

Effectiveness of Marketing Mix on Competitive Advantage of Private Universities: A Case of Selected Private Universities in Nakuru County

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Abstract: Therefore, the research wished to investigate the effectiveness of Marketing Mix on Competitive Advantage of private universities of Nakuru County. The guiding framework reviewed Porters theory of competitive advantage, Market Based View, Resource Based View and Institutional Theories that constituted the literature, as well as carrying out empirical study of similar research in the industry. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design, whereby the sample population was selected from the Private Universities. 233 staff members was purposively sampled and used as sample size from the target population of 5 private universities. This study used questionnaires containing both structured and unstructured questions so as to be able to capture more information and this was for collection of primary data. No secondary data was used from the private university's resource data. The questionnaires were pilot tested in order to validate and yielded a Cronbach reliability of 0.83 coefficients. The collected data was coded, edited for errors and then analyzed. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, and percentages) was done by use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 for windows, and processed information therefore shown by way of tables, pie charts and graphs. This study showed the components for marketing mix namely product, price, promotion and positioning are effective strategies for private universities' competitive advantage. The researcher recommends that the government have a function of supporting, regulating and monitoring private universities to ensure that they operate effectively. Everyone in the private universities right from the top management, staff and students are recommended to embrace use of marketing mix tailored to their unique university characteristics to enhance competitive advantage.

Keywords: Competitiveness, Marketing Mix, Competitive Advantage and Effectiveness.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, the university enrollment in public universities spurred through the introduction of parallel degree programmes since 2003. In his thesis, Mbirithi intimates that despite this straining of the available public university resources; there were calls to the same public universities to innovate strategies that would enable more Kenyans to acquire university education (Mbirithi, 2013). According to Mutali and Messah (2011), for the last forty years, the societal burdens with respect to higher education in Kenya have visibly concentrated. Nthiiri (2014) agrees that Kenya's universities and colleges have stayed as a rapidly emerging sector of the education system over the earlier 2 decades where enrollment increased by a mean of by 6.2 per cent each year. The past years have witnessed an upsurge in the number of universities and also a rise in students' registrations. Massification (Nthiiri, 2014) became a term signifying the continuous raise in the learners' registrations devoid without commensurate addition to budgets allocated, ventures on amenities or educational workforce (Nthiiri, 2014). The huge registration numbers of college learners became the means resulting in founding other communal institution of higher education. This facilitated most middle-level institutions to be closed down in favor of universities (Nthiiri, 2014). Recent inclination in the university is portrayed in difficult rivalry particularly seen in founding of sub- hubs of universities transversely within the state and the employment of diverse strategies to attract potential students (Kaburu & Embeywa, 2014).

Development of Privately owned tertiary institutions within Kenya resulted from improvement in new graduates from high school, massively caused with introduction of no fee learning in primary schools. Onsongo (2007) says that the high demand for the university education cannot be met by public universities alone. Public Universities only admits 10,000 students annually out of the 50,000 qualifying students (JAB, 2003), becoming the key sole reason that gave rise to private universities. Onsongo (2007) further says that private universities in Kenya have broadened access to university education with flexible programmes; Students can break and resume classes at their own conveniences but also imperative that it is stated consequently, admittance to the non - public institutions of higher learning are in regards to these students capability of paying for learning and living expenses (Onsongo, 2007). Private universities consequently run their programs in similar manner which make a prospective student be spoilt for choice when all other mandatory requirements by the JAB are already met and the student has a financial base to support their application. It becomes the private university's prerogative to therefore bring out the best offer in terms of the suitability of the academic programs, infrastructure to support and terms of the students life with regards to co-curricular activities. Abdullahi (2000) argue as a consequence, where businesses desires for continued vivacious with long- time success, its obligated to construct brunt evaluation for its peripheral surroundings, particularly the important factors like clientele, opponent, patrons, dealers, merchants with also its political administration.

Effective strategy like the marketing mix could facilitate firms' persuasion of surroundings favorably while protecting the firm from rivalry. Muturi (2003) append hence , with particular modern business focus , presents a requirement of understanding opponent potency within marketplace along with posing its individual contributions for obtaining lead for flaws by avoiding attacks that don't favour power. He says so as to acclimatize with surrounding transformation, businesses need efficient guidance which agrees with the institutional theory that organizations like private universities, must lay guiding frameworks to be effective in competitiveness. But in a cut-throat industry, all this tend to be uniformly given across all private universities giving a prospective student a limited room for comparison of what is offered by the Private universities. The recent advances in the role of the firms resources as the foundation of the firm's strategy reflects dissatisfaction with the equilibrium at the business strategy levels (Grant, 1991). Exploring the relationships between resources and, competition and profitability will include analyzing competitive imitation and probability of return to innovations to sustain competitive advantage (Grant, 1991).

Empirical studies that have been carried out are not in relation to this study and thus the researcher found a gap as Kamau (2013), agrees that association involving competitive strategies and performance improvement is with reaction on bigger rivalry and the strategies put in place should be effective. These will help private Universities to create beneficial and protracted spot in opposition to the powers which establish business competitiveness. Because superior tactic is able contribute in expansion, success, market infiltration, decrease of costs, advanced unification for goods with prolonged competitive advantage in industries (Kamau S.M, 2013). Nthiiri (2014) also recommends for such university ought to maintain its uniqueness in contributed progress stratagem by advance further in such strategy. This is because such strategy comprises momentous persuasion of escalating learners' admissions while drawing and keeping competent personnel (Nthiiri C.M, 2014).

