RESEARCH ARTICLE

Marketing Public Tertiary Institutions in Ghana via Informative Advertising: A Study of Ho Polytechnic

* Cedric Bobson Dorkenoo[1], Israel Kofi Nyarko [2], Edinam Agbemava [3], Vincent Asimah [4]
1. University of Health and Allied Sciences, School of Public Health Ho, Ghana
2. Department of Marketing Ho Polytechnic, Ghana
3. Department of Accountancy Ho Polytechnic, Ghana
4. Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management Ho Polytechnic, Ghana

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into the significance of informative advertising in the marketing of public tertiary institutions in Ghana, using Ho Polytechnic, a public polytechnic, as a case study. The purpose of the paper is to find out how much of informative advertising the polytechnic uses in its awareness creation and other marketing campaigns to its targets. Informative advertising seeks to develop initial demand for goods, services, organizations, persons, places, ideas or causes. It helps give information about the suitability and quality of products or services. The information given via this medium tends to help generate good reputation for organizations. The target population for this study included employees and students of the Polytechnic. A sample of 200 respondents consisting of 50 employees and 150 students were selected using aaccidental sampling technique. Data gathered was analyzed using simple frequency tables. Findings from the study revealed that though informative advertising helps in improving the image of institutions and public education, awareness creation, and persuasion to audiences, public tertiary institutions in Ghana do not employ this tool in their marketing and mass communication activities. The study further revealed that efforts made in the marketing of public tertiary institutions are not encouraging.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of informative advertising in delivering business objectives in this era of what one can simply refer to as "globalization and its cut throat competition" is very critical. Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). There are various forms of advertising like persuasive advertising, reminder advertising and informative advertising. Informative advertising is used to inform consumers about a new product, service or feature or build primary demand. It describes available products and services, corrects false impressions and build the image of the company. Informative advertising can be done through print media which includes newspapers, magazines, audio media for example radio, and visual media which includes billboards, and television (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Informative advertising makes sense in two basic scenarios. Organizations should make informing customers a focus when they are introducing an unfamiliar product or service to the market. The other common reason to use informative advertising is when a company sells a complex solution that is difficult for the target market to understand. In both of these instances, persuading customers to buy your peculiar solution is difficult if they do not understand it.

An informative advertising objective relates to primary demand stimulating, which is advertising that present general product category information as opposed to selective demand stimulating, which is use of ads to persuade customers to buy your brand. Primary demand is typically used by new companies to promote a new product innovation and inform customers about its purpose. Another common reason for primary demand messages is to promote an industry. Use of informative advertising to promote new product innovations is important to companies that constantly upgrade or introduce products. Keeping customers informed about the upgrades and the features of new products iterations is critical because it often involves more cost to the customer to buy new versions of the product or updates to existing product. Thus companies that do this often use advertising to provide information on their new product innovation or services. Informative advertising includes advertising that aims to provide the customer with information about the product. This form of Advertising informs the customer about the various features and the benefits of using the product. According to Cartwright (2002) informative advertising is often combined with persuasive advertisement on the grounds that as customers become more sophisticated they will require more information about products. Advertising for the public sector may be completely informative although the trend has been for these to be more sophisticated, including humor.

1.1 Background of the Study

Information on higher education has become very vital to the public due to the fact that prospects, potential students and guardians need information about tertiary institutions. Hence, public tertiary institutions spend a lot of money on advertisements in giving information to the masses and by extension, their prospective and current students. It is in line with this that this paper is aimed at examining the contributions of informative advertising to the marketing communication campaigns of public tertiary institutions in Ghana, with focus on Ho Polytechnic. The study is, in effect, aimed at assessing the extent to which information advertised by public tertiary institutions benefits the general public, clients, and other audiences. The objectives of this study include:

- examining the contribution of informative advertising to the marketing efforts of public tertiary institutions;
- establishing the effects of informative advertising on the image enhancement of tertiary institutions;
- examining the extent to which the information advertised by tertiary institutions help their targets to make informed choices.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010) marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and organizations obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others. They also defined marketing as the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return. Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders. In the words of Kotler and Keller (2013), marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services of value with others.

