Marketing Strategies and Customer Satisfaction: A Study on the Higher Education Institutions in Johor

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Abstract

The future of education industry is dependent on the university's ability to develop an effective marketing strategies, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Marketing strategies are the plans that enables university to achieve competitive advantage. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between marketing strategies, namely packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image and customer satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor, Malaysia. Questionnaires were distributed to 90 students who currently studying in universities in Johor, Malaysia. SmartPLS 3.0 (M3) was applied to test the hypotheses and subsequently bootstrapping was conducted to investigate the standard error of the estimate and t-values. The findings indicated that relationship marketing and price have positive relationship with customer satisfaction. On the other hand, findings revealed that packaging and brand image does not show positive relationship on customer satisfaction. It is believed that packaging has a short lifespan and the respondents does not really concern about the popularity of the brand. There is limited research on this topic to guide the

universities to cope up with the current situation. Thus, this research findings have provided significant insights that help stakeholders to better strategize and position universities, particularly in the scenario of Johor, Malaysia.

Keywords: Marketing strategies, Packaging, Relationship marketing, Price, Brand image, Customer satisfaction, Institute of higher learning, Johor

1. Introduction

Higher education industry is a multibillion dollar business to a country and it is the most powerful weapon which a country can use to change the world. Over the past decade, countries bring rapid growth in the number of universities and programmes in order to boost higher education quality (QS Asia News Network, 2018). Thus, education expected to prosper in the future. In Malaysia, higher learning institutions have grown tremendously since independence in 1957 to produce sufficient graduates to meet the manpower requirements for nation's economic growth (Selvaraj, Anbalagan, & Azlin, 2014). In other words, this is to meet the demand for quality education. The National Council on Higher Education Act 1996, the Private Higher Education Act 1996, and the National Accreditation Board 1996 Act were launched by Malaysian Government in 1996 to increase the provision of higher education (Anis & Islam, 2019). As a result, higher education institutions in Malaysia especially private higher education institutions have become the fastest growing sector in which there are 70 private universities, 34 university colleges and 410 colleges that play a vital role in education industry (Halai, 2013; Li, 2014). Besides, the dramatic development and drastic changes in the number of colleges and universities have transformed Malaysia as an education hub, especially in the region of South East Asia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

Education is one of the crucial foundation to a country's social and economic development. Education empowers learners of all ages with knowledge, skills, value, and attitudes to prepare, find solutions, and to make informed decisions for the interconnected global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, poverty, and inequality (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021). With education, it allows people to change the society and to care for the planet. Furthermore, the quality education in a country provide the biggest boost to economic growth in the long run (Clevenger, MacGregor, & Ryan, 2019; Lim, 2021). It is within this context that private higher education institutions in Malaysia has steadily increased its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Products since 2015 to 2018 by RM14.09 billion, RM 14.84 billion, RM 15.70 billion, and RM 16.62 billion respectively (The Star, 2019). Hence, the development of higher education institutions has transform Malaysia into a centre of educational excellence in the Asian region (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad, & Othman, 2011; Hou, Hill, Chen, & Tsai, 2018).

The development of higher education institutions in Malaysia is undeniably beneficial for Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). However, there are low enrollment rate in higher education institution, as shown in Table 1. The tertiary education enrollment rate in Malaysia had dropped from 45.10 per cent in 2018 to 43.10 per cent in 2019 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021). Furthermore, the

Coronavirus diseases (Covid-19) outbreak has impacted higher education sector across the world and Malaysian Higher Education Institutions are not exempted. Covid-19 is an infectious diseases caused by a newly discovered coronavirus, which will cause mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without special treatment (World Health Organization, 2021). Covid-19 has changed the way academicians work and the way how students learn in university. Lectures and tutorials have had to switch from face to face learning to virtual learning. Students have to adapt to virtual learning and their expectations about what university offers to them are higher and changing (Small, 2021). Students expect universities to support their well-being, supply remote resources, flexibility and empathy while learning from home. When Malaysia government imposed a Movement Control Order (MCO) from 18th March 2020 onwards, it caused high dropout rate, fewer foreign students, and major dip in enrollment in schools and higher education institutions (Banoo, 2020; Choong, 2020). Some foreign students who had registered for the courses were unable to return to the countries of their host universities when they reopen and this had lead to a high withdrawal rate in the year of 2020 (Babulal & Solhi, 2020). Furthermore, some of the existing local students were unable to continue their studies due to financial distress which caused by the pandemic (Aristovnik, Kerzic, Ravselj, Tomazevic, & Umek, 2020). In other words, the students were dissatisfied with the current situation and the role of the university during this pandemic season, which lead to high dropout and withdrawal rate. Consequently, this scenario caused Malaysian Higher Education Institutions especially private higher education institutions make losses and financially insolvent.

