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MARKETING STRATEGIES AND STUDENTS' ENROLMENT IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated marketing strategies and students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. One research question was raised and two null hypotheses formulated to guide the study. Thirty two (32) school administrators in 32 private secondary schools in the study area constitute the study population and were used intact as the study subjects. Data were collected using a 30item research questionnaire titled "Marketing Strategies and Students' Enrolment Questionnaire (MSSEQ). The obtained data were analyzed using Mean, Population T-Test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The results revealed some marketing strategies that can be used in private secondary schools to boost students' enrolment in their order of perceived effectiveness. It also indicated that the extent private secondary school administrators adopt marketing strategies in enhancing students enrolment is significantly low in most of the studied school. The results further showed that there is significant relationship between marketing strategies adoption and student enrolment. Based on the findings, it was concluded that adopting effective marketing strategies in private secondary schools can enhance increase enrolment which will expand school income opportunity for sustainability and quality service delivery of the organization. It is therefore recommended that marketing strategies such as school website/social media, quality school programmes, infrastructural development, media adverts should be used to boost enrolment since it is a modern means of awareness creation and communicating values of the institution to the prospects. This will serve to increase enrolment rate, thereby increasing literate populace in the country for social and economic well-being.

Keywords: Marketing, Strategy, Marketing strategy, Students' enrolment, Private secondary schools.

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Contribution/Originality

The paper's primary contribution is finding of some marketing strategies that can be adopted by private school administrators to facilitate students' enrolment. Its implementation will afford the absorption of admission left over from public schools. This will enable reduction in number of admission seekers and help increase literate populace in Nigeria. Private schools can also generate more income from enrollees for sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is now a global service that every country strives to provide for their citizens since it serves as a tool for socio-economic development. The expansion in population poses the demand for establishment of more educational institutions which will accommodate more students for literacy acquisition. On this note, education has been liberalized by the government to enable private sector participation in its provision. The private sector participation has bring about increase in number of educational institutions to serve the growing populace, programme quality, and general innovation in modern educational practices. Following the private sector participation, which bring about "profit focus" has given rise to institutions competing for students and finding creative ways to satisfy students and parents needs and preferences. Since the beginning of the millennium, there have been a significant expansion in secondary schools especially in response to innovation, demand for meeting standard for globalization and secondary education in Nigeria (Onyemaechi, 2013).

As at 2014, there are 32 private secondary schools in Calabar Municipality out numbering 15 public secondary schools in the same Local Government Area. The emergence of several private secondary schools means that they must become aggressive in publicizing their institutions and communicating their institutions values to the prospects in order to increase their market share in terms of students' number and the quality of those enrolling. Moreover, public schools have upper hand in number of students' enrolment arising from government education subvention which enable low income home students to afford their education almost free of charge, compared to their counterparts in private schools. Sequel to this, without marketing strategy adoption, public secondary schools still have adequate enrollment of students into their schools, and sometimes above carrying capacity of the school.

Private secondary schools are mainly established to serve students from middle to high income homes and therefore their services always seems to be commercialized for profit making like other organizations. The difference is their contribution in provision of education as social service to citizens which contributes significantly to bridging the gap between the extent the government can establish number of schools that can serve the entire populace. Meanwhile as an established private or cooperate organization requires high magnitude of patronage through students enrolment to ensure their sustainability. The level of patronage they acquire from the public is mainly dependent on how well they carry out marketing of their institutions which involves strategies adoption to effectively create awareness and project their institutions as the best, establishing reasons why parents/guardians should choose them for their wards. Marketing can be viewed as the process by which organizations

create customer interest in products or services. It generates the strategy that underlies sales techniques, business communication, and business development. It is an integrated process through which organizations build strong customer relationships and create value for their customers and for themselves. It simply means the process of communicating the value of a product or service to customers, for the purpose of selling that product or service. To educational institutions, it connotes the process of communicating values and inherent quality service delivery of schools to the customers and prospects for the purpose of attracting more enrolment. Strategy according to Lynch (1997) is the pattern or plan that integrates an organizations major goals or policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole usually deals with the general principles for achieving the objectives. It sought to justify why organization has chosen a particular route towards achievement of its long and short term goals. Strategy is the means by which objectives are achieved. Meanwhile objectives specify what is to be done; therefore strategy lays down how it is to be done.

