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Contribution to Higher Education in Ghana: Improving Student Enrolment through Application of the 7Ps of Marketing

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Abstract:

Within the competition in higher education industry, academic institutions should identify and address the needs of students to attract more and to retain the existing students. The relationship between marketing strategies and efforts of higher education institutions in Ghana and their performance in terms of student enrolment is poorly understood. The aim of the study was to apply the 7Ps of marketing (product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and process) to investigate the impact of education marketing on enrolment of students at a higher education institution in Ghana. This was a case study with a quantitative research approach and was carried out from November to December 2019. Random sampling was used to select 150 students of the study institution. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the study participants on the relevant education marketing variables based on the 7Ps of marketing. Four dominant factors accounted for student decisions to enrol at the institution, with each of the factors accounting for $\geq 65\%$. The most important factor was quality of lecturers (people), followed by teaching practices (process), discounts and scholarships (price), and employment opportunities of the course (product). Focusing on promotion component of the marketing mix, the most common mode by which the study participants got to know the institution, was through family and relatives (80.7%), followed by friend (72.7%). There are two main conclusions arising from the study. Firstly, higher education institutions in Ghana can increase enrolment of students by focusing on matters related to quality of teaching. Secondly, such institutions can strengthen their promotion by building a strong relationship with the community.

Keywords: Marketing, Ghana, sampling, education

1. Introduction

Marketing plays an essential role in many organizations and is defined as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (Gamble, Gilmore, McCartan-Quinn, & Durkan, 2011). The actual concept of marketing originated with the market mix or four p's including product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler & Keller, 2009; Krush, Sohi & Saini, 2015). The marketing mix is an essential tool that assists businesses organizations comprehend what the product or service can provide and how successful marketing of the product can be anchored on. The peculiarity of marketing for the higher education industry requires additional components beyond the ordinary market mix. According to Ivy (2008), the extra components that must be included in the marketing mix to address service needs are packaging, partnership, programming, positioning, and people. Each of the additional five p's adds further dimension to the market mix for higher education. In marketing for higher education, promotion may have the central role in the marketing mix. This includes the selling and advertising that really help market the organization almost more than any other of the p's.

In Ghana, one of the most important service industries that emerged in the last two decades is higher education provided by private universities, and like every other industry, it is marked by competition. Lynch and Baines (2004) reported that sustainable competitive advantages of higher education institutions are usually based on superior knowledge, reputation, innovation or architectural related advantages. Higher education as a service entails addressing the needs of students through knowledge acquisition and provision of specific academic programmes. In this case students are the costumers and the object of all marketing activities. There is the need to strategically plan marketing of higher education taking cognizance of the nature of the service and identifying more creative ways to satisfy student needs and preferences. Aurier and de Lanauze (2012) reported that building good relationships between higher education institutions and their students is essential for their long-term success and branding. In an era of intense competition in the higher education industry in Ghana, the importance of education marketing research cannot be overemphasized, especially for the private universities which in most cases are regarded secondary to public universities.

2. Statement of the Problem

The higher education system in Africa has been experiencing unprecedented numerical growth in the last two decades. In many African countries, there existed only a few public universities which were incapable of meeting the ever-growing demand of their citizens for university education. With the liberalization of higher education in these countries, many private tertiary institutions sprang up to fill the gap and address the problem. In Ghana, the landscape of higher education has changed tremendously with the continuous proliferation of private universities (Ray & Ayam, 2017). According to the National Accreditation Board of Ghana, currently, there are 81 private and 10 public accredited universities in the country (Ntim, 2014). In addition, there are 111 other accredited higher education institutions in Ghana (Ray & Ayam, 2017). In 2015, there were about 65,890 applicants in private and 228,347 in public universities. These numbers of applicants are woefully inadequate for the total number of higher education institutions in Ghana, and depict the stiff competition among higher education institutions in the country. Another dimension to the issue is the globalization occurring in higher education with foreign institutions offering programmes in Ghana. For example, Lancaster University in England has opened a campus in Ghana which allows students across Africa to access the university's academic programmes locally. Many universities in Ghana, especially, private institutions have also formed partnerships with universities in the western world. In order to stay in business and also to develop a sustainable competitive advantage in the changing higher education landscape in Ghana, higher education institutions should satisfy the needs of their customers by adding value. This has resulted in a wide variety of academic programmes in Ghana with flexible study periods. It is important to note that, the proliferation of private higher education institutions in Ghana applies mainly to academic programmes in the Humanities, Arts and Business. Due to the high capital cost, many private institutions in Ghana are unable to offer Science, Medicine and Engineering. For example, of the 81 accredited private universities in Ghana, only two offers a programme in Medicine. Competition in the higher education system in Ghana is projected to increase in the foreseeable future, making marketing very important in the industry.

