A SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLOOK ON BRANDING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The rise in popularity of branding and social media is changing the landscape in consumer marketing. This shift has also affected how higher education institutions build relationships with their stakeholders. With the proliferation of online degree options, distance is less of a consideration in choosing a school and thus institutions are aiming for global visibility and a wider reach. This study explores how branding and social media engagement impacts relationship quality between the university and prospective students, current students and the society at large. It also examines how consistent and targeted branding can increase student numbers. Data collected from institutions across Africa was analysed to determine if a correlation exists between branding and increase in student enrolment in higher institutions in Africa. The study focuses on the common digital and social media marketing utilized by universities across Africa and identifies the purpose of using digital and social media marketing by higher education institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, it also assessed the level of adoption of digital technologies. This study suggests the exploration of market segmentation as a means of meeting the needs of prospective students and increasing visibility and desirability.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Branding, Social Media Marketing, Higher education&Africa

Original Article

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is learning that occurs at a university, college, polytechnic or institute beyond high school level. It is a phase of learning that is accomplished in colleges, universities or academies usually after the completion of secondary education (igi-global.com, 2020). As of today, the African Development Bank estimates that there are 14 million students in higher education in Africa, representing about 6.4% of global tertiary education enrolments. Despite impressive growth in tertiary education in the past two decades, enrolment across Africa still averages at only about 7% of the age cohort necessitating the adoption of branding and marketing strategies as a means of increasing enrolment numbers in institutions across Africa. Private providers have played an important role in growth, and currently enrol 25% of students on the continent (Campos, 2018).

Branding is the marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products. An effective brand strategy gives you a major edge in increasingly competitive marketscompany by means of advertising and distinctive design. The purpose of branding is knowing and consistently living from a true identity, from a real story, so that executive leadership, sales, marketing, product, support, operations, and corporate culture all align and mature in a compelling manner that is meaningful to anyone who encounters the collection of people who make up a brand. A brand is the story of people headed in a direction, inviting you to journey with them (Gall, 2019).

Previous studies have explored how African Universities are adopting branding strategies. Universities generally brand using logos, colours, social media, videos, alumni, recruitment, online design and digital learning. An institution's logo is the most powerful and important university branding decision a school has to make. It's more than having a name and an image. It's about how an institution wants to define itself to be perceived by it's targeted audience. Every college has a unique logo because they want to look different from others in the area. Features such as colour palettes, fonts, and tone make your university what it is. All branding is important, and colours are no exception. While palettes are a small part of a larger picture, it can represent an institution without a logo or words. Colleges on Instagram use highlights to promote different aspects of themselves such as athletics, events, and graduation. Video is useful to show emotions and create a connection with viewers. It's common to see current students talking about their experiences as promotional material. This can be hard-hitting to the right type of prospective student. If they see themselves in there, they're more willing to look into your programs and campus. It helps with university branding because it showcases the population on your campus. An institution's alumni is a unique type of market because you've already sold your product to them. This special audience is important to continue marketing your university. A consistent factor across all of marketing should be branding(Solis, 2019).

Social media encompasses all forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).They are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. A solid social media strategy can help increase student engagement and drive enrolments, and many global educators are already putting best practice tactics to great use to do just that. Some education institutions have already found ways to implement successful social media for higher education, using it to connect with students using relatable voices on the platforms they use every day like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, blogs, websites and YouTube. Social media has massive potential to grow an audience as over 70% of prospective students are using social media to research their college options, which means higher education providers can start communicating with prospects long before an official campus visit. By adhering to the best practices of social media marketing for just one or two platforms, it's possible to create a thriving brand that people recognize long before they start actively researching your college as an option for enrolment.

Consistent interaction on social media also drives enrolment numbers up. It is a great way to reach more people and can exert a major influence on students who are torn between several school options. Research indicates undergraduates are 44% more likely to be influenced by social media when deciding on where to study abroad. Every platform has unique benefits. By focusing on social media stories, which combine short videos, good photos, quirky captions, and popular filters, educators can publish engaging content that prospective students find relatable and easy to access. Social media engagement for higher institutions is about engaging audiences/stakeholders of the universities and driving traffic with the university's website where the ultimate conversions happen. It is also about managing the social presence and gaining audience participation as well as perhaps gaining customer/student feedback through social media marketing. Research shows that there is an increasing number of organizations who are already engaging in social media as part of their marketing strategy (Barnes, 2010; Barnes & Mattson, 2009). It is also true in the case of higher education institutions that are now making larger use of social media and digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and podcasts to market their programs, likewise website design and interface are showing an essential factor in how colleges and universities present themselves to prospective students (Hanover Research, 2014).

