

The Student's Perception of Marketing Strategies and the Impact on the University's Performance

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Abstract: In the present day, the business environment of most universities is characterized by increased competition among local and foreign universities. With the emergence of demanding customers and technological advances, most universities have to compete in the educational market. In this study, we extended the resource-based (RBV) theory to establish the student's perception of marketing strategies and the impact on organizational performance in terms of student enrolment. Using a closed-ended questionnaire and structural equation modelling (SEM) of a sample of 150 students from Mulungushi University, the study established that the product strategy and promotional strategy have a significant impact on student perception and enrolment numbers. However, the influence of pricing strategy and the physical evidence (learning environment) on enrolment numbers was not statistically significant. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings have been presented together with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Marketing mix; university performance; marketing strategies; customer perception.

INTRODUCTION

Given the significance of marketing strategies in influencing performance, organisations are adopting well-planned strategies to survive and compete in the markets characterised by increased competition (Daniel, 2018). For instance, most organisations have used marketing strategies to attract and return customers through value creation. Using marketing strategies, organisations can react to competitive situations to achieve their set objectives in the target markets (Kartawinata & Wardhana, 2013). While Marketing is seen as the foundation of the business world, its significance and appropriateness in the Education sector are less comprehended (Michael, Hamilton, & Dorsey, 1995). However, in the recent past, Universities have expanded their utilization of marketing strategies to stand apart from other universities due to increased competition influenced by internationalization and the new institutions of higher learning being created because of the liberalization of economies (Lomer, Papatsiba, & Naidoo, 2018; Yu, Asaad, Yen, & Gupta, 2018). Because of the Increased number of universities in the educational sector, many universities continue to grow their Student base by employing marketing strategies that will have a competitive advantage over their competitors (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Weinstein & McFarlane, 2017). Additionally, most universities are no longer surviving on the Grants given by Government and it is only imperative to take further actions to grow the revenue base and remain Competitive.

Marketing strategies are techniques used by organizations to organize and direct their resources

and energies toward actions meant to create a competitive advantage in the target market and increase sales volumes (Ngure, 2018). In the case of learning institutions, it's about determining how the prospective students will be attracted and how the intuition will differentiate itself from its competitors. Therefore, a marketing strategy is described as a tool employed by an organization to survive in a competitive market and be able to absorb pressure (Daniel, 2018). According to Kotler & Armstrong, (2012), a marketing strategy is a set of activities conducted by an organization to create value for itself and its customers and enhance customer relationships. This can be achieved in learning institutions by developing and combining marketing activities and programmes to create a marketing mix needed to communicate value to students and potential students.

Given the important contribution studies on the 7Ps (i.e. product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence) have made to the existing literature on the performance of learning institutions, one significant area that remains underexplored is the influence of marketing mix on student's perception and their choice to enrol for the programme (Rutter, Lettice, & Nadeau, 2017; Lim, Jee, & De Run, 2020). Most of the studies on marketing strategies have focused on specific marketing outcomes such as customer relationship management, brand loyalty, corporate culture, innovation, equity brand and others (Zahay & Griffin, 2010; Frosen, Tikkanen, Jaakkola, Vassinen, 2010; De Jager & Gbadamosi, 2010; Kartawinata & Wardhana, 2013; Dholakia

& Acciardo, 2014; Daniel, 2018). Therefore, this study was an attempt to contribute to the existing education literature by investigating students' perceptions of marketing strategies. The study investigated the student's perception of the marketing strategies namely; product, price, promotion and physical evidence and the impact of enrolment numbers. Understanding students' perception of the university marketing strategies is significant in establishing that strategy which is critical to the performance or success of an institution in a target market. Therefore, this study provides insights into how universities can organize their resource and efforts to enhance performance and remain competitive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Place of Marketing

Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as "a management process of identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably" (Wilson & Gilligan, 1997). According to Rownd & Heath, (2008), the American Marketing Association (AMA) defined marketing as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create an exchange that satisfies individuals and organizational objectives". Unlike the picture portrayed by AMA's definition, marketing is progressively conceptualized as an authoritative way of thinking or as a way to deal with carrying on with work.

Conversely, McDonald, (1989) argues that "Marketing is the management process where the resources of the whole organization are utilized to satisfy selected customer groups to achieve the objectives of both parties. Marketing then is first and foremost, an attitude of mind rather than a series of functional activities".

