

Effect of Selected Marketing Communication Tools on Student Enrolment in Private Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

Student recruitment has become competitive; forcing institutions to find efficient, fast and effective means of providing prospective students with information while they are in the process of deciding. The significance of this study is represented by its attempt to identify the effect of selected marketing communication tools in terms of enhancing student enrolment in private universities in Kenya. Independent variables under study are; public relations, advertising, personal selling and direct marketing; the dependent variable is student enrolment.

The study adopted a descriptive research design. Correlation was undertaken to determine the relationship between the dependent (student enrolment) and independent variables (public relations, advertising, personal selling, and direct marketing) addressing the effect of selected marketing communication tools on student enrolment in private universities. Probability-simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample size of 125 respondents from 25 private universities in Kenya. Descriptive data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Chi-Square test of significance). Statistical program for social sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis.

The results reveal that print media; newspapers, brochures and alumni networks were rated highly as the most effective marketing communication tools to provide information to prospective students. This is due the wide reach and reliability of these tools. The study found out that advertising plays a critical role in enhancing student enrolment in private universities. The study also found out that most universities have not embraced the use of social networks to use as student recruitment tools.

Technological advancements are changing how student recruitment is being conducted in higher learning institutions in targeting the techno-literate prospective students. The study established that internet use through university websites had a high usage rate which was equally indicated by student use in accessing university information. Websites are therefore effective marketing communication tools in enhancing student enrolment numbers. Traditional marketing communication tools like billboards, posters, radio, university newsletters, and alumni magazines were rated as less effective tools to reach and provide information to prospective students in bid to increase student enrolment numbers.

It is a descriptive rather than an evaluative study of marketing aspects as practiced by Kenyan private universities. This study therefore is of significance to University management and policy makers to use the study findings to formulate effective student enrolment strategies, product development, forecasting, admissions and recruitment policies, strategic planning process and expansion of academic programmes.

The study found out that Public relations' influence student enrolment. It is crucial that higher learning institutions understand the perceptions and expectations of students and translate them into marketing activities that would attract and retain students. The need to provide value for money to the students and to be responsive to their needs has necessitated universities in general and marketing units in particular to look beyond marketing paradigms and customer approach in the HE sector. Declaring how their products are positioned against benchmarks and other ratings has already begun in many HEIs.

Public Relations, a university's public image and its customer satisfaction index are important aspects in enhancing student enrolment because satisfied and happy clientele speak well of the institution and influence others to enrol with the institution. The study established that apart from an institutions academic excellence, exhibitions and university image are key tools in increasing student enrolment.

Several aspects that need to be coordinated among quality assurance departments, academic staff, and the marketing departments in an effort to accomplish these needs.

The study recommends that universities top management should incorporate a greater market orientation into their strategic planning and frequently revise marketing communication tools to determine their effectiveness in order to have a competitive advantage and gain a big market share.

Key words: marketing communication tools; student enrolment; private universities.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Universities worldwide are undergoing unprecedented change and confronting multiple challenges brought about by the vast and complex processes of globalization and liberalization (Mok, 2003). Economic development is correlated with the development of higher education. Enrolment ratios in higher education average over 50% for the countries belonging to the organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) compared to 21% in the middle income countries and six percent in low income countries (El-Khawas 1998).

Kenya's higher education has remained the fastest-growing segment of the education system over the past 20 years, with enrolments increasing on average by 6.2 percent per year, Abagi (1995). This has been exemplified by the rise in enrolments in public and private universities, the proliferation of more private universities and the establishment of private wings (self sponsored programmes) in the public universities, Sifuna (1998). There are 25 registered private universities in Kenya. 11 are chartered 8 with letters of interim and authority and 5 with certificate of registration CHE, (2010). The current trend in universities is characterized by aggressive competition especially with the establishment of satellite centers across the country and use of different marketing communication (MC) tools to attract potential students.

Rapid expansion of university education has led to a number of challenges. According to UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998), low funding from the exchequer, increased enrolment without commensurate improvement in available facilities, gender inequality, equity and efficiency, political interference and low research capacity, are some of the problems facing universities in the East African region.

There is need for MC orientation to enable private universities to create an edge in the competitive market through the establishment of marketing/ student recruitment departments. Acknowledging that no one marketing communication strategy will work with prospective students, college recruitment practices in the early twenty-first century seek to individualize the process, use and integrate all forms of MC.

Survival of Universities in the competitive education environment will entirely depend on how well they strategically position themselves in the market through strategic planning of marketing activities, MC tools used and management for sustainability in the current turbulence of globalization and competition. Public universities have an upper hand in the share of students who are sponsored by the government (JAB) unlike the private universities who have to aggressively recruit students as the competition between private universities has become stiffer.

Despite the large number of private universities in Kenya, some universities still have relatively low student enrolment, Ngome (2010). Demographic shifts in the environment, alternative forms of academic systems, life-long learning, and internationalization introduced new perspectives to teaching and learning in the higher education (HE) environment. Along with all these shifts and changes, the HE sector began to align itself with a marketized framework. Educators were often forced to take a hard look at marketing to see what this discipline might offer to keep their institutions viable and relevant, Kotler and Fox (1995).

Marketing in the HE sector is quite different from marketing in the commercial sector. HE products are both highly intangible and have characteristics that restrict applications of marketing framework. As a result of these environmental changes HEI are marketing aggressively in order to increase their market share, whether in terms of student numbers or the quality of those enrolling, Delloite and Touche (1994). Numerous new marketing communication options are available to marketers due to rapid globalization and the development of new technologies. Marketers are under constant pressure to innovate, and the new-media environment has created an extra domain for them to grapple with.

MC Mix includes all the staff of the university that interacts with prospective students and indeed once they are enrolled as students of the university. These could be both academic, administrative and support staff. The role of the image and status of academic staff in recruitment of prospective students is open for debate; however, student perceptions of teaching staff reputations can play an important role in the choice process, Cubillo et al., 2006; Ivy, (2001).

Some students are usually influenced to enroll in universities because of academic staff who are PhD holders or by academics' public profiles. On the administrative and academic support front, significant input to the provision of higher education services both at the front line and what might be considered

behind the scenes is provided, which does impact on student perceptions of service quality. The simple process of how a telephone enquiry is handled may have a greater impact on whether or not a prospective student is going to keep that university in their range of options than an eminent university research record.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Kenyan universities are operating in different markets than they did a decade ago; their overall marketing orientation and survival is determined by how well they reposition themselves as distinct academic entities to increase student enrollment in the competitive academic environment created by technological changes and globalization, Siringi (2005).

Kenyan public universities have an upper hand in student enrolment through the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) unlike private universities, Koech (2000). This has created a cutthroat competition for university students in Kenya between local universities (both public and private) and foreign institutions. Lack of MC orientation and customer focus/needs/segmentation has led to poor use of MC tools to enhance student enrolment in universities because different prospective student segments use different sources of information and MC tools to access information about a university (Gray et al. 2003).

Globalization has driven universities to venture into new technology-up to date MC tools and sophisticated ways of packaging programmes to potential students who have become techno-savvy, sophisticated and enlightened consumers, Armstrong (2001). Despite the availability of information at the click of a button and MC tools used, many students and parents still have limited enrolment information about universities. Documents provided for prospective students fail to give sufficient information about the university therefore raising the question on how effective some MC tools are in terms of increasing student enrolment, Hawary and Batayneh (2010).

Acknowledging that no one MC strategy will work with prospective students, universities seek to individualize the process, use and integrate all forms of MC, Kimmel (2005). To date, there is poor understanding of the role/use of effective MC with customers in attracting and maintaining prospective and present customers in higher learning institutions Ngome, (2010). This study therefore endeavors to fill the study gaps by focusing on the effect of selected MC tools on student enrolment in private universities in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective

To determine the effect of selected marketing communication tools on student enrolment in private universities in Kenya.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- a) To determine whether public relations influences student enrolment in private universities.
- b) To establish whether advertising influences student enrolment in private universities.
- c) To examine whether direct marketing influences student enrolment in private universities.
- d) To assess whether personal selling influences student enrolment in private universities.

1.4 Hypothesis of the study

- H₀ There is no relationship between public relations and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between public relations and student enrollment.
H₀ There is no relationship between advertising and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between advertising and student enrollment.
H₀ There is no relationship between direct marketing and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between direct marketing and student enrollment.
H₀ There is no relationship between personal and student enrolment.
H₁ There is a relationship between personal selling and student enrollment.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study was limited to the effect of selected marketing communication tools on student enrolment. The study targeted all private universities within Kenya that are registered, chartered and those operating with interim authority letters from CHE.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Theoretical review

2.1.1 Communication theory

Harold Lasswell's communication model expounds the "Who" is the Source; "Says what", the message; and "To Whom" the destination. Communication involves a planned exchange of deliberate communication between a sender and receiver through pre-determined channels of communication to create a desired response and generate feedback, Malan and L'estrange (1991)

It's critical for a university to analyze its target market and publics to determine each group's communications needs, what response it wants from each group and appropriate MC tools to use. A combination of MC tools is better placed for effectiveness to create an impact and desired response to increase student enrolment, Mok, (2000).

