



## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENT'S DECISION TO PURSUE, SUSTAIN OR TERMINATE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY

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### **Abstract:**

The overall purpose of the study is to determine key factors that influence students in the quest to continue their relationship with their university or to quit. The study employed the use of the descriptive design. Data was collected from three private and public universities in Ghana. These were to ensure equal representation from both sectors. The study used standardized questionnaires as the main source of data collection instrument. In terms of the analysis of data, the study employed the use of the statistical package for social sciences version 21. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. It is evident that fulfilment was significant in determining student continues relationship with university ( $\beta=0.713$ ,  $p=0.014$ ). Furthermore, the table also reveals that there was a positive and significant relationship between maximum academic support individuals had and their continuous relationship with university ( $\beta= 0.511$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Thus, maximum academic support individuals had was significant to their investment behavior after controlling for all other demographics. This was in line with the assertions of Tandoh (2011) when he indicated that factors such as fulfilment, reward for hardwork, fulfilment and the likes can affect hugely the continuous relationship with university by individuals.

**Keywords:** student decision making, relationship, university

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Market orientation literature has coalesced into an organized knowledge system, replete with theory and a body of empirically derived generalizations. Although scholars have documented the proposed benefits, the intricacies of the adoption of a market orientation have received limited attention (Argenti, 2000), and cultural change has emerged as a

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central focus (Danneels, 2003). From this perspective, we draw on Delucchi, M., & Korgen's (2002, p. 27) definition of customer orientation as *"the set of beliefs that puts the customer's interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders in order to develop a long-term profitable or viable enterprise."* A crucial element in the marketing of higher education institutions is based on a relationship marketing approach, which is characterized as helping to develop and foster interactions between the organization and its customers (Desai, Damewood & Jones, 2001). This approach emphasizes the importance of developing a customer- i.e. student-driven organizational culture, and focuses on the quality of the service (DeShields, Kara & Kaynak, 2005).

Above all, however, the relationship marketing approach commences with a commitment to marketing orientation, which is a set of beliefs that puts customers' students' interests first, in order to gain a competitive edge in the highly competitive global environment.

Marketing orientation frequently underpins the development and implementation of successful relationship marketing strategies in any organization (Driscoll & Wicks, 1998).

If a higher education institution can develop or improve its degree of marketing orientation, then it should also be able to achieve improved levels of relationship management. For instance, data analysis from an international study that compared the degree of marketing orientation in two universities, one in Israel and one in England, two countries that have experienced different higher education policies in recent years. Thus, England has established international markets in higher education although marketization is at a relatively early stage (with undergraduate fees currently capped); in Israel there is no national Quality Assurance Agency, and every institution of higher education has its own declared policy aims and is therefore still largely autonomous. A published paper (Eagle & Brennan, 2007) previously presented the Marketing Orientation Inventory for use in educational institutions, and the pilot study findings (based on data from two countries) were later presented at the Academy of Marketing Conference, Budapest, (Edmunson, 1997). Data and findings from a study with a larger sample are presented in this paper.

As there is already some empirical evidence for the positive impact of MO on industrial and service organizations (Emery, Kramer & Tian, 2001), it seems of high value to examine the degree of marketing orientation in higher education institutions in general and in different national higher education systems, in particular because this kind of comparison could provide some clues about the relationship between market-oriented higher education policies and the incorporation of marketing orientation in academic settings. Besides, whereas past research on marketing orientation found that it is positively correlated with innovation, excellence, employees' high levels of satisfaction and commitment, customers' satisfaction, and brand loyalty (Fowler, 2009), higher education institutions have long been accused of neglecting these important issues. Understanding the context of marketing orientation within higher education institutions

is, therefore, the first stage in attempting to increase this orientation in higher education systems.