Statement of the Problem:

The higher schooling sector despite witnessing rapid growth in the recent years has also seen to the rise of unfair competition amongst the government sponsored tertiary institutions versus the privately sponsored tertiary institutions. Kenyan universities have witnessed a more competitive environment than they did a few years ago. The overall sustainability of the universities are determined by how well they continually re-position themselves to increase student enrolment in the competitive environment The trends in higher education in Kenya have shown that each institution has increased resources in branding and marketing of these Institutions. Many of the universities are hiring Marketing professionals, engaging publicity and advertising firms, investing in technological advances in higher education, adopting the current social media and other emerging platforms to engage prospective clientele. This has seen to an increase in digital activity but nevertheless, traditional methods that prefer direct interactions with the students are still the most preferred. This has led to direct and indirect competition among the universities with private universities being at the losing side of this state of affairs. The negative impacts of competition are caused by ethical and non ethical collusion and imitations among players in the university sector. Due to the shared behavior of students in when utilizing existing socialization networks, with cellular phone tools, becomes progressively more effortless investigating institute's standing through internet technology, face to face references, or supplementary contact conduit outside an institutions' express management. And therefore to gain the competitive advantage, institutions should have practical obligations when

formulating policy which draws extra learners which will guarantee development with longevity for an institution, to increase student enrolment, attract and retain qualified staff. The research sought to establish effectiveness of marketing mix on competitive advantage of private universities.

Objective of the Study:

This research aimed toward ascertaining effectiveness of marketing mix on competitive advantage of Private Universities. Specific Objectives of the study included:

1. To ascertain the effectiveness of price on competitive advantage of private universities in Nakuru County
2. To establish the effectiveness of product on competitive advantage of private universities in Nakuru county
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of promotion on competitiveness of private universities in Nakuru counties
4. To determine the effectiveness of place / distribution on competitiveness of private universities in Nakuru County.

Research Questions:

In conducting the study the following research questions were answered:

1. How effective is price on competitive advantage of private universities in Nakuru County?
2. Which product is effective on competitive advantage of private universities in Nakuru County?
3. What is the effectiveness of promotion on competitive advantage of private universities in Nakuru County?
4. Are place / distribution effective on competitive advantage of private universities in Nakuru County?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review:

Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage: The concept on competitive advantage is one of the earliest theories of economics and it has evolved to the theory of absolute advantage by Adam Smith and concept of comparative advantage given by Ricardo. This study taking reference to the concept of competitive advantage, whereby competitive advantage of states gives one refined means to analyze competition including every proposition. Porter's concepts thus add the perceptive of competitive advantage of states for global business and produce (Porter, 1990). The center, nevertheless, considers each business, or collection of these businesses, whereby, the ideology on competitive advantages were useful just like in the case of private universities (Porter, 1990). Porter's concept starts in single businesses which construct to become a financial system entirely where firms, not states, contend within global marketplace. Porter's case concludes that mother states manipulates the capacity of the businesses' success within specific industries and due to this interrelation, this emerges to portray for competition within a specific sector, being that all specific aspects within competitive diamond of the entire state must be required (Porter, 1990). This is similar in this study context where for effective competition of private universities, all the 5 Ps of the marketing mix must be employed effectively. The theory therefore propagates that there are determinant conditions that must be met for competitiveness and these conditions are; demand condition, related and supporting industry, structure factor condition, firm strategy & competition. Despite the main component, Porter regarded other extra determinant being less significant than other variables manipulating formation advantageous competition, nevertheless also considerable as a determining course for persuasion. Known as opportunity (events outside a firm's power like inventions plus breakthrough in new technologies) and government (where policies can be a major influence to the entire systems) (Porter, 1990). Private Universities in Kenya gain competitive advantage through continually reconfiguring their internal resources and capabilities to adapt to the national environment in universities in Kenya which are highly influenced via determinants stated in Porter's concept of competitive advantage.

The Market-Based View (MBV):

MBV is a concept which proposes industrial aspects of outer market identity as principal variable in a company's activities (Caves & Porter 1977; Porter 1980, 85,96Bain 1968; Peteraf & Bergen 2003). In agreement, Bain's (1968) says that basis for an organization's worth is entrenched within rivalry state which characterizes the outcome deliberate positioning. Deliberate positioning for an organization which is defined by its different performance on similar activities to other firms reverts that an organization's productivity other than activity is established wholly through structural and

rival activities in industries inside where they function (Schendel 1994). This view which comprises placing the strategic concept schools with development concepts, within industrialized firm's financial stage, of which Hoskisson's version for developing in thoughts of strategy is one (that Porter's a case in point) (Mintzberg et al. 1998; Hoskisson et al. 1999 and Porter 1980). Within the stage, the firm's focused more in environmental as well as exterior aspects. Investigators saw that industrial factors influenced to a large extent the exterior activities of a firm. This examined strategies within a framework of industrial positioning for a firm's marketplace in relation with the competition. Industrial Organization's model proposed by Bain (1968), identified as Structure-Conduct-Performance (SCP) model also describes the correlation on industrial structures affecting a firm's conduct, eventually firm's conduct. The SCP model were proposed by investigators (Caves & Porter 1977; Caves 1980; Porter 1980) which elucidates the reasons firms build up strategies when responding to structural industries where firm's participate so as to grow their competitive advantage. During policy creation, organization's usually construct general evaluation for individual competitive advantage by evaluating exterior surroundings supported by the five forces model (Porter 1979; 1985). The five forces being considered consists of: barrier to entry, threats of substitution, negotiating command on sellers, negotiation influence of purchasers and challenge between competing firms (Porter 1985). With this regard, private universities foundation for marketplace influence is explained in their relative effectiveness to achieve competitiveness.

