

Analysis of relational marketing strategies in higher education institutions in Colombia and Spain

Análisis de las estrategias de marketing relacional en instituciones de educación superior de Colombia y España

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Abstract

Marketing strategies in universities have allowed a better understanding of the audiences and the classification of actions that generate value to the university brand. That is why this research project aims to identify the importance of relationship marketing strategies in the education sector, especially in the main universities in Colombia and Spain to know how they implement marketing actions that generate value. The methodology used to achieve this objective was based on a review of literature, where the evolution and models of marketing applied in education were analyzed; likewise, the main variables of marketing with a relational approach were examined and comparisons were made between the countries mentioned to find the difference in the strategies that each one implements. It is concluded that, both in Colombia and in Spain, marketing strategies with a relational focus are beginning to be planned that generate value to academic and administrative management; likewise, it is evident that the main variables - creation of value, satisfaction and confidence - for the different actions implemented in the universities of the countries analyzed are fundamental pillars for the incorporation of good relational marketing in education.

Resumen

Las estrategias de marketing en las universidades han permitido una mejor comprensión de las audiencias y la clasificación de acciones que le generen valor a la marca universitaria. Es por esto que el presente proyecto investigativo pretende identificar la importancia de las estrategias de marketing relacional en el sector educativo, especialmente en las principales universidades de Colombia y España para conocer de qué manera implementan acciones mercadológicas que generan valor. La metodología utilizada para lograr este objetivo fue a partir de una revisión de literatura, donde se analizó la evolución y los modelos de marketing aplicados en educación; de igual manera, se examinaron las principales variables de marketing con enfoque relacional y se hicieron comparativos entre los países mencionados para encontrar la diferencia en las estrategias que cada uno implementa. Se concluye que, tanto en Colombia como en España, se empiezan a planear estrategias de marketing con enfoque relacional que generan valor a la gestión académica y administrativa; así mismo se evidencia que las principales variables —creación de valor, satisfacción y confianza— para las diferentes acciones implementadas en las universidades de los países analizados son pilares fundamentales para la incorporación de un buen marketing relacional en educación.

Keywords | palabras clave

Marketing, relationship marketing, strategy, management, higher education, student, teacher, service.

Marketing, marketing relacional, estrategia, gestión, universidades, estudiante, docente, servicio.

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1. 1. Introduction

Understanding marketing is an important challenge for organization managers. Marketing was previously used in companies, and it focused on the commercialization of tangibles, but almost all companies today require incorporating strategic marketing plans to potentialize results. Analyzing this market discipline in universities shows the incorporation of innovative actions that allow the positioning and visibility of the university brand (Peralta-Silva & Linares-Cazola, 2013). The focus of marketing on administrative management has evolved towards much closer communication with different audiences in order to construct a more lasting relationship with them (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001) as well as a relevant brand concept and content commitment from the different digital platforms they currently have (Peruta & Shields 2018). The formation of individuals is a relevant aspect with great impact on global development, because of the significant changes it can have in society. Education is the route towards knowledge that allows to improve both personally and professionally; to this extent it is of great importance for the development of a city, a country and the world (Ceballos-Lozano et al., 2012). However, the globalization of education services, the funding crisis and the growing competition that comes from the private sector have forced higher education institutions to consider strengthening relations with their stakeholders as the key to future success (Fernández et al., 2007), to offer quality services that generate value in each action to consolidate in the market (Sakthivel & Raju, 2006), being effective in service and responding promptly (Cownie, 2019).

It is necessary to analyze how relationship marketing has permeated into the management of universities to build quality portfolios along with stakeholders (Arnett et al., 2003; Webster & Hammond, 2008). For this purpose, the concept of relationship marketing has become especially important in the field of services, since it has considered variables such as trust, value, commitment or loyalty (Bryce, 2007), where all these are necessary for the development, maintenance and strengthening of long-term relationships with different stakeholders (Trullas et al., 2018). However, the interrelationship between studies in the field of educational services and the research in service marketing is still very scarce (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). This study aims to analyze relationship marketing in the educational context, as a discipline specialized in the study of service, quality and satisfaction, which is necessary in every organization to understand the competitive environment, focused on demonstrating how relationship marketing is an important tool for the conduction of new strategies that allow university institutions to have a greater strengthening in relation with their stakeholders to which their educational services are directed. Likewise, it is oriented on the relationship marketing in the universities of Spain and Colombia, observing the strategies these implement for constant relationship in the education sector. Hence, it is appropriate to answer the following question: What are the strategies implemented by higher education institutions in relational marketing for a better relationship with stakeholders? For this purpose, a theoretical development was carried out in the evolution of marketing in education, relationship marketing and the importance of educational management; subsequently, the method of the literature review and the results obtained are presented, along with the conclusions of this study.