Within the competition in higher education industry, academic institutions should identify and address the needs of students to attract more and to retain the existing students. This brings to the fore, research on education marketing and practical applications of the findings. So far, in Ghana, very few studies have been carried out in this area (Bamfo & Atara, 2013; Fosu & Poku, 2014). Consequently, the relationship between marketing strategies and efforts of higher education institutions in Ghana and their performance in terms of student enrolment is poorly understood. In line with this, the specific factors of an academic institution that are likely to attract prospective students in the country and the most effective marketing promotional channels to enhance enrolment are not fully unknown. This situation presents a major challenge in achieving success in educational marketing in Ghana. Several lines of evidence indicate that the impact of educational marketing factors on student enrolment tends to vary geographically (Haur, 2009; Fosu, 2014), and this highlights the need for local studies in addressing the marketing needs of higher educational institutions. This study therefore fills an important knowledge gap, and the findings would have practical applications to higher educational institutes in Ghana particularly the private universities.

3. Study Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study was to apply the 7Ps of marketing (product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and process) to investigate the impact of education marketing on enrolment of students at a selected university in Ghana. The institution selected for the study is designated as University X in this manuscript and the basis of the selection is the institution's rapid growth, branding and competitiveness.

The specific objectives of the study were to—

- identify the factors of a higher education institution that are most likely to attract students in Ghana.
- determine the effective promotional activities of a Ghanaian higher education institution.

4. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

4.1. The Elements Used in Marketing Mix for Higher Education

4.1.1. Product

The product of a marketing mix is what is being sold (Enache, 2011; Rodić-Lukić & Lukić, 2016). In the case of a higher education institution, students are the costumers and the degree awarded is the product (Ivy, 2008). The way the degree programme is structured and designed is crucial to the product element of the marketing mix. The curriculum in terms of its contents and duration must be developed and adapted to meet the needs of the students.

4.1.2. Price

Price refers to the amount a customer pays for a product and is the only variable that has implications for revenue. In the case of an academic institution, the price element of the marketing mix is dominated by what is being charged for the degree or tuition fees that are required to enrol at the university (Rodić-Lukić & Lukić, 2016; Samani, Hashemi, Shahbazi & Sarhadi, 2017). Price could also play a role in differentiating one service from another and therefore the customer's perceptions of value obtained from a service and the interaction of price and quality are essential considerations in many service price sub mixes. The pricing element not only affects the revenues that a university derives from its enrolment, but also affects student perceptions of the quality.

4.1.3. Place

Place refers either to the physical location where an organization carries out business or the distribution channels used to reach markets (Ivy, 2008). In the case of a higher education institution, it is the distribution method that the institution employs to provide tuition to its students (Enache, 2011; Rodić-Lukić & Lukić, 2016). From the classroom, modes of tuition have expanded to a wide spectrum of alternatives such as virtual learning media, like as Blackboard and Moodle.

4.1.4. Promotion

Promotion refers to marketing communications. It encompasses all the tools that universities employ to provide the market with information on what it offers (Rodić-Lukić & Lukić, 2016). This could range from basic promotional activities such as advertising to more advanced activities such as public relations.