Following the foregoing Kotler *et al.* (1999) viewed marketing strategy as the marketing logic by which the business unit hopes to achieve its marketing objectives. Bovee and Thill (1992) sees it as the overall plan for choosing a target and succeeding within it through product, pricing, distribution and promotional choices. The ability of schools to achieve its goals of sustainability and quality service delivery is highly dependent on how they convert their plans to action, in acquiring good number of students to enroll with them which will bring about increase in the school income to carter for sustainability of the institution. Baker (2008) maintained that marketing strategy is the goal of increasing sales and achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. In line with the above conceptions, marketing strategy as applied to educational institutions can simply said to be plans and channels which institutions tactically adopt to reach their prospects convincingly to enroll in their institutions.

Maringe and Foskett (2002) opine that in competitive analysis for educational institution, an institution may be interested in knowing the following things about competition: Which institutions do we compete with for students, and how successful are we? To answer the questions, an institution has to do a SWOT analysis. This information will serve as an indicator of how competitive the institution is and designing and the use of effective marketing communication tools to use to attract potential students to choose their institutions over their competitors. The primary targets in institution marketing are the parents and the students' enrollees. Meanwhile educational institutions can increase students' enrolment to enhance their income magnitude through application of effective means of customer attraction. This can be in form of direct information to parents, radio/television advert, improved academic programmes, beautified school environment and quality teaching, use of website and social networks, announcements, and so on.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

One of the major determinant of development in a country is the number of literate population. On this note, the Federal government of Nigeria, through open door policy on education has empowered private sector participation in education provision.

Notwithstanding this enhancement, enrolment in private secondary schools is still very low. This has been attributed to non-adoption of adequate marketing strategies to create awareness and to project the quality of service delivery obtainable in the institutions to the target prospects, which is usually middle to high income homes. This has led to over flooding the public schools with enormous number of enrollees, leading to overage in school carrying capacity. Irrespective of government effort in ensuring that private schools are up to standard before approval for operation, which assures quality in their educational programmes, coupled with the attempts of most private schools to reach their target prospects by use of modern infrastructures in the schools and adoption of some awareness creation medium, the problem continued in high dimension. This work has been designed to establish whether the problem of poor enrolment in secondary schools in Calabar Municipality is being caused by non-adoption of marketing strategies by the institutional heads. The study will attempt to find out the extent marketing strategies is being utilized by school administrators in enhancing students' enrolment. It will also find out whether there significant correlation between adoption of marketing strategies in terms of TV/Radio Adverts, Newspapers/Magazines Advert, Bulk Messaging, Face to Face talk with Parents, Quality programmes, Infrastructural development, Social Media/Website, Price, Public address system, Prints and students enrolment. Based on this backdrop, the problem of this study is raised as a question thus, how can marketing strategy adoption enhance students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Calabar Municipality?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scot (1999) agrees that the survival of many schools depend to a great extent on their capacity to retain current students and recruit new ones, their mobilization of resources, achievement of their students, and their success in making their programs attractive to the external environment. He therefore considered marketing strategies to be an indispensable managerial function if they are to survive in competition environment. Sharrock (2000) argues that it is not enough for a school to be effective; it must also project an effective image to parents and stakeholders. Bowen *et al.* (2012) undertake a study to determine marketing strategies that attract and increase student enrollment in private universities in Kenya. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study. Probability-simple random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 98 continuing undergraduate students and 28 employees from two private universities. A questionnaire was used as the research instrument and the obtained data were subjected to quantitative analysis. The findings indicated that advertising using an institution web site, advertising using the various media stations, use of social networks such as face-book, encouraging word-of-mouth, career fair involvement, open day on campus and alumni support are marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrollment of students.

