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EFFECT OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON ENROLMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OPERATING IN WESTERN KENYA

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Abstract

In the recent past, public universities have seen tremendous expansion in terms of establishment of campuses in various parts within and outside the country. Western Kenya has become one of the areas that house a number of such campuses. Western Kenya covers Gusii, Luo and Luhya land regions, the purpose of the study was to establish effects of strategic management practices on enrolment in public universities operating in Western Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the effects of product innovation on enrolment of public universities in Western Kenya, to establish the effects of market intelligence on enrolment of public universities in Western Kenya and to determine the influence of market orientation on enrolment of public universities in Western Kenya. The study was pegged on three theories; the Theory of Push and Pull Customer Service, Marketing Mix Theory and the Theory of Sustainable Competitive Advantage. The study adopted a survey research design. The study was undertaken in all the university campuses in Western Kenya. Further results from the ANOVA confirmed that all the three independent variables (product innovation, market intelligence and market orientation) have significant influence on the enrolment of public universities. The study helped to expose the types of various methods that university campuses are using in order to market themselves. The findings of the study also informed the management of these campuses to know which of the marketing techniques have a greater influence in improving their performances. The study found out that universities introduce new programs regularly, gather information concerning the programs offered by other universities and they do not share information with other universities. Conclusions found out universities have tried to embrace product innovation by introduce new programs, there is some satisfaction on the part of the clients and that universities assess client satisfaction frequently.

Keywords: enrolment, public universities, strategic management

Background of the Study

The business environment has become a war zone where by every company is trying to do something to succeed and remain in business. In view of this has arisen the need to employ strategy in a business to give it a competitive edge in order for it to compete effectively and be a force to reckon with (Amaoko and Dartey-Baah, 2012). Ishak (2002) discovered that marketing managers play a pivotal role in the formulation and implementation of marketing strategy among the Indonesian organizations, and that they provide the decision makers with current and up to date strategic issues, which in turn enhance the credibility of the formulated strategy. Further still, the findings of the study revealed that, within the strategy implementation, the managers with their autonomy conduct evaluation and control of the marketing strategy, and adjust the strategy to any significant environmental changes to achieve the desired performance. Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002) supports the idea that marketing budgets should be seen as capital expenditure in building revenue generating marketing assets rather than overhead expenditure; marketing resources ultimately drive long-term marketing performance.

Specific factors that may lead to altered consumer buying behavior are size and composition of the evoked set of alternatives, perceived risk, brand loyalty and attribution of dissatisfaction (Chilumo, 2009). For this reason therefore, the impact of a firm’s marketing strategy is focused towards improving its marketplace performance, which more often than not relates to a specific brand a firm is marketing. Similarly distinctive marketing capabilities enable the firm to out-perform competitors by reaching target markets effectively (O'Cass, Weerawardena and Julian, 2004). Chilumo (2009) claims that consumers make purchase decision by examining alternatives before making the purchase. Sometimes, the purchase may differ from the purchase decision reached earlier. There is always a post purchase evaluation by the consumers after purchasing and consumption of the service.

A study by Magunga (2010) on the effects of marketing strategies on the performance of insurance companies in Kenya, found out that there is much distrust of the insurance sector among the low income earners, mostly out of ignorance, thus there the need for a comprehensive awareness programme in order to tap the vastly un-insured market of low income households in need of insurance services. In addition, the study also realized that products available are not designed to meet the needs of low income earners.

Continuous innovativeness has also been associated with competitive advantage and related isolation mechanisms (Hooley and Greenley, 2005). Andrevski and Ferrier (2008) discovered that, firms can develop a concept of value enhancing entrepreneurial actions to show that the intensity with which a firm recognizes more productive resource combinations and progressively enhances the value of its products and services is primary driver of sustainable competitive advantage. A study by Black, Lockett, Winklhofer and Ennew (2001) showed that it is the perceived attributes of the innovation play a vital role in adoption decision by the clients of insurance companies in Kenya. Udegbe and Udegbe (2013) showed that the impact of product development on organizational performance was higher in Nigeria when consumers perceive product innovation as stronger, more favorable and more unique and therefore recommended that creative innovations should be maintained continuously to develop appropriate product continually.

