



Assessment of Marketing Mix as Marketing Communication Strategies by Selected Private Universities

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Abstract. For brands to reach a wider audience and ensure that their core message is well-received and understood, they need to communicate and do that well. As a result, different brands, such as private universities, employ marketing strategies to help them do this effectively. This study, therefore, aimed to assess the different marketing mixes some private universities employed as part of their marketing communications strategies. The universities studied include Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti; Caleb University, Imota Lagos; and Adeleke University, Ede. The study employed the survey and adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather data from some parents and students of selected schools for this research. Findings from this study show that all private universities sampled for this study employed all or some of the marketing mixes as their marketing communications tools. Students surveyed from each university admit that the following marketing mixes were essential in helping them make choices of universities: price, process (registration, accommodation, and results), and programme. Although the three private universities studied for their marketing communications programmes, they do not operate similarly in terms of execution and engagement with customers. Therefore, it is recommended that private universities should mix their marketing tools strategically so they can effectively communicate the unique values they offer through their services. The three universities also need to focus on the people element of the seven marketing mixes.

Keywords: Marketing, Marketing Mix, Communication, Marketing Communication, Private Universities

1. Introduction / Background to the Study

What are the objectives of tertiary education in Nigeria? Is it simply to educate young people? Besides providing quality tertiary education, tertiary institutions have other objectives, one of which is to make profits. Therefore, while tertiary institutions aim to educate and equip their students with the knowledge they need to function in society, work and earn a living, and be instruments of change, they also pursue economic objectives.

Furthermore, as De Vaus (2002) and Zikmund (2000) highlighted in their different studies, governments of developed or developing countries cannot single-handedly provide tertiary education for all their student population. Consequently, the private sector supplements the infrastructure needed for university education.

Therefore, to be ahead of their competition, private universities such as Adeleke University, Ede; Caleb University, Imota; and Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, need to apply effective marketing strategies. Furthermore, three private universities have relied on communicating their brands and the products they offer – in this case, educational services. Marketing communication for private institutions involves letting their customers and potential customers know the products they offer. They try to create an appealing and marketable brand image during this process. In this context, therefore, we can define communication as the process or action of transferring information from one person (the sender) to another person (the receiver) using words, symbols, and body language, amongst others (Ogili, 2005). Therefore, scholars like Jefkins (1989) agree that marketing, or marketing communication as it is, should include all forms of communication.

In addition, the market share for institutions offering tertiary education services become smaller the stakes become higher because of influx of different institutions offering similar services (Ojo & Afolabi). To stay in the competition, many of these private universities try new strategies to help them capture a more significant chunk of the market share. These strategies also aim to give them a competitive advantage over others offering the same quality of services.

However, like other products and services, what appeals to people are quite different regarding university education. Some people will require different services from others, which will determine whether they enroll their child or wards on those universities or even consider them an option. Other considerations generally include tuition and education costs (Dahari & Ya, 2011).

As stated earlier, customer preference varies when it comes to university education. Faith-based private universities may be the choice for some people because of considerations such as morals, religious values, and spiritual and character development. As Sebba (1991) and Van Pelt, Alison & Allison (2007) highlight, some parents can go as far as withdrawing their children or wards from the schools when they feel those schools no longer offer the same moral values. In addition, these customers' income level is significant in their choice of institutions and educational level. Other customers will prefer schools with big size and prestige or the school (Khan, Triq & Tasleem, 2010) as well as security and accessibility.

Therefore, this article addresses an important question: whether any of these factors inform the planning and implementation of the marketing mix of three private universities - Adeleke University, Ede; Caleb University, Imota; and Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti. The challenge, however, is that while some customers may be aware of what they want from their choice of higher institutions, they do not make these decisions. For some, the decision of the University of choice is made by other family members. Therefore, this article aims to assess and compare the marketing mix of three different institutions and how they perform.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Unlike other regular goods and commodities, branding in terms of universities in Nigeria has the interest fewer researchers. That is why it is not difficult to understand why there are fewer studies on tertiary education branding. The few studies on this

issue have highlighted the growing competition among existing universities, especially private universities. Therefore, this highlights the need for adequate and very effective marketing communication campaigns to improve University brands and foster the relationship between universities and prospective consumers or their services (Chapleo, 2010; Ivy, 2008; Saginova & Belyansky, 2008).