Different elements are used for different publics. Indeed some publics, like prospective students, are so important that a number of promotional tools will be targeted at them for recruitment purposes. Open days, international higher education exhibitions, conventions, direct mail and advertising are but a few of the tools the universities employ to inform, remind and persuade prospective students to select their institution.

Successful student recruitment is the beginning phase of a successful, modern enrollment management plan for a university. MarcommWise (2006) opines that MC is a systematic relationship between a business and its market. MC entails all strategies, tactics, and activities involved in getting the desired

marketing messages to intended target markets, regardless of the media used. MC tools mix includes advertising, sales promotion, and public relations, sales promotion and direct mail, Maringe, (2004). MC elements provide information and consultation that are important components to add value to a product or service.

Marketing communications helps to define an organization's relationship with its customers. This emphasizes the strategic importance of such communication and its long-term effect on consumers. Communication models act as predictive guides, but in the end it is important to recognize the autonomy and unpredictability of consumers.

Customers need information about the features of the product or service, its price and how they can access it, to make informed purchase decision. Thus, if customers are able to get the necessary information about the product timely and adequately, they may feel that they are buying quality product or service. This means having good and effective marketing communication channels adds value to the product or service of the company as customers have confidence in the choice of products and services over competitors.

The nature of the education service industry (intangibility of the service) and the challenges for educational institutions pushes universities to pursue holistic marketing approach to effectively interact with customers. In service setting, MC tools are especially important because they help create powerful images and a sense of credibility, confidence, and reassurance. It's vital to evaluate the effectiveness of all the MC elements and how to use the effectively to generate desired results, (Perreault and McCarthy 2002).

The primary goal of MC is to affect the perception of value and behaviour through directed communication. MC in HEIs has emphasized the need to adjust objectives and strategies to changing marketing and communication realities. In the rapidly changing and highly competitive world of the twenty-first century only strategically oriented MC can help businesses to move forward, (Schultz and Kitchen 2000).

Marketing units must step into the life of prospective students from their early stages of planning for HEIs. They must share elements which prospective students may use in order to identify an appropriate programme to study and an institution that offers it. Importance of using authentic resources and the benefits of obtaining information from current students, alumni, and counsellors available in institutions must be emphasized. Prospective students must be informed how and why personal aptitude, interest, ability, and resource should be evaluated before choosing the programme, regardless of its popularity and prospectus.

MC tools can be divided into personal communications and non-personal communications, *Personal communication tools* are those in which two or more people communicate with one another, and word of mouth is the primary means of communication, although other media, such as email, are growing in significantly. *Non-personal communication tools* are those in which communication occurs through some other media other than person-to person. These include national and regional newspapers and magazines, television, satellite, and cable television. Radio offers a wide range of competitively priced promotional

options. Posters can be placed in a wide variety of different environments, billboards at the roadside. Leaflets and publicity are important “takeaways” that can act as reminders of products and contact points. Attracting International students is of paramount importance for many educational institutions. Institutions have looked to fee-paying international students both as a means of generating income and as a means of adding diversity to the student body.

2.1.2 Promotion and the hierarchy of effects model

AIDA is an acronym for: Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action. According to AIDA model, marketers should begin by winning attention or gaining awareness, creating interest, inspiring desire and precipitating the action or purchase in the prospects in order to enable its products to be adopted by the target market, Kimmel (2005). Before potential students decide to enrol with a university, they have to be aware on the existence of the institution and the programmes it offers. Awareness is expected to generate interest which in turn will lead to the potential students to apply and enrol with a university.

Under the hierarchy of effects model, the buyers purchase decision is preceded by steps such as conviction about product benefits, preference for the brand, liking for the brand, knowledge relating to the benefits and features of the product, after an awareness of the product has been gained. Students use different media when searching to choose universities they wish to enrol with thus they make use of the media for their specific needs. Basic implication of these models is that the function of persuasive communication should be handled deftly at every stage of the buyers adoption process.

Porter (1985) argues that MC tools can create competitive advantage, boost sales and profits, while saving money, time and stress. MC wraps communications around customers and helps them move through the various stages of the buying process. The organisation simultaneously consolidates its image, develops a dialogue and nurtures its relationship with customers. This 'Relationship Marketing' cements a bond of loyalty with customers which can protect them from the inevitable onslaught of competition. The ability to keep a customer for life is a powerful competitive advantage.

2.1.3 Student enrolment processes

Decision making is broadly seen as a problem solving process undertaken by applicants in the process of making choices by prospective students. Models of decision making have been developed around what is commonly called the purchase behavior of consumers. Purchase behavior is generally seen as encompassing a series of stages including need arousal, information search and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and the post purchase feeling, Kotler (2003). Chapman et al (1984) was amongst the first to apply buying behavior theory to education suggesting that in selecting an institution or subject of study, students and their parents will pass through a number of uniquely definable stages. The stages include;

Pre-search behaviour

This stage involves early thoughts about their future where students passively register the existence of information about HE to which they are exposed. Crucially, institutions need to capitalize on this early decision making as some of the lasting attitudes and views are often developed during this stage. Maintaining an institutional presence in the passive minds of choosers may be a useful strategic option for institutions seeking to develop their recruitment markets.

A model of the college selection process

Key research questions with regard to the pre-search phase include the following:

1. When does pre-search begin? When does a student first come to realize the possible value of a college-level education?
2. Who is consulted about educational and career options, with what frequency and what effect?
3. To what extent do family circumstances, lifestyle, personal values, and culture influence a student's perceptions of the value of a college education in general, and of the value of specific college options (either colleges or types of colleges [e.g., public vs. private]) in particular?

Search behaviour

At this stage, applicants have already made a short list of potential providers and begin using a variety of sources of information to make up their minds while looking for data relating to a wide range of decision criteria. The key for institutions here is to know when this happens among groups of students and to maximize information opportunities to facilitate the search process.

Application stage

Students at this stage submit their applications to the selected institutions. Dealing with applications as swiftly as possible, and developing strategies to keep applicants “warm” during the time between an offer and registration are considered the vital marketing activities related to this stage. “In a market . . . those that are seen to provide a high standard of customer care and respond quickly to communications will undoubtedly gain an advantage” Sargeant (1999).

Choice decision

This marks the acceptance of the offer by the student. Because acceptance are often non contractual in education, students tend to make multiple offers. Institutions which maintain dialogue with those it has offered places help to seal a psychological bond between the applicant and the institution.

Registration

Finally the applicant turns up for registration, but often some turn the offer down after a few days in the institution. This equates with the early post purchase feelings applicants often have at the time of committing themselves to the institution. Many universities put up exciting fresher’s weeks with a variety of support services marketing to the needs of students as far as possible. Clearly a sound grasp of the above ideas is a necessary the first step in developing a recruitment strategy that allows the institution to compete favourably in the recruitment market. Seeking to know the reasons students choose the institution provides a solid foundation for building this understanding and for positioning the institution strongly in the competitive recruitment market.

2.1.4 Positioning the institution

Consumers in HEIs now exist in positional market, where institutions compete for the best students while the applicants compete for the most preferred institutions. No institution can be excellent at everything, nor can any single institution pander to needs of all applicants. Universities in this environment need to play to their strengths or situate themselves around aspects for which they can become excellent. Dibb (1997) has defined positioning as: The process of designing an image and value so that customers within target segments understand what the company or brand stands for in relation to its competitors. Positioning thus involves three elements of developing an institutional brand or image, deciding on the

market segments to serve and developing a communication strategy that accentuates the institutional capability to deliver to this market. Understanding choice and decision making of applicants feeds into this institutional positioning strategy through a clear identification of both the reasons for purchase behaviour of applicants.

Authors have suggested that universities might need to re-position themselves in order to attract successive generations of students, Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet, (1998) which may involve carrying out a situation analysis to ensure that market positioning is established and strategies are put in place to effectively present the institutional image and develop their position in the minds of the public, Ivy, (2001). Gray et al. (2003) recognized that little research had been conducted on market positioning in international HE markets even though the overseas market is highly competitive and there is an increasing emphasis on branding.

