

Exploring predominant marketing strategies for branding higher education institutions in Tanzania

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Abstract

It is worth noting that the utilisation of marketing strategies by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operates within a complex and unclear environment. This study, therefore, explored the predominant marketing strategies used for branding HEIs in Tanzania. The study adopted an embedded mixed methods research design. Semi-structured interviews with 12 staff members from 6 HEIs, including 6 public relations officers (PROs) and 6 registrars were utilised. An online questionnaire was also administered to 100 students through Google Forms. PROs and registrars were purposively selected, while a convenience sampling technique was applied for student participants. Qualitative data were thematically analysed, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 27. The findings indicated no statistically significant differences in the marketing strategies employed by public and private HEIs. This suggests that both private and public-owned HEIs employ a diverse range of marketing strategies, encompassing both traditional and digital approaches to enhance their brand image. The study also identified that word-of-mouth recommendations from current students, alumni, and other influential individuals emerged as a particularly influential marketing channel for HEIs. University websites and various digital platforms were also identified as key branding tools. Traditional approaches such as print media, school visits, and radio/TV advertisements still hold relevance to some extent. The study recommends that HEIs continue to invest in and optimise their digital marketing capabilities while also calling for the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) to provide comprehensive guidance and support for the effective utilisation of both traditional and digital branding approaches.

Keywords: Brand identity, predominant marketing strategies, prospective students

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, the ability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to effectively market themselves has become paramount to their success and sustainability (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2019; Toderiou, 2021; Zhang, 2017). As these institutions navigate the increasingly competitive higher education marketplace, a deep understanding of strategic marketing practices has emerged as crucial (Clark et al., 2020). While marketing strategies are well-established in business firms, HEIs, as educational service

providers, face unique challenges in developing effective marketing approaches (Białoń, 2015; Guilbault, 2018). In Tanzania and other developing countries, HEIs are under increasing pressure to compete for students and funding while also prioritising the delivery of quality education (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). This competitive environment presents both challenges and opportunities for HEIs, in Tanzania (World Bank, 2020). Attracting a talented student body, both domestically and internationally, is crucial for institutional success (Mwesigye & Muhangi, 2015). In this context, establishing a solid and distinct brand identity has become a strategic imperative for Tanzanian HEIs (Amani, 2022a).

Marketing strategies in HEIs encompass various aspects, including competition analysis, institutional autonomy, diversified funding sources, performance measurement, consumer choice, marketing and branding techniques, entrepreneurialism, performance-based incentives, accountability mechanisms, and flexibility (Mkunde & Dachi, 2023). These aspects shape the transformation of HEIs towards a market-driven approach, aiming to drive efficiency, innovation, and responsiveness to consumer demands (Muya & Tundui, 2021). This shift has prompted HEIs to adopt various market-oriented practices aimed at enhancing their visibility and appeal. As HEIs strive to position themselves effectively in the minds of prospective students, understanding the predominant marketing strategies becomes essential for institutional success. A well-defined brand serves as a powerful tool for HEIs to differentiate themselves in the saturated market for higher education (Amani, 2022b). A strong brand effectively communicates an institution's unique value proposition, encompassing its academic offerings, research strengths, faculty expertise, campus environment, and student life experiences (Khoshtaria et al., 2020). This not only attracts prospective students but also fosters a sense of community and loyalty among existing students, alumni, and stakeholders (Mogaji et al., 2020).

HEIs in Tanzania are established under the University charter, which requires the HEIs to be independent while performing their core functions, namely teaching, research, and public service (TCU, 2019a). To perform these noble functions, each HEI needs to have resources such as qualified human resources, modern infrastructure and facilities, and funding for research and outreach programs (Nedbalová et al., 2014). Attracting such resources and, hence, effective teaching requires effective marketing strategies that not only promote the HEIs' brand and reputation and attract students, researchers, and donors to the HEI (Wu & Naidoo, 2016) but are also contextually relevant to the international and national communities. This would definitely respond to the growing apprehension that surrounds the call for balanced perspectives between service provisions and profit generation (Zhang, 2017).

The implementation of marketing strategies in HEIs across the globe has yielded diverse outcomes. Experiences in developed countries like Poland, Canada, and the United States have shown that aggressive market-driven approaches can erode the perception of higher education as a public good, leading to increased tuition dependency and a reduction in public funding. Furthermore, effective branding and marketing strategies have become essential for enhancing institutional visibility and attracting diverse student populations, while innovations in program offerings and flexible learning options are increasingly necessary to meet evolving student demands (Huang et al., 2022; Wu & Naidoo, 2016). African HEIs face unique challenges, including limited resources and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder the effective implementation of marketing strategies. These constraints often lead to compromises in educational quality, as the pressure to increase enrolment can overshadow the commitment to academic standards (Carr-Hill, 2020). Given these experiences, it is essential for Tanzanian HEIs

to develop context-specific marketing strategies that prioritise educational quality and inclusivity, ensuring that they can attract students while fulfilling their social responsibilities as educational providers.

The use of marketing strategies in Tanzanian HEIs has significant implications for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education (Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2023). However, the market-oriented strategies adopted by HEIs may inadvertently create barriers to achieving these goals (Kessy, 2020). The fact is that the increasing competition among HEIs for students and funding may lead to a concentration of resources and opportunities in certain institutions, limiting access for marginalised groups, uneven distribution of admission, students' preferences to few HEIs, dilemma situations to students caused by the influence of inappropriate brandings and perpetuating inequalities in education while emphasising on revenue generation (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). HEIs in Tanzania find it difficult to isolate themselves from the global marketing-oriented practices and challenges in relation to the branding efforts of their institutions and programs (Amani, 2022).