Empirical Review:

The marketing concept which is a philosophical narrative contemplates recent marketing, stating that to facilitate competition and flourishing, organizations need to establish clients' need and want that pleases their need/want efficiently from what their rivals can accomplish (Narver and Slater, 1990). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) describe orientation of market by a mannerisms standpoint as a firm's broad creation of market intelligence that pertains recent or prospective clientele need, information distribution across subdivisions, with broad reaction of the firm in this regards. According to Varadarajan and Jayachandran (1999), Institutional theory proposes procedures that are in organization in which their results should be subjective to their information structure, values, plus regulations which are characteristic of an organization's context. Rowan et al (1982) explored development within managerial services in California municipal schools (health, psychology with curriculum) in an institutional theory perspective. He established a soaring intensity in harmony and collaboration inside the institutional environment, flow of inventive structure was balanced as well as long-term. Nonetheless, where an institutional environment has controversy with lack of focus, to adopt structures innovation becomes sluggish with uncertainty.

Rowan et al conclusions evaluated in Tolbert and Zucker (1996) evaluated pace for adopting public service organs within United States from 1880-1935. The outcome wholly supported above drawn institutional theory. Where coercion pressure was established was great (e.g., within state command), whereby firms rapidly adopted innovative composition. Where coercion pressure was little, adopting pace became minimal. Conversely, increase in adopting makes authenticity of institutional environment, accelerates pace for adopting novel form of structures. Tolbert and Zucker (1996) confirms that supposition of previous firms adoption of latest forms that improved competence, these firms thereafter adopted these formation of structures maintaining authenticity and in this study, competitiveness. In their study of U.S textile apparel industries, Berdine et al., 2008 deduced that the industry developed into reduced world market competitiveness due to many factors like overloading as well as diminishing profits; moreover, remarkable rise of import coming from lowly costed production nations, presented most harmful blow for home industries with regards to several views. Their study aim examined reasons why United States textile and apparel industries had possibly remained in competition countering world rivalry, particularly factors which United States innovative competitive advantages were and what could influence enhanced effectiveness in the United States textile and apparel companies (Berdine *et al.*, 2008).

Their research (Berdine *et al.*, 2008) also explored specific mechanism which drove competition among the best exporting constituents of textile and apparel, presenting approaches which United States textile and apparel industry adapted and competed. Particular conclusion for their study included proof purposing for United States textile firms major driving force was innovative supply chain toward in cooperating dealers and consumers. In addition, adoption of 3 strategic competitiveness which differentiated goods manufactured made in United States companies with those of different world states was researching and developing, advertising, and consumer service. In his study of the textile and apparel industry rivalry in two world economical states, which were U.S verses Japan, in relation of trading and production form 1962 to 2010, Lee (2013) found out that textile/ apparel companies deemed powerful in soaring additional functional values like innovative produce strategies, in addition to managing markets and chain supplies, produced world branded focal point of increase in balance of trade and production due to them mutually being absolutely correlated competitive industries.

Competitive advantage relates to a state where nations or firms functions effectively in superiority to their competition and/or profitability. Competitive advantages typically originate due to core competence. A firm's nucleus competence relates to what the firm performs proficiently from competition. Competitive advantage entails diversity in a firm's distinctiveness in Client focus, Value of the brand, production quality, as well as focus in Research and Development. Effectiveness in competitive advantage should be: hard to imitate, apply to several circumstances, distinctive, manageable in the long-run, and advanced to that of the competitor (Porter, 1998). Core of competitive advantage is positioning of the firm in a market which is clear in strategic marketing. The two fundamental forms in competitive advantages are differentiation and lower cost. Lower cost means firm's capability in designing, producing, and marketing equivalent products better resourcefully than competition. The cost of produce being nearly equivalent that of competition, reduced price converts to greater profits. Differentiation means capability that makes available distinctive, greater worth superior products for the customers, with unique attributes, and provision of subsequent transaction services. Differentiation strategy permits the organization to demand best value, turning it bigger profits as long as price are equivalent with those of competition (Porter, 1985). A critical equity created by firms can be calculated in price a consumer agrees in purchase of its goods/services (Berdine et al., 2008). A firm's profitability, Berdine et al., (2008) says is seen when the worth surpasses total price for doing all the requisite actions.

