

Influence of Differentiation Planning Strategies on Competitiveness of Private Universities in Nairobi County, Kenya

Nene Nderitu, Dr. Paul Edabu, Dr. Mary Chui Mugwe

Abstract— In the last three decades, the republic of Kenya has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of chartered universities and a stiff competition for students. The student enrolment base coupled with the emergence of private university education providers turned the university arena in Kenya into a student enrolment market, leading to intense competition between Public and Private Universities. The researcher realizes that, the existing studies relate competitiveness with performance. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the influence of differentiation planning strategies on competitiveness of private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. Resource Based Theory, Competitive Advantage Theory and Generic Framework Theory guided this study. The study applied mixed method approach and thus adopted concurrent triangulation design. Target population comprised 66 Registrar Academics, 66 Registrar Admissions and 33 Directors of Marketing all totalling to 165. Using the Central Limit Theorem, 36 Registrars of Academics, 36 Registrars of Admissions and 18 Directors of Marketing were purposively sampled. Questionnaires were used to collect data from Registrar Academic and Admissions whereas interview guide was used to gather data from Directors of Marketing. Data analysis began by identifying common themes from the respondents' description of their experiences. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and were presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferentially using Chi-Square through Statistical Packages for Social Science and presented using tables. The study established that many private universities have not fully adopted effective differentiation planning strategies to enhance their competitiveness. The study recommends that ought to ensure that their locations are strategic to enable students access services within such locations; have adequate security features for students and staff, availability of accommodation facilities, embrace new technological advancements and offer quality academic programmes in order to attract many undergraduate students.

Index Terms— Differentiation planning strategies, competitiveness of private universities, students' enrolment..

I. INTRODUCTION

Highlight Differentiation planning strategies are marketing techniques used by a firm to establish strong identity in a specific market. In other words, the differentiation planning strategy involves creation of

differentiated products for different segments. O'Regan, Kling, Ghobadian and Perren(2012) posit that using differentiation planning strategy, a firm will introduce different varieties of the same basic product under the same name into a particular product category and thus cover the range of products available in that category. Davidow and Uttal (2009) posit that differentiation planning strategy can also be defined as positioning a brand in such a way as to differentiate it from the competition and establish an image that is unique. According to O'Regan et al (2014), a variety of products, each branded and promoted differently with levels of function, allows a company to 'desensitize' prices, and on the basis of being different, charge premium or higher prices. O'Regan et al (2014) further assert that this planning strategy also provides a hedge against different markets and product life cycles, allowing cash flow to come in even if a few products decline, while others grow or mature.

Price is an important consideration when attracting customers. However, the differentiation approach looks to develop product uniqueness and attractiveness to engage customers. Once again, there are a number of concepts involved in this approach, and each one is all about playing to customers' perceptions. In a study carried out amongst 112 firms in Venezuela, Denis, Lamotheand Langley(2001)established that differentiation planning strategy might include promoting a product's durability and general utility which appeals to a customer's sense of value. Denis et al (2001) further noted that it could also involve touting the support system for a service or product, which creates a certain air of accountability. Finally, there is also the notion of brand image, creating meaningful connections with customers to ensure long-term loyalty (Denis et al, 2001). Companies that differentiate want to meet customers' unique needs and are rewarded with premium prices. These findings point to the fact that differentiation planning strategy calls for a company to provide a product or service with distinctive qualities valued by customers. Besides, it is aimed at the broad market that involves the creation of a product or services that is perceived throughout its industry as unique.

In higher education context, a suite of benefits that flow from increased differentiation includes higher-quality teaching and research programs, more student choice, a globally competitive system and increased financial sustainability (Weingarten & Deller, 2010). Ontario University, published Teaching Loads and Research Outputs of Faculty Members in 2014: the implications for

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Productivity and Differentiation of the Ontario University verified that faculty members in the more research-intensive universities have the greatest research success (measured in research funding dollars) and impact (measured in citation volume) and tend to teach less than faculty from universities that are more undergraduate focused (Jonker & Hicks, 2016). Differentiation planning strategy aims to build up competitive advantage by offering unique academic programmes which are characterized by valuable features, such as quality, innovation, and student service. Differentiation can be based on the academic programme itself, the delivery system, and a broad range of other factors. With these differentiation features, institutions of higher learning provide additional values to students which will reward them with a premium price.

