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Chapter 15

Student University Choice Making in Africa: Emerging Challenges, Opportunities and Agenda for Research, Practice and Policy

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Understanding how student decides which University is important, more like understanding the consumer behaviour in order to develop the strategic marketing communications to engage with the students. The expectations of students are changing and importantly communicating with them is evolving. Irrespective of the type of university, there are marketing challenges as they engage with students who have choices to make about which university to attend. In the competitive higher education market, developing strategies to reflect the decision making proves of the students is important for any University that wants to remain viable and attract partnership and global recognition. This concluding chapter on explorations on Student Choice in Africa presents practical implication and critical insights into factors influencing students' choice of higher institution in Africa. Agenda for future research were also provided. It is anticipated that this will shape further discussion and theoretical advancement which will be relevant for scholars, students, managers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of higher education marketing.

Keyword: Africa, Student Choice, Research Agenda, Marketing, Higher Education

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Introduction

The need to understand how students decide on which university to attend is important. This understanding is relevant for University manager as they develop their marketing and recruitment strategies. Higher education institutions are facing challenges that has necessitated the need to develop new marketing approaches (Simões & Soares, 2010) as Universities need to effectively position themselves in the competitive market.

With specific focus on Africa's higher education market, this book has presented critical insights into student university choice making. Chapters of this book offers theoretical and practical implications in an area that has been neglected. These studies supplement the existing literature on the field of higher education marketing and student choice by highlighting the factors determining the decision-making process of African students.

These topics were covered over three themes. Theme 1 covers *Choice and Decision Making* with chapters theoretically position universities as custodians of information and with the obligation to share the information to allows student to engage with it. Theme 2 explores factors influencing choice with studies from Nigeria and South Africa while Theme 3 focuses on *Attracting Prospective Students* which highlights how Universities are positioning themselves to attract prospective student, with through using ranking, information on website or the marketing mix.

In concluding this book, this chapter has three objectives. First, to summarise the key findings presented in the book, providing critical insights into student university choice making in Africa. Second, to present a summary of both theoretical contributions and managerial implications for scholars, students, managers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of higher education marketing, and thirdly, highlight research agendas for a better understanding of marketing higher education in Africa.

Summary of Studies

Although the chapters in this book do not constitute a representative sample of research on the student choice across the African continent, they nevertheless represent some of the latest offerings on the subject. Thirteen chapters were included with two having a general focus on the African continent, majority of the book chapters focuses on Nigeria, with five chapter and this was closely followed by South Africa with four chapters. Ghana and Uganda were a focus of one chapter each.

Considering the methodological emphasis of the chapter, six chapters adopted a quantitative methodology using questionnaires with students while two chapters utilised Qualitative in-depth interviews with participants. There were one chapter each using case study, content analysis, descriptive and analytic research, systematic review of literature and theoretical positioning. Table 1 presents a summary of all the thirteen chapters. This fills a gap in the unresearched higher education market in Africa (Mogaji, et al., 2017).

Table 1: Summary of all the Chapters

Conceptual/thematic area	Author/s and country	Topic	Country Focus	Methodological emphases	Contribution to the field
Theme 1: Choice and Decision Making	Robert Ebo Hinson, Emmanuel Mogaji	Co-Creation of Value by Universities and Prospective Students: Towards an Informed Decision-Making Process.	Africa	A largely theoretical chapter, providing an analysis for co creation of value between Universities providing information and University students process the information.	Presented a theoretical framework Exploring the relationship between supply and demand of information. University needs to highlight their values and enhance the students' information processing stage.
	Clement Adamba	Understanding High School Students' University Choice - Implications for Marketing and Management of Higher Education in Ghana	Ghana	Questionnaires administered to final year senior high school students in Ghana using stated preference (intent to choose) approach	Final year senior high school students from Ghana recognising institutional reputation, infrastructure, economic and family as factors influencing their choice of higher education.
	Godwin Muhangi	Delving into Undergraduate students' choice of higher education in Uganda	Uganda	A largely descriptive and analytic paper based on both primary and secondary data analyses.	Factors such as reference groups, family background and sponsorship influence students' choice of a higher education institution.
	Felix Maringe and Otilia Chiramba	International and Southern African perspectives on Choice and decision making of young	South Africa	Systematic review of literature to understand perspectives on choice and decision making of	The review identifies ten descriptors of the nature of emerging research on

