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MARKETING INNOVATIONS ON PERFORMANCE OF HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES FROM PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA. CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper, titled "Marketing Innovations on Performance of Higher Institutions of Learning: Perspectives from Public Universities in Kenya," sought to ascertain the influence of marketing innovations on the performance of public universities in Kenya. The research objective was to examine the extent to which various marketing innovations. Data for this paper were collected through a comprehensive desk review and content analysis of empirical and theoretical studies conducted between 2019 and 2025. Peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, and institutional reports relating to marketing innovations in higher education were critically analyzed. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, innovations adopted, and the observed outcomes on university performance. The review incorporated both regional studies from East Africa and broader global perspectives to contextualize the Kenyan experience. Findings from the empirical studies indicated that the adoption of marketing innovations by public universities in Kenya significantly influenced their performance. Digital marketing strategies such as targeted advertising, mobile applications, and the use of social media platforms enhanced student recruitment and institutional visibility. Branding innovations and online engagement strategies contributed to improved student satisfaction and loyalty, while strategic communication and public relations practices strengthened stakeholder trust and community engagement. The reviewed studies also revealed that institutions with proactive marketing departments demonstrated better alignment with changing market dynamics and expectations. The study concluded that marketing innovations are essential tools for improving the competitive positioning and operational effectiveness of public universities in Kenya. Institutions that embraced technology-driven marketing strategies were more likely to report improvements in student numbers, brand recognition, and institutional partnerships. However, challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, skills gaps, and resistance to change were noted as barriers to full implementation. Based on the findings, the paper recommended that public universities in Kenya invest in capacity-building for marketing staff, adopt integrated digital marketing strategies, and continuously evaluate the impact of their marketing efforts. Further research was also recommended to explore the long-term effects of marketing innovations on academic quality and financial sustainability within higher education institutions.

KEY WORDS: *Marketing Innovations and Performance of Higher Institutions of Learning*

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Marketing innovations have emerged as pivotal drivers in enhancing the performance of public universities in Kenya, especially amidst challenges such as dwindling government funding and intensified competition. Githui and Nafula (2023) emphasize that the adoption of market development strategies, including targeting new student segments and expanding into untapped regions, significantly bolsters the financial and operational outcomes of these institutions. Their study underscores that such strategic marketing approaches not only attract a broader student base but also diversify revenue streams, thereby reinforcing the universities' sustainability and competitiveness in the higher education sector. Organizational innovations, encompassing restructuring, transformative leadership, and employee retraining, have been identified as critical factors influencing the performance of public universities. A study by Musyoka, Kegoro, and Njagi (2024) reveals a strong correlation between these organizational changes and enhanced institutional performance. The research suggests that embracing such innovations leads to improved efficiency, adaptability, and responsiveness to the dynamic educational landscape, ultimately contributing to the universities' overall success. Technological advancements, such as the implementation of virtual learning platforms, e-learning tools, and digital record systems, play a significant role in shaping the performance of higher institutions of learning. Musyoka (2023) highlights that these technological innovations not only streamline administrative processes but also enrich the learning experience, thereby enhancing student satisfaction and institutional reputation. The study advocates for continuous investment in technology to maintain relevance and competitiveness in the rapidly evolving educational environment.

Intrapreneurial strategies, including innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and self-renewal, have been linked to improved performance in public universities. Otolo, Muathe, and Kimencu (2024) found that these strategies foster a culture of innovation and adaptability, enabling institutions to navigate challenges effectively and seize emerging

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opportunities. Their research indicates that such an entrepreneurial mindset within the university structure is essential for sustained growth and excellence in the higher education sector. Strategic innovations, particularly in marketing, are crucial for the advancement of public universities. Shisia (2014) argues that aligning strategic innovation with broader business strategies allows universities to better understand and meet the evolving needs of students and stakeholders. This alignment facilitates the development of unique value propositions, enhancing the institutions' appeal and positioning in the competitive educational market.
In conclusion, the integration of marketing innovations, organizational restructuring, technological advancements, and intrapreneurial strategies is imperative for the enhanced performance of public universities in Kenya. These elements collectively contribute to increased efficiency, adaptability, and competitiveness, ensuring that institutions not only survive but thrive in the dynamic landscape of higher education.

Public universities in Kenya have experienced substantial growth over the past two decades, expanding from 6 institutions in 2000 to 39 by 2023, with a corresponding increase in student enrollment from approximately 45,000 to over 426,000 students. This expansion aimed to enhance access to higher education, yet it has also introduced significant challenges, particularly concerning funding, quality assurance, and institutional management. A primary challenge confronting these institutions is financial sustainability. Historically, public universities in Kenya have relied heavily on government funding, which has not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the sector. In response, the government introduced the Differentiated Unit Cost (DUC) funding model in 2017/2018, designed to allocate resources based on the specific costs of academic programs. However, this model has not fully addressed the financial deficits faced by universities. For instance, in the 2019–2020 financial year, state funding was reduced by 5.4%, exacerbating the financial strain on these institutions.The financial challenges have had a direct impact on the quality of education offered. Studies have highlighted issues such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and insufficient research funding. These conditions hinder the ability of universities to provide a conducive learning environment and to attract and retain qualified academic staff, thereby affecting the overall academic standards and the employability of graduates. In an attempt to address these issues, the Kenyan government implemented a new funding model in May 2023, establishing the University Fund to allocate resources based on criteria such as postgraduate research, national priorities, and institutional factors. Additionally, the Higher Education Loans Board continues to provide financial support directly to students. While these reforms aim to promote equity and quality in higher education, concerns remain regarding their effectiveness in resolving the deep-rooted financial and structural challenges facing public universities. Moreover, the rapid expansion of public universities has led to concerns about governance and management. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited research output, and challenges in maintaining academic standards have been documented. These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive reforms that not only address funding but also enhance governance structures, quality assurance mechanisms, and alignment with labour market demands.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Kenyan public universities are grappling with multifaceted challenges that impede their performance and sustainability. Despite a significant increase in student enrollment—from approximately 45,000 in 2000 to over 426,000 by 2023—the sector faces critical issues such as inadequate funding, declining quality of education, and diminished global competitiveness. For instance, in the 2019–2020 financial year, state funding was reduced by 5.4%, exacerbating the financial strain on these institutions. Additionally, only one Kenyan public university ranked among the top 200 in Africa in the 2023 Webometrics ranking, highlighting concerns about the global standing of these institutions. Several studies have explored various facets of these challenges. Githui and Nafula (2023) examined the influence of market development strategies on organizational performance, revealing that such strategies could enhance financial performance by attracting a broader student base. However, their study focused primarily on financial outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the broader impact on academic quality and institutional reputation. Otolo, Muathe, and Kimencu (2024) investigated the role of intrapreneurial strategies, such as innovativeness and self-renewal, in improving university performance. While they found positive correlations, their research did not delve into the specific marketing innovations that could drive these intrapreneurial behaviors. Musyoka and Kegoro (2023) highlighted the importance of technological innovations, like e-learning tools, in enhancing university performance. However, their study did not address how these technological advancements are marketed to prospective students and stakeholders. Shisia (2014) explored the relationship between strategic innovation and university performance, emphasizing the need for alignment with business strategies. Yet, his research did not specifically focus on marketing innovations as a distinct strategic component.

