

Advertising Strategies and Students' Enrolment in Private Secondary Schools in Abeokuta Metropolis, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The research explored the correlation between advertising techniques and students' choice of Private secondary schools in Abeokuta Metropolis of Ogun State. The research raised one question and tested two hypotheses. An ex-post-facto type of descriptive research design was used in the study. The sample comprised 155 private secondary School Administrators drawn from Abeokuta South and Abeokuta North Local Government Areas using purposive and random sampling procedures. The information gathering tool for the study was a 32 items self-constructed questionnaire titled "Advertising Strategies and Students' Enrolment Descriptive Questionnaire" (ASSEDQ). Data generated from the instrument were analysed using mean rating and standard deviation to answer the research question, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was made use of in testing the hypotheses. The result showed that the most commonly used strategies of advising in private schools were radio, handbills, social media, roadshows, and direct interaction with parents. Significant positive relationship was found between media advertising and direct advertising strategies and students' enrolment. Hinging on the results obtained, the research consequently, advocated that private school owners need to enlist the services of Professional Advertisers for effective results. Schools are also to engage in open house system in addition to creating Parents' Advocacy Groups.

Keywords: Advertising strategies, students' enrolment, School administrators, private secondary schools, Abeokuta metropolis.

Introduction

The history of the Western-oriented system of education in Nigeria is traceable to the endeavours of private organisations, specifically, the Christian Missionaries. Ayodele (as cited in Olomola, 2014) affirmed that the advancement in the Nigerian education is such that the earliest set of educational institutions, elementary, secondary or teacher training, were of the initiatives of the various Christian bodies in which they were fully in charge for 40 years. Subsequently, successive governments in Nigeria have realized the importance of education as an agent of change, thus, describing education as an exceptional tool for bringing about the development of the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN, 2014).

Therefore, over the years, different efforts have been made by the government to increase the literacy level in the country, for example, the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the Universal Basic Education Schemes, with the target of promoting egalitarianism in educational delivery in the country (Tikolo, 2008). The

introduction of the UPE scheme resulted to a tremendous increase in school enrolment (Ogbiji & Ogbiji, 2014), the resultant effect of which included: over-crowded classrooms and students' hostels, inadequate school infrastructure, overgrown lawns with weeds and shrubs as well as inadequate and meaningless employee empowerment programme (Ejiogu as cited in Olatubosun, 2005).

The above scenario was a manifestation of the fact that the provision of education for the entire citizenry of the country was intimidating to the government due to the extremely large amount of money involved, hence, the need to involve the private sectors. This brought about the deregulation of education in the country. The deregulation of education has provided ample opportunity for Nigerians to either attend public or private secondary schools and has led to the emergence of a great number of private secondary schools all over the country (Archibong, 2011).

The Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) (2011) reported that the education scenery in Lagos was overshadowed by the private ownership, with the large number of students getting enrolled into different types of private schools. Though, this report was on Lagos state but this situation seems to apply to Ogun State which borders Lagos State. At present in Nigeria, private education is irresistibly a competitive commercial and service-oriented activity, in which schools have to carve a niche for themselves by creating a positive image and projecting to the community their distinguishing factors from other schools in the neighbourhood; the process of which is known as Advertising.

Advertising can be described as the process of exchanging information with those who are involved in the consumption of commodity or labour. It is a marketing strategy that involves payment for space in order to promote a product or service and reaching out to, and enticing people who have the likelihood and willingness to patronize the organisation's product and services (Berger, 2017). Advertising is an important instrument used by organisations to create awareness about the arrival of its products and services in the market. Apart from the provision of adequate information about a brand to the prospective service users, advertising equally creates space for the brand in the minds of the target audience, when it is done effectively (Karsan, 2015).

The American Marketing Association (as cited in Adeyanju, 1997) described advertising as every compensated mean of impersonal offering of thoughts, commodities and kindness by a perceived promoter. Therefore, school advertising can be regarded as a means whereby school owners / proprietors / administrators communicate with parents, guardians, students and the general public about the school, its activities and distinguishing factors through a medium, for the purpose of persuading the audience to sign up for the school.