Based on a theoretical model, the four-level classification of international branding strategies, Medina and Duffy (1998) identified five main brand positioning dimensions: a university's learning environment (including excellent staff, facilities and resources); reputations (including brand name, achievements and high standard of education); graduate career prospects (including graduates' employment prospects, expected income and employers' views of graduates); destination image (including political stability, safety and hospitality) and cultural integration (including religious freedom and cultural diversity), Gray et al., (2003). They also recommended that future research could investigate the media and brand preferences of parents since they were found to be an important secondary group of decision-makers for choice of undergraduate programmes. This research used a problem-solving design and lends some support to the importance of image and resources identified in the earlier studies, which had used a problem identification design, to explore of the effectiveness of marketing communications and dissemination of information. Here again, nevertheless, researchers have borrowed models that have been developed in non-education sectors in order to explain the marketing needs/processes of HE institutions.

Universities today find themselves competing for students and support in a marketplace made increasingly complex by a convergence of factors. First, their target audience is bombarded by an assortment of marketing messages and consumer information – beginning with the ranking systems that identify the “best” schools and the “top” programs. The audience (Gen Y) is also more brand-savvy than its counterparts from previous generations.

In the competitive education sector, a consistent, consolidated and crystal clear message has a better chance of cutting through the 'noise' of over five hundred commercial messages which bombard customers each and every day. MC can boost student enrolment by stretching messages across several communications tools to create more avenues for customers to become aware, aroused, and ultimately chose the product. Making presentations and any type of one-to-one communication, to reach customers and strengthen an institutions relationship with clients is vital in boosting student enrolment.

Holistic marketing approach for services requires external marketing which deals with the interaction of the company as a whole with the customer in terms of company product, price, distribution channels, and promotion activities. Internal marketing is the process of engaging the support and commitment of employees and other organizational members for the goals and objectives of the company; Organizations have to communicate with their existing and potential customers about what they are doing.

MC is very important and at the same time challenging in the service sector as the nature of services is characterized by intangibility of the service product, which is decisive to convince customers on the value of a product. The intangibility of services has a number of managerial implications Allen and Shen

(1999). Linking the overall HEIs objectives and strategies during the marketing planning phases is vital to evaluate and fine-tune the specific activities of MC.

Public Relations is a planned and sustained management function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an institution with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance, Malan et al (1991). Good Public relations (PR) with stakeholders enables institutions to have a favourable mention in the media and consequently enhance student enrolment. Every institution has its publics. Most critical are internal university publics (employees and students) who should be empowered to be good ambassadors of HEIs.

A university's PR office is tasked with monitoring the institutions public image, media relations and advises the administrators on areas of image strength and weaknesses. PR office distributes press releases, preparation of adverting materials such as programme brochures and admission/ intakes as well as general campus stories. PR as a marketing communications tool is initiated through public appearances, news/press releases, exhibitions or event sponsorships whose main purpose is to build trust and goodwill by presenting the product, company or person in a positive light.

Gatfield and Graham (1999), opine that an institutions actual quality is often less important than its prestige, or reputation for quality, because it is the universities perceived excellence which, in fact, guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars to enrol with an institution. Competitive HEIs have a strong interest in how its target public's view the institution, programmes and services because people often respond to the institutions image, not necessarily its reality. Publics holding a negative perception about the institution will avoid or disparage it, even if the institution is of high quality and those holding a positive image drawn to it.

An institutions present image is usually based on its past record. A strong favourable image comes about as a result of an institutions performance, academic ranking and generating real satisfaction about the institution and letting the public know about this. A concern for university administrators would be (1) what image is; (2) how image is measured; (3) what factors contribute to image formation; (4) how image can be transformed (5) the relationship between image and an institutions reaction.

Public relations tools employed by HEIs include: Written materials like annual reports, catalogues, student handbook, employee newsletters, alumni magazines, posters, brochures, student handbooks, bulletins and fliers. Audiovisual material like films, power point slides, institutional identity media through branding through visual symbols, News, Events Speeches, telephone information services/customer care and personal contact.

Direct marketing brings the market directly into the home or office of potential customers, instead of the customer going to the market. Direct marketing is communication directly to consumers, without the use of intervening commercial communication media, Kimmel (2005). Direct marketing is a form of personal communication between a marketer and individual customer without the use of intervening commercial communication media. Personal communication is considered as more efficient because it gives

immediate feedback telling the communicator whether he/she has been successful in conveying the intended message.

The objective of direct marketing is to generate an immediate response from customers. Essentially, each direct marketing piece contains the information needed for the customer to respond immediately and can provide a personal touch by addressing customers by first names. This is aimed to move buyers through the buying process like getting potential students to visit an exhibition or to establish contact, (Kotler 2003).

Well-executed direct advertising campaign can offer a positive return on investment through increased student. Direct advertising communicates the product offers, service, or event; and explains how to get the offered product, service, or event. This tool utilizes email, mail, catalogues, encourage direct responses to radio and TV, in order to reach targeted audiences to increase sales and test new products and alternate marketing tactics.

Personal Selling is an oral communication with potential buyers of a product with the intention of making a sale. It involves personal contact; marketing officers in HEIs use this tool through face-to-face meetings or via a telephone conversation, though newer technologies that allow contact to take place over the Internet including using video conferencing or text messaging.

HEIs use personal selling, a face-to-face activity; customers in which potential customers obtain a relatively high degree of personal attention and to build good long-term relationships. School visits and career open days play a big role in disseminating messages about programmes offered in universities.

Maringe and Foskett (2002) opine that in competitive analysis for educational institution, an institution may be interested in knowing the following things about competition: Which institutions do we compete with for students, and how successful are we? To answer the questions, first an institution has to do a SWOT analysis. This information will serve as an indicator of how competitive the institution is and designing and the use of effective marketing communication tools to use to attract potential students to choose their institutions over their competitors. Second, education institutions can assess application overlap by comparing totals of shared applications. Then for each competitor: What programs does it offer, and how good are they? What marketing tools do they use? How effective are these MC tools in increasing student enrolment? What are the enrollment trends? What are the threats and opportunities facing the institution as far as marketing communication tools being employed?

With the advent of the internet, many HEIs have realised that this new medium would bring new opportunities for the marketing communication process. Some scholars even predict the death of the traditional marketing function. Abrahamson (2000) found that traditional methods of communication are too slow for this generation (Gen Y) and that higher education needs to shift its culture from the print to the web in order to reach these students in the way they like to communicate. He further stated that many institutions have been unable to coordinate the dissemination of a consistent image and message in printed materials. This is especially seen when individual departments send out mailings that are inconsistent with the look and content of the mailings from the admission's office. Web pages can be easily monitored and maintained for image, information, and accuracy.

The role of MC is pivotal to positioning educational institutions in a competitive landscape. Reviewing and revitalizing marketing strategies is vital for universities in order to attract and recruit new and existing students in the borderless higher education industry. In their competition for resources, educational institutions can use the following marketing assets among others: program quality, program

uniqueness, price, convenience, reputation (PR), and well qualified students and faculty (who attract others like themselves) and use of effective, timely and reliable channels and tools of MC to reach target customers to increase student enrolment. Many institutions recognize that a clear and well-organized website is an important tactic in an overall recruitment strategy. This student-centered communication strategy allows prospective students to visit an institution's website repeatedly and interact with representatives from colleges and universities. Using multiple channels and one clear voice also allows institutions to communicate with prospective students in a timely fashion and personal manner. This repetition and interaction help institutions and prospective students to bond and form relationships.

2.2 Empirical literatures

Umashankar (2001) in his study on antecedents and consequences of market orientation in higher education institutions: concluded that, market orientation in the higher education context has not received a great deal of attention.

Annually, colleges and universities compete for outstanding students, academic prestige and resources. According to Brown and Oplatka (2006) in their study on Universities in a competitive global marketplace; they examined how marketing framework has influenced various aspects of HEI management and its implication to dealing with student issues. Institutions need to know their competition, establish a respected image, develop a marketing communication plan and identify the needs of various marketing segments. In their findings, in a study on 'Universities in a competitive global marketplace by Hemsley and Oplatka (2006): found that the role of marketing units in developing a mature market which is strong enough to demand quality HE products is emphasised.

Sevier (2000) in his study on the use of the recruitment funnel by universities, asserts that the series of contacts to potential students include the use of direct mail, the World Wide Web, campus visit programs, telemarketing, and special events help to move a prospective student from initial contact to matriculation. Sevier, in his findings on the use of student recruitment funnel, opines that colleges must have a clear understanding of which consumers make up the target markets, their interests, their levels of financial need, and how they weigh different college-choice variables and what marketing communication tools are used to access university information. Students today (Gen Y) expect almost instantaneous answers to their questions, and they want to be treated uniquely. The relationship between recruitment and financial aid is becoming stronger, student behaviour and thinking: students' choice of university; information sources that prospective students use when making their choice; and their loyalty to and degree of satisfaction with the institution they want to enrol in.

