

Perceived Role of Marketing Communication Strategies on Students' Enrollment in Private Secondary Schools in Mbale Municipality, Mbale District

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Abstract

The study examined the effect of marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality, Mbale district. The hypotheses of the study were; (a) external marketing communication strategies have no statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality, (b) internal marketing communication strategies have no statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality, and (c) relationship marketing communication strategies have no statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality. A correlation research design was adopted for the study, with a population of 290 from which a sample of 165 was selected. A closed ended questionnaire was used for data collection, with both descriptive statistics and inferential used for data analyses. The study discovered significant effects between external marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment ($r = .490$, $N = 158$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .490$), internal marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment ($r = .493$, $N = 158$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .493$), and relationship marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment ($r = .594$, $N = 158$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .594$). This implies that a unit change in external, internal and relationship marketing communication strategies leads to a 49.0%; 49.3% and 59.4% change in students' enrollment respectively. The study concludes that external, internal and relationship marketing communication strategies have a statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale Municipality. Due to a higher effect relationship marketing communication strategies should be given priority when undertaking marketing in private secondary schools in Mbale Municipality, Mbale District.

Keywords: Marketing communication strategies, students' enrollment, private secondary schools, Mbale municipality

1. Introduction

School marketing is increasingly becoming an important managerial tool adopted by private secondary schools to increase students' enrollment. Due to the stiff competition in the education sector today there is a shift in the marketing approach at all educational levels (Watts, 2005). This has been adopted by the desire for schools to attract more students and to remain active in provision of education services in the face of the new competitive environment. Designing effective marketing communication strategies is therefore essential for adequate students' enrollment and sustainability of schools (Muthoni, Gachambi & Kathuni, 2014). It is necessary to market schools in the current situation where education is integrated in the market economy. Schools are exposed to market competition and require adequate strategies if they are to maintain, or increase students' numbers (Angelopulo, 2013; Njuguna, 2015; Danjuma, Shasi & Hauwa, 2017). From various studies, marketing is defined as a management process that is responsible for anticipating, identifying and satisfying the demands of the consumers with a view of increasing sales and making profits (Watts, 2005). Marketing is also considered as the science and art of exploring, creating and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit (Kotler & Karen, 1995). Marketing involves the communication with consumers to identify their needs through market research. This is done by choosing the target market through market analysis, segmentation and choosing the channels through which the message is communicated (Watts, 2005). Marketing is involved in determining market segment, information gathering about customer needs, design a service or product required by customers, communicating or advertising, selling the products as well as building a long lasting relationship and trust with the customers (Silk & Stiglin, 2015; Farayibi, 2017). Findings from various studies reveal that print media, newspapers, brochures, alumni, social media, websites are effective strategies in providing information to prospective students, while the traditional marketing communication strategies like bill boards, posters, radios, newsletters, alumni and magazines are rated less effective in providing information and attracting students (Farayibi, 2017). Also, quality programmes, infrastructural development, televisions, radio advertisements, face to face talk with parents, newspapers, magazines, social media, websites, bulky messaging, print media, posters and public address system are used by schools to attract students and increase enrollment (Uchendu et al., 2015). As well Newberry (2016) believes that leadership, quality school experience, vision and improvement, staff and parents' satisfaction, school reputation, competition, marketing and enrollment strategy have great effect on

enrollment growth.

Marketing involves a long term and ongoing communication between the prospective and the current customers in a way that informs and builds a firm relationship over time (Martina, 2009; Scott, Cheryl, Lauri & Hikaru, 2017). Marketing in schools means promotional activities that are aimed at creating awareness about the existence of the school, the services offered and persuading the students to join in order to gain a competitive advantage over other schools. School marketing involves marketing communication strategies that are deliberately designed to attract and retain as well as maintain a long lasting relationship with students and parents (Fontaine, 2014; Muthoni, Gachambi & Kathuni, 2014). Marketing Communication strategies are channels that establish a systematic relationship between business and its market (Karinga, 2012). In this marketers organize a variety of ideas, designs messages and decides on the media to use, communicate the ideas to influence the perception of the target consumers for the product or service in order to increase sales. Karinga (2012) identifies several marketing communication strategies that are used by schools which include personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, sponsorships, exhibitions, packaging, point of sale, internet, word of mouth and corporate identity. In the context of this study marketing communication strategies are broadly categorized as external, internal and relationship marketing communication strategies.

