

Marketing Higher Education: A Study on Attaining Sustainability through Redesigning Curriculum

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Abstract

Purpose: Marketing function in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is gaining popularity as it integrates institution's marketing and communication goals with its strategic and academic goals. The aim of this paper is to review current trends in marketing of HEIs, the role of curriculum redesign as a marketing cue and its effect on sustainability of the HEI. **Methodology:** An integrative literature review on HEIs was carried out with an objective of establishing the linkages between redesigning curriculum and attaining sustainability. To ensure credibility and validity of the research findings, triangulation method using both narrative and bibliometric process of literature review was followed. Two hundred and thirty-two papers were extracted from Scopus database and studied using Social Network Analysis (SNA) and narrative literature review to cull insights. **Findings:** Entrepreneurship skills, leadership skills, multi-tasking and trouble shooting skills, and use of social media with networking skills were identified as the four key skill that students demand from any higher education program. To bridge the demand supply gap and to attain sustainability, HEIs are redesigning their curriculum based on two major dimensions which are collaborative learning and digital innovation. **Research limitations:** Since the study primarily focuses on attaining sustainability through curriculum redesigning, other factors related to processes or human resources have been kept outside the purview of the present research. Due to paucity of time and resource an empirical analysis could not be carried out and kept for future study.

Keywords: Curriculum Re-Design, Higher Education, Higher Education Institutions, Marketing, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have been on the radar for their quality and outcomes. More than ever before it is imperative for HEI to improve the skill and employability of its students. Adopting haywire measures leads to quick fixes but lacks sustainability. This research focuses on the sustainable measures adopted by HEI and marketing of those practices to the student fraternity.

1.1 Higher Education (HE) in 21st century

Higher education is one of the prime driving forces for economic growth, social development and nation building (Arnove, 1980; Schiliro, 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 2002). Raising skills through higher education holds the key to higher living standards and well-being. Investing in knowledge creation and enabling its dissemination throughout the society creates employment, enhance productivity and promotes competitiveness.

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Globalisation, urbanisation, swelling income levels and skyrocketing aspirations, coupled with growing business opportunities, have increased demand for highly skilled workforce and hence HE programmes (Ashton & Green, 1996; Johnson & Kress, 2003; Marginson & Wende, 2007).

1.2 Sustainable Higher Education- A brief Background

Sustainable development is the biggest challenge to universities in the twenty-first century. HE is a potential catalyst for sustainable development for the next generation. Its importance is beginning to emerge in a more commercialized landscape, and many believe that universities imparting HE has the answer for developing a sustainable future. With global economy growing at such a great pace, importance of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has certainly gone up. HEIs are actually the main bridge between professional workforce and potential talent (Sibbel, 2009). Increasing competition among universities and colleges offering similar programmes, and the need to offer programmes in emerging opportunity areas necessitated HEIs to develop strategies balancing institutional economies and opportunities for growth (Ramachandran, 2010; Veloutsou Lewis & Paton, 2004). Sustainability describes how a system remains diverse and productive which throws a challenge to these HEIs to initiate strategic thinking for the present demand and ensure continuous and sustainable growth for the future (Adomssent et al., 2007; Reza, 2016; Sterling, 2001; Thomas, 2004). Hence the need to acknowledge the role of curriculum redesigning arises, which impacts students and keeps them adept with the current knowledge and professional requirements (Koch, 1997).

1.3 Marketing Function in Higher Education

One of the critical factors that have emerged recently is marketing in higher education which can guide these HEIs to attract the right talent. Marketing is no more a specialization being taught in HEIs but has become an essential part of their success. Today, marketing departments occupy unique positions in the organisational structure of any HEIs. Integrating institution's communication and marketing goals with its strategic and academic goals has become important with implications to institutional visibility

and reputation (Sands and Smith, 2000). The only thing which differentiates them from others is how they market their institute and how differently they position it in front of prospect students. With so many institutes operating, HE students undergo extended decision-making during their process of application for what courses they want to apply and in which institute they want to take them. Since, the decision-making process is so complex, universities/HEIs compete with each other to recruit best students by the means of extensive marketing strategies. The value, effectiveness and potential benefits of using marketing theories and concepts, which have so far been effective in the business world, are now gradually being applied by many universities with a view to gain a larger share of the high potential students and acquire a competitive edge over others (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Hunt & Lamhe, 2000).