Researchers like Dekimpe and Hassens (1995) have written extensively on how various types of communication strategies in marketing, for instance, have been applied and evaluated by tertiary institutions. These marketing strategies include advertising, public relations, personal selling, and other promotional tools. This confirms that universities and colleges use marketing strategies to reach their target customers. Moreover, they do this because of the absolute necessity caused by intense competition in the tertiary education market.

Nevertheless, while several studies highlight the performance of marketing communications strategies that different brands have employed, very few studies focus on the marketing strategies employed by these private universities. As will be the focus of the article, these strategies are the seven marketing mixes. The seven marketing mixes include programme, price, people, process, and physical evidence.

Kotler (2008) developed the seven marketing mix for educational service marketing. For him, when this marketing communication mix is strategically applied, it can influence the target audience's perception. This influence is because people are more likely to establish shared meaning, understanding, and relationships through communication that occurs frequently and is coherent. Nevertheless, Kotler emphasises that some of these marketing communications may focus on achieving instant awareness and deal with challenges related to brand image and preference, particularly regarding their target market. In contrast, they could have approached communication from the point of managing the consumers' buying process, particularly during these stages: pre-selling, selling, consuming, and post-consuming. Therefore, private universities and their marketers need to assess the influence of each communication strategy at different levels of consumer perception.

Consequently, this article aims to assess the marketing mix as marketing communication strategies of three private Universities in Nigeria,

namely: Adeleke University, Caleb University, and Afe Babalola University. Finally, it will also assess how communication strategies achieve the intended effect.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

Specifically, this study aims to assess the marketing mix as part of the communication strategies employed by the following private universities in Nigeria; Adeleke University, Caleb University, and Afebabalola University. Additionally, this study will assess the impact of marketing communication strategies used by the above universities in Nigeria in helping customers of higher institutions make their choices of universities. Finally, the study will also identify some of the marketing strategies used if these marketing communication strategies meet their objectives, how effective they were, and if they influenced the decisions of customers in choosing higher institutions of learning.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are marketing communication strategies employed by the selected private universities in South-West, Nigeria, to communicate with their customers?
- To what extent do the marketing communication strategies employed by the private universities in South-West Nigeria meet their objectives?

2. Literature Review

Some marketing communication studies have focused on how businesses can sell themselves and their products to various stakeholders. This highlights the critical role marketing communication plays in the success of a business. Scholars like Varey (2001:4) emphasised that marketing communication provides analytical and constructive knowledge about businesses and their products. This is an example of communication woven to focus on and deliver the critical message to the right audience. Also, its core goal is to meet the immediate customer's needs and draw prospects to foster business growth (Grinuite, 2000).

For private universities, studies like that of Grinuite (2000) imply that they need to implement marketing communication because it will help them provide sufficient information about the University's critical products to their customers. However, according to Porter (1996), strategy is simply being different; that is, a business's ability to select a different set of

actions or events to a unique combination of values (Porter, 1986). He further argued that strategy is about a brand's competitive position, how it sets itself apart from others, and about adding and defining its value. Furthermore, all of these are done using a mix of activities that are different from the ones used by most competitors (Porter, 1986). Therefore, we can define marketing communication strategy as selecting various activities to effectively communicate a unique mix of values that can be delivered adequately.

For Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, and Terbalancle (2004), marketing communication strategies is an activity that begins by distinguishing customer groups, identifying their needs, mixing the needs with the organisation's offer, and effectively selling the offer to stakeholders. This means that implementing customers' needs is only one part, so organisations must give themselves an advantage over their competitors, mainly when they offer similar products. Customer retention is also critical. As Kotler (1999) noted, retaining customers is far cheaper than obtaining them. However, his study also found that customers that have been won do not remain forever. For instance, students may leave their current program and transfer to another university, and other customers' perceptions about the universities might be affected when this happens. Therefore, a university can benefit from designing a market strategy that helps it compete well with others offering similar or the same services. To design these strategies, they must first analyse their customers' needs and follow that up with analysing their competitors.

