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Co-creation of Value by Universities and Prospective Students: Towards an Informed Decision-Making Process

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Introduction

Africa is a continent with different countries and different education market (Ndofirepi, Farinloye, & Mogaji, 2020). The Continent represents the environment in which education as a service is being produced and consumed. Since the education service is a sophisticated service jointly produced with a broad group of services, the physical environment constitutes an essential element in the decision-making process of students (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019). The reconstruction of Africa during the period following independence in the 1950s and

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1960s saw the need for development of university education (UE) in Africa. It is worthy of note that in order to meet the immediate human resource needs of Africa, many African countries sent their citizens to be educated abroad to acquire knowledge and skills required for the nation-building agenda. During this post-independence era, African countries fully funded UE and, as a result, took monopoly of the tertiary education in Africa. State-funded public UE, therefore, became the most common characteristic of UE development in Africa between the period 1950s and 1970s. This era was described as *golden era for higher education in Africa* (Fonn et al., 2018).

The introduction of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s, following economic development challenges African countries faced, which sought to assist African countries in reducing their fiscal deficits, questioned the role of the state in UE development. This led to a shift in attention of African states from UE to primary and secondary education. The fortunes of UE in Africa subsequently declined, resulting from significant cuts in funding public sector institutions (universities inclusive) by the state.

The diversion of UE funding to the funding of primary and secondary education did not only stall infrastructural development and expansion in African universities but also deteriorated the working conditions in the universities. Consequently, top faculty in African universities migrated, leaving research and innovation abandoned. According to Fonn et al. (2018), although Africa accounts for 13.5% of the global population, it spends less than 1% of global expenditure on research and development and contributes less than 1% of global research output. African countries, therefore, depends significantly on international collaborations and visiting academics for her research output.

Nevertheless, there was a growing number of young people seeking access to UE, with its resultant rapid growth in university enrolment. The reduction in funding amidst growing numbers of students created tension between the political elite and academia, which precluded working together in searching for a standard solution for African development challenges. Quality of training and research in African universities were being compromised on account of limited funding of universities by African governments, inadequate teaching and learning

infrastructure, inadequate materials and equipment for research, heavy teaching loads for career researchers, to mention but a few.

In the 1990s, however, African universities sought to regain their role as agents of transformation in Africa, following the emergence of globalisation, which depended heavily on knowledge economy and information technology and required availability of highly educated professionals. This need, coupled with increasing population of secondary education graduates, called for expansion in UE in Africa. However, the ability of African governments to fund and expand UE to absorb the rapidly growing population and high demand for UE in Africa remained a mirage.

The World Bank, realising the significance of universities in political and socio-economic transformation in Africa, changed its policy in favour of UE in Africa. In this regard, the application of market-oriented higher educational reforms was proposed [by the World Bank] and embraced [by the African countries]. Resultantly, new higher education reforms such as cost-reduction, cost-recovery, cost-sharing, and income-generating approaches of funding UE were introduced. The aim was to reduce reliance on the state for the success of UE in Africa. It could be said, therefore, that the financial incapacity of Africa states to adequately fund and resource UE in Africa, compelled most African countries to promote and encourage not only private sector participation in UE but also to fully and/or partially privatise UE in Africa.

African Universities are making an effort to offer values, to enhance the human resources of the continent (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020). Likewise, there are growing demands for higher education places on the continent. This paper offers a theoretical insight into the value delivery systems of the Universities and the factors influencing choice. The chapter is positioned theoretically to recognise the values presented by the University, manners in which they are positioned and the information processing by the students. This offers theoretical insight into the relationship between Universities as providers of information and students as processors of information, adding knowledge to the marketing dynamics between the stakeholders (Olaleye, Ukpabi, & Mogaji, 2020).

The subsequent section of the chapter explores Universities as a value delivery mechanism, exploring the various value delivery channel. This is followed by various factors known to influence student choice.

A theoretical positioning is after that presented, highlighting a common ground for informed decision making which is anchored on information provided by the Universities and information processing by the students. The chapter ends with a concluding section.

University as Value Delivery Mechanisms

Universities train professionals needed in the expansion of public service, in the extension of the frontiers of knowledge, and the service of the national economies. They equip graduates with a holistic university experience, needed for the development of African countries. The significance of universities, therefore, in political and socio-economic transformation, cannot be overemphasised. The ‘university’, according to Council (2016), refers to an institution of higher learning involved in three essential value delivery functions: teaching, research and community engagement. The BC emphasises that what defines an institution like a university is its substantial focus on theory. By this, university graduates develop familiarity with theoretical underpinnings of professional practices and ability not only to challenge received ideas but also to generate new theories that are fundamental to innovation and value-addition. Universities are thus valued delivery mechanisms through the functions of teaching, research and community engagement. In this era of sustainable development goals (SDGs), universities, with their broad remit around the creation and dissemination of knowledge and their unique position within society, have a critical role to play in the achievement of the SDGs through value delivery systems (SDSN, 2017). The mechanisms through which universities deliver value can be categorised into classroom value delivery mechanism, campus value delivery mechanism and community value delivery mechanism (Council, 2016).

