AFRICA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BRANDING
AS A MARKETING STRATEGY IN SELECTED PRIVATE
UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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the requirements for the degree of Master of Education
(Leadership & Administration)

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DECLARATION

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I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other College
or University for academic credit

The views presented here are not necessarily those of Africa International University
or the Examiners

(Signed): _____
Ng'ang'a, Edwin Maina

July 2017

ABSTRACT

Private universities are operating in an increasingly complex environment characterised by stiff competition for students and resources. Internationalization of education, competition from public universities and growth of online courses are some of the factors that private universities have to contend with. Private universities have resorted to branding in order to differentiate themselves and attract student numbers.

This study sought to explore the factors that shape the effectiveness of branding strategies of private universities. Data was collected from a sample of 16 students in four private universities in Kenya. It was found that peer referral, high quality education and prospects of employment ranked highest among the factors that students considered when selecting a university.

The study recommends that private universities review their marketing and branding strategies and align them with the priorities and needs of their target market.

DEDICATION

To my very first teachers:

- Mr Macheru who - in Class 1 at Kianjogu Primary School -saw my potential and lit the spark in me for lifelong learning

- Jeniffer Wachu - my aunt -who looked out for me at Kianjogu Primary

- Rose Wanyaga (d) - my grandmother – who never tired of exhorting us to excel in our studies

- Peter Ng'ang'a (d) - my father - who enrolled me in KNLS library Nyeri and later CREDU in Nairobi and to whom I greatly indebted for my superior writing abilities

- Catherine Wairimu Ng'ang'a - my mother - for her amazing and unceasing sacrifice for the cause of my education. Without her, my pursuit for education would have ended long ago.

No earthly reward is enough to repay you for your work. May God himself bless you. I hope I can be a teacher that emulate these people and touch and change the lives of my students.

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Ultimately, I thank Almighty God our creator for the ability to complete this project.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

This study explored the factors that shape the effectiveness of branding strategies of private universities and used university students as a sample. Universities engage in various branding strategies in order to attract students, a fact that provides the rationale of collecting data from university students. "The examination of an employee-defined view of brand orientation is one-sided and myopic because it ignores the vital role of students as customers in higher education context in terms of value recognition" (Casidy 2013, 804).

The growth of private universities in Kenya has been triggered by a massive demand for education at a time when public universities face deep challenges of under capacity, lowered quality, reduced government subsidies and weak management practices (Oketch 2003). Decline in public universities was caused by – among other factors –political interference, years of operation without regulation, brain drain of staff to foreign countries and high enrolment numbers (Mwiria, et. al. 2007).

Owing to these factors, private universities have been perceived as a better alternative that predictably provides good quality education in an ideal environment. Oketch (2003) attributes the growth of private universities to five reasons, the first of which is demand. Kenya's population grew by 4% in the 1970s and 1980s, creating a large pool of university students. Unfortunately, the government failed to plan for this growth, enabling private universities to step in and fill the gap. "Private universities have created some space for those who cannot gain places at the public universities

and are able to afford the tuition fees and related expenses charged by these institutions"(Oketch, 20).

Another reason for the growth of private universities in Kenya was the 1980s global trend of privatization of social services. According to Oketch, "the privatization agenda in Kenya can also be explained within the context of the global trends in educational policy coupled with the success of private primary and secondary academies that mushroomed throughout Kenya's urban centers in the 1980s" (Oketch 21). At the same time, the government was reducing its subsidies to public university owing to pressure from the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and World Bank) which argued that governments should invest more at primary and secondary levels and less at university level. This created a vacuum that was filed by private universities. The Bretton Woods institution also pushed for policies that reduced government monopoly in education. "The policy of educational decentralization, particularly in the developing countries, created the conditions for greater private-sector involvement in educational provision" (Oketch, 24).

The high secondary school completion rates are the third reason why private universities have blossomed. Simply put, Kenyans have become more qualified so that a high school certificate cannot get anyone a well paying job. To get a fair chance of getting a decent job, high school leavers opt to enroll for university education. Given the diminished confidence towards public universities, many of the high school leavers enroll in private universities.

Thus, Oketch (2003) gives five reasons that have favoured the rise of private universities in Kenya as; high demand, global trends, numerous high school graduates, low confidence in public universities as well as reduced government monopoly in higher education. One would expect that with all these factors working

in their favour, private universities would have an easy time of attracting and retaining students. However this has not been the case.

Scholars and marketing practitioners point out that today's private universities are competing for students and financial resources in a "market place made complex by a convergence of factors" (Whisman 2009, 367). Increased internationalization of education providers and the popularity of online courses in recent years are just two of the factors that have contributed to this complexity (Casidy 2013; Harden 2012).

Reduced government subsidies compelled public universities to look for an alternative. One strategy that was adopted by all public universities was the implementation of the parallel programmes. As Oketch (31) argues, "the introduction of parallel degree courses at the public universities threatens the expansion of private universities. Public universities have created cutthroat competition by lowering entry points thereby attracting entrants who would have otherwise joined the private universities" (27).

Apart from local competition, private universities also face competition from universities in US, UK, Australia and other countries which have been aggressively targeting students in Africa (Hanover 2014).

This diversity of choice means that universities have to differentiate themselves in their quest to get more students. One way of differentiating themselves is through branding "…which communicates special features and advantages of a product, thereby simplifying the decision making process for customers" (Kotler 2010, xiii). Institutions that embrace branding are likely to attract better quality students while boosting their academic reputation (Bunzel 2007).

The practice of branding is likely to become commonplace as private universities seek to meet the high demand for education in the knowledge economy that we live in (Armstrong and Chapman 2011; Samsinar et al. 2003).

Despite the importance of effective branding, not all universities have embraced this phenomenon. Some resistance towards higher education branding occurs because universities fail to realize that their needs are similar to the needs of profit seeking companies (Whisman 2009, 367). Yet the commercial practice of branding is one way through which private universities can achieve diversification of resources for "…organisations exclusively depending on one or few resource providers are likely to experience their constraining influences" (Macedo and Pinho 2006, 538).

Jevons (2006) conducted a literature review: *"Universities: a Prime Example of Branding Going Wrong"* that challenges universities to implement the branding theories that they teach in their programs. The writer argued that higher education institutions must develop a message of their uniqueness and communicate that to their stakeholders.

Private universities that intend to remain relevant should seriously consider branding. By so doing, they attract the right type of students and attract talent and resources in a self-feeding cycle that propels them to sustainable success. To achieve this, they need an acute knowledge of changing customer preferences, identifying the market segments that are compatible with the institution's mission and a high degree of customer orientation. "…notions of branding, competition and customer orientation are important areas for consideration in the continued survival of an organisation in a corporate context" (Akojee and Mcgrath 2008, 133).

"Various corporate marketing strategies are being employed in the academic world as universities search for ways to improve ranking" (Bunzel 2007, 152). One strategy that universities - especially in USA - are using is change of name. Trenton State College in New Jersey changed its name to College of New Jersey while Beaver College in Philadelphia became Arcadia University. New Jersey Institute of Technology adopted a new brand while Sacramento State hired a professional branding firm to develop a new identity package. These branding initiatives boosted the ranking of these institutions in such guides as the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* and *US News & World Report.* The process of ranking simplifies decision making:

> The reality is the consumers are not only aware of brands, but also focus their attention (applications) on the better brands established by these rankings. The better brands gain in quality of student and raise the overall academic standing of a university (Bunzel 2007, 152).

Branding is viewed as a way of simplifying the students' decision making process when it comes to selecting a university (Casidy 2013) and various components go into the branding process. These include "image (Sevier 1994), reputation" and "academics" (Berger and Wallingford 1996) as well as "strong reputation" (Mazzarol and Soutar 2012).

Private universities in Kenya have little choice but to engage in branding strategies that can appeal to potential students and enable them to attract the right calibre of students amidst stiff competition from other service providers. Potential university students are today spoilt for choice. For example, a student in Kenya who does not wish to join a public university has the option of joining the 17 private universities in the country. If the family has the financial resources, the student can choose from hundreds of universities in the UK, USA, Australia and other Commonwealth countries. Clearly, engaging in branding is not a choice. Educational marketer, Robert A. Sevier poses:

> There are 3,600 two- and four-year colleges in the United States. Even as a member of the academy, how many can you name? How many can your prospective students' name? Or prospective donors? Can they name yours? Will they (Sevier, 2002, 5)?

Kenya has 70 public and private universities but the competition for students is no less intense. For private universities to continue attracting students and remain financially viable, they have to explore strategies on how to strengthen their brands in the higher education marketplace. For Kenyan universities, this important question can be paraphrased and addressed to private universities as: Numerous universities in US, UK, Canada, India, South Africa, Australia and Kenya all target the same students as you are. Does your university stand out in such a crowded field?

The pursuit of this study therefore was to explore the factors affecting the branding efforts of private universities in Kenya. How effectively are the institutions branding themselves as a way of responding to the rapidly changing and competitive educational marketplace? The study explored whether there are factors that impact positively or negatively on the branding efforts of these institutions. Clearly,

> Educational marketers must attempt to answer some fundamental questions: why do students select a particular college or university from the large number of alternatives? In evaluating the many options available to them, how would students (and their sponsors) come to a purchase decision? On what criteria would they appraise their options? (Oswald 261).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the great value of branding in enabling private universities to attract students, there is some resistance to the notion that HE institutions should market and brand, two practices that some universities perceive as being antithetical to the non-profit mission of universities (Oplatka 2006).

Yet, private universities are facing several challenges including stiff competition for students and resources as well as emerging technological means of delivering educational content. Some analysts argue that the current mode of offering

university education is too costly and eventually unsustainable (Harden 2012). The new way of delivering university education will be through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and that many students will flock to online courses offered by top universities such as Harvard and MIT, leading to the death of many universities. Harden (2012) estimates that in a few decades, 50% of universities in USA will be closed as a result of competition from MOOCs. This is a threat even to private universities in Kenya.

