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The current reference for this work is as follows:

Mogaji, E., Maringe, F. & Hinson R. E., 2020. Exploring factors influencing student choice in Africa: Introduction to Edited Collection. In: E. Mogaji, F. Maringe & R. E. Hinson, eds. Higher Education Marketing in Africa - Explorations on Student Choice. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

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Chapter 1

Exploring factors influencing student choice in Africa: Introduction to Edited Collection

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Universities in Africa are witnessing unprecedented growth; The government is establishing more universities, and private institutions are also coming on board to meet the growing demands for university places. As well as the increasing numbers of universities in Africa, there are also international partnerships with universities in Europe and America, while some other universities are opening campuses in Africa. Due to this increase, prospective university students have an increasingly wide range of choices. Understanding this student choice is essential for the marketing strategies of the universities. This process has been extensively researched in literature. This plethora of knowledge, however, has focused on developed countries, leaving a gap in our knowledge about student choices in Africa. This chapter introduces the coverage and contents of the edited book which explores student choices in Africa. This book on Higher Education Marketing in Africa - Explorations on Student Choice focuses on different factors that influence the choice of prospective students in Africa to study at a particular university. The authors have covered different geographies on the continent and employed different methodological approaches to reach their study conclusions. The authors' affiliations are also international in scope. The collection reflects the diversity and breadth of current research within this stimulating and evolving research area.

Keywords: Student choice, influence, higher education, marketing, Africa, choice criteria,

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Introduction

Universities in Africa are witnessing unprecedented growth; there has been a rapid increase in the number of universities in Africa over the last 20 years (Olaleye et al., 2019). The government is establishing more universities, and private institutions are also coming on board to meet the growing demands for university places (Farinloye et al., 2019). As well as the increasing numbers of universities in Africa, there are also international partnerships with universities in Europe and America, while some other universities are opening campuses in Africa (Ndofirepi et al., 2019). Due to this increase, prospective university students have an increasingly wide range of choices (Dao & Thorpe, 2015). Prospective students in Africa need to decide which university to attend, perhaps to attend a home university, travel to another country or attend a brand campus.

Understanding this student choice is essential for the marketing strategies of the universities. Importantly, from the students' point of view, deciding on a university is a high-risk, complex process (Le et al., 2019). This process has been extensively researched in literature with findings revealing that the decision of which university to apply to is influenced by a wide range of factors, such as the personality of the student, characteristics of institutions, or influential information sources (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). This plethora of knowledge, however, has focused on developed countries, leaving a gap in our knowledge about student choices in Africa.

The challenges for African universities are multifaceted. They face unique developmental challenges based in narratives of poverty, postcolonialism, coloniality, and more recently, decolonisation (Maringe, 2019). While acknowledging the limited theoretical insight into marketing higher education in Africa (Maringe & Foskett, 2002; Ivy, 2008), this book aims to fill this gap in knowledge by examining some of the theoretical and empirical issues surrounding student's choices in Africa's context, recognising sources of information and factors of choice as critical dimensions when addressing information-seeking behaviour (Simões & Soares, 2010).

The challenges for the administration of the universities, funding structure, curriculum, and quality of education (Maringe, 2005) are recognised; this book, however, focuses on the student decision-making process. It offers empirical insight into who and what influences the choice of university (Johnston, 2010). In addition, it recognises that understanding student choices is a crucial task for higher education marketers (Le et al., 2019), therefore managerial implications are presented for higher education administrators, and practitioners on how best to reach out to prospective students in the competitive higher education market using digital media and updated websites, highlighting values and engaging with stakeholders and other family members and siblings who can influence the prospective students. We hope that this book meaningfully advances our comprehension of marketing higher education in Africa and that it will stimulate further research.

Coverage and Content of the Book

Following a process of double-blind refereeing, thirteen articles were selected that reflect some of the main challenges and themes of higher education marketing in Africa, which represents a relevant area of research, both for scholars and practitioners. The chapters are grouped into three different themes. Theme one has four chapters with a focus on *Choice and Decision Making*. There are five chapters in theme two that explore *Factors Influencing Choice*. Theme three is *Attracting*

Prospective Students explored over four chapters. In addition to these chapters, there is an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter written by the editors. This first chapter provides a background for the study and introduced the coverage and contents of the book, highlighting the different themes and chapters.

Robert Ebo Hinson and Emmanuel Mogaji open with the second chapter titled *Co-Creation of Value by Universities and Prospective Students: Towards an Informed Decision-Making Process*. The authors offer a theoretical insight into the value delivery systems of the universities and the factors influencing students' choice. The chapter is theoretically positioned to recognise the co-creation of value between the university and prospective students. The chapter posits that while students need information to decide which university to attend, there is a sense of responsibility on the part of the universities to showcase their inherent values that may appeal to the student. The chapter extends our theoretical knowledge on value creation, student choice and marketing of higher education. Implications for managers with regards to the value audit, communication and engagement are also presented.

