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*Full Length Research Paper*

# The role of marketing communications in student enrolment in private universities in Ghana

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**The provision of information to prospective customers by business organizations is very important in attracting and retaining them. Thus, marketing communications are very vital to the survival and/or success of every business organisation. This study seeks to investigate the role of marketing communications in attracting students to enrol in private universities in Ghana. The study employed questionnaire and interviews in collecting data from current students and officials of selected private universities in Ghana. A sample of 126 respondents was selected for the study; comprising students and admission/marketing officers from the selected private universities. Convenience sampling technique was adopted. The statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for the analysis. The study among other things revealed that advertising was the most important tool in attracting students to enrol in private universities in Ghana. It is thus recommended that private universities rely heavily on advertising as a marketing communication tool in attracting prospective students into their institutions. However, considering the importance of the other elements of marketing communications, there is the need for integration. It can therefore be concluded that, for effective positioning and/or sustainable competitive advantage, private universities in Ghana will be better off if they invest more in advertising.**

**Keywords:** Marketing communications, tertiary, education, advertising, personal selling, public relations, enrolment.

## INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education has been identified to be one of the major pillars of development especially in developing countries. It is also common knowledge that taking into account the populations sizes and growth rates of various countries, it is difficult if not impossible for

governments of even the most developed countries to provide tertiary education singlehandedly for residents; hence the call for private participation in the provision of tertiary education (De Vaus, 2002; Zikmund, 2000). It is however worth-noting that these private education providers come into the picture with the primary aim of making profits. They therefore adopt the methods of running any other business in the running of these educational institutions including extensive marketing

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communication. This has become absolutely necessary because of the intense competition in the tertiary educational sector. Private universities have to compete not only among themselves but also with their public counterparts which are relatively more developed and enjoy government subsidy. Moreover, the public institutions most of the time do not need any promotion before they get overwhelmed with student applications that they cannot even contain (Al-Hawary and Batayneh , 2010). All forms of promotional tools are therefore employed to sell out these private institutions and their products in the form of academic programmes and courses to the public especially prospective tertiary students and/or their families. Some of these tools include advertising, public relations, personal selling and other marketing communication tools (Kitchen, 2003). Interestingly, despite the cost involved in these promotional activities, most if not all of these institutions seem to be crowd followers. That is, they employ the use of some promotional tools just because other institutions are employing them and not because they actually know how much they (the promotional tools) influence their target customers' purchase decision (De Vaus, 2002; Al-Hawary and Batayneh , 2010; Kitchen, 2003).

## **OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

The general objective of this study is to investigate the role of marketing communications in the enrolment of students in private universities in Ghana. The specific objectives are:

- To determine whether advertising, public relations, and personal selling influence enrolment in private universities in Ghana.
- To determine the relative strengths of the promotional tools mentioned above.
- To investigate other factors which influence student enrolment decision apart from advertising, public relations and personal selling.

Based on the objectives set above, the study attempts to seek answers to the following questions:

- Does advertising, public relations and personal selling influence the enrolment decision of students in private universities in Ghana?
- Which of the marketing communication tools influence enrolment decision of students in private universities in Ghana more than the others? In other words, what are the relative strengths of the promotional tools of advertising, personal selling and public relations in the enrolment of students in the private universities in Ghana?
- Are there any factors which influence students in choosing their private tertiary institution apart from the aforementioned promotional tools? What are the other factors which influence student enrolment decision in the private universities apart from advertising, public

relations and personal selling?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed the mixed methods of data collection and analysis combining both the quantitative and qualitative methods (Tewksbury, 2009; Saunders et al, 2009). This is evidenced by the fact that it adopted the use of questionnaires to collect data from the students and both questionnaires and unstructured interviews to collect data from the authorities of the selected institutions. The qualitative data supported the quantitative data to enable the researchers determine whether or not the selected marketing communication tools influenced the enrolment decision of students. This study was mainly descriptive as it sought to find out the specific role that marketing communication plays in the attraction and enrolment of students in the private universities in Ghana. It sought to find out which marketing tools play a greater role (Stebbins, 2001; De Vaus, 2002; Zikmund, 2000).