Atarah and Peprah (2014) wrote that today, definitions of advertising abound. But it must be noted that the definition as well as its practice has evolved over the years in consonance with time and available resources and technology. Starch (1923) defined advertising as "selling in print". Starch's definition is limited to the print media. This is as a result of the fact that the only available media at the time was print media (Nan & Faber, 2004), and the other forms of media, as we know today, did not exist at that time. Richards and Curran (2002) defined advertising as "a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action now or in the future". They focused on the persuasive role that advertising plays in the communication process. Kotler and Keller (2009) see advertising as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor". Dunn et al (1978), Richards and Curran (2002) and Kotler and Keller (2009) as cited in Atarah and Pepra (2014), view advertising from its functional perspectives, hence they define it as a paid, non-personal communication through various media by business firms, non-profit organization, and individuals who are in some way identified in the advertising message and who hope to inform or persuade members of a particular audience. Morden (1991) is of the opinion that advertising is used to establish a basic awareness of the product or service in the mind of the potential customer and to build up knowledge about it. Advertising's main aims are usually to make known the availability of a product, an idea or a service on offer to the target audience (Akanbi et al, 2011), and influence their awareness, attitude and buying behaviour (Ayanwale et al, 2005). Private Tertiary institutions therefore advertise to create the awareness to their prospective customers

(students) and their parents of the academic courses they offer in the schools, to persuade and remind them (Boone & Kurtz, 2001) of the advantages they would get in the advertising institutions than in other institutions offering same or similar programmes.

According to Hossler et al (1990) cited in Atarah and Pepra (2014), television and radio advertising have proven to be particularly effective in helping institutions build their image and visibility especially in specific geographical areas. A survey carried out by Jansen and Brenn White (2011) on the overview of current marketing initiatives by higher education institutions and national agencies within the European higher education area showed that most institutions use multimedia advertisements through print media, direct mail, outdoor (posters, banners and billboards), online advertisements and email advertising to make known their institutions and the programmes they offer. If an organisation is to succeed, its central point of focus should be the customer (Peters & Austin, 1985). Therefore, every business has as purpose, to create, satisfy and retain customers. The way students make choices when it comes to tertiary institutions is likened to what Kotler and Fox (1995) termed consumer buyer behaviour. This studies how individuals, groups and organisations select, buy, use and dispose of goods or services to satisfy their needs and desires and, the factors that affect this behaviour (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

Studying consumer buyer behaviour could provide answers to key marketing questions such as: what do consumers want to buy? How do they buy? Why do they select a specific provider? Providing answers to such questions could guide marketers towards more effective marketing approaches, bearing in mind that the aim of marketing is to meet and satisfy consumer needs and wants (Blackwell et al, 2001). If tertiary educational institutions are able to know the process of the student choice of institution and subsequent enrolment, then they would be in a better position to properly target them with appropriate advertising messages. The process that students go through in choosing an institution is a complex series of activities (Litten, 1982). According to Al-Fattal (2010) cited by Atarah and Pepra (2014), five stages are identified as being the stages that students go through in their choice process. The five stages are needs and motives, information gathering, evaluating alternatives, decision and post-choice evaluation. In this view, a need or motive for higher education arises on the part of the student. The student then seeks information on the various providers of the type of education he or she may want to acquire. The various alternatives are evaluated using the criteria best suitable to the student after which a decision to enroll is taken. After enrolment an evaluation is done as to whether the decision to enroll is worth it or otherwise. Referring to Al-Fattal (2010) in Atarah and Pepra (2014) and for the purposes of this study, we shall consider the first two of these steps: need and motives, and information gathering.

2.1 Need and Motives
The realization of a need usually begins the student's decision making process to make a choice (Al-Fattal, 2010). Al-Fattal asserts that, a need is activated when there is sufficient discrepancy between the actual and the desired state of the customer. According to Van Dam (1997), a PROBLEM arises from a perceived lack of something on the part of the customer. A student's PROBLEM for university education could be triggered by many factors either within or outside the student concerned. Internally the professional career the student intends to get could be a motive for getting a university education. Family and or friends of students can also be a very important source of motivation for their wishes for tertiary education (MacDermott et al, 1987; Choi et al, 2005). Corwin and Tierney (2007), Roderick et al. (2008), and Mullen (2009), mention teachers as playing a great role in inspiring students to pursue tertiary education. Marketers of various tertiary institutions try to find out the unmet or unsatisfied needs of consumers (students) so they can find ways to satisfy them. Their ability to satisfy those needs or wishes attracts students to their institutions. Kotler and Fox (1995) observed that many educational institutions still make the mistake of predicting students' needs and designing programmes that do not match those needs. Educational institutions can effectively design academic programmes only when they are able to ascertain what students actually want to study, and this can only be achieved through building strong communication channels with students (Al-Fattal, 2010). Institutions and their marketers cannot create needs for students, they can however, help them to recognize their educational problems through awareness creation of unperceived needs or possible future problems that could arise if action, presented by these institutions in the form of solutions is not taken presently (Blackwell et al., 2001). This can bring a lot of students to become potential students if they actually recognize their need as presented by the advertising institutions.