Blythe, (2000) asserts that marketing requires objective setting, marketing audit and tactical planning which should be built within the organization's overall strategic plan. This includes a mission statement which states the main business of the organization, shared values, culture and beliefs and attitudes of the organization. The organization has to break down its mission into specific goals and objectives which the organization sets out to achieve.

Marketing Strategies

There are various components which have been utilized by marketing teams in bringing issues to light of products and services presented across the

world. A portion of the mechanisms is viewed as suitable in one circumstance or association when contrasted with the other. The marketing technique taken on by an association or company is subject to the target population, the product being marketed, the Market Share of the organization and the money distributed or budget allocation for marketing. Most Marketing Strategies have components drawn from the 7Ps of marketing namely Promotion, Price, Product, People, Physical climate, Process and Place (Lim, *et al.*, 2018).

Product Strategy

According to Kottler & Philip, (2012), Product related marketing strategies are essential in any organization. These strategies incorporate the utilization of product design and utilization of innovation i.e. technology in product improvement as well as conveyance or delivery. The product can be contended to be the main component of the retailing mix, as just with reasonable products will the work put into such things as pricing and promotions reap any rewards.

Product is the principal item presented by a company to fulfil the necessities or needs of its buyers. Kotler & Armstrong, (2013) noticed that a portion of the Strategies taken on in the domain of products are: perceived quality or image as the market faces rivalry, quality and reliability of the product offerings gain significance. Quality in this situation is seen as the client's view of the item or product and perceived quality or image must be created (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Previous studies have reported a positive relationship between product strategy and organizational performance (Aremu & Lawal, 2012; Owomoyelaet, Oyenyi & Ola, 2013; Daniel, 2018). Based on the above discussion, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1 Students' perception of the product strategy is positively related to enrolment.

Pricing Strategy

Price is the worth put on goods and services that clients will pay for a product or service (De Toni, Milan, Saciloto, & Larentis, 2017). The role of price in marketing strategy relies upon the target market, the product and the distribution systems that are chosen by management (Cravens, 2006). Managers fostering a pricing strategy ought to put together their choices with cautious thought of a few factors, for example, costs, demand, customer impacts and competitor prices. Pricing strategies

provide general and consistent approaches for firms as they come up with prices for their product.

Lovelock, Wirtz, & Chew, (2011) suggested that “pricing is the only factor of the marketing mix strategy that produces revenues for the organization, whereas all the others are related to expenses”. The degree of complexity of pricing strategy in the service sector is comparatively significant due to the high degree of homogeneity between most service groups and shared service delivery and operating systems (Kotler, 2011). Empirical studies conducted have revealed a positive association between pricing strategy and business performance (Füreder, Maier, & Yaramova, 2014; Al-Salamin & Al-Hasan, 2016; De Toni, *et al.*, 2017). However, the study conducted by Morimura & Sakagawa, (2018) reported a negative association. Based on the understanding above, the hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2 Students' perception of the pricing strategy is positively related to enrolment.

Promotions Strategy

Promotion includes both providing the customer information regarding its company's product or service presenting as well as influencing the buyer discernments, attitudes, and behaviour towards the store and what it brings to the table. It is both an informative and powerful correspondence process. To be successful, the special technique should be directed by showcasing ideas like zeroing in on buyer needs and coordinating movements of every kind of association to fulfil those requirements (Keegan & Turner, 2002).

Such strategies incorporate advertising and direct client connection. Great salesmanship is fundamental for private ventures in light of their restricted capacity to spend on advertising. Great phone directory promotion is likewise significant. Direct mail is a powerful, minimal expense medium accessible to small businesses. There is no one promotional tool that can accomplish promotional strategy objectives which, thus, implies that most service organizations use more than one promotional tool to stay away from the hindrances of each tool.

Harrison-Walker, (2000) implies that each “promotional tool has different advantages and disadvantages, so most service organizations try to use more than one promotional tool to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of

each”. Studies have shown that promotional strategy has a significant impact on the performance of an organisation (Divol, Edelman, & Sarrazin, (2012); Morimura & Sakgawa, 2018; Yasa, Adnyani, & Rahmayanti, 2020). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 3 Students' perception of promotion strategy is positively related to enrolment.