Table 1. Tertiary Education Gross Enrollment in Malaysia from 2011 to 2019

Year	Percentage (%)
2019	43.10
2018	45.10
2017	43.70
2016	46.80
2015	45.60
2014	39.50
2013	39.10
2012	37.60
2011	36.10

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2021)

Marketing strategy refers to the plan of actions through which a firm aims to provide a quality product that satisfied customer needs, offering affordable price and engaging in wider distribution and back it up with effective promotion strategy (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Ipek, 2020; Kotler, 2003). Similarly, marketing strategy allows organization to evaluate the marketing environment and use the resources within the internal and external marketing environment to respond to the challenges in the industry (Han & Kang, 2020). In other words, marketing strategy is crucial prerequisite for education industry to strengthen its market share and minimize the negative impact from the external marketing environment. Previously, many research investigated the relationship between marketing strategies and customer

satisfaction in higher education industry in United Kingdom (Hemsley & Oplatka, 2006; Russell, 2005), United States of America (DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005), Norway (Helgesen, 2008), Ghana (Kingsley, 2017), and Kenya (Kandie, 2018). This showed that there has been limited examination of the effects of marketing strategies and customer satisfaction particularly in higher education institutions in Johor context. Hence, this study attempts to fill in the gap in the existing literature on the student's perceptions of marketing strategies in higher education institutions. The research objectives of the present study are as follows:

To investigate the relationship between marketing strategies, namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image and customer satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Customer Satisfaction

In this modern century, customers are very demanding and they have more bargaining power (Kotler, 2017). This is due to customers today have many choices and advancement in technology provides the customers with access to information. According to Sabir, Irfan, Akhtar, Pervez, and Rehman (2014), customer satisfaction formed the basis of any organization's marketing strategy because it determined overall success. In other words, organization needs to initiate a good marketing strategy to delivery high quality products to achieve customer satisfaction and in turn gain competitive advantage. Furthermore, customer satisfaction can be described as the feeling of liking or displeasure as a result of linking the outcomes with the individual's inner desires (Al-Hersh, Aburoub, & Saaty, 2014; Marinescu, Mihai, & Toma, 2010). In other words, satisfaction refers to an emotional reaction that an individual have towards a product. The feelings of satisfaction come from a comparison of the product's perceived performance and expectations. If the performance exceeds the expectations, then customers feel satisfied. If the performance is less than what was expected, then the customer is dissatisfied. In this study, customer satisfaction refers to the student satisfaction and student's feeling of liking or displeasure towards the university's marketing strategies. Thus, customer satisfaction is crucial to an organization as it is an ideal key to improve the company's performance and expand it to a bigger market.

2.2 Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategies are organization plans that used to reach the consumer. Marketers tailor the messages to the consumer at the right place, price and time (Stuterile, 1980). The basic component of marketing strategy includes markets selection, market segmentation, product differentiation, market positioning and marketing mix, for a company to attain and achieve profitability (Kotler, 2003). Similarly, the fundamental principle of marketing strategies include the needs of the consumers, the product, communications, and relationships (Han & Kang, 2020). Furthermore, marketing strategies are concerned with the marketing mix (4Ps), namely, product strategies, pricing strategies, promotional strategies, and place strategies (Hollensen & Opresnik, 2010; Othman, Harun, De Almeida, & Sadq, 2021). In other words,

marketing strategies are processes through which companies determine which market and market segments they choose to sell and where to sell the products. According to Lidia (2015), marketing strategies is about giving the firm sense of purpose and direction, providing a measure against which proposed actions can be gained or accessed and ensure firm's competitive advantage in the market. On a similar note, firms will adapt the marketing strategies to achieve a competitive advantage when entering into a market (Hammerschlag, Bick, & Luiz, 2020; Hapsari, Stoffers, and Gunawan, 2017; Vrontis & Thrassou, 2007; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Lamprianou, 2009). The concept of marketing strategy entails designing and constructing a unique package of benefit that the target customer will perceive to be superior to those offered by their competitors. In other words, marketing strategies enable the company to outshine the competitors. Hence, in this study, marketing strategies refers to packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image that could help universities to gain competitive advantage in higher education industry.

