

Through comprehensive literature review and empirical research, Gomes and Murphy (2003) suggested that student web-search behaviours are divided into six categories which is adopted in this study:

- (1) Search web for information;
- (2) Went to Homepage (University's web site);
- (3) Used of Search Engine;
- (4) E-mailed for information;
- (5) Found site through promotion/portal; and
- (6) Found sufficient information.

Having stated the above that involves in students' decision making process, below explained the conceptual aspect of student's decision making on choosing university.

2.4 Student decision-making on choice of institution

Cubillo et. al. (2006) stated that the growing number of international students in search of higher education and the inclusion of new countries as destinations for this purpose have increased the need to understanding the behaviour of consumers from a cross-national perspective. There are still insufficient researches on understanding students' decision-making process and university choice (Moogan et. al., 2001; Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis 2005; Maringe, 2006; Cubillo et. al., 2006). Before joining the university, many students hold certain concrete expectations of university life. Hence prospective students' preferences and expectations are pertinent in their decision-making on their choice of institution.

“Student preferences and expectations, and the relationships of these to institutional expectations and priorities, are exceedingly complex issues for analysis. The complexity is caused in the main part by the highly participatory nature of the higher education enterprise and the two-way interaction between the actions of students and those of universities — the higher education process not only *shapes* student expectations, the education process is itself influenced by the character of student expectations. There is presently no single theoretical framework that adequately deals with these relationships.” (James, 2001)

According to Maringe (2006), models of decision-making have been developed around what is commonly called the purchase behaviour of consumers. The purchase behaviour of consumers passes through five stages which Kotler (2006) stated: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of the alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behaviour. Constantinides (2004) suggests that consumer

buying process as learning, information-processing and decision-making activity. Students' decision-making is broadly seen as a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices (Maringe, 2006). Hodkinson et. al. (1996, cited by Maringe, 2006) argued that choice is a rational process that is constrained by realistic perception of opportunities and shaped by individual personality.

Particularly for students in making choices, Hossler and Gallagher (1987, cited by Nagaraj et. al. 2008) identified three stages: (a) predisposition (when students decide if they wish to continue on to tertiary education); (b) search (when students begin to investigate institutions); and (c) choice (when students decide on attending a particular institution). In this study, choice of institution is related to the students as consumer on the demand side (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Gomez and Murphy, 2003; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Maringe, 2006; Nagaraj et. al. 2008). The factors which are found to affect students choice includes better facilities provided overseas (Naude and Ivy, 1999; James, 2001; Moogan et. al., 2001; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003, Russell, 2005; Ivy, 2008;), university's image/reputation and provision of international education (Mazzarol, 1998; Moogan et. al., 2001; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Binsardy and Ekwulugo, 2003; Russell, 2005, Ho and Hung, 2008), broad range programmes or courses (Mazzarol, 1998; Moogan et. al., 2001; Ivy, 2008), lower cost of living (Gomez and Murphy, 2001; Mazzarol et. al. 2003; Ho and Hung 2008; Ivy, 2008) and good job prospects (Soutar and Turner, 2002; Maringe, 2006).

On the other hand, it is worth to note that Cubillo et. al. attempt in proposing a theoretical model that integrates factors which influenced the decision-making process of international students by analysing different dimensions of the process and explaining the factors which determine choice of institution. By selecting 25 years of literature review, they proposed a theoretical model that include personal reason, country image effect, city effect, institution image and programme evaluation. Most research on prospective students involves dimension and factors which led to students' decision-making. Such research will tend to be a popular topic as students being Higher Education consumers face a complex buying decision.

Even though research on higher education marketing were likely on prospective students (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Gray et. al. 2003; Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis, 2005; Chen and Zimitat, 2006) or existing students on the 'consumer – universities marketing relationships' (Naude and Ivy, 1999; Binsardi and Ekwulugo 2003; Russell, 2005). The assumption of this study is to analyse international students feedback that will highlight how they have made UUM their place of study (choice/purchase decision), may share their experience as prospective students (purchase intention) of the university and show up an understanding of the university marketing effort through UUM web site. It goes align with Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis (2005) study stating that present students represent the degree of to which various information sources are consulted when selecting a higher education institution, and, the relative reliability and credibility placed on them by prospective students.

2.5 Conclusion

Due to unpredictable environment, higher educational institutions worldwide need to compete and survive. Some traditional English-spoken countries were forced to close institutions due to short numbers of enrolments. Other part of the world, higher education institutions and government bodies especially where non-English spoken countries are seen to have taken tremendous effort in recruiting international students. Involvement in higher education marketing will be growing especially through new ways of reaching international students. Research on students' purchasing behaviour, the usage of marketing communication and understanding ways and means of the supply and demand of higher education marketing are still at pioneer stage of development. This study aims to highlight various independent variables that influence UUM foreign students' choice of institution and considers UUM web site as a marketing tool.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter underlines the methodology to collect empirical evidence and information needed to achieve the research objectives. This chapter describes and explains the theoretical framework, hypotheses, research design, operational definition, instrumentation, data collection procedures and sampling; and techniques of data analysis.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Sekaran (2006) notes that a theoretical framework is a conceptual model of how one theorizes or makes logical sense of the relationships among the several factors that have been identified as important to the problem. The framework discusses the interrelationships among the variables that are deemed to be integral to the dynamics of the situation that are being investigated (Sekaran, 2006). This will help the researcher to postulate or hypothesize and test certain relationships and thus to improve understanding of the dynamics of the situation (Sekaran, 2006).

Based on the literature review above, this section proposes an alternative conceptual framework that illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. The dependant variable in this study

is students' choice of institution (UUM). Choice can be defined as when students decide on attending a particular institution (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987, cited by Nagaraj et. al. 2008) based on assumption that choice is a rational process that is constrained by realistic perception of opportunities and shaped by individual personality (Hodkinson et. al., 1996, cited by Maringe, 2006). The independent variables are internet marketing and web search behaviours. Internet Marketing is defined as achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies (Chaffey et. al., 2006) and Hofacker (2001) suggests that business to consumer activities include communication, selling and web site contents. These variables are shown in Figure 3.0 below.

