Advertising as a Marketing Strategy for Private Schools Enrolment in Kwara State, Nigeria

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The increase of school enrolment is usually attributed to public becoming informed about the existence of such school which can be accelerated through advertising strategies. Advertising is therefore an imperative marketing tool used by private school owners to communicate their offerings. Advertising became crucial to school's survival in view of the ever-increasing number of new private schools and the vast erosion of school market shares by recently improving public schools in Kwara State. The primary objective of this study is to assess the effects of advertising as a marketing strategy for private schools' enrolment in Kwara State. The study used descriptive quantitative survey research design and adopted survey method to collect data on school advertising efforts and enrolment records from 200 private basic and post basic schools in Kwara State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all private schools that have used at least one form of advertising or the other. Frequency Distribution Analysis (FDA), Correlation Analysis, and Pearson correlation statistics were used to analyse the hypotheses formulated.

The study's findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between advertisements and students' enrolment in Kwara State private secondary schools. Based on the analysis of the results, it indicated that the calculated r of 0.644 is greater than the critical r of 0.116 at 0.05 level of significance. It was also revealed that total enrolment for the schools grew by about 27% from 54,078 to 68,909 between 2015/2016 and 2017/2018 academic sessions. It was concluded that private schools in Kwara State needed to employ the various advertising mix if they want to boost their enrolment because of the positive impact they have on the school enrolment in the state. It is therefore recommended that private schools should step up their advertising activities by expanding the frontier of their advertising activities. The study further recommended that there is a need for school management to increase their advertising budget and above all establish a functional marketing unit in their schools to be manned by professional school marketing executives.

Keywords: *Advertising mix, School enrolment, Mobile advertising, marketing strategy, Online advertising*

INTRODUCTION

There has been a tremendous rise in private sector involvement in the Nigerian education sector, this was partly due to the liberalisation policy of government in the sector as well as the seeming poor returns on education investment in the public sector. Various arms of education have witnessed huge involvement of private investors; basic education, post basic and tertiary sectors have all experienced huge private participation. Over the last two decades private schools at all levels have suddenly become the toast of high and middle income households. Though low income households are not left out of the rush for private school enrolment for their wards.

The preponderance of schools by private individuals and organisations have its own effects; the state of the nation's economic condition over the last three years has forced many parents back to public schools, many parents had to pay through their nose for school fees and tuition as well as other charges that make the private schools become exclusive preserve of the rich. Thus, enrolments to these schools have dropped drastically. As if that is not enough, most public schools are responding very well to parent needs, and they have started posting good results both in internal and external examinations. The initial urge and drive to send students to these private schools

are not as high as they were in the last two decades. The existing private schools are confronted with dwindling enrolment, high operation cost and stiff competition among schools. They have to struggle for patronage, old established ones have seen their market share eroded and new ones coming in are devising state of-the-art advertising and promotional tools to gain ground and push their frontier of influence beyond their immediate location.

Advertising informs the public about new products; it reminds them of existing products and persuades them to make purchase. School owners in Kwara State have resulted to employing advertising tools to push up their enrolment. The level of school enrolment depends on the schools' ability to attract new students and retain old ones. Attracting many students increase their numbers, while retention reduces dropout rate for the schools. Private schools have opportunity to inform the public about services offered to increase the number of their students. This can only be done by using appropriate channels. Schools need to adopt new approaches in marketing themselves to position them and also to have an opportunity for them to increase enrolment (Goosen, 2010). Schools that develop clear messages and effectively deliver them to their customers using appropriate communication strategies have competitive advantages in recruiting, retaining and building loyalty among their students and parents than those that do not. In recent times, large amount financial resources are committed to continually developing new products, rolling out advertisements, innovative and cutting-edge pricing, to create a better and customer-friendly brand (Aremu, Musa, Mustapha & Aremu, 2018). Advertising is a marketing tool for communicating ideas and information about goods and services to an identified group which employs paid space or time in the media, and other communication vehicles to delivery its offerings.