A sample of 126 respondents was selected for the study; comprising students from selected public universities and admission/marketing officers from each of the selected universities. Convenience sampling technique was adopted in the case of the student respondents as they were chosen based on ease of access. This technique was employed because the total student population of the selected institutions was targeted irrespective of their programmes of study (Saunders et al, 2009, De Vaus , 2002). The statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for the analysis (Al-Hawary and Batayneh , 2010).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Marketing Communication**

Marketing Communication involves the transmission from a sender to a receiver of a message dealing with the buyer-seller relationship. Whatever message that is sent and received has to do with the relationship that exists between the buyer and the seller. In other words the kind of message that is sent by the marketer to buyers depends on the relationship between them (Boone and Kurtz, 2001). In defining marketing communications, Kotlers and Keller (2009, p. 510) take an extensive view of the concept by indicating that marketing communications is "the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers, directly or indirectly about the products and brands they sell". Therefore, relationship which is said to be very important in the transaction of business is built through communications between businesses and their brands on one hand and their customers on the other. Other

writers such as Hawkins et al, (2001, p:19) have also taken a broader view of marketing communication by arguing that it includes "advertising, the sales force, public relations, packaging and any other signals that the organisation provides about itself and its products and services". Communication in effect is the "voice" of companies and their brands.

Thus the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) posits that marketing communications such as advertising, sales promotion, sponsorship or direct marketing should be produced directly by or on behalf of marketers intended primarily to promote products or to influence consumer behaviour (ICC, 2006). In the case of private tertiary institutions, marketing communication is extremely important since the students or potential students are the customers and would need to be communicated to effectively and efficiently as a way of influencing the decision of the students in favour of their institutions (Al-Hawary and Batayneh, 2010).

### **Marketing communication tools**

Marketing communication tools consist of both the planned and unplanned messages between organisations and customers, as well as those carried out among customers. Communication tools can be categorised into two types; personal communications tools and non-personal communications tools (Jennifer, 1998). Personal communication tools are those in which two or more people communicate with one another with the aim to achieving a particular goal. Word of mouth is mostly the primary means of communication in this case although other media forms such as email, mobile telephony, direct mail and others are growing and increasingly being used significantly (Al-Hawary and Batayneh, 2010).

Non-personal communication tools include those that employ the use of other media in the communication process other than person-to person. These media include but not limited to newspapers (both national and regional), magazines, leaflets, billboards, television, radios and many others (Jennifer, 1998). Traditionally, universities have usually relied on the print media, word of mouth and public relations to recruit students (Chung, 2010). After a study on the antecedents and consequences of market orientation in higher education institutions, Umashankar (2001) concluded that, market orientation in the context of higher education has not been given the needed attention.

### **Advertising**

Today, definitions of advertising abound. But it must be noted that the definition as well as its practice has evolved over the years in consonance with time and

available resources and technology. Advertising has been defined as "selling in print" (Starch, 1923, p: 5), Starch's definition is limited to the print media. This is as a result of the fact that the only available media at the time was print media and the other forms of media as we know today did not exist (Nan and Faber, 2004). Recent explanation of advertising has been offered by different authors. Richards and Curran (2002, P. 74) define advertising as "a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action now or in the future". Their focus is on the persuasive role that advertising plays in the communication process. Kotler and Keller (2009, p.538) see advertising as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor". Dunn et al. (1978), Richards and Curran (2002) and Kotler and Keller (2009) view advertising from its functional perspectives, hence they define it as a paid, non-personal communication through various media by business firms, non-profit organization, and individuals who are in some way identified in the advertising message and who hope to inform or persuade members of a particular audience. Morden (1991) is of the opinion that advertising is used to establish a basic awareness of the product or service in the mind of the potential customer and to build up knowledge about it.