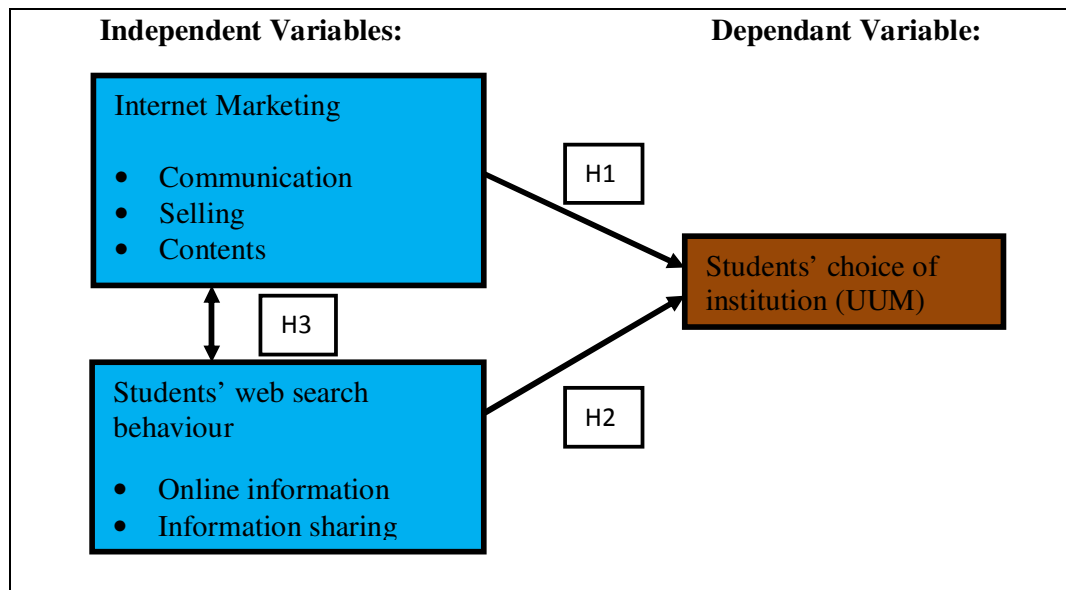


Figure 3.0: Theoretical Framework

As shown from the above figure highlighted through the literature review and developed into theoretical framework above, the researcher mainly has three hypotheses to be tested:

1. There is a significant relationship between internet marketing and foreign student choice of institution (UUM).
2. There is a significant relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and foreign students choice of institution (UUM).
3. There is a significant relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour.

3.3 Hypotheses

According to Sekaran (2006), hypothesis is a logically conjectured relationship between two or more variables expressed in the form of a testable statement. These relationships are conjectured on the basis of the network of associations established in the theoretical framework formulated in the research study (Sekaran, 2006). In order to arrive to research question solutions, hypothesis testing and confirming the conjectured relationships are established.

H1: There is a significant relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' choice of institution.

H1a: There is a significant relationship between selling and foreign students' choice of institution.

H1b: There is a significant relationship between web content and foreign students' choice of institution.

H1c: There is a significant relationship between communication and foreign students' choice of institution.

H2: There is a significant relationship between web search behaviour and foreign students' choice of institution.

H2a: There is a significant relationship between online information and foreign students' choice of institution.

H2b: There is a significant relationship between information sharing and foreign students' choice of institution.

H3: There is a relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour.

3.4 Research Design

Research design offers critical choice points to carry out the study. Two obvious steps that would bring benefits as Hair and Samouel (2007) pointed out – choose a design that (1) will provide relevant information on the research questions/hypotheses, and (2) will complete the job most efficiently. They mentioned that sometimes theory are limited or perhaps nonexistent, however when hypotheses

can be developed the researcher 'chooses the appropriate design alternatives, taking into consideration its specific purpose' (Sekaran, 2006).

Since the researcher intends to investigate the relationships between variables this study is considered hypotheses testing. According to Sekaran (2006) studies engage in hypotheses testing usually explain the nature of certain relationships, or establish the differences among groups or the independence of two or more factors in a situation. He also stated that hypothesis testing is undertaken to explain the variance in the dependent variable or to predict organizational outcomes.

The framework for this study is used as a guide for collecting and analyzing data. From the comprehensive literature review done and considering time and financial constraints, data will be collected through questionnaires and analyzed through quantitative measures. Moreover this study concentrates on gathering the important data as identified in the previous research which proven limited empirically and conceptually supported. Since the information is on how foreign students select UUM as their choice of institution based on UUM internet marketing and their web search behaviour, a survey is an appropriate methodology for gathering information. It is design to be descriptive and correlation in nature so to give insights as to which factors of internet marketing and web search behaviours have influenced (not caused) students' choice. It will also assist in documenting areas of interest as well as generalizing some patterns that could be derived from them.

3.5 Operational Definition

Construct	Dimension	Definition
Internet Marketing		Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements. Chaffey et. al., 2006 defined internet marketing as achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies.
	Communication	Products and services are communicated effectively through website. By utilizing two-way communications, customers may perceive product/service quality and personal relevance. (Chaffey et. al., 2001; Rowley, 2001).
	Selling	Marketing stimuli are the traditional marketing Mix (four p's) based on Kotler's framework (2003, from Constantinides, 2004; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003).
	Web content	Content is defined as the design, text and graphical information that forms a web page (Chaffey et. al., 2001) and can also represent service quality that may influence online consumer's behaviour (Chai and Fun, 2003; Constantinides, 2004).
Students Web Search Behaviour		The use of web in gathering information (Rowley, 2000; Gomes and Murphy, 2003) and e-mailing to respective institutions by students (Gomes and Murphy, 2003).
	Online information	Information that allows them to imagine studying in their chosen course (Gomes and Murphy, 2003)

	Information sharing	Wong, Chan and Leong (2005) defined information diffusion as performing co-sharing information between consumers and providers.
Students choice of institution		Students' decision-making is broadly seen as a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices (Maringe, 2006).
	Choice	Choice is done when student decide on attending a particular institution (Hossler and Gallager, 1987 from Nagaraj et. al., 2008).

3.6 Instrumentation

The questionnaire (as attached as Appendix 1) is designed to ensure ease of communication with the respondents to dissolve the difficulty in language (i.e. slangs and jargons) and cultural barriers to encourage respondents'. The questions used a five-point Likert scale where individual question is referred to measure attitudes (ie. (1) Disagree, (2) Disagree somewhat, (3) Neutral, (4) Somewhat agree, (5) Agree) and opinion (i.e. (1) Very poor, (2) Poor, (3) Average, (4) Good, (5) Excellent) in order to gain explanation on the subject matter (Hair et. al., 2007; Sekaran, 2006). All data will be keyed-in and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

The structured questionnaire consists of 83 items. Items are assigned to each dimension of the variables. The questionnaire has two main sections. The first part consists of questions on university choice (adapted from Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Maringe, 2006; Cubillo et. al. 2006; Nagaraj et. al. 2008), web search behaviour (adapted from Gomez and Murphy, 2003) and personal details for respondent's profiling. The second part includes three main subject under internet marketing (as suggested by Hofacker, 2001) which are: (1) four P's (adapted from Binsardi and Ekulugo, 2003), (2) web contents (adapted from Bell and Tang, 1998; Thomases, 2007; Bonnema and Van Der Waladt, 2008) and; (3) communications (adapted from Hoey, 1998 and Chai and Fun, 2003).