Oyedapo et al. (2012) perceived sales promotion as a direct inducement that offers an extra value or incentive for the product to the sales force, distributors or the ultimate consumer with the primary objective of creating an immediate sale. Mandić (2009) came up with a conclusion that, sales promotions consist of a variety of marketing tools, which are designed to stimulate purchase by providing an incentive

According to the study Osalo (2007), some of the marketing strategies put forward are:- intensified marketing activities locally through market penetration, market development and product development strategies, increased the level of customer service and focus in all departments of the company; intensified personal selling as a marketing communication strategy and pursue a competition oriented pricing strategy in all markets.

Firms gain sustainable competitive advantage when competitors have ceased their efforts to imitate their advantages (Hitt, Freeman and Harrison, 2001). One of the most serious tensions in strategic management research today is the ongoing debate about the sustainability of competitive advantage (Makadok, 1998). On one hand, the dominant theories in strategy research posit that a firm’s competitive advantage can be relatively durable (Andrevski and Ferrier, 2008) by ensuring sustainability of competitive advantages which is indicated by identifying factors that pose ex-ante or ex-post limits to competition. According to the study, this can be achieved by either utilizing the characteristics of the industry, for instance, high barriers to entry; or in firms’ strategic resources that competitors are unable to replicate. However, some theorist have challenged the sustainability argument by arguing that, in today’s hypercompetitive environments firms cannot protect their competitive advantage because any resource or strategy quickly imitated or leapfrogged by rivals (ibid).

Statement of the Problem

There are a number of university campuses that have been established in set up in Western Kenya. However, it has been observed that the performance of these universities in terms of students’ enrolment has been low while its competitors are enjoying continuous increase in enrolment every other year. Its strategic management techniques have been perceived to be the root cause of this problem. Kotler (2003) lamented that, due to increasing demand of consumers in the market, management of business organizations have to increase their resources with attention focused more on attracting and retaining its customers. Only a handful of studies that have been done in this area like Gordan (2013) who investigated the impact of market orientation and marketing strategy on the performance of higher education institutions. The study focused on economic faculties from Romania. Besides, the study only focused on one objective-market orientation, while this study brings on board three objectives focusing on the academic programs, marketability and market intelligence.

Conceptual Framework

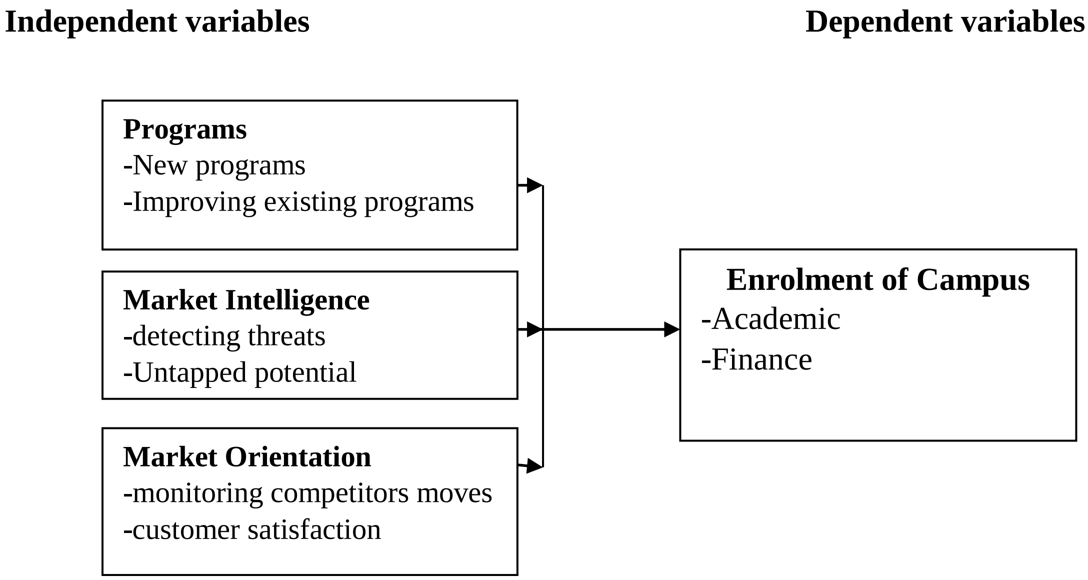

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the effects of strategic management practices on enrolment of university campuses. The independent variable of the study is strategic management which consists of programs, market intelligence and market orientation. The dependent variable is enrolment of campus which is characterized by increased enrolment of fresh students and increase in finances.