In Kenya, according to Nthiiri (2014) the tertiary education sector has witnessed intense competition depending on items they compete in which can be; rivalry for students, workforce members, state funds and study funding. The competition is seen additionally when investigating organization features, outlines of departing stakeholders as well as the contextual framework (Martinez & Wolverton, 2009). Study by Kimando, et al., (2012) asserts therefore that fast increase in privately owned institutions of higher learning in the past five years, was as a result of various causes as well as inadequate prospects existing in communal institutions of higher learning with need for add to more universities. The rivalry caused makes state universities to jump in the tussle through establishing other centers and hubs within other towns in the state as well as launching corresponding degree syllabus as a reaction on increasing need for tertiary education and also to deal with rivalry from privately owned colleges (Nthiiri C, M. 2014). Recent tendency of institutions of higher learning are described in antagonistic rivalry particularly by founding of outpost hubs in many parts of the state, as well as employment of diverse plans which draws prospective learners (Kaburu & Embeywa, 2014). Currently existing are 23 state colleges and 29 privately owned colleges' universities in Kenya. Certified documents for education (GOK, 2009) concur to state resources for schooling are overextend as a result state colleges are advised to employ the presented capital in an effective manner or to employ feasible lower expenditure procedures. This has thus made to both state owned and privately owned colleges to rely on privately funded programmes which augment on the college's economic sources (Nthiiri C, M. 2014).

Conceptual Framework:

In their study of the competitive advantage of the US Textile and Apparel Industry, Berdine et al., (2008), Porter's Generic strategy for competitive advantage was adopted as variables for the independent variable. This was broken down to overall cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus and differentiation focus. But this study adopted marketing mix strategies involving product (university programs), price (cost of the University programs), promotion (sales and advertisement of university programs) and place (distribution of the university campuses) instead of the generic strategies.

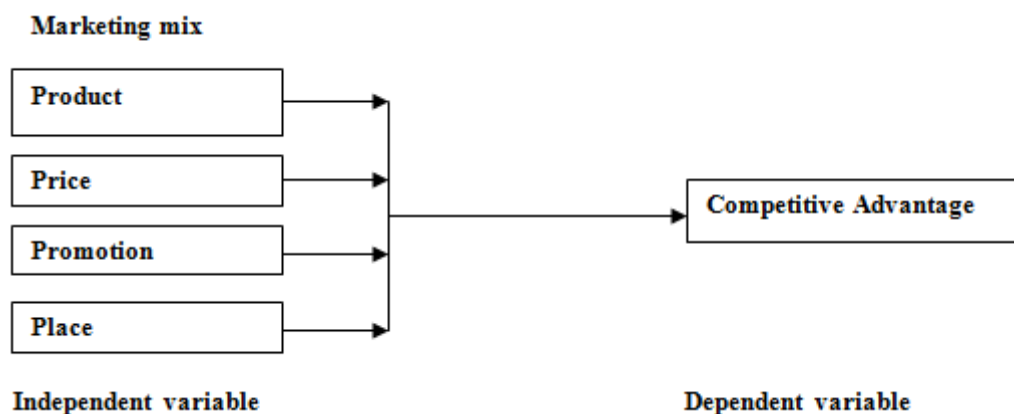


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Marketing Mix and Competitive Advantage

Marketing mix strategies applied by private universities are purposed to create models that are geared toward raising the number in applications for the universities programs which translates to growth and expansion, higher number of students

enrolled and customer service satisfaction. This is through application of correct marketing mix strategies (product, price, place, promotion); where the Four P's of Marketing are crucial when choosing the model for a firm. It is used when initiating a plan of marketing or business. Since marketing mix decision areas would also impact on market segmentation decisions, market targeting decisions and market position assessment. Basing on products produced, segmentation & targeting decisions must be done. Basing on the cost part of the mix, the market positioning is established. Eventually these marketing mix decisions will impact the place & promotional decisions. Hence, the market mix strategies go together alongside market segment, market target and market position.

Product in the Marketing mix: Being the initial component within a market mix, but in this study; it refers to the programs offered by the university. Decisions concerning Product are the initial decisions that have to be taken before a marketing plan can be made. A product basically can segregate into three parts. The core product which directly relates to its competencies- what it is supposed to achieve, the augmented product which is the added value that is not purchased with the product and the actual product which is the actual product purchased, in this study, the universities programs.

Pricing in the Marketing mix: Product pricing as used in this study, the private universities programs is depended of series within varied component, consequently it must continuously be reorganized. The key factors affecting in pricing level is the product costing, the marketing and advertising expenses, any market price fluctuations and or the cost of distribution. Most of these variables can change separately or together .Therefore the price level set must be able to accommodate such over specified phase. Nevertheless, when the factors vary all together, then the price level of the product must be adjusted upwards or downwards accordingly. Other variables of pricing competition, the market targeting and market positioning of the product sales promotion activities such as trade discounts.

Promotions in the Marketing mix: The promotional activities as used marketing literature involve the entire integrated market connections that comprise of ATL and BTL promotion together with trade endorsements. Promotional activity relies much on the pricing and product decision. The marketing and advertising budget, stage the product in its lifecycle. A completely new product requires heavy branding and advertising and product awareness promotions but existing and known products require few promotional activities aimed at reminding the market to continue using the products. Promotional activity also determines the market segmentation, market target and market position of the companies' products. Precise type of promotional activities influences individual marketing mix – product (programs), price (cost of programs) & place (location of campuses). Incidentally, the promotional budget is usually very high for extensive and intensive promotional activities. Promotions activities must be considered as a cost of marketing and they ought to be taken in into consideration when costing a product to be taken to the market.

