



**EXPLORING THE USE OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE FOR
STUDENT RECRUITMENT AT SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN
EAST LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

Student recruitment is crucial for universities. Increased competition among institutions due to rising applications makes competitive recruitment strategies essential. The competition among South African Higher Education institutions, specifically in East London, has led Walter Sisulu University and the University of Fort Hare to compete for students. The overall aim of this study was to investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment. A mixed methodology was used to collect data from first-time entering students and staff members from two public universities based in South Africa, in the Eastern Cape. A Cronbach's alpha reliability measurement scored 0.89 which is in keeping with the reliability's quantitative domain. Results revealed that a combination of both traditional and technology-based communication strategies is being used by public universities for student recruitment. The study also found that the marketing and communication divisions were not using a standardised communication strategy for recruitment. Instead, they rely on both traditional and competitive intelligence-driven communication strategies. This diversity assists with devising messages to meet the diverse communication needs of students. To promote student recruitment at public universities this study therefore recommends a communication strategy framework that incorporates competitive intelligence.

Keywords: Competitive intelligence (CI), communication strategies, higher education, student recruitment.

DECLARATION

I, Chulumanco Mgweba, hereby declare that the content of this dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Science: Public Relations and Communication in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Durban University of Technology represents my own original work and has not been previously submitted to any other Higher Education Institution. All sources used in the study were cited, referenced, and acknowledged accordingly in the referencing list.

December 2023

Mr Chulumanco Mgweba

Date

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to:

My family and especially my kids, Luphawu Kungawo Mgweba and Luthango Omingaye Mgweba. I know you missed a lot of quality time with me, but I will make up for the lost time.

Most of all, my one and only love, friend, and mother of my kids, thank you Mrs Lusanda Mgweba for being the best wife for whom I could wish. There were days where my studies took priority and you assisted that because you saw the passion. We started this journey in 2009, you were there when I started, and you were still there when I graduated my Master's in 2017.

This is for you “Mqiya, dlamakhandlela, mntande, mfaz’obelenye...Madlomo..”

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CI	competitive intelligence
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	Durban University of Technology
EWP	Education White Paper
HBI	Historical Black Institutions
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institutions
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HWI	Historical White Institutions
LMS	Learning Management Systems
MOOCS	Mass Online Open Courses
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NCHE	National Council on Higher Education
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
SAHE	South African Higher Education
SMH	Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
SPU	Sol Plaatjie University
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UL	University of Limpopo

UMP	University of Mpumalanga
UWC	University of Western Cape
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study's focus is on how marketing and communication is used as a student recruitment strategy in higher education institutions (HEIs), and how these institutions employ these marketing and communication techniques to attract potential students. Competitive intelligence strategies, as well as marketing and communication techniques, are employed by HEIs to assist with student recruitment. The goal of this study was to investigate how Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and the University of Fort Hare (UFH) recruit students, with a particular focus on the theoretical standpoint of marketing and communication using competitive intelligence strategies. East London is one of the most competitive areas in the Eastern Cape, with just WSU and UFH operating alongside other HEIs offering parallel programmes. The coexistence of the two HEIs intensifies regional competition.

For HEIs to be able to co-exist in the East London region, they need to have marketing and communication strategies infused in their competitive intelligence strategies that ensure their sustainability and contribution to the economy, especially the higher education sector. Both these two institutions have rich backgrounds, which they use to support their image and reputation. The study aimed to investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment. Research objectives were set to understand competitive intelligence theories that can be used as a communication strategy and its relevance to student recruitment in higher education in two public universities.

The study took a mixed method approach and was undertaken at two public institutions in East London, namely WSU and UFH. A cluster random sampling technique was utilised, which allowed for the analysis of a specific population in which the sample was taken from a specific school or East London cluster. The sample size was 400 first-time entering students (200 students from each institution) and ten marketing and communication department staff members (5 per institution). For permission to participate in the study, research participants were given a research consent form. As gatekeepers of the institutions, the research directorates of WSU and UFH were asked to approve the project. The research will benefit academics who are working on crucial competitive strategies in higher education.

Amoako *et al.* (2023:2) state that in recent years, colleges have become more globally focused and competitive due to increased marketing and communication efforts and reforms. Global rankings and social media have intensified competition for both domestic and international institutions. COVID-19 has intensified the competition in tertiary institutions. Therefore, higher education institutions,

especially in emerging economies, must enhance their performance to attract and retain students through innovative methods. This research describes the use of competitive intelligence as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment in public universities in the higher education sector. The HEI sector was selected for this study due to its potential to convey sustainable economic growth and national development because of its income generation through student enrolment. In addition, HEIs are known to attract potential students, who reside in proximity to the institutions. The changing higher education market focused on drawing student enrolment consequently affects financial stability. It would be advantageous for HEIs to focus on how they plan to improve student enrolment and their business processes. The transformation process of merging HEIs brought together historical cultures and legacies which may affect the viability of universities. One of the areas that needs to be investigated would be their lack, if proven, of the core competences to attract large numbers of students. These core competencies include technical and managerial skills through their identification of opportunities and threats that affect the higher education environment. Challenges faced by HEIs in South Africa, particularly in East London, comprise several factors including strategic planning and access to information.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Marketing and communication technologies are vital for successful student recruitment in higher education. As competition grows, institutions use innovative marketing and communication technologies to connect with and engage potential students. This study explored how marketing and communication strategies influence student recruitment in higher education. Higher education institutions are vital to the country's goal of creating skilled and competent graduates. The first step in the proper direction is for higher education institutions to offer in-demand academic programmes to attract a substantial number of potential students. Regardless, there are a variety of additional relevant tactics that can be used to attract these potential students. Tight (2020:689) asserts that institutions of higher education, their various schools and departments, and academics have long been interested in making sure that students, once enrolled, stay, and successfully complete their courses. Higher education is the process through which students who have completed their secondary general education are trained at a variety of higher education institutions to become highly competent professionals in the fields of economics, technology, culture, and science.

Furthermore, higher education allows students to make decisions based on their preferences, various aspects of their lives, and careers (Singh and Kumar 2023:123). Higher education refers to several types of education offered in postsecondary institutions. This results in a degree, diploma, or certificate upon

completion of study. It encompasses universities, colleges, and professional schools offering education in diverse fields. Teacher-training schools, junior colleges, and technical institutes are included in higher education. They typically require at least a high school education, and the average age of entry is around 18 (Brittanica 2023). Additionally, higher education is the pinnacle of academic pursuit, transforming individuals through specialised and advanced learning, while nurturing intellect, critical thinking, and personal growth. Higher education is specialised learning that enables individuals to become experts in their chosen fields. It includes undergraduate and graduate programmes, like Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees, based on students' goals. Higher education drives societal progress and economic development. Well-developed systems create skilled and innovative workforces, boosting global competitiveness and overall prosperity. It is crucial in shaping the future of individuals and society, empowering learners to be responsible and contributing members of communities. Education is vital for a nation's economic and social development, with higher education (HE) being crucial. Higher education institutes such as colleges and universities are complex organisations with various academic and administrative processes. Academic processes involve teaching, tests, grades, advising, curriculum, research, feedback, etc.

WSU and UFH, the only two universities in the area, are closely located in East London along with approximately 120 high schools, housing a student population of 6500 annually. These institutions serve the same area and recruit students from the same target market. This requires changes in marketing and communication, including expectations and programmes for potential students. These institutions must be marketed accordingly due to increased competitiveness and changes in marketing and communication methods. Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare have satellite sites in Buffalo City Campus and East London, respectively. Both universities have competitive enrolment strategies. These competitive intelligence (CI) strategies help maintain or increase market share in education. Effective use of CI is crucial for the South African higher education sector's economic growth. Student recruitment is vital for institutional success as it shapes the diversity, quality, and character of the student body, and thus, the entire academic community. Understanding prospective students is essential for a successful recruitment strategy in higher education. It impacts rankings, reputation, financial sustainability, and long-term objectives.

The sector's unique characteristics affect its sustainability. Each university's management structure has a marketing and communication department, which deals with student recruitment. These departments are responsible for disseminating information to high schools of what they can offer students who achieve certain points in their grade 12 results. Therefore, to support the HEIs' mission, HEIs need to have marketing and communication strategies on how they can maintain competitor advantage of

student enrolment. The necessity to advertise a school to a diverse variety of prospective students through direct and indirect methods has evolved over the years into a rapidly developing but vital sector. In East London, students at tertiary institutions come from diverse communities with unique needs. Annually, these institutions compete to reach prospective students with persuasive messages. Little is known about prospective students' information needs and source preferences influencing their decision of higher education institutions. Student recruitment may appear to be like conventional sales on the surface. For university recruitment experts, this new generation of students represents an unusual and intriguing challenge.

Comprehensive and developing universities, each with their own set of sustainability issues, dominate the market in this regard. Many students meet the academic requirements for university enrolment but are unaware of what the selected university has to offer in contrast to other universities in the region. Universities possess unique qualities that impact their long-term viability. Marketing and communication departments ensure universities gain a competitive edge and employ effective enrolment techniques to achieve their goals. There are many student recruitment tactics that can be used, and current strategies may not be enough for competitive intelligence. More needs to be done by HEIs. Students contribute to the competitive advantage strategy. This study investigated how WSU and UFH used marketing and communication strategies to recruit students with competitive intelligence.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Because of the substantial number of HEIs in South Africa, the sector contributes to the country's economy. Their contribution is made possible by the increased number of present and prospective students who pay fees, which contributes to the institution's viability. In 2022, almost 580 555 pupils passed their grade 12 exams, with all provinces achieving a pass percentage of more than 70%, with the Eastern Cape province achieving a pass rate of 77.3% (News24 2022). As a result, HEIs must devise strategies for attracting the enormous number of students who have completed grade 12 and are entitled to enrol in any HEI. Recruiting university students is a big challenge for recruiters in attracting students, boosting enrolment rates, and marketing their offers effectively to succeed. HEIs must adapt to survive funding cuts and find cost-effective marketing strategies and effective recruitment methods with competitive intelligence. As a result, HEIs have admission standards that determine student enrolment based on the number of points earned by potential students for certain programmes. Sikalumbi *et al.* (2023:37) define marketing strategy as a plan to reach and convert potential clients into customers. It includes the value proposition, brand messaging, and demographic information. By analysing marketing and communication strategies, and media usage in HEIs, it is possible to identify

factors that drive student enrolment and create effective marketing and communication campaigns focused on competitive intelligence to enhance recruitment and enrolment efforts.

Choosing a programme helps identify available programmes per HEI. The DHET (2014:7) differentiation policy shows programme differentiation among HEIs. The NPHE (2001) categorises programmes based on institution type such as university, Technikon, and comprehensive university. This leads to certain universities attracting and enrolling potential students based on their available programmes. Despite some potential students being unaware of available programmes and offerings in Grade 12, they rely solely on their results for admission to any HEI. Recruiters heavily depend on reputation and word of mouth. Taylor and Childs (2022:16) state that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted recruitment for marketing and communication student enrolment units. Due to decreased enrolment and difficulties attracting students to HEIs, it is recommended that HEIs implement a modern marketing approach. This modern marketing strategy has revolutionised society and can recruit college students by expanding their online presence, especially during challenges and pandemics such as COVID-19.

Hannan and Lui (2023:266) allege that as the bar for college success rises and higher education evolves, the pressure on college administrators to effectively compete in a global field intensifies. As a result, HEIs must provide exceptional service, and developing a great reputation will assist them in creating a pipeline of referrals, which is a fantastic method to attract additional students. HEIs must find the best competitive intelligence position for their marketing and communication strategies to recruit students in higher education amidst ongoing challenges. Many institutions need to effectively position themselves and their services to capture prospective students' attention using competitive intelligence, marketing, and communication strategies (Romero 2022:35).

Malcheva (2021:25) states that there are multiple communication channels, increased stakeholder influence, and a need for prompt, dependable, and personalised approaches in reaching prospects. Growing university competition has a significant impact on students' lives. Unlike the past, when universities promoted actively just before the academic year, today's marketing and recruitment activities are ongoing. Universities constantly compete for prospective students, their largest revenue source. Thus, growing competition among universities has prompted HEIs to adopt competitive strategies. HEIs must adapt to attract the best students and faculty, offer innovative resources, personalised learning, and remain financially viable. They must implement innovative business strategies to compete in a changing market influenced by government funding, internationalisation, and the growth of online education.

Student recruitment involves marketing and communication strategies to attract, convert and keep potential students. The main goal is to find potential students and motivate the students to apply and enrol in the institution's programmes. Marketing and communication institutional recruiters aim to persuade prospective students of the advantages of their institution. Marketing and communication, including public relations, viral and buzz marketing, advertising, and branding, lack a central focus in higher education institutions. Different areas of the institutions are developing their own methods and trends for student enrolment processes and programme requirements. (Vasquez 2021:25) This study examined how HEIs promote the use of marketing and communication for student recruitment using competitive intelligence strategies.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this study was to investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment.

Based on the above aim, the following were research objectives of the study:

- Examine marketing and communication strategies used for student recruitment at public universities.
- Discuss how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy for student recruitment.
- Explain competitive theories within the context of public universities.
- Investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment at two public universities.
- Recommend a communication strategy that incorporates competitive intelligence for student recruitment.

1.5 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The research is significant for higher education institutions seeking a competitive advantage in the higher education market. The findings of the study will enable institutions to develop strategies that will meet the needs of potential students while remaining within the financial constraints of each demographic group. Their earnings will rise because of these competitive intelligence methods. Following that, when HEIs concentrate on the best approach for gaining a competitive edge, they will have secured a position in the higher education market. Scholars will be able to utilise the study as a foundation for their arguments and literature reviews, as well as to compare it to other findings in the same competitive intelligence domains. It was envisaged that the study would be used as tool to interact with local communities and especially high schools in the area for the development of a positive relationship. The

study will also attempt to establish a strategy for WСУ and UFH to co-exist in the highly contested area of East London.

HEIs need recruiting officers to understand students' university choices, as well as what messages to use in media channels and when to target specific groups, to persuade students to apply and enrol. Marketing helps universities target new students and measure their return on investment using statistical analysis platforms. In today's competitive higher education landscape, many public universities have adopted market-oriented strategies, making student recruitment a crucial topic in the global market (Collins, Simsek and Takir 2022:4).

Due to competition, institutions must be more initiative-taking in marketing and communication, increasing the role of marketing and communication in student recruitment. HEIs must grasp these processes and use intelligent marketing to attract and influence prospective students' decisions. Additionally, HEIs approach to prospective students must be delicate due to their differing motivations, requiring the institution to reflect on its marketing and communication, and branding. Researchers have used various theoretical approaches in an attempt to understand the effectiveness of competitive intelligence strategies used by HEIs.

A commonly used strategy is competitive advantage, which may have laid a foundation for the competitive intelligence (CI) strategy. This theory was applied by organisations and which by now has been adopted by higher education institutions operating as business entities. Garcia-Alsina, Cobarsí-Morales and Ortoll (2016:57) explain that competitive intelligence is the process of collection, transmitting, analysing and dissemination of ethically and publicly available legally acquired information as a means of producing actionable knowledge. The process results in the improvement of corporate decision-making and actions taken. Therefore, the study was confined to marketing and communication in respect of the use of competitive intelligence in the parameters of academic offerings of WСУ and UFH respectively in the East London region. Although existing literature provides the definitions and understanding of marketing and communication used in student recruitment, competitive intelligence, its activities and theories, there is little information on how public universities can use CI for student recruitment. Therefore, the study was confined to the parameters of academic offerings of WСУ and UFH respectively in the East London region and to determine whether their CI activities have any impact on their student recruitment.

1.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study took place in East London, inclusive of other regions under the Buffalo City metropolitan municipality, such as Mdanstane and King Williams town. Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare were identified and only first-time entering students could participate in the research. Also, at WSU and UFH, ten marketing and communication department staff were used. Due to the vast region of East London, not all areas were requested to participate due to the researcher's lack of resources.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in WSU and UFH and the study sample reflects only students and staff of these universities. Though data fullness was reached, and the findings reflect perceptions of students of WSU and UFH, the findings cannot be generalised to include all the students. Also, the researcher is an employee of WSU but did not have any influence on WSU students' responses to questions during the research process. The response rate was inadequate due to lack of resources to include more programmes in the study but sufficed under the conditions. Increased sample size could have allowed for better understanding of the research issues posed but due to lack of financial resources, the researcher was unable to travel across towns to other campuses to access fairer distribution of students as participants.

1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to only 400 (200 first-time entering students per institution) registered first-time students entering WSU and UFH and ten (5 employees per institution) employees in the marketing and communication departments. Both universities are in the East London region within a 30-kilometer radius.

1.9 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The literature of this study is divided into the following sections: theoretical framework, higher education sector of South Africa and how the use of a competitive intelligence strategy would provide a competitive advantage using marketing and communication strategies for student recruitment. The literature review conducted by the researcher was to explore marketing and communication incorporated within the CI theory and its application to higher education in East London for student recruitment. It was also to analyse how local high schools interact with the two institutions in question and their impact on the long-term viability of HEIs in the area in terms of marketing and communication

in a competitive position. In addition, the section discusses the status of HEIs in South Africa and the use of CI for student recruitment. It also covers student recruitment activities and the role of the marketing and communication departments in WSU and UFH, as well as the distinguishing programmes. According to Beneke (2011:31), marketing in tertiary institutions has two roles: attracting academic resources like faculty, staff, and students, and attracting financial resources like government funding, sponsorships, and research financing. Many institutions associate marketing with selling and advertising. To ensure effective marketing and communication of HEIs, marketing and communication departments must understand potential students' needs to attract and recruit the right ones, helping them choose a specific institution (Moogan, 2011).

HEIs should better understand their target market for effective marketing strategies. This requires identifying students' pain points and goals, allowing universities to tailor their communications approach accordingly. By consistently maintaining their presence will boost brand identity and stay top of mind during applicants' decision-making. With a strong market for university places, HEIs are working to attract their share of applicants by understanding their desires through their marketing and communication strategies directed at student recruitment. Each institution has its own unique offering and target applicants, but it is helpful to be aware of current student recruitment trends. Student recruitment is the strategic endeavour of techniques, marketing, and sales in an institution to attract and convert potential students into new enrolments. Higher education is crucial for developing a competitive global and local economy, contingent upon a strong society and democracy.

The NPHE (2001) addresses the country's economic and social status and how HEIs should align themselves with the integrated higher education system. This helps identify their location and target market, serving the neighbouring communities' education needs. Through the mergers between 2001 and 2007, three former Technikons in the border-Kei region were integrated to form one institution. Through the merger in 2005, Border Technikon in East London, University of Transkei in Mthatha, and Eastern Cape Technikon in Butterworth resulted in the establishment of Walter Sisulu University (WSU) (Manona 2015:119). Walter Sisulu University has four campuses, spread across the border-Kei region, in Mthatha (Nelson Mandela Drive and Zamukulungisa site), Butterworth (Ibika Campus), Queenstown (Masibulele and Gately Road sites) and East London (Buffalo City Campus). These four campuses provide the region with a variety choice of programmes in 11 faculties spread across the region. Known for its notable alumni of political figures who hailed from the University of Fort Hare, UFH was formed in 1960 with its main campus in Alice. UFH opened the Bhisho campus in 1990 and East London campus in 2004. UFH has five faculties across its campuses.

The NPHE (2001) reduced the existing 36 HEIs to 23 HEIs through these mergers (Ministry of Education 2001). Out of 36 HEIs reduced, 11 were traditional universities, six were universities of technology, and six were comprehensive universities. Arnolds, Stofile, and Lillah (2013:3) suggest that increased enrolment from disadvantaged communities and meeting national demands were among the reasons for mergers. WSU was formed in 2005 through mergers of three Technikons, while UFH has remained unchanged since 1916. The Higher Education Act of 1997 was a strategy to transform institutions of higher learning, based on recommendations from the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) of 1996 and the White Paper on Higher Training of 1997.

The marketing and communication departments of the HEIs have the responsibility to visit 180 high schools in the region to inform grade 12 students about their campus programmes and admission requirements. Potential students have the chance to ask questions and visit lecture halls, facilities, and the library during high school visits and open days. Other forms of student recruitment, like radio and newspapers, can rely on familiar brands to gain a competitive advantage. Chen (2019:1) argues that institutional understanding and brand exploitation drive competition among universities. WSU and UFH aim to be the leading higher education institutions by utilising business strategies like competitive intelligence to establish a unique university identity. Malan (2023) claims that university marketing departments face challenges in recruiting students due to rising tuition costs. This influences students' decision-making and their desire to find a university that provides a sense of belonging.

Technical and professional communication tools are used by universities to market themselves through recruitment ads. HEIs focus on marketing techniques to attract top high school students, enhance their reputation, and boost enrolment. HEIs face the challenge of attracting and retaining students to maintain enrolment and compete in higher education. Higher education institutions employ marketing and communication strategies for student recruitment and competitive intelligence. These strategies aim to convey the value proposition, engage students, and convince potential students to choose their institution. In respect of these discussions, HEIs commonly develop a brand identity reflecting values, strengths, and offerings conveyed through websites, social media, and promotional materials such as targeted ads to reach prospective students. HEIs may advertise on social media, search engines, and other popular online platforms used by students and conduct market research to find out about their target audience and competitors to gain valuable insights through competitive intelligence to identify opportunities for differentiation and improvement.

Frølich and Stensaker (2010:359) state that HEIs must adapt to the evolving environment, leading to increased competition among universities and colleges in a market-like setting. As a result, HEIs must

compete for student enrolment. As previously stated, WSU and UFH are located close to each other in a high-demand area for higher education. East London's competitive HEI environment depends on strategies to attract students. Additionally, the demand for higher education may vary based on specific university programmes. Therefore, WSU and UFH must intensify the marketing and communication strategies by using competitive intelligence to attract potential students to enrol for their available programmes in their East London campuses.

Sassi et al. (2016:597) define competitive intelligence (CI) as a branch of business intelligence focused on the company's competitive environment. It involves the ethical and systematic gathering, analysis, and management of external information that could impact an organisation's plans, decisions, and operations. CI in a competitive business environment has pushed organisations to strategise for survival. Therefore, HEIs must boost competitiveness to maintain their advantage. HEIs must grasp the evolving landscape and adapt for survival in the competitive HE sectors. According to Sassi et al. (2016:597), CI traces its origins back over five thousand years to ancient Chinese warfare. Sun Tzu's "Art of War" was the first reference to the military domain, and it also influenced the world of business. In the 1980s, CI became popular as organisations embraced it due to changing environments, competition, and goods alternatives (Hlavaty and Lizbetin 2021:1274).

The three CI phases are market, competitors, and technological intelligence. Sassi et al. (2015:486) explain that one goal of CI is to analyse data on current information/competitors to predict business environment changes for better revenue and competitive strategy. Hughes and White (2005:43) explain that legal and ethical processes are part of the CI used to gather information from various sources. This information helps organisations manage their operating environment. Musselin (2018: 662) suggests that increased competition among institutions has driven universities to adopt strategic competitive behaviours. HEIs must also consider their branding strategies to remain competitive. Universities have faced student protests, harming their image. Hence, HEIs must review branding for positive marketing and communication. Universities use marketing strategies, like analysing web content, for student recruitment, focusing on applications, faculty, and tours. Therefore, student recruitment is more than matching profiles with institutions but includes a range of factors that impact choices and the potential for success. Good student recruitment strategies consider all factors to help students make informed choices. The competition for quality students is a marketing challenge for universities, leading to the use of various recruitment practices. In universities, the primary objective is to reach potential students by using a marketing communication plan that aims to reach, inform, convince, remind, persuade, and build relationships with the target audience, prioritising their needs and using various forms of communication.

WSU and UFH must understand the potential students' market and their expectations in East London. Wee and Thinavan (2013: 70) define branding as a distinguishing name or term for an institution. Barret (2010:28) states that CI in higher education has not benefitted or affected university planning. Instead, HEIs face new threats like enrolment decline, demographic changes, and increasing costs. An organisation must gather information about its environment to survive competition. Thus, interpreting the collected information is essential for forming intelligence. These organisations convert collected information to competitive intelligence. HEIs' survival relies on their market position. To compete effectively in the market, they must strategically plan and adapt to globalisation's impact. Changing higher education markets require HEIs to innovate to attract and grow enrolments. CI's objective is to assist in decision-making of the organisation which will enable a competitive advantage of the organisation by constantly providing information about changes in the environment (Pellissier and Nenzhelele 2013:2). Researcher have discussed several competitive intelligence theories such as the competitive intelligence cycle, Porter's five forces model and the competitive intelligence process model. Garcia-Alsina, Morales and Ortol (2016:4) state that CI practices in HEIs can be characterised by organisation of the function and processes of the intelligence cycle.

Due to the competitive higher education market, student decision-making has become crucially linked to their demographics. Marketing and communication departments inform students about admission policies and requirements for degrees in HEIs. It depends on whether the stakeholder is convinced and will not try other familiar competitors. HEIs must analyse their audiences to increase enrolments. They should understand communication needs and use appropriate tools for the expected response. WSU and UFH had to prepare for a surge in applications for 2023 and beyond admission. These HEIs should employ effective marketing and communication strategies to boost student enrolment. To target Grade 12 students and high schools, WSU and UFH use promotional tools like open days, career exhibitions or expo, and advertising. HEIs use them to inform, remind, and persuade students to choose their institution.

The marketing and communication student recruitment unit should also utilise popular social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, ensuring the well-being of their most important asset. Student recruitment in higher education institutions has grown significantly. Public universities lack the capacity for the entire higher education sector. Therefore, the above discussions and insights will help marketing and communication departments in public universities adapt their advertising techniques to meet students' needs effectively and subsequently promote student recruitment. Students would be pleased with the shared information and form relationships with public universities, leading to recruitment and enrolment. To boost higher education student enrolment, HEIs should create a recruitment strategy

using competitive intelligence data and student demographics. Competitive intelligence can be used as a communication strategy to attract students. In the higher education marketplace, marketing offices help admissions by utilising digital tools to develop recruitment strategies. Competitive intelligence optimises student attraction. Competitive intelligence also aids in highlighting a university's strengths, making it a strategic marketing tool for student recruitment.

1.10 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher considered biased and unbiased views and used the mixed methodology to integrate quantitative and qualitative data in the study. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011:3) argue that mixed methods involve collecting, analysing, and combining quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. This approach aims to improve understanding of research problems. Rucker (2017) defines a population as the entire study group with specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. Due to limited access, researchers rely on studying a subset of a population, known as the study sample or sample population. The primary audience for this study was first time entering university students in WSU and UFH and the secondary audience was university staff members in WSU and UFH. The study analysed student recruitment strategies at WSU and UFH. The study used the Buffalo City metropolitan (East London) for research. The first-time entering population comprised a total of 1500 unit, consisting of both male and female first-time entering students. The study sample comprised 400 first time entering students (200 first time entering students per institution), representing 33.3% of the total population and ten (5 staff members per institution) staff members in the marketing and communication department in the respective HEIs.

Both qualitative and quantitative sampling was used in this study for the separate populations of interest (students and staff). The chapter on this also covers the sample, sampling strategy, sample features, and sample size. Cluster sampling was used for quantitative data, and convenience sampling for qualitative data. This study used quantitative probability sampling, which allows the identification of any population member through sample selection. Cluster random sampling was used to analyse a specific population within a school region like Mdantsane or East London. This technique involves selecting participants from natural geographic or organisational groups (Curtis and Keeler 2021:53). The populace was divided into clusters of faculties and one cluster was randomly selected from each university. WSU has two faculties in East London and UFH has three faculties in East London. Each cluster has multiple departments, which are also clusters. These departments were assigned numbers and chosen randomly to create a cluster sample. Therefore, by selecting clusters in two public universities and choosing every

member within each cluster, the participants were diverse and more representative of the population. This divided the selected population from the larger population into smaller sections.

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative research data collection tools in HE to show how CI is used as a marketing and communication strategy and how it gives HEIs a competitive advantage. This involved combining various data collection techniques and tools to increase the validity and reliability of the data through multiple processes and sources. This study utilised three primary research tools: open-ended and closed-ended questions, as well as interviews, to enhance the convergence and complementarity of quantitative and qualitative findings. To achieve the study objectives, both questionnaires with 29 closed-ended questions and interviews with 25 open-ended questions were used as data collection methods for this mixed-method study. Ethical considerations were adhered to and prior to data collection, venues were communicated in advance to all participants.

Remenyi and Banister (2012:118) define data analysis as the stage in research where gathered information is assessed for its significance in terms of a hypothesis, recommendation, or new theory. Tolley *et al.* (2016:65) argue that the data analysis process depends on theory principles. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 25, including statistical examination of the acquired information. The degree of measurement used for the examination study determines the specific research methodology. Qualitative data was analysed with NVivo 12 software. Interview transcripts were also analysed using thematic coding to extract vital information. The data was systematically analysed using summarisation, explanation, and structural format in line with an interpretative philosophy. This analysis uncovered meaningful symbolic content within the interview responses, addressing the research questions of the study. Codes were labelled and grouped to answer the research questions. The qualitative findings were backed by participant responses and analysed using a thematic framework analysis. Textual data was created from audio-recorded interviews.

Ismael, Kinchin, and Edwards (2018:1) define small-scale research as a pilot study conducted before the actual study to help researchers plan and refine their approach. A draft questionnaire was used as a pilot study to evaluate its significance, accuracy, length, layout, and complexity before distributing it to a larger group. First-time entering students from WSU and UFH on any campus with prior knowledge of what worked for them before enrolling were used in preliminary pilot research. Before the instrument was completed, it was desired to have ten volunteers per institution serving as respondents. The interview schedule was tested with one staff member from each university who was indirectly involved in student recruitment in the marketing and communication departments of higher education

institutions. The interview guide's questions and other elements were revised to improve accuracy. Instruments were updated based on results for data collection readiness.

The study was conducted in East London. Only first-time entering students from Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare participated. Ten staff members (5 at WVSU and 5 UFH) were used for marketing and communication. Lynnette, Otara, and Otengah (2021:25) argue that improving data quality is the primary objective of validity and reliability concerns in data collection instruments. These tests evaluate the instrument's ability to produce reliable, valid, and consistent data over time. Akimanimpaye (2021:1050) states that instrument validity is determined by its ability to accurately measure its intended target and produce reliable results. To evaluate this, the researcher used the Cronbach alpha coefficient before applying any instruments in this study. Typically, the scale's Cronbach coefficient should exceed 0.70. The study used Cronbach's α as it is a widely used measure for internal consistency of a latent construct represented by a set of variables.

Nieuwenhuis (2020c:143) emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Trustworthiness factors such as credibility, reliability, and transferability were considered in this study. The legitimacy was determined by providing a list of information to specialists and scholars in competitive intelligence. The aim was to define the interview schedule and maximise the results. The conclusion and rectification were important for the investigation's success. Content validity was used to measure the study's goals and to determine if they had been met. Miami University (2016) states that content legitimacy and validity indicate the level of accuracy with which items measure the substance and content of the property or attribute being assessed. The instrument was modified based on the pilot study results. The main goal of the revisions was to achieve face validity, construct validity, internal validity, and external validity. Specialists at WVSU and UFH were consulted for face and content validity. Experts ranked questions to determine their relevance to the study's goal.

Confidentiality and trustworthiness are crucial in research, especially qualitative. It is ensured by obtaining consent forms signed by both researcher and participants. Participants received a consent form guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. Information will not be shared beyond the research and will be discarded after a set time. (Ethical issues in qualitative research) Since qualitative research involves humans, ethical considerations are crucial. Ethics dictates our conduct (refer to annexure D). Educational research must prioritise ethics, ensuring participant anonymity, consent, and ethical direction throughout. Researchers have an ethical obligation to deliver accurate and error-free results. Ethical standards for research must be considered to report study results ethically. Applications for ethical clearance were submitted to WVSU and UFH. A guarantee of participant safety was provided. A

study request was submitted to the university ethics committees, outlining the confidentiality, safety, and anonymity measures.

1.11 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1 provides a brief and critical background to the study, introduces the content and orientation of the study, context of the study and problem, marketing and communication for student recruitment, and its relevance to competitive intelligence use in student recruitment in higher education institutions in South Africa.

Chapter 2 provides global and African perspectives of higher education and the application of competitive intelligence theories as a communication strategy to student recruitment in South African higher education institution, especially WVSU and UFH as higher education institutions.

Chapter 3 provides a theoretical perspective and background of competitive intelligence theories and provides relevant information on how it is used as a communication strategy for student recruitment in various competitive intelligence strategies used for student recruitment.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology used, research design, data collection methods used and lastly data analysis of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the interpretation of findings and the findings of the study.

Chapter 6 of the study provides recommendations for a communication strategy that incorporates competitive intelligence, conclusions derived, and challenges faced by the researcher when conducting the study.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a framework and the context for the research as well as a summary of all the chapters. It also discussed the motivations behind the researcher's choice to conduct the study. A thorough analysis of the study's pertinent literature is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how public institutions use competitive intelligence to attract students to HEIs. Additionally, it examines how the challenge of student recruitment has affected HEIs in Africa and internationally. These challenges have been applied in the higher education industry to inform marketing strategies and attract prospective students. This chapter introduces how HEIs use marketing and communication to promote student recruitment. This has the following three main purposes:

- To provide an overview of higher education, both African and global perspectives.
- To provide an overview of the South African higher education environment, past, and present, as the context for this study.
- To provide an overview of the how marketing and communication can be used to promote student recruitment in higher education institutions.

HEIs must embrace a digital-first agile approach for successful student recruitment. This means using CI for marketing and communication strategies and implementing a personalised and engaging college recruitment strategy to attract potential students. Factors such as demographic shifts, the COVID-19 pandemic-induced digital acceleration, and increased competition make this approach crucial. Institutions can provide future-proof recruitment by exploring trends, such as virtual recruiting, advanced analytics, and digitising services. These strategies can be implemented to create personalised experiences that nurture prospective students and admit the best-fit students. As a result, Hassan, and Shamsudin (2019:533) concur that maintaining student happiness is critical for HEI survival in this cutthroat environment. As a result, this study aimed to effectively solve these challenges by utilising CI techniques and competitive advantages to produce the greatest graduates, and the desired outcome of this study will provide guidance on how these issues will impact HEI's futures. It is vital to understand why and how prospective and existing students prefer one institution over another to actively follow the path of how these HEIs manage to stay ahead of the curve and maintain sustainability.

According to Chentukov *et al.* (2021:375), HEIs are important components of modern global economic systems that regulate trends in human development and provide learning opportunities because they operate in a constantly changing economic environment that necessitates adaptation. Chládková, Skpalová, and Blaková (2021:127) add that competitiveness can be improved by consistently upgrading quality to maintain public image. Nonetheless, how these stakeholders see them is determined by their image and reputation.


Saymour (2020:25) notes that HEIs are grappling with rising competition from a growing number of institutions and declining high school graduates. This has compelled many HEIs to explore alternative marketing approaches beyond the conventional ones that have previously proven effective. Proponents of higher education marketisation argue for increased flexibility and efficiency in universities to boost applications and enrolment. They advocate changing current recruitment strategies and adopting a business-oriented mindset. To compete in a tough market, HEIs must embrace non-traditional marketing, making use of digital media and competitive intelligence to recruit students. They need to adopt innovative marketing and communication strategies to appeal to the new generation.

2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is defined as tertiary or post-secondary education by the World Bank (2022), which comprises public and private colleges, universities, specialised training institutes (technical), and vocational schools. HE plays a critical role in promoting development and poverty reduction.

Alemu (2018:211) notes that HE encompasses a broader range of higher education institutions, including the university, while HE is a subset of HE that builds the university. Higher education institutions face the challenge of student recruitment in an increasingly competitive landscape. To address this challenge, institutions have turned to marketing strategies to attract and retain students. Marketing has become crucial for student recruitment, as institutions have seen declines in enrolments. The importance of marketing is further emphasized by the need to diversify institutions and recruit international students (Tsoukalas 2023). Institutions must focus on providing quality services and creating a positive learning environment to enhance student loyalty (Ngao and Sang 2023).

Student recruitment in higher education is the process of attracting and enrolling students from different countries to enhance internationalisation efforts. It involves marketing the institution and its programmes to potential students. The goal of student recruitment is to maintain and increase enrolment while ensuring quality and suitability, influenced by strategic plans and institutional culture. Student mobility is surging and so is university competition to attract the best students. Traditional recruitment and marketing methods are rapidly changing for a technological effective approach. Therefore, the growing university competition affects students' lives. In contrast to the past, universities now engage in ongoing marketing and recruitment activities to compete for prospective students and their main revenue source (Malcheva 2021:25).

Therefore, HEIs  ought to be aware of determining factors influencing university choice from the perspective of potential students, which is necessary for HEIs to understand student selection and

improve their recruitment strategies. Today, the higher education sector is highly competitive and HEIs are now employing market-focused strategies, with student recruitment becoming crucial in the global market. Universities must understand why students choose them and how to effectively communicate through media to attract them to apply and enrol.

2.3 PHASES OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Effective recruitment strategies, including marketing and the use of social media, are essential for attracting students. Additionally, efforts should be made to enrol students from diverse backgrounds, considering socioeconomic inequalities. The recruitment process is another significant phase in higher education development. Institutions may face challenges in attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds due to socioeconomic inequalities (Batool and Liu 2021). Therefore, efforts to enrol a higher number of students from diverse backgrounds are essential for HEIs.

Smolentseva (2017:213) cited in Trow (1970) mentions three phases in the HE development in South Africa, namely (1) elite group, (2) mass, and (3) universal.

2.3.1 Elite higher education stage

Boughey and McKeena (2021:3) purport that the search for education brought about an increase in student populations in HEIs, student population massified and diversified to include other students in different social backgrounds, instead of the elite who had enjoyed exclusive access to higher education. Waghid and Davids (2020:5) add that the increased participation of students in higher education was vital in democratising access to higher education in South Africa and allowing access to higher education to more diverse social backgrounds, which were excluded from the elite system of higher education.

Davids (2021:5) notes the transition from higher education as a privilege for the elite to a right and then an obligation. This shift is crucial for democratic South Africa's social engagement. It involves changing criteria for student selection to prioritise merit, social equality, and unrestricted access to higher education. Mlambo, Mlambo and Adetiba (2021:32) outline the grouping of stages as follows: Elite stage represents up to 15% of national enrolment, massification stage represents 50% and above, and the universal stage represents over 50%. Allais *et al.* (2020:137) attribute the origin of the elite stage to colonial rule, when HEIs were exclusively accessible to the highest income social classes.

According to Makhanya (2020:24), the University of Fort Hare in colonial administration produced notable alumni like Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Robert Mugabe who advocated for African independence. However, the desire of South African HEIs to be considered elite like global universities

has a negative impact on students without financial means (Ngwenya 2020:34). Elite institutions are biased against students from disadvantaged backgrounds or underprivileged schools as they lack desired qualities. HEIs seeking status may not attract elite students compared to well-resourced institutions. Adetiba (2019:17) states that HE access in South Africa has become inclusive for effective social engagement due to transformation, while Wheelahan and Moodie (2020:101) argue that the elite systems currently have less than 16% participation and serve the purpose of preparing the ruling class, limiting higher education access to only the privileged elite.

2.3.2 Massification of higher education stage

Noui (2020:97) defines "massification" as Martin Trow's term for high enrolments in a national education system, where only qualified individuals have access to higher education. This concept aims to equip the population with skills for technical and economic roles. Msiza, Ndhlovu and Raseroka (2020:46) argue that this stage challenges the idea that only privileged individuals can access higher education. It also addresses the historical segregation of South African higher education based on race and colour during apartheid. Today, classrooms have grown and it is complex to accommodate a larger number of students. The authors discuss how financial standing and social context contribute to the massification of institutions. Mve (2021:189) defines "massification" as the increase in student enrolment in higher education. Massification of higher education provides increased access to a larger number of qualified students, but a misalignment exists between enrolment and the capacity of institutions to accommodate them.

Regarding higher education development, elitism (elite stage) transitioned to the massification stage. This involved a rise in the student population from diverse social backgrounds pursuing post-secondary education. However, HEIs were unprepared for this surge in enrolment, resulting in higher dropout rates and demands for better education quality (Bengesai and Pocock 2021:1). Katsioudi and Kostareli (2021:1282) state that in recent years, political, economic, and social factors have led to HEIs being pushed to enrol more students. However, this increase in student intake has resulted in a decline in the quality of teaching. According to Noui (2020:93), higher education is increasingly concerned with massification, which refers to the democratisation of university access and its impact on both developed and developing countries.

Whereas some countries appeared ready for the mass demand of higher education and other countries did not plan for mass demand of higher education, South Africa was not prepared to deal with massification and this resulted in negative consequences. Areas such as physical infrastructure of HEIs, staffing, and educational quality impacted negatively (Mokoena 2021:24). The issues of free education,

student access and the decolonisation of the curriculum were evident in the 2015/2016 student fees must fall protests. Pillay (2020:14786) states that in South Africa, there are too few HEIs that can accommodate the remarkably high demand for access to higher education.

In the South African higher education, due to massification, there have been curriculum changes and large class instructions which impact academics and academic productivity. This phenomenon is new in South Africa as the country is the latest country to experience it and has been applauded but the quality of education cannot be assured (Mahabeer and Pirtheepal 2019:33). Enrolment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds has increased as higher education becomes more accessible through massification. Those from privileged social classes, with higher socioeconomic levels, and racial/ethnic minorities, on the other hand, have profited the most. Additionally, massification improves access and participation in education by 1) increasing student enrolment rates, allowing more students to be recruited and have access to education; and 2) horizontally diversifying HEIs, attracting students by developing HEIs with varying goals. Universities' competitiveness and impact are critical in the marketisation of higher education (Jin 2022:2241).

WSU and UFH East London campuses cater for the more Border-Kei regions of the Eastern Cape, with large rural communities circling the region. Both institutions are faced with the larger number of enrolments and have had to build more classrooms and deal with more student accommodation than their capacity. Scott (2021:455) adds that, to a limited extent or exceptions, most HEIs are currently mass systems, depending on forms and structures as the difference. In the higher education systems in developed countries most systems are beginning to become universal systems and some countries are in the post-mass systems.

2.3.3 Universal higher education stage

Wright and Horta (2018:187) extend that higher education plays a leading role in training future generations to meet the growing demand for high-skilled labour. HEIs have since radically transitioned from the socioeconomic elites to being talent scouts capable of producing a mass of qualified graduates to foster prosperity of the economy. Wheelahan and Moodie (2020:102) claim that the universal higher education systems support more than 50% of the student body population in higher education by preparing the larger population for speedy social, technological, and economic change. Krausse (2020:5) adds that information technology was the facilitator for internet-based universal accesses to higher education with technology playing a contributing role to trends towards universal access to postsecondary education.

The existence and conception of mass higher education, as stated above, should be encouraged in every higher education system and momentum given to internet-based universal accessibility. In higher education, information and communication technologies can somehow improve innovation, quality of teaching and learning and the quality of educational systems (Krankovits and Kukorelli 2021:62).

Gqubule (2021) adds that South Africa ought to make a rapid transition, using one generation, towards a universal system of higher education with a tertiary enrolment rate of at least 75% and doubling the tertiary education sector size. Universal access to higher education may be viewed as an element of the right to education and lasting learning opportunities, but the return of investment in higher education is not only high for those who attended higher education but also for society and the economy at large (Pedro 2021).

The challenges of managing diversity and addressing student needs can be overcome with innovative technology like artificial intelligence. It can improve recruitment by spreading attention globally, delivering personalised experiences, and increasing campus diversity. Marketing and communication strategies like using competitive intelligence directed at student recruitment can help overcome this obstacle (Morrison 2021:196).

2.4 HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

South African public tertiary education institutions have long used similar strategies to attract students. Typically, prioritising state funding over attracting the desired number or mix of students. This has led universities to be more proactive and selective in admissions. Njoko (2018:175) states that the methods used to communicate or recruit prospective students impact those who receive the information. The author adds that marketisation in higher education has led to intense competition for top students and funding, causing institutions to be selective in their recruitment strategies. Potential students have limited sources of information in the digital age. Trinh and Nguyen (2019:3) suggest that university recruitment is vital for effective university management and has garnered attention for improving its effectiveness. They highlight the impact of managing and marketing the recruitment process on the university's brand, image, and reputation.

According to Adonis and Silinda (2021:74), South Africa was under the administration of colonial rule by Britain, and the South African education system was undermined with any form of indigenous knowledge. South Africa has not completely done away with its apartheid system of government, which lasted from 1948 to 1991. The Bantu education law, brought about by the apartheid government, is still somehow visible in the country's education system. It systematically restricted the Black population

from certain education subjects and politically and economically marginalised them. Tewari, and Ilesanmi (2020:2) add that South Africa witnessed reforms and transformations in the post-apartheid period 1994 onwards. The measures were introduced by the new South African democratic government to transform tertiary education in the country, with equitable access to higher education regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

Mtshweni (2022:235) claims that the South African apartheid administration established institutions in rural areas or former "homelands" and townships, which were the only places where the majority Black people were allowed to live, as a catalyst for racial tensions. Historically Black Institutions (HBIs) are institutions that served the Black racial class, whereas Historically White Institutions (HWIs) are universities that served the White racial class. HWIs were designed to serve only the White population and were strategically positioned in the urban centres. In contrast to HBIs, which were ignored by the apartheid regime, HWIs were provided with enough infrastructure, human resources, and state finance. This is evident in the post-apartheid age, where racial inequities continue and are overwhelming.

Badat (2020:28) mentions that adequate resources have not been available for comprehensive higher education change since 1994, with negative effects for equity, quality, and progress. The uncertain consequences of post-1994 higher education are exemplified by student access, opportunity, and success. Despite significant increases in enrolment and increased equality of access, poor participation, high dropout, low completion, and inconsistent quality have persisted. Saurombe (2018:120) adds that the new African National Congress government had the task to dismantle any traces of apartheid established in 1948 by the National Party which used education as domination tool to undermine the oppressed population in South Africa. The author further states that the detrimental effect of being marginalised had to be overcome as it created separate development and disparities amongst racial groups under the pretence of superiority.

Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020:2) purport that pre-1994, there were calls to transform higher education with fears that, in the new government, some of the concerns would not be considered. In 1994, a new vision to transform education and training was announced in the ANC draft policy framework for a transformed education system. Furthermore, the transformation included access to higher education, with financial implications as the Black populace could not obtain funds for tuition. The new government allocated R20 million financial aid to assist the said. Subsequently to 1994, Mpungose (2020:2) affirms that much has been done in higher education to address historical disparities through policy changes at higher education institutions and the National Plan for Higher Education (2001).

From 1994 onwards numerous policy documents were initiated by the new democratic government, specifically the Department of Education. For purposes of this study, only the discussed policies that are regarded as directly relevant to the objectives of this study are dealt with. The policies and Act are:

- The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) of 1996.
- Education White Paper (EWP) 3 of 1997.
- 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE); and
- Higher education Act 101 of 1997.

Dumpath and Subbaye (2018:87) report that the newly formed South African National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) task team in 1996, reported to the democratic government that the South African education system was plagued with redundancies and inefficiencies and could not respond to the needs of the country, and thus they recommended a higher education reform strategy. From then onwards, the country was in discussion with policymakers and government bodies to find ways to reform the sector, until 2001, with the development of the national plan for higher education. The mechanisms of the NCHE in 1996 assisted in the development of the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997. Nakunah, Bezuidenhout and Furtak (2019:287) add that the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 was established to regulate the higher education sector, its governance and funding of public higher education institutions and lastly to address higher education inequalities.

However, several concerns, including access to higher education, diminishing government funding, racial inequities, and decreasing graduate throughput rates, are persistent and ongoing. Following the passage of granting access to HE to all members of society, there was a growing issue of student debt among formerly underprivileged students, which threatened their educational prospects.

Sebola (2022:4) states that South African HEIs have continued to function in a poorly established higher education institutional framework, limiting their ability to contribute to national skilled labour generation and development. As a result, successive governments have worked to restructure higher education, particularly in terms of research performance, at least since 2005, for public institutions to contribute to skilled labour generation and development of a nation as well. Abe and Mugobo (2021:113) agree that transformation initiatives were developed as a strategy to effect institutional changes aimed at overcoming unfair discrimination, access to education and training as according to White Paper 3 of 1997. Onwana (2022:60) affirms the above discussion in his reflection that 25 years after South Africa's apartheid system was dismantled and higher education was accessible to most of the Black population, the country's higher education curriculum is still dominated by "White, male, European, capitalist, and worldviews".

The National Plan for Higher Education (NHPE:2001) provides strategies for the development of the SAHE system, such as the role of HE in national competitiveness through the continuation of knowledge acquisition and knowledge production in the global sphere. Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019:7) confirm that the NHPE (2001) was developed as an implementation framework in support of goals of the White Paper of 1997. Its primary objective was to develop a higher education system that will be responsive to the demands of the country and its social justice for the citizens.

Mzangwa (2019: 11) adds that as means to support the SAHE transformation, a series of HEI mergers took place in 2002 to reduce the number of HEIs from 36 to 26 institutions. However, some elements of the White Paper of 1997 were not addressed yet, i, e access to education that will limit a certain percentage to higher education. This was a hindsight in the ambition to fast-track transformation and the issue of access remains a factor since HEI numbers were decreased in 2002. In support of the above arguments, Rakoma (2018:48) mentions that the merger of universities was in response to the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 to merge institutions with stronger institutions. One of its objectives was to align its programmes offered to be responsive to local, regional, and national needs. Distance learning programmes were available in traditional universities with the aim to address challenges of access and redress inherited inequalities.

According to Roger (2017: 18), contained in the NPHE, five objectives were identified to play a role in the transformation of higher education, as stated below.

- Increasing access to HE and production skilled workforce to address human resource needs.
- Increasing and strengthening the current research capacity to a high-level capacity.
- Reaching knowledge needs in the institutional landscape to be locally, regional responsive.
- Addressing societal inequalities.
- Restructuring and creation of new institutions to address inherited inequalities.

Motala and Menon (2020:82) believe that COVID-19 brought widespread changes to societies and higher education that have the potential to transform HEIs, adding a new layer of complexity and uncertainty to an already volatile and conflicted higher education sector, as evidenced by protests over fees, decolonisation, and affordability, among other issues. The focus of the higher education response to this issue in South Africa was on the material inequalities that exist between historically White urban universities and historically Black rural universities (Kele and Mzileni 2021:1), with the former having the required technology and infrastructure to migrate their systems to the online environment, while the latter was forced to put their frameworks on hold. As a result, according to Odularu *et al.* (2022:188), HEIs must redesign their learning and teaching strategies to address the COVID-19

situation, as well as be aware of potential barriers, and recognise new systems and tools that incorporate online education into teaching-learning processes. When compared to actual, face-to-face teaching and learning approaches, it was found that online teaching saves time in delivering lessons. In addition, online learning must be more effective and timelier than in a face-to-face session. Students liked the online learning method, which may be more successful than traditional face-to-face instruction.

According to Pretorius and Blaawu (2020:47), the increase in higher education access and reduction in government subsidies have created challenges for universities to meet enrolment goals while ensuring high-quality education. South African universities use various strategies like personalised marketing, product differentiation, and internal systems to boost staff and student enrolment in different qualifications. South Africa's potential HEI students expect a customer-focused approach from academic and administrative staff in their student recruitment plans.

Reputation and information are crucial in attracting students to SA higher education institutions. Academic and programme reputation, marketing activities, and recruitment challenges vary for prospective students. Chen (2019:3) argues that student recruitment is the start of a long-lasting relationship between universities and students, which extends beyond the course and continues after graduation. The perception of the university brand and the relationship with students influence future interactions. Brand awareness is being easily recognised. Ali (2021:437) also adds that effective marketing promotion directly influences students' decision-making process when choosing their education and institution. HEIs' integrated marketing campaigns should be strategy-based to achieve goals and objectives. Various promotional tools serve different purposes, and HEIs' marketing managers must coordinate and allocate sufficient resources to ensure consistent messaging across all promotional activities (Camilleri 2020:11).

2.5 MERGER OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Students desire and seek a superior-quality educational service experience, and institutions offering the desired campus experience via student recruitment strategies have been the biggest beneficiaries, leading to a competitive higher education market. Sułkowsk, Fijałkowska and Dzimińska (2019:1470) mention that HEIs are under serious pressure to compete and collaborate in today's world, which is characterised by rising cross-border competitiveness in both scholastic offerings and inquiring about yields. The HEIs fight for subsidising, gifted understudies, high-quality teachers, exceptional investigation, and tall positions in all-inclusive positioning. Strategic mergers in higher education are referred to as strategies of "blending academic institutions for common development." The merger fever has been a crucial aspect of restructuring higher education on the African continent recently. Since 2002, South

Africa's education sector has seen significant changes. This has affected how potential students perceive and behave as consumers. Public tertiary institutions were merged between 2000-2004 to create new ones. This trend continued in 2013 and 2015 with the establishment of Sefako Makgatho University and Sol Plaatje University, respectively.

The higher education industry has seen a rise in mergers, as organisations aim to enhance their competitive advantage and effectiveness, and HEIs have adopted mergers to cope with change. The mergers were considered for several reasons, which include financial stability, attracting new students, expanding into new specialisations, and recruiting a wider faculty. Additionally, HEIs opted for mergers to adapt to competition and gain a competitive advantage. Thus, aligned mergers can be effective in their implementation going forward (Zahraa *et al.* 2021:928).

In South Africa, the change in the HE sectors involved historically disadvantaged HEIs merging with traditionally advantaged universities to expand access to education (Shawa 2020:106). Davies (2020:6) adds that the South Africa's higher education system was restructured to correct the previous inequality higher education landscape created by apartheid policies. This entailed creating a higher education system that is responsive to the human resource and knowledge demands of South Africa and is consistent with the vision, values, and principles of a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society.

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The DHET (2001b; 2002) policy on Restructuring of the Higher Education System, according to Garraway and Winberg (2019:40), was the first policy that announced planned institutions that would be merged, with a major concern to normalise the SAHE by merging historically Black and White Technikons into single institutions. They further state that the merger of Technikons and universities formed a comprehensive university but renaming of Technikons to universities of technology would somehow not work in the planned transformation; however in 2003, then Minister Kader Asmal agreed to put pressure on Technikon vice chancellors to have universities of technology. Shawa (2020:106) adds that higher education transformation has mostly failed to aid universities in adequately addressing socioeconomic inequities, which is a key cause of discomfort. University mergers, with historically

disadvantaged universities merging with historically advantaged ones, equity in staff employment based on a racial lens, and improved formal and empirical access to higher education, particularly for formerly disadvantaged groups, were all part of this sector's transformation.

According to Kara (2021:22), it is economically impractical to have multiple higher education institutions with similar goals competing for limited resources. In the future, mergers and consolidations among both public and private institutions will become more frequent as a strategic move to increase efficiency, improve processes, and achieve their objectives.

According to Senekal and Lenz (2020:533), the Higher Education Act establishes a planned and unified system of higher education, leading to the consolidation of 36 institutions into 23 in 2004 and 2005. In 2022, merging institutions in South Africa led to the rebuilding of the higher education landscape. Three main types of HEIs were formed: comprehensive universities, traditional universities, and universities of technology. During the merger planning, HEIs would have autonomy with government oversight. Red flags were raised when financially viable institutions opted out. Bunting (2020:1) notes that South African universities operate autonomously under their own private statutes (South Africa 2002), granting decision-making power to the institutional council, senate, management, students, and stakeholders.