Value Delivery Through Classroom

“Classroom’ here refers not only to the literal room in which classes are taught but to all of the formal learning that takes place in accredited

courses” (Council, 2016, p. 98). In a broader sense, classroom embraces the provision of the disciplinary and technical knowledge that students need in their diverse areas of work. It also extends to the quality of degree courses designed to develop a range of transferable skills, including those of analysis and critical thinking, in students. Universities, therefore, deliver specific values through the classroom mechanism, and such values include:

Pedagogy

The method adopted by a university to impact knowledge to its students explains its value delivery primarily. Many universities across Africa are dominated by transmission-based teaching approaches. These approaches are usually based on lecturing, with few opportunities for students to engage in discussion, to critique the ideas received and to apply the ideas conveyed. New strategies, such as the adoption of problem-based learning in a range of degree courses, are considered valuable and are needed to enable students to participate in learning actively.

Forms of Assessment

In most universities in Africa, examinations are dominant forms of assessment. Usually, these modes of assessment are based on inert forms of knowledge. This has encouraged memorisation and cramming (chew-poor-pass- forget) among students. It is essential therefore, that, as teaching methods and strategies changed, the methods of assessment are also transformed to reflect the changes in pedagogy. As noted by Council (2016), it is extremely hard to transform pedagogy without transforming assessment. New forms of assessment (presentations and group projects) are needed to support the development of analytical skills, creativity and teamwork.

Adequacy of Learning Resources

The availability and adequacy of resources for teaching and learning in the university determines the value delivery of the university. Council (2016)

has identified a severe lack of essential equipment in many African countries, particularly for teaching and learning natural science and agriculture programmes. Quality of teaching, research and community engagement are therefore severely compromised by inadequate facilities. Provision of a productive learning environment for all students through well-stocked libraries, virtual learning platforms, internet connectivity and space for independent and group study should be taken seriously by universities.

Curricular Relevance

A vital area of a university's value proposition and delivery is the relevance of its curriculum and programmes. Most universities in African countries are accused of running outdated curricula and not keeping abreast of new developments in industry and the workplace. Nevertheless, there have been attempts in various contexts to reform the content of university courses, where in some cases; employers make input in the design of new courses, particularly to strengthen the quality and relevance of science and technology education. Curricular relevance is a process that requires that taught programmes are kept abreast of new developments in research, the latest technologies and professional practices. Besides, regular reviews of programme and curriculum content and close interaction with industry and professional organisations are critical components of curricular relevance.

Disciplinary Spread

How specialised and integrative the programmes offered by a university is a significant definition of how the university delivers its values. Concerns are raised across African countries concerning the disciplinary offerings of universities. While some universities focus on offering specialised specific courses (which are seen to be too narrow to be of much use to students in their working lives) as a means of maximizing income through capturing new markets, other universities, which previously focused on technical, vocational or scientific areas, are moving towards more generic academic programmes. The former reduces the diversity of

the university offers, and the later churn out vast numbers of students from generic applied social science areas, with fewer students specialising in technical and vocational areas. While it is positive for universities to have disciplinary specialisms, the full range of courses should be represented across the UE system, from natural sciences to arts and humanities, and from academic to more applied professional subjects. All of these areas are important for the achievement of development goals and employability. At the micro-level, individual students have the opportunity to be exposed to a broad-based curriculum that includes both technical and liberal arts elements. That is, all students, in addition to their primary discipline, are exposed to a range of courses including humanities, technology and African studies.

Theory-practice Fit

African universities are under the attack of theory-practice misalignment. Council (2016) reports that African universities do not teach students how to fit into the industry and deliver courses divorced from practice. Universities are sites of higher learning and theory has an essential place on academic courses of all types. Nevertheless, rebalancing is needed in response to students' and employers' concerns about a lack of practical applicability. There is a need to rethink how UE and training prepare the next generation of graduates for the world of work and in particular, how it can enhance graduates' employability and encourage them to be innovative and entrepreneurial. Students should, therefore, be supported in developing the ability to engage with theory critically and to apply it effectively in their working lives. This addresses the alleged mismatch between employer requirements and graduate employability and enhances the attributes of graduates, which by extension explains the value delivery of the university.

Targeted Skills Development Courses

The critical role of UE is the development of critical skills relevant to the economy, including the ability to innovate. While many transferable

skills can be gained through regular degree courses, a range of skills development opportunities and courses, such as entrepreneurial courses, CV writing and updating, voluntary work, internships, and leadership training through school unions, need to be provided to enhance value delivery of the universities. Attention must be paid to delivering such courses in a participatory manner, allowing students to experiment and gain hands-on experience.

