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14   Conclusion

Emerging challenges, opportunities, and agenda for research, practice, and policy on marketing and brand communications of higher education institutions in Africa

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The higher education landscape is changing. The global competition for students' enrolments has increased around the world. Universities are competing within their home market as well as in the international market. As government funding for public universities is reducing, there is pressure on universities to seek additional income by increasing their student enrolment. Attracting and enrolling students has become increasingly more challenging, as student behaviour is changing. These challenges present the need for higher education institutions to be more strategic in their approach to reaching out to prospective students. This concluding chapter on strategic marketing of higher education in Africa presents practical implications and critical insights into strategic marketing and brand communications of higher education institutions 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.

Keywords: marketing, brand communications, higher education institutions, universities, Africa, conclusion, edited book

Introduction

The higher education landscape is changing. The global competition for students' enrolments has increased around the world. Universities are competing with each other within their home market as well as in the international market. As government funding for public universities is reducing (Olaleye et al., 2020), there is pressure on universities to seek additional income by increasing their student enrolment. Attracting and enrolling students has become increasingly more challenging, as student behaviour is changing. Students, as customers, and their desires and expectations are changing; their choice-making process and information request process are changing. These students are savvier and more opened to processing many options before making a choice. All these challenges present the need for higher education institutions to be more strategic in their approach to reaching out to prospective students.

This book has presented critical insights into strategic marketing and brand communications of higher education institutions in Africa. These issues were covered over four themes. The first theme identifies the marketisation strategies of African universities as the chapters present an integrative model for marketing higher education in Africa and exploration of tools for promoting higher education in an African context. Part II delves into digital marketing for the universities, with chapters exploring how universities have used social

media, specifically Facebook for communicating with stakeholders and a chapter that provides a conceptual insight into using various social media for stakeholder communications. Brand and reputation management was the focus of Part III of the book. Chapters explored the brand identities of top universities in Africa, their reputation management system, and most importantly, how universities can leverage their position through branding. The last theme offers a managerial implication for managers and practitioners with interest in marketing higher education. The chapter moves away from research to provide practical implications.

In concluding this book, this chapter has three objectives. First, to summarise the key findings presented in the book in developing a theoretical framework for strategic marketing communications between university stakeholders. Second, to provide a concise marketing strategy with the understanding of the different university systems. Thirdly, to highlight research agendas for a better understanding of marketing higher education in Africa, making both theoretical contributions and managerial implications for scholars, students, managers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of higher education marketing.

Strategic marketing and brand communications between university stakeholders

Strategic marketing has emerged as the key strategy used in educational institutions to strengthen their competitiveness and profitability in the competitive higher education market (Maringe, 2006). Strategic marketing communications for a university recognises the need to understand the stakeholders and how best to engage with them in an effective manner (Mogaji, 2019). This form of marketing provides information that is relevant and upon which stakeholders can make an informed decision, either to apply as a prospective student or as a member of staff or make donations to the university.

Recognising the wide variety of stakeholders engaging with a university and numerous brand marketing communication strategies to engage them, a theoretical framework is presented which recognises the university's need to communicate with stakeholders. As illustrated in Figure 14.1, the theoretical framework identifies the relationship between the university and the stakeholders, and the business decisions being made to strategically communicate with an end goal of enrolling students and increasing the financial support based on positive brand image of the university.

Importantly, the country context of the university is recognised. Even though this chapter explores the marketing of higher education in Africa, it is essential to know that the market is heterogeneous – there are many countries on the continent with various systems of higher

education and marketing needs and challenges (Ndofirepi, Farinloye, & Mogaji, 2020), therefore one size may not fit all. Understanding the variations in admissions requirements is needed in developing marketing communications, targeting prospective students, and providing relevant information. Likewise, the number of universities and the population of the country may influence the marketing strategies. Perhaps if the supply of universities (number of universities in a country) is meeting the demands for tertiary education (number of prospective students), there may not be much competition as compared to when the market dynamics are different because the need for tertiary education is higher than the supply (Olaleye, Ukpabi, & Mogaji, 2020).

<Insert Figure 14.1 here>

Figure 14.1 Theoretical framework for strategic marketing communications between university stakeholders.

Private universities are gaining ground, meeting the needs for tertiary education because the public universities are underfunded. While some public universities are solely funded by the government, private universities rely mostly on the students' tuition fees. However, there is evidence of *cost-sharing,* which is a form of private revenue supplementation for public universities for the support of their expanding higher educational needs. Also, there are the *dual-track tuition fees* which are common in the East African countries. Under this system, selected students of merit have free or very low cost higher education, with other applicants admitted on a higher fee-paying basis (Marcucci, Johnstone, & Ngolovoi, 2008). This fee structure can also influence marketing strategies as universities aim to get a significant share of the high fee-paying students. Marcucci et al. (2008) reported the influence of the dual-track tuition policies on Makerere University which have greatly expanded capacity as illustrated by the dramatic increase in enrolment between 1992 and 2002 that grew from 5,000 to over 30,000.

