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***Marketing strategies that can increase enrolment rate in Institutions of Higher Learning: A Case of Private Universities in Kenya***

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**Abstract**

*University Education in Kenya has experienced tremendous growth in the last decade due to rising number of students seeking post secondary school education. A mismatch between capacity in public university and the number of students, who directly qualify, result in a number of students to seek admission in private universities while some still find admission in public universities as privately sponsored students. It is important for private universities to have up-to-date knowledge and information regarding marketing strategies to adopt in order to attract and enroll a good number of students. This study is aimed at identifying marketing strategies that could be applied by private universities so as to attract and enroll students utilizing a 5-year period data from 2006-2010. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study. Probability-simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 98 continuing undergraduate students and 28 employees from two private universities in Kenya and a questionnaire was used as the research instrument. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicate that advertising using an institution web site, advertising using the various media stations, use of social networks such as Facebook, encouraging word-of-mouth, career fair involvement, open day on campus and alumni support are marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrolment of students.*

**Keywords:** Marketing Strategies, Students' Enrolment, Private Universities

**Introduction**

Since the year 2000 there has been a significant expansion of both public and private universities in Kenya in response to higher demand for university education. This is evident by the number of constituent colleges and campuses that had been established by 2010. A number of Technical Training Institutions including National Polytechnics were upgraded to university college status. By the year 2011, there were 25 Private Universities and 7 Public Universities in Kenya, with 24 public university constituents' colleges (Commission for Higher Education, 2012).

The emergence of several private universities and public university constituent colleges means that private universities must become more aggressive in marketing their institutions in order to increase their market share in terms of student number and the quality of those enrolling. This has resulted to fierce competition among the private and public universities trying to offer the best so as to enhance its enrolment of students. Nevertheless, public universities have an upper hand arising from support in terms of long standing government financial support. As such, even without aggressive marketing strategies, public universities still enroll students to their programmes through Joint Admissions Board (JAB) while some enroll through self sponsorship programme (SSP). However, the number of students absorbed by public universities represents a small fraction of those who qualify. For instance, in 2007, about 82,000 had qualified but public universities through JAB enrolled about 16,000 students only (Daily Nation, 2009). Normally, the remaining students with financial ability and desire to pursue university education seek admission either in private universities or public universities' self sponsored programmes. As a result, Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) make every effort to maximize their full potential through effective use of marketing strategies in order to create awareness of their services to attract and enroll students.

The study focused on two selected private universities with the following research objectives: (i) to determine the rate of student enrolment between the period (2006 - 2010) in the selected private universities; (ii) to establish marketing strategies that offer opportunity to attract and increase enrolment of students and what could be improved on in order to attract and increase students' enrolment.

## **Literature Review**

According to Richardson *et. al.*, (1995), an institution can fail to achieve its objectives thereby losing its competitive edge hence lose its market share to its competitors. Further, it will depend on how effectively the institution uses the scarce institutional resources to enhance quality on the same. With a view to gaining a competitive edge and gaining a larger share of the national market, universities have finally realized the role of marketing as a powerful source of competitive advantage in increasing enrolment of its students (MacGregor, 2000; Merten, 2000). Competitive pressure has forced the higher educational institutions to look for more competitive marketing strategies in order to compete for students in their respective markets (Joseph & Joseph, 2000). In response to these changes, the value, effectiveness and potential benefits of using marketing theories and concepts, which have been effective in the business world, are gradually now being applied by many universities so as to attract and enroll a good number of students.

There is evidence in literature indicating that the higher education market is now well established as a global phenomenon with a number of studies conducted worldwide that address the marketing strategies employed by IHLs to attract students. For instance, a study conducted by Ming (2010) on institutional factors influencing students' college choice decision in response to intense competition in the higher education sector in Malaysia indicated that location, academic programmes and campus visits are some of the variables that influence students' college choice. Ho and Hung (2008), explored how an institution can develop effective marketing strategies by using a model that integrates analytic hierarchy process, cluster analysis and correspondence analysis for a graduate school at National Chiayi University in Taiwan. They identified key factors for students' school selection,

namely employability, curriculum, academic reputation, faculty, and research environment. Others are lower tuition, fewer entrance-exam subjects, lower entrance-exam pass rates, and easier graduation requirements. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) conducted a systematic review of higher education marketing whose purpose was to explore the nature of the marketing of higher education in an international context. The study concluded that potential benefits of applying marketing theories and concepts that have been effective in the business world are gradually being recognized by researchers in the field of higher education marketing. Additionally, there are works that have dwelt on marketing strategies that can be employed by IHL to attract foreign students such as those by Mazzarol (1998), Zeithaml et al., (1985), Helgesen (2008), and Altbach & Knight, (2007).