Despite the establishment of University Act No. 7 of 2005 by the government of the United Republic of Tanzania, along with the Education and Training Policy of 2014 and the Admission directive to the TCU in 2017 for managing HEIs (URT, 2005, 2014, 2017), the specific benchmark governing the marketing strategies employed by both public and private HEIs as service providers to attract students and sustain their operations in Tanzania remains unclear. This lack of clear guidelines has created an environment where HEIs have the opportunity to deploy various marketing strategies to gain a competitive edge in the rapidly expanding higher education landscape in Tanzania (Buyanza-Mwidima & Nkeni, 2021; Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). As these institutions strive to build a positive reputation, effective branding strategies become crucial (Suru, 2015, 2021). Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate the marketing strategies commonly used by both public and private HEIs to enhance their appeal and sustainability.

The majority of HEIs are still facing challenges in attracting qualified staff and students, corporate collaborations, and research funds (Muya & Tundui, 2021; Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2023). In light of this, various scholars have highlighted the importance of social media as a strategic tool for engagement and branding (Kessy, 2020), the role of alumni in enhancing institutional reputation and outreach (Amani, 2022b), and the significance of strategic marketing planning in higher education (Suru, 2021; Mkunde & Ndachi, 2023). Together, these studies underscore the necessity for HEIs to adopt integrated marketing approaches that effectively leverage both digital platforms and community networks to attract and retain students. However, there is a notable lack of research on the marketing strategies employed by both public and private HEIs in Tanzania. This gap presents an opportunity to investigate marketing strategies that enhance branding for these institutions, ultimately attracting students and sustaining their operations in Tanzania. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to explore the predominant marketing strategies employed by HEIs in Tanzania to enhance their brand presence and attract students effectively.

Research question

This research study was guided by one research question:

- i. What marketing strategies are predominantly used for branding Higher Education Institutions in Tanzania?

Theoretical considerations

This study is guided by the Marketing mix (4Ps) model, which was initially developed by Neil Borden in the 1950s and later popularised by E. Jerome McCarthy in 1960 (Boateng, 2014). The 4Ps model (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) is a foundational marketing framework that was initially developed to provide a structured approach for businesses and organisations to consider the key elements that influence the marketing of their products or services (Kidulani, 2013; van Waterschoot & van den Bulte, 1992). This model posits that the formulation of effective marketing strategies involve the management of four core elements:- product, price, place, and promotion (Nedbalová et al., 2014). In the context of this study, the product element pertains to the services offered by HEIs, and pricing strategies involve determining an appropriate price point considering factors such as tuition fees (Brkanlić, 2019). The place element focuses on distribution channels and decisions related to making service accessible to the target market. Finally, the promotion element involves various communication and marketing tactics employed by HEIs to create awareness, generate interest, and persuade customers to engage with the service offered (Išoraitė, 2016). This model, therefore, provides a practical foundation for analysing and evaluating the marketing efforts of HEIs, offering guidance on effectively managing the elements of the marketing mix to meet students' and stakeholders' needs, differentiate from competitors, and achieve organisational goals (Gajic, 2012; Nedbalová et al., 2014). Scholars contend that the systematic application of the 4Ps can lead to improved brand positioning and increased student engagement in a highly competitive educational landscape (Brkanlić, 2019; Išoraitė, 2016).

Research Methods

The current study adopted a mixed-methods research approach and embedded mixed-methods research design was utilised. A quantitative dataset plays a supportive, secondary role within a primarily qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the available marketing strategies predominantly used for branding HEIs in Tanzania (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The integration of the two approaches helps to leverage the strengths of each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The embedded design implies that data from different educational stakeholders have been collected independently and simultaneously, analysed separately and then integrated together during the data analysis and interpretation phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative data were collected from administrative staff using interviews and document review, while the quantitative data were collected from students in the selected HEIs. This design was utilised to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively explore the predominant marketing strategies for branding Higher Education Institutions in Tanzania (Demir, 2018).

The study was conducted in the purposively selected 6 HEIs from Dar es Salaam, Morogoro and Dodoma Regions of Tanzania. These three regions have been chosen out of the other 26 regions of Tanzania because they have both public and private-owned full-fledged HEIs. In addition, the selected regions have both old and newly established HEIs under the TCU, which are well suited to providing information about longstanding and emerging trends and practices on marketing strategies in higher education (TCU, 2019b). Moreover, Dar es Salaam, Morogoro and Dodoma are significant geographical locations within Tanzania, representing major urban centres where a significant portion of the country's educational infrastructure and resources are concentrated (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The selection

criteria for these six HEIs prioritised those with education and business colleges or faculties, high enrolment rates, and significant history of establishment and accreditation (TCU, 2022).

A total of 112 participants, including 6 Public Relations Officers (PROs), 6 registrars, and 100 students from each HEI, were involved in the study. PROs and registrars were purposively selected as they possess knowledge about institutional policies, admission processes, and student enrolment. The sample size of 100 students was determined by using the standardised sample size table proposed by Yamane (1967), Glenn (1992) and Singh (2014). Glenn (1992) and Singh (2014) report that when the total population size is in the range of a thousand or more, a sample size of at least 10% of the population is recommended. However, when the total population size is several thousand or more, a sample size of 5% or less can be sufficient. Also, Yamane (1967) identifies the use of a 100 sample size in a population of more than 20000 with a 0.1 precision level and a confidence interval of 90%. In this case, for a total population of 92200 students, the sample size of 100 students was appropriate for the study.