3. Development of Hypotheses

3.1 Packaging and Customer Satisfaction

Packaging refers to the design, quality, and color of the visual appeal that used to protect the product from the external environment and for promotion purposes (Raheem, Ahmad, Vishnu, & Imamuddin, 2014; Silayoi & Speece, 2007). Besides, packaging is one of the important component in product as it can help to differentiate the company's product with other company's product (Hussain, Ali, Ibrahim, Norren, Ahmad, 2015; Keller, 2009). In other words, packaging is one of the marketing strategies that is crucial in promoting, designing, and plays an important role in product differentiation. A research showed that an attractive packaging will capture consumer's attention and will increase people's purchase intention (Javed & Javed, 2015; Ranjbarian, 2009; Yeo, Tan, Lim, & Khoo, 2020). Furthermore, packaging visual cues such as labels, color, font style, packaging design, and printed information will affect consumer perceptions and consumer purchase intentions (Huang, Dahl, Li, & Zhou, 2019; Waheed, Khan, & Ahmad, 2018). Ahmed, Billo, and Lakhan (2012) and Aniuga & Ogba (2021) found that good packaging could lead to customer satisfaction which in turn will lead to repurchase intention. In this study, packaging refers to the appearance of the university and the detailed information about the programs, tuition fees, and departments that printed on the university's brochures and leaflet. From this, hypothesis 1 was developed.

> *H1: Packaging is positively related to customer satisfaction.*

3.2 Relationship Marketing and Customer Satisfaction

Relationship marketing is one of the successful marketing strategies that used to focus on long term goals and building long term relationships with the customers (Rahimi, Koseoglu, Ersoy, & Okumus, 2017). Gummesson (1994) indicated that relationship marketing has a strong emphasis on business to customer relationships within a customer relationship marketing paradigm. Besides, the social interactions between the company and customers have high connection with satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2017). Similarly, relationship marketing involves creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong

relationship with customers and other stakeholders (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). This is further supported by Rababah, Mohd, and Ibrahim (2011) that relationship marketing is about building customer-oriented culture and it is a strategy that used by the companies to acquire, enhance the profitability, and to retain customers. Additionally, relationship marketing have been widely utilized in service industries to enhance customer satisfaction and retention (Buttle & Maklan, 2019; Casais, Fernandes, & Sarmento, 2020; Pai & Tu, 2011). In other words, relationship marketing is crucial for an organization to increase customer satisfaction. In this study, relationship marketing refers to the marketing activities that the university used to build a long term relationship with the students. Thus, hypothesis 2 was formulated.

H2: Relationship marketing is positively related to customer satisfaction.

3.3 Price and Customer Satisfaction

Price is a "give" component rather than a "get" component from the customer's perspective (Zeithmal, 1988). Price plays a crucial role in consumer behaviour and consumer decision making process as it involve many aspects of psychology (Konuk, 2019). On a similar note, price is considered to be the most significant factor that affects consumer's choice (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong, 2002). As a result, price can lead to business survival or failure (Weisstein, Asgari, & Siew, 2014). According to Imran, Safwan, Rehman, Afzal, Ali, and Ali (2010), price reasonability also plays an important role in creating customer satisfaction. One of the reason customer switch to other company is due to price reasonability. Setting a right price is important to an organization as consumers are price conscious in their purchasing behaviour (Clemes, Gan, & Zhang, 2010). Customers who perceive price as reasonable will spread positive word-of-mouth about the company to others. This is further supported by Hamzah and Shamsuddin (2020) that the company will not have any problem in setting the price of the products when the customers are satisfied with the product. On the other hand, if customers perceive price as unreasonable, then they will switch to other company. Similarly, when customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with the overall price of the product, they may refer to price fairness, price-quality ratio, and price confidence (Matzler, Wurtele, & Renzl, 2006). As such, price has a direct influence on customer satisfaction (Cheng, Lai, & Yeung, 2008; Rama, 2020; Shamsudin, Nayan, Ishak, Esa, & Hassan, 2020; Varki & Colgate, 2001, Vyas & Raitani, 2014). In this study, price refers to the academic programme fee offered by the university. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was formulated.

H3: Price is positively related to customer satisfaction.