Value Delivery Through Campus

‘Campus’, as defined by Council (2016), refers to the broader learning experience of the university, outside the classroom experience, usually packaged in extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities have a significant positive impact on student development and are highly valued by prospective employers. However, the increasing numbers of students working full-time and studying at evenings and weekends has challenged traditional conceptions of the campus university. Nevertheless, universities work to maintain broader spaces for learning outside of formal teaching, given their significance for the personal, intellectual and professional development of students. These learning opportunities can be particularly crucial for those students going on to develop social enterprises and other forms of entrepreneurship but are also critical for conventional forms of employment. Value delivery by universities through campus, According to Council (2016), is seen in the following:

Careers Service

One way universities deliver value to students is through careers service. Significant gaps in career support at universities across African countries have been identified. In some cases, this is a question of the absence or limitation of a dedicated careers adviser and support activities. In other cases, provision of career supports is available, but students do not take up the opportunities sufficiently. Nevertheless, some African universities, especially well-endowed private universities, succeeded in providing

extensive support to students for making choices and developing skills for careers and linking in with employers, for the whole of the student body. However, rolling out such provision in large public universities is a significant challenge.

Extra-curricular Activities

Universities deliver value to students through a range of activities outside of their formal programmes, including artistic pursuits, sports, drama and debating. These activities serve recreational purposes but also are a source of learning and development of social relations. Some African universities, for example, have campus/community radio programmes, in which students act as producers and presenters, serving an essential function in providing local language services as well as raising critical issues in the public interest, such as health campaigns.

Student Voice and Representation

Opportunities offered to students by universities to be engaged in some administrative matters are valued delivery mechanisms. Through these, students have the opportunity to engage in student unions or representative councils. This form of participation is critical in developing civic capacities and engagement on the part of individual students. It also serves an essential function in feeding in student views on the university and enhancing the quality of university service delivery to students.

Employer engagement

The ultimate aim of UE for many students is the enhancement of their employability. It is, therefore, a value worth considering if universities consciously design activities to link students up to employers. Beyond the involvement of employers in the development of curricula, other events and activities, such as careers fairs, in which employers can provide information to students on prospective employment opportunities, as well as develop direct contact with them, can be run on campus as value delivery mechanisms.

Innovation Incubators

Universities can deliver value to students through innovation incubators. Some universities provide students with opportunities for the development of start-up companies and creation of innovative products on their campuses. Students can benefit from space and facilities, support of experienced entrepreneurs and in some cases financial support to develop their entrepreneurial ideas.

Value Delivery Through Community

Students, through extramural learning opportunities facilitated by their universities, gain many benefits in the course of their degree studies beyond the gates of the university. Council (2016) defined 'community' as the learning experiences taking place outside the university gates, not only in the local community but also in work placements and internships. The value of such activities in developing employability attributes of students is well established and documented in extant literature. Such experiences have not only positive impacts on the communities involved (whether a local neighbourhood or a workplace) but also have significant benefits for the students themselves. Specifically, value delivery through extramural learning focuses on:

Work Placements

Professional learning through work placements or internships is one surest way universities deliver value to their students. Work placement opportunity for real experience in the workplace is, perhaps, one of the most commonly discussed and longest practised interventions relating to employability and student experience in terms of value delivery. Much professional learning (experience) occur in the workplace. These experiences are generally essential for students before looking for employment. In addition to facilitating links with employers for students, universities need to ensure that students are supported throughout the process. Employers also need to provide a conducive

environment for students to engage and develop in order to make the work placement experience valuable.

Volunteering and Service-learning

Value delivery of university can also be seen in volunteering service learning. Through the facilitation of the universities, students commonly engage in activities voluntarily to support local communities, participate in environmental projects, work with children or the elderly, and involve themselves in diverse forms of work with NGOs, social movements, and religious and other civil society organisations. In addition to having a positive impact on the communities concerned, such activities represent an essential source of learning for the students themselves. Specifically, community-volunteering services help develop generic, transferable skills. Community services are particularly relevant for students looking to develop social enterprises in the future.

For a holistic student learning experience, universities develop and deliver value propositions across the classroom, campus and community (3Cs). Focus on the 3Cs is, therefore, crucial to develop the kind of 'all-rounder' graduate that employers seek (Council, 2016). The 3Cs value delivers mechanisms produce graduates who will succeed in a rapidly changing labour market. Besides, it is suitable for carving out new opportunities and generating positive benefits for society. Universities, in their quest to deliver delightful learning experience to their students, should pay attention to all of these three spheres simultaneously, and ensure that they are providing students with a rich array of learning experiences in each.