Effective marketing strategy through advertising provides solutions and alternatives to the problems encountered by most private schools in the marketing of their services. For efficient and effective marketing of their services, the management of private schools must define the target market, and design marketing mix components that meet their desires. It is pertinent to note that the strength of any advertising strategy depends on the strength of the competitive analysis on which it is based (Ishola, Aremu & Adedoyin, 2016).In order for schools to increase students' enrolment, they need to adopt appropriate channels of advertising. Advertisements capture the students' attention which is essential in influencing their decision to join a particular school. School advertisement creates awareness for their prospective students, and their parents, it is to persuade and remind them of the advantages they would get in the particular school than in other schools that offer same, or similar programmes.

In line with the above background of the study, the study examines the effects of advertising as a marketing strategy on students' enrolment in Kwara State private schools. Other specific objectives of the study are to: examine the nature, and advertising techniques adopted by private schools in Kwara State; examine the level of school enrolment in pre and post school advertising practices in Kwara State and evaluate the relationship between advertising marketing strategy variables and school enrolment in Kwara State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual clarifications

Marketing is the process is the process of taking goods or service from the concept phase to the point where customers will want to purchase those goods. It is how a brand communicates to its

audience in a way that is more personal beyond trying to sell a particular product or service. Essentially, marketing involves the four Ps; product, price, place and promotion strategy development that can sustain the audience engagement through regular communication. Marketing involves a long-term and ongoing communication between prospective and current customers in a way that inform and build firm relationship over time (Nukwana & Musa, 2018). Advertising, on the other hand, is a component of the marketing process. Advertising principally is embedded onto awareness creation with the goals of influencing consumers buying behaviours. An effective advertising plan begins with developing an understanding of where a particular product or service stands in the market. Advertising in school is one of the promotional activities aimed at creating awareness about the existence of the school, the services offered at persuading the students to join so that the school can gain competitive advantage over others.

If the school advertising is to become effective and meet its goals, it must according to Gordon (2017) have four clearly defined steps:

i. the definition of the schools business goals;

ii. identification of behavioural changes required to achieve stated goals;

iii the selection of relevant behavioural strategy that can make a consumer purchase the school product offerings; and

iv. development of creative ideas based on the selected behavioural strategies.

School marketing involves marketing communication strategies that are deliberately designed to attract and retain as well as maintain a long-lasting relationship with students and parents (Gathambi & Kathumi, 2014). Relationship marketing communication strategies build a long-lasting relationship between the school, parents and students by keeping clients happy and engaged even after their wards have been enrolled (Araujo, 2017). The relationship marketing strategies takes different dimensions such as a visit to schools, open day celebrations, community outreach programs, public performance, use of alumni network, continuous communication with the current and potential parents and students. Enrolling students is the most important need for your school. Without students your school cannot fulfil its mission. With more students, your school has the opportunity for greater impact in your community. With increased competition among schools, as well as the current economic impact, it is increasingly important for administrators to focus on their enrolment, and marketing strategies.

Schools operate in a competitive marketplace. In fact, every school has to compete within its sector; it does not matter if you are a private or public, primary or secondary or even faith based. School in recent times, compete with other schools for pupils, parents, effective teachers, adequate resources, financial support, sponsorship, and media space, and community approval. Your school not only need to excel at teaching, you also need marketing skills to survive in such a competitive environment (Atolagbe & Umaru, 2016).

However, students' enrolment in a given school depends on the strategies adopted. Enrolment is a process of initiating attendance to a school. The level of school enrolment depends on the schools' ability to attract new students and their retention. Attracting many students increase their numbers, while retention reduces dropout rate for the schools to have adequate numbers. Advertisements capture the students' attention which is essential in influencing their decision to join a particular school (Shadid & Imran, 2010). In a study carried out by Atolagbe, and Aremu, (2014) on private schools marketing practices in Ilorin

metropolis, it revealed that almost 90% of the schools engaged in one form of marketing campaign or the other.