Branding alone is not sufficient to ensure survival of private universities if such initiatives do not arise out of a solid understanding of client dynamics. Chapleo (2010) differentiates between successful and failed university brands in that "successful brands show a greater degree of congruence between the values that firms develop for their brands and the rational and emotional needs of their consumers" (171).

A deeper reason for understanding the customer is the power wielded by the modern customer through technology. People are empowered as a result of the internet and social media (Samsinar et al. 2003; Stick n.d.).In fact social media is a potent tool in the hands of a tech savvy generation - for better and for worse. As Stick (n.d.) says, "the consumer isn't a moron. She's digitally empowered, marketing-savvy and highly influential and can bring down your brand in a matter of minutes" (34).

It is clear that branding is a complex process and private universities need to carefully examine how they approach it to make a long lasting impact on their target market. Universities will waste money in branding and marketing strategies that do not reach their target market or those that are not seen as authentic by potential customers.

There was therefore a need for a Kenyan study that establishes what factors affect the effectiveness of branding strategies in private universities.

Purpose of the Study

The study explored what factors influence the effectiveness of branding in selected private universities in Kenya. This study is essential given that private universities have to brand themselves in a complex environment characterised by popularity of online courses, declining financial fortunes from traditional donors, dwindling numbers of students and competition from other universities.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following 3 objectives:

1. Investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya
2. Investigating what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join
3. Exploring how students would brand their private universities differently

Research Questions

RQ1: Do students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya?

RQ2: What factors do students consider when selecting private universities to join?

RQ3: How would students would brand their private universities differently?

Significance of the Study

The proposed study sheds light on the factors that make branding effective in promoting awareness of private universities among potential students. The findings of the study are likely to be significant to:

University administrators: The findings may sensitize these leaders on where to invest money in branding for better returns.

University marketers: The findings of this study can also assist marketers in universities to engage in appropriate strategies that attract students.

Branding experts: These professionals can use this study as the basis for further study

Potential investors: Potential investors in the higher education sector can also benefit from the research findings.

Limitations

Since each private university in Kenya has its own culture and tradition, the research conclusions may not be easily generalizable to all private universities in Kenya.

Delimitations

There are 17 chartered private universities in Kenya. The study did not cover all these private universities in Kenya. The researcher selected four (4) private universities in which to conduct the study. The rationale behind this choice is the ease of access since all of them are in Nairobi area, thereby making access easier and financial cost of the research affordable. The 4 private universities are: Africa International University (AIU), Zetech, Presbyterian University of East Africa (PUEA) and KCA University.

Assumptions

The study is based on various assumptions, namely that:

1. Participants truthfully responded to the questions posed to them in the course of data collection.

2. Branding is a critical component in the existence and growth of private universities in Kenya and will continue to be critical in future.

Definition of Key Terms

Branding - a brand is the sum total of all characteristics of the product, service, or group, including its physical features, its emotional assets, and its cultural and emotional associations (Landa 2005). In this study, branding was considered as a subset of marketing.

Marketing - The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (CIM 2015). In this study, marketing is taken to be all the total strategies and activities that an organization engages in to attract and keep solvent customers. It is taken as broader than branding.

Market Orientation – This is the idea that organizations should be close to their customers so that they can understand their needs and respond to those needs. It refers to the manner in which organisations gather information on customer needs, how they disseminate that intelligence and how the whole entity responds to the identified customer needs (Kohli and Jaworski 1990).

Private universities – These are universities that do not received funding from government and are not set up by government but by private entities.

MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses. These are online courses offered for free or a small cost by leading universities such as Yale, MIT and Harvard.

Conceptual Framework

The theory of brand differentiation holds that products and services are branded to stand out from competing products in the marketplace. According to Jevons (2006) universities must develop and communicate differentiated brands. Yet, the branding may not be effective in attracting the target market.

There is need to find out what influences potential students to join a private university after the institution has engaged in marketing.

This study explored the factors that shape the effectiveness of branding strategies of private universities. These factors include: branding strategies used, knowledge of branding and factors considered in selection. All these are independent variables. The effectiveness of the branding is the dependent variable. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES   **DEPENDENT VARIABLE**

1. Branding strategies used
2. Knowledge of branding
3. Factors considered in selection

EFFECTIVENESS OF BRANDING
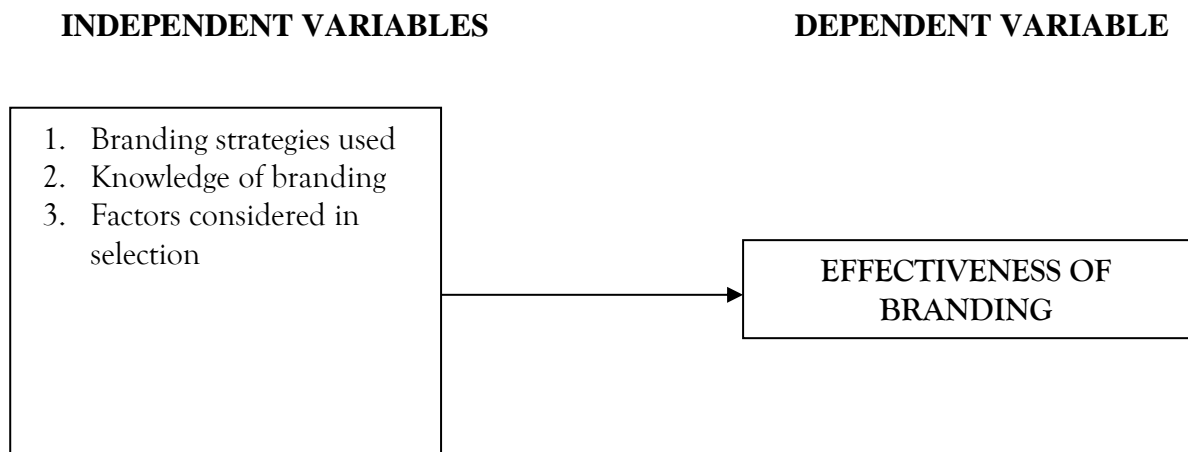
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
(Researcher, 2017).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It was necessary to explore the factors that underpin the effectiveness of branding efforts of private universities in Kenya given the intense competition in the higher education landscape (Hanover Research 2014). Branding is one of the strategies undertaken by non profit organizations in response to increased competition and it is necessary to evaluate the efficacy of this complex strategy borrowed from the corporate world (Stride and Lee 2007). Private universities engage in branding to attract and retain high quality students and overcome the challenges of competition from more established public universities, high operating costs, growth of online courses and global competition (Bunzel 2007; Whisman 2009; Jevons 2006; Harden 2012).

Casidy (2013) notes that the competition within higher the education sector has "intensified in recent years due to the growing internationalization of education providers" (816). Private universities face double competition; from local public universities and from foreign universities, some of who enjoy better brand value than local private universities.

One effective way that private universities have responded to these challenges is through branding, coming up with ''a name, term, symbol or design or a combination of these items intended to …differentiate them from …the competition'' (Keller 2008, 3). According to Hanover Research (2014):

As universities find the need to appeal to an ever-increasing and diverse student base, successful branding have become increasingly important activities for institutions. Universities must now go to greater lengths to differentiate themselves from competitor institutions. Successful branding can help with increasing enrollment, expanding fundraising capabilities and other outcomes. (5)

The importance of this study is underscored by the fact that institutions do not have unlimited budgets with which to engage in branding and financial prudence requires that they spend money where they will get returns on their investment (Bowen, Gogo and Maswili 2012).

This study was guided by three research objectives; investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya, investigating what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join and exploring how students would brand their private universities differently

Various Branding Strategies

Like their counterparts in other countries, Kenyan universities are branding themselves as a way of attracting high quality students since "better brands gain in quality of student and raise the overall academic standing of a university" (Bunzel 2007, 153).

Whisman (2009) avers that universities are targeting an audience that is highly brand-savvy and one that is constantly receiving persuasive marketing messages regarding 'top ranked' universities' (367). It is not lost on private universities that, "Suppliers who do not immediately spring to the customers mind have unfavourable odds of being selected for consideration" (Andersen 2001, 174). Branding has been a way of ensuring that they remain in the minds of potential students.

Universities also engage in branding as a way of asserting their autonomy. Overdependence on donors and benefactors for financial support may curtail an

institution's independence. 'With the exception of some institutions, such as the United States International University (USIU), most private universities in Kenya are religious" (World Bank 2006, 4) which have been receiving financial aid from their partners and well wishers abroad.   Macedo and Pinho (2006) hold that, "…organizations exclusively depending on one or few resource providers are likely to experience their constraining influences" (538). "…empirical data partially supports the conclusion that diversification of revenue sources is likely to favour a higher degree of market orientation" (Macedo and Pinho 2006, 533) and effective branding is a way of attracting more students who pay fees, which form the bulk of these institutions' income (Mwiria, et al 2007).

In light of competition and other pressures on private universities, how best can they approach marketing? Bowen, Gogo and Maswili (2012) conducted a study to identify marketing strategies that could be applied by private universities so as to attract and enroll students. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study. Probability-simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 98 students and 28 employees from Kabarak and Daystar universities in Kenya.

The research instrument was a questionnaire. Descriptive data was analyzed using the two-way analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicated that advertising using an institution web site, advertising using the various media stations, use of social networks such as face-book, word-of-mouth, career fair involvement, open day on campus and alumni support are marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrolment of students. This study is an eye- opener for any private institution in their branding efforts.

However, this study assumes that branding strategies on their own attract students to a university without the influence of other factors. A closer scrutiny of the performance of private universities negates this perspective. For example, the Nairobi based School of Professional Studies (SPS) was granted a charter and renamed Inoreero University, a name that carried negative tribal connotations in the tribalised Kenyan psyche. Potential students shunned the university and numbers plummeted, starving the institution of funds with it would have used to offset a big bank loan (Waruru 2014). Finally, the campus building was bought by rival Mt Kenya University and that was the end of Inoreero University. The lesson here is that a brand is hard to build and easy to destroy (Hanover 2014).