1.4 Redesigning Curriculum

With expanding global middle class and growing young adult populations, especially in the developing world, demand for HE is increasing by leaps and bounds. HE needs an innovative curriculum to adapt to the needs and demand of 21st century learners. With the development of technology, online institutions, open-source classrooms and virtual campuses, HEIs are competing with traditional structures and the entire educational system is gradually moving away from producer driven business model to student-based demand model. At present HEIs impart knowledge to students through teaching that is moulded by a curriculum or course content. Sustainable higher education demands for developing programs of study that actually prepare graduates with the necessary knowledge and values with a capacity for critical thinking and motivation to deal with diverse problems.

The purpose of the present study is check whether curriculum redesigning ensures that students receive integrated, up-to-date and coherent learning experiences that contribute towards their academic and professional learning along with personal development (Kali, Levin-Peled & Dori, 2009). This paper further links using curriculum design change as a marketing cue to create positions and messages that will ultimately lead to sustainability of the HEI.

2. Literature Review

The literature review section has been sub divided into five parts which are discussed as under.

2.1 Higher Education (HE) - A Changing Scenario

The existing practice of higher education believes that functions like teaching, research, operations, and relations with local communities as separate activities. The current curriculum is often relevant neither to students nor to societal and economic needs. Thus, there is a profound need to rethink the significance and applicability of what is taught and how it is taught keeping sustainable goals in consideration. Since students experience and learn from everything around them and those experiences are aligned with the principles of sustainability, integrating all interdisciplinary areas including education, research, university operations and external community become a necessity (Figure 1). To achieve sustainability HEIs must operate as a fully integrated community that will embed social and biological sustainability within itself and associate with the local, regional, and global communities on a continuous basis (Cortese, 2003). In order to respond to the present needs and future demands, HEIs are redesigning their curriculum so that students learn and experience new knowledge and skills and develops their character. Applying the traditional scientific method in curriculum, it won't be possible to build knowledge, skills and attitude for a sustainable future and this call for a complete revision of policy and practice in HE sector (Mumford, Medeiros & Partlow, 2012).

2.2 Integrated Higher Education System

Sustainability always speaks of change and creativity which form the basis of self-developing and keeping oneself updated by starting early and becoming the first one to initiate changes (Wals and Jickling, 2014). A modified visual interpretation from the work of (Wals and Jickling, 2014) has been presented in Figure 1 which depicts the following shifts in Sustainable Educational Orientation (SEO).

Symbiotic learning in higher education (Brew, 2003) through international collaborations aims at increasing the quality parameters among students, faculties as well as institutional quality as a whole. Improving students' knowledge as well as the students' transition into industry,

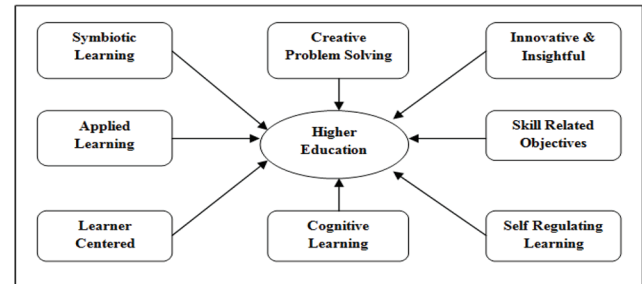


Figure 1. A modified visual Interpretation of Sustainable Educational Orientation (SEO). (Wals & Jickling, 2002).