Essop (2020:10) states that for the purposes of the report, public higher education institutions have been divided into five categories:

- i. Research-intensive universities (RIUs) – Universities of Cape Town (UCT), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Pretoria (UP), University of Stellenbosch (US), and University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).
- ii. Other universities (OUs) include Nelson Mandela University (NMU), Northwest University (NWU), Rhodes University (RU), Universities of the Free State (UFS), University of Johannesburg (UJ), University of Mpumalanga (UMP), and Sol Plaatje University (SPU), University of Mpumalanga and Sol Plaatje University.
- iii. Historical Black university includes the Universities of Fort Hare (UFH), Limpopo (UL), Venda (UV), Western Cape (UWC), Zululand (UZ), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), and Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMH).
- iv. Universities of Technology (UoTs): Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Central University of Technology (CUT), Durban University of Technology (DUT), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), and Vaal University of Technology (VUT).
- v. University of South Africa Distance Education (Unisa).

The South Africa universities are divided into the following categories, as according to BusinessTech (2017)

- i. Nine universities of technology focused on vocationally oriented education.
- ii. Six comprehensive universities offering a combination of academic and vocational diplomas and degrees.
- iii. Twelve traditional universities offering theoretically oriented university degrees.

Since the 2003 longwinded and difficult merger process, to a certain level, the process was successful though the newly formed Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University was demerged from the University of Limpopo. Tshwane University of Technology and Walter Sisulu University experienced instability (Swartz *et al.* 2019:571). The 2001 SAHE reforms led to the establishment of a new framework that formed the guidelines of HEIs with respect to their planning and funding to achieve the new national goals for universities (Cited in Sehoole and Phatlane 2013) by Abugre (2018:328).

Cingillioglu, Gal and Prokhorov (2023:4) state that HEIs are now student-centric, treating potential students as clients and using their marketing and communication strategies and brand to enhance recognition and maintain a positive image. Therefore, HEIs adapted to market conditions and their striving for a competitive advantage has since utilised various modern marketing and communication platforms, including social media, to connect with potential students, alongside conventional methods.

2.6 MERGED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Luvalo (2017:77-80) illustrates how SA HEIs merged and with which institutions in support of BusinessTech (2015) in the university typology in the tables below; traditional universities offer general formative and professional academic programmes,

Traditional universities (11) offer theoretically oriented university degrees.

Table 1: Traditional Universities in South Africa

Name	Merged/unmerged	Institutions merged
University of Cape Town	Unmerged	
University of Fort Hare	Merged	University of Fort Hare and Rhodes University East London Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal	Merged	University of Durban-Westville and University of Natal
University of Free State	Merged	University of the Orange Free State, University of the North QwaQwa Campus, and Bloemfontein Vista University Campus
University of Limpopo	Merged	University of the North and Medical University of South Africa
North-West University	Merged	University of the North-West, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, University of Bophuthatswana, Vista University Sebokeng Campus, Vaal Triangle Campuses.
University of Pretoria	Merged	Vista Mamelodi Campus and University of Pretoria.
University of Stellenbosch	Unmerged	
Rhodes University	Unmerged	
University of the Western-Cape	Unmerged	
University of the Witwatersrand	Unmerged	

Six Universities of Technology were established through merging the former Technikons that offered career-oriented programmes, but the Technikon Act (No. 125 of 1993) allowed former Technikons to offer degrees. Subsequently, in 2004, former Technikons tried to change their status in higher education to either merge with traditional universities to form comprehensive universities or become universities of technology. Additionally, since their status change as universities of technology, they have worked towards acquiring all the elements, privileges, and rights of a university. Universities of technology focus more on undergraduate career-focussed programmes.

Table 2: Universities of Technology in South Africa

Name	Merged/unmerged	Merged institutions
Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)	Merged	Cape Technikon and Cape Peninsula Technikon
Central University of Technology (CUT)	Merged	Welkom campus of Vista University and Technikon Free State.
Durban University of Technology (DUT)	Merged	Technikon Natal and Technikon ML Sultan formerly known as Durban Institute of Technology (DIT), which changed to DUT in 2008.
Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)	Unmerged	Formerly known as Mangosuthu Technikon.
Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	Merged	Technikon North-west and Pretoria Technikon, and Technikon Northern Gauteng.
Vaal University of Technology (VUT)	Unmerged	Formerly known as Vaal Triangle Technikon

Hlengwa (2019:7) states that comprehensive universities offer a combination of traditional and vocationally oriented qualifications, focused on providing higher education on a larger scale. However, the South African government's decision to create 'comprehensive' universities may have been a great move but the current reality is complicated and troubled. The confusion has been caused by lack of knowing how to deliver their mandate, which may threaten institutional programme differentiation, formerly intended as the main point of new universities. The NPHE (2001:6) and Department of Education (2002) mention that comprehensive universities will provide the following as part of their mandate:

- i. Enhance access to a wider variety of programmes with various entry requirements.
- ii. Promote articulation and student mobility between career-focused and formative courses.
- iii. Expand research opportunities in applied research of Technikons.
- iv. Respond better to regional needs to increased capacity and scope.

The table below provides a list of comprehensive universities in South Africa.

Table 3: Eight comprehensive universities of South Africa

Name	Merged/unmerged	Institutions merged
University of Zululand (UNIZULU)	Unmerged	Reclassified
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Merged	Witwatersrand Technikon, Rand Afrikaans University and Vista University East Rand and Soweto Campuses
Walter Sisulu University (WSU)	Merged	Eastern Cape Technikon, Border Technikon, and University of Transkei
University of South Africa (Unisa)		Technikon Southern Africa, Unisa, and component of Vista University Distance Education Campus
University of Venda (UNIVEN)	Unmerged	
Sol Plaatjie University (SPU)	Unmerged	
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)		Port Elizabeth Technikon, University of Port Elizabeth, and Port Elizabeth Campus of Vista University.
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University	Unmerged	Established after demerger from Medunsa in 2014.

2.6.1 Walter Sisulu University (WSU)

Giba-Fossu (2020:26) explains that WSU merged with two legacy institutions in 2005, inclusive of the University of Transkei, with the old Eastern Cape Technikon in Butterworth, which has campuses in Mthatha and Queenstown, and the former Eastern Cape Technikon in Butterworth, which also has campuses in Mthatha and Queenstown. Formerly known as Border Technikon, this institution is in East London. WSU was formed by the merger of three heritage institutions. Buffalo City Campus in East London, Ibika Campus in Butterworth, Queenstown Campus in Queenstown, and Nelson Mandela Drive Campus in Mthatha are the four campuses that make up Walter Sisulu University. This university is named after the late Walter Sisulu, a much admired and significant leader in South Africa's struggle for democracy. Its size and complexity make it the largest university in the Eastern Cape, with a long and illustrious history and political backdrop.

Songca, Ndebele and Mbodila (2021:46) state that WSU was established in 2005, as a non-profit public HEI, with its head office located in the suburban city setting of Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. This institution's delivery sites are in several towns and campuses in East London (Buffalo City Campus), Queenstown campus (Komani), Butterworth campus. According to Nogemani and Magade (2022:2),

there are around 33,500 students at Walter Sisulu University, which has four campuses in Mthatha, Butterworth, East London, and Komani and offers 175 approved academic programmes.

WSU (2022) provides that WSU's Buffalo city campus has six delivery sites in the city of east London, with five of the sites situated in the inner city of East London, namely College Street site, Heritage site, Arts, BRU, Chislehurst site and the last site is Potsdam site situated in the outskirts of east London, between Mdantsane and King Williams Town. College street, Arts, Heritage, BRU and Potsdam site were former Border Technikon campuses, and the Chislehurst site was the former Eastern Cape Technikon East London Campus.

Functioning with only two faculties in the Buffalo city campus (BCC), the Faculty of Business Sciences and the Faculty of Engineering, Science and Technology offer different disciplines to current and potential students in the border Kei region of the Eastern Cape. WSU is a comprehensive university with a mixture of programmes for both Technikon and Traditional university courses. This means that WSU has an advantage over UFH, having more programmes for both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. The Department of Education (2004:37) concept document identifies characteristics of a comprehensive university in terms of its delivery of programmes, as stated below:

- Diversity in programme offerings of both university and Technikon type.
- Accessibility to education through varied university entry requirements.
- Student mobility through horizontal or vertical articulation.
- Responsiveness to regional and local demands for educational programmes.
- Flexibility in strengthening community engagement initiatives.

WSU has a marketing, communication, and advancement (MCA) department, formerly known as the marketing and communication department, which is responsible for the marketing and communication of the institution. The directorate has a student recruitment team where they embark on drives to lure the cream of the crop to the institution by hosting career expos, open days, and high school visits. Nwendu (2019:1) adds that institutional student recruitment and retention strategy is particularly important and inevitable, which is a typical global business plan of higher education institutions.

WSU has a competitive edge over UFH in East London due to unique study opportunities. However, entry requirements can also hinder a student's choice. Educations.com (2020) states that admission requirements differ based on the institution and programme desired. HEIs visit high schools to inform students about their programmes and admission requirements. Online applications have disadvantaged some students, leading them to prefer walk-in applications. The assumption is that not all high schools

in the region visit WSU. Some schools prefer other universities outside the region. Also, some potential students may not meet the entry requirements for WSU and UFH, so they choose a vocational path instead.

The recent COVID-19 scenario has made it extremely difficult to continue doing things the way we have been doing them. Students who are academically challenged might attend tutorials at the institution to help them with their studies. Students participate in small group sessions led by trained instructors. Students at Walter Sisulu University were accustomed to using the blackboard; however, this had to change due to the epidemic. Students have found the obstacles of e-learning to be tough and have deregistered as a result (Nogemane and Magede 2021:2). Newlin and Grasia (2021:2255) add that the COVID-19 situation was different at rural and poor universities like WSU and UFH and 90% of WSU students lacked access to ICT infrastructure, making online learning impracticable at the time. UFH was in a similar situation, with 70% of students without access to ICT, which was exacerbated by bad connectivity.

2.6.2 University of Fort Hare (UFH)

UFH was established in 1916, as a non-profit public higher-education institution in sub-equatorial Africa open to the Black population. The university has well-known African nationalists and politicians who were former students in the university such as Oliver Tambo and Govan Mbeki; Robert Sobukwe; Mangosuthu; Eluid Mathu; Nelson Mandela; Chris Hani; Robert Sobukwe; Robert Mugabe and Herbert Chitepo of Zimbabwe; Ntsu Mokhehle of Lesotho; and Fwanyanga Mulikita of Uganda (UFH 2020). The university is located in Alice in the Eastern Cape and is a medium-sized coeducational HEI offering courses and programmes leading to officially recognised higher education degrees such as bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctorate degrees in numerous fields of study.

Mdiya (2020:4) mentions that UFH has a total of six faculties and enrolls between 8 000 and 9 500 students, the majority of whom are based on the Alice campus. The six faculties are made up of the following elements: Management and Commerce has seven departments, Health Science has five departments, Education has none, Social Science and Humanities has 15 departments, Science and Agriculture has 14 departments, and the Nelson Mandela School of Law has four departments. The university is recognised throughout the African continent as one of the existing prestigious universities boasting with more 9 500 students (EduRank 2020). In 1990, the Bisho campus was the first satellite campus followed by the East London Campus in 2004, with approximately 5000 students. The University has five faculties (Education, Law, Management & Commerce, Science & Agriculture, Social Sciences & Humanities) all of which offer qualifications up to the doctoral level.

Formerly Rhodes University campus, the UFH East London campus was established through the incorporating and integrating a new campus with Rhodes University, into UFH. The strategy was a significant turning point for UFH in its development and operating strategy which expanded into new markets in East London (UFH 2020).

This study aimed to explore competitive strategies used by HEIs, specifically WSU and UFH in the highly competitive region of East London in the Eastern Cape province.

The universities, WSU and UFH, co-exist in East London and are competitors in their quest for student recruitment. As they both have satellite sites in East London it characterises their aggressive competition across the region. Notwithstanding the strategies used, their goal is to attract potential students and maintain a competitive advantage. Therefore, WSU and UFH use competitive intelligence for student enrolment, such as career expo, high school visits and social media by providing information of their offerings.

De Anjo (2014:32) states that HEIs must constantly monitor market trends and assess their surrounding environment to be able provide suitable qualifications and ensure a proactive evolution. Survival of universities in the competitive environment will depend entirely on how well they position themselves in the market through strategic planning, strategies adopted and management for sustainability in the current turbulence of globalisation and competition. Varble and Hawes (2009) cited in Watson (2019:81) found that marketisation has led to increased pressure on HEIs to recruit more students to stay competitive. Therefore, studying the stages of student recruitment is important when examining marketing and communication strategies for student recruitment. These include pre-search, search, application, choice, and matriculation decisions. Therefore, in a competitive environment where students are seen as consumers, universities have become more market-oriented, focusing on value for money, consumer choice, and competition. This competition is particularly intense for higher education institutions from different provinces. Students have more choices, with neighbouring provinces like KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State also advertising their universities. Prospective students tend to choose HEIs that provide great service and higher student satisfaction, influenced by family and friends. University image impacts students' choice of higher education institutions.

2.7 AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In colonial Africa, access to HE was initially limited to elite families' children. Later, the importance of HEIs in economic and human capital development was acknowledged. Recent disruptions to student mobility have prompted African universities to reconsider their recruitment strategies. Universities with

a recruitment strategy for Africa will lead in tapping students; furthermore, Africa must revamp HEIs as knowledge centres to stay relevant. According to Agbaje (2023:144), students globally are increasingly seeking quality higher education outside their home countries. In Africa, the demand for higher education is increasing, with a significant rise in the number of students seeking enrolment in recent decades, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Most African HEIs cannot meet demand due to limited space, unstable academic calendars, quality issues and reduced government funding in African countries.

Ndofirepi, Farinloye and Mogaji (2020:10) allege that African universities aim to improve society and address challenges, despite varying entry requirements and challenges. African nations face challenges in accessing quality education, including concerns about HEI quality and reputation, as well as linguistic mismatch. Language is a big worry for students travelling for education as more students strain publicly funded universities. Limited resource countries struggle to fund larger student populations while maintaining educational quality. The learning environment influences higher education marketing and student university choices. Prospective students seek universities with top-notch facilities that enhance their learning experience, giving the university a competitive edge. The location, features, and environment enhance its appeal. The competition within the HE sectors forces HEIs to reengineer their institutions to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Higher education is the gateway to sustainable development for the African continent at all levels. For Africa to make effective and efficient use of its human and untapped natural resources, it needs quality higher education that will provide its citizens with the requisite skills and knowledge. However, ensuring quality higher education in the continent calls for massive financial investments. Bondar *et al.* (2021:9) claim that the competition between HEIs promotes professionalism through continuous innovation to support private investment or social equality and access to education. Therefore, it is worth noting that a variety of sources for competitive advantage are being examined by HEIs in their search of securing customers and staying competitive in the market.

The COVID19 pandemic has virtually not spared any HEI in the world. However, the impact was more severe in low-income countries and some HEIs struggled to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. The expansion of access to higher education through online or virtual teaching and learning is somehow queried due to questions about quality of education, academic integrity, and mode of delivery. Teferra (2021) states that the transition to online has not been easy, as there was resistance by students and staff. He further states that the online delivery mode was the last step towards a recognised practice during COVID19.

Lemoine and Richardson (2020:43) state that HEIs need to be proactive in planning to enhance institutional effectiveness and have flexible leadership that can envision the future to create a competitive advantage. Exercising planning and leadership would mean adoption of new strategies for the betterment of the institution during COVID19. To develop competitive higher education system strategic approaches are key to the plan, which is also known as "flagship universities." They are renowned research institutions tasked with increasing the country's competitiveness in the global knowledge field. However, options, choices, and shift in the market for future students may result in students approaching competitors for online programmes (Al-Kumaim *et al.* 2021:3).

Dei, Osei-Bonsu and Amponsah (2019:1) mention that Africa has over 470 universities and colleges across the continent's top ten populated countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Democratic republic of Congo, Algeria, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania that are supported both by the private sector and government.

Technology has rapidly transformed teaching and learning education aimed at providing skills and abilities to students to develop themselves in a societal setting (Liesa-Orús *et al.* 2020:2). Technology integration in teaching and learning, research, and administration is considered one of the strategic pillars to increase education quality and competitiveness, according to a study of 30 African HEIs (Bekele and Ofoyuru,2021). According to Bekele (2021:248), the COVID-19 lesson, and the incorporation of technology in continental, national, and university strategic plans, are important indicators that African universities are more likely than ever to embrace technology in the future. Olcott (2020:183) adds that the decision to adopt permanent online/e-learning teaching and learning is determined by the increased competitive market and the institutional positioning is critical for future financial success.

Uleanya *et al.* (2021:174) state that the higher education boom in Africa brings challenges. It is important that students have access to sufficient information when choosing a career. The 21st century universities rely on strategic positioning, marketing plans, communication tools, and sustainable management to effectively recruit students and survive in the competitive education industry. While public universities have an advantage when it comes to students receiving government funding, private universities face more competition and must recruit students more aggressively. Therefore, universities need innovative recruitment plans to address the challenges and use competitive intelligence strategies in student recruitment. Reddy (2022:330) states that it is important to combine traditional and electronic methods for innovative student recruitment marketing. Traditional tools such as newspapers, brochures, and alumni networks effectively inform potential students. Integrating marketing tools into institutional

research increases university strengths and student recruitment and requires a combination of traditional and electronic communications.

2.8 HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

Over the years, some of the continent's most prestigious universities have been established in countries such as South Africa (University of Cape Town), Uganda (Makarere University), Tanzania (University of Dar es Salaam) and Nigeria (University of Ibadan). Ghana (University of Ghana) and Zimbabwe (University of Zimbabwe) have experienced their own challenges and have gradually mentored more students each year. As mentioned previously, more students around the world are seeking quality higher education outside their home countries. Universities can use rankings for marketing and student requirements, highlighting their ranking and improvements over the years (Mogaji, 2019:130). Universities use positive rankings for better marketing and public opinion support. Demand for higher education is increasing in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of students seeking admission has increased significantly in recent decades. Most universities in Africa are unable to meet demand due to limited space, unstable academic schedules, quality issues, and reduced government funding in African countries. Indeed, in recent years higher education has been discussed in all policy-making platforms in sub-Saharan Africa to transform the sector and contribute to the global knowledge economy. Unterhalter *et al.* (2018:4) add that Africa has achieved rapid growth due to the continued participation of its people and progress in education.

Jowi *et al.* (2015:13) suggest that the African higher education landscape has been recognised as a significant role player in the continent's development. However, it has been faced with many challenges and societal demands that threaten its sustainability. Challenges include limited resources, infrastructure, inadequate capacity, and weak funding which require an immediate intervention.

Ghana is the first African country to discuss the improvement of HEIs, including an increase in student enrolment. However, attracting and retaining staff remains a major challenge. Student and staff retention is crucial in any higher education institution. The flagship university of Ghana, formerly University College of London, was established in 1948. Under Ghana's 1992 Constitution, public universities have traditionally received substantial state funding. However, with the government's financial cuts and proposed changes to the funding model, support for universities in Ghana has decreased. HEIs aim to thrive in prestige, scope, and competition. However, they face ongoing pressure to adapt to complex societal issues (Bonzi-Simpson and Agomor 2021:3).

Porter (1996) states that while an organisation can be a market leader, it does not guarantee long-term market leadership. Developing sustainable strategies is essential for maintaining that leadership. Ayam (2017:18) argues that Ghanaian HE reforms aimed to increase access to HE and close the HE demands gap, leading to the growth of private HEIs and colleges. According to Agormedah *et al.* (2020:185), COVID-19 was first recorded in Ghana on March 12, 2020, leading to the closure of universities and institutions. Several universities in Ghana, such as the University of Ghana, Wisconsin International University College, University of Education, Ashesi University, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, have adopted e-learning platforms to continue academic activities. According to Essel *et al.* (2021:295), the novel coronavirus changed teaching in higher education and HEIs had to balance continuing education while ensuring safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2004), higher education in Nigeria aims to enhance national development through advanced training, instilling values for individual and societal survival, and developing intellectual capacities to understand and respect local and external environments. Nigeria, in western Africa, has a Federal Republic government structure, a rapidly growing economy, and a large population in Africa. (Africa.com, 2019).

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2004), higher education in Nigeria aims to enhance national development through advanced training, instilling values for individual and societal survival, and developing intellectual capacities to understand and respect local and external environments. The University of Nigeria in Nsukka was founded in 1960 to expand higher education to different fields. Funding and infrastructure challenges persist in Africa, including Nigeria, where there are 170 universities (43 federal, 48 state, and 79 private). For many decades, Nigeria's higher education has been controlled by public universities. Nigeria has 44 state universities and federal universities (Mufta, 2021:179). According to Etim and Nneka (2020:96), higher education in Nigeria is crucial for Africa's development, especially in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Mengistie (2021:2) argues that higher education in Ethiopia is still in its preliminary stages, with few students and a disorganised system. It started in 1950 with limited experience and progress has been gradual until the 21st century. According to Kabtyimer (2020:1), higher education in Ethiopia has a brief history, with new policies focused on quality, relevance, and the connection to national development. Ethiopia's HE sectors became imbalanced due to the COVID-19 impact on higher education. During the pandemic, university staff positions were questioned, and face-to-face teaching became prohibited globally. Many universities switched to virtual learning. According to Mengistie (2020:4), Ethiopia has 45

public higher education institutions, mostly located in rural areas. Each region has at least one institution, with various programmes for students.

Yallew (2020:24) supports this, stating that Ethiopia aims to internationalise its higher education system to achieve ambitious standards and create globally competitive institutions. Ethiopia encountered significant health, economic, and educational challenges amid the pandemic, resulting in the displacement of over 30 million students and a million tertiary students (Tamrat 2021:60). COVID-19 impacted institutional operations in both public and private sectors, posing additional challenges in the future. In response, Ethiopian institutions have provided training to lecturers on e-learning platforms for teaching. The main educational technology platform utilised was online. (Machaba and Bedada 2020:186

Zambia's higher education (HE) has been influenced by internationalisation, aided by foreign policies and collaborations (Masaiti and Mwale 2020:101). The authors discuss the changes in Zambia's HE system in the 1990s. Zambia's education history started in 1966 with the University of Zambia, a public institution with limited capacity. Zambia's population of over 18 million drives the need for greater higher education access. The COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 significantly affected Zambia's higher education sector, resulting in institution closures. To avoid disrupting academic calendars, universities swiftly switched to online lectures, ensuring students' progress, and maintaining financial stability (Hapompwe, Kukano, and Sichoongwe 2021:388).

Zimbabwe is a medium-sized country with a well-established higher education system but low international student attraction (McGrath, Thondhlana and Garwe 2021:4). Internationalisation of higher education in Zimbabwe has been ongoing since the colonial era. European missionaries introduced formal education in colonial Zimbabwe, which was developed by British colonialists. However, education policies perpetuated racial segregation, resulting in unequal offerings for White and Black communities. Zimbabwe's University of Zimbabwe (formerly University of Rhodesia) was established based on the British model as the country's first higher learning institution, aiming to further British objectives. (Mazodze, Mapara and Tsvere 2021:2) Chinyoka and Mutambara (2020:2) state that Zimbabwe's education sector has grown significantly since its independence in 1980.

In the previous years, Zimbabwe had no form of higher education until the establishment of the University College of Salisbury (University of Zimbabwe) in 1956. Garwe and Thondhlana (2019:2) disagree that the country's higher education started in 1955, with the establishment of University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN) which was affiliated to the university of London. The UCRN was renamed twice to what is now called University of Zimbabwe. According to Abdurrahman, Garwe,

Thondhlana and McGarth (2020:2), in 1960, the Black population of students was accepted to study in the University of Fort Hare in South Africa, and therefore most went to study abroad.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already cost African universities a significant amount of money, which has yet to be quantified. Universities throughout the world, including those in Africa, had to rapidly expand online instruction, resulting in unforeseen costs. As a result, face-to-face classes were halted, and blended learning, which combines digital and classroom instruction, was widely accepted and Omwenga, Mbithi and Muthana (2021:208). Beans, Maireva and Muza (2020:271) confirm that the Zimbabwean government announced the closure of universities and colleges, with students being forced to transition to online study. Under these abrupt demands, institutions had to demonstrate their worth by providing support to their teachers and students.

Effective communication plays a crucial role in student recruitment for African universities and one of the major challenges is the lack of resources and funding for marketing and communication activities. This poses a problem for universities to invest in marketing tools such as user-friendly websites, online platforms and adapting to the digital era.

Farinloye *et al.* (2020:4) suggest that universities must rethink their communication and promotion strategies to attract students amid growing competition and effectively promote their brand in the African continent. These challenges are from the university's perspective as they engage stakeholders. Many universities still rely heavily on traditional marketing methods and have limited online presence. Kieu *et al.* (2020:7) purport that, within the African context, its diverse cultures and education systems, size of the continent, HEIs in Africa face challenges in being competitive and attracting potential students. African HEIs can adopt various communication practices, such as sponsorships, targeted advertising, career or open-day campus events, high school presentations, and recruitment through alumni. The significance of promotional information and marketing lies in influencing students' selection of HEIs, including blending new and traditional media to recruit and retain students in HEIs in Africa.

Universities in Africa face a variety of challenges when recruiting students. These challenges include the need to compete for student enrolment in both domestic and international markets and the pressure to increase student enrolment due to reductions in government funding for public universities. Additionally, universities must focus on strategic marketing and brand communication to effectively attract and enrol potential students. Konyana (2023:483) adds that African universities face intense competition in student recruitment and are implementing marketing and communication strategies to attract potential students. The recruitment process is about finding potential students within and

outside the university. Social media, alumni, and current international students play a critical role in universities' marketing efforts to ensure sustainable international student recruitment.

2.9 GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Globalisation has changed higher education in a variety of ways, according to Hsieh (2020:1), including increased student global mobility, the use of English as the primary language of instruction, research and cross-national research collaboration, and the development of branch (satellite) campuses. Globalisation is a long-term system based on government and international capital's market-driven policies (Deuel 2020:103).

According to Bound *et al.* (2021:176), university learning has facilitated global mobility of individuals and knowledge for centuries. However, the recent influx of students and tuition revenues from foreign students is unprecedented. Moreover, university marketing and communication departments use diverse student recruitment strategies to attract international students, including social media, traveling abroad to meet with students, parents, counsellors, and alumni at schools and education fairs. According to Zhu (2022:16), international higher education has shifted from student exchanges to strategic student recruitment through cross-border partnerships and has become a priority for universities. Various recruitment methods for international students include joint degree programmes, gaining popularity often focused on enrolment numbers. As a result, higher education institutions are actively engaging in the recruitment of international students. International student mobility has the potential to transform higher education institutions into global environments, fostering knowledge exchange and cultural diversity.

Student recruitment and enrolment for higher education has expanded dramatically because of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education. Furthermore, many students desire to study overseas, which has resulted in a huge increase in cross-border higher education. Previous initiatives in higher education to globalise and internationalise have laid a solid framework for student mobility, including similar education systems (Mok *et al.* 2021:3).

According to Noha and Ludmila (2021:168), in the HE system, globalisation is perceived as both a threat and an opportunity. Furthermore, due to several factors that force HEIs to create forms of internationalisation include the growth of competition between traditional HEIs and the emergence of new educational service providers who offer distance learning programmes. Bilevičiūtė *et al.* (2020:7) state that education is a crucial factor in the contemporary knowledge-based economy development

where competition among HEIs is gaining momentum with only those that offer current and flexible education programmes surviving the higher education market.

De Wet (2020:34) continues to emphasise that HE internationalisation has a contribution to the HE sectors, where the shift from traditional institutions has moved since the 1990s to a competitive internationalisation. Zapp, Marques and Powell (2021:7) direct the notion of global higher education to a competitive sphere, where HE is in competition for students, talent, scholars, and research excellence are major factors in the quest for internationalisation. In addition to marketing strategies of competing in the global market, institutions are also focusing on creating effective student recruitment and retention strategies. Student recruitment and retention are essential for the success of higher education institutions. Institutions are implementing various strategies, such as creating pathways to counselling professions and promoting excellence and diversity, to attract and retain students. Additionally, institutions are focusing on creating effective student recruitment and retention strategies to ensure long-term success. By implementing these marketing and communication strategies directed at student recruitment, institutions can enhance their reputation, attract a diverse student body, and provide quality education.

Hung and Yen (2020:14) state that globalisation has affected student recruitment in higher education, requiring innovative marketing approaches for international student recruitment. It has also increased competition among institutions, leading to changes in curricula and in teaching methods. Marketing is key for a country's education system to attract enough students and meet recruitment criteria. Globalisation has changed recruitment strategies in higher education, emphasizing internationalisation and technology integration. Social media is vital for international students' satisfaction and loyalty to their educational institution. According to Camilleri (2019:20) and Sokhan and Danko (2022:32), HEIs can enhance their marketing and communication strategies to attract more students by diversifying their portfolios and recruiting both domestic and international students. Using effective promotion entails utilising different marketing and communication technologies like advertising, public relations, direct marketing, and fair and exhibition activities which should be integrated into a comprehensive system of marketing communications directed at student recruitment. Therefore, institutions should measure their marketing effectiveness by analysing indicators like enrolment ratio, graduates, and student retention. Using media organisations, social media, and competitive intelligence can be beneficial. Additionally, HEIs should prioritise key stakeholders in their marketing efforts, including departments, faculty, staff, media, students, and marketing departments.

Therefore, HEIs are ramping up global student recruitment and using international rankings to promote themselves globally and emphasize the significance of international student recruitment in the face of global competition and higher education rankings (as shown in Figure 1). International rankings are increasingly important for promoting and marketing institutions globally. As higher education mobility grows, there is a greater need for strategic recruitment, particularly for attracting international students.

The Top 20 Unis in the World	World Ranking
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
University of Cambridge	2
Stanford University	3
University of Oxford	4
Harvard University	5
California Institute of Technology	6
Imperial College London	7
UCL	8
ETH Zurich	9
University of Chicago	10
National University of Singapore	11
Peking University	12
University of Pennsylvania	13
Tsinghua University	14
The University of Edinburgh	15
EPFL	16
Princeton University	17
Yale University	18
Nanyang Technology University	19
Cornell University	20

Figure 1: Qs World University Rankings (2023)

HEIs often use marketing and recruitment to attract international students. They also develop strategic plans for internationalisation and student recruitment, including marketing, preparatory courses, and student exchanges, all of which affect international student recruitment. However, COVID-19 impacts

global tertiary education, including student recruitment and financial sustainability. New students worry about the impact of higher education on their experience (Brammer and Clark 2020:453).

The following table by Portnoi and Bagley (2018) lists the eight distinguishing characteristics of emerging global model institutions.

Table 4: Eight higher education distinguishing characteristics

Characteristic	Description
Global mission	The scope of these universities is expected to be global, and their personalities are global in nature.
Research intensity	Information and knowledge production through intensive research is fundamental and is attached to both technology and university industry associations.
New roles for professors	Professors are progressively in competition for positions and research reserves and are required to participate in commercial value research activities.
Diversified funding	Indeed, even in countries with more university fund allocations, non-governmental entities are even more broadly engaged with subsidising, giving a more grounded connection to industry.
Worldwide recruitment	Professors who are recognised internationally are esteemed and valued for their involvement in different societies and varying viewpoints that fuel advancement and innovation.
Increasing complexity	These universities regularly have complex internal authoritative structures as organisations with specific research units and interdisciplinary directorates or centres.
New relationships with government and industry	More noteworthy collaboration exists between these universities, government, and industry, with states being less focal.
Global collaboration with similar institutions	These universities are getting progressively interconnected and reliant, with various global affiliations and associations to help their work.

Tight (2021:54) agrees that globalisation is about a stage transition, with global patterns and development currently affecting local and national societies. Therefore, a university's success and global influence depend on effective student recruitment and communication with students and alumni. To achieve long-term goals, the university must understand its target market, assess competition, establish partnerships with local institutions, and offer attractive programmes and services for international students.

Global universities are seeking innovative ways to recruit and retain students from foreign countries, as it brings significant benefits to both the institutions and students (Nwedu 2019:9). Successively, a competitive intelligence framework would work in their advantage to determine their global

competitors and how they could then position themselves as one of the sought-after institutions in the global HE markets. HEIs in Asia face challenges in globalising their marketing strategies due to language barriers, which hinder effective communication with potential students and impede the promotion of multiculturalism. Additionally, political conflicts and landscape pose difficulties in recruiting international students. Institutional recruitment units should plan their marketing strategies before jumping into specific content (Hung and Yen 2022). Rosyida, Martin Rosyidi (2020:353) state that universities use various promotional strategies, including positive media coverage, to attract students. This includes utilising websites and social media as promotion tools. Promotion in higher education is the effort to influence others to accept ideas, products, or services provided by institutions through effective communication. In a competitive education market, global HEIs need strong marketing and communication plans to attract students using unique value and capture potential students' interest. In global higher education discussions, HEIs must explore marketing and communication strategies to attract talented students and develop effective strategies to understand target audiences with different demographics based on location, academic programmes, and institutional goals. Using these, HEIs need to customise their marketing messages and channels for better engagement with potential students (Verma 2023).

2.10 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Kisiołek, Karyy and Oalkiv (2021:755) argue that the speedy expansion of the internet-based communication system and network is affecting various spheres in business and the societies which has now become an integral environment for remote communication and cooperation. HEI markets are one of the affected spheres which use marketing strategies like internet technologies to communicate. HEIs have, therefore, modified their stakeholder communication methods by paying attention to the available diverse and innovative ways of communicating. Through integration of communication methods by stakeholders, the possibility exists of using diverse types of media in an integrated way and reaping the benefits of that integration (Gordon-Isasi, Narvaiza and Gibaja 2021:56). HEIs have prioritised digital transformation to enable them to meet rapid and transformation challenges in their environment.

This helps HEIs to determine the stakeholder needs and behaviours in advance, and to provide education in a changing competitive environment (Kuzo 2020:9). Zalite and Zvirbule (2020:298) allude to the fact that digitization provides HEIs with a wide variety of technologies for organising their information systems, improving performance, communicating with staff, faculty, and students, and

enhancing of their marketing actions on the website through social media. Presently, in an active market economy, HEIs need to be strategic by changing their marketing strategy relative to the increasing HEI competition caused by the appearance of commercial/private educational institutions (Beltyukova *et al.* 2020:3485).

Obeidat (2021: 197) states that nowadays, digital marketing strategy has become popular in organisations, often referred to as electronic marketing. Electronic marketing allows organisations to be innovative, eco-friendly, and adoptive to technology, thereby targeting their customers effectively to stay relevant and competitive. Therefore, to remain competitive, organisations need to be able to survive in the market, where their strength will determine their competitive advantage, and hence creating customer loyalty towards their organisation. Hosseini and Yadegari (2021:151) add that markets have become more competitive in today's world and entering competitive markets, offering innovative products and services involves high investments and high-risk tolerance. According to Le, Robinson and Dobele (2020:809), from marketing perspective, students make the decision to study in university when they recognise the need, to which in turn HEIs use their choice factors and information sources as part of their marketing strategy to understand and develop their marketing communications. In higher education, student recruitment is one of the strategies used by HEIs to recruit their potential students into enrol with them.

The continuous student recruitment strategies for enrolment are seemingly a challenge for HEIs. With the development of alternative options available for students, HEIs are seeking ways to gradually upgrade their current recruitment strategies to cater for the potential and current student needs (James and Derrick 2020:570). Institutional recruitment directorates, such Marketing and Communication departments or Advancement offices representatives, are committed and are constantly engaging their potential and current primary stakeholders in retaining them and recruiting more for increased enrolments (Oke *et al.* 2017:3). HEIs' competitive efforts to recruit potential students are a common strategy of marketing in admission affairs for which they use promotions and advertisements to reach prospective students through a variety of media. The development of HEIs' communication strategy should be long-term considering the changing external environment conditions – they should do so by continuously disseminating information to current students, potential students, and the whole society. The plan would be to try to gain a competitive advantage by ensuring the sustained and continuous activities of attracting the target audience (Kryvytska *et al.* 2021:462). The ability of organisations to tap the potential needs of customers, by collecting and analysing their demand, can help identify market demand and accordingly generate new products and services. Bao (2020:3) reveals that in CI, there is a competitor analysis tool called “opponent analysis” used to identify market competitors, by analysing

their strengths, and predicting their strategies. The author further expounds that opponent analysis is used to evaluate new products of the competitor in terms of price, cost, profit, marketing strategy and it also includes the competitor's strengths, weaknesses and how they meet customer needs.

The marketing and communication directorates in WSU and UFH are liable for building and upholding their respective university's image and competitive positions in the East London region, in the province, nationally and globally. They uphold their institutions by broadening their presence in the international market of higher education institutions. The excellent work by these directorates provides service to WSU and UFH's stakeholders, both internally and externally. These activities are further extended to institutional management and academic faculties by using a comprehensive approach in their quest to convey messages to stakeholders using all communication platforms in their disposal. In this section, the application of CI refers regarding marketing as the purposeful strategy mostly responsible for the dynamic growth of an organisation. The information gathered by CI would assist HEI marketing and communication departments to generate insights about their customers and competitors in the higher education environment. Nuseir and Refae (2020:1) state that competition among HEIs forces them to adopt competitive marketing strategies which respond to potential students' decision-making to enrol in a particular HEI and that will appeal to both local, national, and international students.

HEIs have adopted marketing strategies and techniques to counter the fierce competition in the higher education market, and accordingly, HEI management often undertake market research, positioning, and comparative advantage (Lee 2020:281). HEIs need to stand out from the other institutions and be able to establish a connection with the intended public, in this case students, by using strategic ways of communication for a desired common goal. Through CI activities, organisations can identify opportunities and threats, improve communication with customers and other stakeholders through the analysis of information about customers, competitors, and other key elements in the market. Broucker, De Wit and Mapaey (2021:929) agree that the HE systems that rely on elevated levels of marketisation have significant competitive pressure, which affects their differentiation from competitors. Peruta and Shields (2018:175) state that due to the interest in higher education, and when competition amongst institutions for the best students takes place, HEIs develop approaches to enrol such students. Approaches of marketing include connecting with potential students through letters, career expo, open days, and social media.

Arrigo, Liberati and Mariani (2021:2) define social media as a collection of internet-based applications used for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Additional social media marketing is used to gain customers' attention and acceptance through social media platforms such as Facebook or

Twitter. Momen, Sultana and Haque (2020:154) confirm that the introduction of online communication such as social media allows effective brand building strategies for HEIs owing to the large of the students who form perceptions about institutions online. Furthermore, it is overly critical for any HEIs to analyse the target market and the public. This will enable the HEIs to determine and develop each group's communication needs, types of response expected and which marketing and communication tools to use. However, a single approach does not guarantee good response, and thus using a combination approach is better and will more likely result in an increase in student enrolment. Nik *et al.* (2020:326) allude to the increasing competition in higher education sectors as they aim to attract new customers, concentrate on meeting the demands, expectations and needs of students.

2.11 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION STUDENT RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

In higher education, HE marketing and communication for student recruitment emphasizes the importance of connecting institutional marketing and recruitment, yet they are distinct concepts. A student recruitment strategy is a key programme to attract and retain prospective students for a specific institution and should be integrated into the marketing and communication strategy. Student recruitment in strategic planning is vital for the sustainability and success of the institution. The recruitment strategy highlights the need to attract the right students in adequate numbers for long-term sustainability (Dlamini 2017:45).

Huebner (2020:1) claims that HEIs employ marketing strategies to tackle recruitment challenges and vie for students. However, not only would this discussion indicate challenges in marketing and communication for student recruitment, but also the value of higher education and the perception of a good job after graduation. To counter such perceptions, HEIs need to be innovative, develop effective marketing and communication strategies, and provide pivotal content via their marketing and communication tools to increase student enrolment. HEIs globally operate in an uncertain environment and face challenges like reduced government funding.

Svanholm (2020) states that communicating accurate information to prospective students is challenging due to evolving tools and limited resources. However, social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram now offer more opportunities to connect with potential students. Students monitor email closely and respond better to newsletters. Therefore, a robust digital marketing and communication strategy is vital for engaging prospective students. COVID-19 has severely impacted student recruitment and enrolment in HEIs. It is projected that student numbers will decline for the next three to five years. This poses a challenge for HEIs, which have adopted a technology-focused strategy using social media

for marketing, recruitment, and engagement with prospective students in promoting student recruitment (Cant and Beeson 2023:51).

Seybert (2022:31) claims that HEI's recruitment and marketing teams are vital for attracting and enticing students to enrol in university and they therefore employ digital marketing strategies to engage students and allocate recruitment resources efficiently. A lack of resources is a challenge for HEIs in their recruitment. HEIs should consider factors influencing student decisions to enrol and communicate effectively with potential students to stay on their university list. With evolving communication models, marketers must understand the desires of potential students. Traditional marketing and communication methods like print media are declining, along with decreasing television and broadcasting audiences. On the other hand, internet and pay-to-view channels are gaining users and expanding advertising budgets. Bently-Steyn (2019:45) argues that traditional university marketing platforms are losing effectiveness in the connected world. While traditional methods are still important for attracting Gen X students, strategic use of social media can give universities a competitive edge.

Anane-Donkor and Dei (2021:151) add that the efforts to improve student recruitment arise from the fact that HEIs in the modern market strive to achieve higher student enrolment numbers and to gain a competitive advantage. To do so, HEIs need to analyse their marketing environment and assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Camilleri 2019:21). Omboi and Mutali (2020:172) argue that HEIs should employ holistic marketing strategies to engage potential students and establish positive institutional images for desired outcomes.

University marketing and communication departments face challenges similar to other businesses, but also encounter unique ones related to higher education. Competitive intelligence helps these departments grasp the factors that influence student decisions, such as university brand, culture, and academic reputation, which impact prospective students. HEI recruiters can assess key factors for applicants and tailor marketing messages accordingly. Recruiting and retaining students is a major concern for today's higher education institutions. Competition and student expectations have created a dilemma for HEIs. Recruiting international students is a potential solution for institutions to internationalise.

Hodge (2022) says that to succeed, HEIs must address student recruitment issues and make necessary changes to overcome them. These issues include university competition, declining enrolment, lack of student recruitment resources, political uncertainty, and financial support, where students compete for entry into their desired courses, and HEIs need to capture attention and increase enrolment rates. Recruiters should prioritise diversifying offers, implementing cost-effective strategies, and building brand

awareness. Balicco (2019:66) suggests that besides student recruitment, factors such as HEI reputation, market profile, course offerings, partnerships, staff expertise, innovation, and promotion efforts play a crucial role in influencing destination branding strategies. Additionally, inequality in education is a significant challenge for students in South Africa (as stated in Section 2.4 of this study). Apartheid in South Africa created educational inequality that is still present today, affecting access to quality education for different racial groups. Poverty contributes to inequality in education. Students from disadvantaged households lack access to quality schools available to wealthier families. Students with disabilities may face challenges being admitted to general education.

Ruland (2021:11) claims that the widespread COVID-19 pandemic has had a mammoth negative impact on HEIs due to the campus closures that interrupted the teaching and learning for students. The sudden changes in lesson delivery due to social distance measures led to academic activities being shifted from the traditional /venue based face-to-face learning system to an online learning system. However, during the transition to emergency remote teaching influenced by the COVID19 pandemic, competence and digital literacy of both academics and higher education students' concerns were raised including the technological infrastructure of many HEIs. Therefore, it has become essential to provide specific support to disadvantaged students and families as part of the online education process, by facilitating access to technological devices and the Internet (Karokose 2021:56).

The above discussions relate to the adoption of e-learning due to the global pandemic; however, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, but it was not efficiently utilised. In many countries across the globe, the current situation in HEIs comprises the sudden shift from the traditional classroom to the adoption of e-learning; and the question is whether this will continue post-pandemic, and how the change would impact the global education market. Some authors, such as Aboagye Yawson and Appiah (2020:3), believe that the unexpected and rapid move to online learning has some disadvantages, which affect the evolution of education. Lack of training by users and insufficient bandwidth will result in poor user experience that will hinder the sustained growth.

Competitive intelligence plays a role in e-learning and the adoption of online teaching and learning due to the pandemic. As most HEIs adopted the online classes in response to the pandemic, some are busy developing new systems to accommodate online-only students. To compete, survive and succeed during the COVID-19 outbreak, HEIs needed to have confidence in building their brand to ensure they satisfy students and enhance their brand performance in the competitive market for survival during the pandemic (Chaudhary, Chaudhary, and Ali 2020:631).

As a result, it indicates that the strategic use of communication can play an essential role in attracting international students. Furthermore, corporate identity management is seen as a key communication strategy for institutions looking to compete in the worldwide student recruitment market and attract international students. Zhu (2019:175) found that past research on marketing strategies in HEIs primarily focused on traditional methods, neglecting the potential of social media campaigns. Social media marketing is popular in HEIs for student attraction, branding, and engaging diverse users. However, studies focus on Facebook and Twitter. For this study, the researcher specifically looked at student recruitment at WSU and UFH.

2.12 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Silva (2021: 230) describes strategic marketing as method of strategy development, which encompasses identifying objectives, developing, and implementing marketing programmes such as marketing tactics and strategies. These strategies cannot be effective without a worthy data system. Moreover, faced by new challenges in the competitive environment, enhanced digital competencies, skills and practices have been adopted by many organisations in their plans to remain relevant and competitive in the marketplace (Ferreira *et al.* 2021:2). The latter authors elaborate that decision makers will need to be forceful in the strategies to remain competitive. The above discussions regarding organisational marketing strategy can be applied to higher education institutions as organisations that offer academic programmes that fit potential student individual needs. Masele and Rwehikiza (2021:40) purport that HEIs are forced to differentiate themselves from other competitor institutions in their mission to be the first to connect with potential students. Despite the differing viewpoints, contemporary views suggest the need for promotion of activities, thereby enabling them to be proactive in their marketing endeavours. Additionally, HEI's marketing strategy may be implemented by means of communication which includes market specifics and the relationships between the customer (student), responsible party and educational services consumers, bound by public relations as the common factor (Bolshakova, Shakurov and Slanov 2020:9).

In this study, CI is defined by de las Heras-Rosas and Herrera (2021:2) as a strategic action that supports organisations to adapt to and cope with the changes in the environment and industry disruptions. Therefore, allowing organisations to better understand and continuously learn from competitors' business strategies. Additionally, Salman, Li, and Latif (2020:2) add that globalisation and the 4IR have made organisations to be dependent on developing innovative products to market, which depends on creativity, innovative ideas, and skills. Regrettably, numerous organisations become unsuccessful in the product launch due to ineffective marketing strategy and poor skills.

Camilleri (2020:3) states that the HEI management are not market-oriented and may not be able to differentiate themselves from institutions by marketing their high-quality education programmes, but have other determinants that can influence students' perceptions such as the HEIs' campuses, infrastructure, and other surroundings. Creative marketing strategies and creative skills are vital for decision makers in the implementation of marketing strategy for organisations to survive in the dynamic market. Moreover, Dropulić, Krupka and Vlašić (2021:211) state that HEIs functioning in the increasing global competitive environment feel the pressure to improve their institutional ranking and aim to attract the best students. Furthermore, business marketisation concepts and competitive theoretical models can also be applied to HEIs.

Due to notable international pressures and the change in HE towards globalisation, nowadays, HE competition has become more interesting and innovative (Parasii-Verhunen *et al.* 2020:2498). Previously, in the past decades or so, HE was the key sector for economic growth and development as it progressed towards changes to influence competition. Savo and Tohiera (2021:166) purport that producing knowledge and socioeconomic capacity building are some of the foremost roles of higher education. The authors further argue that poverty eradication and good governance fall under foremost roles of higher education in the society. Moreover, the now extraordinary competition has brought about consequences to HE to place more emphasis on student satisfaction and to influence their preferred professional direction which links with their academic success (Nhi and Ha 2020:23).

D'Andrea and Luce (2021:603-604) claim that strategic marketing (SM) is about the organisational approach to the market and how it positions itself in competition for its survival, which requires innovation for survival, and organisational behaviour in a dynamic environment. Alao *et al.* (2020:109) agree that strategic marketing deals with a variety of issues of executing marketing philosophy, such as analysis of market-based information, planning and adopting a supreme marketing strategy to create a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Strategic marketing concepts such as marketing research, promotional strategy, and social media marketing assist organisations in implementing their marketing strategy that provides benefits to the business and develops their brand value (Kalogiannidis, Kotsas and Papaevangelou 2022:50).

Ryńca and Ziaieian (2021:1) add that in HEIs, marketing defines quality and a market-oriented education system, where formulating an institutional marketing strategy involves making decisions about whether (1) to maintain, build or discontinue current programmes and markets, (2) plan new programme and market prospects, (4) competitor analysis and market positioning of the competitors, and lastly (5) choosing the target markets and developing the marketing mix. Therefore, HIEs in a market economy

need to change their current marketing strategy due to the increase in competition between HEIs and introduction of commercial educational institutions (Beltyukova *et al.* 2020:3485).

Khusnuliawati and Putri (2021:1498) mention that market segmentation, rarely applied in HEIs, can assist in providing the essential, precise strategies and activities for the targeted market which will provide insights into segmentation, positioning and strategies targeting the definite features of each market segment. The competition between HEIs for the best students, staff and resources has been ongoing for a long time, but the increased marketisation of HEIs has exacerbated and highlighted the existing competition and rivalry between institutions (Wilkin 2020:139). Gülpınar Demirci (2021:515) refer to another factor in strategic marketing, namely organisational positioning that represents a significant strategic marketing concept in consumer markets with limited implementation prospects for industrial goods and services. Moreover, for HEIs it also represents the creation of images and quotations to establish a perceived different image in the target market and subsequently creating a unique HEI profile that will differentiate them from other HEIs and they will gain a competitive advantage. Danjuma (2016:36) explains that strategic marketing can also be interpreted in the HE markets where HEIs must adopt their own personalised strategies for prolonged and sustainable customer satisfaction. The author mentions three interlinked strategies that technological universities can adopt for their varied customers and stakeholders, namely:

I. Segmentation

Segmentation in HEIs is twofold as it impacts both the target audience (prospective students) and the society. These prospective students differ in many forms, such as sociocultural and economic background, opinions and perspectives, career aspirations, learning orientation and lifestyle (Biswas 2020:5). The identified market group must be large enough to sustain the institution in terms of student enrolment number and target market satisfaction. The strategy will enable the institution to understand the students' geographic area, demographic behaviours and trends assisted by a positive employee customer-oriented attitude to bolster a positive customer satisfaction perception. Additionally, HEIs can access students in their geographical areas by dividing students into their local and international areas. Therefore, HEIs can use market strategies designed for a specific region to attract students, such student demographics, e.g. age, race, nationality, and gender as factors in their segmentation groups.

II. Target marketing

HEIs can develop marketing strategies for that market group that is unique. This will enable institutions to adopt one of the three target marketing options of differentiated marketing, orchestrated marketing, and concentrated marketing.

III. Market positioning

HEIs must provide a unique product to persuade and influence consumer perceptions in terms of its brand and product relative to its competitors. This strategy aims to clarify how HEIs locate themselves in the HE markets, using their brand history, portfolio, research, and regional development. Institutional mission can provide a direction and a position which the institution can take (Fumasoli, Barbato and Turri 2020:307).

Therefore, competitive intelligence aids student recruitment by enhancing knowledge, promoting innovation, and informing strategic decision making. It is essential within the field of strategy. Competitive intelligence boosts a university's marketing.

2.13 USING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STUDENT PERCEPTION AND CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY AS A COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

Anastasiou and Koumi (2020:19) mention that personal and social dynamics influence the students' study perceptions and study choices which impact their decision-making processes and attitudes. They further allude that the environment where students live plays a key role that positively or negatively affects their decision-making process. However, due to the highly competitive higher education industry, HEIs encounter challenges in attracting potential students who have alternatives of other institutions.

Relationship marketing is crucial for HEIs focusing on attracting and maintaining contact with potential students and providing high-quality information for recruitment. Recruiting students is crucial in a competitive setting. Identifying factors and their impact on student choices helps marketers. Traditional promotions include mass media advertising, print promotions, and direct mail. Technology is also gaining importance. However, there is limited information about prospective students' information needs in choosing an institution (Kwang 2019:21). Therefore, both the HEIs and students need increased information – for the HEIs to be able to attract and for the potential students to be able to choose (Khan and Yildiz 2020:108). Chinnappa and Kurunakaran (2021:183) add that customer relationship marketing (CRM) in higher education focuses on automating and improving institutional processes like recruitment, marketing, communication management, and support to manage student relationships.

Smith (2021:7) claims that HEIs are becoming more business-like by introducing fees, marketing to students, building brands, and prioritising individual benefits over public good. Due to COVID-19, HEIs had to be strategic in their marketing and communication. Customer relationship management (CRM) encompasses the media used to communicate with students and the strategies behind messaging. It is a management philosophy that aims to improve business performance through a shift in focus towards

meeting customer needs. By implementing a Student Relationship Management strategy, HEIs could automate and personalise messages to potential students across various media. Communication is crucial for enrolment and must adapt to a changing education landscape. The future success of higher education depends on HEIs effectively communicating with and meeting the needs of their students.

Krezel and Krezel (2017:118) extend that there are social determinants that influence the student's choice of a higher education institution, such as 1) institutional communication; 2) student-related factors, and 3) the greater social environment. These are discussed below.

2.13.1 Institutional communication

Build rapport with potential students using newsletters, brochures, and web content. Messages through these mentioned influential platforms must be clear and unambiguous to avoid confusion and misrepresentation of information. Fissaha (2020:1) agrees that it is crucial for HEIs to project their communication image to the target market as they are dependent on its environment and students are influenced by the image that the specific HEIs project.

Marketing and communication messages shape student expectations and experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how HEIs present themselves on social media to prospective international students (Bamberger, Bronshtein and Yemini 2020:476). Universities use marketing and communication tools to present appealing and persuasive marketing messages. Through a combination of visuals and text, HEIs aim to capture the potential student's attention and stimulate interest and reactions. Mogaji and Yoon (2019:1565) argue that HEIs should use their marketing tools to create appealing messages for potential students.

Lavesque (2022:36) suggests universities use content marketing to generate interest in their brand by sharing online material. Higher education marketing should simplify and decipher online information for potential students. Potential students want creative, entertaining, and connected interactions with higher education institutions. Content marketing is an effective tool for showcasing these qualities and attracting engagement from potential students. HEIs that embrace new technologies in their recruitment processes can deliver information and features in a preferred format.

Higher education student recruitment messages matter as they are the first contact universities have with potential students. The impression made by a standard mass mailing versus a personalised message tailored to the student's needs can determine their perception of the university. Moreover, print media is essential for higher education marketing and recruitment, acting as the core pillar in communicating messages and campus experiences to attract students (Richardson 2019).

WSU and UFH have their own social media presence and regularly engage with their potential students; however, they still use traditional means of communication, such as in the newspaper and billboards around the city. They have also created links in their digital platforms, where students gain direct access to what is being offered, in which campus and the costs of the programmes. Therefore, competition is very intense.

2.13.2 Student related factors

Student demographics have an influence on their choice of institution, where their family income, location and background come to the fore. The basic notion is that both the potential student and their family as consumers will pick a course that fits higher education fees using an academic, financial, and social criterion (Somaratna 2020:10). Not only these are key factors, but also geographical background, financial aid, and affordability of these students. WSU and UFH are public universities and are bound by legislative laws that govern their bracket for fees and availability of financial aid to deserving students. Both institutions cater for the larger black demographics reaching to disadvantaged backgrounds and are accessible. The availability of other facilities such as student residences, campuses closer to where they stay, and accessibility by transport are other factors they consider.