		people in Higher Education		young people in Higher Education	choice and decision-making in higher education in Southern Africa; it further suggests that qualitative studies tend to be predominant. The research in this area is described as tentative, mostly descriptive and a theoretical. There is call for more diverse form of research to explore choice, decision-making and recruitment in an increasingly competitive and commercialised higher education sector in Southern Africa.
Theme 2: Factors influencing Choice	Samuel Adeyanju, Emmanuel Mogaji, Johnson Olusola, Muhammed Oyinlola and Babajide Macaulay	Factors Influencing Students' Choice of a Federal University: A Case Study of a Nigerian Federal University.	Nigeria	Quantitative study. Questionnaires administered to Undergraduate students at a single federal University in Nigeria.	Personal interest of student to attend a federal university is reported. This is followed by parental influence, university reputation, university ranking, and fees. The results provide an understanding of students' choices for universities in a Nigerian context, especially from a federal university point of view.
	Yirakpoa Ikaba and	Evaluative Criteria for	Nigeria	Quantitative study, survey	Identifies location as an

	Charles Enyindah	Selection of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria		students across the Geopolitical zone of the country to understand their selection criteria	important choice factor for Nigerian students. Teaching quality, opinion of parents, facilities, reputation and proximity were also found to be significant.
	Adesoga Adefulu, Temitope Farinloye, Emmanuel Mogaji	Factors Influencing Post Graduate Students' University Choice in Nigeria.	Nigeria	The research utilised multiple qualitative in-depth interviews to discover factors influencing postgraduate students' university choice in Nigeria	Confirms and better illustrates the concerns with location as a factor influencing choice of University in Nigeria. The economic and security reasons of travelling on poor road networks often makes student choose University that is close to home. Religious affiliations and prior experience at Undergraduate level are also significant factors.
	.André Calitz, Margaret Cullen, Carlien Jooste	Factors and Sources of Information that influence a Student's University of Choice	South Africa	Quantitative study. First questionnaire was distributed to home students while second questionnaire was distributed to International student to understand factors and sources of information that influence a student's university of choice	Differences in national and international student's source of information and fact influencing choice. The results will assist the international offices and marketing departments to identify the important factors to consider and focus their attention on,

					when recruiting students, specifically from Africa.
	Genevieve Bosah	Consumer behaviour and student motivation influence the choice of higher learning institutions in Africa.	Nigeria	Quantitative study. Questionnaire was distributed to students in a Nigerian University.	Course accreditation and programmes were reported as being the most important factor when deciding on a higher education institution. In addition, there are other social, economic and educational factors that influences students' choices.
Theme 3: Attracting Prospective Students Customer service and/or satisfaction	Emmanuel Mogaji, Amarachukwu Anyogu, Thomas Wayne	Minding the Gap: An assessment of the quality of course information available on the websites of African Universities	Africa	A content analysis of programme pages on institutional websites of Africa's top 30 Universities using the ALARA Model of Information Search.	The need for African universities to provide information about their programme and keep their website updated as prospective students will engage with the quality of information provided.
	Margaret Cullen, André Calitz and Watiri Kanyutu	The importance of University Rankings for Students' University of Choice: A South African perspective	South Africa	A questionnaire was developed from literature and captured on the online survey tool Questionpro. The URL was distributed to post-graduate students.	The chapter confirmed the desirability of ranking from a student's perspective, however, Universities should rely on internal quality measures like internal audits where factors can be benchmarked against appropriate institutions

					locally and globally.
	Nevensha Sing	Narrative Experiences of Doctoral Students' Vulnerability in South Africa	South Africa	A narrative research approach based on the foundation of socio-cultural theory, the study explored the phenomenon of vulnerability through semi-structured narrative interviews with self-identified doctoral students at risk.	Students' vulnerability is a multidimensional concept, however with the understanding of individual student's vulnerabilities, Universities can improve their systems and support network, including training the Doctoral supervisors.
	Stella Aririguzoh	Making a Private University Appealing to Prospective Students: A Case of Covenant University	Nigeria	Utilises a case study approach and Marketing Mix to theoretically explore the University's marketing strategies.	The paper uses 7P marketing mix to provide insights into what the best private University in Nigeria is doing to attract prospective students.