3.7 Data Collection Procedures and Sampling

The major approach in generating data for this study is through questionnaires. The survey is conducted in UUM by distributing questionnaires among foreign students. According to Sekaran (2006) Simple Random Sampling is the best when generalizability of the findings to the whole population is the main objective of the study. The total number of UUM foreign students as of December 2008 are 1308 (**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** dated January 2009). According to Sekaran (2006) the number of sample for population of 1300 is 297.

The study will use a self-administered survey method. Sekaran (2006) stated that the main advantage of a personally administering questionnaire is able to collect all

completed questionnaires immediately after they are completed. He also mentioned that the researcher may be able to provide clarifications sought by the respondents on the spot and establish rapport with the respondents while introducing the survey. This may motivate the respondents to answer questions based on their real experience and understanding on the questions.

3.8 Techniques of Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in this research.

3.8.1 Descriptive analysis

- i. Descriptive Analysis: In analysing the respondents' demographic factors and background.
- ii. Inferential statistics used to test hypotheses formulated for the study. Hypotheses Testing, Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression were used to analyze the relationships of the independent and dependent variable which are discussed further below. This is to show the significance and direction of the relations postulated in the hypotheses.

3.8.2 Hypothesis testing

By using appropriate menus from the software programs (SPSS) each hypothesis is tested using relevant statistical test. Hypotheses results will answer the research

objectives and research questions as stated in the first chapter. Since the interest is to investigate the relationships between internet marketing and students' web search behavior towards students' choice of institution, the Pearson correlations and the regression analysis will be used.

Pearson correlations is a statistical procedures for analyzing associative relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables obtained from the five interval-scaled variables in the questionnaires. Any bivariate correlation can be obtained by clicking the relevant menu, identifying the variables, and seeking the appropriate parametric or non parametric statistics (Sekaran, 2006).

3.8.3 Multiple regression analysis

Regression analysis is used to measure linear relationship between two or more variables. Hair et. al., (2007) explained that with multiple regression analysis, several independent variables are entered into the same type of regression equation and predict a single dependant variable, whilst a separate regression coefficient then is calculated for each independent variable that describes its individual relationship with the dependent variable. The coefficients enable the researcher to evaluate the relative influence of several independent variables on the dependant variables (Hair et. al., 2007).

Multiple regression analysis is done to examine the simultaneous effects of several independent variables on a dependent variable that is interval scaled (Sekaran, 2006).

In this study, multiple regressions will be carried out to investigate which among the

set of predictors is the most important in explaining the variance in the dependant variable.

3.8.4 Strength of relationships

The scale suggested by Cohen and Manion (1994) was used to describe the relationships between the independent variables and dependant variables.

<u>Coefficient Value (r)</u>	<u>Strength of Relationship</u>
1.0	Perfect relationship
0.85 – 0.99	Very strong relationship
0.65 – 0.84	Strong relationship
0.35 – 0.64	Moderate relationship
0.20 – 0.34	Slight relationship
0.0 – 0.19	No relationship

3.9 Summary

This chapter discusses the methodological issues that is relevant for the research project and sets out the specific methods that are undertaken for the various parts in the research. The theoretical framework, the sample of respondents, the instrumentation used, the data collection methods and the techniques of data analysis were explained and discussed. The analysis and findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discuss on (1) profiles of the respondents; (2) descriptive statistics the variable in the model of the study; (3) reliability of the study and (4) hypotheses and regression results. Before these analyses a reliability test is done to determine the internal consistency of the measurements.

4.2 Sample response

Data was collected via questionnaire at random on UUM vicinity. The study evaluates responses from 288 valid responses from foreign students who are studying at UUM. This represents a total of 96.97 per cent response rate from the total number of sample for population. The survey was carried out for two weeks in the month of October 2009.

Table 4.1 below shows the background of respondents. The study involved 157 (54.5%) male respondents and 131 (45.5%) female respondents. There are 277 (78.8%) respondents who are under 30 years old and there are 61 (21.2%) respondents who are more than thirty years old but below forty years old. Most are undergraduate students with a total number of 195 (67.7%) and 93 (32.3%) are postgraduate students. Only 2 (0.7%) respondents are under Malaysian sponsorship

whilst there are 228 (79.2%) respondents who are studying on self finance/parents and 58 (20.1%) of the respondents are under their country's government sponsorship/grants. About 55 (19.1%) respondents are living in the rural area in comparison to 233 (80.9%) in urban areas. They come from different parts of the world which is detailed in the table below.

Table 4.1: Background of Respondents

Variables	Numbers	Percentage (n = 288 (100%))
Gender:		
Male	157	54.5%
Female	131	45.5%
Age:		
Under 30	227	78.8%
31-39	61	21.2%
Country of origin:		
Azerbaijan	2	0.7%
Botswana	4	1.4%
China	116	40.3%
Indonesia	30	10.4%
Somalia	17	5.9%
Thailand	46	16.0%
Others:	73	25.3%

Other Asian	33	
Other Middle East	48	
Oceania	8	
Educational level:		
Postgraduate	93	32.3%
Undergraduate	195	67.7%
Living area:		
Urban	233	80.9%
Rural	55	19.1%
Types of sponsorship:		
Self finance / parents	228	79.2%
Government sponsorship/grants	58	20.1%
Government sponsorship (Malaysian)	2	0.7%

Table 4.2 below shows response on the most important reason for respondents in their choice of institutions and their ranking of UUM among their universities choices. It shows that among the reasons, 36 per cent of the students rated broad range of programmes or courses as the highest reason, followed by 30 per cent of students cited lower cost of living as the second most important reason. It is also evident that the university's image/reputation and provision of international education ranked third reason by 25 per cent of the respondents. About 5.6 per cent choose good job prospects and 2.8 percent choose UUM due to better university facilities and support

services. A percentage of 47.2 per cent of the responses thought that UUM as their first choice and that 11.1 per cent response UUM was their only choice.

Table 4.2: Most important reason for choosing UUM and UUM among choices

Reasons	Frequency	Percentages
Broad range of programmes or courses	104	36.0 %
Lower cost of living	88	30.0 %
University's image/reputation and provision of international education	72	25.0 %
Good job prospects	16	5.6 %
Better university facilities and support services	8	2.8 %
UUM is you number..... choice.		
• 1 st choice	136	47.2 %
• 2 nd choice	120	41.7%
• I only choose UUM	32	11.1%

Nominal questions were asked on web search behaviour to gain understanding on the questions posted in [Table 4.3](#) below.

