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CHALLENGES OF MARKETING ORIENTATION IN TANZANIA HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS REVISITED: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The increasing complexity in the environment that higher learning institutions (HLIs) operates, has resulted in increased attention and desire on marketing orientation applicability in a higher education context. This initiative is however facing various challenges which cannot be generalised due to variation in education, economic and political systems among countries. The purpose of this paper is to identify the marketing orientation challenges in Tanzania HLIs, believing that this can be a stepping stone for those HLIs that want to adapt the marketing orientation strategy. Interviews were used to collect data from 31 respondents comprised of employers' representatives, HLIs staff in the quality assurance bureaus/centres and students' leaders. The respondents and institutions were obtained by using both convenient and purposive sampling and data were analysed by using thematic analysis with the use of MAXQDA software. The study revealed that Tanzania HLIs are also facing marketing orientation challenges experienced by education institutions in different parts of the world. The challenges identified in this study were on the nature of HLIs, high cost and technology limitations, attitude and limited availability of marketing personnel in HLIs and the nature of Tanzania environment. This study recommends that any heartfelt effort to adopt marketing orientation as a strategic weapon for HLIs that want to succeed in the current era, must be accompanied by pre-measures to make sure that the stated challenges are eradicated.

Keywords: Marketing orientation, challenges, higher learning institutions

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are currently facing challenges including increased competition, globalisation of education, low enrollment and retention rates, reduced government subsidies, pandemics and increased societal expectations (Štimac & Šimić, 2012; Muya & Tundui, 2020). In an environment with such challenges, many authors advised that it is high time for HLIs to be marketing oriented (Akonkwa, 2009; Lafuente-Ruiz-De-Sabando, *et al.*, 2018). According to Brkanlić (2019), marketing orientation in an educational environment implies striving for quality in every management segment of the faculty because the educational service market offers a wide range of education institutions, forms and programs. It is simply the application of marketing principles in an education context in order to add value to both HLIs and their esteemed stakeholders. Higher learning institutions (HLIs) that are marketing oriented are exposed to various benefits.

Marketing orientation enables HLIs to deeply understand their clients as well as rivals (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009; SeyedJavadin, *et al.*, 2012). In addition, marketing orientation helps HLIs to increase the share of their market and profit and to be innovative hence leading to national and international competitiveness (Brkanlić, 2019; Neneh, 2016; Stachowski, 2011). Furthermore, marketing orientation is also linked with other benefits including, surviving

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as an organisation, increasing institutional professional reputation, improving facilities and faculty, and increasing enrolment, retention and endowment (Lafuente-Ruiz-De-Sabando, *et al.*, 2018; Polat & Umit, 2010).

Despite the benefits of being marketing oriented, the adoption of marketing orientation in higher education institutions is very low. Over years, marketing orientation in such institutions has remained in a form of a press release, public relations, advertisement attracting applications, education fairs and exhibitions and other means of communication (Nicolescu, 2009; Starck & Zadeh, 2013; Tabaku & Mersini, 2013). Marketing of HLIs is therefore among the greatest challenges facing such institutions worth working on (Gibbs, 2011; Domański, 2014). The centrality of marketing orientation in the current era, combined with the challenges of being marketing oriented, make this area interesting to study.

When the challenges of marketing orientation are clearly known, those HLIs which need to adapt this strategy then can do so smoothly. This is in line with the views of Anis, *et al.* (2018) who declared that consideration of problems/challenges facing educational institutions is crucial for the development of effective strategies for enhancing the performance of such institutions. It is not that studies on general marketing orientation and its related challenges are inexistent, but a number of such studies were review of literature based works (Akonkwa, 2009; Domański, 2014; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2012) resulting to the absence of fresh findings on the area and dangers for presenting information that may be outdated and partially addressing the research objectives (Saunders, *et al.*, 2012).

Several studies focused on general challenges facing HLIs and such studies offer limited insight on marketing orientation related challenges (Anis *et al.*, 2018; Butt & Hemani, 2019; Kebritchi, *et al.*, 2017; Pima, 2014; Stander & Herman, 2017). Also, in addition, a number of these studies were carried out in other countries than where the current study is carried out (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009; Domański, 2014; Foskett, 2012; Hayes, 2008; O’Cass, *et al.* 2012; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Poole & Campos, 2016; Tabaku & Mersini, 2013), making it difficult to generalize marketing challenges across countries which differ in education, economic and even political systems.

Despite the existence of studies on marketing orientation challenges, Maringe and Gibbs (2009) declare that institutional barriers and affordances to developing a university marketing orientation, are among many aspects that are still not quite known today. Given all such issues, undertaking a study for uncovering marketing orientation related challenges in higher education institutions in Tanzania HLIs is very important as this study intend to do.

