The Role of Telemarketing Lead Conversions in Indian Business Schools: A Qualitative Study

Siluvai Raja[1]
Assistant Professor-Marketing, Loyola Institute of Business Administration, Chennai
Ameeta Fernando[2]
Assistant Professor-Business Analytics, Loyola Institute of Business Administration, Chennai

ABSTRACT
As technology advances around the globe, HEIs are increasingly relying on digital channels to promote their courses. Telemarketing, or telecalling, is one of the most popular strategies used by admissions teams. This paper aims to determine the core underpinnings of tele-marketing on student admissions through a qualitative study and by providing and discussing the mobile phone revolution, changing higher education systems in the Indian context, part-time management programmes, the admission process, online marketing tools, and challenges faced by institutions, in addition to highlighting some of the theories on tele-marketing.

Keywords: Tele-Marketing, Tele calling, Part-Time, HEIs, TRAI, Digital Marketing, B-schools

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions in both developed and developing countries are increasingly focusing on increasing the visibility of their courses and programmes on international platforms. Business schools and other HEIs in these countries must create policy frameworks and set strategic objectives to ensure that they are able to adapt to the ever-evolving environment (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2020; Ivi, 2008; Kotler & Fox, 1995).

2. The Mobile Phone Revolution

According to Statista, India is currently the second largest telecommunications market in the world. In 2020, India was the second largest region in the world in terms of smartphone ownership (742.32 million), and this figure is projected to increase to nearly 974 million in 2025. By 2022, the proportion of the Indian population using smartphones reached 31.3%, whereas in 2019, it was 8%. The Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRAI) of India has reported that India has 1198,50 million subscribers in the wireless sector (1176,84 million) and 21,66 million in the wireline sector (21,66 million). These figures demonstrate India's leadership in the digital market.

3. The Higher Education System

Higher education is no longer just for the elite but for the masses, enabling greater access and participation (Karine (2012)). This has resulted in a diversification of student profiles, educational institutions and educational products offered. Student diversity in terms of academic ability, motivation, commitment, career aspirations and socioeconomic background contributes to the increasing societal demand for higher education and the consequent increase in participation (OECD, 2008). Part-time weekend higher education and distance and online learning are becoming increasingly important in higher education (British Council, 2018). Student recruitment at these higher education institutions is competing to obtain the best colleges to admit them, and competition is heating. Universities are therefore compelled to find efficient, fast and effective ways to provide potential candidates with the necessary course information during the decision-making process. In today's digitally advanced generation, tech-savvy, technical and innovative methods are used to attract and recruit the best students (Nguyen, 2015). When a university seeks to increase the number of students enrolled in its institution, traditional marketing channels such as university newsletters, alumni magazines, billboards, television, and radio targets are used to inform prospective students. (Bernard, 2015). Studies have also shown that institutional outreach plays an influential role in higher education enrollment (Bernard, 2015; Camelleri, 2019; Schofield, C., et al., 2013)

4. Part-Time Management Program

A part-time program, commonly referred to as flexi-learning, is not a new concept. A 1913 special report to Congress by the Massachusetts Board of Education emphasized the requirements and scope of part-time education. For this report, they examined part-time training from three perspectives. One is from the worker's perspective, which considers the worker's needs and economic situation. Second, it is the responsibility of the institution, especially in terms of enabling effective teaching through careful structuring of courses. The third is the opinion of the employing industry on the need for such training and how important it is to the future health of the industry and how workers do so and make part of their day to devote it to their studies (Board of Education, 1913).

5. The Admission Process

Paul N. Finlay and Malcolm King (1989) of the Loughborough Institute of Technology developed a three-step expert system using an expert system shell to support student enrolment in part-time graduate courses. The first phase was an unstructured approach to demonstrate the feasibility of the system. However, there were some challenges during development. In the second stage, after simplifying the system analysis, a more comprehensive and structured system was created. However, this method also has limitations in that the operation is troublesome and unattractive. In the third phase, a mathematical model of decision-maker judgement was developed, resulting in a more sophisticated system.