According to Jonker and Hicks(2016), differentiation planning strategy is an approach under which an institution of higher learning aims to develop and market unique academic programmes for different student segments. Usually employed where an institution of higher learning has clear competitive advantages and can sustain an expensive advertising campaign (Jonker & Hicks, 2016). It is one of three generic marketing planning strategies that can be adopted by any institution of higher learning. In a study conducted in the Netherlands, Luliya, Sununta, Yuosre and Chot(2013)established that, to maintain this planning strategy the institution of higher learning should have: strong research and development skills, strong academic programme engineering skills, strong creativity skills, good cooperation with distribution channels, strong marketing skills, and incentives based largely on subjective measures, be able to communicate the importance of the differentiating academic programme characteristics, stress continuous improvement and innovation and attract highly skilled, creative people. Luliya et al (2013) noted that academic programme differentiation is a common way of differentiating the institution of higher learning's offerings from those of its competitors.

In keeping with these assertions, Beal and Yasai-Ardekani(2000)carried out a study amongst 27 tertiary institutions in Colombia and discovered that a differentiation planning strategy calls for the development of an academic programme or service that offers unique attributes that are valued by students and that students perceive to be better than or different from the academic programmes of the competition. The value added by the uniqueness of the academic programme may allow the institution of higher learning to charge a premium price for it. Beal and Yasai-Ardekani(2000) further assert that the institution of higher learning hopes that the higher price will more than cover the extra costs incurred in offering the unique academic programme. Because of the academic programmes' unique attributes, if universities increase their prices, the institution of higher learning may be able to pass along the costs to its students who cannot find substitute academic programmes easily (Beal&Yasai-Ardekani, 2000). To corroborate assertions of Beal and Yasai-Ardekani(2000), Davidson (2001) noted that, in Austria, institutions of higher learning that succeed in a differentiation planning strategy often have

access to leading scientific research, highly skilled and creative academic programme development team, strong sales team with the ability to successfully communicate the perceived strengths of the academic programme and corporate reputation for quality and innovation. In other words, successful differentiation is based on a study of students' needs and behavior in order to learn what they consider important and valuable. The desired features are then incorporated into the academic programme to encourage student preference for the academic programme. The basis for competitive advantage is an academic programme whose attributes differ significantly from rivals' academic programmes.

In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to differentiate often result in higher costs (Gopalakrishna&Subramanian (2001).Profitable differentiation is achieved by either keeping the cost of differentiation below the price premium that the differentiating features command, or by offsetting the lower profit margins through more sales volumes (Grant, 2002). A study carried out in Mauritius by Ramsaran-Fowdar(2007)revealed that, with the differentiation planning strategy, on the other hand, the unique attributes or perceptions of uniqueness and characteristics of an institution of higher learning's academic programme other than cost provide value to students. Ramsaran-Fowdar(2007)indicated that any institution of higher learning pursuing differentiation seeks to be unique in its industry along some dimension that is valued by students, which means investing in academic programme and marketing. This implies that it is the ability to sell its differentiated academic programme at a price that exceeds what was spent to create it that allows the institution of higher learning to outperform its rivals and earn above-average returns.

Ramsaran-Fowdar(2007)further posits that an academic programme can be differentiated in various ways. Unusual features, responsive student service, rapid academic programme innovations and technological leadership, perceived prestige and status, different tastes, and engineering design and performance are examples of approaches to differentiation (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007). However, rather than cost reduction, an institution of higher learning using the differentiation needs to concentrate on investing in and developing such things that are distinguishable and students will perceive. Hence, the essential success factor of differentiation in terms of planning strategy implementation is to develop and maintain innovativeness, creativeness, and organizational learning within an institution of higher learning. In a study conducted in KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa, Kotler (2001) insists that anything that an institution of higher learning can do to create student value represents a potential basis for differentiation. Once it finds a good source of student value, it must build the value, creating attributes into its academic programmes at an acceptable cost (Kotler, 2001). These attributes may raise the academic programmes' performance or make it more economical to use. This implies that differentiation possibilities can grow out of possibilities

performed anywhere in the activity cost chain. This lends credence to the assertions of Porter (1985) who posited that an institution of higher learning may obtain a competitive advantage by creating a higher value for its students than the cost of creating it, either by adopting a differentiation planning strategy or an efficiency planning strategy.