Despite investing in branding, Inoreero University failed to attract students to the extent that it became insolvent. Other contexts offer lessons on what to avoid. Ajadi's (2010) paper traces the highs and lows of private universities in Nigeria. Using a descriptive approach, Ajadi chronicles the abysmally poor quality of private universities in Nigeria. Successive governments have had a love hate relationship with private universities in the country - sometimes supporting and sometimes shutting down all private colleges for poor quality. Elsewhere in Malaysia, "…many students and parents are complaining about the poor quality of certain programs offered at a few private colleges" (Samsinar 277).Clearly, branding alone is not sufficient to win over students but "…college authorities must be aware of students' needs…" (Samsinar, et. al 2003, 279).In addition, "private universities must also be in tune with the educational cycles if they are to get the attention of potential students" (Moogan 2011, 582). It would be futile, for example, to engage prospective students during the season of final examinations.

Various universities have also come to the realization that one way they can boost their student numbers is to target older non-traditional students (Quinn 2013). Branding intended to target this demographic is different from that which works for the younger learners. Mature students are likely to be attracted by a university's housing, flexibility in offering courses and assistance with using technology. To attract non-traditional demographics such as working professionals, universities should design strategies that offer flexible modes of delivering education including evening course and online courses. They should also make it easier to transfer credits and designing innovative programmes (Quinn 2013; Moogan 2011).

Private universities must come up with innovative and cost-effective strategies to enable them brand their institutions sustainably especially because they rely on students' fees and do not enjoy government financial support (Mwiria, et al 2007). One approach is to form a marketing unit within the university that can handle the other entrepreneurial aspects of the institution. These units - staffed with professionals - can be charged with branding as well as executing projects that diversify a university's income. Through resource allocation, internal controls, management capacity and work culture, the units can boost the revenues of their institutions (Tsuma and Mugambi 2014) while also enhancing the brand identity of the specific universities. The study by Tsuma and Mugambi (2014) recommended that universities would increase the returns of their enterprise units by investing more on their human resources and technology while also deploying workers according to their competencies.

The idea of nurturing marketing units in colleges attracted the attention of McGrath and Akoojee (2007). The two, in the South African context, argued for universities to nurture marketing units in colleges because the units "assist in the

building of institutions that are better attuned to satisfying the needs of various internal and external stakeholders as well as help create a better brand image for the institutions"(132)

Clearly, understanding students' needs by private universities is the first step towards effective branding. Forming enterprise units, timing and targeted marketing also go a long towards forming a coherent branding strategy by these institutions. From the example of Inoreero University, it is clear that the successful branding of a private university cannot guarantee appeal to students with the exclusion of certain other factors. It is essential at this point to consider some of the factors that may influence effectiveness of branding in private universities.

Student's Knowledge of Branding Strategies

The second research objective of the study was to explore whether the students were aware of these branding approaches given the futility and expense of engaging in branding strategies of which the target market is oblivious.

Bowen, et. al (2012) conducted a study to identify marketing strategies that could attract students to private universities. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study. Probability-simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 98 students and 28 employees from Kabarak and Daystar universities.

A questionnaire was used as the research instrument. Descriptive data was analyzed using the two-way analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicated that advertising using an institution web site, advertising using the various media stations, use of social networks such as face-book, encouraging word-of-mouth, career fair involvement, open day on campus and alumni support are marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrolment of students. Other scholars have

considered various factors that could be at play in university choice including interaction with staff (Akojee and Mcgrath 2008), role of alumni (Moogan, 2011), advice of opinion leaders(Chaudry and Irshad 2013), perceived quality of the institutions (Samsinar et. al. 2003) and ethical reputation (Sharma 2011).

The shift in universities' operating environment has taken place at a time when the role of universities is becoming critical due to the rise of the knowledge economy (Armstrong and Chapman 2011). Former president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers, among others has linked expansion of university education to the success of the US economy, noting that the current world economy is dominated by knowledge based industries (ibid).

Thus a dialectical scenario has emerged whereby university education is in demand in a knowledge based economy and yet the need for universities to brand themselves has been necessitated by global competition and declining government support. Kenyan private universities have tremendous potential to attract students from all over Africa if only they can overcome internal challenges and brand themselves effectively.

Some Factors that may Influence Effectiveness of Branding

The study considered the various factors that are necessary for branding success in higher education institutions. Since potential students receive persuasive marketing communication from many private universities (Whisman 2009), it is essential to investigate what factors influence the student to choose one private university over another. Scholars have considered various factors that could be at play in this choice including specific branding strategies used by private universities, awareness of the students regarding the branding strategies, factors considered in university selection

and factors not considered in university selection by prospective students and how these affect

the effectiveness of the branding process.

Interaction between University Staff and Prospective Students

In *Becoming a World Class University,* Tayeb, Zahed and Ritzen (2016)

highlight the central place of university staff in brand enhancement;

> The means for delivering excellent education are people. It is important to realize time and time again that universities are a people business. It is the university staff members who make, or unfortunately possibly break, the quality of the university. Human resource policy is an important element that involves having the right people in the right places, investing in motivation and continued learning, and investing in facilities which make it possible for staff to achieve the proper life-work balance (183).

Open days and campus visits "are useful in showcasing what a particular

university has to offer, and has the advantage of attracting potential students to attend

together with their parents" (Moogan 2011, 582). These forums enable potential

student to interact with the university's staff. The attitude and conduct of the staff

may create an impression that affects whether the student enrolls in that institution as

personal encounters are highly effective marketing tools (Andersen 2001). Akojee and

Mcgrath (2008) assert that:

> …in a service context a marketing orientation should permeate the whole organization. Marketing strategic therefore cannot be an isolated marketing department function. The interaction of the whole organization with the customer means that marketing as a function of the enterprise should permeate the whole organization. (134)

For this to happen, it is proposed that "universities have to align their thinking

to adopt a more customer centered approach in which the organization places the

customer at the centre of everything it does" (Dolnicar and Lazarevski 2009, 279).

Akojee and Mcgrath (2008) propose that where services are produced and

consumed simultaneously, customers look for clues by which to evaluate service

quality. In this context the role of employees as those responsible for service quality

must assume the role of brand ambassadors, whose charge is to transmit positive clues to the customers, in this case the students. Thus "when a university understands that their most valuable tangible asset is their employees and when universities engage them in their institution's brand development process, the most valuable intangible asset becomes internal branding" (Whisman 2009, 370).

For university staff to become brand champions, they should believe in the mission and authenticity of the institution. Stride and Lee (2007) emphasize that there is a distinction, "…between a brand's visual identity, which can be controlled, or 'policed' and the deeper, underlying values of the brand for which greater ownership or buy-in from stakeholders is required" (116). In the latter case, "the adoption of shared belief through participation was viewed as a more effective management process than control imposed simply by authority" (116). Internal marketing focuses on promoting the buy-in of the university among the staff since "the importance of staff buy-in is considered critical to complement the external marketing strategies employed in educational institutions" (Akojee and Mcgrath 2008, 139). Motivating staff enhances buy-in and possibly promote the effectiveness of branding in private universities.

It is therefore clear that the attitudes and conduct of a university's staff is critical in how they handle potential students and whether those students enroll or do not. In addition, such potential students can spread word of mouth – for or against the university – that would have a bearing on whether other potential students are attracted to that institution or not. This study explored the role of university staff as one of the factors that has an influence on the effectiveness of branding.

Even after students join a particular university, their interaction with university staff is still a vital part of their experience. This is the concept of internal

marketing. "Internal marketing points to the internal processes that leads to successful client transactions" (Akojee 140). This means that the employees of the institution have to be brand champions of the university. "Attention to internal marketing enables staff to be convinced about their role in marketing" (Gray 1991; Hartley 1999).

This approach is the foundation of relational marketing which is increasingly being viewed as a better alternative to the traditional approach to marketing which was based on persuading the customer to make a purchase rather than building a relationship based on trust and benefitting from the long term business of that customer (Andersen 2001). The essence of relational marketing 'is to decrease exchange uncertainty and to create customer collaboration and commitment through gradual development and ongoing adjustment of mutual norms and shared routines" (Andersen 168). Thus members of staff keep in constant touch with customers and receive ongoing feedback which should be incorporated in the ongoing brand experience.

For this to happen, the institution has to ensure that employees are treated well as an important resource. Workers who are ill treated or overworked may not be in a frame of mind to become good brand ambassadors of the university. White, et. al., (2003) explain that employers and employees are both to blame for long working hours. Employers are intent on maximising returns from increased numbers of white collar workers at a time when labour unions are weak or inactive. On their part, workers go for demanding jobs 'to fulfil material ambitions in a consumer society that has developed powerful forms of advertising and credit purchase systems" (177). Personal debt is one of the reasons workers are willing to put up with companies that overwork them.

Bubb and Earley (2004) quote a 2004 research of 300 staff in UK institutions that found that 85% of them admitted that excessive workloads were having a negative impact on their domestic life. More than 30% said that too much work left them with daily exhaustion and stress while an equal number said that they had little time for a social life. Such people was stressed at work and was ineffective when relating to students, both prospective and enrolled.

From a Biblical perspective, there is a need for workers to rest. Psalm 127:2 states that; *It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep (*Psalm 127:2). This verse recognises the futility of overworking ourselves for riches. We are to sleep at the right time because God also gave the time for sleep.

God knows that when people rest, they are refreshed and ready for the task ahead. *Six days thou shall do your work, and on the seventh day thou shall rest: that your ox and your ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed (*Exodus 23:12). God actually expects us to take rest and to give our servants (and even beasts of burden) rest. *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day (*Deuteronomy 5:15). According to Tim Keller (nd) "

> God ties the Sabbath to freedom from slavery. Anyone who overworks is really slave. Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave—to a need for success, to a materialistic culture, to exploitative employers, to societal expectations, or to all of the above. These slave masters will abuse you if you are not disciplined in the practice of rest. Sabbath is a declaration of freedom. This interesting view has some truth. Failing to take a rest indicates we are slaves of some master. If Christ took our burdens, we should be able to take rest from our labour without feeling guilty (115).