1.1. Evolution of marketing from 2000 to the present

Marketing has evolved over the years and it has taken different perspectives depending on the need of the market (Oplatka & Lapidot 2018), thus there have been different marketing trends such as: educational, relational, transactional and tradition-

al marketing (James et al., 2019). Marketing should be understood more as an interactive management process rather than as a function, since market-oriented management is created better on the relationship than on the transaction (Barroso & Martín, 1999). Therefore, it is observed that from the development of individuals, market behavior is affected and organizations implement actions that generate a culture of service, concluding that marketing is found everywhere, not only in the formal but also in the informal (Córdoba-López, 2009). Over the last 60 years, marketing has passed from being focused solely on the product to doing so on the customer, which was formerly called marketing 1.0. Later, when companies realized that the customer is the vital source and fundamental part of their companies, they preferred to make of this new force the center of their strategies and decisions, thus creating marketing 2.0. Currently, marketing has had a further evolution in the new dynamics of the market, where it can be seen how companies expand their business focus towards more humanistic issues, where profitability must be much more balanced with corporate responsibility (Gómez & Uribe, 2016); therefore, creation is given to what is currently known as marketing 3.0 (Kotler et al., 2018). Over the years, there are a variety of concepts in which different authors have defined relationship marketing, where different thoughts of how to maintain and intensify customer relationships are presented (Chan-Tien et al., 2019). Marketing helps with customer relationships and make them much more durable over time. It also focuses on the management of the relationship between the company and its customers, and in order to facilitate the success of this management it must be considered that other market players may be involved on it, such as suppliers, distributors, partners and financial institutions (Barroso & Martín, 1999, pp. 34-35).

1.2. Relationship marketing: a look from different authors

There have been different definitions of relationship marketing throughout history. Grönroos (1996) defines relationship marketing as the identification, establishment, maintenance and improvement of relationships with customers and other stakeholders, in order to generate a common benefit. Morgan and Hunt (1994) define it as all marketing activities aimed at establishing, developing and maintaining relational exchanges that are successful. In terms of the educational context, relationship marketing encompasses strategies designed to attract, establish and consolidate the relationship with stakeholders, such as students, parents, reference groups and high-profile government agencies, with an emphasis on student retention and the search for new prospects (Moore & Bowden-Everson, 2012); but previously Grönroos (1994) would define it at the basis of the relationship that identify needs to be met from the development of products that generate closeness with consumers (Dzimińska et al., 2018), based on exchange and benefit with those involved in the organizational process (Liu et al., 2016).

On the other hand, relationship marketing is defined as long-term exchange, where relationships can be established and generated with customers (Alet i Vilaginés, 1994). Christopher et al. (1994) state that it helps to achieve a “realignment” focused on two points, attracting the attention of customers and their retention (Popovic, 2006).

1.3. Educational management and its importance from marketing

Educational marketing has become the main driver of change in education (Llorente, 2019), which is an adaptation of service marketing that serves educational institutions to design new strategies, so that they allow to expand student coverage and satisfy the different interests of members of the academic community by planning, developing and disclosing academic programs (Ospina-Díaz & Sanabria-Rangel 2010).

In addition, the strategies of educational marketing are to create and facilitate customers-consumers, in this case students, to be able to interact in participatory learning situations inside and outside educational contexts, with the conviction that learning is an experience process that leads to reflection, discussion, analysis and interaction (Khoshtaria et al., 2020) and group feedback (Naranjo, 2011). The same is the process of researching social needs, aimed at developing and elaborating new educational projects that meet the needs (Hashim et al., 2020), also generating an individual's growth through the development of educational services (Solís, 2004).