Implications of Studies

The research presented in this book has important implications for marketing and recruitment strategies pursued by HEIs in Africa. The chapters present type of information prospective students will need in order to make an informed decision, the most useful sources of information and advice and the factors influencing the choice.

The information search stage of decision making is a noteworthy influence on consumers' choices (Simões & Soares, 2010). While Universities are recognised for their marketing communication, it is important they strategies and be more effective in their marketing and recruitment drive. Universities websites should be updated with relevant information. Social media should also be considered for engaging with different stakeholders. Content creation strategy should be out in place to regularly update profile with relevant information (Mogaji, 2019). Universities can modify their activities on social media to satisfy the information need of their prospective students, this can include observing the online discussions, replying to comments and questions on social media and providing accurate information. (Le, et al., 2019).

Considering that in some part of Africa, especially the disadvantaged communities, they are limited, or unreliable or intermittent access to the internet and this suggests that universities may need to consider other ways for promoting themselves to the recruitment market. (Maringe, 2006). This could mean updating their prospectuses to provide relevant information for students, if printed copies cannot be posted, it should be made available online for download. In addition, to position the university brand to attract prospective students, public relations, corporate social activities and global partnership should be explored.

It is not surprising that in Africa, applicants will rely on current and former students, tutors, parents, siblings and friends for guidance and information about University. This highlights opportunities for Universities to engage with these stakeholders, carrying them along and ensuring they provide a positive word of mouth in their role as communication channels.

Regarding the choice factors considered by prospective students, the studies highlighted location, future job prospects, teaching quality, staff expertise, and availability of program and fees as essentials. These factors however differ from country to country. Though previous studies from developed world has identified factors that shapes student decision, it is important to note that higher education institutions (HEI) cannot simply extend the practices designed from other countries (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017) for recruiting and admitting students in Africa, considering its unique and emerging segment of higher education market. This studies further suggest that Universities need to better understand their students and differentiate communication strategies according to search patterns (Simões & Soares, 2010)

The higher education environment has become increasingly competitive and this research has demonstrated that applicants to HE are no longer passive consumers in this environment (Maringe, 2006). As Applicants are becoming discerning choosers in the HE marketplace, University managers needs a better understanding of the choice factors and information sources utilised across various segments in order to develop an effective campaign. Universities need to recognise that different segment of the student body will require different form of information, therefore using the findings of these chapters, Managers can

customise messages and provide suitable content across their communication channels to fit targeted segments.

Finally, while there are some differences as well as similarities in findings between these countries, it is important to note that findings may not be directly transferrable to other countries within the continent, likewise what is applicable for individual institutions may not be applicable in another University, even in the same country, so there needs to be a contextual understanding of these factors. Subsequent section presents research agenda to fill this gap in knowledge.

Agenda for Future Research on Students' University Choice Making in Africa

It is essential to acknowledge that this book covered only a limited scope of students' university choice making in Africa. While attempts have been made in providing theoretical insight through the chapters in this book, there are opportunities to extend knowledge about this subject area as findings will be relevant for:

- Students studying and researching higher education marketing and management;
- Scholars and academic researchers in higher education marketing, providing a theoretical underpinning for their research and theory development;
- Universities' Managers and Administrators who need to understand student choice and decision making in order to develop their marketing and recruitment strategies
- Practitioners – marketing, advertising, and brand agencies with interest in marketing higher education in Africa; and
- Policymakers who are responsible for the quality and quantity of higher education in Africa.

This section highlights five broad areas for future research to shape knowledge about the educational sector in Africa.

Student Choice across Africa as a unique market.

It is recognised that African universities' challenges are multifaceted. They face unique developmental challenges located in narratives of poverty, postcolonialism, coloniality, and more recently, decolonization (Maringe, 2019), this therefore necessitates the need to theoretically explore and understand the uniqueness of Africa as a different market, in terms of students' option of which University to study (to stay at home country, travel to other countries in Africa, attend International Brand Causes or go outside Africa). This strand of research should focus on specific and unique African problems.

Student Choice across other countries

The studies in the book predominantly focus on Nigeria and South Africa, though the education system in these countries is huge, there are opportunities for research to explore how students choose their universities in other parts of the continent. While there is a study from Uganda, representing the East Africa, there is no insight yet from the North Africa. That is an area that was not covered in this research and therefore opens opportunity for future research. It is paramount to extend knowledge about student choices in other parts of the continent, to understand if the choices found in south and west of the continent are important or different from other parts of the continent.