Institutions must therefore make effort to ensure that their employees work under suitable human resource conditions as a way of attaining effective internal marketing (Lings 2004). In *Living the Brand*, (2007) Nicholas Ind proposes that:

> This indicates that employees need to understand what the organisation stands for and be capable of delivering it in their everyday work. This is the goal of the concept of living the brand: to inspire individuals to identify and internalize the brand; to become committed to delivering value so that customers and consumers can enjoy a seemingly seamless experience that lives up to and exceeds their expectations (4).

Perceived Quality of Private Universities

Among the factors recognised as contributing to the strength of a brand of a higher education institution is the perceived quality of education offered at the institution. ''Academic reputation' refers to the prestige of the degree conferred, such as whether it is recognized nationality or internationally'' (Samsinar, et. al 2003, 263).This aspect is closely linked to the economic perception of education as an investment which should yield certain returns. According to Tayeb, Zahed and Ritzen (2016)

> The world has become familiar with the notion that education is not only essential for the development of a person, but that it also is an investment, which, just as with other investments, can subsequently yield beneficial returns. The investment notion implies costs and potential benefits, where the costs have to be met prior to benefits being reaped (42).

In today's competitive world, education is merging as the major differentiator between countries that achieve social and economic development and those that do not. It is emerging as a differentiator between companies that achieve great profits and those that do not. Investment in education is acknowledged as a precursor to economic development (Bindra 2016). The critical role of education has been triggered by the rise of the knowledge economy, increased mechanization of repetitive tasks and priority of skills over natural resources in economic development. This state

of affairs has put the spotlight on the quality of education that universities offer and

the calibre of their graduates in the marketplace. Tayeb, Zahed and Ritzen (2016)

postulate that;

> Recent insights into the importance of graduates for socio-economic
> development have placed universities at center stage. All quality education has
> an enduring impact on economic development, but it seems that university
> education in particular plays a central role in the current stage of globalized
> development where knowledge and its creative and problem solving use plays
> such an important role, while routine work is increasingly mechanized or
> robotized (43)

The recognition of higher education as an accelerator of economic

development is almost universal. In a 2006, UNESCO publication, *Growth and*

Expansion of Private Higher Education in Africa, Abadi says:

> The role of higher education in Kenya as in other countries in sub-Saharan
> Africa is recognized as being more influential than ever in creating greater
> opportunities for individual development, selection and placement in the
> competitive labour market. Besides, higher education is seen as an important
> vehicle for accelerating economic growth and development in general. The
> role of private higher education in meeting these challenges in even greater
> than before…" (75)

What makes graduates of a certain university high quality can be a subjective

matter. However, there are certain expectations that the graduates should fulfill

including cognitive achievement and knowledge, teamwork, intercultural

understanding as well as some knowledge of ICT (Tayeb, et.al. 2016). According to

Oketch (2003), "The idea of an academic degree as a private good that benefits the

individual in terms of increased earnings and competitive advantage in the labor

market rather than a public good is increasingly being widely accepted in Kenya…"

(23).

In Malaysia, Samsinar Md. Sidin, Siti Rahayu Hussin and Tan Ho Soon

(2003) explored the criteria students consider in selecting tertiary institutions of study

and further establish the ranking of variables perceived to be important in the process

of college selection. A total of 210 respondents were surveyed; comprising first-year undergraduate students from 8 universities (4 public and 4 private).

Data collected from the survey was analyzed using SPSS software. A series of analyses, including descriptive and factor analysis were conducted. The research results validated 3 of the 4 hypotheses that student selection of colleges depends on academic quality and campus facilities and surroundings. Thus, the importance of the perceived quality of a university education seems to be almost universal.

The study by Samsinar et. al. (2003) also revealed a"…significant bias in students from higher income families enrolling in private establishments" (277). This corroborates Oketch (2003) who claims that "private universities have emerged in response to the demands of the wealthy and prosperous sections of society for something better for their children that will enable them have a competitive edge in the labor market" (23). The sensibility of the upper classes is similar to that of their counterparts in Malaysia who as Samsinar et. al. (2003) notes, "There is a significant bias in students from higher income families enrolling in private establishments Samsinar" (277).

Private universities in Kenya must be accurately aware that they need to provide quality education as one way of justifying their higher fees as well as safeguarding loss of student numbers to competitors. Even as they engage in branding, private universities must persist in offering high quality education to attract and retain their target market.
"It is very important to keep promises, particularly when it comes to the quality of the education provided." Institutions must be committed to maintaining and improving quality (Hanover 2014, 7).

The issue of quality university education is so serious that governments are increasingly their oversight role to ensure quality. In 2012, the Kenya government enacted the Universities Act as a way of improving the quality of university education in the country (Ng'ang'a 2013). Among its provisions, the Act brought all universities – public and private – under the same law and nullified the different acts of individual universities. The Act formed the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service which is responsible for admitting students to all universities, both public and private.

The Commission for Higher Education (CHE) was replaced by the Commission for University Education (CUE) which was empowered to accredit all courses offered in Kenyan universities, public and private.

Despite challenges, Kenya's private universities have earned a reputation for quality (Ng'ang'a 2010). Private universities should continuously strive to uphold high quality standards, for as Tayeb et. al. (2016) aver:

> Raising the educational and academic status and ranking of universities to that of internationally accepted world-class universities has become the goal of many university higher administrators around the globe in recent years. This trend has been made possible and accelerated by rapid global economic growth and development. Such efforts inevitably involve the progressive evolution of successful strategies dealing with issues concerning academic and educational excellence, funding, support facilities' suitability, academic staff qualifications, and graduates' competencies (1).

This current study was instrumental in contextualising the role of quality university education in higher educational branding efforts within a Kenyan context. The study sought to find out the conception of university students on the role of quality education in relation to a university's appeal.

Advice of Opinion Leaders and Alumni

Prominent members of the alumni are a useful and often overlooked source of marketing (Moogan, 2011). In the case of private universities, engaging members of

the alumni on a continuous basis can provide an inexpensive marketing channel by people who have experienced the brand and can speak from that experience. As Casidy (2013) notes, such communicators, "may feel more confident talking about their university to their friends if the university has a strong brand which conveys coordinated message about its strength and reputation" (807). The study investigated whether alumni have played any role in affirming the branding of private universities through encouraging potential students to enroll in their old institutions.

In their understanding of opinion leaders, Chaudry, Shahid and Irshad (2013) draw from the definitions of Cosmas, C., & Sheth, J. (1980) Burt, R. (1999) who define opinion leaders as people:

> "whose opinions are highly respected and utilized by the respondents to help in making decision across a variety of situations such as what types of clothes to wear, where to have major household items repaired, how to discipline children, and for whom to vote in political elections. This person can be someone with whom the respondents have personal contacts (a friend, priest, member of social group, relative, or someone in public life whose advice is derived from his/her public statements). Opinion leaders are more precisely opinion brokers who carry information across the social boundaries between groups. They are not people at the top of things so much as people at the edge of things, not leaders within groups so much as brokers between groups (16).

Relying on other people's opinion as we make crucial decisions is part of our life. Malcom Gladwell (2000) wrote a book known as *The Tipping Point; how little things can make a big difference* in which he explains how opinion leaders shape the perceptions and decisions of people in everyday life. Gladwell argues that epidemics are spread by a few people who have impact in social relations and whose influence tips the critical balance to enable an idea or product become widely accepted. He classifies opinion leaders as mavens, salesmen and connectors. The three differ in various ways.

The mavens "have the knowledge and the social skills to start word-of-mouth epidemics" (67). These are people who collect prodigious amounts of information which they freely share with other people in their social groups. In regard to universities, mavens would know what universities offer scholarships, quality programs and high regard in the market. They not only collect the information but also pass it along to other people who have need for it. In other words, they do not hoard the information. This is an era when students face a bewildering choice of universities and it is likely that prospective students consult opinion leaders before they settle for institutions.

Gladwell's second type of opinion leaders is the connector, an individual who knows and is known by many people, more than the average person does. The connector's role is to introduce people to other people, to networks of like - minded people. According to Gladwell, "connectors invite people to their social networks" (38).

Apart from the maven and the connector, Gladwell identified the salesman as the last category of the opinion leader. The salesman is a gifted persuader who goes out of his way to persuade you to make a certain choice and disregard another. In the case of higher education choice, salesmen can be individuals or organizations. In the USA, for example, organizations influence the perception of universities through the practice of ranking universities. According to Bunzel (2007, 152) when, "Trenton State College in New Jersey changed its name to College of New Jersey, increased admission criteria, …the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* considers it an "up and coming public institution" (Fiske 2006, 454-5). Bunzel also cites examples of universities such as New Jersey Institute of Technology, University of Texas and Sacramento

State that have engaged in branding and rebranding as a way of repositioning themselves in the higher education market.

Although ranking of universities in Kenya has not attained the level it has in the US, there is need for private institutions to project a clear brand identity. If ranking takes on a serious dimension in Kenya, then some prospective students and their parents may come to rely on it before they settle for what university to attend.

Clearly, the role of opinion leaders is an important one in making purchasing decisions. There is need to find out whether opinion leaders – parents, peers, media and career counselors – do affect the selection of private universities in Kenya. The study explored the influence of opinion leaders in getting potential students to respond to branding by private universities. According to Chaudry and Irshad (2003);

> Research is frequently conducted to determine consumer attitudes toward a product category, brand, or company. However, the attitudes which opinion leaders "pass on" to their circles of influence are rarely identified. The identification of opinion leaders might provide an indication of such attitudes among opinion leaders, particularly as compared to their rank-and-file associates (20).