Table 4.3: Web Search Behaviours Questions (Nominal)

Questions	Answer	Frequency	Percentages
Used the internet for information about overseas education before furthering your studies.	Yes	264	91.7 %
	No	24	8.3%

E-mail UUM to make further enquiries	Yes	216	75.0%
	No	72	25.0%
How long did UUM reply to your inquiry?			
Within 1 day		40	13.9%
1-2 days		136	47.2%
3-5 days		24	8.3%
More than 5 days		16	5.6%
Does UUM email response influence your decision?			
Little influence		8	2.8%
Some influence		112	38.9%
Fairly influence		96	33.3%

There were 264 respondents representing 91.7 per cent who used the internet for information about overseas education before furthering their studies which is significant to Gomez and Murphy (2003) research, ranking it as the highest behaviour of students on the internet highlighting the internet role in marketing to overseas students. A total number of 216 of them have emailed to UUM prior to make enquiries before entering the university which amount to 75 percent. The university responded mostly in 1 to 2 days (47.2%) and a high percentage of 38.9% responded that it had influenced their decision in some ways.

4.3 Reliability Test

Reliability test was conducted to determine the stability and consistency of an instrument in measuring a concept to a degree that the observed score has minimal error. The lower the error the lower the bias answers that represent a higher accuracy, thus it represent more reliability of a concept measured. Reliability coefficients can take on values from 0 to 1.0 inclusive... and in educational measurement; it is desirable to obtain high-reliability coefficients, although coefficients of 1.0 are very rare (Wiersma, 1999). Cronbach alpha which is developed by Cronbach (1951, from Wiersma, 1999) is based on two or more parts of the test which requires only one administration of the test.

According to Sekaran (2006) Cronbach's alpha can be considered a perfectly adequate index of the interim consistency reliability. It is considered that above 0.70 is acceptable. Nunnally suggest 0.6 and above is acceptable (1978; as cited by Wong, Chan and Leung, 2005) and those over 0.70 or higher is good, the closer the number is to 1, the higher the internal consistency reliability (Sekaran, 2006).

4.3.1 Analysis of the reliability of internet marketing

The second section of the questionnaire measured the independent variable of Internet Marketing. There are three dimensions which fall under the independent variable which are selling, web content and communication.

Table 4.4: Reliability Analysis of Internet Marketing

Constructs	Number of Items	Number of Items Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Internet Marketing	44		
- Selling	21	18	0.7274
- Web Content	15	10	0.6012
- Communication	8	3	0.8010
Total no. of items reliable:		<u>11</u>	0.745

From Table 4.4 above there are three dimensions consisting of 44 items. Web content is represented by 3 items with a total of Cronbach's Alpha Value at 0.6012. There are five items of Communication that are valid with a total of Cronbach's Alpha Value of 0.8010. Out of 20 items for selling only three are appropriate to include under the internet marketing variable to achieve a total of Cronbach's Alpha Value at 0.7274. Thus there are 11 items under Internet Marketing that are acceptable.

4.3.2 Analysis of the reliability of students' web search behaviour

The other independent variable of Students' Web Search Behaviour was asked in the first part of the questionnaire. There are two dimensions which fall under the independent variable which are online information and information sharing.

Table 4.5: Reliability Analysis of Students' Web Search Behaviour

Constructs	Number of Items	Number of Items Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Web Search Behaviour	27		
-Online information	12	2	0.9114
-Information sharing	15	9	0.9728
Total no. of items reliable:		<u>16</u>	0.8654

From Table 4.5 above there are two dimensions which consist of 27 items. The first dimension is online information which is represented by 10 items with a total of Cronbach's Alpha Value at 0.9114. The Cronbach's Alpha Value for information sharing is 0.9728 for a total of 6 items. Altogether the Cronbach's Alpha Value for student web search behaviour is 0.8654 or 16 items acceptable. This shows that these values indicate that the measure possesses higher reliability standards.

4.3.3 Analysis of the reliability of choice of institution

The dependant variable of the study was asked earlier in section one. The dimension consists of 12 items. The result indicates 0.8926 as a value for Cronbach's Alpha for 10 items, and shows that the measure was reliable and acceptable. Below Table 4.6 shows the results of the reliability test for the choice of institution.

Table 4.6: Reliability Analysis of Choice of Institution.

Constructs	Number of Items	Number of Items Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha Value
University Choice	12		
-Choice	12	5	0.8926
Total no. of items reliable:		<u>7</u>	0.8926

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

According to Cohen and Manion (1994) the correlational approach is valuable to clarify relationships and where correlation coefficients will achieve these ends. They also mentioned that the approach has more advantages particularly in tackling problems in education and the social sciences because it allows for the measurement of a number of variables and their relationship simultaneously. Another interesting point they highlighted that correlational research only identifies what goes with what – it only implies concomitance and therefore does not necessarily establish cause-and-effect relationships. The results from this analysis are listed as below.

4.4.1 Relationship between internet marketing and choice of institution

The researcher intends to analyze whether there is a significant relationship between internet marketing and choice of institution. This is the first hypothesis as shown below.

H1: There is a significant relationship between internet marketing and choice of institution.

H1a: There is a significant relationship between selling and choice of institution.

H1b: There is a significant relationship between web content and choice of institution.

H1c: There is a significant relationship between communication and choice of institution.

Table 4.7 below showed the output for the above relationship in order to discover whether there is a relationship between the two variables. Pearson Correlation is used to measure the existence. According to the output, the results shows that there is a slight relationship between internet marketing and foreign students choosing UUM ($r=.220, p < 0.01$).

Table 4.7: Analysis of the relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' choice of institution

	Choice
Internet Marketing	.220**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Regression analysis is also undertaken in this study to determine if the variance in the dependent variable is explained by a set of independent variables. Multiple correlation or 'regression' indicates the degree of association between three or more variables simultaneously (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Table 4.8: Multiple regression result between internet marketing and choice of institution

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig. F
.220 ^a	.049	.045	4.462	14.613	.000 ^a

Above Table 4.8 shows that 4.5 per cent of the variance has limited meaning explained by the set of predictors. In other words, it indicates the amount that the two variables (independent variables and dependent variable) have little in common even though it is statistically proven correlated.

Table 4.9: Multiple regression result between internet marketing dimensions and foreign students choice of institution

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (constant)	12.716	2.897		4.389	.000
Selling	.779	.203	.224	3.837	.000
Web content	.346	.146	.139	2.366	.019
Communication	.038	.092	.024	.414	.679

Table 4.9 above shows the multiple regressions result between internet marketing dimensions which are communication, selling and web content with foreign students choice of institution. From the table, only two dimensions were found to have statistically significant association with foreign students choosing UUM, they are

selling and web content. Selling represents 22.4 per cent of the variance and web content represents 13.9 percent of the variance of the foreign students choosing UUM.

Therefore the results of the hypotheses testing between internet marketing and foreign students choosing UUM indicated that H1a and H1b are supported, while H1c is rejected at 0.01 level.

4.4.2 Relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution

The relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution as shown in hypotheses below is analysed further.

H2: There is a significant relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution.

H2a: There is a significant relationship between online information and foreign students' choice of institution (UUM).

H2b: There is a significant relationship between information sharing and foreign students' choice of institution (UUM).