2.13.3 The greater social environment

Parents and peers have a strong influence in the decision making and choice of a preferred institution by potential students. This occurs through consultations with parents regarding their choice of institution. However, this may depend on the ethnicity of educational background of parents. For a greater influence over the choice of a preferred institution, parents must direct them toward a particular programme or course, reputation of the institution and selectivity. Having educated parents gives students hope of getting more information about higher education and what to expect. Friends also have an influence in the choice.

Ming (2010) has alluded to the components of institutional nature that impact the student's decision making and has distinguished different autonomous factors for examples.

- **Fixed institutional characteristics:** Study programmes, location of the institution, reputation of the institution, its facilities, its tuition fees, and employment possibilities after completion of a qualification; and
- **Institutional marketing and communication:** Campus visit (career expo), brand representatives and its advertising campaigns.

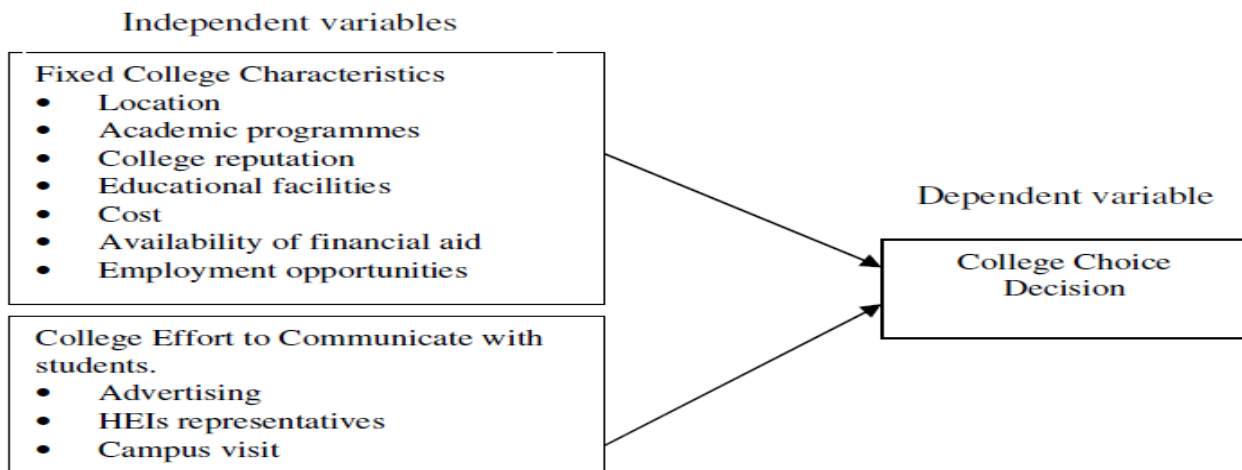


Figure 2: Student choice influencing factors

(Source: Ming 2010:55)

Among institutional elements, Ming (2010), Azonne and Socin (2020:3) explain that HEI’s reputation, location and the quality of academic programme are the foremost factors affecting students’ choice, collectively including the geographical proximity to bolster the interaction between both parties. Aydin (2013:206) concurs that location is one of the most important factors that influence a student’s decision making. He adds that HEIs located in proper metropolitan regions have a better chance of being chosen. However, that does not guarantee the decision but location is generally the best strategy to attract students. WSU and UFH are in one metropolitan region with enough infrastructure for both institutions – the number of students willing to enrol with either of them increases every year.

According to Kusumawati (2019:2), digital marketing has led to increased student enrolment in higher education. Universities must now stay relevant to tech-savvy students. To tackle this challenge, higher education marketing must transition from brochures to social media and the web to attract potential students. HEIs are becoming more selective in spending and recruitment. And, increased competition and prices necessitate students to be more selective in choosing schools. Therefore, universities must attract students through effective advertising, especially related to budgets. Besides traditional methods, universities should explore social media for recruitment.

2.14 STUDENT RECRUITMENT DURING AND POST COVID-19 IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

James (2022:20) mentions that student recruitment is vital for HEIs. International students' tuition and fees have contributed to HEIs' economic growth since the 1980s. This environment drives countries and HEIs to compete for international student fees. As a result, HEIs invest in advanced student

recruitment techniques to compete globally and adapted recruitment tactics to online methods, adjusting enrolment expectations, and managing their workforce during the pandemic. Paschal, Pacho, and Adedoyin (2022:18) argue that higher education should equip students with problem-solving skills and knowledge. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and measures such as curfews and quarantine hindered learning activities globally.

According to Nwedu (2019: 2), African colleges lack student recruiting and retention methods as they do not confront severe competition in the marketing environment. Public HEIs are now competing for students by opening satellite campuses and offering programmes, both venue based and online to meet the demand for higher education. Private HEIs are using their already existing infrastructure to outmanoeuvre other HEIs through a sustained competitive intelligence strategy. The core competition in HEIs is to attract self-funding students who will contribute to the growth and sustainability of the institution. In Chapter 3, the researcher explores how competitive intelligence impacts student recruitment in higher education through institutional transformation and inclusive strategies. The need to transform aims to address inequalities in education access, participation, and success, to increase South Africa's competitive participation globally.

Aruleba, Jere and Matarirano (2020:172) explain that since the first recording of COVID-19 cases in 2020 and subsequent closure of HEIs in South Africa, the HEIs had to source groundbreaking strategies in response to the global crisis. Due to the restrictions posed by the national government such as social distancing in crowded environments, the HEIs faced unanticipated changes in daily operations and academic delivery of academic programmes. The adoption of online teaching and learning strategy ensured completion of academic programmes, but institutional preparedness was another factor owing to poor internet connectivity, costs, infrastructure, and technological limitations (Cullen, Calitz and Sapepa 2020:139). The immediate transition from venue-based/traditional teaching and learning had some pedagogical implications, such as the apparent gap between academics and students. This needs a well-designed framework for the transition, costs associated and readiness by both academics and students (Motala and Menon 2020:86).

An innovative approach to curriculum delivery through the adoption of Learning Management System (LMS) was a new dimension and a critical tool globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, which proved to be convenient for students and worked effectively for teaching and learning. The inclusion of teaching and learning technologies helped to improve teaching and learning and boost competitive advantage over other HEIs (Gamede, Ajani and Afolabi 2022:76). Nanath, Sajjad and Kaitheri (2021) declare that the HE sector is becoming increasingly competitive, with HEIs offering a variety of academic

programmes and different modes of study (online, distance and traditional). These HEIs compete in alike markets aiming to attract potential students, who in turn have options to choose a particular institution. Competitive intelligence on the current trends and competitor strategies of online courses and e-learning platforms depend on institutional decision makers.

For HEIs to cope during the COVID19 crisis, they needed to focus on innovation in response to the changing global environment. Institutional decision makers needed to ensure the survival of HEIs through innovative ideas. Shava (2022:107) purports that the global COVID-19 outbreak forced HEIs to temporarily close, causing a shift away from the traditional face-to-face learning and toward blended learning. Blended learning is a planned combination of online and face-to-face instructional activities designed to stimulate and promote student learning. The obstacles that some institutions of higher learning faced in fully implementing online learning were caused by institutional policies and infrastructure discrepancies. The pandemic struck during the digital age, allowing for the transfer from face-to-face to online study. However, given the unprepared nature of rural universities, notably in South Africa, this change was not without its obstacles. Lee and Cheng (2022) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic altered international recruitment practices, mainly because of travel restrictions and school closures. Student recruitment in higher education is crucial for budgeting and assessing institutional sustainability. Bright and Schwanke (2021:4) assert that student recruitment is a top priority for institutions' enrolment strategies. A common marketing tactic employed by universities is inviting prospective students to visit the campus in order to highlight facilities and programmes. To help students decide on their higher education, campus visits play a vital role. However, during COVID-19, remote recruitment strategies became necessary.

These ideas must have a market potential and be able to overcome local competitive pressures and technological problems (Adelowatan 2021:142). However, Armoed (2021:2) concedes South Africa has over the years developed methods to assist the higher education sector during transition. These transition practices were from traditional face-to-face interaction to online and/or multimodal approach. All these modalities were directed at meeting sustainability goals and to maintain a competitive edge in the higher education market. Furthermore, certain academic staff at higher education institutions were said to have no expertise or training in online learning methodology. Mtshiwani (2022:233) states that throughout the 2020 South African academic year, some HEIs struggled to mobilise resources (such as laptops and mobile data) to meet the needs of a high number of students who relied on financial aid. Hedding, Greve *et al.* (2020:2) confirm that HEIs faced issues in not just assisting students in learning remotely, but also in providing staff employees with resources to conduct their duties remotely. These

obstacles made it difficult to continue teaching and learning remotely, causing disruptions to the academic calendar.

However, students were also unprepared to be taught online since some lacked access to technology and others battled with connection, digital skills, and data concerns, despite institutions' expectations that students use technology in their studies (Moyo et al. 2022:24). The authors further elaborate that there is evidence that South African university students are increasingly adopting mobile phones, and universities across the country have recently made some efforts to provide students with technological support such as computers, tablets, and data. However, whether these initiatives have achieved positive effects has yet to be determined.

Universities face a major hurdle in student recruitment and require marketing and communication solutions for improvement. Competitive intelligence can help address this issue. Student recruitment is a global concern for universities. It involves understanding students' decision-making criteria, and information sources provided. Universities need refined marketing and communication strategies aimed at recruitment strategies due to the complexities in decision-making processes of prospective students, especially first time entering. Multiple groups in student recruitment can create challenges, but systems thinking can develop a viable recruitment model aligned with organisation goals. By using marketing theories and concepts, universities can attract more students and gain a competitive edge. Modern technology like artificial intelligence can further improve student recruitment.

COVID-19 forced higher education online, prompting universities to adapt student recruitment by focusing on online activities instead of on-campus events, tours, high school visits, and community outreach. Marketing and communication strategies intensified to combat COVID-19's impact on recruitment. HEIs needed to adopt digital marketing instead of physical activities like email marketing due to COVID-19 to connect with prospective students (Hisel and Pinion 2020:36).

Elhajjar and Yacoub (2022:6) conclude the above discussion by stating that marketing and communication are both crucial for HEIs today to meet the needs of potential students. This involves using various marketing and communication tools like social media, brochures, and press ads to boost enrolment, promotion, and education-related goals. However, the COVID-19 pandemic provided educational institutions during and post COVID-19 with the chance to leverage digital marketing strategies like influencer marketing, email automation, campaign marketing, and social media to promote themselves online. Additionally, the authors further claim that a key focus for higher education marketing and communication is establishing a robust online presence and brand image to attract prospective students and social media is key for institutions to attract students and enhance their brand

image. Therefore, marketing and communication help universities to address student recruitment challenges by gathering and analysing external information for decision-making and strategic planning with the use of competitive intelligence strategies. Applying business marketing theories can help universities improve global competitiveness in student recruitment.

2.15 CONCLUSION

The chapter discussed higher education in global and African perspectives, higher education institutions challenges and mergers. HEIs are important in society and the role they play in ensuring student access to education. Universities compete in the global sphere due to internationalisation influenced by globalisation and maintaining an elevated level of competitiveness. Universities have been defined in the global perspective, African perspective, and South African perspective, and COVID-19 has affected every HEI in world from traditional teaching and learning to online teaching and learning. A tailored and captivating recruitment strategy is essential to win them over. Universities use competitive intelligence to solve student recruitment issues by gaining competitor insights, understanding student sentiment, and improving strategic planning. By employing competitive intelligence strategies, HEIs attract high-ability students, increase programme enrolment, and stand out from other institutions using marketing tools like viewbooks and brochures to attract students, and data-driven analytics are being used more to understand target audiences and improve recruitment.

Student choice is a complex process that starts when a student desires higher education and seeks information on potential providers. The student looks for various HE institutions that match their needs. Websites and staff play a major role in their decision-making. Social media, billboards, and TV are popular communication channels, while university websites and programme catalogues are used by HEIs to reach potential students (Kwang 2019:13).

The next chapter discusses and explores competitive intelligence as an intervention to assist with student recruitment. It further examines how competitive intelligence could be used as a strategy to aid HEIs in identifying threats, enhancing efficiency, and competing effectively for students by integrating marketing communications and using new forms of communication, such as social networks, to attract prospective students. Competitive intelligence is crucial for student recruitment marketing strategies. Universities must enhance marketing to attract domestic and international students. Applying marketing concepts can boost university competitiveness globally. Utilising modern technologies and computer science experts is vital for universities aiming to enhance interaction on their websites for student recruitment. Institutional research is crucial for marketing of universities to external stakeholders and for improving student recruitment. Competitive intelligence, marketing theories, technology, and

institutional research are key for effective recruitment strategies. Therefore, for educational institutions to be globally competitive and attract new students, they must utilise competitive intelligence in marketing and communication. This includes integrating marketing communications and utilising social networks to effectively target student recruitment.

CHAPTER 3: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND BACKGROUND OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented an overview of higher education. This chapter discusses how to improve student recruitment as a solution to poor student recruitment. It does so by presenting the literature relating to competitive intelligence and provides a theoretical framework for competitive intelligence and the utilisation of several strategies.

Regarding competitive intelligence in higher education, this chapter assesses rival institutions' strengths, weaknesses, and recruitment opportunities to gain an advantage in student recruitment. It also evaluates the efficiency of their recruitment strategies to identify the most effective methods to attract students. To succeed, institutions must grasp student recruitment strategies and develop effective marketing methods to attract new students. Chapter 2 emphasized the importance of marketing and communication in higher education recruitment. Effective strategies for educational institutions to increase student recruitment and attract new students include an efficient website, social media, direct mail, and email campaigns.

3.2 BACKGROUND OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

To survive and grow in today's competitive market, organisations must provide competitive services. Rapid market shifts, client preferences, technology improvements, and the emergence of new competitors are driving this. CI is defined by Moyane *et al.* (2020:594) as actions or methods used to comprehend and respond intelligently to competitors and the competitive landscape. This comprises managers collecting and analysing information in a methodical and ethical manner to assist corporate planning, decision-making, and operations. There is, however, no universal definition of CI. Govender and Nel (2021:58) mention that across the world, HEIs have now understood their roles in inspiring economic growth and socioeconomic development for sustainability. The latter notion demands that each HEI needs to stand out and grab the attention of prospective students.

Subsequently, these challenges brought about persuasive arguments for HEIs to become more adaptable regardless of the uncertainties of the economy. The HE sector has now become a competitive market where HEIs are service providers and the service seekers (customers), students, demand service. HEIs as service providers compete based on tangible and intangible factors such as course content, price, better facilities, and outcomes with each institution offering a slightly differentiated substitute (Brennan

2021:21). Due to this increase in the competitive elements of the higher education sector, it became paramount for HEIs to have more data than their competitors.

Knowing the business market sectors just as having the option to foresee and envision a specific event or action, can significantly impact the results of an organisation's activities and influence its strategy. In any case, just having more data is not sufficient nor effective. Calof and Sewdass (2020:32) explain that decisions taken by an organisation are endorsed by competitive intelligence where a disciplined system of gathering information can analyse and disseminate findings about the organisation's external environment. The well-organised system will be able to then drive competitive advantage for that organisation. Therefore, HEIs must not just depend on their CI strategy, and like institutional decision makers they must adopt data-driven decisions to inform institutional decisions if collected data is right and reliable.

Asikhia *et al.* (2021:144) state that for organisational success, it is important to have innovative and strategic decision making. The authors further elaborate that organisations need to keep pace with the competitive world to meet targets and to improve business processes. Sajwani *et al.* (2021:925) add that strategic decisions are important to determine the success or failure of organisations which will affect the organisation's performance and competitiveness. Mergers and acquisitions are the two most popular organizational strategic decisions used to develop, grow, expand, or rescue a business. Higher education mergers were encouraged by issues of quality enhancement, efficiency, and quality that link with academic standards. Additionally, other issues involved in these mergers were institutional management, leadership, and branding (Wollscheid and Røsdal 2021:258).

The National Plan on Higher Education (2001:1) has affected every HEI, as the institutional landscape of higher education is a result of the geopolitical and politically sanctioned racial segregation planners. Successively, these actions have resulted in a mass influx of a previously disadvantaged population into higher education (Nkohla *et al.* 2021:162). With the excessive number of new entrances in the higher education sector, known as potential students, HEIs engaged in competitive strategies to attract these new entrances.

Added information about sector competitors will determine whether HEIs need to act on the information or not. Additionally, competitor information such technology, students, facilities and employees and other relevant activities about other HEIs in the region will be helpful if it is escalated to decision makers in the institutions, who will act on it to achieve that competitive advantage. For HEIs to be able to compete in the HE sectors, they need to understand the changing environment and be adaptable for their competitive survival (Camilleri 2020:20).

This discussion explored using competitive intelligence for university student recruitment. Methods such as direct mail, the web, campus visits, telemarketing, and events are effective in attracting potential students. It is crucial for HEIs to understand their target market's interests, financial needs, preferences, and communication tools to provide relevant university information. HEIs can use CI as a communication strategy for student recruitment and marketing. It helps promote student recruitment and gather marketing intelligence for institutional growth. Marketing departments handle initial contact, student information, events, and marketing intelligence for institutional progress (Omboi and Mutali 2020:195).

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Competitive intelligence (CI) is a new technique that has acquired traction in the South African workplace, according to Wang (2019:666). Overall, there is no fixed framework of competencies and capacities for characterising the duties of CI professionals currently. Furthermore, according to Shapira (2021:95), CI is a business strategy that aids firms in strategic management and allows them to improve corporate performance through improved information and knowledge, as well as internal and external communications. According to De las Heras-Rosas and Herrera (2021:1), competitive intelligence is based on how an organisation anticipates and adapts to changes in its environment using obtained information, but it also aids in coping with those changes. Cavallo *et al.* (2021:251) assert that CI is not only about gathering information but also about converting that information into useful actionable intelligence that will provide competitive advantage.

Competitive intelligence permits organisations to gather information from their customers, information about their competitors, technologies, and their suppliers and thus building a strong innovation process of new strategies (Hassania and Mosconi, 2021:20). Additionally, Salguero *et al.* (2019:2) also state that CI is a process that comprises the analysis of the discovered environmental information of that organisation and translating that information into knowledge. Sassi *et al.* (2016:597) indicate that CI dates to the Chinese battle era of more than 5000 years ago. The military realm referred to as "Art of War" was first mentioned by Sun Tzu. The writers go on to say that the word has evolved from a military strategy to a business strategy. Furthermore, due to changing settings, rising levels of competition, and alternative goods, CI became a more popular approach in the 1980s, with organisations implementing it. Organisations who are aware of the competition, according to Kumar, Saboo, Agawarl and Kumar (2020:194), understand the market better and can make successful decisions based on their knowledge and comprehension of the competitive environment.

Cited in Cavallo *et al.* (2020:3), Iansiti and Euchner (2018) and Trabucchi, Talenti and Buganza (2019), the business market where organisations operate is becoming volatile and uncertain due the improvement of technology. Organisations are now forced to gather valuable data and information. The reason gathering CI is progressively pertinent for businesses. CI is a measure that creates significant data about the organisation and its environment to help them make strategic market-related choices (Ranjan and Foropon 2021:3). Bulger (2016:63) supports the latter authors by characterising that CI is the robust joining of insights from 'intelligence pools' that are recognised over the business market in collaboration with other business functions and teaching that are integrated to gain a holistic current market status. Indeed, threats necessitate HEIs to improve and place solid accentuation on proficiency and effectiveness of the provision of services to their target markets. This has been brought up by assessing the emerging threats in their environment. However, a strong emphasis must be put on the structure of competitive intelligence activities and how they deliver and improve the HEIs' strategic planning process, thereby assisting the HEIs by improving oversight of the environment and by actualising CI assessments techniques across the HEIs' departments (Wilkins 2020:143).

The subsequent result of coordinated intelligence endeavours is critical as it will impact on the business competitive advantage. CI is now applicable to the HE sectors, where HEIs have tremendous amounts of student information that has enormous potential to be used for a competitive advantage (CA). This information needs to be examined and dissected effectively. Their ability to extract valuable information would allow them to position themselves in the HE sectors and develop internal strategies (Panda *et al.* 2019:235). In any case, making this data effectively available and shareable internally within the respective HEI, will improve the core critical decisions on factors that unswervingly impact their performance, such as student recruitment and enrolment, academic performance, and grants.

HIEs are representations of a competitive sector in which organisations aim to stay relevant and assess the environment in which they operate by continuously monitoring the environment to maintain market share in the overall industry. The business environment can change quickly, and the competition may be able to detect change and more effectively prepare for it without warning. The goal of this study was to determine whether there is a link between the competitive intelligence topic and how HEIs, as organisations, can use this proactive strategy to improve their management information and decision-making, as well as from an HE perspective, where HEIs can act as competitive intelligence drivers among the youth who are their target potential students. Each business entity endeavours to remain relevant in its sector or environment. A strategy is typically a long-term plan which is geared towards the efforts of the organisation to stay competitive. Ngozichukwu and Onuoha (2020:169) purport that with competitive intelligence, the organisation's product offerings and marketing add profitability to the

organisation. Ozbekler and Ozturkoglu (2020:1507) add that competitive strategy will then guarantee an increased profit and sustainability to the competition. Moreover, organisations must be able to identify competitors and craft strategies to gain an advantage over the competition. Such strategies will provide an upper hand over their competitors and ensure their market sustainability.

According to Islami, Mustafa, and Latkovikj (2020:15), an organisation's system consists of the procedures and actions they use to attract potential customers and meet their expectations, as well as to withstand competitive challenges by reinforcing its market position. These strategies give the company the ability to respond to the environment in which it operates. Additionally, they must develop tactics and techniques to position themselves and capture that strategic advantage to sustain a competitive edge in the market (Porter, 1998). According to NPHE (2001:12), the development of South African HEIs has transformed the entire HE landscapes since the commencement of democratic governance in 1994. This has been amplified by the student enrolment increase in both public and private HEIs as part of transformation by means of equitable access irrespective of demographic and socioeconomic status (Tewari and Ilesanmi 2020:2).

One of the advantages of competitive intelligence is that it assists organisations to adapt to the changing environment and to endure tricky situations (Kim, Seok, Choi, Jung, and Yu 2020:2). During the most recent decade, organisations have been changing their innovations from a closed in-house plan to a more collaborative strategy that includes clients, suppliers, research establishments, and competitors (Bao 2020:1). Cited in Calof and Swedass (2020:33), Nasri (2012:25), extends that the CI environment is one that has been rapidly changing where new competitors are entering the market, and current competitors are offering new products to the market. Moreover, they add that for an organisation to survive in the competitive environment, they should proactively identify opportunities, risks, challenges, and limitations presented by the external environment where they operate.

Khouroha *et al.* (2020:712) agree by elaborating that environmental instability supports organisations to develop their strategies to manoeuvre and overcome risks and identify opportunities in the market. This strategy by organisations will assist in converting environmental turbulences into benefits through innovative abilities of adapting. Hakmaoui *et al.* (2022:4) also add that the rapidly changing business environment landscape has forced organisations, either small or large, to be proactive. This requires close monitoring of such changes with the anticipation of change that may affect the organisation both within and outside the organisation. They elaborate that CI plays a vital role to overcoming such changes in the environment.

As much as CI is used for different purposes and needs a definite time frame to use the data, CI is also utilised for improving business operations. Nevertheless, decision making succeeding data analysis will provide direction from which CI was meant to accomplish (Nguza-Mduba and Mutambara 2021:2). Nte and Omede (2021:113) explain that CI entails analysis of data, information gathering and dissemination to facilitate organisational strategic decision making to enhance an organisation's competitive advantage. Du Toit (2015:15) defines CI as "a practice that produces and disseminates significant intelligence by planning, legally and morally obtained processing of information by analysing data from received from the environment for managers to make strategic decisions for a competitive advantage of the environment."

The current trend in universities is characterised by aggressive competition especially with establishment of satellite centres across the country and use of different strategies to attract potential students. Faced by forces from numerous angles, such as changes in student engagement, globalisation of education systems, student-centred technology adoption trends, HEIs are continuously trying to meet the demands of the new generation of students (Santos *et al.* 2020:1). Equally, Fumasoli, Barbato and Turri (2020:326) add that the survival of universities in the competitive environment will entirely depend on how well they strategically position themselves in the market through strategic planning, strategies adopted and management for sustainability in the current turbulence of globalisation and competition. Consequently, innovation is taking the front seat as HEIs are now actively considering how to better approach the ever-changing student demands to stay future-ready during digital transformation and growing competition. For HEIs to possess a competitive edge, it is important that they build a solid bond with their students by providing quality education (Twum and Peprah 2020:170).

Fomunyam (2021:699) explains that not only does the competitive edge apply in the above-mentioned fronts in higher education (globalisations and sustainability), but also in student recruitment by strategically positioning their brand and determining what practical actions are required to harness the competitive edge. Sloan (2021) states that HEIs that aim to have a competitive advantage in the higher education market should reassess if the information and technology at their disposal will support their student recruitment abilities and thus provide a competitive edge over other institutions. Nicol (2021) agrees that HEIs need to track their graduates for graduate competitive positioning and increase their possibility employment through employer engagements. HEIs' use of technology, web marketing of their online classes, use of e-learning and distance learning strategies may uncover the advantage of how these various systems can counter competition. In 2019, COVID-19 forced the world into lockdown, and HEIs were no longer offering contact teaching and learning and had to quickly adopt virtual learning for all academic activities (Demir *et al.* 2021:1437).

Major (2020:266) alleges that prior to the pandemic, HEIs were experiencing a decline in student enrolment in campus-based programmes. However, due to the introduction of these technological tools, access to HE learning became simpler and more effective during the pandemic and therefore, increasing their online enrolment. Furthermore, organisations can benefit through their CI strategy due its favourable influence on the environment, how it impacts and protects itself from the competition. Likewise, organisations need effective leadership to steer the organisation, and be on the lookout for environmental opportunities and threats to effectively take advantage of the competitor shortcomings (Asri and Mohsin 2020:102). As indicated by the above several authors, competitive intelligence, as explained by Al-Waely *et al.* (2021:53), increases organisational decision-making processes that in turn enable an organisation to achieve or surpass its objectives and to maintain its competitive advantage.

CI has expanded over the past decades due to the need for technological enhancements, reduction of costs, and the alignment of the environment and business strategy (Salguero *et al.* 2019:1). They elaborate that CI encourages organisations to pre-empt and detect any new valuable opportunities in the market, which could improve their performance. Therefore, business managers can make informed and decisive decisions about their organisations. Miotto *et al.* (2020:341) contend that HEIs compete to attract and enrol the diligent students and to recruit productive academics, and to have better facilities and community engagements with sought-after organisations. All these are aimed at imparting and sharing knowledge. Sustainable competitive advantage is also important in the HE sector, where sustainability relies upon several factors. Higher education plays a key role in the growth of developing countries due to the demand for education. Additionally, the higher education sector faces a range of challenges that force them to adapt and quickly respond to those challenges (Ngoc *et al.* 2021:81).

Organisational practices, in relation to competitive intelligence (CI) and competitive advantage (CA) have been explained broadly. These practices and strategies afford HEIs to sustain themselves in this contested HE sector. Furthermore, the benefits of being able to identify competitor shortcomings and seizing opportunities, will lead any HEI in this study to a sustainable future in the sector. Cited in Porter (1992), Mohamed Hashim, Tlemsani and Matthews (2021:8) reason that competitiveness, in the context of higher education, would be when two universities encounter competition, by measuring the educational standard of students. Therefore, this requires collaborative work within these institutions to produce advantages of the market to promote student recruitment via marketing and communication information provided by their CI strategies.

3.4 TYPES OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

For any organisation to be able to identify a strategic way forward in its operations is through strategic thinking of decision makers. Competitive intelligence is a strategic discipline that assists organisations to adapt to changes in their surrounding environment (De las Heras-Rosas and Herrera 2021:1). O'Connell, AbuGhazaleh and Whelan (2021:2) add that it is a process by which organisations transform industry, competitor, and market data into actionable strategic knowledge. This strategy allows organisations to understand their competitor position, performance, and capabilities in the market. Furthermore, CI is defined by Ranjan and Foropon (2021:3) as a process of collecting strategic information, analysing, interpreting and disseminating of such information for decision making in order to gain an edge in the marketplace.

The advantage of acquiring such information about the external operating environment improves decision making and being able predict market development. Hassani and Mosconi (2022:1) also agree that competitive intelligence is a process or product that includes collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of information and affords strategic information that can be used in decision-making processes of an organisation. Likewise, since competitive intelligence is defined as a process by above authors, Casarotto, Malafaia, Martínez and Binotto (2020:8) state that CI assists to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of competitors so as to make it easy to formulate an effective CI strategy. Therefore, CI is an ongoing process of assessing and monitoring the organisation's market to identify (1) its competitors in the market, (2) the competitor activities, (3) how the competitor activities and actions will affect the organisation, and (4) how will it respond to such activities, which may pose as a threat to its sustainability. In addition, the process of collecting information (inputs) from the environment and the transfer of information from the environment must be ethically acceptable and within the rules.

There are three types of competitive intelligence as cited by De Anjo (2014:6) in Deschamps and Ranganath Nayak (1995), namely market intelligence, competitor's intelligence, and technological intelligence.

3.4.1 Market intelligence

Carson, O'Connor, and Simmons (2020:797) mention that market intelligence enables organisations to establish continued long-term relationships with its customers and acts as key factor for achieving competitive advantage in markets they operate in. Additionally, organisations would be able to build new value propositions, identify market attractiveness and drive innovation. The turbulent global

markets determine the risks and opportunities of organisations, where CI plays a key role in the growth of the market and focusing on the survival of organisations (Sewdass and Calof 2020:31). They further elaborate that the global rapid transformations present numerous challenges for CI such as the utilisation of multiple sources of information to establish the direction the organisation wishes to take and thereby understanding the market and customer needs and competition. Therefore, the advantages of using market intelligence are to obtain a competitive advantage, consumer and market understanding and product intelligence. Falahat et al. (2020:2) explain that market intelligence is the organisation's capacity to foresee market changes and then know how to respond to the said marketing actions. Shailza, Yadav, and Meena (2020:132) add that market intelligence includes price, product, place, and period as its four major components. Market intelligence also comprises these elements that can be used to attain competitive advantage of the market, namely customers, understanding competitors and stakeholders.

Mulyono *et al.* (2020:931) claim that HEIs that plan to have a competitive advantage need to work on being innovative in their creative ways of attracting new students and retaining the current cohort. In the higher education market, other HEIs are competitors who target potential students and customers who are local and international students and subsequently use market intelligence to support their strategic decisions. Lim, Jee and De Run (2020: 226) add that the higher education institution's existing market has its own needs and new entrants to the global higher education market would make the market competition tough. Proper decision-making can be achieved through accurate and confident determining of strategies to be used in different areas of the organisation, such as market development, long and short-term strategies and market opportunity. Singh, Eyad and Mohammed (2021:11) elaborate and explain that market intelligence involves acquiring suitable market information through updated market- and competitive intelligence methods and tools. It is, therefore, imperative that HEIs adopt an innovative approach based on their assessments of the market to formulate strategic market intelligence to keep pace with market growth trends. Moreover, HEIs must have a comprehensive understanding of their regulatory environment, focus on market and consumer behaviour for a successful market entry when exercising their market intelligence activities. Competitive pressures have intensified for higher education in the 21st century and includes the competition for students and key employees (Scott 2021:16).

Thus, being in a position of competitor awareness, decision makers will have information about their competitors' latest product, product launches, and a lifespan marketing strategy will provide a competitive advantage and to grow their market share. Sahin and Bisson (2021:900) conclude that marketing intelligence is about keeping abreast of the market and being ahead of the competition by

gathering information. The information can, thereafter, be transformed to actionable intelligence both short- and long-term strategic planning.

3.4.2 Competitor intelligence

Cited in Bulger (2016:72), Köseoglu *et al.* (2021:531) purport that competitor intelligence permits organisations to develop strategies and/or new systems which will improve and maintain a competitive advantage to lead in the market. It also reveals threats and opportunities and needs to be controlled for quality and reliability. New students entering the higher education market evaluate each prospective institution before enrolling at any institution. Obonyo and Kilika (2020:1695) explain that competitor intelligence transpires when assessing the competitor behaviour and competition at large where organisations gather and disseminate information about competitor strategies, new products and services, competitor structures and new industry entrants. This necessitate HEIs to stand out by using their resources to gather information about other institutions that are in the market so as to inform their own positioning in the higher education sector. Additionally, HEIs can analyse their competitors by checking their website, review websites, blogs, social media, and customer engagements. These actions might provide HEIs with a clear understanding of their position in the market and how to attract new students; as well as to understand how the competitor is doing something and why the competitor is doing something different. This forces HEIs to determine their competitive threats and to uncover their market opportunities. Al-Surhmi, Cao and Duan (2020:41) state that organisations pursue the use of competitor intelligence to analyse competitors in their external environment as a road map to guide their product development, and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses to stay ahead of competitors in the market.

3.4.3 Technological intelligence

Technological intelligence is characterised by the collection, investigation, analysis, and application of freely accessible data on external activities in technology that could affect an organisation's business. It is important to keep up with the industry requirements with regards to technological trends and to gain competitive advantage by gathering and disseminating knowledge on current and future technologies. Obonyo and Kilika (2020:1695) mention that technological intelligence is a significant management instrument that is aimed at improving the nature of both strategic and operational decisions with the key focus on external conditions and actions. Nte *et al.* (2020:77) support the argument by stating that it is imperative for organisations to have a thorough understanding and knowledge of the competitive forces. The advantage of this behaviour is to survive and remain competitive in such a changing environment. Without technological intelligence, an organisation cannot visualise its present technology

position or its future technological success. The benefits incorporate decreased danger and increased opportunities. Technological intelligence consists of various forms of information regarding processes, methods and technologies used by competitors in the same market environment, which organisations can utilise as a strategic gain to develop and improve their own operations and services for a competitive advantage (Iwu-James, Haliso and Ifijeh 2020:156). Tracking the up-to-date technological developments in the competitive market could be cumbersome for most organisations but it is vital.

3.4.4 Strategic and social intelligence

Wijianto et al. (2021:3369) add the fourth type of intelligence used by organisations. This type of intelligence includes individual knowledge of financial, legal, economic, political, and social resources as well as availability of human resources.

CI in universities helps marketing and communication units tailor student recruitment efforts to meet the needs of current and potential students and graduates. It is a valuable strategic management tool that goes beyond operations to also support student recruitment. Competitive intelligence is crucial for gaining an advantage in the university environment. It involves gathering information, intelligence, and knowledge to formulate strategies and make management decisions. By engaging in competitive intelligence work, HEIs gain a competitive advantage in enrolling students and strategically managing the university (Rahmi, Ishak and Oli'l 2020:73).

3.5 DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Zuzak (2011:45) cited in Hlavaty and Lizbetin (2021:1275) and Cavallo et al. (2020:6) states that CI was developed from a Chinese novel, called Art of War by Sun Tzu. Robles et al. (2020:604) also confirm that the Art of War Book provides a point of view on military strategy to defeat the enemy and when to use information about the enemy that represents a key advantage for success in the military campaign.

- Competitive intelligence gathering is the first stage which consists of developing skills in information acquisition (Tsagkidis and Blomkvist 2020:6). Barnea (2020:707) concurs that there is no shortage of information as these competences have evolved given that intelligence is proactive action that seeks to obtain information. The gathered information alerts the organisation to changes in the external environment.
- Industry and competitor analysis consists of building a business case for CI, spy image and analytical skill development. CI dates back to 1970 in the United States of America and has been globally accepted (Asri and Mohsin 2020:106).

- Competitive intelligence for strategic decision making started in 1980 which consists of demonstrating bottom-line input, role of information technology, CI technology, international CI, demands vs. supply driven CI and counterintelligence – that started between 1987 to 2000 (Wideman 2020:38). Wijianto et al. (2021:3369) purport that the term CI was coined before 1980 in the United States of America. The term explained data gathering activities by organisations as part of their intelligence for decision-making.
- Competitive intelligence as a core capability which consists of managing the parallel process, intelligence infrastructures for multinationals. CI is a learning and network analysis. Cavallo et al. (2020:7) claim that the development of a digital era is increasingly feeding most decision-making processes in the world. They further elaborate that with competitive data gathering (1960-70s) – followed by the focus on data acquisition in the 1980s – CI has developed to emphasize its strategic relevance. Currently CI is envisioned as a core competence related to the learning process of the organisation and to its capacity to transform data into intelligence.

3.6 COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE THEORIES

In the recent volatile and unstable global competitive environment, CI has gained momentum as the effective discipline to assist organisations to adapt their environmental changes in the environment they operate in (Coates 2021). Albeit Brancati, Brancati, Guarascio and Zanfei (2021:3) provide appropriate understanding about the drivers of CI activities and processes, organisation, and use of CI in businesses, but there has been no evidence of any relationship between CI and organisational performance. According to Porter's (1980) competitive concept, the competitive analysis was aimed at tracking the conduct of the competitor and connecting competitor analysis to an effective competitive strategy. Atkinson et al. (2020:13) state that strategic management, as stated in page 3, links the collection of activities that allow an organisation to adjust to its environmental changes.

Tahmasebifard (2018:2), cited in Morgan and Michael (2007), indicates that CI includes three major functions, namely collection and organisation of data, the analysis and interpretation of data and dissemination of intelligence. Gauzelin and Bentz (2017) and Du Plessis and Gulwa (2016:2) concur and add to defining the process of CI. They claim that the first step is gathering of information, analysis of information and disseminating information which will be paramount in decision-making leading to strategic planning in an organisation. Arrigo (2016) proposes that to lead the market and have fundamental CI process outputs, there must be the capacity to make good decisions. Organisations who have continuous dissemination and flow of information will be more competitive through their adaptation and adjusting their strategies as opposed to those that do not. Madureira, Popovic and Catelli

(2021:1) affirm that CI's goal is to guarantee organisational survival in the market by improving its performance progress through efficient decision making.

As the competition in higher education intensifies, HEIs are providing related products and services to the target market, their potential students, who are the only factor of HEIs' performance, their success and competitiveness in the higher education sector. The establishment of WSU and UFH satellite campuses in East London might influence how these two institutions maintain their market position in the region. WSU has a rich history in the region, and, previously known as Border Technikon, merged to form WSU in 2005. UFH established its satellite campus in East London in 2007, which was a satellite campus from Alice as the fundamental campus. In the Border Kei region, which includes the former Transkei (from Butterworth to Mthatha) and Ciskei (East London and surrounding areas), there are two universities namely WSU and UFH which have satellite campuses in the region.

These HEIs in East London can, therefore, react to the expansion of the industry in many ways in the expectation of discouraging the competitor institution as opposed to confronting the competitor institution. In their pursuit of a niche area and market segment in the sector, these HEIs may relinquish their competitive market share in the region and target outlying markets which are not focus areas of the competitor. The above CI discussions highlight the need for CI in marketing and communication of student recruitment strategies. This is aimed at addressing communication issues and improving recruitment effectiveness. According to Majerčáková and Madudová (2016:3), university recruitment shows the potential of marketing as a tool for student recruitment and communication, bridging the gap between desired information and traditional forms of university communication. University marketing can boost enrolment and assist students in making well-informed decisions about their studies and university selection by using competitive intelligence. Therefore, it is important that for strategies to stay ahead of other HEIs, they are examined through theories outlined in this section.

3.7 COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE MODELS AND THEORIES

There are several competitive intelligence models used in research, which mostly have similarities in function, but differ in the implementation depending on when the information is required. As stated in Section 2.9 above, CI influences decision making. Information received from CI is selected, sifted, and distributed to influence the path which an organisation must take. Moreover, Rothberg and Erickson (2017:96) mention that one critical element in CI is the input sources which are derived from internal and external publicly available information, data, and human intelligence. Moyane *et al.* (2021:594) assert that using CI as a strategy will allow the organisation to understand and deal with the competition intelligently and with the competitive environment. They further emphasize that CI involves the

systematic collection of information by ethical means and analysis of information by decision makers to determine organisational plans, decisions, and operations. Kordestani and Heydari (2021:1193) define competitive intelligence as an ethical system of gathering and analysing data, by managing the combined information concerning the environment in which an organisation operates. The information and knowledge acquired through process provide a substantial competitive advantage to enable decision makers to make sound decisions based on the information. The definitions of CI now come into light as the interpretation will be visually presented. In organisations, CI serves as a warning system that provides insight into any shift or movement of the competitor, which will influence decision making. Rothberg and Erickson (2017:99) elaborate that there are similarities between CI and other intelligence structures, such as process orientation which focuses on interrelated components or systems, such as (a) inputs as information/data, knowledge, and insights; (b) the analysis of the information is the throughput, and lastly (c) intelligence which comes in a form of answers and insights.

Koseoglu, Yick and Okumus (2021:1) explain that the importance of an organisation possessing competitive qualities is to acquire a competitive advantage in enhancing customer experiences, through which better organisational performance is accomplished. Moreover, to expand on the above process orientation, input sources of information are assembled from dissimilar sources, frequently for a particular reason to respond to a particular inquiry or question. Information sources are both internal and external to the organisation. Kula and Naktiyok (2021:55) reveal that in the organisational competitor information process, there are three basic steps, namely (1) obtaining information about the competitor, (2) interpreting, and (3) adapting. An assortment of scientific model analysis is applied to deliver insight and knowledge. Results are communicated through effective structures and forms. Actionable insight experiences are now directly influencing organisational decision making.

3.7.1 Competitive intelligence systems

Figure 3 below provides a visual understanding of the CI system.

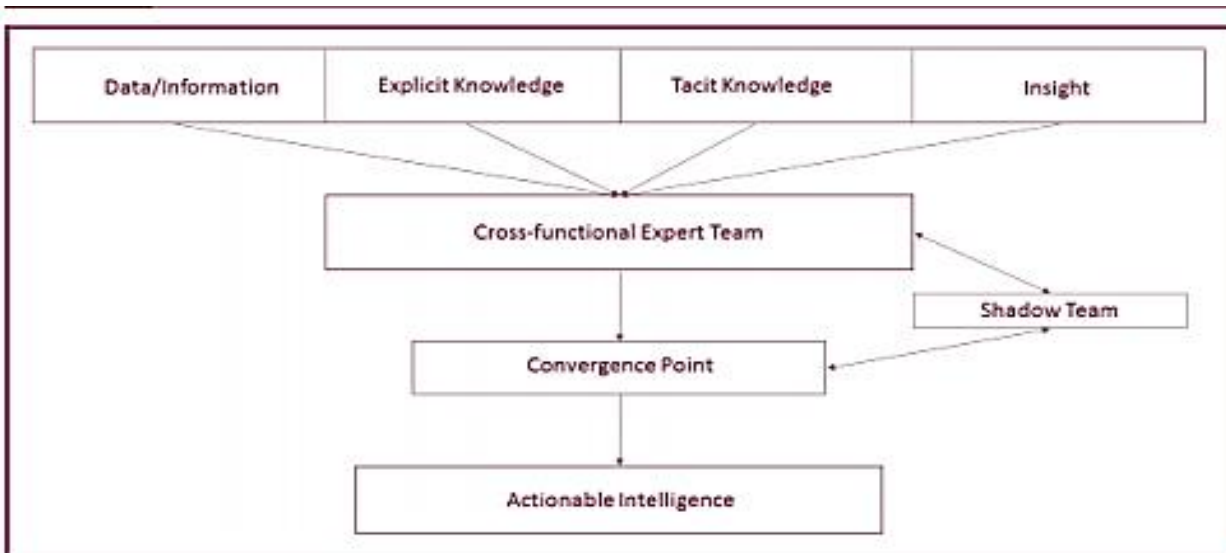


Figure 3: Rothberg and Erickson's depiction of Competitive Intelligence Systems

(Source: Rothberg and Erickson 2017:99)

Inputs from the internal and external environments are gathered and collected by the intelligence team, which may be in the form of a marketing department to a convergence point, resulting in actionable intelligence. Examples of these factors include, but are not limited to, the internal environment which comprises the strengths and weaknesses that are internal to the business, such as strategies and the organisation's position in relation to its competitors. External environments include the opportunities and threats caused by the competition. Either these factors bring a positive or negative effect to the business (strengths), or there are factors that prevent the development of the organisation (weakness). Marczewska, Jaskanis and Kostrzewski (2020:3) claim that organisations need to incorporate internal and external factors in their strategy to counteract the dynamically changing environment. These are also abilities to identify and shape opportunities and threats, taking advantage of opportunities, and maintaining a competitive position in the market.

The shadow team interacts and cross-functions with both formal and informal teams and the intelligence team. The shadow team's sole purpose is to brainstorm and then report to senior management about any of the competitors' new developments, and about technologies that may affect the organisation.

Through a formal/informal expert team, the intelligence team now has direct contact with senior management and will ensure that the intelligence is followed through with actions.

Kula and Naktiyok (2021:550) state that for organisations to establish a strategy, there needs to be competition. A strategy is typically long term, which is the guiding map towards competition, geared towards the endeavours of the organisation to stay competitive, in accordance with Porter's generic techniques which include cost leadership, differentiation, developing one of a kind good and services for various customers. The strategy is to be able to develop creative ideas and innovative solutions to gain competitive advantage (Kula and Naktiyok 2021:55).

Michael Porter was an economic researcher by profession who examined competitive behaviours that entailed successful organisations. In the 1980s, he set out to reveal the ways in which organisations maintained sustainable long-term advantages over their competitors. Through this examination, Porter's Generic Strategies (Porter 1980) cited in Ali and Anwar (2021:43) was created, which provided the three interconnected concepts that most organisations use to create key operating procedures and outsmart competitors. A competitive strategy guarantees profitability and sustainability over competition. Therefore, organisations need to be proactive in identifying the competition and developing strategies to counter plans by the competition (Ekeagbara *et al.* 2019:3). This process strategy allows some decision makers to be familiar with the industry they operate in, competitor behaviours and capabilities, and what is important to maintain that competitive advantage.

Lutz and Bodendorf (2020:581) explain that CI provides decision makers with a balanced picture of the industry environment regarding the behaviour of external stakeholders (competition) of the organisation in order to reach strategic decisions. Subsequently, an understanding of what needs to be done for a competitive advantage is gained. The sources of competitive advantage are building an information system that supports the management and decision-making, but the challenge is to acquire quality and valuable information. Organisations would, therefore, need to establish an integrated and intelligent system for collecting data and analysing data about their competition in the market. Amponsah-Tawiah and Mensah (2015:395) indicate that some of the critical elements of competitive advantage are gaining momentum in the business sector such as attracting and retaining highly skilled personnel. According to Ganapavarapu and Prathigadapa (2015:1), competitive advantage represents an organisation's capacity to accomplish dominance over its competitors or rivals, and in the future delivering above-average business sustainability and performance. Therefore, it may be asserted that competitive advantage is important to the organisation, and it can be sourced from diverse organisational capabilities.

Gračanin Kalac and Jovanović (2015:30) purport that there is not much known about the development and evolution of CI activities and programmes in an organisation. The perception is that users of CI and

managers do not utilise information and knowledge offered by the CI systems whereas they should create a sustainable competitive advantage.

3.7.2 Competitive intelligence cycle

Iwu-James defines CI, Haliso, and Goodluck (2020:156) refer to the CI cycle as a legal and ethical technique of gathering information on a company's competitors' activities. According to Pellissier and Nenzhelele (2013), the process generates and disseminates useful information that can help decision makers make better decisions. The intelligence cycle's goal is to turn raw data into intelligence that can be used by the organisation's decision makers (Mihăescu and Bulgariu 2020:207). Simes (2019:16) further claims that CI's goal is to give actionable information obtained through legal means on the organisation's external environment and have a favourable impact on strategic management. The competitive intelligence (CI) cycle is described as an eight-step continuous process that encompasses planning and direction, information gathering, information filtering, information analysis, intelligence dissemination, decision making, processes and structures, organisational and cultural awareness, and feedback (Wijianto *et al.* 2021:3369). The benefits of the CI process, according to Hanif and Arshed (2020:2), include gathering and obtaining valuable information, sifting, and avoiding redundant information, managing, and reducing risk, strategically employing information, and transforming information into unique and reliable knowledge for staying ahead in the market. Furthermore, according to Dei (2021:2), knowledge is acknowledged as an important asset and commodity in organisations for gaining a competitive advantage.

However, Zpravodajství, Rozhodování and Chladný (2016:202), cited in Govoreanu, Mora and Serban (2004), seem to provide a less complicated process by mentioning that CI characterises a systematic and organised cycle of the below mentioned activities:

- Competitive intelligence planning
- Data gathering
- Data analysis
- Dissemination of the results



Figure 4: Competitive Intelligence Cycle

(Source: Govoreanu, Mora and Serban 2004:104)

- *Competitive intelligence planning:* CI planning characterises the point of CI and indicates what area will be observed and monitored, what sort of information will be gathered and what techniques will be utilised to play out the task. Adetayo, Asuri and Omalabi (2021:7) also explain that this is a determining stage of what intelligence is required, which direction to follow, and the type of information for decision-making. Therefore, it must be clear what the reason is for the entire CI activity influenced by the monitoring activities used. CI planning focuses on factors that are deemed critical to senior managers and that are expedited by the understanding and reliance of internal and external information (Freyn and Farley 2020:619). CI planning ensures that HIEs stay on track to meet their desired goals and support their strategic objectives. CI planning can help universities, as according to Goldman and Salem (2015), they sustain their position and maintain stability in an ever-changing environment and respond strategically to increasing competition or external threats. Therefore, van der Berg, Coetzee, and Mearns (2020:4) affirm that the planning phase outlines the decision makers' intelligence requirements.
- *Data gathering:* The chosen strategy for CI determines which information will be gathered. Cavallo *et al.* (2020:254) mention that as much as CI is focused on data acquisition, it has also evolved to the point where its strategic relevance is emphasised through learning process capabilities. Furthermore, the authors elaborate to state that one of CI's capabilities is to transform data into intelligence. Information about the competitors in the market is extracted from several sources such as traditional and new media, customer surveys, media reports, industry trends, patent data,

customer surveys, interviews with third parties, annual reports of competitors, all media reports, and industry trend reports (Ranjan and Foropon 2021:3). Asghari *et al.* (2020:554) allege that nowadays information about competitors can improve innovation management which is a benefit for organisations. Madureira, Popovic and Catelli (2021:13) provide the information that is utilised for competitive intelligence activities:

- Information concerning the external environment (gross domestic product, inflation rate swelling rate, total national output, foreign exchange and unemployment rate and tax systems;
- Information concerning the competitors in the sector – name and location of the competitor in the environment, its goods and services, its profit and assets, and the number of the employees; and
- Information concerning the organisation's internal environment (resources available), financial statistics (financial indicators), management quality and market position.

Silva (2021:230) mentions that competitive intelligence allows organisations to analyse opportunities and threats or the external environment. Yılmaz and Özgener (2021:3) support that by stating that monitoring activities such as the industry, technological and innovative developments, ecological developments, customers, market, suppliers, and competitors of CI are part of the intelligence processes. Additionally, social, and political movements, and socio-cultural structure are also included in these processes. Rahmi, Ishak and Oli (2020:73) state that in higher education, competitive intelligence is in demand, where it is used as a strategic management strategy. It is paramount to extract and retrieve reliable information from the external competitive market environment of the HEI. They further proclaim that competitors must be monitored and analysed as the core function of information on competitors of the HEI's competition intelligence. HEIs have now recognised their valued intelligence and have assumed a changing role in the education sector and the society to act as business organisations, using their resources to deliver quality services to stakeholders and maintaining a competitive advantage (Kanwal, Nunes, and Arif 2019:601).

Samiee (2020:427) extends that the world wide web (WWW), also known as the internet, can be useful for competitive advantage as far as CI is concerned. Internet is one of the biggest sources of information data in the world. The content provided by search engines via the internet is free, but it must be assessed and analysed before it is used for further exploitation. Jean and Kim (2020:3) argue that IT-related resources and capabilities make it possible to generate a competitive advantage.

- *Data analysis:* The accumulated information must be cleaned and sifted as per its importance and subsequently stored in proper information storage. Saddhono *et al.* (2019:156) state that the

information is stored into distinct categories of information (valuable or non-valuable information) to determine what information is used and/or discarded. These authors further elaborate that analysed information is thereafter handed over to decision makers for action. A database method offers an enriched solution on how to store the assembled information adequately. Supardi and Herawan (2019:18) explain that even though the collected data needs to be analysed to make decisions, it needs to be sifted and processed to extract valuable and quality information, as well as reliable and useful information. Through this process of analysis, HEIs would receive valuable information, such as benchmarking and could use it to position themselves in the market. Data software applications tools can be used to provide a detailed report and present data to be analysed in a variety of formats to help HEIs to identify trends, market opportunities and support decision-making as their number one priority. Therefore, HEIs could turn the data into insights and actions. Cited in Adidam, Banerjee and Shukla (2012:7), Sahin and Bisson, (2021:902) explain that CI serves several business functions such as converting information into actionable knowledge and for the strategic decision-making process.

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- *Dissemination of the results:* The results from the whole CI activity should be conveyed to both internal or external customers in a suitable structure and within a desirable time plan, including conclusions and suggestions. Feedback can thereafter be used in the next CI activities. University decision makers need to be aware of such CI results and acknowledge its existence. The results must provide the most valuable information relevant to the strategy. García-Madurga and Esteban-Navarro (2020:21) proclaim that dissemination is most important in the closing process of competitive intelligence projects as it ensures protection of the data gathered and the intelligence created and transmitted. For HEIs, the dissemination of results depends on what kind of intelligence was needed, such as student enrolment, new programmes, and funding. Institutional decision makers might seek clarity on the intelligence before implementation of a new intelligence programme. Therefore, the main component for HEIs is the quest for competitive advantages where high competition in the educational sector market exists. Freyn and Farley (2020:622) confirm that the CI process assists in capturing the correct and valuable information to analyse and disseminate intelligence within the organisation, which will in turn become a valuable resource for creating knowledge for the organisation.

There are many versions and models of the CI cycle in literature which have both similarities and variations in conceptualisation of the CI cycle. Most of these models provide the basics steps in their

resemblances as identified by different authors mentioned above, who divide the CI process in four to six phases. Ghannay and Mamlouk (2012:25) explain that the CI process contains the following steps:

- i. Monitoring the business environment (external data, information, and knowledge), as stated by Zwerenz (2020:39), who explains that CI delivers the required knowledge of the external environment for an organisation's competitiveness.
- ii. Gathering information, as stated by Surpadi and Herawan (2019:18), who explain that this step is used to identify and define the most significant information needs from the environment, to promote the use of relevant information and to reduce the accumulation of excess information.
- iii. Analysing relates to the explanation, interpretation, and transformation of collected raw information into actionable intelligence with the use of analytical tools (Markovic *et al.* (2019:709). Therefore, it can also be divided into two ways, where one is used to decide and the other is used to add value to the information gathered (Ikokoh and Ikokoh 2020:127).
- iv. Filtering is where the information is filtered, distilled, and analysed by decision makers to make decisions (Priporas 2019:998). Khatibi, Keramati and Shirazi (2020:2) extend that in the intelligence process, information is filtered, cleansed, processed, and transformed into knowledge and insight.
- v. Disseminating intelligence is the most important stage because it ensures that analysis findings are appropriately communicated to decision makers who will act on the findings and communicate using various channels such as reports, e-mails, seminars, and short notes (Alshammakh and Azmin 2019:31). Moreover, data will be reflective of the process and provide information to decision makers to increase their competitiveness and improve organisational position. As information dissemination is the last stage of the intelligence cycle, Diyaolu (2019:6) concludes the process by explaining that this last step is where results are communicated to organisational decision makers, and thereafter a possible or alternative course of action would be taken with recommendations based on logical arguments.