Ethical Reputation of the Universities

There is a significant and positive correlation between development of an ethical institutional brand and attaining competitive advantage in the academic world (Sharma 2011). In *Towards Developing an Ethical Institutional Brand,* Sharma aimed at "developing a perspective that ethical practices in higher education institutions can be a powerful tool for branding and attaining competitive advantage" (ibid, 1999)." This is especially relevant to Christian-based private universities in Kenya such as African International University which was one of the institutions under review.

In a world where exam cheating has become rampant, employers are not sure about the quality of the graduates in the marketplace. Did the prospective worker

benefit from exam leakage while in high school? Did they cheat their way through the system? If a private university has a reputation for ethical standards, their graduates are likely to be more attractive in the market.

Sharma (2011) proposed that an institution can base their ethical brand on just and fair practices in all its operations. In the survey, data from 167 respondents was collected using a self-constructed questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. Sharma reported the following findings:

> The key findings of the research show a relationship between the perception of the respondents towards the quality of admission process and the development of an ethical institutional brand (r ¼ 0:284,p# 0:01). They also show that with just and fair academic processes, an ethically strong institution can be built (r ¼ 0:411,p# 0:01) and development of an ethical institutional brand will lead to attaining competitive advantage in the academic world (r ¼ 0:558,p# 0:01). 196

The survey's findings are constructive to managers who want their universities to have a strong brand in the long term for it recognises that short term views can lead to institutions cutting corners. It can also be useful to regulators of higher education institutions as they enforce an ethical code of conduct in private as well as public universities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the methodology that was used to investigate the factors affecting the effectiveness of branding strategies in selected private universities. "The methods section is the most important part of a research paper because it provides the information the reader needs to judge the study's validity" (Kallet 2004, 1232).

The chapter comprises various sections namely: research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis.

Research Design

According to Buckingham and Saunders (2004), a research design is a plan or guide for data collection and interpretation, with sets of rules that enable the researcher to conceptualize and observe the problem under study.

This was a descriptive study in which a survey research design was adopted. This enabled the researcher to obtain and assess opinions and attitudes of private university students.

Target Population

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define population as "an entire group of individuals, events or objects having common observable characteristics" (9).According to Kenya's Commission for University Education website, as of November 2015, the country had a total of 36 private universities classified as: 17

Private Chartered Universities, 5 Private University Constituent Colleges, 13

institutions with Letter of Interim Authority (LIA) and 1 Registered Private

Institution. There are about 92,346 students in the 36 private universities in Kenya

(Wanzala 2016; Ogeto 2015). Though no reliable records are available for the number

of staff in the private universities, all the 92,346 students and staff in all 36

institutions are the target population.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Out of the 36 private universities in Kenya, 4 universities were purposively

selected owing to reasons of convenience, accessibility and representativeness of the

study population. Given the impracticality of conducting research on the whole

population, the researcher must resort to studying a sample of the target population.

"A sample is a subgroup of the population you are interested in" (Piam 2011, 1). A

sample of 16 respondents in the four private universities was selected for practical

reasons of the study.

According to Ranjit (2010), the value of sampling in research is, "…either to

gain in-depth knowledge about a situation/event/episode or to know as much as

possibleabout different aspects of an individual or a situation on the assumption that

the individual is typical of the group and hence will provide insight into the group"

(192).

The research made use of cluster sampling that 'allows individuals to be

selected in geographical batches' (Mathers, Fox and Hunn 2009, 13). The research

collected data from Kenyan and non Kenyan students in the 4 universities given that

Kenyan universities have been able to attract students from other countries (Mwangi

2013; Ng'ang'a2010). In addition, the sample among students included male and

female students on a 50/50 basis.

To collect the data of these groups (Kenyan, alien and gender) the research made use of 4 clusters in every university, namely; *Kenyan Male, Kenyan female, Foreign Male, Foreign Female.* Thus, four (4) respondents came from each of the selected 4 private universities in Kenya. Table 1 below shows the various strata, sample size and distribution of the proposed study.

Table 1: Strata, sample size and distribution

No.	Africa International	No. of Informants	Description of informants
	Zetech	4	KF – 1. KM – 1, NKM – 1, NKF -1
	Presbyterian	4	KF – 1. KM – 1, NKM – 1, NKF -1
	KCA University	4	KF – 1. KM – 1, NKM – 1, NKF -1
	AIU	4	KF – 1. KM – 1, NKM – 1, NKF -1
	TOTAL	**16**	

Key

KM – *Kenyan Male* NKM – *Non Kenyan Male*

KF – *Kenyan Female* NKF – *Non Kenyan Female*

Data Collection Instruments

This study made use of an unstructured questionnaire whose design is based on the research questions in Appendix I. The questionnaire contained unstructured (open ended) questions which are "broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation…" (Creswell 2013, 9).

Advantages of using questionnaire as a data collection instrument include feedback from the respondents and it is relatively quick method of collecting data (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). Table 2 illustrates how the research items addressed each research objective.

Table 2: How research items addressed research objectives

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	ITEM QUESTIONS THAT ADDRESS IT
1. Investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya	1,2,7 , 11, 12
2. Investigating what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join	2,3 4, 5, 8
3. Exploring how students would brand their private universities differently	6,7,11,12

Validity and Reliability

Drost (2011) explains that in ensuring validity, a researcher should be interested in finding out whether the instrument is measuring what it is intended to measure while reliability is an examination of the stability or consistency of responses of a research (CTRL n.d., 3). It is concerned with whether the same outcomes would be arrived if the research was repeated in the same conditions and with the same informants (*Shenton 2004) since* "validity is based on determining if the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers" (Creswell 2009, 190).

Creswell (2013) gives various strategies to ensure reliability of research instruments including triangulation, which is "a means for seeking convergence a cross qualitative and quantitative methods" (Creswell 2013). Another one is the detailed description of the research methodologies as well as clarifying biases that may exist in the researcher. A deep knowledge of the topic or of the respondents also boosts reliability.

The researcher used triangulation by collecting data from primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected through questionnaires while secondary

data was collected through an observational checklist that sought to analyse the website metrics and social media information of the universities under review as well as with leading universities in Africa and in the world.

According to web metrics, which ranks universities globally, the leading universities in the world are Harvard, Stanford and the Boston based Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) while the leading universities in Africa are Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch Universities, all in South Africa. In this analysis, several criteria were considered; the country and global ranking of the university as ranked by alexa, a web metrics company. Alexa tracks the daily performance of websites and ranks them in order of the traffic that they generate.

The researcher's several years experience in higher education is a significant factor in the topic knowledge. This experience and interest is what prompted a research into this topic. In addition, Creswell (2013) gives various strategies to ensure validity and reliability of research instruments including attaching sample items from the instrument or the entire instrument (18). The instruments are included as Appendix 1 and 2.

Data Collection Strategies

The unstructured questionnaire included demographic information for the purpose of comparing the characteristics of the respondents. The questionnaires were administered to the 16 respondents within the 4 selected private universities in Kenya. A respondent took about fifteen minutes to fill each questionnaire. The researcher also collected data from the websites and social media accounts of the universities and compared them with the websites and social media accounts of leading universities globally and in Africa.

Data Analysis

The collected data was organized and analyzed using excel spread sheet. The data obtained has been presented using frequency distribution tables and percentages. Table 3 illustrates what research items addressed each research objective.

Table 3: How research items addressed research objectives

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	ITEM QUESTIONS THAT ADDRESS IT
1. Investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya	1,2,7 , 11, 12
2. Investigating what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join	2,3 4, 5, 8
3. Exploring how students would brand their private universities differently	6,7,11,12

Ethical Considerations

The necessary approval for data collection was sought from the Africa International University. The participants were informed on the purpose of the study and the researcher clearly identified himself as an AIU student. The study was therefore based on voluntary participation of the participants.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2010), informed consent means that individuals to be sampled in a study are first informed about the study to comprehend its aims and benefits to them before consenting to take part.

The respondents remained anonymous during and after data collection and are only be identified in numerical form - Participant 1 (P1) to Participant 16 (P16). Moreover, the study participants were in a position to withdraw at any stage from participating in the study at their own will and convenience.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents data analysis, findings, interpretations and presentations. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that affect the effectiveness of branding in Kenyan private universities. A total of 16 unstructured questionnaires were administered to the participants in 4 private universities. All 16 were filled and returned. This represented a 100% response rate. The research was guided by these 3 research objectives:

1. Investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya

2. Investigating what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join

3. Exploring how students would brand their private universities differently

Participants Profile

This section presents the demographic characteristics of individual participants interviewed in the research. The characteristics include the gender, the age at the time of the study and their level of education. This information offers a general understanding of the population under the study. Table 4 illustrates the socio-demographic profiles of the participants.

Table 4: Socio-demographic profiles of the participants

	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	8	50
	Female	8	50
	Total	16	100.0
Age	18-24 Years	7	43.75
	25-29 Years	4	25
	30-34 Years	3	18.75
	35-39 Years	2	12.5
	Total	16	100.0
Level of Education			
	Fist Year	2	12.5
	Second Year	3	18.75
	Third Year	4	25
	Fourth Year	5	31.25
	Masters	2	12.5
	Total	16	100.0

From analysis of the data provided in the various research items, several broad themes emerged including the extensive use of newspaper branding by private universities. The students themselves have high regard for peer referral and social media students as well as low regard for newspaper branding. In addition, students are more likely to join a university whose courses are highly reputable in the job market.

Summary of Responses

This section presents a summary of the responses provided by the participants for the various research items. Table 5 illustrates the research objectives and the research items that address them.