Due to continued government underfunding HEIs have to raise funds and part of this endeavour includes wooing prospective students thus necessitating the adoption of social media marketing and branding. Online marketing through social media offers a cost-effective alternative at a time when many universities cannot rely so heavily on public funding. They are under increasing pressure to adopt creative ways to control costs while still maintaining a high level of service.To keep students engaged an institution must ensure they continue perceiving it as the best one. A great way to do this is by adding digital learning to curriculums. Many schools already use this type of learning and have to find a balance between marketing online-only programs and continuing the traditions (Solis, 2019). Opoku, Abratt, & Pitt (2006) did a content analysis of websites of South African Business Schools in order to find out what brand personality each school features. Makgosa & Molefhi (2012) established the perceptions of students of the University of Botswana regarding its brand equity following the rebranding exercise, and their result, however, showed that the brand equity of the new logo was lower than that of the old logo. The stakeholders were more endeared to the old identity. This change in name is not something new as Mogaji (2018) reported how Kings College and Loughborough University in the United Kingdom had to change their logo because the students did not like it. While research on African Universities has focused on public Universities, an understanding of branding in private Universities is necessary.

Research carried out by this study reveals that 100% of sampled institutions are now using some form of social media but it also reveals that there is no reliable data on how effective the use of such tools are in terms of enrolment or elevating institutional value. As to specific platforms used, it reflects a wider adoption of the following social media platforms: Facebook is the most common form of social networking being used, with 100% of universities confirmed as having a Facebook page. Today's students rely on their timelines for their news, their motivation, research, and even opinions. Other preferred platforms include; Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. The influence of this medium is so strong, that a study by Social Admissions report shows that one out of every two teens rely on social media in their research for which universities or colleges to apply for. Universities get returns from branding directly and indirectly. Universities seeking to attract prospective students have to invest in the kind of image that makes an impression in the customers mind and eventually translates to enrolment. This means that resources have to be spent on adverts and producing promotional materials. Through this, universities get returns through students enrolment, this then leads to improvement of infrastructure and thus growth of the universities. Also through the sale of the promotional materials universities make money (Berger and Wallington, 1996).

The aim of this study is to explore the social media branding trends in African higher institutions, and the relationship between social media branding and student enrolment. The literature review explores social media forecasts and trends over the years as opined by experts. The methodology reveals survey results on the common social media platforms utilized by 10 universities drawn from across Africa, with 2 drawn from each of the 5 geographical regions of the continent. The study points to market differentiation as a means of increasing an institutions visibility and appeal to prospects and also suggests that HEIs explore emerging applications and tools as new instruments of the ever competitive social media onslaught.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to American Market Association (2010) branding is a marketing practice in which a company creates a name, symbol or design that is easily identifiable as belonging to the company or that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers or competitors. This helps to identify a product and distinguish it from other products

and services. Proper branding makes a memorable impression on consumers and allows clients know what to expect from a company (Smithson, 2015). An effective brand strategy gives you a major edge in increasingly competitive markets. According to Rosenthal (2003), branding is part of the promotional aspect of marketing and is extremely important to the image, reputation and success of a product or company.

As the digital landscape makes online learning more appealing to many college-age students, there is increasing pressure for higher institutions to up the ante with student recruitment. The importance of social media for universities cannot be underrated when it comes to brand identity, recruitment, and funding. Social Media provides opportunities for universities to solidify their brand, attract potential students and connect with alumni who are potentially useful in funding universities through giving back both financially and in-kind(Ruforum, 2017).

University branding may vary in regards to the size of the university. Older universities often believe that they can survive on the reputation and that this gives them sufficient attention (Bulotaite, 2003). Branding has the best impact if an institution maximises and demonstrates the entirety of it's strength. In other words, HEIs need to embrace the diverse complexity of their institutions with a ruthless clarity (Max du Bois, 2016). According to Cheslock (2006), branding essentially drives the sales and services of an organization. It is important for institutions of higher learning to emphasize their matchless elements to the greater community. Branding essentially holds corporations and institutions, such as universities accountable for the worth of the product or service they offer. Branding is the intangible feature an organization or institution upholds and delivers. This is supported by Moogan (2010) who postulated that, "marketers should make sure that they provide accurate information in the first instance and that student expectations are not inflated as a consequence. Providing relevant information sources so that students can make the best possible decision for them is crucial".