Supporting Literature

The study was pegged on three theories; the theory of push and pull customer service, marketing mix theory and the theory of sustainable competitive advantage to explain the relationship between strategic management practices and enrolment in public universities

Theory of Push and Pull Customer Service

There are three basic types of promotional strategies – a push strategy, a pull strategy or a combination of the two. A push strategy is sales oriented, a pull strategy is marketing-oriented and a push-pull strategy is a combination of the two (Maglov, 2015). The study further claim that, a push promotional strategy works to create customer demand for your product or service through promotion, for example, through discounts to retailers and trade promotions, while on the other hand, a pull promotional strategy uses advertising to build up customer demand for a product or service. Other pull strategies include sales promotions and offering discounts. Many companies are moving away from the push theory to a pull theory. That is, they are providing the information and solutions in a generally accessible format and allowing the customer to determine what best suits their needs (Magunga, 2010).

Marketing Mix Theory

The marketing mix constitute the famous 4P's of marketing , namely*;* Price (which refers to the value that is put for a product), Product (which refers to the item actually being sold), Place (which refers to the point of sale) and Promotion (which refers to all the activities undertaken to make the product or service known to the user and trade). This promotion includes advertising, word of mouth, press reports, incentives, commissions and awards to the trade. It can also include consumer schemes, direct marketing, contests and prizes (Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2009). These four P's are the parameters that the marketing manager can control, subject to the internal and external constraints of the marketing environment and the goal is to make decisions that centre the four P's on the customers in the target market in order to create perceived value and generate a positive response (Magunga, 2010).

Strategic marketing has borrowed from Price and Promotion components of the 4Ps of the marketing mix theory in the sense that, when there is product innovation, the usefulness of the product tends to be improved which in turn makes it more appealing to the consumers. In the universities' setup, when a university rolls out a new academic program to the market, clients tend to rush to it with hopes of getting a job immediately after completion of the program.

Theory of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Andrevski and Ferrier (2008) argue that competitive advantages of firms can be sustainable even if resource-based advantages of firms can be quickly replicated by rivals or when the barriers to entry are almost non-existent. The theory further demonstrates that hat firms can persistently earn above-average profits even in highly volatile environments when they are more capable than rivals to more intensively enhance the value of their product or service offerings. This value-enhancing entrepreneurial activity of firms is equilibrative force that moves the market toward better coordination with customer preferences and technological possibilities, and that, a firm's entrepreneurial ability can intensively recognize value-enhancing entrepreneurial actions rather than on their ability to prevent competitors from imitating or eroding either their resources advantages or the barriers of entry in a given market. The study does on to define a firms' entrepreneurial ability as its ability to either frequently discover new product markets and technologies (that is, value-creating entrepreneurial actions) or intensively recognize new ways of enhancing the value of the products and services (that is., value enhancing entrepreneurial actions). According to this theory, entrepreneurial abilities on the other hand are concerned with entrepreneurial discovery of new production factors and technologies and/or recognition of more productive combinations of resources and recombine that resource potential to create or enhance the value for customers. This theory is instrumental in this study in the sense that it advocates for the universities to improve the existing programs continuously so as to meet the market demands. Besides, the universities should come up with new programs earlier than its competitors so as to meet the market demand.

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design to analyze the effects of strategic marketing on performance of university campuses. This design enabled the researcher to get the relevant information from a sample and analyze so as to draw conclusion upon.

Target Population

The target population of this study was all the marketing staff and students who were registered in all the public universities in Western Kenya. These include; Kisii University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (Kisii CBD), Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (Kisumu campus), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Maseno University, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology. Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology Kisii Campus, Rongo University College, Maasai Mara University Kisii Campus, University of Nairobi Kisii Campus, University of Nairobi Kisumu Campus and Kenyatta University Kisumu Center. These universities host a total of 27,900 students and 334 marketing department members of staff (Respective universities' Human Resource Department, 2015; Deans of Students, 2015 February).

