Development of Online Marketing Strategy for Thai Educational Institutes: Case of International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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Abstract. This research is aimed to explode strategy of online marketing for adjusting in International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (or SSRUIC in short), Thailand. The objectives of this study consist of; 1) to analyze online marketing environment in SSRUIC; and 2) to explode guideline to develop online marketing strategy. This research is a qualitative research method, in which the in-depth interview will be used to collect data. To analyze environment and explode guideline of online marketing strategy, the interview was conducted with 20 lecturers, supporting staffs, and current students who are currently working and studying in the college. The results illustrated that overall online marketing environment, both within and outside SSRUIC were in the good condition. Administrative environment could help the college to operate online marketing more efficient. Meanwhile external environment could facilitate the institute to effectively reach target market. The college, however, should create various online marketing tools as well as provide clearer and deeper information to all audiences. To develop guideline of online marketing strategy, SWOT analysis can be applied with readjusted 4Ps marketing mix and 4S model. The college could maximize strengths by creating reliable and attractive online marketing tools. They could also offset weaknesses using opportunities in order to provide faster information with higher accuracy. Moreover, threats could be reduced by updating content to accomplish customer preferences. This research, as a result, can contribute the guideline to those who are in academic field to adjust their resources with online marketing strategy.

1. Introduction
Currently, the trend of aggressive marketing approach has been widely used among educational institutes. The fact that higher educational institutes try to compete each other to attract customers’ intention shows that effective marketing strategy could increase number of potential customers who might interested in their institutes. One of these marketing strategies is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with foreign universities to attract students who want to enroll in student exchange program. This strategic plan, indeed, is a result from the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). In reality, however, Thai educational institutes have been forced to compete with number of foreign institutes that open their branch in Thailand. This problem, for instance, is obviously seen after Thailand-Australia Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) has been done by Thai-Australian Government. This agreement has given flavor to Australian universities if they have...
branches in Thailand. Students who study in these universities can get a good chance to obtain Australian degree while studying in Thailand. This situation, therefore, forces Thai education institutes to enhance their educational standard to compete with foreign educational institutes [1].

To enhance education quality, an institute should combine various inputs together, such as administration, management, human resources, skills of lecturers, curriculum standard, capital as well as students [2]. Method of improvement must be flexible. Process can be focused through adopting business model to manage budget and risk [3]. This is the concept of ‘students are customers’ which concentrates on customer-driven marketing strategy to maximize customers’ satisfaction. Some researcher suggested that factors influenced Thai institutes to use this concept include a high competition among educational institutes, limitation of fund from the government as well as the concept of ‘total quality management’ that give important on customer-focused as an indicator of measuring organization quality. Thus, institutes should integrate customer-based marketing with their strategic plan.

Due to the limitation of fund each year, public universities in Thailand have shifted their normal offline marketing into online marketing. Online marketing is a marketing distributed through internet, including both paid and unpaid platform. For educational sector, universities get benefits of easily reaching potential target market, accuracy of message, cheaper than offline marketing methods [4]. Pressure by this high competitive market, thus, SSRUIIC needs to increase number of customers in order to have enough funds covering all expenses. Therefore, this research aims to develop online marketing strategy for SSRUIIC to be able to reach more target markets and compete with privatized institutes.

2. Literature review
This research aims to study and analyse online marketing environment in SSRUIIC. Thus, online marketing concept and strategy as well as the educational environment will be examined in order to specify guideline to develop the online marketing strategy.

2.1. Online marketing concept
Traditionally, marketing means the way that a company uses to satisfy customers’ wants or needs. However, the new trend of marketing has been focused on maximizing value of product or service to customers according to their preferences [5]. Since the traditional marketing mix (4Ps) is not appropriate to explain the nature of online marketing, marketing researchers tried to expand marketing concept into online aspect. Internet has been brought to the world of business for quite sometimes. Online activities have been added to the type of supported business practices and activities. There is a gradually increase in the usage of marketing via online platforms. Online marketing is, therefore, combining technology with marketing strategy in order to distribute product or service to the hand of customers efficiently. Normally, there are two types of online marketing used within a company: click-only and click-and-mortar. Click-only refers to companies that has established only on online platforms, no physical location. Click-and-mortar, on the other hands, means companies that a physical location for their operations. This type of online marketing allows firms to pursue a various marketing channels - applying online marketing with off-line marketing [6]. For SSRUIIC, the click-and-mortar has been used to attack the target market. Previous researchers had been argued that new communication and interaction options will change the aspect of commercialization in many industries [7]. Differences in physical and online marketing would be a barrier to the application of traditional marketing management. Moreover, web designed is, probably, the main factor to success of today’s marketing strategy. The more well-designed of the web site, the more a business communicates efficiently with customers [8], [9], [10].

