**The Impact of COVID-19 on the Marketing Strategies of USIU-Africa: A Study of Student Recruitment and Retention**

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Course

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Due Date

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

The marketing sector has witnessed considerable upheaval in recent years due to the introduction of new technology, evolving consumer behaviour, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. Marketing continually evolves, with fresh innovations altering how organisations communicate with clients. The pandemic has altered marketing plans and pressured the education sector to address issues never dreamed of before COVID-19. Owing to the pandemic, many institutions and schools have closed, requiring students to complete their education online (Chang & Chou, 2021). The pandemic has compelled the United States International University Africa (USIU-Africa) to alter its marketing strategies. This has considerably impacted recruiting new students and retaining those currently enrolled at USIU-Africa, and other universities which employ more conventional marketing tactics to achieve these goals. The purpose of this study is to assess the effect that COVID-19 has on the marketing strategies used by USIU-Africa, with a focus on student recruitment and retention.

Located in Nairobi, Kenya, USIU-Africa is a private, non-religious learning institute. USIU-Africa allows students to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in various disciplines, such as business, the humanities, and the social sciences. More than 70 countries are represented by USIU-Africa students (Njoroge, 2022). The university has always given marketing activities full attention to recruiting students from various backgrounds. The COVID-19 pandemic has faced the university with additional hurdles, necessitating modifications to its marketing methods. The pandemic has significantly altered consumer behaviour, including an increase in the amount of time spent online and a reorganisation of purchasing priorities. To adapt to the current context, USIU-Africa has had to change its marketing strategies (Njunguna & Yogo, n.d.). Sadly, it has yet to be evident how efficient these approaches are; consequently, it is vital to research their implications.

This study aims to analyse how COVID-19 has affected the marketing operations of USIU-Africa, emphasising student recruitment and retention. This study aims to determine whether or not USIU-Africa changed its marketing approach in reaction to the pandemic and, if so, how successful those changes were. The purpose of the study is also to identify the difficulties that USIU-Africa will have in adapting to the changing environment and to provide viable solutions that might be put into practice to enhance student attraction and retention. The value of this study is that it will add to the body of knowledge already available about the impact that COVID-19 has had on marketing strategies used in the education industry. In addition, it will cast light on the obstacles that institutions such as USIU-Africa have had to overcome to adjust to the new milieu and propose best marketing practices in the post-pandemic age. Understanding how COVID-19 affects marketing initiatives can assist USIU-Africa in creating successful marketing plans that will draw in and keep students in the new environment.

## **Background of the Problem**

Businesses and organisations worldwide are working to adapt to the new environment brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has also significantly impacted the global economy. The pandemic has forced businesses in the marketing industry to change their strategies (Firang & Mensah, 2021). Due to the pandemic, some educational institutions have shut their doors, while others have changed their business models to focus on online learning. As a result, educational institutions have had to significantly alter their marketing strategies, particularly those that deal with student recruitment and retention. The pandemic has forced USIU-Africa and many other organisations to change their marketing tactics. This has necessitated several things, including a shift to digital marketing, an improvement in online presence, and the introduction of virtual campus tours.

The challenges that USIU-Africa faced when responding to the new marketing climate are common. Other institutions worldwide deal with similar issues, and the marketing sector is rapidly shifting. For instance, a study by Hutahaean et al. (2022) discovered that Indonesian colleges had needed help luring and keeping students since the pandemic. Similarly, a study undertaken by Osei‐Kojo et al. (2022) showed the obstacles faced by universities in Ghana while seeking to adjust their marketing strategies to the altering circumstances. Universities have traditionally relied on successful marketing tactics to recruit and retain students since marketing is vital to higher education. Effective marketing tactics for educational institutions can achieve higher enrolment and retention rates. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented educational institutions with new challenges that must be overcome to deploy conventional marketing methods successfully.

Recent literature has examined the effects of COVID-19 on the marketing industry and the difficulties academic institutions have encountered in their attempts to adjust to the new environment. For instance, the pandemic has shifted toward digital marketing methods, and institutions need to increase their online presence (Istrefi-Jahja & Zeqiri, 2021). Similarly, Agasisti & Soncin (2020) suggest that schools adopt a more student-centric marketing strategy based on the needs and preferences of students in the new environment. The literature also emphasises the need for institutions to develop effective communication methods that address the concerns of students and their families around the pandemic.

Given the substantial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational institutions' marketing efforts, it is vital to analyse the efficiency of the techniques utilised by USIU-Africa to attract and retain students (Njoroge, 2022). This study aims to address the challenges faced by USIU-Africa and provide best practices for marketing in a post-pandemic environment by reviewing the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on marketing strategies and student recruitment/retention in higher education.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the entire world, including the educational system. In response to the new reality of the pandemic, higher education institutions, particularly USIU-Africa, have had to significantly modify their marketing strategies (Rono & Waithera, 2021). In this regard, it is essential to find out the consequences COVID-19 had on USIU-Africa's marketing strategy for attracting and retaining students and the obstacles the organisation encountered in dealing with the pandemic. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of the changes USIU-Africa made to its marketing activities in response to the pandemic. The study will evaluate the difficulties USIU-Africa encountered in adapting to the pandemic and how it overcame them. The study will also highlight the best practices adopted by USIU-Africa in response to the pandemic, which could serve as an example for other higher education institutions dealing with similar issues.