3.4 Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction

Brand image is a crucial factor of brand equity, the brand's ability to capture customer's attention (Aaker, 1991). Brand image enables an organization to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Lau & Lee, 1999). In other words, brand image can be used as a powerful tool to outperform their competitors. On a similar note, consumers are able to identify the needs that the brand satisfied and to differentiate the brand from its rivals when the brand image is successful (Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004). As a result, brand could increase consumer's demand towards a product. Moreover, brand image was the perceptions of

customers about the brand and it is also the current opinion of the customers about the brand (Kumar, 2019). Additionally, Da and Syed (2006) stated that if the customers are satisfied with the goods and services offered by a good brand, then they will recommend the goods and services to others. In other words, customers have less probability to switch to other brands and will repeat purchase. Brand image has been recognized as an important antecedent of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, prior researchers stated that, brand image is positively associated with customer satisfaction (Anwar, Min, & Dastagir, 2019; Chien & Chi, 2019; Cuong & Khoi, 2019; Cuong & Long, 2020; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2010; Koo, 2003; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Sondoh, Omar, Wahid, Ismail, & Harun, 2007; Song, Wang, & Han, 2019; Tu, Li, & Chih, 2013). As such, a distinctive brand image is the key for universities to compete in the competitive environment and in turn affects customer satisfaction. In this study, brand image refers to the reputation of the university. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was formulated.

H4: Brand image is positively related to customer satisfaction.

4. Methodology

Convenience sampling was used to select the respondents, who were the students that currently studying in universities in Johor, Malaysia. This study examined the impact of marketing strategies, namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image on customer satisfaction at the Institute of Higher Learning in Johor, Malaysia, as indicated in Figure 1. The items for the five constructs in this study were adopted from the studies by Keith, Kevin, Arthur, and Steve (2005), Kingsley (2017), Nelson (2007), Shwu and Ting (2014), and Stephen, Maznah, Nabsiah, and Amran (2007). The items, as shown in the Appendix, were pre-tested with 25 students who currently studying in universities in Johor, Malaysia. Some questions were re-worded to suit the context of the students in Johor. A total of 90 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and were used for analysis. In order to access the model, SmartPLS 3.0 or partial least squares (PLS) was applied for path modeling and bootstrapping (Chin, 1998) was used to analyze the data with 500 re-samples to generate the standard error of the estimate and *t*-values.
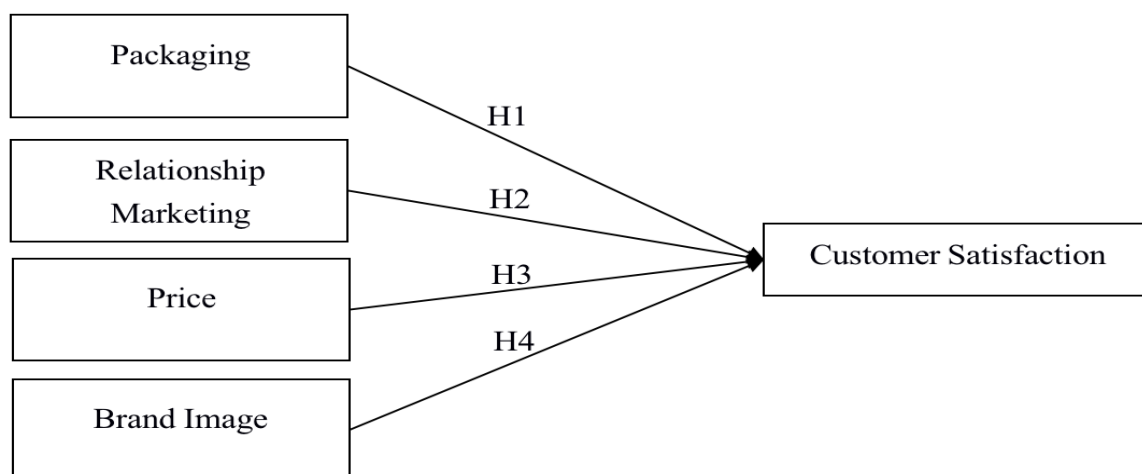
Figure 1. Research Model

5. Findings

5.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess measurement validity, reliability, and discriminant validity of the scales. Most of the item loadings in each construct, as shown in Table 2 and 3, were larger than the cut-off value of 0.5 (significant at p< .01), as mentioned by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006). Furthremore, Table 3 indicates that the average variance extracted (AVE) of each model construct exceeded the acceptable level of 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In terms of composite reliability, it was above the recommended value of 0.7, as recommended by Gefen, Straub, and Boundreau (2000) and Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle and Mena (2012). The Cronbach alpha values exceeded the ideal value of 0.7, as suggested by Nunnally (1978). Thus, this study achieved convergent validity as all indicators loaded higher on the hypothesized factors than on other factors.