Marketing has been established as an innovation tool, so that universities achieve their presence and consolidation in the educational market (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019). It is important to note that the use of marketing only took place in organizations engaged in the marketing of products, however, this discipline has gained greater credibility with this advance mainly seen in the field of consumer behavior (Peralta-Silva & Linares-Cazola, 2013). With changes in the environment and progress in knowledge, the concept and applications of marketing have evolved (Kureshi & Thomas, 2020), since this was initially understood as a discipline that studied distribution activities from the producer to the consumer. Currently marketing is considered to be part of the human sciences, whose scope is not limited only to economic activity, but also to other activities in which people work. This development is evident in WADA's recent definition, which more accurately presents the essential characteristics of marketing as an organizational function, such as a set of activities to create and give value, providing benefits for all individuals and institutions involved in the activities (Ponce, 2005). Likewise, Córdoba (2009) indicates that relationship marketing is not only aimed at creating loyalty in customers and generating higher revenues, but also lasting relationships with mutual benefits with the consumers.

2. Method

This study is a systematic literature review, in which it is possible to have greater accuracy and synthesis of the information obtained (Beltrán, 2005), on Dialnet, Scopus, Redalyc, SciELO and google Scholar databases, whose search keywords were "relational marketing" and "m marketing in education", in order to respond to the objective posed in the research question (Tranfield et al., 2003). The inclusion criteria for this article were books and articles published in Latin America, just as the main topics were focused on the marketing of educational services. The only exclusion criterion occurred in thesis, and the final number of articles was 61 nationally and internationally.

The research presented is exploratory, because a topic, where not many answers are found and a specific answer cannot be given, is being analyzed (Sabino, 2014). The analyses carried out identify the different generational changes between the years 2000 to 2018 of the concept of relational marketing, which is shown in Table 1. Table 2 and 3 present the different models created and applied in Colombia and Spain. The sample to be evaluated is obtained from the QS ranking, where the top ten universities of Colombia and Spain are included, and where the different relational marketing strategies used to reach their stakeholders are presented.

3. Results

The results were classified as follows to meet the objective. Initially, Table 1 shows the description of the evolution of relational marketing from 2003 to 2018; subsequently Table 2 contains the relational marketing models created and applied in Colombia; then, Table 3 presents the relational marketing models analyzed in Spain. On the other hand,

Table 4 provides a comparison between the most commonly used variables of relationship marketing models by universities in the countries mentioned above; and Table 5 identifies the top 10 of universities in both countries; finally, two graphs synthesize the importance of digital communication and the classification of different stakeholders.

Table 1. Evolution of the concept of relational marketing

Concept	Bibliography
Relationship is understood as a repetitive exchange, where there is a benefit for those involved in the transaction	(San Martín , 2003)
Create and communicate processes that generate value to individuals, with the aim of having long-term relationships that benefit the company and consumers	(AMA, 2005)
"Relationship marketing is the process of managing company relationships in a cost-effective way"	(López-Pinto Ruiz, Mas-Machuca, & Viscarri-Colomer, 2008, p. 363)
A process where relationships with stakeholders are created, managed, and endured	(Wakabayashi, 2010)
Development of lasting customer relationship to find organizational loyalty and profitability	(Gummesson, 2011)
"It seeks to create the exchange relationship that is generated and maintain it over time or break it at any given time"	(Mejía-Galeano, 2014, p. 156)
"Relationship marketing could be a strategy that contributes to strengthening relations between Higher Education Institutions and their stakeholders within the internationalization process"	(Palacio de la Cruz & Rondón , 2018, pp. 1-2)

Source: Own elaboration.

In Table 1 can be seen the evolution of the concept of relationship marketing over the last 15 years, defined by a variety of authors who have been very important in terms of impact, not only of relationship marketing but also of marketing in general (Gómez & Uribe, 2016). It can be concluded from Table 1 that the definition has not changed much, but that it has been adapted to the different stages of the evolution of marketing, helping the business and educational sector to understand what is the way to achieve the goals.