Table 5: Research objectives and the research items that address them

Research Objective	Corresponding Item Questions
1. Investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya	1,7 , 11, 12
2. Investigating what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join	2,3 4, 5, 8
3. Exploring how students would brand their private universities differently	6,7,11,12

Research Objective 1 Findings

Research Objective 1 (investigating whether students know the various branching strategies used by private universities) was addressed by research items numbers 1, 7, 11 and 12. From the responses, it is clear that 100% of the respondents were aware of how their private universities branded themselves. The highest number (37.5%) of the participants indicated that newspaper advertisements were the most commonly used method followed by open days and TV advertisements. At 12.25%, online advertisements were the least used according to the participants as illustrated by Figure 2.

Apart from that, newspaper advertisements are considered ineffective by the students of the universities under survey. Item no 7 in the research questionnaire sought to know what the participants would do differently if they were in charge of branding in their institutions.
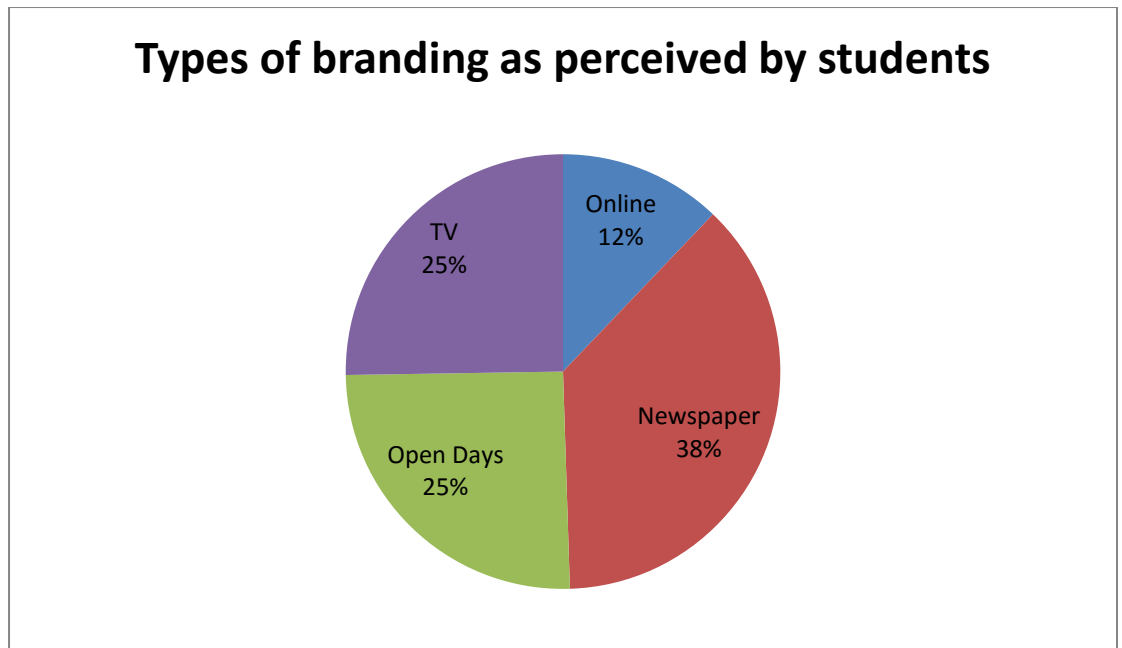
Figure 2: Types of branding as perceived by students

More than 50% indicated that they would do away with newspaper advertising with a number indicating that they would implement 'interactive branding experiences.' They indicated that newspaper advertisements are "still, lifeless and boring" and one said that "no one reads newspapers." This response is not surprising and seems to highlight the attitude of the millennial generation, "the people born between 1980 and 2000" (PWC 2011). This generation prefers electronic means of communication than their elders. Valentine and Powers (2013) conducted a study, *Generation Y values and lifestyle segments* in which they sought to understand the media usage patterns of the millennials. According to this study,

> …electronic media are the primary media used by this group. Television ranks first and the internet ranks second. Magazines ranked third and radio ranked fourth. The internet (49 percent) and television (54 percent) were rated as high to very high in importance as a source of advertising information. The majority of the respondents rated billboards (85 percent), daily newspapers (79 percent), direct mail (70 percent), free community papers (86 percent),in-store ads (60 percent), magazines (42 percent), radio (50 percent), and weekly newspaper (70 percent) as low to very low in importance as a source of advertising information (600).

Clearly, students are aware of the branding efforts of their universities and have even formed opinions of what they think works and what does not work. This confirms Whisman (2009) who argues that "universities are targeting an audience that is highly brand-savvy…" (367).

Item numbers 11 and 12 required the participants to indicate what they would continue doing as well as discard if they were in charge of their university's branding. Majority of the participants (60%) indicated that they would stop newspaper advertisements an instead invest more in social media marketing and paying for referrals. One of the universities actually has a scheme where they pay people for referring new clients to them. A third said that peer referral is what most attracts students to join their current university. This means that over half of the participants believe that peer referral is very effective in attracting students to private questions and they would be willing to pay for it, if they had the power.

The issue of peer referral is one that universities need to seriously consider given that peer influence works even in media choice among the millennial generation (born between 1980 and 2000).

> Millennials also appear to be drawn into news that they might otherwise have ignored because peers are recommending and contextualizing it for them on social networks, as well as on more private networks such as group texts and instant messaging. Once they encounter news, moreover, nearly 9 in 10 report usually seeing diverse opinions, and three-quarters of those report investigating opinions different than their own (Young, E. 2015, 2).

Research Objective 2 Findings

This objective investigated what factors students consider when selecting private universities to join. From the responses, it is clear that the highest percentage 51% gave high quality of courses and chances of employment as their reason. Figure 3 illustrates the factors that attracted participants to join their current university.
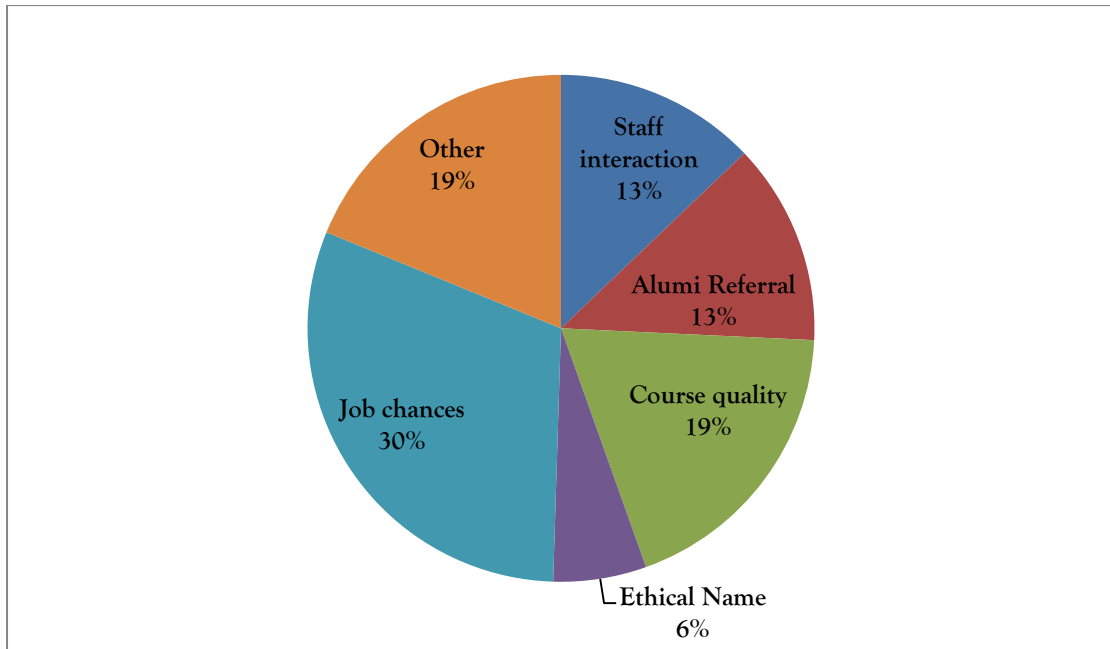
Figure 3: Factors that influenced current university choice

The issue of education quality and prospects of employment is one that has emerged as a priority in university choice. According to Mazzarol, "In marketing education, the success of Ivy League institutions, for example, is linked to their image and reputation regardless of their teaching quality" (Mazzarol 165). "With higher teaching quality, it is also expected that students will more easily attain their educational objectives thus increasing the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth advertising" (Zebal and Goodwin 350). In the study that Samsinar et al. (2003) conducted among university students in Malaysia, the quality of teaching emerged as factor number four out of ten factors that were considered in the study. Only the institution's reputation, library collection and facilities merged higher than quality of teaching. The three factors however are closely associated with quality of teaching, a fact that buttresses the great importance attached to the quality of education.

The current research confirms the priority that students attach to the quality of their education / courses, resulting in attraction of more students through word-of-mouth through a continuous cycle as shown in Figure 4.
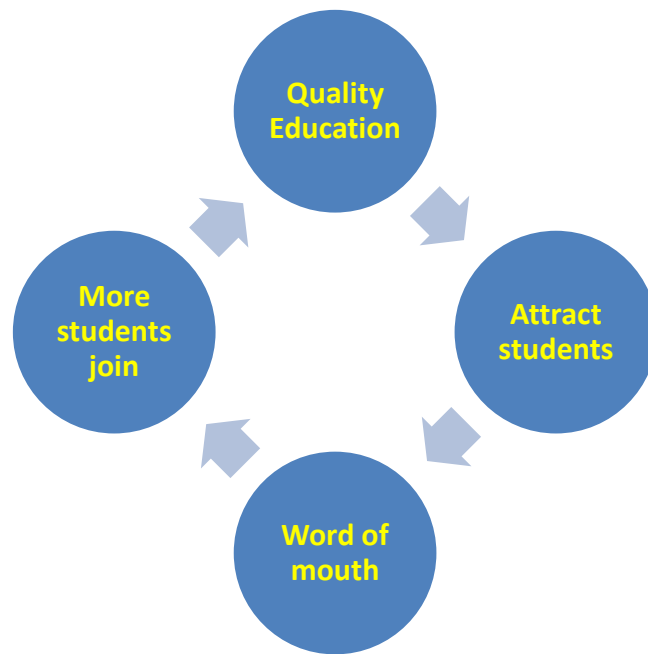
Figure 4: Continuous cycle through word of mouth

The priority attached to quality university education is taking place at a time when the role of universities is becoming critical due to the rise of the knowledge economy (Armstrong and Chapman 2011). Former president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers, among others has linked expansion of university education to the success of the US economy, noting that the current world economy is going to be increasingly dominated by knowledge based industries (ibid).