Table 4.10 below shows the analysis of the relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution. The result indicates that there is a moderate relationship between the two variables with $r = 0.477$ as a correlation value

at the 0.01 level. This means that at 0.01 level, there is a positive relationship between students' web search behaviour and foreign students choice of institution.

Table 4.10: Analysis of the relationship between students' web search behaviour and foreign students' choice of institution

Choice	
Web search behaviour	.447**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

The following Table 4.11 below points the regression result between foreign students' web search behaviour and foreign students' choice of institution. The results below shows that 44.7 per cent of the variance of foreign students choosing UUM is explained by their web search behaviour as indicated by the F-value of 71.312.

Table 4.11: Multiple regression result between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig. F
.447 ^a	.200	.197	4.092	71.312	.000 ^a

An examination of the t-values indicates that the information sharing ($\beta=.968$, $p=.000$) contributes to the prediction of students' choice. This is indicated at 96.8 per

cent of the variance on students' choosing UUM. These results are taken from the following [Table 4.12](#) below.

Table 4.12: Multiple regression result between foreign students' web search behaviour and their choice of institution

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (constant)	9.280	.353		26.313	.000
Online info.	-.015	.007	-.029	-2.006	.046
Info. Sharing	.818	.012	.968	66.943	.000

To conclude, the result of the hypotheses testing between foreign students' web search behaviour and their choosing UUM showed that only information sharing is supported and online information is rejected.

4.4.3 Relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour

The last hypothesis to be analysed is the relationship between the UUM website's internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour. The analysis is presented in the following paragraphs.

H3: There is a relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour.

From Table 4.13 below shows the result of correlations analysis between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour. The result shows there is a statistically significant r value of 0.168 ($p < 0.001$). Even though it may be statistically significant the result indicates a very slight relationship (4 per cent of the variance).

Table 4.13: *Analysis of the relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour*

Internet Marketing	
Web search behaviour	0.168**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Hence, the result of the hypothesis between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour is statistically proven significant.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The following discussion is on overall findings. This is based upon the three objectives mentioned in Chapter One.

4.5.1 The relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' choice of institution

Research into Higher Education choice or consumer behaviour in higher education markets, although not extensive, has principally been simulated by an individual institution's need to anticipate the long-term implications of choice and to understand

the key factors involved in student choice of institution (Fosket and Hemsly-Brown, 2001; from Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006). As suggested by previous researchers, students as customers posed complex marketing conceptions that institutions place importance in marketing by undertaking a wide range of activities designed to attract prospective students internationally (Mazzarol, 1998; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Svensson and Wood, 2007). Institutions synchronize their marketing effort as providing services and Zinkhan (2002, from Lagrosen 2005) pointed that since services are high in information content the internet should be particular suitable to promote and deliver services.

H1 suggested that there is a relationship between internet marketing and foreign students choosing UUM even though the results in Table 4.7 showed limited amount of correlation. This can be seen from a literature review on Internet Marketing by Schibrowsky et. al. (2007), only a total of 28.2% of research has been done in Education from 2003-2004. Research that began to emerge in 1990s interpreted marketing within the narrower definition of marketing communications and was based on the assumptions that in order for any Higher Education to market itself successfully managers would need to examine the decision-making process and potential students' search for information (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Internet marketing posed a way of reaching towards international students however the much debate of Marketing Higher Education theory wise has altogether implied more research needs to be done (Gomez and Murphy, 2003; Ngai, 2003; Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis 2005).

As shown in Table 4.9 above only two dimensions under internet marketing were supported statistically that there is a relationship between selling and web content with foreign students' choice of institution. The relationship between selling and foreign students' choice is supported by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) research by highlighting that institutions who took into account the variables in selling (four p's) and making the variables the most important have determined international students' choice of institutions for their Higher Education study. Mazzarol (1998) highlighted that one critical success factors for international education marketing is by making effective usage of information technology and it scored a high percentage rating by 1004 institutions in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and USA. In this study, he web content of UUM website significantly proven to be correlated with foreign students' choice of institution.

Even though communication has 2.40 per cent correlation with foreign students' choice, the study also shows that communication has statistically significant correlation with web content at $r=0.227$, $p<0.01$; and with online information at $r=0.277$, $p<0.001$. The variable used in this study is communication through UUM own web site. However in reality, University employs a wide range of communication devices such as printed promotional materials or brochures or university letterheads that may have influenced foreign students' on their decision making. An interesting point that Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis (2005) highlighted in their research is that as Higher Education Institutions tended to replicated existing information formats and as their understanding of the webs/information technologies potential develops, it will likely be that more innovative communication opportunities will be develop.

4.5.2 The relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution

Search behaviour is when applicants begin using a variety of sources of information for data relating to a wide range of decision criteria (Maringe, 2006). According to Keller (1987, from Moogan et. al., 2001) the decision effectiveness is affected by the quality of information (usefulness to the consumer) and the quantity of information (number of items describing the alternative). This study shows that there is a positive relationship between students' web search behaviour and foreign students choosing UUM as their place of study at 44.7 per cent variance (Table 4.11 above). Moogan et. al. (2001) longitudinal study supports this. Prospective students go through three stages: (1) problem recognition; (2) information search, and (3) evaluation of alternatives where at the second stage, where the study shows that prospective students require special information which is very important at the earlier stage of the process. He pointed that it was important for Higher Education Institutions to re-examine their own marketing effort and highlighted the requirements that prospectus and web site need to have sufficient course content as well as effective delivery (i.e. easily accessible, readable, informative and understandable).

As stated by Bourke (2000, from Gomes and Murphy, 2003) the most critical variable for choosing overseas education is information. Maringe (2006) research too highlighted that empirically information appear to exert the greatest influence on choice of institution. Gomes and Murphy (2003) study also shows a positive relationship between the variables above marking that the highest rank was that prospective students searched the web for information about educational institutions

before deciding to join the institution. However in their study, only one in 20 prospective students found sufficient information in the institution's website. This can also be seen from Table 4.12 where 294 foreign students used online information but statistically showed it does not contribute to their choice of institution (at -0.02 per cent). 96.8 per cent of the web search behaviour is explained by the information sharing between foreign students' choosing UUM where from Table 4.3 above. More than half of the respondents (n = 216) shared information through e-mail with UUM and found that 90 per cent of these respondents agreed that the email response has influenced their choice of institution.

4.5.3 The relationship between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour

This study has also considered the hypothesis above and found that it is statistically significant at 4 per cent of the variance. The variance is explained by the correlation between communication with web content ($r=.227$, $p<0.001$), and communication with online information ($r=.277$, $p<0.001$) (Please refer the Appendices). This is explained further below.

