

## **DIFFERENCES IN ADVERTISING OF FOR-PROFIT AND NON-PROFIT UNIVERSITIES**

Teddi A. Joyce, University of South Dakota

Charles A. Lubbers, University of South Dakota

Brandon H. Nutting, University of Nebraska—Lincoln

### **ABSTRACT**

External economic pressures and a shift from a manufacturing economy to a more knowledge-based economy have many people turning to higher education. To meet educational and training demands of the workforce, traditional, non-profit colleges and universities as well as for-profit institutions use multiple techniques to attract new students and influence enrollment decisions. Many institutions use video advertisements and television commercials as a way to reach prospective students. This exploratory study uses content analysis to assess the message variables in non-profit and for-profit institutional communication, specifically video advertisements prior to the enactment of the federal gainful employment regulations, high profile for-profit institutional closures and Federal Trade Commission litigation related to misleading advertisements that appeared on television, radio, print, online and other media. Results of the content analysis suggest non-profit institutions used advertising messages that are more transformational and emotional in nature to attract and recruit their primary demographic as well as speak to myriad stakeholders including parents and alumni. For-profit institutions more frequently used informational messages but employed a more balanced approach or tempered the informational messages with an emotional approach in messaging. Differences were also found based on message variables of belonging and presentation of future opportunities.

*Keywords:* For-profit institutions, non-profit institutions, advertising, marketing

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2015 and 2016 closures of high-profile, for-profit institutions including Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute coupled with DeVry University's December 2016, \$100 million settlement of a Federal Trade Commission lawsuit based on allegations of misleading prospective students with advertisements could be a sign of the for-profit education bubble busting. Since 2000, for-profit institutions have served approximately 11% of the nation's undergraduate population (Public Agenda, 2013).

State and federal investigations that have included charges of predatory lending and false advertising, coupled with the federal gainful employment regulations, impact the college and university requirements for Title IV funding. This regulation also requires for-profit higher education institutions and non-degree programs at community colleges to meet minimum thresholds of debt-to-income rates.

With some form of postsecondary education a real economic necessity, coupled with questions about institutional accountability, students face tough choices about where to turn for higher education. For students 18-55 who do not hold an associate's or bachelor's degree, the most common sources of information on higher education are people they know and advertisements on television, billboards, and other media (Public Agenda, 2013). In one study, 64% of students between the ages of 18 and 55 not holding any type of degree learned about colleges from advertisements (Public Agenda, 2013).

While individuals are struggling to find non-advertisement information about colleges and universities, those same institutions are under increasing pressure to improve enrollment figures. The total number of high school graduates is expected to decrease in all ten of the graduating classes between 2014 and 2023 (Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education [WICHE], 2016). Between 1991 and 2011, the 25-44 year old population in the United States increased only 1%; however, adult enrollment in both undergraduate and graduate programs increased by more than 50% (Eduventures, 2012). Moreover, the federal government and others have set ambitious higher education attainment goals for the nation. For example, the Lumina Foundation calls for 60% of Americans to attain “high quality degrees and credentials” by 2025, up from the approximately 40% in 2011 (Lumina Foundation, 2012).

In addition to the increasing pressures to recruit, much has been written about the current budgetary issues and shortfalls facing higher education. Higher education's significant challenges include reductions in state appropriations, changing student expectations, growth in distance learning, erosion of public trust, the continued expanding role of technology, and public pressures centered on accountability (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011).

These changes in the higher education landscape pit institutions against each other for enrollment and resources. Yet, not even a generation ago, colleges and universities thrived in an environment of stable funding, increasing student enrollment, predictable student needs and learning patterns, and limited overt competition among schools. Twenty years ago economic, demographic, and political changes forced colleges and universities into an ambiguous arena—one that looks more and more like a competitive marketplace (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). This increased competition for students, faculty, and resources means institutional survival is about creating, enhancing, and maintaining a strong image in the marketplace. Thus, the current investigation seeks to learn more about one of the most commonly used recruitment tools: the video advertisement.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **For-Profit Institutions**

In the 1990s, two-thirds of for-profit colleges enrolled students in training programs (such as cosmetology and truck driving) lasting less than one year (Eduventures, 2012). According to the United States Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee (2012), while certificate and diploma programs continued to grow, the primary program growth in for-profits were degree programs. Between 2004 and 2012, the number of associate degrees awarded by for-profit colleges increased 77% and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded increased 136% (2012).