Exploring the challenges facing diffusion of marketing knowledge in schools’ management, Poole and Campos (2016) noted the increasing marketisation of education as necessitating the application of for-profit business tools like marketing strategies. The major challenges facing schools in implementing marketing knowledge in their day to day activities are lack of financial resources, limited understanding of marketing, use of wrong personnel in marketing activities and cultural barriers which perpetuate a pervasive resistance to marketing functions. The study is concluded with the suggestion that if it is accepted that marketing knowledge need to be acquired to survive in an increasingly competitive environment, additional research must be done to help in creating effective marketing programs.

The importance of financial resources in a HLIs context, was also recognised in a study by O’Cass, *et al.* (2012) who declared that the process and ability of attracting the customer and then retaining them through marketing efforts, is directly related to an organisation’s resource capability. These studies provides a very good picture regarding challenges of marketing orientation. Whether these challenges hinder marketing orientation in different parts of the world, is something worth researching.

In the course of investigating the marketing means used by non-profit organisations in Albania, Tabaku and Mersini (2013) found that non-profit organisations still focus on fundraising, advertising, and public relations despite the calls for non-profit to adopt a more market-oriented approach. The reasons for this limited use of marketing were few numbers of staff working on the field, lack of information on marketing and its importance, lack of time and money to engage in a marketing orientation and negative perception of non-profit organisations on marketing which seems like a manipulative tool that is not compatible with their mission. Such findings corroborate those by Hayes

(2008) who found that lack of adequate resources both human and financial ones is the major challenge facing academic marketers.

In the same vein as the authors above, Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) found that marketing in non-profit organisations was generally not run by staff members who were trained in marketing, something which impeded the adoption of market orientation across non-profit organisations. According to Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2012) the uses of marketing strategies in a school environment is undisputable though faced with many challenges. The major challenges include negative view of marketing in education as against moral values and ethical codes, need of marketing engendering major dilemmas for principals and staff, failure to recognise the importance of marketing and absence of compatibility of marketing in education. The authors view the source of all these challenges being narrow understanding of the definition of marketing. The negative view towards marketing in HLIs and other similar challenges were also observed in a study by Hawkins and Frohoff (2010).

A study by Foskett (2012) established that the applicability of marketing in the education industry has been facing many challenges for a number of decades including, resistance to the notion of marketing viewed as an alien concept, poor and limited adoption of promotional techniques, marketing viewed as the function of the management rather than being embedded in the culture and organisation of the institution, marketing run by staff with no background in marketing, absence of formal training opportunities either for senior staff or head teachers in strategic and operational aspects of marketing.

According to Naidoo, *et al.* (2011) higher-education managers and researchers have indicated that it is often the case that when higher education borrows marketing techniques from the corporate sector, outdated and shallow versions of such techniques are imported. Among the recommendations provided concerning this discussion was that marketing principles and marketing ideas can be applied to the higher education sector, but not in the same way as in the business sector. Gibbs (2011) warned against the development of a ‘group think’ that marketing somehow can be applied to the products and services of higher education without endangering the essential nature of higher education as a diverse sector.

Marketing orientation challenges furthermore stem from critics provided by different authors. According to Rotfeld (2008), marketing practices of higher education could be serving the decline of thinking among college graduates. A study by Gibbs (2011) pointed out ethical challenges evident in some ways, for instance, those relating to the promotion whereby the use is often made of invasive marketing techniques via social networking sites, buzz marketing as well as inflated claims that are often made about bursaries. Others were part truths told in terms of promoting a university’s league position, incentives, financial or material offered to attract students or the promotion of star professors who are unlikely to come into teaching contact with the student.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative (mono-method choice) in nature, adopting a case study strategy, trying to build a theory on HLIs strategies (inductive) in a cross-sectional time horizon (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Non-probability sampling especially convenient and purposive sampling was used to select ten (10) HLIs, ten (10) employers, ten (10) graduates, ten (10) students and ten (10) staff in each HLIs. The expected sample size was therefore 40 respondents but a total of thirty-one (31) respondents which is equal to 77.5% participated in this research. There was a challenge in reaching students’ leaders (1 respondent), graduates (5 respondents) as well as quality control staff (3 respondents). Primary data were collected using an interview guide which contained a number of closed-ended questions (demographic characteristics of the respondents) and open-ended questions (challenges of marketing orientation in HLIs).

The reliability of qualitative data in this study was ensured by testing the questions with several respondents and checking the transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription (Creswell, 2009). Validity was ensured through the member check method where three (03) participants in the interview were invited to check the findings and results, and give feedback if they find themselves in or not (Grosssoehme, 2014; Kanis, 2014).