Convenience sampling approach was used to obtain 100 students from the sampled HEIs for the quantitative component to supplement data collected through qualitative approach. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study (Golzar & Noor, 2022). This approach was necessitated by the fact that many students were engaged in university examinations during the study period, limiting availability. Specifically, students from the fields of business and education were targeted, as these disciplines typically have higher enrollment numbers, a greater variety of programs, and elevated graduation rates, thereby representing critical segments for inclusion (TCU, 2024). Furthermore, first-year and third-year students were deemed particularly relevant as they could provide valuable insights into the marketing strategies that influenced their enrolment decisions and overall perceptions of the HEIs. Consequently, quantitative data were collected from 36 students from Institute A, 6 students from Institute B, 32 students from Institute C, 4 students from Institute D, 16 students from Institute E, and 6 students from Institute F. Notably, Institutes A, C, and E are public HEIs, while Institutes B, D, and F are private HEIs, resulting in a total of 100 students participating in the study.

Data collection

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The in-depth interview was conducted to collect data from PROs, and registrars from HEIs. The interview method was thought important to explore deeper experiences, views, beliefs, or motivations of individuals in exploring relevant marketing strategies in HEIs involved in this study. The interview guide for PROs and Registrars was adapted and modified from the institutional marketing personnel schedule tool by Weerawardane (2018). Likert Scale Questionnaire, which ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with five points, was administered to students.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments employed in this study, a pilot investigation was conducted at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) - Dodoma Centre. This was instrumental in making necessary modifications to the questionnaire and interview guide. By piloting the instruments with 20 students and two staff members, the researcher was able to assess the appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness and usefulness of the data collected. In order to ascertain the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Likert scale items were incorporated, and Cronbach's alpha was utilised as a measure of reliability.

The analysis revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .83 for the items related to the research question, surpassing the minimum reliability threshold ($\alpha \geq .70$) and suggesting that the items effectively measured the intended construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy (KMO) and the anti-image correlation matrix (AntiI) were employed to assess the validity of the collected quantitative data. As a general guideline, any finding with a KMO value greater than 0.5 and an AntiI-value exceeding 0.5 was considered valid (Kaiser, 1974; Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974). The results of the validity test indicated that all proxies of the research objective yielded KMO and AntiI-values of 0.5 and above, suggesting that the obtained quantitative data were valid and adequate for performing the necessary numerical analyses, as illustrated in Table 2

Table 2: Validity and Reliability of the quantitative data
Validity

Variables	KMO	Anti-Image Correlation
Online search engine		0.54
Social media platform		0.90
Recommendations from others		0.69
School recommendation		0.85
Print media	0.83	0.87
Radio, TV advertisement		0.89
Outreach programs by Universities		0.87
School visiting by educational institutions		0.87
Through the website of the University		0.70
Through TCU Admission guidelines		0.83

Reliability

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Online search engine	31.71	53.299	-.194	.875
Social media platform	31.88	43.198	.456	.816
Recommendations from others	31.40	44.444	.435	.818
School recommendation	31.68	39.412	.768	.785
Print media	31.85	39.482	.713	.789
Radio, TV advertisement	31.93	39.177	.692	.791
Outreach programs by Universities	31.98	40.666	.606	.801
School visiting by educational institutions	31.88	39.036	.698	.790
Through the website of the University	31.48	44.192	.435	.818
Through TCU Admission guidelines	31.55	41.179	.602	.802
Number of Items = 10	Cronbach's Alpha 0.827			

Source: Field Data (2024)

Ethical considerations were ensured throughout the study. The University of Dodoma's Research Ethical Committee reviewed and granted ethical clearance (MA.84/261/68/2) on behalf of the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). Informed consent

was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained.

Data analysis

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires was analysed descriptively and inferentially by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The chi-square test was applied to test for the significance levels of the obtained findings, while the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to identify the existence of significant differences between public and privately-owned universities in terms of marketing strategies. Thematic analysis, following a six-step process of data familiarisation, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme identification, and theme reporting, was applied to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Results

This study sought to explore the available marketing strategies predominantly used for branding Higher Education Institutions in Tanzania. This section presents the demographic information of the participants involved in the study and the key findings that emerged out of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Table 3: Demographic information of the participants

Variable	Sub-scale	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	52	46.4%
	Female	60	53.6%
Educational level	Bachelor degree	68	60.7%
	Masters	39	34.8%
	PhD	5	4.5%
Age	< 21	16	14.3%
	21-30	50	44.6%
	31-40	32	28.6%
	41-50	13	11.6%
	>50	1	0.9%
Occupation	Students	100	89.3%
	Staff	12	10.7%
Ownership	Public	87	77.7%
	Private	25	22.3%

Source: Field Data (2024)

The findings in Table 3 reveal a perfect response rate of 100% across all participant categories, including students and staff from both public and private HEIs. This indicates a well-executed and consistent participant recruitment process, suggesting that a high level of consistency significantly enhances the reliability and validity of the data collected for the study.

Marketing Strategies Predominantly used for Branding

The study objective was to explore marketing strategies that are predominantly used to brand HEIs in Tanzania. Quantitative data were gathered from students through questionnaires, and qualitative data from staff and individual interviews were gathered. For quantitative data, the students had to rate their level of agreement on the primary source through which they became aware of the programmes and HEIs under study by ticking each one of the given sources: (1 - Strongly Disagree , 2 - Disagree ,3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree ,5 - Strongly Agree). Subsequently, the quantitative data from students’ responses were subjected to descriptive analysis such as mean scores and chi-square testing (See Table 4).