Kotler and Fox (1985) suggested that adopting marketing strategies would be an effective tool to overcoming decline in student's enrolment. The scholars maintained that schools that fail to think strategically about their marketing to portray the values of their institutions to be public often find themselves struggling with a range of issues such as poor enrolment, shrinking operating budget and

image confusion. They suggested some marketing strategies that schools can use such as word of mouth, effective use of school website/social media, customization, pricing, adequacy of infrastructure, and advertising. Private secondary schools must explore a variety of marketing strategies as a way of communicating and convincing old and prospective customers (parents, students and stakeholders) that their school is the right choice.

One of the best ways to realize increase school enrolment is to run such an excellent operation, that parents and students will be very satisfied with the academic programmes and the impact will be seen in students' high academic achievement. In other words, it is operating the school business at a higher level than the regular school organization norms and effectively communicating the improvement to customers (Oplatka, 2006).

Michael (2003) takes a similar position by emphasizing the need to do something special to get people talking about your business. Products or services must be appealing and desirable for word of mouth marketing to be effective. This means that the services offered by private secondary schools should be one that is worth telling. Kotler and Keller (2009) states three noteworthy characteristics of word of mouth as a means of awareness or marketing a business: the first being that it is credible because people trust others they know and respect, secondly word of mouth may be a very intimate dialogue that reflect personal facts, opinion and experiences and it occurs when people want it to and when they are most interested, and it often follows noteworthy or meaningful events or experiences of customers.

Omboi and Mutali (2011) states that a well-executed direct advertising campaign can offer a positive return on investment through increased student enrolment. They maintained that direct advertising communicates the product offers, service, or event; and explains how to get the offered product, service, or event. This tool utilizes email, mail, catalogues, encourage direct responses to radio and TV, in order to reach targeted audiences to increase sales and test new products and alternate marketing tactics. Television is generally acknowledged as the most powerful advertising medium and reaches a broad spectrum of consumer, however needs to be adopted by educational institutions in reaching their target prospects and enrollees. Advertising has two particularly important strengths; first it can be an effective means of vividly demonstrating product attributes such as; school facilities, buildings, computer laboratory, science laboratories, libraries, sports equipment, school uniform, etc. Secondly, it can dramatically portray user and usage imagery, brand personalities and other intangibles Kotler and Keller (2009). Advertising can be carried out through the media like newspaper, internet, and direct mails. Private school can us these mediums to reach prospective customers. Other outdoor advertising such as billboards and road shows can also be effectively utilized.

A well designed school environment, modern equipment and infrastructures can also serve as a strategy to attract patronage in terms of students' enrolment to institutions. Kotler and Fox (1985) believe that the first image in the mind of a parent/student will be shaped by this factor. Though appearances can be deceptive, the look of the school plant and its equipment create important first impressions of the school. The degree input is made in school environment to put up the structures and provision of teaching learning equipment will serve to determine the cost at which the education is

provided. It is also a determinant of parents' willingness on how much to pay for the educational services. Onyemaechi (2013) states that price is the amount buyer pays for the service provide and to a large extent influence students enrolment. The price parents are willing to pay for the services offered needs to be affordable and commensurate with the educational services provided.

The use of websites and social media are contemporary means of advert and is seen as an effective way to portray organizational image to the world. It is however, a marketing strategy that is mainly needed in educational institutions in this global age. According to Rayport and Jaworski (2001) companies must design websites that embody or express their purpose, product and vision. They argued that often, the first move of someone who doesn't know about an organization will be to visit its website. This is reason why private secondary schools should maintain a web site and actively involved in social media interaction at all times. Scot (1999) opined that an effective educational marketing website needs to capture critical customer information such as the products and services offered by a school. Kennedy (2014) also noted that the target parents of today belongs to a generation that is active in the use of social media. Social media he argues is easily shared. When it is well done consistently can strengthen value in the mind of the target audience and will improve enrolment. Some of the most suitable social media that could be adopted by educational institutions as a marketing means include Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, You Tube, Messengers, etc. The relevance of marketing strategy application cannot be overlooked if educational institutions must create impression that they are the best, which will facilitate customer attraction for them. Broadcast of important programmes, quality of programmes, beautified school environ, sufficient modern teaching equipment, social networking and school website will serve the purpose of attracting vast audience and prospects to facilitate number of enrolment.