In the Indian context, the regulator provides a framework for a professional system with which university-affiliated colleges with university qualifications are obliged to comply (University Grants Commission, 1956). For colleges of technology offering engineering and technology, management and hotel management courses, both affiliated colleges and independent institutions should follow the weighting and process framework established by the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

6. Challenges

Some of the challenges faced by B-schools during the admission process are:
   a. Attracting quality applications
   b. Underrepresentation of diverse groups
   c. High drop-out rates associated with the admission process
   d. Uneven awareness and response
   e. Uneven understanding of admissions policies and processes
   f. Definition of merit
   g. Fair Admissions system

7. Digital Marketing Tools

According to Raja. A (2020), there are nearly seven digital marketing types and several tools and activities available for influencing the behaviour of prospective customers.

Table -1
Digital Marketing Type, Tools & Activities

Sl. No.	Digital Marketing Type	Digital Marketing Tools & Activities
1	Intent Based Marketing	Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Admission Alert, Recommended Search result
2	Brand Marketing	Branding, Banners, Call Predictor, Sentiment Analysis, Display/Digital Advertising
3	Content Marketing	Home page, Content, Trending Institutes, Advertorials, Page Associate Sponsor, Admission Buddy, Micro site, Institution comparison, Job portals, Native Advertising
4	Community based Marketing	Social Media Marketing (SMM), City page, Whats app session
5	Partner Marketing	College Admission Forum, Affiliate Marketing, Sponsorships & PR
6	Communication Channel Marketing	SMS, Emailer, Leads Generation, Newsletter – dedicated, Q & A session
7	Platform Based Marketing	Facebook sponsorship page, Preference Building, You tube channel

Source: Digital Marketing Type, Tools, and Activities (Raja. A, 2020, 11234, Mattingley)

8. Telemarketing

The Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA), completed in November 2003, states that "Telemarketing is the act of a business making a telephone call to offer a commercial transaction." Rosette Siriban (2008) describes it as "the process of marketing a product, advertising a service, or providing customer service over the phone." Geetika, Deepesh Tiwari and Preeti Gupta(2012) found that telemarketing contributes to industry competitive leadership, the speed of marketing, cost efficiency and customer satisfaction. However, there are also downsides to defensive marketing, as it risks interfering with people's lives and offending potential customers.

9. Types of Telephone Marketing

According to Simon Cooke (1996), there are two types of telephone marketing: inbound and outbound. The inbound telemarketing category includes order taking, customer service, helpdesk, troubleshooting, customer support, etc. Outbound telemarketing techniques include cold calling, lead generation, program review, telesales, needs analysis, etc.

Table -2
Type of Telemarketing and Its Effectiveness

	Direct Mail	Telephone	Email	SMS
Reach	All Household	Most Household	Internet Users	Mobile User

10. The Effectiveness of Tele-marketing

According to E. Boyd (1996), the phone builds relationships and retains customers through customer satisfaction, cheap marketing, and speed. A study by Geetika et al. (2012) revealed that most respondents felt that telephone calls could provide useful and authoritative information about calls and text messages and that after receiving calls, some even reported that their purchases were affected.

11. Challenges in Tele-Marketing

a) Inherently impersonal According to marketing guru Philip Kotler, marketing is about understanding a need/problem one-to-one and finding the right solution. It is a social process that involves finding solutions. Telemarketing is therefore impersonal and does not qualify as a social process.

b) Telemarketing is less effective in services than the same approach to products: J. Wang (2007) Distinguish product marketing and sales from services. Comparing telephone marketing for products and services reveals significant differences in consumer recall, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. Marketing through face-to-face presentations rather than phone marketing seems to have greater recall.

c) Potentially Disruptive to Consumers: According to a study by Licata and Kleiner (2005), telemarketing services report problems with the customers they try to contact. Customers perceive telemarketing as annoying and the process as an invasion of privacy.

d) High attrition: According to Geetika, Deepesh Tiwari, Preeti Gupta (2012), almost 47% of people make phone calls, whether in the form of recorded voice calls, SMS or manual calls. Always ignoring solicitations. Telemarketers also work in environments characterized by high dissatisfaction, burnout, fluctuations, and absenteeism, as well as low work ethics and low productivity.

e) Privacy and ethics concerns: As a commonly used marketing tool, the telephone intrudes people's lives and can be interpreted as offensive and irritating. All of these results are counterproductive to the very idea of defensive marketing. M. Evans (1995) highlights ethical and legal issues and suggests self-regulation as the best solution.