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed the descriptive research design aimed at collecting information by interviewing a sample of individuals to determine their attitudes, opinions and habits (Kothari, 2004). This design was suitable for the study for it sought to describe staff and students' attitude and perception towards their institutions in regards to marketing strategies that could be employed by IHL to attract and increase enrollment of students. This design was preferred because it enables direct generation of information and creates the opportunity for in-depth responses, and consequently provides a good understanding of the phenomenon under study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The population comprised of all continuing undergraduate students and staff working in the marketing/corporate affairs, admissions and academic departments (HODs) in the selected private universities. The target population was derived from all 4<sup>th</sup> years continuing undergraduate students and all staff working in the admissions, marketing/corporate affairs and academic departments (HODs). A total of 976 students fell under the targeted 4<sup>th</sup> year continuing undergraduate students (Kabarak 276, Daystar 700) and 28 members of staff (Kabarak 11, Daystar 17).

The sample size was 98 fourth year continuing students which was about 10% of the target population of 976 which is in line with Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) for descriptive studies. Since the number of staff working in the selected departments was relatively small, all the 28 employees in these departments were included in the study (100%).

Simple random sampling method was used whereby three classes of 4th year students for Daystar University were identified where a sample of 70 undergraduate 4th year students were asked to voluntarily fill the questionnaires. For Kabarak University, a sample of 28 students was randomly sampled from a class of 36 continuing 4th year students where the first 28 students to enter class had a chance of being included in the sample. The sample size therefore, was 98 for continuing undergraduate students and 28 staff as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Target population and Sample size

University	Target population		Sample size	
	Staff	Students	Staff	Students
Kabarak university	11	276	11	28
Daystar university	17	700	17	70
Total	28	976	28	98

Source: Kabarak University and Daystar University Admissions offices (2011)

Both primary and secondary data was used for this study. Primary data was collected from the respondents through the questionnaires while secondary data was collected from the institutions' records and reports. The questionnaire was developed and tested on a judgmental sample of students and staff in a private university, resulting in some changes being made to clarify certain issues. Permission were sought from the government agency (National Council for Science and Technology) to conduct research. A number of questionnaires were administered at the beginning or end of lecture, with the permission and assistance of the lecturers while the researcher self-administered other questionnaires to staff members.

A total of 126 questionnaires were administered to 4<sup>th</sup> year continuing students and staff in the corporate affairs/marketing, admissions and academics department (represented by HODs) where a total of 113 were filled and returned which constituted 89.6% response rate. Out of the 113 respondents (those who answered and returned the questionnaires), 79.6% were students while 20.4% were the staff as shown in Table 2. The 89.6% is adequate response rate as argued by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) that the return of 50% or more is acceptable. Non-response rate in this study was about 10.3%. The findings and the results were analyzed using SPSS.

Table 2: Response rate

Respondents	Questionnaires Issued	Questionnaires Received	Percent
Students	98	90	79.6
Staff	28	23	20.4
Total	126	113	100.0

### **Results and discussion**

Enrolment data obtained from Kabarak and Daystar Universities, as plotted in Figure 1 and 2 respectively indicate that there was a steady growth in student enrolment of undergraduate students of Kabarak University between the periods 2006 and 2007. It again declined between 2007 and 2009 and then started increasing in the year 2010. Daystar university students' enrolment also increased steadily between the years 2006 and 2009 but declined in the year 2010. The figures for May semesters and January 2010 were not included because the data were not forthcoming; hence the results regarding the student enrolment indicated in Figure 2 excludes data for May semesters.