Student Choice across different University Type

Ndofirepi, et al. (2020) recognise the heterogeneous nature of Africa Universities. The cost has often been a determining factor for students to consider public Universities but with growing middle class on the continent, there are growing demands for private University education and International education outside home country. Future study should endeavour to empirically establish the factors influencing choices among different Universities. Why does students choose government university over public university? Could it be the fees or the availability of relevant programs? With different types of universities, fields of study and types of university, for example, public and private universities, and arts, humanities or science subjects (Dao & Thorpe, 2015; Farinloye, et al., 2019), future studies should endeavour to identify factors affecting student choices of these universities. Likewise, about the choice between religious and non-religious private university. Could a religious affiliation of the students (and parents) influence their choice of studying in a religious private university?

Student Choice influenced by different factors.

Future studies should endeavour to understand how specific factors are shaping student's decision-making process, with specific focus on the African higher education market. Factors to consider includes servicescape of Universities in Africa, perhaps students are not deterred by poor physical environments and excited by enthusiastic staff and students in the public universities (Winter & Chapleo, 2017), the impact of facilities (Price, et al., 2003), location (Winter & Thompson-Whiteside, 2017), ranking and prestige (Dearden, et al., 2019), safety and security (Calitz, et al., 2019) and destination image (Phau, et al., 2010).

Student Choice influenced by Who and What

A more indebt insight is needed into understanding the who and what influences the students in Africa. The 'who' recognises the people around the students, their parent, siblings, friends and school counsellor, how they influence the student into choosing a University. The 'what' explores the physical features of the University, including the location, programmes and prestige. Research into the sources of information is also important. Do African Universities produce prospectus even though it has been found to be an effective source of information (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019), if they do, what are the content, what messages are they conveying to prospective students? How can these messages be strategically positioned to appeal to the students? As internet plays a crucial role in communicating and engaging with the students (Mogaji, 2016), how updated is the website to provide information? How are student engaging with social media? The challenges with access to internet facilities should also be recognised. How about the roles of parents, especially in collectivistic society where there is a close long-term commitment to the member 'group', be that a family, extended family, or extended relationships and loyalty (to place of worship and religious University) is paramount. (in a collectivist culture is paramount (Hofstede, 2019). The understanding of these 'who' and 'what' will assist in shaping the marketing strategies of the Universities.

Conclusion

Understanding how student decides which University is important, more like understanding the consumer behaviour in order to develop the strategic marketing communications to engage with the students. The expectations of students are changing and importantly communicating with them is evolving (Mogaji et al, 2019). Irrespective of the type of university, there are marketing challenges as they engage with students who have choices to make about which university to attend. In the competitive higher education market, developing strategies to reflect the decision making proves of the students is important for any University that wants to remain viable and attract partnership and global recognition.

Empirical insights have been provided through various chapters of this book, and this chapter attempts to offer key summaries and present a theoretical framework for student university choice making in Africa. The resultant chapters in the book are different in focus, likewise in terms of the methodologies that were adopted. The authors' affiliations are also international in scope. The collection reflects the diversity and breadth of current research within this stimulating research area. This however also highlights the challenges of researchers in Africa who do not have the resources and capabilities to produce rigorous research which can be published in high-quality journals and books.

Some manuscripts exploring interesting topic were ultimately excluded from publications because of the poor research. design and theoretical underpinning. This inadvertently will affect the quantity and quality of research output from that part of the world. African universities need to champion the redefinition of what counts as research and knowledge to rediscover lost knowledge forms and values, which help in the development of shaping new identities and a sense of being of the African university (Mogaji et al, 2019b).

In addition, there are some limitations with regards to this book which should be considered. Not all the countries and education systems in the continent have been covered, and some areas still need further research to extend our understanding of how student decides on which University to attend, the factors influencing their choices and their source of information. The preceding section presents areas for future research.

It has been a great pleasure to contribute to knowledge on higher education marketing from the student decision making point of view, and it is anticipated that this will shape further discussion and theoretical advancement which will be relevant for scholars, students, managers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of higher education marketing.