2.1. Purpose of the Study

Specifically, this study seeks to;

- Identify the marketing strategies that are deemed effective for boosting students' enrolment in private secondary schools.
- 2. Determine the extent school administrators employ marketing strategies in enhancing students' enrolment in private secondary schools.
- 3. Find out if marketing strategies significantly relate with students enrolment in private secondary schools.

2.2. Research Question

1. What are the marketing strategies that are deemed effective by private secondary school administrators for enhancing students' enrolment?

2.3. Research Hypotheses

 Marketing strategies adoption by school administrators for enhancing students' enrolment in private secondary schools is not significantly low.

2. There is no significant relationship between marketing strategies and students enrolment in private secondary schools.

3. METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was adopted for the study since it attempts to study the nature of the situation as it exists currently. The study was carried out in Cross River State, located at South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The State is made up of 18 local governments and the study was specifically carried out in Calabar Municipality which is one of the local government areas in the state. The population of the study comprises of 32 private secondary schools in the study area. Intact population of 32 school administrators in the 32 private secondary schools in the study area was used as the study subjects.

3.1. Research Instrument

The researchers developed and used a 30-item research questionnaire titled "Marketing Strategies Adoption and Student Enrolment Questionnaire" (MSASEQ). The research instrument was validated by some experts in test and measurement. The instrument was further subjected to further verification through a trial study to establish the reliability of the instrument. After the interval dual administration to the selected trial group, test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.83 using Pearson correlation technique was obtained for the instrument, which prove it reliable for the study.

3.2. Research Procedure

The research instruments were administered to the respondents and were properly briefed on the mode of its completion. 32 questionnaires were administered to the respondent and were retrieved the same day. The collected data were coded for analysis using a modified 4-point Likert scale.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data collected were analyzed using Mean, Population T-Test, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Results obtained are presented in the tables below.

Research question:

What are the marketing strategies that are deemed effective by private secondary school administrators for enhancing students' enrolment?

With Mean, the responses on the various marketing strategies that are deemed effective by the school administrators are ranked. Results are presented in table 1.

From the above table, the responses of private school administrators in Calabar Municipality based on the marketing strategies that could be used to increase students' enrolment in their order of perceived effectiveness are presented.

Table-1. Mean ranking of private secondary school administrators' perception of effective marketing strategies that facilitate students' enrolment. N=32

	Agreed		Disagree		
Marketing Strategies	%	X	%	X	Rank
Quality programmes	96.9	0.969	3.1	0.031	1
Infrastructural development	90.6	0.906	9.4	0.094	2
TV/Radio Adverts	87.5	0.875	12.5	0.125	3
Face to Face talk with Parents	84.4	0.844	15.6	0.156	4
Newspapers/Magazines Adverts	78.1	0.781	21.9	0.219	5
Social Media/Website	75.0	0.750	25.0	0.250	6
Bulk Messaging	65.6	0.656	34.4	0.344	7
Price	43.8	0.438	56.3	0.563	8
Prints	37.5	0.375	62.5	0.625	9
Public address system	31.3	0.313	68.8	0.688	10

Table-2. Test of one sample mean analysis of extent of marketing strategies adoption by private secondary school administrators in Calabar Municipality. N=32

Marketing Strategies	μ	X	SD	t	Sig.
TV/Radio Adverts	5.00	5.88	1.36	3.634	.001
Newspapers/Magazines Advert	5.00	5.84	1.02	4.682	.000
Bulk Messaging	5.00	6.06	1.22	4.941	.000
Face to Face talk with Parents	5.00	6.13	1.13	5.638	.000
Quality programmes	5.00	4.94	1.85	191	.850
Infrastructural development	5.00	4.81	2.21	481	.634
Social Media/Website	5.00	5.81	1.60	2.881	.039
Price	5.00	5.81	2.12	2.172	.038
Public address system	5.00	5.41	1.04	2.204	.035
Prints	5.00	4.38	1.91	-1.848	.074

^{*}p<.05; df = 31; Critical t = 2.042

From the responses, Quality programme ranked first, with the agreement percentage mean of 0.969, followed by Infrastructure development, 0.906; TV/Radio adverts, 0.875; face to face talk with parents, 0.844; Newspaper/Magazine adverts, 0.781; Social media, 0.750; Bulk messaging, 0.656; Price, 0.438; Prints, 0.375; Public address system, 0.313. More so, the first seven items scored agreement mean above 0.50 showing that they are more effective in application that the last three items that scored the agreement mean below 0.50.