Chapter three, titled *Understanding High School Students' University Choice - Implications for Marketing and Management of Higher Education in Ghana*, was written by Clement Adamba. The chapter focuses on higher education in Ghana, recognising the competition in the sector from the new government policy to upgrade all polytechnics into technical universities. The chapter draws findings from questionnaires administered to final year senior high school students in Ghana. The results show that the choice of a higher education institution is influenced more by institutional reputation, infrastructure, economic and family or relationship factors. The results further show that the best allies for marketers of higher education institutions to attract prospective undergraduates are the teachers and counsellors in senior high schools. The chapter offers areas of attention for management, which include establishing a stronger connection with industry and showing evidence of that connection to prospective students. University representatives should target students directly with this information during visits to senior high schools.

The fourth chapter focuses on another African country. It offers theoretical insights into student choices in Uganda. This chapter, written by Godwin Muhangi and titled *Delving into Undergraduate Students' Choice of Higher Education in Uganda*, examines the process of choosing a higher education institution by undergraduate students in Uganda. The chapter starts by presenting the Ugandan higher education context and brings in the concept of higher education marketing. Factors such as reference groups, family background and sponsorship were found to influence students' choice of a higher education institution in Uganda. The chapter recommends that higher education institutions in Uganda must consider marketing in order to survive in the competitive higher education market.

Chapter five, titled *International and Southern African Perspectives on Choice and Decision-Making of Young People in Higher Education*, written by Felix Maringe and Otilia Chiramba, recognises that these have become significant areas of endeavour internationally. The rise of neoliberalism and the market in higher education seem to have fuelled this growth. The chapter offers a discussion on the theoretical underpinnings behind choice and student decision-making in higher education based on purposefully selected articles from Southern Africa, and the discussion

describes the research emphasis and omissions in the growing literature on the subject in Southern Africa. The review identifies ten descriptors of the nature of emerging research on this subject.

Chapter six is the first chapter under theme two of the book, which focuses on factors influencing students' choices. The chapter titled *Factors Influencing Students' Choice of a Federal University: A Case Study of a Nigerian Federal University* was written by Samuel Adeyanju, Emmanuel Mogaji, Johnson Olusola, Muhammed Oyinlola and Babajide Macaulay. The study is contextualised in Nigeria and focuses on a federal university, which is different from state and private universities. The federal university is one of the best public universities in the country, and it is not surprising that many students want to attend the university. The study adopts quantitative research through a structured questionnaire completed by undergraduate students at the university. The study found that personal interest greatly influenced students' decisions, followed by parental influence, university reputation, university ranking, and fees.

Evaluative Criteria for Selection of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria is the seventh chapter of the book and is also contextualised in Nigeria but did not focus on a single university. This chapter, written by Yirakpoa Ikaba and Charles Enyindah, acknowledges that there is a dearth of empirical studies reporting factors that influence students' choice of tertiary education institutions in Nigeria. To fill this gap, the chapter adopts a quantitative methodology to survey students in order to understand the factors that influenced their choices. The empirical analysis indicates that the choice of higher education institution (HEI) was significantly impacted by location, teaching quality, opinion of parents, facilities, reputation and proximity. However, the cost of programme and security do not have a significant effect on the choice of HEI.

Chapter eight is another study from Nigeria, but unlike the previous studies from Nigeria, this study, titled *Factors Influencing Post Graduate Students' University Choice in Nigeria*, adopts a qualitative methodology, focused on postgraduate students in a private university. The chapter, written by Adesoga Adefulu, Temitope Farinloye and Emmanuel Mogaji, noted that while previous studies have focused on developed countries and undergraduate students, their chapter explores factors influencing postgraduate students' decision-making. The study recognises that the rapid expansion of the enrolment of undergraduates has also stimulated students' enthusiasm for postgraduate studies and importantly, postgraduate students have prior experience in a university service environment (compared to undergraduate students). The semi-structured interview was conducted with first-year postgraduate students at a private university in South-West Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed four key factors, which are the desire to study for a postgraduate degree, the facilities of the university including its geographical location, the courses on offer and the influence of other stakeholders such as parents, siblings and friends. This influence of stakeholders aligns with the fundamental values of a collectivist culture like Nigeria.

The next chapter is a move away from Nigeria to South Africa. Chapter nine, written by Margaret Cullen, André Calitz and Carlien Jooste and titled *Factors and Sources of Information that Influence a Student's University of Choice*, presents an empirical study that was conducted amongst national and international students at a South African university. The study found that international students considered university brochures and websites, recommendations of former students and information from the International Office as factors influencing their choice to study

in South Africa. Home students, on the other hand, indicated that a recommendation from a former student or friend, the university website and visits by university representatives were the critical factors they considered. The university's use of social media was ranked more critical by international students than national students. The chapter concludes that the main factors in terms of marketing and recruitment tools students accessed were adverts in media, university websites, university fairs and word of mouth.