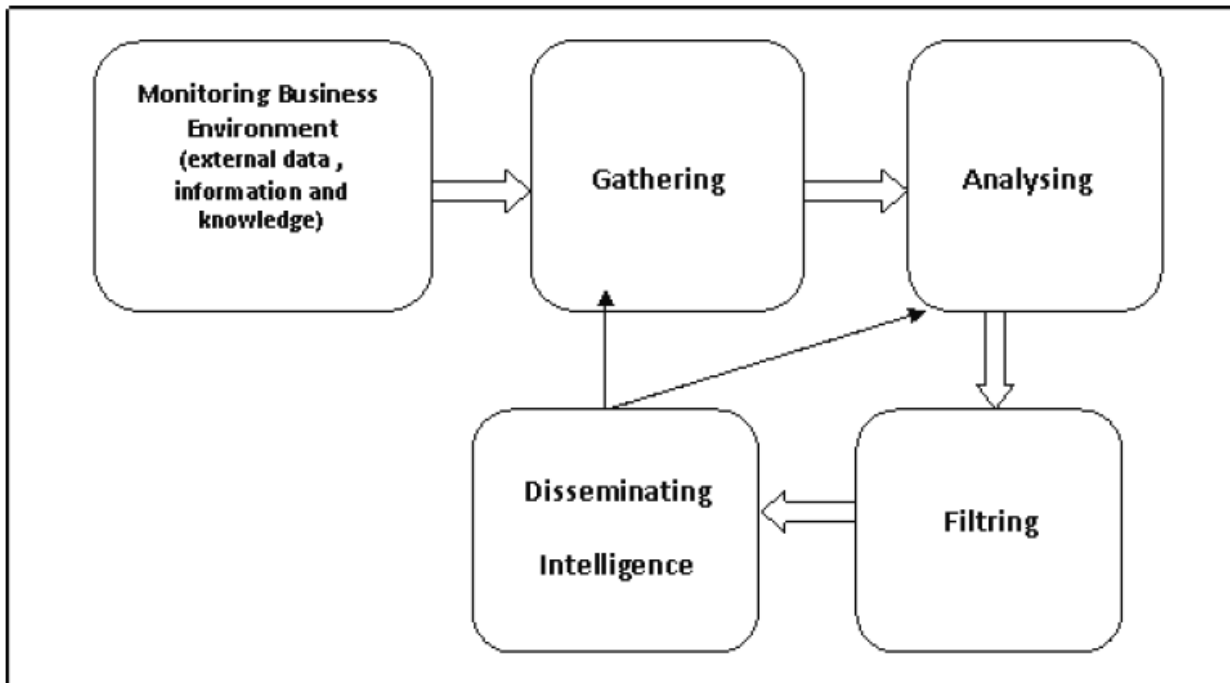


Figure 5: Competitive intelligence process

(Source: Ghannay and Mamlouk 2012:25)

3.7.3 Porter's generic strategies

The generic strategies can be utilised to decide the direction (procedure/strategy) of the organisation. This generic strategy by Michael Porter (1980) has four procedures that an organisation can choose from. He asserts that an organisation must have a clear point of departure to outsmart the competition, subsequently differentiating itself from the other competitors who offer the same product. Okatahi et al. (2021:282) add that Porter's generic strategies are defined as actions aimed at achieving company objectives and long-term sustainability, respectively, and that strategic implementation includes the assurance of sufficient human resources and finances. Ali and Anwar (2021:42) mention that strategy is the process of developing a useful market and distinctive position through an assortment of activities. This theory is linked to HEIs due to their need to recognise their resources, their capabilities and their core competencies that are linked to the institutions' ability to achieve its strategic competitiveness and earn an advantage. Interestingly, Salsabila et al. (2021:3) indicate that the success of a specific generic strategy can be affected by the industry structure, where the industry structure is stable but may change due to evolution of the industry. Moreover, a business model should be able to sustain the organisation and maintain that competitive advantage. An organisation which aims to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors must offer or provide a service that its competitors cannot offer, be innovative and provide a better product or service compared to other organisations (Rusu 2021:532). WSU and

UFH offer the same product, which is higher education, but the difference would be the different qualifications that attract different people at the same time. Hifza, Palapa, and Maskur (2020:1747) support the argument of HEIs by stating that, where an institution can achieve and maintain a competitive advantage, it will perform above average, particularly in the area where the business is run. Islami, Mustafa and Topuzovska Latkovikj (2020:1) mention that the first years of a young firm are very crucial as they try to understand and survive the market. Furthermore, around 33% of new European firms do not make it to their second year, while some also do not make it to their seventh year. Therefore, Porter's approach would provide these dying firms with a management strategy that would ensure their stay in the market. Porter's generic approach assists in providing a competitive advantage by creating a product that distinguishes the organisation from other organisations in the market.

Furthermore, the strategy alludes to a broader execution and opportunistic activities aimed at developing a competitive advantage, notwithstanding the business, the type, and size of the organization (Saxenna and Vibhandik 2021:63). HEIs at this point cannot move away from the way that they work in an inescapable competitive market. The increase of environmental threats demands the exploitation the full scope of information gathering and analysing techniques available to remain relevant to the target market. Therefore, the strategy is a thoughtful search and development of an action plan intended to develop a competitive advantage for the organisation, and thus the objective is to strategically position itself in the market, for it to benefit from the market (Guedes and Vas 2021:470).

As indicated by Porter (1980), the four distinct bases are cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy and focus strategy, either low cost or differentiation. When HEIs make staunch strategic decisions to improve the quality of education they offer, they also embark on cost and price leadership strategies which are differentiated by product quality.



Figure 6: Porter's generic strategy

(Source: Porter 1980:35)

Peixoto, Alcantar and da Silva (2021:7) state that the generic strategies model defined by Porter (1980), as in Figure 5, indicates that businesses will develop and adopt decisions based on their strategies on generating competitive advantage, thus choosing one of the four basic quarters as possible alternatives, namely cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus, and differentiation focus. The cost leadership, differentiation and focus are strategic measures that were adopted and applied to enable various businesses to attract and retain customers to their businesses (Wanyonyi *et al.* 2020:2). As indicated by Porter (1985), a business can boost performance either being the low-cost service provider (cost leadership strategy) or by disconnection of its line of goods and services from those of different organisations (differentiation strategy); both viewpoints can be the organisational focus on a given section of the market (focus strategy). These are explained below by Hales and Mclarney (2017:8):

i. **Cost leadership strategy**

A position in which a company tries to be the cheapest supplier to a wide range of consumers. An organisation can outsmart the competition if it can meet the business's most basic expenses while still charging standard rates. According to Salsabila *et al.* (2021:4), organisations that utilise cost-leadership and differentiation strategies outperform those that use integrated strategies, where the financial performance measurements of the organisation are the dependent variables. This attribute refers to a higher education institution's ability to compete in the market and its level of competitiveness. Vasilev (2020:7) considers the possibility that HEIs' cost leadership approach would be jeopardised, specifically

when the cost of education exceeds the market value due to increasing educational quality decreasing with the competitiveness of the university.

The improved competitiveness of HEIs decreases the quality of education they offer. Higher education institutions would then set tuition fees slightly lower than that of other private universities to remain competitive in the industry or regard cost minimisation as more important than high quality services. Kasamani, Omido and Chepkuleli (2021:14) add that university-based academic programmes and subsidisation of fees for students are categorised within the cost leadership and differentiation domains of the Porter's competitive generic strategies. The cost leadership strategy contributes to an organisation's competitive advantage by generating competitiveness through the development of uniquely defensible positions (Kimiti, Muathe and Murigi 2021:2978). Therefore, Wanyonyi *et al.* (2020:3) purport that cost advantage achievement compels businesses to constantly increase their production efficiency, improve operational processes and gain access to lower production costs.

ii. **Differentiation strategy**

A situation in which an organisation wishes to set itself apart from the competition by providing excellent products or services that give better value to a wide variety of customers. Okechukwu (2021:177) explains the second technique, which requires businesses to implement by developing a product or service that is unique but easily recognised by competitors and customers in the market, and then charging the best price. If an organisation can differentiate itself, it should be able to charge higher prices and obtain higher yields to outperform the competition. Whether it is through branding, organisational design, market positioning, or site, technology, and innovation. Moreover, Damayanti and Rahadi (2021:71) extend that this strategy allows the business to charge a premium price for a product and be sustainable by maintaining excellent product quality and reliability for a good market position. The provision of services that differentiates HEIs from competitors comprises a wide range of differentiated services that HEIs offer.

Competitive strategies are strategic activities of marketing-capability arrangements that support plans on how to attract and compete for target customers and achieve desired objectives (Silvia *et al.* 2020:26). Additionally, HEI's differentiation strategy indicates that each university concentrates on their provision of unique programmes, different from their competitors (Ekeagbara *et al.* 2019:83). HEIs would need to provide services that have excellent value to potential and current students to be able to set exceptional prices for programmes offered and for other facilities. This strategy will provide a distinctive element in the market and thereby reduce the competitor institution's advantage which is of value to potential and current students.

iii. **Focus strategy**

A strategy in which an organisation focuses on a certain consumer or industry area. It is most effective when a group of clients (buyers) have specific (individualistic) needs and the competition is not meeting those needs. Focus is a sort of competitive strategy in which an organisation relies on a certain market or customer group inside a specific geographic area (De Bruin 2021). Focus strategy is used by Hidayat *et al.* (2020:2423) to select certain segments of the market to be the business's focus by means of the following: (1) Focus on better products for specific market segments; (2) Focus on a specific market that ties in with the business's excellent products; and (3) Focus on providing a service to the market being offered.

- **Cost focus**

A focus position where a segmented group of customers are provided with that ideal item at a cheaper price than that of the competitor. Islami, Mustafa and Latkovikj (2020:3) indicate that the low-cost strategy is an attempt by an organisation to outsmart its competitors and to gain a competitive advantage by reducing its costs below the costs of competing firms. Lee, Hoehn-Weiss, and Karim (2021:2222) confirm that organisations that produce low cost products create more value than their competitors and have the possibility for higher profits.

- **Differentiation focus**

A differentiation focus is that of providing quality products better than the competitor. This strategy seeks to create a differentiated focus for a specific market division of the business (Salsabila *et al.* 2020:2). Therefore, this requires focusing on strategic priorities related to the service differentiation advantage, as stated by Sousa and da Silveira (2020:1562).

Mohamed (2020:70) contextualises Porter's discussions in higher education, where HEIs fight for students, research grants, faculty members, financial assistance, and reputation, among other things. Nonetheless, competition for institutional expansion and sustainability is mostly driven by students. As the competition for sustainability grows, so does the number of HEIs in competition, resulting in increased innovation, higher quality, and distinction. To deal with the speed of change in their environment, HEIs must be proactive and be able to anticipate any flaws, which necessitates ingenuity and invention (Hebtoor, Arshad and Hassan 2019:2). This compels HEIs to offer distinctive and intriguing academic programmes and qualifications in the higher education sector that are not offered by other institutions (Fumasoli, Barbato and Turri 2020:306). To be able to adapt to the demands of

society and the labour market at large, one technique of promoting excellence in HEIs is to encourage industry or product specialisation between institutions. As a result, it is critical to provide appropriate qualifications and programmes to ensure that the revolution continues, as well as to establish the role of WSU and UFH's innovative strategies within the competitive intelligence borders.

WSU and UFH share the same market segment, where potential customers, in this case students, may find what they are looking for. Regardless, some requirements must be satisfied by each institution for them to enrol. In most cases, however, grade 12 students have followed in the footsteps of friends or siblings who have assured them of an excellent education. East London is a hotly disputed location with a slew of student residences on two sides, particularly the Quigney and Southernwood neighbourhoods. Both institutions provide similar services, such as transportation to and from campus for sites outside the region, secure student housing, and wireless internet access, to name a few.

Students' preferences in terms of HEI offers are inextricably linked, and the reasons for either would be convenience and amenities rather than qualifications. In addition, the entry requirements for a specialist qualification may have dictated or influenced which qualification they qualified for. When faced with rising competition, Goodrich, Swani, and Much (2020:435) concur that target marketing and the utilisation of product, price, place, and promotion (4ps) can help HEIs better achieve their goal. With increasing expenditures for sustainability and viability, HEIs must be effective in their promise of offering quality core products and services incorporated in their differentiated educational programmes (Basha, Sweeney and Soutar 2020:263).

3.7.4 Porter's five forces model

Isabelle *et al.* (2020:28) outline the evolution of Michael E. Porter's five forces model, which began in 1979. The five forces model, which was developed as a crucial framework for understanding competitive forces, was used to identify forces driving industry competition. This model raised concerns about business profitability in comparison to other businesses, necessitating an in-depth examination of how the industry is structured, considering the power of buyers and suppliers, current competitor competition, as well as the threat of product substitutes and new entrants in the market (Wellner and Lakota 2020:1). The main competition is for students who best represent the university's growth and manageability. Michael Porter's five forces model has been utilised to distinguish forces in any monetary area (industry) that drives profitability and competition in any market. Restricted endeavours have been made to examine and broaden this model in research. Mugo (2020:31) explains it is pivotal for businesses to concentrate on acquiring competitive advantage to enable them respond and compete effectively in the market.

According to Asimakopoulos and Whalley (2017), when a company can secure customers and protect itself against competitive forces, it has a competitive advantage over its competitors. A competitive advantage is one of the prerequisites for a company to win in industry competition. The attractiveness of the industry and the competitive position of the business in the market are two competitive strategy determinants, according to Birru, Sudarmiati, and Hermawan (2022:3), citing Porter (1985). They go on to say that the long-term profitability of an industry determines its attractiveness. As a result, the authors agree that competitive forces decide the business tactics to employ to get a competitive advantage in the industry.

This paradigm, according to Khurram, Hassan, and Khurram (2020:4), is one of the most rational to company strategic frameworks used today. It manages the organisation's position in the market, particularly in its industry, and improves its capabilities to fight the competition's strategies for a competitive advantage. Porter's five forces model is based on the industrial organisation framework, which states that market structure determines market participants' behaviour, which in turn determines the attractiveness of the industry in which a company operates. However, it cannot be adopted uniformly across all industries; rather, it will alter over time as government strategies and macroeconomic conditions change (Jung and Jeong 2020:49). Jelonek *et al.* (2022:198) confirms that Porter's five competitive forces model can be applied to analyse the market industry and its external environment to determine whether a business should partake in the industry and the risks associated with entering the industry. Schweinsberg, Sharpley and Darcy (2022:1) applied Porter's five forces model to HEIs, who are active players in the higher education marketplace by providing products such as education, and who thereafter, consider imparting knowledge as 'raw material' to be produced, developed, and subsequently sold in higher education markets.

However, Duran, Cabuya and Molina (2020:7) provide a different view – that in a competitive and non-limited business territory, organisations need to develop effective strategies to survive and endure the difficulties of the market. Yet, the same number of failed businesses show the possibility of a not well-structured approach adaptable to their business which could not provide sustainability. However, Mtisi and Govender (2022:54) oppose the notion of external influences in the competition by having its limitations which disregard the business's internal strengths and resources, which can assist in the quest for a competitive strategy.

Interest in higher education has increased over the past decades, resulting in change and competition, which have been a subject for some studies. HEIs are understood to have a competitive advantage in situations where they have a competitive edge over other institutions by attracting customers (students)

and repelling competitive forces (Kariuku, Ombaka and Kiumbe 2021:41). Mulwana *et al.* (2020:59) add that the higher education sector environment has drastically changed due to the expanding education demands and government-related budgetary limitations and has gone through transformation that required structural changes at all levels in both private and state-run HEIs.

Increased enrolments in HEIs should also be attributed to the potential and current student demands, and HEIs need to ascertain how can they adapt to the needs of the labour market by attracting and retaining students (Zalite and Zvirbule 2020:298). Moreover, Mahdi and Hammad (2021:36) state that depending on the institution, Porter's five forces framework highlights the importance of innovation and creativity in HEIs in how they confront competition in all spheres. A few articles and books have expounded on the idea of competitive advantage, where Porter's five forces model has been used to examine competition in the business and how business associations can acquire the competitive advantage in the business (Aydin 2017: 380).

This theory is keen on the external environment structure of an organisation, particularly in this study, the higher education external environment. Though the model may not be applicable in the HE sectors in terms of its utilisation and insightful structures, in this study the higher education external environment was evaluated using Porter's five forces as a theoretical perspective. The five forces model entails the threat of new contestants, suppliers and buyers, pressures of substitute products and competition within a given industry. In higher education, the elements of the five forces model include students, other HEIs in the region both private and public, new academic programmes and technology in other HEIs.

Collectively, these powers determine the profitability and sustainability of the organisation within the competitive environment, also maintaining its position in the said sector or industry. Thiong'o, Wasike and Yano (2021:42) add that Porter's five forces assist to identify where power lies in the business's market and the strength of its current and future competitive positions in the market. They further elaborate that through the classification of power, the business can identify areas of strength, to improve its weaknesses and to avoid error by using the five forces model.

The higher education scope is complex and is categorised by a high degree of competitiveness, either at the micro-, macro-, and meso-economic levels. The competitiveness of HEIs includes the prospects of occupying the best relative competitive positions in both regional and global educational markets whilst responding to the challenges of a dynamic environment. HEIs are in direct competition regarding how they acquire funds and subsidies from the government, and possess qualities of a trusted institution which provides quality education to students (Djakona *et al.* 2021:13). Williams (2021:1205) says that

the changing higher education landscape, motivated by the need for HEIs to impart quality education and value to stakeholders and intensive competition has forced HEI administrators to focus on strategic planning. Stakeholders such as national governments that provide institutional financial support must be given value for the money. De Haan (2015:46) mentions that competition does not only exist in public higher education institutions, but also includes private higher education institutions in their pursuit for a higher education sector market share. These include fee paying potential students, offering education training and parallel programmes.

Mathooko and Agutu (2015:3370) state that in the higher education industry, three key components of competitive advantage have been identified – branding and image, its location and facilities, and the mode of delivery (i.e. contact, distance, or online learning). Miotto, Del-Castillo-Feito and Blanco-González (2020:343) state that HEIs are now adopting an entrepreneurial management tactic based on their proactive, market-oriented student recruitment strategies which provide a sustainable competitive advantage. The most important building block in higher education is their relationship with students, who in this case are named as customers and buyers, qualified personnel (suppliers) and all other factors that determine their livelihood in the sector. Anabila *et al.* (2020:125) explain that owing to the global increase in higher education competition, HEIs are developing new ways of exploring alternative methods to redefine their value proposition to differentiate their programme offerings with the aim of attracting students and remaining competitive. Aldosari (2021:7) mentions that competitiveness is primarily associated with quality and technology, ability to reduce costs, innovation, and development, in addition to the financial resources available.

Jaiswal (2021:76) provides the forces that will be discussed, as illustrated in Figure 6 below.

- Threat of new entrants.
- Intensity of competition (rivalry).
- Threat of substitutes.
- Bargaining power of buyers.
- Bargaining power of suppliers.



Figure 7: Porter's five forces

(Source: Porter 1979)

The interpretation and study of competitive advantage in educational institutions has been studied widely by several researchers, namely Mazzarol and Soutar (1999) who examined the development of mental models in developing sustainable competitive advantage in educational institutions; Curran (2000) who studied factors that form a competitive advantage in higher education institutions; and Mainardes (2009) who proposed for a model that explains the process of identifying competitive advantage in HEIs. For this study, Porter's five forces model (Figure 6) is relevant, as introduced by Oglu and Usmanovich (2022:48), who explained it in the interpretation of a microenvironment by contrasting it with a macro-environment which is associated with the provision of goods to its own customers for a desired profit. Microenvironment changes require the business to evaluate its position in the market and the industry. Therefore, businesses should use their strengths to generate a desired profit exceeding the industry average.

Pringle and Huisman (2011:39) explain that Porter's model (1985) which is grounded in microeconomics is perhaps the most applied strategic system utilised today. They elaborate that in view of Porter's model, the strategy is regarded as competition and characterises competition as a struggle for revenues set apart by five forces, as provided in the diagram above (Figure 6). Abdelazim and Georgieva (2021:4) contend that Porter's five forces analysis examines the market competitors and players to determine

the advantage of current market position. Furthermore, the HE market presents a wide range of offerings, from various degrees, longer and short courses, and certifications, owing to the diversification of programmes. Several existing competitors are already proving these products and are established market providers. As such, the five forces characterise an industry's structure and shape the nature of competitiveness in that given industry.

Abdelazim and Georgieva (2021:5) cite Johnson (2014:55) that the five forces can be applied to the higher education sector as explained below.

i. **Threat of new entry**

The threat of entry of new entrance or arrivals into the market is subject to the existing obstacles of entry, with the collective reaction of current and existing market competitors which can be predicted by the newcomer (Sofyan and Fantini 2021:123 in Porter, 1980). There is a progressive entry of various players in the higher education sector and their offerings are rapidly evolving based on the preference and accessibility of education. Laxmi (2021:76) states that institutions with position advantage have sufficient capital, have funding resources, have a good networking circle, have a good standing reputation in the market and lastly, have established good rapport with the higher education regulatory bodies. In South Africa, the higher education landscape changed in 2001, which brought about several changes in the HE sectors (NPHE 2001). This meant that higher education institutions merged from 36 to 23. The decrease in numbers brought competition to those who already existed and those who recently merged to form new institutions. The mergers did not only apply to public universities but also to private HE institutions that emerged to counter the situation in South Africa.

Cited in Porter (2008), Mahat (2019:1085) claims that it is not certain that the entry of new competitors is the threat to the industry which can affect competition and influence the industry's profitability. Furthermore, the threat of new entrants in the market regulates how effortlessly a business can enter the industry; the stature of existing market entry barriers and on the reaction new entrants can anticipate from long standing business (Handrian and Mansoor 2021:134).

Walter Sisulu University is one of the institutions that resulted from the merger between Border Technikon in East London, University of Transkei in Mthatha and Eastern Cape Technikon, which had satellite campuses in Mthatha and East London in 2001. In the East London region, WWSU had co-existed with Buffalo city FET collage for years, alongside private higher education institutions such as Boston and Damelin college. The University of Fort Hare opened its East London campus in 2004, formerly Rhodes University satellite campus (UFH general prospectus. 2019:2). The UFH East London campus

introduced a new entrant into the East London (Buffalo city) higher education market, which presented a larger entrant and presented significant challenges in their expansion. Henceforth it is deliberately planning to develop programmes in a wider student market and is re-profiling Fort Hare through its three campuses, namely in Alice, Bhisho and East London. The development of more private higher education institutions as new entrants into the market has affected the enrolment figures of public HEIs.

Hifza, Palapa and Maskur (2020:1749) believe that private HEIs should be concerned about quality issues as providing quality educational service to the community as consumers, active management, quality education that responds to community needs and lastly, the types of educational services provided are understood by the public. Moreover, private HEIs rely on their differentiation strategy of programme offerings which provides online, evening classes and other means of class attendance for the busy professional student market. This strategy provides personalised class attendance which cannot be offered by public HEIs. Established public HEIs counter private HEIs by having accredited programme offerings. Binnawas, Khalifa and Bhaumick (2020:1953) add that owing to the rapid increase in competition between HEIs, higher quality in HE educational services has become one of the few forms of differentiation for gaining competitive advantage. Differentiation relates to numerous higher education drivers such as the knowledge economy, democratisation, the expansion of secondary education and institutional specialisation in teaching and research (Carpentier 2021:198).

Young, Piche and Jones (2021:31) state that HEIs have a duty to meet the needs of a diversified student body by providing a diverse higher education system that is efficient and effective for both the government and HEIs in fulfilling their purposes and functions in education. Certainty is uncertainty. Chivugi *et al.* (2021:22) confirm that HEIs should be able to create and adopt a differentiation strategy to enable them to resist local and international market competitive pressures. These strategies enable HEIs to improve and offer better quality education products and/or services to create a competitive advantage. As tertiary education institutions face competition from around the globe, they must respond to the complex factors that have an impact on attracting and retaining customers. Jørgensen and Brogaard (2021:87) confirm that HEIs increasingly attract a diverse student population from diverse backgrounds having varied educational experience and needs. This has permitted HEIs to rework their strategy to cater for the busy student professionals who are willing to attend and not miss classes in their busy working schedules. Therefore, creating the contested programme offering in a personalised delivery method of instruction.

ii. Threats of substitutes

Substitutes are alternative products and services that satisfy similar needs of the customer and give similar solutions. Thus, businesses apply strategies to provide substitute services that will bring in profit for them to enjoy a share in the market (Study Corgi 2021). Substitutes as option for alternative educational offerings in the HEI sector have additionally proceeded with the creative destruction process of higher education. Employers seek employment candidates who possess desired qualifications acquired within a timeframe, such Master's, Honours, bachelor's degrees for their field to fill specific job vacancies. Subsequently, as competitive as the higher education sector is, new field specialisations have emerged, with employers' preference for a two-year acquired specialised qualification as opposed to the three to four years certified qualification. This has increased competition.

Artisans and engineers are some of the specialised fields required by employers. Therefore, HEIs have since resorted to provide non-degree programmes, as there is demand for such by both employers and potential students in the market. Spruin (2021:5) indicates that key threats to the higher education market come from substitutes, which offer similar educational courses, and which is further aggravated by the high power of students in the market as they possess free will to switch institutions if unsatisfied with their current institution. Swanson (2021:7) agrees that substitutes are secondary where the customer/client can opt for what they want instead of utilising the specific process given. The non-formal education industry shows the HIGH threat of new entrants.

Walter Sisulu University has a staff component of approximately 2000 and a student population of around 33,000 across campuses (WSU 2022) and the University of Fort hare had 12307 students and 1120 staff in 2022. WSU and Fort Hare have similar programmes in general offerings, but in the East London region, some of the programmes offered by WSU are not offered by UFH and vice versa. As in the WSU general prospectus (2023), WSU Buffalo city campus offers mostly business management programmes, as stated below.

- Human Resources Management
- Marketing
- Public Relations Management
- Sport Management
- Office Management and Technology
- Public Administration
- Public Management
- Tourism and Hospitality Management.

Apart from these business-related programmes, science and technology programmes are also offered.

- Information Technology
- Chemistry
- Engineering programmes (Mechanical engineering, Electrical engineering, and Building).

All these programmes are limited to an accredited Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma qualification (previously known Bachelor of Technology) upon completion. UFH, in East London offers undergraduate programmes such as.

- Bachelor of commerce in Information systems
- Bachelor of social science
- Bachelor of Social work
- Bachelor of Education
- Bachelor of Health Sciences in Human Movement Science
- Advanced Diploma in District Health Management and Leadership
- Diploma in Local Government Law and Administration
- Bachelor of Nursing
- Bachelor of Agriculture: B Agricultural Economics
- Bachelor of Theology: B Theology.

All the above programmes in both institutions are governed by the student preference and employment possibilities, location and offering by that institution. However, it may not necessarily mean that the one is better than the other, but the competitiveness of these two institutions is more than the eye can see. An example of one of the determinants of students is the pass grade in their grade 12 year, recognition of prior learning, and scarcity of work on completion of a certain programme. Therefore, HIEs have now restructured and reworked their delivery methods of offering non-degree programmes to satisfy labour market demands. Seven of the programmes listed in UFH are not offered by WVSU, which brings focus to preference of student, accessibility, and enrolment.

i. **Bargaining power of buyers (i.e. students)**

The focus of force is related to the buyer analysis, where the buyer's choice plays a pivotal role in buying and selling of existing products, buyer's options of products from a particular business or having options for the same product (Kurniawan, Tarumingkeng and Adirinekso 2022:14). In this context of interpretation, students can be described as customers as they enter universities and pay tuition fees for educational services of their choice from their institutions. Educational cost rates have reliably

increased over the previous decade without contrarily influencing demand; however, the bargaining power of students has gradually increased.

Nguyen Ngoc (2020:37) alludes to the fact that students are the primary consumers of educational services provided by HEIs, which have been prioritised by the government to be accessible to students, resulting in a massive increase in student enrolment in HEIs. The introduction of private universities gave students additional options, which increased the value of private higher education institutions. Distance learning (online learning) has removed barriers that previously limited consumers' educational options and opened access to a wide range of options. As a result, students now have more negotiating power because they may choose from a wide range of options that suit their preferences, lifestyles, budgets, and schedules. Additionally, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has, in a roundabout way, moved a lot of bargaining power of students through the availability and accessibility of funds to study. Therefore, HEIs frequently become dependent on their enrolment numbers and funding or grants to remain financially sustainable.

The funds available for students looking for higher education degrees equip them with more significant bargaining power over the financially bankrupt HEIs. This surplus money has expanded competition and resulted in a fight where HEIs are looking for approaches to differentiate and accommodate student inclinations.

Cited in Porter (2008b), Mahat (2016:87) contends that strong customers can capture more of an incentive by forcing prices to decrease, requesting better quality and service, and setting up competitors to compete. Ahmad *et al.* (2015:39) contend that the real stakeholders of higher education are the students as they have the power to impact and influence a specific institution's revenue by changing to institutions of their choice. HEIs have been encouraged to develop a student-centred approach which will influence their way of thinking and change their approach to be more student focused and embrace a new way of thinking. The approach is important to students as it will impact their prospects and their work possibilities will, therefore, become more restricted. Therefore, students from WSU and UFH can choose any HEI that will suit their needs and that will guarantee their future after completion of their qualifications. It will then depend on whether these institutions have what they are looking for considering their approach of recruitment strategies. Cost of education may be another factor which will influence them.

ii. **Bargaining power of suppliers (i.e. institutions of higher education)**

Porter (1979) states that the service provider's power can affect the profits and revenue of an industry by raising costs or decreasing the quality of goods provided. If a supplier can practise these types of changes, he will be in a position of acquiring a greater amount of value for himself (Porter, 2008). Ottonicar, Valentim and Mosconi (2018:57) add that central to CI is the provision of access to information, interpretation of information and lastly, dissemination of information. This information is gathered from the external environment to contribute to product and service innovation. Hassani and Mosconi (2017) confirm that innovation does influence the quality and speed of the final product.

Mathooko and Ogutu (2014: 338) state that in an industry examination, the suppliers are individuals or organisations that provide the materials, knowledge, or information to enable an organisation to produce its goods, services and additionally to benefit from such. HEIs employ qualified personnel or a labour force to impart knowledge to the students and this ought to be perceived as a supplier through the perspective of a supplier. As previously stated, lecturers are the highly skilled labour in the HEIs, including researchers and administration. The status, image and reputation of the HEI and the discipline are all significant. Therefore, potential students will choose an institution that has qualified personnel and will direct them into a trajectory they desire, and of course the desired institution should meet their standard of preference by offering disciplines of choice. The fewer the suppliers, the lesser the options for the buyer in the respective area. Suppliers are now an advantage to force the buyers (students) to choose any in the respective regions but the cost of the alternative is high. In this instance, WSU or UFH can each be the alternative, and each can be the option which has lower enrolment fees than the other institution.

iii. **Intensity of competition (rivalry)**

If there is serious competition in an industry, it will urge organisations to participate in the following:

- Price wars of a competitive nature where prices are reduced
- Product innovations
- Intensive marketing campaigns aimed at attracting customers.

Every one of these exercises will build expenses and lower benefits. A few variables decide the level of serious competition such as the number of competitors, brand loyalty, costs of alternatives. The force of competition among competitors in an industry alludes to the degree to which organisations within an industry apply pressure on each other and cut off or block each other's financial benefit potential. If

competition is strong, the competitors will attempt to take away the profit share of the other and reach a competitive advantage. This diminishes profit potential for all organisations within a given industry.

Martin (2019) says that in the marketplace, in this case higher education, the competitive force analyses how exceptional the competition can be. It considers the number of existing competitors in the sector and what they can provide independently. Moreover, there seems to be high competition when there are few organisations offering a goods and services. WSU and UFH are the only universities in the East London region, and there seems to be a lot of competition on who gets what in the higher education sector, excluding TVET colleges and private higher education institutions. Additionally, potential students can switch to a less costly service provider. HEIs' enrolment strategies should use competitive advertising and marketing campaigns in the quest to recruit students for gained profits.

3.8 COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE FAILURES

Nelson, Walsh, and Cui (2020:2127) state that competitive intelligence has been discussed within the framework of market orientation and it operates through the efficient dissemination of competitive intelligence information to improve organisational performance. Barnea (2021:21) alleges that intelligence failures are unwelcome surprises for businesses who have incorrectly assessed the competitive environment and its risks which have caused dire financial constraints. Therefore, businesses that seek for improved performance must first seek correct information to generate competitive intelligence in those organisation factors that are linked to their performance (Nte *et al.* 2019:81). Barnea (2020:708) mentions that intelligence failures and strategic surprises can be investigated to prevent competitors from gaining a significant advantage and prevented through the identification of market changes among consumer audiences.

Tsuchimoto and Kajikawa (2022:9) confirm that there are several issues that cause CI failures such as outdated use of the CI cycle, especially in the first phase, where key intelligence topics and questions often cause the failure of CI. Functional areas such as strategic planning and competitive intelligence in big businesses are used for monitoring the external environment, including capturing plans and actions of competitors (Barnea 2020:79). Maungwa and Fourie (2018:2) discuss that information intelligence is a strategic decision-making tool but it often comes with failures that manifest when the intelligence data does not provide the correct information and turns out to be wrong. Therefore, well thought through and organised intelligence can assist the decisions to be made and adapt to the information needs.

Examples of competitive intelligence failures discussed below have devastating consequences and could result in loss of revenues and profits, as explained by Maungwa and Fourie (2018:4).

3.8.1 Organisational culture

Julie, Gillespie, and Reader (2021:458) define organisational culture as generally accepted culture in an organisation that provides the steady and shared system of values, beliefs, and assumptions which guides employee behaviour through social interaction, which may be resistant to change. Mohamad, Ramayah, and Lo (2020:2) agree that organisations that lack the appropriate organisational culture will have limited sharing of knowledge which is core for organisations that want to learn and improve. It is important for employees in higher education to be able to respond voluntarily to unexpected opportunities in the market, where organisational culture may be key to producing sharpness. Therefore, HEIs' culture would need to enable employees to be strategically aware and able to apply strategic decisions right down to the lowest levels based on competitive intelligence reports. If HEIs do not have stringent value *et al.* systems, beliefs, and ethics, they will need to adjust and endure to avoid counter productivity. Asghari *et al.* (2020:562) state that employees must be willing to participate in organisational learning, collaborate to learn from one another, be efficient and share knowledge. Al-Husseini, Beltagi and Moizer (2021:670) add that some of the significant resources that assist in competitive advantage are knowledge and knowledge sharing and they are also key to enhancing innovation. University organisational culture is an example of typical organisational culture which was founded through institutionalisation of a culture developed on traditional academic values and principles (Gorzelay *et al.* 2021:21).

3.8.2 Mistakes by data analysts

Due to its over-simplicity and lack of knowledge of its complexity, the classic cycle model of intelligence is rendered ineffective by CI research, which has constraints such as accuracy and efficacy, rendering it invalid and distorting reality (Oraee, Sanatjoo and Ahanchian 2020:2). Organisations employed information analysis approaches using statistics and advanced database technologies as part of their CI processes at first, which necessitated a lot of trial-and-error. Organisations nowadays are concentrating on gaining real-time knowledge to cope with competition (Ranjan and Foropon 2021:2). HEIs cannot afford to take a blanket approach to competition, regardless of whether the opponents are weak or not. Due to many market possibilities that could take their share, they must ensure that their CI operations are keeping their brand alive. A holistic approach is needed to provide them with information on what their key potential stakeholders are, to be able to pre-empt and understand them. Higher education institutions may lack understanding of how market competitors meet consumer needs or not, but it may be beneficial to design their competitive strategy around what is needed out there, and where it can be acquired, as the collected information is examined for patterns, relationships, and anomalies.

Lutz and Bedendorf (2020:586) mention that the basis of this failure, even in the CI model, is failure to generate purposefully relevant and practical information through the interpretation of the collected information by using different text mining methods, including statistical analysis, network analysis and classification. In this CI failure context, special attention is given to deficiencies in its analysis that may affect HEIs strategy. To properly understand CI paucities, there must be a guarantee that the information gained through data analysis is correct which will save HEIs from failure. Connecting the dots, what the competitor is planning, paying attention to detail and being consistent in their CI activities are paramount in the competitive market of higher education. Additionally, there might be inaccuracies in the data analysis caused by missing or poor data which creates room for problems and failures. This failure could be a result of lack of appropriate data made available to the analyst, gaps in the provided data or failure in the collection process. The success of data analysis and its accuracy depend profoundly on the tools and techniques used to analyse the data, not just missing data or poor collection process (Ranjan and Foropon 2021:3).

3.8.3 Lack of support by senior management

Organisational management is concerned with dealing with organisational complexity and promoting consistency in established routines such as planning and budgeting, managing, organising, and staffing to deal with day-to-day issues (Leal Filho *et al.* 2020:2). Decision makers in higher education institutions, such as Vice Chancellors, Marketing and Communication departments, require support in deciding which strategic direction to pursue and how to communicate it to the entire institution. Due to the significant sums of money and time required, another key failure of the CI plan implementation has been the lack of top management support. The success of the activity depends on significant buy-in and executive backing (Fuertes *et al.* 2020:5). Senior management's responsibility is to allocate resources to adapt to both internal and external environments and to focus on competing strategies to ensure the organisation's sustainability and long-term survival (Ali and Anwar 2021:333). As much as senior management make critical and strategic decisions for the organisations, failure to support CI strategies would m

3.8.4 Errors made during decision making process

According to Sliva (2021:229), the CI definition helps the correct dissemination of information and strategic decisions made, but the most significant base of CI is the sort of information to collect and insights necessary. Instead of trying to figure out where the information will be used, HEI decision makers need to know what type of information has to be collected, how it will be analysed, and conveyed. As a result, HEIs require high-quality data from decision makers for them to make smart

business decisions that affect the entire institution. Although waiting for the correct information is time consuming, postponing a decision for further consultation would be ideal due to environmental uncertainties. In HEIs, a due diligence strategy with the Dean, Heads of Departments, and Support Departments can be quite valuable to determine whether it is worth the time and effort.

It is imperative that organisations identify changes in the competitive environment and adapt to them appropriately. The advantage of this action gives a glimpse of market environment activities where they operate (Shapira 2021:67). Grim (2019) adds that in previous years, organisations have been reactive rather than proactive to competitive intelligence surprises and had many organisations to their death. He refers to his competitive research study that proved that approximately 70% of competitive intelligence data proved no significance to the organisation and the market it operates in. Consequently, organisations tend to be reactive due to the market forces and they make haphazard decisions which become unmanageable. Moreover, an organisation's failure to grasp the competition can result in meeting partial customer needs which also leads to being unable to differentiate organisations in the marketplace.

3.9 COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE IN THE 4TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

According to Rapanyane and Sithole (2020:492), the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) has resulted in changes in communications, technology, analytics, and data, all of which have an impact on people's daily lives, relationships, and work. Organisations must be informed about what is happening in their respective industries, be aware of what affects them, and be able to translate that information into actionable information. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, according to Martinelli, Farioli, and Tunisini (2021:1084), is defined by three smart connected product elements: physical, smart, and connection components, which enable organisations to interpret and convert information into useable data. Brondoni and Zaninotto (2018:1) concur that the 4IR will induce a paradigm shift in business, affecting manufacturing and service processes and resulting in a competitive advantage for enterprises. HEIs have been considered as training centres around the world, with the goal of developing human capital that will contribute to society and, as a result, to the growth of a country (Aliu, Aigbavboa and Wellington 2021:212).

Furthermore, HEIs' roles in knowledge transmission have positioned them as important drivers of innovation and economic progress. The 4IR, on the other hand, is still in development, although it has already incorporated several innovative technological concepts. According to Park, Dhalgaard-Park, and Kim (2020:5), the 4IR is defined by a mix of physical and cyber technologies with an output of an intelligent digital transformation that addresses an integration of advanced information and

communication technology for industrial purposes. Interestingly, 4IR masquerades as a superior benefit to businesses and the country, but there are far more implications that it will bring such as disruption in the labour market and the inequality trends in South Africa (Rampanyana and Sithole 2020:495).

Oke and Fernandez (2020:2) provide a historical development of the 4IR which started in the early 1950s. It marked the basis of the 3rd industrial revolution, influenced by the advances in technology by the first and second industrial revolutions. The revolution brought machinery, computers, creating new and faster information and communication infrastructure, including teaching and learning. The shared factor for the hypothetical development of this study depicted in this section is the Information Age, now referred to as the 4th Industrial Revolution, which is characterised by one's capacity to investigate information with the assistance of technology.

Pretorius *et al.* (2021:539) agree that the rapid transformations caused by 4IR will have different consequences for many sectors, especially the higher education system which necessitates being responsive to 4IR advancements. The authors further elaborate that the curricula (teaching and learning) in the 4IR must be dynamic and adaptable in its response to the demands for new skills. Driving the 4IR development is primarily technical innovations in technology, while the management is responsible for execution and implementation. An organisational management that does not see the importance of using technology for better intelligence data and assumes not to be part of the development has become irrelevant (Søilen 2020:1). Liu (2017:114), De'Souza and Mudin (2018:1) provide the progression of the industrial revolutions up to the 4th Industrial Revolution, as stated below.

- The first (1st) industrial revolution occurred in 1760 to 1840, which defined the transition of traditional manufacturing to new process of manufacturing using steam and water.
- The second (2nd) industrial revolution started in 1850, which was the turning point to mass production, using steel and iron assisted by using electricity and electrification of industries.
- The third (3rd) industrial revolution started in 1969 and its development was through the introduction of the information age and information technology to automate production. The technological advancements were influenced by the previous two industrial revolutions of manufacturing and energy developments.
- The fourth (4th) industrial revolution has primarily altered the way we live and interact with one another by building on the digital revolution of the 3rd industrial revolution. It has transformed the integration of technologies to bridge the gap of digital, physical, and biological domains. Therefore, allowing the embedding of technology into the society and the business sector.

Ottonicar, Valentim and Mosconi (2018:54) add to the definition of CI, as stated in the above arguments, by positing that CI is determined by the scanning and monitoring of the environment which subsequently influences the market they are in. This process allows these organisations to respond to market changes by facing their challenges. Moreover, to successfully understand how CI works in the 4IR requires scrutinising the functionality of HEIs within the context of COVID-19 during the 4IR, the nature of teaching and learning in HEIs during the pandemic, digital transformation and the challenges that have arisen from the COVID-19, which encouraged online digital transformation (Olawale and Mutongoza 2021:267). In 2020, the digital economy faced challenges intensified by the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic effects. HEIs, in trying to counter and respond to these challenges, had to digitalise activities to remain competitive in the higher education market (Kholiavko *et al.* 2021:188).

Due to the above changes to the higher education landscape caused by the 4TH IR, HEIs had to adapt from face-to-face interaction to digital formats in courses that required social interaction (Arnold and Ulber 2021:1). Manda and Dhaou (2019:246) purport that efficiency and good decision making are key factors in the 4IR to enable organisations to comprehend customer needs, preferences, market trends and marketing conditions. Jung (2020:135) shares the same sentiments that HEIs play a crucial role of being the main participator in knowledge production by directly generating new knowledge through academic research and having a trained and qualified labour force. Higher education institutions are now forced to produce skilled graduates in the technology fields. This has been forced by the labour market for technology savvy, and an innovative and skilled labour force.

Coetzee *et al.* (2021:2) confirm that HEIs need to speedily respond strategically in an increasingly innovative environment as only 11 out of 26 universities are already offering modules and degree programmes that respond to the skills demand of the 4IR. HEIs will then have to provide the labour market with skilled graduates who will drive the technology advancements of the market to new heights. There has been a massive development of higher education in the 4IR through providing learners with the latest knowledge by means of innovation (Lupanda 2020).

Matthews, McLinden and Greenway (2021:3) mention that future HEIs will have to adapt to technological advancements. In the 4IR, physical geographical borders have now been transformed to being more virtual than previously, and that has given way to new popular education business models like the MOOCs (massively open online courses). MOOCs do not require physical proximity, only virtual presence (du Preez and Sinha 2021:15). Prior to the developed teaching approaches, tools such as electronic mails (e-mail), YouTube, Google, and other search engine were used by HEIs, though some required worldwide web (www) connections, which subsequently introduced blended learning for

student-teacher interaction using both the traditional face-to-face approach and the online teaching and learning methods (Ruzive, Masengu and Madongwe 2021:23). Latif, Pervin and Karim (2021:4) add that teaching in the 4IR requires using the blended learning approach (i.e. mixed e-learning and face-to-face learning methodology) though virtual environments provide conducive educational value in the information transmission and interactive participation, either by video conferences, forums and chats. Xing and Marwala (2017) elaborate that the connection between society and higher education is normally implied to be one-way where education plays a significant role as far as political and economic trends are concerned.

HEIs should also set up a plan that addresses the University-Industry Revolution 4.0 approach to address the current needs of students, as they will emerge as competitive graduates in the sector (De'Souza and Mudin 2018:1). Abdulrahim and Mabrouk (2020:293) claim that education in the 4IR allows teaching and learning in the digital-learning environment from anywhere in world, to exchange ideas and information through multiple communication modes. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many institutions to upgrade their traditional means of education and adopt the new type of full online educational service delivery. This move necessitated HEIs to redevelop methodologies due to the necessity for online distance learning.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that spread across the globe, offering online teaching and learning became a new norm. According to du Preez and Sinha (2021:19), when HEIs were forced to operate in during the global pandemic, constraints arose regarding remote teaching and learning. The COVID-19 outbreak forced universities to close under lockdown. The lockdown did not entirely close HEIs but restricted physical proximity (social distance of 1.5 meters) on campus due to the fear of virus contamination - this rule was welcomed by both academics and students. Academic teaching and learning support units have begun to provide academics with full-time access to deliver online teaching to their students (Shahzad et al. 2021:806). However, the shift to online mode has raised many queries about the quality of education. Khoza and Mpungose (2020: 2) suggest that when HEIs were faced with adapting to the new mode of teaching and learning during COVID19, they were also faced with academics who resisted to use online teaching and learning which affected the whole institution.

WSU and UFH will have to fight for the graduate output, where the demand for these skills is high. Both these institutions have what is needed by the labour market but what differentiates the two institutions would be the exceptional programmes they are offering to students. There needs to be a preference in choosing the best institution that will be able to provide these students with information technology skills using an accredited curriculum which focuses on the current trends in information

technology. García-Morales and Garrido-Moreno (2020:1) advocate that the circumstances of teaching and learning during COVID19 were caused by COVID19 effects. They further elaborate that global higher education has undergone has a radical transformation of education and training to adapt to e-learning and to implement technological resources made available by the 4IR. Azionya, and Nhedzi (2021:166) conclude that staying up to-date with emerging online teaching and learning technologies is the most effective way to facilitate online student learning environments without physical interactions of a classroom. The modern technologies catered for by the 4IR would offer best online student learning and the best course management system to adopt.

HEIs need to leverage themselves in the face of increasing competition in tricky situations. These educational institutions of the future will need to continue investing in suitable resources, competencies, and skills. In terms of their intended use, several marketing and communication instruments are different from one another. Therefore, the marketing managers of the HEIs must organise and coordinate their numerous marketing and communication initiatives. To ensure that all touchpoints deliver the same information to the target audience, they must dedicate enough financial resources to each marketing activity. Jain, Mogaji, Sharma and Babbili (2022:2) state that HEIs have adapted to the changes quickly and this is to the advantage of stakeholders.

Higher education institutions were forced to reconsider their beliefs, integrate digital communication tools, and reassess their goals to engage with their stakeholders. This connection acknowledged the importance of stakeholders and their connections to higher education. To acquire a competitive edge in a highly competitive human-intensive economy, the higher education sector is therefore intent on optimising relationship marketing by planning, identifying, prioritising, and engaging with stakeholders through ongoing interactions. Relationships with stakeholders are now valued by universities as a priority.

3.10 USING COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE AS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO PROMOTE STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Bussey et al. (2021:10) explain that the student recruitment process is not simple, but an expensive exercise, using marketing techniques, aimed at attracting and engaging with potential students during the HE admissions process. Bapat and Gankar (2020:1860) mention that throughout the world, HEIs are faced with various expectations as to how they should respond to the ever swiftly changing environment. In the HE sectors, marketing plays a progressively key role in student recruitment. Nowadays, the traditional HEI's recruitment and marketing ways of communication are changing rapidly

with various channels of communication available to potential prospects to enable a prompt, personalised and reliable recruitment strategy (Malcheva 2021:26).

Maluleka and Chummun (2023:3) examined CI as a complex business construct and its role in marketing strategy development. They argue that CI practice is crucial in strategic management and marketing, serving as the initial connection in shaping perceptions and behaviours for business adaptation. Marketing includes a long-term and progressive communication, overtime, between the new and existing customers in a manner that informs and establishes firm relationships. Marketing and communication strategies, as channels, establish a relationship among businesses and their markets. This suggests that schools convey and disseminate clear messages about who they are and what they can offer using their brand and reputation as draw cards (Siragi and Musa 2018:109). Therefore, Mulyono *et al.* (2020:929) believe that it has become a crucial and significant objective of HEIs to attract new students and retain current students and as such they must be creative and innovative to gain a competitive advantage in the future. HEIs should be consistent and proficiently gather, investigate, and utilise market knowledge to improve where there are shortfalls in the marketing plans.

According to Andriani, Setyanto and Sudarto (2022:1239), specific media are used to carry out internal marketing (products, prices, distribution, and promotions of companies used in catching consumers' attention), and marketing communication is internal information dissemination that involves consumer decision-making systems, buying and selling activities that help people to make decisions, and direct exchanges to market products with high effectiveness. The phrase "marketing and communication" is useful because it includes the process of communicating with the target audience. A group of the elements are combined in marketing communication. Promotion of sales through personal contact, direct marketing, public relations, and sponsorship are some of the examples of marketing and communication (Ahmed 2021:10).

Gerardo and Metcalfe (2020:782) believe that in response to the increased higher education competition, HEIs are now using advertising and marketing campaigns for student recruitment and for market positioning within a competitive system. Therefore, HEIs create and develop marketing and communication campaigns intended to attract, in the most encouraging way, soon-to-graduate high school students to their institutions. The campaigns can be an informal interaction from home or school visits to direct mail. Mishra and Madaan (2020:23) agree that the intense competition among HEIs has encouraged them to use contemporary communication techniques that will make them stand out from the rest in order to reach potential students. Moreover, nowadays, as students live in the digital world, HEIs must constantly re-evaluate their marketing strategies to appeal to an ever-increasing and diverse

audience base, using pivotal activities such as branding and marketing. To ensure that potential students select the institution of their choice, HEIs must be cognisant of important choice factors and put effort into designing an attractive advertising and promotional strategy as a competitive long-term plan (Ali 2021:427).

Cited in Sherman (2014), Kusumawati (2019:2) explains that the higher education sector has been experiencing a transition, which includes both internal and external challenges that require HEIs to move from traditional to more innovative ways of capturing prospective students' attention. The author further states that HEIs are becoming conscious about recruitment expenditures but have developed aggressive potential student recruitment strategies. Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare have the directorate that manages institutional communication in general. In that directorate, there are teams that work with student recruitment in collaboration with the advertising teams. These teams' sole responsibility is recruiting students, using a variety of recruitment strategies.

HEIs can use CI to optimise the student enrolment process. Data from CI helps monitor marketing performance, detect enrolment trends, and allocate resources for campaigns. Furthermore, CI helps HEIs monitor student recruitment campaigns, make informed decisions, optimise the recruitment process, conduct targeted marketing campaigns, attract suitable students, and manage future campaigns (Gaftandzhieva *et al.* 2023:398).

3.11 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE AS STUDENT RECRUITMENT STRATEGY AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

HEIs' student recruitment strategies are highly competitive in the higher education sector, and allow HEIs to receive key updates about tuition fees, scholarships, entry requirements, student support, course changes, events, and more through CI processes. Moreover, one of the advantages of CI is that it helps organisations understand competitive forces and threats that impact success in their environment. Identifying these factors allows organisations to address blind spots that could lead to misunderstandings about markets, competitors, customer needs, or future market positioning (Moyane *et al.* 2020:595).

In higher education, it is an advantage to use CI for student recruitment, as according to Alkhawaldeh *et al.* (2020:954), in addressing competitive pressures, higher education institutions are adopting branding and marketing strategies for student recruitment strategies. In addition, potential students recognise universities that create strong brand images by investing heavily in their image. The

competition among academic organisations has helped HEIs create a unique brand to attract students. A positive brand image attracts more students, funding, and public support. Nwendu (2019:2) agrees to the above statements by mentioning that CI is crucial for HEIs' student recruitment and retention in a global perspective as they rely on students' enrolment and continued presence to function as educational institutions. Universities invest heavily in attracting and keeping students from diverse countries, benefitting both the institutions and the students. This includes recruiting standout students from inside or outside an institution's jurisdiction, starting with contacting them until they are retained.

Seres, Pavlicevic, and Tumbas (2018:9495) state that data provided by the CI process is essential for planning and recruiting students. CI helps universities understand prospective student and parent interactions with web channels and recognise demographic shifts. HEIs invest billions in marketing to differentiate and attract students amidst decreasing numbers. Competitive intelligence drives recruitment to secure and retain top students.

3.12 INSTITUTIONAL BRAND AS A COMPETITIVE STRATEGY FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Zhang (2023:83) argues that branding, as a marketing strategy in higher education, promotes institutional differentiation. Increased competition and decreased government funding are pressing issues for higher education institutions today, making it a highly competitive industry. Institutions must recruit and retain more students for success and, as such, use branding as a solution. Potgieter and Doubell (2020:112) say that a brand is a name that represents a set of perceptions created on emotional and functional standards and benefits that support the differentiation of a product from the rest. Bekimbetova, Erkinov and Rakhimov (2021:113) indicate that branding is referred to as a set of marketing tools and a procedure for brand management, which involves developing a brand name for products, market positioning and ensuring reputation through consistent monitoring for compliance of a definite brand with the market requirements. Mohajer (2020:19) mentions that higher education institutions are overwhelmed by pressures, such as declining financial grants and student enrolment that force them to develop marketing and advancement to global disciplines that encourage the marketisation of higher education. Strategic management, as defined by Ekeagbara *et al.* (2019:82), is a planned approach to dealing with analyses and decisions taken by organisations to retain a competitive advantage over competitors. However, as complex as competition is, organisational managers must make that strategic decision, or they will fail. Brands assist consumers/clients to interpret and process information by adding meaning and feelings to the identified product, giving consumers confidence in their purchase decision-making process. Brand communication includes all forms of communication, actions and

activities that affect the relationship between consumers and the brand. Therefore, how a company communicates with its customers is expanding (Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger 2020:126).