2.2. Marketing strategy concept
The marketing mix has been first discovered in 1948 by James Culliton who described the marketing executive as a decider and a mixer of ingredients. In early 1950s, Borden expanded this concept into
what later called a ‘marketing mix’. Borden had established the first marketing mix checklist consisting 12 sections which contains two-dozen subsections. In 1960, McCarthy had simplified Borden’s lists to a four-element framework: product, price, promotion and place, the now known as “4Ps” [11]. Most marketing professionals consider the 4Ps as the tool for operational market planning. A large-scale study confirmed that the combination of 4Ps is, in fact, the reliable conceptual platform for dealing with marketing problems. This research illustrates that about 70% of the companies surveyed use formal marketing planning as the basis of their operational commercialization plans. Moreover, this study suggested that market leaders are much more dependent on formal operational marketing planning based on the 4P paradigm than market followers [12].

With the environmental change and management paradigm shift, however, the 4Ps marketing mix may not answer customer changing preferences in the ‘e’ era. The current debate about the mix as a marketing paradigm and dominant marketing management tool by academics has raised the question of whether the marketing mix needs to be revised with other sub-disciplines, such as relationship marketing, service marketing, retail marketing, industrial marketing, as well as reviews about a new marketing domain - E (electronic) marketing [13]. This trend shifted the marketing towards new electronic era.

2.3. Online marketing strategy

The commercialization of internet allows business engaged into a variety of commercial online activities (e-commerce). The failure of the dot.com in the 90’s has proved that the traditional marketing mix created unsustainable online business models [14]. Table 1 summarized literature review of e-marketing strategy.

| Author (s)          | E-marketing elements                                                                 | Arguments                                                                 |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mosley-Matchett     | • Who: target audience/market                                                          | The strategy worked well on the internet based on its Web site designed. It is called the marketing mix of 5W’s. |
| (1997)              | • What: content                                                                     |                                                                          |
|                     | • When: timing and updating                                                           |                                                                          |
|                     | • Where: findability                                                                |                                                                          |
|                     | • Why: unique selling proposition                                                    |                                                                          |
| Evans and King      | • Web Planning: defining mission and goals                                          | The theory focused on building a successful B2B web site. Each of these steps brings a number of major managerial implications. |
| (1999)              | • Web Access: how to get web entry                                                  |                                                                          |
|                     | • Site Design and Implementation: content                                             |                                                                          |
|                     | • Site Promotion, Management and Evaluation: commercial and managerial aspects        |                                                                          |
| Chaffey et al.      | The web site design is the key to success:                                           | This theory argued that the Internet can make the traditional marketing mix vary. This is based on eight critical factors: |
| (2000)              | • Capture                                                                           | • Potential audience                                                      |
|                     | • Content                                                                           | • Integration                                                            |
|                     | • Community                                                                         | • Marketing support                                                       |
|                     | • Commerce                                                                          | • Brand migration                                                         |
|                     | • Customer Orientation                                                              | • Strategic partnerships                                                   |
|                     | • Credibility                                                                       | • Organizational structure                                                |
|                     |                                                                                     | • Budget                                                                  |
| Author(s) | E-marketing elements | Arguments |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| Lawrence et al. (2000) | The elements combine the traditional 4Ps with the new five Ps:  
- Paradox  
- Perspective  
- Paradigm  
- Persuasion  
- Passion | This approach suggested that online marketing should be created base on the traditional Ps of the marketing as well as the new five P’s of marketing. |
| Bhatt and Emdad (2001) | The new characteristics of 4Ps have emerged.  
- Product: new options for customized information  
- Place: no time and location restrictions, direct delivery  
- Price: price discrimination and customization, price transparency  
- Promotion: action-oriented promotional activities are possible, promotional flexibility | The virtual value chain has transformed the 4P’s to the new dimensions. Businesses still make their strategic marketing decisions based on the 4P marketing mix. |
| Allen and Fjermestad (2001) | The major changes of 4Ps characteristics in an e-commerce situation:  
Product: information, innovation  
Place: reach  
Price: increased competition  
Promotion: more information, direct links | This approach accepted that the 4Ps can be fundamental of E-commerce strategy. It describes new characteristics of 4Ps that are suitable for e-marketing. |
| Constantinides (2002) | The 4S model offers a comprehensive, integral approach on managing the online presence:  
Scope: strategic issues  
Site: operational issues  
Synergy: organizational issues  
System: technological issues | Lack of interactivity and strategic elements in a fast changing environment made 4Ps not suitable for online marketing. Thus, the 4S model was replaced a traditional 4Ps marketing mix. |