4.1.5. People

This refers to the human factors who participate in service delivery. For an academic institution, these could be both academic, administrative and support staff. Sometimes student perceptions of teaching staff reputations can be a strong factor in the choice process of selecting an institution to study (Ivy, 2008; Samani et al., 2017). The attitude and behavior of administrative and academic support also affect student perceptions of service quality.

4.1.6. Physical Evidence

It is the tangible component of the service offering. It is the physical environment in which service occurs or the space where customers and service personnel interact (Ivy, 2008). A variety of tangible aspects are evaluated by a university's target markets, ranging from the teaching materials to the appearance of the buildings and lecture facilities at the university.

4.1.7. Processes

This is about the procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which service is delivered (Ivy, 2008; Samani et al., 2017). It includes all the administrative and bureaucratic functions of the university. Typical examples of such from the handling of enquiries to registration, from course evaluation to examinations, from result dissemination to graduation, to name but a few.

4.2. Marketing and Higher Education

There has been a real paradigm shift in the governance of the higher education system globally with the incorporation of market-type mechanisms in the last few years. Marketing theories and concepts that have proven effective in business, are increasing being applied by many tertiary level institutions especially, universities (Moogan, 2011; Schofield, Cotton, Gresty, Kneale & Winter, 2013). The higher education industry is characterized by two features that influence the marketing concept that can be applied to it. Firstly, higher education institutions in most countries belong to the non-profit sector, and consequently, application of marketing concepts to the sector do not function as in the business sector, where profit making is the main goal. Secondly, higher education is purely a service, and therefore concepts and theories applicable to marketing of services apply to higher education. The use of marketing concepts in higher education tends to vary widely among countries. For example, application of marketing concepts in higher education has gained significant grounds in the United States as compared to Europe. Even in Europe there are differences, with UK being more market oriented in higher education. In many countries, application of marketing concepts in higher education is not prominent.

It is important to note that the marketing mix is used to a limited extent in higher education, and the different components of the marketing mix have different levels of significance in this sector (Ivy, 2008). Pricing, promotion and product policies tend to be used more in the higher education industry, whereas distribution policy is does not receive any attention at all. Branding tends to be a key marketing concept in the higher education industry and can be considered to be part of both product and promotion policies (Brown & Goonawardana, 2006). In the business sector, branding is usually associated with the creation of images and is aimed at attracting customers and therefore increasing sales. With higher education institutions, the objective of branding is to communicate corporate identity in order to promote attraction and loyalty. Branding is however a bit problematic in the higher education industry due to the high degree of uniformity of the sector resulting in difficulty to differentiate and create unique images for most institutions.

The role of education marketing in higher education including the impact on enrolment has been investigated by several investigators. In Ghana, Fosu and Poku (2014) reported that the essential factors that influence students' choice of university included courses offered, well stocked library and internet, high calibre lecturers, flexible lecture time table, and recognition of qualification by employers. In a Kenyan study by Messah & Immaculate (2011) on student enrolment into private universities, the most effective communication channels for providing information to prospective students were print media; newspapers, brochures and alumni networks. Sarwar (2012) evaluated the factors that inform students' decision in selecting learning programs in higher education institutions in Malaysia. The study showed that, the quality of university teaching was the most important factor, followed by university facilities, program structure and accreditation, campus facilities. In a similar Malaysian study by Haur (2009), content and structure of degree, people (family, friends, peers, and teachers), cost of education, gender and educational background were the significant factors that determined student's intention to study at a higher education institution. In a study carried out in Turkey, Yamamoto (2006) found that families were very influential in students' selection of universities to study.

4.3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study is based on the marketing mix for Higher Education (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Enache, 2011). The marketing mix used in the study comprised product, price, promotion, people, place, process and physical evidence. The different components of the marketing mix are considered as independent variables that affect student enrolment (dependent variable). Different factors were studied for each independent variable. The study participants were required to respond to 11 promotional channels used by the study institution (University X) to reach prospective students. These promotional channels were categorised under the promotion marketing mix component. The study participants were also to respond to 15 factors that influenced their decision to enrol at University X; these factors were appropriately assigned to one of the remaining 6 components of the marketing mix (product, price, people, place, process, physical evidence). The entire conceptual framework of the study is summarised in Figure 1.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design

Research design could be considered as an overall plan for implementing empirical research with a research problem. The research design describes what data is required, what methods are going to be employed to collect and analyse this data, and how these would address the research questions or objectives (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In this study, a case study design was used, as the investigator sought to understand a phenomenon within its real-life context.