Chapter eleven argues that in order to attract prospective students to universities, relevant information about the programme should be provided, at least on the universities' websites. The chapter titled *Minding the Gap: An assessment of the quality of course information available on the websites of African Universities* was written by Emmanuel Mogaji, Amarachukwu Anyogu and Thomas Wayne. The study adopts the Availability, Location, Accessibility, Relatability and Actionability (ALARA) Model of Information Search on websites, a novel methodology, which brings together case study research, stakeholder roleplay and netnography to explore the quality and quantity of information about undergraduate programmes provided on university websites. The study found that prospective students are short-changed as the universities are not providing enough information for them to decide. The study extends our knowledge about marketing higher education, understanding student's information searches. The study also highlights implications for university managers, academic staff, marketing communication teams, information and communications teams and other teams responsible for developing and updating the universities' websites with current and relevant information about the programmes offered by the university.

Margaret Cullen, André Calitz and Watiri Kanyutu wrote chapter twelve of the book, which highlights the values prospective students place on university ranking when deciding on which university to attend. The chapter is titled *The Importance of University Rankings for Students' University of Choice: A South African Perspective*. The chapter recognises higher education practitioners, especially marketers, are turning to university rankings and league tables as a cue when comparing themselves with other universities to attract students. The chapter investigates whether or not students in South Africa consider university rankings as a significant factor when deciding on a university. A survey was conducted amongst students at a South African university that specifically considered the importance of the factors relating to university rankings. The study concludes that the majority of students indicated they considered university ranking to be an essential factor in their decision and university of choice.

Chapter thirteen, titled *Experiences of Doctoral Students' Vulnerability in South Africa*, is another study from South Africa but explicitly focuses on the experience of doctoral students. The chapter, written by Nevensha Sing, lays bare some of the challenges faced by doctoral students. Based on a theory of vulnerability, an analysis of narratives provides a summary of who is susceptible to risks and why, and the ways they coped or did not cope with their experience of vulnerability. The chapter profiles an interpretation of the results of the study concerning the theoretical base adopted and reports on the implications for further research. Therefore, the chapter argues that the conceptualisation of being at risk is a multidimensional concept that is not adequately dealt with in higher education institutional ethics policy and practice.

Chapter fourteen explores how a private university is making itself appealing to prospective students in Nigeria. Stella Aririguzoh wrote the chapter titled *Making a Christian Private University Appealing to Prospective Students: The Case of Covenant University*. The chapter adopts the marketing mix to examine how Covenant University, a Christian faith-based university and the acclaimed leader in the private university industry in Nigeria, has marketed itself. It found that it uses its product, people, work processes and serene physical location to attract new students. Importantly, it uses its relatively high tuition fees to position itself as the school for the children of the elites.

The last chapter is titled *Student University Choice Making in Africa: Emerging Challenges, Opportunities and Agenda for Research, Practice and Policy* and is written by the editors. The chapter summarises key findings from the book and identifies research agendas. The chapter presents practical implications and critical insights into student's university choice-making in Africa. Agendas for future research are 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.

Conclusion

This book has been conceptualised to offer empirical insights into the higher education market across Africa. It builds on previous empirical research that provides an understanding of the higher education market in Africa (Mogaji, Maringe, & Hinson, 2019a) and their strategic marketing (Mogaji, Maringe, & Hinson, 2019b). The book provides significant theoretical and marketing practice implications for academics, higher education administrators, and practitioners on how best to market higher education in Africa and reach out to prospective students.

The selected chapters provide a wide variety of stimulating insights into knowledge advancements in marketing higher education in Africa. We believe this book represents a significant milestone in the study of marketing higher education in Africa, which has been under-researched. Finally, we thank all the authors who submitted articles for consideration in this edited book; over 27 papers were initially received.

We are grateful to the reviewers who contributed their valuable time and talent to develop this edited book and ensured the quality of the chapters with their constructive comments and suggestions. We believe this book contains significant work that is profoundly meaningful for the higher education marketing field, not just for Africa.

This book on **Higher Education Marketing in Africa - Explorations on Student Choice** focuses on different factors that influence the choice of prospective students in Africa to study at a particular university. The authors have covered different geographies on the continent and employed different methodological approaches to reach their study conclusions. The authors' affiliations are also international in scope. The collection reflects the diversity and breadth of current research within this stimulating and evolving research area.

While the research covered in this book adequately represents the conceptual field of student university choice-making in Africa, this book calls for more context-specific student choice-making in Africa, recognising the heterogeneous nature of the market (Ndofirepi, Farinloye, &

Mogaji, 2019) and factors that are typical to Africa such as location (due to security, safety and travelling on bad roads) and religious affiliations (especially in private religious institutions). We hope readers will find the chapters in this book both enriching and thought-provoking and that the insights provided in this collection of research materials will enhance the understanding of this topic, inspire further interest in marketing higher education in Africa, and provide a basis for sound management decisions and stimulate new ideas for future research.

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