Factors That Influence Students' Choice of University in Africa

Privatisation of and private sector participation in UE has made UE in Africa highly competitive. That is, as the competition between traditional public and private universities is increasing, a wider variety

of universities from which to choose is also created. Consequently, the need for universities to differentiate themselves from their competitors through marketisation is self-evident. The role of marketing in student recruitment in African universities, therefore, is increasing in importance. Marketing in the higher education sector is not new (Gibbs, Pashiardis, & Ivy, 2008). When universities offer qualifications that satisfy student needs, distribute tuition using methods that match student expectations, provide data on which students can rely to make informed decisions about qualification choices and price programmes at a level that students see as providing value, marketing is being deployed. This set of controllable variables (tools) the universities use to elicit response they want from their various target markets constitute the universities' marketing mix, described as everything that a university does to influence the demand for the services that it offers. The design of the universities' marketing mix is usually anchored on what the universities perceive students to consider in their choice of a university and their selection of programmes. The students' consideration for choosing universities to attend and selecting courses to offer include programmes, premiums, price, prominence, and place (Gibbs et al., 2008).

Programmes

Every student, contemplating a UE, has in mind a programme to offer and begins to search for universities that offer such a programme. As a determinant of students' choice of a university, programme represents a bundle of benefits that satisfy the knowledge needs and expectations of students. Programme is comparable to *product* in the traditional service marketing mix. Traditionally, universities run different levels of programmes. These include certificate programmes, diploma programmes, undergraduate degree programmes, masters' degree programmes and terminal degree programmes.

Certificate Programmes

A certificate programme usually equips students with a specific skill-set or prepares students to succeed on a qualification exam. They are usually academic and/or practical programmes that generally take up to one year or two years to complete. Some students require certificate programmes to demonstrate their understanding of a topic in order to move forward in their careers. Therefore, students who wish to confirm that they have received specialised training in a field would opt for a certificate programme.

Diploma Programmes

Diploma certificate programmes are usually designed for professionals with experience in their practice fields, or graduates who have already completed a certificate programme in related subjects. Diploma certificate programmes, thus, provide practical training in a specific area that is designed for useful application in the workplace. Therefore, students desirous of practical application of knowledge at workplace may consider enrolling in universities offering diploma programmes.

Undergraduate Degree Programmes

Undergraduate programmes are the most common programmes unto which several students enrol when they gain admission into university for the first time. Undergraduate degree programmes are designed to provide basic careers knowledge and skills needed for success in an entry-level position in the related professional field. In this regard, students whose interest is in charting a professional career path may consider which undergraduate programmes will be relevant for them, and which university is offering such programmes in a manner that is desired. Undergraduate degree programmes come in different forms—major, minor, combined major and minor and double

major—depending on the number of credit hours required. While minor bachelor's degrees require an average of a 15-credit (90 credit hours), major bachelor's degrees require between 18–36 credits (120 credit hours). Students who wish to move quickly into the workplace, or students wishing to pursue a professional programme that requires some prior university work, usually consider the minor undergraduate degree programmes. The major undergraduate degree programmes provide a general education in a particular field of study and are required for admission to further educational pursuits. As part of their packaging strategies, some universities entice students by allowing them to pursue different programmes—double major or combined major and minor—at the same time. These combinations are becoming significant determinants of the choice of programme and university for students' enrolment decisions.

Postgraduate and Masters' Degree Programmes

Higher education is becoming increasingly competitive among young adults. After their undergraduate degree programmes, they further their education by enrolling onto various postgraduate and masters' degree programmes. Postgraduate programmes are designed usually for students who have graduated from undergraduate degree programmes to further develop their knowledge in a specific area. Working professionals and graduates with more experience who find it valuable to develop in their career may also decide to obtain postgraduate certificates by enrolling on postgraduate programmes. Masters' degree programmes are offered to students who have already earned undergraduate degrees. Sometimes, working professionals may return to university for masters' programmes to help secure a promotion, increase their salary potential or stay up-to-date in a changing industry. Many masters' degree programmes culminate with a qualifying exam (with or without research) that students must pass to earn the masters' degree.

Terminal Degree Programmes

To some students, even the sky is not the limit as far as their academic and professional educations are concerned. They want to obtain the highest (terminal) degrees that are awarded in their areas of specialisation. Such students critically evaluate doctoral opportunities that exist in universities. Terminal degree is the highest degrees awarded in a given field of study and requires a rigorous study and a great deal of dedication and intellectual interest in a particular field. In most fields, the terminal-level degree is the doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.). While most degrees that are considered terminal are PhDs or doctorates, some master's degrees are considered terminal if the field does not offer a degree beyond a master's degree. Terminal degrees are needed to conduct research and/or teach at the university. These top-level degrees are usually called research degrees, and they typically come with the title of Doctor, such as Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Education (EdD) and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Doctorate or terminal degree programmes require students to complete several phases of coursework and study, including an oral examination and a lengthy written dissertation (thesis) of several pages.