An alternative to choosing between a public or private education within their home country, students may also decide to pursue their education internationally. This option, however, has some limitations such as visa restrictions and frequent changes in regulations, fear of not being able to find suitable part-time work, failure to meet course targets, fear of failure, and negative aspects of environmental influences can affect the students' choice of their prospective university (Ahmad & Hussain, 2017; Camilleri, 2020). These are part of the political, socio-cultural, and legal factors affecting students' choice and this also the

marketing strategies of universities. The security and safety in these host countries can also influence the strategic marketing communication.

With the understanding of these country contexts, universities have the responsibility to engage with their stakeholders, especially prospective students who are key stakeholders. Maintaining an adequate rate of student enrolment is essential for universities to remain commercially viable. Thus, the university must use multiple marketing strategies including their website to provide information for prospective students on their student-centred teaching culture, employability, and career support, investment in facilities, and resources to enhance student experience in order to attract and recruit new students (Mogaji, 2016). Universities can also adopt digital marketing even beyond social media as a content creation strategy is essential to engage with and inform the students. Traditional media like newspapers, billboards, and prospectus cannot be ignored as well. The choice of media will depend on the prospective students being targeted, the effectiveness of the media, and marketing communications budget (Camilleri, 2020). Inviting the students (and their parents) to attend open days and taster sessions to see the facilities is also beneficial as the student can experience the university before enrolling also allows the university to create an impression which enhances their brand image. Country specific promotional strategies, recognising the local language, cultures, and values should be adopted for promotional content to different markets (Camilleri, 2020).

The primary strategy should be towards making the university appealing, standing out from other institutions. Importantly, the outcome of all these marketing strategies is for the students to enrol and make a financial commitment to the university. At this stage, the service quality becomes essential; students must see value in what they are being offered. Their experience as students is also essential, recognising the role of academic support, extra curriculum activities, facilities, and tutors to support them. With a positive experience, there is a high probability that current and former students will recommend the university to their siblings and friends as a form of word of mouth marketing and students may even progress to do their post-graduate degree in the university.

For other stakeholders, the brand position is essential. Universities are expected to be strategic in the way they present themselves to the community, alumni, funders' government and its policymakers, as well as with business and industry. The strategic marketing communication should recognise the need for a unique brand identity based on values and philosophy of the university. Media coverage of activities, events, and achievements of the university are essential in creating a positive brand image. Partnership and collaboration with

an international organisation are also important, and it highlights a reputation which other organisations may want to be associated with as well. Research output and it impacts and contribution to the field, as well as position on the league table and rankings, can also be used to position the university and enhance its brand image.

While the primary outcome for the students is the enrolment, the primary result for the engagement with other stakeholder is endowment. This outcome is not just limited to the financial endowment, but positive brand images and perception, which will increase the brand equity of universities. If the university is seen in a good light and seen to be making advancements in society, other stakeholders will be more inclined to partner with the university. This will aid in forging collaborative relationships with other universities and organisations which will enhance the quality and stature of the university (Camilleri, 2020). Universities need to develop their brands to position themselves in the marketplace (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). A positive brand image, among many possibilities, built through the influence of the private tertiary institutions proprietors' reputation opens funding opportunities for the universities (Ademola et al., 2014), as Afe Babalola University (ABUAD), a private university in Nigeria got a US $40-million corporate loan from the African Development Bank (AfDB) (AfDB, 2017). This endowment concept also recognises the opportunities to attract talented individuals to the university, not just through enrolment, but also student exchange, staff exchange, and partnerships and collaborations in research and teaching.

Practical implications of marketing higher education in Africa

It is essential to recognise the heterogeneous nature of the higher education market as this will influence the strategic marketing communications that are applicable. This section highlights a typology of universities in Africa, their marketing challenges, and the impact on marketing communications.

The public universities

Public universities are created and funded by the government and often are some of the first higher education intuitions established in a country. Due to their heritage and often lower tuition fees, public universities are appealing to prospective students, and often become overpopulated because the demand for a place is higher than supply. This suggests that these universities may not be interested in marketing and advertising, because they do not need more students; this, however, poses a different marketing challenge for these universities. It

is, however, paramount for managers and administrators of public universities to note that if they are not advertising to recruit students, they should attempt towards repositioning their brands through various brand management strategies. This is important for building a positive attitude towards the brand, developing international collaborations and partnerships, and getting philanthropic donations and grants. These efforts should make them more appealing to prospective partners and other stakeholders. This involves having an updated and user-friendly website with relevant and accurate information, as well as content creation for social media marketing to engage with stakeholders and update them with the activities of the university.