The primary aim of advertising is to make known the availability of a product, an idea or a science on offer to the target audience and influence their awareness, attitude and buying behaviour (Akanbi et al, 2011; Ayanwale et al, 2005). Private universities therefore advertise to create the awareness of their prospective customers (the students) and their parents of the academic courses they offer in the schools, to persuade and remind them of the advantages they would get in the advertised institutions than in other institutions offering same or similar programmes (Boone and Kurtz, 2001). According to Hossler et al (1990), television and radio advertising have proven to be particularly effective in helping institutions build their image and visibility especially in specific geographical areas. A survey carried out by Jansen and Brenn-White (2011) for DAAD on the Overview of Current Marketing Initiatives by Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and National Agencies within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) showed that, most institutions use multimedia advertisements, advertisements through the print media, advertising through mail (direct mail), outdoor advertising through posters, banners and billboards, online advertisements and email advertising to make known their institutions and the programmes they offer.

### **Public relations**

Public relations include a variety of programs to promote

or protect a company's image or individual products (Kotler and Keller, 2009). This definition focuses on the promotion or protection of an image that has already been acquired by the company or product. Educational institutions carve certain images for themselves through the academic courses and student performance over the years. These images they try to protect through effective public relations activities. Public relations has also been defined as "management of communication between an organisation and its publics" (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p. 6) Whilst they see public relations as a communication management tool, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) on the other hand indicate that public relations is a relationship management process. In other words, public relations is primarily about managing the relationship between the organisation and the consuming public. It has however, been argued that public relations should be mutually beneficial. Thus, the success or otherwise of business organizations in managing public relations depends how well they manage public relations not only to their advantage but also for the benefits of their target market (Cutlip et al., 2006).

All these definitions seem to have been summed up by Malan et al (1991) who concluded that Public Relations is a planned and sustained management function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an institution with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. Good Public relations with an educational institution's stakeholders enables the institution to have a favourable and positive image in the media and consequently enhance student enrolment (Messah and Immaculate, 2011). They posit that every educational institution has its publics that it deals with and most critical are internal university publics (employees and students) who should be empowered to be good ambassadors of the institutions to the outside world. Having a good relationship with customers (current students) is also very necessary for the purpose of retention (Diaconu and Pandelică). In their view, students who have graduated from a university can become further customers as master students, PhD students, employees or even economic agents of the university then interested in the knowledge and the innovations created by the universities and employers of graduates of the university.

It has been established that an institution's actual quality is often less important than the prestige it holds, or its reputation for quality. This is because it is the universities' perceived quality and excellence which actually guides prospective students in their decisions to enrol in that institution. Institutions, as a result, are usually concerned about the type of image that the public gets about them. Most tertiary institutions, to enhance their image before the public employ the use of press relations, periodic broadcast on campus radio stations and others outside the campus and other

community activities (Jansen and Brenn-White, 2011; Gatfield and Graham, 1999).

### **Personal selling**

Personal selling is defined as a seller's promotional presentation conducted on a person-to-person basis with the buyer (Boone and Kurtz, 2002). Kotler (2006) defines personal selling as a personal presentation by the firm's sales force to make sales and build customer relationships. In addition to making sales which is the aim of most marketing efforts, Kotler adds the relationship building role of personal selling in his definition and adds that good long standing relationships with customers enhance sales, the reason for marketing.

Personal selling is a purchase situation in which two people communicate in an attempt to influence each other (McDaniel et al, 2006). In their view, both the buyer and the seller have a specific aim to achieve in the transaction process. The seller's view may be to convince the buyer of the quality of the product as compared to other similar products, induce purchase and increase revenue and profit. The buyer's aim on the other hand could be to minimize cost and assure himself of the quality of the product (Boone and Kurtz, 2002).

From the various definitions given by experts, personal selling can be said to be a form of communication either oral or otherwise with potential buyers of a product with the intention of making a sale. It usually involves personal contact between sellers and potential buyers. Marketing officials of higher educational institutions use this tool through face-to-face meetings, via telephone conversations, through newer technologies that allow contact to take place over the internet including using video conferencing, chat rooms and text messaging to interact with potential students and their parents (Messah and Immaculate, 2011).