Place in the Marketing mix: In marketing it means mode of distribution of a product. In the case of Consumer product, there is needs to be make the product available as far and wide as possible but in the case of Private Universities, the products which are in form of programs must be given in innovative manner like having the in the mode of distance learning by establishing ODEL centers, or by strategically positioning satellite campuses where there seems to be high demand. The team doing marketing should relate well with businesses being marketed and make goods and services known to the market, the programs availability, and campus distribution being considered. Hence the location of the campuses wherever these programs will be given is dependent cost decision of the programs, and also with regards to Segment Target Position (STP) choice made by the university. Product, Price, Promotion and Place in the marketing mix provides largely a glimpse of what a tangible produce has. Where produce are not tangible, people, physical evidence and process will be included as part of the marketing mix.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design ,Target Population And Sampling

This research used a descriptive survey design. This is the reason why investigation methodology was a methodical practical enquiry where the investigator was not capable of controlling the dependent variables since their outcome was already known and thus the investigator couldn't control (Kerlinger, 2000). Cross-sectional methodology proved suitable in the investigation by allowing the investigator an assessment of all association between dependent and independent variables, for this investigation, constitutes the marketing mix as independent variables and competitive advantage as dependent variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The study was carried out in selected private universities in Nakuru County. There are a number of public and private universities within the county but the study focused on the private universities operating within the county. The study targeted staff members in Private University Campuses in Nakuru

County who included Academic and Non-Academic Staff members. The private universities in Nakuru County are namely, Mount Kenya, Kabarak, Kenya Methodist, St. Paul's and Presbyterian Universities. (Burns & Grove, 2003) Though the study collected data on competitive advantage from university campuses based in Nakuru County, a complete list (a sampling frame) of academic and non academic staff in these campuses was compiled for purposes of drawing a sample through stratified random sampling.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) sampling frames are sets of data employed in identifying sampling group in favor of statistics action. Kothari (2004) also notes that a sampling frame must be within a populace. This sampling is 233. This study used Yamane (1967) formulae for computation of sampling volume in this study hereby;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{560}{1 + 560(0.05)^2} \quad n = 233$$

Research Instruments and data collection:

The researcher developed questionnaire having opened and close ended items. Questionnaire was ideal due to the period taken in administration while allowing information gathering from many people. In guaranteeing validity, both content and construct validity was achieved by consulting supervisors (Kathuri & Pals, 1993). This refers to an extent of the investigation tool yielding outcome that is consistent after recurring tests (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). Piloting of the questionnaires occurred through sampling 20 staff of Presbyterian University of East Africa (PUEA). This University was therefore not included in this study. A reliability coefficient was conducted and yielded Cronbach's coefficient at 0.83 implying that questionnaires were considered to be reliable and fit for data collection as it was greater than 0.7 that is recommended by (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The number is typically taken to be repeatable with the advantage of uniformity (Hennerson et al., 1987). The researcher first obtained introduction letter by concerned school (SPGS) after which the letter was used to apply for permit NACOSTI. The permit from NACOSTI together with introduction letter from post graduate school was presented to the management of the private universities to get their approval to collect data in their universities. After getting permission the researcher collected the data from selected respondents using the questionnaires through a drop and pick method after which completed questionnaires were gathered for analyzing the content.

Data Processing and Analysis:

Information gathered were developed, veiled as well as analyzed for enabling tackling of Investigation goals and testing the objectives. Descriptive statistics was applied to summarize the study findings that were presented in frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations to analyze the data in the form of tables, figures, graphs and curves. The Statistical package SPSS version 22.0 for windows was used in the data analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate:

The researcher managed to collect a total of 200 questionnaires out of the administered 233 constituting a response rate of 85.7 % for the study which according to Babbie (2007) , is sufficient to make inferences on the study population. The adequacy of the reply number becomes critical since scores of scientific investigations necessitate appropriate quantity to carry out proper investigation (Frohlich, 2002). A good response rate also serves like a non direct gauge for its significance as well as its thoroughness in regard to the study in question.

Background Information:

Investigator ascertained the independence of each respondent by gathering information about their distribution in terms of age, gender, working duration in the institutions, academic qualifications and position held respectively. From the study, the employees in private universities are relatively young as majorities (40.5%) are aged 31-40 years and 32.4% were below 30 years. However, 18.9% were aged between 41-50 years with only 8.1% were more than 50 years of age. This study therefore established that the private universities attracted younger workforce who were not absorbed by the public

universities. The study revealed that the sampled staff members had a proportion of 61% male and 39% female. This shows that employment in the sampled private university have met the two thirds gender rule despite the population of male staff members being more than that of their female counterparts. Many sampled populace (48.6%) had labored within private universities for a period of 1-5 years and 31.1% have worked for 6-10 years. As only 16.2% of the staff members have worked for less than a year, it was evident that there are no high turn-over rates. However, only 4.1% of the respondents have worked in the private universities for more than 10 years as many leave to pursue other economic ventures or retirement. A greater part of the respondents (38.4%), had Bachelor's degrees and 32.9% had Masters Degrees. It was also revealed that 17.8% had Diplomas while only 11% were PhD holders. This indicates that majority of the respondents were bachelor's degree holders followed by the Masters' degree holders, with the Diploma holders and PhD's being the fewer participants in this study. Majority (53%) of staff members are non-academic staff who comprise officers working in various departments and sections such as administration and other support staff that runs key offices in the university like finance, customer care, technicians, marketing, students affairs among others. For the sampled universities, 47% of the staff members were academic staff that composed of tutors, lecturers and assistant lecturers for various programs.

Effectiveness of Product on Competitive Advantage :

Programmes offered: The researcher sought to establish the products offered by the sampled universities by gathering information on programs, modes of learning, courses offered as well as the presence of sponsorship programmes.