For-profit institutions, like University of Phoenix and Ashford University, compete against the traditional, non-profit public colleges and universities. Initially, these for-profits offered

specialized programs that met at convenient times for a working adult or classes that were only online (Anctil, 2008). Academic convenience and providing marketable skills that would lead to a good job were a common positioning statement, and for consumers seeking a degree, for-profits provided that flexibility. In 2009, for-profit institutions comprised 43% of all postsecondary institutions in the U.S. and approximately 10% of the undergraduate enrollment (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012). Yet, this sector received 25% of the total Department of Education student aid program funds (United States Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee, 2012). It is clear that for-profit education with its favorable demographics and alternative solutions for higher education created competition for both the adult learners seeking knowledge and skills directly relevant to the workplace as well as for traditional-aged students desiring online learning and flexibility.

### **Institutional Recruitment and Service Marketing**

The higher education literature frequently focuses on the strategies and tactics colleges and universities use to reach the marketplace. Colleges and universities employ several techniques to recruit students—face-to-face communication, direct mail, social media, electronic communication, websites, telemarketing, print and multimedia advertising, etc. The initial goal of recruitment promotional materials, television commercials and taglines is to reach prospective students while building an image and expectations. The ultimate goal is to persuade students that a particular institution is better than the others and thus, influence enrollment. Dimensions of image commonly recognized as influencing the college selection process include academic reputation, campus appearance, cost, personal attention, location, distance from home, career placement, size, social activities, and program of study (Huddleston & Karr, 1982). It is how institutions match those features with the market's needs and demands or appeal to the market that determine enrollment success.

Higher education recruitment requires making connections with services and relationships between and among a variety of constituencies, and the student decision-making process is complicated (Anctil, 2008). According to Dann (2008), the service marketing principle revolves around a customer receiving an experience or emotion or other benefit. Many institutions use the demonstration of experience and benefit at the core of their messaging.

Harris (2009) proposed five major themes that were consistent throughout most institutional messages (campus characteristics, academics, co-curricular engagement, prestige building, and mission/purpose). In their 2012 study on commercials used by 120 NCAA FBS schools Clayton, Cavanagh, and Hettche built on Harris' work and added belonging as a central theme/message. The next section reviews literature on advertising and branding in higher education.

### **Advertising and Branding in Higher Education**

A core element of traditional marketing is differentiation, and for a university, differentiation from its peers is viewed as central to its messaging (Clayton et al., 2012; Klassen, 2000; Parmeswaran & Glowacha, 1995). Stephenson, Heckert, and Yerger (2016) stated that branding techniques are used in higher education as a means to differentiate institutions within the marketplace to attract prospective students. For higher education, the institutional brand reflects not only the distinguishing features, but also the capacity to satisfy students' needs while helping potential

students make smart enrollment decisions (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009). And as part of the institutional brand, the brand promise reflects those features that people choose to buy into whether or not those features are emotional, tangible or invisible, which are translated as part of the marketing message (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009).

Institutional marketing budgets are then spent with an eye toward persuading students that a school is different and offers benefits no other school can match. In its benchmark report on the cost of recruiting undergraduate students, Noel-Levitz (2011) found that for the 2010-2011 year, the median cost per enrolled undergraduates at four-year private colleges was \$2,185 and \$457 per enrolled students for four-year public institutions. These expenditures are made as institutions attempt to differentiate themselves from the competition as a means of increasing student enrollment.

Zemsky, Wegner, and Massy (2005) argued that within higher education marketing, there is a struggle to distinguish institutions based on quality, value, and services. This is consistent with Noel-Levitz's (2012) study that demonstrated the factors most important in the college selection process were cost, financial aid, and academic reputation.