The literature found in different journals in Colombia and Spain allows to infer that Spain is the country with more studies on relationship marketing models in education. It is observed that this country has institutes where research on marketing stands out, in which as a result models are generated to measure variables such as image, quality, trust, satisfaction, identification and loyalty, contributing greatly to the organizational management that benefits the well-being of those who make up the academic community, thus generating actions based on topics such as the motivation and transformation of individuals to be happier in organizations (Foncubierta-Rodríguez & Sánchez-Montero 2019). The following table presents some models applied in Colombia in terms of relationship marketing.

Table 2. Models applied and developed in Colombia in relationship marketing

Author	Objective of the model
(Duque, 2005)	Comprehend the concepts of service and quality of service, to understand the object and characteristics of the measurement models and identify which measurement model can be applied.
(Duque, 2009)	Present the different stakeholder-based perspectives to implement a strategy focused on strengthening the connection between customers and the organization. (University and its clients).
(Ospina-Díaz & Sanabria-Rangel, 2010)	Propose the MIGME model to better meet the needs of society and the productive sector.
(Vergara-Schmalbach, Garavito-Díaz, Guerra-Mercado, & Posso-Quintana, 2015)	Present the different stakeholder-based perspectives to implement a strategy focused on strengthening the connection between customers and the organization. (University and its clients).
(Nader, Peña-Bernate, & Sánchez-Santa-Bárbara, 2014)	Determine whether perception of the social environment, job description (meaning, responsibility and knowledge of results) and experience predict satisfaction and well-being at work.
(Amaya-Guio & Carretera-Siabato, 2014)	Apply the MUSA method to the results of the study surveys to monitor satisfaction and to diagnose the current level of satisfaction of undergraduate students and identify the importance and performance of each of the aspects evaluated by the institution.
(Castro, 2014)	Strengthen the relations of the National University of Colombia, its campus in Bogotá and its graduates, by generating a value proposition that allows a mutual benefit.
(Guerrero, 2015)	Address the educational program and the so-called mixture of educational marketing: satisfactor, exchange, facilitation and communication, which modifies the mix in the traditional market: product, price, distribution and promotion.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 shows the different models applied and developed in Colombia throughout history; it can be seen that education models in this country continue with a traditional method, where many universities have not realized that they must change their mindset or strategy that they generate, and must look for incentives in order to make their services better known so that students and other stakeholders are more constant to them, i.e., implement new alternatives, such as new models that help them strengthen relationships and innovate in their strategies, making them more suitable for the stakeholders.

Every institution of higher education must be aware that at present, there is a greater offer in educational services, whether face-to-face and/or virtual; for this reason, universities must create strategies and think that the decisions made will be the

best for a future (Arrubla-Zapata, 2013). The following table will show the relational marketing models applied in Spain.

Table 3. Applied and developed models of relationship marketing in Spain

Author	Objective of the model
(Rueda Osuna & Rosa Díaz, 2010)	Develop a social and economic system, which plays with the dual role of input and output: interacting with each other, exerting influences and generating influence in others.
(De la Fuente Mella, Marzo, Navarro, Riquelme, & Jesús, 2010)	Allow the Engineering Faculty of the University of Talca to evaluate the influence of these proposed variables on the satisfaction of the staff and indirectly of the general satisfaction experienced by the students with the services received.
(Schlesinger, Taulet, Bonillo, & Fernández, 2014)	Conceptualize and measure variables related to the behavior and perception of graduates. Likewise, of the quality, loyalty and identification with the University.
(Larentis, Antonello, & Slongo, 2018)	Develop an inter-organizational culture based on initial elements such as: shared meanings and symbols, openness to new ideas, frequency and quality of interactions, among others. It is influenced by inter-organizational relationships, through intermediate elements such as trust related to information, actions and people, commitment to actions, results and people, learning processes and results, which can contribute later to the results.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3 presents five models, which in terms of research are the most relevant in Spain, because they are the most used by the best universities in that country, such as University of Valencia and University of Sevilla, which are the pioneers in terms of marketing. It can also be understood with this table, compared to Colombia, that Spain has a certain advantage in terms of research on this topic due to its research activity. However, the Spanish mentality with regard to the adaptation to the different stages of changes in terms of the relationship with consumers-customers is much stricter and more effective in assimilating the situation; on the other hand, Colombians find it more difficult to adapt.

Table 4 shows the most repeated variables in terms of the models described above.