Sampling Technique

This study used stratified random sampling get the sample required. The population was first stratified into the respective campuses. Then, from each campus, a sample of employees and students was selected in proportion to its fraction of the total population. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) states that, the sample size for a population of 10,000 or more can be computed as:

$n = \frac{pqz^2}{e^2}$, Where

n= minimum sample size

p=population proportion with given characteristic

q=1-p

z=standard normal deviate at the required level of confidence

e=error margin

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) claim that, if p and q are unknown, then both can be set at 50%. Since the study will adopt a confidence level of 95%, implying that z=1.96 and the sampling error of $\pm$0.05, the sample size for this study will be calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{(0.50)(0.50)(1.96)^2}{(0.050)^2} = 384$$

This means that the sample size to be used in this study was 384 respondents drawn from the students and employees of all the campuses under study. The sample to be obtained from each campus is as shown on table 1.

Table 1: Population and Sample Size for the Study

Campus	Student Population	Staff Population	Sample (Students)	Sample (Staff)
Kisii University	6000	32	72	5
JKUAT Kisii CBD	1300	8	16	5
JKUAT Kisumu City	1500	7	18	5
MMUST	5000	24	60	5
Maseno University	7000	40	84	5
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga university	4000	19	48	5
Masai Mara University Kisii CBD	500	5	6	5
University of Nairobi Kisii CBD	600	6	7	5
University of Nairobi Kisumu CBD	1000	9	12	5
Kenyatta University Kisumu Campus	1000	9	12	5
Sub-Total	**27,900**	**159**	**334**	**50**

Source: Respective universities' Human Resource Department, 2015; Deans of Students, 2015, May

Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected using a personally administered semi-structured questionnaire which was administered to the respondents. The questionnaire contained both open ended and closed ended questions.

Data Analysis

The data collected were first tabulated, then analyzed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 21. Descriptive statistics involved measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion, and helped in describing the data and determining the respondents' degree of agreement with the various statements under each factor (Ngugi, 2013). The inferential statistics involved multiple linear regressions that was used to develop a model for the study. The model for the study was:

$$Y = \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where,

β_1, β_2 and β_3 are coefficients

Y is the student enrolment

X_1 is the product innovation

X_2 is the market orientation

X_3 is the market intelligence

ε-is the error term

The results will then be presented in tables, charts and figures.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Response Rate

The findings from of this study were based on the information which was implemented by the use of questionnaires which were administered to respondents. Out of the 384 questionnaires that were administered, 373 of them were filled and returned to the respondents. This represented 97.14% response rate.

Effects of Programs on the Universities

The study wanted to know the extent to which some aspects of new programs have been made available in the various universities under study. The results are as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Effects of New Programs and Performance

Key: 5 =Very High, 4=High Extent, 3=Moderate extent, 2=Low extent, 1=Very low extent

	5	4	3	2	1	Σf_i	$\Sigma f_i x_i$	$\frac{\Sigma f_i x_i}{\Sigma f_i}$
Number of new programs introduced	77	275	15	3	3	373	1539	4.13
Reduction in semester interruptions	130	184	36	23	0	373	1540	4.13
Improvement in space utilization	77	275	15	3	3	373	1539	4.13
Reduction in waiting time	47	49	101	132	44	373	1042	2.79
Introduction of a number of new faculties	28	56	93	176	20	373	1015	2.72
Improvement in response time to customer queries	42	52	71	142	66	373	981	2.63
Research and development expenses	2	14	59	229	69	373	770	2.06

The respondents agreed with the claims that their universities have introduced a number of new programs (weight of 4.13). This is in support of the findings of Magunga (2010) who noted that, early identification of new opportunities gives an organization a very high competitive edge. The study further noted that their campuses have reduced semester interruptions (weight 4.13) and that they have improved in space utilization (weight of 4.13).