Physical Evidence

The physical environment strategies are comprised of ambient conditions; spatial layout and functionality; and signs, symbols, and artefacts (Lui, Shah & Schroeder, 2011). The ambience is one of the attributes of the physical environment. The ambient conditions incorporate temperature, colour, smell and sound, music and noise.

The ambience is a bundle of these components which intentionally or subliminally assist a client with encountering the help. The atmosphere can be assorted. The marketer needs to match the feel to the help that is being delivered (Jobber & Fahy, 2006).

There is also the layout and functionality of an office. The design is the structure wherein the furniture is set up or machinery spaced out. Functionality is more about how appropriate the environment is to achieve the client's necessities. For instance, how comfortable the seats in the waiting area are or whether there is satisfactory client stopping. Recent studies conducted have revealed a positive interaction between physical evidence and organisational performance (Banker, Mahruwala, & Tripathy, 2014; Tiong, Sondoh, Igau, & Tanakinjal, 2017). Based on the evidence above we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 4 Student perception of the physical evidence is positively related to enrolment.

Resource-Based Theory

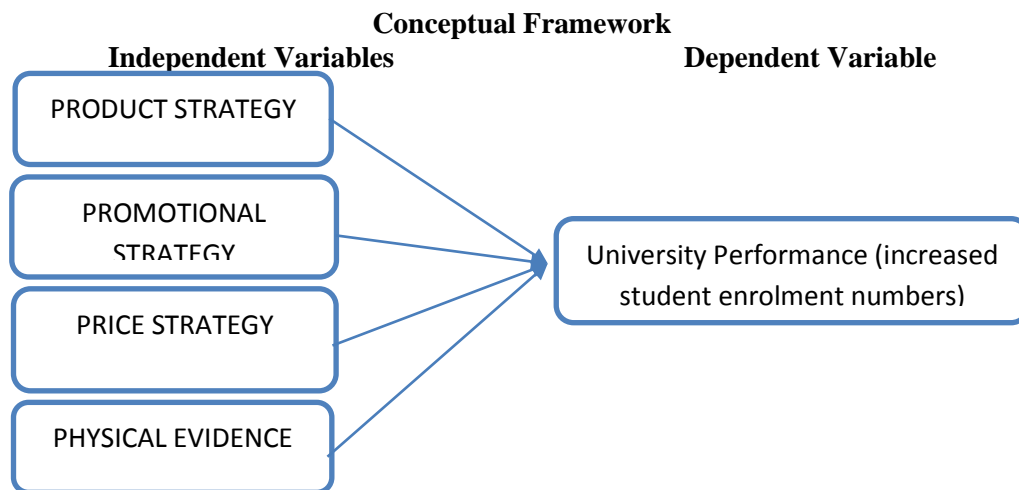
According to Abosede, Obasan & Alese, (2016), the theory stems from the principle that the strength of firms' competitive advantage lies in their internal resources, as opposed to their positioning in the external environment. This theory as a basis for the competitive advantage of a firm lies primarily in the application of a bundle of valuable tangible or intangible resources at the firm's disposal (Penrose, 1959). It holds that a managerial framework is used to determine the strategic resources a firm can exploit to achieve a competitive edge or advantage (Barney, 1991). Penrose, (2009) suggests that resource-based

theory provides a framework for how it can know the organisation's performance. The key focus of this theory is on the firm's performance.

Barney, (1991) suggests further that this theory aims to elaborate on imperfectly imitable firm resources that could potentially become the source of sustained competitive edge. In addition, Wernerfelt, (1984) fundamental work is broadly viewed as the primary significant commitment to the RBV, however different researchers likewise changed the RBV into a full-fledged resource-based theory. Lippman & Rumelt's, (1982) and Barney's, (1986) endeavour helped advance theory; Barney's, (1991) outline of the canter principles and defining characteristics of resources and competitive advantages establishes a basic division point.

However, some disarray perseveres it is more to respect whether it fitting to utilize the resource-based view or resource-based theory. A few researchers allude to the RBV, regardless of proof that this view has advanced into a theory (Barney, Ketchen Jr & Wright, 2011).

Peteraf and Barney, (2003) suggested that a firm achieves a competitive advantage when it can create "more economic value than the marginal(break-even) competitor in its product market". A firm has achieved a sustained competitive advantage (SCA) "when it is making more economic value than the marginal firm in its industry and when different firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy (Barney and Clark, 2007).