Social media is now a key part of any educator's digital marketing strategy in order to raise brand awareness, drive student engagement and be an authority that students go to when they require assistance, reassurance or answers.The key is to create content that resonates and curate imagery that showcases an institution's best. Blogs are also very important, using simple platforms such as WordPress and Medium which can be used to growbrands through content marketing. This boosts organic search rankings, which may make a big difference when students are researching different college options. With a great social media strategy, HEIs can engage prospects, alumni, and current students on the devices and mediums they use every day(DMI Daily Digest, 2020).

Morris (2012) suggested that social media is used by international students to assist in the university decision making process. This is supported by Levitz (2012) who observed that 46% of prospective students visited a college's Facebook page and 69% "liked" a college's page. Similarly, universities are also engaging actively on social media which as Taylor (2008) suggests if effectively tapped and designed, may help in the university's branding. Therefore, social media which encourages a culture of participation, engagement and collaboration, has a high potential to be used by universities to increase visibility and attract more students. (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011). There is no clear way to measure the extent to which social media influences choice of university made by prospective students,whilst social media appears to have much promise and potential, it is still to be empirically determined whether and what role social media plays in students' decision of university.

The intense competition in the higher education market has forced institutions to modify elements of their brands (Makgosa & Molefhi, 2012; Mogaji, 2018). A strong brand has also been known to be a source of competitive advantage

(Melewar et al., 2006) because prospective customers will want to associate with the brand. It is not surprising as well to see Universities taking up this challenge to rebrand and position themselves in the competitive higher education market. Astudy conducted by Merrill (2011), revealed that social media can be a cost effective recruiting strategy and in 2010 in the study of 30 international university admissions staff it indicated that there was an inclination by institutes to use Facebook (96%) and Twitter (66%) as their outreach tools. 46% used YouTube and 33% used LinkedIn. Another study by Slover-Linett and Stoner (2010) reflects that most institutions used social media, with 94% using Facebook. 60% of the institutions also used Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or YouTube. 96% used social media to communicate with alumni, while only about 57% used it as a marketing tool for perspective students. (Constantinides, 2010) posits that comprehensive social media strategies cannot be found in higher education marketing domain. However, looking at experiences from the business practices one could argue that such strategies can provide higher education institutions with new communication possibilities allowing direct engagement with potential students. This engagement can involve interaction with university recruiters or interactions with other students during the process of searching or looking for a suitable study and university. In principle, engaging potential students in the social media domain is an inexpensive way for universities to attract and persuade potential students. Social networks or online communities created by schools as part of their online presence can bring potential and already enrolled students together (i.e. 'University Ambassadors' or student leaders), or with peers looking for similar information and help. These engagements were observed to be highly effective ways of encouraging the contemporary consumer. Recommendations of peers on blogs, social networks, forums, and other forms of social media are playing an increasingly important role in the decision making process, mainly among young persons.

Social media is important to the recruiting and marketing functions of an HEI which can have a direct correlation to the institutions success and influence educational policies. According to Anyangwe (2011), online marketing efforts are tied more closely to a university's success. Richard Taylor from the University of Leicester states that "Marketing considerations are now going to align much more clearly with strategic decision making in universities. It was found out in a study about the use of social networking system as a marketing tool by universities that there is a significant relationship between those logged onto social networks and the likelihood of applying to the university (Hayes, Ruschman, & Walker, 2009). It has a positive effect to stakeholders in the education process once it has a successful electronic marketing and recruiting strategy. Wootton (2011) states that online marketing will play an increasingly strategic role in reaching prospective students, especially among for-profit institutions. HEIs are boosting their presence on social media sites such as YouTube, and utilizing their potential for marketing and as a learning tool. HEIs can have multiple sites to address different customer demographics, departments, and functions (Gilroy, 2010). It was late 2009 when YouTube initiated a specific section intended for academic content, where university professionals can upload educational, marketing and other contents to students and other users (Gilroy, 2010). This site became the most popular social networking site which schools use as a communication tool with students (Pearson Education, 2010). According to Ratliff (2011), the opportunity to create sub-channels that are content specific, also creating podcasts of informational materials can be provided by YouTube. For recruiting non-traditional or online students, it was suggested that Twitter may be better suited them and HEIs should manage specifically tailored Twitter accounts for different consumer demographics (Mansfield, 2009). LinkedIn addresses specific needs of higher education that could serve as a potential method of direct communication for those aiming to further their education and seek formal qualification, since higher education institutions are now moving towards a more commercial sector (LinkedIn, 2012). As from April 2012, over 3500 universities worldwide had an official presence on Facebook (4ICUb). Prospective students or stakeholder who viewed a university's page on Facebook