Oplatka, Brown and Izhar (2006) explored the dynamics of branding in higher education (HE) and universities in a competitive international context. They concluded that, "the best way to attract more international students – according to the respondents – was to lower tuition fees; provide more scholarships and give better quality of care and service" (329). In the Kenyan context, Bowen, Gogo and Maswili (2012) conducted a study to identify marketing strategies that could be applied by private universities so as to attract and enroll students. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study. Probability-simple random sampling technique was used to

obtain a sample of ninety-eight students and twenty-eight employees from Kabarak and Daystar universities in Kenya. According to the 83.3% of the respondents agreed that higher employability is the most important factor they consider when selecting what university to join.

Majority of the participants admitted that the likelihood of getting employment was the .major factor in attracting them to enroll in a particular private university. About 31% of the participants indicated this as a major motivating factor for signing up. Interestingly another 19% indicated that the high quality of the courses offered was their appeal to join a university. The quality of courses can be perceived to be linked to the likelihood of employment after university. Taking this argument, more than half of the participants are attracted to a private university because they perceive that the courses are of high quality and they are more likely then to get employment after graduation.

Many Kenyans consider education as an investment (Moraa 2009). It is only fair for students to be attracted to a quality education as a guarantee to get highly rewarding jobs and careers. Although it was not within the ambit of this study to assess what is meant by high quality education, it is likely that this means the perception of the university's courses in the marketplace.

Research Objective 3 Findings

This objective sought to explore how students would brand their private universities differently. The students place a premium on being linked to opportunities according to the data collected from them. Table 6 illustrates what participants would do differently in branding private universities. According to the data, the highest number (56.25%) of the participants indicated that they would assist students in getting internships and jobs for graduates. This means that university students are

concerned about the available opportunities for them in the marketplace and view universities as facilitators in obtaining access to these opportunities. In universities that play such a facilitative role, "it is expected that students will more easily attain their educational objectives thus increasing the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth advertising" (Zebal and Goodwin 350).
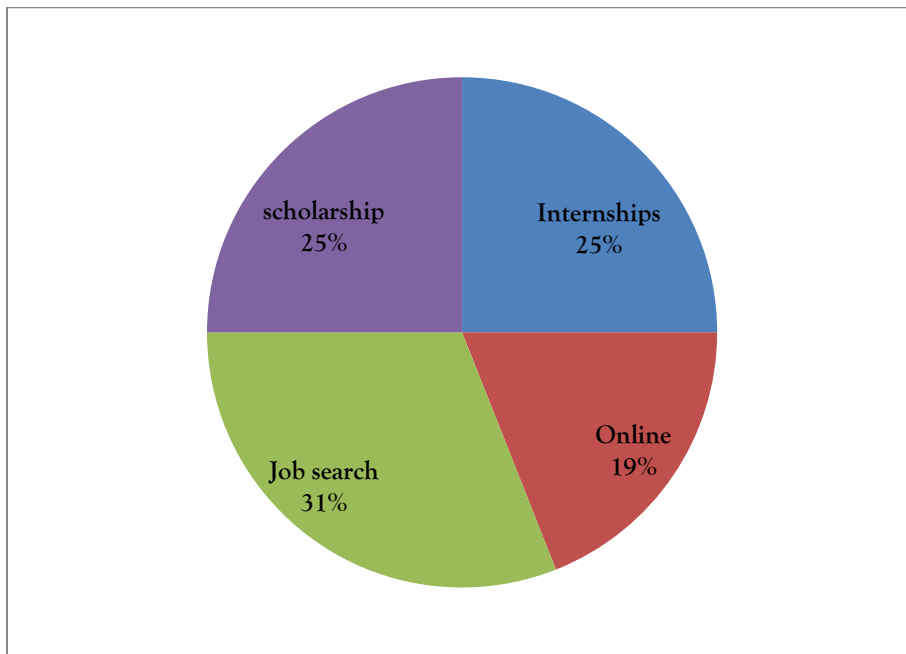
Figure 5: How students would brand differently

In fact from the responses under this research objective, majority of the participants (81.25%) indicated that access to opportunities is what they would do differently in branding their institutions. A minority 18.75% gave online marketing as what they would prioritise. The emerging scenario here is that university students are looking beyond the marketing activities of their universities in order to find out how their institutions can enable them get access to market opportunities such as internships and jobs. This perception is harmonious with the view of higher education as a ticket to economic returns. "The idea of an academic degree as a private good that benefits the individual in terms of increased earning and competitive advantage in the job market … is increasingly being widely accepted in Kenya today" (Oketch

2003, 23). Gudo et. al (2011) affirms that one factor that has contributed to increased demand for university education is the perception that "university education guarantees lifelong secure career" (205).

This perception of a university education as a ticket to a highly rewarding career is one that is bound to continue as more graduates join the job market to compete for fewer available opportunities. As college costs soar, parents are rethinking their educational expense and demanding a return on investment. As Hanover Research (2014) notes:

> Families are seeking evidence of successful results to justify their college investment. Higher education has become less an end in itself and increasingly a means to an end, primarily an economically viable career path. In calculating a college's value proposition, families factor in outcomes as well as cost and prestige. They expect proof of high graduation rates and graduate employment at acceptable salary levels (12).

Universities must therefore ensure that they understand this deep seated need by their students for employment facilitation. Some universities have already sensed this need and adopted accordingly. Some such as Kenyatta, Strathmore and USIU have set up incubation hubs where students are mentored in entrepreneurship and technological skills (businessdaily.com).

It is interesting to note that the participants in this research did not indicate employment facilitation as one of the branding strategies being used their universities. This raises the possibility that private universities could be investing in branding strategies that are not relevant to their target market and yet "college authorities must be aware of students' needs…" (Samsinar, et. al 2003, 279) so as to have a more accurate market orientation – the idea that organizations should be close to their customers so that they can understand their needs and respond to those needs. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) argue that in market orientation, organisations gather accurate

information on customer needs, disseminate that intelligence and the whole entity

responds to the identified customer needs (Kohli and Jaworski 1990).

Online presence of the Universities

The research also looked at the online presence of the various universities

under review and compared with leading universities in Africa and in the world.

According to webometrics, the leading universities in the world are Harvard, Stanford

and the Boston based Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) while the leading

universities in Africa are University of Cape Town and Witwatersrand and

Stellenbosch Universities, all in South Africa.

In this analysis, several criteria were considered; the country and global

ranking of the university as ranked by alexa, a web metrics company. Alexa tracks the

daily performance of websites and ranks them in order of the traffic that they

generate.

Rankings and information from the internet is very important in assessing the

brand strength of various organizations. Universities have realized the importance of

online presence and social media branding in order to reach out to their target

clientele. Clearly, the leading universities globally and in Africa have a strong online

presence when compared to the private universities in this research. For example

globally, MIT's website is ranked 240, that of Wits is ranked position 6,918,601 while

that of KCA University is 207,333,305. In other words, the ranking of KCA

University is more than two million positions behind that of MIT. The website of

Presbyterian University is not ranked because it does not attract sufficient traffic to

warrant being ranked. Table 6 illustrates the comparative ranking of universities'

websites according to traffic.

Table 6: Ranking of universities' websites

WEBSITE RANKING	
Leading Universities Globally	
MIT	
Global rank	420
Rank in USA	197
Total Sites Linking In	71,686
STANFORD	
Global rank	721 187
Rank in USA	299
Total Sites Linking In	66, 906
HARVARD	
Global rank	835 186
Rank in USA	321
Total Sites Linking In	75,737
Leading Universities in Africa	
Wits	
Global rank	6,918,601
Rank in South Africa	30
Total Sites Linking In	2,071
Cape Town	
Global rank	7,884 5,102
Rank in South Africa	41
Total Sites Linking In	3,757
Stellenbosch University	
Global rank	11,617 7,016
Rank in South Africa	74
Total Sites Linking In	2,536
Kenyan Universities under Survey	
KCA University	
Global rank	207,333,305
Rank in Kenya	450
Total Sites Linking In	N/A
Africa International	
Global rank	1,119,328, 724
Rank in Kenya	3,209
Total Sites Linking In	N/A
Presbyterian	Not enough traffic to be ranked

The second criterion considered was the Facebook performance of the various universities while the Twitter accounts were the third criteria. For Facebook accounts, Harvard University has 4.8 million followers on this important social media component while all the 4 universities under review have less than 100 000 followers. This means that Harvard University alone outperforms the four selected private universities by 4.7 million followers. For the four universities to attract the same number of followers as Harvard alone, they would have to attract followers 48 times more than they are currently doing - this a 4800% increase as illustrated by table 7.

Table 7: Comparison of Facebook accounts

Leading Universities Globally	
Harvard University	
No. of followers	4,880,305
Stanford University	
No. of followers	1,173,528
MIT	
No. of followers	962,973
Leading Universities in Africa	
University of Cape Town	
No. of followers	152,847
Wits	
No. of followers	136,699
Stellenbosch University	
No. of followers	85,859
Kenyan Universities under survey	
KCA University	
No. of followers	28,421
Africa International University	
No. of followers	5,584
Presbyterian University	
No. of followers	2,506

While Harvard has 775 000 followers on Twitter, Zetech has 4,375, that is more than 700 000 fewer than the leading university in the world. All the four Kenyan

universities under review have a total of 8,927 Facebook followers, which is almost
10 times fewer than those of Stellenbosch University which has the lowest number of
followers among the South African leading universities as illustrated by Table 8.