Table 4: Marketing strategies predominantly used for branding

Marketing Strategies	Descriptive statistics			Chi-square		
	N	Mean	STD	X ²	DF	Sig.
Recommendations from others	100	3.86	1.02	55.30	4	<0.01
Through the website of the University	100	3.78	1.05	64.30	4	<0.01
Through TCU Admission guidelines	100	3.71	1.15	51.10	4	<0.01
School recommendation	100	3.58	1.11	41.20	4	<0.01
Online search engine	100	3.55	1.14	29.20	4	<0.01
Print media	100	3.41	1.17	34.70	4	<0.01
Social media platform	100	3.38	1.14	27.70	4	<0.01
School visits by educational institutions	100	3.38	1.24	22.00	4	<0.01
Radio, TV advertisement	100	3.33	1.23	22.10	4	<0.01
Outreach programs by Universities	100	3.28	1.20	26.30	4	<0.01

Interpretation of the mean scores

4.01-5.00 = Used very often

3.01-4.00 = Used often

2.01-3.00 = Used rarely

1.00-2.00 = Used very rarely

SDV > 1.5 = Indicate significant deviation of responses

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings in Table 4 show a range of variations of the calculated mean scores from 3.86 to 3.28 (indicating a moderate level of variation), suggesting variations in the different responses regarding the marketing strategies predominantly used for branding HEIs in Tanzania. These results reveal that marketing strategies have relatively high scores, including recommendations from others (3.86), the university website (3.78), and TCU Admission guidelines (3.71). Moreover, the marketing strategies with relatively average mean scores were identified as online search engines (3.55), print media (3.41), social media platforms (3.38), school visits by educational institutions (3.38), and radio and TV advertisements (3.33). Nevertheless, the marketing strategies with relatively low mean scores, though still at a moderate level, include outreach programs conducted by universities, such as career development initiatives (3.28). These findings in Table 4 suggest that HEIs utilise a combination

of online and traditional marketing channels to promote their brand. This aligns with previous empirical studies that have highlighted the importance of both traditional and digital marketing channels in promoting HEIs (Jain et al., 2022; Kwang, 2019).

The high mean score for "recommendations from others" as the most influential marketing strategy supports the notion that word-of-mouth recommendations play a crucial role in shaping the perception and reputation of HEIs (Shahnaz & Qadir, 2019). This finding is consistent with research indicating that positive recommendations from alumni, current students, and other stakeholders can significantly impact prospective students' decision-making process (Amani, 2022a). The prominence of the university website as a preferred marketing strategy aligns with the growing significance of online platforms in higher education marketing (Zhang, 2017). A well-designed and informative website serves as a virtual showcase for HEIs, allowing potential students to access essential information about programs, faculty, facilities, and other relevant aspects (Zhang, 2017). Empirical studies have emphasised the role of university websites in influencing prospective students' perceptions and choices (Hall, 2018).

Using online search engines and social media platforms as prominent marketing strategies reflects the increasing reliance on digital channels in reaching and engaging with prospective students (Ponera, 2023). Such platforms provide HEIs with opportunities to target specific demographics, showcase their unique value propositions, and interact directly with potential students. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of social media campaigns and search engine optimization in enhancing brand visibility and attracting prospective students (Bohara et al., 2022; Buyanza-Mwidima & Nkeni, 2021). The moderate mean scores for print media, school visits by educational institutions, and radio and TV advertisements suggest that these traditional marketing channels still hold some relevance in the higher education context (Masele & Rwehikiza, 2021). While digital channels have gained prominence, empirical studies have indicated that traditional advertising mediums can influence brand perception and generate awareness among targeted audiences (Kwang, 2019; Munene, 2015).

The significant chi-square values indicate that there is a robust relationship between the marketing strategies and their usage, further reinforcing the importance of strategic decision-making in HEI branding (Brkanlić, 2019). The findings highlight the need for HEIs to adopt a comprehensive and integrated marketing approach that combines various strategies to maximise brand exposure and attract a diverse pool of prospective students.

To establish the marketing strategies' significance and differences between public and privately owned HEIs from students' responses, the Kruskal-Wallis test analysis was applied to obtain probability values (p-values), as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Marketing strategies predominantly used for Branding

Strategies		Mean	STD	DF	Test statistic	Sig.
Recommendations from others	Public	3.85	0.01	1	0.02	0.88
	Private	3.89	0.06			
Through the website of the University	Public	3.76	0.01	1	0.01	0.91
	Private	3.8	0.06			
Through TCU Admission guidelines	Public	3.74	0.02	1	0.68	0.45
	Private	3.58	0.07			
School recommendation	Public	3.49	0.02	1	2.16	0.14
	Private	3.95	0.07			
Online search engine	Public	3.52	0.02	1	0.25	0.62
	Private	3.68	0.07			
Print media	Public	3.41	0.02	1	0.02	0.89
	Private	3.42	0.08			
Social media platform	Public	3.40	0.02	1	0.15	0.70
	Private	3.32	0.07			
School visits by educational institutions	Public	3.28	0.02	1	2.20	0.14
	Private	3.79	0.08			
Radio, TV advertisement	Public	3.30	0,02	1	0.64	0.42
	Private	3.47	0.08			
Outreach programs by Universities	Public	3.22	0.02	1	1.03	0.31
	Private	3.53	0.08			

Source: Field data (2024)

The results in Table 5 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in the marketing strategies used for branding by public and private higher education institutions in Tanzania. The analysis, which employed the Kruskal-Wallis test, revealed that the p-values for each marketing strategy examined were greater than the commonly accepted threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the observed variations in the use of branding-related marketing approaches between public and private institutions are not substantial enough to be considered meaningful or representative of true differences. In other words, higher education providers, irrespective of their public or private status, appear to be adopting similar marketing strategies and techniques when it comes to building and promoting their institutional brands. This lack of significant distinction in branding practices across the sector underscores the possibility of a convergence or standardisation of marketing approaches employed by Tanzanian universities, both public and private, in their efforts to establish a strong and differentiated presence in the higher education landscape.