Clayton et al. (2012) and Harris (2009) offer descriptions of the importance of brand development messaging in higher education. Within higher education, there is an additional need to facilitate relationships and understanding beyond the product and its user. The audiences likely to view college/university marketing materials generally, and commercials specifically, may reach well beyond prospective students and include faculty, staff, state officials, alumni, donors, current students, employers, and the general community.

In a study of enrollment offices, Noel-Levitz (2011) reported that in spite of the recent budget challenges for higher education that included higher education budget reductions in most states, enrollment office budgets at four-year public have been consistent and even increased between 2009-10 and 2011-12. To reach prospective students, traditional, non-profit institutions engage in multiple promotional activities including campus visits/open houses, website promotion, brochures, direct mail, electronic mail, and advertising.

For the for-profits, advertising is front and center in their marketing efforts. In addition to billboards and radio and television advertising, it is estimated that the Apollo Group (University of Phoenix) spends nearly \$400,000 a day just on its Google advertising (Chen, 2012). From 2000 to 2009, enrollment in the for-profit sector tripled (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012). Clearly, marketing and advertising pay.

### **Advertising Messaging**

The informational (rational) view can be distinguished from the transformational (emotional) view. The informational view seeks to provide factual information about a brand while the transformation message is about the experience of using the brand and having a sense of shared meaning with the brand's consumers (Hwang, McMillan, & Lee, 2003). In other words, a rational approach related to a college or university degree would focus on the functional need for the degree or the measurable benefits one would see in terms of career earnings or advancement. Whereas the emotional appeal works to target some psychological or symbolic need and stirs up emotions.

While extensive research exists regarding the informative and the transformative appeals used in advertising, only a few higher education studies on institutional advertisements (commercials) offer insights into the content of television commercials. The advertisements used in these studies focus on colleges and universities commercials that have football teams with televised games (Clayton et al., 2012) or during various college football bowl games (Harris, 2009; Tobolowsky & Lowery, 2006). Those studies exclude the for-profit institutions, as they do not field athletic teams. Thus, the current investigation attempts to determine the message elements in higher education recruitment videos. Additionally, the study attempts to locate differences in the message elements employed by non-profit and for-profit institutions.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The literature review leads to several research questions that this study was designed to explore.

- RQ1: Are there differences in the audio messaging elements used by for-profit and non-profit institutions to promote their brand in video advertisements?
- RQ2: Are there differences in the visual messaging elements used by for-profit and non-profit institutions to promote their brand in video advertisements?
- RQ3: Are there differences in the audio approaches (music dominated, voiceover dominated, on-screen talent dominated) in for-profit and non-profit institutional messaging in video advertisements?
- RQ4: Are there differences in the messages (informational vs. transformational) used by non-profit colleges and universities and for-profit institutions in their video advertisements?
- RQ5: Does the commercial approach (rational, emotional, or balanced) differ between non-profit colleges and universities and for-profit institutions in their video advertisements?

### **METHOD**

The goal of this study is to examine the differences in advertised messages between traditional universities (not-profit) and for-profit universities prior to the 2016 Federal Trade Commission lawsuits and the shuttering of some of the for-profit institutions as part of the Department of Education's investigations. A content analysis was employed using a codebook developed by Clayton et al. (2012) to examine the advertising messages of NCAA universities. The codebook constructed by Clayton et al. contains three distinct categories for analysis. These categories are broken down into audio depictions, video depictions, and message type. Coders reviewed/coded the video advertisement at least three times, once for each of the three areas on the coding sheet.

Two criteria were established for the selection of universities for this investigation. First, we wanted to select the universities with the largest enrollments. For traditional universities, community colleges were excluded because they do not offer bachelor's degrees. For the institutions selected in the for-profit sector, in addition to being in the top 10 based on enrollment,

the universities had to conduct degree programs leading to at least a bachelor’s degree. Second, it was important to select materials that were developed prior to the public debate on for-profit universities that occurred in 2013-2015 and led to the 2016 FTC Lawsuits. Thus, the decision was made to use materials from 2012. The sampling frame for this particular study includes the top ten universities by enrollment for both for-profit and traditional universities from 2012 based on data selected from the Institute of Education Sciences (IPEDS) using online and campus-based enrollments.

