



DOES REFERRAL MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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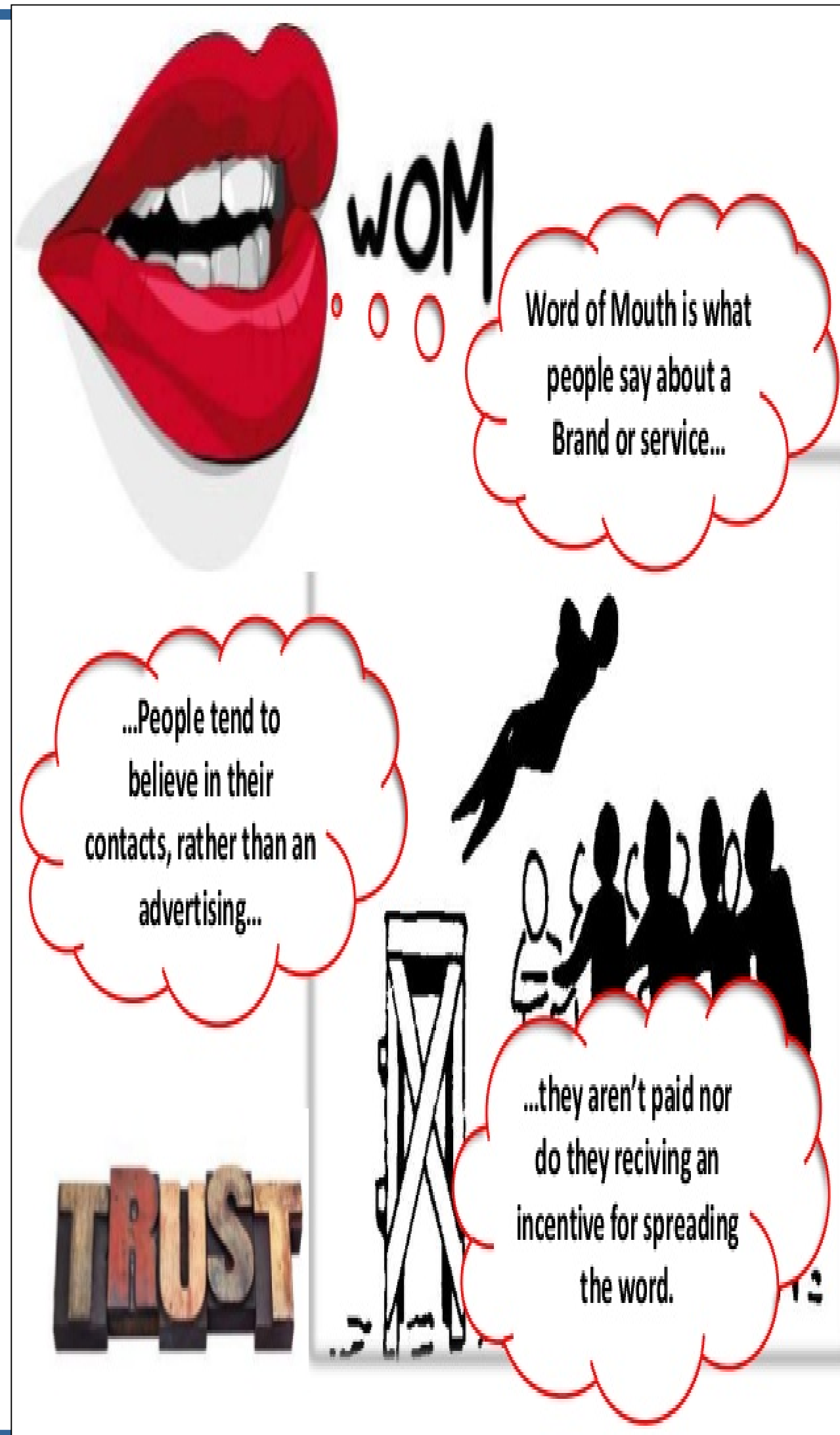
Purpose

Higher Education Institutions(HEI) continually focuses on branding techniques for its survival.

A lot of past studies reveal why branding as a technique is important for universities. But very limited study has been done regarding how word-of-mouth can help HEI attract the prospective students.