Organisational Performance

Organisational performance has been defined using the constructs such as profit, sales volume and market share (Daniel, 2018). Profit is the difference between the amount earned from the sale of goods and services and the cost of production/operations (Ambler, Kokkinaki & Puntoni, 2004). Sales volume refers to the number of goods and services amount sold to the customers while market share is the total percentage of the industry market commanded by a firm. On the other hand, Andreeva & Kianto, (2012) described organisational performance using a scale that has five factors: effectiveness of the organization, market share, growth, profitability and innovation. Orozco, Serpell, Molenaar & Forcael, (2014) suggested that organisational performance is a bunch of determinants such as prices, costs, quality, technological and organizational enhancements, efficiency, connections among organizations, public sector

and academy, and human resources. Organisational performance has also been measured using financial variables like return on investment, return on equity (Kiliç, Kuzey, & Uyar, 2015) and market performance variables such as sales growth, profitability and market share (Wijaya, Rahyuda, Yasa Kerti, & Sukaatmadja, 2019a). In this study, organisational performance was measured in terms of the number of students enrolled in programmes offered at Mulungushi university.

METHODS

Survey Measures

A survey was carried out to collect data for testing the significance of the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework. Primary data was collected from a sample of 150 Mulungushi university students using a questionnaire. The questionnaire used in the survey included basic demographic questions (i.e. age, gender, marital

status, and income) and research items adapted from prior studies that measure the research constructs under study.

More specifically, items that measure marketing strategies were adapted from Ngure, (2018) Influence of marketing strategies on performance of Strathmore University-Kenya whereas items that measure organizational performance were adapted from Andreeva & Kianto, (2012) measured organizational performance using a one-dimensional construct the scale (Deshpandé, Farley, & Webster, 1993; Drew, 1997). The scale has five items: the success of the organization, market share, growth, profitability and innovation. In this study, organisational performance was measured using the student's enrollments.

Sample Characteristics

For the qualitative study 5 experts were selected while for the survey, the sample size was 150 fourth-year students (See Table 1). Regarding age, a large population of 84.7% of the respondents in a sample population are between the age of 21 and 30 years, followed by 8% who are below 20 years and 7.3% between 31-40years. Regarding gender, out of the sample population of 150 students, 50.7% were male and 49.30% were female with a total population of 100%. The marital status shows that out of a sample population of 150 students, 86% were single, 6.7% were married, 6.7% were engaged, and 7% were divorced.

Table 1: Summary of the demographic profile of respondents

Demographic Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	76	50.7
	Female	74	49.3
Age (Years)	Below 20 years	12	8
	21-30 years	127	84.7
	31-40 years	11	7.3
Marital Status Sponsor	Single	129	86
	Engaged	10	6.7
	Married	10	6.7
	Divorced	1	7
	Self	16	10.7
	Family	128	85
	Bursary	1	7
	Company	1	7
	NGO	4	2.7

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE AND PROCEDURE

This study applied PLS-SEM using the software STATA to assess the proposed relationships in the conceptual framework under study reason being is that this data analysis technique is suitable for exploratory and confirmatory research which aims to investigate the extent to which independent latent research constructs predict dependent latent research constructs (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017; Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergen, 2018).

According to Harman, (1976) PLS-SEM procedure for assessing the conceptual framework is built on three steps namely the first step that aims to test for common method bias using the single factor theory. The next step strives to establish both convergent and discriminant validity in the measurement model by performing

confirmatory factor and correlation analyses and evaluating the results against recommended threshold values for factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) (Byrne, 2013; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). Lastly, the third step aimed to examine the importance and effect size of the path relationships in, variance explained by, and predictive relevance of the structural model through bootstrapping and blindfolding procedures (Hair, *et al.*, 2017; Ringle, Da Silva, & Bido, 2015).

Findings

Manipulation Checks

The single-factor test was performed to test for common method bias. In all these tests, all research constructs were entered into one principal

component factor analysis and extraction method of the correlation matrix, KMO and Bartlett's test, component transformation matrix, and component score coefficient matrix was performed.

As per the Criterion of Fornell-Larcker, (1981), Convergent Validity was evaluated by examining the following; factor loadings, composite reliability(CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as indicated in table 2 below.