Furthermore, the square roots of AVE were utilized to test the inter-correlations of the construct with other constructs in order to ensure discriminant validity (Chin, 2010). As shown in Table 4, all of the square roots of AVE exceeded the correlations with other variables. Thus, the measurement model was considered satisfactory with the evidence of adequate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 2. Loadings and Cross Loadings

	Brand Image	Customer Satisfaction	Packaging	Price	Relationship Marketing
Brand Image 1	**0.867**	0.552	0.567	0.361	0.472
Brand Image 2	**0.880**	0.484	0.566	0.378	0.495
Brand Image 3	**0.882**	0.559	0.572	0.492	0.455
Brand Image 4	**0.891**	0.469	0.574	0.420	0.480
Brand Image 5	**0.904**	0.646	0.659	0.491	0.594
Customer Satisfaction 1	0.542	**0.916**	0.599	0.450	0.684
Customer Satisfaction 2	0.616	**0.909**	0.647	0.411	0.705
Customer Satisfaction 3	0.684	**0.898**	0.627	0.463	0.671
Customer Satisfaction 4	0.440	**0.852**	0.512	0.519	0.588
Customer Satisfaction 5	0.474	**0.895**	0.683	0.556	0.631
Packaging 1	0.485	0.421	**0.743**	0.327	0.569
Packaging 2	0.516	0.699	**0.797**	0.546	0.552
Packaging 3	0.646	0.542	**0.843**	0.458	0.602
Packaging 4	0.507	0.561	**0.825**	0.388	0.622
Packaging 5	0.445	0.348	**0.686**	0.205	0.456
Price 1	0.402	0.392	0.434	**0.823**	0.336
Price 2	0.402	0.415	0.400	**0.881**	0.259
Price 3	0.479	0.518	0.502	**0.892**	0.355
Price 4	0.431	0.487	0.496	**0.899**	0.355
Price 5	0.425	0.512	0.448	**0.896**	0.394
Relationship Marketing 1	0.472	0.610	0.682	0.371	**0.827**
Relationship Marketing 2	0.451	0.631	0.553	0.351	**0.833**
Relationship Marketing 3	0.525	0.598	0.630	0.215	**0.843**
Relationship Marketing 4	0.431	0.643	0.525	0.327	**0.862**
Relationship Marketing 5	0.535	0.634	0.669	0.384	**0.878**

Table 3. Result of Measurement Model, Model Constructs, and Reliability Test

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Loadings	t-Value	Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha	Number of Items	CR[a]	AVE[b]
Packaging	Packaging 1	0.743	10.781	0.842	5(5)	0.886	0.610
	Packaging 2	0.797	20.561				
	Packaging 3	0.843	19.893				
	Packaging 4	0.825	21.360				
	Packaging 5	0.686	9.081				
Relationship Marketing	Relationship Marketing 1	0.827	16.750	0.903	5(5)	0.928	0.720
	Relationship Marketing 2	0.833	22.020				
	Relationship Marketing 3	0.843	18.247				
	Relationship Marketing 4	0.862	25.962				
	Relationship Marketing 5	0.878	29.879				
Price	Price 1	0.823	19.245	0.926	5(5)	0.944	0.772
	Price 2	0.881	25.633				
	Price 3	0.892	38.644				
	Price 4	0.899	35.909				
	Price 5	0.896	40.549				
Brand Image	Brand Image 1	0.867	25.079	0.931	5(5)	0.947	0.783
	Brand Image 2	0.880	23.170				
	Brand Image 3	0.882	32.367				
	Brand Image 4	0.891	24.953				
	Brand Image 5	0.904	38.058				
Customer Satisfaction	Customer Satisfaction 1	0.916	43.757	0.937	5(5)	0.952	0.800
	Customer Satisfaction 2	0.909	43.340				
	Customer Satisfaction 3	0.898	35.253				
	Customer Satisfaction 4	0.852	20.205				
	Customer Satisfaction 5	0.895	27.810				

Notes: [a]Composite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}.

[b]Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variance)}.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	Brand Image	Customer Satisfaction	Packaging	Price	Relationship Marketing
Brand Image	**0.885**				
Customer Satisfaction	0.620	**0.894**			
Packaging	0.668	0.688	**0.781**		
Price	0.488	0.534	0.521	**0.879**	
Relationship Marketing	0.568	0.735	0.720	0.390	**0.849**

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the AVE while the other entries represent the correlations.