For this study, the author combined two approaches, the adjusted 4Ps of Allen and Fjermestad and 4S model of Constantinides to write a guideline to develop online marketing strategy of SSRUIC.

2.4. Corporate strategy concept

The corporate strategy concepts have been developed from the corporate management point of view. Corporate strategy is said to be a backbone of a company. The first basis corporate strategy that every corporation should pursue is SWOT analysis of Kenneth R. Andrews who suggested that strategy emerges from aligning environmental opportunity with corporate capability [15]. The SWOT analysis, also known as TOWS, is widely used in the marketing strategy, even if it derives from the business strategy. This approach provides the critical factors in determining effective strategic choice. The key internal factors affecting strategy involve the availability and application of marketing mix resources while external factors such as market size, potential, growth rate, and competitors affect the way corporation achieve the goals. For this study, developing online marketing strategy requires TOWS analysis. It can enhance weakness using strength, and resolve threat using opportunity. The TOWS matrix is illustrated in table 2.
Table 2. TOWS Matrix.

| External Environment | Internal Environment | Strength | Weakness |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------|---------|
| Opportunity          | SO – Matching Approach | Using strength to obtain the new competitive opportunity | WO – Off-Set Approach |
|                      | ST – Covering Approach | Using existing opportunity to improve weakness | |
| Threat               |                     | Using strength to cover organizational objectives from threat | WT – Mitigation Approach |
|                      |                     | Minimizing or mitigating threat that may affect organizational objectives | |

This TOWS matrix explains solution approach after doing SWOT analysis. It can tell how a company should maximize its strength through new opportunity as well as when a company should leave the market. Thus, a company can use this matrix to select the appropriate approach for their marketing strategy.

2.5. Marketing in education sector

The turning point of educational buyer behavior may, perhaps, come from the concept of ‘student is customer.’ This concept has increased a tension of competition in education sector. Reduction of budget supported by the government as well as education quality management is the main factors influencing many institutes to promote their colleges or universities through modern marketing channels. Nevertheless, understanding customers’ preferences is important to identify their behaviors. Often, customers who satisfy with product will recommend it to others [16]. The behavior of buyer also influences marketing activities, such as product characteristics and marketing strategy for a specific target group. Marketer will research these target market and identify marketing activity that satisfy customers’ needs and wants.

To manage higher education system, administrative in terms of supporting function and academic function are needed. Supporting function includes regulate code of conduct, manage internal administrative, writing a strategic plan, establish community relationship, deal with paper work, and manage budgeting and funding. Academic function refers to teaching standard, curriculum management, student enrolment, teaching and learning environment, lecturer management, student and academic affair, and organizational relation management. Marketing is used to support the main functions of education system, particularly finding fund and student enrolment. Due to the reduction of birth rate in Thailand, an institution needs to develop marketing strategy to attract more customers [17]. To increase revenue, therefore, an institution should carefully design appropriated courses, budget, and marketing communication, to compete in high competitive market. In this case, implement online marketing strategy would be an appropriated choice for an institute that has less investment. However, they still need to consider basic infrastructure, such as Internet access, hardware and software for pursuing online marketing communication [18].

3. Methodology

This study is based on a social science research using qualitative method. The semi-interview structure had been adopted in this research. The questions included internal and external environment that may affect SSRUIC online marketing as well as the existing ability that SSRUIC can use to conduct this plan. The Data had been collected by interviewing with 20 persons; supporting staff, academic staff, and current students. A sample group had been purposively selected using simple random sampling from name lists of three stakeholders. The questions had been divided into four main themes: internal environment, external environment, factors associated with online marketing communication tools, and factors associated with online marketing content. Online marketing tools studied in this research
consisted of SSRUIC web site, Facebook, and Line Application. The data had been analyzed using content analysis.