Measurement Models

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Item	Description	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Product Strategy	B1	Broad product line	0.975	0.949	0.974
	B2	Broad market	0.970		
	B3	Innovation	0.970		
	B4	Technology	0.981		
Pricing Strategy	C1	Realistic pricing	0.697	0.792	0.883
	C2	Pricing skills	0.946		
	C3	Prices below average	0.916		
	C4	Monitors competitors	0.974		
Physical Evidence	D1	Convenient location	0.973	0.833	0.909
	D2	Well maintained facilities	0.909		
	D3	Cleanliness	0.773		
	D4	Designed facilities	0.981		
Promotions Strategy	E1	Marketing of products	0.915	0.798	0.888
	E2	Integrated programs	0.720		
	E3	Focus on customer needs	0.971		
	E4	Elicits AIDA	0.945		
Performance	F1	Market share	0.828	0.826	0.908
	F2	Profits	0.909		
	F3	Customer satisfaction	0.934		
	F4	Efficiency	0.959		

To be specific, standardised factor loadings in the measurement model were above 0.70 which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.60 (Byrne, 2010; Hair, *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, composite reliabilities of the construct (research) were greater than 0.80 which exceeds recommended threshold of 0.70 (Sarkar, Azim, Al Asif, Qian, & Peau, 2001). Lastly, the AVE Values for all research constructs are above the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) with the highest AVE value being

0.949 and the least being 0,792 which brings to the conclusion that all three conditions for convergent validity were met as shown in Table 2. Discriminant Validity was also assessed by using the test recommended by Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, (2015) and Fornell & Larcker, (1981). They both suggest that the square root of the AVE should exceed the correlation values between that and other research constructs as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Square Root of the AVE and Correlation Coefficient.

	PS	PRS	LEV	PRO	PEF
PS	0.974				
PRS	0.2841	0.889			
LEV	0.3816	0.1649	0.912		
PRO	0.3713	0.2686	0.3754	0.893	
PEF	0.3530	0.0948	0.3067	0.51	0.906

Note: Bold diagonal values represent the square root of the AVE; the off-diagonal values represent the correlation coefficient.

Table 4 shows that the HTMT condition or criterion as postulated by Fornell-Larcker, (1981) and Henseler, *et al.*, (2015) was met as all the square roots of the AVEs were greater than the

correlation values for each research construct pairing. Further, Henseler, *et al.*, (2015) suggest that discriminant validity is only established between two research constructs when the HTMT

value is below 0.90 (See Table 4). This suggestion is further supported by Fornell and Larcker, (1981)

therefore, the tests of discriminant validity were also met.

Table 4: HTMT Results

	PS	PRS	LEV	PRO	PEF
PS	1.000				
PRS	0.409	1.000			
LEV	0.623	0.254	1.000		
PRO	0.571	0.392	0.578	1.000	
PEF	0.564	0.149	0.496	0.760	1.000

Structural Model

Under this model, the path relationships were tested using a bootstrapping procedure which is a procedure that estimates the precision (estimates) and significance of path relationships between

research constructs. Product strategy (PS), pricing strategy (PRS), physical evidence or learning environment (LEV) and promotional strategy (PRO) influence students' perception and performance (PEF).