In Tanzania, Mwamburi(2012) asserts that differentiation planning strategies offer unique academic programmes or services to students so as to obtain a price premium. This facilitates an institution erection of entry barriers and reduces universities bargaining power through student loyalty and price elasticity (Porter, 1985). In other words, by implementing differentiated customized services or personalized academic programmes an institution can build its student loyalty when substitute academic programmes or services are unavailable in the market (Allen & Helms, 2006). These characteristics of academic programme and services in this industry enable institution to charge their students a higher price than their rivals based on the cost of the delivery system, service quality and the distribution channels involved in creating or producing their unique academic programmes and services (Akan 2006). Miller (2006) further categorizes differentiation planning strategies into academic programme innovation and market differentiation. Miller (2006) also explained that in an academic programme-innovation differentiation planning strategy an institution aims to outperform its competitors by emphasizing the academic programme of creative, up-to-date and attractive academic programmes as well as service quality, efficiency, new academic programme development, design innovations, and fashion or style (Harvey, 2008).

In Kenya, differentiation planning strategies also segmentation planning strategies are marketing approaches used by private universities to institute a strong distinctiveness in a particular market (Mutindi, Namusonge & Obwongi, 2013). For example, a study carried out by Kamau (2013) on competitive planning strategies adopted by private universities in Kenya revealed, as Porter (1985), that the basic concept of generic planning strategies is the competitive advantage of any planning strategy, and achieving it necessitates a firm to make a choice on the type of competitive advantage it seeks to achieve and the parameters within which it will achieve it and comprise cost leadership, product differentiation and customer focus. Kamau (2013) underscores that in the concentrated planning strategy, a firm channels its resources to growing a single product to profitability, in a solitary market, with a particular dominant technology. This method enables the firm to thoroughly develop and exploit its expertise in an enclosed competitive environment, thereby leading to improved performance. Differentiation requires a perception of exclusivity. However, not all customers are willing or able to pay the required higher fees. In the competitive planning strategies, private universities just like their counterpart institutions that offer services should capitalise on the differentiation. For example, a study in the petroleum industry, Murage (2011) found that service stations use differentiation as a method of obtaining competitive advantage over other service stations. However, Murage

(2011) and Kamau (2013) as did other empirical researchers failed to articulate how different planning strategies specially influence competitiveness of private universities.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generic planning strategies are critical in enhancing competitiveness of private universities. When effectively adopted, private universities register many undergraduate and postgraduate students who complete their academic programmes in time. As stated in the background, Omboi and Mutali (2014) posit that a continued survival of universities in the competitive higher education environment is strictly pegged on how well the universities capitalize on marketing activities for strategic positioning. However, in private universities represented in Nairobi County, the number of students enrolled in universities is still low and some still complain of longer periods to complete their academic programmes. For example, enrolment increased from 82,095 students in 2003 to 443,783 in 2015, an increase of 400 per cent, with private universities accounting for 11.5% (2005-2006) academic year, 17.8% for (2007-2008) academic year, 19.7% (2009-2010) academic year, 27.7% (2011-2012) academic year, 19.8% (2013-2014) academic year and 18.1% (2014-2015) academic year (Republic of Kenya, 2015). Despite these statistics, few studies have interrogated the cost-leadership planning strategies adopted by private universities and how such planning strategies influence competitiveness of private universities, hence the study.

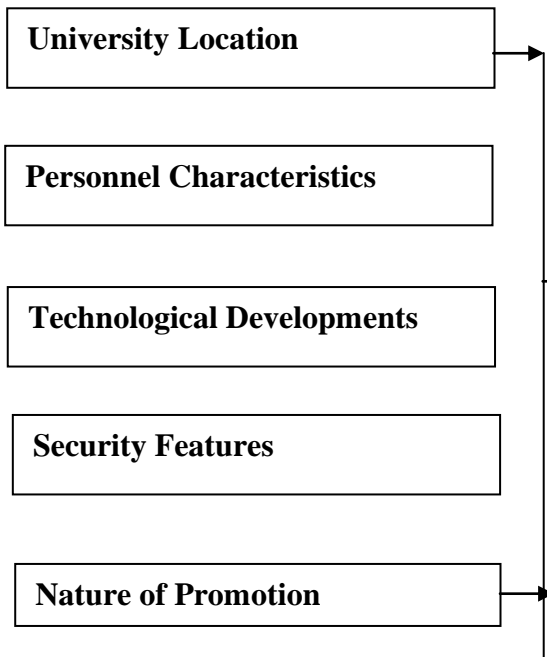
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the Michael Porter's generic framework theory that gives techniques for analyzing industries and competitors. This theory can be used to find the optimum position for private universities within higher education institution and often a determinant of institution's profitability can be said to be the attractiveness of an institution/industry in which it operates. The study was also guided by the Competitive Advantage Theory which was also postulated by Porter (1980). According to Porter (1980) Industries, just like in Higher Education Institution and the individual private universities within the universities are constantly involved in a dynamic interplay in an attempt to build a successful; competitive edge over another. In the same token, the study was also based on Resource based Theory by Thomas (2006). According to resource-based theory as actualized by Thomas (2006), organizations wish to maintain a distinctive product, competitive advantage and will therefore plug gaps in the resources and capabilities in the most cost-effective manner available.