Karinga (2012) points out that external marketing communication strategies include; print media, electronic media, sign posts, billboards, internet, school appearance, exhibitions and public events. Internal marketing communication strategies are a set of actions or strategies that focus on selling the school to internal stakeholders (Braumah, 2016). Basically the role of marketing communication strategies is to create a positive perception and portraying good school image to attract potential students after developing satisfaction (Waleska & Fatima, 2009). Internal marketing communication strategies include; cultivating trust, respect, caring attitude, responsiveness to students' needs, providing quality services to the expectation of the students, shared goals, vision and mission and establishing good relations with students. Relationship marketing communication strategies build a long lasting relationship between the school and the current as well as potential students and parents (Petkov, 2010). Relationship marketing communication strategies focus on building a relationship that retains students in schools, parents and alumni. The relationship marketing strategies takes different dimensions such visits to primary schools, open day celebrations, community outreach programs, public performance, use of alumni network, continuous communication with the current and potential parents and students. Relationship marketing strategies are essential in creating harmonious relationship with students and binding them to the school (Krismiyat, Latuperissa & Wijaya, 2014; Kimberly & Melanie, 2015; Krismiyat & Wijaya, 2013).

Muthoni, Gachambi & Kathuni (2014) highlight that the use of marketing communication strategies varies according to the nature of clients and general pattern of communication in the market. Marketing communication strategies are essential in helping the schools to respond to various challenges, attracting and retaining students, and coping up with competition to gain competitive advantage over other schools (Karinga, 2012; Uchendu et al., 2015). Petkov (2010) opines that students' enrollment in a given school depends on the marketing communication strategies adopted. Enrollment is a process of initiating attendance to a school (Jombo, 2013). It also means the total number of students properly registered or attending classes at a particular school (Friedman, 2015). The level of school enrollment depends on the schools' ability to attract new students and their retention. Attracting many students increases their numbers, while retention reduces dropout rate for the schools to have adequate numbers. Marketing communication strategies capture the students' attention which is essential in influencing their decision to join a particular school. At this stage of decision making it is characterized by a purchase behavior involving several stages that might include; need arousal, information search and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase feelings (Njuguna, 2015).

Schools need to adopt new approaches in marketing themselves so as to position them and also to have an opportunity for them to increase enrollment (Cochran, 2015). Schools that develop clear messages and effectively deliver them to their customers using appropriate communication strategies have a competitive advantage in recruiting, retaining and building loyalty among their students and parents than those that do not. Effective marketing requires going beyond the traditional blind marketing practices and calls for understanding the target group of parents and students before sending the message (Hanover, 2014). This calls for schools segmenting their markets and clearly understanding the characteristics of their parents and students before advertising. Advertisement is a paid non-personal communication through various media to persuade members of a particular audience (Kotler & Karen, 1995; Bede & Peprah, 2014). Identifying recruitment population and understanding the characteristics of the target audience is essential in ensuring that the proper message is sent through the rightful channels to the rightful target market in order to have a positive impact on enrollment. In advertising which is part of marketing schools school appearance, public relations, publicity through radios and televisions, and advertising through print and electronic media are the major forms of promotion that are used by private schools to attract students (Khan & Qureshi, 2010; Krismiyat & Wijaya, 2013). Most institutions use multimedia advertisement through print media, direct mail, posters, banners and bill boards and on line

advertisement in order to make their existence and programs known to the public to attract students (Jansen, Sobel & Zhang, 2011).

Students are believed to develop a need to join the school, develop thoughts about which school to join basing on the available information and then apply to the selected school. This implies that schools that try to provide a clear message about their existence and portray an impressive image of the services offered have greater ability to influence the students' enrollment decisions in their favour. Uchendu et al (2015) and Njuguna (2015) argue that marketing communication strategies adopted by schools have great influence on students' enrollment decision, retention and ensure their long term survival. Friedman (2015) observes that enrollment management is important to schools in responding to their challenges and exploring new opportunities. Recruiting and retaining adequate number of students is good for the financial health of schools for example private schools whose budgets depend majorly on tuition fee. Optimizing students' numbers therefore implies optimizing school revenue and portraying a positive public image to the prospective families who are later attracted to join the school. Whereas adequate students' enrollment is considered to be the major determinant factor for school survival decreasing students' enrollment in private secondary schools is becoming a global issue (Njuguna, 2015). Dwindling enrollment in schools is likely to lead to closure of schools if the schools do not have support from elsewhere (Hartman & Schoch, 2015; Pallegedara & Yamano, 2011). The study highlights the increasing number of private secondary schools in Mbale municipality today which has inevitably culminated into competitive environment as each school is struggling to do its best to attract students. Having adequate numbers of students is ideal for the financial health of private secondary schools that largely depend on tuition fees from parents. This is critical if they are to gain competitive advantage and survive in the current competitive market. However, a decline in students' enrollment has been noted in a number of private secondary schools in Mbale municipality, Mbale district.