5.2 Assessment of the Structural Model

The results of hypothesis testing are shown in Figure 2 and Table 5. As expected, the results confirmed that H2 and H3 were significantly related to customer satisfaction. Hence, hypotheses H2 and H3 were supported. On the other hand, the results showed that H1 and H4 were not significantly related to customer satisfaction. Therefore, H1 and H4 were not supported.
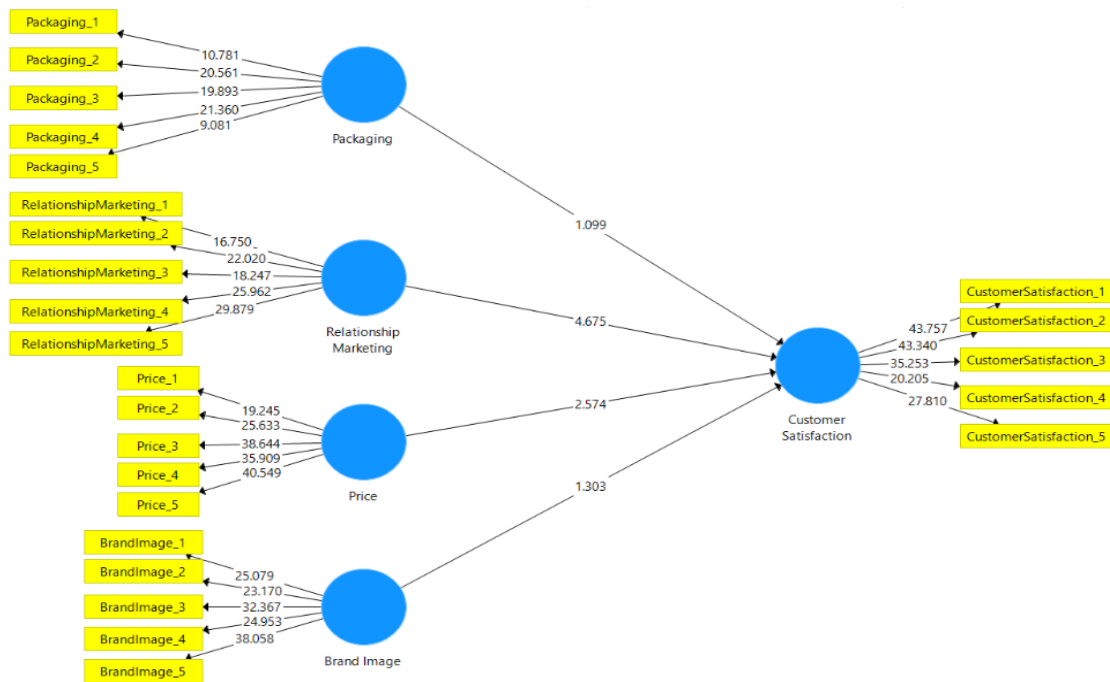

Figure 2. Research Model with t Value

Table 5. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta Value	t-value	Supported
H1	Packaging → customer satisfaction.	0.142	1.099	NO
H2	Relationship marketing → customer satisfaction.	0.460	4.675	YES
H3	Price → customer satisfaction.	0.200	2.574	YES
H4	Brand image → customer satisfaction.	0.167	1.303	NO

5.3 R-Square

The coefficient of determination, R-square (R^2) of customer satisfaction is 0.646, as shown in Table 6. This indicated that the four latent variables namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image moderately explain 64.6% of the variance in customer satisfaction. According to Cohen (1988), R-square value that is more than 0.5 and less than 0.7 is generally moderate effect size. Hence, the R^2 value in this study has a moderate effect size.

Table 6. R-Square

	R-Square (R^2)
Customer Satisfaction	0.646

6. Discussion

This study contributes to the customer satisfaction literature by verifying the relationships between marketing strategies, namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image and customer satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor. Firstly, surprisingly, the resulting analysis for hypothesis one (H1) revealed that packaging was not found to have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. This finding contrasted with the findings by Ahmed et al. (2012) and Aniuga and Ogba (2021), who confirmed that an attractive packaging will lead to customer satisfaction and in turn will increase the customer's repurchase intention. Besides, the results contrasted with the findings by Javed and Javed (2015), Ranjbarian (2009), and Yeo, Tan, Lim, and Khoo (2020) that a good packaging will capture consumer's attention and in turn will lead to customer purchase intention. It is believed that this contrasted result might be due to packaging has a short lifespan that influence the effectiveness of the university's packaging such as the information about the programs, tuition fees, and departments that printed on the university's brochures or leaflet on student's satisfaction. In other words, this type of packaging are easily thrown away or misplace by the students. This is supported by Hahladakis and Iacovidou (2018), Mutha, Patel, and Premnath (2006), and Rhein and Schmid (2020) that packaging such as single-use plastic and paper bags has a short lifespan as it is easily break and discarded by consumers. In addition, Kotler and Keller (2012) also stated that direct mail such as brochures have a "junk mail" image, in which customers might ignore or throw the printing material away. Hence, H1 was not supported.