The theories relevant to this study are; the generic framework theory, the competitive advantage theory, and the resource-based theory. The choice of the three theories in this study is motivated by the fact that the porter's generic planning strategies are guided by three pillars; cost leadership, differentiation and market focus planning strategies and thus the need to support them. These theories underscore the fact that, for an institution using this focus planning strategy approach can opt to either seek lower costs or product differentiation planning strategy and thus have a

focus or market niche planning strategy based on lower cost and a focus or market niche planning strategy based on differentiation. Private universities concentrate on a narrower buyer segment in order to compete with their rivals on the basis of lower cost of operation; while in the differentiation planning strategy the company concentrates on the market niche by offering the customers a product that best suits their tastes, preferences and expectations. These theories agree with the fact that universities have cemented their trade mark on specific programmes as their focal point thus gaining popularity even in the related market pools.

Independent variables



IV. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the conceptual framework was based on differentiation planning strategies reflected through university location, personnel characteristics, technological developments, security features and nature of promotion which constituted independent variables whereas competitiveness of private universities whose indicators included; number of students in private universities and those who graduate constituted the dependent variable. The intervening variable for this study included; government policies and staff support as shown in Figure 1;

Dependent variable

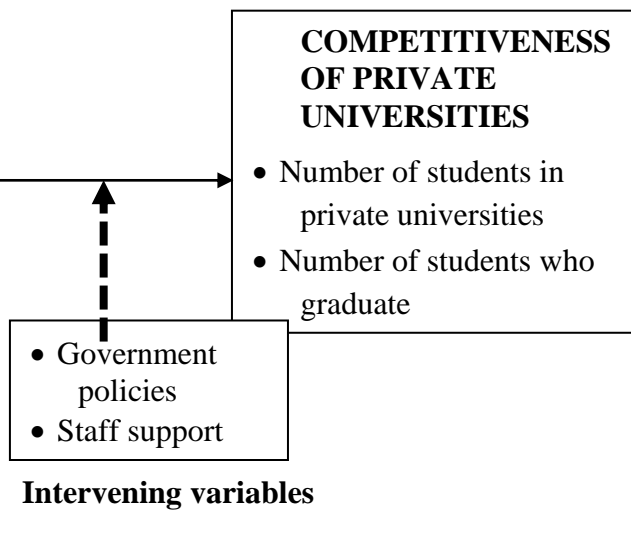


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher (2019)

V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in registered private universities in Kenya. The study focused on assessing the influence of differentiation planning strategies on competitiveness of private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. This study applied mixed methods approach and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. In this study, questionnaires were used to collect data from Registrar Academics and Registrar Admissions whereas interview guide was used to collect data from Director of Marketing.

Research Methodology

The study applied mixed methods approach, that is, quantitative and qualitative methods. The study applied concurrent triangulation research design since this is a single-phase design in which the researcher applied quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time and with

equal weight. Target population for this study was 165 respondents. This is because according to Mugenda and

Mugenda (2003), target population is an entire group of individuals, events or objects having common characteristics.

This consisted of 66 Registrar Academics, 66 Registrar Admissions and 33 Directors of Marketing. The sample for the study was eighteen universities, that is, 54.5% of 33 that was slightly but within the threshold. The choice of eighteen universities was motivated by the fact that they are firmly established in Nairobi County. Using the Central Limit Theorem of sample size determination, all the Registrars in charge of Administration and Registrars in charge of Academic Affairs, their Assistants and Director marketing in all Private Universities were selected purposefully. Purposive sampling was used to select 18 private universities in Nairobi County to act as research sites due to their establishment in terms of period of operation and their magnitude in terms of courses offered. Eighteen Directors of Marketing, 36 Registrar Academics and 36 Registrar Admissions were selected using

purposive sampling.