The findings from the analysis of all students' responses, as presented in Tables 4 and 5, demonstrate that both private and public HEIs employ a diverse range of marketing strategies, encompassing both traditional and digital approaches, to enhance their brand image. The results indicate that recommendations from others, university websites, and digital platforms emerge as particularly influential channels. These insights offer valuable guidance to both public and private HEIs in Tanzania, providing them with contextual understanding to develop

effective marketing campaigns and enhance their competitiveness within the higher education market.

Following the quantitative analysis, the researcher proceeded with thematic analysis and presented the findings derived from qualitative data obtained from interviews with staff members from private and public-owned HEIs. The sampled staff was asked to elaborate on how prospective students become aware of their institutions and programs. The results have been summarised and presented in Figure 1.

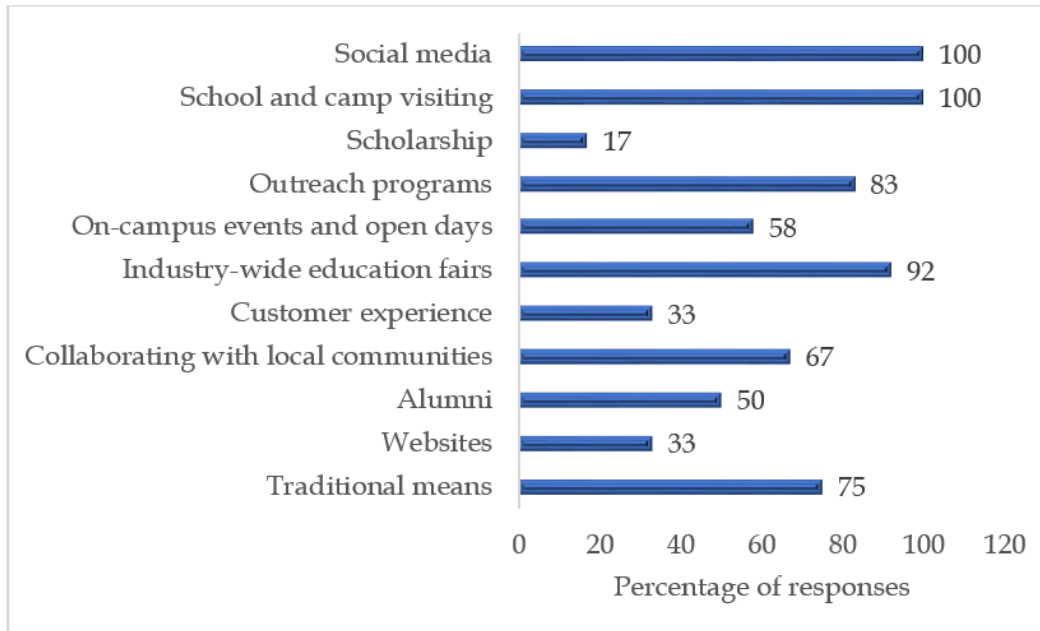


Figure 1: Staff responses rate on the predominantly marketing strategies

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings presented in Figure 1 reveal a range of variations in the reported utilisation of different marketing strategies by higher education institutions (HEIs) to influence their target student population. Based on the responses from 12 staff members interviewed, the data indicates marketing strategies with varying degrees of application, ranging from 100% to 33.3% in utilisation rates. These results reveal marketing strategies with relatively high utilisation rates, including the use of social media platforms and university websites (100%), participation in education fairs and events organised by educational authorities and industry partners (91.7%), implementation of programs such as career guidance to engage with potential students (83.3%), and collaboration with local communities, such as schools and educational consultants, to establish relationships (83.3%).

Moreover, the marketing strategies with relatively average utilisation rates were identified as the use of traditional advertising methods such as TV, radio, and newspapers (75%), participation in community social responsibilities (66.7%), and organisation of campus events such as tours, open ceremonies, and graduation for marketing purposes (58.3%). Nevertheless, the marketing strategies with relatively low utilisation rates, though still employed by some HEIs, include the utilisation of alumni as ambassadors to promote the institute (50%), engagement of influential individuals such as artists to market university programs (33.3%) and creating customer experience (34%). These varying utilisation rates

across different marketing strategies suggest that HEIs may prioritise certain approaches over others when implementing their branding and student recruitment efforts, potentially reflecting institutional preferences, resource constraints, or the perceived effectiveness of these marketing techniques in influencing the target student population.