The possible impact of marketization of education on academic staff and students has been explored by Murphy and Richard (1998) in their study on marketing universities: A Survey of student recruitment activities at 200 colleges and universities gave direct marketing the highest ranking in achieving institutional advertising goals. The study extended and clarified the literature on the use of direct marketing by institutions of higher education by applying the principles of responsive advertising and the use of direct marketing by colleges and universities.

Murphy and Richard found an increasing reliance on marketing concepts in HEIs and its implication to stakeholders. Marketization has opened several opportunities to the HE sector to build strong relationship

with the students and the community as partners in their endeavour to provide quality education and significantly increase student enrolment. It remains to be seen whether HEIs will observe good educational management practices, draw strengths from the government and other regulatory bodies, develop market intelligence and adopt strategic marketing techniques and respond to challenges that confront them, or merely succumb to the pressure of market forces.

2.2.1 Public Relations

Kotler (2003) argues that educational institutions need effective communications with their markets and publics. Educators usually use catalogues and bulletins describing their institution and its programs. HEIs communicate about themselves by their very existence, whether or not they have a formal communications program. HEIs use controllable marketing tools that an institution uses to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that the university can do to influence the demand for the services that it offers. MC goes beyond attracting more applicants. Universities may assume that if they only had enough students, their problems would go away. Yet they may also need to attract the good will and financial support of alumni, foundations and other donors, a task that cannot be accomplished by promotion alone.

According to Athiyaman (1997) in his study on linking student satisfaction and service quality perceptions: the case of university education, suggests that, despite hundreds of publications on consumer satisfaction and service quality, little work has been done to clarify the conceptual basis of these constructs; theorists in the area of service quality argue that the popular press does not differentiate between these two constructs. Athiyaman clarifies the relationship between consumer satisfaction and perceived service quality using a scenario specific to higher education. A model of perceived service quality that could be used in higher education institutions and that a responsive HEI has a vital interest in learning about its images/repute in the market place and making sure that these images accurately and favourably reflect the institution. An institutions actual quality is often less important than its prestige, or reputation for quality, because it is the university's perceived excellence which, in fact guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars considering offers on study opportunities. Responsive institutions recognize the importance of satisfied customers and publics.

PR involves an exchange of information between an institution and its target audience through pre-determined channels of communication. Thorough knowledge of the customer is fundamental to successful marketing to attain a competitive advantage. In the first place, the HE sector has dilemmas in defining its customer. This determines the marketing communication tools to employ for marketing activities in HEIs. George (2000) found that better prepared students are attracted to institutions with better academic reputation. Thus, without the better students, an institution is hampered in its efforts to improve its reputation.

PR consists of efforts to obtain favourable interest in the institution and its programs by planting significant news about them in publications or obtaining favourable unpaid presentation on radio, television or in other media. PR tools entail; written material (posters, fliers, brochures, alumni magazines, newsletters, catalogs and annual reports), audiovisual material (film, PowerPoint presentations), institutional identity media, news, events (university tours, career fairs, exhibitions and open days), speeches, telephone information services and personal contact.

A study conducted in Israel, Oplatka (2002), using a problem identification approach explored the messages low-stratified higher education institutions used to increase their organisational image and “product” status and attract prospective students. The author argued that low status HE institutions should refrain from adopting an image of high stratified HE institutions, because it contributed to a contradiction between the image they tried to convey and their reputation in the market. Oplatka acknowledged, however, that marketers of low-status institutions may face a professional dilemma from the need to elevate the institutional image and attract as many students as possible.

Canadian researchers, Nguyen & LeBlanc, (2001) argued that “a review of the research in the field of management education revealed little empirical evidence to support the relationship between institutional image and institutional reputation. Based on theories developed by economists, organisational theorists and marketers, the researchers conducted a study of a convenience sample of 395 business students which aimed to identify the main effects of institutional image and institutional reputation on student retention or customer loyalty. Nguyen and Le Blanc claimed there was a consensus on the essence of the concept of reputation in that it was the result of the past actions of an organisation, and they found that the interaction between institutional image and institutional reputation contributed to improved customer loyalty. Further, they added that elements such as faculty members and facilities on campus were critical factors which helped determine students’ perceptions of the image or reputation of a higher education institution. This approach was also predominantly a problem identification design as were most of the studies which focused on marketing communications, image and reputation with the exception of work by Ivy (2001).

It seems important to note that the concept of institutional image and reputation might be interpreted differently in HE compared with other services organizations. A company's high reputation, for instance, is usually connected to high sales and high demand from customers. In contrast, a HE institution’s high reputation is often linked to minimal “sales”, i.e. the more prestigious the HE institution is, the fewer students it often accepts onto its educational programmes. In this sense, a HE institution that tries to increase its image through new facilities is considered to be less attractive than those to which many apply regardless of these “tangible” aspects of the institution. For example, an “old” university may continue to receive three or four times as many applications as there are places on programmes; thus many potential clients are rejected – but this only serves to improve the reputation and image of that university. In most service industries, however, if customers were repeatedly unable to purchase the service, this would tend to reduce the reputation of that company unless prices were increased to control demand.

Effective PR program is coordinated to achieve desired results. Rather than using a jumble of bulletins, brochures, press releases, an institution should analyze its various markets and publics to determine each group’s communications needs and suitable MC tools to use. It should consider what response it wants from each group. A combination of marketing tools is better place for effectiveness and to create an impact and desired response for universities.

According to Gibbs and Knapp (2001), they point out that it is important to an institution’s advantage to describe clearly to prospective students what they can expect from college. He discussed five distinct categories to achieve this advantage in recruiting students:

- Clear, coherent mission and philosophy that communicate high but reasonable challenges for students buttressed by ethics of care.

- Campus environments that used the physical setting to educational advantage.
- A complicated web of cultural artifacts that communicate to the students 'how the institution works.
- Policies and practices that clearly and consistently communicate expectations for students' behavior hold students responsible for their own behavior and learning.
- Faculty, staff, and other institutional agents who promote student participation in educationally purposeful, out-of-class learning activities.

2.2.2 Relationship marketing

Gibbs (2001) pointed out that those involved in higher education “seek to develop educational relationships rather than transactional deals between traders”, and claimed that the “economic market commoditize higher education on the basis of the accreditations earned at higher education institutions”. Three papers identified during the literature searches, relied on a problem solving research design and conducted analysis based on relationship marketing theory (Klassen, 2002; Arnett et al., 2003; Trim, 2003) as opposed to the transactional marketing model.

Arnett et al., (2003) conducted research to establish whether there were benefits for non-profit organizations such as universities in adopting a relationship marketing model. They examined the nature of the exchange relationship in higher education for individual consumers, and based on identity theory they developed a model, specific to the non-profit context of HEI. Researchers argued that for higher education marketers, encouraging students to be actively involved in school activities and improving or maintaining a level of university prestige encouraged the formation and development of a university identity, which in turn encouraged students to engage in supportive behaviours in the future. Relationship marketing was considered by the authors to be a viable strategy in the context of HEI but they claimed that success required non-profit organizations, to not only focus on economic rewards, but highlight the “social benefits including emotional satisfaction, spiritual values and the sharing of humanitarian ideals”

In a study of the international marketing of British education, Binsardi & Ekwulugo (2003) provided a comprehensive literature analysis which linked relationship marketing to the marketing of services, and emphasised that relationships require at least two parties who are in contact with each other: the customer and the service provider. There was, therefore, much support for appropriateness of applying the relationship marketing approach to higher education, whereas there was little evidence that researchers examined application of the transactional model.

2.2.3 Advertising

Advertising consists of paid presentation and promotion ideas, products, programs, or services whether in magazines or newspapers, television, radio, billboards, bus card, direct mail, open days, events, exhibitions, speeches, or other mediums. Technological advancements have pushed institutions to do viral marketing through social networking sites like my space, twitter and face book, Kashorda (2002).

According to Ivy (2001), in the study of Higher education institution image: a correspondence analysis approach, asserts that it's critical for institutions to plan for effective and sustainable marketing communications. As competition for student's increases and funding decreases universities need to create and maintain a distinctive image in the market place. Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly aggressive in their marketing activities to convey an image that is favourable to their public,

be they prospective students, employers, funders etc. University marketing communicators must identify the target audience, clarify the response sought, develop messages, choose efficient and reliable medium of communication, select source attributes and collect feedback.

Ivy investigated on how marketing is used to convey higher education institution type image in the UK and South Africa. Using correspondence analysis shows the unique positioning that have been created by the old UK universities, the new UK universities, South African universities. Also identifies which marketing tools these institution types use in conveying their institutional image. Creating effective communication with customers is the most important aspect in services marketing. To date, there is poor understanding of the role of effective MC with customers in attracting and maintaining prospective and present customers in higher learning institutions.