12. Telemarketing regulations

Telemarketing service providers must register with the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRAI). There are two types of telemarketing service providers: promotional voice callers and transactional voice callers. Telemarketing companies are not allowed to make promotional calls to DND (Do Not disturb) registered consumers. In addition, telemarketing firms are required to obtain consent from consumers, who are the target audience, and no calls or messages should be made between 9 PM and 9 AM.

13. Telemarketing theories and concepts

a) **Differential Contact Theory:** This theory suggests that telemarketing can be used to create and maintain ongoing relationships with customers. By providing personalized and timely communication, businesses can differentiate themselves from competitors and build customer loyalty.

b) **Customer Relationship Management (CRM):** CRM theory emphasizes the importance of managing and nurturing customer relationships over the phone. Telemarketing can be an integral part of a CRM strategy, helping businesses understand customer needs and preferences and tailor their offerings accordingly.

c) **Direct marketing theory:** Telemarketing is often seen as a form of direct marketing that involves reaching out to potential customers directly to promote products or services. This theory focuses on targeting specific

customer segments and using telemarketing to generate leads, make sales, and measure campaign effectiveness.

d) Innovation-Adoption Theory: This theory relates to the adoption of telemarketing technology and strategies by businesses. This suggests that the adoption of telemarketing practices can be influenced by factors such as perceived benefits, ease of use, and compatibility with existing business processes.

e) Call Center Management Theory: Effective telemarketing often relies on well-managed call centers. This theory focuses on call center management principles, including workforce scheduling, training, and quality control, to optimize the performance of telemarketing operations.

f) Do-Not-Call List Theory: In some countries, there are regulations and laws that govern telemarketing practices, including the creation of "Do-Not-Call" lists. This theory considers the impact of these regulations on telemarketing effectiveness and compliance.

g) Scripting theory: Telemarketers often use scripts to guide their conversations with potential customers. Scripting theory explores the development and use of scripts to ensure consistency in communication and achieve specific marketing objectives.

h) Permission Marketing Theory: This theory promotes the idea of obtaining explicit consent from potential customers before initiating telemarketing calls. It emphasizes the importance of building trust and respecting the preferences of customers to enhance the effectiveness of telemarketing efforts.

i) Technology-Driven Telemarketing: With advancements in technology, telemarketing has evolved. This theory explores the impact of technologies such as predictive dialers, customer relationship management software, and data analytics on telemarketing efficiency and effectiveness.

j) Social Influence Theory: Telemarketers can use various persuasion techniques and social influence principles to engage potential customers and persuade them to take desired actions. This theory delves into the psychology of persuasion and its application in telemarketing.

14. Literature Review

Telemarketing has emerged as a strategic tool for educational institutions seeking to enhance student enrollment, engagement, and retention. This comprehensive literature review delves into the multifaceted role of telemarketing lead conversion in educational settings by examining the existing research landscape to elucidate its effectiveness, challenges, and implications.

a) Telemarketing Strategies in Higher Education:

Telemarketing has become an integral component of the recruitment and enrollment strategies employed by educational institutions, particularly in the realm of higher education. Scholars such as Smith (2018) have highlighted its significance in targeting specific demographics and facilitating personalized interactions with prospective students. Telemarketing campaigns are often tailored to align with the unique value propositions and academic offerings of institutions, aiming to attract qualified applicants and increase enrollment numbers.

b) Impact of Telemarketing on Student Inquiries and Applications:

Research studies have investigated the impact of telemarketing on generating student inquiries and driving application submissions. Jones and Brown (2019) emphasize the synergistic relationship between telemarketing efforts and broader marketing initiatives in universities, noting their collective influence on increasing student interest and engagement. Telemarketing campaigns, when integrated strategically with other communication channels, have been shown to stimulate interest among prospective students and prompt them to take action, thereby bolstering the pool of applicants.

c) Factors Influencing Telemarketing Success:

The effectiveness of telemarketing lead conversions in educational institutions is contingent upon various factors, ranging from caller attributes to campaign strategies. Wang et al. (2020) explored the role of caller characteristics, such as communication skills and interpersonal rapport, in influencing conversion rates. Moreover, Garcia and Martinez (2017) examine the significance of the timing and frequency of calls, underscoring the importance of strategic outreach efforts to maximize conversion opportunities. Factors such

as the clarity of messaging, relevance of offerings, and responsiveness to prospect inquiries also play pivotal roles in shaping the outcomes of telemarketing campaigns.