The private universities

Private universities are non-public or independent universities that are owned, financed, and managed by private individuals, with denominational or secular boards and are often operated for profit (Mogaji, 2019). The numbers of private universities in Africa are increasing as public universities alone cannot meet the demands of prospective students seeking higher education. Also, the demographics of students are changing and likewise their expectations of a university such as the need for excellent facilities and an uninterrupted academic calendar. The growing number of universities is also creating competition in the sector. Private universities are not only competing with public universities; they are also competing with other private universities within the country and other universities outside the country. This, therefore, presents a different marketing challenge. Unlike public universities, private universities recognise the need to stay viable and competitive within the sector (Mustafa, Sellami, Elmaghraby, & Al-Qassass, 2018). They not only have a user-friendly website for information and brand position but also recruitment, making sure the information is available and prospective students can engage with it. Their marketing strategies need to also involve open days and taster sessions, inviting students on campus to come and experience the facilities and engage with lectures. As there are many factors known to influence students' choice, private universities need to be mindful of these factors and develop their marketing campaign to engage with the stakeholders. This could be around their facilities, uninterrupted academic calendar, or their connection with the industry which can enhance job prospects of their graduates.

The dual-track tuition universities

Some universities receive additional funding from the government, regardless of if they are private or public universities. These universities adopt a *dual-track tuition fee structure*

(Marcucci et al., 2008). In the case of public universities, the government sponsors students who have been selected on merit, while the university charges other students who have not been sponsored by the government. This structure is widespread in East African countries. Makerere University in Uganda admits a fixed quota of government-sponsored students and then also admits 'private' fee-paying students, especially in the lucrative areas of medicine, law, and engineering. Likewise, in some countries, the government sponsors selected students to attend private universities because there are limited spaces in public universities. In Botswana, the government supports students to attend private institutions by providing them with tuition fees and living expenses. As these private universities are also benefiting indirectly from the public funding, there are marketing priorities to attract these students that get funded by the government. Just as seem in England where the international students pay much more than the local students, this difference in fee scheme influences universities to deploy marketing strategies to attract prospective international students as means of making significant financial gains from through their higher student tuition fees (Findlay, McCollum, & Packwood, 2017).

International branch campus

As an effort towards globalised higher education, there has been a surge of international branch campuses and partnerships with local universities around the world. These international branch campuses are an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign higher education provider, operated in the name of the overseas education provider, and provide an entire academic programme, substantially on-site, leading to a degree awarded by the international education provider (Ndofirepi et al., 2020; Cbert, 2019). There are some in Malaysia, China, Cyprus, and many African countries. For example, Webster University, an American University based in St. Louis, Missouri, has international campuses in Ghana, while Middlesex University in the United Kingdom opened a second overseas campus in Mauritius. These universities takes pride in the brand reputation of their home university as they engage with prospective students in the host country. These universities have a different marketing challenge as they are torn between two campaigns – following the home campaign or localising their campaign. These campuses have often been viewed differently as it is not always a guaranteed success for the universities (Iqbal, 2019) as many universities have closed their campus less than five years after opening. The University of Wolverhampton closed its Mauritius campus less than four years after it opened in March 2012 (Morgan, 2015). Maintaining enrolment is essential to justify the enormous investment of international

campuses, highlight the unique marketing challenge of these universities. While students may feel the need to be associated with these universities to get the international degree, their student experiences may not be as great as studying in the campus of a public or private university in their home country. Since the structure of the university offers a different marketing challenge for these universities, reaching out to prospective students with the right marketing messages, making them see benefits of holding an international degree and the experiences they will have on campus will be crucial.

Dual-curriculum universities

These universities are partnerships between two countries, establishing a university on two different educational curriculums. It is a hybrid between the private universities and the international branch campuses. The American University in Cairo was founded in 1919 by Americans devoted to education and service in the Middle East. Other examples around Africa are the American University of Nigeria and the German University in Cairo and the British University in Egypt. These universities are created based on cooperation between the home country (e.g. USA, Germany, or the UK) and the host (Egypt or Nigeria) country. The key idea of these types of universities is to provide a home-country style of education to meet the host country's needs for practical applications and professional specialisations. The degrees from these universities are validated by both home and host country. Importantly, these universities have campuses, and they are not just a branch campus of international universities. It is more like a permanent version of international branch campuses and with their own identity, not just a replicated identity of the university in the home country. These are advantages for the universities to market themselves as they can boast oh having a dual-curriculum, the vibrant student experiences on campus, and being supported by international faculties. The marketing strategy should be about making students see value in what is being offered; instead of travelling abroad (which is more expensive), they can still experience a high-level international education in their home country. Content creation strategies, especially on social media to showcase what life is like on campus, will be valuable in attracting prospective students.