The importance of advertising in private school business cannot be under-estimated. Tekomo (2015) asserted that advertising provides information about the organization in order to keep the general public abreast of the new school. It is a persuasive mechanism aimed at promoting the services rendered by the school towards the accomplishment of the goals of secondary school system. It also helps in increasing the opportunity to expose the schools' services to the general public, thus, increasing patronage in form of enrolment. Therefore, when advertising a school, the audience will be interested in having convincing information that the school will be able to address their needs in term of educational provision.

The effectiveness of the advertising system in promoting students' admission into private secondary schools will be influenced by the strategies adopted. Ivy (2008) asserted that the success of any advertising strategies can be a function of 7Ps, meaning Price, People, Promotion, Physical evidence, Place, Product and Process. The price has to do with all issues relating to school fees and other sundry charges. The people refer to the quality and quantity of staff. Promotion relates to all efforts made to enlist the interest of parents towards enlisting their children in the school, most especially the media of advertising used. Physical evidence includes all physical resources available in the school for teaching and learning as well as for carrying out administrative responsibilities. The place is the location in which the school is cited bearing in mind the distance as well as the conduciveness for educational activities.

Lockhart (2005) believed that potential parents will prefer choosing a school closer to their place of abode. The product relates to the quality of graduates as evident in the performance of students in both internal and external examinations; while process relates to all administrative functions of the school, such as registration process, school fee payment mode and students' management activities (Mehrdach et al, 2012). Studies have shown that advertising techniques remarkably impact students' enrolment in private schools. Khan and Quraishi (2010) carried out a research on the effects of publicity on students' acceptance of private schools in Pakistan and found out that the four indicators of publicity viz, schools exterior, image management, media attention and marketing (print and electronic media) happened to be the major means of attracting students and that school appearance had a significant impact on students' enrolment. The study further showed that radio and television were the most effective media for attracting students to schools. In another study by Bede and Peprah (2014), it was found out that traditional advertising strategy of using bill boards was less effective in attracting students to schools. Khan and Qureshi (2010) however, concluded that other methods of advertising that could be used include the use of website and social networks, though, these could have less impacts in attracting students.

Uchendu et al (2015) researched on the relationship between promotion techniques and choice of non-state high schools in Calabar, Nigeria and highlighted some marketing strategies which could be adopted by private schools in promoting patronage in order of the perceived effectiveness. The study further showed that the extent of adoption of these strategies was low in most of the sampled schools. A significant correlation was thus, found to exist between the marketing strategies adopted and students' enrolment.

Omboi and Mutali (2011) have also identified the direct method of advertisement, which has a high tendency of enhancing increased students' enrolment, as it helps to pass on relevant and requisite information on the products, service and event to the prospective students, giving appropriate description. Direct method of advertisement includes email, mail, catalogues, radio and television. Television is a very powerful medium of advertisement because through it, school owners will be able to showcase the available facilities in the school and prospective enrollees will be able to view the school and its environment.

The significance of advertising in the private school business cannot be under-estimated. Kotler and Keller (2009) asserted that advertising can be used to express and prove to the general public the features of the school, such as the facilities, the uniform, the buildings and the acoustic and aesthetic nature of the school environment. It can also be used to adequately describe the users of services and utilization resourcefulness, the distinctive characteristics of the brand and other non-physical features in the school.

Advertising can be carried out using channels such as newspapers, magazines, internet, direct mails and outdoor advertising (billboards and roadshows). Therefore, private secondary school managers can explore any of these avenues in reaching out to their potential students. Ostapchuk (n.d.) asserted that the budget of a school, the nature of academic activities taking place and the quality and quantity of teachers are determinants of enrolment into a private school, and private school owners make efforts at continuous improvement on the enrolment into their schools. The unique nature of the school should be exposed to the public, which could be in the area of sports, special programmes, faith-based or other approaches to teaching and learning. Therefore, a private school owner/ manager can boost the school enrolment through direct connection to the community, through word of mouth, school website, and social media or by getting recognition in the local news through involvement in various competitions.