Table 4. Comparison of the different models focused on their most repetitive variables between Colombia and Spain

Models	Most repetitive variable	Bibliography
Colombia: Different models based on stakeholders Spain: Model of Graduate-University Identification	Creating value	(Duque, 2009) (Schlesinger, Taulet, Bonillo, & Fernández, 2014)
Colombia: Route model Spain: Theoretical model of the graduate-university relationship	Satisfaction	(Nader, Peña-Bernate, & Sánchez-Santa-Bárbara, 2014) (Schlesinger, Taulet, Bonillo, & Fernández, 2014)
Colombia: Nordic school and American school Spain: Model of Structural Equations	Trust	(Duque, 2005) (Schlesinger, Cervera, & Pérez-Cabañero, 2017)

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4 identifies the different models studied between Colombia and Spain and in the same way it compares the variables that these countries analyze the most and also their similarities.

The first item in Table 4 shows that models in Colombia and Spain repeat the value creation variable, where each model has a specific approach to it, i.e. they have a different perspective. In the Colombian model, this variable focuses on how the university creates value in each of the interest groups, not only in the students but in each of the groups that make up the university, such as managers, secretaries, faculty, among others (Duque, 2009). In the Spanish model the idea is to see how focused the student is with the university and also to realize whether they are doing their job properly or not (Schlesinger et al., 2014).

The second item contained in Table 4 shows one of the main bases that a university has, which is the identification of the level of satisfaction that its students have with universities. In Spain, the satisfaction variable seeks to be measured in graduates, trying to know the satisfaction degree they have with the institution, and in the same way identify the deficiencies to improve them (Schlesinger et al., 2014). In Colombia this variable seeks to measure the satisfaction of students, identifying whether they are in compliance with teachers and the personnel, where the idea is to have a balanced well-being at work (Nader et al., 2014)

As for the last item in the table, the variable trust is observed. In Spain it is measured in terms of the image the students have of the university and in their trust for the institution, i.e. if the institution is actually doing its job in the best way (Schlesinger et al., 2015). However, in Colombia students do not look at this trust in the internal sector but in the external one, identifying how reliable the university is in the sector, this being a way of perceiving how reliable the university is for agents outside the institution, i.e. those who are not part of it (Duke, 2005).

Spain, as a pioneer, is one of the main countries in marketing research, as seen in University of Valencia which is one of the best universities with more research in this area. Not only is this university among the researchers and leading exponents of marketing, but also University of Sevilla.

Comparing Colombia with Spain, it is noted that the research in Colombia in terms of marketing is important, but compared to Spain it is not significant, not in terms of quality, but on the amount of research that is generated; however, there are universities in Colombia that point at the subject of marketing research, specifically in relationship marketing.

Taking into account the literature review, some relationship marketing strategies that focus on the most repeated variables expressed in Table 4 and which are the creation of value, trust and satisfaction are observed in both universities in Colombia and Spain. In relation to value creation, it is flexible in both academic and administrative processes, so that students can see the subjects of the curriculum and pay through funding and partnerships with entities. In relation to confidence, they create strategies based on coherence between what universities promise and what they offer. The most representative strategies in satisfaction are observed in the constant improvement of the infrastructure and facilities that provide significant experiences to individuals, at the same time in the quality of professors and academic processes implemented by universities at the national and international level.

3.1. Strategies of the top universities according to the QS

Table 5 shows the top 10 of universities in Colombia and Spain (QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited), based on the QS ranking, which is responsible for naming the list of the best universities worldwide.

Table 5. Top 10 universities in Colombia and Spain

Country	Logo	University
		Universidad de los Andes
		Universidad Nacional de Colombia
		Universidad de Antioquia
		Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
		Universidad del Rosario
		Universidad del Valle
		Universidad EAFIT
		Universidad de la Sabana

Country	Logo	University
		Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana
		Universidad Industrial de Santander

Country	Logo	University
		Universidad de Barcelona
		Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona
		Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
		Universidad Complutense de Madrid
		Universidad de Navarra
		Universidad Pompeu Fabra
		Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
		Universidad Politécnica de Catalunya
		IE University
		Universidad Politécnica de Valencia