Schools need to adopt new approaches in marketing themselves to position them and also to have an opportunity for them to increase enrolment (Goosen, 2010). Schools that develop clear messages, and effectively deliver them to their customers using appropriate communication strategies have a competitive advantage in recruiting, retaining and building loyalty among their students and parents than those that do not. Private schools therefore advertise to create the awareness of their prospective customers (the students) and their parents of the academic courses they offer in the schools to persuade and remind them of the advantages they would get in the advertising schools than in other schools that offer same or similar programmes. Uchendu, Nwafor and Nwaneri (2015) asserts that the level of patronage acquired by private schools regarding student enrolment depends mainly on how well they carry out marketing of their institutions which generally entails strategic adoption of awareness creation that can help project the institution as the best, highlighting reasons why parents should choose the school for their wards.

In making school choice, Erin (2018) emphasise the adoption and promotion of school brand; a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other competitors. You must think about the families you want to attract to the school. What do they value most? How does the positive attributes of your school align with their educational needs? By demonstrating how your school mission supports their educational goals, you are building blocks of trust and loyalty that translates to increase enrolment. The basic objective of advertising is to educate the customers regarding the utility of the product/service and to make take purchase decision, build primary demand for the product and encourage brand insistence through brand recognition and eventual increase in market share. School enrolment refers to the ability of schools to exert more systematic influence over the number and characteristics of new students, as well as influence the persistence of students to continue their enrolment from the time of their entrance to their graduation.

Enrolment is a process of initiating attendance to a school. It also means the total number of students properly registered, or attending classes at a particular school. Boosting school enrolment depends on the level of advertisement through the use of different media. Parents are always on the lookout for good schools that can provide best education to their children. To attract students, schools must create awareness about their institutions. To create proper awareness and perception of their schools, schools owners need good promotional strategies that can enhance the school's reputation. Boosting and sustaining enrolment, which involves attraction of new prospects and retaining old one tops the goals of school marketing intentions, 62% of the schools were interested in enlarging their market share of enrolment through a substantial marketing engagements that will attract new families, and encourage old parents to retain their students in the school (Atolagbe & Aremu, 2014).

Oluwaseyi (2017) discovered a non-linear relationship between advertising and school enrolment in a study that founds a not statistically significant difference between advertising, advertising budget and school enrolment in Osun State private secondary schools. However, Akinwumi (2018) found a significant effect of advertisement on student enrolment in Ogun State private secondary school. Based on the analysis of data from the study, calculated r- 0.448 > critical r- 0.116 at .05 level of significance, prompting the rejection of the research hypothesis which states that "there is no significant effect of advertisement

on students' enrolment in Ogun State private schools"

This can only be done by using appropriate channels. Schools need to adopt new approaches in marketing themselves to position them and also to have an opportunity for them to increase enrolment (Goosen, 2010). Schools that develop clear messages and effectively deliver them to their customers using appropriate communication strategies have a competitive advantage in recruiting, retaining and building loyalty among their students and parents than those that do not. In order for schools to increase students' enrolment, they need to adopt appropriate channels of advertising. Advertisements capture the students' attention which is essential in influencing their decision to join a particular school. School advertisement creates awareness for their prospective students and their parents of the academic courses they offer in the schools. They persuade and remind them of the advantages they would get in the school than in other schools that offer same or similar programmes.

Marketing Strategies

A marketing strategy is a list of goals that are based on an understanding of whom the target user is, what is it that they should buy and where they normally go to seek those products and services. Gordon(2017) identified two broad categories of marketing strategies; Inbound Marketing that places marketing content in the front of consumers who are likely to develop their interest in the brand. The marketing content is aligned with consumers' interest using such methods as social media posts and different search engines for optimised contents.

Outbound Marketing finds potential customers who may be interested in a particular product or service using outreach methods such as post card or mass emails. Marketing strategies match products and services with customers' needs or wants, decide where and when to sell, distribute, promote products/ services/ ideas and set prices. The strategic approach depends on whether the organization is addressing existing customers or is trying to attract new customers and whether the product or service is new or already established. (Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert,1995).