According to Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2020:132), institutional branding is another determining factor in higher education that separates each institution from the other competitors, and it ensures that the brand promise is executed through the provision of values that are expected by the target audience. In the branding of HEIs as institutions that uphold the principles of brand management with a large population that is directly affected, they should assume a proactive role to understanding and shaping the meaning of the university brand by carving its identity through advertising and public relations (Mathews 2021:9). There are several commonalities in the discussions above, where marketing is concerned and its application to higher education. The following interconnections have been identified by the researcher:

- It is a management process that is aimed at stakeholder satisfaction.
- Set of activities aimed at recruiting maximum number of customers.

However, Degenaar (2018:165) provides his viewpoints on marketing in a higher education context and includes activities such as the following:

- University's mission is executed through marketing.
- Develop an institution's marketing strategy by targeting potential students, retaining current students, market positioning of the institution.

Maresova, Hruska and Kuca (2020:3) claim that as HEIs face increasing competition in attracting new and retaining the current best students, they have adopted social media as a more viable method of communication between the institution and its stakeholders, namely current students, prospective students, alumni, parents, and community members. Arevalo (2021:6) states that in HEIs, the marketing role deals with whether marketing communication techniques are effectively applied and are not only to understand the market forces. Moreover, HIEs can identify the fundamental impact of their marketing strategy that differentiates themselves from other competitor institutions through the application of suitable marketing communication tools. To pull through, WSU and UFH should discover new techniques to showcase and market their institutions to potential students who still see a future in higher education. Potential students will seek surety that their needs will be met should they decide to enrol with them.

HEIs continue to reciprocally engage different internal and external stakeholders in sharing valuable resources by creating and disseminating new knowledge, improving mutual understanding (Nyananzi *et al.* 2021:1). HEIs operate in a serious competitive environment, where their internal and external

stakeholders have their own dynamic demands and needs, such as family income, accessibility, quality education and educational expectations.

Nationally and internationally, HEIs are increasingly perceived as brands in the modern competitive environments which are influenced by the perceptions held by students and how HEIs manage their interactions with their student (Kaushal and Ali 2020:256). Dropulić, Krupka and Vlašić (2021:215) assert that marketing techniques such as brand management will surely assist HEIs to compete effectively, wherein their brand will be representative of perceptions that stakeholders associate with the institution. Additionally, the perception of quality is shaped by the quality of marketing communication and information disseminated by the institution, coupled with students' experience in interaction with the HEI. Hence, understanding and overseeing brand perceptions of all stakeholders is fundamental to accomplish differentiation among competitors (Gutiérrez-Villar, Alcaide-Pulido and Carbonero-Ruz 2022:2).

Alkhaldeh *et al.* (2020:954) mention that HEIs that possess a strong image can compete more effectively whilst maintaining the need to attract students and differentiate themselves from other HEIs in the increased competitiveness between HEIs. For HEIs to manoeuvre in a challenging competitive environment is to develop a distinct positive brand image that will differentiate themselves in the market and build competitive advantage. A higher education institution positive brand image can be shaped through its rich heritage, a positive perception of education service quality, and trust established by the institution (Qazi *et al.* 2021:2). An HE brand is an observation or emotion perceived and sustained by stakeholders based on their experiences related to that academic institution (Hannan 2021:51).

Petrovic (2021:44) argues that an organisational image is not only about the organisation, but the people in that organisation including the management team. The author further states that there are many factors that shape the influence that the image has on the organisation. Comprehensively, the image goes hand in hand with branding to characterise the product for customers and separate the organisation's product from that of a competitor. Pinar, Girad and Basfirinci (2020:1119) agree that an organisational brand includes factors such as how consumers perceive and feel about a product (and/or service) which may have the ability to capture preference and loyalty. Additionally, positive brand image assists an organisation to distinguish itself from the rest in order to build a competitive advantage. Özdemir and Özcan (2021:444) mention that students are regarded as the major stakeholder component of HEIs, which now extends to how the HEIs use their image to fulfil students' needs, to attract other students, and retain the current students. Panda, Pandey, Bennett, and Tian (2019:238)

provide the following three dimensions that make it possible to dissect the university brand image for a competitive advantage:

- **University heritage:** The brand's track record over the previous years and its core values. These include material things (buildings, regalia, and library) and immaterial things (values, ceremonies, norms, and ethics) which appeal to the student's subconscious mind and forms attitudes towards the brand. This also influences their decision as it shows they are being offered value for money education and higher expectations.
- **Trustworthiness:** The student's impression of trust is derived from their own encounters with individuals working at an HEI and its management strategies and practices while conveying their brand promise. Once students develop that confidence in the institution, employees will guarantee their expectation.
- **Service quality:** Institutional, campus-based administration service quality can be credited across various areas like teaching and learning, research, academic staff, and the general facilities provided by the HEI. It is essential that HEIs in a competitive environment concentrate on the quality of service they are offering so as to establish a positive reputation, which will prompt an improved degree of satisfaction among students.

The brand works as a differentiator or marker of a business or service that distinguishes one brand from another in the competitive market (Cindo and Kornelis 2022:186). HEIs in the HE sectors face critical challenges with regards to recruitment of new students. How HEIs manage their relationship with students and how these students perceive the HEI's image can affect their relationship with the institution.

WSU builds its brands through the following activities (2021 WSU general prospectus):

- Student recruitment and general marketing
- Corporate and student recruitment advertising
- University events including graduation ceremonies
- University-branded merchandise
- Media relations
- Internal and external communication
- Corporate publications
- Marketing and content aspects of the WSU website
- Graphic Design for the University Community
- Foundation Activities

- Advancement of the University Activities.

According to the UFH 2021 prospectus, the UFH Institutional Advancement office is responsible for communicating to internal and external audiences about university programmes, research and the activities of faculties and staff. Through visible connection between marketing and communications and UFH's brand value, protecting its image is crucial. Its marketing plans are to increase quality student numbers through targeted pre-application activities and longer-term improvement of recruitment systems to allow potential students to make informed decisions about their future with UFH. Below are their marketing and communication activities:

- Publicising events, successes, and innovations
- Writing, targeting, and issuing news releases
- Updating students on important notices, research developments and campus events
- Briefing journalists
- Responding to enquiries from journalists, media researchers and social media
- Promoting UFH staff as expert commentators on TV, radio, and social media.

Numerous HEIs are indeed adopting and adjusting to new business pressures by creating an institutional brand and advertising programmes, introducing themselves as the best service providers in higher education (Chen 2019:2). Sjögren and Trautmann (2019:11) mention that in the HEI setting, brand architecture is the framework which makes it feasible for the HEIs to manage and advertise programmes as services offered. This framework ought to be in accordance with the institution's mission, support structure and strategies. Differentiating strategies requires differentiating architectures. If an HEI attempts to establish a unique brand and identity different from its competitors, it needs to be able to separate the brand identity from the brand image to have an effective and interactive communication dissemination with stakeholders such as staff and students.

Balmer and Podnar (2021:733) explain that corporate identity is a significant concept that provides organisations with distinctiveness in the market, differentiation, effectiveness, cohesiveness, representation, and lastly competitive advantage. They further state that brand identity refers to how the institution is understood internally by its employees and brand image concerns how the institution is seen externally, especially regarding their distinctive characteristics. In higher education, the concept of corporate image entails market positioning which has an impact on the potential student's decision to enrol with any institution, which may vary depending on that stakeholder (Manov, Mujkić and Husić-Mehmedović 2020:205).

Therefore, brand image is especially important for HEIs as they operate within a competitive environment and are constantly working on differentiating themselves from the rest to appeal to the targeted students. Moreover, there are several interlinked complexities such as internal perceptions of employees about the jobs, level they work in (hierarchy) and the department they are in which results in sub-cultures within an institution (Spry *et al.* 2020:6). It is cited in Stukalina (2019:619) that with the increase in global competition in the HE markets, branding is broadly utilised in HE sectors.

A brand concept in this sector incorporates sizeable and abstract components. They may contain the following”

- University attributes
 - State accreditation of the academia or educational programmes
 - International accreditation of educational programmes
 - Qualification of the academic staff with Master’s, Doctoral and post-Doctoral qualifications
 - Financial characteristics (e.g. tuition fee, available scholarships, and grants)
 - Available facilities (e.g. location, university environment)
 - Technology (ICTs).
- University image
 - Qualification prestige and value
 - Assured employment
 - History of a university
 - Achievements of graduates, etc.
- University brand value.

3.13 CONCLUSION

This literature chapter has demonstrated that CI can be applied to higher education. This will be tested amongst a selected higher education institution by exploring how CI can be used for student recruitment. The chapter also presented the use of efficient student recruiting methods, the implementation of competitive intelligence strategies in higher education institutions, and scrutinised factors influencing marketing and communication techniques in student recruitment. This study has assumed that institutional managers are aware of the elements supporting the success of competitive intelligence strategy in higher education. For higher education institutions to recognise potential students' perspectives and expectations, several CI theories were outlined, along with the importance of student recruiting techniques. The next chapter explains the research methodology employed to conduct the fieldwork for this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION



The literature on competitive intelligence models and theories was discussed in the previous chapter, with a focus on how competitive intelligence is applied in South African higher education institutions. This chapter's main objectives are to present existing research on the availability of competitive intelligence and to discuss the research methods adopted for this study. As a result, the research framework approach and methodology are discussed in this section. Additionally, the procedure outlines all steps that were necessary, and provides a comprehensive overview of data collection and analysis, all of which was based on standards for validity and reliability that guarantee the study would identify and meet the objectives.

A multi-modal methodological approach, referred to as mixed methods by Creswell (2009) was adopted as part of the research design to produce data. A survey was used to elicit information from learners' choice of a preferred higher education institution and which other considerations they used as the first level for data production and analysis. A qualitative approach to obtain data was through interviews in the second data production and analysis. The aim of the interviews with staff members in the Marketing, Communication and Advancement offices in WSU and UFH was to understand their competitive strategies to attracting and retaining students for a competitive advantage over the other institutions and this comprised a case study design for this study.

Through the research design and the justification for data production decision processes, the chapter discusses the steps followed in producing data. As a result, a detailed explanation of the research design is provided, as well as the parts that made up the design which were employed to produce the data. The study population, participants, and information extracted to obtain the needed data are mentioned in this chapter. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the methodological limitations that were encountered during the data collection.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

To gain a thorough knowledge of the competitive intelligence strategies utilised by WSU and UFH, this study integrated quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Data from the survey questionnaire and participant interviews were used to compile this understanding. It is imperative that any research study contains a plan and structure in its attempt to obtain data. Therefore, an exploration into the enquiry ought to highlight the intended outcomes and how these outcomes can be used. McDaniel and Gates

(2014) state that most research examinations apply three kinds of research plans, namely exploratory, causal, or descriptive research designs. This study adopted an explanatory sequential design so that qualitative data could explain and contextualise the study's quantitative findings. Polonsky and Waller (2011:94) affirmed that using a research design requires having planned strategy of connecting the research problems to the relevant and attainable empirical research. Moreover, it provides a step-by-step direction for techniques used before data collection and the data analysis stages (Asenahabi 2019:77). Kumar and Singh (2015:71) contend that the research design undergoes several developments during the study and as understanding of it expands.

Larkin, Begley and Devane (2014: 8-12), and Caruth (2013: 112-122) argue that the choice of the research design in a study can be determined by the research objectives which formed the key driving factors of this study. As the research study design designates the research process of data collection to be undertaken and analysis (Mofokeng, Giampiccoli & Jugmohan 2018:16), the design is consequently important in supporting the researcher to employ appropriate research methods that will validate research objectives. The overall aim of this study was to investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment and the study's objectives are stated below.

- Examine marketing and communication strategies used for student recruitment at public universities.
- Discuss how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy for student recruitment.
- Explain competitive theories within the context of public universities.
- Investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment at two public universities in the Eastern Cape.
- Recommend a communication strategy that incorporates competitive intelligence.

The research aims and its objectives, as stated above, were cautiously considered as supporting factors and were reflected in the research methodology of this study. Considering the insightful observations, the researcher adopted a pragmatic paradigm to comprehend the scope of competitive intelligence strategies utilised and the subjective experiences of student recruiting officials in a university setting.

4.2.1 Research paradigms

Park, Artino and Konge (2020:690) state that a research paradigm is a philosophical framework that underpins research by providing a framework of beliefs and understandings upon which the research project's theories and methods are based. E-international relations (2021) postulate that in an interpretivist approach, knowledge is a result of subjective comprehension of the reality whilst the

reality is relative and complex. Likewise, acquiring knowledge of reality that is difficult for scientists to access is derived from accurate application of interpretive research procedures. The author further elaborates that through qualitative methods, data is collected not to predict but to explain reality. Positivism means that there is only one world and its reality, and Park, Konge and Artino (2020:691) purport there is one reality, based in the assumption that the single reality can be identified, understood, and measured. This is based on objectivity by separating knowledge development from influence of the both the researcher and participants. Most of the mixed methods research ought to be guided by pragmatism as a worldview or paradigm.

It is a problem-focused attitude that asserts that the best research approaches are those that contribute most significantly to the solution of the research topic. Conducting social science research frequently entails combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess various facets of a research subject (Moyo 2021:72). The pragmatic argument that paradigms are logically independent (so do not affect each other) and can therefore be mixed and matched harmlessly, and depending on what suits the research question or questions is a well-known variation of the dual/dialectical attitude. This idea is that paradigms can be placed next to one another. Ontology, epistemology, and research methods make up a research paradigm.

4.2.2 Mixed method approach

Data on extent factors for competitive intelligence strategies was presented numerically, thus prompting a mixed methodology approach for the study. Qualitative data was necessary to capture the experiences and responses of marketing and communication department professionals. Harvard catalyst (2019) suggests that mixed methods research strategically combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to leverage their strengths. By integrating inductive and deductive thinking and exploiting the strengths of each data type, researchers can overcome the limitations of strict quantitative and qualitative research.

Furthermore, it is used to create a thorough description and interpretation of the data, to make quantitative results more intelligible, and to comprehend the broader relevance of qualitative findings from a small sample. Mixed methods inquiry assisted the researcher to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the higher education institutions (VWSU and UFH) by quantitatively generating an account of their enrolment figures as well as qualitatively capturing student perceptions of the each of these universities.

A mixed methods case study design is a type of mixed methods study in which the results of both quantitative and qualitative data collection are integrated to provide in-depth evidence for a case(s) or

to develop cases for comparative analysis (Creswell and Plano Clarke 2018 :16). Additionally, the choice of this mixed methods research was to assess its critical role in exploring and describing the complexities and challenges involved in student recruitment strategies. Maharaj (2018:105) explains that the advantage of this type of approach is to understand the research problem more in its totality by involving both quantitative and qualitative methods, hence the mixed method approach was adopted.

Gowan (2019:36) adds that while mixed methods research has been suggested as a paradigm that integrates the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research, at the same time it minimises their weaknesses. Therefore, connecting the use of qualitative methods of data collection such as interviews with quantitative methods such as surveys (questionnaires) provides the possibility of a more balanced and complete view of how competitive intelligence affects institutional decision making. The strategy, subsequently, has one overarching advantage, which is its ability to respond and answer questions that other methodologies cannot, and to provide some strong arguable conclusions with a greater diversity of viewpoints. Therefore, this study used explanatory sequential design.

4.2.3 Justification of the explanatory sequential design

There are two different sequential designs for mixed methods research, according to Creswell and Clark (2017). Explanatory sequential design is the second alternative following exploratory sequential design. In particular, the explanatory sequential design of mixed methods research is the emphasis of this study. The quantitative phase is highlighted in the explanatory sequential design of mixed method research, which is followed by the qualitative phase. The purpose of the second qualitative phase is typically to provide an explanation for the findings from the first quantitative phase (Tayon 2021:254). To analyse the research problem and answer research questions, the study used mixed-method research using an explanatory sequential design. In this study's technique, quantitative data was first gathered and examined. After that, qualitative information was gathered and examined to clarify the quantitative results. When quantitative data reveal broad relationship patterns that cannot be fully explained by quantitative data alone and necessitate the generation of additional insights, this approach is an excellent fit.

Prior to beginning the qualitative aspects, quantitative data was collected and analysed. On the positive side, employing a mixed method was beneficial. The inclusion of quantitative data during the data gathering process aided in providing a more comprehensive view of the CI strategies at WSU and UFH from many angles. A mixed-method approach also improves the clarity of information as the researcher makes use of each approach's strengths, according to Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017:4). Given that WSU and UFH were the core of the study as higher education institutions, the current study was

conducted on campuses in East London. Universities serve as a hub for competitive intelligence strategies used to attract potential students.

4.3 POPULATION

Nasari *et al.* (2021:654) explain that the entire group of individuals, events, or items of interest that the researcher desires to explore is referred to as the target population. University or undergraduate students are frequently used as study subjects in many academic studies due to practical reasons such as convenience, time, and cost savings. Rucker (2017) defines a population as an entire group of study who have specific characteristics under research (demographics) that the researcher is interested in. The study was conducted in East London, South Africa at WSU and UFH, respectively. The target population of this study refers to all selected participants or all selected individuals, at the time of conducting the study, were above 18 years of age and were enrolled for a first year in WSU or UFH, and participating staff members in both institutions.

Therefore, the first targeted population included first time entering students while the secondary target population was university staff members in the marketing and communication departments. The population was determined as the key units in the study as they were considered to have all the characteristics required by the researcher to validate the study findings.

4.3.1 Quantitative population

The population of this study included **first time entering** students in WSU and UFH in their East London campuses. East London is one of the highly contested regions between WSU and UFH, with WSU having six delivery sites and UFH with one delivery site. WSU Buffalo city campus has an estimated number 700 students, inclusive of approximately 700 first time entering registered students and with 300 staff members, while UFH has 4000 registered first-time entering students spread across faculties of humanities and social sciences, management and commerce, education, and law with 500 first-time entering students in its East London campus. The total number unit of the population is 1500, both female and male first-time entering students, while the study sample population was 400 students that represented 33.3% of the entire population.

The sample was representative of the population in terms of gender. In order to request the participation of the target population, their data/information was requested from WSU and UFH Management Information System departments. Conroy (2018:9) suggests that a researcher needs a large sample for a quantitative survey and this depends on the population size.

Table 5: Quantitative population

Quantitative population			
Institution	Student population	Target population	Sample population
WSU (BCC)	7000	700 first time entering students	200
UFH (EL)	4000	450 first time entering students	200
Total	11000	1150 first time entering students	400

4.3.2 Qualitative population

Five staff members per institution in the marketing and communication departments were identified as they are key role players in student recruitment strategies. The researcher chose marketing and communication workers for an interview using a non-probability purposive sampling technique for qualitative objectives. Purposive sampling, according to Samar (2017:3), is "a technique where researchers utilize their judgment to pick a group of people who are knowledgeable about the problem." Based on the population's characteristics and the study's goals, participants were chosen based on a set of criteria (years of experience in student recruiting).

Table 6: Qualitative population

Qualitative population			
Institution	Staff population	Target population	Sample population
WSU (BCC)	600	10 Marketing and communication staff	5
UFH (EL)	300	10 Marketing and communication staff	5
Total	900	20 Marketing and communication staff	10

4.4 SAMPLING METHOD

Neenkalavile (2015:240) and Krysik and Finn (2013:123) provide a clear distinction between probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling permits the researcher to obtain a more exact sample and to make more dependable projections to the target populace. Non-probability sampling does not utilise random sampling as the populace may not be effectively identifiable and it does not allow accurate generalisation of results. Taherdoost (2016:20) adds that sampling is the act of

extracting a subset or a unit from the chosen sampling frame or entire population. Furthermore, sampling is also used make interpretations and generalisations of a populace in relation to the existing theory. In this section of research, the researcher needs to be aware that the study depends on the choice of his sampling technique, which can be divided into two types of sampling techniques as listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Sampling techniques

Probability sampling	Non-probability sampling
Simple random sampling	Quota sampling
Stratified sampling	Snowball sampling
Cluster sampling	Judgemental sampling
Systematic sampling	Convenience sampling
Multistage sampling	

Taherdoost 2016:23

Cooper and Schindler (2014:84-85) explain that sample design is termed “a blueprint” design for extracting a sample from a given population the researcher adopts in choosing a sample. Cited in Kangisingi (2019:74-75), Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2007) provide the information in Tables 8 and 9 to explain the two types of sampling, probability sampling and non-probability sampling methods.

Table 8: Probability sampling methods

Probability sampling methods	
Simple random sampling	It is the basic type of random sampling. Every element of the sampling frame has the equal chance of being selected.
Systematic sampling	Simple method to use. It could be carried out by selecting the first element randomly and then select every second or third that comes.
Cluster random sampling	It is used to frame the large population. Occurs when there is a need to generate a more efficient probability sample at low cost.
Stratified random sampling	It categorises all element in groups or strata (age and gender). Identifies subgroups of interest and the equal number of elements is drawn for each group.

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell 2007:55

Table 9: Non-probability sampling methods

Non-probability sampling	
Snowball sampling	Difficulty to identify cases. Cases will have characteristics desired as identified cases will also find cases with similar characteristics.
Quota sampling	Guided by some visible characteristic, such as gender and age and race of the population. It is a less expensive way of selecting a sample.
Judgemental sampling	The purposive sampling is based on your judgement. Suitable when the researcher wishes to construct a historical reality.
Convenience sampling	Low in terms of cost but less representative. Cases are selected haphazardly and easy to obtain.

Welma, Kruger and Mitchell 2007:56

4.4.1 Quantitative sampling

Rahman *et al.* (2021:43) assert that research is the process of discovering how to address a problem, learning more about it, and then producing a better solution to deal with the issue. Obtaining a representative sample composed of a limited number of units or cases selected from a much larger group or population is the primary objective of sampling. A generalisation about the total population can be drawn from the sample data. Samples help to reduce the amount of time and expense needed to conduct a survey. Therefore, sampling is a useful strategy for conducting social science research. The probability cluster sampling was used in this study to select the units of analysis and to ensure that different WSU and UFH delivery sites are included in the sample. The cluster sampling divided a research population into groups or subgroups from which the sample was selected. The inclusion of all the subgroups increases the representativeness of the sample and portrays various perspectives in a survey study (Best 2012:238). The researcher selected random groups with systematic random sampling or simple random for quantitative data collection and data analysis.

Cluster sampling works best when the groups (clusters) are like each other but internally diverse on the dimensions of interest. The study populace was divided into many groups, called clusters, where the researcher aimed to sample a fixed number of clusters to collect a simple random sample within each cluster. Though there is no research requirement to sample from every cluster, much opposed to stratified sampling in its process which is very much like cluster sampling, but this technique is more

economical than the alternatives. This process is easier than randomly selecting students from the entire population and having to contact and survey each selected student individually. This allows the selected population to be divided from the larger population into manageable smaller sections. The following inclusion and exclusion standards were established to define the population.

All participants from the specific area who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study, according to Maree (2016:79), who defined a sample as a subset of a full group picked by the researcher to participate in a study.

4.4.2 Qualitative sampling

Ten marketing and communication department staff members with an emphasis on student recruitment were also interviewed for the study's goals. A convenience sampling, according to Scholtz (2021:2), is a non-probability sampling technique that gathers information from anyone who is willing to participate in a study, is the most approachable, or is in some other manner conveniently available to the researcher. The researcher gathered first-hand information from the available sample for a mixed-methods study's qualitative component. It was reasonable to use such a sampling technique to gather preliminary insight into how individuals perceived certain events. As discussed in Chapter 1, the study's aim was to investigate how public universities employ competitive intelligence methods to recruit students. Therefore, convenience sampling was an appropriate choice for data collection in the units that are responsible for marketing and communication, and student recruitment in WSU and UFH.

4.4.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria for students.

The following requirements had to be met by participants to be part of the population:

- Must be a first-time entering student.
- Registered either in WSU or UFH campuses only.
- Above the age of 18 years.
- Be able to read, speak and fully comprehend English.

Inclusion criteria for marketing and communication department staff.

- Participants had to be in the student recruitment unit.
- Knowledgeable about marketing strategies targeted for student recruitment.
- Knowledgeable of student recruitment technologies.

4.4.4 Exclusion criteria

Students were excluded based on the following criteria:

- Participants are not first time entering students registered for level II and above.
- Do not meet the minimum requirements.

Staff members were excluded based on the following:

- Not working in the marketing and communication department.
- Did not have more than five years in higher education student recruitment.

4.5 MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed to first time entering students at WSU and UFH and ten interviews were conducted according to staff availability from both institutions. The study population involved in this study are mentioned above and the primary data collection instruments were questionnaires distributed to the target population and interviews conducted with the target population (N=410). The population for the survey was students (N=400) with different personal data including area of high school and their preferences for their choices. Confidentiality was guaranteed using consent letters (Appendix D) for both the survey and interviews. The quantitative data gathered was properly examined making use of descriptive statistics known as mean and standard deviation with the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. Though there was some expected resistance from the target sample, participants were not forced to participate as it was their right to discontinue when they needed to.

4.5.1 Instrument design

A mixed method study might make use of a variety of tools. The following were related to this study's goals: employing a recorder to capture the data from semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire.

Quantitative instrument design

The researcher distributed the questionnaire to different respondents. The questionnaire consisted of the following sections:

- Section 1 – participant demographics.
- Section 2 – student recruitment and competitive intelligence strategies.
- Section 3 – marketing and communication, and branding and reputation.
- Section 4 – open ended questions.

This question strategy allowed investigation and insight into complex preferences. This investigation utilised a semi-structured questionnaire composed of open and closed-ended questions. These questions were organised in advance and were set to extract the exact information required for the study. Additionally, the closed-ended question intentions were to limit responses from which the respondents had to choose.

A questionnaire is an 'instrument' for gathering and recording data about a specific issue of interest. It is a form of a survey, and the structure is arranged and conveyed to secure reactions to specific inquiries. This instrument provides a compilation of questions which the sample population from which data is required fills in by themselves (Nayak and Singh 2015:96).

The layout of the instrument was simple and non-ambiguous as this may affect the quality of the desired information, interest of the respondent to participate and may cause lack of cooperation. Hereafter, the researcher aimed to develop an easy to read questionnaire with a clear layout, seeking demographic information in the first section, and thereafter gradually leading respondents to sections based on the study objectives. A total of 29 quantitative questions and ten open-ended questions were developed and administered to students. Skard and Thorbjornsen (2017:1414) argue that a survey instrument with open and closed-ended questions ensures that the information required is obtained with an ease to analyse. Although it has some disadvantages, the most notable disadvantage is that the data collected may lack depth and variety and researcher bias.

Qualitative instrument design

The five WSU and five UFH employees in the marketing, communication and advancement directorates were scheduled for 15-minute structured interviews with 24 questions. However, considering the volatile higher education environment, some employees were not willing to readily offer their time even though a letter to conduct interviews had been submitted and approved by both university managements. Irvine and Gaffikin (2006:115) and Bryman (2012:209) both agree that interviews as data collection instruments in research assist to better understand participant views on questions asked. Kumar (2011:47) adds that interviews promote in-depth information from informants which additionally accommodates complex and sensitive discussions. The interview schedule enabled the researcher to comprehend unique strategies used by WSU and UFH regarding competitive intelligence, specifically how they manage to recruit and enrol students, and still maintain a competitive advantage over each other. Dougherty (2014:94) states that various kinds of interviews produce various sorts of responses from various individuals. The researcher recognised the most suitable type of interview to be executed

during the qualitative exploration/research. There are three basic kinds of interviews, namely unstructured, structured and fixed response (closed), and structured and open-ended.

The 24 question semi-structured interviews were categorised by open-ended questions which defined broad subject areas. Busetto *et al.* (2020:3) state that an interview guide, sometimes referred to as topic guide/list, contains broad areas of research interest, with pre-defined topics derived from the study literature. Therefore, the ten informant interviews were used for obtaining information from officials about the two institutions, not information about themselves, but rather information on the study and research topics that they were familiar with.

4.6 PRETESTING

The nature of surveys will absolutely improve extensively from setting up any sort of open pretest technique as the standard within normalised instrument development. Indeed, even open types of pretests will consistently have their impediments. Some pretesting procedures deal with the nature of the study instruments itself as well as testing organisational viewpoints and data collection techniques (for example arrangement of interviewees) A typical approach is to direct a set number of pretest interviews and afterwards evaluate out an assessment of this little dataset dependent on factual standards. Hurst *et al.* (2015:56) contend that the act of pretesting is exceptionally viewed as a compelling method for improving legitimacy in subjective information assortment techniques and the translation of discoveries. Pretesting includes simulating the proper data collection process on a limited scale to distinguish practical issues concerning data collection instruments, sessions, and strategy. The benefit of pretesting can prompt the detection of mistakes in diverse language importance and word ambiguity, just as finding potential flaws in the study variables can. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be utilised in conjunction with a pilot study because both can produce relevant data in this setting (Baldeh *et al.* 2020:1).

4.6.1 Quantitative pretesting

The researcher tried pretesting for reliability in a pilot study utilising a similar populace to improve the developed instrument. The survey was dependent on a perceptive pretest with 30 first-time entering students, 15 from each institution. Guaranteeing the pretesting with every one of the pertinent questions posed was significant, and whenever this was explained, the researcher was then ready to analyse and distribute the surveys (reference section D). In this study, reliability was ensured as only the researcher conducted the main study and pilot study. Three major content sections are in the questionnaire: the cover letter, the demographic profile, the items, and the closing instruction. The

cover letter includes basic information about the researcher and assurance that the information disclosed for this study shall be handled with great confidentiality.

Various methodological decisions likewise should be viewed while choosing a pretesting mode. In conventional academic interviews, researchers have the adaptability to utilise unscripted questions to ask explicit subsequent questions. These elements should be painstakingly considered when planning studies to best use the qualities of every strategy. Each pretesting examination increases the value of the earlier (whether started with interviews or survey), while tending to constraints because of the mode or design, prompting a well-supported conclusion that would not have been conceivable had just a single strategy (qualitative and quantitative) been utilised.

The instrument was finalised for pilot testing. In addition, the instrument was administered for pilot testing with 30 students who met the inclusion criteria set for this study. Participants for the pilot testing were first-time entering students who did not form part of the sample in the final administration of the questionnaire for data gathering. The researcher understood that he had to evaluate the entire questionnaire under survey conditions by conducting a pilot test. The main advantage of pilot testing was finding issues before conducting the complete survey through evaluation of each question's reliability. Therefore, the exercise was to assess whether the questions were gathering the data that was meant to be measured. This was not only to fulfil the study's aims and objectives, but also to analyse various aspects of the entire questionnaire.

The researcher sought to have procedures put in place during the pilot testing of both instruments, as stated below.

- For a pilot test, a small sample of 30 respondents were selected. They were first-time entering students from other campuses in both WSU and UFH.
- The Pilot test was completed with the introductory briefing session to familiarise respondents with the study.
- The instrument was examined while respondents responded to the questions.
- Necessary changes were implemented before the instrument was used in the research field.

The above pretesting of the questionnaire helped to improve the research instrument overall by enabling the clarification and correction of unclear questions. The fixed-choice responses guaranteed that the questions were comprehended by the participants, promoted openness and attentiveness, and gave them a sense of confidence to respond truthfully. The principal and co-supervisor of the researchers were also given both questionnaires to review for suitable content and structure prior to

the piloting. Before beginning to gather data for the main investigation, the results of the pilot project were submitted to the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) for complete approval.

4.6.2 Qualitative pretesting

Less, Walters, and Godbold (2022:3) discuss the significance and role of the pilot study in qualitative inquiry for the purpose of evaluating the viability of the larger project and conducting a smaller-scale version of it to "test the research process in a trial process such as recruitment strategies, data collection, and data analysis methods." Additionally, pilots give researchers the chance to test research tools like surveys so as to make sure the questions are clear and appropriate for the participant demographic. The pretesting for interviews was conducted with three staff members to assess the subjective responses to, and appreciation of the language and information topics. Therefore, the interview schedule instrument was pilot tested for validity and reliability as means to detect any flaws and ambiguity. Any errors picked up, were corrected.

4.7 DATA COLLECTION

In this study, data collection was undertaken using two instruments administered online and physically, namely a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted online as per the participants' request. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed as stated previously, with an option to discontinue should they feel uneasy during the data collection. Before the data collection process commenced, a covering letter accompanied by the consent letter was attached to the questionnaire. The consent letter provided all relevant information such as the study objectives and the instructions to be followed. All respondents were informed of the study's objectives as well as their voluntary participation and their anonymity. The participants' anonymity was protected by not collecting any personal data about them. Furthermore, the analysis employed only recorded sound (i.e. not video). Oral consent was obtained, and interviews were recorded.

4.7.1 Quantitative data collection

Only after receiving approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) at Durban University of Technology did the researcher begin gathering data (Annexure E). The researcher personally sent a parcel containing the questionnaire (Annexure A), a letter of information (Annexure C), and a consent form (Annexure D) to WSU and UFH throughout the recruitment process for all interested students. On the first day the participants were to be recruited, they were approached at WSU and UFH respectively and, if interested, the data collection process was explained to them. The

questionnaire may not only bring advantages, but also downsides. Respondents may give inaccurate, confusing, ambiguous, or irrelevant answers when answering a questionnaire.

The questionnaire development was based on literature considering the research objectives. The survey questionnaire consisted of four sections with 24 question items about university competitive strategies with a set of questions about sociodemographic information (such as sex, age, race, degree, level, and university). Closed questions used a Likert-scale of five options and the students had to evaluate each item. The instrument-related elements were divided into four, with Section 1 as sociodemographic competitive intelligence-related subcomponents; Section 2 contained 16 items on selecting a university, its programmes and accessibility; Section 3 contained nine items on the competitive strategies, marketing and communication strategies employed by universities; and Section 4 comprised open-ended questions.

- Section 1: Socio demographic questions (1 – 4)
- Section 2: Student recruitment (5-8) and Competitive intelligence strategy factors (9-20)
- Section 3: Marketing and communication strategies (20-29)
- Section 4: 10 open-ended questions (1-10).

4.7.2 Qualitative data collection

As part of the ethical requirements, participants were sent emails requesting interviews. The email had an attached letter of information and gatekeeper's permission from their respective institutions for them to peruse. Upon agreeing to participate, they were also requested to participate in the interviews online. The interviews were conducted online via MS teams. WSU participants requested online interviews as they were busy with admissions of recruited students. On the dates of set interviews, an online link was sent to WSU participants based on their preferred times and dates. An interview schedule (Annexure B) was used and designed simplistically to probe notes to ensure consistency. The interviews were conducted online due to the busy schedule of the respondents. Respondents were requested in advance for a data collection session via email, lasting 10 to 15 minutes with 24 questions and provided with the Letter of Information and Consent to participate in a research interview for staff (Annexure D). The ten respondents were informed of the purpose of the study to counteract any negative effects, which were very much unlikely to occur, and additionally, an appropriate follow-up debriefing session was put in-place. The interview schedule enables the collection of objective data from the respondents and prevents diversions from the subject, hence avoiding researcher bias or subjective judgments. Additionally, the same questions are asked of every respondent, allowing for an unbiased

comparison of findings (Brink and Berndt 2010:153). Below are how questions were structured according to the expected outcome of the interviews.

- Question 1– 4: Sociodemographic questions
- Question 5 – 7: Student recruitment
- Question 8 –12: Competitive intelligence strategies
- Question 13 – 17: Marketing and communication
- Question 18 – 20: Branding and reputation
- Question 21 – 24: Factors influencing choice of university.

4.8 STUDY DELIMITATIONS

The first delimitation is this study is that the researcher wanted higher education institutions that are based in East London such as WСУ and UFH with regards to ease of travelling and expenses. Secondly, the questionnaire was to be administered to all respondents and then interviews were to be arranged to probe for clarity where required.

4.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is described by Johnson (2022) as the process of cleansing, manipulating, and modelling data to find relevant information for business decision-making. Extracting usable information from data and making decisions based on that analysis are the goals of data analysis. As per Babbie (2016:22), data analysis is a process of reviewing, cleaning, changing, and displaying information to find useful data, recommending conclusions. Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong (2011:432) add that data analysis is significant as it utilises raw information to learn something more conceptual and general. The process of data analysis includes making sense of the results from the data collected with sophisticated arrangement, as the researcher moves into a more profound understanding of the information, constantly reflecting and analysing (Creswell 2009: 188).

4.9.1 Quantitative data analysis

The methodology for the data analysis is reviewed in this discussion. In this study, the qualitative data was analysed by the researcher after the quantitative data had initially been examined by an accredited statistician, erasing any negative associations with the combined methodological approach. To summarise the characteristics of a sample statistically or graphically, descriptive statistics are used. Data from a sample can be studied using certain techniques to spot trends or patterns that it exhibits. It aids in arranging the data in a way that is easier to handle and understand. The closed questions were utilised to collect data from first-time entering students, and the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS)

version 25 was used to evaluate the outcomes of the items. To achieve the description, descriptive data like the mean score and standard deviation were obtained.

The statistician "cleaned" the data for responses that were obvious errors and undertook a preliminary analysis of the data. The researcher then commenced with descriptive statistics. The use of descriptive statistics, which describe the organisation and summarisation of quantitative data, is one of the main methods for quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics are helpful because they summarise experiment results, enabling research that is more productive after further in-depth study. By examining the distribution of scores for each variable and determining whether the scores on several variables are related to one another, descriptive data analysis seeks to characterise the data.

Devlin (2018:420) concurred that the following information is provided by descriptive statistical approaches in the same context:

- Mean: The average score for a group is determined by dividing the sum of all individual scores by the total number of scores.
- The median is the midpoint of a frequency distribution that was ordered according to size.
- The mode is a value that appeared frequently in a frequency distribution.
- Standard deviation is calculated by adding the deviations (differences) between each observation and the mean after corrections.

4.9.2 Qualitative data analysis

This study used a content analysis approach for qualitative data, dissecting words that occur frequently. Content analysis is a research apparatus used to determine the presence of specific words, topics, or ideas within given qualitative data (for example text). Utilising content analysis, researchers can evaluate and analyse the presence, relationships and meanings of certain words, subjects, or ideas. This type of examination is helpful for investigating verbal data gathered through observations or interviews and furthermore offers opportunities for evaluation of categories (Demuth and Mey 2015:3). A brief description of the quantitative data analysis is explained; various statistical processes are also addressed. Thematic analysis, which is a technique for identifying, examining, and interpreting patterns of meaning (or "themes") within qualitative data, was used in this study to examine the interviews (Clarke and Braun, 2017). Themes that emerged in many of the interviews and/or were strongly emphasised as significant by multiple respondents were examined in the respondents' statements. Then, all pertinent information and relevant themes were compiled and cross-referenced with the complete dataset.

This is the stage where the data is coded, summed up and classified to recognise significant issues of the perspectives being explored; data organisation – the process of amassing the data around specific themes and introducing the outcomes and interpretations; identification of patterns and clarification which prompts conclusions which can be tested through more data collection. This process eliminates irrelevant data and when the researcher was able to categorise data, it was feasible to distinguish significant themes that developed from the study. According to Brawn and Clarke (2012: 57), thematic analysis is adaptable and an undeniably popular technique for qualitative information, which empowers the researcher with a foundation for analytical abilities and skills. Theme development is additionally perceived to help a qualitative analysis researcher with ways to deal with the information analysis (Vaismoradi, Bondas and Turunen 2016:398). For this investigation specifically, topics/themes were inferred with thought to information gathered from the different literature sources.

Therefore, the qualitative data responses were grouped into related categories of response for analysis. Qualitative data was analysed by the researcher using NVivo version 12 software. Interview transcripts were used to capture significant information from the data by using thematic analysis such as coding. Each code was labelled with a description by documenting the researcher's understanding of the code. These codes were grouped into themes to answer the research questions.

As the research focused on the human experience, the qualitative data was given precedence at this point. To provide an explanation of how competitive strategies are used by higher education institutions, particularly WSU and UFH in East London, both the quantitative data and the qualitative data were evaluated and merged.

4.10 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Reliability and validity are the two most significant components of accuracy and are utilised to lessen bias. Reliability and validity are technical terms that pertain to the objectivity and credibility of the research, according to Naidoo (2019:46). Validity and reliability are two ideas that can help assess the quality of outcomes or conclusions from a variety of studies, including those in the social, educational, and medical sciences.

Welman *et al.* (2012:142) state that the concept of validity alludes to the degree to which the examination discoveries precisely address what is truly occurring in the circumstance and that an investigation could become invalid if poor research techniques and examples are misleading which would undermine the legitimacy of the study. Bryman (2012:188) adds that validity in research is the vital and significant focus for integrity of the concluded discoveries as this is a sign to assess whether an idea in

research has really measured what it was set to do. Moreover, the strategy that researchers use to test the validity of the scores from a survey can be utilised to anticipate related behaviours (McBride 2015:80).

Validity and reliability additionally guarantee that research findings, readings and interpretations are accurate. The consolidated technique approach has additionally been informed from a research design approach, noticing that validity and reliability are prevalently from quantitative research, while qualitative research gives in-depth and significant interpretations of participants' experiences coordinated with explanations in interviews.

4.10.1 Quantitative reliability

Validity, as described by Khathise (2019:35), was observed for data quality control. Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures the concept and the extent to which the instrument measures what it is designed to measure.

The researcher checked the validity in the surveys that were administered in the pilot study and the findings addressed the phenomenon that the researcher claimed to measure as all responses for surveys were discovered to be valid in the pilot study. The researcher conducted the main study as in the pilot investigation dependability was guaranteed for this study. A pilot study is a small-scale investigation conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of an instrument before it is utilised in a larger investigation. In order to assure the validity, correctness, reliability, and ethical requirements that should be inherent in the questionnaire that will be distributed in the main study, it is necessary to highlight any potential challenges with interpretation and understanding of the questions.

All questions of the study were clear to all respondents and they understood all questions relevant to the study objectives. Reliability and validity of measures in the quantitative stage are the main validation aspects since they form elements of both summative and formative validity. The quantitative validation founded on reliability has been ascertained to be not appropriate for qualitative research. The survey was edited after the pilot test for simplicity to navigate and considering the indispensable information received from respondents. The order and flow of some questions were modified, and questions were reworded or rephrased for simplicity of comprehension. The feedback from the sample test was again consolidated and reviewed to support the study objective.

To assure consistency and reliability, all data collection tools were pretested (measured) at WVSU and UFH. Thorough pilot methods were used to evaluate the content validity of this study. Before distributing the research questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted to check for clarity and to adapt

different forms of the questions to ensure that the research data would be enough. As a result, in this study, the pilot study was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments and that they satisfied the researcher's goals by eliminating any issues resulting from the testing.

The Cronbach's alpha reliability test was performed to make sure that research equipment measured the items they were designed to measure. Chapter 5 contains a report on the findings. The following were addressed regarding the validity and reliability of this study:

- The pretest was used to ensure accuracy, clarity, and good understanding of the questions in the questionnaire and refinement of research instruments.
- All questions were relevant to the constructs of this study.
- The questionnaire was closed-ended to maintain the same standard of answers from participants.

The reliability of data is additionally considered through the utilisation of different tests; subsequently, this study applied Cronbach's alpha test which to measure the internal reliability of the study instrument used. As per Bonett and Wright (2014:13), Cronbach's alpha test is the most comprehensively used measurement to determine reliability within organisation and social sciences. Taber (2017:1273-1274) states that when determining the internal consistency, the researcher might have the option to test the reliability with various repeated measurements. Therefore, having high reliability does not ensure accuracy but inferences can be drawn from it. Cronbach's alpha measures internal consistency, that is, the way in which a set of items are collectively viewed as closely related or as a group. It is viewed as a measure of scale reliability. A 70 or higher of reliability coefficient is considered "as acceptable" in most social sciences research circumstances.

Zakariya (2022:4) mentions that an inappropriate utilisation of alpha can prompt circumstances in which either a test or scale is wrongly disposed of, or the test is criticised for not producing dependable and trustworthy results. Homogeneity or uni-dimensionality can assist when it is necessary to produce trustworthy results, as they will improve the Alpha use. Therefore, interrelatedness of a test sample is referred to as internal consistency, though homogeneity alludes to uni-dimensionality. Ravinder and Saraswathi (2020:2944) add to the above author's definition by stating that the internal consistency reliability inspects the consistency of results across things in a test and might be affected because of poor recording, time changes and mistaken administration.

4.10.2 Qualitative validity

According to Caluza (2022:65), in qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness refers to the study's quality, dependability, and credibility from the viewpoint of readers and users of research data.

In other words, congruence (compatibility) between the information acquired and what happened in the social situation is what is meant by trustworthiness. To assess the stability and quality of the data in comparison to validity and reliability, which are typically connected with quantitative studies, tests to verify the validity and reliability of qualitative data are crucial. Both validity and reliability are widely concerned with the topic of trustworthiness from the viewpoint of qualitative research. Qualitative research does not have confirmed validation benchmarks such as quantitative research has. An expert panel comprised of higher education communication professionals and higher education recruitment officers—who have a deep understanding of the higher education field—was the subject of a pilot research. Five people took part in the pilot study, but they were not picked for the main study's sample. Nothing was modified.

To avoid subjectivity and incorrect interpretation of the research findings, the researcher continuously considered his influence on both the conduct of the study and his contacts with the participants. The key role players in higher education student recruitment, i.e. recruitment officers, were interviewed and their opinions were recorded. Participants were also debriefed to ensure that the answers given were reliable and consistent throughout the semi-structured interviews as per the interview schedule.

4.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Informants voluntarily consented to participate in the study during data collection. Respondents were unable to fill out the questionnaire's questions without first reading the paragraph describing informed permission and checking the "yes" box because the procedures were both physical. Participants gave their verbal agreement for the interview in the information form as the researcher read their rights and, in the information letter attached to the emails sent to them. Participants were given the option to end the interview at any time, as well as to decline to answer or discuss topics, thanks to the informed consent.

The researcher had to be considerate and uphold the guarantee to protect participants, as the study involved human behaviours and thus had to be conducted in an ethical and more acceptable way. Over the span of this study, the researcher considered all parts of ethical ramifications that guide social sciences and accordingly, participant identities were protected in accordance with the consent forms (Appendix D).

Firstly, participants gave consent prior to data collection which implied that they signed to agree to participate in the study and that ensured the code of ethics in research. The study did not experience any physical or emotional harm as the study had guaranteed no harm to respondents. To guarantee

complete compliance to ethical standards, participants were reassured of their right to privacy and that they would remain anonymous.

It is important to note that, prior to data collection, the researcher requested permission to undertake data collection with both students and staff at WSU and UFH. This was by means of the application via formal and official institutional channels, requesting permission to carry out the study. In this study, the researcher submitted request letters (Appendix F and G) and ethical clearance approval was subsequently obtained from both universities, along with the participants with whom the survey was conducted.

The researcher, the data statistician and the study supervisors are the only individuals with access to all returned questionnaires and any interview-related information. All information gathered will be kept in a safe file and participants' data will be secured and not revealed during the publishing of the results. The materials (questionnaires and interview schedules) used will be put away and will be totally discarded after five years.

4.12 CONCLUSION

The theoretical background and methodology were provided in this chapter. The researcher discussed the theoretical and methodological considerations that influenced how competitive intelligence was interpreted in South African higher education institutions. In the second section, the various methods of scientific research inquiry were described in depth, as well as the research paradigm and justification for choosing WSU and UFH as the study campuses. The methodological section also outlined the methods for gathering and analysing data. Additionally, it emphasized the steps required to guarantee ethical consideration, trustworthiness, and validity. The study findings that were obtained from mixed-method data through analysis are presented in the next chapter, along with comments based on those findings.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.1 SECTION I: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

5.2 INTRODUCTION

The presentation, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of findings influencing the competitive strategies used by public higher education institutions have been motivated by data collected in the field and are presented in this chapter. The structure of the data collection instruments, and the research objectives of this study are used to frame the data presentation and discussion.

5.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Examine marketing and communication strategies used for student recruitment at public universities.
- Discuss how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy for student recruitment.
- Explain competitive theories within the context of public universities.
- Investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment at two public universities.
- Recommend a communication strategy that incorporates competitive intelligence for student recruitment.

5.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research instrument included 29 closed-ended and ten open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, as follows:

- Biographical information
- Student recruitment
- Student recruitment marketing and communication strategies
- Open-ended questions.

In total, 400 questionnaires were distributed to WSU and UFH students on their East London campuses, with 234 responses returning a 58.5 % response rate. When possible, both quantitative data and qualitative data were compared, as well as literature and theoretical support. SPSS version 25.0 was

used to analyse the data collected from the responses. The findings present descriptive statistics for the data collected in the form of graphs and other figures. The study also used semi-structured interviews with six of the ten intended participants to collect data. The target population consisted of the top 234 students from the East London region's two higher education institutions for the 2023 academic year. The interview responses of six participants were analysed, and a narrative analysis of the findings is presented.

5.5 RELIABILITY STATISTICS

The two most important precision characteristics are reliability and validity. Validity and reliability are two of the most important concepts used by researchers to assess the quality of their work. Reliability is concerned with general consistency, whereas validity is concerned with the accuracy of a given measure (StudyCorgi, 2022). Kotian, Liz Varghese and Motappa (2022:571) add that Cronbach's alpha is a metric for evaluating the reliability, or internal consistency, of a set of scale or test items. In other words, the reliability of any given measurement refers to how consistently it measures a concept, and Cronbach's alpha is one way of measuring the strength of that consistency. The process of determining whether a respondent's answer was consistent is referred to as reliability. Cronbach's alpha analysis was used in this study to evaluate the reliability **which reported 0.88 reliability with the 38 items assessed**. This means the study's reliability of the instrument was acceptable. Cronbach's alpha is commonly used as a reliability test. It has been suggested that Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 or higher indicates that the questionnaire is reliable (Abdulkader Mohamed *et al.* 2022:4).

5.6 DESCRIPTIVE QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE

5.6.1 Biographical data of participants

This section presents the results of the descriptive statistics analysis of quantitative survey data. Table 10 summarises the demographic information gathered during the study. A total of 234 people agreed to take part in the study. According to race, Africans accounted for 97% (227 of 234) of the population, with Whites, Indians, and Coloureds accounting for 1% respectively. Male participants made up the largest group at 58.12 % (136 of 234), while female participants were the smallest group with 41.88% (98 of 234) as shown in Table 10 below. Everyone who took part indicated their gender. The age groups of the respondents show that those between the ages of 19 and 23 years accounted for 80.34% (188 of 234) of the sampled population which was the majority age of the respondents. Thereafter, ages 24-28 years made up 19.23% (45 of 234) and 0.43% (1 of 234) was between the ages of 29-33 years. Data

collected shows that 66.67% of participants (156 of 234) are from outside the East London region and 33.33% (78 of 234) are from within the East London region.

Table 10: Biographical data of participants

Variable	Count	Percentage
Race <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African • White • Indian • Coloured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 227 • 1 • 3 • 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 97% • 1% • 1% • 1%
iv. Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 136 • 98 • 0 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58.12% • 41.88% • 0%
v. Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19-23 years • 24-28 years • 29-33 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 188 • 45 • 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80.34% • 19.23% • 0.43%
vi. Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within East London region • Outside East London region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 78 • 156 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33.33% • 66.67%

(N=234)

5.7 SECTION 2: STUDENT RECRUITMENT

5.8 INTRODUCTION

This section examined how WSU and UFH’s student recruitment strategies impacted their competitive intelligence strategies. These strategies require a strategic approach that focuses on differentiating their institutions from others in the market by creating a competitive advantage and attracting the best and brightest students to their respective institutions.

5.8.1 University of study of participants

Question 5 asked participants to indicate their university of study in the East London region. From Figure 8, it is evident that 56.41 (132 of 234) were registered students in the University of Fort Hare and 43.59% (102 of 234) were registered at Walter Sisulu University.

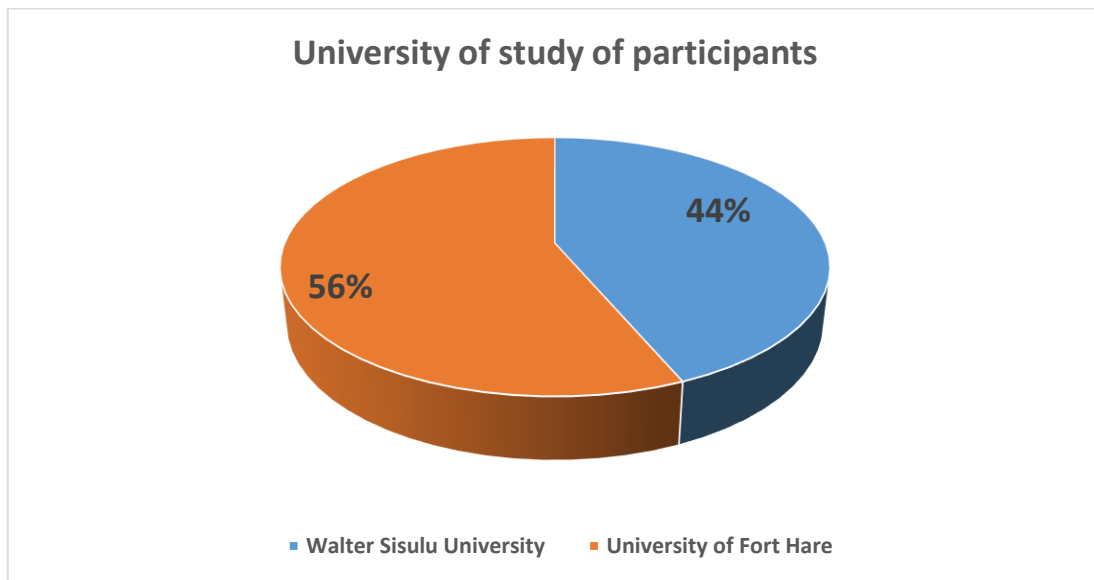


Figure 8: Enrolled university of study of first time entering students

5.8.2 University enrolled programme by participants

Question 6 required the participants to indicate if they were satisfied with what they had enrolled for in the 2023 academic year. The participants were all registered for first year in their respective institutions and fields of study. From Figure 9 below, it is evident that most participants, that is 45.5% (106 of 234), agreed with the statement, 23% (55 of 234) indicated that that strongly agreed, 20.94% (49 of 234) stated that they were neutral, 8.12% (19 of 234) disagreed and lastly, 2.14% (5 of 234) strongly disagreed with the statement.