Effects of Marketing Intelligence and Performance

The study established the effect of market intelligence on the performance of public universities under study. The findings are shown in table 3 below:

Table 3: Effects of Marketing Intelligence on the Performance

Key: 5 =strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=undecided, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree

The university….	5	4	3	2	1	Σf_i	$\Sigma f_i x_i$	$\frac{\Sigma f_i x_i}{\Sigma f_i}$
identifies new opportunities so as to identify new trends	83	266	16	5	3	373	1540	4.13
discovers untapped potential market earlier than other campuses	123	148	52	39	11	373	1452	3.89
has better client interaction than other campuses	79	174	44	51	25	373	1350	3.62
Is able to detect threats in the job market	23	157	42	114	37	373	1134	3.04
gets early warning of other campuses' moves	12	28	55	227	51	373	842	2.26

As table 3 shows, the respondents agreed with the claim that their universities identify new opportunities so as to identify new trends (weight of 4.13) while they disagreed with the claim that their universities get early warning of other campuses' moves (weight of 2.26).

Information and Performance

The study wanted to know the extent to which universities gather information from different sources. The results are documented on table 4.

Table 4: Information and Performance

Key: 5 =Very High, 4=High Extent, 3=Moderate extent, 2=Low extent, 1=Very low extent

Our university…	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	Σf_i	$\Sigma f_i x_i$	$\frac{\Sigma f_i x_i}{\Sigma f_i}$
Client satisfaction is systematically and frequently assessed	140	213	17	2	1	373	1608	4.31

Has competitive strategies which are based on understanding client needs	188	101	43	24	17	373	1538	4.12
achieves rapid response to competitive actions	119	195	33	19	7	373	1519	4.07
functions are integrated to serve market needs	127	183	31	21	11	373	1513	4.06
Is committed to serving client needs is closely monitored	25	287	37	21	3	373	1429	3.83
Has objectives and strategies which are driven by the creation of client satisfaction	97	164	56	35	21	373	1400	3.75
management understands how employees contribute to value for clients	53	69	155	77	19	373	1179	3.16
Top management regularly discuss competitor's strengths and weaknesses	36	49	221	57	10	373	1163	3.12
marketing people share information about competitors	31	99	111	79	53	373	1095	2.94
Communicates information about clients freely throughout the university	36	99	95	81	62	373	1085	2.91
strategies are driven by increasing value for clients	10	84	169	77	33	373	1080	2.90

The results of the study revealed that, to a high extent, the respondents agreed to the claims that their universities' client satisfaction is systematically and frequently assessed (weight 4.31); that they have competitive strategies which are based on understanding client needs (weight 4.12). The respondents also agreed that they achieve rapid response to competitive actions (weight 4.17) and that their functions are integrated to serve market needs (weight 4.03).

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Findings

The first objective of the study was to determine the effects of product innovation on enrolment of public universities in Western Kenya. The study found out that the universities introduce new programs regularly; that the existing programs are suitable for new students and that the universities have reduced semester interruptions besides improving in space utilization.

The second objective of the study was to establish the effects of market intelligence on enrolment of public universities in Western Kenya. The findings of the study revealed that it was not quite clear on whether or not the universities gather information about the job market. However, it was observed that universities share knowledge on the programs offered and that they gather information concerning the programs offered by other universities.

The third objective of the study was to determine the influence of market orientation on enrolment of public universities in Western Kenya. The study revealed that the universities do not share information with other universities. It was also observed that universities' client satisfaction is systematically and frequently assessed; that they have competitive strategies which are based on understanding client needs; that they achieve rapid response to competitive actions and that their functions are integrated to serve market needs.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study came up with several conclusions: first, the study found out that the universities have tried to embrace product innovation by introduce new programs regularly, ensuring that the existing programs are suitable for new students, that there are minimal semester interruptions and that there is maximum space utilization. Secondly, it can also be concluded that universities do not share knowledge on the programs offered and that there is some satisfaction on the part of the clients as far as the marketing intelligence strategies used by the universities is concerned. Thirdly, it was also concluded that universities assess client satisfaction frequently and that they have competitive strategies which are based on understanding client needs; that they achieve rapid response to competitive actions and that their functions are integrated to serve market needs.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the study came up with several recommendations as follows:

Based on the first objective, as part of improving their product innovation strategies, the universities strive to look for modalities to reduce waiting time; introduce a number of new faculties which offer programs which are in diadem with the client needs, they should improve on their customer queries besides increasing their research and development expenses.

Based on the second objective, the universities gather information about the job market. They should also try to discover untapped potential market earlier than other universities, they should have better client interaction than other universities and that they should able to detect threats in the job market.

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