This procedure enabled the researcher to realize a sample of 18 Directors of Marketing, 36 Registrar Academics 36 Registrar Admissions. Data analysis entails the reduction of the consolidated information to a size that is manageable, development of summary, search for pattern and application of the statistics technique (Best & Kahn, 2006). The relevant information was broken into phrases which reflected a specific thought. The responses to the close-ended items were assigned codes and labels. Frequencies of the responses from participants were obtained. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms whereas the quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Chi-Square Test Analysis with the help of SPSS Version 23 and presented using frequency distribution tables.

Table 1: Response Rates

Respondents	Sampled Respondents	Those Who Participated	Achieved Rate (%)	Return
Directors of Marketing	18	16	88.9	
Registrar Academics	36	32	88.9	
Registrar Admissions	36	32	88.9	
Total	90	80	88.9	

Source: Field Data (2018)

From Table 1, Director of Marketing, Registrar Academics and Registrar Admissions registered a response rate of 88.9%. This confirmed the findings of Creswell (2009) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate and of suitable levels to allow for generalization of the outcomes to the target population.

Influence of Differentiation Planning Strategies on Competitiveness of Private Universities

The study sought to find out the influence of differentiation planning strategies on competitiveness of private universities. Descriptive data was collected from Registrar Academics and Registrar Admissions, organized into specific thoughts and results are shown in Table 2;

Table 2: Views of Registrar Academics and Registrar Admissions on the Influence of Differentiation Planning strategy on Competitiveness of Private Universities

Test Items	RESP	SA	A	U	D	SD
		%	%	%	%	%
Location of private universities attracts students thus boosting their enrollment rates with fewer cases of dropouts	RAC	80.5	8.5	1.	5.5	4.0
	RAA	88.3	5.4	5	2.3	2.1
The characteristics of personnel who offer services in private universities enable them to enroll more students and ensure that they complete their programmes in time				1.		
				9		
	RAC	78.5	14.	2.	3.0	1.5
	RAA	77.2	5	5	6.3	1.7
Private universities with advanced technological development enroll more students and take a short period to complete their courses			13.	1.		
			3	5		
	RAC	69.5	12.	2.	10.	6.5
	RAA	75.3	0	0	0	1.9
			20.	1.	1.3	
Security features in private universities enable them to register more students than their counterparts			1	4		
	RAC	74.5	17.	2.	3.5	2.5
	RAA	59.9	0	5	5.7	3.7
			27.	3.		
		4	3			

Results and Discussions

In this section, the data analysis, presentation and interpretation are reported. The following main question guided the study:

- i. What is the influence of differentiation planning strategies on competitiveness in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya

Response Rates

In this study, 36 questionnaires for Registrar Academics and 36 questionnaires for Registrar Admissions were administered. In return, 32-Registrar Academics' and 32-Registrar Admissions' questionnaires were filled and returned. The researcher also conducted interviews amongst 16 Director of Marketing. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1;

Private universities which organize advanced promotion and advertisement of their services has a larger market share by registering more students	RAC	67.0	11.	5.	8.5	7.0
	RAA	76.0	5	5	2.7	3.5
			18.	1.		
			1	7		
Enrolling many students depends on levels of advertisement planning strategies which private universities adopt	RAC	75.0	10.	2.	9.0	3.5
	RAA	62.5	5	5	10.	4.7
			19.	2.	2	
			8	8		
Marketing universities based on the period of completion of academic programmes has increased their enrollment rates	RAC	88.5	2.5	1.	4.5	3.0
	RAA	62.5	9.9	5	13.	10.
				3.	7	2
				7		
Marketing universities capitalize on affordable accommodation services to enroll many students	RAC	68.5	10.	2.	4.4	14.
	RAA	71.5	411.2	3	5.7	4
				4.		6.9
				7		
Effective alumni and placement services offered to former graduates to secure job opportunities after completion enable private universities to enroll many students	RAC	76.5	12.	2.	3.5	5.0
	RAA	60.8	5	5	12.	10.
			13.	2.	5	4
			4	9		