The study tested the following hypotheses;

1. External marketing communication strategies have no statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality.
2. Internal marketing communication strategies have no statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality.
3. Relationship marketing communication strategies have no statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality.

2. Methods

The study was carried out using a correlation research design to determine the effect of the marketing communication strategies on students, enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality. The study population comprised of 290 persons; 7 head teachers and 283 teachers selected from seven schools. A sample of 165 respondents was selected using the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size determination table that comprised of 07 head teachers and 158 teachers. Both purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the sample. A 51 item and four sectioned closed ended questionnaire rated on a likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used in the collection of data which was administered on teachers. The questionnaire was tested for its fitness to collect data for the study; validity (.901) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .911) as determined by Pallant (2007). Pearson's product moment correlation and linear regression were used to establish the effect size of the marketing communication strategies onto students' enrollment by testing the hypotheses.

3. Results

The results obtained from the study are reported using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 1: Years of Service in Schools and Teaching Experience

	Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Years of Service in the School	Less than 1 year	12	7.6
	2-5 years	72	45.6
	6-10 years	47	29.7
	More than 10 years	27	17.1
Teaching Experience	1-5 years	57	36.1
	6-10 years	57	36.1
	11-15 years	27	17.1
	16 and above	17	10.7
	Total	158	100.0

Source: Primary Data, 2018

As indicated in Table 1 majority the respondents who participated in this study had served in the schools between 2-5 years who were 72(45.6%), followed by 6-10 years who were 47(29.7%). 27(17.1%) had served more than 10 years while 12(7.2%) had served for less than 1 year in the schools were they are currently serving. As regards teaching experience, 57 (36.1%) had taught between 1-5 years and 6-10 years. 27(17.1%) had taught for 11-15 years while 17(10.8%) had taught for more 17 years as seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