d) Challenges and Ethical Considerations:

Despite its potential benefits, telemarketing in educational institutions faces several challenges and ethical considerations. Jackson and White (2021) highlighted concerns regarding privacy, consent, and data protection, urging institutions to uphold ethical standards in their telemarketing practices. Moreover, navigating regulatory frameworks such as the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) poses legal challenges for institutions, necessitating compliance measures to mitigate risks (Peterson & Lee, 2018). Consumer resistance to telemarketing calls, coupled with the proliferation of competing offers, further complicates the conversion process and underscores the importance of establishing trust and credibility with prospective students (Roberts & Johnson, 2019).

e) Future Directions and Recommendations

Moving forward, there is a need for continued research and innovation to enhance the efficacy of telemarketing lead conversions in educational institutions. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into the long-term impact of telemarketing efforts on student enrollment, retention, and academic success. Additionally, institutions must prioritize ethical considerations and adopt transparent communication practices to build trust and rapport with prospective students. Embracing technological advancements such as predictive analytics and CRM systems can optimize the targeting precision and efficiency of telemarketing campaigns, enabling institutions to tailor their outreach efforts more effectively (Lee & Kim, 2022).

15. Research Framework and Methodology

This paper aims to study the role and effectiveness of tele marketing (calling) in the business school registration process.
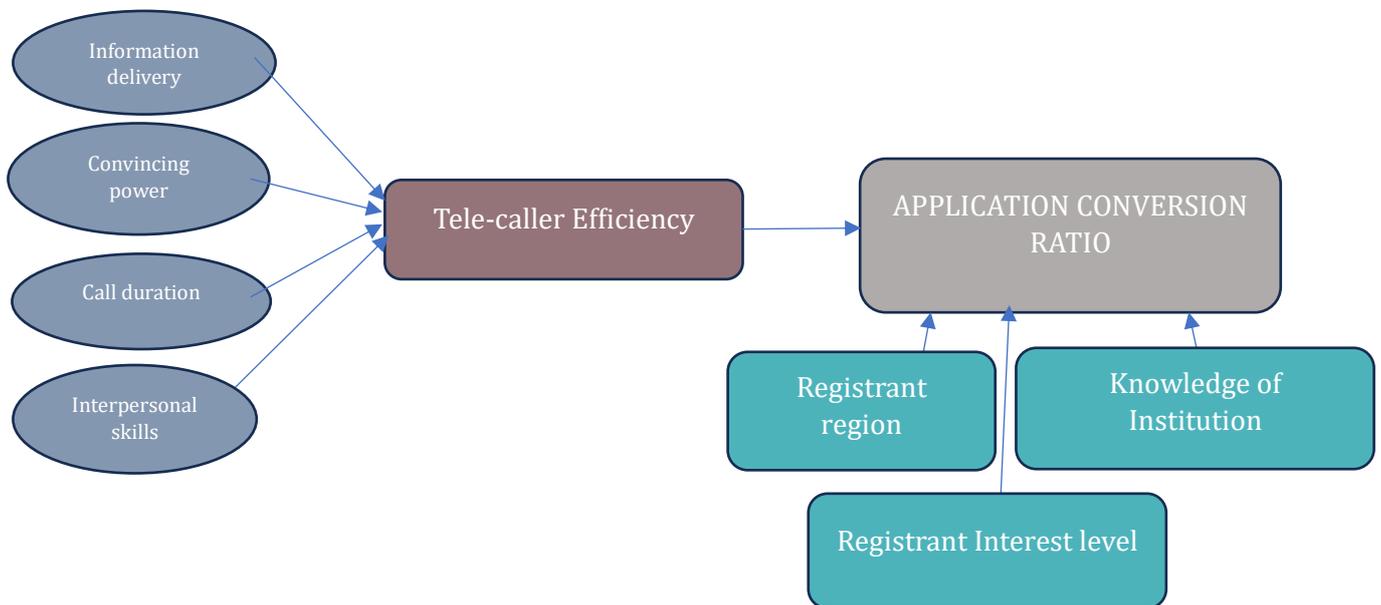

Figure 1: The Tele-marketing Efficiency Framework

A qualitative study was conducted in a business school in Chennai with tele callers belonging to the admissions department. A total of 15 tele callers were subjected to both one-on-one interviews and a moderated focus group discussion. The tele callers were involved in the day-to-day calling of approximately 30-40 registrants who had:

1. Registered to the institute's part-time PGDM program through the web portal, or
2. Downloaded the brochure for the part-time PGDM program in the portal, or
3. Had shown interest in the institute's part-time PGDM program during admission campaigns and drives.