Communication and web content: Constantinides (2004) stated that web site content should exercise direct and crucial influence which factors are likely to affect the customers trust. Maringe (2006) from his quantitative study showed that even though information is regarded having the highest influence on university choice, their qualitative result emphasised that students do not consider university website or other promotional material as significant in their choice. He stated by quoting past researchers that it could be that students find the information provided neither inadequate or misleading nor trustworthy and it could also be that the internet is assumed to have accessed to everyone including disadvantaged communities. Consequently, he stated that university promotional messages need to lay emphasis on issues students find most important to them and not issues universities think are most important to students. Veloutsou , Paton and Lewis (2005) also support this motion, that a sale is greatly influenced by information sources under the direct control of the university and obviously content and validity of the message is important. If the message is disseminated than it will be less reliable resulting to a loss "sale".

Communication and online information: According to Wong, Chan and Leung (2005) consumers seeks for benefits sought (through email) and product usage (based on how customers behave on the web) which they will spend considerable time on access, online and usage occasion. According to them, if online marketers are able to optimise the usage occasion data with customers' demographics, they are able to communicate the best when customers are most likely to pay attention to the message they want to deliver. Online marketers would likely optimise this when they know the customers' responses at the occasion of the information sharing in the form of their reliance on information diffusion.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter describes the analysis of data and findings of the research. Statistical analysis was taken through the use of SPSS software for computational accuracy. Data is fitted into numerical forms in tables to highlight key information. The underlying reasons and facts were revealed and discussed consistent with previous research which proven limited empirically and conceptually supported.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings of the study, the study implications, the limitation of the study and the recommendation for further research.

5.2 Key Findings, Practical Implications and Recommendations

The results of the survey attempted to empirically identify the three objectives: the relationship between internet marketing and choice of institution; the relationship of foreign students' web search behaviour and their choice of institution; and, the relationship of internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour.

A total number of 288 valid responses were collected through self-administered questionnaire-based survey method totalling 96.97 per cent response rate. The study involved foreign students who were studying at Universiti Utara Malaysia (Northern Malaysian University). Before analysing the data, reliability test were done to determine the internal consistency of the measurement. Several sections of analysing the data were separated based on tests. Descriptive findings of the study were done followed by inferential statistic analysis to seek an understanding how the variables related to each other. This is presented through hypothesis testing, correlation analysis and regression analysis.

The study discussed on the descriptive analysis of respondents' demographic background such as age, gender, country of origin, education level, living area and types of sponsorship. Nominal questions were also asked for in depth understanding on their choice of institutions. The most important reason for choosing UUM and UUM among choices was the broad range of programmes or courses that UUM offered. Making decision to study abroad involved high risk and in order to lower the dissonant, students went through a high information search. As students referred themselves as consumers seeking value for their money, and that this study showed that they were the key decision makers, therefore there is a need to look into the second stage as resulted in Moogan et. al. (2003) longitudinal study. The results showed that only during the first stage of the search process that programmes or courses were important and the second stage refer to other services such as utility as earlier work by Levitt (1980) pointed out the tangible and augmented products (e.g. physical layout of university).

Interestingly, the second reason was the lower cost of living. Research done in most English-spoken countries showed that financial aspects such as tuition fees and financial assistance had practical implications on students' decision making as of having to afford their education. This is especially true when international universities abandoned plans to set out branches where cost of living is high. Higher education institutions and government bodies as well as students are concern with the educational budget. Lower cost of living may influence such a crisis.

The third reason is the university's image or reputation and provision of international education. Among the questions respondents' were asked of their opinion on

Malaysian universities, which countries were its competitors. Interestingly most students responded that Australia, New Zealand, Canada, U.S.A. and even Saudi Arabian countries posed as competitors. This is aligned with Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) mobility report that Malaysia and Singapore will increase in volume of international students' recruitment as the new destination countries for overseas studies. Institution need to reflect the university's image and provision of international education through their promotional messages and medium.

Since good job prospects followed the reason above, one way in tackling core products is to win customer trust. This can be done by highlighting ex-students or alumni on their educational and working experience through their web site or university's bulletin. Alumni association activities could be linked into UUM website and any calendar events should be highlighted as marketing activities. Winning customer trust should be a central point for online marketers. Institutions marketers need to look into their marketing strategies, marketing communication and controllable elements to take full advantage of the recent trend.

The relationship between internet marketing and foreign students choosing UUM was tested. It resulted that among the internet marketing dimensions which supported statistically of the relationship were selling and web content. Both dimensions were considered highly related to foreign students' preference of institutions. Foreign students who were studying in UUM ranked the broad range of programmes or courses as their top reason at 36 per cent, these results tally with most researches done such as Moogan et. al. (2001), Russell (2005), Maringe (2006), and Nagaraj et. al. (2008).

Internet marketing researchers highlighted that web content is an ongoing process and web site being a communication marketing tool will influence customers on what they perceived from promotional messages by an organization. Selling and web content need to be designed through University's website (e.g. video or clips of lecturers and students highlighting activities that are related to real life work or activities) combining with University's program such as Talk and Forums from distinguished speakers so that overseas students may be able to grasp a better picture of the University of its mission and vision as stated in the web site presently.

The web content should also take into consideration of the stakeholders involved, even though students rate themselves as the key decision players in deciding to study overseas, however parents and sponsorship do matter. Most institutions especially in English-spoken countries are taking an integrated approach in determining future strategies that they have taken up integrated marketing function, interdepartmental co-ordination and using their web site as a tool in gaining competitive advantage.

In this study communication and foreign students' choice of institution did not show any relationship thus implying that a degree in marketing communications needs to be planned. In explaining communication failure, Klassen (2002) explained that low-ranking universities fail to provide sufficient interactive and relationship building capabilities on their website. Prospective foreign students may likely to have the first impression during their visit through the university web site. There are several elements in the web site that could trigger their experience including communication. Communication plays important role in reference to organization's quality and personal relevance as well as reducing the online consumer's uncertainties.

Internet communication activities need to be integrated in the overall marketing communications mix (Lagrosen, 2005). Another way of reaching effective communication is by establishing marketing objectives through web presence or promotional objectives (Rowley, 2001) for instance increasing visibility and improving corporate image. Rowley argues that web presence should make an impact on customers and fulfil promotional objective of the organization in order to be effective.

Another dimension which is being studied under submerging topics of higher institution's web sites research is the institution's online information. This dimension has practical applications of how a university or a college web site may be used to increase enrolment (Klassen, 2002; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). However in this study it represents a negative impact on foreign students' choice of institution. This is explained by Moogan et. al. (2001) longitudinal research on prospective students that during the first stage the course content was the most important attribute, however during the second stage, location became more important and that there was a large increase in utility that adequately reflect choice criteria. This is described by Klassen's longitudinal research where students ranked partnership level on those universities' web site which have had included university's map with photo images where potential students may experience virtual tours. Another feature that had received partnership level by prospective students were those that gave students the opportunity to check the status of their application online (Klassen, 2002).