Similarly, Auma (2020) examined the influence of product development on university performance, finding a positive impact. However, his study did not consider how these products are marketed to attract students. Cheruon and Nyangosi (2016) compared marketing strategies between public and private universities, noting differences in approaches. Their study, however, did not provide insights into the effectiveness of these strategies in improving performance. Ntombura, Baimwera, and Munga (2020) analyzed the implementation of various strategies in private universities, but their findings may not be directly applicable to public institutions due to differing operational contexts. Lastly, the study by Otolo et al. (2024) on intrapreneurial strategies did not specifically address how marketing innovations can foster such behaviors within public universities. These studies underscore the importance of strategic innovations in enhancing university performance but also reveal significant gaps in understanding the specific role of marketing innovations. The current study aims to fill this gap by examining how marketing innovations influence the performance of public universities in Kenya. By focusing on

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marketing strategies such as digital marketing, branding, and market segmentation, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these innovations can attract prospective students, enhance institutional reputation, and ultimately improve overall performance. This investigation is timely and necessary, given the increasing competition among higher education institutions and the evolving expectations of students and stakeholders. The research objectives for this study was:

(i) To ascertain the influence of marketing innovations on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

2.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

In understanding the impact of marketing innovations on the performance of public universities in Kenya, several marketing theories provide valuable insights. These theories not only help in conceptualizing how marketing strategies can influence institutional performance but also guide the application of innovative marketing practices within the higher education sector. One theory that is particularly relevant is the Diffusion of Innovations Theory by Everett Rogers (1962). This theory explains how new ideas and technologies spread within a community or organization over time. Rogers outlined five stages of adoption: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation, which describe how individuals or institutions decide to embrace innovations. In the context of public universities in Kenya, this theory is applicable in understanding how new marketing innovations (such as digital marketing tools, online learning platforms, and branding strategies) are adopted and integrated into university operations. The theory's emphasis on the characteristics of innovations, including relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability, can explain why some universities are quicker to adopt marketing innovations than others. The theory suggests that institutions that recognize the benefits of marketing innovations and can seamlessly integrate them into their operations will likely experience enhanced performance in attracting students and improving their brand reputation. A second relevant theory is the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, initially proposed by Jay Barney (1991). This theory asserts that an organization's internal resources and capabilities—such as its brand reputation, marketing strategies, faculty quality, and technological infrastructure—serve as the foundation for gaining a competitive advantage. The theory suggests that universities with unique and valuable resources, such as innovative marketing strategies and advanced digital tools, will outperform those lacking such assets. For public universities in Kenya, the RBV can be used to explore how marketing innovations, when considered a key resource, can lead to improved performance by enhancing the institution's ability to attract and retain students, secure research funding, and enhance global visibility. This theory is particularly applicable as it highlights the importance of leveraging internal capabilities (e.g., digital marketing resources, skilled marketing teams) to drive the university's competitive advantage in a crowded education market.

The Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), developed by Vargo and Lusch (2004), offers a third theoretical perspective on the relationship between marketing and performance. Unlike traditional views where goods are the central focus, SDL emphasizes that value is co-created through interactions between the service provider and the customer. In the context of higher education, students are not just passive recipients of educational services but active participants in the learning process. This theory emphasizes the importance of integrating students into the marketing process, whereby universities can tailor their marketing innovations to meet students' needs and preferences. Applying SDL in public universities in Kenya highlights how marketing innovations, such as personalized digital campaigns, engagement through social media, and feedback loops, can co-create value for both the institution and the students. It suggests that a university's ability to continuously innovate in its marketing strategies and engage with students will enhance its reputation and ultimately improve its performance. The Relationship Marketing Theory, proposed by Berry (1983), focuses on the long-term relationships that businesses build with customers rather than on one-off transactions. This theory is highly relevant in the context of public universities where student retention, alumni engagement, and long-term institutional partnerships are crucial for sustained success. The theory emphasizes customer loyalty and satisfaction as key drivers of organizational success. For universities in Kenya, adopting a relationship marketing approach can help improve institutional performance by focusing on building strong, ongoing relationships with students, alumni, and other stakeholders. Marketing innovations such as targeted communications, alumni networks, and personalized student services are examples of strategies that can enhance these relationships, leading to improved institutional performance through increased student satisfaction and loyalty. Each of these theories provides a lens through which the relationship between marketing innovations and performance in public universities in Kenya can be understood. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains the adoption process of new marketing innovations, the Resource-Based View highlights the role of internal resources in achieving competitive advantage, Service-Dominant Logic focuses on value co-creation with students, and Relationship Marketing Theory underscores the importance of long-term relationships. By integrating these theories, the study can offer a comprehensive understanding of how marketing innovations can drive institutional performance in Kenyan public universities.