Figure 1. Universities Selected for Video Advertising Analysis

<u>For Profit (alpha order)</u>	<u>Non-profit (alpha order)</u>
Ashford University	Arizona State University
Capella University	Florida International University
Colorado Technical University*	Michigan State University
DeVry University	Ohio State University
ITT Tech**	Pennsylvania State University
Kaplan University*	Texas A&M University
Strayer University	University of Central Florida
Touro University	University of Florida
University of Phoenix*	University of Minnesota
Walden University	University of Texas at Austin

\* Institutions that have undergone restructuring since data collection in 2012.  
 \*\* Institutions that have closed since the data collection in 2012.

Using the selection criteria outlined in the previous paragraph a total of 31 advertisements representing the 20 selected institutions (see figure 1) were discovered and were included in the analysis. Seventeen of the 31 videos represented the ten for-profit institutions. The commercials for each university were selected from advertising campaigns for each university prior to the gainful employment regulations and obtained from university websites or university sponsored YouTube channels in 2013 and identified as institutional commercials. All 31 advertisements used were 15, 30, or 60 seconds in length. Four of the advertisements used were 15 seconds, four were 60 seconds and the remaining 23 videos were 30 seconds.

Coders for this study included the lead author and a second coder who works in higher education marketing and was not affiliated with the project or any of the institutions selected. The two coders worked independently and overall agreement between the two coders was 97%.

## RESULTS

Using content analysis of the 31 video advertisements of 15, 30, and 60 seconds in length, audio and video messaging in the commercials were examined. The for-profit institutions utilized an average 1.8 different visual components and 2.1 audio components for 3.9 message elements per

video advertisement. Non-profits averaged 6 video and 2.1 audio for a combined 8.1 message components per video advertisement.

### **Research Questions**

The remainder of the results section will provide results related to the previously presented research questions.

***RQ1: Are there differences in the audio messaging elements used by for-profit and non-profit institutions to promote their brand in video advertisements?***

***RQ2: Are there differences in the visual messaging elements used by for-profit and non-profit institutions to promote their brand in video advertisements?***

In an attempt to determine if institutional messages differed in for-profit and non-profit institutional video advertisements, 21 variables (see Table 1) used by Clayton et al. (2012) were used to explore the commercials' message elements. As expected, several variables differed in their visual and auditory depictions. Elements of scenic beauty, NCAA Athletics (which were exclusive to the non-profits in this sample), performing arts, nostalgia, and study abroad were more likely to be presented visually, and these variables were not present in any of the for-profit messaging. However, students were more frequently shown or discussed as being in a classroom in for-profit university commercials (7 compared to 2 of the non-profit institutions).

Combining the visual and auditory elements, the message elements of belonging and future opportunities were the most frequently used. The future opportunities element was more frequently stressed in the for-profit messaging, while belonging was more frequently featured the non-profit video advertisements. Clayton et al. (2012, pp. 202-204) defined belonging as, "students or alumni having a unique, shared experience/bond, or focus on the community aspect of the university." This sense of belonging was demonstrated a combined 19 times in traditional universities compared to six times of for-profit universities. The opposite was true when considering the variable future opportunities. Clayton et al. defined future opportunities as, "references that suggest or imply that a college/university education will lead to success in one's future life" (pp. 202-204).