Marketing by utilising social media platforms and the university website

Based on the interview results, it was revealed that the participant's opinions were based on the fact that utilising social media platforms and the university website emerged as the most prominent marketing strategy, with 100% of the interviewees recognising its importance. The importance of a university website cannot be overstated. In the digital age, a well-designed and informative website serves as a crucial touchpoint for potential students. It provides essential information about programs, faculty, campus facilities, and admission procedures. A user-friendly website that effectively conveys the institution's value proposition can attract and engage prospective students, helping them make informed decisions. This strategy allowed them to reach a wide audience and interact with potential students effectively. In an interview, a B2 officer from "B" HEI stated:

We harness the power of social media channels as integral tools for strategic marketing and meaningful engagement. By leveraging these platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, Youtube and Twitter, we effectively connect with our target audience, share compelling stories, and cultivate interactive experiences that foster a vibrant online community around our institute (Officer B2, 11th March 2024)

Officer B2 from Institute B emphasised the power of social media channels as integral tools for strategic marketing and meaningful engagement. Leveraging platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter allowed them to connect with their target audience, share compelling stories, and cultivate interactive experiences that fostered a vibrant online community around their institute. This highlights the ability of social media to facilitate direct communication and engagement with prospective students, as well as the opportunity to create an engaging and interactive online presence. Other views were expressed by officer B2 from institute "D" who said:

We have a strong website with all the information needed for students.....We also use influential people platforms like the Instagram account of MILLARD AYO for marketing as it has more than 1 million followers, so it is easy to reach the society and customers (Officer D2, Institute D, 13th March 2024)

The officer from Institute D mentioned the use of influential people platforms like the Instagram account of MILLARD AYO for marketing. By leveraging the large following of such influencers, HEIs can easily reach a broader audience and potential customers. This demonstrates the recognition of the reach and impact that influential individuals on social media can have in promoting the institution and connecting with prospective students.

Participating in education fairs and events

The majority of interviewees recognised this strategy, highlighting its effectiveness in attracting and engaging prospective students. By participating in education fairs and events, institutions have the opportunity to connect with potential students face-to-face. Officer C1 from Institute C emphasised the importance of these events, stating:

We participate in education fairs and events organised by education authorities to connect with potential students face-to-face. We also attend Saba Saba day exhibition, where we showcase our courses and the internationalisation unit is there to support foreigners; also we are accompanied by the Confucius Studies Unit (Officer C1, Institute C, 12th March 2024)

On the same view, officer A2, from institute A added:

We actively participate in activities organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, as well as TCU and NACTEVET, such as MAKISATU, Saba Saba, Nane Nane, UNGUJA EVENTS, and TCU. These events allow us to showcase our programs and engage directly with potential students (Officer A2, Institute A, 6th March 2024)

These quotes suggest that educational fairs and conferences act as venues for organisations to present their curricula, initiatives, and distinctive offerings. Through this exposure, HEIs are better equipped to showcase their advantages over rivals and convince potential students of the value they can offer.

Conducting programs such as career guidance

Conducting programs such as career guidance in schools or camps also emerged as a significant marketing strategy, as highlighted by the interviewees. This strategy enables institutions to reach out and connect with potential students in a meaningful way, providing them with valuable information and establishing a rapport. The interviewees recognised the importance of conducting career guidance programs to reach out and connect with potential students. One officer stated:

We also visit schools and JKT camps to organise career guidance sessions and interact with students directly. Furthermore, we actively collaborate with industry partners and conduct outreach programs that expose potential students to the unique opportunities our institute offers (Officer F1, Institute F, 29th February 2024)

They emphasised the significance of providing valuable information to students, helping them make informed decisions about their educational journey and future career prospects.

Collaborating with local communities

Collaborating with local communities, including schools and educational consultants, emerged as another important marketing strategy, as acknowledged by the interviewees. This approach allows institutions to build relationships, establish a presence, tap into existing networks, and gain credibility within the community. One Officer stated:

We actively encourage our students to participate in community service initiatives, volunteer programs, and projects that address societal challenges. Through these experiences, our students develop a sense of social responsibility and become compassionate leaders who can make a positive difference in their communities (Officer D2, Institute D, 13th March 2024)

In agreement with officer D2 from institute D, as illustrated in the quotation, an officer from institute C had the following to add:

The institute fosters collaborative relationships with local communities, particularly schools, recognising the significance of building strong ties that mutually benefit our institute and the community. Through these partnerships,

we actively engage in initiatives that promote educational growth, cultural exchange, and community development (officer C1, Institute C, 12th March 2024)

These collaborations demonstrate the institution's commitment to the local community and its willingness to contribute to its betterment actively. Officer C1 from Institute C emphasised the significance of building strong ties with local communities, particularly schools, to mutually benefit both the institution and the community.

Utilising traditional advertising methods such as TV, radio, and newspapers

The participants recognised that the utilisation of traditional advertising methods, including TV, radio, and newspapers, was recognised as a marketing strategy by 75% of the interviewees. Despite the rise of digital media, these traditional channels still hold significant reach and impact on the target audience. The interviewees acknowledged the continued relevance and effectiveness of traditional advertising methods, such as TV, radio, and newspapers, as a marketing strategy. The following quote from the interview with officer F1 illustrates the utilisation of the traditional media.

Our institute adopts a comprehensive marketing strategy to reach prospective students. We have our Institute ambassador who moves around schools currently to invite students, which also means traditional radio, TV brochures, and banners at the centre of the town for everyone to see (Officer F1, Institute F, 29th February 2024)

On the other hand, officer B1 from Institute B expressed a more cautious approach towards advertisements, indicating that their institute does not believe much in advertisements but still utilises TV and radio sessions to attract students. This suggests that while they acknowledge the importance of traditional media, they may prioritise other marketing methods.