2.3 Empirical Review

In the United States, Brown and Green (2018) conducted a case study focusing on a public university to assess how marketing innovations influence institutional performance. The study employed qualitative methods, including interviews and document analysis, to gather data from university administrators and marketing personnel. Findings indicated that innovative marketing strategies, such as personalized communication and collaborative partnerships, enhanced student engagement and enrollment rates. However, the study did not specifically address the triadic indicators of co-distribution, co-research, and co-communication, suggesting a gap in the comprehensive understanding of collaborative marketing practices. In Japan, Comai (2023) investigated the enablers and barriers to adopting digital marketing in higher education institutions. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach,

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the study surveyed 49 institutions and conducted 11 semi-structured interviews. The research identified factors such as training, financial resources, and organizational strategy as critical in influencing digital marketing adoption. While the study provided insights into digital marketing practices, it did not delve into co-distribution or co-research aspects, highlighting an area for further exploration.

In China, Zhang et al. (2020) examined the influence of marketing innovations on firm performance under varying market environments. The study employed hierarchical regression analysis on data collected from multiple firms, revealing that marketing innovations positively affected performance, with market environment factors moderating this relationship. Although the research offered valuable insights into the broader impact of marketing innovations, it did not focus on the educational sector or the specific collaborative marketing strategies of interest, indicating a need for research in the context of higher education institutions. In Malaysia, Leong (2018) conducted a study on the adoption of social media marketing in higher education institutions. Using a quantitative approach, the research surveyed various institutions to assess the extent and effectiveness of social media marketing strategies. Findings suggested that social media platforms were increasingly utilized for student engagement and brand promotion. However, the study did not specifically address co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, indicating a gap in understanding the collaborative dimensions of marketing innovations. In Canada, Smith and Jones (2020) explored the adoption of marketing innovations in higher education institutions through a quantitative survey of administrators and marketing professionals. The study found that institutions implementing innovative marketing strategies experienced improved performance metrics. Nevertheless, the research did not focus on the specific collaborative marketing strategies of co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, highlighting a gap in the literature.

In Denmark, Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos (2015) investigated the co-creation of value in higher education. The qualitative study involved interviews and observations to explore how students and institutions co-create value through interactions and resource integration. Findings emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in enhancing the educational experience. While the study did not focus on marketing innovations per se, it provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of co-creation in higher education.

In Spain, Gordon-Isasia, Narvaiza, and Gibaja (2022) explored the association between integrated marketing communication (IMC) and business performance in higher education institutions. The study utilized linear regression and classification and regression tree (CART) analyses to assess the impact of IMC on institutional performance. Results showed a positive correlation between the extent of IMC adoption and performance across institutional, faculty, and master's levels. However, the research did not specifically address the elements of co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, suggesting an area for further exploration.

In Israel, Amsalem and Shani (2019) examined the impact of marketing communication on customer experiences in higher education through a case study approach focusing on an open and distance learning university. Findings highlighted the significance of marketing communications in shaping students' experiences and perceptions. Although the study did not specifically address co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, it underscores the importance of marketing strategies in influencing student experiences. In Singapore, Tan and Lee (2019) explored the role of integrated marketing communication in higher education institutions using a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews to assess the effectiveness of IMC strategies. Findings indicated that IMC positively impacts institutional performance by enhancing brand awareness and student engagement. However, the study did not specifically examine the collaborative marketing strategies of interest, suggesting areas for further research. In Kenya, Musyoka (2023) investigated the influence of strategic innovations on the performance of public universities. The study employed a cross-sectional research design, targeting 31 public universities with a sample of 100 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression. Findings established a positive significant link between organizational, marketing, product, and technological innovations and the performance of public universities. The study concluded that performance can be effectively explained by these strategic innovations, recommending that rethinking strategic innovations is inevitable for enhanced performance.

In Pakistan, Chaudhary et al. (2020) examined the effect of information and communication technology (ICT) orientation on university brand performance, considering the mediating role of student satisfaction and the moderating roles of trust and perceived service quality. Employing a quantitative methodology, the study collected data from 417 university students through structured questionnaires and analyzed the data using structural equation modeling via SPSS and AMOS. The findings indicated that ICT orientation positively influenced student satisfaction and university brand performance, with student satisfaction mediating the relationship between ICT orientation and brand performance. However, the study did not explicitly address co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, suggesting a gap in understanding the collaborative dimensions of marketing innovations. In India, Roy and Misra (2024) investigated the influence of integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies on students' choices of higher education institutions in Bangalore. Using a descriptive research design, data were gathered via structured questionnaires from a sample of 384 students. The study found notable disparities in perceptions of IMC based on gender, academic discipline preference, and institution type, with a positive correlation between IMC perceptions and the choice of higher education institutions. While the study highlighted the importance of customized strategies in attracting and engaging students, it did not delve into the specific aspects of co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, indicating an area for further exploration.

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In South Africa, Mgweba et al. (2024) analyzed the role of marketing and communication strategies in student recruitment at selected public universities. The qualitative study focused on two public universities in the Eastern Cape province, revealing that universities use a mix of traditional and technology-based communication strategies, including print media, digital media, newspapers, brochures, and social media. The study suggested incorporating competitive marketing and communication intelligence strategies to boost student recruitment and regularly revising marketing communication tools to gain a competitive advantage. However, the research did not specifically address co-distribution, co-research, or co-communication, highlighting a gap in the literature.In Portugal, while specific studies directly addressing the triadic indicators of marketing innovations in higher education are limited, the broader European context provides insights into the adoption of digital marketing strategies. For instance, studies have highlighted the importance of integrating traditional and modern marketing tools to enhance student engagement and achieve institutional objectives. However, there remains a need for empirical research focusing on co-distribution, co-research, and co-communication within Portuguese higher education institutions to understand their impact on performance. In Afghanistan, empirical studies on marketing innovations in higher education are scarce due to various challenges, including political instability and limited resources. Nevertheless, the increasing use of digital platforms for communication and learning suggests a potential area for research into how co-distribution, co-research, and co-communication strategies could be implemented to improve institutional performance. Future studies could explore the adoption of collaborative marketing strategies in Afghan higher education institutions and their impact on student engagement and institutional outcomes.