### **Student choice and enrolment process**

The most important factor in the success of an organisation is the customer (Peters and Austin, 1985). Therefore, every business has as purpose, to create customers, and if a business fails to satisfy the needs of its customers it will not stand the test of time and under normal competitive conditions, survive and prosper (Lancaster and Massingham, 1998). Organisations that fail to respond to their customers and do not have their customers' satisfaction as their major concern are bureaucratic, impersonal, rigid, anti-innovative and are unlikely to stand up to competition (Kotler and Fox, 1995). Student choice in the case of tertiary institutions is equated to what Kotler and Fox (1995) refer to as consumer buyer behaviour. This studies how individuals, groups and organisations select, buy, use and dispose

of goods or services to satisfy their needs and desires and, what factors affect this behaviour (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008).

Studying consumer buyer behaviour could provide answers to key marketing questions such as: what do consumers want to buy, how do they buy and why do they select a specific provider? Providing answers to such questions could guide marketers towards more effective marketing approaches, bearing in mind that the aim of marketing is to meet and satisfy consumer needs and wants (Blackwell et al, 2001). If tertiary educational institutions are able to know the process of students' choice of institution and subsequent enrolment, then they would be in a better position to properly target them with appropriate communication tools.

The process of student choice of an institution is a complex series of activities (Litten, 1982). Five stages are identified by Al-Fattal (2010) as being the stages that students go through in their choice process. The five stages are needs and motives, information gathering, evaluating alternatives, decision and post-choice evaluation. In his view, a need or motive for higher education arises on the part of the student. The student then seeks information on the various providers of the type of education he or she may want to acquire. The various alternatives are evaluated using the criteria best suitable to the student after which a decision to enrol is taken. After enrolment an evaluation is done as to whether the decision to enrol is worth it or otherwise. Figure 1.1 shows students' choice and enrolment stages.

### **Need and motives**

The realisation of a need usually begins the student's decision making process to make a choice. It is asserted that, a need is activated when there is sufficient discrepancy between the actual and the desired state of the customer (Al-Fattal, 2010). According to Van Dam (1997), a need arises from a perceived lack of something on the part of the customer.

A student's need for university education could be triggered by many factors either within or outside the student concerned. Internally, the professional career the student intends to get could be a motive for getting a university education. Family and or friends of students can also be a very important source of motivation for their need for tertiary education (MacDermott et al, 1987; Choi et al, 2005). It has also been established that teachers in a particular tertiary institutions play a great role in inspiring students to pursue tertiary education (Corwin and Tierney, 2007; Roderick et al., 2008; Muller, 2009). Marketers of various tertiary institutions try to find out the unmet or unsatisfied needs of consumers (students) so they can find ways to satisfy them. Their

ability to satisfy their needs attract students to their institutions.

Kotler and Fox (1995) observe that many educational institutions still make the mistake of predicting students' needs and design programmes that do not match those needs. Educational institutions can effectively design academic programmes only when they are able to ascertain what students actually want to buy, and this can only be achieved through building strong communication channels with students (Al-Fattal, 2010). Institutions and their marketers cannot create needs for students, they can however, help them to recognise their needs through awareness creation of unperceived needs or possible future problems that could arise if action, presented by these institutions in the form of solutions is not taken presently (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001). This can bring a lot of students to become potential students if they actually recognise their need as presented by the communicating institutions.

### **Information gathering**

After the student has identified the need to study in a tertiary institution, the search for information about the providers of such services (tertiary education) begins. This search can either be internal or external. Internally the student begins to search from his own memory the various providers of the types of education he seeks. This internal search is usually based on the student's own experience and knowledge (Palmer, 2001). The student's quest and level of need for the information and his or her involvement are the determinants of the amount of information gathered (Menon et al, 2007).