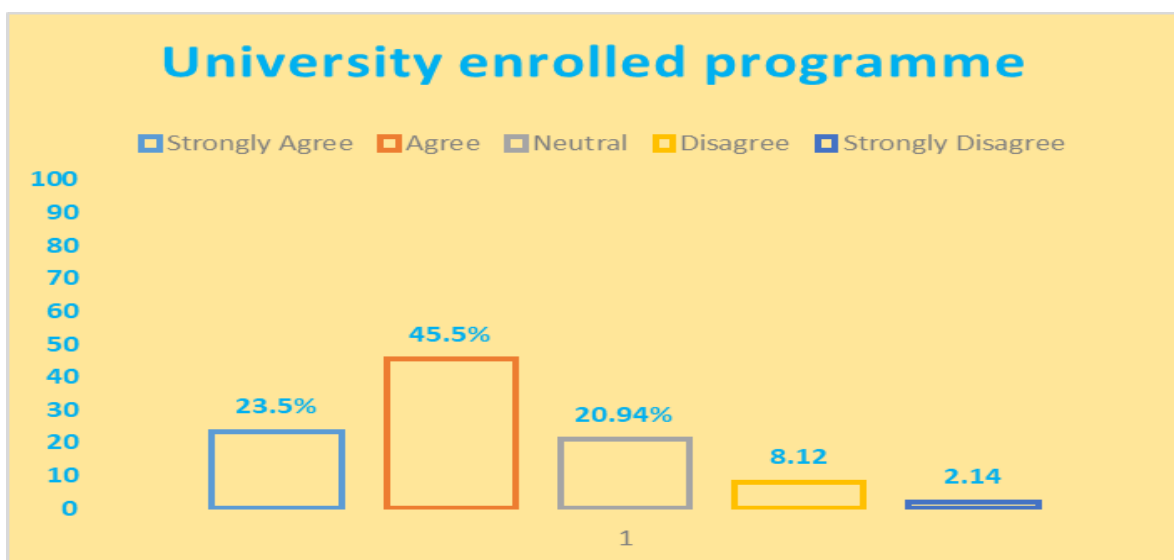


Figure 9: University enrolled programme of participants

5.8.3 Programme choice and alignment to career

Question 7 asked participants whether their enrolled qualification was aligned to their career. Figure 10 below details that most participants, 41.88% (98 of 234), agrees that their choice of enrolled programme was aligned to their career, 25.64% (60 of 234) indicated that they strongly agreed, 20.51% (48 of 234) stated that they were neutral, 10.26% (24 of 234) disagreed and lastly, 1.71% (4 of 234) strongly disagreed with the statement. It is important for students to begin thinking about their career alignment early on in their academic journey and to align their course selection with future career goals. By aligning their courses with career goals, there is a possibility of gaining the knowledge, skills, and experience required for success in their desired career path. Tabigne and Musni (2022:2) state that the emergence of new careers complicates career selection. It necessitates a thorough and accurate understanding of a profession. It is critical for students entering professional education to make the right career choice. It has an impact on their professional life and future success.

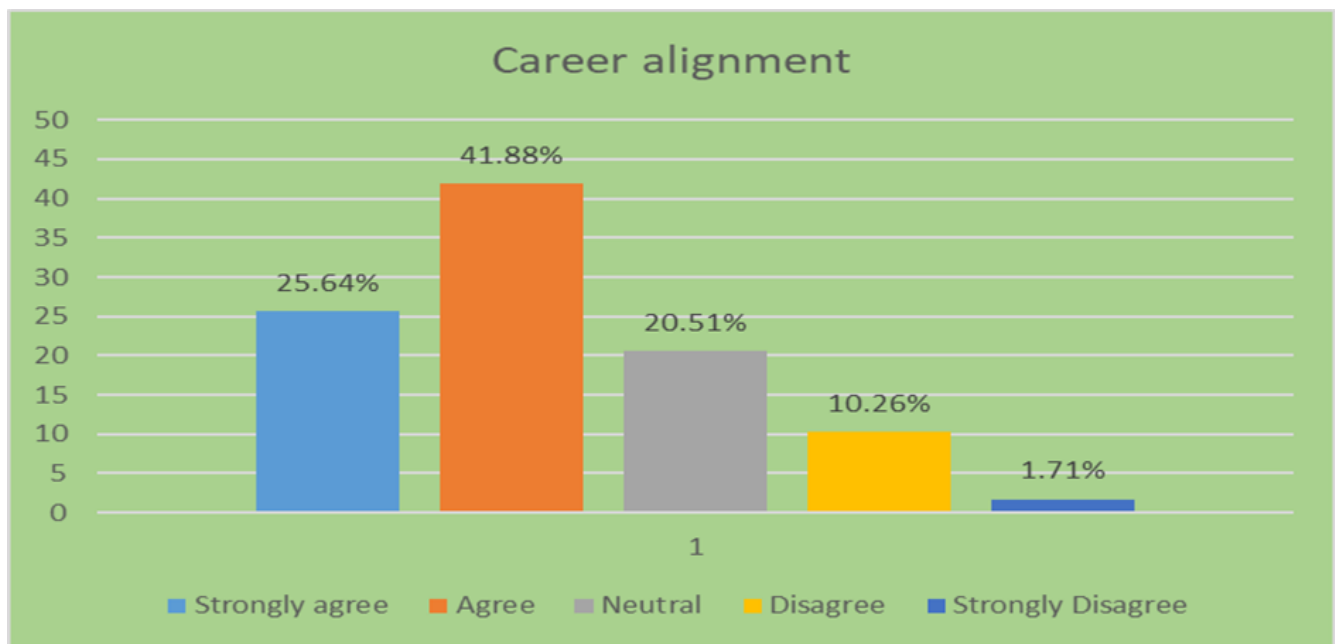


Figure 10: Career choice alignment of programme

5.8.4 Academic requirements

Question 8 asked participants to indicate if they met the programme requirements to register their courses in their respective universities. Figure 11 below shows that 47.44% (111 of 234) agreed that they met the requirements, 41.88% (98 of 234) stated that they strongly agreed with the statement, 6.84 (9 of 234) disagreed and 3.85% (16 of 234) were neutral. Meeting course requirements is a critical aspect of college success. By understanding the requirements, planning a schedule, attending school classes, and seeking help when needed, students can ensure they are on track to meet all course

requirements and achieve academic success. The academic results as well as additional information required by the various universities to determine if students are academically qualified to enrol in their school are referred to as entry requirements. To be eligible for a course, students must meet three distinct requirements such as minimum tertiary entry requirements, university requirements and course requirements.

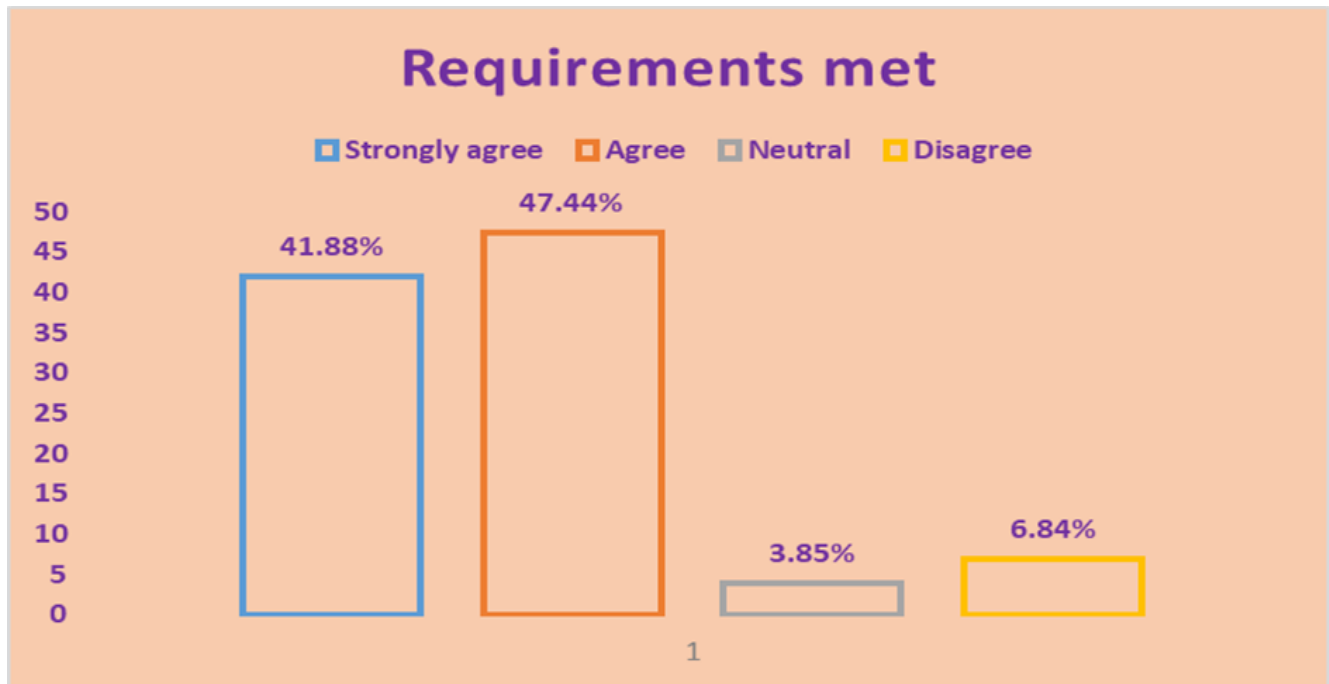


Figure 11: Programme requirements met by participants

5.8.5 Institutional academic reputation and academic brand

Question 9 asked participants whether the university reputation and academic brand had an influence on them to choose a university they identified with. Figure 12 below shows that 45.73% (107 of 234) agreed with the statement, 43.16% (101 of 234) stated that they strongly agreed to the statement, 9.83% (23 of 234) were neutral and 0.85% (2 of 234) disagreed and lastly, 0.43% (1 of 234) strongly disagreed. A university's reputation can reflect its academic quality, research output, faculty expertise, and student success. A formidable reputation can also enhance job prospects and networking opportunities for graduates. The decision of which university to attend should be based on a variety of factors, including academic programmes, location, campus culture, extracurricular activities, and cost. The reputation of a university reflects the institution's history and credible actions focused on its target groups (Kaushal and Ali 2020:255).

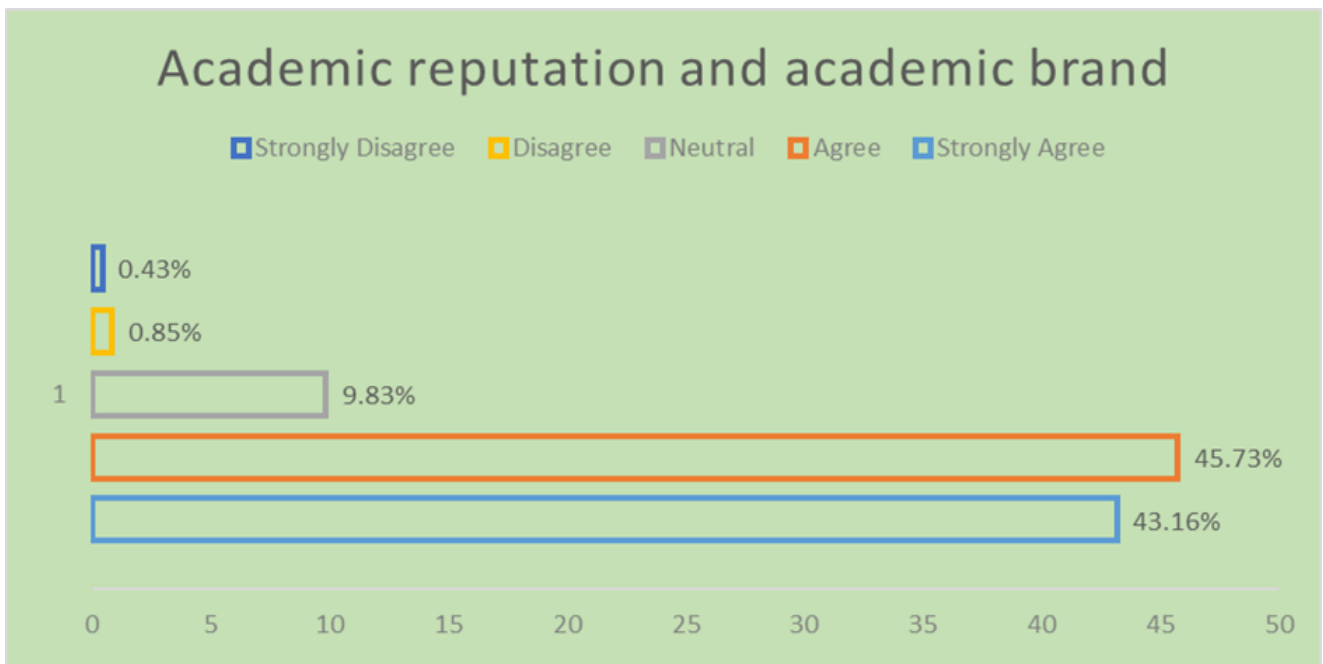


Figure 12: Academic reputation and academic brand factors

5.8.6 Institutional size, affordable fees and location determining factors

Question 10 asked participants if the size of university, affordable fees and its location were their determinants for choosing their respective universities. As shown in Figure 13 below, 49.15% (115 of 234) agreed with the statement, 16.24% (38 of 16.24) strongly agreed, 23.93% (56 of 234) were neutral, 9.40% (22 of 234) disagreed and 1.28% (3 of 234) strongly disagreed. The size of a university can have a significant impact on a student's experience. Larger universities may offer more resources, a wider variety of courses, and greater opportunities for research and extracurricular activities. Tuition is also a crucial factor for many students. The cost of attending a university can vary widely, and for many students, it is a major consideration in their decision-making process. A decision to attend university is influenced by a variety of demographic, economic, social, political, and institutional factors. Availability of preferred programmes, availability of financial aid, cost of attendance, and location of the institution are key factors mentioned in the literature that influence the choice of university (Van Zyl, Meyers, and Pelser 2018:346).

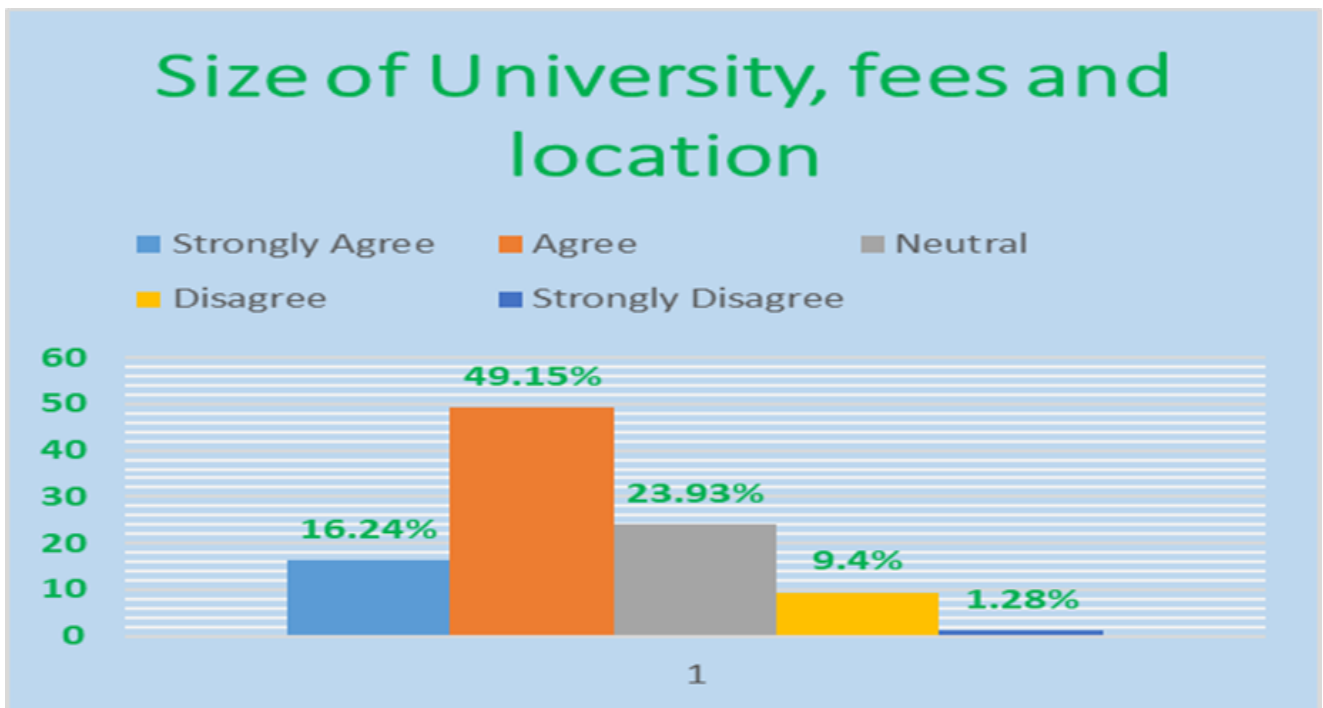


Figure 13: Size of university, FEE, and location

5.8.7 Wide choice of programmes and accreditation were influential choice factors

Question 11 asked participants to indicate how they identified their university of choice. A total of 57.69% (135 of 234) stated they agreed that they had looked at the wide choice of programmes and accreditation of programmes, 10.68% (25 of 234) strongly agreed, 20.94% (49 of 234) were neutral towards the statement, 8.97% (21 of 234) disagreed, and lastly 1.71% (4 of 234) strongly disagreed. Students want to have the best chance of success in their chosen field, and they recognise that the range of programmes and the quality of accreditation can help them achieve their goals. Kumar, Shuklar and Passey (2022:8) agree with the above statement and declared that the process by which a higher education institution or programme is evaluated to see if it complies with predetermined standards or criteria that have been developed, reviewed, and critically evaluated by experts or a peer group is known as accreditation. Accreditation is used as a quality indicator.

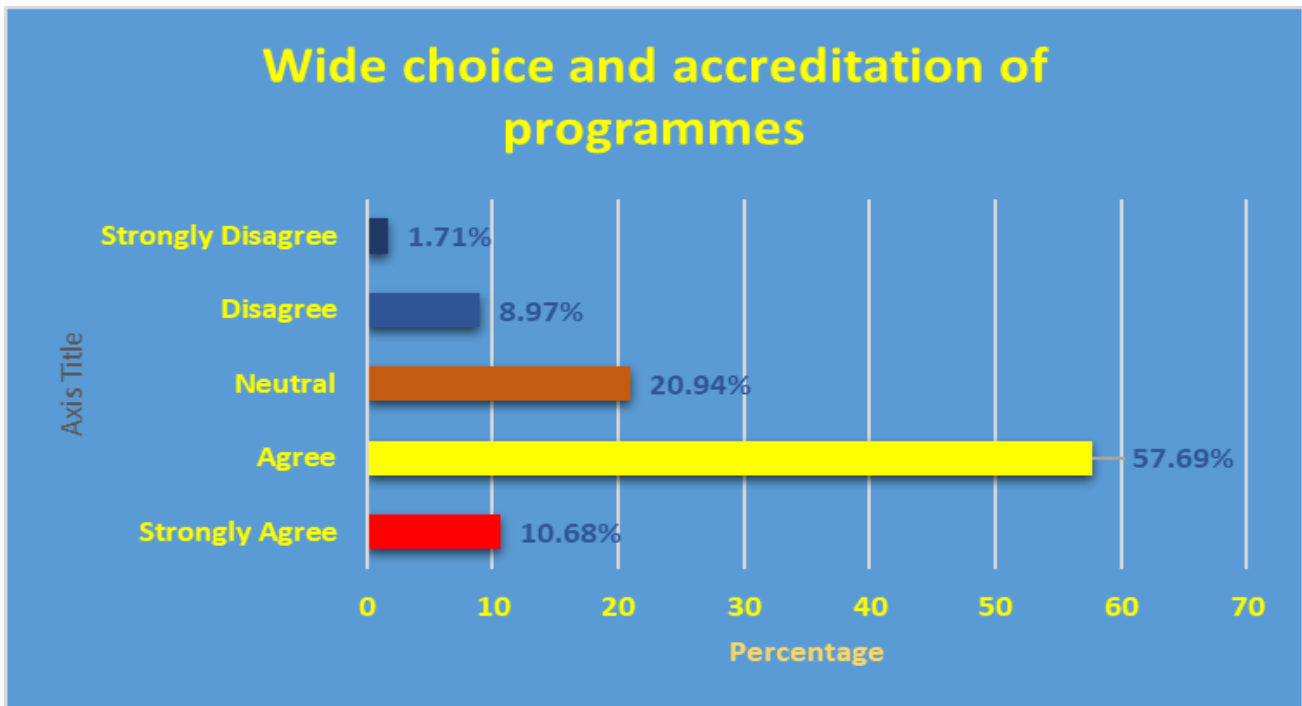


Figure 14: Wide choice of programmes and accreditation of programmes

5.8.8 Institutional teaching and learning methods

Question 12 asked participants to specify their satisfaction with the teaching and learning methods in their university of choice. Figure 15 below elucidates that a majority, 52.56% (132 of 234) agreed that they were satisfied with the teaching and learning methods, 23.50% (55 of 234) were very satisfied, 20.09% (47 of 234) remained neutral to the statement, 3.85% (9 of 234) were dissatisfied. Excellence in higher education can be defined differently in different contexts that indicate an institution's standing and academic reputation. However, this is dependent on the students' experiences as well as the institutional missions (Kumar, Shuklar and Passey 2022:3). There are many factors that can influence a student's satisfaction with university teaching and learning methods, such as quality of instruction, relevance of teaching material and availability of resources. It is important for the universities to offer a variety of teaching and learning methods and to regularly assess and improve their teaching practices to ensure that their students are receiving a high-quality education.

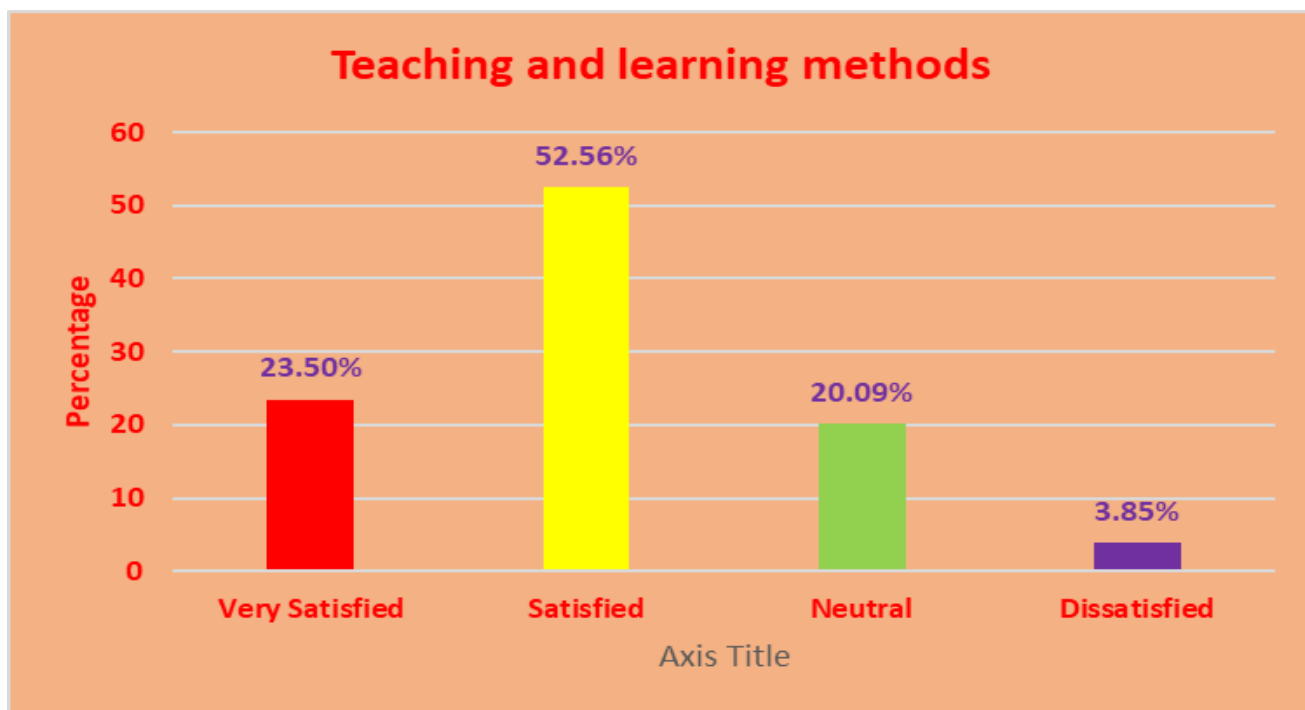


Figure 15: Teaching and learning methods

5.8.9 University facilities as a factor in participants' university choice

Question 13 asked participants to describe the level of satisfaction with university facilities as a factor that influenced their university choice. As clearly reflected in Figure 16 below, 46.58% (109 of 234) stated that they were satisfied, 17.09% (40 of 234) were very satisfied, 30.77% (72 of 234) were neutral, 5.13% (12 of 234) were dissatisfied, and 0.43% (1 of 234) was very dissatisfied. It is, therefore, evident that university facilities can have a significant impact on a student's university choice. Universities with exceptional facilities can enhance the student experience, making it more enjoyable and comfortable. Universities should invest in improving their facilities to attract and retain students, improve academic outcomes, which will enhance the overall reputation of the institution. Nuseir and Refae (2021:223) assert that facilities have a moderate influence on student decisions. This factor suggests that institutions should improve their infrastructure and services to influence student selection more effectively. The availability and ease of access to non-academic facilities should influence a student's attachment to the university.

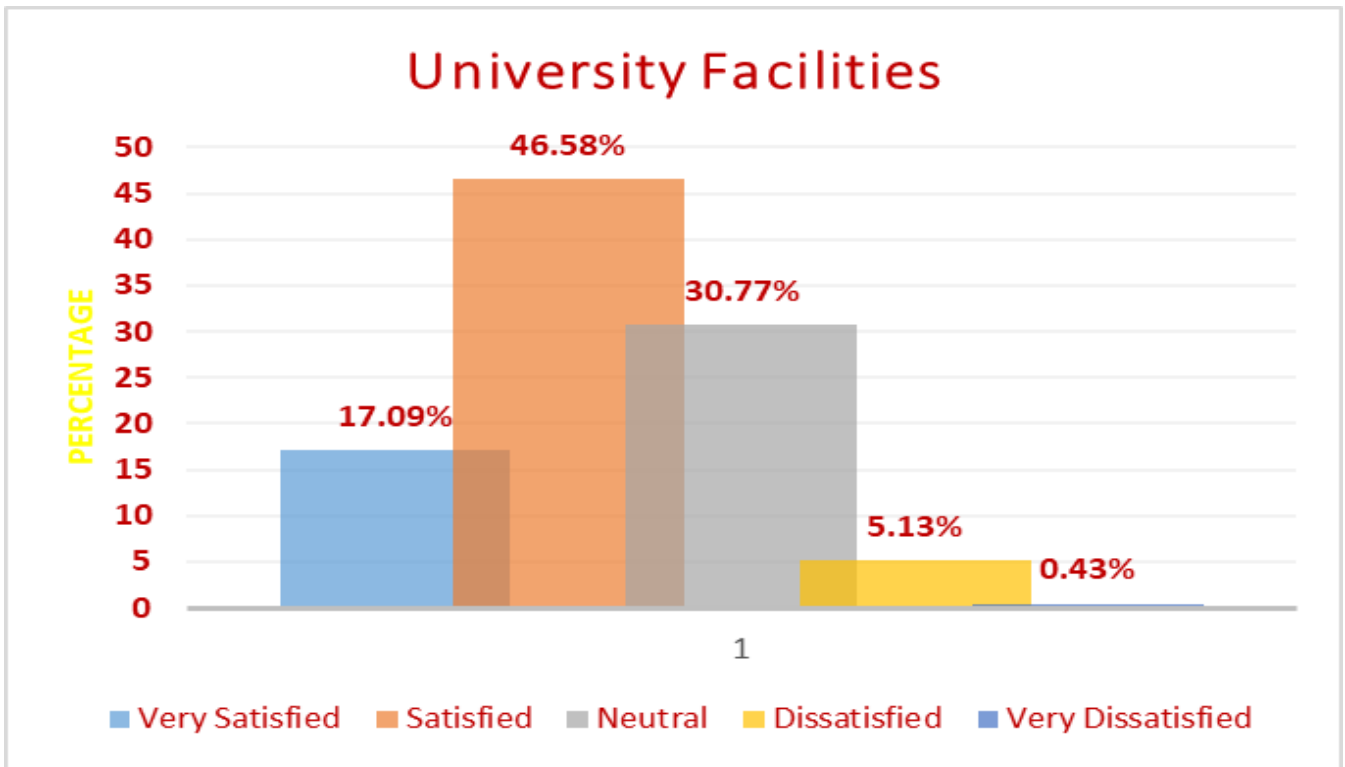


Figure 16: University facilities

5.8.10 Assistance from faculty and support staff of the university

Figure 17 illustrates the responses to question 14, which required participants to state their feeling about academic support provided by their universities of choice. Most participants, 47.86% (112 of 234), were satisfied, 24.79% (58 of 234) stated that they were very satisfied, 23.50% (55 of 234) were neutral, 2.99 (7 of 234) and 0.85% (2 of 234) were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied respectively. University support includes a broader range of services such counselling, health care and financial support which are beneficial to students both inside and outside the classroom. Students in national and international educational institutes around the world can access campus support services to help them perform better and achieve their academic and career goals. This indicates that support services are in place to increase the likelihood of students continuing in college and meeting their academic needs, ultimately leading to the completion of their studies and the enrichment of the skills required for university success (Johnson *et al.* 2022:1).

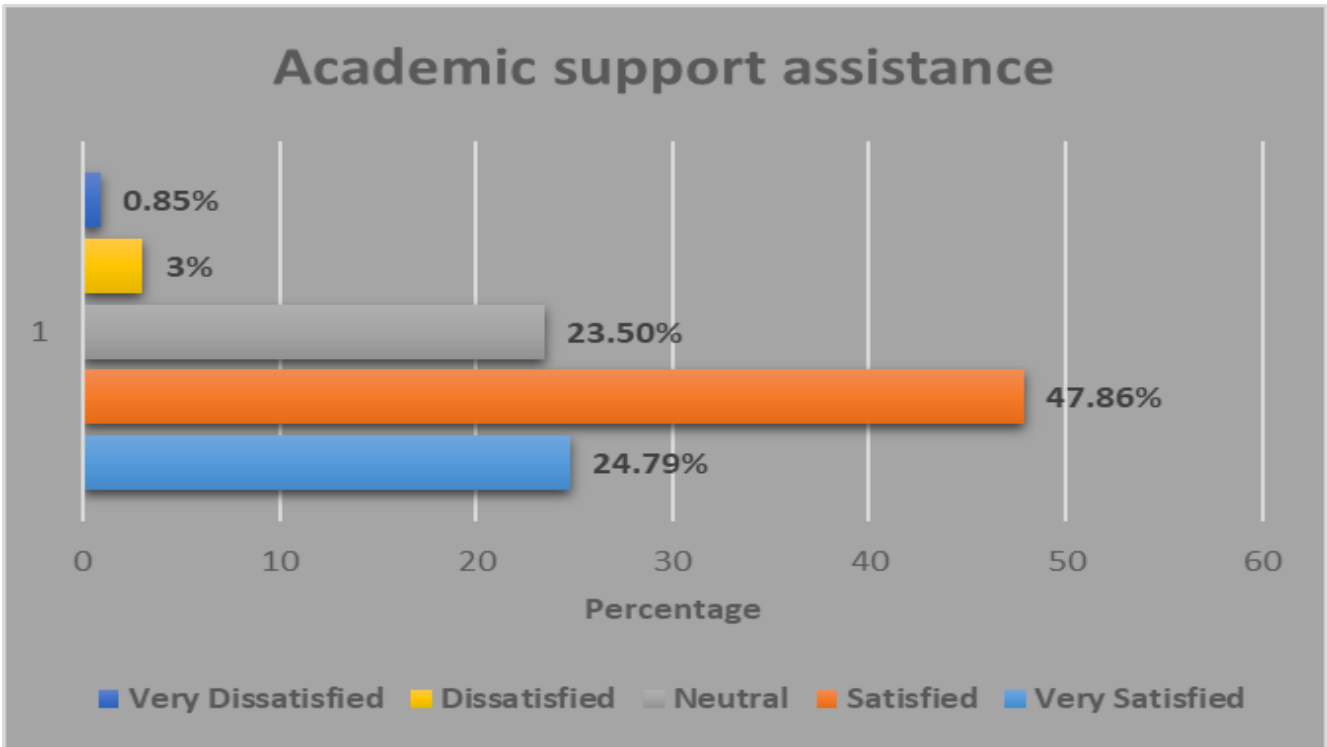


Figure 17: Academic support assistance

5.8.11 Needs met by university of choice

Question 18 asked participants about whether their needs were met by their universities of choice. A total of 51.71% (121 of 234) stated that they agreed that their needs were met by their respective universities, 18.80% (44 of 234) strongly agreed with the statement, 20.51% (48 of 234) indicated that they were neutral, 6.41% (15 of 234) disagreed and 2.56% (6 of 234) strongly disagreed with the statement. Jooste (2020:83) says that when universities market themselves, they focus on what they can offer students while keeping the consumer and their needs and desires in mind. Organisations must be able to understand the market in which they intend to operate, and the market needs, before marketing a product. Students are very likely to express their desires and needs, and they expect their university to fulfil those expectations. Universities can achieve this if they invest in and cultivate relationships with their students. Therefore, universities that prioritise meeting student needs and wants are likely to enjoy a competitive advantage in the higher education market.

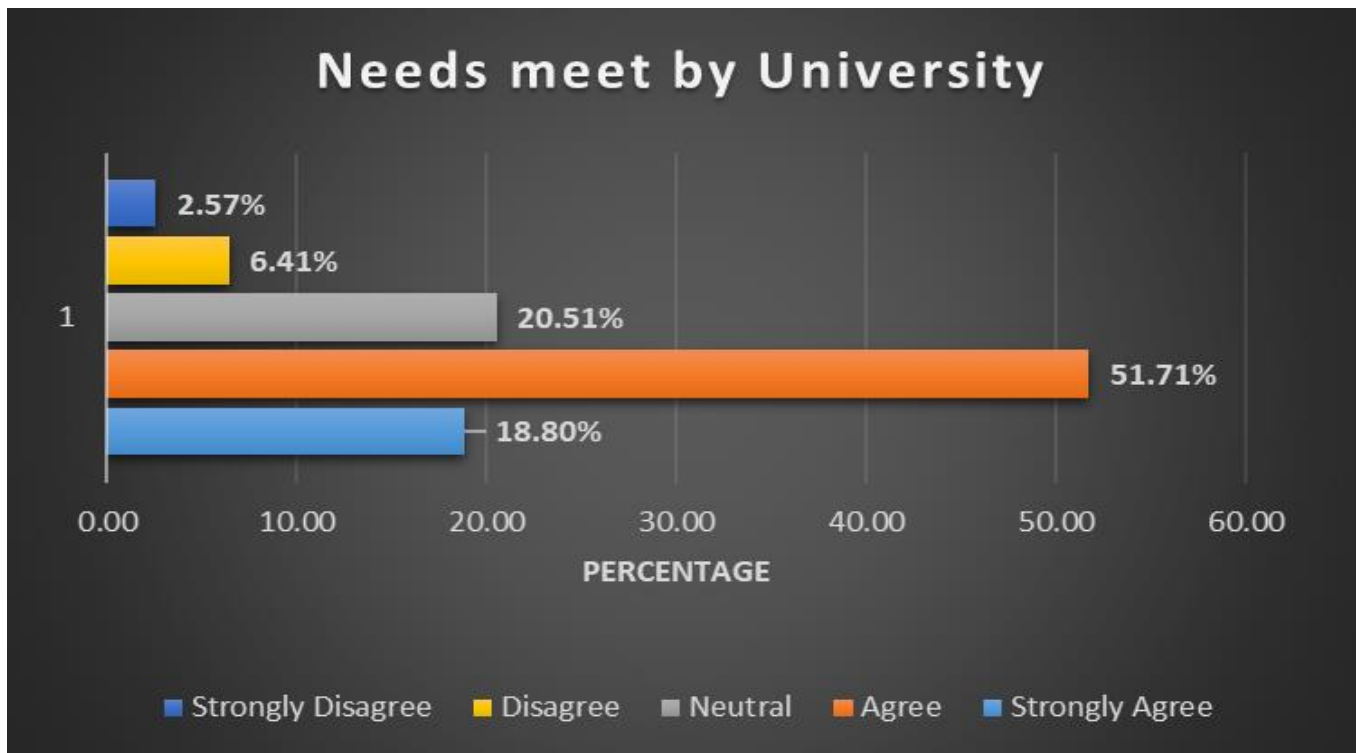


Figure 18: Needs met by university of choice

5.8.12 University competitive tuition costs

Question 16 asked participants how they perceived their respective universities' tuition costs and whether they were affordable. Many participants, 47.86% (112 of 234), stated that they agreed that tuition fees were affordable for them, 15.81% (37 of 234) strongly agreed, 31.20% (73 of 234) were neutral whether the tuition fees were affordable, and 5.13% (12 of 234) disagreed. Figure 19 below clearly articulates that it is important for students to research the tuition fees for each university and the programmes they are considering in order to gain a better understanding of the costs involved. These tuition fees depend on several factors including, but not limited to, the location of the university, the type and level of programme registered and the reputation of the university. When higher education institutions want more enrolled students and need enrolment management, the competition is fierce. When a student enrolls in college for the first time, tuition fees may have an impact on their enrolment decision (Bohara, Suri and Panwaar 2022:2149). The authors further elaborate that the socioeconomic status of a parent influences the child's educational development and achievement.

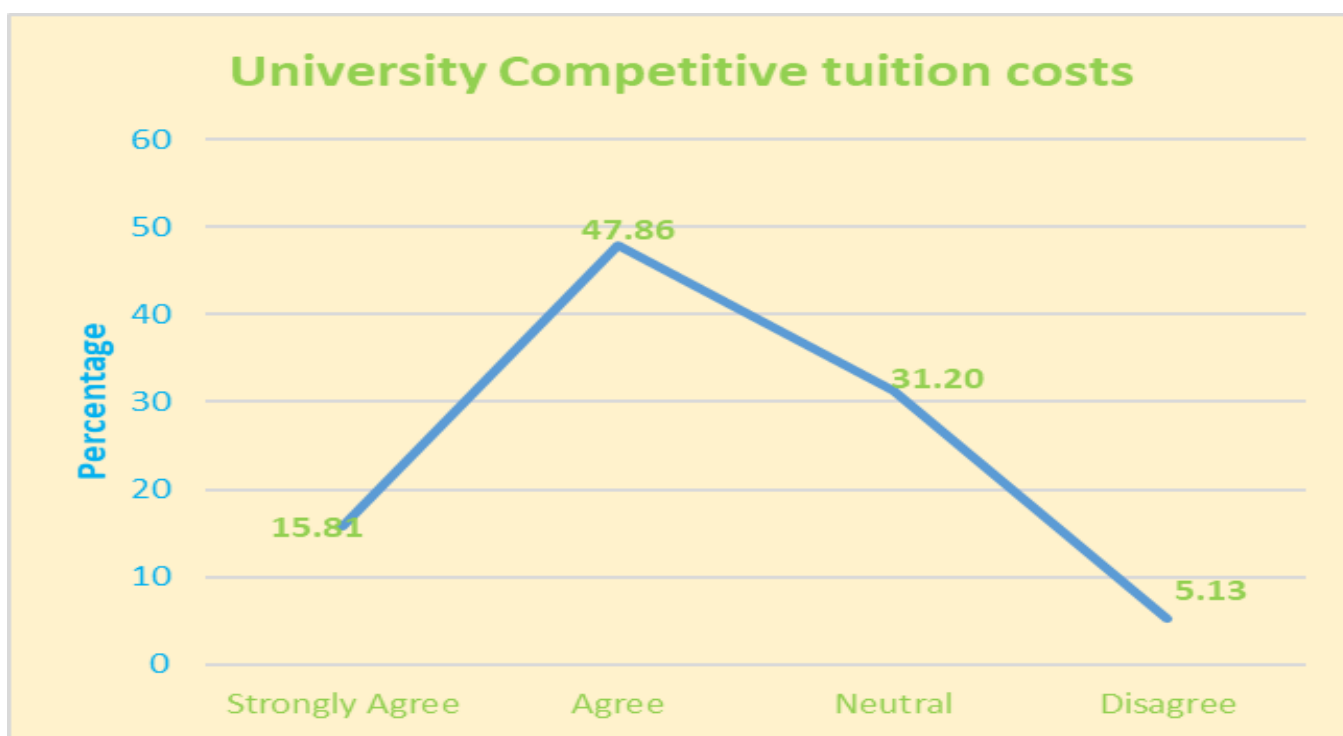


Figure 19: University competitive costs

5.8.13 University accessibility, convenience, and positioning

Question 17 asked participants to confirm whether they viewed their university accessibility, convenience, and positioning as important. Figure 20 below shows that 64.96% (152 of 234) indicated they agreed with the statement, 8.12% (19 of 234) strongly agreed, 19.23% (45 of 234) were neutral towards the statement, 5.13% (12 of 234) disagreed, and 2.56% (6 of 234) strongly disagreed to the statement of university accessibility, convenience, and positioning. Figure 20 thus illustrates that students evaluate how accessible, convenient, and well-positioned their university of choice is. Moreover, the ease of getting to campus, closeness from home or place of accommodation and the positioning of that institution, such as the city, malls and hospitals are important. The researcher believes if these are taken into consideration by potential students, they will guarantee students the best possible experience. The university's location and image, as well as the amount of development in the region, all have a considerable impact on student selection of a university. Gaspar and Soares (2021:24) claim that proximity to the student's usual location is one of the most significant considerations affecting HEI selection, and that students' decision is influenced by a favourable image of the city in which the HEI is located. The two criteria evaluated were campus proximity and accessibility, but only university accessibility influenced HEI selection of institution of choice.

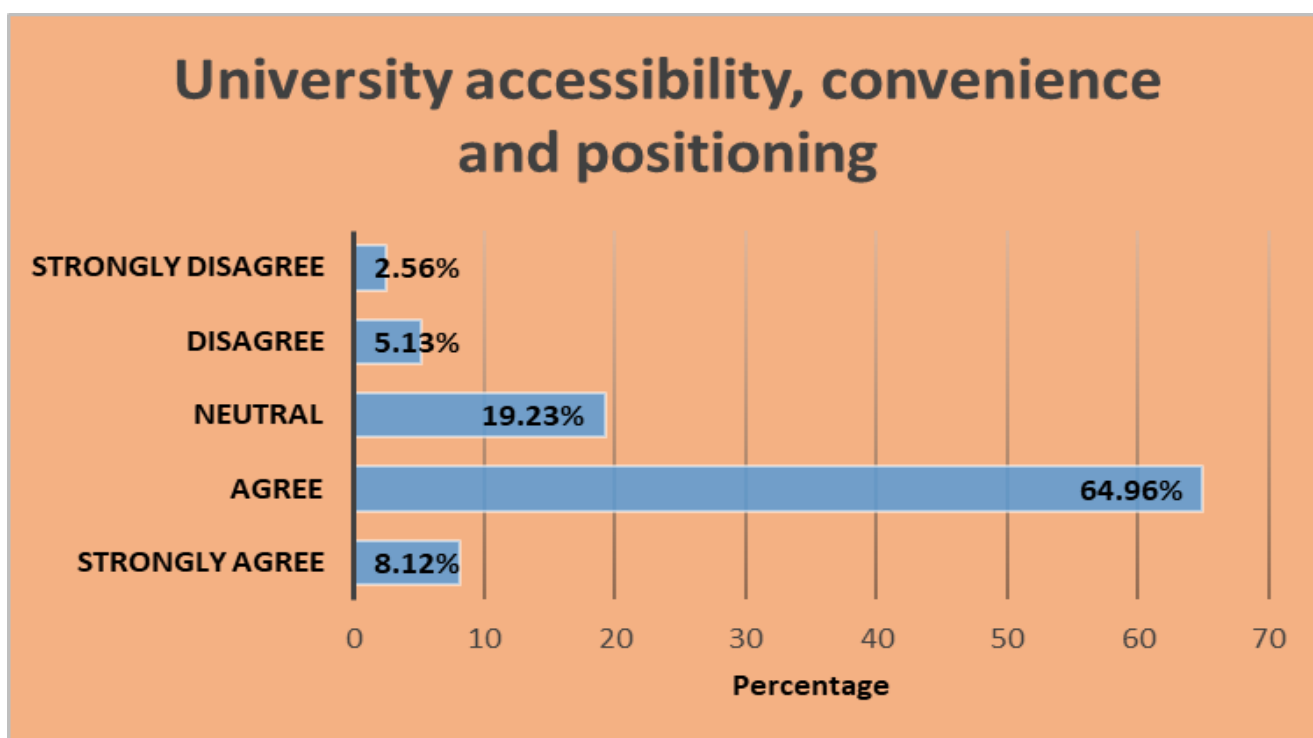


Figure 20: University accessibility, convenience, and positioning

5.8.14 Academic programme support

Question 18 sought to understand if university academic programme support services influenced students' university choice. Figure 21 below shows that the majority of respondents, that is 58.97% (138 of 234), indicated that they agreed, 11.11% (26 of 234) strongly agreed, 24.79% (58 of 234) were neutral, 5.13% (12 of 234) disagreed. University academic support can come in many forms which can have a significant impact on a student's university experience and academic support. These academic support initiatives such as academic advising, tutoring, and writing centres can help students overcome their academic challenges and improve their performance. Therefore, these universities should commit themselves to providing robust academic support that plays a critical role in attracting new students. HEIs must understand their students and have methods in place to help students realise their potential. As a result, "support services should be expanded to assist students in managing dissatisfaction and meeting the rigors of academic life" (Sekonyela 2021:240).

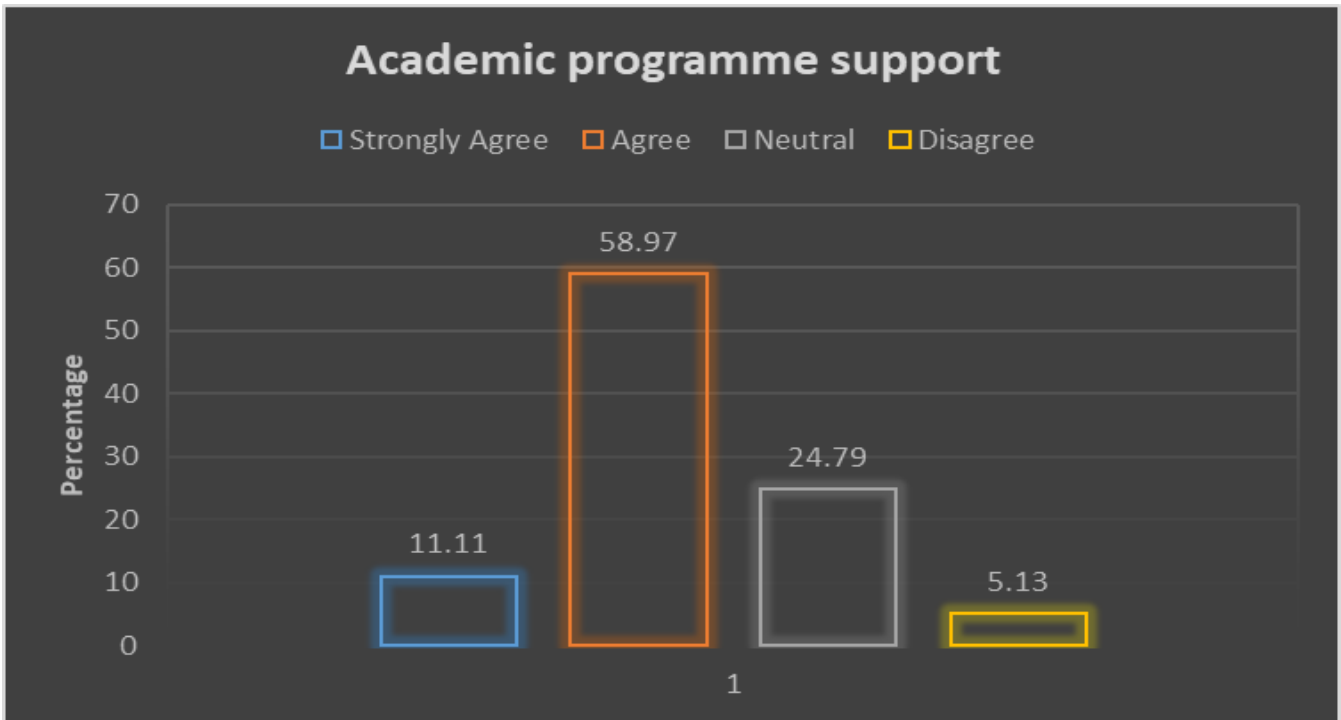


Figure 21: Academic programme support

5.8.15 Partaking in extra-curricular activities

Question 19 asked participants whether they will be partaking in their university's extra-curricular activities during their year of study. Figure 22 shows that most participants, 45.30% (106 of 234) indicated that they will be partaking in the activities, 40.60% (95 of 234) will not be partaking, 14.10% (33 of 234) were not sure if they will be participating in these activities. These activities can provide opportunities for students to develop new skills, make connections with peers, and engage in activities that interest them outside of the classroom. Therefore, participating in extra-curricular activities in university can provide students with a range of benefits that can enhance their overall academic experience and improve their job prospects after graduation. Extracurricular activities have been lauded for their ability to foster critical thinking, academic achievement, personal competence, and concentration. Soft skills are still lacking among students, and what students need to learn these skills is time and a solid training environment. Extracurricular activities are just what pupils require to bridge skill gaps. Chapman, Emambocus and Obembe (2023:139) state that extra-curricular activities are defined as activities and hobbies associated with the university but are not directly part of the academic activities as they offer practical learning experiences and developmental opportunities. Finnerty *et al.* (2021:2) add that extra-curricular activities are important in any student's problem-solving and can enhance adaptability which contributes to their interpersonal skills development.

Participation in Extra-curricular activities

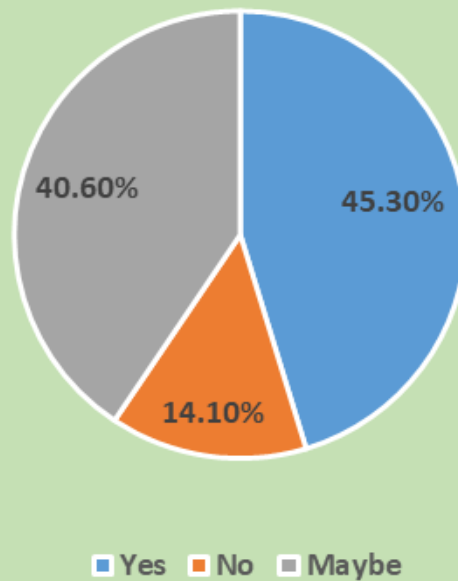


Figure 22: Participation in extra-curricular activities

5.8.16 Payment of tuition/fees

Question 20 required participants to indicate how their studies were financed for their 2023 academic year. Figure 23 below shows that most participants, 88.46% (207 of 234), were financed through a bursary, 8.12% (19 of 234) were financed by parents, 2.56% (6 of 234) were self-paying and 0.85% were uncertain of how their fees were financed. This majority of students are funded through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) which is a Department of Higher Education strategy to fund academically deserving students who cannot afford tuition. Wildschut, Megbowon and Miselo (2020:30) claim that, considering the massification of higher education and the growing diversity of student populations, this interest has grown steadily in recent years in the South African context, as both government subsidies to higher education institutions and the allocation of bursaries and/or loans to financially and academically deserving students from poor and working-class households have grown steadily and continue to account for a significant proportion of investment and GDP.

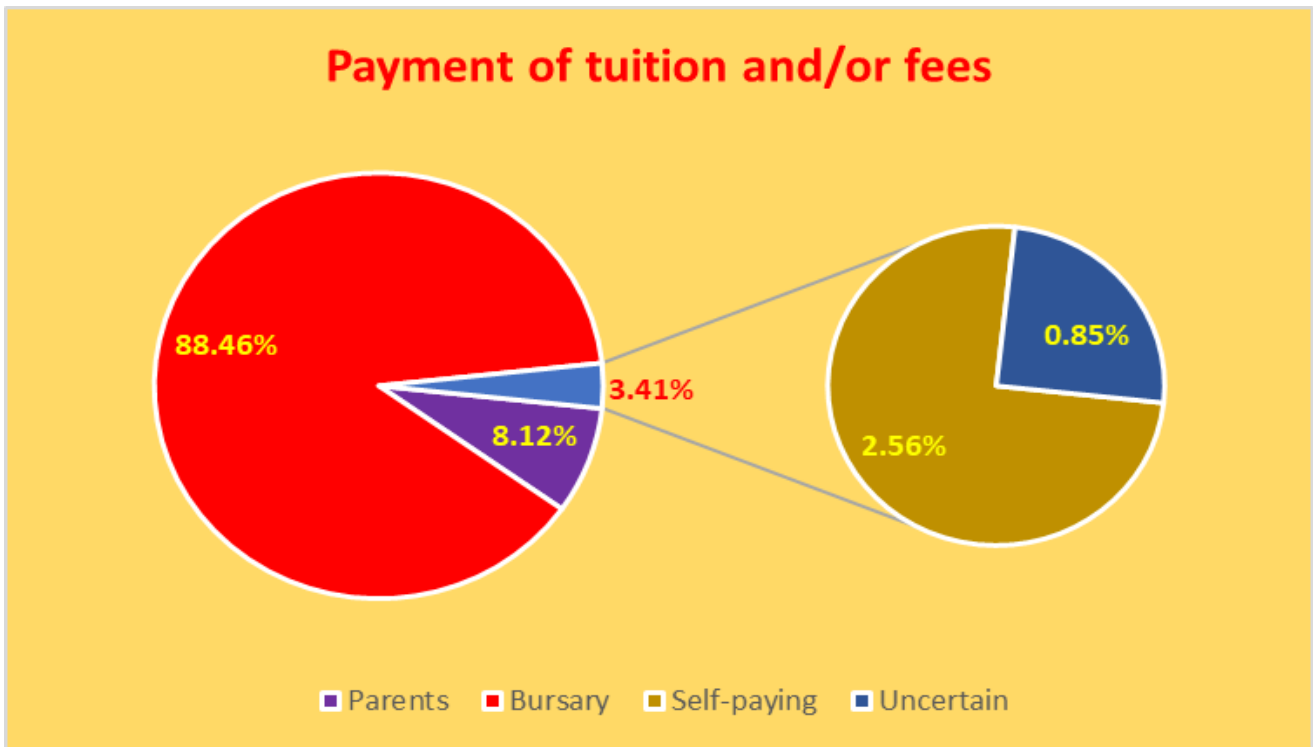


Figure 23: Payment of tuition fees

5.9 SECTION 3: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

5.9.1 INTRODUCTION

This section deals with how HEIs use their marketing and communication strategies which require a comprehensive understanding of their target market, their interest, and the channels that they prefer to use for communication. Through these questions answered by participants (a provided below), HEIs will be able to continuously adapt their strategy based on feedback and data.

5.9.2 Information about university of choice

Question 21 sought to understand whether they had previously been informed about their university of choice and how they sought information about their respective institutions. Figure 24 below shows that 61.97% (145 of 234) indicated that they agree that they had been informed about their university of choice, 11.54% (27 of 234) stated that they strongly agreed, 18.80 (44 of 234) said that they were neutral towards the statement of receiving prior information about their university of choice, 6.84% (16 of 234) disagreed, and 0.85% (2 of 234) strongly disagreed with the statement. The information provided to new students is initiated by the institutional advancement offices, which included programmes offered, admission requirements, tuition fees, campus facilities and campus student life. Academic institutions must be aware of these techniques to employ intelligent marketing to influence and facilitate

potential students' selections. As a result, to deliver sustainable higher education, these academic institutions must be aware of and actively seek out potential students' requirements, motives, preferences, and ambitions. As a result, prospective students will apply to the institution.