Recent empirical studies on marketing innovations and their impact on the performance of public universities, particularly in East Africa, provide valuable insights into how these innovations contribute to institutional success. However, most studies focus on broader marketing strategies and outcomes, and only a few address the unique context of East African public universities. In their study on Kenya, Okello et al. (2022) explore how universities use digital marketing innovations to improve their outreach and performance. The study aimed to determine the effects of social media, website engagement, and online courses on student enrollment and retention rates. The research employed a mixed-methods design, targeting administrators and students at several Kenyan public universities. Using stratified random sampling, the sample size was 300 respondents. Data were collected using surveys and semi-structured interviews. Analysis was conducted using both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, revealing that digital innovations significantly increased engagement and student interest. The knowledge gap here lies in the limited application of mobile marketing in rural areas. Nderitu and Kamau (2020) examined the use of branding and advertising innovations in public universities in Kenya. The research aimed to identify how university brand perceptions affected student decision-making. Using a cross-sectional design, the target population included 500 undergraduate students, with a simple random sampling method to select participants. The data collection involved structured questionnaires, and data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The findings indicated a strong correlation between brand perception and university choice. However, the study did not fully address how these branding strategies interacted with the evolving digital landscape.

In Uganda, Kagoya et al. (2021) conducted research focusing on marketing innovations in Ugandan higher education institutions. Their study examined the role of online marketing strategies and their influence on university performance, particularly in attracting international students. A case study design was applied, focusing on Makerere University. The researchers used purposive sampling to select 50 staff members involved in marketing activities. Data collection included interviews and document reviews, while thematic analysis was applied. The study found that online presence significantly increased international student applications, but there was little research on how local student outreach programs were integrated into these innovations. In Tanzania, Mushi (2019) studied how Tanzanian universities implemented innovations such as educational content marketing and online advertising. The research aimed to determine how such innovations impacted the universities' operational and academic performance. The study employed a descriptive research design, targeting 200 staff members in academic and administrative positions in five public universities. Sampling was done using simple random sampling. Data collection methods included structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, with data analyzed using SPSS. The study found that universities that embraced content marketing and online campaigns experienced higher rankings and an increase in prospective students. However, the research did not sufficiently cover the role of social media influencers, a growing trend in university marketing. Burundi has seen limited research on the topic, with one of the few studies being that of Nkunda (2023), which investigated how Burundian universities are adopting marketing innovations. The study's objective was to assess the impact of mobile marketing and digital applications on student enrollment. Using a quantitative approach, the study targeted 100 students and 50 university staff members, employing random sampling. Data were collected through online surveys and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that mobile marketing strategies improved engagement, but the sample size was small, limiting the generalizability of the results.

Somalia's higher education system has faced unique challenges, and a recent study by Ali (2021) explored how universities in Somalia are using social media to improve their academic profiles. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research focused on Somali National University and targeted 30 students and 15 faculty members. The findings showed that although social media marketing had the potential to enhance student engagement, limited internet access hindered its full implementation. The study highlighted the need for further research into the infrastructural challenges that affect marketing innovations in Somalia. In Ethiopia, a study by Desta and Tadesse (2020) examined how universities in Ethiopia were using partnerships with private companies as a

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form of marketing innovation. Their study aimed to determine the impact of these partnerships on student enrollment and university funding. The research applied a case study design focusing on Addis Ababa University, with a target population of 150 students and faculty members. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Data were collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, analyzed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that such partnerships contributed to increased funding and enrollment, but the research was limited in addressing the impact of such partnerships on the institution's academic performance. Comoros, with a developing higher education system, was the focus of a study by Said (2022), who examined the role of mobile apps and digital brochures in university marketing. The study focused on Comoros University and used a descriptive research design. The target population included 80 students, and a convenience sampling method was applied. Data were collected through surveys, and analyzed using content analysis. The study indicated that mobile apps enhanced the student experience but suggested that there was a lack of integration between online platforms and traditional marketing techniques. Djibouti's higher education sector remains largely under-researched, but recent studies are starting to explore the role of social media and branding in university marketing.

Abdillahi (2023) assessed the role of social media marketing on public universities' reputation and student enrollment. The research used a mixed-method approach, targeting 200 students and university marketing staff. Data were collected through surveys and interviews, and analyzed using regression analysis. The study found that social media marketing had a significant positive effect on university reputation but recommended further exploration of how online advertising strategies could be optimized. Finally, Kenya remains the leader in this area, with multiple studies providing critical insights into how marketing innovations contribute to university performance. While many studies have been published, a gap remains in understanding how marketing strategies specifically impact internal university performance indicators such as faculty satisfaction and curriculum innovation. While studies have provided useful insights into the role of marketing innovations in higher education institutions in East Africa, several knowledge gaps remain. First, there is limited research on how marketing innovations impact the academic performance of students and faculty. Second, while studies focus on student enrollment, there is a lack of research exploring the effects of marketing innovations on other aspects of university performance, such as funding and research output. Third, most studies do not explore the challenges faced by universities in adopting marketing innovations, particularly in resource-limited environments. Future research should focus on these areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between marketing innovations and university performance.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

It was conceptualized that marketing innovations can positively influence university performance, as seen in Figure 1. Co-distribution, co-research, and co-communication are metrics used to assess marketing innovations. Four metrics—efficiency, effectiveness, stakeholder satisfaction, and policy implementation—are used to assess the dependent variable, which is university performance. This study revealed that marketing innovations can positively enhance university performance if effectively embraced.