It is important to note therefore that the programmes on offer in the various universities range from certificate programmes to terminal degree programmes. Each programme is a package of several courses, some of which are core (compulsory) others are elective (to be selected by students to make up for the required number of credit hours). However, students are keenly concerned about the relevance of the programmes to their future aspirations and present needs for self-employment, public-sector employment, private-sector employment, further study or portfolio of careers. Therefore, how specialised and integrative the programmes are designed is a significant concern for students in the choice of university to enrol in. The duration of the programme (how long it will take students to complete the programme) is also critical for students in deciding which university to attend. It is essential therefore that a curriculum should be appropriately developed and adapted to the needs of students and the broader society.

Premiums

Another factor that is gaining ground in students' consideration for making enrolment decisions is premium. Gibbs et al. (2008) defined premiums as those incentives that add exceptional value to students' university experience, and enumerated availability of on-campus accommodation or residential status, total number of credit hours required for a degree, international student exchange opportunities, class sizes and cultural diversity of students enrolled on a programme as examples of premiums.

Residential Status Requirements and/or Availability of on-campus Accommodation

It is impracticable to have university campuses established in all communities. Students leave their places of residence to attend universities elsewhere. Therefore, when making enrolment decisions, students pay particular attention to residential status requirements and availability of on-campus accommodation. Generally, students prefer either a residential status or on-campus private accommodation to off-campus accommodation. This is based on convenience, easy access to academic and social amenities and relatively better security arrangements associated with residential status and on-campus private accommodation. Unfortunately, on-campus accommodation in several public and private universities in African countries are woefully inadequate to accommodate all students on enrolment. This results in unmeasured demand on traditional halls of residence and private on-campus accommodation. The spill-off of students who could not get accommodation on campus are left with no choice than to seek accommodation outside campus, with all its attendant implications of exorbitant rents being charged and rubbery attacks. Universities must appreciate that residential status and on-campus accommodation is a major consideration for students in making enrolment decisions.

Total Number of Credit Hours Required for a Degree

The total number of credit hours required in a particular degree programme is becoming a source of decision for some prospective students. A credit hour is a unit used to measure educational achievement in a particular field. Some courses require and deliver more credit hours than others. Typically, credit hour requirement for a course is determined by the advanced nature of the course. The more advanced the course is, the more credit hours are awarded for its completion. For example, minor undergraduate degree programmes take an average of 3 years to complete, and major bachelor's degree courses take between 3–5 years to complete. Most Master's degree programmes require 40 hours of credit. Despite these averages of credit hours for different programmes, some universities strategically vary the credit-hour requirements for selected programmes, based on the needs and requirements of students. The number of credit hours, therefore, needed to complete a university programme depends on the university and the programme. It is on this score that students make a credit-hour requirement an essential determinant of their decision to choose a programme and a university for enrolment.

International Student Exchange Opportunities

An opportunity to participate in an international student exchange programme is increasingly becoming a determinant of students' consideration for enrolling on a particular programme in a particular university. The desire to travel abroad is very high among the youth and young adults of many African countries. However, obtaining VISAs individually to travel abroad is a difficult task for them. Through international exchange programmes, students easily acquire visas. Therefore, the ease of VISA and passport acquisition, coupled with the rich experience associated with such international exchange programmes, students of African universities thoughtfully assess the availability of such opportunities before affirming their decision whether or not to enrol in a particular university.

Class Sizes

Infrastructure deficiency of higher education with its resultant congestion of students in academic facilities of learning (Abugre, 2018) is one of the significant challenges African universities are faced with. The phenomenon affects teaching and learning in several ways, including but not limited to poor quality of teaching, difficulty in assessing students' performance and difficulty in timely identification and remediation of academically weak students (Yelkpereri, Namale, Esia-Donkoh, & Ofosu-Dwamena, 2012). Students are thus mindful of the average class sizes of the various programmes in African universities before making their enrolment choices.

Price

Another factor that determines students' choice of a university is the costs associated with a particular programme or university. Price, in a narrower sense, is described as fees charged for programmes and other services rendered by a university (Gibbs et al., 2008). From a broader perspective, however, price, in addition to the fees charged for the programme, connotes all the sacrifices a student has to make to be able to offer a particular programme. It includes the cost of all foregone benefits and all expenses that are incurred in order to pursue a university programme.

Tuition Fees

Tuition fees are fees charged by education institutions for instruction or other services. Different universities charge different tuition fees and for different programmes. Fees charged have an impact on the revenue of the university and influence the students' perception of the quality of programmes and image of the university. As a result, universities are tempted to charge as high fees as possible. On the contrary, affordability of the price is a significant consideration of students in choosing universities to attend.