The salient points that resulted from the interviews are discussed below:

1. Among all the factors that cause a significant increase in the *application conversion ratio* (given by the number of applications converted divided by the number of leads pursued), the efficiency of the tele caller is the most significant. Although the region to which the respondents belonged, the prior knowledge of the institution and the interest level of the registrant were also factors that helped to increase the number of applications, from the data provided about registrants from approximately 450 leads, it was found that the information delivered by the tele callers, their convincing power and rapport creation within the first minute helped to convert registrants into applicants across regions, varying interest levels and awareness of the institution's features.

2. From the qualitative survey, it was found that leads from campaigns and admission drives were the most difficult to convert, with a conversion percentage of 5% or less. The easiest to convert were the leads that came from institutional portal registrations, which accounted for approximately 37.5% of the conversions. The conversions from leads generated through the downloading of program brochures from the institute's website were approximately 17.5%. The conversion charts from the various sources of leads are shown below:
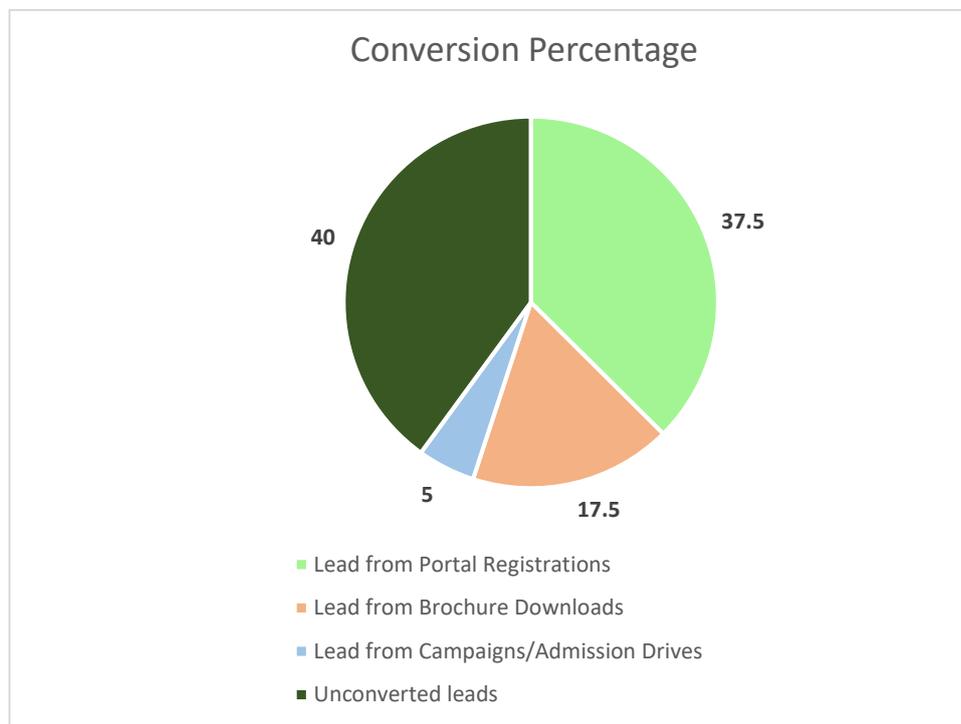

Figure 2: Registration to Application Conversion Chart

3. It was also found that the average duration spent by the tele callers for the purpose of registration conversion was between 3 and 4 minutes. However, the call duration for the noninterest registrants was less than one minute.

16. Limitations
The following limitations were identified in the present study:
1. The sample size was restricted to 15 tele callers and 450 leads. Increasing the number of people included in the study could have provided a more extensive picture of the effectiveness of tele calling.
2. The study was conducted on candidates from a single B-school. Therefore, if one were to address considerations of diversity and cultural differences because of geography, the scope could be extended.
3. The comparative efficacy of tele calling to that of other media, such as social media campaigns, billboards, and targeted advertising campaigns, has not been studied. Taking a more holistic view of the efficacy of different channels could help B-schools and other HEIs determine the most feasible channel.

