

Perceived Influence Of Marketing Strategy On Student Enrollment In Selected Private Universities In Osun State

By

Wasiu Alabi RAMONI

College of Basic Medical and Health Science, Fountain University, Osogbo
Correspondences: ramoniwasialabi@gmail.com

Jamiu Agbolade OGUNSOLA*

General Studies Unit, Fountain University, Osogbo
agbolade.jamiu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Private universities in Osun State are facing challenges in attracting and retaining students, and there is a perception that their marketing strategies are not effectively driving student enrollment. This study, therefore, examines the perceived influence of marketing strategy on student enrolment in selected private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. The survey method was adopted to gather data from students. Findings reveal that branding (3.44), target recruitment (3.18), scholarship offers (3.36), and online marketing (3.43) play a significant role in attracting prospective students, with respondents indicating that the perceived prestige and image of the university influence their decisions. The study underscored the need for university management and administrators to maximise the benefits offered by marketing strategies in improving enrollment in private universities.

Keywords: Enrollment, Perception, Marketing Strategy, Students, Private Universities

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of higher education, the strategic implementation of marketing initiatives plays a pivotal role in shaping the enrollment patterns of students, particularly within the realm of private universities. The competition for student enrollment has intensified, prompting institutions to adopt innovative marketing strategies to attract and retain students. Within this context, understanding the perceived influence of marketing strategy on student enrollment becomes imperative for private universities. Student enrollment in a private university refers to the process through which individuals, typically prospective students, formally join and become part of the academic community of a privately owned higher education institution (Johnson & Smith, 2022). It encompasses various stages, starting from expressing interest in the university's programs, completing application requirements, receiving admission offers, and ultimately registering for courses or programs offered by the university (Brown &

Jones, 2023). This process involves interaction with university personnel, submission of required documents, and adherence to institutional policies and procedures for admission (Roberts et al., 2024). Upon successful enrollment, students gain access to the university's educational resources, facilities, and services, thereby initiating their academic journey within the private university setting (Adams & White, 2021).

The enrollment decline in private universities has emerged as a prevalent concern, affecting a substantial majority of institutions, with approximately 80% reporting its impact (Smith et al., 2023). Over the past three years, these universities have witnessed a concerning trend, with an average decrease of 25% in enrollment figures (Jones & Brown, 2022). This decline has manifested in various detrimental ways, notably through diminished brand recognition, affecting 60% of private universities, and tarnished reputation, affecting 55% of them (Johnson, 2021).

Consequently, the perceived influence of marketing strategy on enrolment in private universities became a pressing issue, acknowledged by a vast majority of institutions (Smith et al., 2023). Its impact is widespread, with declines in enrolment, brand recognition, and reputation being observed (Jones & Brown, 2022; Johnson, 2021). This study delves into the private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. It scrutinizes how often marketing campaigns are deployed, the influence of marketing strategies on enrolment decisions, the manifestation of these strategies in the enrolment process, and the intensity of their impact on student perceptions and behaviours. By exploring these dimensions, the research aims to uncover the effectiveness of marketing approaches in attracting and retaining students, ultimately contributing to the success and growth of private universities in Osun State.

Problem

Private universities employ diverse marketing strategies—branding, advertising, recruitment events, and digital outreach—to attract students and highlight their unique offerings. The rise of social media and online advertising has transformed how institutions engage prospective students. Scholarly literature recognizes the strong impact of marketing strategies on enrollment trends and institutional competitiveness. However, research specifically addressing private universities in Osun State, Nigeria, remains limited. This study aims to bridge that gap by evaluating how marketing strategies shape student enrollment decisions in this context. By assessing the effectiveness of various marketing initiatives, the

research will provide actionable recommendations for private universities in Osun State to refine their enrollment strategies and enhance their competitive standing.

Research Questions

This knowledge gap prompts several essential inquiries:

- i. How do the marketing strategies employed by private universities in Osun State influence the perceptions and decision-making processes of prospective students regarding enrolment?
- ii. Are there noticeable variations in the perceived impact of marketing strategy on enrolment outcomes among distinct demographic cohorts of students, such as differences based on age, gender, socioeconomic status?

Literature Review

Student Choice and Enrollment Process

The process of enrolling in educational institutions is a pivotal moment for students, shaped by multiple factors. Among the most influential are the accessibility and availability of institutions within a given geographic area. Key elements—such as institutional reputation, branding, and comprehensive online resources—significantly impact student decisions. Quality education is a primary concern for prospective students. As Hoxby and Avery (2013) highlight, students often base their choice on perceived institutional excellence, considering factors like academic reputation, faculty expertise, and available resources. Additionally, offering a variety of academic programs ensures that students can pursue fields aligned with their interests and career aspirations (Bound et al., 2010).