Table 1: Programmes offered

Programs	Offered	Not Offered
Doctor of Philosophy (PHD)	16.7	83.3
Masters	66.7	33.3
Executive Masters	33.3	66.7
Post Graduate Diplomas	33.3	66.7
Bachelors	100	0
Diplomas	100	0
Certificates	83.3	16.7
Pre-University Programmes	33.3	66.7

According to Table 1, all (100%) the sampled private universities offer bachelors and diploma programmes. According to 83.3 % of the respondents, their private universities offer certificate programmes as 33.3% also offer Post Graduate Diplomas (PGD) as well as Pre-University Programmes (PUP). Likewise, 66.7% of the respondents pointed out that their private universities offer masters programmes, 33.3% executive masters while only 16.7% stated that they offer PhD programmes.

Mode of Learning: Most private universities have embraced multiple modes of learning so as to make education accessible to a wide range of customers.

Table 2: Mode of study

Modes	Offered	Not Offered
Regular	100	0
Part-Time	83.3	16.7
Digital	66.7	33.3
Distance and Institutional based learning	83.3	16.7

This is characterized by 100% stating that they offer regular classes, 83.3% part-time learning, 83.3% again Distance and Institutional Based Learning (DIBL) and 66.7 % offer digital learning.

Courses Offered: Private universities have diversified the courses offered into various disciplines as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Courses offered

Courses	Offered	Not Offered
Health Sciences	83.3	16.7
Pure and Applied Sciences	83.3	16.7
Computing and Informatics	83.3	16.7
Engineering, Energy and Built environment	50.0	50.0
Business and Economics	100	0
Law	50.0	50.0
Social Sciences	100	0
Education	100	0

According to table 3, all the respondents (100%), their universities offer education, social sciences as well as business and economics courses, 83.3% pointed out that they offer health sciences, physical/biological and applied sciences with computing plus informatics courses while 50% indicated that law as well as engineering, energy and built environment courses are offered.

Sponsorship of Programmes:

Table 4: Presence of sponsorship programs

Sponsorship	Offered	Not Offered
University sponsored programs	16.7	83.3
Government sponsored programs	83.3	16.7
Self sponsored programs	100	0

All (100%) of the private universities offer self sponsored programmes, 83.3% government sponsored programs with only 16.7% offering university sponsored programmes. It is evident that most of the students from the private universities are self sponsored. However some benefit from sponsorship from state funds given by Higher Education Loan Board among other sectors.

Opinions on Product/Programmes Effectiveness: The Investigator wanted to ascertain the opinions of the respondent on the effectiveness of products and programmes on competitive advantage of private universities. The staff members were required to give their response in a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) and the results presented in Table 5

Table 5: Respondents Opinion on Effectiveness Of Product/Programmes

Product	SA	A	N	D	SD
Marketable and competitive programs	50.8	44.6	4.6	0	0
Business programmes	35.4	93.8	0	0	0
School Based programs carried out regularly by trained staff	42.2	39.1	17.2	1.6	0
Sponsored programs which are offered to deserving students	31.3	42.2	20.3	3.1	3.1
Government sponsored programs	33.8	40	20	3.1	3.1

Perceived Effectiveness of Product on Competitive Advantage: The researcher sought to establish the perceived effectiveness of selected products on competitive advantage of private universities. The staff members were required to give their response on a 3-point Likert scale (*Effective, Not Effective and Don't Know*) with its outcome represented in Table 6

Table 6: Perceived Effectiveness of Products

Products	Effective	Not Effective	Don't Know
New programs development	87.5	11.1	1.4
Program diversification	87.8	8.1	4.1
Sponsorship of programs	59.4	30.4	10.1
Customer Care and student support	80	12	8
Attachment and placement services	65.3	24	10.7
Participation in Co-curricular Activities	58.1	24.3	17.6

According to Table 6, the nature of programmes were perceived to be effective on private universities competitive advantage as pointed out by 87.5% citing new programs development, 87.8% program diversification and 59.4% sponsorship programmes. Student related issues were also considered to be effected as stipulated by 80% citing customer care and student support, 65.3% attachment and placement services while 58.1% postulate participation co-curriculum activities.

Effectiveness of Price on Competitive Advantage:

The question in the administered questionnaire was “To what extent do you agree with the following statements of Price effect on competitive advantage in private universities?” The results were as follows;

Opinions on Price Effectiveness: The investigator desired to establish the opinions by the sampled group on effectiveness of price on competitive advantage of private universities. The staff members were required to give their response on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) with the above outcome represented by table 7

Table 7: Respondents opinion on Price Effectiveness

Competitiveness	SA	A	N	D	SD
Price gives key function when choosing and developing the programs	53.3	42.7	1.3	1.3	1.3
Staff training and motivation is effective in implementation of the pricing strategies	28	44	22.7	4	1.3
Competitive Pricing gives the university a competitive advantage	46.6	46.6	6.8	0	0
Continuous product innovation and competitive pricing is a competitive advantage for the university	47.3	43.2	5.4	2.7	1.4
Students enrollment in the university is motivated by the pricing of programs	45.3	45.3	6.7	1.3	1.3
Institution seeks to create affordable pricing of programs which address market needs and the corporate world	41.3	41.3	14.7	2.7	0
The university has identified and majored in providing its core products, with the right pricing	36	48	13.3	2.7	0
Students products are based upon solving of real and relevant problems thus motivating student enrollment through the right pricing of programs	22.7	50.7	18.7	6.7	1.3