5.2. Research Approach

There are two main research approaches to collecting and analyzing data, which are quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative research deals with non-numerical data and helps to address research answers why and how a certain phenomenon may occur rather than how often. *Quantitative research* focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon. A research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods are described as mixed methods. This study used a quantitative research approach as the investigator was interested in exploring the relationship between different variables in order to explain a particular phenomenon.

5.3. Study Population

The study population refers to the entire set of units for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. It is the population from which the study sample is selected. In this study, the population was students of University X which numbered 1,173.

5.4. Sample and Sampling Technique

Our calculated minimum sample size was 150 based on 80% power at the 0.05 level of significance. According to Patton (2006), random sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. Random sampling technique is also used in many aspects of quantitative research. In this study, random sampling was used to ensure that everybody in the population had an equal chance of participating in the study, thereby reducing sampling bias. All enrolled students of University X at the time of the study were eligible to participate in the study. Students of University X who did not have a decision role in selecting the university for their studies were excluded from the study.

5.5. Questionnaire Administration

A questionnaire was administered to the study participants to collect data on the relevant education marketing variables that were needed to address the study objectives. A questionnaire was used as the data collection tool because it provides an inexpensive, flexible and practical way of gathering data from a large audience. The questionnaire used in this study was developed through a literature review of marketing studies carried out in the higher education industry. Before its use, the study questionnaire was pretested with 10 people to ensure their validity and reliability.

5.6. Data Analyses

Data collected in the study was entered into MS-EXCEL and analysed in STATA 12.0. The quantitative data were analysed by data summary approaches such as frequencies, proportions and geometric means; significant association between variables were performed by the Chi-squared test.

5.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues cannot be ignored in human subjects research. Consequently, this study was carried in line with ethical standards in social research as spelt out by Haggerty (2004). Among others, these ethical guidelines included getting approval from the study institution, obtaining informed consent from all the study participants and maintaining adequate confidentiality of the research data.

6. Results

The study participants comprised 53.3% (80) males and 46.7% (70) females and had a mean age of 19.0 (Standard Deviation= 1.3) years. Four programmes of study were represented among the study participants and the most

common was Business Administration (54.3%), followed by Engineering (19.3%), Computer Science (18%), and Management Information Systems (8%). The study participants were at various academic levels of their programme of study including levels 100 (55.3%), 200 (22.6%), 300 (10%) and 400 (12.1%). The demographic features of the study participants are summarised in Table 1.

The factors considered by the study participants in making a decision to enrol in University X are reported in Table 2. Overall, 14 of such factors were cited by the study participants. The most common factor reported by the study participants was the quality of lecturers (79.3%), followed by teaching practices (75.3%). Cafeteria and sufficient playing arena was the least factor (16%) considered by the study participants in making a decision to enrol. The relationship between gender and factors considered in making a decision to enrol in the institution is shown in Figure 2. Males were relatively more represented in 7 of the factors including quality of lecturers, teaching practices, employment opportunities of the course, library and information technology facilities, university affiliation, discounts and scholarships, college location and accessibility. Similarly, females were relatively more represented in the other 7 factors including management team, placement by college, programme fee, previous academic results, provision of extra curriculum activities, building attractiveness and classroom layout, cafeteria and sufficient playing arena. Among the 14 factors, management team was the only factor that showed a significant difference between males and females ($p=0.009$).