requires efficient joint ventures by both learning institutions and industry partners (Chandrasekaran, et al., 2013). It renders students with a glimpse on how they will be doing their work in future and the experience they goes through paves the way for their self-development in the their career (Seymour, 1992). Student-centred instruction focuses on skills and practices that enable lifelong learning and independent problem-solving (Lea, Stephenson and Troy, 2003). Learner centred or student-centred learning is the process wherein students are transformed from a mere passive receiver of information to an active participant. Creative Problem Solving (CPS) is a way of solving problems or identifying opportunities when conventional thinking has failed (Oosterbeek, Van Praag & Ijsselstein, 2010). It encourages you to find new perspectives and come up with innovative and alternative solutions, so that you can build a plan to overcome obstacles and reach your goals. Cognitive Learning is the function based on how a person processes and reasons information. It revolves around many factors, including problem-solving skills, memory retention, thinking skills and the perception of learned material (Cowan, 2014). Learning should incorporate thinking about or planning the future with imagination or wisdom by keeping the students at the centre of focus and binging in innovative ways of imparting knowledge (Vaught, 1989, Lueddeke, 1999). Specialized learning is an experience uniquely tailored to a student's strengths and areas of interests (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). By leveraging an individualized perspective (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) to learning, a student may acquire knowledge through methods that best address his or her needs. Self-regulated students have full confidence in themselves to take on any challenging tasks, practice their learning, and establish a deep understanding of subject matter (Collins & Mellahi, 2009; Perry et al., 2006). Self-regulated learners are successful because they control their learning environment. They deploy this control by directing

and regulating their own actions toward their learning goals (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

2.3 Theoretical framework for Sustainable Higher education

Three theories have predominantly been associated with higher education. These are social cognitive theory, self-efficacy theory and Boyer model of scholarship. They are each detailed out below.

2.3.1 Social Cognitive Theory

The concept of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991), which finds its usage in psychology, education, and communication, explains that an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions and experiences. Thus, understanding this human-environment interaction is an essential factor for embracing the sustainability principles in higher education (Terenzini, Pascarell & Blimling, 1996). Collaborative learning and symbiotic learning in higher education has boosted students' self-esteem, developed a sense of responsibility within them and has encouraged them to deal with diverse problem and perspectives with self-management and leadership skills.

2.3.2 Self-Efficacy Theory

The concept of self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute specific behaviours necessary for attaining a specific performance (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects one's confidence in himself and the extent of control over one's own motivation, behaviour, and social environment. A high level of self-efficacy indicates a degree of autonomy and self-determinism in oneself, which are recognised as significant outcomes of higher education for sustainability (Wals and Jickling, 2002). Motivation, persistence and confidence of success are the important challenges an individual has to face in working environment and implementing the principles and to develop self-efficacy attributes in students curriculum should include hypothetical or real problem solving exercises, structured with appropriate levels of professional and peer support to ensure positive outcomes (Smith, Wallston and Smith, 1995).

2.3.3 The Boyer Model of Scholarship

The model of scholarship as proposed by Boyer (1990), provides another theoretical basis to design a curriculum that will educate individuals for sustainability. Scholarship is the central theme of this model that requires a comprehensive view of the human condition, which arises when knowledge is acquired through the processes of discovery and integration. Boyer's theory of four scholarships like discovery, integration, application and teaching (Figure 2) finds strong parallels with sustainability education. Hence redesigning curriculum based on this theory becomes necessary. To gain a competitive edge over other HEIs, marketing communications must include this development to attract students.

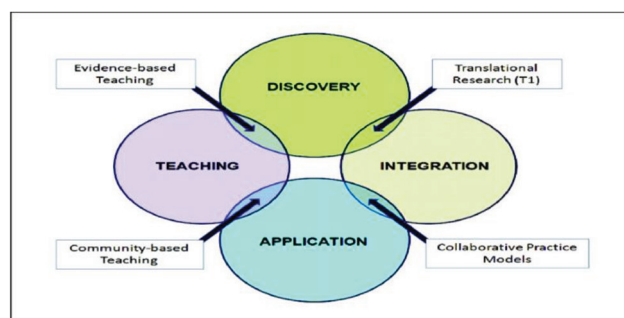


Figure 2. Boyer's model of scholarship.

2.4 Redesigning Curriculum

With expanding global middle class and growing young adult populations, especially in the developing world, demand for HE is increasing by leaps and bounds. HE needs an innovative curriculum to adapt to the needs and demand of 21st century learners. With the development of technology, online institutions, open-source classrooms and virtual campuses are competing with traditional structures and the entire educational system is gradually moving away from producer driven business model to student based demand model (Dempster, Benfield & Francis, 2012). At present HEIs impart knowledge to students through teaching that is moulded by a curriculum or course content. Sustainable higher education demands for developing programs of study that actually prepare graduates with the necessary knowledge and values with a capacity for critical thinking and motivation to deal with diverse problems.