With reference to table 7, best part (96%) of the respondents was for the opinion that price played critical function for choice and advancement of programs. Staff training plus motivation is effective in implementation of the pricing strategies according to 72% of the respondent. Similarly, 93.2% of the respondents opined that competitive Pricing gives the university a competitive advantage. Continuous product innovation and competitive pricing is a competitive advantage for the university according to 90.5% of the respondents. According to 90.6%, student enrollment in the university is motivated by the pricing of programs. Institution seeks to create affordable pricing of programs which address market needs and the corporate world as cited by 82.6%. According to 84%, universities were considered to have identified and majored in providing its core products, with the right pricing. As pointed out by 73.4%, students’ products that are based upon solving of real and relevant problems were considered to motivate student enrollment through the right pricing of programs.

Effectiveness of Price:

Perceived effectiveness of price in relation to competitive advantage of private universities was established by the researcher. The staff members were required to give their responses on a 3-point Likert scale (Effective, Not Effective and Don’t Know) and the results are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Perceived Effectiveness of Price

Price related issues	Effective	Not Effective	Don't Know
Competitive pricing of programs	80.8	13.7	5.5
Sponsorship of Co-curricular Activities	46.7	32	21.3
Sponsorship of County Government Activities	44	36	20

Table 8 above reveals that 80.8% of respondents agreed that competitive pricing was considered to be an effective marketing tool. It was also indicated that sponsorship is also an effective competitive strategy with 46.7% citing co-curricular activities sponsorship and county government activities sponsorship.

Effectiveness of Promotion on Competitiveness:

The researcher sought to establish the perceived effectiveness of promotion on competitive advantage of private universities. The staff members were required to give their response on a 3-point Likert scale (Effective, Not Effective and Don't Know) and for outcomes represented in Table 9

Table 9: Perceived Effectiveness of Promotion

Promotion	Effective	Not Effective	Don't Know
Radio Advertisements	64	28	8
Television Advertisement	69.3	18.7	12
Personal Selling	63.9	19.4	16.7
Sales promotions	61.6	27.4	11
Branding	84.9	11	4.1
Informative pamphlets and brochures	78.7	12	9.3
Informative website	74.7	16	9.3
Government collaboration	64.4	24.7	11
Active Alumni Participation	52	33.3	14.7

As documented in Table 9, branding was perceived to be an effective promotion strategy for private universities as pointed out by 84.9%. Pamphlets and brochures were considered to be informative means of promoting private universities effectively by 78.9%. According to 74.7%, 69.3% and 64% of the respondents, the use of informative website, Television advertisement and radio achievement respectively by private universities are promotion strategies perceived to have effects on their competitive advantage. It was also evident that majority of the respondents, 63.9%, 61.6%, 64.4% and 52% pointed out that personal sales, sales promotions, government collaboration and active alumni participation were considered to be effective promotions for private universities' competitive advantage.

Effectiveness of Place / Distribution on Competitiveness:

On perceived effectiveness of place on competitive advantage of private universities, staff members were required to give their response on a 3-point Likert scale (Effective, Not Effective and Don't Know) with the outcome given in Table 10

Table 10: Perceived Effectiveness of Place

Place/Distribution	Effective	Not Effective	Don't Know
Strategic positioning of programs in the market	77	14.9	8.1
Accessible university infrastructure	83.8	14.9	1.4
Field trips	56.2	26	17.8

As shown in Table 10, majorly (77%) of the respondent pointed out that strategic positioning of programmes in the market was effective in giving private universities the much needed competitive advantage. It was also established by an overwhelming majority of 83.8% that the accessibility of university infrastructure through proper positioning gives the private university competitive advantage. Through road trips according to 56.2%, the private universities were able to position themselves effectively to the targeted customers.

Effectiveness of Marketing Mix on Private University competitiveness:

The investigator wanted to ascertain the opinions of the sampled populace on effectiveness of marketing on selected aspects of competitive advantage of private universities. The staff members were required to give their response on a 5-point Likert scale (*Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree*) and the results presented in Table 11a.

Table 11a: Respondents Opinions on Marketing Mix Effectiveness

Competitive Advantage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Promoting growth and expansion	45.5	40.9	10.6	3	0
Promoting higher number of student enrolment	37.9	50	10.6	1.5	0
Promoting customer service and satisfaction	42.4	45.5	10.6	1.5	0

As stipulated in Table 11a, majority of the respondents admitted that marketing mix promotes the growth and expansion of private university according to 86.4% of the respondents. Majority (8.9%) postulated that marketing mix promotes higher number of student enrolment while 87.9% were for the opinion that it promotes customer service and satisfaction.

Marketing Strategies Suggested to Management for Customer Satisfaction:

The researcher sought to establish marketing strategies that can be applied by the management of private universities in enhancing customer satisfaction. This was done by asking an open ended question asking respondents for their views and opinions in suggesting the strategies. Results are displayed in Table 11b.