Key: RESP-Respondents; RAC-Registrar Academics; RAA-Registrar Admissions

Table 2 reveals that 26(80.5%RAC) and 28(88.3%RAA) strongly agreed with the view that location of private universities attracts students thus boosting their enrollment rates with fewer cases of dropouts as did 3(8.5%)RAC and 2(5.4%)RAA who agreed. However, only a paltry 1(1.5%) of the Registrar Academics as well as 1(1.9%) of Registrar Admissions were undecided, 2(5.5%) of Registrar Academics as did 1(2.3%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 2(4.0%) of Registrar Academics and 1(2.1%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed. The study also found out that majority 25(78.5%RAC) and 24(77.2%RAA) strongly agreed with the view that the characteristics of personnel who offer services in private universities enable such universities to have a competitive edge over others by enrolling more students and ensure that they complete their programmes in time. At the same time, 5(14.5%) of the Registrar Academics as did 4(13.3%) of the Registrar Admissions agreed. However, 1(2.5%) of Registrar Academics and 1(1.5%) of the Registrar Admissions were undecided, 1(3.0%) of Registrar Academics and 2(6.3%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 1(1.5%) of the Registrar Academics as did 1(1.7%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed.

These findings are consistent with the assertions of Kamau (2013) that differentiation planning strategies also segmentation planning strategies are marketing approaches used by a firm to institute a strong distinctiveness in a particular market. The planning strategy aims to promote competitive advantage by contributing unique products with valuable features, which include quality, improvement, and customer care. This implies that, in the competitive planning strategies private universities just like their counterpart institutions that offer services should capitalize on the differentiation planning strategies such as location and characteristics of the personnel they have employed. The study also revealed that majority 22(69.5%RAC) and

24(75.3%RAA) strongly agreed with the view that private universities with advanced technological development enroll more undergraduate and postgraduate students and take a shorter period to complete their courses. On the same breath, 4(12.0%) of the Registrar Academics as did 6(20.1%) of the sampled Registrar Admissions agreed. However, 1(2.0%) of Registrar Academics and 1(1.4%) of the Registrar Admissions were undecided, 3(10.0%) of Registrar Academics and 1(1.3%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 2(6.5%) of the Registrar Academics as did 1(1.9%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed.

These findings lend credence to the assertions of Pearce and Robinson (2010) who underscored the fact that in the concentrated planning strategy, a firm channels its resources to growing a single product to profitability, in a solitary market, with a particular dominant technology. According to Pearce and Robinson (2010), this method enables the firm to thoroughly develop and exploit its expertise in an enclosed competitive environment, thereby leading to improved performance. Thus, these findings point to the fact that the planning strategy aims to promote competitive advantage by contributing unique products with valuable features, which include quality, improvement and customer care. Majority 24(74.5%RAC) and 19(59.9%RAA) strongly agreed with the view that security features in private universities enable them to register more students than their counterparts without good security for students and staff. 5(17.0%) of the Registrar Academics and 9(27.4%) of the Registrar Admissions agreed. At the same time, 1(2.5%) of the Registrar Academics and 1(3.3%) of Registrar Admissions were undecided, 1(3.5%) of Registrar Academics and 2(5.7%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 1(2.5%) of the Registrar Academics as did 1(3.7%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed.

On the same breath, majority of the respondents 21(67.0%RAC) and 24(76.0%RAA) strongly agreed with the

view that private universities which organize advanced promotion and advertisement of their services has a larger market share by registering more students. 4(11.5%) of the Registrar Academics and 6(18.1%) of the Registrar Admissions agreed. However, 2(5.5%) of the Registrar Academics and 1(1.7%) of Registrar Admissions were undecided, 3(8.5%) of Registrar Academics and 1(2.7%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 2(7.0%) of the Registrar Academics as did 1(3.5%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed. Majority of the respondents 24(75.0% RAC) and 20(62.5% RAA) strongly agreed with the view that enrolling many students in private universities depends on levels of advertisement planning strategies private universities adopt. 4(10.5%) of the Registrar Academics and 6(19.8%) of the Registrar Admissions agreed. At the same time, 1(2.5%) of the Registrar Academics and 1(2.8%) of Registrar Admissions were undecided, 3(9.0%) of Registrar Academics and 3(10.2%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 1(3.5%) of the Registrar Academics as did 2(4.7%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed.

These findings corroborate the assertions of Kamau (2013) that the corporate growth planning strategy focuses on the firm's present status as well as its potential products and markets (customers). This affirms that differentiation planning strategies also segmentation planning strategies are marketing approaches used by a firm to institute a strong distinctiveness in a particular market. Majority of the respondents 28(88.5% RAC) and 20(62.5% RAA) strongly agreed with the view that marketing universities based on the period of completion of academic programmes has increased their enrollment rates.