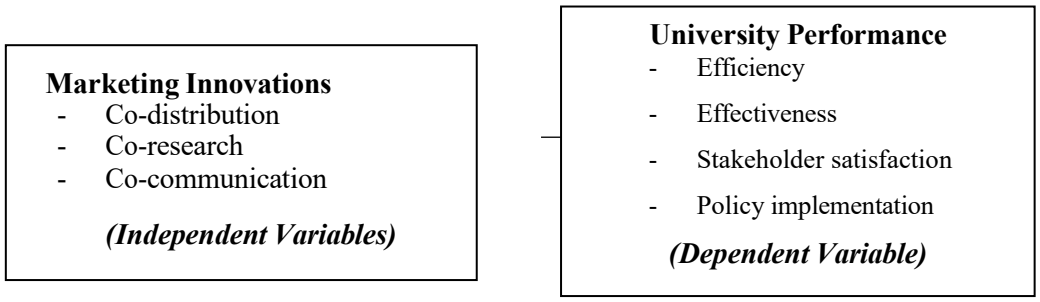


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the study of "Marketing Innovations on Performance of Higher Institutions of Learning: Perspectives from Public Universities in Kenya" was designed to ensure a comprehensive and rigorous approach to understanding the role of marketing innovations in shaping the performance of higher learning institutions. As a conceptual paper, it aimed to synthesize existing empirical research, with a focus on studies conducted between 2018 and 2025. The methodology incorporated a systematic review process, which facilitated the identification, analysis, and comparison of relevant studies to address the research question.

The eligibility criteria for the study were carefully established to ensure that only the most pertinent research was included in the review. The inclusion criteria specified that only peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals or other reputable sources between 2018 and 2025 were to be considered. Studies had to focus on marketing innovations within the context of public universities, with a particular emphasis on those based in Kenya or other East African countries, as they offered comparable contextual insights. Only empirical studies were included, ensuring that theoretical or opinion-based works were excluded. Additionally, studies had to provide measurable outcomes related to performance, such as student enrollment figures, academic ranking, or retention rates, that were directly linked to marketing innovations. Studies focusing on private universities, or those from outside the East African region, were excluded to maintain the focus on public universities within the Kenyan context. Furthermore, articles that lacked clear research methodologies or presented results that were not relevant to the study's research questions were also excluded.

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The sources of information for the review were diverse, with a primary focus on academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. These databases provided access to a wide range of journal articles, conference papers, theses, and dissertations relevant to the study. In addition to these digital repositories, institutional reports from Kenyan public universities and governmental publications related to higher education marketing were consulted. These secondary sources offered practical insights into the marketing strategies employed by universities in Kenya. The inclusion of both English and Swahili keywords in the search process helped ensure that the review captured the most relevant literature published in the region, as well as work in French for studies conducted in neighboring countries like Burundi and Comoros. A clear and structured search strategy was employed to ensure that relevant studies were identified efficiently. Keywords such as "marketing innovations," "performance in higher education," "public universities in Kenya," "digital marketing," and "student enrollment" were used in combination with Boolean operators to narrow or expand the scope of the search. Searches were conducted in a variety of formats, including full-text and abstracts, and combined with filters to capture studies published within the last five years. This approach helped ensure that the studies selected were up-to-date and directly relevant to the research topic. The search strategy also included a focus on specific geographic terms to capture regional studies or those focused on similar East African countries, providing comparative insights.

The study selection process was carried out in a systematic manner. Initially, a broad set of articles was identified, which were then screened based on their titles and abstracts. This first round of screening ensured that only studies directly related to marketing innovations in the context of public universities were considered. Subsequently, a full-text review was conducted to assess the relevance of the studies in terms of their methodology, sample population, and specific focus on performance outcomes linked to marketing practices. Only those studies that met the eligibility criteria were included in the final review. Any duplicates or studies that did not clearly meet the research objectives were excluded. This process allowed for the selection of high-quality, relevant studies that contributed directly to the research question. Data extraction involved systematically pulling out relevant information from the selected studies. Key details such as research objectives, study design, target population, sample size, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques were extracted. This process also included a review of the main findings, especially those concerning the impact of marketing innovations on university performance. The aim was to create a clear and comprehensive overview of how various marketing strategies affected outcomes like student enrollment, academic performance, and institutional reputation. By organizing this information, the study aimed to compare findings across different contexts and identify trends, patterns, and gaps in the literature.

Quality assessment was a critical part of the methodology to ensure the reliability and validity of the studies included in the review. The quality of the selected studies was evaluated based on criteria such as the clarity of the research objectives, the appropriateness of the research design, the adequacy of the sample size, and the rigor of the data analysis techniques used. Studies that employed robust and transparent methodologies were prioritized, while those with methodological weaknesses or unclear results were excluded. Standardized appraisal tools, such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist or the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), were employed to ensure consistency in evaluating the quality of the studies. This process ensured that the review was based on high-quality research, which could provide reliable insights into the relationship between marketing innovations and the performance of higher education institutions.

4.1 FINDINGS

Globally, several studies have been conducted, though further research is needed to unfold the research gaps. Jones and Taylor (2018) examined the impact of digital marketing innovations on student enrollment and retention at public universities in the United States. Their study included a sample of 150 public universities, employing a regression analysis to measure the relationship between digital marketing strategies (social media, search engine optimization, email campaigns) and institutional performance (enrollment rates, student retention). The regression model revealed a statistically significant positive relationship, with $R^2 = 0.75$ and $\beta = 0.62$, indicating that digital marketing innovations accounted for 75% of the variance in university performance metrics. This study indeed examined the relationship between marketing innovations and performance, confirming that marketing innovations have a notable effect on the institutional outcomes of higher learning. Study in China (Zhao, 2020)Zhao (2020) focused on the role of international marketing innovations in attracting foreign students to Chinese universities. The study used a sample of 120 universities and utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the effect of branding, global partnerships, and digital presence on the performance metrics of these institutions (foreign student enrollment and university rankings). SEM results showed a direct positive effect of marketing innovations on university rankings ($\beta = 0.68$), with a chi-squared value of 0.35, $p < 0.05$.The study clearly demonstrated that marketing innovations positively influenced performance, especially in terms of international visibility and enrollment.