Table 1. Message Elements in Television Advertisements for College and Universities

Message Elements	Visual		Audio		Combined		Tot	Diff
	Profit N, %	Nonprof N, %	Profit N, %	Nonp N, %	Profit N	Nonp N		
Belonging	2, 11.8	10, 71.4	4, 23.5	9, 64.3	6	19	25	13
Future Opportunities	9, 52.9	6, 42.9	9, 52.9	1, 7.1	18	7	25	11
Human Knowledge	1, 5.9	4, 28.6	6, 35.3	5, 35.7	7	9	16	2
Student Oriented	5, 29.4	3, 21.4	5, 29.4	-	10	3	13	7
Graduation	2, 11.8	8, 57.1	2, 11.8	1, 7.1	4	9	13	5
Research Accomplishments	1, 5.9	7, 50.0	1, 5.9	3, 21.4	2	10	12	8
NCAA Athletics	-	10, 71.4	-	1, 7.1	0	11	11	11
Individuals in laboratory	3, 17.6	7, 50.0	1, 5.9	-	4	7	11	3
Students in Classroom	5, 29.4	2, 14.3	2, 11.8	-	7	2	9	5
International Reach	-	4, 28.6	1, 5.9	3, 21.4	1	7	8	6
Performance Arts	-	6, 42.9	-	1, 7.1	-	7	7	7
Scenic Beauty	-	5, 35.7	-	1, 7.1	-	6	6	6
Volunteerism/Service	-	4, 28.6	1, 5.9	1, 7.1	1	5	6	4
Embrace Ethical Discourse	1, 5.9	1, 7.1	2, 11.8	1, 7.1	3	2	5	1
Non-NCAA Athletics	1, 5.9	3, 21.4	-	-	1	3	4	2
History/Nostalgia	-	1, 7.1	-	2, 14.3	-	3	3	3
Study Abroad	-	3, 21.4	-	-	-	3	3	3
Faculty of Distinction	1, 5.9	-	1, 5.9	-	2	-	2	2
Alumni of Distinction	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Student Scholars	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
University Administrator	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	31	84	35	29	66	113		

When combining visual and audio messages, seven (41.2%) of for-profit universities video advertisements had the element of students in a classroom compared to just two (14.3%) of traditional universities videos. Advertisements for traditional universities showed students at graduation in nine (64.2%) of the messages compared to four (23.6%) of for-profit universities. This variable was demonstrated in for-profit university advertisements a combined 18 times compared to just seven times in non-profit university videos.

Informational advertising provides the consumer with factual, relevant brand data that is obviously important and accepted by the consumer as verifiable (Puto & Wells, 1984). For-profit universities were more likely to take an informational approach with ten (58.8%) of advertisements taking that approach, while only two (14.3%) of the non-profits were informational.

Addressing the research questions, RQ1 and RQ2, the results from the content analysis as presented on table 1 suggest that being shown working in a classroom is more important for the for-profit institutions (seven of the nine instances of students in classroom). Additionally, non-profit institutions are far more likely to use messages of belonging, research accomplishments, NCAA athletics, performance arts and visual beauty of the campus. For-profit advertisements were more likely to suggest that enrollment in the institution would lead to future opportunities as well as featuring the elements of graduation, being student-oriented, and showing students in a classroom. The difference between the number of times an element was used in for-profit advertisements and the non-profit advertisements is noted in the far right column of table 1.

***RQ3: Are there differences in the audio approaches (music dominated, voiceover dominated, on-screen talent dominated) in for-profit and non-profit institutional messaging in video advertisements?***

Although present in all the video advertisements reviewed, music was not the dominant approach. As noted in table 2, the voiceover was clearly the most frequently used audio approach, with almost two-thirds of the non-profit and over three-fourths of the for-profit ads featuring a voiceover as the dominant audio characteristic. In general, there were no major differences in the major audio approach taken by non-profit and for-profit institutions.

Table 2. Use of Audio Approaches in Non-profit and For-profit Video Advertisements

	Music	Voiceover	On-Screen	Total
Non-profit	3, 21.4%	9, 64.3%	2, 14.3%	14
For-profit	2, 11.8%	14, 82.3%	1, 5.9%	17

The codebook used by Clayton et al. (2012) also examined the overall message elements of the advertisements. These overall message variables examined if the advertisements were informational (the message had verifiable factual information) or transformational (associations of unique experiences with the institution). The approach (rational, emotional, or mixed) and the style elements of the commercial were also categorized.