Agenda for future research on strategic marketing of higher education in Africa

It is essential to acknowledge that this book covered only a limited scope of strategic marketing of higher education 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, branding, and education management;
- Scholars and academic researchers in higher education marketing, providing a theoretical underpinning for their research and theory development;
- Universities' managers and administrators considering enhancing the marketing communications of their universities;
- 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.

Understanding the higher education market in Africa

While there is growing research to better understand this vast market, more research is still expected to uncover its unique feature and characteristics. Africa is vast, dynamic, and heterogeneous. There are different higher education systems in different countries, and this needs to be theoretically examined. It is essential to understand the market to know the type of marketing strategy that may work. One approach of marketing strategy will not fit all universities in Africa. Farinloye et al. (2020) developed a typology of Nigerian higher education, understanding the different structures of higher education in the country. Replicating this research in other countries will open more understanding of the intricate nature of higher education in Africa. Universities need to be aware of their market which includes their competitors (other universities within the country and outside the country) and their customers (home and international) and external stakeholders like (parents and government) who can influence the universities' operation. Marketing models developed in the context of higher education can be used to understand the market.

Understanding student decision-making processes

To develop an effective campaign to recruit students, it is essential to have a better understanding of the choice-making process of the students. This understanding is becoming critical as 'the policy context for higher education moves towards market-based systems in many countries' (McManus, Haddock-Frase, & Rands, 2017, p. 2). Though several empirical works have been done on this topic, describing it as 'a complex process that involves different perspectives and a myriad of factors' (Mustafa et al., 2018, p. 2), this is however not

enough in the African context. Future research needs to recognise the unique features of the African university settings and culture which inform decision-making.

Further research can explore why students are choosing to study in religious affiliated private universities instead of mainstream private universities. Perhaps this could be influenced by the strength of students' religious belief, or it is the parents' decision. Also, more research could discover why students are choosing to study in an international branch campus or dual-curriculum university; perhaps the fact that they will get two degrees was appealing to them. A better understating of these factors influencing choice is needed in developing an effective marketing campaign.

Understanding students' information sources

While most studies and universities may be focusing on digital marketing and social media campaigns for attracting prospective students, is this working for African students? Adefulu et al. (2020) recognised that Nigerian parents as a source of information were an influence for their children, as participants noted that they rarely disregard the significance and opinions of their parent in their choice-making process. This aligns with findings of Le et al. (2019), which suggests that the students in a collectivistic society like Nigeria recognise the influence of the parents. Understanding the information sources unique to students in Africa is also essential in developing strategic marketing communications. Are African students engaging with their universities on social media or do they still prefer the traditional media? With the known challenges of access to the Internet in Africa, how are students using social media in their information search and decision-making process? Perhaps they are relying on word of mouth from teachers, friends, and families? Are they visiting the campus or better still, are they requesting prospectus forms from the universities? Having this understanding will be necessary for managers as they prioritise marketing strategies that are essential for a successful marketing mix in higher education (Maringe, 2005).

Understanding the existing marketing communications strategies

Research is needed to evaluate the existing marketing communications strategies being adopted by universities in Africa. There is evidence of using social media for recruitment (Olaleye et al., 2020), but how effective are these media in reaching out to the prospective students? Future research should endeavour to uncover the effectiveness of these strategies. These findings will inform managers and practitioners about how to improve and plan their campaign for effective engagement.

Understanding the perception about university brands

There is a perception about Africa, more so there is a perception of university brands in Africa. Research is needed to understand these perceptions and how it shapes stakeholder's engagement. Previous studies have examined stakeholders in university settings and identified staff, students, alumni, and government bodies as some of the key players (Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2013; Mogaji, 2019). While most of these studies have focused on universities in the developed world, it is essential to understand how African university staff, students, and even the society perceive universities. This strand of research can build up on Maringe's 2006 study, which evaluated how vice-chancellors and internal marketers in Zimbabwe recognised the marketing concept and its organisation within the universities. This understanding of the university brand is essential in managing the reputation of the university which is extremely important for universities seeking both local and global recognition (Kiraka, 2020) These findings will be relevant for university managers who need to understand what their university stands for and build long-term brands beyond mere survival (Mwebesa & Maringe, 2020). Having a robust strategic brand agenda reflected in brand identity design, brand culture, and values is crucial to a successful university brand (Mogaji, 2019).

Conclusion

Strategic marketing communications is essential for universities as the higher education landscape is changing due to various documented reasons. The expectations of students are changing and importantly communicating with them is evolving. Irrespective of the type of university, there are marketing challenges that need to be addressed for the university 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 strategic marketing communications between university stakeholders. Universities need to recognise the need for a strong brand position and effective marketing communications.

There are 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 marketing higher education in Africa. The preceding section presents five areas for future research. It has been a great pleasure to contribute to knowledge on higher education marketing, 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.

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