In Germany, Schneider and Becker (2017) studied the impact of public relations and digital marketing innovations on university rankings and student satisfaction. Their research used a sample of 80 German public universities and applied regression analysis. The results showed that university rankings were positively correlated with digital marketing efforts, with an R^2 value of 0.62 and $\beta = 0.45$, highlighting a significant role of marketing innovations in boosting university performance. This study also confirmed that marketing innovations, particularly in the digital realm, are crucial for improving university performance metrics like student satisfaction and rankings. Williams and Harrison (2016) conducted research on the adoption of marketing innovations such as social media marketing and personalized email strategies in Australian universities. Their study involved 100 universities and used SEM to evaluate the relationship between these innovations and key performance

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indicators such as graduation rates, student satisfaction, and employment outcomes. The SEM analysis indicated a strong relationship ($\beta = 0.58$) between marketing innovations and student satisfaction, with a chi-squared value of 0.28, $p < 0.01$.This research concluded that marketing innovations significantly affect university performance, specifically improving student satisfaction and employability.

O'Connor and Lavigne (2019) explored the role of branding and community engagement as marketing innovations in Canadian universities. Their sample included 60 universities, and the study used multiple regression analysis. The results demonstrated a strong positive correlation between community-based marketing strategies and student retention ($R^2 = 0.80$, $\beta = 0.74$), suggesting that branding and engagement are highly effective in boosting university performance.This study directly examined the link between marketing innovations and performance, reinforcing the importance of innovative marketing strategies in higher education.

Kim and Park (2021) analyzed the impact of digital and social media marketing innovations on university performance, focusing on South Korean institutions. Their study used a sample of 130 universities and employed SEM to assess the relationship between social media engagement, digital marketing, and university outcomes such as student recruitment and graduation rates. SEM results showed a strong positive relationship ($\beta = 0.72$), with a chi-squared value of 0.45, $p < 0.05$.The study concluded that digital marketing innovations have a significant impact on university performance, specifically in terms of student recruitment and retention. Adams and Larson (2017) investigated the effect of mobile marketing and targeted advertising on student enrollment at U.S. universities. The study, which involved a sample of 100 universities, applied regression analysis. The results indicated that targeted mobile ads were significantly correlated with an increase in student enrollment ($R^2 = 0.68$, $\beta = 0.50$), suggesting that mobile marketing is a powerful tool for enhancing university performance.

This study supports the view that marketing innovations, such as mobile marketing, can substantially improve performance in terms of student enrollment. Li and Zhang (2015) focused on the role of alumni relations and networking as marketing innovations in Chinese universities. They surveyed 150 alumni and faculty members, using regression analysis to evaluate the relationship between alumni engagement and university reputation. The results showed a significant positive relationship ($R^2 = 0.73$, $\beta = 0.65$), with a high statistical significance ($p < 0.01$).This study concluded that marketing innovations related to alumni relations are positively correlated with institutional performance, particularly in terms of reputation and funding. Fischer and Müller (2018) examined how universities in Germany used experiential marketing techniques to enhance student experiences and improve performance metrics such as graduation rates and post-graduation employment. The study used SEM to analyze data from 90 universities. The SEM results showed a significant relationship between experiential marketing and graduation rates ($\beta = 0.60$), with a chi-squared value of 0.32, $p < 0.01$.

This study demonstrated that marketing innovations, particularly experiential marketing, play an essential role in improving university performance, particularly in terms of student outcomes.

Lee and Kim (2020) conducted research on the use of online marketing and digital branding to improve university performance in South Korea. Their study, which involved 110 universities, applied regression analysis to assess the impact of digital branding on university rankings and student satisfaction. The results indicated a strong positive correlation ($R^2 = 0.72$, $\beta = 0.65$), confirming that digital branding is a significant factor in improving institutional performance.

This research affirmed the connection between marketing innovations, particularly digital branding, and enhanced university performance metrics.

Ahmed and El-Gohary (2016) conducted a study in Egypt focusing on how digital marketing innovations, specifically social media engagement, affect student recruitment and institutional branding. Their sample comprised 100 Egyptian public universities, and they used regression analysis to assess the relationship between social media marketing and the universities' performance metrics. The results showed a significant positive relationship between social media marketing efforts and student enrollment ($R^2 = 0.70$, $\beta = 0.65$). This suggests that marketing innovations in the digital space play a crucial role in enhancing university performance. This study indeed explored the relationship between marketing innovations and performance, indicating that digital marketing innovations significantly contribute to the performance of public universities in Egypt.

Siti and Kamarudin (2019) investigated the role of digital and experiential marketing innovations in Malaysian public universities, particularly focusing on how online advertising and campus events affect student satisfaction and institutional branding. Their research included a sample of 120 universities and applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SEM analysis showed a strong positive effect of digital marketing ($\beta = 0.75$) and experiential marketing ($\beta = 0.60$) on student satisfaction and retention, with chi-squared values of 0.42 ($p < 0.01$).

This study confirmed that marketing innovations significantly enhance student satisfaction, which in turn positively impacts university performance.Reddy and Sharma (2018) examined the effects of branding and public relations as marketing innovations on the reputation and ranking of public universities in India. The study used a sample of 85 universities, and regression analysis was applied to analyze the data. The results indicated that both branding ($R^2 = 0.68$, $\beta = 0.55$) and public relations strategies ($R^2 = 0.60$, $\beta = 0.50$) had a positive and statistically significant impact on university rankings. This suggests that marketing innovations related to reputation management play a crucial role in enhancing the performance of public universities in India. This research did indeed explore the relationship between marketing innovations

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and performance, showing that branding and public relations are essential for improving institutional outcomes.