***RQ4: Are there differences in the messages (informational vs. transformational) used by non-profit colleges and universities and for-profit institutions in their video advertisements?***

The review of literature discusses the importance of brand value as well as advertising appeals based on informational or emotional approaches. As noted in table 3, in the case of the non-profit messages, 12 (85.7%) were rated as connecting the viewer to a unique set of psychological characteristics or an emotional appeal to evoke a positive feeling with the institution. Only two of the non-profit videos were viewed as having informational as the dominant advertising message.

Table 3. Use of Messages in Non-profit and For-Profit Video Advertising

	Informational	Transformational	Total
Non-profit	2, 14.3%	12, 85.7%	14
For-profit	10, 58.8%	7, 41.2%	17

For the for-profit institutions in this sample, ten (58.8%) instances of the advertising messaging were informational, providing the viewer with factual, relevant information about the institution, while seven (41.2%) were transformational. Thus, while the for-profit ads were more balanced in the message category, the non-profit video advertisements strongly favored transformational messages.

***RQ5: Does the commercial approach (rational, emotional, or balanced) differ between non-profit colleges and universities and for-profit institutions in their video advertisements?***

An emotional approach was viewed as an appeal to feelings not reason. As indicated on table 4, ten (71.4%) of the non-profit videos were seen as presenting an emotional commercial approach while four (28.6%) videos presented a balanced (rational and emotional presentation). None of the non-profit video advertisements were seen as taking a rational approach only to messaging. The for-profit advertisements used in this study were more evenly split in their approach. Seven (41.2%) were viewed as emotional, seven (41.2%) balanced, and three (17.6%) rational.

Table 4. Use of Commercial Approach in Non-profit and For-profit Video Advertising

	Balanced	Emotional	Rational	Total
Non-profit	4, 28.6%	10, 71.4%	0	14
For-profit	7, 41.2%	7, 41.2%	3, 17.6%	17

## DISCUSSION

While traditionally the student bodies at non-profit and for-profit institutions have differed, market pressure on most traditional, non-profit institutions caused them to respond with increased marketing and advertising (Anctil, 2008). More than just a collection of characteristics designed to brand an institution, video advertisements match product elements with the needs and interests of particular student populations. The initial results of this study indicate that while both types of institutions use advertising as a portion of their promotional activities, there are differences in how traditional, non-profit universities, and for-profit universities use messages to entice students.

At the time of these campaigns for-profit institutions seemed to be capitalizing on the record numbers of Americans that were turning to higher education to give them an edge in the job market. And, in turn, for-profit institutions became one of the fastest growing sectors of higher education and featured messages related to future opportunities. For any institution, increasing enrollments generally means more fiscal resources. Numerous educational studies show that students are

interested in future opportunities, and positioning advertising around an appeal to future employment may be an area where traditional, non-profit institutions came up short in presenting a sense of future opportunities compared to the for-profit institutions. Instead, as noted on table 1, traditional non-profit institutions emphasized a sense of belonging, research accomplishments, athletics, performance arts, and the beauty of the campus.

Rational appeals in advertising messaging tend to focus on the features of a product and/or the benefits derived from the product. This demonstration of a rational-based appeal is of particular interest in this study because according to the 2012 Freshman Survey, the ability to get a better job was a very important reason to go to college and ranked as a very important reason to attend college with an all-time high of 88% of respondents (Sander, 2013). And, by 2016's Freshman Survey, the job outlook response was at an all-time high, where 60% of students said whether a college's graduates land good jobs was a 'very important' consideration in choosing a school (Kueppers, 2016).

For-profit universities are less likely to be coded as using transformational elements/approaches in their video messaging. This along with other variables suggests that for-profit university commercials are less likely to attempt to develop a sense of belonging between the student and the organization and more likely to focus on future opportunities. The accountability and transparency components of the gainful employment regulation are designed to ensure that students receiving federal aid are enrolled in programs that prepare them for gainful employment in a recognized occupation. These advertisements might have foreshadowed some of the recent for-profit litigation as the claim of future opportunities upon graduation touted in advertisements coupled with the debt-to-income ratio is at the center of for-profit closures and the 2016 DeVry lawsuit.