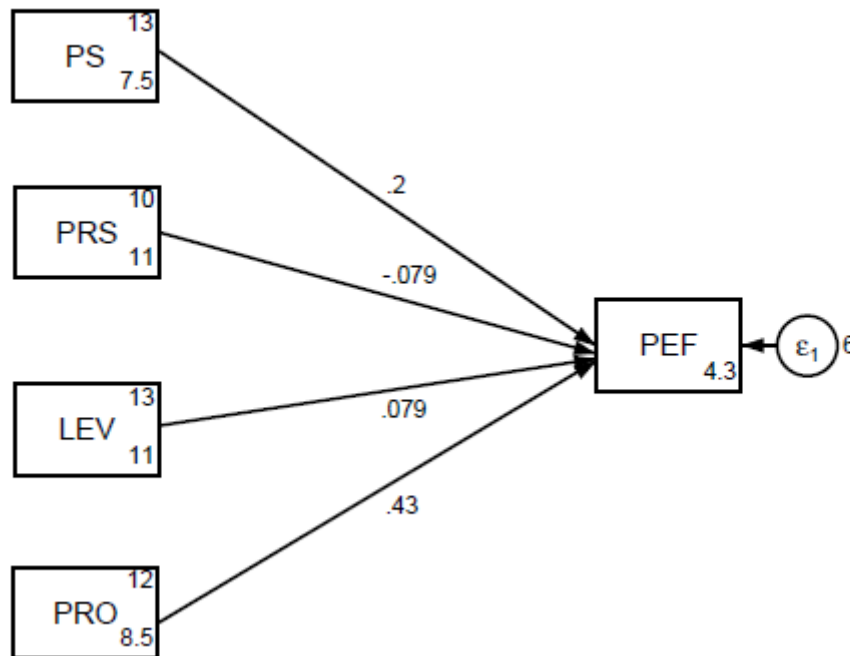


Figure 2: SEM Path Diagrams

Table 5: SEM Results

	Coef	Std error	z	P>[z]	[95% Conf. Interval	Hypothesis
Structural PS->PEF	.1966673	.834476	2.36	0.018	.331131 .360225	Supported
PRS->PEF	-.0794636	.652111	-1.22	0.223	-.207275 .483477	Not Supported
LEV->PEF	.07937664	.0683591	1.16	0.246	-.054605 .2133578	Not Supported
PRO->PEF	.4338879	.0777348	5.58	0.00	..2815306 .5862453	Supported
Cons	4.30434	1.181808	3.64	0.00	1.988038 6.620642	
Var(e.PEF)	5.994036	.6921316			4.780035 7.516361	

LR test of model Vs Saturated: Chi2(0) =0.00, Prob >Chi2

Structural equation model, Estimation method=ml, Log Likelihood= -1828.4797 and Number of obs=150.

Interpretation of Findings

Based on the Structural Modelling results in Table 5 above, the results have reported mixed results on the relationship between marketing strategies and the university's performance.

The first objective of this study was to examine the student perception of product strategy and its influence on the performance of the university. Based on the results obtained (Coef. = 0.1966; p =

0.018), product strategy is positively related to student enrolment. Therefore, hypothesis 1 which reads “Students perception of the product strategy is positively related to enrolment” is supported. Another statistically significant relationship was observed between promotional strategy and university enrolment numbers (Coef. = 0.433; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was accepted which reads “Students' perception of promotion strategy is positively related to enrolment”.

Non-statistically significant relationships were reported between Price strategy, physical evidence (learning environment) and the university performance. With Coef. of -0.0794 and the $p = 0.223$, hypothesis 2 which reads “Students perception of the pricing strategy is positively related to enrolment” was not supported. Lastly, hypothesis 4 “Student perception of the physical evidence is positively related to enrolment” was also not supported (Coef. 0.793; $p = 0.246$).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine students' perception of the marketing strategies on the performance of a university. While most of the previous studies applied marketing strategies to understanding marketing-specific outcomes (Kartawinata & Wardhana, 20013; Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014; Daniel, 2018), this study provided insights into a significant area which is under reached – i.e. understanding the student's perception of marketing strategies and impact of university enrolment numbers. This study has reported missed findings with significant theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implication

Prior studies have established the relationship between marketing strategies employed by learning institutions and the impact on their performance (Odhiambo, 2015; Tiong, *et al.*, 2017, Muola, 2017; Yasa, *et al.*, 2020). This study contributes to the extant literature by exploring the student perception of the marketing strategies and the impact on the performance of the university in the Zambian context. More specifically, firstly, the findings have reported a positive relationship between the student's perception of the product strategy and its impact on the enrolment numbers for the university. The results are consistent with previous studies (Aremu & Lawal, 2012; Owomoyela, *et al.*, 2013; Daniel, 2018) which reported a positive interaction between product strategy and student enrolment numbers. Additionally, students' perception of the

promotion strategy was also reported to be positively related to student enrolment numbers like in previous studies (Divol, *et al.*, 2012; Morimura & Sakgawa, 2018; Yasa, *et al.*, 2020). The explanation for this is that universities offer to learn programmes as products which Mulungushi university students perceive to be of quality. Designing quality, reliable and innovative learning programmes coupled with learner centered teaching has a significant influence on the student's perception of the programmes and the demand for them. Regarding promotion strategy, the learning institution uses a combination of different promotional tools such as social media, brochures, trade shows, and electronic and print media. Using a combination of promotional tools does not just compliments and enhances the weaknesses and strength of each tool but helps to reach effectively different prospective students and influence their perception and attitudes. For example, most prospective students like using social media most of the time, therefore using social media as a promotional platform has helped the institution to increase enrolment numbers.