It is clear that in terms of online presence and social media use, Kenyan
private universities are lagging behind their counterparts in other parts of the world.
This is unfortunate given the high usage of social medial by the millennials. "Even
though it is not the only path to news, social networks play a preeminent role in
millennials' news acquisition. Social networks are an extraordinarily important part of
Millennials' digital lives, in part because social networks have become much more
than a way to connect about personal matters (Young 2015, 25).

If Kenyan private universities do not play a more active role on social media,
they will not overcome global competition in a "market place made complex by a
convergence of factors" (Whisman 2009, 367).

Table 8: Comparison of Twitter accounts

Leading universities Globally	
MIT	
Following	476
Followers	775 000
Harvard University	
Following	728
Followers	729 000
Stanford University	
Followers	508
Following	510 000
Leading universities in Africa	
University of Cape Town	
Following	806
Followers	42 600
Wits	
Following	576
Followers	39 899

Stellensboch	
Following	481
Followers	36 220
Universities under Survey	
Zetech University	
Following	1,201
Followers	4375
KCA University	
Following	239
Followers	3,702
Africa International University	
Following	279
Followers	647
Presbyterian University	
Following	560
Followers	203

Some universities recognise the value of social media in reaching their clients.

"The outreach of universities is performed by universities and their researchers in both traditional media and increasingly via social media" (Tayeb, et. al. 2016, 97).

> One of the most significant ways branding and marketing of higher education has changed in recent years has been in the online space, using a variety of new platforms for external engagement and communication. The terms "social" and "digital" refer to the use of both social media and digital marketing more generally, and include the role of effective and intuitive websites. Institutions are making greater use of social media and digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and podcasts to market their programs, while website design and interface is proving a crucial component in how colleges and universities present themselves to prospective students (Hanover 2014, 9)

Given its universal appeal, reach and cost-effectiveness, the web remains an unchartered territory in higher education branding especially in Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research has made several important implications to the body of literature regarding the role of brand effectiveness in private universities. The study was unique in that it sampled students from 4 private universities. The other study focusing on marketing in private universities was by Bowen, Gogo and Maswili (2012), *Marketing Strategies that Attract and Increase Student Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Learning: Case of Private Universities in Kenya* which – unlike the present one - used samples from 2 private universities.

This chapter summarizes the findings and the implications based on the objectives of the study. Major conclusions drawn from the study are also discussed. This is followed by key recommendations and suggestions sampled student or further research.

Summary of Findings

In relation to RO1 (Exploring what branding strategies Kenyan private universities use to attract students), it emerged that the institutions used newspaper advertisements online advertising, career and alumni events.

In relation to RO2 (Investigating whether students know the various branding strategies used by private universities in Kenya) it was clear that the students are very much aware of the branding approaches being used by their institutions.

In relation to RO3 (investigating what factors students consider when selecting what private universities to join) it emerged that quality education and graduate employability a well as peer referrals were the effective factors in branding that attracted students.

In relation to RO4 (exploring what factors students **do not** consider) the participants indicated that newspaper advertisements are considered ineffective. Influence by alumni was also not considered effective by the participants.

Conclusions

Majority of the participants admitted that the likelihood of getting employment was the major factor in attracting them to enroll in a particular private university. The quality of courses can be perceived to be linked to the likelihood of employment after university. Although it was not within the ambit of this study to assess what is meant by high quality education, it is likely that this means the perception of the university's courses in the marketplace. Private universities can leverage on quality education to position themselves in a competitive marketplace. One way f doing this is by collaborating with industry and offering courses that are relevant in the marketplace as well as assisting their students to get internships in organizations.

One of the more surprising findings was the theme of referral. Research participants indicated that they esteemed referral by their peers more than that of alumni or relatives. A quarter of the participants indicated that they joined their current university after recommendation by their peers. Private universities should consider using their existing students to reach out to their peers to enroll in these institutions. A sustainable system of rewards can be sought to achieve this. This is related to what the participants indicated they would do differently.

To the question as to what branding strategy they would do differently, some of the participants indicated that they would actually pay for referrals. One of the universities under review actually has a scheme where they pay people for referring new clients to them and this is a scheme that other private universities can explore.

One item in the research questionnaire asked what was the respondent considered the least important factor when selecting a university and many of the participants indicated that newspaper advertisements. Item no 5 in the research questionnaire asked participants to name strategies that their universities used that the participants did not consider effective. Yet some of the participants indicated that their universities used newspaper advertisements as the number one branding strategy. This gives rise to a situation where private universities are spending financial resources on newspaper advertising and yet the target market does not consider such advertisements when thinking of where to attend university.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

a) Private universities in Kenya urgently review their marketing and branding strategies and align them with the priorities and needs of their target market.

b) Private universities in Kenya devote more resources towards boosting their links with industry as a way of facilitating post-graduation employment for their students.

c) Private universities in Kenya engage in a consistent market survey in order to find out what works and what does not work in their branding strategies.

d) Private universities in Kenya consider marketing collaboration as a way of cutting the high costs of branding and marketing.

e) Private universities in Kenya cut back on newspaper advertisements and use that money to increase payments for referrals.

Suggestions for Further Study

a) The study was delimited to four private universities in Kenya. Further and related studies are recommended especially those that would involve a higher sample number of universities and students as a basis of comparing the findings with this study.

b) The study was confined to some of the factors that can influence the effectiveness of branding and marketing in private universities in Kenya. Further studies on other factors are recommended.

c) An in-depth study is recommended to ascertain what high quality education means to students of private universities

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APPENDIX I

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

My name is Edwin Maina, a student at Africa International University studying Master of Education in Leadership and Administration. I am conducting a study to find out factors affecting the effectiveness of branding as a marketing strategy in selected private universities in Kenya.

 I would like to request you to take a few minutes to fill in this questionnaire. I therefore, urge you to answer the questions below.

Gender_____

Age _____

Your current level of Education_____

1. In what ways does your university market itself?
    _____

2. What attracted you to join your current university?
    _____

3. If you about to join university for the first time, would you select your current university again? Why?
    _____

4. What do you think most attracts students to join your current university?
    _____

5. Say why you would recommend someone to join your current university?
    _____

6. Say why you would not recommend someone to join your current university?

   _____

7. Name anything your university does to attract students which you feel does not work?

   _____

8. Explain how your studying in your university will help you in career growth

   _____

9. Comment on how active your university's online presence is – website, Facebook and Twitter.

   _____

10. How do you participate in your university's social media?

    _____

11. If you were in charge of your university branding and marketing, what would you continue doing?

    _____

12. If you were in charge of your university branding and marketing, what would you stop doing?

    _____

APPENDIX II

OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST GUIDE FOR THE RESEARCHER

This observation guide checklist enabled the researcher to gain an overall impression on how active the universities are in their branding and marketing initiatives

1. How the university consistently communicates on digital platforms

2. How the university compares with others in use of Facebook.

3. How the university compares with others in use of Twitter.

4. How the university compares with others in website ranking

5. How often the university's website is updated

CURRICULUM VITAE

Edwin Maina

P.O. Box 49202 – 00100 Nairobi, Kenya

Mobile: +254 - 721- 383 788

E-mail: edwinmainan@gmail.com

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

- Creativity in teaching English to students from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Pleasant personality and ability to work with minimum supervision
- Eloquent communication skills in communicating
- Strong planning and organizational skills

EMPLOYMENT / WORK CONTRACTS

From 2001 to date, I have worked in various professional positions, such as:

Teacher of English, Drama and Literature and Head of Boarding (Currently)
-Mt Kenya Academy, Nyeri, Kenya

Teacher of English   -The Language Center, Nairobi

IGCSE Teacher of English -Mahanaim International High School

Teacher of TOEFL & SAT -Education & Training Ltd

Teacher of TOEFL & SAT-American Universities Preparation Institute

Writer / Editor -Professional Writers / *Education & Training* Magazine

EXPERIENCE

- Teaching of English to students taking the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- Assisting English Language Learners (ELLs) to acquire fluency in English – oral and written
- Helping ESL students to set individual goals and devise strategies of achieving the goals
- Monitoring ESL reports to ensure accurate quality information reaches the parents
- Checking daily the progress ESL students are making and supporting students
- Teaching of English to students taking the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)
- Teaching English to students in the ESL programme to learn English language skills e.g.
- *Word Classes*
- *Vocabulary Building*
- *Reading Comprehension*
- *Speaking*
- Teaching English to ESL students using diverse methods such as:
- *Instruction*
- *Group work*
- *Role Play*
- *Multi-media*
- *Immersion*

EDUCATION

Ongoing **Master of Education** Africa International University

2016 **Post Graduate Diploma in Education** University of Nairobi

1996 **Bachelor of Arts** (English and Literature) Kenyatta University

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Attained 8.0 grade in International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
- Conducted a research on Kenya's educational system for School Choice, New York and

retained as educational consultant (www.schoolchoiceintl.com)

- Successfully prepared students for standardized tests (SAT, TOEFL, GRE and GMAT); students went on to join MIT, USIU and University of Florida
- Acting & stage managing *The Government Inspector*

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Available

AFRICA
INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

Committed to His mission
Connected to His world

March 22, 2017

To whom it may concern:

Dear Sir Madam,

RE: EDWIN MAINA NGANGA ADMISSION: 141078MAED

The above named person is a Masters candidate in the Master of
Education (Educational Leadership & Administration) in the Education
Department of Africa International University (AIU).

He seeks to collect data and information for his research work.

His research topic is: *Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Branding in
Selected Private Universities.*

Kindly accord him any help he may need to do his research.

Thank you for your kind assistance. Please, feel free to contact the
university (see the details below) if you have any questions.

Yours Sincerely,

Samuel Ngewa, Prof.
Dean of Graduate School
E-mail: Samuel.Ngewa@africainternational.edu
Phone: 0724442070