Next the relationship between foreign students' web search behaviour and choice of institution. The high percentage of variance is explained by web search behaviour on

foreign students' choice of institution by $r=0.447$, $p<0.001$. Most of the foreign students (91.7 per cent) used the internet to facilitate in choosing their overseas institution. The study shows that students perceive high value for information sharing with the total correlation between information sharing and university choice as $r=0.969$, $p<0.001$. Most of the students responded that they sought information from the university through email. Most of them also agreed that this method of information sharing has influenced their university preference. Most of them who emailed the institution response that the institutions replied have fairly influenced them. Over 13 per cent of the emails were replied more than three days and a mark improvement on a standard format or time frame can be implemented.

According to Gomes and Murphy (2003), their interviews with nine Australian institutions revealed that all the institutions agreed that the Internet would be increasingly important for recruitment and marketing. They also stated that while the internet cannot and will not replace human interaction for information search and decision making, all institutions agreed that the Internet speeds up administrative processes, save times and costs. Alternatively, attracting prospective students could be done by understanding not only their 'search strategy, but also their information requirements as the search proceeds, so that, a search that may start with browsing may eventually have a very focused intended outcome' (Rowley, 2001). There is also a need to look into consumer behaviour and observing how the institution web sites are used to try to find out what students think if for instance the university is applying Customer Relationship Management and if they see themselves being in the relationship with the university. Perhaps online marketers could consider alternative such as students and academic staff forums that is more user friendly.

Lastly the study showed significant correlation between internet marketing and foreign students' web search behaviour. Gomes and Murphy (2003) stated small private education providers they interviewed were sceptical of the internet's marketing potential and hesitant to make substantial e-business investments.. they questioned how this technology helps them recruit globally and enhance their customer service. Some of the universities' online marketers suggested that sophisticated web sites, structured e-mail response system and online customer services were greatest in institutions with a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Consumer behaviour is an on going research as Bareham (2004) pointed out the attempts of consumer behaviour research have been going on for 40 years and that there is still inadequate theories of consumer behaviour to try and predict future behaviour. This is because consumer is unpredictable and may change their decision strategies from occasion to occasion and within one purchase sequence (Bareham, 2004). Other researchers pointed out segmentation to understand consumers online motivation, question specific services attributes and their marketing practices in comparison to their competitors i.e. how universities differs in using the internet in delivering their services.

With the increasing global market the dependency on internet is significant. Global consumers will depend on information that they gain from the internet or other means of communication. Institutions who are associated with the business world could not rule out themselves from the growing interest of the stakeholders. Stakeholders will want competitive results thus demand attributes that would relate to them as value.

Online marketers must acknowledge the service attributes that institutions provide together with marketing practices and be able to investigate the changing behaviour of their customers in order to meet their needs. Another important question in order for any sustainable organization is what the customers think of the present service and marketing efforts?

Klassen (2002) highlighted that the effective use of the internet as marketing tool for institutions of higher learning relates to the willingness and ability of schools to not just build, but effectively maintain and successfully operate web sites. Hence, online marketers should take the advantage that 'technology is transforming choice and choice is transforming the marketplace' (McKenna, 1991 from Wong, Chan and Leung, 2005).

5.3 Recommendation for Future Research

This research can be further strengthened under a longitudinal research to grasp more detail of the factors which are related to prospective students. The research signifies that web search behaviour has influenced foreign students' choice of institution and that students value information sharing. This dimension could be broadened to include the kind of information that has the highest value and focusing which characteristics of the web site have determine their decision making. Another scope is to broaden the limitation of this paper in order to increase validity because generalizing data for this university is questionable. Further research could also investigate and conceptualise factors affecting choices in more detail, for example web content and selling with consumer behaviour.

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APPENDICES



Questionnaire on

FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CHOICE OF INSTITUTION (UUM) – INTERNET MARKETING AND WEB SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

To valued respondents:

I am currently conducting a research on factors influencing international students' choice of institution particularly on Internet Marketing and Web Search Behaviour as a part of my postgraduate degree in MSc. Management.

Completing the questionnaire:

The success of this study really depends on your participation in answering honestly on the entire questionnaire attached. The questions cover a wide range of subjects which most can be answered simply by placing a tick (✓) in boxes or by circling your answer. No special knowledge is required and I am confident that every one of you will be able to participate.

The questionnaire should not take very long to complete and I hope that you will find it interesting and enjoyable. Only you should fill it in, and **not anyone else** that is address to you. All the information given will be kept strictly confidential and that its use will be confined to only establish the data required for the study.

Returning the questionnaire:

Thank you for your kind assistance and cooperation.

If you have questions regarding this questionnaire, do not hesitate to contact myself at the below email.

Aldrina @Mimi Othman Mohd. Peter Andu

Email: mimialdrina_o.p.andu@hotmail.com

Mobile: 013-4130188

SECTION 1:
Research Questions on University Choice, Web Search Behaviour and Personal Details

A. University Choice:

1. Please give your response to the following statements regarding your decisions to study in University Utara Malaysia (UUM) based on your opinion, knowledge and experience by circling your answer.

Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1.1	Better university facilities and support services.	1 2 3 4 5
1.2	University's image/reputation and provision of international education.	1 2 3 4 5
1.3	Broad range of programmes or courses.	1 2 3 4 5
1.4	Lower cost of living.	1 2 3 4 5
1.5	Good job prospects.	1 2 3 4 5

2. Among the items listed in question 1, which is the most important reason for selecting UUM. Please tick **one** (✓).

2.1	Better university facilities and support services	
2.2	University's image/reputation and provision of international education	
2.3	Broad range of programmes or courses	
2.4	Lower cost of living	
2.5	Good job prospects	

3. Other reasons that you might think that would influence the choice of study. UUM...

3.1	Was willing to recognise my previous qualifications.	1 2 3 4 5
3.2	Has strong alumni through which I learn about it.	1 2 3 4 5
3.3	Has a reputation for being responsive to student needs.	1 2 3 4 5
3.4	Is financially stable.	1 2 3 4 5
3.5	Advertises and promotes UUM strongly.	1 2 3 4 5

4. UUM is your choice.

4.1	1 st choice	
4.2	2 nd choice	
4.3	3 rd choice	
4.4	Please rank your choice. My choice	
4.5	I choose only UUM	

B. Web Search Behaviour:

5. Have you ever used the internet for information about overseas education before furthering your studies? Please tick **one** (✓).