Based on an instrument developed by the authors to measure perceptions of marketing orientation in universities, distributed by email to faculties in both universities, the reported study tested whether there are significant differences between the two countries, in terms of perceptions of marketing orientation in higher education, which marketing orientation dimensions (student; competition; intrafunctional) indicate more positive attitudes and whether the differences are significant; and the reliability of the instrument for using a larger sample of respondents internationally.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The advantage of comparing and contrasting one university to other universities is that a university can identify areas where they can improve competitiveness, and also learn from what another university is doing well. The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) is useful both for assessing one university independently and also for comparing and contrasting that university to other universities. In this study, the Noel-Levitz SSI is used because it offers students the option to rate their levels of expectation and satisfaction within a university. Determining the aspects that the students feel are important and which are not is useful so that a university might avoid spending valuable resources improving services that students are not actually interested in (Roszkowski, 2003). Then, the gaps between the importance ratings and satisfaction ratings are compared and contrasted across universities of the same type, public or private (Franz, 1998).

A study conducted in Bangladesh on universities provided evidence of the many reasons these universities should be assessed by student importance and satisfaction levels, rather than by the "areas of achievement". A previous study conducted by the others author in different countries and context revealed that students value qualifications of the lecturers and condition of campus facilities as an important determinant of quality. It is not clear whether or not the high costs of private universities in Bangladesh are justified (Goodwin, 2009). One of the professors at a public university noted,

*"The overall education system in Ghana has been subject to severe criticism by students and other stakeholders like governments leading to adoption of privatization program. However, a mere change in the ownership through a privatization program does not produce better results"* (Siddiqui, 1994).

Another study noted that though private university graduates are considered "above average" in a number of categories, they "have not yet reached satisfactory level." This study also suggests that in order to satisfy employers' concerns about the preparation of graduates, private universities must guarantee a high quality education

(Greenberg, 2004). Yet another study also highlights the disparities in cost between more established private universities in Bangladesh, and those that are newer (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). Consequently, it is the case that while the addition of many private universities in Ghana has expanded opportunities for the increasing numbers of students seeking a higher quality education, it remains to be determined whether or not these private universities can achieve and maintain high quality educational services and whether or not high costs of private universities are reasonable. Investigation of student satisfaction in one private university and public university showed higher levels of satisfaction among students in the private university (Helms & Key, 1994). To validate the previous study, this study investigated student satisfaction service delivery and the quality of the services in ten different public and private universities across different geographical regions of the country. This study seeks to determine which areas students have high expectations, and whether or not they are being met. Therefore, the analysis of the results has developed recommendations for universities so that they can continue to provide high quality educational resources or to begin providing such services if they are not doing so already.

## **2.1 Objectives of the Study**

The overall purpose of the study is to determine key factors that influence students in the quest to continue their relationship with their university or quit.

## **3. Review of Literature**

### **3.1 Social Exchange Theory**

The work of Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2002) as having influenced his conception of social exchange. Holbrook (2004) argued that it is possible to understand social structure and events that occur within social structures by looking first at individual processes that occur between people and then building on them. His theory of social exchange attempts to do just that.

Blau's theory combines principles from operant psychology and economics to provide a conceptual framework for the analysis of social relations. Blau maintains that individuals WU enter into and maintain a relationship as long as they can satisfy their self-interests and at the same time ensure that the benefits outweigh the costs. An individual will seek to maximize his or her profits (positive reinforcements, rewards) and minimize losses (negative reinforcements, costs) in interactions with others.

In terms of continuing relationship, individuals will try to maintain those exchanges which have proven to be rewarding in the past, to break off those which proved to be costlier than rewarding, and to establish new relations which have a good chance of being more rewarding than costly.