Therefore, their marketing communication strategies should follow the organisation's vision, strategy, and mission (Fill, 1999). An effective marketing communications strategy is consistent across all the communication messages and channels. In addition, using consistent themes is a great way to build trust and coherence in how the audience perceives the message.

Nevertheless, Sargeant (2005) stated that several problems might exist for private Universities trying to build and execute their marketing communication strategies. Some of the challenges they may face include:

- The management and academic units may have conflicting ideas. For example, the responsibility to deal with customers between departments and the central administrative functions may differ.

- They may lack strategic insights and perspectives. For example, universities run courses to maintain the glory or status of the University instead of running those courses based on their demand or economic viability.
- Preference towards academics. Some people consider academic mission more critical than marketing the institution (p.297).

Therefore, the marketing communication strategies need to have values; they should not be common and should not have strategically common equivalents for the resource skill. Also, to formulate a competitive marketing (communication) strategy, universities need to reorganise the relationships between marketing mix elements. They need to conduct in-depth analyses and assessments of the impact of competitive and market conditions on formulating a

marketing mix. More importantly, they must interact effectively to change customers' behaviour and meet their needs.

2.1 Marketing Mix of the Universities

Two scholars, Kotler and Fox (1995), developed a version of the marketing mix for universities in their study titled, Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions. They developed education marketing mix as programme, price, promotion, place, people, process, and physical evidence. Other scholars who have written on this came up with programme, price, promotion, placement, people, process, and physical evidence (Ivy, 2008). This study, however, will assess the elements of the marketing mix for educational services using the following: programme, price, place, people, process, physical evidence, and promotion.

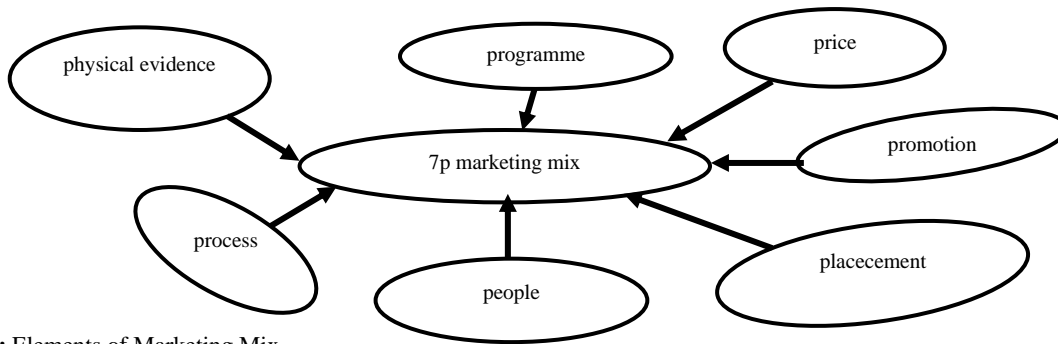


Figure 1: Elements of Marketing Mix
Source: Ivy, (2008)

2.1.1 Programme

Private universities need to schedule periodic programme modifications and evaluations. They should also consider programmes that are more central than others. While auxiliary programmes such as recreational activities may be easier to modify, others may not be so easy. Kotler and Fox (1995) mention that flagship programs play a significant role in attracting customers. These may include a variety of short courses, academic quality, and sporting programmes. Some academic programmes are core while others are catch courses.

Kotler and Fox (2012) describe the programme in curricula and services. For others, it is seen from its dominant intangible quality. However, education, although intangible, also has its tangible elements. Institutions provide service activities like teaching and customer contact – the intangible element. It also provides teaching and learning materials like students' textbooks, laboratory equipment, electricity, and infrastructure – tangible element. However,

Adam and Mamound (2014) highlighted that the University's curriculum must be developed correctly and adapted to suit the educational needs of the students. According to Kotler and Fox (1995) quality of higher education institution (universities) services becomes essential as a trigger for customer satisfaction.