Using campus events for marketing purposes

It was also revealed from the findings that campus events, including tours, open ceremonies, and graduation, offer valuable opportunities to showcase the campus culture, engage with prospective students, and create a positive impression. These events often bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, including current students, faculty, alumni, and community members, thereby providing a platform for networking and building relationships. Officer C1, from institute "C" stated:

We proactively extend invitations to prospective students, warmly welcoming them to experience our vibrant campus life through a diverse range of engaging events and open days. We have events; whatever small they are, we make them bigger, including graduation for marketing; we demand that management increase the budget for marketing those events to have images and post them through social media platforms. We also have research week. It is nine years in a row we have had this (Officer C1, Institute C, 12th March 2024).

The representative phrase from Interviewee C1 emphasises the effectiveness of campus events as marketing opportunities to showcase the campus culture and engage with prospective students.

Leveraging alumni, current students and staff as ambassadors

It was also revealed from the findings that Alumni, in particular, play a crucial role in promoting the institution by sharing their success stories and experiences. Participants were of the view that alumni ambassadors serve as powerful advocates for the institution, as they have

first-hand experience of the education and opportunities provided by the institution. Officer E1 stated:

Our institute harnesses the immense potential of our esteemed alumni network, strategically leveraging them as passionate ambassadors to champion our institute's values, accomplishments, and transformative educational experiences to prospective students (Officer E1, Institute E, 28th February 2024).

In addition to the previously provided response, officer F1 from school F added:

Currently, our Institute ambassador is moving around secondary schools in Tanzania to invite students to join our institute (Officer F1, Institute F, 29th February 2024)

Officer F1 from Institute F mentioned the use of Institute ambassadors who move around secondary schools in Tanzania to invite students to join their institute. This demonstrates a proactive approach to leveraging current students as ambassadors to engage with potential students and generate interest in the institution. In the same view, Office A2 from institute A commented that;

From an internal perspective, I believe that a strong alumni engagement process is crucial for promoting our programs and institute. Our alumni are our brand ambassadors, and their success stories and testimonials carry significant weight in attracting prospective students (Officer A2, Institute A, 06th March 2024)

Officer A2 from Institute A highlighted the importance of a robust alumni engagement process for promoting their programs and institute. They acknowledged that alumni serve as brand ambassadors, and their success stories and testimonials carry significant weight in attracting prospective students. This further emphasises the value of alumni in promoting the institution's reputation and attracting new students.

Customer experience and scholarship

It was revealed from the findings that a positive customer experience has significant implications for a brand's reputation, customer loyalty, and overall business success. Officer C1 from Institute C highlighted several strategies employed by the institution to enhance the customer experience and make prospective students feel comfortable during the application process. Officer C1 stated that:

Another issue is customer experience done by making a customer feel comfortable during application windows, using Buses, having people with ASK ME t-shirts in the gates and banks (Officer C1, Institute C, 12th March 2024)

On the other hand, using scholarships as a marketing strategy serves as a powerful tool to attract prospective students to educational institutions, according to participants. Scholarships offer significant benefits both to students and institutions, and their strategic implementation can yield positive outcomes in terms of student enrolment and institutional reputation. The interview with Officer D2 from institute D revealed the use of scholarship offerings to prospective students as a way of attracting them and retaining them in their institute. For example:

Our institute is proud to offer scholarships specifically for humanities studies to our prospective students, covering approximately 50% of the tuition fees. These scholarships are designed to recognise and support the academic excellence and passion of students pursuing humanities disciplines. We believe in fostering the growth of the humanities and providing opportunities for talented individuals to

engage in meaningful and impactful studies. Through this scholarship program, we aim to empower and inspire the next generation of scholars and leaders in the humanities field (Officer D2, Institute D, 13th March 2024)

Similarly, another officer, F1 from institute F, was quoted saying:

We are affiliated with international Universities to share some programs and experiences that our students used to study here in the first semester, and then in the second semester, they have to go to those international Universities. We provide scholarships to Poland and Australia for our new students, especially Master's students who pursue philosophy, but next year for education programs (Officer F1, Institute F, 29th February, 2024).

The findings from the interviews with Officer D2 from Institute D and Officer F1 from Institute underscore the significance of scholarships as a potent marketing strategy for attracting and retaining prospective students. Officer D2 emphasised the offering of scholarships specifically tailored for humanities studies, covering a substantial portion of the tuition fees, to recognise and support the academic excellence of students in humanities disciplines. This approach highlights the institute's commitment to fostering the growth of the humanities and inspiring future scholars and leaders in the field. Similarly, Officer F1 highlighted the institute's affiliation with international universities, providing opportunities for students to study abroad and offering scholarships to destinations like Poland and Australia.

All registrars and public relations officers (PROs) from both public and private HEIs agreed that the use of different marketing strategies is beneficial in maintaining the brand of the HEIs and promoting the programs offered in order to attract more students. They also agreed that HEIs compete for students' survival. With this idea, some of them differ in the use of marketing strategies, and it is sometimes challenging to compete with some larger HEIs. This was supported by one staff member who said:

There is no guideline or policy governing marketing strategies, something causing the challenges to promote quality education provisions. We need to have a fair system for running our marketing programs to attract students (Officer B2, Institute B, 11th March 2024)

This suggests that regulatory oversight and policy guidelines are needed to ensure a level playing field for HEIs in their student recruitment and marketing efforts. Therefore, a comprehensive framework must be developed to address the issues surrounding the marketing of higher education and its impact on institutional practices and student access.