2.5 A Bibliometric Study using Social Network Analysis

For constructing and viewing bibliometric maps the present study has used VOSviewer program. VOSviewer is used to construct maps of authors or journals based on co-citation data or to construct maps of keywords based on co-occurrence data. VOSviewer uses the VOS mapping technique (Van Eck and Waltman, 2007), where VOS stands for visualization of similarities. Social network analysis is also a process of investigating social structures through the use of networks and graph theory (Scott, 1988). It is characterized by a network structure which includes nodes and the ties, edges, or links that connect them. A network analysis with a bibliometric map was carried out and visualized through a sociogram figure where nodes represented all the factors that came out from the literature impacting higher education (Figure 3) and sustainable development (Figure 4) and the different linkages between them. The present study finalised 232 Scopus indexed papers for this network analysis with selected keywords like, higher education, sustainable development and HEIs. Vosviewer software was used to construct the SNA diagram given in (Figure 3 and 4). The present study uses bibliometric analysis in two phases, where the 1st phase measures the research paper on marketing of higher education (Figure 3) and the 2nd phase measures the research papers on sustainable development (Figure 4). The main objective of the bibliometric study is to identify the important factors (Keywords) associated with the marketing of higher education and sustainable development. It is also used to find out the missing links or the research gaps for present and future studies.

3. Research Methodology

Triangulation refers to the application and combination of at least two research methods in a particular study (Jick, 1979). Taking cue from the same, the present study uses both narrative as well as bibliometric study to review the present trends in marketing of HEIs, the role of curriculum redesign as a marketing cue and its effect on sustainability of the HEI. Searching the Scopus database with keywords like “Higher Education”, “Sustainable Development” and “Higher Education Institutions” has yielded a pool of two

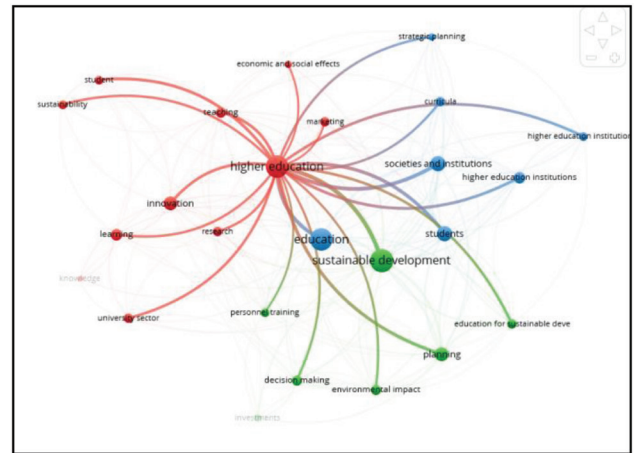


Figure 3. SNA diagram with higher education.

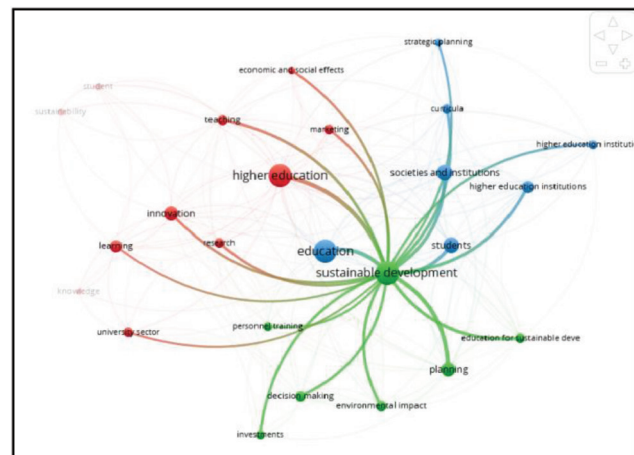


Figure 4. SNA diagram with sustainable development.

hundred thirty-two research papers which form the basis for the primary review. The bibliometric study uses Vosviewer software and constructed bibliometric maps. The bibliometric maps were analysed using SNA framework and the linkages between HEIs and sustainability were measured which in-turn aided in carrying out the narrative literature review in a systemized manner. With further filtering in the Scopus database with keywords like “Marketing” and “Marketing Curriculum” the count of paper was brought down to fifty on which extensive analysis was carried out.