Emotional message elements in advertising make the experience of using the product richer and more enjoyable while connecting the experience of the advertisement to the brand (Puto & Wells, 1984). The dimensions of image that build on the brand promise are often intangible, thus it was not surprising that 85.7% of the non-profit advertising messages were transformational in nature in an attempt to persuade students that the institution is different and offers benefits no other school can match. It is how institutions match those features with the market's needs and demands or appeal that may determine brand position.

In the case of message elements promoting a sense of belonging, the non-profits, clearly put greater emphasis on belonging with the tone of their messages. Using the definition of belonging from Clayton et al. (2012), where belonging was operationalized as visually capturing students or alumni having a unique, shared experience/bond or focusing on the community aspect of the university or speaking to members of the institution being 'one', or place heavy emphasis on the collective nature of the community 'we', non-profits put greater emphasis on trying to arouse emotions or positive feelings that would enhance the uniqueness of the experience.

Adult prospective students are looking for a positive and empowering educational experience, and they hope to enter a program that trains them directly for a job all while having instructors who care about them and know how to teach (Public Agenda, 2013). Interestingly, both traditional and for-profit university advertisements were more likely to be coded as emotional or balanced as

opposed to rational. The use of this approach may have been crucial in positioning the for-profits as not being different (educationally) than the non-profits and attracting a broader audience.

Although the number of for-profit and non-profit institutions in this exploratory study is limited, the study does illustrate the need for research in the area of the higher education advertising messages, message placements, as well as expenditures. A 2012 Senate investigation found that 15 of the largest for-profit colleges received 86% of their revenue from federal student aid programs and spent 23% of their budgets on some form of student recruitment including advertising, while non-profits spent less than a percent of their revenues on recruitment (Douglas-Gabriel, 2015).

The results of the current investigation offer several topics for further investigation. This study did not attempt to examine data regarding message placements or budgetary expenditures, so those areas are important ones for future investigations. While reviewing the type of audio approach, one factor not reviewed was whether or not the talent was male or female. There are a variety of studies that examine the tonality and gender of the voiceover artist in terms of building audience trust and brand recall. Both of which may be important to successfully reaching and enrolling students in for-profit and non-profit institutions.

This study investigated the advertising messages of for-profit and non-profit institutions prior to the implementation of several federal regulations and high-profile lawsuits aimed at for-profit institutions. All video advertisements were content analyzed based on the coding frame used by Clayton et al. (2012). In the case of institutional advertising if understanding the wants and needs of prospective students can help those students make better enrollment decisions, it is worth examining the link between the advertising messages and the type of appeals used. A unique characteristic of this study was the ability to examine for-profit and non-profit higher educational advertisements created in an era of limited federal oversight. With the changes in state and federal regulations, future research might include a larger sample size of non-profit and for-profit institutions' advertising messages since the implementation of these regulations, how attractive the messaging appeals are to students, and which content messages resonate with students.

## REFERENCES

- Altbach, P. G., Gumport, P. J., & Berdahl, R. O. (2011). American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ancil, E. J. (2008). Marketing and advertising in higher education. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 34(2), 19-30.
- Bennett, R., & Ali-Choudhury, R. (2009). Prospective students' perception of university brands: An empirical study. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19, 85-107.
- Chen, K. (2012, December 4). How for-profit colleges ace marketing and flunk education. Retrieved from [www.fool.com/investigating/general/2012/12/04/how-for-profit-college-ace-marketing-flunk-educat.aspx](http://www.fool.com/investigating/general/2012/12/04/how-for-profit-college-ace-marketing-flunk-educat.aspx)