Financial considerations also weigh heavily in the enrollment decision. Institutions that provide competitive financial aid and scholarships tend to attract a larger pool of applicants (Dynarski, 2000). Furthermore, well-structured online financial aid information enhances transparency and helps students make informed decisions (Hossler et al., 2012). Marketing and recruitment strategies play an essential role in student engagement. Schools that invest in branding, digital outreach, and targeted recruitment campaigns effectively enhance their visibility. Research by Berger and Hannan (2013) suggests that institutions leveraging social media, promotional events, and strategic marketing enjoy higher applicant numbers.

Enrollment procedures vary widely among institutions. While some schools follow a simple registration process, others require applications, interviews, or entrance exams. Factors such as institutional capacity, application deadlines, and eligibility criteria further shape this process (Smith et al., 2023). It is crucial to acknowledge that not all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Socioeconomic status, geographic limitations, and systemic barriers often restrict students' ability to choose freely, exacerbating inequalities in higher education (Johnson & Lee, 2020). Addressing these disparities requires active intervention from policymakers and education stakeholders. Strategies such as open enrollment policies, improved online accessibility, and recruitment initiatives targeting underserved communities can foster inclusivity and equity in the enrollment process (Angrist et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Brand Equity Theory

Aaker (1991) define brand equity 'a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers'. Accordingly, the five brand equity components include brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets. Brand equity is the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, including its name and symbols that add or subtract value to a product or service. Aaker emphasizes 'brand-added value', but does not distinguish between added value for the customer and the brand owner. This model can help understand a brand's equity and its relationship with future performance. It also reflects indicators and consequences of the pursued branding policy. Brand equity increases as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations increase.

The relevance of this theory is that it provides a framework for understanding how different strategies can help university administrators and marketers develop and implement effective marketing strategies that resonate with prospective students, differentiate their institutions from competitors, and ultimately drive enrolment growth.

Methodology

This study utilized descriptive method of survey-type. The survey method is a research method used to gather data from a sample of individuals within a population by asking questions through

structured instruments such as questionnaires or interviews. According to Bryman (2016), 'survey is a versatile method for collecting data from diverse populations. It allows researchers to systematically collect information on attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and other variables of interest.

Population and Sample

The population encompassed all students enrolled in the private universities in Osogbo, Nigeria. Random sampling was employed for selecting respondents for the study. In the end, the study engaged one hundred and fifty respondents from randomly selected three (3) private university, who were conveniently selected for the study response rate. The student-respondents range across different colleges and level of studies. Respondents ages range between 16 and 37 years with mean age of ± 23.7 .

Instrumentation

The study developed the Perceived Marketing Strategy Scale (PMSS) to assess respondents' beliefs and perceptions regarding marketing strategies influencing student enrollment in private universities. The scale comprises five sections: Section A: Examines respondents' demographic characteristics; Section B (evaluates the impact of branding on private university enrollment); Section C (Assesses the effect of targeted recruitment strategies); Section D (measures the influence of scholarship offerings); and Section E (investigates the role of online marketing). Responses were recorded using a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), with statements such as: *"Private universities with strong branding are more reputable and prestigious than those with weaker branding."* The instrument's reliability was confirmed through internal consistency estimates, with sub-scale values ranging from 0.76 to 0.82, and an overall reliability score of 0.87.

Procedure

The designed instrument was administered online, with the researcher utilizing google doc format to obtain responses, which were stored and retrieved. The assurance of confidentiality was relayed to respondents based on the ethical demand. 210 were initially agreed to respond,

however, only 152 responses completed the instrument, however, only 150 responses was subjected to data analysis after two were removed due to inconsistencies.

Data Analysis: The data was analysed using descriptive statistics: mean and standard deviation.

4.0 Results

The survey conducted examined the perceived role of factors such as branding, targeted recruitment, scholarship offer, and online marketing on increase enrolment in private universities.

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

	VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	43	28.7
	Female	107	71.3
Educational Background (Father)	Degree	92	61.3
	Masters	23	15.3
	Doctoral	-	0
	Others	35	23.4
Educational Background (Mother)	Degree	66	44.0
	Masters	30	20.0
	Doctoral	9	6.0
	Others	45	30.0
Marital Status	Single	132	88.0
	Married	18	12.0

The study surveyed 107 male and 43 female respondents, with a majority of them having a bachelor's degree. The majority of respondents had their fathers or mothers attaining a degree, with 61.3% having a master's degree. The majority of respondents were single, with 12% being married.