This study is critical because it will contribute to the literature on how COVID-19 affects marketing strategies in higher education institutions. The results of this study will provide information on the strategies used by USIU-Africa to combat the pandemic and how effective they have been. In light of the pandemic and beyond, these findings will help other higher education institutions develop effective marketing initiatives for attracting and retaining students. The study's outcomes will aid in elucidating how educational institutions might adapt their marketing tactics to meet the evolving needs of their target consumers. The study's findings will also be helpful to policymakers and stakeholders in the education sector, who may use them to build policies that support institutions in adapting to the new normal. The study will also establish the basis for ongoing research into how the pandemic affects higher education institutions' marketing tactics and how these institutions may prepare for future crises.

## **Purpose of the Study or General Objective**

Educational institutions have been forced to experiment with unique marketing strategies to maintain their student base. This study examines how COVID-19 has affected USIU-Africa 's student recruitment and retention marketing approach. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies USIU-Africa deployed in response to the pandemic and to identify the challenges it encountered in adjusting to the new normal. The study will also examine the best practices adopted by USIU-Africa in response to the pandemic and how other institutions of higher learning may apply them. Therefore the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how the COVID-19 pandemic affects USIU-Africa's marketing operations in Africa to attract new students and retain existing ones.
2. To assess the success of the marketing plans used by USIU-Africa in response to the pandemic.
3. To highlight the hurdles that USIU-Africa has discovered in adapting to the pandemic and how to overcome them.
4. Determine the best practices adopted by USIU-Africa in response to the pandemic and how they might be duplicated in other higher education institutions.

The primary purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing literature on the impact that COVID-19 has had on the marketing strategies employed by higher education institutions. The conclusions of this study will provide information on the strategies employed by USIU-Africa to combat the pandemic and the degree to which those strategies have been successful. Other higher education institutions could use these statistics to develop efficient marketing strategies for student recruitment and retention throughout the pandemic and beyond.

The results of this study will help educational institutions better understand how to adapt their marketing strategies to meet the ever-changing demands of their target consumers. The study's findings will be helpful to policymakers and stakeholders in the education system. These individuals may utilise the data to design policies that assist institutions in adjusting to the new normal. The study will also lay the groundwork for future research on how the pandemic affects higher education institutions' marketing plans and their future crisis preparedness.

In general, the purpose of this study is to provide insights into the impact of COVID-19 on USIU-Africa’s marketing strategies for student recruitment and retention, evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies used, identify the challenges faced and best practices developed, and provide recommendations for higher education institutions on developing successful marketing strategies in a post-pandemic era. The study's objectives will be attained through a detailed analysis of the data gathered through surveys and interviews with critical stakeholders and a review of the essential literature on the topic.

## **Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected USIU-Africa 's marketing approach. This objective will require a careful review of the various marketing methods implemented by USIU-Africa before and throughout the pandemic. The study aims to provide a comprehensive knowledge of how USIU-Africa has modified its marketing strategy in response to the pandemic by analysing tactics, messaging, and channels of contact changes.
2. Assess the benefits of COVID-19 on student recruitment and retention at USIU-Africa. The enrolment and retention rates of USIU-Africa students before and during the pandemic will be examined to do this. By examining the influence of COVID-19 on these rates, the study intends to determine the extent to which the pandemic has damaged USIU-Africa 's ability to recruit and retain students.
3. To determine the success of the marketing methods adopted by USIU-Africa during the pandemic. The efficiency of the marketing tactics implemented by USIU-Africa throughout the pandemic in reaching the desired objectives will be studied to accomplish this goal. The study intends to shed light on the efficacy of USIU-Africa's marketing initiatives throughout the pandemic by analysing data, including website traffic, social media engagement, and application rates.
4. To adopt marketing tactics during the pandemic, USIU-Africa must overcome some obstacles. To achieve this objective, USIU-Africa will analyse its challenges when implementing its marketing strategies during the pandemic. This study aims to shed light on the specific difficulties USIU-Africa had during the pandemic regarding student recruitment and retention.
5. USIU-Africa needs to advise on strengthening its marketing strategies for student recruitment and retention in light of the present pandemic. We will summarise the study's findings to aid USIU-Africa in enhancing its student recruitment and retention marketing strategies. The study intends to assist USIU-Africa in navigating the current obstacles brought on by the pandemic and positioning itself for long-term success in student recruitment and retention by providing practical and research-based assistance.

## **Research Questions or Hypotheses**

This study will be based on the following research questions:

1. What modifications have been made to USIU-Africa’s Marketing student recruitment and retention strategies due to COVID-19?
2. What obstacles did USIU-Africa encounter when implementing its marketing plans during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How effectively does USIU-Africa employ marketing methods to recruit and retain students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. How can USIU-Africa strengthen its marketing strategies to meet its recruiting and retention objectives and overcome the COVID-19 issues?