17. Conclusion
The theories provide a framework for understanding and improving telemarketing strategies, whether for sales, customer relationship management, lead generation, or market research in terms of student admission. Effective telemarketing requires a balance between the technical aspects of the practice and an understanding of human behavior and psychology. Several studies have demonstrated that tele calling for the purpose of student recruitment into B-

schools does indeed have a positive impact on student enrolment numbers. If applied effectively, the admissions team of B-schools could reach out to a larger number of students by deploying resources accordingly, thus helping increase the number of students who have registered.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

References

Camilleri, M. (2020). Higher Education Marketing Communications in the Digital Era. *Strategic Marketing of Higher Education in Africa*, 77–95. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429320934-7

Camilleri, M. A. (2016a). Corporate Sustainability and responsibility toward education. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, *7*(1), 56–71. https://doi.org/10.1108/jgr-08-2015-0015

Camilleri, M. A. (2016b). Reconceiving corporate social responsibility for business and educational outcomes. *Cogent Business & Management*, *3*(1), 1142044. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2016.1142044

de Jager, J., & Gbadamosi, G. (2009). Specific remedy for specific problem: Measuring service quality in South African higher education. *Higher Education*, *60*(3), 251–267. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9298-6

Deepesh Tiwari, and Preeti Gupta, G. (2012). A Study of Indian Consumers' Perception on Telemarketing. *International Journal of E-Education, e-Business, e-Management and e-Learning*, *2*(2).

Degenhard, J. (2021, July 20). *Smartphone user worldwide 2020, by country*. Statista. https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1146962/smartphone-user-by-country

Eric Boyd, D. (1996). Defensive Marketing's use of Post-purchase telecommunications to create Competitive Advantages: A strategic analysis. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *13*(1), 26–34. https://doi.org/10.1108/07363769610107374

Evans, M., O'Malley, L., & Patterson, M. (1995). Direct marketing: Rise and rise or rise and fall? *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *13*(6), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1108/02634509510094147

Friga, P. N., Bettis, R. A., & Sullivan, R. S. (2003). Changes in graduate management education and New Business School Strategies for the 21st Century. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *2*(3), 233–249. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2003.10932123

Highlights of telecom subscription data as on 31st. (n.d.). https://www.trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/PR_No.35of2021_0.pdf

Ivy, J. (2008). A new higher education marketing mix: The 7PS for MBA Marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *22*(4), 288–299. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540810875635

Kotler;fox. (1995). *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions*. prentice hall.

Lepkova, N. (2009). The Challenges for Marketing Distance Education in online environment - An Integrated Approach. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*.

Licata, W. J., & Kleiner, B. H. (2005). Managing telemarketing departments effectively. *Management Research News*, *28*(11/12), 14–19. https://doi.org/10.1108/01409170510785192

MESSAH Omboi, B. (2015). *Effect of Selected Marketing Communication Tools on Student Enrolment in Private Universities in Kenya*, *3*(3).

Nguyen, T. (2015). The Effectiveness of Online Learning: Beyond No Significant Difference and Future Horizons. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, *11*(2).
Opportunities and insight. British Council | Opportunities and insight. (n.d.). https://ei.britishcouncil.org/educationintelligence/ei-feature-international-studentmobility-2027-local-investment-global-outcome

P, Kaplan. (2020). *Competition: Higher Education*. Pearson Education.

Pucciarelli, F., & Kaplan, A. (2016). Competition and strategy in Higher Education: Managing complexity and uncertainty. *Business Horizons*, *59*(3), 311–320. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2016.01.003

Raja.A, S. (2015). *Entrepreneurship in Higher Education*. APH.

Schofield, C., Cotton, D., Gresty, K., Kneale, P., & Winter, J. (2013). Higher education provision in a crowded marketplace. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *35*(2), 193–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080x.2013.775928

Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society (Summary in English). (2008). *OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education*. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264046535-sum-en

Wang, J.-H., Jow, J.-L., Liao, Y.-L., Tsai, T., & Hung, G. (2007). An overview of telemarketing fraud problems and countermeasures in Taiwan. *Intelligence and Security Informatics*, 309–310. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-71549-8_34