If there is to be exchange, there must be "things" exchanged. Yet, exchange is not solely limited to the economic market. Blau suggested that "*neighbors exchange favors; children toys; colleagues, assistance; acquaintances, courtesies; politicians, concessions;*

*discussants, ideas*" (p. 88). Individuals have many social resources of various sorts including expertise (which makes one valuable as a colleague in a working relationship), physical beauty or prowess (which is intrinsically attractive to others), or a relationship with some socially desirable or prestigious group. By calculating the value of various resources to individuals in a group, it may be possible to predict how they will interact. Many of the intangible exchanges are readily recognized by those involved. In our daily life, we constantly encounter situations where we are giving favor and assistance in return for something else received in the past, or in anticipation of receiving something else in the future. Individuals often speak of "owing" another a letter, or of being "indebted" to someone for help received. It is probably safe to assume that in our society some sort of reciprocal principle is operating and that for every individual some of his or her behavior is governed by such a principle. Blau included within the category of social exchange all "*actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from other and that cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming*" (p. 6). In other words, any behavior that is motivated by an expected return or response from other falls under the heading of exchange. A basic assumption that differentiates social exchange from purely economic exchange has to do with trust. A study by Holbrook (2005) found that subjects volunteered more time to help in a research project when high rather than when low monetary reimbursement was offered. Holbrook (2007) stated that such arrangements fall within the domain of purely economic exchange. In economic exchange, payment is in set units, with amounts usually fixed beforehand, payment is immediate. The conclusion of the exchange formally marks the end of the relationship between buyer and seller. In social exchange, on the other hand, there is usually no fixed understanding beforehand about the rate at which social resources will be exchanged, or about the length of time over which repayment will be made. Exchange as a social process "*entails supplying benefits that create diffuse future obligations and the nature of the return cannot be bargained about but must be left to the discretion of the one who makes it*" (p. 93). Social exchange may involve intrinsic benefits in which, rather than the acts themselves, it may be an underlying mutual support or friendliness that is being exchanged. For example, an individual seeking advice may be confirming the friendly relations between him or herself and another. Another example is when a couple is invited over to their friend's house for dinner. The two couples typically do not sit down in advance to decide the date for repayment of the debt. The relationship is one founded on trust; trust that eventually, at some point in the future, the couple will reciprocate.

Holbrook and Hulbert (2002) argued that social exchanges, such as the ones described above, require that individuals trust each other. Assuming that individuals will in fact reciprocate for gifts they have received, social exchange will generate feelings of gratitude and trust. The trust will allow the individuals within the relationship to establish a bond of solidarity between them. If there is no trust, then neither is their social exchange. Furthermore, Blau called attention to the fact that distrust will have a negative impact on social behavior in general. He suggested that trust tends to build up gradually

through commitment to a relationship in which there is free communication between those individuals involved.

## 4. Methodology

Due to the fact that the study sought to determine some causalities, the predictive design was used. This design was deemed expedient according to Edmunson (1997). Besides, the study employed the use of the quantitative approach in that data was collected in the form of figures that were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS V.21). More specifically, the hierarchical regression was used in that the study sought to control for other influencing factors.

### 4.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

**Table 4.1:** Regression of Student Related factors on Continuous Relationship with University Controlling for Demographics

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.599 <sup>a</sup>	0.359	0.316	6.86219	0.359	8.284	5	74	0.000
2	0.851 <sup>b</sup>	0.724	0.693	4.59820	0.365	31.270	3	71	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Maximum Academic Support, Reward for Hardwork, Understand Financial Situation, Recognition of Opinions, Fulfilment, Recognition and Respect									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Maximum Academic Support, Reward for Hardwork, Understand Financial Situation, Recognition of Opinions, Fulfilment, Recognition and Respect, Availability of Lecturers , Aid in development skill, Availability of Resources and Tuition Fees									
c. Dependent Variable: Continuous Relationship with University.									

Source: Survey data, 2020.