Baker (1992), indicated that, marketing strategies are the means by which a marketing goal is to be achieved. It is usually characterized by a specific target market, and if a marketing goal is to be achieved, then marketing strategies are employed. Each institution has a marketing strategy, which is an overall plan for the attainment of institutional goals.

According to Baker (1992), a well formulated marketing strategy helps to marshal and allocate an organization's resources into a unique and viable posture based upon its relative internal competencies, shortcomings, and intelligent components. A marketing strategy in the view of Leist and Winter (2000) is the means by which marketing goals are to be achieved usually characterized by a specified target market and a marketing programme to reach it. One of the best strategies to communicate the school to several clients is the direct advertising campaign. Direct advertising communicates the product offers and explain how to get the offered product by utilizing such tools as email, mails, catalogues, radio, and television audience responses to reach targeted audiences (Omboi & Mutali, 2011).

Most private school parents today are young and social media friendly. Employment of social media marketing could be the antidote for falling enrolment. Most of the social media network accounts are straightforward to share and repost. The ease of sharing and communicating on social media network makes it a superior alternative marketing medium to the traditional methods. Kennedy (2014) argued that, when the social media

is employed, and used consistently, it can strengthen value in the mind of the target audience. Consistent use of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp. Twitter, YouTube, Messengers and Blogs by the schools in the direction will improve enrolment.

Increasingly, schools are taking advantage of the internet and social media to create a wider reach in the market. The first step is to create a social media account, especially Facebook and Twitter, share special school events, stories and accomplishments with the school public. Encourage students, teachers, and parents to get involved on these platforms. Online and social media adverts must be well-designed to deliver promotional messages to specific audience in the most effective way (Schools Compass, 2018).

In highly competitive school markets, schools must be able to integrate customer, channel partner and company needs (Alese & Owoyemi, 2004). Balancing the different needs are not easy and costly missteps may occur quickly. In addition to customer, channel and school needs, a school has to watch the competition. So how can a school succeed and thrive in a competitive school marketing environment? There is no strategy that works for the school. Different schools need different strategies, depending on the marketing and the school goals they want to achieve; the competitiveness of the industry; and general industry and market trends (Steven, 2004).

Harrison (2002) stated that managers must draw up effective marketing strategies for various services offered by their organisation. Marketing strategy is the basic approach that the business unit will use to achieve its objectives. It is the determination of basic goals, objectives and the adoption of the courses of action as well as the allocation of necessary resources for achieving their goals and objectives.

Harrison (2002) concluded that in developing a marketing strategy, the marketer faces a great number of choices and options. To succeed therefore, school managers must base their strategy formulation in the following:

i. The character of the economy.
ii. The company's competitive size and position.
iii. The resources available must be identified
iv. The competitors marketing strategies.
v. The co-ordination of tactic into an integrated intensive whole.

Jagodowski (2017) was of the view that if the aim of school marketing plan is to increase admission, the marketing goals must then be to increase online user experience, increase the number of qualified leads, and generate a new expanded target audience. Jagodowski(2017) suggested that the marketing strategy to employ must include website redesign, increased email workflows, blog campaign and SEO campaign.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research of survey type to collect all the required data. The study employed school enrolment and advertising checklist to gather data on school enrolment as well as information on school advertising strategies including the cost of each programme.

The checklist was administered to 200 private schools that have adopted one form of advertising technique or the other within the last two academic sessions. Schools were purposely selected on the basis of having done at least one form of advertising or the other in the last two academic sessions. The data gathered were analysed using rank order to determine the responses to the research question while Correlation analysis, and Pearson moment correlation statistics was used to determine the significant relationship between advertising techniques and school enrolment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Results

Table 1: Ranking of advertising techniques adopted by private schools in Kwara State				
SN	**Advertising technique**	**Number of school**	**Percentage**	**Rank Order**
1.	Radio Advert	167	83.5	2nd
2.	Television Advert	102	51.0	4th
3.	Online Advert	84	42.0	5th
4.	Mobile display on school vehicles	195	97.5	1st
5.	Newspaper Advert	53	26.5	6th
6.	Flyers and leaflets	145	72.5	3rd

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2019

From Table 1 it was observed that most of the schools uses radio advert (83.5%), mobile bill board and displays on school vehicles(97.5 %), distribution and placement of school flyers (72.5 %) and average number use the television adverts (51.0%). It is also observed that online advertisement and newspaper advertisement have not been fully used by private schools in Kwara State.