- Clayton, M. J., Cavanagh, K. V., & Hettche, M. (2012). Institutional branding: A content analysis of public service announcements from American universities. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 22(2), 182-205.
- Dann, S. (2008). Applying services marketing principles to postgraduate supervision. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 16(4), 333-46.
- Douglas-Gabriel, D. (2015, July 30). Slick for-profit college marketing is starting to backfire. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/07/30/the-slick-ways-for-profit-colleges-market-themselves-is-backfiring/?utm\\_term=.fa7896f214ba](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/07/30/the-slick-ways-for-profit-colleges-market-themselves-is-backfiring/?utm_term=.fa7896f214ba)
- Eduventures. (2012, August). The adult higher education consumer. Retrieved from [http://www.usnews.com/pubfiles/the\\_adult\\_higher\\_education\\_consumer\\_2012.pdf](http://www.usnews.com/pubfiles/the_adult_higher_education_consumer_2012.pdf)
- Gioia, D. A., & Thomas, J. B. (1996). Identity, image and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41(2), 307-404.
- Harris, M. S. (2009). Message in a bottle: University advertising during bowl games. *Innovative Higher Education*, 33(5), 285-296.
- Huddleston, T., & Karr, M.B. (1982). Assessing college image. *College and University*, 57(4), 364-370.
- Hwang, J. S., McMillan, S. J., & Lee, G. (2003). Corporate web sites as advertising: An analysis of function, audience, and message strategy. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 3(2). Retrieved from <http://jiad-org.adprofession.com/article32.html>
- Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2012, July). A new classification scheme for for-profit institutions. Retrieved from [http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/a-f/\(Report\)\\_For-Profits\\_Classification\\_July\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/a-f/(Report)_For-Profits_Classification_July_2012.pdf)
- Klassen, M. L. (2000). Lots of fun, not much work, and no hassles: Marketing images of higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10(2), 11-26.
- Kueppers, C. (2016, February 11). Today's freshman class is the most likely to protest in half a century. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Today-a-Freshman-Class-is/235273>.
- Lumina Foundation. (2012). A stronger nation through higher education: Visualizing data to help us achieve a big goal for college attainment. Retrieved from [http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A\\_stronger\\_nation\\_through\\_higher\\_education-2013.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education-2013.pdf)
- Noel-Levitz. (2012). Why did they enroll: The factors influencing college choice. Retrieved from <https://www.noellevitz.com>

- Noel-Levitz. (2011). 2011 Cost of recruiting an undergraduate student: Benchmarks for four-year and two-year institutions. Retrieved from [https://www.noellevitz.com/documents/shared/Papers\\_and\\_Research/2011/2011%20Cost%20of%20Recruiting%20Undergraduate%20Students.pdf](https://www.noellevitz.com/documents/shared/Papers_and_Research/2011/2011%20Cost%20of%20Recruiting%20Undergraduate%20Students.pdf)
- Parmeswaran, R., & Glowacka, A. E. (1995). University image: An information processing perspective. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 6, 41-56.
- Public Agenda. (November, 2013). Is college worth it for me?: Adults without degrees think about going (back) to school. Retrieved from <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/is-college-worth-it-for-me>
- Puto, C. P., & Wells, W. D. (1984). Informational and transformational advertising: The differential effects of time. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 11, 638-643.
- Sander, L. (2013, January 24). Freshman survey: This year even more focused on jobs. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Freshman-Survey-This-Year/136787/>
- Stephenson, A. L., Heckert, A., & Yerger, D. B. (2016). College choice and the university brand: Exploring the consumer decision framework. *Higher Education*, 71, 489-503. doi:10.1007/s10734-015-9919-1
- Tobolowsky, B. F., & Lowery, J. (2006). Commercializing college: An analysis of college representations during bowl games. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 6(3), 232-242.
- United States Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. (2012, July). For profit higher education: The failure to safeguard the federal investment and ensure student success. Retrieved from [http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for\\_profit\\_report/PartI.pdf](http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI.pdf)
- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. (2016, December). Knocking at the college door: Projections of high school graduates. Retrieved from <http://knocking.wiche.edu>
- Zemsky, R., Wegner, G. R., & Massy, W. F. (2005). *Remaking the American university: Market-smart and mission-centered*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

---

# QRBD

## QUARTERLY REVIEW OF BUSINESS DISCIPLINES

---

February 2017

Volume 3  
Number 4



A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF BUSINESS DISCIPLINES  
SPONSORED BY UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA  
ISSN 2334-0169 (print)  
ISSN 2329-5163 (online)