2.1.2 Pricing

Price may be defined as the amount of money that a buyer gives in exchange for a service he is provided by a seller (Lamb; Hair; McDaniel, Boshoff & Terbalancle, 2004). In the context of tertiary institutions, prices are defined by the cost of tuition fees and other items or services offered by the school. Pricing influences marketing communication strategies for private institutions majorly. This is because most students and parents are often concerned about the high cost of tertiary education and its implications on their finances. Kotler and Fox (1995) agree that students' prices comprise monetary, effort, physical, and time costs. For example, parents

may accrue a time cost when they spend much time visiting their child or ward in school.

Furthermore, Gajic (2012) explains that price may be an economic and psychological element. If it is viewed from an economic standpoint, the price could be said to determine income and profit. While from the psychological viewpoint, price determines the value of the service.

2.1.3 Place

Place or distribution is the third element of the higher education marketing mix. The place is simply the method of distribution the universities adopt to provide their services. In this case, service refers to lectures the students receive. Therefore, place refers to where they receive this service – lecture and whether the condition of the place meets the students' expectations. For Kotler (2008), place or distribution is "the availability of education/programme to potential students in the most convenient and accessible way." Therefore, part of the universities' responsibilities is to provide convenient and accessible venues for students (their customers) to receive lectures.

Gajic (2012) opines that in order to create a competitive edge strategically, a place reflects the need and requirements of the University's target market, in this case, parents and students. Furthermore, he adds that institutions must find ways to draw "users" to the existing building (p 35).

Additionally, some private universities use distance learning and contemporary technology to enhance their competitive advantage. According to Adam and Mammud (2014), opportunities for distance learning have sprung from post, email, video, teleconferencing, and the internet.

2.1.4 People

Regarding educational services, people are always the focus, which requires a high level of interaction. Since it requires a considerable level of interaction, the delivery of its service and performance is critical. For instance, the University's fate is decided at this point – interaction with the customer (Ruskin-Brown, 2006). He explains the reason for this: "The customer 'consumes' the service as it is performed, and at the same time forms an impression of its quality, level of satisfaction, and the basis on which they will, or will not buy again and also recommend the firm (University) to others (who have the potential to be customers too)". When it comes to university service

providers, both the teaching fraternity and the non-teaching community, directly and indirectly, associated with rendering services in the school, may fall under this umbrella.

Therefore, the people element of the University marketing mix refers to everyone, especially humans, who renders their services and directly or indirectly influences how customers perceive the institution. For example, customer perception may start from how the direct service providers appear, how they behave, and their attitudes (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996; Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2005; Tareef & Balas, 2010). Therefore, the element of people refers to all the university staff and students already enrolled who interact with prospective students and other students already part of the school community.

2.1.5 Process

The process is how the service is delivered. It is also seen as the procedures by which the buyers acquire and utilise the product and the flow of activities involved in creating, distributing, and offering educational services (Goldsmith, 1999; Palmer, 2005). This also includes handling enrolment, registration, enquiries, course evaluation, result dissemination, policies, mechanisms, employee discretion, graduation, and enquiries (Ivy, 2004; Soedijati & Pratminingsih, 2011; Adam & Mamoud, 2014).

In addition, a university grading system that is done accurately, correct handling of accommodation processes, and schedule of classes are some tertiary institution processes that can bring about customer (student and parents) satisfaction (Adam and Mamoud, 2014). Hoffman and Bateson (2011) add that rules and regulations also profoundly affect the students' experience of the university service. Therefore, delivering services can position a private university differently from others.

2.1.6 Physical Facilities and Evidence

This refers to every tangible or physical structure, item, or object a private school provides for its students. These may include items like brochures, infrastructure, technology, and books. Physical facilities are excellent for image building and communicating to existing and potential customers the nature of service they will receive in the universities. Standard infrastructure, for instance, can give prospective customers the impression of a conducive learning environment. It could also communicate to the potential students that the

institution cares about their learning and where they learn. Additionally, it gives potential customers an idea of customer satisfaction level with the University (Ivy & Fattal). Therefore, physical

facilities can strategically influence how customers perceive the quality of the institution's service delivery (Gajic, 2012).