Although qualitative data can be analyzed using different methods such as Grounded Theory Method (GTM), semiotics and conversation analysis (Babbie, 2007) thematic analysis method (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Scharp & Sanders, 2019) was used to analyze data in this study with the help of MAXQDA software. Data analysis involved a number of activities including transcribing interviews, typing up field notes into Microsoft word, familiarisation with the data, as well as reading and re-reading of the data. Other activities included generation of codes and sub-codes based on the issues explored in the study and the responses of the interview transcripts, thematic coding which included collating codes into potential themes and gathering of all data relevant to each potential theme. The themes were then reviewed, refined, properly defined and renamed as per ongoing analysis and presented.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of thirty-one (31) respondents participated in the interviews of this research. Among these 93.5% were from public institutions, one (1) from a local government organisation, and 3.2% were from private organisations. The majority of the respondents' age, fell under two groups of 31-40 (38.7%) and between 41-50 (32.3%). Regarding their status/occupations, 32.3 % were employers' representatives, 29% were staff in the Quality Assurance Bureaus/Centers which included directors of quality assurance and quality control coordinators. Another group that participated in the interviews were students' leaders included presidents, prime ministers and ministers (29%), and graduates from five (05) HLIs (16.1%). Regarding their level of education, the majority of the respondents (45.2%) had a bachelor degree/doing bachelor degree studies, 38.7% had masters' degrees, 12.9% had a doctor of philosophy degree, and 1 respondent had a postgraduate diploma.

3.2 Challenges of Marketing Orientation in Tanzania HLIs

In the course of collecting and analysing data on this objective, it was found that marketing orientation is still a "no-challenge free approach". Based on Thematic Analysis using MAXQDA Software, several themes were identified relating to the challenges of marketing orientation in Tanzania HLIs including "nature of HLIs", "high cost and technology", "marketing personnel in HLIs", and nature of "Tanzania environment". Presentation on how these themes were generated, is shown in Table 1. One of the outputs from MAXQDA Software on the stated challenges is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Strategies' Word Cloud

Table 1: Marketing Orientation Themes Generation Process

1st order codes/categories	2nd order codes/categories	Aggregate dimensions/Themes
The majority of HLIs being public, the assumption that HLIs is known, the demand of students is high, presence of regulators which do not accepts some of the ideas which go against their standards, nature of HLIs products which do not require a lot of marketing activities, the role of graduates as one to do the marketing of a HLIs Absence of a supportive environment, limited access to the internet for the rural population to access distance learning, a limited income of people.	Nature of HLIs Nature of Tanzania environment	Marketing orientation challenges
Lack of financial muscles to do a lot of advertisements, lack of enough technology to modernise learning, high expenses to be marketing oriented, lack of best tools and equipment to contributes to marketing orientation efforts, lack of marketing technology	High cost and Technology	
Lack of experts hence marketing done by admission office, management-related weakness especially failure to fully meet their obligations, low accountability of administrators in becoming marketing oriented, lack of personal initiatives, lack of creativity, few marketing experts, lack of marketing expertise.	Marketing people in HLIs	

3.2.1 The Nature of HLIs

Several respondents in public HLIs felt that being marketing-oriented is not important as they are public ones hence being guaranteed financial resources, reputation, and even high student enrolment. For example, one respondent said: *“Marketing is not the right strategy for HLIs. Their duty (HLIs) is to produce the best graduates who will offer optimal productivity to their employers or be in a position to run their firms. Such success can help a lot in marketing a HLI”*.

The views are in line with those of other respondents who commented that: *“The nature of HLIs products do not require a lot of marketing activities as everybody will be surprised at you. Graduates are the ones to do the marketing of a university, not a university to undertake marketing of its graduates or programmes”*.

Another observation was that HLIs operates under rules and regulations as well as two major regulators, mainly the Tanzania Commission for University (TCU) and the National Council of Technical Education (NACTE). The presence of these regulators may limit HLIs from being marketing-oriented as this might contradict their standards. For example, section 47 of the University Act Regulations (URT, 2013), prohibits marketing-related activities such as advertising of courses and organisation of exhibitions on university education in the United Republic of Tanzania without the approval of TCU. Such rules may affect HLIs from the smooth undertaking of their marketing activities.

The nature of HLIs as a challenge towards its marketing orientation was also found in several studies (Nicolescu, 2009; Poole & Campos, 2016; Rotfeld, 2008). The findings above shows that despite their nature, HLIs must embrace marketing for the sake of addressing challenges facing them in the current era. Customisation of marketing practices must be done so that marketing is not applied as in non-education institutions.