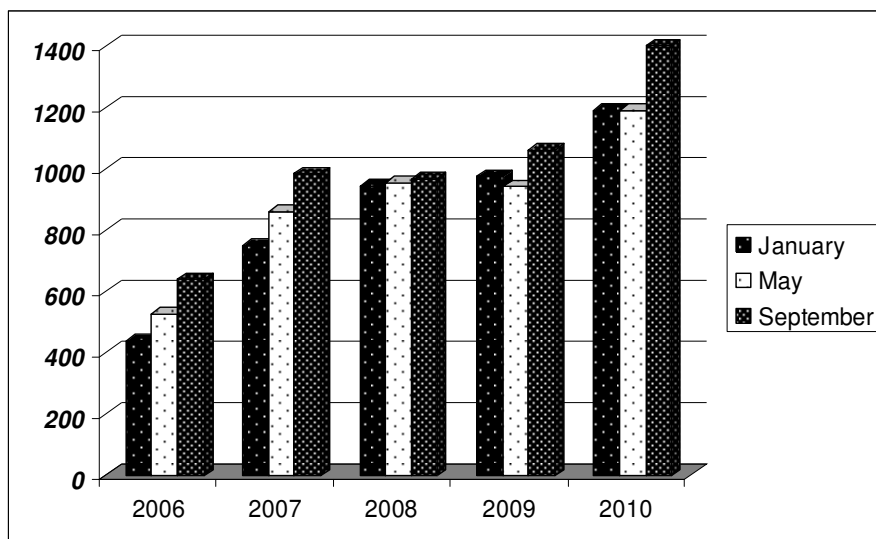


Figure 1: Kabarak University undergraduate student total enrolment  
Source: Kabarak University Admission office

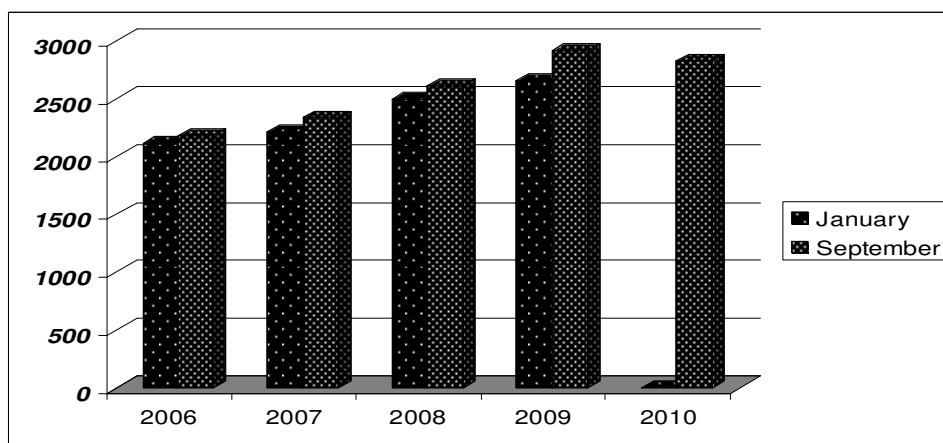


Figure 2: Daystar University undergraduate student enrolment (Source: Daystar University Admission office)

**Rate of students' enrolment**

The study sought to establish the rate of student enrolment for the five years from 2006 to 2010 in the selected private universities. The rate of students' enrolment was calculated as:

$$\frac{\text{current enrolment} - \text{previous enrolment}}{\text{previous enrolment}} \times 100\%$$

Figure 3 indicate the rate of students' enrolment for Kabarak University between the period 2006 to 2007 was 71.3% in January, 63.3% in May and 53.8% in September while, between the year 2007 and 2008 the rate of students' enrolment declined to 25.9% in January, 10.8% in May and -1.6% in September. Consequently, between the year 2008 and 2009, the rate of increase of students enrolment also increased but on a declining rate of 3.2% in January, -1.1% in May and 9.4% in September. Between 2009 and 2010 there was an increase in students' enrolment at a rate of 22.3% in January, 15.9% in May and 32.2% in September.

This implies that although there was an increase in enrolment of students, the rate of increase was on the decline in some years. However, an increase of student enrolment was realized in 2010.