2.2 Information Gathering
After the student has identified his/her educational problem to study in a tertiary institution, the search for information about the providers of such services (tertiary education) begins. This search can either be internal or

external. Internally the student begins to search from his own memory the various providers of the types of education he seeks. Palmer (2001), states that this internal search is usually based on the student's own experience and knowledge. The student's quest and PROBLEM level for the information and his or her involvement are the determinants of the amount of information gathered (Menon et al., 2007). Some students will be satisfied with a little amount of information whilst others would want to have a whole great amount before they can conveniently and confidently make a choice. Menon (2004) posits that the student's level of involvement has a direct link with the student's socio-economic background - those with lower socio-economic backgrounds are more involved than their counterparts with higher socio-economic backgrounds. The level of involvement of a particular student in the decision to be taken is seen in the information gathering process (Al-Fattal, 2010). A student will be highly involved in the decision to attend the university since it will have a great impact on his or her future life prospects (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Drummond, 2004). After the internal search, if the student realizes that the information gathered is not enough to base on and make a decision, external sources of information are considered. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008), the sources of information available to prospective customers are as follows:

- personal non-marketer controlled sources: these include family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, colleagues etc;
- personal marketer controlled sources whose examples include sales representatives;
- non-personal non-marketer controlled; publicity in the mass media is an example of this source;
- non-personal marketer controlled, examples include but not limited to advertisements, prospectuses, websites.

Students start by exhausting the personal sources of information before supplementing it with the non-personal sources. There are a lot of sources that students gather information from to help them make decisions. Taylor (1992) is of the belief that friends' advice is the major source of information influencing students' choice of tertiary educational institutions. James et al. (1999) and Foskett (2009) point out the importance of the role played by career advisers in the provision of information on higher educational institutions. An institution's own members of staff, through telephone conversations and email correspondences to prospective students also play a major role in influencing students' choice decision (Evans, 1995). Most students also turn to their families for advice as to which institution to choose (Pimpa, 2005). Other literature such as Pasternak (2005) seeks to suggest that the information given by the institution's own printed materials is also very influential in student choice process. Despite these numerous sources of information, there is still a general lack of adequate information for prospective students and their parents to make meaningful comparisons among universities offering the same or similar academic programmes (Eckel, 2007) in Atarah and Pepra (2014). He attributes this to poor promotional materials designed by educational institutions that are less informative.

2.3 Informative Advertising
According to Boone and Kurtz (1998), informative ad seeks to develop initial demand for a good, service, organization, person, place, idea or cause. The promotion of any new market entry tends to pursue this objective, because marketing success at this stage often depends simply on announcing availability. Therefore, informative advertising is common in the introductory stage of the product life cycle. It helps give information about the suitability and quality of a product. The information given tends to help generate a good reputation. Cartwright (2002) observed that informative advertising is often combined with persuasive advertisement on the grounds that as customers become more sophisticated they will require more information about products. Advertising for public sector may be completely informative although the trend has been for these to be more sophisticated, including humour. Informative advertising aims to create brand awareness and knowledge of new products or new features of existing products, Kotler and Keller (2013). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010) informative advertising is used heavily when introducing a new product category. In this case, the objective is to build primary demand.