Coefficients						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	10.321	7.810		1.322	0.0000
	Maximum Academic Support	10.031	1.647	0.789	1.090	0.000
	Reward for Hardwork	-0.251	0.801	-0.030	-0.313	0.005
	Understand Financial Situation	0.411	1.536	0.540	0.419	0.006
	Recognition of Opinions	0.190	1.294	0.014	0.147	0.014
	Fulfilment	0.219	0.687	0.028	0.290	0.012
2	(Constant)	9.295	5.281		1.760	0.003
	Maximum Academic Support	1.397	0.451	0.511	1.231	0.000
	Reward for Hardwork	4.537	1.278	0.267	1.549	0.001
	Understand Financial Situation	-0.188	0.540	-0.023	-0.349	0.006
	Recognition of Opinions	-0.931	1.048	-0.058	-0.888	0.001
	Fulfilment	0.021	0.869	0.713	0.025	0.012

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Recognition and Respect	0.511	0.469	0.472	1.088	0.170
Availability of Lecturers	0.047	0.128	0.445	0.369	0.013
Aid in development skill	0.145	0.072	0.217	1.097	0.150
Availability of Recources	0.211	0.121	0.315	1.201	0.021
Tuition Fees	0.969	0.213	0.501	1.545	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Continuous Relationship with University					

Source: Survey data, 2020.

From the analysis in table 4.8 below, it is evident that fulfilment was significant in determining student continues relationship with university ( $\beta= 0.713$ ,  $p=0.014$ ). Furthermore, the table also reveals that there was a positive and significant relationship between maximum academic support individuals had and their Continuous Relationship with university ( $\beta= 0.511$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Thus, maximum academic support individuals had was significant to their investment behavior after controlling for all other demographics. This was in line with the assertions of Holbrook and Hulbert (2002) when he indicated that factors such as fulfilment, reward for hardwork, fulfilment and the likes can affect hugely the continuous relationship with university by individuals.

On the contrary, understand financial situation and recognition of opinions and experience could not explain more variance in continuous relationship with university. After controlling for all the variables, only tuition fees and availability of lecturers that were significant to continuous relationship with university ( $\beta= 0.501$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and ( $\beta= 0.445$ ,  $p=0.013$ ) respectively. In line with a meta-analysis by Boer (2012), availability of lecturers was insignificant to continuous relationship with university after controlling for all variables.

The purpose of this objective is to determine the various factors that influence student's decision to pursue sustain or terminate their relationship with the universities. This objective was achieved by addressing this variable presented to the respondents.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The finding of the study note that fulfilment was one major factor in their continuous stay in the university. The respondents stated that they were satisfied, gratified and fulfilled based of the services rendered to them by the universities. The results shows that satisfaction, gratification and fulfilment was significant in determining continuous relationship with university. The finding has a  $\beta$  value of 0.713 and a  $p$  value of 0.014 indicating that satisfaction, gratification and fulfilment are very significant in determining the stay of students in the university. The study agrees with the finding by Holbrook (2004) social rewards in such as satisfaction, gratification, and fulfillment of needs builds continuous relationship. Furthermore, the study also reveals that there was a positive and significant relationship between maximum academic support individuals had and their continuous relationship with university. This implies that students who were given maximum academic support maintains their relationship with the university. This was in line with the assertions of Helms and Key (1994) when he indicated that

factors such as given maximum academic support to students helps them a lot and aids them to recommend the university to their friends and families.

The finding also reveals tuition fees plays major role in students desires to pursue, sustain and terminate their relationship with a university. The result shows that only tuition fees is significant to continuous relationship with university. The results implies that students can easily terminate their relationship with a university as a result of high fees charged by the university. Relationship benefits have positive effects on relationship outcomes, such as commitment to service business (Fowler, 2009), commitment to continue in a relationship (Gwinner et al., 1998), and philanthropists' commitment to non-profit organizations (Driscoll & Wicks, 1998). DeShields, Kara and Kaynak (2005) suggested that students will continue their relationship with their education institution if the education institution offers superior benefits in terms of education quality, location, cost of tuition, internship opportunities, better placements and networking opportunities. The higher the relationship benefits obtained by the students, the higher the relationship commitment of students to their education institution will be. Universities should develop a state of the art 360 degree student management plan that will enable them ensure that all concerns of students are taken to books and a practical solution given to them to ensure that they get the best out of these students.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

### **About the Authors**

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