On the average the study participants had known University X for 2.8 (Standard Deviation= 0.2) years prior to admission. The study participants were interviewed about how they got to know about the institution and the outcome is reported in Figure 3. Overall, there were 11 ways through which the study participants got to know University X. The more common mode of knowing the institution was through family and relatives (80.7%), followed by friend (72.7%) while the least common mode of knowing the university were through magazines (11.3%) and hoarding boards (11.3%). For the 11 sources of information about University X, males were relatively more represented than females in 8 sources and these included, information from friends, family and relatives, different websites, already enrolled students, Facebook, educational events, hoarding boards, and television (Table 3). Two sources of information were relatively more represented by females than males, and these were newspaper and radio. Magazines as an information source were equally represented by males and females. As shown in Table 3, significant difference between males and females in information sources for prospective students about University X was associated with only Facebook ($p=0.04$).

7. Discussion

Marketing efforts in higher education are geared towards building up a good institutional image, improving the level of satisfaction of students and the stakeholders, gaining competitive advantage and also increasing market share. Consequently, the importance of marketing in higher education cannot be overemphasized though this subject had been relegated to the background in many higher education institutions. The main objective of the study was to investigate the role and function of education marketing in a higher education institution in Ghana. The sample used to address this main objective has a good balance in terms of gender, as there were 80 males and 70 females. The sample also has a good balance in terms of the programme of study, considering the fact all the major programmes of the university are represented. Additionally, all the undergraduate levels including 100, 200, 300 and 400 are also covered in the sample.

In this study, four dominant factors accounted for student decisions to enrol at University X, with each of the factors accounting for $\geq 65\%$. These factors were the quality of lecturers, teaching practices, discounts and scholarships, and employment opportunities of the course. All four factors have previously been reported in other studies as significantly affecting students' decision in enrolment into universities (Porkhrel, 2016). In contrast, none of these factors were reported by a study conducted by Haur (2009) in Malaysia. In the study of Haur (2009), the key factors affecting students' decision to enrol in a university were cost of education, content and structure of degree, people (family, friends, peers, and teachers), gender and educational background. The four dominant factors in the current study illustrate an interesting interconnected relationship. Two of these factors including quality of lecturers and teaching practices relate directly to teaching, which shows the high emphasis most prospective students place on the quality of education of an institution compared to other factors. Though not directly related to teaching, discounts and scholarships enable students to access the teaching practices and lecturers of an institution. The fourth factor, employment opportunities of the course, shows how students link their present academic considerations to the future. It is important that academic institutions take note of the interconnected relationship among the factors discussed above and apply them in their marketing efforts towards increasing student enrolment. The four dominant factors in the current study could also be discussed in the context of the marketing mix elements in education. The peculiarity of marketing for the higher education industry requires additional components beyond the ordinary market mix of product, price, place, and promotion. The extra components included in the marketing mix to address service needs of higher education are people, process and physical evidence. Relating the data of this study to the marketing mix of higher education, one could say that the four dominant factors accounting for student decisions to enrol at University X are represented as, quality of lecturers (people), teaching practices (process), discounts and scholarships (price), and employment opportunities of the course (product). It is interesting to note that two of the dominant factors are represented in the traditional marketing mix (product and price) while the other two factors are represented in additional marketing components specific to service or higher education (process and people). This shows the limitations of applying the traditional marketing mix to higher education as have been emphasized by other researchers. The results of the study indicate that while the seven p's of the marketing mix in higher are all important, University X and probably other universities in Ghana should place emphasis on four of the components including product, price, people and process. Further studies are needed to understand how these marketing mix components interact in the higher educational setting of Ghana.

The data of the study shows that there is a wide range of promotional channels through which prospective students can get to know University X. However, there are two dominant promotional channels including family/relatives (80.7%), and friends (72.7%). By comparison Messah (2011) conducted a study on student enrolment in private universities in Kenya and reported that print media; newspapers, brochures and alumni networks were rated as the most effective promotional channels to prospective students. The identification of family/relatives and friends as effective promotional channels is probably related to the strong ties that one keeps with such people. This relationship has a powerful effect on decision making of many people. The disparity observed in this study with others in relation to market promotional channels and factors affecting students' decision in enrolment could be due to differences in student behaviour in terms of geographical, cultural, economical and educational needs. This underscores the need for more local data to inform marketing decision in higher education.