Some students will be satisfied with a little amount of information whilst others would want to have a whole great amount before they can conveniently and confidently make a choice. Menon (2004) posits that the student's level of involvement has a direct link with the student's socio-economic background - those with lower socio-economic backgrounds are more involved than their counterparts with higher socio-economic backgrounds. The level of involvement of a particular student in the decision to be taken is seen in the information gathering process (Al-Fattal, 2010). A student will be highly involved in the decision to attend the university since it will have a great impact on his or her future life prospects (Kotler and Fox, 1995; Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Drummond, 2004).

After the internal search, if the student realises that the information gathered is not enough to base on and make a decision, external sources of information are considered. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008) the sources of information available to prospective customers are as follows: (i) personal non-marketer controlled sources. These include family, friends,

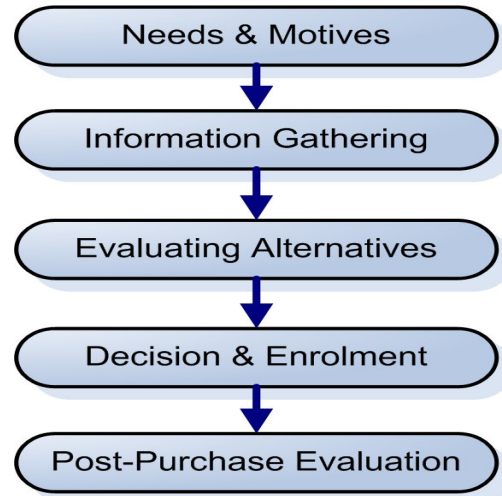


Figure 1.1: Student Choice Model (Adapted from Al-Fattal, 2010)

acquaintances, teachers, colleagues etc; (ii) personal marketer controlled sources whose examples include sales representatives; (iii) non-personal non-marketer controlled. Publicity in the mass media is an example of this source; (iv) non-personal marketer controlled, examples include but not limited to advertisements, prospectuses, websites.

Students start by exhausting the personal sources of information before supplementing it with the non-personal sources. There are a lot of sources that students gather information from to help them make decisions. Taylor (1992) is of the belief that friends' advice is the major source of information influencing students' choice of tertiary educational institutions. James *et al.* (1999) and Foskett (2009) point out the importance of the role played by career advisers in the provision of information on higher educational institutions. An institution's own members of staff, through telephone conversations and email correspondences to prospective students, also play a major role in influencing student choice decision (Evans, 1995). Most students also turn to their families for advice as to which institution to choose (Pimpa, 2005). Other researchers such as Pasternak (2005) seeks to suggest that the information given by the institution's own printed materials is also very influential in student choice process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Source of Marketing Information to Prospective Students

Marketers send out information about their products and services through different communication tools and

media, both personal and non-personal (Jennifer, 1998). These tools include but are not limited to advertising, public relations, personal selling and many others including some that are not controlled by the marketer such as word of mouth and publicity. The results of the research indicated that advertising has the biggest percentage of 35% (n=42) as being a source of information to the respondents. This confirms what Akanbi *et al.* (2011) asserted that advertising serves to inform potential customers about the availability of products or services as offered by the advertising marketer.

Following advertising is recommendation by family, friend or colleague with a percentage of 26.7% (n=32). This indicates that family members, friends and colleagues are also very potent and important source of information to potential students seeking admission to tertiary institutions. These findings are in line with those of MacDermott *et al.* (1987); Choi *et al.* (2005); Pimpa (2005) and Taylor (1992) that family and or friends of students can also be a very important source of information and or motivation for their need for tertiary education and the institution they would enrol in.

Current students are also said to be a source of information for potential students. 15% (n=18) of the total respondents said they got their information about the school from current students. Some potential students see their peers who are already in tertiary institutions as role models and would therefore listen to what they say about which institution to enrol in. This indicates that the public relations (PR) machinery of the institutions is quite functional as current students and employees are part of the PR machinery of a company.