Hypothesis one:

Marketing strategies adoption by school administrators for enhancing students' enrolment in private secondary schools is not significantly low.

With population T-Test, the population mean and observed mean were compared. Results are presented below.

The above table shows that the observed mean is greater than the expected mean in in 7 items. The obtained T-values for the seven items are greater than the critical T-value of 2.042 at .05 level of significance under degree of freedom 31, and their p-values less than 0.05 level of significance. The obtained values are as follows: TV/Radio adverts, t = 3.634, p = 0.001 < .05; Newspapers/Magazine adverts, t = 4.682, p = 0.000 < .05; Bulk messaging, t = 4.941, p = .000 < .05; Face to Face talk with parents, t = 5.638, p = .000; Social media, t = 2.881, p = .039 < .05; price, t = 2.172, p = .038 < .05, and

public address system, t=2.204, p=.035<.05. With these results, the null hypothesis is rejected. However, marketing strategies adoption by school administrators for enhancing students' enrolment in private secondary schools in terms of TV/Radio adverts, Newspapers/Magazine adverts, Bulk messaging, Face to Face talk with parents, social media price and public address system is significantly low.

The table further indicated that the observed mean is less than the expected mean in 3 items. Their calculated t-values were less than the critical t value of 2.042 and their p-values greater than .05 level of significance. The values are as follows; Quality programmes, t=-.191, p=0.850; Infrastructural development, t=-.481, p=0.634, and prints, t=-1.848, p=.074. With these values, the null hypothesis is accepted in the 3 items. However, marketing strategies adoption by school administrators for enhancing students' enrolment in private secondary schools in terms of quality programmes, infrastructural development and prints is not significantly low.

Hypothesis Two:

There is no significant relationship between marketing strategies and students enrolment in private secondary schools.

With Pearson Product Moment Correlation, the relationship between marketing strategies and students enrolment were determine. Summaries of the results were presented in the below.

Table-3. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis of the relationship between marketing strategies and students enrolment. N = 32

Marketing Strategies	X	SD	rxy
Quality programmes x1	19.067	0.907	0.794
Social media/Website x2	19.100	0.893	0.605
Infrastructural development x3	19.033	0.723	0.780
Face to face talk x4	19.300	1.058	0.624
Media adverts x5	19.500	0.958	0.764
Price x6	14.133	7.034	-0.614
Students Enrolment y	20.0	0.672	
*p<.05; df = 30; critical r-value = 0.349			

The above table shows that at .05 level of significance under degrees of freedom 30, the critical r-value is 0.349 which id less than the calculated r-values obtained for the six listed marketing strategies in terms of; Quality programmes, r=0.794; Social media/Website, r=0.605; Infrastructural development, r=0.780; face to face talk, r=0.624, Media adverts (TV/Radio, Newspaper/Magazines, Bulk messaging, Prints & Public address system) r=0.764; and price, r=-0.614. With these results, the null hypothesis is rejected and however, there is significant relationship between marketing strategies in terms of quality programmes, social media/website, infrastructural development, face to face talk, media adverts, and price and students enrolment in private secondary schools. Furthermore, the table showed positive r-values in all cases except in Price. This show that in other cases, as implementation of the marketing strategies increases, enrolment will increase. The negative correlation in price means that increase in price can decrease enrolment, and vice versa.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The general findings of this study revealed that marketing strategies can increase students' enrolment and that the extent of its application by private secondary school administrators is still low. The result obtained from the research question showed some marketing strategies that can be adopted in private secondary schools to boost students' enrolment in their order of perceived effectiveness by the school administrators. The strategies according to their rank order are as follows; Quality programmes, Infrastructural development, TV/Radio Adverts, Face to Face talk with Parents, Newspapers/Magazines Adverts, Social Media/Website, Bulk Messaging, Price, Prints (posters, handbills and signage) and Public address system. This means that when the marketing strategies are applied in educational institutions, especially adopting the higher ranked ones, will enable increase in students' enrolment. This will enable increase in the schools income base and thereby enhancing sustainability and quality service delivery by the school organization.