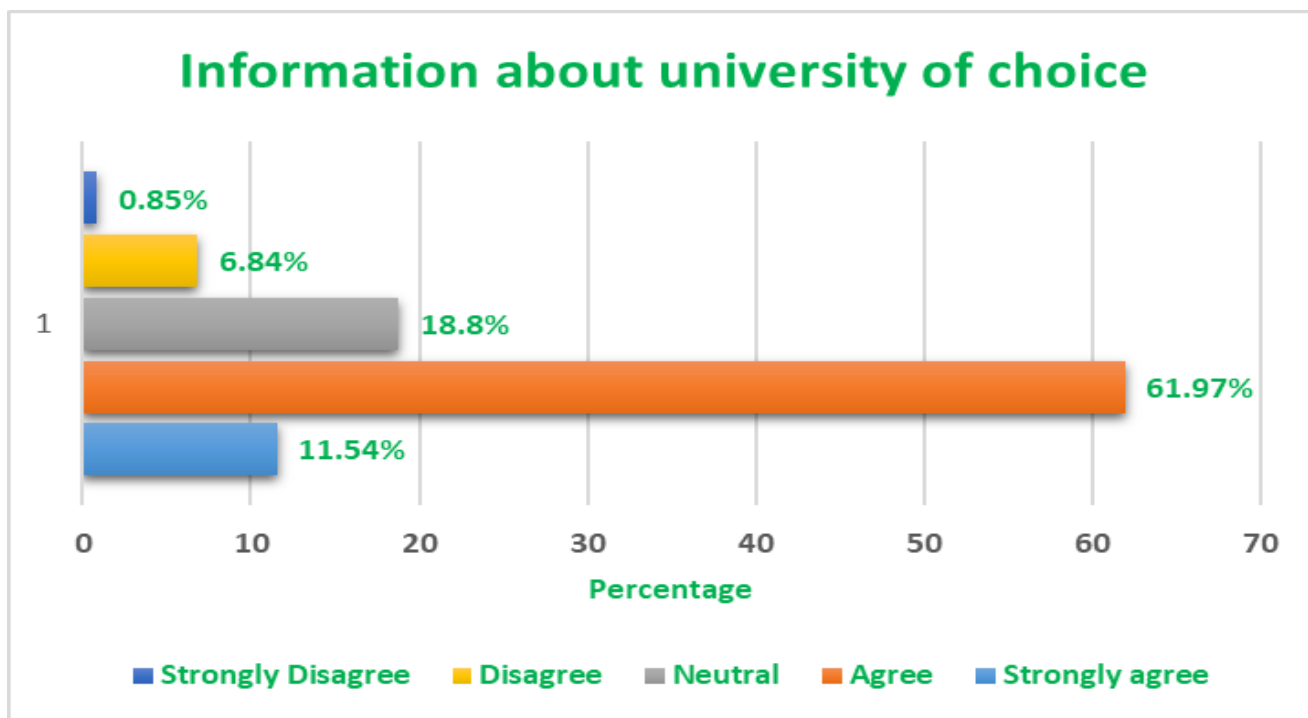


Figure 24: Information about choice of university

5.9.3 Amount of information disseminated

Question 22 asked participants to indicate that they were satisfied with the amount of information provided by the university of choice's marketing and communication dissemination strategy. It is evident in Figure 25, that 54.70% (128 of 234) participants agreed to the statement, 10.68% (25 of 234) strongly agreed to the notion, 25.21% (59 of 234) participants were neutral and 9.40% (22 of 234) strongly disagreed. The amount of information provided to potential students about a university can vary depending on the institution and resources available to disseminate such information. HEIs can use their websites, brochures, campus tours, information sessions through school visits, and direct communication with university staff. It is, therefore, important that potential students take time to research and gather as much information as they can about a university before deciding. Uleanya *et al.* (2020 :6051) mention that there are several ways in which information can be disseminated to potential students to assist them in their career guidance and career path which include newspapers, radio, and internet.

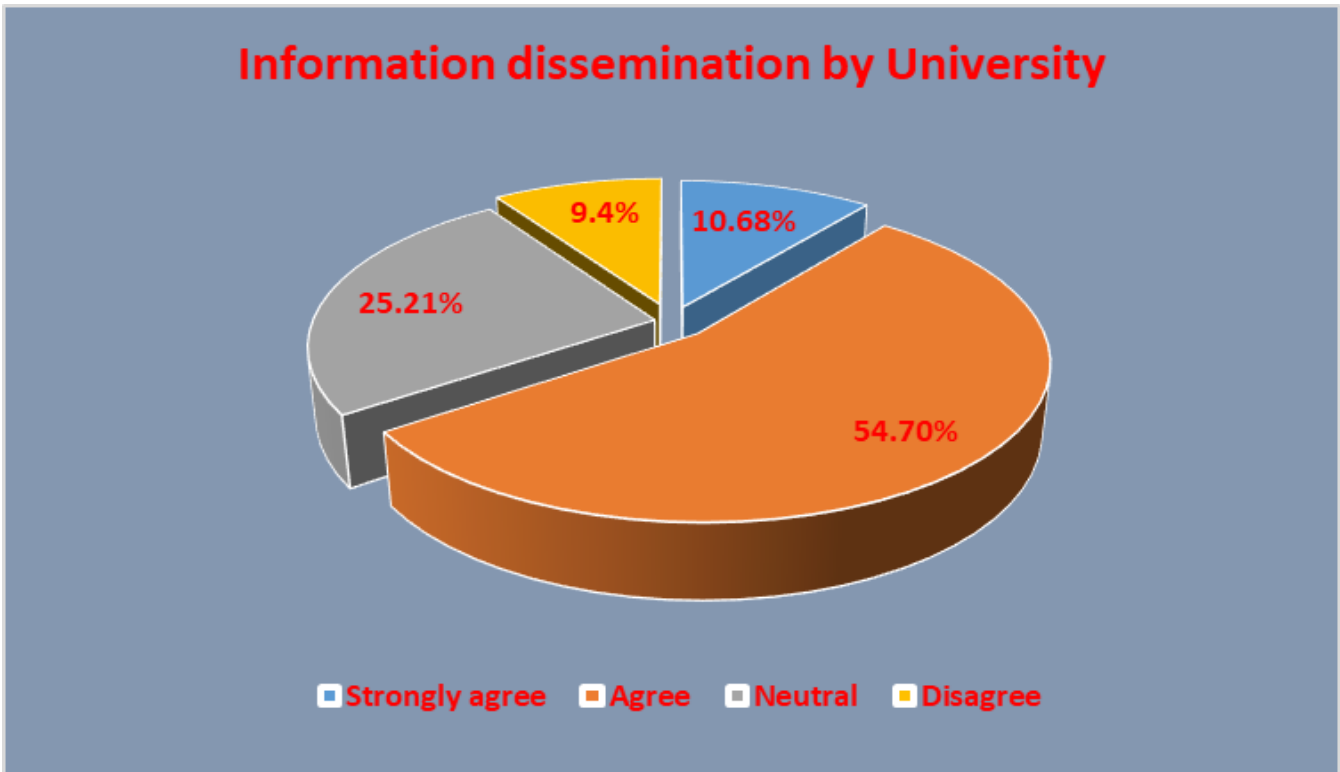


Figure 25: information dissemination by university

5.9.4 Effective information disseminated by university of choice

Question 23 required participants to indicate that the communication they received was effective to make a choice. Figure 26 shows that 57.26% (134 of 234) agreed that the information they received was effective enough for them to make an informed decision, 11.11% (26 of 234) strongly agreed, 24.36% (57 of 234) were neutral, and 7.26% (17 of 234) disagreed with the statement. These responses from participants show that information can have a significant impact on a student’s decision-making process when it comes to choosing a university. The effectiveness of the information depends on a variety of factors, including quality of the education, source of information and the relevance of the information to the student’s goals and interests. However, it is important to recognise that students’ decision-making processes are complex and many factors beyond the information provided can influence their final decision.

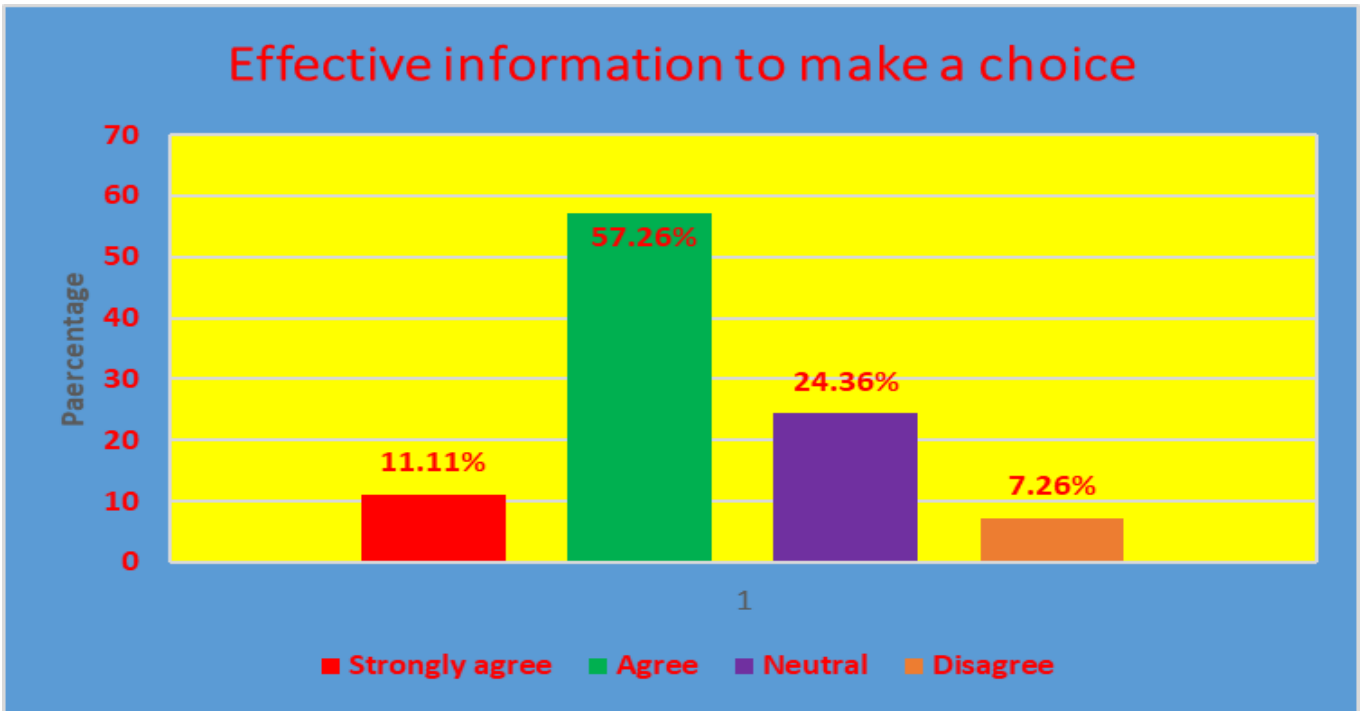


Figure 26: Effective information to make a choice

5.9.5 Persuasiveness of university marketing strategy

Question 24 asked participants whether their university of choice's marketing had an impact of persuasion in their decision making. It is evident in Figure 27 below, that 41.88% (98 of 234) of participants agreed that they were persuaded by their university of choice's marketing strategy, 7.26% (17 of 234) of participants stated that they strongly agreed, 28.63% (67 of 234) of participants were neutral with the statement, 20.94% (49 of 234) of participants disagreed, and 1.28% (3 of 234) strongly disagreed. WSU and UFH may have used their unique selling points, their leverage in social media that built these relationships which well positioned them to attract potential students. Courses are more likely to be filled when universities offer qualifications that meet student needs, distribute tuition in ways that match student expectations, provide data on which the students can make informed decisions about qualification choices, and price those programmes at a level that students see as providing value (Bapat and Genkar,2019:1860).

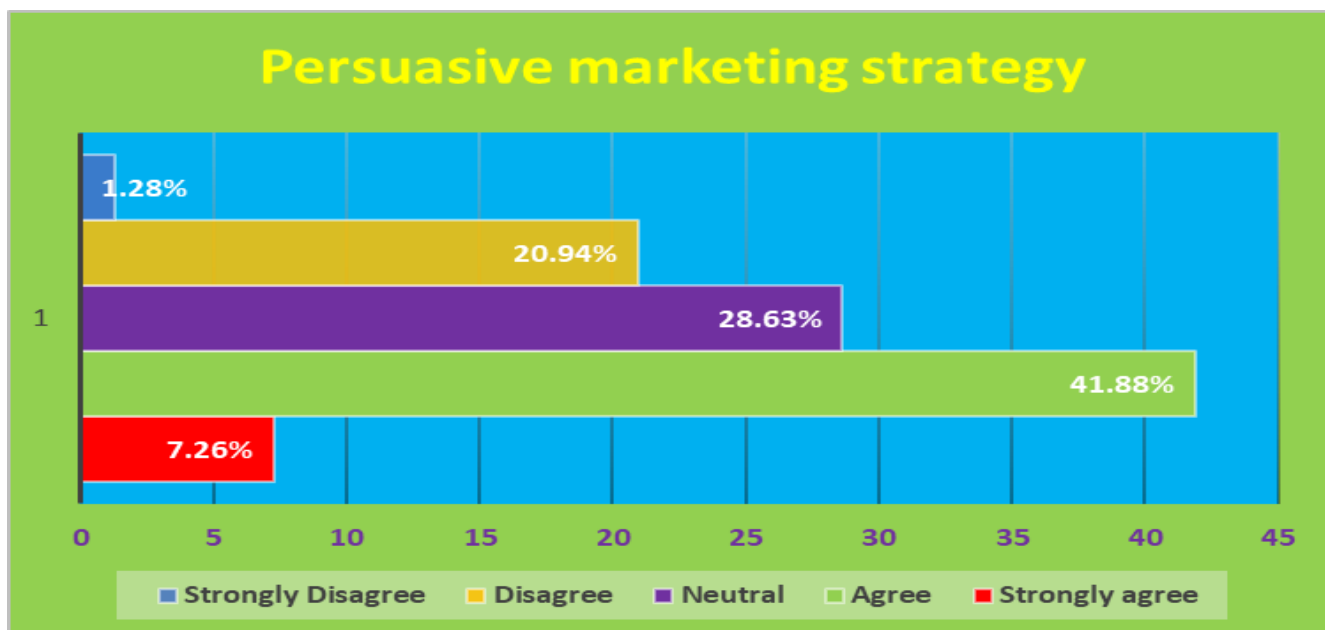


Figure 27: Persuasive marketing strategy

5.9.6 University advertising campaigns

Question 25 asked participants how they viewed institutional advertising campaigns at universities where they are enrolled. These campaigns are effective ways to attract potential students to the institutions by marketing and communication/advancement offices. Due to the complexity of using several tables or diagrams, the researcher opted for an inclusive table which will direct the reader to each variable/element that makes up the advertising campaigns. Table 11 below explains these campaigns according to the number and colour in the table.

- i. **University website as an advertising tool:** Only 19.66% (46 of 234) strongly agreed that they were exposed to the university website as a media to look for information, 35.04% (82 of 234) agreed to the statement, 27.78% (65 of 234) stated that they were neutral, 14.10% (33 of 234) disagreed and 3.42% (8 of 234) strongly disagreed. A well-designed informative university website can be an effective recruitment strategy for attracting potential students and encouraging them to apply. There are several reasons why university websites can be beneficial, such as 24/7 accessibility by students, enough information is provided, multimedia to highlight university facilities and campus, interaction, and application process. By providing the necessary guidelines on the website, the higher education website seeks to help prospective students and scholars. Rosalina, Patimah and Nursyifa (2021:133) claim that university website usability is widely regarded as the most critical criterion of effective higher education advertising. The university website has been divided into multiple sections that contain information about the

university, such as its vision and mission, its profile, its address, its agenda, its faculties, majors, information about lecturers, and much more. The university website's primary function must be to advertise and highlight the university environment to the public at large.

- ii. **Career exhibition as an advertising tool:** According to the table below, career exhibition was one of the advertising campaigns used, hence 35.04% (82 of 234) of respondents indicated that they agree to having been exposed to career exhibition hosted by the WSU and UFH, 19.66% (46 of 234) indicated that they strongly agreed, 27.78% (65 of 234) remained neutral, 14.10% (33 of 234) disagreed and 3.42% (8 of 234) strongly disagreed with the comment. Career exhibitions can be an effective student recruitment strategy as they provide a platform for students to explore career options and interact with potential employers. The plan for these exhibitions is for increased visibility and direct engagement with institutional academics. Career exhibitions provide a competitive advantage as they allow universities to highlight their unique strengths and differentiators in a crowded market.
- iii. **University campus visit as an advertising tool :** According to this advertising campaign, the table shows that 27.78% (65 of 234) agreed to have visited their respective institution through campus visit, 20.09% (47 of 234) strongly agreed, 19.23% (45 of 234) were neutral to the statement, 23.08% (54 of 234) disagreed to not have experienced this tool, and 9.83% (23 of 234) strongly disagreed. A campus visit is an efficient way for HEIs to allow students to tour the campus, interact with current students and faculty, and gain an understanding of the institution's culture and atmosphere. During a campus visit, HEIs can display their facilities such as innovative classrooms, libraries, and student residences, as well as their extracurricular activities and resources such as clubs, sports teams, and career services. As an alternative to the traditional walking tour, several universities are going out of their way to create one-of-a-kind experiences for prospective students by presenting outside-the-box experiences during campus tours. Universities should strive to give visitors an unforgettable experience. To differentiate the university from the competition, the emotional marketing technique seeks to establish a bond with the consumer, in this case the prospective student.
- iv. **School visit by university representative as an advertising tool:** According to this section in Table 11, the majority of participants, 25.21% (59 of 234), agreed that they were exposed to this tool of advertising, 24.79% (58 of 234) were neutral, 19.23% (45 of 234) strongly agreed, 18.80% (44 of 234) participants disagreed to having been exposed, and 11.97% (28 of 234) strongly disagreed. During a school visit, representatives from universities may meet with high school counsellors, teachers, and students to discuss the positive aspects of attending their institution. They may also hand out informational materials like brochures and flyers and answer

questions from prospective students about the enrolment process, scholarship opportunities, and educational requirements. Personal interaction at school visits and word of mouth from university representatives, and/or high school counsellors continue to play a significant part in communicating information about universities to prospective students, as branding initiatives can raise awareness and shape a university's image (Shields and Peruta 2019:69).

- v. **Media (newspaper, television and radio as an advertising tool):** According to the data received, a majority, 35.47% (85 of 234), agreed to being exposed to the media as an advertising tool, 23.50% (55 of 234) strongly agreed, 21.79% (51 of 234) were neutral, 14.10% (33 of 234) disagreed and 5.13% (12 of 234) strongly disagreed. Traditional forms of media allow institutions to reach a large audience and advertise their courses, university life, and educational offerings to potential students. University commercials can highlight their campus by targeting a particular period of day when prospective students are most likely to be watching or listening. Advertising in the press, television and radio advertising, and other forms of communication over the Internet are among the most frequently employed marketing communications tools used by Moscow universities (Vetrova et al. 2019:373).
- vi. **Social media as an advertising tool:** This tool shows that most participants, 38.03% (89 of 234), strongly agreed that they were exposed to social media, 36.75% (86 of 234) agreed, 16.67% (39 of 234) were neutral, 7.69% (18 of 234) disagreed to the statement and 0.85% (2 of 234) strongly disagreed. Institutions can use social media to connect with a broad and varied audience, which includes high school pupils, students who are transferring, and adults who are learning. Other forms of online media include building through social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. Some websites use SMS to advertise online. It can be said that successfully building online advertising pages is the key to establishing and reinforcing the university's brand (Nguyen, Mihn, and Van Dan 2019:122).
- vii. **Word of mouth as an advertising tool:** Word of mouth in the table below shows that 33.76% (79 of 234) strongly agreed that word of mouth was one of the advertising strategies by the universities, 32.91% (77 of 234) agreed, 19.23% (45 of 234) were neutral, 10.26% (24 of 234) disagreed to the statement, and 3.85% (9 of 234) strongly disagreed. It is evident that word-of-mouth advertising is an extremely effective tool for universities, especially among households and their connections. When a family has an excellent experience with a university, they are more likely to share it with their relatives, close friends, and co-workers. Universities can encourage positive reviews and recommendations, increase their visibility, and attract a diverse group of talented students.

Table 11: University advertising campaigns

Item	Scale	Number of participants	Percentage of responses
a) University website	Strongly Agree	46	19.66%
	Agree	82	35.04%
	Neutral	65	27.78%
	Disagree	33	14.10%
	Strongly Disagree	8	3.42%
b) Career exhibition	Strongly Agree	46	19.66%
	Agree	82	35.04%
	Neutral	65	27.78%
	Disagree	33	14.10%
	Strongly Disagree	8	3.42%
c) University campus visit	Strongly Agree	47	20.09%
	Agree	65	27.78%
	Neutral	45	19.23%
	Disagree	54	23.08%
	Strongly Disagree	23	9.83%
d) School visit by university representative	Strongly Agree	45	19.23%
	Agree	59	25.21%
	Neutral	58	24.79%
	Disagree	44	18.80%
	Strongly Disagree	28	11.97%
e) Media (newspaper, TV and radio)	Strongly Agree	55	23.50%
	Agree	85	35.47%
	Neutral	51	21.79%
	Disagree	33	14.10%
	Strongly Disagree	12	5.13%
f) Social media	Strongly Agree	89	38.03%
	Agree	86	36.75%
	Neutral	39	16.67%
	Disagree	18	7.69%
	Strongly Disagree	2	0.85%
g) Word of mouth	Strongly Agree	79	33.76%
	Agree	77	32.91%
	Neutral	45	19.23%
	Disagree	24	10.26%
	Strongly Disagree	9	3.85%

5.9.7 Personal interaction with the university marketers

In question 26, the researcher sought to comprehend the impact of interaction and influence on potential students' decision-making. University marketers play an essential function in attracting potential students to their institution as a strategic vision to influence and have a competitive advantage. Personal interactions with university marketers can be a successful method to learn about the university and its programmes, as well as pose queries and determine whether the institution is a good fit for them.

- i. **Career exhibition:** Table 12 below show that 35.05% (75 of 234) of participants agree that they interacted with the university marketers during career exhibitions, 26.50% (62 of 234) strongly agree, 14.96% (35 of 234) were neutral, 29.23% (45 of 234) disagreed with the statement, and 7.26% (17 of 234) strongly disagreed.
- ii. **Open day:** It was also evident that most participants 39.32% (92 of 234) agreed to have had a personal interaction during their open day visit to campus, 23.50% (55 of 234) strongly agreed to the notion, 13.68% (32 of 234) remained neutral, 18.38% (43 of 234) disagreed and 5.13% (12 of 234) strongly disagreed.
- iii. **School visit by university representative:** The question of interaction during school visits by university representative shows that 29.06% (68 of 234) agreed that they interacted with a university representative during their school visits to their school, 24.79% (58 of 234) strongly agreed, 25.21% (59 of 234) disagreed not have had a personal interaction and 7.69% (18 of 234) strongly disagreed that they did not interact with the university marketing representative.
- iv. **Campus tour:** For this, 26.50% (62 of 234) strongly agreed to that they interacted with university marketers during their campus tour, 25.64% (60 of 234) disagreed with the statement, 24.79% (58 of 234) agreed to have had such personal interaction during campus tours, 15.38% (36 of 234) remained neutral and 7.69% (18 of 234) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Arevalo (2021:41) states that the team of representatives includes institution staff members or those who participate in an office related to the university communication unit and might express an opinion and supply information in favour of the educational programmes based on the above results, which focused on the interaction between potential students and university representatives from the HEI. These actions or tools represent direct or face-to-face marketing. Bresnick (2021) adds that while it may appear difficult to attract and enrol new students in the modern era, creating and implementing innovative approaches to recruitment and enrolment models can assist universities in standing out and differentiating themselves to effectively reach out to and enrol new students.

Table 12: Direct marketing interaction by university of choice

Item	Scale	Number of participants	Percentage of responses
a) Career exhibition	Strongly Agree	62	26.50%
	Agree	75	32.05%
	Neutral	35	14.96%
	Disagree	45	29.23%
	Strongly Disagree	17	7.26%
b) Open day	Strongly Agree	55	23.50%
	Agree	92	39.32%
	Neutral	32	13.68%
	Disagree	43	18.38%
	Strongly Disagree	12	5.13%
c) School visit by university representative	Strongly Agree	58	24.79%
	Agree	68	29.06%
	Neutral	31	13.25%
	Disagree	59	25.21%
	Strongly Disagree	18	7.69%
d) Campus tour	Strongly Agree	62	26.50%
	Agree	58	24.79%
	Neutral	36	15.38%
	Disagree	60	25.64%
	Strongly Disagree	18	7.69%

5.9.8 Direct contact by university through various channels

Question 27 sought to examine if there was any possibility of the respective universities (i.e. WSU & UFH) using various communication channels. From Figure 28 below, it is evident that the majority of participants, 52.56% (123 of 234), stated that they agreed to having been exposed to various communication channels, 28.21% (66 of 234) were neutral, 14.96% (35 of 234) strongly agreed, 2.99% (7 of 234) disagreed, and 1.28% (3 of 234) strongly disagreed. It is crucial for any university to reach a wider student audience and attract a potential target market via social media (Facebook and Twitter), email marketing, events (tours and exhibitions) and their website to keep potential students informed. It is therefore critical for HEIs to first analyse their market and evaluate which tools would better suit their marketing and communication channels, and thereafter to create dialogue between themselves and potential students. This demands a clear message in all communication platforms to be competitive to help build trust and goodwill between the two parties (Mutali and Omboi 2020:181).

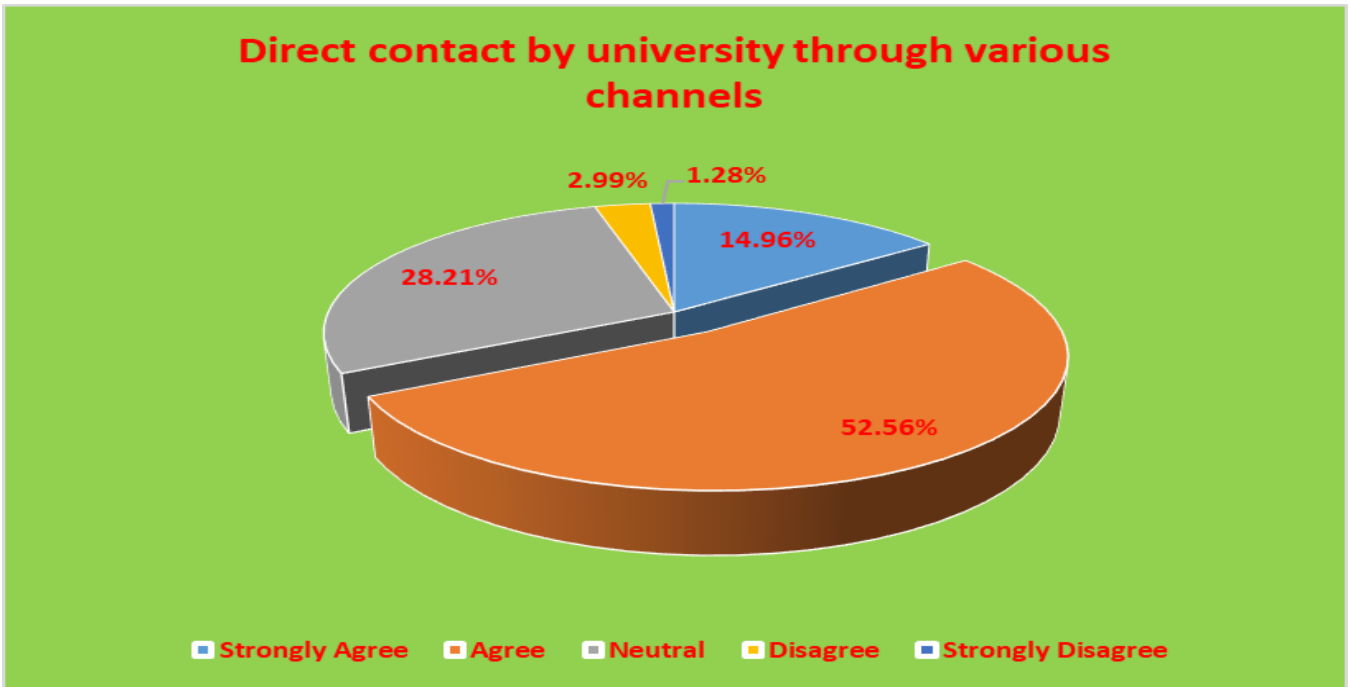


Figure 28: Direct contact by university through various channels

5.9.9 Customer service provided by admissions and student recruitment at the university of choice

Question 28 asked participants whether they were satisfied with customer services from their university of choice, and how they were assisted by the admissions and recruitment officers. Figure 29 below shows that many participants, 49.15% (115 of 234), agreed to have been satisfied with the statement, 24.36% (57 of 234) were neutral, 13.68% (32 of 234) stated that they strongly agreed to being satisfied, 9.40% (22 of 234) disagreed and 3.42% (8 of 234) strongly disagreed. It is evident that it is the responsibility of recruitment officers to guide potential students through their enrolment process, admission requirements and financial assistance available. The information provided will guarantee their choice of institution, improve their satisfaction with all information provided and enhance the reputation of the university. The perceptions of service quality at academic institutions vary, depending on the needs of the customer. The customer in an educational setting can be a potential or current student. Universities need to regularly measure service quality for the purpose of regulating and enhancing the level of assistance provided (Fuchs, Fangpong and Southam 2022:2).

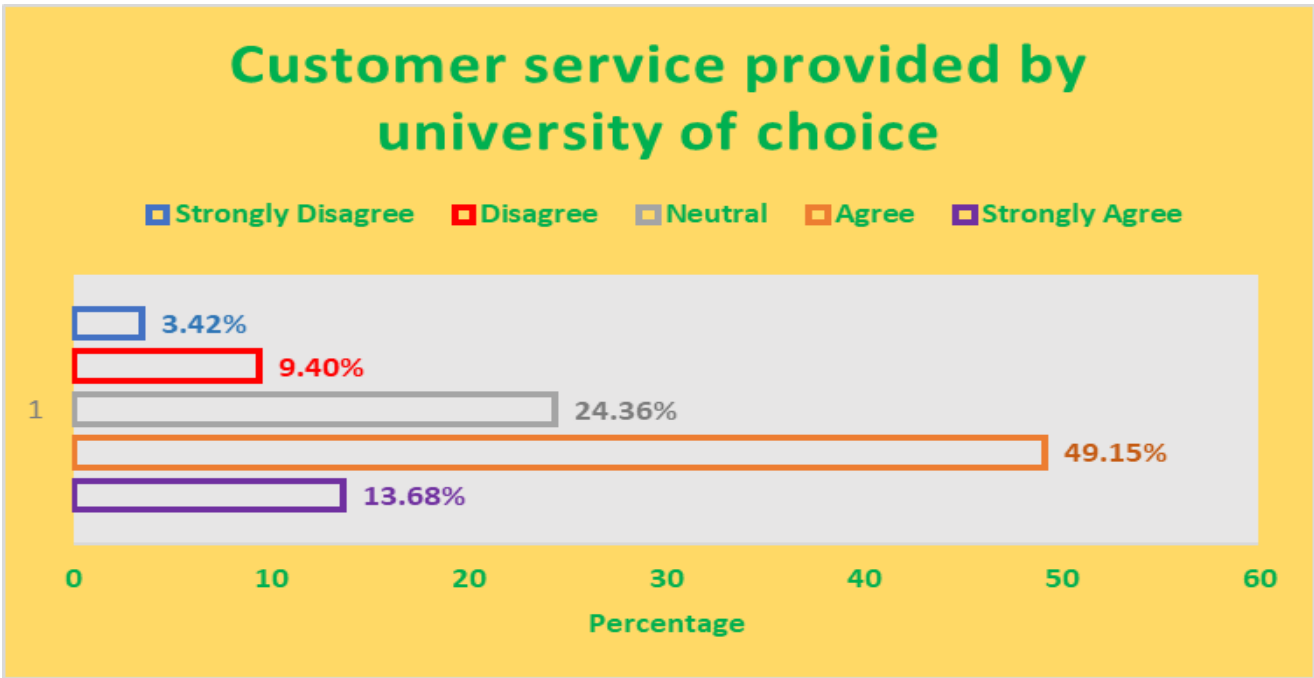


Figure 29: Customer service provided university of choice

5.9.10 Recommendation of university as a university of choice

Question 29 asked participants if they would recommend their university of choice to a friend or family member. It is evident in Figure 30 below that many participants, 49.57% (116 of 234), agreed that they would do so, 23.50% (55 of 234) strongly agreed, 15.38% (36 of 234) stated they were neutral about the statement, 7.69% (18 of 234) disagreed and lastly, 3.58% (9 of 234) strongly disagreed. Todea *et al.* (2022:4) mention that students are among the most significant stakeholders for a university, their satisfaction is a critical driver of student loyalty. When they are satisfied, they enrol in additional educational programmes at the exact same university and recommend them to others. The current cohort of students' personal experience with the university community and their trust can represent confidence in the university's dependability and integrity, which would be a strong recommendation of what potential students require from a university.

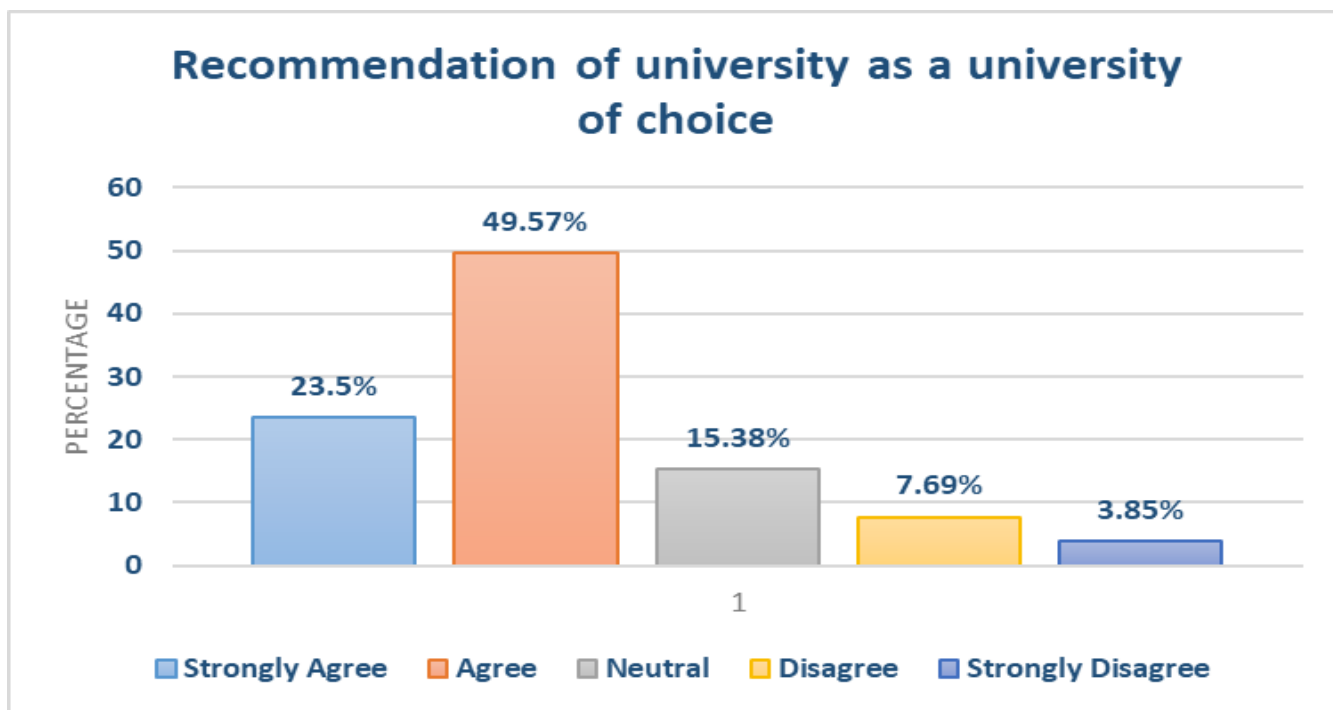


Figure 30: Recommendation of university as a university of choice

5.10 SECTION 4: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS OF STUDENT RESPONSES FROM WSU AND UFH

5.10.1 INTRODUCTION

The quantitative data gathered from the end-users' questionnaires was presented in the previous section as quantitative findings. The researcher organised the answers to the open-ended questions into categories of themes for analysis. Based on the data gathered from the participants, these themes were prepared and created to ease flow into interpretation and significance. By making sure that both WSU and UFH students took part so as to hear the opinions of both groups, bias was avoided. Respondents who participated in the study were asked ten open-ended questions and their responses varied according to participation. Not all participants responded to the questions and some only answered certain questions or not at all. Therefore, there is no definite number of responses per question. Participants were required to respond through the questionnaire (Appendix A) to the various themes mentioned below.



- Theme 1: University choice and preference
- Theme 2: Quality of education
- Theme 3: Cost and affordability of tuition fees
- Theme 4: Marketing and communication

- Theme 5: Communication tools
- Theme 6: Competitive advantages
- Theme 7: Location and convenience
- Theme 8: Brand and reputation.

5.10.2 Theme 1: University choice and preference

Participants were asked if the university where they are registered was their university of choice. Most respondents (67.7%) stated that the institution where they are enrolled now was not their first choice. Additionally, some of the concerns about the university of choice raised by participants included university accessibility and location, quality of education, university reputation and image. The responses indicate that the participants were not happy where they are studying but for some reason certain factors resulted in them being at their university. It is possible that they were not accepted in their university of choice or did not meet the entry requirements for their programme of choice. It was also noted that for those (32.3%) who stated that it was their university of choice, the quality of education, university location and influence from family members were some of the factors that made their current university to be their first choice. The findings are confirmed by Tan, Bich, and Long (2022:7843) who state that studies have revealed some factors that can influence high school students' university choice, such as university communication activities, educational institution's reputation, educational activities, influential individuals and alumni, and their own student characteristics. There is, however, not any research on the decision to select a high-quality programme that highly excites them.

5.10.3 Theme 2: University quality of education

The respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the quality of education they received in their university of choice, and what satisfied them about it. The respondents' feedback indicated that the majority (86.3%) were satisfied with the quality of education and stated that the use of multi-tools/methods for teaching and learning was very satisfying. Some of the other responses described that they were influenced by family and friends who had studied in their university about the quality of education at WSU/or UFH, respectively. Universities' goals include getting students to choose and use their product, which is their educational programme, as well as making sure they are satisfied with their choice (Thi, Mihn, and Huang 2022:134). An institution's level of internationalisation has a significant impact on its academic reputation, which has always been a big sign of how good a university is. The quality of a university is reflected in its academic reputation, which is a social rating system for the institution's quality that has been developed over time (Ke, Junfeng and Xiaojing, 2022:3).

5.10.4 Theme 3: Cost and affordability of tuition fees

Respondents were asked to explain whether the quality of education was comparable to the cost of education in their respective universities. The findings indicate that most respondents agreed that education does provide value for money. Additionally, the question was somehow linked to the quality of education and how they view their teaching and learning, which now shows that there was greater satisfaction with the monetary position/factor. However, not everyone can get into higher education. The affordability issue can impact access to higher education. To close the ongoing discrepancies in university access and ensure that everyone can enrol, it is important to examine the affordability of higher education. It is necessary to maximise the private and public benefits of this investment. The pursuit of postsecondary education is frequently seen as a path to enormous economic success, but many students—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, first-generation college students, and people of colour—remain marginalised in higher education. Higher education is now out of reach for underprivileged students due to the rising cost of higher education, a reduction in government financial aid, and widening income gaps. Lavesque (2022:21) affirms that the cost of tuition is frequently cited as a reason for not applying to or selecting a specific university. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the beneficial role that financial aid plays in assisting students in making good college choices, especially when students base their decision-making on their financial aid expectations. Financial aid is frequently available in amounts greater than the overall cost of attendance.

5.10.5 Theme 4: University marketing and communication strategy

Respondents were asked if their university marketing and communication strategy worked for them to be recruited and later enrolled in their respective universities. Many respondents indicated that it worked for them, and some responses included their positive brand and reputation, and presence in most marketing and communication platforms such as websites and social media. The findings also noted that the information about crucial factors such as entry requirements was shared with them, either during school visits or campus tours. According to Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom and Osman (2022:10019), universities are pushed to improve their marketing strategies to attract both domestic and international students. In this regard, a good brand reputation of HEIs may help the university achieve a higher university rating. Prospective students' primary source of information is HEI websites, and it is by means of this form of communication that such institutions make their first impression. The message conveyed through the HEI's websites is thus critical, and it should ensure that it is possible to determine their mission and what distinguishes them from other institutions (Guimarães and Estima 2022:317). Moreover, it was noted that university brand and reputation must be conveyed in every communication, either via website or any convenient tool accessible to the target market.

5.10.6 Theme 5: University marketing and communication tools used

The **respondents** were asked which communication tool worked best for them in the student recruitment process. The responses pointed to utilisation of various tools by the university and new students, such as social media, internet, face to face (school or campus visits) and cell phones. The findings show that social media and face to face, followed by using cellphone (calls or text), worked for the respondents. This shows that the universities' competitive strategy in terms of communication was to use multi-tools for maximum interaction. Because online research is so popular, colleges and universities must make an excellent digital first impression. Higher education leaders must implement more effective student recruitment strategies as the field enters a new era. While digital recruitment is critical, colleges must also look for innovative ways to re-engage prospective students. Enrolling learners' strategies should be feasible and must provide meaningful responses to questions from prospective students (Carballo 2019). According to Ade-Johnson (2022:66), it is important for marketing communication strategies to have values; they should not be generic or have strategic resource equivalents. To develop a competitive marketing (communication) strategy, universities must also reorganise the relationships between the marketing mix's elements. They must conduct in-depth assessments and analyses of how the market and the competitive environment affect the development of a marketing mix. More importantly, they need to function well as a team to mould consumer behaviour and meet their needs.

5.10.7 Theme 6: The existence of competition between higher education institutions in East London

Question 6 asked **participants** if they were aware of any existing competition between their university and other higher education institutions in the East London region. Due to the lack of elaboration from participants, 52.6% (70 of 133) stated that there was competition between WSU and UFH and other institutions, with 43.6% who said there was no competition. The competitive intelligence theme assigned to this question extracted that participants were aware of differentiation, marketing and communication and quality of education. One participant stated that "WSU is seen as a low university, but they know that WSU has the best education," while some other participants stated that due to "the recent forensic audits, deaths and corruption at UFH, we have now lost any credibility." The theme not only extracted their views, but some of the responses pointed out the entry requirements or point system of the university, with the needs for more clean students' residences. According to Kettunen *et al.* (2022:2), it is novel and poorly understood that entire universities are undergoing extensive transformations that are transforming them into strategic organisations with goals determined by competition in a wide range of activities. Modern university competition is a type of competition in which higher education

institutions are influenced by market expectations created by ranking organisations and public comparisons. Therefore, HEIs need to firstly assess what the contemporary trends in higher education are, and then how they can exploit those in terms of strategically positioning themselves to be the drivers of new edge trends.

5.10.8 Theme 7: University location and convenience

The following is raw data collection from participants from WSU and UFH on how they viewed their university location and their convenience to go to campus. The sub-theme of accessibility was extracted in the analysis. Most respondents felt that their university was well located and convenient to them. Some of the participants stated that their “*campus was a walkable distance*”, some adding that even though the campus’s location was convenient, the “*university provides transportation from student residences to campus and back*”, and others, who the researcher presumed to be living with parents stated that “*the campus closer to the CBD and in the taxi route*”. However, the current cohort of new students, and those who were recruited in 2022 were exposed to new ways of doing things. Do, Tran, Le (2022:1) elaborate that in the previous two years, the global education community had to find some new ways for teaching students to minimise disruption in the learning process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning became the primary method of instruction. Apart from the epidemiological methods advantages of learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic, other advantages mentioned include more convenience and access to resources irrespective of location or time.

5.10.9 Theme 8: University brand and reputation

Question 8 asked participants if the university brand and reputation were what they were looking for in a university, and how that has worked for them. Most respondents indicated that they were happy with the brand and reputation. Some respondents also pointed out that student protests are damaging the reputation and these new corruption reports are also tarnishing their brand which is somehow linked to the academic excellence of these institutions of study. Another key factor is that some respondents acknowledged their university’s strides to fix some of the bad media coverage they were receiving. Also, some of their alumni who hold very influential positions have constantly worked with the university in their social networking platforms to recruit students. The university brand represents what they stand for and needs constant evaluation to ensure there is no irreparable damage to their reputation. It is, therefore, imperative that the advancement office be proactive in instances where their brand and reputation is at stake. Further, there needs to teamwork with the institutional administration where some of these instances originate, such as meal allowance, accreditation, and campus/off student residences to mention a few. In a time when social media has a significant impact on higher education

and brand value is linked to online popularity, universities must be aware of their reputation. They need to be aware of how sponsors, parents, teachers, students, and the public view them (Bual 2023).

5.11 TRANSFERRING/ENROLLING TO ANOTHER UNIVERSITY


Due to the high number of participants and the variation of other questions the respondents had to answer, this question sought the gauge whether the participants would enrol or register in another university instead of their current institution. Most respondents clearly indicated that they would leave their current institution to enrol somewhere else. The responses received clearly indicated that they were not satisfied at all. The dissatisfaction can be as a result of many concerns that somehow prevent them from experiencing a good campus life/student experience. Some of the factors elaborated on by some participants point to the direction of looking for universities in big cities. It cannot be assumed that those who preferred to stay were happy, but due to social demographics, closeness to home, and quality of education held more weight in their decision-making process of staying.

5.12 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO BE COMPETITIVE WITH OTHER HEIs

Most respondents stated that their concerns were focused on student needs which demand attention to some institutional administration, admissions department, finance department and registration departments. There was also mention of how the universities ignore matters until a massive student action takes place, thereby delaying teaching and learning. One of the participants stated that “there needs to be consequence management” when it comes to student needs. Some respondents indicated that “quality of education needs to be reworking,” where lecturer academic qualifications are used to teach a certain level or course, and “redesigning their technology in teaching and learning strategy.” It was also noted that student residences and accommodation were some of the areas where improvement was needed. The sub-themes that were extracted included availability of study tools, poor facilities in some cases, better smart classrooms, and better communication during strikes.

5.13 SECTION 5: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS FROM STAFF MEMBERS

5.13.1 Introduction

The qualitative findings from the individual interviews are presented in this section. Appendix B contains the interview questions that were given to the participants. To put the qualitative findings into context, the number of people who raised an issue (i.e. a theme ) for each question is also provided.

Aside from agreeing to participate, all participants consented to the interview being recorded (see Appendix D for the informed consent form). The form made it clear that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and that any information they provided would be kept strictly confidential.



Because the interviews were conducted through MS teams, they were recorded on the platforms. Before they could be analysed, all the recordings had to be transcribed. Each interview question was recorded, then handwritten in a notepad and later transcribed into a Word document. Each interview was transcribed immediately after it had ended, while everything was still fresh in the researcher's mind and could be accurately remembered.

To ensure transcription accuracy, the transcribed data was read several times, and the recordings were listened to several times. Greater accuracy is achieved in qualitative research by re-evaluating the collected and captured data through repeated careful listening or watching. According to McMullin (2021:1), transcription is the process of converting recorded audio (usually spoken word) into a written form that can be used to analyse a specific phenomenon or event.

The qualitative data collection included six participants, as illustrated in Table 13 below. The study was intended to interview ten people. Due to their busy schedules, all the interviewed participants requested online interviews during the interview request process. The qualitative data obtained through the interview process was subject to content and thematic analysis in this qualitative discussion. The identified themes were based on the semi-structured interview process. Data was analysed by identifying patterns and the frequency with which specific concepts or words appeared in respondents' feedback and the literature review; each data item was then classified into themes and linked to an overarching concept of competitive intelligence.

Ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality is considered ethical practice. The researcher should assure participants that the information they provide will not be linked to them in presentations or other forms of dissemination. Researchers must consider whether it is necessary to protect the identities of research participants. If participants are promised anonymity, the researcher must not reveal their identities in research or dissemination. The use of pseudonyms can help to keep research participants anonymous.

As a result, this study achieved anonymity by assigning each participant a pseudonym. The pseudonyms were created by taking the institution's name and assigning a number to it for each participant. All respondents who took part in the study were therefore assured of their confidentiality.

The questions identified for this qualitative data collection format necessitated data responses to support the study with more in-depth and rich data. The following theme questions were raised during the qualitative discussion:

- Student recruitment
- Competitive intelligence
- Marketing and communication
- Branding and reputation
- Factors influencing choice of institution.

5.13.2 Biographical details of participants

The respondents were asked which university they worked for, how long they had been there, and what position they held in their respective institutions. The results are shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13: Biographical data of qualitative participants

Code of Participants	Institution	Department	Years of employment	Position	Years in position
WSU1	WSU	Marketing, Communication and Advancement.	13 years.	Marketing and Communication Officer.	6 years.
WSU2	WSU	Marketing, Communication and Advancement.	12 years.	Marketing and Communication Officer.	5 years.
WSU3	WSU	Marketing, Communication and Advancement.	10 years.	Senior Marketing and Communication Officer.	5 years.
WSU4	WSU	Marketing, Communication and Advancement.	26 years.	Deputy Director: Marketing and Communication Officer.	5 years.
UFH1	UFH	Institutional Advancement.	11 years.	Manager: Marketing and Communication.	11 years.
UFH2	UFH	Institutional Advancement.	10 years.	Recruitment officer (EL Campus)	8 years.

The findings and responses from the individual interviews are presented in the sections that follow. The findings are presented in the order in which the questions were asked during the interview (Appendix C). Questions 1 to 4 have been explained in the tables above. Section 5.13.2.1 below starts from question 5 and is detailed according to the interview schedule/questions.

Individual interview responses are presented for each of the questions. The purpose of the qualitative findings was to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the use of competitive intelligence strategies in Higher Education Institutions. Using this exploratory study in conjunction with the literature analysis, the researcher is able to make recommendations.

Theme 1: Student recruitment

Question 5 (Appendix C) asked the participants if their institution had a student recruitment strategy in place for student recruitment initiatives. Responses confirmed the availability of the student recruitment strategy, even though three respondents stated that it is either not working or that a new strategy is in the making. Three other respondents stated that their strategy is effective and is providing satisfactory results.

Question 6 posed the question of whether the student recruitment strategy was working for the institutions. It was discovered that the strategy laid a path to embark on the recruitment journey and integration plan of attracting potential students, according to three respondents, often through visiting school in their geographical areas in search of best performing schools in mathematics and science. It was interesting to note that one mentioned that “the strategy was not working and was based on old strategies that are outdated for today’s potential students.” Two participants mentioned that the strategy served as a guideline in reaching schools from Grahamstown, covering the broader scope of the East London region. WSU4 explained that the strategy is mostly used to “market the university programmes and which campus these programmes”.

Question 7 (Appendix C) asked the participants what tools they were using to recruit students, which formed part of their student recruitment strategy. Three participants mentioned “face-to-face school visits and video presentations” which seemed to work for WSU and one of the participants added “we do have principal’s luncheon” and the use of institutional alumni. WSU is a university that covers the far-reaching parts of the border-Kei regions via their closest campuses in those areas. Ruffalo Noel-Levitz (2020) discovered that email communications, text messaging, and mobile responsive websites were the three most effective outreach strategies outside of social media. The author also mentioned that redesigning university websites is a common recruitment strategy used by many institutions.



Theme 2: Competitive intelligence

Question 8 (Appendix C) asked if participants understood the term “competitive intelligence”. Three participants knew what the term competitive intelligence meant and what it means to their respective higher education institutions. However, three other participants did not know the term. It was surprising that marketing and communication officers did not know what competitive intelligence was.

Question 9 wanted to check whether their institutions had a competitive intelligence strategy to keep up with contemporary trends in the higher education sector. Two WSU participants said that “WSU does not have a competitive strategy” which contradicted the other two WSU participants who stated that “WSU has a competitive strategy.” However, both UFH participants confirmed that “UFH has a competitive strategy which they use to guide them in the higher education market.”

Question 10 (Appendix C) asked respondents what impact competitive intelligence strategies have on their institutions. All six respondents indicated that the strategy assists their institutions in benchmarking their costs, having affordable registration fees and being accessible to the larger East London student population. One participant added that “with the use of their media personalities and strong alumni in the communities works to WSU’s advantage.” The participants also mentioned factors arising from using competitive intelligence to gain a competitive advantage by mentioning what makes their institutions better than the other in the same competitive region market. Four participants contended that while most of the core factors were their ability to identify and collect data about market competitors, they lacked the necessary skills to analyse the data and use it effectively in decision making. Two of the six participants mentioned that good data analysis skills are critical for competitive intelligence, and that the process is likely to fail without them. There seems to be a lack of a roll out plan of their competitive intelligence strategy regarding what factors should be included and how these factors can work for them. It is worth also noting that, although the strategy is somehow available, the issue is of identifying the gaps where each institution can exploit the other by gaining the competitive edge.

Question 11 (Appendix C) asked the participants about the impact of their competitive intelligence strategy on their student recruitment programme. The participants indicated several issues, which can be divided into factors that add to the competitive advantage and practices that provide a positive impact. One participant indicated that it has a significant impact on making UFH “aware of the competitive space they operate in and what they can do better within that space.” Another participant mentioned that their strategy’s impact is “on their different programme offerings, such from certificates to doctorate,” and one added that “WSU covers a large geographical spread across the Eastern Cape

province,” which was collaborated. It appears that both institutions share a mutual understanding of competitive intelligence strategy at the organisational level, which contributes to a strong articulation of intelligence needs. Many participants agreed that it is critical for marketing and communication officers and recruiters to have a thorough understanding of their organisation's goals and strategies.

Question 12 (Appendix C) asked the participants which higher education institutions they regarded as their immediate competitors in the East London region. WSU/UFH, technical and vocational education and training institutions such as Buffalo City College, and other private sector institutions were named as competitors by all respondents. With the above-mentioned competitors, it was clear that each institution in the study is aware of the other in the region, but their offerings in the region differ.

Theme 3: Marketing and communication

Theme 3 sought to investigate how HEIs align their marketing and communication strategies with their student recruitment plans.

Question 13 (Appendix C) asked participants if their institutions have a marketing and communication strategy that directs student recruitment. All participants indicated that their institutions had a marketing strategy directed at student recruitment. Though WSUI indicated that it is still being improved for a better integration into their vision and mission. Following the interviews and discussions, it was discovered that while participants did have a marketing strategy, some other challenges may arise from the strategy's implementation and incorporation into other student recruitment-related plans. The emphasis was on effective student recruitment methods and practices. The researcher learned from the interviews that it is critical for a higher education institution to have a marketing and communication plan aimed at student recruitment. When recruiters market their institution through presentation and face-to-face information dissemination, the effectiveness of that strategy will provide a significant competitive advantage. One of the participants mentioned that WSU intends to conduct strategic planning because of the DUT vision 2030 plagiarism scandal. As a result, most WSU communication strategies are on hold.

Question 14 (Appendix C) asked participants about the role marketing plays in their student recruitment strategy. Six participants emphasized that marketing's role is to persuade potential students to enrol in their institutions through various student recruitment initiatives. It was also clear that the participants understood which marketing tools to employ in their student recruitment strategies. Some of the strategies included marketing their institutions and programmes to potential students to

determine which university has what they are looking for. This means that their marketing strategy should include a clear presentation of what is available to potential students so that they can make an informed decision about which institution to enrol with. It was also clear that a marketing strategy must be aligned with the institution's strategy and how it can be implemented in the institution's marketing strategy.