4. Findings

The findings section is divided into two parts. Insights from the narrative literature review and findings from the bibliometric study.

4.1 Insights from Narrative Literature Review

4.1.1 21st Century Students and expectations from them

With the advancement of professional requirements companies hiring personnel prefers candidates having multi-tasking capacity (Calderwood, Ackerman and Conklin, 2014) and who can solve problem (Snyder and Snyder, 2008) and work independently during crisis. In present scenario candidates possessing skills like artificial intelligence, machine learning knowledge and research and developments skills attract recruiters. Companies' desire for candidates who holds logical and analytical skills (Entwistle, 2005) to solve critical problems faced during emergencies. Social media platforms have become an essential part of everybody's life which is not only used for personal purpose but for professional usage for promoting business ideas and processes and expertise in handling social media platform is must for today's workforce. Networking skills (Rennie and Morrison, 2013) through social media not only build connection between professionals but also forms relationships required for business processes. Candidates should acquire knowledge of problem-solving skills and they should be ready to handle a team as teamwork (Dunne and Rawlins, 2000) drives a company towards success. Recruiters hire candidates who can bring out the best in others and can become a team member. Keeping updated with the latest industry trends a candidate is expected to possess entrepreneurial skills (Oosterbeek, Van Praag and Ijsselstein, 2010) that can bridge the existing gaps in organisation and look for newer approaches to improve the existing business processes for a sustainable future. A graphical representation of skills required for 21st century students are given below in (Figure 5).

4.1.2 Marketing Higher Education

Two important factors that have emerged out of literature are collaborative learning and the digital innovation. The present study proposes that these two significant factors can be efficiently utilised as a marketing tool for promoting this HEIs.

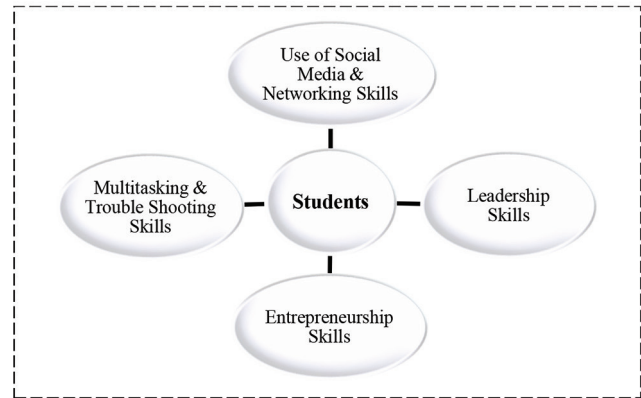


Figure 5. Skills requirement for 21st century students.

4.1.3 Collaborative Learning

Global visibility has become a top priority for many HEIs as they are targeting a rapidly growing demography or the global middle class that is hungry for higher education. Competition to recruit and retain students is heating up worldwide, not just at home but also across the globe which is making this HEIs to look for alliances with other institutions. Mutual understanding is an essential process in symbiotic learning and is based on diversity. Students from diverse backgrounds and social strata having dissimilar experiences, ideas and values are accepted in a learning group. Number of students choosing to study internationally is constantly increasing which is making HEIs across the globe to increase their global presence through forming global partnership and fostering relationships with other institutions. Collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1993) through partnership between the institutions is an educational approach that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or initiate a new research. Collaborative learning experience with educational institutions and industry enables students to develop higher-level thinking, self-management, and leadership skills (Brindley, Blaschke and Walti, 2009). It not only promotes student-faculty interaction, increases student retention, provides exposure to diverse perspectives but also prepares a student for real life social and employment needs (Oesch, 2010). Effective marketing of HE through collaborative learning facility is gaining popularity and is not only benefiting the students or institutions but also the society at large.