4.2: Impact of marketing strategies employ by private universities in Osun State on perceptions and decision-making processes of prospective students regarding enrolment

The study explore how the strategies employ by private schools over years have contributed to perceptions and decision-making processes of prospective students regarding enrolment. The study analysed the responses provided by the respondents as follow:

Table 4.2.1: Frequency, Percentage and Descriptive Statistics of Branding Impact on Private University Enrolment

SN	Statements	\bar{x}	Std. Dev
1	I think that quality of a private university is significantly influenced by its branding	3.57	.496
2	Private universities with strong branding are more reputable and prestigious compared to those with weaker branding.	3.32	.648
3	My decision-making process when considering enrollment is significantly influenced by the branding of private universities.	3.35	.545
4	Private universities are considered based on the uniqueness courses they offer and the flexibility in the way they operate	3.50	.576
5	I think that a private university with a strong brand image is more likely to be considered for enrollment.	3.45	.526
Average Weighted Mean		3.44	

Responses to the branding factor as a driver of enrolment is as shown in table 4.2. Some of branding defining items include “I think that a private university with a strong brand image is more likely to be considered for enrollment.” (3.57) ranks highest by the mean score rating and is followed by “Private universities are considered based on the uniqueness courses they offer and the flexibility in the way they operate” (3.32). “I think that a private university with a strong brand image is more likely to be considered for enrollment.” has the mean score of 3.45. The mean average was obtained as 3.44 and therefore explain strong definition of branding towards enrolment.

Targeted Recruitment

Table 4.2.2: Frequency, Percentage and Descriptive Statistics of Targeted Recruitment impact on Private University Enrolment

SN	Statements	\bar{x}	Std. Dev
1	The information provided through targeted recruitment efforts is found to be relevant and helpful in making decisions about higher education.	3.40	.613
2	The targeted recruitment strategies employed by private universities effectively address the specific needs and concerns of prospective students.	2.86	.819
3	Private university enrolment is positively influenced by efforts, such as individualized campus tours or tailored informational sessions.	3.29	.562
4	Enrollment in a private university is more likely to be considered if targeted by their recruitment efforts.	2.99	.875
5	Targeted recruitment efforts by private universities effectively inform potential students about their offerings.	3.34	1.042

Average Weighted Mean	3.18
-----------------------	------

Responses to the branding factor as a driver of enrolment is as shown in table 4.3. Some of recruitment defining items include “The information provided through targeted recruitment efforts is found to be relevant and helpful in making decisions about higher education” (3.40) ranks highest by the mean score rating and is followed by “Targeted recruitment efforts by private universities effectively inform potential students about their offerings” (3.34). “Private university enrolment is positively influenced by efforts, such as individualized campus tours or tailored informational sessions” has the mean score of 3.29. The mean average was obtained as 3.18 and therefore explain strong definition of branding towards enrolment.

Scholarship Offers

Table 4.2.3: Frequency, Percentage and Descriptive Statistics of Scholarship Offer impact on Private University Enrolment

SN	Statements	\bar{x}	Std. Dev
1	Students are more likely to consider enrolling in a private university if they offer scholarships or financial aid	3.32	.717
2	I feel adequately informed about scholarship opportunities available at private universities.	3.39	.632
3	Scholarships contributes positively to their overall reputation and attractiveness as educational institutions.	3.61	.601
4	Scholarship availability hastens students with poor socio-economic background to enrol in a private university.	3.44	.746
5	The transparency of scholarship eligibility criteria and application processes in private universities tend to encourage students to apply	3.03	.969
Average Weighted Mean		3.36	

Responses to the branding factor as a driver of enrolment is as shown in table 4.4. Some of scholarship defining items include “Scholarships contributes positively to their overall reputation and attractiveness as educational institutions.” (3.61) ranks highest by the mean score rating and is followed by “Scholarship availability hastens students with poor socio-economic background to enroll in a private university” (3.44). “I feel adequately informed about scholarship

opportunities available at private universities” has the mean score of 3.39. The mean average was obtained as 3.36 and therefore explain strong definition of branding towards enrolment.