Considerable attention has been given to the need for firms to increase their level of marketing effectiveness. Firms which were close to customers, had a common set of values, and demonstrated an external market orientation were those perceived to have a high degree of MC effectiveness.

A more holistic problem identification approach to the study of MC was undertaken by Gray *et al.*, (2003) in Australia with a convenience sample of 1,096 students attending private colleges, high schools, universities and polytechnics in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. This study, focused primarily on branding, investigated the media that students used to gain information about foreign universities, and using One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and t-tests, concluded that “the World Wide Web (WWW) and print media were perceived to be the most important sources of university information in all three Asian markets” (Gray *et al.*, 2003). The researchers acknowledged, however, that: “students had different media preferences which might be related to differences in cultural values, levels of Westernisation and communications infrastructure in their home countries”.

2.2.4 Direct Marketing

In order for any HE institution to market itself successfully, managers would need to examine the decision-making process and potential students’ search for information. Kotler and Fox (1985) opine that effective MC calls for managers to have adequate information for planning and allocating resources properly to different markets, products, territories, and marketing communications tools. Marketing effectiveness depends also on whether management can design a profitable strategy. Marketing plans do not yield desirable results unless they are efficiently carried out at various levels of the organization. MC effectiveness is not synonymous with profitability. The premise is that levels of return on investment, sales, etc. depend on marketing effectiveness.

Mok (2000) in his research, on marketing of HEIs in the new global marketplace argues that the narrow economic model of education is flawed, as the education system exists not just to prepare students for work in today’s market, but also to inform them about the market and to encourage critical thinking about the marketplace. It’s critical for universities to engage in marketing and branding programmes. Umashankar (2001) emphasizes the need to effectively manage various points-of-marketing in marketing HE programmes. Cautioning managers and marketers of HE not to use the tools of marketing carelessly,

Gibbs (2008) analysed the changes in the essence of educational provisions that marketing has contributed in HEIs functional processes. Gibbs further explored the development of marketing strategies within a strategic planning structure in HEIs.

Print communications provide potential students with information in the form of prospectuses, booklets and student guides, Miller K (2005). However, the most essential difference, from a communicative perspective, is not the changing set of tools. More important is to adjust and align objectives and strategies to changing marketing and communication realities.

Gomes and Murphy (2003), investigated on the Internet's role in communicating educational opportunities from two perspectives: students' Internet use to facilitate information search and decision making; and educational institutions' e-business adoption and implementation. They found out that the different elements of integration in MC represent the voice by which companies can establish a dialogue with customers and other stakeholders, about their product/service offerings and/or other company issues. Information from different media channels all becomes a part of messages about a company and its product and service for consumers. The study results showed that prospective overseas students do indeed use the Internet. Institutions should immediately establish procedures for answering e-mail and review changing their Web sites to appeal to overseas students. Conflicting messages from different sources can create confused company images in the consumer's mind. Therefore, the need for systematic integration and coordination of all the messages and communication channels is not merely a theoretic concern, but has become a fundamental issue for marketers.

2.2.5 Personal Selling

The interactive nature of personal selling also makes it the most successful promotional method for building relationships with potential HEIs customers. Personal selling is a useful communication tool at certain stages of the buying process, particularly in building up buyers' first choices, certainty and proceedings. This is most imperative especially for a service sector like education, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries, Armstrong (2001).

Allen and Shen (1999) in a study on character of competition among higher education institutions, found out that enrolments are significantly negatively related to either gross or net tuition prices, private education is a normal good and there is an empirically significant enrolment response to the opportunity cost of college enrolment. They concluded that tuition price subsidies play a critical role in managing enrolment demand at this institution.

MC programme includes all internal and external university publics that interact with prospective students and indeed once they are enrolled as students of the university. These stakeholders could be academic, administrative, alumni, students, suppliers, donors, competitors and support staff. Through word of mouth, these key university publics play a key role in attracting students to enrol with an institution; empowering these stakeholders to be marketers of a university is vital. The image and status of academic staff in recruitment of undergraduate students is open for debate; however at a graduate level, student perceptions of teaching staff reputations can play an important role in the choice process.

Some students, for example, may be influenced by the number of academic staff who are PhD holders or have a Professorial title, others by academics' public profiles (as experts for television interviews or other publicity) Eshiwani (1990). On the administrative and academic support front, significant input to the provision of higher education services both at the front line and what might be considered behind the scenes is provided, which does impact on student perceptions of service quality. How telephone enquiries are handled may have a greater impact on whether or not prospective students are going to keep that university in their range of options than an eminent Professor's publications or research record. Physical evidence and processes are the newest additions to the services mix. Physical evidence is the tangible component of the service offering.

A variety of tangible aspects are evaluated by a university's target markets, ranging from the teaching materials to the appearance of the buildings and lecture facilities at the university. MC effectiveness in HEIs is positively related to the marketing communication culture of the institution (service quality, interpersonal relationships, selling task, organization, internal communications, and innovativeness) that universities might need to re-position themselves in order to attract successive generations of students (Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet, 1998) which may involve carrying out a situation analysis to ensure that market positioning is established and strategies are put in place to effectively present the institutional image and develop their position in the minds of the public (Ivy, 2001). Gray et al. (2003) recognized that little research had been conducted on market positioning in international HE markets even though the overseas market is highly competitive and there is an increasing emphasis on branding.

According to Kotler (2005), the first requirement of effective marketing is that key managers recognize the primacy of studying the market, distinguishing the many opportunities, selecting the best sections of the market to serve, and gearing up to offer superior value to the chosen customers in terms of their needs and wants. Next, the organization should be staffed so that it will be able to carry out marketing analysis, planning, and implementation, and control.

Research that began to emerge in the 1990s interpreted marketing within the narrower definition of marketing communications, and was based on the assumption that in order for any HEI to market itself successfully managers would need to examine the decision-making process and potential students' search for information, Mortimer, 1997; Gatfield et al., (1999). Gatfield in his study on measuring communication impact for university advertising materials found out that there was a significant disparity between student perceived needs and those communicated by the universities printed material.

In a study carried out in the USA by George (2000), the question "What is marketing?" was asked to 300 educational institution administrators, whose institutions were facing declining student enrolments, increasing costs and rising tuition fees. The results indicated that sixty-one percent viewed marketing as a combination of selling, advertising, and public relations. Another 21 percent said it was only one of these three activities. Only a few percent knew that marketing had something to do with needs assessment, market research, product development, pricing, and distribution (Murphy *et al.*, as cited by Kotler and Fox, 1985).

Strategic approaches were studied by examining perceptions of HEI marketing (Maringe, 2004) and types of marketing strategies (Maringe and Foskett, 2002). Problem identification research by Maringe and Foskett (2002) asked questions about the marketing challenges university marketers were facing in their institutions in the Southern African region, and aimed to identify how marketing was organized and what philosophies underpinned marketing perceptions and practice. They identified four broad marketing

strategies that university institutions tended to use: public relations approach; sales approach; customer satisfaction approach; and marketing as strategy approach. In terms of which strategies and approaches to marketing were prevalent in the region's universities they found that institutions were at different stages of development in marketing terms and that marketing functions needed to be more adequately identified and defined. They recommended that marketing efforts needed to be directed at developing longer-term institutional visions and missions that incorporated marketing as an integral component of the development plans.

An Australian study by Rindfleish (2003) focused on the marketing technique of segment profiling, to examine whether, and in what ways, this marketing tool could be effectively employed to measure the potential of new market segments and the viability of strategic planning goals in the HE sector. The study relied on secondary data analysis from a database of 495 students from one university using geo-demographic mapping. The identity of the university used for this study was not disclosed, and the author highlighted the need to keep such information confidential for commercial reasons. The author argued that the technique was useful as a way reducing the risk of specific strategic planning goals, by identifying the potential of new market segments and streamlining target marketing practices. He claimed that the strategic goals of the organization, whether they be goals based on student access and equity needs or an increased target of full-cost international students, could be broadly assessed before management decisions were made. The subject of market differentiation was also a key theme of problem solving research that aimed to explore the possibilities of applying marketing theory to the HE sector.

Authors (Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet, 1998) have suggested that universities might need to re-position themselves in order to attract successive generations of students which may involve carrying out a situation analysis to ensure that market positioning is established and strategies are put in place to effectively present the institutional image and develop their position in the minds of the public. Due to the increasing power of technology in the area of customer databases, segment profiling is now commonly used as a way of matching the strategic goals of the organisation with the potential needs and wants of segments within specific markets (Kotler, 2003). The university market has been characterized as forming three main segments: international students; mature students and high-school leavers, and each segment consider different factors when making choices.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The study is based on communication theory. This theory asserts that communication involves a planned exchange of deliberate communication between a sender and receiver through pre-determined channels of communication to create the desired response and generate feedback.