Other Expenses

Several cost elements, aside from the tuition fees, are associated with UE. Some of these expenses include; accommodation charges, cost of books and other materials needed for studying the programme, cost of travel to and from lectures, cost of feeding on campus, cost of research and print outs associated to the study of the programme, cost of international exchange programmes abroad, to mention but a few. These expenses differ from university to university. While these expenses are relatively higher in private universities and universities located in urban areas, they are relatively lower in public universities, especially those that are not located in urban areas. In the analysis of their decisions, students take into consideration all these other expenses before settling on which university to attend.

Opportunity Costs

The thought of pursuing UE, in most cases, create a dilemmatic situation for many students, especially those students who are employed. It is a trade-off situation. Choosing to go to school means forfeiting the job (work), and choosing to work also means deciding to forgo education. The dilemmatic situation gets intensified, and creates cognitive dissonance within the individual, particularly in a situation where the outcome and benefits of EU are not guaranteed. There is therefore always an opportunity cost to incur if a student enrolls on a programme at a university. Opportunity cost refers to the loss of potential gain from choosing one option from several alternate options. That is, for every choice a potential student makes, there are potential benefits the students lost out on by choosing that option. While some opportunity costs (income from the best alternative foregone) can be easily monetised, others can not be expressed in monetary terms, and are difficult to calculate. Therefore, through cost-benefit analysis, students consider and critically examine the opportunity costs of enrolling onto a programme in a university. The price is a crucial consideration for both the university and the students.

Place

The importance of place (modes of knowledge transmission) in influencing students' choice of university is noticeable, particularly in recent times. Modes of knowledge transmission explain the distribution methods that a university adopts to provide the tuition to its students in a manner that meets, if not exceed, the students' expectations. Increasingly, universities are varying their methods of delivering tuitions. No longer are tuitions restricted to and students confined to lecture halls on university campuses. The rising cost of UE is making it difficult for many prospective students, particularly those working on quitting their jobs for regular programmes. In response, African universities are distributing tuition using methods that match students' expectations. Gibbs et al. (2008) affirmed that the development of alternative modes of tuition have grown significantly. That is, access to lectures and other support materials are increasingly becoming available not only through regular on-campus lectures but also through part-time arrangements, evening sessions, weekend options, sandwich modes, distance learning, virtual media learning, block release options and pod-casts. These modes of distributing knowledge by African universities are greatly influencing students in choosing their universities and programmes. For instance, Widiputera, De Witte, Groot, and van den Brink (2017) investigated the roles that the distance of study programmes plays in student decisions to attend a university and demonstrated that the closest distance between similar programmes offered and competition between programmes have significant effects on the enrolment of students in higher education.

Prominence

Students are gradually becoming sensitive to what Gibbs et al. (2008) describe as prominence in determining their universities of choice. Prominence refers to the excellent reputation of a university. The prominence of a university is seen in terms of teaching, research, standards and recognised qualifications. It describes the image of the university

and positively or negatively positions the university in the minds of students and the world at large. Students' evaluation of prominence focuses on reputation of the university through its people (faculty, administrative and support staff) and league tables (rankings) or press reviews.

The Reputation of University Through Its People

Students hold in high esteem the reputation of all the staff of the university in making their enrolment decisions. Different categories of university staff interact with prospective students and indeed when they enrolled as students of the university. The reputation of both academic, administrative and support staff is thus a crucial point of reference for students in making enrolment decisions. The role of the status of academic staff in recruitment of students and the choice making processes should be significantly valued by African universities (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006). Some students, for example, are continually cross-checking profiles of academics to be sure that academic staff who are Ph.D. holders or have a Professorial title will teach the courses they wish to enrol on before affirming the enrolment status. In this case, the perceived quality of the programme is tied to the calibre of the academic staff who teach them. Students are also focusing on the administrative and academic support staff to access the quality of the service they receive. Gibbs et al. (2008) claim that "the simple process of how a front line administrative staff handles a telephone enquiry may have a more significant impact on whether or not a prospective student is going to keep that university in their range of options than an eminent Professor's publications or research record" (p. 290). According to them, the quality of UE to prospective students embraces all the administrative and bureaucratic functions of the university: from the handling of enquiries to registration, from course evaluation to examinations, and from result dissemination to graduation. Unlike tangible products that a customer purchases, take ownership of and then takes the product home to consume, a UE is an intangible service, the consumption of which cannot be separated from its production. That is, the quality of students' university experience depends, to a considerable extent, on the

professionalism and the friendliness of the staff the students meet along the process. It is essential, therefore, that significant input to the provision of higher education services both at the front line and at what might be considered behind the scenes is provided in order to influence students' perceptions of service quality.