4. Results
The results of this research are explained according to the research objectives: 1) to study and analyze online marketing environment in SSRUIC and 2) To explode guideline to develop online marketing strategy.

4.1. Online marketing environmental analysis
To analyze online marketing environment of SSRUIC, the author examined internal and external online marketing environment based on educational context. The result is shown on the table 3.

| Internal Environment | External Environment |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Online Marketing Administration | 1. Social factor |
| The administration of online marketing relies on Public Relation Division, which means it is easy to control and manage online marketing function. Information and data provided on the website must pass the permission from the head of PR Division. | There is an increasing rate of adopting online marketing among higher education. The trend of connecting with others through online is an upcoming strategy that an institute can apply to reach the wide range of target group. |
| 2. Online Marketing Communication | 2. Economic factor |
| It is the fastest way to communicate marketing with target market. Even though it is fast, an institute should increase a variety of choice of marketing communication to reach all targets at once. | Applying online marketing gives a benefit to middle income families since it incurs lower cost for them to gather information about an institute when comparing with offline marketing. |
| 3. Competition factor | 3. Competition factor |
| Due to an increase in competition, education institutes should provide wide variety of marketing communication and public relation online. These channels should also be able to provide further information about course, program, tuition fee, etc. to students and parents. | |

According to the internal environmental assessment, managing online marketing system in SSRUIC is flexible because there is only one division control the system. However, in-depth information about programs or courses still needs to be enhanced. Each program, thus, should collaborate with public relation division to maximize efficiency of online marketing promotion content. On the other hands, result from external environment analysis shows that middle income families can take benefit of online marketing to find information faster and lower cost than other methods.

The author translated data received from the environmental assessment into SWOT analysis in order to apply it with online marketing strategic planning in SSRUIC. The flexibility of system management and up-to-date information are the main strengths of online marketing strategy applied by the college. Using pictures and other graphics can attract young target market. Moreover, cost of online marketing is lower than other types of marketing communication. With the improvement of standard infrastructure in suburb areas, opportunity to reach a wide range of customers is growing. Since the cost of internet is lower, customers can obtain information whenever and wherever they want. Although the college provides information on online marketing tools, it could not cover all
detail of each program. Furthermore, the variety of online marketing tools should be improved to reach the large number of customers. For threats, the competition has put more pressure on educational institutes in terms of their marketing fund. To target more customers, they need to invest lots of money to do marketing activities. This, in turn, increases cost of maintaining trust on the online marketing system to those institutes. The SWOT analysis has been applied based on SSRUIC online marketing environment and it can be concluded in the table 4.

### Table 4. SSRUIC SWOT Analysis.

| External Environment | Internal Environment |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
| 1. Accuracy and flexibility of online marketing system | 1. Too general detail of each program |
| 2. Control by Public Relation Division | 2. Less variety of tools (only website, Facebook, and Line application used in the college) |
| 3. Up-to-date information | |
| 4. Attractive graphics | |
| 5. Low cost when comparing with other marketing communication channels | |
| **Opportunities** | **SO – Matching Approach** | **WO – Off-Set Approach** |
| 1. Increase accessibility of infrastructure (i.e. internet) | Use progressive marketing approach by put more pictures and graphics on web site to attract potential customers. | 1. Expand online marketing tools to reach wide range of customers. |
| 2. Growth rate of online marketing users | | 2. Provide in-depth information for each program including activities, news, blog, and announcement |
| **Threats** | **ST – Covering Approach** | **WT – Mitigation Approach** |
| 1. High competition of educational market | Due to high accuracy of the system controlled by Public Relation Division, information provided in all marketing channels can gain high trust from customers. | Minimize the effect of competition by promote each program progressively through wide range of marketing tools, including offline marketing channel. |
| 2. Perception of trust on the online marketing system through the eyes of customers | |

The SWOT analysis, therefore, provides alternative approach that International College can use to compete with other institutes. Increasing strengths while off-setting weaknesses could increase the number of customers reach the college’s information. High accuracy of system would increase trust from customers, which will lead to a high reputation in the future. Moreover, keeping information up-to-date is the most important task in promoting the college.