Discussion

This study explored the predominant marketing strategies employed by higher education institutions (HEIs) in Tanzania for branding purposes. The findings reveal the heterogeneity of approaches taken by these institutions to attract and engage with their target student population, as evidenced by the varying utilisation rates across diverse promotional channels.

First and foremost, in the rapidly evolving digital landscape, HEIs have recognised the immense potential of leveraging social media platforms and their institutional websites as strategic marketing tools. As highlighted in the information provided, 100% of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of these two pillars in effectively reaching and engaging with

prospective students. The HEIs website, in the digital age, serves as a crucial touchpoint for potential students, providing essential information about academic programs, faculty, campus facilities, and the admissions process. A well-designed and informative website effectively conveys an institution's value proposition, attracting and engaging prospective students and helping them make informed decisions about their educational journey. This finding aligns with a growing body of empirical research highlighting the efficacy of online marketing in higher education. For instance, a recent study by Bohara et al. (2022) in Nepal found that strategic social media engagement significantly improved student enrolment and brand awareness for HEIs. However, it is crucial to consider the potential limitations of these digital channels, such as information overload and the difficulty of standing out in a crowded online space (Ponera & Ngulube, 2023). HEIs must carefully curate their digital presence to ensure effective communication and differentiation from competitors.

Additionally, the study exposed the relatively high utilisation rates for participation in education fairs and events organised by educational authorities and industry partners, reflecting a reliance on traditional networking practices. While these events provide opportunities for showcasing programs and building partnerships, it is essential to critically evaluate the return on investment and the long-term impact of such activities on student enrolment. Furthermore, the utilisation of programs like career guidance to engage with potential students appears to be a promising strategy. It was found that some prospective and current students fail to make decisions about their career path while pursuing studies in secondary schools and HEIs. This is also a challenge to parents. The study also noted that by participating in education fairs and events, institutions have the opportunity to connect with potential students face-to-face. This personal interaction allows for direct engagement and a deeper level of communication, which can significantly impact students' perception of the institution.

However, the relatively lower utilisation rates for strategies such as utilising alumni as ambassadors, engaging influential individuals, and using billboards and outdoor signage raise questions about their effectiveness in the Tanzanian higher education context. While these strategies may have proven successful in other settings, their limited use in Tanzania suggests the need for empirical studies to assess their impact on brand promotion and student enrolment. A critical examination of these strategies, as undertaken by Amani (2022a) in their investigation of alumni engagement in university marketing, is necessary to determine whether they align with the cultural and social context of Tanzania and effectively resonate with the target audience.

On the other hand, the lack of statistically significant differences in the marketing strategies employed by public and private HEIs in Tanzania, as indicated by the Kruskal-Wallis test analysis, suggests a possible convergence or standardisation of marketing approaches. This finding can be attributed to various factors, such as HEIs emulating the successful marketing practices of their competitors, both public and private, in an effort to remain competitive and appeal to the same target student population (Shahnaz & Qadir, 2019). The regulatory framework and policy guidelines governing higher education in Tanzania are driving a more homogeneous approach to marketing as institutions seek to comply with established norms and practices (Nagy, 2007). Public and private HEIs in Tanzania face similar resource limitations, leading them to prioritise and adopt the most cost-effective and accessible marketing strategies, resulting in a convergence of approaches (Masele & Rwehikiza, 2021; Mkunde & Dachi, 2023).

The findings emphasise the need for HEIs to adopt a comprehensive and integrated marketing approach, which aligns with the growing body of research on the effectiveness of integrated marketing communication (IMC) in higher education. The findings align with a study by Buyanza-Mwidima and Nkeni (2021) on emerging marketing strategies in Tanzania's higher education, which found that the strategic integration of various marketing channels, both digital and traditional, can enhance brand awareness, improve student recruitment, and foster stronger relationships with stakeholders. Similarly, a study by Ahmed (2016) on marketing strategies in Bangladesh higher education highlighted the importance of aligning brand messaging and communication across multiple touchpoints to create a consistent and compelling value proposition for prospective students. However, the current study also uncovered concerns expressed by staff participants regarding the need for regulatory oversight and policy guidelines in the Tanzanian higher education context, echoing the ongoing scholarly debate around the marketing of higher education and its potential impact on institutional practices and student access. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the effective implementation of comprehensive and integrated marketing strategies in HEIs must be balanced with appropriate policy frameworks and regulatory mechanisms to ensure equity, quality, and ethical practices in student recruitment and marketing efforts (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023), enabling HEIs to navigate the complex dynamics of the higher education landscape and achieve their strategic branding and enrolment goals.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study concludes that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Tanzania have embraced a diverse range of marketing strategies, encompassing both traditional and digital approaches to enhance their brand image and appeal to prospective students. Recommendations from others, university websites, and digital platforms emerge as influential channels. Traditional marketing channels such as print media, school visits by educational institutions, and radio and TV advertisements still hold some relevance in the context of higher education in Tanzania. The study recommends that HEIs continue to invest in and optimise their digital marketing capabilities while also calling for the Tanzanian government, through the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), to provide comprehensive guidance and support for the effective utilisation of both traditional and digital branding approaches. This holistic framework would empower HEIs to navigate the dynamic marketing landscape and, ultimately, strengthen their brand presence and appeal to the next generation of learners. Moreover, it is recommended that HEIs expand their strategic focus to include international marketing and branding initiatives, thereby enhancing their corporate reputation and attracting foreign students, which not only enhances their global visibility but also contributes to internal revenue generation. Further research is needed to understand why digital platforms, such as university websites and social media, have emerged as the most influential channels in HEI branding.

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