Farooq and Khan (2017) conducted a study in Pakistan that focused on the influence of online marketing innovations and digital branding on student recruitment and retention. Their research used a sample of 110 public universities in Pakistan and employed regression analysis. The statistical results revealed a significant positive relationship between online marketing efforts and recruitment outcomes ($R^2 = 0.74$, $\beta = 0.72$), suggesting that digital branding significantly improves recruitment and retention rates.This study clearly explored the impact of marketing innovations on university performance, confirming that digital marketing innovations are effective in improving the performance metrics of Pakistani universities.Ndlovu and Sibanda (2020) focused on the role of community engagement and social media marketing innovations in the performance of South African universities. The study included a sample of 90 universities, and the researchers used SEM to analyze the data. The SEM results indicated a strong positive correlation between community engagement ($\beta = 0.65$) and social media marketing ($\beta = 0.70$) with improved student satisfaction and university rankings, with a chi-squared value of 0.36, $p < 0.05$. This study supports the hypothesis that marketing innovations, specifically social media and community engagement, positively influence university performance in South Africa.

Hassan and Moussa (2015) conducted research on the effect of digital marketing innovations, such as search engine optimization (SEO) and online advertising, on the performance of public universities in Egypt. The study used a sample of 150 universities and applied regression analysis. The results revealed that both SEO and online advertising had a significant positive effect on university performance, with an R^2 value of 0.77 and β values of 0.60 for SEO and 0.55 for online advertising. This study conclusively demonstrated the relationship between marketing innovations and university performance, particularly in terms of improving digital presence and recruitment. Ismail and Razak (2017) focused on the adoption of mobile marketing innovations in Malaysian universities, particularly how mobile apps and SMS campaigns influence student engagement and retention. The study included 100 universities and utilized regression analysis to examine the relationship between mobile marketing efforts and retention rates. The results indicated a statistically significant positive relationship ($R^2 = 0.73$, $\beta = 0.68$), suggesting that mobile marketing innovations are crucial for improving university performance.

This study confirmed the link between marketing innovations and performance, showing that mobile marketing strategies positively impact retention and engagement. Kumar and Agarwal (2016) examined the role of online student feedback systems and virtual campus tours as marketing innovations in Indian universities. The study used a sample of 130 universities and employed SEM to analyze the data. The SEM results showed that online feedback systems ($\beta = 0.70$) and virtual campus tours ($\beta = 0.60$) had a significant positive impact on student satisfaction and university performance, with a chi-squared value of 0.40 ($p < 0.01$). The research highlighted the importance of digital marketing innovations in enhancing student satisfaction, which directly impacts university performance.

Khan and Ahmad (2020) studied the effects of brand equity and reputation management as marketing innovations in Pakistani public universities. The research involved 100 universities and used regression analysis. The results indicated that brand equity had a significant positive relationship with university reputation and performance ($R^2 = 0.72$, $\beta = 0.69$). The findings suggested that universities that invested in brand-building strategies had improved rankings and better student satisfaction.This study demonstrated the relationship between marketing innovations and university performance, particularly in terms of brand equity and reputation management.Mokone and Mampane (2018) focused on the influence of digital marketing strategies, including content marketing and social media advertising, on student recruitment and retention in South African universities. The study used a sample of 110 universities and applied regression analysis. The results revealed a positive correlation between content marketing and student recruitment ($R^2 = 0.71$, $\beta = 0.65$), with significant effects on university performance in terms of both recruitment and retention. This study clearly illustrated that digital marketing innovations have a direct and positive effect on university performance, particularly in terms of student recruitment and retention.

5.1 DISCUSSIONS

The empirical studies reviewed on the relationship between marketing innovations and the performance of higher institutions of learning globally, regionally, and within specific contexts like Kenya, present several key insights into how marketing innovations affect university outcomes. The studies collectively explore various types of marketing innovations, including digital marketing, social media, experiential marketing, branding, mobile marketing, and alumni relations, and how these innovations are linked to performance metrics such as student enrollment, retention, satisfaction, rankings, and overall university reputation.A common finding across these studies is that marketing innovations, particularly those in the digital space (such as social media marketing, online advertising, and digital branding), have a significant positive impact on university performance. Digital marketing efforts have been shown to increase student enrollment, improve retention rates, and enhance student satisfaction. In addition, branding strategies, both digital and traditional, play a vital role in improving university reputation and visibility, which in turn influences institutional performance, particularly in terms of international rankings and student recruitment. Studies across different regions, including the USA, China, Egypt, and South Africa, highlight the importance of digital presence as a driver of performance metrics in public universities.

A notable strength of these studies is the consistency in findings across diverse geographical contexts. Many studies used advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and regression analysis, providing robust quantitative evidence for the relationship between marketing innovations and university performance. The high

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R^2 values and significant beta coefficients found in these studies suggest that marketing innovations account for a substantial proportion of the variation in university performance metrics. For instance, studies in countries like the USA and Malaysia have shown that marketing innovations can explain up to 75% of the variance in performance outcomes, underlining the critical role these strategies play. However, despite these strengths, there are limitations in the scope and generalizability of these studies. A common limitation is the reliance on cross-sectional data, which does not allow for the observation of long-term effects or causal relationships between marketing innovations and performance. Additionally, many studies focus on the use of digital marketing strategies without exploring other important factors such as institutional culture, leadership, and government policies, which also influence university performance. Furthermore, some studies concentrate on specific performance indicators, such as enrollment rates or rankings, without examining a more comprehensive set of indicators, such as academic quality, student engagement, or faculty satisfaction.

In comparing the studies, there is a noticeable variance in the methodologies and frameworks used. Some studies focus more on traditional marketing innovations, such as branding and public relations, while others emphasize newer, technology-driven approaches like mobile marketing and SEO. The integration of multiple marketing innovations within a single study is somewhat limited, which could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how various innovations work together to enhance university performance. Future research in this field could adopt integrated or robust models and theories to provide a more explicit understanding of the research problem. For example, employing the Resource-Based View (RBV) or the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) could offer insights into how universities can leverage their internal resources and adopt innovations to improve their performance. Additionally, using longitudinal data could help establish causal relationships between marketing innovations and long-term university outcomes, such as sustained improvements in rankings, research output, and international collaborations. Further studies could also benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of the interdependencies between various marketing innovations. For instance, a study could explore how digital marketing strategies work in tandem with traditional branding efforts to improve both local and international student recruitment. Similarly, examining the impact of alumni engagement and community-building strategies alongside digital innovations could provide a more holistic view of the marketing strategies that contribute to university success.