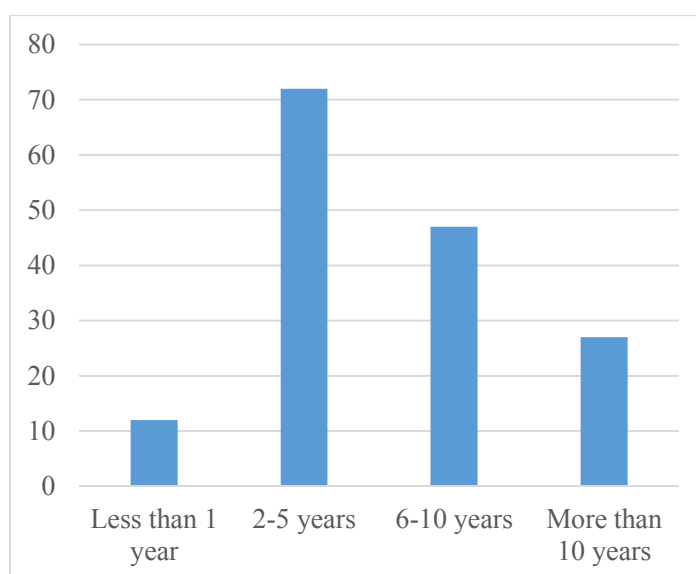


Figure1: Years of Service in the School

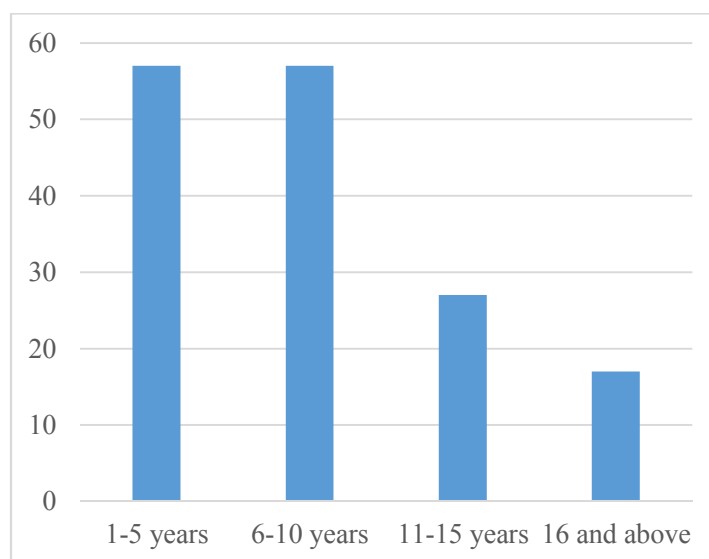


Figure 2: Teaching Experience

Table 2: Pearson's correlation coefficient index between independent variables and students' enrolment.

Variable(s)	Students' Enrollment Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N (sample)
1. External Marketing Communication Strategies	.490**	.000	158
2. Internal Marketing Communication Strategies	.493**	.000	158
3. Relationship Marketing Communication Strategies	.594**	.000	158

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to results in Table 2 of the Pearson's correlation coefficient indices all the results indicate significant positive relationships between external marketing communication strategies, internal marketing communication strategies and relationship marketing strategies on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality, Mbale district. The results of external marketing communication strategies indicate that there is a moderate positive relationship between external marketing communication strategies and students' enrollment ($r = .490$, $n=158$, $p < .01$). Results of internal marketing communication strategies reveal a significant moderate positive relationship between internal marketing communication strategies and students' enrollment ($r = .493$, $n=158$, $p < .01$). Results of relationship marketing communication strategies reveal a strong positive correlation between relationship marketing communication strategies and students' enrollment ($r = .594$, $n=158$, $p < .01$). This indicates that relationship marketing communication strategies have a statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality. To all the above three hypotheses tested the null hypotheses were rejected.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient Indices for External Marketing, Internal Marketing and Relationship Marketing Communication Strategies on Students' Enrollment.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1.Constant	16.086	1.585		10.148.000		12.955	19.217
Total EMCS	.268	.038	.490	7.024 .000		.192	.343
2.Constant	19.171	1.153		16.626.000		16.893	21.449
Total IMCS	.268	.038	.493	7.076 .000		.193	.343
3.Constant	16.371	1.193		13.727.000		14.015	18.726
Total RMCS	.346	.038	.594	9.213 .000		.271	.420

Dependent Variable: Total SE

Keys

Total EMCS = The sum of items under external marketing communication strategies

Total IMCS = The sum of items under external marketing communication strategies

Total RMCS = The sum of items under external marketing communication strategies

Total SE = The sum of items under students' enrollment

From the results of linear regression in Table 3 the effect sizes of external marketing communication strategies, internal marketing communication strategies and relationship marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment are revealed. According to the results external marketing communication strategies a coefficient index of $\beta = .490$ at .000 level of significance was revealed which implies that the effect of external marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment is 49.0%. This also means that a unit change in external marketing communication strategies will lead to a 49.0% change in students' enrollment, other factors affecting enrollment kept constant. From the results it can be noted that external marketing communication strategies have a statistically significant effect on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality, Mbale district.

From the results of internal marketing communication strategies in Table 3 a coefficient index of $\beta = .493$ at .000 level of significance was revealed. This highlights that there is an effect of 49.3% of external marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality. This also implies that a unit change in internal marketing communication strategies will leads to a 49.3% change in students' enrollment other factors affecting enrollment kept constant. The results reflect the correlation coefficient index value of .493 yielded under correlation results.

From the results of the regression coefficients in Table 3 it is revealed that relationship marketing communication strategies had a statistically significant effect on students' enrollment, as indicated by the beta value of $\beta = .594$ at .000 level of significance. The collaboration of correlation analysis results yielded the same value of .594. According to the results, it is observed that a unit change in relationship marketing communication

strategies will lead to a 59.4% change in students' enrollment, other factors held constant. According to the three variables considered under this study relationship marketing communication strategy have the greatest effect on students' enrolment. Therefore, relationship marketing communication strategies has to be given greater consideration when marketing is done to increase students' enrolment in private secondary school in Mbale municipality, Mbale district.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