Chand (2014) identified nine strategies through which advertisement can take place, these are direct mail, newspaper, window display, fair and exhibition and especially advertising. According to him, direct mail is the foremost channel of advertising in which the provider of services sends messages to the prospective consumer through post. Comprehensive information on the product and service is contained in the message including prices. This method enables the service provider to have direct contact with the consumer and be able to appeal to their emotions on why they should patronize. Media advertising involves the use of radio, television, newspapers, magazines, journals, films etc. to attract students. The outdoor advertising involves the use of

channels such as posters, placards, sandwich men, bus and train advertising. This medium is also known as moral advertising, aimed at catching the attention of passerby. This type is flexible and can be used to meet peculiarity of people in a particular locality. It is a relatively cost-saving medium of advertising. Specifically, advertising involves giving free souvenir in which the name of the school is imprinted or engraved depending on the nature.

It is against the background that the research explored advertising techniques and students' enrolment in non-governmental post-primary schools in the municipality of Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The role of advertising in promoting enrolment into private schools has continued to be incontrovertible. It is also factual that private schools are established primarily as business venture, and the continuous existence is considerably contingent on the enrolment trend into the schools. However, it has been observed that in attempts to have adequate returns on investment, private school owners/ managers explore different strategies to attract students and increase enrolment into their schools. Some of the strategies seem to vary from one school to the other, from one locality to the other and or based on the school type (day or boarding), therefore, this appears to have implications on enrolment into the schools.

The need to examine the effectiveness of the advertising strategies adopted on the enrolment into private post-primary schools in Abeokuta municipality of Ogun State has prompted the researcher to embark on the research.

Research Question

The research provided answer to the question:

1. What is the extent of utilization of advertising strategies in students' enrolment in private post-primary schools in the municipality of Abeokuta, Ogun State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant correlation between media advertising and students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Abeokuta metropolis of Ogun State.
2. Direct advertising does not have significant correlation with students' enrolment in private post-primary schools in the study area.

Methodology

This is a quantitative study which adopted a descriptive design of causal comparative type. This is because the variables were studied in retrospect since the researcher did not manipulate any of the variables. The population comprised all administrators of all private secondary schools in Abeokuta South and Abeokuta North Local Government Areas constituting Abeokuta municipality, Ogun State. The participants were made up of 155 private secondary school administrators selected from the two Local Government Area using purposive and random sampling techniques.

A 25 items self-designed questionnaire titled “Advertising strategies and Students’ Enrolment Questionnaire” (ASSEQ) was made use of in collecting data for the study. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was determined by two lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and an expert in Educational Evaluation at the University of Lagos. The instrument was trial tested using 10 school administrators of private secondary schools in Ado-Odo/ Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State, using Crombach Alpha reliability method, and a co-efficient of 0.89 was got. This high value of reliability showed that the instrument was good enough to elicit responses from the participants. Information obtained through the instrument were statistically tested making use of descriptive statistics of mean rating and standard deviation to answer the research question and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical tool for hypotheses testing at .05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question: What is the extent of utilisation of advertising strategies in students’ enrolment?

The question was answered using Mean and standard deviation, the result is shown in table 1.

Table 1

Extent of Utilization of Advertising Strategies in Private Secondary schools

S/N	Advertising Strategies	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Radio	3.08	0.72	High extent
2.	Television	2.43	0.65	Low extent
3.	Newspapers	2.05	0.68	Low extent
4.	Magazines	1.27	0.95	Low extent
5.	Social media	2.63	0.57	High extent
6.	Bulk messaging	2.96	0.91	High extent
7.	School website	2.05	0.84	Low extent
8.	Handbills	3.42	0.86	High extent
9.	Road shows	2.71	0.49	High extent
10.	Billboards / signposts	3.66	1.68	High extent
11.	Sound truck	2.08	0.53	Low extent
12.	School fees	2.89	0.14	High extent
13.	Face-to-face talk with parents	2.58	1.32	High extent
14.	Learner-friendly environment	2.69	0.60	High extent
15.	Quality academic outputs	2.73	0.77	High extent

*Criterion mean = 2.50

Table 1 reveals the mean rating of the extent of utilization of Advertising strategies in the Private secondary schools. The table shows that items 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 had the mean ratings above the criterion mean of 2.50, while items 2, 3, 4, 7, 11 had mean ratings below 2.50.

It then means that hand bills were the most frequently used strategy because of the highest mean rating of 3.42, while the least used strategy was the school website with the lowest mean rating of 1.05.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant correlation between media advertising strategy and students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

This hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation; the result is presented in table 2.