Table 11b: Suggested Marketing Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	%
Internal marketing	32	13.7
Focus on quality	37	15.9
Career and motivational talks	29	12.4
Academic trips	18	7.7
Training	26	11.2
Awarding good performance	25	10.7
Student placement	17	7.3
Social media interactions	13	5.6
Consultancy	11	4.6
Bench marking	10	4.5
Research dissemination	8	3.4
Marketing centers in different counties	7	3.0
Total	233	100.0

From the gathered opinions, it was established that 13.72% of the respondents suggested that private universities should embrace internal marketing strategies so as to attain the necessary competitive advantage. The study findings according to Table 11b suggest that other strategies should be applied by private universities, focus on quality teaching and learning was suggested by 15.9%, career and motivational talks to secondary schools according proposed by 12.4%, academic trips for students cited by 7.7%, training to both students and staff regarded by 11.2%, awarding good performing students and exemplary staff suggested as an incentive for 10.7%, providing student placement opportunities during internships given by 7.3%, while encouraging quality interactions using social media platforms was suggested by 5.6%, engaging in consultancy for research was cited by 4.6%, bench marking with other universities to rate the university was proposed by 4.5%, research dissemination 3.4% as well as opening of marketing centers in different counties was postulated by 3.0% of the respondents.

Strategies Suggested to GOK for Promoting Private Universities Effectiveness:

The researcher sought to establish strategies that the government can implement in order to promote the effectiveness of private universities. An open ended question was asked to gather the respondents’ opinions and suggestions and results are displayed in Table 12,

Table 12 Suggested Government Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	%
Setting guiding regulation and standards	48	25.4
Issuance of student loans	31	16.4
Government subsidies	27	14.3
Exchange programmes	23	12.2
Deployment of government sponsored students	16	8.5
Internships	15	7.9
Regular inspections	13	6.9
Promotes innovations through incubation	9	4.8
Approvals and accreditation of courses on offer	7	3.7
Total	189	100.0

The researcher managed to interact with the respondents and solicited their suggestions on what the government ought to do so as to ensure that private universities attain competitive advantage effectively. According to table 12, majority (25.4%) of the respondents stated that the government set regulations and standards that guide private universities so as to ensure the operations are within the stipulated parameters. Government was also requested to issue adequate and timely student loans to facilitate private university students by (16.4%), provision of government subsidies to private universities as cited by 14.3%, exchange programmes between students in private and public universities (12.5%), giving private universities the government sponsored students (8.5%), while providing graduates with opportunities for industrial attachments and internships (7.9%). Also conducting regular inspection to ensure that private universities adhere to stipulated standards (6.9%), promoting innovations through incubations (4.8%) as well as approving and accrediting courses that are offered in the private universities was pointed out by 3.7%.

V. CONCLUSION

From the study findings, it is evident that the products offered by the private universities are in line with effective marketing mix strategy and how they affect the competitive advantage in private universities. Through diversification of the programs and courses on offer, modes of study as well as sponsorship possibilities are attractive marketing tools. Through their products, private universities were found to enroll a wide range of students from different parts of the regions, country and even abroad increasing their revenue base. Private universities handle their students, who are the clients with quality customer care and provision of advancement opportunities through placements and attachments as well as exposure through academic trips and co-curriculum activities. The price as a marketing mix component is of great significance to private universities. The amount of fees charged to students and the parameters of paying the same is of essence to the student’s choice of a private university. Universities continuously develop new programmes whose pricing is competitive and therefore attractive. Sponsorship opportunities are also enhance so as to make courses affordable to the needy. Different approaches as stipulated by the study are applied to ensure that the private universities’ programs are optimally priced so as for them to remain competitive. Private universities were found to apply various techniques to promote themselves through branding, marketing their programmes through websites and pamphlets, running media adverts through TV, radio and newspapers as well as organizing activities like road trips, career and motivational talks where they interact with a wider audience. This plays a key role in ensuring that the public is aware of what they offer and well convinced on why they should chose them in favour over their competitors. The packaging and positioning of private universities was found to be done in such a way that they their products are accessible to a wide range of targeted clients. This is attained by opening canters in different counties and towns, adequate and accessible university infrastructure that supports learning for instance hostels among others. With ease access, it is easy to convince and enroll more clients therefore becoming more competitive. The researcher formulated recommendation that if implemented, the private universities can effectively apply marketing mix strategies to become competitive. The recommendations targets

the government as the regulator of higher education, management of the private universities as policy makers and the entire university fraternity that includes the marketing officer, staff and students. The government should set up customized and effective standards governing higher education that supports quality teaching and learning which takes place in all universities including the private ones. Regular inspections should be conducted on adherence to set standards. This will ensure that private universities will adhere to the requirement which in turn will make them more competitive. The government should involve private universities as key stakeholders of higher learning when formulating or reviewing education policies. Workshops and other forums should be organized to sensitize and create awareness of key education issues and guidelines.

The management should ensure that they embrace internal marketing strategies by promoting equality, employee welfare, and customer satisfaction so as to remain competitive. The learning and working environment should be comfortable for better marketing results. The university marketers should embrace a variety of marketing strategies so as to ensure that the good name of the private universities reaches as many people as possible. The marketing information should be captivating and informative to raise awareness of the need for quality education to the intended customers. Students and staff should make good use of the available opportunities to promote the university by giving their best in both curriculum and co-curriculum activities. Exemplary achievements and performance should be recognized and used to brand the university. The researcher wishes to highlight on areas of interest that further research should be conducted on so as to provide more information on marketing mix strategies effectiveness for organizational competitive advantage. A study should be conducted to establish the competitiveness of public universities with regards to the quality of education, Effectiveness of customer service on marketing mix should also be explored, The government support among other services and facilities that are present in the institutions of higher learning too should be investigated.

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