These research questions are consistent with the study's objectives and will guide the data collection and analysis. The research questions are ideal for the study's purpose since they are specific, quantifiable, and manageable. The response to these study questions will provide insight into how COVID-19 has changed USIU-Africa’s Marketing efforts for attracting and retaining students.

## **Justification or Significance of the Study**

Higher education institutions all across the world are confronting a unique issue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because traditional campuses are being phased out in favour of online learning, educational institutions have been forced to rethink their marketing strategies for attracting and retaining students (Ali, 2020). Since students and their families face terrible economic circumstances and are concerned about the future, the pandemic has also added to the immense financial pressure that has been forced on educational institutions. In this context, it is of the utmost importance to comprehend how COVID-19 has impacted the marketing strategies used in higher education and to identify solutions to improve student recruitment and retention.

The proposed study intends to determine how COVID-19 has affected the marketing methods utilised by USIU-Africa to recruit and retain students. The study will shed light on the effectiveness of the university's safety procedures during the pandemic and identify areas for improvement. The study's results will significantly assist the university's marketing department as it works to adapt to shifting conditions and enhance student enrollment and retention. The study's conclusions may substantially impact the area of marketing as a whole. There is a need for a study that studies the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on several industries because it has brought significant upheaval to the marketing industry. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in this field by examining the impact of COVID-19 on the marketing methods employed in the higher education business. Also, the knowledge may be helpful to other businesses, assisting in developing marketing strategies in response to the pandemic.

The study's potential impact on student recruitment and retention cannot be overstated. The marketing operations of USIU-Africa, a prestigious university in East Africa, may impact many students' academic and professional futures. The institution may play a crucial role in fostering its students' academic and professional success by increasing student recruitment and retention. Hence, the university and its students will benefit substantially from the study's outcomes.

Overall, the suggested study is essential for marketing and higher education. By examining the impact of COVID-19 on USIU - Marketing Africa's approaches to student recruitment and retention, the study will provide valuable insights that can be used to improve the university's marketing efforts and to advise other institutions facing similar challenges. This research is significant and beneficial due to its potential contributions to the field of marketing as well as its implications for student recruitment and retention.

## **Scope of the Study**

The study population will include current and prospective USIU-Africa students and the institution's marketing staff and administration. A representative population sample will ensure the findings apply to the entire population. The sample size will be determined using probability sampling procedures. Due to time and resource constraints, the sample size may be small and need to reflect the spectrum of ideas in the community adequately.

On the other hand, it is crucial to identify any limitations or assumptions that could influence the study's findings. Self-reported data has several potential drawbacks, as survey respondents may need more accurate information. The study may also be affected by the pandemic's quick state change, as new legislation and technological improvements may affect how successfully USIU Africa's marketing efforts operate. Given these restrictions, the study will strive to provide a complete analysis of how COVID-19 has impacted USIU Africa's marketing efforts to attract and keep students.

## **Definition of Terms**

A few essential terms in this study must be defined for the reader to grasp the context in which they are employed. The infectious disease caused by the novel coronavirus is first and principally known as COVID-19. The pandemic caused by the spread of COVID-19 has considerably impacted enterprises and organisations worldwide, especially USIU-Africa.

The second definition of marketing strategies is "the tactics and processes utilised by corporations to advertise their products or services." The marketing methods implemented by USIU Africa to pull in and retain students despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic are significant to this study. Therefore the process of enticing and enrolling new students is referred to as student recruiting. On the other hand, student retention ensures that current students remain enrolled and complete their education. Furthermore, higher education refers to any training that occurs after high school and ultimately leads to a degree or professional qualification. USIU-Africa is a private higher education institution headquartered in Kenya that provides several degree programs.

## **Chapter Summary**

This study aimed to investigate how COVID-19 affects the marketing strategies employed by USIU-Africa, specifically in terms of new student recruitment and retention. The chapter begins with a brief introduction of the topic, including the current situation of the marketing business and the challenges faced by organisations such as USIU Africa. A literature study was also conducted, looking at relevant studies concerning how COVID-19 affects marketing efforts and student recruitment and retention in higher education. The influence of COVID-19 on USIU Africa's marketing strategies for recruiting and retaining students was identified as the research problem.

The study's purpose, rationale, and objectives were then explained. The study's specific objectives, which are intended to contribute to achieving the broader goal, were also outlined. A list of research questions and hypotheses directed the data collection and analysis. The reason and Significance of the study were then addressed in detail, underlining the worth of the study and its predicted contributions to the field of marketing and higher education. The study's duration, demographics, and sample size were also mentioned, along with any limitations or hypotheses that would influence its conclusions. The chapter concluded with a summary that emphasised the importance of the study and highlighted the key points made. This chapter is the foundation for the rest of the dissertation, providing a clear and short introduction to the study subject and its importance.

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