Contrary to the findings above, pricing strategy and physical evidence (learning environment) were not statistically significant. While previous studies revealed a positive effect of pricing (Filtreder, *et al.*, 2014; Al-Salamin & Al-Hasan, 2016; De Toni, *et al.*, 2017), this study has reported contradicting results and supported the findings by Morimura & Sakagawa, (2018). Furthermore, contradictory results were observed between the physical evidence (learning environment) and student enrolment numbers (Banker, *et al.*, 2014; Tiong, *et al.*, 2017). Pricing is no longer a factor in the marketing mix employed by the university due to loans being given to the successful applicant by the government. For those who are not on government loans, the tuition fees being paid are affordable and have a flexible payment system like in other universities limiting its influence on students' perception and choice to enrol for Mulungushi university programmes.

While the physical environment or ambient conditions such as spatial layout, functionality, signs, symbols, and artefacts play a significant role in influencing client perception (Lui, Shah & Schroeder, 2011) for Mulungushi university students it's a different story. Students' perception of the learning environment is overshadowed by their perception of the learning programmes being offered and the promotion tactics being used to reach them and change their perception. Having

more information about the learning programmes being offered influences students' perception together with the availability of sponsorship and limits the attention to the learning environment.

Therefore, the above discussion on the significance of marketing strategies in enhancing enrolment numbers contributed to the theoretical advances in understanding the student's perceptions of marketing strategies.

Practical Implications

Literature has highlighted the importance of marketing strategies in enhancing the performance of business organisations (Daniel, 2018; Muola, 2017; Yasa, *et al.*, 2020). However, this study has reported that not all marketing strategies are effective in influencing the student's perception and enrolment numbers. Based on the findings that; a) products and promotion strategies have a positive influence on student's perception and enrolment number and; b) pricing and physical evidence (learning environment) have no positive effects on perception and enrolment numbers, universities should consider investing resources and efforts on strategies that will positively influence student's perception and their choices to enrol for the programmes on offer.

In this regard, the practical implications are that the promotional and product strategy have an impact on student enrolment numbers which means that Mulungushi University needs to concentrate highly on strengthening and improving these two major strategies by:

Continue offering programs that appeal to the marketplace and that also meet industrial needs.

An introduction to the prospectus is needed by the university; this could be given as students inquire about various programs or when the admissions office sends admission letters to prospective applicants.

The website has to be improved to showcase programs i.e. Masters, Undergraduate, diplomas, PhDs, Short Course etc.

More reviews in program content and advertising on social media and other platforms to attract more numbers.

Continue employing highly qualified lecturers and the value chain around students also needs to be improved in terms of carrying surveys to get feedback about program structure, content etc.

Employ more support staff, especially in the academic office and other units like the accommodation office and accounts office.

Adopt Technological advances in service delivery to improve turnaround time (TAT) and invest in areas contributing to ranking.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study just like any other study has limitations that the reader should take into consideration when evaluating the findings. The first one pertains to the sample size which was obtained from one university in Zambia. Based on the Zambian context the conceptual framework was developed, and the hypothesis tested. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised beyond this context. which makes is affected by two limitations. Zambia as a developing country has a different cultural, economic and political landscape which may be different from other countries. Secondly, the study included pricing as one of the marketing strategies investigated. We are aware of different pricing strategies employed by different learning institutions like universities. For instance, value-based, cost-based, competition-based and other (Toni, *et al.*, 2017). This study can neither confirm nor deny the influence of different pricing strategies on the student's perception and their choice to enrol on the programmes. Future research studies should consider using different pricing strategies to examine their influence on student perception and enrolment numbers in universities. Furthermore, future studies should also separate physical evidence or learning environment into physical infrastructure and resources and academic content and investigate their influence on students' perception separately.

CONCLUSION

This study was anchored on the resource-based theory and has produced mixed results contrary to the previous studies conducted in this area. It has provided insight into how universities can leverage their resources and employ marketing strategies that can increase their enrolment numbers and remain competitive in a target market in a Zambian context. Utilising a sample size of 150 Mulungushi university students, the study reported that product and promotional strategies have a positive influence on students' perception and enrolment numbers while the other two strategies in the name of pricing and physical evidence were not statistically significant. Therefore, product and promotional strategies are significant in enhancing

the performance and survival of learning institutions.

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