A paltry 1(2.5%) of the sampled Registrar Academics and 3(9.9%) of the sampled Registrar Admissions agreed. At the same time, 1(1.5%) of the sampled Registrar Academics and 1(3.7%) of Registrar Admissions were undecided, 1(4.5%) of Registrar Academics and 4(13.7%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 1(3.0%) of the Registrar Academics as did 3(10.2%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed. These findings are further consistent with the assertions of Pearce and Robinson (2010) who further noted that market development planning strategy involves marketing current products but with just superficial alterations to customers in related market. This could involve adding more distribution outlets or altering the content of advertising or promotion features. Thus, these findings point to the fact that differentiation as a planning strategy adopted by private universities are critical dynamics which influence

enrollment of many undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The study also found out that majority 22(68.5% RAC) and 23(71.5% RAA) strongly agreed with the view that marketing universities capitalize on accommodation services to win many students which has increased their enrollment rates. At the same time, 4(10.4%) of the Registrar Academics as did 4(11.2%) of the Registrar Admissions agreed. However, 1(2.3%) of Registrar Academics and 2(4.7%) of the Registrar Admissions were undecided, 2(4.4%) of Registrar Academics and 2(5.7%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 5(14.4%) of the Registrar Academics as did 2(6.9%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed. The study also found out that majority 25(76.5% RAC) and 19(60.8% RAA) strongly agreed with the view that effective alumni and placement services offered to former graduates to secure job opportunities after completion enable private universities to enroll many students. At the same time, 4(12.5%) of the Registrar Academics as did 5(13.4%) of the Registrar Admissions agreed. However, 1(2.5%) of Registrar Academics and 1(2.9%) of the Registrar Admissions were undecided, 1(3.5%) of Registrar Academics and 4(12.5%) of the Registrar Admissions disagreed whereas 2(5.0%) of the Registrar Academics as did 3(10.4%) of the Registrar Admissions strongly disagreed.

These findings are consistent with the findings of a study conducted amongst 27 tertiary institutions in Colombia in which Beal and Yasai-Ardekani(2000) in which discovered that a differentiation planning strategy calls for the development of an academic programme or service that offers unique attributes that are valued by students and that students perceive to be better than or different from the academic programmes of the competition. This implies that successful differentiation is based on a study of students' needs and behavior in order to learn what they consider important and valuable. The desired features are then incorporated into the academic programme to encourage student preference for the academic programme. In other words, the basis for competitive advantage is the provision of unique services such as alumni and placement whose attributes differ significantly from rivals' nature of services. To further verify the possibility of relationship between differentiation planning strategy and competitiveness of private universities, data was collected on how far private universities are located from the Nairobi CBD and the number of students in such private universities and results are shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Results of the Distance of Private Universities from CBD and the Number of Students in Private Universities

Distance in km from Nairobi CBD	Number of Private Universities
25 km	13000
15 km	23000
1 km	28000
0.5 km	50000

Source: Field Data (2018)

Table 3 indicates that registered private universities which are located close to the CBD attract more students than those situated far away from towns. These findings further corroborate the assertions of Pearce and Robinson (2010) who underscored the fact that a firm channels its resources to growing a single product to profitability, in a solitary market, with a

particular dominant technology.

Inferential Findings on the Influence of Differentiation Planning Strategy on Competitiveness of Private Universities
 Data in Table 3 were further subjected to Chi-Square (χ^2) Test Analysis and results are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Chi-Square (χ^2) Analysis Showing Relationship Between the Distance of Private Universities from CBD and the Number of Students in Private Universities

	Value	d	Asy m. Sig. (2-side d)	Monte Carlo (2-sided) Sig.	Carlo Sig. 95% Confidence Interval Lo Upper Bound	Sig. 1.000	Monte Carlo (1-sided) Sig. 95% Confidence Interval Lo Upper Bound	Carlo Sig. 95% Confidence Interval Lo Upper Bound	Sig. 1.000
Pearson Chi-Square	12.000 ^a	9	.213	1.000 ^b	1.000	1.000			
Likelihood Ratio	11.090	9	.270	1.000 ^b	1.000	1.000			
Fisher's Exact Test	10.610			1.000 ^b	1.000	1.000			
Linear-by-Li near Association	2.056 ^c	1	.152	.127 ^b	.120	.133	.042 ^b	.038	.046
N of Valid Cases	4								