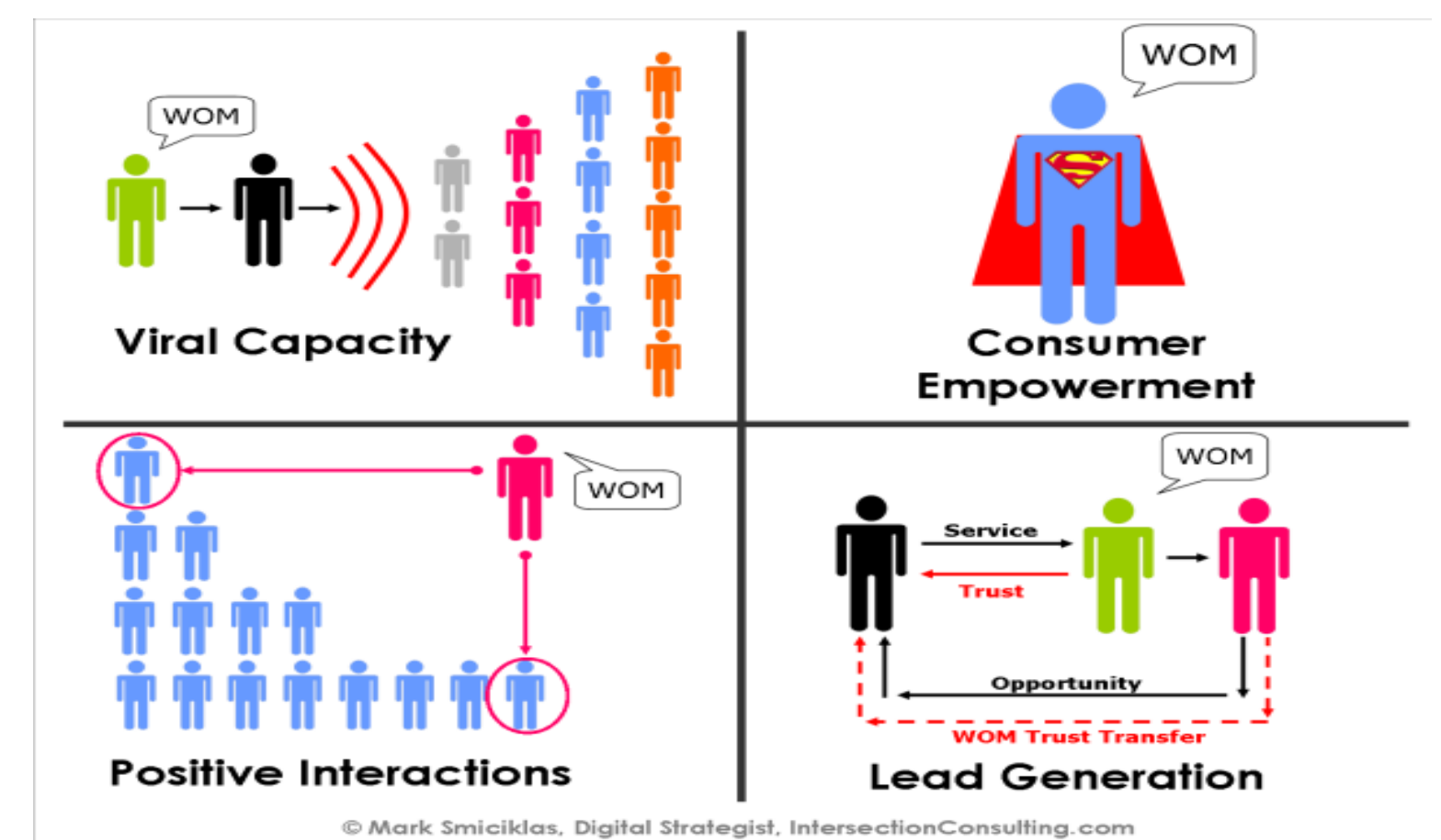
The purpose of branding for HEI is to become the talk of the town through heavy word of mouth. And WOM is a medium through which HEI can develop a positive brand image.

So, the question is how can WOM help HEI brand themselves and attract the prospective students to the university?



Main findings

- Students who have positive identification with the university brand, tend to commit stronger to it and hence be motivated to offer positive WOM.
- Neutral or negative perception that students previously had on HEI can be changed to a positive one through WOM.
- The internet and social media have made it easier to get hold of word-of-mouth information.
- HEI need to focus on their online image which includes their official and social media webpage, blogs, and discussion boards as students will consider online WOM while making a decision to select the right university.



Methodology

A total of 297 peer-reviewed scholarly articles were identified with keywords "higher education branding" from marketing databases such as ABI/Inform, JSTOR, and Academic Premier.

Based on relevance, 279 articles published after 2004 were selected. Convenience sampling led to the final number of 30 articles to be studied in detail.

Value

WOM as a branding technique is increasing its value as university's depend on it for its survival against competitors.

Due to the lack of trial factor(it is not feasible to try educational program before enrollment), education is dependent on referral. So, WOM is valued by students before selecting the right HEI.