The study explored the relationship between gender and the factors accounting for student decisions to enrol at University X, as well as the promotional information sources through which students got to know about the institution. Generally, the results showed that male and female prospective students consider the same factors in making enrolment decisions. This is shown in the trend of 13 of the 14 factors which did not show any significant difference between male and female students. The only factor that showed a significant difference between male and female students was management team of the institution. This is interesting and shows female students are more likely attracted to an institution that has a good management team. This concurs with several literatures in business management which shows that females are better managers than males. For example, in a study by Gallup (2016), it was observed that 41% of female managers are engaged at work, compared with 35% of male managers. In fact, female managers of every working-age generation are more engaged than their male counterparts, regardless of whether they have children in their household. The attraction of females to institutions with good management teams could be explored as a marketing tool by universities seeking to step up their female enrolment. Similarly, results of the study show that male and female prospective students tend to be exposed to the same promotional information sources about institutions. This is reflected in the fact that 10 of the 11 promotional information sources did not show any significant difference between males and females. The only promotional information source that showed a significant difference between male and female students was Facebook, and males were more represented. The association of males with Facebook concurs with a recent study which reported that 57% of the global account profiles of Facebook are set to "male" and 43% to "female" and that men account for 35% more active accounts than women. Again, the association of males with Facebook could be explored as a marketing tool by universities and other institutions that aim to target male students.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

There are two main conclusions arising from the study. Firstly, University X can increase enrolment of students by focusing on matters related to quality of teaching. Secondly, the university can strengthen its promotion by building a strong relationship with the community.

There are two main recommendations arising from the study. (1) Marketing education in Ghana should emphasize all the seven elements of the marketing mix for higher education but more emphasis should be placed on product, price, people and process, which represent the four predominant factors associated with student enrolment in this study. (2) Higher education institutions in Ghana which seek to reach prospective students through promotional activities should devise strategies that target friends and family/relatives of the students.

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Appendix

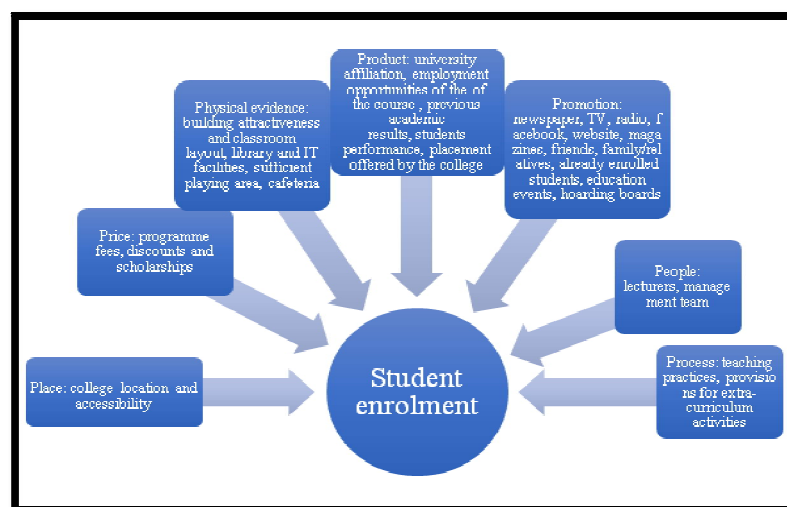


Figure 1: Development of a Conceptual Framework to Study the Impact of Education Marketing on Student Enrolment