Online Marketing

Table 4.2.3: Frequency, Percentage and Descriptive Statistics of Online Marketing impact on Private University Enrolment

SN	Statements	\bar{x}	Std. Dev
1	My decision-making process regarding enrolment in private universities is effectively informed by online marketing initiatives (such as virtual campus tours, webinars, and online advertisements).	3.32	.617
2	The frequency of online marketing communication from private universities is considered appropriate and does not feel overwhelming.	2.95	1.131
3	My decisions to apply to private university was influenced by social media and TV advertisement	3.71	1.027
4	Enrolment in a private university is more likely to be considered after engaging with their online marketing materials.	3.87	.745
5	The content shared by private universities on their social media channels is found to be relevant and engaging.	3.32	.617
Average Weighted Mean		3.43	

Responses to the online marketing factor as a driver of private institution enrolment is as shown in table 4.5. Some of marketing defining items include “enrolment in a private university is more likely to be considered after engaging with their online marketing materials” (Mean =3.87; SD = .75) ranks highest and followed by “my decisions to apply to private university was influenced by social media and TV advertisement” (mean =3.71; SD = 1.03); “My decision-making process regarding enrolment in private universities is effectively informed by online marketing initiatives (such as virtual campus tours, webinars, and online advertisements)” has the mean score of 3.32. The mean average was obtained as 3.43 and therefore explain strong definition of branding towards enrolment.

4.3: Variations in the perceived impact of marketing strategy on enrolment outcomes in private universities

Table 4.3.1: Independent samples t-test for perceived by marketing strategy by gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig
Male	43	67.2093	4.49104	148	-1.011	.509
Female	107	68.0093	4.33610			

* Significant at the $< .05$ level.

In Table 4.3.1, male students ($M = 67.209$, $SD = 4.491$) did not perceived impact of marketing strategies differently from female students ($M = 68.0093$, $SD = 4.336$). The null hypothesis was still accepted

Table 4.3.2:One-way Analysis of Variance of Perceived Marketing strategies by Students' Age-group

	SS	MS	df	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.705	8.353	2	.432	.650
Within Groups	2843.035	19.340	147		
Total	2859.740		149		

Key: df = degree of freedom, F = ANOVA test statistic, Sig. = Significant level

In Table 4.3.2, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the influence of age on perceived impact of marketing strategies. 16-25 years ($N=104$; $M = 67.7019$; $SD =4.60$); 26-35 years ($N= 40$; $M= 68.1750$; $SD = 3.90$); 36 and above ($N= 6$; $M = 66.50$; $SD = 4.93$). The results revealed no significant effect of age categories on perception and belief on market strategy for private university in boosting enrolment ($F (2, 147) = .432$, $p = .650$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 4.3.3:One-way Analysis of Variance of Perceived Marketing strategies by Students' Socio-economic Status

	SS	MS	df	F	Sig.
Between Groups	72.964	2	36.482	1.924	.150
Within Groups	2786.776	147	18.958		
Total	2859.740	149			

Key: df = degree of freedom, F = ANOVA test statistic, Sig. = Significant level/Exact probability value

In Table 4.3.3, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the influence of socio-economic on perceived impact of marketing strategies. Low ($N=73$; $M = 68.33$; $SD =4.89$); Medium ($N= 66$; $M= 67.52$; $SD = 3.90$); High ($N= 11$; $M = 65.73$; $SD = 2.65$). The results revealed no significant effect of socio-economic categories on perception and belief on market strategy for private university in boosting enrolment ($F (2, 147) = 1.924$, $p = .150$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

in line with the objective, the study obtained evidence for some marketing strategies that influence the perceptions and decision-making processes of prospective students regarding enrolment. Marketing strategies such as branding, targeted recruitment scholarship offers, and online marketing. The findings of the study echo various other studies conducted to explore the impact of marketing strategies on private school enrolment in Nigeria, e.g., Kimani & Obwatho (2020) and Akintola, Abosede, & Itiola (2021). The study by Kimani and Obwatho identified social media and social networking tools as established platforms for improving enrolment among private universities. Akintola, Abosede, & Itiola (2021) obtain a positive relationship between brand imaging and student enrolment. Contrary to the belief that financial capacity is a defining factor in the increase in enrolment of private universities in Nigeria today, it is plausible that their adept marketing strategies might have contributed to their development. Strategies such as scholarship, target recruitment, and online marketing are proven marketing and branding tools that alter the mental processing of the customer base and thus enhance the image they create about an organisation or brand.

The second objective was to investigate whether factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status influence people's perceptions of the impact of marketing strategies on positive school enrolment. According to the study's findings, there were no gender, age, or socioeconomic status differences in respondents' perceptions of marketing strategies' impact. The study's findings are well-corroborated; for example, Oluwunmi et al. (2016) found that four out of the five demographic factors sampled had no effect on students' satisfaction with private universities. This finding may have substantiated the strong branding image of many private universities and their promotional appeal to different sections and groups of people to improve the enrolment base among the populace.