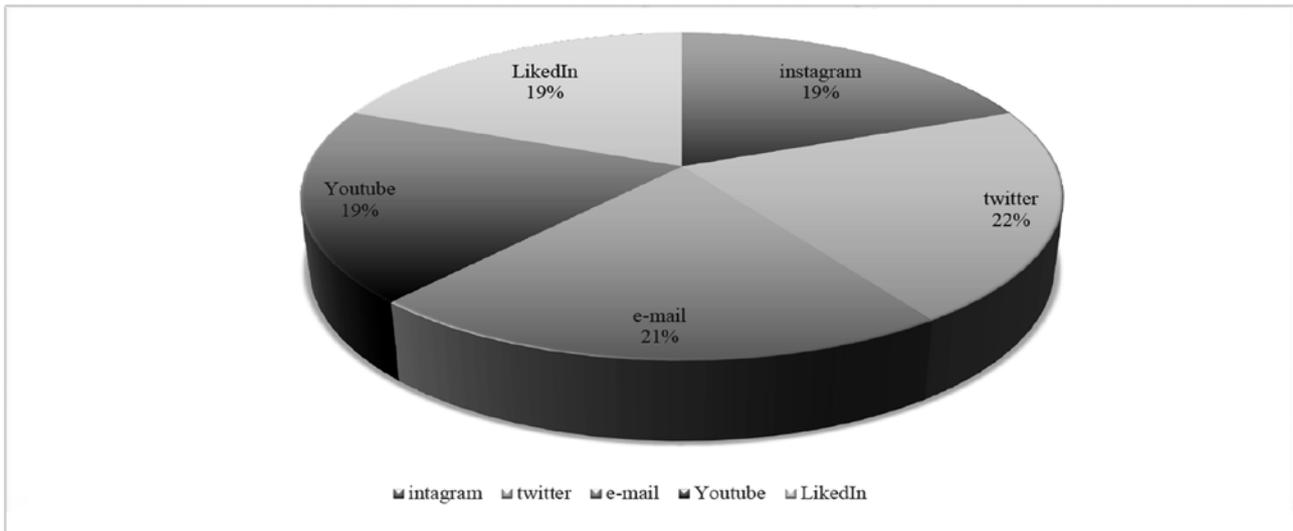
Source: Own elaboration based on the QS ranking.

It is observed in Table 5 that Spain has two institutions in its top 10 of universities that are widely recognized for their research in relationship marketing at the educational level; these are University of Navarra and IE University, in which some marketing studies can be found, but the universities that conduct the most research on relationship marketing do not appear in this top. Similarly, three very well positioned universities in Colombia with research on marketing are in the top 10. Among these institutions are the National University of Colombia, this being the most relevant to marketing, making great contributions not only to its entity but also to the educational community at the national level. In addition, University of Andes and EAFIT University, which also make research contributions to marketing.

In order to synthesize the different strategies implemented at the communication level by the universities analyzed, Figure 1 shows the social media communication scheme, and Figure 2 presents the stakeholders they relate the most. The latter is cre-