Table 2: Advertising budget for the sample schools				
Year	**Average budget above ₦25,000 per term**	**Amount (₦) million**	**Average budget below ₦25,000 per term**	**Amount (₦) million**
2016/2017	120	**3,000,000**	80	**857,000**
2017/2018	158	**5,135,000**	42	**1,363,000**

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2019

In 2016/2017 session, 120 of the schools actually had minimum of 25000 Naira budget for advertising purposes per term while about40 percent of the schools (80) had budgets below that level. However, in 2017/2018 session the number of school with advertising budget above 25000 Naira increased from 120 to 158, such that budgets for advertising grew from ₦3 million for that category of school to ₦5.1million. This trend was also noticed for schools that spend below ₦25,000 on advertising per term in a session. Their total budget spending grew from ₦857,000 in 2016/2017 to ₦1,363,000 in 2017/2018 session.

Table 3: Distribution of enrolment before advertisement (2015/2016)			
S/NO.	School population	Number	Total enrolment
1	450 and above	30	1,3520
2	>300 < 450	40	1,2050
3	>250 < 300	80	20,380
4	>150 < 250	30	4,678
5	. < 150	20	3,450
TOTAL		200	54,078

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2019

Table 3 shows the categorisation of schools by enrolment levels before advertisement; out of 200 sampled schools only 30 had population above 450 students before advertisement. Schools with population above 300 students but below 450 enrolments stood at 40 while 80 of the 200 school have enrolment between 250 and lower than 300 enrolments before advertisement. About 50 of the schools had low enrolment below 250 before advertisement.

Table 4: Distribution of enrolment after advertisement in (2017/2018)			
S/NO.	School population	Number	Total enrolment
1	450 and above	45	23,085
2	>300 < 450	44	17,450
3	>250 < 300	83	22,825
4	>150 < 250	15	3,675
5	. < 150	13	1,874
6	TOTAL	200	68,909

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2019

The effects of advertising can be seen by the number of increase in enrolment in year 2017/ 2018 session. Total enrolment grew from 54078 to 68909 a whopping difference of 14,831 enrolments. Schools with enrolment above 450 grew to 45 from 30 a whole 50 percent increase while those with enrolment above 400 students increased from 40 to 44 likewise schools with enrolment above 300 increased from 80 to 83. Schools with lower enrolment before the year 2017/2018 session dropped drastically due to their advertising efforts. Schools with population less than 250 students dropped from 30 to 15, a 50 per cent reduction while those with less than 150 students dropped from 20 to 13 marking 35 percent drop in the number of schools within that low enrolment category.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between advertisement and students' enrolment in Private Secondary Schools, Kwara State.

Table 5: Relationship between advertising and students' enrolment in Private Secondary Schools, Kwara State							
Variable	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Df**	**Calc. r-value**	**Critical r-value**	**Decision**
Advertisement	200	16.540	1.58	198	0.644*	0.116	Rejected
Student Enrolment	200	13.850	1.767				

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2019

Table 5 shows the relationship between advertisement and students' enrolment in Kwara State Private Secondary Schools. Based on the analysis of the results, it indicated that the calculated r of 0.644 is greater than the critical r of 0.116at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis is hereby rejected. The implication of this finding is that advertisement is an essential marketing weapon and strategy that influence the school enrolment in private schools. The individual will only patronize schools base on available information at their disposal which can be communicated through advertisement.