Source: SPSS Generated (2018)

From the Chi-Square (χ^2) Statistics in Table 4, the processed data, generated a significance level of 0.042^b which shows that the data is ideal for making a conclusion on the population's parameter as the value of significance (p-value of 0.042^b) is less than 5%, that is, p-value=0.042^b<0.05. It also indicates that the results were statistically significant and that there is significant relationship between the location of private universities from CBD and the number of students enrolled in such universities. These results were consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Pearce and Robinson (2010) which generated a p-value of 0.025<0.05. Just like descriptive findings above, these findings attest to the fact that market development planning strategy involves marketing current products but with just superficial alterations to customers in related market. Thus, these findings point to the fact that differentiation planning strategies adopted by private universities are critical dynamics which influence enrollment of many undergraduate and postgraduate students.

VI. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ON THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENTIATION PLANNING STRATEGY ON COMPETITIVENESS OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

During interviews, the Director of Marketing also responded in favor of the view that location of private universities attracts students thus boosting their enrollment rates with fewer cases of dropouts. Director of Marketing, DM2, further observed,

“We employ staff with a variety of qualities and characteristics such as adequate training and experience to

offer services in our university. This has enabled us to have a competitive edge over others by enrolling more students and ensure that they complete their programmes in time”.

Just like in quantitative findings, these views point to the fact that differentiation planning strategies also segmentation planning strategies are marketing approaches used by a firm to institute a strong distinctiveness in a particular market. The Directors of Marketing in private universities also concurred with the view that technological advancements and development have been part and parcel of their success in enrolling more undergraduate and postgraduate students and take a shorter period to complete their courses. These views also corroborate the views expressed by Pearce and Robinson (2010) that a firm channels its resources to growing a single product to profitability, in a solitary market, with a particular dominant technology. The interviewees concurred with Pearce and Robinson (2010) that differentiation as a planning strategy enables firms to thoroughly develop and exploit its expertise in an enclosed competitive environment, thereby leading to improved performance. When probed further, Director marketing, DM3, further noted,

“Security features in our university have also made our university very attractive for students which, in turn, improved our enrollment rates. This has also been characterized with advanced promotion and advertisement of their services and academic programmes”.

These views further corroborate the viewpoints held by Kamau (2013) that the corporate growth planning strategy focuses on the firm's present status as well as its potential

products and markets. Like quantitative findings, these views attest to the fact that differentiation planning strategies are marketing approaches used by a firm to institute a strong distinctiveness in a particular market. These planning strategies involve marketing current products but with superficial alterations to customers. On the question of hostels and accommodation services, Directors of Marketing also responded in favor of the view that marketing universities capitalize on accommodation services to win many students which increases their enrollment rates. Directors of Marketing, DM3, reported,

“Our university offers many hostel and accommodation facilities to all students at affordable rates, offered quality meals and guaranteed security in the hostels. Through this initiative, we have been able to attract more students to fill all our accommodation facilities”.

The Directors of Marketing also indicated that alumni and placement of former students in the job market have also been adopted as a planning strategy for boosting their student population. These views further corroborate the views expressed by Beal and Yasai-Ardekani (2000) that a differentiation planning strategy calls for the development of an academic programme or service that offers unique attributes that are valued by students and that students perceive to be better than or different from the academic programmes of the competition. Like in quantitative findings, these views affirm the fact that differentiation is based on a study of students’ needs and behavior in order to learn what they consider important and valuable. Thus, the basis for competitive advantage is the provision of unique services such as alumni and placement whose attributes differ significantly from rivals’ nature of services.

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the study findings, it is also evident that private universities adopt different differentiation planning strategies ranging from location of the universities, security features to technological advancements. These planning strategies have enabled private universities to attract many students thus boosting their enrollment rates with fewer cases of dropouts. Thus, private universities which are located close to the CBDs, have advanced security features which guarantee safety of students and staff, have adopted technology for instruction and research, have a competitive edge over other universities and thus register many undergraduate and postgraduate students.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the study findings, the study recommends that universities should ensure that their locations are strategic to enable students access services within such locations; should have adequate security features for students and staff. Universities should also embrace new technological advancements as a way of improving quality of pedagogy in private universities.

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