Yes	5.1	(Go to Question 6)	
No	5.2	(Skip and continue on Question 8)	

6. How did you find the web site of UUM?

6.1	Through a search engine.	1	2	3	4	5
6.2	Through promotional materials.	1	2	3	4	5
6.3	Through an educational portal.	1	2	3	4	5
6.4	Through educational agents web site.	1	2	3	4	5
6.5	Others. Please specify -					

7. Was the information posted on UUM web site sufficient for you to decide to enrol with that institution?

7.1	Course and programs.	1	2	3	4	5
7.2	University facilities.	1	2	3	4	5
7.3	Ease of entry into the country and university.	1	2	3	4	5
7.4	Living environment.	1	2	3	4	5
7.5	Costs and finance.	1	2	3	4	5
7.6	Personal improvements (e.g. career prospects, employment, status/lifestyle).	1	2	3	4	5

8. Did you e-mail UUM to make further enquiries? Please tick **one** (✓).

Yes	(Go to Question 9)	
No	(Skip and continue to Question 11)	

9. How long did it take for UUM to reply to your inquiry? Please tick **one** (✓).

9.1	Within 1 day	
9.2	1-2 days	
9.3	3-5 days	
9.4	More than 5 days	

10. Did the email influence your decision to enrol with UUM? Please tick **one** (✓).

10.1	No influence	
10.2	Little influence	
10.3	Some influence	
10.4	Fairly influence	
10.5	Highly influence	

11. Do you think that it is important that you gain information before you enter the university?

11.1	Course and programs.	1	2	3	4	5
11.2	University facilities.	1	2	3	4	5
11.3	Ease of entry into the country and university.	1	2	3	4	5
11.4	Living environment.	1	2	3	4	5
11.5	Costs and finance.	1	2	3	4	5
11.6	Personal improvements (e.g. career prospects, employment, status/lifestyle).	1	2	3	4	5

12. Who is the key decision maker for your choice of overseas education?

12.1	Self.	1	2	3	4	5
12.2	Parents.	1	2	3	4	5
12.3	Independent agent in home country.	1	2	3	4	5
12.4	Other relative or friends.	1	2	3	4	5
12.5	Sponsorship.	1	2	3	4	5
12.6	Home country government.	1	2	3	4	5

Personal Details: Please tick (✓) the appropriate box:

13. Age

13.1	Under 30	
13.2	31 – 39	
13.3	40 - 50	

14. Gender

14.1	Male	
14.2	Female	

15. Country of Origin/Citizenship

15.1	Azerbaijan	
15.2	Botswana	
15.3	China	
15.4	Indonesia	
15.5	Kenya	
15.6	Somalia	
15.7	Thailand	
15.8	Others. Please specify -	

16. Are you...

16.1	Postgraduate	
16.2	Undergraduate	

17. Is your hometown or previous education in an urban or rural area?

17.1	Urban	
17.2	Rural	

18. Are you studying on....

18.1	Self finance/parents	
18.2	Government Sponsorship/Grants (own country)	
18.3	Government Grants (Malaysian)	
18.4	Others. Please specify -	

SECTION 2: Internet Marketing
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Please indicate your opinion and experience regarding UUM web site using the scale below:

Very Poor 1	Poor 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5
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A. Selling

Product:

19. Which package or benefits that was important for you to consider?

19.1	Cost of living, accommodation, safety and culture.	1 2 3 4 5
19.2	Ease of finding employment after study.	1 2 3 4 5
19.3	Ease of university admissions and of immigration procedures.	1 2 3 4 5
19.4	Educational standard, recognized qualifications worldwide.	1 2 3 4 5

Place:

20. Which criteria do you think that would most likely to be important to you?

20.1	Choosing the place of study that is nearer to home country.	1 2 3 4 5
20.2	The place of study has the availability of integrated transportation facilities (i.e. air and land transportation).	1 2 3 4 5
20.3	The place of study is situated in a suburban and quiet-studious environment.	1 2 3 4 5
20.4	The place of study is has a comfortable climate and exciting place to live.	1 2 3 4 5

21. Who are Malaysia's main competitors or in which country would you like to study if not in Malaysia?

21.1	Singapore	1 2 3 4 5
21.2	China	1 2 3 4 5
21.3	Australia	1 2 3 4 5
21.4	Others (Please specify:.....)	1 2 3 4 5

Price:

22. According to your opinion, what is the best way to attract international students such as yourselves or what are the aspects to observe?

22.1	More facilities, computers, alumni networks, promotion, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
22.2	Provide offline communications techniques or one stop centre.	1	2	3	4	5
22.3	Providing more scholarships or financial assistance.	1	2	3	4	5
22.4	Providing better services to support students living/studies.	1	2	3	4	5
22.5	Lower fees and lower cost of living.	1	2	3	4	5

Promotion:

23. What is the best way to attract more students from your country or from where did you learn about Malaysian's higher education?

23.1	Web sites, Consulate, higher education exhibition.	1	2	3	4	5
23.2	UUM alumni, friends, relatives.	1	2	3	4	5
23.3	Local universities, teachers/lecturers recommendations.	1	2	3	4	5
23.4	Others, via newspapers, government contacts, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

B. Web Contents

Very Poor 1	Poor 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5
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24.	The website purpose and services featured are immediately clear.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	The website "look and feel" of the entry page is appropriate and easy to remember.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Overall, the site is visually appealing and inviting.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	The website is user friendly and users feel at ease in using the site.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	The website uses effective navigation (i.e. headings, lists, return to the top).	1	2	3	4	5
29.	The website is effective to navigate between main page and secondary pages (i.e. return to previous menu, menus).	1	2	3	4	5
30.	The content is timely and current.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	The content is relevant, useful, and meaningful to prospective students, parents and visitors.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	The website convey important and interesting information (i.e. programs, career and health services, news and publications).	1	2	3	4	5

33.	The website provides resources that go beyond the ordinary (i.e. special, unique, local).	1 2 3 4 5
34.	The content presented in an efficient and effective manner (i.e. goes beyond basic facts and data).	1 2 3 4 5
35.	The website contains mix of content formats (i.e., text, graphics, photographs) to address/meet specific needs.	1 2 3 4 5
36.	The content is logically organized.	1 2 3 4 5
37.	The website design is aesthetically attractive.	1 2 3 4 5
38.	Overall, the content of the website represent UUM service quality.	1 2 3 4 5

C. Communication

Very Poor 1	Poor 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5
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39.	The website has all of the information that I needed to accomplish my purpose.	1 2 3 4 5
40.	The website contains accurate, high quality information (i.e. useful resources, sufficient).	1 2 3 4 5
41.	The website has emphasized most relevant information for students overseas (i.e. Frequently Ask Questions, visa/students' entry, mode of payment, map, residential halls).	1 2 3 4 5
42.	The website is easily readable, clarify of grammar and absence of mistakes and outdated pages.	1 2 3 4 5
43.	The writing is clear and appropriate to meet the reading level of the audience.	1 2 3 4 5
44.	Communication through email is very important to prospective students from overseas.	1 2 3 4 5
45.	The web site offers me quick responses to my online questions.	1 2 3 4 5
46.	The website has sufficient communication features. (i.e. email, email lists, newsletters, contact numbers via phone/fax).	1 2 3 4 5

***** THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH *****