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Full Length Research Paper

The “custen model”: How experiential it is from the Ghanaian higher education spectrum

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The research aims to propagate the “custen model” that suggests how the management of Ghanaian universities could retain qualified and knowledgeable students through its relationship officers. A survey design was engaged. A total of 500 respondents from selected universities in Ghana were used. Data were explored using smartPLS 3. The results revealed that the “Custen Model” that is customer retention is built on an institutional retention system and further enhanced by the student loyalty disposition. Longitudinal data would have been more appropriate to determine the scope of retention thus serving as a limitation to the research. This study elucidates the need for the university management to focus on their strategic relationship marketing stratagems on building strong bonds with students which will subsequently lead to a greater proclivity in the student retention rate. The formulation of the “retention model” in this research conveys new empirical understanding and outspreads our acquaintance on relationship marketing.

Key words: Retention model, smartPLS3, SRM stratagems, Universities, Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

Student retention has become a newsworthy issue in the Ghanaian education sector (Ameyaw et al., 2021). Some scholars believe that it is quite easy to attract students but extremely difficult to retain them when the need arises (Andoh and Attafuah, 2021). The situation is not different in the university spectrum where management is making efforts painstakingly to retain their enrolment drive (Olaniran and Uleanya, 2021). Different strategies are being developed to surmount this hurdle (Chaudhuri, 2021). Multidimensional and holistic approaches are

adopted culminating from all disciplines (Gupta et al., 2021). From the relationship marketing perspective, the thinking is that students can be retained competitively through conscious relationship building. Given this, the research is intended to propose a retention model that seeks to suggest how management from the university spectrum can develop a sustainable retention strategy from the relationship marketing standpoint. Research has proven that retaining students has become a contemporary issue (Pray, 2021). Factors such as scholarships,

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admission rates, job opportunities, and the approval of students by the industry (Qazi et al., 2021) are viewed as some of the determinants of students' loyalty. Empirically, lack of commitment, trust, competence, service experience, and frequent conflict between management and students are some of the underlying reasons why student retention has become an issue in our universities Shafait et al. (2021). The objective, therefore, is to ascertain the incidental mediating relationship that exists between student loyalty, strategic relationship marketing stratagems, and student retention? The retention model will be coined from the findings to help practitioners in formulating retention strategies. The entire study is steered by this question; how does student loyalty indirectly mediate the relationship between strategic relationship marketing stratagems and student retention. The findings are of importance to both practitioners and academicians. It spelled out the meticulous efforts that university management has to engage in to retain hard-won students. It has also broadened the discussion on relationship marketing by viewing it from a strategic perspective.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

This study is reinforced by the social penetration theory. It was initially created by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor. The theory with its application explains how students develop and progress in forging a relationship with the university (Mason et al., 2021), stating the importance of communication during relationship development. It hypothesizes that (Appiah et al., 2021), an individual student may initiate a relationship with the university through the first interaction.

Moreover, ensuing an interaction (Yagil, 2021), the individual envisages the outcome of future interactions that arise with the potential relationship parties. The individual then applies (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021), these project to decide on whether to carry on or let go of the relationship. Unending the relationship means the initiation of a second interaction that will ultimately be adjudicated in turn. It will also be substantiated if the expectation comes true and then a new decision will be based on these results. The theory further explains that the (Kitcharoen, 2021), student will either dismiss or remain faithful to the university when absolute satisfaction is attained. It infers that the proposed relational marketing strategies should strategically ignite the student's desire of initiating a relationship and subsequently maintain it because of desire fulfillment. The relationship will finally be solidified when their expectation is surpassed (Mori and Stracke, 2021). The service experience encountered will be the basis for strengthening existing relationships and for future demand (Pownall et al., 2021). The information acquired will serve as a connexion between the individual

consumer and the prevailing relationship. The theory further explains that relational members tend to keep the information gathered (Zhang and Xiang, 2021), for future business opportunities. Based on this theory it presupposes that the (Tóth and Bedzsula, 2021), student retention rate with the university in question should be enhanced by continuously offering student-oriented programme propositions. It is therefore incumbent on the university (Cele, 2021), to maintain a constant and standardized academic programme to serve as an anchor between both parties. Empirically, it is proven that different strategies (Abbas, 2021), could be installed to retain students.

Strategic relationship marketing is in the move to ascertain how it can effectively be used to lure potential and actual students to stay for life. The cost-benefit analysis does not support retention strategic decisions (Maldonado et al., 2021) instead, it makes room for (Sin et al., 2021), attraction schemes. Notwithstanding, university management still views it quite imperative to go for retention strategies because of its long-term associated benefits both for the university and the students (Seery et al., 2021). Conceptually proven that retention tends to widen the student loyalty net (Baradhi, 2021). Drawing the shutter on higher education, it is believed that sound university management (Harun, 2021), rigorous continuous professional development sessions (Sims and Fletcher-Wood, 2021), coupled with an achievable university strategic plan (Kouritzin et al., 2021), can help improve the university retention packages. Viewed from a different perspective; technical and functional qualities (Mailizar et al., 2021), as well as a positive corporate image (Harun, 2021), are also proven to be vital resources for retaining students. Other scholars also think that the physical and interactive capabilities of the university (Banartseva and Kaplina, 2021), rather enhance the retention rate of the student. Extensive research has concluded that assurance (Htang, 2021), empathy (Corradi and Levrau, 2021), reliability (Ibad and Sharjeel, 2021), responsiveness (Talton, 2021), and tangibles (Le et al., 2021) from the university management can equally drive student retention in the higher education spheres. The quality nature of the human resources both staff and non-staff are critical determinants for retaining students (Loh, 2021). Promoting or instituting professional development schemes (Morris, 2021), coupled with efficient institutional managerial skills (Bukhari et al., 2021) can draw more students in the long run. Grounded on these scholarly appraisals the "custen model" is predicted and assumed (Figure 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted using the quantitative approach because it is more (Lempert and Turner, 2021) scientific, objective, fast, focused, and acceptable. Survey strategy was also collected

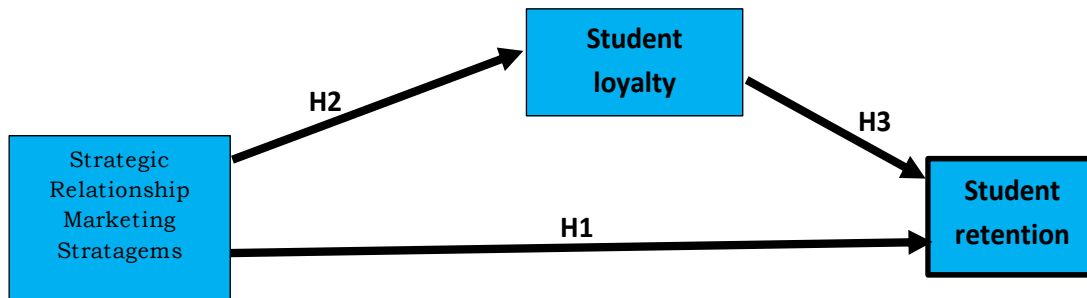


Figure 1. Custen model. The “Custen Model” is grounded on the assumption that customer retention is constructed on superior retention schemes and further boosted by the degree of loyalty disposition. Hypothetically, structured as follows: H1: SRM stratagems have a direct positive relationship with the student retention schemes.H2: Student loyalty has an indirect positive inclination on student retention and the institution’s SRM stratagems. Source: The proposed “Custen model”

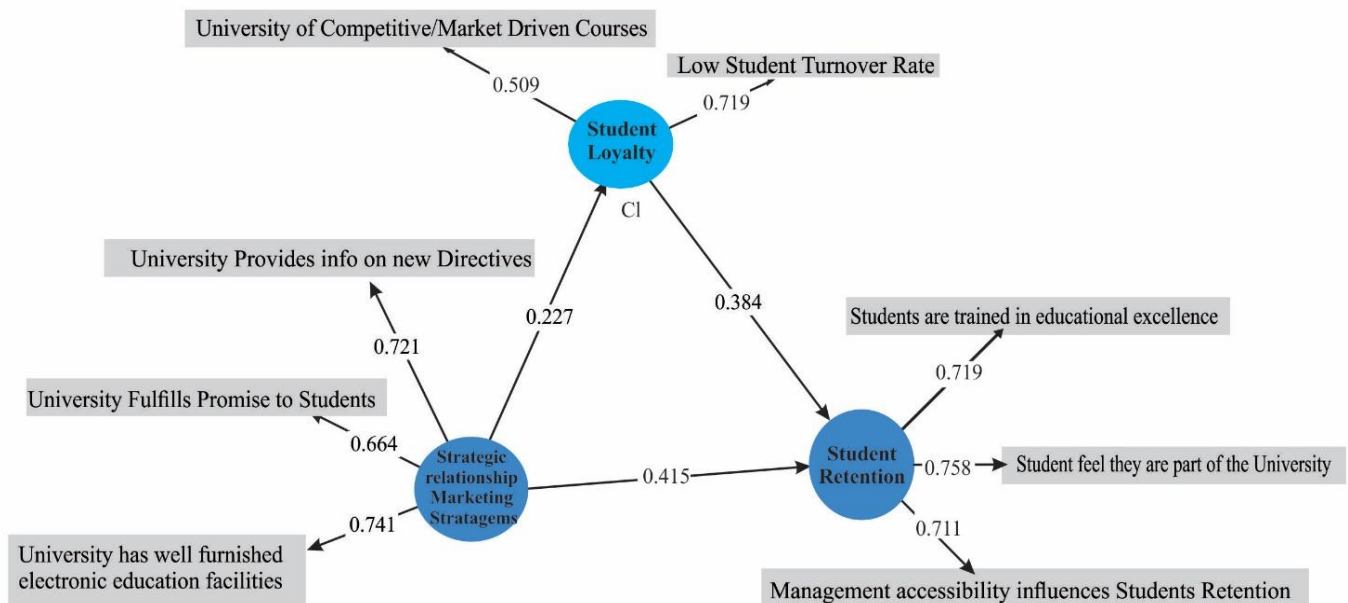


Figure 2. Affirms the proposed “custen model”. It depicts the mediating role of student loyalty on the link between Strategic Relationship Marketing Stratagem and student retention.

from five universities namely; the University of Ghana, University of Education, Winneba, University of Cape Coast, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, and Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration because (Wiser et al., 2021), allows for more accurate findings across a greater number of respondents. The research seeks to recommend a model that spells out how university management can array strategic relationship stratagems to retain students contextualizing in Ghana. It further throws more light on how student loyalty mediates between strategic relationship marketing stratagems and student retention. SmartPLS 3 was used to analyze the data collected using the close-ended questionnaire. The instrument was designed as follows: Section A collected bio data of the relationship officers from the five public universities. Section B of the questionnaire was meant to solicit data about the Ghanaian-oriented strategic relationship marketing stratagems utilizing a five-level Likert scale;

1 indicates strongly disagree and number 5 indicates strongly agree. Section C, took data about their loyalty posture. Section D also picked information from retention. The result was analyzed and used to formulate the retention model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analytically, it could be observed from Figure 2 that strategic relationship marketing stratagems from the Ghanaian perspective have an unswerving connexion between retention and students' loyalty disposition. The outcomes supplementarily specify that loyalty critically plays a stanch mediating role on the affiliation between

Table 1. Reliability of the factors influencing the Constructs.

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Student loyalty	0.604	0.760	0.726	0.592
Student retention	0.661	0.562	0.773	0.532
Strategic relationship marketing stratagem	0.613	0.516	0.752	0.503

strategic relationship marketing stratagems and retention. It clearly shows that about 19.4% of the changes in the student retention rate can be ascribed to vicissitudes in strategic relationship marketing stratagems and loyalty. Nevertheless, a unit variation in strategic relationship marketing stratagems can cause 14.5% variation in retention and 22.7% variation in loyalty. Yet again, 5.2% of the fluctuations in loyalty were triggered by variations in strategic relationship marketing stratagems. On the other hand, a unit change in loyalty can cause a 38.4% alteration in retention. The results further confirm that loyalty has a substantial impact on both strategic relationship marketing stratagems and students' retention propensities thus; it can be used as an ancillary conduit for improving students' retention ratio. The regression model for Figure 2 is given by the general linear equation. $CR = 0.194 + SRMS (0.145) + 0.384 (CL)$... equation 1. $CL = 0.052 + 0.227 (SRMS)$ equation 2. By substituting equation 2 into 1. $CR = 0.194 + SRMS (0.145) + 0.384 (0.052 + 0.227(SRMS))$. $CR = 0.194 + SRMS (0.145) + 0.019968 + SRMS (0.087168)$. $CR = 0.213968 + 0.232168(SRMS)$... equation 3. Converting the values to percentage. $CR = 21.4 + 23.3(SRMS)$ equation 4. The upshot in equation (4) designates the intermediating role of loyalty on the affiliation between strategic relationship marketing stratagems and retention. The model points to the fact that if there are no variations in the current strategic relationship marketing stratagems of the five public universities, the student retention rate will increase by about 21.4%. However, if they commit more resources to improve loyalty schemes, a unit alteration in their strategic relationship marketing stratagem will increase the student retention rate by an additional 23.3%.

The quality criteria of the “Custen Model”

This part of the study examines the reliability and validity of the three constructs and their respective factors. It gives a measure of the quality of the research objectives based on the factors that are selected and tested. Reliability is about the consistency of the research method, technique, or test in measuring the three constructs and their respective factors. It can be observed from Figure 2 that strategic relationship marketing stratagems and retention are explained by three factors while loyalty is explained by two factors.

From Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha values being greater than 0.6 shows that these factors were very reliable in explaining their respective constructs. On the other hand, the composite reliability values above 0.7 indicate that the constructs are very reliable as a model. Similarly, the rho_A values being less than 1 indicate that the factors are significant in describing or representing their respective constructs and should be considered for the policy and resources allocation. This is supported by the $AVE > 0.5$ which implies that for each of the three constructs, there is a direct association between their respective factors. This means that changes in one factor may result in a direct change in alternative factors, but they do not linearly predict each other.

Validity of the “Custen Model”

Validity is about the accuracy of the research method and techniques in measuring the research objectives (Table 2). The $HTMT < 0.9$ indicates that the respective factors of each of the three constructs are statistically different and do not predict each other. Further indications show that there is no occurrence of high intercorrelations among two or more factors in a multiple regression model. Similarly, the Fornell-Lacker Criterion values less than 0.7 indicate the three models are statistically different from each other. It also indicates that retention is statistically different from both loyalty and strategic relationship marketing stratagem. The f-square values show that loyalty is more important for achieving retention using the strategic relationship marketing stratagems.

Significance of the “Custen Model”

A hypothetical statement that was mooted above was to ascertain the significance of the “custen model.” The results in Figure 2 are a measure of the significance of the model in Figure 1. The path coefficient values are t-statistics for measuring the significance of the model. It measures the size of the difference relative to the variation in the sample data. The t-value is the calculated difference represented in units of standard error hence the greater the magnitude of t, the greater the evidence against the null hypothesis. From Figure 3, all the values of the path coefficients are greater than two which implies the entire model is significant hence the null hypotheses are rejected. It implies that strategic relationship

Table 2. Measure of accuracy of research method.

Measurement	Constructs	Student loyalty	Student retention	Strategic relationship marketing stratagem
Fornell-Lacker criterion	Student loyalty	0.769		
	Student retention	0.417	0.730	
	Strategic relationship marketing stratagem	0.227	0.232	0.709
F-Square	Student loyalty		0.174	
	Student retention			
	Strategic relationship marketing stratagem	0.055	0.025	
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	Student loyalty			
	Student retention	0.734		
	Strategic relationship marketing stratagem	0.449	0.418	

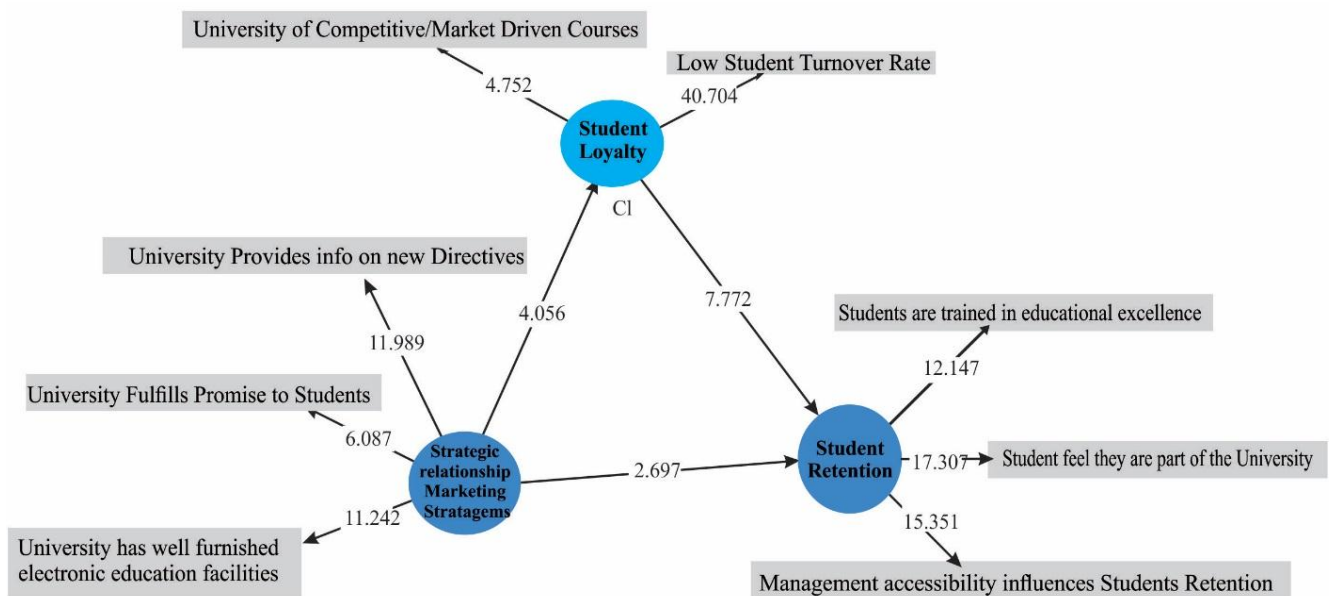


Figure 3. Significance of the Custen Model.

stratagem has a significant consequence on retention and loyalty mediate perfectly on the relationship between retention and strategic relationship marketing stratagems.

Predictiveness of the “Custen Model”

The results in Figure 4 show that about 9.3% of variations in student retention can be predicted by variations in student loyalty disposition and strategic relationship marketing stratagems. Similarly, about 23% of vicissitudes in loyalty can be predicted by vicissitudes in strategic relationship marketing stratagems. It means that student loyalty significantly arbitrates in strategic relationship marketing stratagems and student retention.

Conclusion

The “custen” which means customer retention is a model that has empirically demonstrated how relationship officers from the Ghanaian educational spectrum could retain current and potential students, who will intend to become ambassadors towards the sustainability of the institutional retention agender. It advocated that students can be retained if the university provides superior academic offerings far more than its competitors thus affirming the conclusion drawn in Kenya (Kasamani et al., 2021) but partially disagreed (Lambert and Lavin, 2021). Thus, at any given period the university management should be prompt in fulfilling its service propositions through the provision of quality education with practical

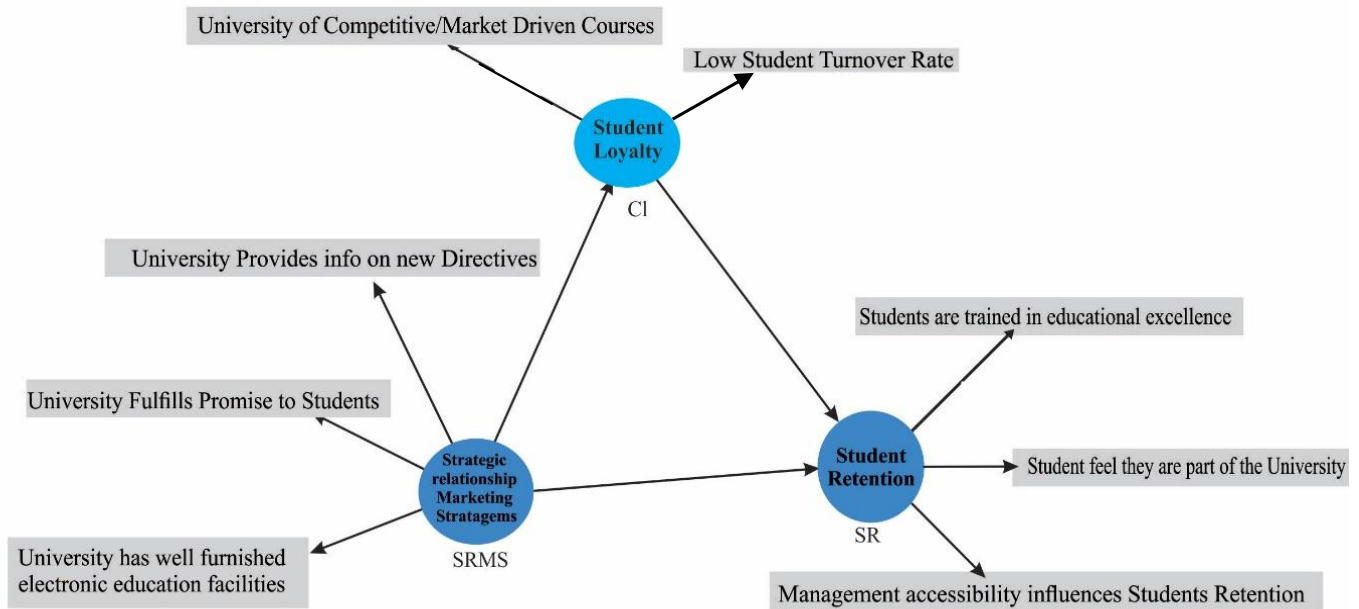


Figure 4. Predictions of the “Custen Model”.

orientations as confirmed (El Alfy, 2021). The university should provide timely and trustworthy information that addresses the students' needs especially in this pandemic era as established (Shi et al., 2021), and again provides aspiration for career possibilities. Symposiums, local colloquiums, international conferences, and roundtables discussions should be inculcated in teaching and learning in the universities which were strongly upheld (Omodan, 2021). Periodically captains of industries should be invited to address new ways of executing business proceedings which serve as a motivational tool for the young scholars supported by (Gento et al., 2021). Ghana is lacking behind in ingenuity, creativity, and innovativeness in conducting business. Thus, the 70-30 hybrid model of assessment where practitioners blended with academics (Gento et al., 2021), should be embraced to help retain competent students who are strongly influenced by market-driven programmes. There should be constant hands-on practical courses that are 70% driven by industrial curriculum with the idea of reshaping practical thinking.

Competent university academic staff with international repute in practical know-how should be engaged (Bwiruka et al., 2021) in scholarly work. Management should institute 24 h open access policy for the usage of electronic educational facilities in the various universities. The student should be well motivated to help patronize the facility least it will be left idle as it has proven (Kammer et al., 2021), that Ghanaian students are not comfortable using electronic libraries. Model is explicitly saying that students are prone to stay with Ghanaian universities that are constantly and consciously responding to their educational needs swiftly with global

considerations. Thus, the whole strategic relationships marketing stratagems should be positioned towards addressing the various concerns raised. In conclusion, student loyalty has shown to have a significant mediating role in the relationship between strategic relationship marketing stratagem and the rate of their retention. It offers an alternative route for improving retention; hence for policy and resource allocations, management should concentrate on lowering the students' turnover rate by offering competitive and market-driven courses and also be prompt in fulfilling students' academic promises.

Limitations and future research

Researchers should take up and prove the generic practicability of the “custen model” in other business dominions in Africa and beyond. Limited only in Ghana, scholars can also investigate further on this new concept, strategic relationship marketing, and develop a more practicable outline for both practitioners and academics.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interests.

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