The Reputation of the University Through League Tables and Press Reviews

Considerable competition for students exists in the marketplace as a university in African countries, particularly the private one, compete for students. Most universities are utilising branding activity such as reputational capital through university league tables to deal with such competitive threats (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). University league tables are the rankings of universities based on a set of criteria such as entry requirements, student satisfaction, graduation prospects, research quality or any other relevant metrics. The university rankings are organised into lists, which can be used for checking and validating the quality of a university. Students rely predominantly on university league tables to ascertain the quality universities, which influences their choice of universities for enrolment decisions. University rankings are quality assessment tools used to examine the quality university programmes and are used to influence behaviour and shape institutional and student decision-making (Berbegal-Mirabent & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2015; Kiraka, Maringe, Kanyutu, & Mogaji, 2020).

Theoretical Positioning

The University has a unique position within the society. Universities deliver values in the classroom, on campus and in the community. It is however essential for Universities to highlight their values as they engage with stakeholders, especially the prospective students that are considering various universities for their higher education. Prospective students are influenced by different factors which include the programs

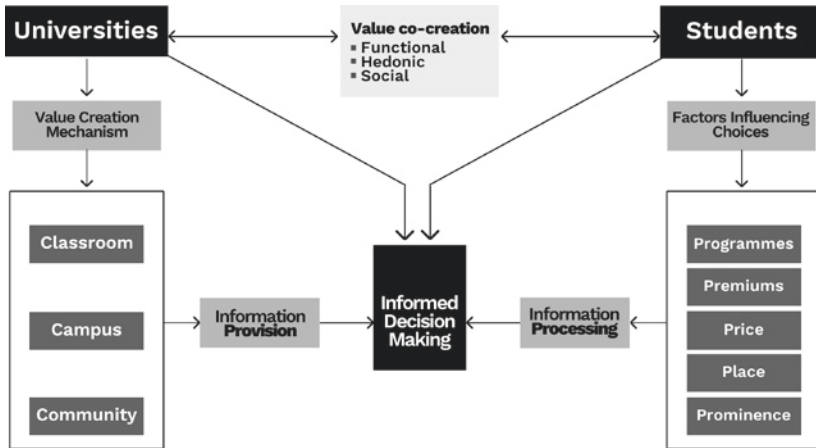


Fig. 2.1 Theoretical positioning of information provision and processing for informed decision making

offered by the University, the location of the University and even the ranking.

Figure 2.1 illustrates a conceptual relationship between the offers of the University and the students' expectation. Universities provide value through the classroom, campus and community. This highlight what the University has to offer. It presents the pedagogy approach, facilities and extra curriculum activities within the University. As Farinloye, Adeola, and Mogaji (2019) identified typology of universities, there will be variations in the values provided by the Universities. The type of University, the funding structure and the year of establishment, among many other factors will affect the value provided by the University. However, irrespective of the value being provided, there it is essential that Universities communicate this to stakeholder, including prospective students.

This recognize the role of universities as Information providers. This is important, as Mogaji, Anyogu, and Wayne (2020) found that most African Universities are no providing enough information about their programs and courses to prospective students. It is essential for University to provide a whole range of information for their student, not only about the curse but also about the extra curriculum activities

to enhance the student experience. Universities are expected to provide this information through their websites, prospectuses, social media, public relations and other marketing communications channels.

Research has identified various factors influencing student choice of University, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level (Adefulu, Farinloye, & Mogaji, 2019; d'Aiglepieire & Bauer, 2018; Maringe & Carter, 2007). These factors vary according to individuals, and they include the programs on offer, premium and prestige, price, place and location. The need for student to search and process information cannot, however, be ignored as Mangan, Hughes, and Slack (2010) found that many students appear to lack enthusiasm and determination to search for information about their University choices as many students search for information about local universities and may not search further if they feel their needs have been met.

Theoretically, it is positioned that Universities should provide relevant information about their value for their prospective students. Likewise, the students are expected to process the information. This is further integrated with the consumer value theory. Holbrook (2005, p. 46) defines customer value as an “interactive, relativistic preference and experience”. Xu, Peak, and Prybutok (2015) posited that consumer value involves a trade-off process where customers evaluate the benefits received and the sacrifices given from using a product/service. Zhang, Guo, Hu, and Liu (2017) further defined consumer value as the process by which producers and consumers, as peer subjects, co-create value for themselves and each other.

This highlights the working relationship between the University and the students to co-create value and have a common ground where students can make an informed decision. Zhang et al. (2017) presented customer value creation as a three-dimensional construct, having functional, hedonic, and social values. Functional value assumes that the Students are rational problem solvers, searching for information to enhance their decision-making process. Therefore they need Universities to make that information available. Hedonic values conceptualised the feelings and emotive aspects of vales created on campus, classroom and the community (Wang, 2016), representing the extent to which the creates appropriate experiences, feelings, and emotions for the prospective

students (Smith & Colgate, 2007). Social value is considered an independent dimension in total customer value that is used to enhance user status and self-esteem (Rintamäki, Kanto, Kuusela, & Spence, 2006). This is posited as the anticipated engagement with the University necessitating the students' decision on which University to attend.