4.1.4 The Digital Innovation

Online learning process serves as a catalyst to enable the paradigm shift of HE towards student demand-based education policies and programs (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). Online learning is a new social process that is beginning to act as a complete substitute for both distance learning and the traditional face-to-face class. Over the years online learning has grown tremendously and with the increased accessibility of the internet and world wide web (www) has created a vast opportunity among masses who would have previously gone for traditional education (Kraber, 2001). The explosion of technology has provided learners with easy access to course material and has taken classroom teaching across geographical locations (Coyner & McCann, 2004). Working class population, busy in their life and travelling often and carrying a desire to advance their career find online learning as an attractive option (Lyons, 2004, Kraber 2001), stated that the increasing demand for education and the limited funding option available for expanding physical facilities, many HEIs have altered the traditional way of delivery of education. Online education posits a new challenge and brings in a new paradigm to educators, and its potential is still an undiscovered territory waiting to be explored. Since sustainable education is learner centred and believes in innovative way of attaining it, online education can become a marketing tool (Temple & Shattock, 2007) to attract the right talent and ensure sustainability throughout.

The takeaway from the above discussions is that, modern days HE system is expected to prepare a student in both professional and personal front to cope up with the everyday challenge of life. Here the importance of course curriculum and tuning it with the advancement of knowledge and needs of the industry becomes utmost important. It is expected from a curriculum to keep a level of balance between the demand of the students with the requirements from the employers or the industries. Keeping so, the four skills identified in the study along with the two major dimensions of curriculum designing get synthesized with each other. Hence HEIs need to redesign their curriculum on a continuous basis, market those to the students and industry and by doing so can reach a level of sustainability that will benefit the HEIs, students, employers and society at large.

4.2 Findings from the Bibliometric Study

The SNA (Figure 3 and 4) illustrate and corroborate with the narrative study. The factors that emerged out of the literature review have also appeared in the sociogram which proves that both the studies are aligned with each other. Factors like innovation, sustainability, research and marketing have emerged out from the narrative review as well as from the SNA figure. Size of the nodes indicates the volume of research work already carried out on them and more the distance from the principal node means, less is the research work carried out with them. There are many factors that have not come in the above diagram as research on them are on the initial days and there lies a scope for this present study to address.

The bibliometric analysis indicates a dearth of study on marketing of curriculum and attaining sustainability. Though two hundred thirty-two Scopus indexed research papers were identified and examined here, only a handful of them cater to marketing of curriculum. Even research papers on sustainability are available in abundance but linkage with HE is inadequate. Hence the present study points out a research gap that needs to be addressed and taken up for further research.

5. Research Limitations

Since the study primarily focuses on attaining sustainability through curriculum redesigning, other factors related to processes or human resources have been kept outside the purview of the present research. Reviewing the existing literature, the present study found that redesigning curriculum keeps only students and employers into consideration and marketing them to achieve sustainability for the HEIs. It didn't consider employees or processes that can also lead to sustainability. Due to paucity of time and resource an empirical analysis couldn't be carried out and kept for future study.

6. Conclusions and Future Scope

The objective of this paper is to align HE towards meeting the challenge of sustainability. Effective marketing of higher education has been predicted to gain popularity as HE is a volatile and a responsive market that changes with number and quality of students, services and other aspects based on the kind of marketing policies adopted

by institutions. There are many facets of marketing of HE which causes positive and negative fluctuation such as public institutions facing competition from private institutions, government monopolies and the trends and scope of marketing strategies. The need for marketing of higher education as being integral is being recognized as essential by educational institutions at a national and international level. The present study can provide a framework for creating sustainability in HE institutions by identifying emerging themes to encourage innovative and successful learning that can lead to improvements in curriculum design. HEIs are leveraging on digital platforms to promote their courses and their institution on global platform. However, they need to take care of the fact that compared to traditional communication channels, social media still play a secondary role in the student's choice of higher education. Hence, there is a need to build online trust and boost prospective student's confidence on HEIs and effective marketing communication holds the key for a sustainable future.

The present study also scopes areas for future research. Redesigning the course curriculum in HEIs need not only consider students or employers but also the employees, consisting of staff and faculties. Especially so, as staff and faculties form the medium of imparting HE. Even they are readily available and are less costly to approach. Future research can also focus on implementing customised marketing strategies for students (one-time consumer) and employers (repeat consumer). Future researchers can also look for an empirical study to establish the constructs pointed out in the present study.

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