Campus visit also had a significant percentage of 4.2% (n=5) as being the source of information to respondents before they enrolled. This gives the impression that

personal selling as a communication tool is also practised by these institutions. Special publications such as brochures, magazines and others printed by tertiary institutions also proved to be a source of information to potential students. These together represented 2.5% (n=3) of the respondents on their source of information. This confirms the suggestion by Pasternak (2005) that the information given by the institution's own printed materials is also a very influential source of information to prospective students and their choice process.

A total of 14.2% (n= 17) of the respondents had more than one source of information. It should however be noted that all these included advertising in their sources of information. If this is added to advertising's percentage of 35%, the total percentage of respondents who heard about their institutions through advertising rises to 49.2% making it the leading source of information to potential students as per the findings of this study. This finding seems to go contrary to the assertion of Kitchen (2003) that mass media advertising is rapidly making way for more personal form of communication such as personal selling and direct marketing as far as tertiary institutions in Ghana are concerned. It is however worth noting that Kitchen's environment (America) is absolutely different from (Ghana) where the current research was carried out and this could account for the discrepancy.

A percentage of 2.5% (n=3) of respondents said they got their information from other sources. Two of those respondents said they got the information from church announcements whilst the last one has a lecturer of the school as the source of information. This last respondents' source confirms Evans (1995) observation that an institution's own members of staff can be a good source of information to potential customers.

### **Advertising as a source of information and influence of enrolment decision**

The findings of the study indicate that 49.2% of respondents said they got the information about their school through either advertisement alone or advertisement and some other source. Different respondents chose different media as being the source from which they got the information. Figure 1.2 shows the different media sources and the percentages of respondents who chose them as being their sources of information.

From Figure 1.2 above which illustrates the type of advertising media and the corresponding percentages of respondents that got their information through them, 32.2% of those who chose advertising as their source of information heard it from only radio advertisement. 15.3% heard it through television advertisement, 10.2% through posters, and 10.2% through billboards. The internet as well as newspapers/magazines had 3.4% each. Those who heard their information from both radio

and television represented 18.6%. Radio and billboards and radio and newspapers/magazines both got 3.4% each. In all, the total percentage of respondents who chose radio advertisement as their source of information is 57.6% making radio advertisement the dominant source of information to prospective students. Television advertisement is the next highest single source of information to prospective students with a percentage of 15.3% followed by billboards and posters. Newspapers/magazines and the internet performed quite poorly with a percentage of 3.4%. This is either as result of the fact that Ghana is not so internet inclined and so prospective students don't usually visit the internet or that the institutions do not advertise on the internet. With small percentage recorded by newspapers/magazines, respondents probably have not developed the culture of reading newspapers. It is observed that the dominant age group of respondents is 18-27 years whose interest is not found in the reading of newspapers as compared to listening to radio or watching television (Gatfield and Graham, 1999; Ayanwale et al, 2005).