The finding of this study is in agreement with the study of Uchendu,et. al. (2015) that examined the extent of marketing strategies adoption by school administrators in Calabar Municipality. They discovered that a low adoption of marketing strategies by schools. However, the study founds a significant relationship between the social media/website, face to face talk with clients, media adverts and students enrolment in private secondary schools.

Hypothesis 2

H_o -Adoption of advertising techniques does not enhance and private schools enrolment in Kwara State

Table 6: Correlation Matrix showing relationship between advertising techniques and private schools enrolment.							
Variables	**School enrolment**	**Radio Advert**	**Television Advert**	**Online Advert**	**Mobile display on school vehicles**	**Newspaper Advert**	**Flyers and leaflets**
School enrolment	1.0000						
Radio Advert	0.7966	1.0000					
Television Advert	0.8784	0.7320	1.0000				
Online Advert	0.6110	0.8011	0.8795	1.0000			
Mobile display on school vehicles	0.8411	0.7753	0.8466	0.6832	1.0000		
Newspaper Advert	0.4325	0.5520	0.3865	0.9749	0.8462	1.000	
Flyers and leaflets	0.9287	0.7487	0.8650	0.8221	0.9001	0.8420	1.000

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2019

Table 6 shows the correlation matrix which is an indication of how the advertising variables are related. It shows that advertising strategies of private schools in Kwara State, Nigeria which entails practices like Radio Advert (78%), Television Advert (88%), Online Advert (61%), Mobile display on school vehicles (84%), and Flyers and leaflets (93%) are correlated to school enrolment. However, Newspaper Advert (43%), less than 50% from advertising strategies variables listed in the study. Thus, the adoption of advertising strategies contributes positively to the school enrolment in Kwara State. The null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted; hence adoption of advertising strategies enhances private school enrolment in the state.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study findings concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between advertising and student enrolment. Most schools employed various forms of advertising backed up with monetary budgets to enhance their enrolment efforts. It was discovered that, advertising efforts by the schools yielded positive impact on enrolment. The study therefore concluded that the advertising efforts of private schools in Kwara State have a big influence on students' enrolment. The result of the correlation matrix further confirmed this position. From the six advertising variables used five of the six revealed that, at the moment they are highly correlated to the school enrolment.

The Pearson moment correlation statistic performed on the relationship between advertising efforts by the schools and enrolment showed a significant relationship between the two variables. This was informed by the calculated r-value (0.644) >than the critical r-value (0.116) at 0.05 level of significance which implied that the study rejected the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant relationship between advertisement and students' enrolment in Private Secondary Schools, Kwara State. From this finding, it can be concluded that private schools in Kwara State needed to employ more advertising techniques and promotional tools if they want to boost their enrolment. With enrolment upward movement to over 27.4% in two years, of advertising efforts, it can safely be concluded that, advertising has a significant impact on school enrolment in the State. This corroborates with Olodo, Aremu, Aremu, and Ajila (2015) that attractive packing of products appreciably influences users' buying option and instinct buying. It thus acts as a source of advertising to the consumers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that it is not debatable that advertising is an integral part of our social and educational system. The ability of advertising to deliver messages to various audiences has given it an important role in the marketing programmes of the most schools. The school managers spend much on various advertising techniques such as Radio Advert, Television Advert, Online Advert, Mobile display on school vehicles, Flyers and leaflets and Newspaper Advert due to their belief of what advertising offers to the school enrolment in Kwara State of Nigeria.

The study concluded that advertising strategies and variables used in the study have great influence on the student enrolment in private schools in Kwara State. Different advertising techniques adopted by the schools have contributed meaningfully to their current enrolment of students. The study founds a significant influence of advertising on school enrolment and if the trend is to be sustained and enhanced, it is therefore recommending among others that:

i. Schools should increase their advertising budgets to cover all types and forms of advertising that will enhance the students' enrolments;

ii. Schools owners/management should establish a marketing unit/division which will be manned by professional school marketing officers who can design appropriate marketing strategy suitable for each school needs; and

iii. The private schools managers should sustain and further increase the current advertising techniques been practiced as it has proved to have contributed to increase in school enrolment.

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