SUBMISSION FOR THE CONFERENCE: - 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

TITLE OF PAPER: - A MIXED METHOD STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE AS A MARKETING TOOL TO SUPPORT BRAND AWARENESS AND SELECTION OF A UNIVERSITY AMONG FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.


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Background: - Education is hailed as the single most important poverty alleviation strategy available to many communities within the developing world. Globally and most specifically within South Africa, universities have exerted significant effort in promoting their recruitment of first year university students particularly from ethnic minority, migrant and materially disadvantaged populations. Within that, universities have reported consistent problems with attracting and recruiting candidates and most notably, challenges have been reported in developing culturally relevant marketing strategies. Guided by this, an exploratory study was conducted in South Africa’s largest universities and one of the world’s top 10 mega-universities.

Aim: - The aim of the study is to identify and assess the attributes of a culturally relevant marketing and brand awareness strategy to influence first year students to select a University.

Objectives: - The study had a number of progressive objectives that included:

- Determining students’ assessment of the contribution that brand marketing and awareness makes to the selection of a university for their first degree.
- Identifying the attributes of a brand awareness-driven marketing strategy and its comparative impact/ contribution to the decision-making process of selecting a University.
- Assessing the extent to which culturally-targeted marketing contributes to University selection among prospective students.
- Developing culturally relevant brand management and marketing guidelines to improve prospective student selection.

Methodology: -

The study is presented as a mixed method study with two empirical phases. Phase 1 was a cross sectional case study design that employed an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to gain an in-depth understanding of the views and experiences of prospective first year students (n=25). Phase 2, was an online survey with prospective first year university students (n=1027) in which respondents offered insights into the impact that specified brand awareness attributes had on student selection choices.

Findings

The findings reveal that the impact of specific marketing interventions is significantly impacted by culture and applicants from different cultural groups respond differently to different branding images.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

The study concludes that any attempts at recruiting prospective students from different cultural groups would benefit from being modified to ensure that they are culturally relevant. Similarly, there is a need for varied marketing strategies to target prospective learners from different cultures.