It was discovered that blind marketing practices and calls for understanding the target group of parents and students before sending the message plays a great role in advertising schools (Hanover, 2014). The study finding affirms that use of prospectuses and calendars are essential in providing important details and influencing prospective students' enrollment decisions (Shahid & Qureshi (2010). These are some of the approaches that are used by the schools in Mbale municipality to advertise and attract students. As part of the external marketing some schools have put to use brochures which they distribute to prospective students and parents. The use of brochure in advertising schools has also had great impact in attracting students to the schools. This finding is consistent with that of Omboi & Mutali (2011) whose study found out that brochures and newspapers were effective marketing communication strategies in conveying information and influencing students' enrollment decisions in Kenya. But this result is inconsistent with that of Bede & Peprah (2014) whose study was carried out in Ghana which revealed that brochures were not a significant source of information that influenced students' enrollment decisions to particular schools.

There has also been great use of posters as an external marketing strategy of school for the unreachable parents and students. According to studies it was discovered that print media like school posters, sign posts and bill boards as some of the major strategies used by schools to attract students and increase enrollment (Uchendu et al., 2015). Though these might attract students but they are not the most effective methods to be used by schools of modern times (Conchron & Schola, 2013). There is another external advertisement method such newspaper but this has been rarely used by the schools in Mbale municipality. In studies conducted by Omboi & Mutali (2011) and Bede & Peprah (2014) revealed that traditional marketing strategies like bill boards are less effective in attracting students to schools. But other studies revealed that radios and televisions are the most effective methods in attracting students to schools as a mode of advertisement (Shahid & Qureshi, 2010; Uchendu et al., 2015). Other methods of advertisement might involve improving on the school appearance such painting schools (Sitwala, Kongolo & Grewal, 2002; Shahid & Qureshi, 2010; Uchendu et al., 2015), use of websites and social networks (Uchendu, et al., 2015).

A relationship between internal marketing communication strategies and students' enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality was observed. The study observed that quality teaching, staff care to students and staff relationship with students has great positive influence on student enrollees (Danjuma, Shasi & Hauwa, 2017). This can also be related to staff's responsiveness to students needs that have translated into students' enrolment in schools (Cochran & Schola, 2013; Hilbert, Schonbrunn & Schmode, 2007). Watts (2005) holds the view that emotional factors like students' happiness and establishment of trust and respect between staff and students are significant in choosing and staying in a particular school. Provision of special services to students, promotion of games and sports, addressing students' concerns (Conchron & Schola, 2013) and involving students in decision making might be internal marketing strategies of any school that would like to increase its student numbers. Cornor (2014) believes that fostering internal collaboration and involving everybody in advancing the school mission is important in retaining and increasing students' enrollment. Effective communication with students is essential in increasing information flow and ironing out grievances to make the students like the school (Waleska & Fatima, 2009; Braimah, 2016). As internal marketing strategies there is also motivating of students (Oplatika, 2006; Watts, 2001), fairness and equity in treatment of students (Braimah, 2016), students' empowerment (Conchron, 2013; Cornor (2014), and students' accessibility to teachers (Danjuma, Shasi & Hauwa, 2014).

In this study it has been discovered that marketing communication strategies have an effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality. Open day celebrations that involve public performance have great deal in communicating to the prospective students and convincing old ones to believe that their school is the best (Bowen et al., 2012). Laura & Railsback (2011) opined that organizing public events provide schools with an opportunity to interact with the general public to appreciate and develop interest in the school. Others involve participation in community outreach programmes, visit to primary schools that are feeder to secondary schools (Watts, 2005; Wolniak, 2007), use of alumni and parents (Bowen, 2012; Watt, 2005) and communication from parents (Schonbrunn & Schmode, 2007). There should be staff training in customer care might be a strong communication strategy that might market the school and also increase students' enrolment (Waleska & Fatima, 2009; Helgesen, 2008). Uchendu et al (2015) believe that portraying a good image before the parents and other stake holders is very important in winning their support and increasing students' enrollment.

With regard to general enrollment in private secondary schools in Mbale municipality the schools have a

low enrolments and many schools do not have written students' enrollment plans. Schools should have enrollment management plan as a management tool to improve students' enrolment in their schools (Newberry, 2016; Friedman, 2015). In a conclusion from the results of the study it was noted that there is a positive moderate relationship between external marketing communication strategies and students' enrollment, a statistically significant effect of internal marketing communication strategies on students' enrollment and a strong positive correlation between relationship marketing communication strategies and students' enrollment.

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