The ultimate purpose underlying all advertisement is increased awareness, Baker (1991). An examination of the significance of informative advertising listed by Matthews et al. (1964) reveals the following benefits: building primary demand which means the advertising campaign intends to drive interest in the product against a particular brand. Organizations often pool resources to generate interest when they collectively struggle. Another purpose of primary demand stimulation is to introduce an entirely new product category by providing customers with basic information of what the product or a service does. Informing about an organization's availability, informative advertising will communicate about an organisation's existence. It focuses on the task of attracting customers by educating them on the nature and benefits of the product, along with identifying the benefit derived from choosing to purchase the product or service. It focuses attention on what a given product or service has to offer in terms of

quality and practical use rather than comparing the product or service to similar goods or services available in the market place. Building brand recognition or brand preference or brand insistence; informative advertising will make an organisation's brand popular and be a top performer in its industry. It can make your business become the top of its competition. When a brand becomes popular, people will buy it even if the price isn't right because of its recognition. Creating a reputation for service reliability or research strength; since the approach includes an effort to educate customers on the nature and benefit of the product or services, there is little or no room to draw comparison with similar products or infer that those other products are not good. Instead, informative advertising makes no comparison, but simply provides factual data about what the product does and does not offer. Building the overall company image; informative advertising will convey a company's image to its customers. It's what a company wants to convey about its self, product, work ethic, professionalism, combined with the strategy it has developed to reach its target audience. Reaching new areas or new segments of population within existing areas; organisations use informative advertising to reach new areas. By developing messages that extends to new segments of their population.

According to McCarthy and Perreault (1993) informative advertising also helps to present the company's name and the merits of its product. According to Bone and Kurtz (1998) the promotion of any new market entry tends to pursue this objective because marketing success at this stage often depends simply on announcing availability; informative advertising is common in the introductory stage of the product life cycle.

2.4 A Brief about Ho Polytechnic
Ho Polytechnic is the premier tertiary education institution in the Volta Region of Ghana. The Polytechnic started in 1968 as a technical institute with the primary goal of providing pre-technical education. By 1972, the Institute made tremendous progress and upgraded its courses. The polytechnic got the full backing of the law in 1993 to become a fully-fledged tertiary institution, charged with the responsibility of training students to the Higher National Diploma (HND) and Degree Levels. Ho Polytechnic as an institution has some strengths that need to be marketed vigorously with informative advertising. These strengths include:
- effective leadership and management: the polytechnic has a governing council composed of distinguished personalities and a competent management staff;
- experienced and dedicated staff;
- conducive environment for academic work;
- good public image;
- strong linkages between the polytechnic and other institutions; and
- land space for infrastructural development and physical expansion.

Over the years, Ho Polytechnic has not done much in its marketing efforts via informative advertising. There is very little on the polytechnic's website (for instance) on programmes and course contents. There is little or no information on faculty and research publications. There is no information on alumni and their placements in the corporate world. These elements are vital to attracting prospective students who could be convinced by ordinary testimonials from alumni across the world. Ho Polytechnic needs to step up its game on informative advertising.

3.   METHODOLOGY
The purpose of this research is to determine the significance of informative advertising in the promotion of public tertiary institutions in Ghana. The emphasis is on discovering whether informative advertising is a necessary tool in promoting public tertiary institutions in Ghana. The objectives of the study signify that the researchers' dissertation is descriptive. It is aimed at identifying, defining and obtaining a clear picture of the phenomenon, to give the researchers an orientation in the question to be investigated. In order to achieve the aims and objectives of this dissertation, both quantitative and qualitative data were used. Based on the rationale of this research, it became evident that the researchers could not do without either of them, since data would be collected and quantified for some parameters and also non-quantifiable issues would be discussed. The research was carried out in Ho Polytechnic as the study area because it was obvious that respondents from this study area will provide the needful data for informed conclusions to be drawn in a bid to achieve the study objectives. The population for the study involved selected students and employees of the Polytechnic. A total sample size of two hundred respondents were accidentally selected which consists of Fifty employees and one hundred and fifty students from a population of about five thousand. Structured questionnaires were administered to the sampled population. The data collected from the field was edited and analyzed using simple frequency tables.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was carried out on the students and employees of Ho Polytechnic, the premier public tertiary institution, in the Volta Region of Ghana.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Female	86	43
Male	114	57
Total	**200**	**100**

From the table above, eighty six out of two hundred respondents were females representing forty-three percent with the remaining fifty-seven percent being male. It is clear that more males were available than females. It is also obvious that the information provided by this study and its implicative consequences is skewed by fourteen percentage points towards male perspectives.

Table 2: Visibility of Polytechnic Advert (in the last 6 months)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	47	23.50
No	153	76.50
Total	**200**	**100**

The results from table 2 indicate that the visibility of the polytechnic is not encouraging. Only 23.50 percent indicated that they have seen or heard of an ad of the institution in the last 6 months to the date of responding to the questionnaire. This is a signal that the institution seem cut off from its immediate stakeholders not to talk of prospects.