could choose to become a 'fan' of the institution, which showed their personal profile page, allowing them access to information about the university. It can create a viral marketing effect, wherein friends are also likely to become fans of the university (Reuben, 2008).

Social Media Branding in African higher institutions

Indeed, institutions face a plethora of issues and challenges in the current era of higher education endeavours. In this respect, institutions are "being urged to provide high quality education, exist as a well-reputed university, achieve enrolment success, improve competitive positioning, provide contemporary and well-designed academic programs, and maintain financial strength" (Cetin, 2003, p. 57). This has forced administrators at HEIs to begin to recognize that they need to function more like a business and market their offerings utilizing sound strategies (Hancock and McCormick, 1996).

Social media statistics from 2019 show that there are 3.5 billion social media users worldwide, and this number is only growing. That equates to about 45% of the current population (Emarsys, 2019). According to Africa Digital Report 2019, out of the total population of 1.304 billion in Africa, 80 percent of Africans (1 billion) use mobile phones, an increase of 5.2 percent. Active social media users grew by 13 percent (25 million people) while those using social media on their devices grew by 17 percent (30 million Africans).Social media statistics for January 2020 show that almost 60% of all social media activity in Africa was via Facebook while YouTube cornered almost 17% of all social media usage in Africa, Pinterest usage was close to 10% while Twitter usage was just over 8% and Instagram at just over 6% with Tumblr rounding up the list at 0.09%. University interaction and outreach is also predominantly done via Facebook as well.

Social Media Stats in Africa - January 2020

Facebook: 58.91%, YouTube: 16.93%, Pinterest: 9.55%, Twitter: 8.14%, Instagram: 6.18%, Tumblr: 0.09%.

This study analysed data from 10 higher institutions in 10 countries drawn from all 5 geographical regions across Africa; South Africa, West Africa, East Africa, North Africa and Central Africa and just like the majority of the African social media population, universities engage predominantly on Facebook with all 10 universities running an active Facebook handle, showing a 100% adoption rate.

University of Cape Town, South Africa

Rated 4.5/5 stars and with a student population of 26, 357, University of Cape Town is one of the leading higher education institutions on the African continent and has a tradition of academic excellence that is respected worldwide. It is Africa's oldest and foremost university. Three worldwide rankings have placed UCT among the world's top 200 institutions, the only African university to have achieved this distinction. UCT boasts a strong social media presence; 202,000 Facebook followers, 196,000 Facebook likes, 215, 312 LinkedIn connections and 203,700 Twitter followers. It also has 1,871,177 views on YouTube, 8077 employees on LinkedIn and 74 recently posted jobs as at February 14th 2020 on LinkedIn. The university has a very colourful and active website with current and future campus events outlined.

University of Namibia, Namibia

The University of Namibia (UNAM) is the largest and leading National institution of higher education in Namibia. It was established by an act of the National Assembly on 31 August 1992. It is a diverse institution with a student population from 41 countries and from all continents. Although a relatively young university, it has grown to support a student population

of over 30,144 this year. Academic programmes at the University are housed by eight faculties and eight schools. With 40,834 followers on Facebook, 39898 Facebook likes, 9156 Twitter followers and 1034 YouTube subscribers and a website, the university of Namibia is very active on social media as well.

Kenyatta University, Kenya

Kenyatta University is home to over 38,000 students and boasts some of the world's top scholars, researchers and experts in diverse fields. The University is one of the leading universities in Kenya judging by the quality of the graduates. What gives graduates of Kenyatta University an edge over their peers is the University's emphasis on practical hands-on knowledge and the skills training imparted to its students. The institution has 264, 000 followers on Facebook, and 49,800 on twitter. The institution has a LinkedIn account, Google+ and WhatsApp group.