#### 4.2. Guideline to develop online marketing strategy

The result suggests that the best way to develop online marketing strategy for SSRUIC is to combine the work of readjusted 4Ps marketing mix [19] and the 4S model [20]. The new 4Ps characteristics is concerning with e-marketing situation meanwhile the 4S model offers an integrated managing approach with online presence. The SSRUIC online marketing strategy can be summarized in table 5.
Table 5. SSRUIC 4Ps + 4S online marketing mix.

| 4Ps marketing mix                                                                 | 4S model                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Product:** information provided within online marketing tools should include    | Scope: consisted of four areas:                                          |
| 1. Up-to-date information                                                        | 1. Strategic objective: using various online marketing tools to reach    |
| 2. Attractive graphics/pictures/video                                              |    wide range of customers                                                |
| 3. In-depth program’s information such as activities, news, blog, and announcement| 2. Market definition: market potentials are those students who are        |
|                                                                                   |    studying in English program. Main competitors include higher educational |
|                                                                                   |    institutes that offer the same courses as SSRUIC.                      |
| Place: all marketing tools should be easy to reach and access by customers (      | 3. Degree of readiness: according to the accuracy level of online        |
| parents and students). By offering a wide range of online marketing tools,        |    marketing system, SSRUIC is ready to compete with others universities   |
| especially social media channels such as Youtube, Linkin, Instagram, etc.        |    via online platform.                                                   |
| Price: the tuition fee should be provided clearly in each program course detail.  | 4. Strategic role of online marketing: even though using online          |
| Promotion: outstanding points, such as MOU with international universities,      |    marketing is effective, the offline channels are still important in   |
| scholarship for student exchange program, international internship program, etc.  |    terms of the direct contact between customers and SSRUIC.              |
|                                                                                   | Site: the online marketing tools adopted in SSRUIC should be designed     |
|                                                                                   |    attractively, functionally, and uncomplicatedly by creating an         |
|                                                                                   |    audiovisual, coherent graphic chart, categorize the contents, etc.    |
|                                                                                   | Synergy: integrates online marketing tools by encouraging students and    |
|                                                                                   |    staffs to check SSRUIC information on the website, Facebook, and Line |
|                                                                                   |    application as well as putting the website’s link on partners ‘website.|
|                                                                                   | System: the system should be monitor by IT technician with public relation|
|                                                                                   |    department control over the contents.                                  |

This online marketing mix can be drawn as a 4Ps+4S model shown in figure 1 below.
This guideline, therefore, could be used as basic information to develop online marketing strategy in the near future for SSRUIC. The readjusted of 4Ps marketing mix in the online presence provide the content viewpoint for the college while the 4S marketing model offers the guideline to effectively develop online marketing tools.

5. Discussion and conclusion
This research has shown that online marketing strategy plays a significant role for educational institutes. The guideline of online marketing mix can help an institute to generate their online marketing strategy. It also shows the integration of 4Ps marketing mix and 4S model in the education field so that education institutes can adapt this model with their resources.

From the environmental assessment and SWOT analysis, the result shows that the system itself has high accuracy rate because the contents has been controlled by only one department, public relation. Although graphics used in online marketing tools are attractive, there is less variety of these tools – only Website, Facebook, and Lind application has been used. Furthermore, high competition means customers have low switching cost of accessing information via online marketing channels. This means that, from the parents and students point of view, they can easily change their mind to other university without hesitation. The results from TOWS matrix has been integrated with 4Ps and 4S model adopted from Allen and Fjermestad, and Constantinides. This model, called in this research as ‘SSRUIC 4Ps+4S model’ gives the guideline to those practitioners who want to apply online marketing strategy in education sector. The 4Ps+4S model suggested that all online marketing tools should provide in-depth information about each program through attractive contents. Each tool should also be monitored by the technician in order to maintain the accuracy rate. Moreover, the university information should be promoted in a variety of channels, such as social media, website, as well as other offline channels in order to obtain more customers from this high competitive market.

To be able to apply this study with the future research, the environmental assessment is needed for a particular institute. This is because the differences between management style, budgeting, vision of each institute, as well as external environments may shift methodology of the research. Consequently, the model has to be adjusted according to the changing environmental analysis.

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