Table 3: Regular Ad Media used by the Polytechnic

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Newspaper	8	17.02
Television	0	00.00
Local Radio	21	44.68
Internet	0	00.00
Notice boards	18	38.30
Total	**47**	**100**

The study revealed that out of forty-seven respondents who indicate that they had seen or heard an ad of the institution in the last six months, a cumulative of 82.98 percent did so via the local radio (campus) station of the polytechnic (Volta Premier 98.1 FM station) and campus notice boards. Only 17.2 percent attested to the visibility of the institution via some national newspaper. This is indicative of the posturing of public tertiary institutions in Ghana towards mass communication and marketing over the past years. In the past most prospective students had very limited choices when it came to enrolment into tertiary institutions in Ghana. But with the current proliferation of tertiary institutions (both private and public) it is relatively 'suicidal' to neglect marketing and advertising campaigns aimed at attracting prospects. The polytechnic cannot keep to only internal media such as notice boards and a local radio station that travels just a few kilometers in and around campus.

Table 5: Relevance of Information from Advert

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	17.02
No	28	58.60
Not sure	11	23.40
Total	**47**	**100**

Respondents were asked to comment on the relevance of information received from the institution. The figures on table 5 reveal that more than half of the sampled population is of the opinion that the type of information they got from the institution's ads were irrelevant to them. Whereas 23.40 percent said they were not sure of the relevance of the information they had, eight were sure. Unfortunately, 58.60 percent were disappointed about the type of information thrown at them since most of this information was aimed at current students on campus. Respondents hinted that only about 5 minutes announcements daily were heard regarding locations where prospects could buy admission forms.

Table 6: Visibility of Adverts of Other Tertiary Institutions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Ashesi University	35	17.50
Central University	20	10.00
E. P. Univ. College	65	32.50
Other Colleges	80	40.00
Total	**200**	**100**

The study intended to contrast the adverts of the polytechnic with other tertiary institutions with the research area and the country at large. The responses as depicted on table 6 are quite implicative. Ashesi and Central are private universities in Ghana located in different geographic regions. E. P. University College (Evangelical Presbyterian University College) is a private tertiary institution located in Ho and therefore shares in the dynamics of the research area. This private tertiary institution per the study is 35.50 percent visible with internet ads, information flyers, banners, posters, and radio ads. Respondents were however more privy to adverts and information from other colleges and institutions across the country than the polytechnic which is closer to them.

Table 7: Improving the Polytechnic's Image via Informative Ads

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	173	86.50
No	12	6.00
Not Sure	15	7.50
Total	**200**	**100**

Respondents were quizzed as to whether they thought frequent informative ads will aid in enhancing the polytechnic's image and visibility in the country and beyond. The results overwhelmingly indicated an affirmative response with 86.50 percent endorsing regular ads of the institution.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the study betray the attitudes of managers of public tertiary institutions in the country towards marketing their operations. It could therefore be inferred from the findings that the polytechnic does not place premium on marketing   and mass communication to create awareness, inform, educate, and persuade its targets and prospective students. It is also evident that private tertiary institutions in Ghana and other colleges (including foreign institutions) are making giant incursions into the polytechnic's catchment areas due to the seeming lack of information about the institution. It was also obvious that some respondents were not impressed about the efforts made in marketing the institution. It is herewith worth recommending that public tertiary institutions in Ghana, such as Ho Polytechnic, should wake up to the game of aggressive marketing of their institutions and programmes. This way, the institutions will be well positioned in the minds of stakeholders and prospects. The greater percentage of information thrown up by tertiary institutions across the world is informative. Public tertiary institutions in Ghana should be more informative on the types of programmes they run; infrastructure; caliber of faculty/teachers; relevance of courses to industry; course contents and their relatedness to career aspirations of prospective students, and other relevant marketing information. This would help in image enhancement and aid prospects in making informed programme choices.

6. SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The findings from this study are of great significance to tertiary institutions in Ghana such as polytechnics, training colleges, and universities in appreciating the contribution of informative advertising to their publicity and public relations and marketing activities. It will aid tertiary institutions to ascertain how efficient and effective informative advertising helps in enhancing corporate image. The study will provide good information for managers of public tertiary institutions in making mass communications.

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