It's a transactional process between two or more parties whereby meaning is exchanged through the intentional use of symbols, Engel *et al.*, (1994). Based on this theory, the study proposes the following conceptual framework defined by a dependent variable which is student enrolment. Independent variables are as public relations, advertising, direct marketing and personal selling.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework below represents the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

2.4.1 Relationship between the variables

Globally, universities use public relations as a MC tool to reach prospective students hence increasing enrolment for competitive advantage. An institutions actual quality is often less important than its prestige, or reputation for quality, because it is the university's perceived excellence which, in fact guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars considering offers on study opportunities.

Advertising is an important marketing communication tool in creating awareness about the university products and services to prospective students and consequently help to boost student enrolment on a large scale reach.

Direct marketing is vital to stimulate the interest of potential consumers in the institutions existing programmes and services. The main task of an institution is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and to satisfy them through the design, communication, pricing and delivery of appropriate and competitively viable programs and services.

Personal selling is an interactive nature of personal selling also makes it the most successful promotional method for building relationships with potential HEIs customers with an aim of increasing student enrolment. Personal selling is the most useful communication tool at certain stages of the buying process, particularly in building up buyers' first choices.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research design

Research design is the master plan for collection and analysis of data which aids in answering the research questions. The study adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive study is undertaken in order to ascertain and be able to describe the characteristics of the variable of interest in a situation (Kothari, 2008). Correlation was undertaken to determine the relationship between the dependent (student enrolment) and independent variables (public relations, advertising, personal selling, and direct marketing) addressing the effect of selected MC tools on student enrolment in private universities.

3.2 Target population

In this study, respondents comprised of marketing/student recruitment /public relations officers and students from each of the twenty five private universities formed the target population.

3.3 Sampling technique

Probability-simple random sampling technique was adopted. The total study population was 25 private universities in Kenya.

3.3.1 Sample size

A sample of 125 respondents was targeted; a total of five respondents (two student recruitment/public relations officers: and three students) from each of the private universities were selected. The selected samples were representative for generalization of research findings. (See, attached appendix for list of private universities).

3.3.2 Data collection methods and techniques

To undertake the primary collection of data, a questionnaire was designed as an instrument to guide in gathering data. The researcher sought authority from the specific universities to carry out the research. A cover letter introducing the researcher and seeking permission to the authorities was attached to the questionnaires.

3.4 Data collection tools

Questionnaires were used as the principal tools for data collection. Data was collected using self administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were based on the numerical and likert scale for measurement purpose. The questionnaire was made of five sections. The first section captured the general information of the respondents, the second, third, fourth and fifth section addressed variables of the study. The respondents were required to fill the questionnaire as honestly as possible.

3.4.1 Data collection procedure

The researcher collected the data within a time frame of three weeks. A cover letter introducing the researcher to the authorities was attached to the questionnaires. It was an introduction to the respondents and to enlist permission from relevant authorities to carry out research in the identified universities.

3.5 Pilot Study

To establish reliability and the validity, the researchers conducted a pilot study with four (4) student recruitment officers and students in two randomly sampled private universities. The respondents were administered with questionnaires twice with a one week interval. This was aimed at testing whether the same response will be obtained. The purpose of pilot testing was to test the accuracy and appropriateness of the research design and instrumentation and therefore enhanced face validity. After the pilot study, the main survey was conducted.

The pre-test was useful to the study in the following ways;

1. Deficiencies in the questionnaire were revealed.
2. It helped to minimize random errors and increase reliability of data collected.
3. Analysis of questionnaires administered determined if methods of analysis were correct.
4. Incorporation of crucial questions, suggestions and comments from the respondents was incorporated.

3.6 Data analysis and presentation

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of data was done to answer the four research questions of this study. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Data collected was sorted, classified, coded and tabulated for ease of analysis. The data was then summarized and categorized according to common themes. Data was analyzed using frequency distribution tables, descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-Square test of significance was used for hypothesis testing to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15 was used for data analysis.

3.7 Ethical consideration

The respondents were identified and objectively selected as subjects to provide information for the study. Respondents were given an option of not writing their names on the filled questionnaires for maximum confidentiality. The researcher treated the collected data provided by respondents as strictly confidential and the collected data was used solely for the purpose of the study and not for any other self serving reason.

4.0 Findings

The following are the summary finding objective wise.

4.1.1 *To determine whether public relations influences student enrolment in private Universities.*

Public relations' was found to influence student enrolment. The frequent use of exhibitions, institution reputation, and excellent customer satisfaction are key MC tools for increasing student enrolment. Among the written communication materials, brochures were rated highly as most effective MC tools to enhance student enrolment. Competitive universities have a strong interest in how its target public view the institution, programmes and services because customers often respond to the institutions image, not necessarily its reality. Publics holding a negative perception about an institution will avoid or disparage it, even if the institution is of high quality and those holding a positive image drawn to it. This study is in line with Gatfield and Graham (1999) and Athiyaman (1997), Nguyen & LeBlanc, (2001) who concluded that an institutions actual quality is often less important than its prestige, or reputation for quality, because it is the universities perceived excellence which, in fact, guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars to enrol with an institution.

Public relations tools employed by universities include: written materials like annual reports, catalogues, student handbook, employee newsletters, alumni magazines, posters, brochures, student handbooks, bulletins and fliers. Audiovisual material like films, power point slides, institutional identity media through branding through visual symbols, news, events speeches, telephone information services/customer care and personal contact.

The study found out that universities carry out market research and revise MC tools for student recruitment. These findings are confirmed by Brown and Oplatka (2006) who concluded that universities need to know their competition, establish a respected image, develop a marketing communication plan and identify the needs of various marketing segments. Responsive institutions recognize the importance of satisfied customers and publics. Better prepared students are attracted to institutions with better academic reputation. Thus, without the better students, an institution is hampered in its efforts to improve its reputation. An institutions present image is usually based on its past record. A strong favourable image comes about as a result of an institutions performance, academic ranking and generating real satisfaction about the institution and letting the public know about this. A concern for university administrators would be (1) what image is; (2) how image is measured; (3) what factors contribute to image formation; (4) how image can be transformed (5) the relationship between image and an institutions reaction.

Marketing/student recruitment departments occupy unique positions in the organizational structure of any university. Integrating institution's communication and marketing goals with its strategic and academic goals has become important with implications to institutional visibility and reputation because most

private universities depend on student tuition fees to manage and run these institutions. This study's findings are also very closely related to a theoretical model, the four-level classification of international branding strategies by (Medina and Duffy 1998) which identified five main brand positioning dimensions: a university's learning environment (including excellent staff, facilities and resources); reputations (including brand name, achievements and high standard of education); graduate career prospects (including graduates' employment prospects, expected income and employers' views of graduates); destination image (including political stability, safety and hospitality) and cultural integration (including religious freedom and cultural diversity), Gray et al., (2003).

In addition to providing information to prospective students, organizing career-fairs and exhibitions, marketing departments are expected to bring back information (marketing intelligence) on a range of subjects that are intended to help institutional progression. Usually being the first point of contact, marketing departments gain easy access to information from students in general and freshmen in particular. Hence elements such as faculty members and facilities on campus were critical factors which helped determine students' perceptions of the image or reputation of a higher education institution in order to increase student enrolment.

4.1.2 To establish whether advertising influences student enrolment in private universities.

The study found out that advertising plays a critical role in enhancing student enrolment in private universities. Advertising, through print and electronic media is a key tool for universities in reaching potential customers at a wider reach. The study established that print media; newspapers were rated highly as the most effective marketing communication tools to provide information to prospective students. This is due to the wide reach and reliability of these tools. This study's findings are close to what (Miller, 2005) concluded that print communications provide potential students with information in the form of prospectuses, booklets and student guides.

Stiff competition has pushed universities to be innovative and use marketing communication tools that have a wider reach and are user friendly to potential students. In the competitive education sector, a consistent, consolidated and crystal clear message has a better chance of cutting through the 'noise' of over five hundred commercial messages which bombard prospective students each day. Advertising entails the use of media such as magazines, newspapers, outdoor posters, direct mail, radio, television, bus posters, catalogues, directories, programmes and circulars. Advertising as a MC tool is used by universities to communicate messages to large audiences through media such as radio, TV, Magazines, newspapers, internet, billboards and other mobile technological communication devices.

Traditional marketing communication tools like billboards, posters, radio, university newsletters, and alumni magazines were rated as less effective tools to reach and provide information to prospective students in bid to increase student enrolment numbers.