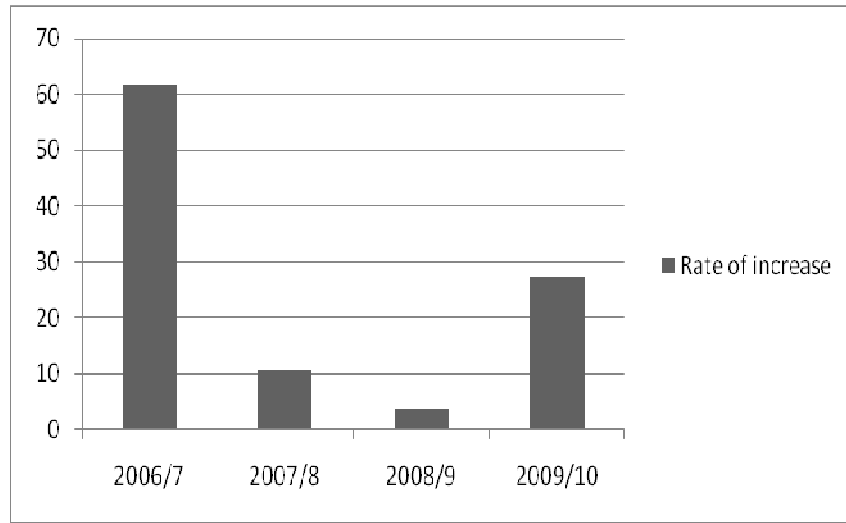


Figure 3: Kabarak university undergraduate student rate of enrolment  
(Source: Kabarak University Admission office)

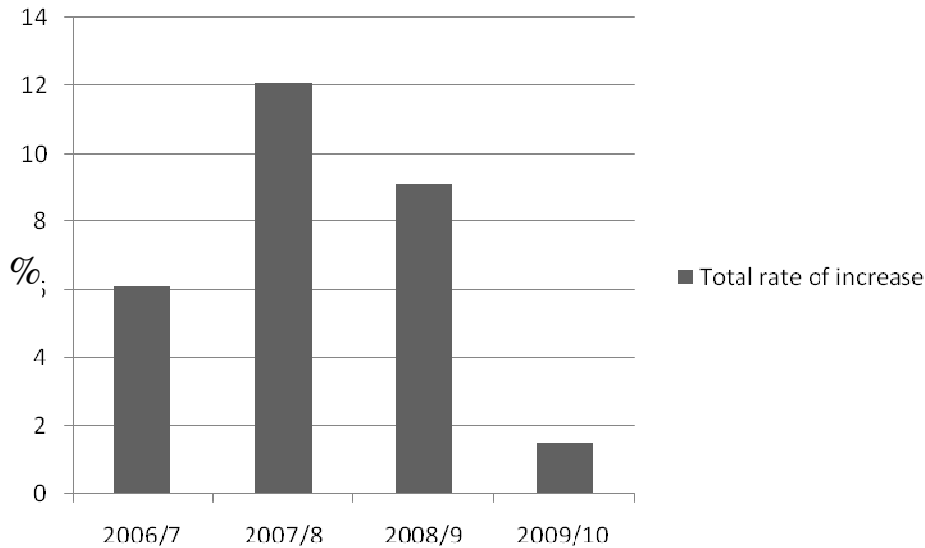


Figure 4: Daystar University undergraduate student rate of enrolment  
(Source: Daystar University Admission office)

For Daystar University, the results revealed that in the period 2006/7 there was an increase of students' enrolment with a rate of 4.8% in January and 7.3% in September. For the period 2007/8 there was also an increase of student enrolment with rate of 12.7% in January and 11.6% in September. But in 2008/9 the rate of increase of students' enrolment increased with a declining rate of 6.5% in January and an increasing rate of 11.5% in September. In 2009 and 2010, the rate of increase of student enrolment decreased on a declining rate of 2.9% as indicated in Figure 4 respectively.

The findings regarding the rate of undergraduate students' enrolment in the selected Universities revealed that the rate of student enrolment was increasing but the increase is on the decline. The changes in enrolment rate could be attributed to the emergence of several private universities and public university's constituent colleges that made the field of Higher Education become increasingly competitive (CHE Handbook, 2010).

### **Marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrolment of students**

The study sought to find out the extent of some marketing activities that private universities may employ in order to attract and increase enrolment of students by extent of agreement. The findings (Figure 5) revealed that 83.3% of the respondents agreed with higher employability after graduation while 10% disagreed. The respondents considered promotional aspects like promotion via the web (i.e. World Wide Web) important with 79.7% agreeing while 11.6% disagreeing. Advertisements were also ranked highly with 76% agreeing and 12% disagreeing. The findings are in line with the literature according to Hayes (2009) who claimed that advertising is among the tools universities employ to inform, remind and persuade prospective students to select their institutions. The respondents also agreed with Career fair involvement, Open day on campus and alumni support each with 79.6%, 72.5% and 71.9% respectively. Respondents also regarded faculty specific prospectuses as important with 65.5% agreeing while 12.7% disagreeing which support the findings of Nicholls (1985) who argued that despite there being a considerable growth in the role of the internet in accessing information about universities and the programmes that they offer, printed materials mailed to or collected by students remain an important tool in marketing. With regard to visits to high schools by university career counselors and recruiters, 69.0% and 25.4% of the respondents agreed while 16.8% and 60.5% disagreed respectively.