Table 1: Elements of Physical Evidence

Facility Exterior	Facility Interior	Other tangibles
Exterior design	Interior design	Business cards
Signage	Equipment	Stationary
Parking	Signage	Billing statements
Landscape	Layout	Reports
Surrounding environment	Air quality/temperature	Employee dress
		Uniforms
		Brochures
		Web pages
		Virtual service scape

Source: Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2006)

2.1.7 Promotion

Promotion is crucial to the service marketing mix or communication (Fill, 2002). Therefore, private universities must inform their target audience about their services through prompt, timely, and coordinated promotional strategies. Their target audience may include existing customers and prospective customers.

Marketing communication is essential but has challenges, particularly in service delivery. For instance, since the nature of services is characterised by the intangibility of the service product, it becomes necessary to be decisive when convincing customers of the intangible product's value. This means that brands in the service delivery sector might have more work than they imagined. Gajic (2012) stresses this point as he states that promotion will only be efficient if instruments such as product, price, distribution, people, process, and environment play their roles efficiently. Therefore, private universities must do more than develop a good programme for promotional purposes.

3. Methodology

This study employed the survey research design and adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative data were collected via in-depth interviews. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data by generalising the population's findings. Furthermore, secondary data were obtained from the selected private universities.

3.1 Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What marketing communication strategies are employed by the

selected private universities in South-West, Nigeria, to communicate with their customers?

Theme: various types of Marketing Communication tools employed by the three selected private universities

The respondents agree that they implemented all seven marketing mix elements based on the data gathered. The seven elements of the marketing mix listed by participating private universities include programme, price, process, physical evidence and people. Although they all agreed to have combined these different marketing mixes, their responses to the question on which marketing mix elements had been used to communicate with their target customers were diverse. For example, Afe Babalola University reported that they use all seven elements of the marketing mix as tools for marketing communication strategy. In addition, Afe Babalola University also reported having been integrating the marketing communication tools as they work simultaneously.

On the other hand, Adeleke University Reports applied five tools: promotion, programme, people, place, and price. Furthermore, Caleb University revealed that they applied four marketing mix elements for their marketing communication strategy. Although Caleb University claimed to have the same number of tools employed for their marketing communication strategy, the mixture of these tools is quite different from the other universities and vice versa. For instance, Caleb University declared promotion, people, affordable price and place as their marketing mix.

The responses indicate that only Afe Babalola University, of the three universities studied, employed every element of the marketing mix to communicate with their customers. The others, Caleb and Adeleke University, did not.

Research Question 2: To what extent do the marketing communication strategies employed by the private universities in South-West Nigeria meet their objectives?

Theme: How marketing communication strategies employed by private universities in South-West Nigeria meet set objectives.

Afe Babalola University employs seven elements of the marketing communication mix to be able to help them interact with their target customers. Additionally, the University employed an element of people by relying primarily on its founders' personalities to sell and promote the institution's image. Based on data gathered, this strategy has drawn some levels of customer satisfaction and, in turn, has enhanced good relationships with them.

In addition, respondents from Afe Babalola University said they often organised forums for parents and intending parents where the University explains why they employ whatever strategy they employ, particularly concerning price. The officer explained price in relation to time cost; that is, the amount of time saved considering a four-year course in their school could extend to six or eight years in other schools. Furthermore, Afe Babalola University also saw the concept of price in relation to the dynamic nature of the course of study. For instance, the course covered the danger of constantly being on the road due to frequent university strike actions and cultism. In addition to the danger element, student safer (security) was also mentioned as part of the price definition. Price also covered aspects such as improving students' reasoning ability, enlightenment, and international connection.

On the other hand, Adeleke University has a marketing strategy that first tries to find out and analyse how customers see the University and how it prefers to be seen by it. This analysis begins by identifying and improving the University's selling points – people (such as students and staff), physical evidence, place, and promotion. Based on this analysis, the University focuses on improving the standard of staff and their qualification. First, it introduced a feasibility course, which aimed at helping staff members change their orientation. This course covered both academic and non-academic staff members. The University sees its staff as the focal point for building the school's image. They are, therefore, taught communication skills, courtesy, politeness, and managing adverse reactions.