Secondly, H2 showed that relationship marketing is positively related to customer satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor. This finding is congruent with the findings of Buttle and Maklan (2019), Casais, Fernandes, and Sarmento (2020), and Pai and Tu (2011), who found that relationship marketing could used to increase customer satisfaction in service industries. In other words, relationship marketing is one of the marketing strategy that could help an university to build a strong and long term relationship with the students and in turn increase the student's satisfaction. Similarly, this finding is also in line with the findings by Tussyadiah and Zach (2017), who mentioned that a good relationship between a company and customers could lead to high satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth. In addition, this findings also supported by Ibojo and Dunmade (2016), who found that a 1 per cent shift in relationship marketing will result in 81.1 per cent shift in customer satisfaction. This indicated that relationship marketing has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Besides, it is believed that the students will enjoy their study in an university when they form a strong relationship with the staff such as the lecturers and the staffs who works in student affairs and services department in the university. Thus, H2 was supported.

Thirdly, this study confirmed that the price set by the university is positively related to

customer satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor. This finding is consistent with the study by Imran et al. (2010), who suggested that a reasonable price plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction. Furthermore, this findings validates a number of past studies, such as the findings by Cheng et al. (2008), Rama (2020), Shamsudin et al. (2020), Varki and Colgate (2001), and Vyas and Raitani (2014), who found that price has a direct influence on customer satisfaction. Moreover, Matzler et al. (2006) also suggested that price fairness, price-quality ratio, and price confidence are the factors that could affect the customer satisfaction. As such, it is believed that the students perceived that the university offer the right combination of the service quality at a reasonable price. Therefore, H3 was supported.

Lastly, the analysis for H4 revealed that the brand image was not found to have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor. This findings contrasted with the findings by Anwar et al. (2019), Chien and Chi (2019), Cuong and Khoi (2019), Cuong and Long (2020), Kandampully and Suhartanto (2010), Koo (2003), Parasuraman et al. (1988), Sondoh et al. (2007), Song et al. (2019), and Tu et al. (2013), who mentioned that company who have a strong brand image will enhance customer satisfaction. Furthermore, this findings also contrasted with the findings by Da and Syed (2006), who found that a good and strong brand could enhance customer satisfaction, and in turn satisfied customers will spread positive word-of-mouth to others. It is believed that the rationale behind this contrasted results is due to the students does not really concern about the popularity of the brand of the university in Johor, especially during this pandemic season. On the other hand, students may concern more about the service quality that provided by the university and the relationship that they have with the university. This is further supported by the previous research conducted by Alves and Raposo (2007), Hasan, Ilias, Rahman, and Razak (2008), and Schijns (2021), who indicated that service quality is a key to satisfaction in higher education context. Students expect high quality content in exchange for the fees that they pay. In other words, students want high value for the money that they spent in the university. Hence, H4 was not supported.

7. Component that Contribute the Most to Customer Satisfaction

In this study, the component that contribute the most to student satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor is relationship marketing. As shown in Table 5, the beta value, β of relationship marketing is 0.460, which is the highest score among the rest of the variables. As such, relationship marketing is one of the factors that contribute the most to student satisfaction at the Institute of Higher Learning in Johor. Therefore, universities need to emphasize more on building strong and long term relationship with the students, especially during this pandemic in order to increase the number of student satisfaction, which in turn could ensure the universities' survival in this pandemic.

8. Implications

This research has a number of theoretical and practical implications for both scholars and practitioners, particularly in the domain of customer satisfaction. Firstly, this study represents the theoretical or empirical research about the marketing strategies, namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image in customer satisfaction. In the past, there

have been limited empirical research on marketing strategies, more so from the students' perspective. Thus, the framework of this research provides a better understanding of how packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image will have tremendous impact on customer satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. Secondly, this study provide useful guidelines for the scholars who are interested on the study of customer satisfaction. Without any doubt, the research on customer satisfaction from the students' perspectives is still limited in its ability to provide an unequivocal guidelines.