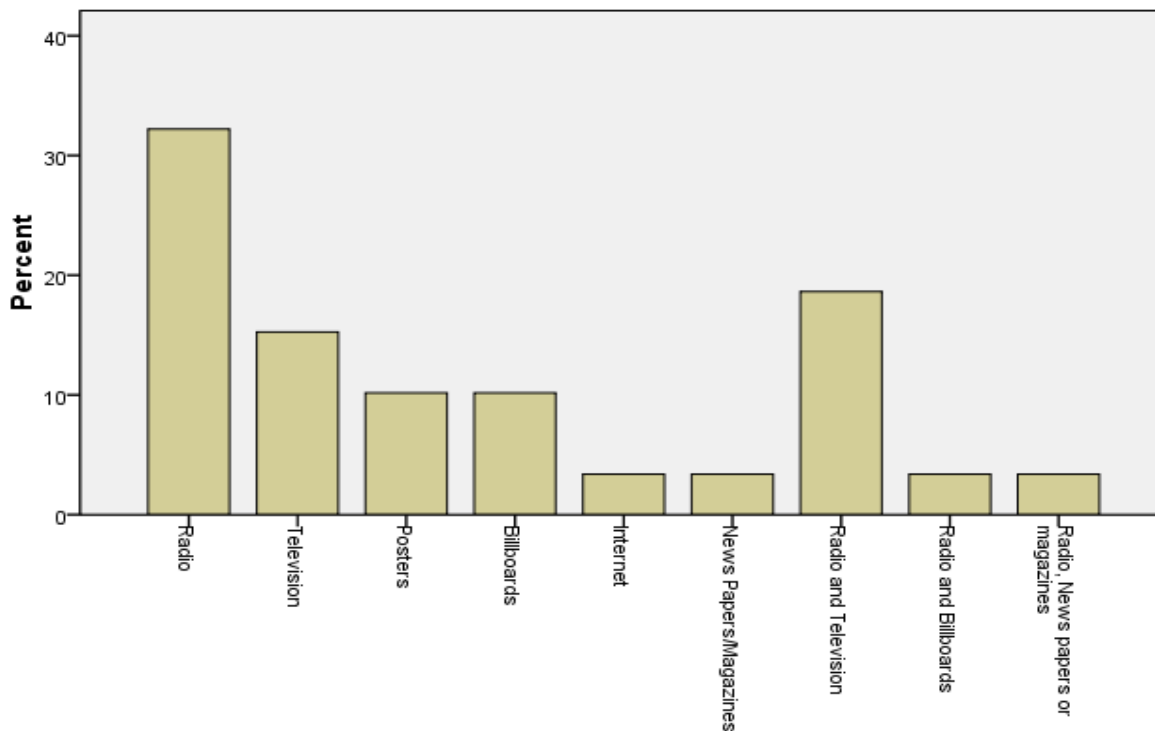
A larger number of respondents who chose radio as the medium through which they heard the advertisement fell in the age group of 28-37 years. This is probably due to the fact that people in this age group are most likely to be in the working class and so would be listening to the radio whilst at work than watching television or reading newspapers. In the same vein, a larger number of respondents whose enrolment decision was influenced by advertising fell within this same age group (28-37 years) and also chose radio as the medium of advertisement through which they heard the information about the school.

### **Influence of enrolment decision by advertising**

Though 57.6% of respondents said they heard about their institutions either through only advertising or advertising and other sources, not all those respondents were influenced by advertising to enrol in the institution. Out the total number of respondents who heard about their institutions through advertisement, 84.7% of them were influenced by advertising to enrol. Only 15.3% were not influenced by the advertisement they heard. This strongly confirms the assertion of Ayanwale et al (2005) that advertising influences the buying decision of customers.

### **Public relations as a source of information and influence of enrolment decision**

Organisations engage in good public relations in order to enhance their image in the eyes of the public. Some of the activities and/or media through which they do this include but are not limited to printing newsletters,



**Figure 1.2:** Types of Advertising Media. (Source: Researchers' field work, 2012)

undertaking community services, sponsorship of events, special publications, radio and television broadcasts. The study revealed that some of these activities serve as a source of information about the institutions to prospective students. The study indicated that 63.3% of the total number of respondents said they had heard about their institutions through public relations activities. A smaller percentage of 36.7% had not heard about their institutions through public relations activities. This indicates that the institutions are doing well when it comes to public relations and confirms the opinion of Gatfield and Graham (1999) that public relations activities are a good way of informing the public about the existence and performance of an organisation.

### **Influence of enrolment decision by public relations**

A total of 76 respondents out of the total number said they heard about the institutions that they currently attend through public relations. However, not all those people were influenced by the institutions' PR activities to enrol. 68.4% of the respondents who got the information about their institutions through PR said their enrolment decision was influenced by PR. 31.6% on the other hand said they were not influenced through the activities of PR. Public relations therefore influences the

enrolment decision of students in to private tertiary institutions. This confirms the findings of Messah and Immaculate (2011) who conducted a similar study in Kenya and found similar results.