Furthermore, the University also uses physical evidence. For example, each school has its building, and the students and staff members were encouraged to wear their identification tags and dress corporately. Additionally, the school's management changed the physical environment to reflect the international standards. For example, they landscaped the school and built hotels, hostel facilities, and other state-of-the-art lecture halls. These facilities served as their unique selling points. The university hotels also had facilities that would encourage customers to have their vacation in a relaxing and serene environment. This, according to the University, will serve as physical evidence that would encourage customers to choose the University.

The promotion was applied through the use of social media. They did this through the University's website. Through the website, the University has been able to influence potential customers' perceptions of the University and what it stands for. Along with websites, newsletters were used to share information with the general public about what the institution stands for and its services. Promotions were also carried out on the radio and in newspapers. For them, promotion was the most successful marketing mix in attracting prospective customers. Nevertheless, the school successfully blended all its marketing communication elements.

At Caleb University, the marketing mix elements are mixed to create a positive outcome. At first, promotion, people, and place elements were combined; however, of all the elements mixed, there was more emphasis on place. At first, it began by emphasising that it was the first and only University in Lagos State to target Lagos-conscious people. While it worked for some time as they got many intakes, it is no longer effective as there are other universities in Lagos State. Therefore, its focus has switched to promotions mixed with physical evidence and place. It continuously applied this strategy and updated it as time went by. One of the things they did was create a WhatsApp group page for all existing parents where they received constant information on the school's activities. Caleb University also made telephone calls to parents and students to keep them updated on the school's activities. Parents could also interact with the school through the parents' forum. In addition, the University created jingles and shared flyers that advertised some of its remarkable living and lecture facilities. The school also sent bulk SMS to potential parents and visited secondary schools and JAMB coaching centres as part of its marketing drive.

Table 1.1: Elements of Marketing Communication Strategies employed by Afe Babalola University

Marketing Communication Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	NR	Mean	SD
Programme	167(74.8)	47(21.1)	9(4.0)			3.7	0.55
Price	110(49.3)	94(42.2)	13(5.8)	3(1.3)	3(1.3)	3.3	0.67
Physical evidence	210(94.2)	7(3.1)	3(1.3)	3(1.3)		3.9	0.44
People	91(40.8)	122(54.7)	10(4.5)			3.3	0.57
Place	160(71.7)	56(24.7)	7(3.1)			3.5	0.53
Process	154(69.1)	55(24.7)	14(6.3)			3.6	0.60
Promotion	113(50.7)	97(43.5)	13(5.8)			3.5	0.60

KEY: SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, D= Disagreed, SD= Strongly Disagreed, NR= No Response
 Decision Rule if mean is ≤ 1.49= strongly disagreed; 1.5 to 2.49=disagreed; 2.5 to 3.49=agreed; 3.5 to4.49= Strongly agreed
Field, 2017

The table above represents the elements of marketing communication strategies which Afe Babalola University employs when engaging its students and potential students. 95% agree that Afe Babalola University employs programmes to communicate with its students for the first element, programme. However, 4% disagree. In addition, 91.5% agree that price is one of the significant elements of its marketing communication strategies. Around 2.1% of the population disagreed, and 1.3% could not give a response. Regarding physical evidence, 96.3% agree that the school employs this element, and 2.6% disagree. People element a percentage of 95.5% agreement ratio, while 4.5% disagree.

Regarding the place, 96% agree that it is one of the university's marketing communication strategies, but around 3.1% disagree. Regarding the process, 93.8% of the respondents confirmed that it is one of the elements of marketing communication strategies; however, 6.1% do not agree. Around 94.2% of respondents agree that promotion is one of the elements of communication the university uses. However, 5.8% do not agree. Based on the results from the above table, all seven marketing communication tools were used for information sharing. The average responses show that respondents strongly agree that programme (Mean = 3.5%, SD = 0.55), physical evidence (Mean=3.9, SD=0.44), place (Mean=3.3, SD = 0.53), process (Mean = 3.6, SD= 0.60), promotion (Mean = 3.5, SD=0.60), price (Mean=3.3, SD= 0.67), and people (Mean = 3.3, SD= 0.57) were employed in engaging students.