Question 15 (Appendix C) sought to assess if their institutional marketing communication plan was successful. WSU1 and WSU3 indicated that WSU's image has been tainted in the media due to recent accreditation issues and which indicates that its institutional marketing communication was not successful. However, WSU2 and WSU4 mentioned that it is successful as the university has had an increase in enrolment quotas over the past years, proving that WSU is the university of choice to some potential students. Two participants from UFH indicated their institutional marketing communication plan was successful. Most participants agreed that to have a strong marketing communication plan, it needs to be implemented as effectively as possible. According to one participant, the best method for a successful plan will be determined by the urgency and priority of the improved plan.

Question 16 (Appendix C) asked the participants about which marketing and communication tools they use to recruit students. Brochures, pamphlets, and promotional items were frequently mentioned by participants. Furthermore, all participants mentioned stakeholder engagement with life orientation teachers and the principal's luncheon. With the use of Facebook, WhatsApp communication and video graphic material to highlight their institutions to potential students, technology has simplified traditional methods of marketing and communication. It is worth noting that financial constraints have limited the use of other effective marketing and communication tools. Many participants' responses were pragmatic in nature, offering suggestions and specific actions. As with question 15, a brief overview and a limited number of responses were provided to put the responses into context. Feedback from principals and other far-reaching initiatives, such as using alumni in their communities to persuade potential students to enrol with their universities, were effective in allowing them to tailor their marketing and communication to their needs. One participant mentioned that the colour and layout of some marketing and communication tools were out of date. As a result, there must be a collaborative effort.

Question 17 (Appendix C), enquired of the participants what other alternative communication channels the department employs in its marketing communication efforts. Although the participants did not explicitly mention the most effective alternative communication channels, both institutions identified Facebook as the most common. However, WSU4 and UFHI both stated that alternative channels may be expensive, so they rely on free media. The tools mentioned were all about communication and



keeping the prospective students informed. The importance of maintaining regular contact with prospective students was emphasized.

Theme 4: Branding and reputation

Question 18 (Appendix C) asked participants if they believed their university brand is well positioned in the East London region. All six respondents indicated that their institution's brand was well positioned in the region. However, WSU3 also mentioned that somehow the perceptions of WSU within the community were not brand positive. "WSU struggles in that its brand performance of students is not positive" due to their constant protests that have been shown on all media platforms. The advancement offices work tirelessly to preserve their institutional brand throughout their marketing and communication initiatives. According to Pinar (2020:2), branding universities as a recent marketing tool aims to attract, engage, and retain students as well as position universities. In addition, universities, as service organisations, rely on their distinct service characteristics to distinguish themselves from the competition. As a result, a brand with strong equity is easily recognised and remembered, and more importantly, it creates a distinction strong enough to elicit favourable responses to the brand.

Higher education institutions face different branding challenges than available products or services do. The provision of education by HEIs is a service that exists because of ongoing contact between consumers (current and prospective students, faculty, and the community) and service providers (higher education institutions) until consumers complete their education at those institutions (Yudis Puspitasari, MS and Pandjaitan 2020:3355). Pereraa, Nayak, and Van Nguyen (2021:3) state that although prospective students evaluate numerous factors to assess the quality of HEIs, it is difficult for HEIs to demonstrate the quality and consistency of HEIs' brand promise delivery until students enrol and use HEIs' services. To address these issues, HEIs strive to improve their brand equity as an indicator of educational quality.

Question 19 (Appendix C) asked participants their opinion on whether their institution's brand image and reputation play a key role in student recruitment. Most participants responded in-depth to this question, and some stated that they had already addressed everything in their responses to question 18. However, WSU participants stated that "their institutional image has been tainted and dented with student protests and other issues, but there have been positive stories since". The overall findings show that most participants passionately believe that their institutions' brand and reputation worked for student recruitment, despite current issues of accreditation at WSU and recent attacks on the UFH Vice Chancellor, but they have seen an increase in student enrolment, indicating that their brand and reputation remain favourable. To protect their institutions, marketing and communication professionals must develop brand and reputation strategies. Today's higher education institutions operate in a highly

competitive environment fraught with brand and reputation risks. Within the context of a university, reputation is defined as the sum of stakeholders' impressions based on communication and interaction with the university. The student's experience at the university helps to build his or her reputation. Mateus and Acosta (2022:2) add that in a competitive environment, more universities are turning to marketing to improve the perception of their image and reputation, to attract not only students, but also teachers and financial resources.

Question 20 (Appendix C) asked participants what they think their institutional reputation was doing well for their brand in the East London region. Four WSU participants stated that their reputation was to a certain extent “not doing well,” that the university “has to work on its customer service to avert student protests” and their institutional brand was “mediocre.” Contrary to WSU, both UFH respondents indicated that “the Vice Chancellor’s investigations in cleaning up the university’s corruption brings credibility to the institution.” Universities are competing to recruit more students as global markets become more globalised. According to Wu, Chen, and Tien-Tze (2019), brand image is derived from brand customers' evaluations, and brand image in consumers' memories will become a significant factor in their purchasing or enrolling decisions. The public's perception of an organisation is referred to as brand reputation (Anušić, 2021). Consumers’ overall appraisal of university brand reputation happens with judgment. The responses from the participants indicated that they do have intentions of restoring the reputation which will demand collective work from university management.

As a result of an organisation's record of meeting stakeholder expectations, reputation describes the opinions that are formed about others based on their previous behaviour. Building a university's brand reputation is critical to its long-term viability. Reputation is the most crucial factor in developing university brand equity because it fosters a sense of connection, which leads to rewarding interactions and aids in the development of brand equity. As a result, a variety of strategies may be required to ensure the successful creation of brand equity (Tan, Rasoolimanesh and Manickam 2021:4).

Theme 5: Factors influencing choice of institution

Question 21 (Appendix C) asked participants to provide some of the factors for potential students to enrol with their institutions, either WSU or UFH. Common factors were mentioned by all respondents such as accessibility to the institutions, affordable fees, and free online application for WSU potential students. However, programme differentiation was also mentioned by WSU4, namely that “our quality education supersedes our brand”. Two participants mentioned that their “university leadership style and historical background paves the way for any potential students who want a traditional university.” Overall, the findings show that most participants highlighted crucial factors that contribute to the

positive increase of student quotas that contribute to competitive intelligence success. Many participants mentioned institutional affordability and institutional governance. It is worth noting that institutional alumni have aided in ensuring that their institutions receive a desirable number of new entrants.

According to Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, and Osman (2022:10058), a variety of factors can influence high school students' university selection decisions. They go on to say that the quality of education, campus facilities, atmosphere, financial factors, advertisement, and publicity are all crucial factors that students consider when choosing a university. According to Mukanziza and Singirankabo (2022:3), environmental conditions such as family and social status, economic development, education policies that provide access and accessibility to HEIs are among the factors that influence decision-making to enrol in a higher education institution. Selecting a university to pursue a degree is a complex process that requires students and their parents to consider several relevant factors that influence pre-degree students' decision-making for the place of study. The high number of public and private universities increases competition for student recruitment every year. More importantly, universities have increasingly faced various challenges and major transformations, such as changes in demand for education, global competition, and reduction in education funding (Ditta-Apichai and Phairot 2022:38).

Question 22 (Appendix C) asked participants to indicate if they had other key determining factors that would influence students' choice of university. The question wanted to uncover key factors not mentioned in question 21. Three participants mentioned common key factors such as their institution "offer diploma and degree programmes," "accessible to the larger geographical area" and "family and friends' studies there." These responses indicated that their system of differentiation works for them and that the use of their alumni as influencers to choose an HEI is effective. However, three participants indicated that "the quality of education" is an extraordinarily strong determining factor. They also indicated that "campus safety and security, location, and campus facilities" are key factors. The overall point extracted from these responses is that both institutions detail what they have and what they perceive to be key factors. According to Bansal (2022), institutional reputation, university programme details, potential job opportunities, financial support, and scholarship programmes are the most crucial factors students consider when choosing an institution for higher education. Other key factors include HEIs' location, integrated facilities, canteen, accommodation, quiet learning zones.

Question 23 (Appendix C) asked participants for their opinion on what works best at their institution in influencing the choice of institution. Two participants indicated that "offering key and flagship programmes to the potential students, such engineering and science in the East London region." Additionally, two more participants mentioned that "institutional heritage, location, and leadership style

work as advantages” to their institutions in gaining a competitive intelligence. One participant added that their institution “uses a variety of communication tools that are designed to reach everyone” and stated that their “institution contributes by using its alumni to influence potential students”, such as “Mhlobo wenene FM Co-host Dr Tebelele, Council chairperson Advocate L Ngcukayitobi and most of media personalities in the broadcasting industry are former students”. All the responses above indicated that both institutions either serve the same communities or have a limited geographical reach. As a result, it is critical for higher education institutions to reconsider recruiting at the same feeder high schools. If traditional recruitment methods are used, more diverse pools of applicants, including those from underprivileged communities and high schools, may be denied equal opportunity. According to Clarkson (2022), higher education institutions have broadened their online student recruitment strategies to include social media and online feeds. Even though many institutions have reopened to walk-ins, digital recruitment strategies are now firmly entrenched in the competitive strategies of higher education. Based on data gathered throughout the year, their student recruitment strategies should be reviewed and refined on an annual basis. Furthermore, using data to support their student strategic recruitment will help HEIs ensure they are making the best decisions for their institution and future students.

Question 24 (Appendix C) asked participants if the factors they mentioned in question 23 were benefiting their institutions. All participants stated that the factors were beneficial to their institutions.

5.14 CONCLUSION

The findings of the study were presented in this chapter. The information gathered from the participants' profile questionnaires and individual interviews was used to generate the results. The following chapter presents a recommendation of findings identified through analysis and correlation with literature findings. The following chapter also presents the study's populated frameworks as well as the information model approach that can be used for future research into the use of competitive intelligence strategies to recruit students in higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the empirical findings, which included descriptive questionnaire participant profile findings and qualitative interview schedule findings. As a result, this chapter discusses the main findings outlined in Chapter 5, as well as compares the findings where applicable. Consequently, this chapter shows that the research objectives were met and now offers suggestions for what could be done considering the findings. A discussion of the study's limitations and future research directions is also included.

6.2 MEETING THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study's aim was to investigate how public universities employ competitive intelligence methods to recruit students, including how these competitive intelligence methods affect public university student recruitment in the East London region. The study also sought to examine what influences student recruitment in higher education. Therefore, several competitive theories were used as a base for discussion and the development of the arguments.

6.3 ANSWERING THE STUDY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. How do competitive intelligence methods affect public university student recruitment?
- ii. What influences student recruitment in higher education?

The study sought to answer the above questions in its quest to see how CI methods are used to recruit potential students. Based on that intention, the study observed that there were two sides to the CI methods, i.e. how HEIs could use the CI methods to their benefit and how students observe HEIs' strategies in recruiting them. Competitive intelligence (CI) techniques can help higher education institutions evolve into being more important in their regions. The strategic planning process "requires identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses as well as those of competitors; looking to the environment to discern potential threats and opportunities; and determining how the institution can best respond to both." These HEIs require CI methods to gain access to high-quality, future-oriented information required for sound long-term decision making. Obtaining such data entails identifying certain elements of the future that presently exist, that is, seeking which driving forces and trends have begun to exist in the environment.

However, there was a disconnect in establishing the relationship between the two; however was evident that CI methods are mostly used for academic purposes than for institutional image and reputation. The foremost intention was highlighting their academic/educational offerings that are more aligned to the market. This goes to show that these HEIs understood that there were trends in the market, and the plan was to access those trends, check their wide choice of programmes and whether the most popular academic offer was available in their own institutions. However, as dynamic as the market is, there were more differences in preference of programmes and meeting entry requirements. The strengths of the institution were to offer these programmes, followed by the process of enrolment for those who qualify, and thereafter guaranteeing a best student academic experience in their institutions.

WSU and UFH could improve their CI methods if they can first establish their intent with the methods of establishing or improving a relationship with their CI and the institution. Furthermore, through the establishment of such relationship, HEIs will be able to kick-start the set strategy by defining their goals and tools to be used in the process, followed by defining what to implement and then the implementation, as well as involving all relevant people in information dissemination of their CI processes.

The second question addressed student recruitment in higher education institutions, revealing both advantages and disadvantages in student preferences and offered opportunities. Quality of education, campus facilities, teaching methods, and campus accessibility were influential factors. Challenges were noted for studying in other provinces, which referred to either economic factors or entry requirements. HEIs prioritise offering students more than just academics, with other factors contributing to influencing recruitment. Institutional marketing and communication strategies fostered interaction between the parties, which can serve as their selling point for building influence. Additionally, the monetary factors were seen as an advantage for participants who received a bursary for studying, while those who did not qualify could stay closer to home.

6.4 MEETING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study's objectives were set to determine the direction of the study and provide a base lens into how competitive strategies would be used. Below are the study's objectives and how each objective was met using the survey.

6.4.1 Examine marketing and communication strategies for student recruitment at public universities

The objective was to examine which marketing and communication strategies were used by the two HEIs in their quest for student recruitment. This included three aspects, first of which are the primary tools for marketing and communication; second are the current tools used to recruit potential students; and third are the alternative tools used. The results were demonstrated in Chapter 5, where the survey instrument was used for various questions to examine which marketing and communication tools were used by the two HEIs. It was discovered that multiple strategies were utilised to contact potential students and current students. In terms of institutional programmes and facilities, most of the participants indicated that their decisions were largely affected by teaching and learning factors, such as wide choice of programmes (57.69%), they met the entry requirements (45.5%), the choice of programmes were aligned to their career choice (41.88%), they met the entry requirements (47.44%), and academic support provided by the university (58.97%). Their overall perception of the summarised view of university teaching and learning was 52.56%. The above data confirmed that the entry requirements for their choice of career were especially important.

Other factors such as university facilities were also paramount to their decision making, and now directly aligned to marketing and communication strategies utilised by these universities of choice. Campus facilities (46.58%) and extra-curricular activities (45.3%) persuaded them to enrol.

Institutional marketing and communication strategies that worked for potential students involved the various techniques used to reach them, either in high schools or via a multi-modal strategy. Institutional brand and reputation, according to both instruments used, showed that there were commonalities in the effectiveness that persuaded them to enrol. This notion points to the required information that was provided (61.97%), which was enough for them and covered many aspects they as potential students needed to know (54.70%), and the information received was effective for them to make an informed decision (57.26%), and such information persuaded them (41.88%). The data showed that there was a positive impact of such information dissemination to potential students.

Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questions showed similarities according to themes set prior to data collection.

All themes such as student recruitment, competitive intelligence, marketing and communication, branding and reputation, and factors influencing choice all pointed to the positive direction the HEIs are taking. However, there was more to do in terms of being proactive, namely they need to check which tools were primarily used and which ones were basic. The qualitative data, as analysed in Chapter 5,

indicated what worked best and for which purposes. It was also noted that the quality of education was value for money for the students, whereas quality of education on the wide range of programmes was a selling point in the academic positions of the HEIs. Another positive factor was university location which was very conveniently based, and on the taxi routes, and in some cases the university providing transportation to and from campus.

The university brands and reputations were somewhat hampered by the student protest, accreditation, and corruption in the respective universities. The lack of one formal strategy needs to be reviewed institutionally to cover the needs and demands of students working with administration departments. Because of increased competition, the importance of branding in academia has grown. Clark, Chapleo and Suomi (2019:134) state that universities wish to grow the number and calibre of students, strengthen ties with alumni, and further distinguish themselves from other contenders in the higher education market. As a result, to be successful, HEIs must pay special attention to factors such as internal brand management if their structure or model is multi-campus with regional delivery campuses or sites in order to increase efficiency.

It can be concluded that there was evidence of the utilisation of various marketing and communication methods. Marketing is an extraordinarily strong angle for visibility and for attempting to secure a position in the minds of students. It also works hand in hand with communication and thus cannot be effective without speaking and interacting with the intended public (potential students). There is constant and dynamic marketing and communication initiatives directed at student recruitment in the highly contested East London region.

Secondly, the information shared must effectively persuade potential students, and therefore it is crucial for advancement officers to improve their marketing and communication intelligence systems.

Thirdly, respondents indicated that the marketing and communication tools used by the HEIs should be convenient and provide full information across all platforms to help the potential students make informed decisions.

6.4.2 Discuss how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy for student recruitment


The data collected in Chapter 5 showed that HEIs are using competitive intelligence strategies to attract and retain students. However, the key finding was that though participants were aware of how they are targeted by these HEIs, their concern was how the HEIs will meet their demands for them to make an informed decision. It was noted that the theories used in the study provided a framework of how

students structure their needs. Regarding the HEIs in the region, they used their key strengths against the competition for a competitive advantage by means of fees, location, programme differentiation and accessibility.

6.4.3 Explain competitive intelligence theories within the context of public universities

The study literature provided a solid foundation of several competitive intelligence theories and how each theory served its purpose in the study. These theories were used for different interpretation of and application for each field in the study. Rothberg and Ericksonb (2012) discuss how CI inputs from either internal or external factors formed the strategy, which included strategic teams (internal and external) and sharing that information with senior management. Enhancing internal collaboration, documenting, and disseminating best practices, and managing customer relationships and securing and utilising competitive intelligence are all possible with a better understanding of organisational type and knowledge management processes (Adeinat and Abdulfatah 2019:47). The competitive intelligence cycle provided that the strategy had to be planned for the desired outcome, and gathering all data (internally and externally), data analysis of how the collected data can be used for each purpose, and finally disseminating the data to decision makers for final strategy based on the inputs and outputs.

The competitive intelligence process by Ghannay and Mamlook (2012) also assisted in the study's theoretical framework design, where the theory stated that to maintain the business environment (external data) requires being aware of what is going in the business's environment, gathering information, analysis of data, filtering stage and data dissemination. The researcher observed that all these theories were essential for providing CI application and how they would impact these businesses' activities and secure a competitive advantage.

Porter's general  theory and five forces model were aligned to how HEIs were using CI strategies to recruit students, such the element of cost leadership, differentiation strategy, focus strategy – low cost and focus strategy – differentiation. The five forces model drew a picture of how new entrance in the sector provided a threat to the already existing benefactors. The intensity of the competition influenced how each HEI would position themselves and what products would guarantee participation in the market. However, threats of substitutes such as degrees and certificates in the programme offerings were a challenge.

With regards to the fees and affordability questions and their application to the theories, it was noted that 47.86% (112 of 234) stated that their focus was on the tuition and affordability costs, though the method of paying their tuition costs was indicated by 88.46% (207 of 234). The data shows that there

are numerous factors in the application of the theories in HE, some of which involved monetary decisions made by potential students over the competitors.

6.4.4 Investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment in two public universities

The survey also sought to gather how these HEIs used their advertising tools. The university website (27.78%), career exhibitions (35.04%), campus (27.78%) and school visits (25.21%), use of media (35.47%), social media (38.03%) and word of mouth (33.76%) were very influential in terms of ensuring that the universities reached their target market. The data received, as shown in Chapter 5, had a significant impact on how they ensured interaction until they enrolled in these institutions. The survey data showed that the tools the universities were using worked to their advantage.

Therefore, it is imperative for HEIs to adopt a digital marketing strategy that will include the new digital trends of higher education marketing strategy. Digital marketing in higher education is regarded as important, particularly as HEIs face intense global competition. Higher education has moved away from government funding and toward a competitive market. The transformation of higher education from a reliance on funding from the government to a competitive market necessitates universities to compete for students in recruitment markets. As a result, universities must comprehend how to attract students and market themselves (Kusumawati 2019:4).

To support the above discussions on marketing and communication, the data showed that maintaining direct contact and having good customer care resulted in their universities being recommended to family and friends. However, the university location and affordability were the strongest key factors used over other competitors. Data was also collected through interviews with advancement officers, who acknowledged their strengths such as WSU covering a large geographical area and being pro-poor and UFH mentioning that their university history and legacy were their strongest factors. Moreover, their institutional alumni played a role in their communities and through various marketing and communication strategies. With open-ended data collection, it was discovered that potential students had other options to enrol in other HEIs outside the province, because their current university was not their first choice.

6.4.5 Recommend a framework comprising of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at public universities

Based on section 2 and section 3 of the survey, the identified factors that influenced students' choice of university rested entirely on the institution's competitive strategy as stated in objective two. These factors are wide choice of programmes available which were also linked to entry requirements into the

choice of programme focused on personal career direction of each respondent, facilities, student support, affordability, and assistance. Other factors included marketing and communication, tools used to market, and familiar tools used by respondents. Besides, to be very competitive in the HE markets, HEIs need to be proactive and capitalise on the competitors' weaknesses which were not required in the instruments used. It is noted that these factors were common to most HEIs in the world. Below is a proposed framework, using competitive intelligence strategies, for student recruitment at public universities.

6.5 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The above discussions were on the data collection process and data analysis findings based on the theoretical framework on competitive intelligence and how this applies to higher education institutions. Chapter 3 focussed on how the CI strategy can be used in organisations and thereafter how to transfer the concept to the HE environment. Internal and external pressures and challenges confront HEIs. Adequately guiding their institution, meeting ever-increasing fiscal demands, and remaining competitive and relevant in the marketplace are all critical to success and survival. According to the CI process in higher education, programmes must be competitive and relevant, activities must be effective, networks must be cross-functional, and the institution must have systems in place that seek pertinent and relevant information from within and across sectors. These processes will rely heavily on innovation; resistance to change must be avoided and eliminated.

The contribution to knowledge regarding CI strategies demonstrates that strategies can help an organisation succeed and gain a competitive edge over its competitors. The university, and its administration, should maintain a competitive strategy that is difficult for competitors to imitate. For example, a differentiation strategy can demonstrate that the university is focused on providing unique programmes that set it apart from its competitors. To successfully implement CI and CI strategy, each HEI must prioritise internal assessment, characterise and develop its information, define its CI strategy and goals, and how to distribute resources, among other factors. Then, they need to perform an external assessment to find the right information that will answer their concerns and help them better anticipate opportunities and threats, as well as establish and sustain a competitive advantage.

Finally, if CI in any organization is dependent on its structure, size, and strategy, then for each organisation to implement a CI programme, it cannot rely on a study conducted by another university; it must conduct its very own investigation first. As a result, increased competition from other HEIs offering comparable degree programmes or courses puts the use of CI methods/strategies in a university setting at risk.

The study's findings indicate that employing a CI strategy as opposed to more general or conventional approaches produced better knowledge of the standards upon which prospective students base their enrolment decisions and the degree to which universities would satisfy their needs. Below is a suggested framework for the study based on the intent of the study, its research questions, and objectives.

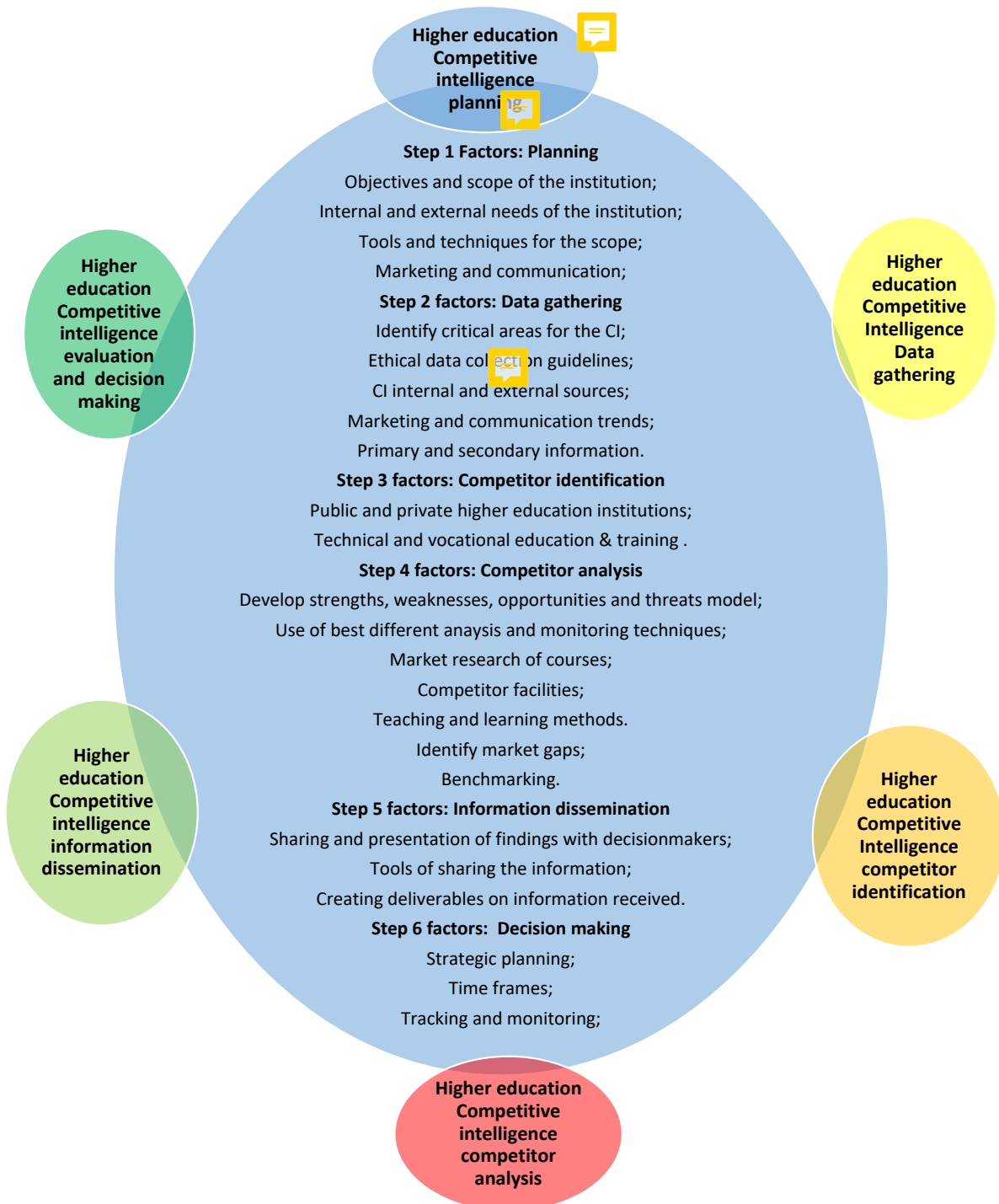


Figure 31: Proposed framework for utilisation of CI in HEIs

6.6 MODEL AND COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

To assist HEIs in continuing to assess a competitive environment in the HE sectors in an organized manner, the Competitive Intelligence Cycle, which was used in the study, was built upon earlier theories, which are listed in Chapter 3, empirical literature and discussed in Chapter 2, and the study findings, which are discussed in Chapter 5. The Competitive Intelligence Framework proposed in this study consists of the following steps:

Step I: Higher education competitive intelligence planning

The process of HE competitive intelligence starts in the planning stage. Structure and the institution's overall scope are provided during this phase. To provide direction and scope for the institution, HEIs must first identify the requirements for gathering pertinent data about the factors that affect their institution both internally and externally. Even though CI is interconnected, one factor's success depends on that of the other. To improve business decisions, competitive intelligence (CI) is the practice of legally and ethically tracking, collecting, and analysing data on an organisation's rivals in the same sector. Brands can use CI to find growth opportunities and fill any strategic gaps (Bretous 2022). A successful HE CI would concentrate on collecting pertinent key data so that decisions could be made with knowledge. The marketing and communication factors must be infused because certain decisions that will be taken during the planning stage will have to be communicated including what marketing and communication tools will be in this HE CI method. HE CI planning in marketing and communication must include digital marketing and media planning. The planning phase must be a collective effort in the university, and not only focus on the student recruitment, but the effectiveness of the strategy rests on the effective plan with various stakeholders. To ensure that the competitive intelligence effort in HEIs is directed toward information gathering, this phase also identifies factors such as objectives and scope of the institution and internal and external needs of the institution. According to Marulanda-Grisales and Vera-Acevedo (2022:525), the implementation of objective initiatives at HEIs necessitates the utilisation of a variety of assets, both tangible and intangible. Knowledge is an intangible asset that is reflected in intellectual capital (IC) and serves as the foundation for creating competitive advantage.

To gather appropriate knowledge about their near competitors in the regions where they operate, HEIs might use planning strategies to stay ahead. However, if not founded on precise detailed plans, these developed CI models may still prove to be overly generic, resulting in less accurate information regarding both the HEI's positioning and effectively locating competitors. To assess how well they are achieving their tactical and strategic goals in accordance with their planned HE CI, the HEIs marketing and communication department and advancement officers must track key performance indicators. They

are essential to the institution's comprehension of the challenging higher education environment. As a result, a benchmark of where the HE stands in relation to other, HE competitors is frequently included in strategic marketing and communication plans. This aids in concentrating efforts on brand influencers and drivers by allowing them to base their objectives on those of a larger institution.

Step 2: Higher education competitive intelligence data gathering.

The HE competitive intelligence data gathering plan should be designed at this phase. This includes determining the data sources to be used, the individuals and teams involved in the data collection process, and how the information will be gathered throughout the plan. Creating perceptual maps allows HEIs to study several perspectives on how they compare to your competition, based on how potential students perceive the institution in contrast to other universities in the same or other places. Chivugi and Tadu (2020:2) purport that the sum of the institution's corporate and brand image results in a competitive advantage and improves organisational performance. The creation of a strong and distinct image necessitates more creativity and effort on both sides of the institution's management and personnel. As a result, marketing and communication must have a clear understanding of what their competition is achieving and what the industry is declaring to not only apply the same analytics as the rest of the institution but doing so well can make that HEI a major player in the HE sectors. Wilkins (2020:141) mentions that there is less evidence that HEIs are using the full range of marketing tools and techniques used in business, such as strategic group analysis to gather data using multiple marketing techniques, even though they have embraced marketing principles like social media, branding, and digital communication in recent years. Moreover, the advancement officers should develop an annual data gathering plan, which will provide them with new and developing trends through constant surveys and be able to know what potential students need and what they look for in an institution. The data gathered after such exercises will prepare them for the following year plans.

Other critical factors in this step are that HEIs need to identify critical areas where their CI strategy will exist and what resources they will need to effectively produce the intended outcome of data at the end. Higher education institutions can develop a data strategy within their CI strategy where they will identify their internal and external sources. As their primary sources of information, HEIs would rely on perceptions and views acquired from prospective students, current students or from any other HEIs, and competition data gathered through a marketing data gathering exercise. Other contractual organisations that keep an eye on the business and provide an overview, such as the internet and other relevant online media, would also be secondary data sources for them.

Step 3: Higher education competitive intelligence competitor identification

Asghari *et al.* (2020:2) mention that the phrase CI is divided into two sections: competitive and intelligence. The first section discusses the process of competition between two businesses or industries. CI encompasses all corporate information and facilitates the generation, dissemination, and transmission of knowledge from markets and business investors. In general, CI contains information about various participants in a competitive landscape, such as competitors, customers, providers, and related technology. It is also the process of gathering critical information about markets and rivals while examining the data to determine a plan to improve competitive advantage. The purpose of excellent HE competitive intelligence strategy cannot be to enable an institution to replicate its competitors' strategies; rather, it should be utilised to predict competitor activities and seek ways to acquire or sustain stronger competitive position. Therefore, HEIs should invest in these identification exercises to find out who their competitors in the region are and to assess what makes their competitors stronger or comfortable to be competitors. Additionally, there may be commonalities in these competitors regarding their offerings, facilities, technology, and teaching and learning methods. That assessment can also be affected by the budget to strengthen the competitor identification. Upon correct data collected and competitors identified, HEIs can then weigh their strongest elements in the market, what the public see in their competitors and what they can do better to attract students, and thereafter, increase their enrolment figures.

The goal of HE competitive identification is to provide a thorough understanding of the competitors present in the HE competitive environment. This stage will try to comprehend the competitors of the industry in which they operate, their position in terms of competition, the conditions necessary for survival and prosperity, and the nature of competition and the market process. The outcome of this strategy gives management a platform to debate and assess their presumptions on the organisation's capabilities, competitive landscape, and market position.

Step 4: Higher education competitive intelligence competitor analysis

SWOT analysis frameworks for HEIs might help them locate their institution within the larger higher education environment. They would be able to determine external elements that influence their institution's competitive positioning using the framework. This stage's SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats, Opportunities) model explains the institution's position in the larger context. HEIs can assess their institution's strengths and weaknesses. Threats and opportunities are based on trends across the sector during the period under consideration. As a result, HEIs must narrow down their list of competitors to conduct an effective and efficient analysis that will produce favourable results on who

their strongest competitors in the region are. It is also critical to have a thorough understanding of the landscape based on expertise in the field of higher education, identifying any emerging threats or discovering new opportunities that HEIs may capitalise on. The merit of this HE CI strategy is that it makes it easier to identify prospective opportunities and threats in the HE system; nevertheless, identifying such competitors will help in classifying them based on their nature, whether public or private. Furthermore, the nature and success of the HE CI strategy alters each competitor's perception and strategic movements, which can have an impact on their everyday operations.

This process also includes locating and investigating distinct variables that are targeted to their specific university demands and will be compared to competitors. The quality of data utilised to evaluate per HEI against others is a feature that distinguishes an average competitor analysis from a strong competitor analysis. Some of the micro aspects that come into play when determining the competitors are quite detailed. The following are the important micro variables that comprise an effective and dependable competition perspective: course level comparisons, nearby competitors, entrance to programme requirements, and global rankings (Ruben 2022). The management tool known as competitor analysis is used in strategic management to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both existing and potential competitors. To recognise possibilities and risks, it offers both a proactive and a safeguarding strategic perspective. To assist successful and efficient strategy design, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment, competitor profiling combines all pertinent sources of rival analysis into a single framework (Adom, Nyarko and Som 2016:116).

Step 5: Higher education competitive intelligence information dissemination

This phase is used to communicate knowledge with strategic decision makers to plan and execute actions that will change primary intelligence factors. Competitive intelligence is the methodical gathering of information about the firm's external business ecosystem that may influence its actions, such as information about consumers, competitors, vendors, goods, and regulation (Markovich, Raban and Efrat 2022:481). The data collected will need to be sorted and distributed by marketing and communication officers. The data outcomes of their HE CI process, on the other hand, would be delivered to institutional decision makers, who would then discuss it with institutional executive management. The responsibility for acting on the findings rests with the scrutiny of the data, the impact of the data in the decision-making process, and subsequent responses from decision makers that can aid in subsequent preparation and advancement of the institutional CI strategy or its development. Communicating information in a timely manner aids in making knowledge available to others in the institution when needed. In this regard, information sharing obtained soon after data collection may be influenced by the

knowledge management systems employed in that specific HEI, as well as its information and communication technology, which aids in the collection of data and information for distribution. The advancement officers will have a responsibility to table these findings and provide a strategic path which the institution must take based on the findings shared with decision makers.

Step 6: Higher education competitive intelligence evaluation and decision making

In this last step, there are several determinations that come into effect based on the findings presented to decision makers. The advancement officers and institutional management will sift through the data for institutional alignment of the organisational structure. Additionally, the CI findings will be assessed and evaluated to determine whether they were satisfactory or unsatisfactory to reach an agreement on the expected findings of the HE CI strategy. This is the most difficult step, as it involves evaluating competitive intelligence gathered to ensure its accuracy and utility. As a result, some HEIs lack sufficient human resources and financial resources to support with ICI evaluation of collected data, and instead rely on their advancement officers to do so. HEIs can evaluate their HE competitive intelligence using available tools or by contracting with an organisation. This section includes the identification of data gaps, and relevant information will be identified before it is distributed to decision makers. This will inform HE managers about what the HE competitive intelligence covers.

Iroaganachi (2022:6) states that disseminating findings (intelligence) assists decision making processes, thus increasing competitiveness and boosting the status of enterprises. As a result, there will be sufficient decision making as well as great processes and structure. Furthermore, CI is a critical aspect of the knowledge-based economy, requiring careful analysis of competitors and the overall market to enable archives and organisations to effectively anticipate market innovations and take timely action.

The above discussion elaborates that HE CI strategy must have time frames on what it should deliver as well as tracking its activities and monitoring its progress over time. This will need advancement officers to report to decision makers if there are any changes in the developed strategy.

6.7 SUMMARY

This study looked at how HE institutions in the East London region use competitive intelligence to attract potential students and gain a competitive advantage in the HE sectors. The participants included approximately 234 students and six staff members from the respective institutions. For students doing level, random sampling was used, while convenience sampling was used for university officials. The sample size for students was 400, and the sample size for university officials was ten, for a total of 240 participants. The study was guided by a mixed methods approach. All participants were given semi-

structured questionnaires with structured (quantitative) and unstructured and qualitative in nature sections. The quantitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics approaches and the Cronbach alpha reliability test. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data in the study. The study's findings were adequate, and they effectively answered the researcher's research questions and objectives.

The universities' appeal to potential students was paramount in their responses, which indicated factors that formed their decision. These universities relied mostly on the traditional means of CI, which clearly indicated that they had no concrete CI strategy. However, these institutions made attempts to utilise what they had at their disposal to maximise their reach and outmanoeuvre their competitors in the region. Moreover, it must be noted that institutional brand and reputation was another factor that had detrimental effects on whether they managed to attract these potential students. With the use of their marketing and communication tools, the study showed that participants were indeed aware of them but preferred both traditional and digital tools. School visits were also used to advertise these universities through their relationship with high schools, principals, and local leaders.

Marketing and communication officers (Advancement staff) were interviewed in the study on how they use their marketing and communication strategies to attract students. There were some contradictions and differences, which were owing to not having a plan book but to working with old strategies which need improvement. Furthermore, the study wanted to ascertain if these tools yielded the desired effect. From the results, it was evident that they have exceeded their student quota in some programmes and their enrolment numbers keep growing, owing to what they possessed over their competitors.

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the study generated fresh information and provided helpful insights into competitive intelligence strategy and competitive intelligence theories, the findings are only acceptable if the study's limitations are recognised so as to prevent overstating the issue when conclusions and suggestions are made. There are some limitations to this study. For starters, the study was confined to the Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare campuses in the East London district of South Africa's Eastern Cape province, hence the findings may not be generalisable to other HEIs or provinces where institutional determinants may change. The study utilised registered first-time entering students in both institutions. Also, initially, the study planned to have one-on-one interviews with staff members in the advancement departments of these HEIs; however, due to their busy schedule, online interviews were conducted via MS teams. As a result, HEIs in various regions or provinces may reach differing results.

Second, the data was acquired at a given period; in this context, alternative intervals could influence the conclusions because added information is generated daily. The following section highlights and suggests areas for additional research.

6.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

To reinforce the CI process, demanding assessment methods of teams involved in the competitive intelligence process based on their abilities and expertise must be used prior to executing the competitive intelligence process. HEIs must be proactive to be the region's first choice of university. To attract the attention of potential students, various facilities should be marketed more frequently. Marketing and communication tools must be updated on a regular basis to meet the needs of students. There must also be a plan in place to retain present students to forward the agenda of an institution that can meet the demands of students. Data collection tools must be altered based on the necessity and significance of the period.

The competitive intelligence approach custodians' awareness, insight, and responses in relation to the use of competitive intelligence techniques employed for student recruitment as perceived from a need for a competitive advantage perspective may influence decision makers to embrace the strategy. It is consequently proposed that feedback from advancement officers be considered in strategy formulation for HEI CI plans.

6.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a summary of the study and the findings on the main research question and its sub-questions as addressed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.4). This chapter also made recommendations that will help to improve the efficacy of the competitive intelligence process on a practical level, and to deepen understanding of the causes of problems as well as the search for solutions from a theoretical level. Apart from showing the value of an information behaviour lens (comprising all information activities as defined in Section 1.9) to deepen understanding of competitive intelligence failures, this study succeeded in showing that competitive intelligence professionals have some understanding of the key causes of competitive intelligence failure, even though they focus mostly on solutions when discussing the problems.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOR STUDENTS



Letter of information

Title of the Research Study: Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Chulumanco Mgweba

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Prof V. P Rawjee (D.Phil.) & Dr P Naidoo (D. Phil)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The overall aim of this study was to investigate how competitive intelligence is used as a communication strategy to promote student recruitment, specifically at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and University of Fort Hare (UFH) in the highly competitive region of East London in the Eastern Cape Province. These core competencies include technical and managerial skills through their identification of opportunities and threats that affect the higher education environment. Challenges faced by HEIs in South Africa, particularly in East London, provide several factors including strategic planning and access to information. Notwithstanding the strategies used, their goal is to attract potential students and maintain a competitive advantage. To keep up with the demands for higher education, this, therefore, forces them to use Competitive Intelligence (CI) tools to position themselves in the sector, therefore providing options of how their brand can respond to education demands within the higher education environment.

Hello, I am DPhil student at the Durban University of Technology doing research for my PhD degree in Management Sciences specializing in Public Relations Management and communication. I would like you to participate in the research. Research is a systematic search or enquiry for generalized new knowledge.

Outline of the Procedures: As a participant in this research, you will be required to answer questions as honestly as possible. You are required to answer a questionnaire, which comprises of 32 questions and will take 15 – 25 minutes to complete. The analysis of the results will enable the researcher to provide sound recommendations to Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare regarding the importance of competitive intelligence strategies, and these strategies would provide information on how to position themselves in the higher education market and attract maximum enrolment. Prior to this consent, permission has been obtained from Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare Research committee to proceed with this research. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons, and without prejudice or any adverse consequences. The information you give will only be used for research purposes and will be aggregated with other responses and only the overall information will be used. Your identity and individual answers will be confidential.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There is no known or anticipated risk to you or your organisation as a participant of this research.

Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study: As a participant, you are allowed to withdraw yourself from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, by advising the researcher that you wish to discontinue participation.

Benefits: The study considered important to benefit higher education institutions who aim to have a competitive advantage in the higher education market. The study will benefit universities to manage and to establish strategies that will meet the needs of their potential students. Hereafter, the study will recommend the best strategy that would yield competitive advantage and secure their space in the higher education market. Research scholars would use the study as basis for argument and in their literature reviews and to benchmark against other findings in the same competitive intelligence fields.

It is envisaged that the study will be used as tool to interact with local communities and especially high schools in the area for the development of a positive relationship. The study will also attempt to establish a strategy for WSU and UFH to co-exist in the highly contested area of East London.

Remuneration: As a participant, you will not receive any remuneration or compensation in the research.

Costs of the Study: As a participant, you will not be liable to cover any costs for this study but bared by the researcher.


Confidentiality: As a participant, the researcher guaranteed that the information you provide would remain confidential. No names will be used. Only the researcher, supervisor(s) and statisticians will be the only individuals with access to the data you provide.

Results: The results will be made available to participants upon request.

Research-related Injury: This research does not pose any danger to the participants.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings: Research data will be stored for 5 years in long-term storage capacity for digital (cloud storage on google drive) or non-digital data (in a file) as hard copies. The digital storage will allow the researcher to retrieve the data within a specified time. A request for authorisation to dispose data will be submitted to both universities of study, and the university where the researcher is registered for the current qualification. Upon authorisation, the data will be irreversibly wiped from the cloud storage to ensure that the data cannot be recreated and unreadable as it contained critical, confidential, and sensitive. Non-digital data will be physically shredded and taken to secure waste disposal facility.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

- Researcher - Chulumanco Mgweba – 047 401 6044 or cmgweba@wsu.ac.za
- Supervisor- Prof V.P Rawje  031 373 6826 or rawjeeve@dut.ac.za
- Co- supervisor – Dr P Naidoo- 031 373 5277 or paulenep@dut.ac.za
- Institutional Research Ethics administrator: 031 373 2900
- Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Prof K Motaung on 031 373 2577 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za.

General:

As stated above, confidentiality and no harm to the participants is guaranteed. Should you wish to discontinue your participation, you can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. The Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban of University of Technology accepted and reviewed the study. A copy of this consent will be provided to all participants upon request for record keeping.



CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London.

Names of Researcher/s: Chulumanco Mgweba

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher Chulumanco Mgweba about the nature, conduct, benefits, and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: **IREC 113/21_**,
- I have also received, read, and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) Date

Signature

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW FOR STAFF



LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Chulumanco Mgweba

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Prof V. P Rawjee (D.Phil.) & Dr P Naidoo (D. Phil)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The overall aim of this study was to investigate how competitive intelligence is used a communication strategy to promote student recruitment used by HEIs, specifically Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and University of Fort Hare (UFH) in the highly competitive region of East London in the Eastern Cape Province. These core competencies include technical and managerial skills through their identification of opportunities and threats that affect the higher education environment. Challenges faced by HEIs in South Africa, particularly in East London provides several factors including strategic planning and access to information. Notwithstanding the strategies used, their goal is to attract potential students and maintain a competitive advantage. To keep

up with the demands for higher education, this, therefore, forces to use Competitive Intelligence (CI) tools to position themselves in the sector, therefore providing options of how their brand can respond to education demands within higher education environment.

Hello, I am DPhil student at the Durban University of Technology doing research for my PhD degree in Public Relations Management and communication. I would like you to participate in the research. Research is a systematic search or enquiry for generalized new knowledge.

Outline of the Procedures: As a participant in this research, you will be required to answer questions as honestly as possible. The interview comprises of 24 questions and will take 10 – 15 minutes. The analysis of the results will enable the researcher to provide sound recommendations to Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare regarding the importance of competitive intelligence strategies, and these strategies would provide information on how to position themselves in the higher education market and attract maximum enrolment. Prior to this consent, permission has been obtained from Walter Sisulu University and University of Fort Hare Research committee to proceed with this research. Only 10 participants will participate in the interviews. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons, and without prejudice or any adverse consequences. The information you give will only be used for research purposes and will be aggregated with other responses and only the overall information will be used. Your identity and individual answers will be confidential.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There is no known or anticipated risk to you or your organisation as a participant of this research.

Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study: As a participant, you are allowed to withdraw yourself from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, by advising the researcher that you wish to discontinue participation.

Benefits: The study considered important to benefit higher education institutions who aim to have a competitive advantage in the higher education market. The study will benefit universities to manage and to establish strategies that will meet the needs of their potential students. Hereafter, the study will recommend the best strategy that would yield competitive advantage and secure their space in the higher education market. Research scholars would use the study as basis for argument and in their literature reviews and to benchmark against other findings in the same competitive intelligence fields.

It is envisaged that the study will be used as tool to interact with local communities and especially high schools in the area for the development of a positive relationship. The study will also attempt to establish a strategy for WSU and UFH to co-exist in the highly contested area of East London.

Remuneration: As a participant, you will not receive any remuneration or compensation in the research.

Costs of the Study: As a participant, you will not be liable to cover any costs for this study but bared by the researcher.

Confidentiality: As a participant, the researcher guaranteed that the information you provide would remain confidential. No names will be used. Only the researcher, supervisor(s) and statisticians will be the only individuals with access to the data you provide.

Results: The results will be made available to participants upon request.

Research-related Injury: This research does not pose any danger to the participants.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings: Research data will be stored for 5 years in long-term storage capacity for digital (cloud storage on google drive) or non-digital data (in a file) as hard copies. The digital storage will allow the researcher to retrieve the data within a specified time. A request for authorisation to dispose data will be submitted to both universities of study, and the university where the researcher is registered for the current qualification. Upon authorisation, the data will be irreversibly wiped from the cloud storage to ensure that the data cannot be recreated and unreadable as it contained critical, confidential, and sensitive. Non-digital data will be physically shredded and taken to secure waste disposal facility.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

- Researcher - Chulumanco Mgweba – 047 401 6044 or cmgweba@wsu.ac.za
- Supervisor- Prof V.P Rawjee – 031 373 6826 or rawjeeve@dut.ac.za
- Co- supervisor – Dr P Naidoo- 031 373 5277 or pnaidoo@dut.ac.za
- Institutional Research Ethics administrator: 031 373 2900
- Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Prof K Motaung on 031 373 2577 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za.

General:

As stated above, confidentiality and no harm to the participants is guaranteed. Should you wish to discontinue your participation, you can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. The Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban of University of Technology accepted and reviewed the study. A copy of this consent will be provided to all participants upon request for record keeping.



CONSENT

Full Title of the Study: Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London.

Names of Researcher/s: Chulumanco Mgweba

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, C Mgweba about the nature, conduct, benefits, and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance

Number: **IREC 113/21.** _,

- I have also received, read, and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF

<p>1. Demographic information</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Which University/Department are you working in?2. How long have you been working in this institution?3. What is position do you hold?4. How long have you been in this position?
<p>2. Student recruitment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Do you have a student recruitment strategy?6. What role does it play in attracting students?7. What tools do you currently use to recruit students?
<p>3. Competitive intelligence</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. Are you aware of the term competitive intelligence?9. Does your institution have a competitive intelligence strategy? Explain10. What impact does competitive intelligence have in your institution?11. What impact does your competitive intelligence strategy have on your student recruitment?12. In east London, which institutions do you consider as your competitors and why?
<p>4. Marketing and communication</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">13. Do you have a marketing strategy directed to student recruitment?14. What role does marketing have in your student recruitment strategy?15. Is your marketing communication plan successful, can you explain why you think so?16. What are the marketing and communication tools do you use to recruit students?17. What are the other alternative communication channels the department is using in its marketing communication efforts?

5.Branding and reputation

18. Do you believe your brand is well positioned in East London?
19. Does your university brand image and reputation play an important role in student recruitment? Explain your answer.
20. Do you think your reputation is doing well in-terms of your brand?

6. Factors influencing choice of institution

21. What do you think are some of the factors for potential students to enrol with your institution?
22. What other key determining factors that may influence their choice?
23. What advantages do you have that work in your favour in influencing the choice of institution?
24. Are these factors benefiting your institution?

APPENDIX D: **FIRST TIME ENTERING STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The questionnaire must be filled in by PEN and returned to the researcher/ research assistant present.
2. You may ask for clarity where needed.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Information provided will be treated with **STRICT CONFIDENCE** and for **RESEARCH PURPOSES**.
2. You do not have to put your particulars to the questionnaire (*i.e., Name*)
3. Information provided will be used to contribute to the WSU and UFH research databases.

SECTION I

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your racial background? (**Please Tick on list**)

African	<input type="checkbox"/>
White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coloured	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Gender (Please tick on list)

Female	
Male	
Other	

3. Age (please tick on list)

19 -23	
24-28	
27-30	

4. Location of High school (**Please Tick on list**)

Within the East London region	
Outside the East London region	

SECTION 2

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

5. In which university are you registered to? (**Please Tick on list**)

University of Fort Hare	
Walter Sisulu University	

6. I am enrolled in what I wanted to study in this university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. My career choice is aligned to what I wanted to study.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. I met the requirements for what I wanted to study.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9. I consider a good academic reputation and academic brand as important factors in a university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10. Size of university, Affordability of fees, location determined my choice of university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

11. Academically, wide choice and accreditation of programmes influenced my choice of university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

12. Are you satisfied with the teaching staff and their teaching methods in this university?

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied

13. How satisfied are you with the facilities provided by the university?

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied

14. Are you satisfied with the assistance you receive from faculty and support staff in the university?

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied

15. The university meets my needs as a student.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16. The university costs are affordable compared to other Universities in the region.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

17. The university positioning and accessibility is convenient for me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

18. Academic support for programmes influenced my choice of university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

19. Will you be partaking in any of the available extra-curricular activities in your university?

Yes	
No	
Maybe	

20. How are your studies financed?

Parents	
Bursary	
Self-paying	
Uncertain	
Bank loan	

SECTION 3

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

21. I have been informed about my university of choice.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

22. I am satisfied with the amount of information provided about the university?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

23. The information received from university was effective for me to make the choice of university to study?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

24. The university marketing strategy persuaded you to enrol?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

25. I was very exposed to advertising campaigns of the university in the following media.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
University Website					
Career Exhibition					
University Campus Visit					
School visit by university representative					

Media (newspaper, tv, radio, billboards)					
Social media					
Word of mouth					

26. I was very exposed to personal interaction by the university marketers at the following events.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Career Exhibition					
Open day on campus					
School visit by university representative					
Campus Tour					

27. I am very satisfied with the direct contact received through the different channels used by the university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

28. I am very satisfied with the customer service provided by the admissions and recruitment offices at the university.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

29. I will recommend the university as a tertiary institution to a friend or family member.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Section 4

Open-ended questions

Was the university where you are registered your first choice? if yes why?

.....

Are you satisfied with the quality of education you receive from your university, how?

.....

Is the quality of education you receive comparable to the cost of education in your university? how?

.....

Did the university marketing and communication strategy work for them to recruit you? how?

.....
.....

Which communication tool best worked for you?

.....
.....

Do you think there is competition between your university and local institutions in your region?
How?

.....
.....

Is the university location convenient for you?

.....
.....

Does the university brand and reputation represent what you were looking for? explain your answer

.....
.....

Given a chance, would you enrol in another institution instead of your current university?

.....
.....

What would you recommend the university improves on to be competitive with other universities?

.....
.....

APPENDIX E: DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY ETHICAL APPROVAL



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Beneyo Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology
P.O. Box 1204, Durban, South Africa, 4001
Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: irehad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics
www.dut.ac.za

30 November 2022

Mr C Mgwaba
5 Perks Road
Morningside
East London

Dear Mr Mgwaba

Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London

Ethics Clearance Number: 113/21

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your final data collection tools for review.

We are pleased to inform you that the data collection tools have been approved. Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely,

Prof J K. Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

APPENDIX F: WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION WSU



DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND RESEARCH DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Nelson Mandela Drive
Mthatha Campus
Private Bag XI
MTHATHA 5117
Tel: +27 47 502 2137/2044
Fax: +27 47 502 2185

wakpan@wsu.ac.za

Buffalo City
Potsdam Campus
EAST LONDON
Tel: +43 708 5444
Fax: +43 708 5458

28 September 2022

Chulumanco Mgweba
Walter Sisulu University
Department of Finance
MTHATHA
5100

Dear Mr Mgweba,

Gatekeepers Permission Letter to conduct research at Walter Sisulu University

Ethical Clearance Number: IREC 113/21

Institution: Durban University Of Technology

A Gatekeeper Letter is hereby granted for the study "Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London" provided that copies of your completed study will be submitted to the Campus Rector of the campus in which the study will be conducted and the Directorate of the Research & Innovation.

All data pertaining to Walter Sisulu University will be treated confidentially and you are required to abide by ethical principles at all times. It is your responsibility to seek consent from Participants.

Kind regards



Senior Director: Research & Innovation

Walter Sisulu University

APPENDIX G: UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE GATEKEEPERS PERMISSION



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

University of Fort Hare
OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

Alice (Main) Campus: Private Bag X1314, King William's Town Road, Alice, 5700, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 40 602 2501 • Fax: +27 (0) 40 602 2577 • Email: akatururo@ufh.ac.za / registrar@ufh.ac.za
East London Campus: Private Bag X9083, 50 Church Street, East London, 5201, RSA

3rd October, 2022

Chulumanco Mgweba
Durban University of technology
cmgweba@vwsu.ac.za

Dear Chulumanco

RE: Permission to Conduct Research at the University of Fort Hare.

We have reviewed your request for permission to conduct research at the University of Fort Hare under a PhD project titled **Exploring the use of competitive intelligence for student recruitment at selected public Universities in East London** at the Durban University of Technology.

This letter serves to notify you that permission is hereby granted for you to carry out the research and to utilise the data for this project as laid out in

- your request for this gatekeeper's permission
- your research proposal
- the semi research instrument/questionnaire that you submitted,
- letters of information and consent, and
- in accordance with the stipulations under which ethical clearance for the study was issued by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee at the Durban University of Technology.

EN Zuma

University Registrar