3.2.2 Nature of Tanzania Environment

In addition to the above-stated challenge, the study found the nature of the Tanzania environment as also limiting marketing orientation efforts in HLIs. One respondent said:

“The nature of Tanzania environment limit HLIs from becoming marketing oriented in its widest scope. For example, if you want to orient the “place” element by distance learning or having many regional campuses, at the end a HLI may find itself incurring loss by not getting enough students due to limited incomes of Tanzanian and technological related challenges”. In the same vein, another respondent commented that *“the nature of Tanzania environment limit HLIs from being marketing oriented as it cannot be effective. For example, using a website for rural students can be challenging due to limited access to the internet hence HLIs are forced to use those tools which can have high reach”*.

The study findings revealed that the country has no supportive environment for such facilities and services. Among the major challenge is limited access to the internet for the rural population due to the absence of appropriate infrastructures but also due to the limited income of people. Such types of challenges were also highlighted in several studies in the course of studying e-learning activity in different countries (Awour & Kaburu, 2014; Hollow, 2009; Tarus & Gichayo, 2015). The challenges identified by the respondents and those pointed out through literature review, real do exist in the Tanzania environment but HLIs can not avoid to become marketing oriented due to such challenges. One of the strategy which can make marketing orientation a success story in HLIs is by segmenting the Tanzania market and choose those regions which can have a good number of targets hence directing the marketing efforts.

3.2.3 High Cost and Technology

The respondents pointed out that becoming full marketing-oriented may be expensive. Therefore, other HLIs are not ready to bear the costs. One respondent had this to say: *“To become marketing oriented one may need technology that HLIs do not know, they do not have or are not ready to incur the associated costs.* Another respondent commented that: *“HLIs are not marketing oriented due to lack of technology and lack of best tools and equipment to contributes to marketing orientation efforts”*. These challenges are close to other challenges pointed out by the respondents such as weak financial muscles or limited financial resources. Information Communication Technology (ICT) illiteracy is also a problem among people in the HLIs.

The fact that high cost and limited technology is a challenge of marketing orientation in HLIs is supported by (Hayes, 2008) who pointed out lack of adequate resources both human and financial as the major challenge facing academic marketers. The findings are also supported by Poole and Campos, (2016) who found that limited resources hinder effective marketing operations in an education environment. From the research findings, it is beyond reasonable doubt that successful marketing efforts hinge upon HLIs having enough financial resources. HLIs must have a budget to direct financial resources to organisational-wide marketing efforts rather directing those resources to the marketing department only. Being afraid of cost and technological barriers, means HLIs are not marketing oriented and therefore prone to the danger of the forces and complexities of the curent environment in which are operating.

3.2.4 Marketing Personnel in HLIs

It was pointed out that the marketing orientation challenges emanate from “marketing people in HLIs”. The respondents argued that some people who are responsible in the marketing departments or public relations offices are not aware of what marketing orientation means. One respondent said, *“whenever people hear marketing orientation, they associate this with promotion element of marketing mix something which is not true”*. It was vividly revealed that enough efforts are directed to the promotion element while other elements remain unforgotten or unknown. Another respondent said: *“Marketing orientation is hampered by the absence of marketing expertise, hence marketing done by admission officers lacks creativity, low accountability and limited initiative to marketing orient HLLs by the people concerned”*.

These results are supported by (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009) who found marketing portfolio was not run by staff members who were trained in marketing, similar problem was also identified in a study by Tabaku and Mersini (2013). The overall picture obtained from these findings is that personnel in HLIs are real a hudle in marketing efforts. For the marketing efforts to be successful in the HLIs contexts, weaknesses emanating from the marketing people must be addressed. This may take different forms like employing people with marketing expertise, educating them on the importance of marketing and the use of proper marketing strategies. Such efforts will help in creating a conducive environment for marketing efforts which can boost the survival and attainment of HLIs goals.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major conclusion in this study is that marketing orientation initiatives in Tanzania higher education context also suffers from several challenges as it was in HLIs in other parts of the world. Though, globally, some challenges are common in HLIs, other challenges are specific to the Tanzania context, justifying the importance of this study. The challenges identified in this study relates to the nature of HLIs, high cost and technology limitations and marketing personnel in HLIs and the nature of Tanzania environment.

This study recommends that, any heartfelt effort to adapt marketing orientation as a strategic weapon for HLIs which want to succeed in the current era, must be accompanied by pre-measures to make sure that the stated challenges are eradicated. The measures can take various forms like segmenting their markets, customisation of marketing principles for education environment without applying them as done in the business sector, undertake more research on HLIs marketing and provision of marketing education.

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