Table 1.2: Elements of Marketing Communication Strategies employed by Adeleke University

Marketing Communication Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	NR	Mean	SD
Programme	10(20.0)	28(56.0)	12(24.0)			2.9	0.63
Price	47(94.0)	2(4.0)	1(2.0)			3.9	0.34
Physical evidence	48(96.0)	1(2.0)	1(2.0)			3.9	0.31
People	48(96.0)	2(4.0)				4.0	0.20
Place	34(68.0)	14(28.0)	1(2.0)	1(2.0)		3.6	0.64
Process	17(34.0)	26(52.0)	6(12.0)		1(2.0)	3.3	0.65
Promotion	3(6.0)	11(22.0)	22(44.0)	14(28.0)		2.1	0.87

KEY: SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, D= Disagreed, SD= Strongly Disagreed, NR= No Response
 Decision Rule if mean is ≤ 1.49= strongly disagreed; 1.5 to 2.49=disagreed; 2.5 to 3.49=agreed; 3.5 to4.49= Strongly agreed
Field, 2017

The table above shows all the marketing communication strategies used by Adeleke University to reach existing and potential customers. Therefore, 10 (20.0%) of the respondents strongly agree that the programme is one of the marketing communications strategies employed by Adeleke University and another 28(56.0%) of the population agree, while a total of 12 (24.0%) disagree. For physical evidence, 48 (96.0%) of the respondents strongly agree, and 1 (2.0%) agree that physical evidence is among the elements. Nevertheless, 1 (2.0%) respondent disagreed. As for the people element, the response shows that 48 (96.0%) strongly agree, and two respondents (2.0%) agree that Adeleke University applies this element as part of its marketing communications strategies. Finally, as for the place, 34 (68.0%) of respondents strongly agree that place is an element of marketing communication strategies applied by the University, and 14 (28.0%) do not agree, while 1 (2.0%) strongly disagree.

Therefore, it can be said that Adeleke University employed the elements as follows: programme (Mean= 2.9, SD= 0.63); price (Mean= 3.9, SD= 0.34); physical evidence (Mean= 3.9, SD= 0.31); people (Mean= 4.0, SD= 0.20);

place (Mean= 3.6, SD= 0.64); and process (Mean= 3.3, SD= 0.65) as marketing communication tools to transfer messages to respondents.

Table 1.3: Elements of Marketing Communication Strategy employed by Caleb University

Marketing Communication Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	NR	Mean	SD
Programme	6(10.7)	3(5.4)	45(80.4)	2(3.6)		2.1	0.56
Price	6(10.7)	47(83.9)	3(5.4)			2.9	0.13
Physical evidence		3(5.4)	50(98.3)	3(5.4)		2.1	1.03
People	3(5.4)	3(5.4)	50(89.3)			2.2	0.94
Place	6(10.7)	15(26.8)	33(89.3)		2(3.6)	2.5	0.89
Process	6(10.7)	6(10.7)	44(78.6)			2.4	0.64
Promotion		3(5.4)	53(94.6)			2.2	0.33

KEY: SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, D= Disagreed, SD= Strongly Disagreed, NR= No Response
 Decision Rule if mean is ≤ 1.49= strongly disagreed; 1.5 to 2.49=disagreed; 2.5 to 3.49=agreed; 3.5 to4.49= Strongly agreed
Field, 2017

From the table above, it can be deduced that Adeleke University employed the elements as follows price (Mean= 2.9, SD= 0.13) and place (Mean= 2.5, SD= 0.89). Whereas the respondents held contrary opinion when it came to programme (Mean= 2.1, SD= 0.56), physical evidence (Mean= 2.1, SD= 1.03), people (Mean= 2.2, SD= 0.94), process (Mean= 2.4, SD= 0.64) and promotion (Mean= 2.2, SD= 0.33) as the five elements were rated lowly. Therefore, one may infer that Caleb University used marketing communications strategies such as price, physical evidence and place to spread their intended messages than they used programme, price promotion and process.

4. Findings and Recommendations

The selected private universities in South-West Nigeria use marketing communication tools to communicate with their customers.