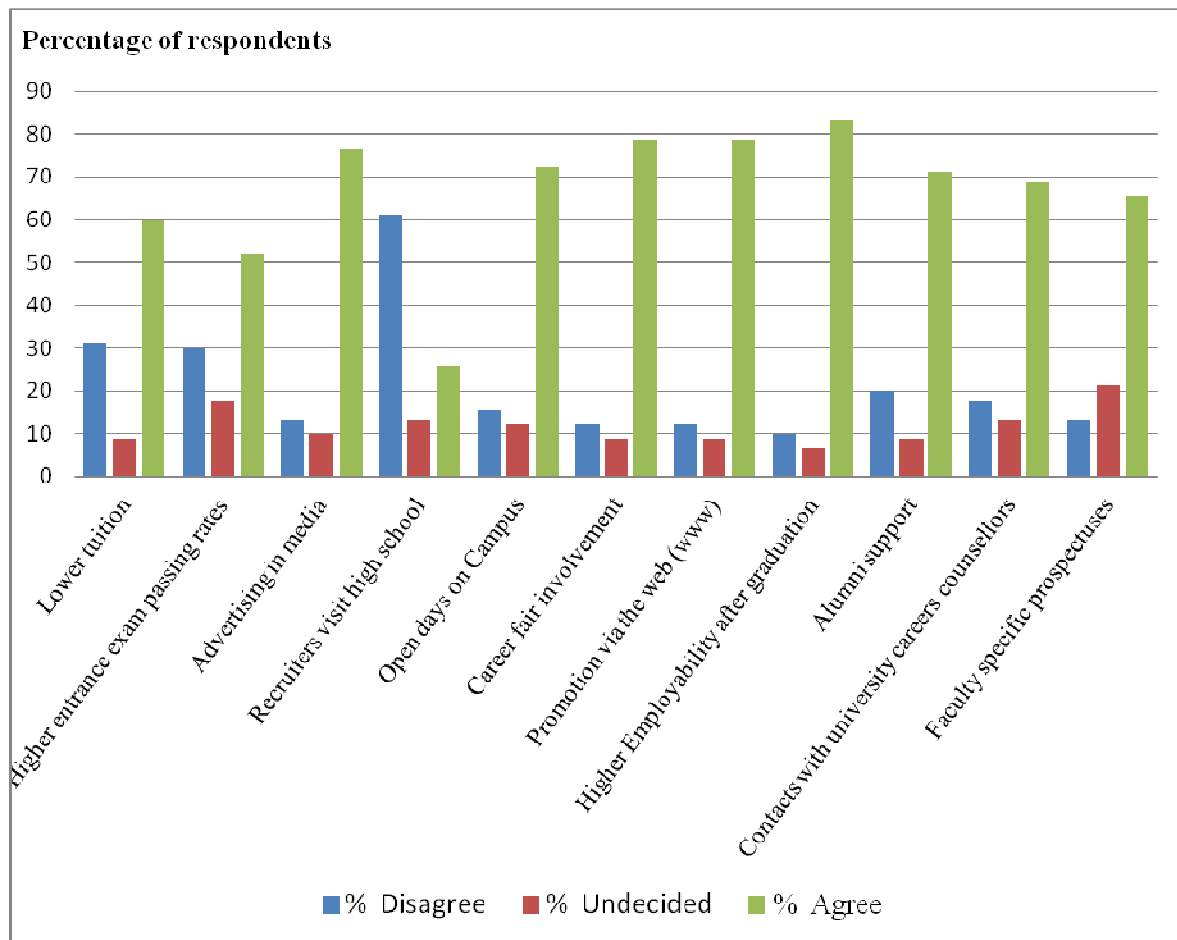


Figure.5: Extent to which marketing activities may be employed by private universities

## Conclusion

Analysis of the gathered data collected from the two institutions necessitate the need for IHLs to be more innovative to be able to compete favourably for students. The findings showed that the main marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrolment of students are promotional strategies which include promotion via the web (i.e. World Wide Web) advertising through the media, Career fair involvement and open day on campus. Faculty specific prospectuses, higher employability after graduation, alumni support and contact with university career counselors are some of marketing strategies that can attract and enhance enrolment of students.

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