University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

The University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) which has a student population of 19,650 started in 1961 as a College of the University of London. In 1963 it became a Constituent College of the University of East Africa. It was formerly established in August 1970, as a National University, through the University of Dar es Salaam Act number 12 of 1970. In 1961, the University started with the Faculty of Law. It expanded over the years with the establishment of the numerous Faculties and Institutes. It established a number of Colleges, some of which were later evolved into independent fully-fledged universities. With 13, 092 Facebook followers, 712 LinkedIn connections, YouTube and Instagram accounts, UDSM has good social media visibility.

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Established in 1948, the University of Ibadan, UI as it is fondly referred to, is the first University in Nigeria. Until 1962 when it became a full-fledged independent University, it was a College of the University of London in a special relationship scheme. The university of Ibadan has 70,511 Facebook followers and a student population of 35,000.

University of Ghana

The University of Ghana, the premier university and the largest university in Ghana was founded as the University College of the Gold Coast by Ordinance on August 11, 1948 for the purpose of providing and promoting university education, learning and research. The University has launched a new Strategic Planaimed at distinguishing itself in the area of research and making an impact at the national and international level. The institution has a student population of 35,000 and 133,000 Facebook followers. It also has Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube accounts.

Catholic University of Cameroon

Catholic University of Cameroon: Established in 2010, Catholic University of Cameroon is a non-profit private higher education institution located in the urban setting of the medium-sized city of Bamenda (population range of 500,000-1,000,000 inhabitants), Northwest Region. Officially accredited and/or recognized by the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, Cameroun (Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon), Catholic University of Cameroon (CATUC) is a coeducational higher education institution formally affiliated with the Christian-Catholic religion. With 64,348 and 1755 Facebook and

Twitter followers respectively the institution is quite active on social media. It is also ranked 10th in the country and 10890 in the world.

Catholic University of Bukavu, Congo

The Catholic University of Bukavu in Congo is the hub to a talented and diverse student community. The university offers 75 course in 11 faculties, has 4000 students enrolled and has a Facebook following of 4264, 330 Twitter followers, 1065 connections on LinkedIn and 149 subscribers on YouTube.

American University of Cairo, Egypt

Designed to accommodate 5,500 full-time students and 1,500 faculty and staff, American University of Cairo's $400 million, 260-acre campus is technologically advanced and environmentally sensitive. Offering state-of-the-art resources to students and faculty from around the world. The institution boasts a large following on social media with 803,000 Facebook followers, 796,000 Facebook likes, 153, 310 LinkedIn connections, 28,000 Twitter followers, 49,800 Instagram followers and 13,500 YouTube subscribers.

University of Blida, Algeria

The University of Blida which boasts over 45,000 students, is a university located in Blida, Algeria.Blida has a country rank of 25 and world rank of 6348. The institution only has a Facebook account with 18,974 followers and 18,000 Facebook likes. Majority of the North African countries have their website and social media account content written in Arabic and this creates a language barrier.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to explore the social media branding trends in African higher institutions, and the relationship between social media branding and student enrolment. The study explored the common social media plat for msutilized by 10 universities drawn from across Africa, with 2 drawn from each of the 5geographical regions outlined below;

Geographical Region	Countries (2 per region)	Universities Selected
East Africa	Kenya Tanzania	University of Kenyatta University of Dar es Salaam
South Africa	South Africa Namibia	University of Cape Town University of Namibia
West Africa	Nigeria Ghana	University of Ibadan University of Ghana
North Africa	Algeria Egypt	University of Blida American University of Cairo
Central AfricanRepublic	Cameroon Congo	Catholic University of Cameroon Catholic University of Bukavu

The study examined the reasons why African HEIs use social media branding and also assessed the extent to which digital technology is employed or exploited by HEIs in Africa. The study used a descriptive type of research to describe and explain the current situation of how HEIs in Africa are adapting to social media marketing. Various web portals and social media pages provided by the institutions were examined and observed to collect data. The respondents of this study were 10 randomly selected African universities drawn from all 5 geographical regions in Africa.