It is believed that marketing strategies is needed because it is the key to achieve customer satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. This research would added the value to the literature on customer satisfaction, especially in Johor settings since there are limited literatures on similar setting. Furthermore, this study enables universities to recognize the importance of marketing strategies, namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image in student satisfaction. As such, this would have a significant contribution to customer satisfaction given the fact that if universities realise the importance of marketing strategies, especially relationship marketing and price in achieving student satisfaction during this pandemic, it can help the universities to achieve competitive advantage.

9. Limitation and Direction for Future Research

There are restrictions and limitations during the development and implementation of this research. Firstly, this study only cover the higher education institutions in Johor. In other words, this study may not be applicable to other higher education institutions in Malaysia. However, the results have served as a basic research for future discussion on marketing strategies and customer satisfaction. Secondly, the sample size is small to generalize the results to other higher education institutions in other states in Malaysia. Thus, for further studies, it would be interesting to test the variables in other higher education institutions in other states in Malaysia to see if the reliability and validity persist.

10. Conclusion

It is believed that the findings have provided a compelling evidence on the importance of marketing strategies on customer satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. Although marketing strategies have been studied in previous researches, no known researches have been found to empirically study specifically on marketing strategies, namely, packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image in customer satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. Thus, it is worth to examine the impact of marketing strategies on customer satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. This study would excite the universities about the importance of packaging, relationship marketing, price, and brand image in achieving student satisfaction at the higher education institutions in Johor. Moreover, this research claims to understand the effectiveness of marketing strategies on customer satisfaction from the students' point of view. Results have shown that relationship marketing and price are the key elements in achieving student satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. This is so because students who have a strong and long term relationship with the lecturers and staffs who works in the university will enables them to enjoy their study in an university. Furthermore, students perceived that the university offer the right

combination of service quality at a reasonable price. Moreover, results also indicated that packaging and brand image do not have a positive relationship on customer satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. As such, universities should emphasize more on relationship marketing and price as the marketing strategies to enhance student satisfaction at higher education institutions in Johor. Thus, this will enable higher education institutions in Johor to survive during this pandemic and in turn achieve competitive advantage.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Items of the Questionnaire

Items of Packaging	
Packaging 1	I think that the academic programme are attractive.
Packaging 2	I think that the campus of the university are attractive.
Packaging 3	I think that the programme package of this university are more interesting than other university.
Packaging 4	I think that university offers more modern facilities than other university.
Packaging 5	I think that the academic programme package of university offers more employment opportunity after graduate.

Source: Kingsley (2017), Shwu & Ting (2014)

Items of Relationship Marketing	
Relationship Marketing 1	I think that the employees in this university able to handle conflicts well.
Relationship Marketing 2	I think that the employees in this university are reliable in communicating with me.
Relationship Marketing 3	I think that the employees in this university is committed to provide a good education services.
Relationship Marketing 4	I think that the employees in this university serve me with passion.
Relationship Marketing 5	I think that the employees in this university is flexible in serving my needs.

Source: Keith, Kevin, Arthur, & Steve (2005), Nelson (2007)

Items of Price	
Price 1	I think that the university offers the best price for the programme I want.
Price 2	I think that the costs in this university seem reasonable for what I get.
Price 3	I think that the price of the education services meet my expectations.
Price 4	I think that the price of the tuition fee is worth for the academic programme.
Price 5	I think that the price of the tuition fee attracts me to enrol in this university.

Source: Kingsley (2017), Shwu & Ting (2014)

Items of Brand Image	
Brand Image 1	I think that the brand image of the university performs as it promises.
Brand Image 2	I think that the brand image of the university is reliable.
Brand Image 3	I think that the brand image of the university makes me feel proud.
Brand Image 4	I think that the brand image of the university have a good reputation.
Brand Image 5	I think that the brand image of the university makes me feel good.

Source: Stephen, Maznah, Nabsiah, & Amran (2007)

Items of Customer Satisfaction	
Customer Satisfaction 1	I am satisfied with the service provided by the employees in this university.
Customer Satisfaction 2	I am satisfied with the lecture hall.
Customer Satisfaction 3	I am satisfied with the programme offered.
Customer Satisfaction 4	I am satisfied with the university's physical facilities.
Customer Satisfaction 5	I am satisfied with the environment in the university.

Source: Shwu & Ting (2014)

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