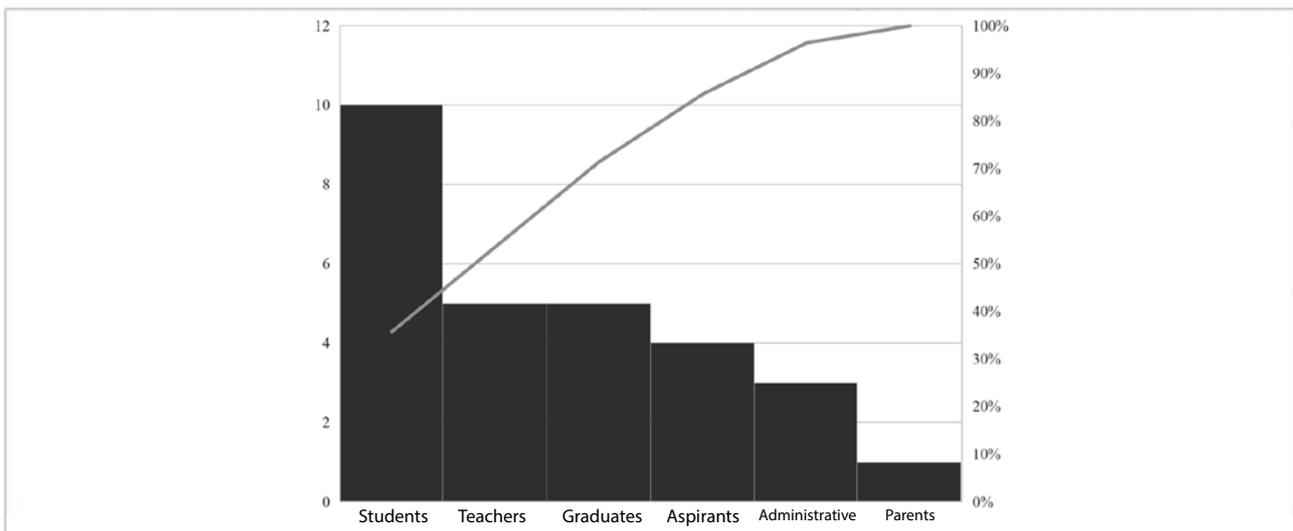
ated based on the observation technique with relationship sheets of the universities and their use of digital tools. The different communication strategies implemented by the universities mentioned in Table 5 can be seen, where their social networks are evidenced as well as their impact in education for a better relationship of the institution with their stakeholders as shown in Figure 2, observing that universities have a different observational approach for the different target groups.

Figure 1. Social networks used by the universities of Colombia and Spain



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2. Interest groups targeted by the universities of Colombia and Spain



Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of strategies, universities in Spain provide housing services where foreign people can access in an easy and convenient way; in addition, these offer financial service support through scholarships, donations and exchanges to different universities around the world. As for scholarships and donations, these can also occur by students and teachers, giving certain donations, whether economic or university-related such as books, easing the entry of new people to the university.

4. Conclusions and discussions

It can be concluded that relationship marketing has been gaining importance in the work schemes for the administrative management of universities, and different variables have been involved, providing more strength to this concept, and making it more attractive to be applied in the different stakeholders of the university; however, although the concept is important and it requires more attention by university managers, little has been used in relation to management models and strategies applied to generate value.

Likewise, relationship marketing focused on education has caused satisfactory results, not only in the institutions that carry out research on this topic, but also in the administrative management of education in general, with the elaboration of different models that implement strategies that can be used as a guide to achieve better benefits in indicators of satisfaction and loyalty of the community. With the construction of models, it is evident that Spain and Colombia base their approach on three variables, which are value creation, satisfaction and trust.

While it is true that there are some strategies focused on relationship marketing that generate value in universities, progress must be made in incorporating strategies that involve different audiences and that would relate them to the market objectives to improve the visibility and profitability of administrative management. Additionally, there are schemes that focus on the commercialization of services, but not on creating satisfaction to generate loyalty.

However, in analyzing the comparisons between countries it is found that Spain is a generator of new knowledge on relational marketing, and authors have created several models that universities can apply to generate new strategies, and even to measure variables, providing instruments that validate the answers. Spain, in relation to marketing, is important since it has universities with significant research on relationship marketing in education, one of this is University of Valencia. Likewise, Colombia has a wide variety of studies carried out by recognized and well positioned universities at the Latin American level, generating models and tools that help to obtain more knowledge on the subject, serving these models not only for educational institutions, but also for the business sector in terms of the internal organizations. In this topic of relationship marketing, it is observed that universities such as the National University, EAFIT, University of Antioquia and University of Andes are the most important in terms of research.

Due to the need to deepen on the topic of marketing in education, it is considered appropriate to continue to research the importance of relationship and communication strategies in educational management from the different stakeholders the institutions interact with, while comparing the work done in Colombia with countries other than Spain to identify which strategies can be contextualized in the Colombian educational environment.

Relationship marketing has evolved throughout history, and it not only focuses on an audience but it also evaluates all stakeholders to identify the best strategies to generate better added value. From an educational perspective, higher education institutions must continue evolving in specific aspects such as their brand, attention and social networks, which are the most visible variables that the internal and external community has to know about the university.

3.2. Supports and financial support of the research

Entity: University of San Buenaventura, Medellin campus

Country: Colombia

City: Medellín

Project: Relationship marketing in higher education, 2019

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