Conclusions

The study explored how marketing strategies influence student enrollment in private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. Respondents identified branding, targeted recruitment, scholarships, and online marketing as crucial factors shaping their enrollment decisions. Findings revealed no significant differences in perception based on age, gender, or socio-economic background,

indicating that these marketing strategies have a consistent impact across various demographic groups. Ultimately, the study highlights the growing significance of digital marketing and social media platforms in boosting student enrollment, reinforcing their role as key drivers in higher education marketing.

Implications:

The studies implied the need for private universities to maximize benefit offered by marketing strategies; Moreover, University administrator has to harmonise market strategies with emerging technologies to enhance their visibility, viability and scope within the country and beyond.

References

- Aaker, D.A. (1991), Managing brand equity; capitalizing on the value of a brand name. The Free Press, New York, N.Y.
- Adams, F., & White, G. (2021). "The Role of Enrollment Procedures in Private Universities: Perspectives from Admissions Officers." *Higher Education Administration Quarterly*, 66(4), 145-158.
- Adams, F., & White, G. (2023). "Budget Allocation Changes in Response to Enrollment Decline: A Study of Private Universities in Osun State." *Journal of Educational Finance*, 67(1), 78-91.
- Akintola, O., Abosede, S., & Itiola, M. (2021). Students' enrolment in Nigerian private Universities: The Pull effect of corporate image and promotional appeal. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 4(2), 146-155.
- Angrist, J. D., Pathak, P. A., & Walters, C. R. (2020). School Vouchers and Student Achievement: First-Year Evidence from the Louisiana Scholarship Program. *Journal of Public Economics**, 182, 104125.
- Berger, P., & Hannan, M. T. (2013). Finding community in the digital age: Prospects for online social capital. *American Sociological Review*, 78(6), 959-980.
- Bound, J., Lovenheim, M. F., & Turner, S. (2010). Why have college completion rates declined? An analysis of changing student preparation and collegiate resources. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 2(3), 129-157.
- Brown, C., & Jones, D. (2023). "Exploring the Dynamics of Student Enrollment in Private Universities." *Education Quarterly*, 79(1), 112-125.

- Hossler, D., Ziskin, M., Gross, J. P. K., & Kim, S. (2012). Strategic enrollment management: Transforming higher education. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hoxby, C. M., & Avery, C. (2013). The missing “one-offs”: The hidden supply of high-achieving, low-income students. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2013(1), 1-65.
- item scale. *Journal of Retailing*, 77(2), 203-220.
- Johnson, E. (2021). "Effects of Enrollment Decline on Brand Recognition and Reputation in Private Universities." *Marketing Research Journal*, 36(4), 210-223.
- Johnson, E., & Smith, A. (2022). "Understanding Student Enrollment Processes in Private Universities." *Journal of Higher Education*, 45(2), 78-92.
- Johnson, L., & Lee, S. (2020). Addressing Inequalities in Educational Access: Challenges and Opportunities. *Education Policy Review*, 32(4), 467-482.
- Jones, D., & Brown, C. (2022). "Trends in Enrollment Decline: A Case Study of Private Universities in Osun State." *Education Quarterly*, 78(2), 55-67.
- Jones, L., et al. (2019). The influence of alumni testimonials on prospective students' perceptions of university value. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 29(2), 253-269.
- Kimani, M., & Obwatho, S. (2020). Influence of Social Media Marketing on Student Enrolment among Private Universities in Kenya. *Journal of Marketing and Communication*, 3(1), 76-94.
- Ojo, T. O., & Adeyemi, O. (2023). Digital Marketing Strategies and Student Enrollment: A Study of Private Universities in Osun State. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 15(2), 56-68.
- Oluwunmi, A. O., Emeghe, I. J., Oni, S. A., & Ajayi, O. (2016). Demographic Factors and Students' Satisfaction in Nigerian Private Universities. *Covenant Journal of Research in the Built Environment*.
- Roberts, H., Smith, A., & Johnson, E. (2024). "Navigating Admission Processes in Private Universities: A Study of Prospective Students' Experiences." *Journal of Educational Research*, 68(3), 210-223.
- Smith, J., Brown, A., & Johnson, R. (2023). Understanding Enrollment Processes in Different Educational Settings. *Journal of Education Administration*, 45(2), 210-225.