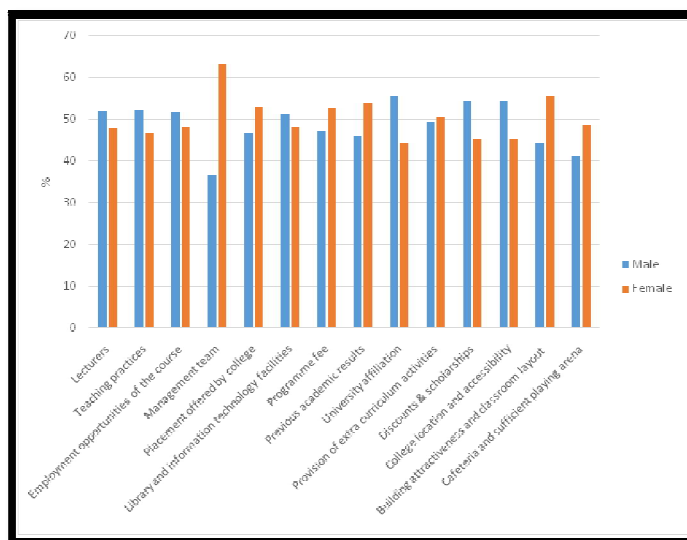


Figure 2: Relationship between Gender and Factors Associated with Student Enrolment at University X

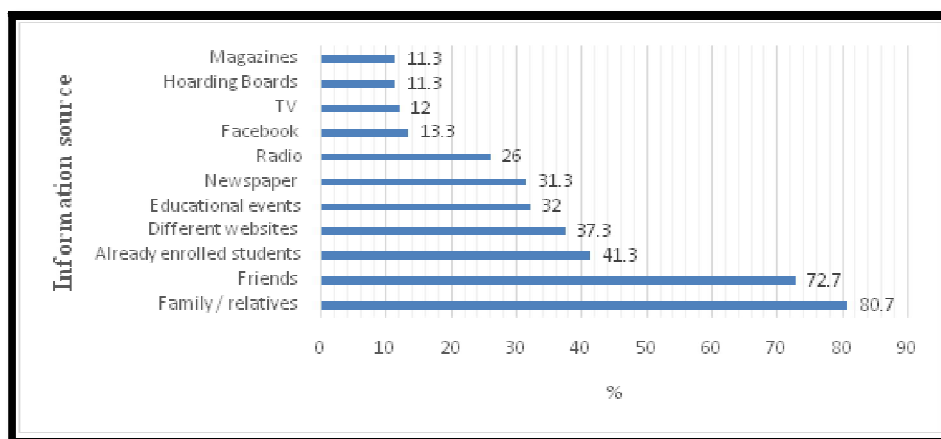


Figure 3: Promotional Information about University X to Prospective Students

Feature	N	%
Gender		
Male	80	53.3
Female	70	46.7
Programme of Study		
Business Administration	82	54.4
Engineering	29	19.3
Computer Science	27	18
Management Information Systems	12	8
Level of Programme		
Level 100	83	55.3
Level 200	34	22.6
Level 300	15	10
Level 400	18	12.1

Table 1: Demographic Features of the Study Participants

Factor	N	%
Quality of lecturers	119	79.3
Teaching practices	113	75.3
Discounts & scholarships	106	70.7
Employment opportunities of the course	102	68
Previous academic results	70	46.7
Building attractiveness and classroom layout	70	46.7
Library and information technology facilities	67	44.7
Placement offered by college	62	41
Provision of extra curriculum activities	58	38.7
University affiliation	51	34
College location and accessibility	47	31.3
Programme fee	42	28
Management team	37	24.7
Cafeteria and sufficient playing arena	24	16

Table 2: Factors Associated with Student Enrolment at University X

Promotional Information Source	Male (%)	Female (%)	Chi 2 value	P value
Friends	55.1	44.9	1.0898	0.297
Family and relatives	51.2	48.9	0.3029	0.582
Newspaper	48.4	51.6	0.1697	0.68
different websites	55.8	44.2	0.453	0.501
Already enrolled students	53.1	46.9	0.0271	0.869
Facebook	78.6	21.4	4.3678	0.037*
Educational events	58.1	41.2	1.9026	0.386
Hoarding boards	58.8	45.2	0.1262	0.722
Television	58.3	41.7	0.2096	0.647
Magazines	50	50	0.1209	0.728
Radio	48.7	51.3	0.6786	0.41

Table 3: Relationship between Gender and Sources of Promotional Information about University X

* P Value Is Significant