The result from the first hypothesis showed that the extent of marketing strategies adoption by private secondary school administrators in Calabar Municipality is significantly low in most of the items. Effective application of marketing strategies is dependent on the extent of compatibility with the surrounding and target prospects. Meanwhile this era of information and technology requires that most of modern means of reaching prospects and portray of school image especially through media and networks will be applied to enable the school attract attention from both those who are far and near. This will enhance increase in enrolment and as well attract students from diverse backgrounds as against the present situation the focus of many school administrators is limited to reaching or impressing the immediate surroundings. The result obtained from the second hypothesis showed that there is significant relationship between marketing strategies in terms of quality programmes, social media/website, infrastructural development, face to face talk, media adverts, and price and students enrolment in private secondary schools. This indicated that when marketing strategies as mentioned are employed in schools, it is bound to attract students to enroll with the school. Not necessarily that all the marketing strategies will be employed simultaneously. Administrators should find the match between what is obtainable in the current society with the strategy they will adopt to ensure that it effectively yield the desired result of boosting students' enrolment. It is however maintained that since the current status of the society is mainly Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven, they should adopt the strategies that are ICT based like social media and website hosting, Media adverts and programme broadcast, to help transmit programmes and achievements of the school as wide as reaching the whole world. Bulk messaging, newspaper adverts and publications of school programmes and achievements, TV and Radio advertisement and broadcast of most school attractive programmes through same medium, will ensure that they reach vast audience to widen the scope of their prospects. This to a large extent will enable increase in students' enrolment for the schools. The findings of this study is in agreement with the study of Bowen et al. (2012) whose study determined marketing strategies that can attract and increase students' enrolment in Private secondary schools. They discovered that advertising using an institution web site, advertising using the various media stations, use of social networks such as face-book, encouraging word-of-mouth, career fair

involvement, open day on campus and alumni support are marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase enrollment of students. Kennedy (2014) advocated for use of social media and other ICT driven medium in creating values of institutions in the mind of the target audience. This is a very effective strategy schools will use to increase their enrolment in this face of ICT driven society. Kotler and Keller (2009) are also of the view that advertising can be effective means of vividly demonstrating product attributes such as school facilities, buildings, computer laboratory, science laboratories, libraries, sports equipment, school uniform, etc. It can dramatically portray user and usage imagery, brand personalities and other intangibles, which will attract users i.e. students, to enroll with the institution having been given a fair knowledge of the school quality in terms of academic programmes, teaching equipment and other programmes that can forster production of globally competitive outputs

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study revealed some marketing strategies in their order of perceived effectiveness by private secondary school administrators in Calabar Municipality. It also revealed that the extent the administrators employ the marketing strategies in enhancing enrolment of students is significantly low in most of the strategies, hence the need to adopt the strategies that is most enhancing in this present Information Technology driven age. It is however, discovered that there is significant relationship between adoption of marketing strategies in terms of; quality programmes, social media/website, infrastructural development, face to face talk, media adverts, and price and students enrolment.

Following the findings of the study, it was concluded that marketing strategy adoption can be a means of boosting students' enrolment in private secondary schools. This will serve dual purposes: To the school, increase enrolment will facilitate the school income which will ensure sustainability of the organization and quality service delivery. To public education sector, it will serve to reduce the students enrolment competition in public secondary schools which most times amount to admitting students more that the carrying capacity of the school, which lowers effectiveness of academic programmes.

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, it is recommended that;

- 1. Private school administrators should from time to time sought for expert advice on marketing strategies to adopt at a particular time for enrolment increase in their institutions.
- 2. There is need to build in marketing plan within the budget of private schools so that marketing activities will not be an afterthought. The implementation strategies with timelines should be clearly spelt out for proper effectiveness.

normal admission to school carrying capacity, and improvement in academic programme impeded on by larger crowd of students.

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