This study's findings are in line with Porter (2001) that some institutions have used internet technology to shift the basis of competition away from quality, features and service toward price, making it harder for anyone in their industry to reach profitability. New technologies play such a prominent role in higher education marketing that comments about these technologies appeared among the top two overall challenges. Competition for students is a fact of life, with advantages for prospective students, faculty, and donors. The existence of many educational alternatives encourages institutions to offer attractive

programs of the best possible quality and in some cases to specialize to take advantage of unique strengths and circumstances.

Universities today find themselves competing for students and support in a marketplace made increasingly complex by a convergence of factors. First, their target audience is bombarded by an assortment of marketing messages and consumer information – beginning with the ranking systems that identify the “best” schools and the “top” programs. The audience (Gen Y) is more brand-savvy than its counterparts from previous generations. Universities have to do market analysis to determine which are best advertising media to best reach the sophisticated, technologically savvy students.

4.1.3 To examine whether direct marketing influences student enrolment in private universities.

The study established that direct marketing influences student enrolment. Internet use through university websites had a high usage rate which was equally indicated by student use in accessing university information. Websites were rated as most effective direct marketing communication tools in enhancing student enrolment numbers. This study finding concurs with (Sevier 2000) who stressed on the importance of the recruitment funnel, the series of contacts to potential students that include the use of direct mail, the World Wide Web, campus visit programs, telemarketing (alumni), and special events, which moves a prospective student from initial contact to matriculation. Hence, universities must have a clear understanding, of which type of consumers that make up their target markets.

MC can boost student enrolment by stretching messages across several communications tools to create more avenues for customers to become aware, aroused, and ultimately chose the product. A clear and well-organized website is an important tactic in an overall marketing communication recruitment strategy. This student-centred communication strategy allows prospective students to visit an institution's website repeatedly and interact with representatives from colleges and universities.

The study also found out that most universities have not embraced the use of social networks like Face book and Twitter to use as student recruitment tools. Technological advancements are changing how student recruitment is being conducted in higher learning institutions in targeting the techno-literate prospective students. The objective of direct marketing is to generate an immediate response from customers. Essentially, each direct marketing piece contains the information needed for the customer to respond immediately and can provide a personal touch by addressing customers by first names. This is aimed to move buyers through the buying process like getting potential students to visit an exhibition or to establish contact (Kotler 2003). This study revealed that prospective students do indeed use the Internet. Institutions should establish procedures for answering e-mail and review changing their Web sites to appeal to students at national and international level.

4.1.4 To assess whether personal selling influences student enrolment in private universities.

The study established that personal selling influences student enrolment. Prospective students expect almost instantaneous answers to their questions, and they want to be treated uniquely. Well-executed

personal selling campaigns can offer a positive return on investment through increased student. Career days were rated as the most effective MC tool of personal selling to increase student enrolment. Personal selling through high school visits communicates university products and service; and explains how to get the offered product or service

This study established that making presentations and any type of one-to-one communication, to reach customers and strengthen an institutions relationship with clients is vital in boosting student enrolment. This observation, (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003) confirms in his study that using multiple channels and one clear voice also allows institutions to communicate with prospective students in a timely fashion and personal manner. Subsequently, career days have a profound effect in increasing student enrolment numbers. Personal selling utilizes, campus visits by prospective students and career days and high school visits organized by university student recruitment departments.

In relation to this study, (Gomes and Murphy 2003), found out that the different elements of integration in MC represent the voice by which companies can establish a dialogue with customers and other stakeholders, about their product/service offerings and/or other company issues. Information from different media channels all becomes a part of messages about a company and its product and service for consumers.

Conflicting messages from different sources can create confused company images in the consumer's mind. Therefore, the need for systematic integration and coordination of all the messages and communication channels is not merely a theoretic concern, but has become a fundamental issue for marketers. The study established that family and friends have been identified by the students as the factors having the greatest influence on their decision to study at a particular tertiary institution.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

4.2.1 Hypothesis One: There is no relationship between public relations and student enrolment.

The researchers reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between public relations activities and student enrolment. This is because an institutions actual quality is often less important than its prestige, or reputation for quality, because it is the universities perceived excellence which, in fact, guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars to enrol with an institution, Nguyen & LeBlanc, (2001) In addition to providing information to prospective students, organizing career-fairs and exhibitions, marketing departments bring back information (marketing intelligence) on a range of subjects that are intended to help institutional progression. Usually being the first point of contact, marketing departments gain easy access to information from students in general and freshmen in particular. Hence elements such as faculty members and facilities on campus were critical factors which helped determine students' perceptions of the image or reputation of a higher education institution in order to increase student enrolment.

4.2.2 Hypothesis Two: There is no relationship between advertising and student enrolment.

The researchers reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between advertising and student enrolment. This is because advertising, through print and electronic media is a key tool for universities in reaching potential customers at a wider reach. The study established that print media; newspapers were rated highly as the most effective marketing communication tools to provide information to prospective students. This is due to the wide reach and reliability of these tools. This study's findings were close to what (Miller, 2005) concluded that print

communications provide potential students with information in the form of prospectuses, booklets and student guides.

4.2.3 Hypothesis Four: There is no relationship between direct marketing and student enrolment.

The researchers reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between direct marketing and student enrolment at 1% level of significance. This could be attributed to well-executed direct marketing campaigns which offer a positive return on investment through increased student. Career days were rated as one of the most effective MC tool of direct marketing to increase student enrolment. Direct marketing through career days communicates university products and service; and explains how to get the offered product or service. This tool utilizes, campus visits by prospective students and career days and high school visits organized by university student recruitment departments. A clear and well-organized website is an important tactic in an overall marketing communication recruitment strategy. This student-centred communication strategy allows prospective students to visit an institution's website repeatedly and interact with representatives from colleges and universities.

4.2.4 Hypothesis Four: There is no relationship between personal selling and student enrolment.

The researchers reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between personal selling and student enrolment. This could be attributed to universities making presentations and any type of one-to-one communication, to reach potential students and strengthen an institutions relationship with clients is vital in boosting student enrolment. This observation, (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003) confirms in his study that using multiple channels and one clear voice also allows institutions to communicate with prospective students in a timely fashion and personal manner is crucial in attracting and retaining potential students in higher learning institutions. MC can boost student enrolment by stretching messages across several communications tools to create more avenues for customers to become aware, aroused, and ultimately chose the product.

In relation to this study, (Gomes and Murphy 2003), found out that the different elements of integration in MC represent the voice by which companies can establish a dialogue with customers and other stakeholders, about their product/service offerings and/or other company issues. Information from different media channels all becomes a part of messages about a company and its product and service for consumers.

4.3 Conclusion

It is crucial that higher learning institutions understand the perceptions and expectations of students and translate them into marketing activities that would attract and retain students. The need to provide value for money to the students and to be responsive to their needs has necessitated universities in general and marketing units in particular to look beyond marketing paradigms and customer approach in the HE sector. Declaring how their products are positioned against benchmarks and other ratings has already begun in many HEIs.

Public Relations, a university's public image and its customer satisfaction index are important aspects in enhancing student enrolment because satisfied and happy clientele speak well of the institution and influence others to enrol with the institution. The study established that apart from an institutions academic excellence, exhibitions and university image are key tools in increasing student enrolment.

Several aspects that need to be coordinated among quality assurance departments, academic staff, and the marketing departments in an effort to accomplish these needs. Hence, it is important for institutions to know why students choose a particular institution over another one. Factors that usually cause hardships to students and parents include lack of transparency in entry criteria, hidden costs, insufficient information about the programme and possible career opportunities, and limited or misleading details on accreditation, validation and recognition by other universities and prospective employers. Frequent changes to academic policies, curriculum, and assessment strategies also have implications to student progression. Furthermore, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate learning resources, and unqualified and inexperienced staff often de-motivate students.

Academic administrators must be keen on developing dynamic marketing units that provide inputs to strengthen management functions and bridge the gap between the market and the HEIs. The role of marketing units has shifted from selling products of and for their institutions to seeking HE products for students. In this effort, marketing units are also involved in educating the markets in order to help them understand environmental changes has been have been instrumental in making academic institutions are market themselves ever more aggressively in order to increase their market share, whether in terms of student numbers or the quality of those enrolling.

Personal selling through high school visits and career days contribute significantly to increased student enrolment. Direct marketing is equally a reliable tool through the use of alumni networks and use of internet to reach prospective students on wider scale. Students must be provided with all the tools that are required for them to explore, analyze, and make informed decisions regarding university choice.

The role of MC is pivotal to positioning educational institutions in a competitive landscape. Reviewing and revitalizing marketing strategies is vital for universities in order to attract and recruit new and existing students in the borderless higher education industry. In their competition for resources, educational institutions can use the following marketing assets among others: program quality, program uniqueness, price, convenience, reputation (PR), and well qualified students and faculty (who attract others like themselves) and use of effective, timely and reliable channels and tools of MC to reach target customers to increase student enrolment.