1. Inclusion/ exclusion criteria

Two inclusion criteria were created to screen for relevant studies: (1) published between 2006 and 2020 and (2) contained in the studies keywords or synonyms related to the research questions: (a) Social media, (b) higher education and (c)

branding (d) Africa. The search terms were as follows:

- Social media branding
- Higher education OR higher institution
- Africa
- Social media marketing in African higher institutions

2. Data Screening and Extraction

This approach uncovered a total of 10 university websites and 24 social media accounts. 33 papers and articles were reviewed, all published between 2006 and 2020. 2 of the articles were NGO reports on higher education enrolment statistics in Africa, while 31 were primary research studies, theoretical analysis and commentary on higher education in Africa, social media marketing in Africa, branding and university enrolment data.
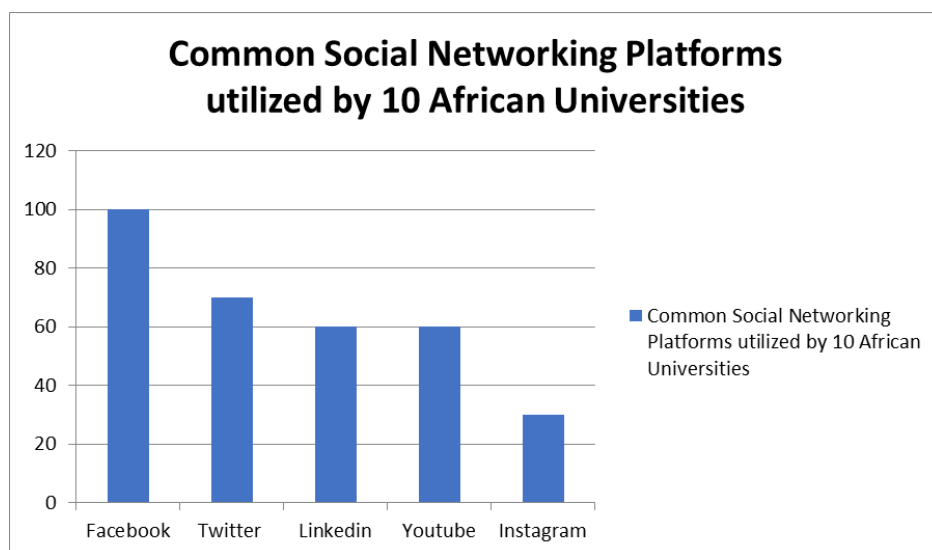
FINDINGS

Figure 1: Displays the common social media platforms utilized by 10 African universities drawn from all 5 geographical regions in Africa.

All 10 universities surveyed utilize Facebook which comes to 100%, next is Twitter which is used by 7 of the 10 universities coming to 70%, LinkedIn and YouTube, both at 60% and Instagram with 30% as the least utilized social media platform used for social media networking and marketing in African universities. The study found that universities with a large following on social media also had huge student numbers like the University of Namibia, Kenyatta University, University of Ibadan, American University of Cairo, University of Blida, Algeria which have 30,000, 38,000, 35000, 35000 and 40, 000 students respectively.

It can be inferred that institutions with high social media visibility attracts more prospective students through their social media accounts than their counterparts with less visibility and this attention eventually translates to enrollment and higher student numbers. All 10 institutions had websites with varying degrees of activity with some being well laid out, interactive and frequently updated with the latest information on current and future campus events and initiatives ranging from orientation events and pictures to awards won for feats performed, sporting events, seminars and workshops,

scholarship information, vice chancellor's bulletin, science projects, admission information, faculty and departmental events and similar information. While others were infrequently updated and lacking in content. It was observed that universities with a strong social media presence also had higher student numbers and social media following. With admission information and procedures clearly laid out on their websites and other media, prospective enrolees were more inclined to register at such institutions as opposed to having to journey all the way to campuses to make enquiries. It was also observed that universities that had their websites and social platforms written in a language other than English, like the majority of institutions in North and Central Africa had less traffic and way less online interaction between students and school authorities than their English speaking counterparts, leading to the conclusion that language barriers may slow international interaction in the form of enquiries and consequently enrolment.