Among the public relations tools/activities, newsletters was rated the highest when it comes to influencing student enrolment decision. This is consistent with the findings of Gatfield and Graham (1999); Athiyaman (1997); Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) who came to the conclusion that an institution's actual quality is often less important than its prestige, image or reputation for quality. This in their view is because it is the institution's perceived excellence which, in fact, guides the decisions of prospective students and scholars to enrol with an institution.

### **Personal selling as a source of information and influence of enrolment decision**

Personal selling which involves a more personal and direct way of communication between the marketer and the customer employs a number of forms including face-to-face interaction, telephone conversation, direct mailing, e-mails, campus visits in the case of educational institutions, and so on. The findings of the study showed that the institutions under study employ personal selling



sponsorship of events. All four respondents said their institutions try to contact potential students to convince as a means of communication to prospective students. 63.6% of respondents said they were contacted in one way or the other by their institutions before their enrolment. This indicates that the institutions have responded to the call by changing times and events to either move away from mass communication to more personal ways of communicating with clients or at least to include it. Among the media used by the institutions to contact prospective students, face-to-face through campus visits dominates, followed by telephone contact.

### **Influence of enrolment decision by personal selling**

A number of respondents said they were influenced by the personal selling activities of their institutions. 33.3% of respondents were influenced by personal selling. 6.7% said they were not influenced by personal selling and the remaining 60% did not respond to that. The 33.3% of respondents who said they were influenced by personal selling to enrol goes to confirm the findings of Hossler et al (1990); Messah and Immaculate (2011) that personal selling influences students' enrolment decision.

### **Other factors that influence enrolment decision**

Out of the total number of respondents, 1.7% said they got the information about their institutions and the course they are pursuing from church announcements. They also indicated that they were totally influenced to enrol by those same announcements made in church. Other factors mentioned were proximity to workplace, the fact that institution is a Christian institution, availability of part-time (evening) classes and career enhancement especially for those already working.

Out of the six respondents representing the authorities of the two private universities targeted, only four were reachable. All four answered that their institutions engaged in all the three selected marketing communication tools to attract students to enrol- advertising, public relations and personal selling. Concerning media used in the communication, all four chose radio advertising as a medium used to disseminate information about their institutions and the courses offered. All also chose the internet as a medium since both institutions have websites through which they send adverts to the public. Two respondents from one of the institutions said they employed the use of billboards to advertise their institution and the courses offered to the public. They also indicated that they use the fence wall of their school building as a billboard to advertise.

On public relations, all four chose school brochures, three chose special events and publications, two

chose newsletters and community service and one chose them to enrol. As to the media of contact, all chose campus visits, face-to-face and e-mail. They were however quick to add that the campus visit is what they try to practise most since it is difficult to get either the telephone numbers or e-mail addresses of potential students to contact them. They mentioned that though the e-mail medium would have been the most cost effective, the difficulty lies in getting the e-mail addresses. Concerning the effectiveness of these communication tools they employ, they admitted that numbers have been increasing over the years as far as enrolment is concerned. However, they are unable to monitor and know which medium of communication is most effective in attracting potential students to the schools.

### **CONCLUSION**

The provision of information to prospective customers is very important that all business organisations must be keen at making information available. Marketing communication is thus a vital tool for private universities for attracting prospective students to enrol in their institutions. Based on the analysis and discussion of the study, it can be concluded that advertising is the most effective marketing communication element in term of reaching out to prospective students. Private universities in Ghana that effectively and efficiently manage their advertising campaigns stand the chance of positioning themselves well and thus gain sustainable competitive advantage in the industry. However, it is important to indicate that, while private universities rely heavily on advertising, they should not lose sight of the fact that the other marketing communication elements also contribute in various ways to reaching out and attracting students. In other words, they have important part to play in reaching out and attracting prospective students. Thus, there is the need for integrating the marketing communication tools. Integrated marketing communications should effectively be institutionalised, while investing more in advertising.

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