Table 2
Media Advertising Strategy and Students' Enrolment

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-cal	Sp	Remarks
Media Advertising		28.05	3.71				
	155			153	0.56	0.002	Ho rejected
Students' Enrolment		14.83	5.96				

$P < 0.05$

Table 2 reveals that the r-calculated value of 0.56 with 153 degrees of freedom is significant ($P = 0.002 < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between media advertising strategies and students' enrolment was rejected. This implies that a significant positive correlation existed between media advertising and students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

Hypothesis Two: Outdoor Advertising does not have a significant relationship with students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

The hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The result is presented in table 3.

Table 3
Direct Advertising Strategies and Students' Enrolment

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	r-cal	Sp	Remarks
Direct Advertising		36.62	8.59				
	155			153	0.75	0.001	Ho rejected
Students' Enrolment		14.83	5.96				

$P < 0.05$

Table 3 indicates that the relationship between outdoor advertising and students' enrolment is positive and significant ($r\text{-cal} = 0.75$, $df = 153$, $P = 0.001 < 0.005$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was declined. This implies that direct advertising and enlistment into non-governmental post-primary schools were significantly related.

Discussion

The first result showed that to a high extent the following strategies were used by private secondary schools for advertisement: Radio, Social media, bulk messaging, handbills, roadshows, billboards/ signposts, school fees, face-to-face interaction with parents, learner-friendly environment and quality academic outputs. Specifically, handbills advertising was the most frequently used medium while the use of the school website was the least used medium. This is an indication that private secondary school made use of different media in attracting students into their school. This present finding confirms the earlier one by Khan and Qureshi (2010) that the aesthetic nature of the school environment, relationship with the public, publicity and use of print and electronic media were the major ways of attracting students into schools by school owners, though, radio and television were the most effective media.

The result of the first hypothesis testing indicated that a significant relationship between media advertising and students' enrolment. This shows that the use of radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and social media for advertising is a determinant of students' choice of private secondary schools. This present study confirms Uchedu et al (2015) that the adoption of electronic and print media for advertisement was low in most of the sampled schools and significant correlation was found between the marketing strategies adopted and students' enrolment.

The last result indicated that direct advertising strategies had remarkable connection with students' enrolment in private post-primary schools. This means that the use of media such as handbills, billboards/ signposts in school marketing had overreaching implications on how much students are attracted into the schools. The study contradicts that of Bede and Pephrah (2014) that the use of billboards and other direct means of advertising was less effective in attracting students into the schools. This finding is not surprising because most of the private secondary schools fall within the range of low fee schools with a very few falling within the range of medium fee school.

Conclusion

The study has examined the correlation between advertising techniques and students' enrolment in private post-primary schools in Abeokuta municipality of Ogun State. The study has been able to explore different means used by private school owners in attracting students into their schools. Therefore, it will be right to conclude that the commonly used means of persuading students are the handbills, billboards/ signposts, direct interaction with parents, roadshows, radio etc. other means were less utilized. The type of strategies adopted has also been found to determine the enrolment trend into private schools. Therefore, the use of print media and modern electronic media, except radio was not prominent media of advertising within the study area.

Recommendations

Arising from the results of the research and the inference drawn from it, the following measures are recommended: The Private school owners should always take the good advantage of advertising in boosting their school enrolment. They should realize that advertising is not something to be done in trial and error. Therefore, the services of professional advertising agencies should be enlisted at all times, so as to have the best of the exercise. This is because the expertise of these professionals will make it possible for them to put in place plans to suit the peculiarities of a particular school;

Proprietors/ administrators of private secondary schools should as much as possible consider the location and the uniqueness of their schools in deciding the strategy to adopt in enticing students into their schools. Therefore, the use of inappropriate strategy can be counterproductive and may not achieve the desired results.

Since most of the schools attract their students from within their immediate locality, school owners could

organize open-house, where members of the community are invited to the school in order to show case the schools' activities, programmes, achievement and infrastructure as a way of encouraging parents to patronize the schools. That can also create opportunity for the school to establish a parent advocacy group, whereby parents of already admitted students help to speak on behalf of the school to persuade fellow parents in enrolling their wards into the school.

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