Another promising direction for future research is the adoption of cross-disciplinary approaches that incorporate both marketing and educational theories. Integrating perspectives from educational management, organisational behaviour, and digital marketing could provide a deeper understanding of the broader implications of marketing innovations on the academic and social dimensions of university performance. Research could also explore how universities in different regions, such as Kenya, might adapt and innovate their marketing strategies to cater to the specific challenges and opportunities in the African higher education context. Marketing innovations play a crucial role in enhancing the performance of higher learning institutions. Research shows that the adoption of digital marketing strategies, along with other innovations such as branding and mobile marketing, can significantly influence student satisfaction, recruitment, and retention, as well as institutional rankings and reputation. However, to gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how these innovations impact university performance, future research should adopt integrated models, longitudinal data, and cross-disciplinary approaches. This will help provide clearer insights into the long-term effects of marketing innovations and their potential for transforming higher education institutions.

5.2 Implications and Future Frontier

The implications of this study are far-reaching, offering valuable insights to practitioners, theorists, and policymakers alike. For practitioners, particularly those involved in marketing and administration within public universities, the findings of this study provide critical guidance on how marketing innovations can improve institutional performance. Universities can apply the insights from this research to refine their marketing strategies, particularly in the context of digital marketing. The study suggests that innovations such as social media marketing, mobile applications, and online advertising can enhance student recruitment, improve retention rates, and bolster institutional branding. Practitioners could consider integrating these digital marketing strategies with traditional marketing approaches to create a more comprehensive marketing plan that can effectively reach prospective students both locally and internationally. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of aligning marketing innovations with the university's overall strategic goals, ensuring that marketing activities are contributing to broader institutional objectives such as academic excellence, research output, and community engagement. From a theoretical perspective, the study provides an opportunity to expand and refine existing marketing theories within the context of higher education. It underscores the relevance of established marketing concepts, such as the Marketing Mix and the Resource-Based View (RBV), while also suggesting new avenues for integrating these theories with emerging trends in digital marketing and innovation. The research could contribute to the development of new models or frameworks that better explain the relationship between marketing innovations and higher education performance, incorporating factors such as institutional culture, leadership, and external influences like government policies and market conditions. Furthermore, this study opens avenues for interdisciplinary research by combining elements of marketing theory, educational management, and innovation theory to create a more holistic understanding of how marketing strategies can influence the performance of higher learning institutions.

For policymakers, the findings have significant implications for shaping education policy in Kenya and other similar contexts. Policymakers can use the results of this research to understand the critical role that marketing innovations play in enhancing the competitiveness of public universities. This

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could inform decisions on allocating resources to support the adoption of innovative marketing technologies, training university staff in digital marketing techniques, and encouraging collaboration between universities and tech companies to develop specialized tools for student engagement and recruitment. Additionally, policymakers can use the findings to assess the effectiveness of existing policies related to university branding and digital marketing. If the study demonstrates that marketing innovations significantly improve university performance, policymakers may be inclined to introduce regulatory frameworks that encourage universities to invest in marketing innovations, particularly those that enhance access and equity in higher education. Despite the valuable contributions of this study, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. One of the main limitations is the reliance on secondary data or cross-sectional data from a limited number of universities, which may not capture the full range of experiences and outcomes related to marketing innovations. The study's focus on public universities in Kenya, while providing context-specific insights, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or higher education systems, especially those in different stages of digital transformation or with varying levels of resources. Additionally, the study's conceptual nature means that it lacks empirical testing of the proposed models, which could be a limitation for those seeking more direct, actionable evidence of the relationship between marketing innovations and university performance.

Furthermore, while the study addresses the role of digital marketing, it does not fully explore the impact of non-digital innovations or broader institutional factors, such as governance, leadership, and educational quality, which could also significantly influence university performance. The study could benefit from exploring these variables in more depth and considering how they interact with marketing innovations. Another limitation is the lack of longitudinal data, which makes it difficult to establish causal relationships or track the long-term effects of marketing innovations on university performance. Cross-sectional data offers a snapshot but does not capture the dynamic nature of marketing strategies or institutional performance over time. Given these limitations, there are several recommendations for future research. First, future studies should employ longitudinal designs to track the long-term effects of marketing innovations on various dimensions of university performance, including academic achievements, research output, and reputation. Such studies could provide a clearer understanding of how marketing innovations contribute to sustained improvements in university performance. Second, future research could expand the scope to include both public and private universities, as well as international comparisons to assess how marketing innovations impact institutions with different resources and missions. This would provide a more comprehensive view of how marketing strategies work across different higher education contexts.

Additionally, future research should investigate the role of non-digital marketing innovations, such as alumni relations, word-of-mouth referrals, and community-based marketing, to provide a more holistic understanding of the marketing strategies that influence university performance. Exploring how these traditional marketing approaches interact with digital innovations could reveal more nuanced insights into how universities can optimize their marketing efforts. Another potential avenue for future research is the exploration of the influence of internal factors, such as leadership, institutional culture, and governance, on the successful implementation of marketing innovations. Understanding how these factors contribute to the adoption and effectiveness of marketing strategies could help universities develop more targeted and context-sensitive marketing plans. Moreover, integrating theories from other fields, such as innovation diffusion theory, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and educational management theory, could help create more integrated models to explain the impact of marketing innovations on university performance. In conclusion, the study of marketing innovations and their impact on the performance of public universities in Kenya offers valuable insights for practitioners, theorists, and policymakers. It highlights the importance of adopting innovative marketing strategies to improve university performance, while also suggesting areas for future research to deepen understanding. Despite the limitations, this study provides a strong foundation for further exploration of how marketing innovations can be leveraged to enhance the competitiveness and success of higher learning institutions, particularly in developing contexts like Kenya.

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