Some MC tools have very little or no influence on the student's decision to study at a particular institutions. It's critical for universities to revise their MC tools to determine which are more or less effective in reaching prospective students to boost student enrolment numbers. It's critical for universities to analyze its target markets and publics to determine each group's communications needs and appropriate MC tools to use. It should consider what response it wants from each group. A combination of marketing communication tools is better placed for effectiveness and to create an impact and desired response to increase student enrolment,

4.4 Recommendations

1. The study recommends that universities top management should incorporate a greater market orientation into their strategic planning and frequently revise marketing communication tools to determine their effectiveness in order to have a competitive advantage and gain a big market share. Higher institution administrators and policy makers must check how far they are providing their services in terms of customer orientation. With current strategies, are they serving the needs of students (and in most cases their parents and sponsors)? What areas should they improve in

order to provide better education for future generations? This information will assist private institutions develop a better marketing strategies in attracting and retaining students.

2. Universities should empower its key stakeholders; students/alumni and staff to be key ambassadors on behalf of institutions because a good public image and academic quality attracts potential students to enrol in a university. It should not just be the task of student recruitment and public relations departments to spearhead public relations and student recruitment campaigns. Wherever necessary, student departments should involve academics staff; students, alumni, and members from the industry as well as career counsellors, academic advisers and other university employees should be involved in student recruitment activities.
3. Universities should consider embracing new technology up to date marketing using social networks like face book, my space and twitter which have a wider reach. Most potential students are technologically literate-(Gen Y) and can access these tools on their mobile phones. Traditional methods of communication are too slow for this generation universities need to shift their culture from the print to the web in order to reach these students in the way they like to communicate.
4. As indicated in the study, opportunities to meet friends and to take part in extracurricular activities feature strongly in students' college choice selection. Thus, when attempting to attract students to enrol, universities should publicize social or charitable events designed for them such as sports carnivals, exhibitions, blood donation campaign, open days etc.
5. To serve the customers' needs, the quality of teaching, institutions' image and campus surroundings must be considered by college operators in order to attract students. Image and reputation - promotion should be targeted to relevant groups such as the students, and their friends and families. Potential students must be provided all tools that are required for them to explore, analyze, and make informed decisions regarding universities they want to enrol in.

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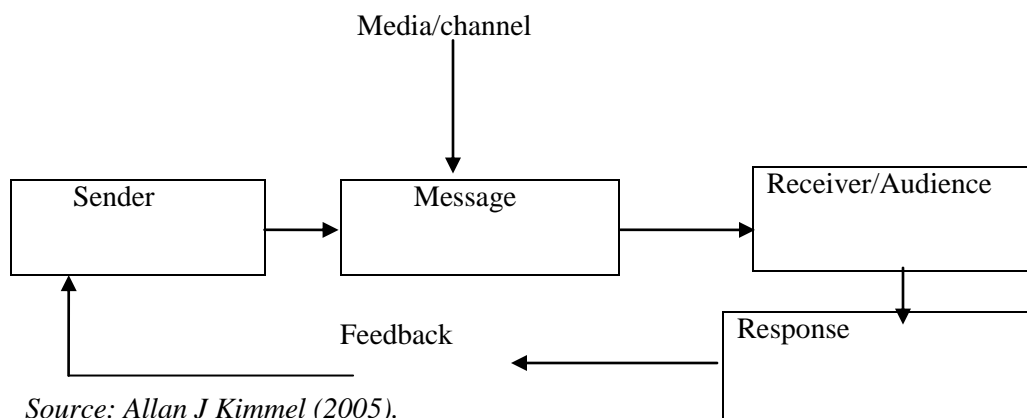
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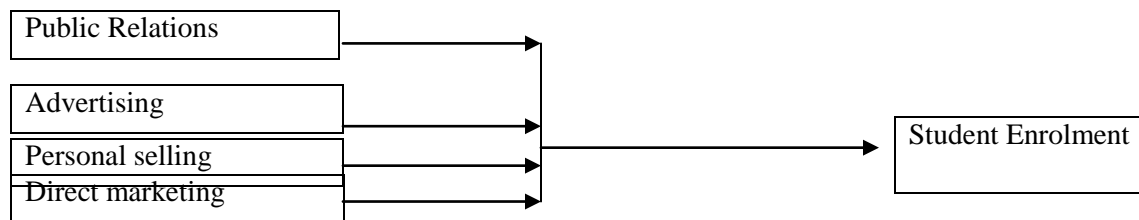
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Fig: 1.1 Communication Process



Source: Allan J Kimmel (2005).

Fig: 4.1. Conceptual Framework



Independent variables

Dependent variable

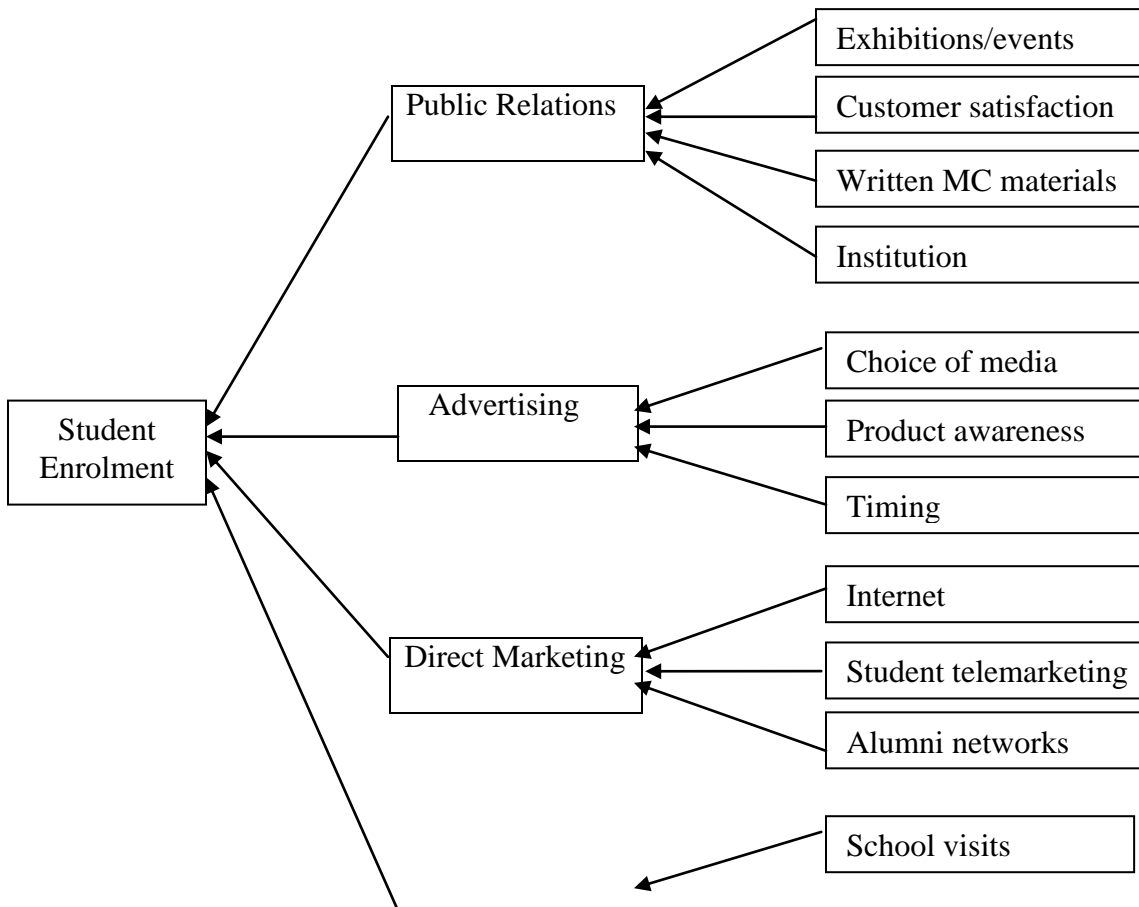
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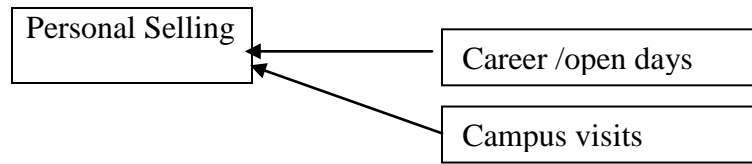
Table 4.2 Chi-Square Test

| | Public Relations | Personal Selling | Advertising | Direct Marketing |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Chi-Square | 20.512 | 29.146 | 44.366 | 10.756 |
| Degree of Freedom | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|
| Asymp. Sig. | .000 | .000 | .000 | .001 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|

Fig 1.2 Operational Framework





Variable

(Source: Authors, 2011)

Parameter

Statistics

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