There is evidence that universities do not have to spend significant amounts of money to be effective. Elliance and other industry experts identify several top trends from 2013, and many of these branding and marketing approaches are feasible for most colleges and universities. Unsurprisingly, they are heavily centered on the use of technology: Among the most important tools for social media branding is an effective and intuitive website, which should be considered the "ultimate brand statement" for an institution. Websites often feature elements and layouts so as to streamline and highlight content, including navigation bars, engaging visuals such as slideshows, and prominent "call to action" buttons that encourage students to apply, for example. Despite increased digital activity, a recent survey found that the most effective marketing strategies for universities are nevertheless events-based and involve direct interaction with potential students. Radio ads, asking current students or alumni for applicant referrals, and online college fairs were deemed least effective, while the most effective methods of outreach were open houses and campus visit days for high school students.

Responsive website design: Institutions are placing more emphasis on responsive web design to create intuitive and easy to navigate websites that can be viewed on multiple devices and platforms.

Search engine optimization: Administrators want their institutions to receive a prominent spot in search engine results, particularly Google. Especially for institutions that offer niche programs, it is increasingly important to ensure that search results include these programs at the top.

Use of web analytics: Colleges and universities are relying on data-driven analytics to determine who, how, and where they are reaching their audiences. The use of analytics software is increasing as the higher education web ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex, and the amount of material institutions have online is expanding (domains, subdomains, etc.). Getting a better handle of this data is a new area of concentration for colleges and universities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent to which African HEIs utilize or exploit social media as a means of brand enhancement. The study also seeks to establish the relationship between higher institution branding on social media and attraction of prospective students to these institutions, The study investigated the role of branding in African universities and its effect on building new relationships as well as maintaining effective communication with existing students and alumni. This study concludes that branding is a public relations technique higher education institutions use to differentiate themselves from the competition and stay in touch with prospective and current students as well as it's alumni. To avoid being displaced by competing institutions, universities enhance their brand by consistently reminding prospective students of what they have that their competition lacks. In Africa this is predominantly done through the

institution's website and social media handlessimilartotheir foreign counterparts who focus on a strong online presence ably aided by numerous event-based direct interaction with potential students. These universities emphasize on their achievements, affordability, unique courses, duration to complete courses and their facilities. All this is done with the aim of attracting a prospective student who is looking to enrol at a university.

Drawing from the most effective method of outreach which was found to be open houses and campus visit days, this study suggests online interaction with the intimacy of one-on-one communication through the use of 24 hours live chat sessions where prospects can drop in and chat with anadmissions officer about the admission process and institution. This eliminates the loss of prospective students who consider writing mails back and forth for information to be an arduous task.Targeted bulk email adverts should be regularly sent out to school age prospect sadverting admissions with the link attached for easy access to information. Most foreign universities already have this feature that helps reduce response time through automation. Virtual school fairs should be held for prospects that do not have the time to visit in person. Using Google+ Hangouts, colleges reach out to students by hosting video chats explaining the school, academics, and admissions.

To increase visibility, institutions need to invest in search engine optimization for their website and all content should be designed with the intent to rank on search engines. Regular targeted bulk emails should be sent out to target age group with information about the school. Webcasts and web conferences offer a large forum for prospective students to ask questions and share answers with the entire group. Group video chats work well as do one-on-one video conversations between counsellors and students via skyping. University Facebook pages should provide Q&A forums during admissions season, allowing students to ask questions about the school. The use of podcasts are also a current trend where a series of podcasts are shared featuring faculty members and undergraduates that prospective applicants listen to and explore what the college has to offer. This should be embraced by African higher institutions as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This study recommends that universities carry out market segmentation to discover the needs of prospects before embarking on branding strategies. By knowing the needs of prospective students, they are able to give what is needed which then leads to enrolment of students. African universities should also embrace the use of sponsored search results like google AdWords and Yahoo sponsored search. Also admission officers should regularly post university news and admission deadline reminders on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Alumni filmmakers and students can create viral videos or short films that share what's great about their alma mater, bringing new students to campus. Universities should also utilize blogging with good content to drive enrolment.

Another area of future research would be on the use of the web as a marketing tool for universities. According to Briggs 2006, the website is the most influential source of information for applicants followed by campus visits. Websites can be used to gather information on both students and prospective students and help to recruit students from all corners of the globe, but universities are currently failing to use them effectively to meet consumer requests and respond to consumer complaints (Klassen, 2002). Universities should aim to make their websites welcoming and interesting to encourage prospective students to look further and apply for enrolment. The websites should be able to allow students complete an online application and check on its progress online. This area is not well ventured by universities in Africa.

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