With the need to co-create value, there is a need for a common ground which ensures that the student is making an informed decision. This decision guarantees that the student has processed the information provided by the University. The student acknowledged the value provided by the university and agrees to enrol. This informed decision is made on a common ground anchored on information provided by the Universities and information processing by the students.

Conclusion

Understanding choice criteria for prospective students have received much academic attention in recent time. This understanding is vital for marketing higher education, securing the long-term success of the universities, as well as its marketing strategy (Adefulu et al., 2019). These understanding can shape engagement and marketing relationship between the students and the university, providing relevant information and engaging to enhance the students' experience. Likewise, the Universities must ensure their success by making progress in recruiting many students annually and to enhance recruitment efforts, the values they offer must be presented for prospective students.

This study offers theoretical insight into the information-based relationship between the University and the prospective students. The chapter is theoretically framed to recognise the University as a value delivery mechanism. University is delivering value through their teaching, curriculum relevance and development courses (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020). They offer values with regards to education for enhancing human resources of a country. Also, University delivers values through extra curriculum activities on campus, student voice and presentation, given the students the opportunity to develop and improve their lifestyles. Lastly the University offers values thorough their

community, recognising the impact of their research, offering placements and volunteering. These values, however, are expected to be communicated to the stakeholders (Mogaji, 2019a).

While the communication of these values is essential, there is a responsibility on the part of the student to engage with the information and process what has been offered based on different factors that have been known to influence choices. The student has got to understand how to make an informed decision based on the information that is made available. It has been acknowledged however that the information search can be tedious and not surprising to find that there is a limited active information search on the part of the students (Menon, Saiti, & Socratous, 2007), necessitating the need for Universities to provide information for their students.

The study offers both theoretical and practical implications. First, this study extends knowledge of the student choice-making process. The theoretical position and framework acknowledge the students' responsibility to process information and also on the Universities' responsibilities to make the information readily available. While Mogaji et al. (2020) have focused on course information on University website, this study explores the Universities' holistic responsibility in information provision. Besides, it extends literature on value delivery and service marketing by focusing on African universities. Recognising the value, they deliver and how they are positioning themselves to reach prospective students. Thirdly, it contributes to knowledge of marketing higher education in Africa. While recognising the role of the Universities, there is an expectation for them to take pride in the values they provide and effectively marketing it to reach prospective students and stakeholders. While Ndofirepi et al. (2020) provided a holistic understanding of higher education market in Africa from a marketing perspective using the 7Ps of marketing, this study presents a 5P approach exploring the factors influencing student choice and the value delivery mechanism of the Universities. Lastly, it extends the consumer value theory (Zhang et al., 2017) and the ALARA Model of Information Search (Mogaji, 2019b) with focus on higher education. This study recognises the co-creation of value between University and the prospective students and the provision of information to enhance the decision-making process for students.

There are managerial implications from this study which will be relevant for University Managers as they reach out to prospective students and improve their marketing strategies. Firstly, Universities must recognise the values to deliver and how they will deliver it. As Farinloye et al. (2019) identified typology of universities, there are different University with different value deliverables. Universities must recognise what they stand for. This could involve carrying out an audit to understand the inherent values within the University. This audit will reveal what the University is doing well and areas in which they can improve. Understanding these values will inform the marketing communication strategy. Secondly, Managers needs to ensure that their values are well communicated to the stakeholders. This involves updating the website to highlight what the university offers (Mogaji, 2016), social media profile with content creation strategies providing relevant contents regularly, well designed and informative prospectuses, user-friendly and engaging mobile applications and public relations. The stakeholders must know what the University has to offer. Lastly, relevant information for students should be made available to them. This could be in easily accessible format, recognising the challenges with data and internet connections in Africa, Universities will be expecting the students to make an informed choice as this is important in avoid students dropping out or not completing their studies because they were not satisfied with their experience at the university. There is a common ground for informed decision making with is anchored on information provided by the Universities and information processing by the students.

This study has provided a conceptual paper that highlights the relationship between values being provided by the university and factors shaping students' choice. While the absence of empirical data could be considered a limitation, efforts have been made to extend knowledge and offer an understanding of student choice, especially from an Africa perspective. There is still a shortage of research on higher education market in Africa which suggest the need for more empirical insight into this emerging market. Future studies can empirically evaluate the values provided by the universities, to understand is this varies across Universities in the continent. Besides, future studies can explore students' understanding of the values and manners in which they have

been communicated. It is anticipated that this chapter will meaningfully advance the comprehension, and understanding and stimulation of further research on student choice and marketing higher education in Africa.

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