From the findings in this study, all private universities used elements of the marketing mix as their tools for their marketing communication, mainly to reach their different customers. Afe Babalola University, for instance, applied all seven marketing mixes as part of its communication tools, while Adeleke University employed five marketing mix elements as part of its marketing communication programme. In addition, Caleb University employs marketing mix elements for its marketing communication programme. All three private universities agree that they have integrated marketing to communicate with their customers clearly, and findings in this research show that they did. Therefore, this study agrees with Pour, Nazari, and Emami's (2013) findings that when these elements are appropriate, the aim is often to attain the marketing goal.

How marketing communication strategies are employed by the selected private universities meet their set objectives

In terms of meeting their marketing communications objectives, the three universities used for this research applied different marketing mixes to meet their objectives. However, the three private universities' elements or marketing communications objectives are similar. Ultimately, this confirms the position of Porter (1996 pg 3), who states that "strategy means performing different activities to those performed by rivals or performing the same activities differently."

Although these private universities have the same tools for their marketing communications programmes, they operate differently when executing them and engaging customers. For instance, Adeleke University began by first analysing the market; that is, by analysing how people see them and how they want people to see them. Therefore, Adeleke University implemented its strategies while identifying and analysing customers' needs and wants.

Furthermore, Afe Babalola University exploited the image and personality of its founder to execute the people element because they found that it had the potential to open doors for the institution in terms of branding and marketability. This peculiar feature – using the image and profile of the person named after the school – is only peculiar to Afe Babalola University alone. Moreover, this strategy is peculiar to only Afe Babalola University as no other university under study has employed such. Consequently, the ability to outshine other universities to gain more market share and customers requires strategy.

Caleb University has a different opinion regarding meeting its set objectives. For example, it makes use of promotion and people, and it does this by making prompt payment of its staff's salaries. However, the University did not mention that they invest in academic and non-academic staff members.

Effectiveness of the marketing communication strategies employed by selected private universities in South-West Nigeria

Students in Afe Babalola University agree that the institution's seven marketing communication tools were mainly employed to reach out to customers. Other features mentioned by parents include admission processes, lecturers' qualifications and reputation, and parents' forum. In addition, the personality of the founder and the school's facility are some significant elements that influenced how they perceive the school. This, therefore, agrees with Ademola, Ogundiper, and Babatunde's (2014) findings that most students in Afe Ababalola University selected the institution because of the founder's personality. Unfortunately, this is a feature some private universities have not yet tried to exploit.

Respondents from Adeleke University revealed that items such as programme, price, physical evidence, people, process, and place were employed as marketing communication tools, whereas the communication officers stated that the University applied promotion, programme, people, place, and price. This means that the University has been communicating with the process and physical evidence elements even though they may not be aware they are doing so. Nevertheless, parents reveal that they learned about the University from the radio and a website. The student's parents also mentioned the following as essential in helping them decide: price, process (registration, accommodation, and results), and programme.

Based on findings from this research, Caleb University used the following marketing communications elements: physical evidence, price, and place, and this helped them disseminate their intended messages. Furthermore, the study also showed that the University used price, physical evidence and place elements to convey its intended messages, not price, people, promotion, and place. Students agreed that the school uses place and price, while parents admitted that the school uses promotion. The students also stated that physical evidence was used to engage them. Frequent information about the school's admission was a

critical factor influencing the parents' choice of Caleb University.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research concludes that marketing communication strategies and their elements influence the choices of private universities in South-West Nigeria by parents and students. In addition, this study also establishes a correlation between universities' marketing communications elements and their performance indicators: brand awareness, brand image, perception, relationship building and referral. This invariably affects the choice of private universities.

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations are made. First, private universities should mix their marketing communication tools strategically to effectively communicate the unique value they offer through their services. Secondly, universities need to focus more on the people element. Factors such as the lecturers' academic qualifications, communication skills, and personality improve the universities' images and all aspects of the people element.

Furthermore, universities should work hard on improving their relationship with customers; this will contribute to retaining them. Retaining customers, therefore, should be part of the marketing communications objectives. In addition, private universities like Afe Babalola University should be more informed about the price element.

Finally, its messages marketing communication messages should be coherent and clear. It should also be focused on the target audience. By doing this, students and parents will be better equipped with the knowledge tools to make better choices for where they would lie to study.

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