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## IMPROVING UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE VIA CUSTOMER-CENTRIC BRANDING IN ZIMBABWE

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**Abstract:** State-owned universities in Zimbabwe are facing intensified competition, both domestically and internationally. To survive and thrive in this competitive landscape, universities are employing various strategies, including customer-based university branding. This study aims to investigate the impact of customer-based university branding as a survival strategy for state-owned universities in Zimbabwe. The study employed a quantitative research methodology and collected data from one thousand students selected from four state-owned universities using probability sampling. The results indicate that there is a positive relationship between customer-based university branding and the capacity of state-owned universities to survive in the face of foreign competition. A conceptual framework was proposed for managing university branding from a customer-based perspective, including university brand elements, managing university communications, developing a university's marketing strategy, and relationship management. The study provides valuable insights for university management on how to brand their respective universities from a customer-based perspective.

**Keywords:** Customer-based branding, State-owned universities, Zimbabwe, Brand elements, University communications, Marketing strategy, Relationship management.

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, state-owned universities are engaged in serious marketing as they compete with other universities for students as well as for funding from their respective governments. Some universities have begun to spread their markets into foreign countries in an effort to grow their 'businesses' in terms of market share and their revenues. Branding has become, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), a very important matter for universities and other educational institutions. Several scholars (Aaker, 1991; Farquar, 1989; Keller, 1993; Rosseti, 2005) view branding as the use of a name, term, symbol or design, or a combination of these, in an effort to identify the products of one seller or a group of sellers in an endeavor to distinguish them from those of competitors.

In Zimbabwe, state-owned universities are differentiated by different names, terms, logos, symbols or other designs, which make it easier for students, prospective students and other stakeholders to quickly identify their degree programs. Most researchers have focused mainly on the advantages of brands in relation to product marketing in the corporate world, and not much research has been done specifically in the area of customer-based university branding of universities. The majority of the researchers have also focused mainly on marketing planning within the context of the university sector (Brookes, 2003). Some of the researchers have focused on marketing communications (Klassen, 2002).

Researchers such as Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton (2004) have passionately looked mainly on university selection requirements and student satisfaction. By embracing customer-based university branding, a

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university is likely to enjoy a considerable return in terms of its increased market share students locally, regionally and internationally.

**Table 1.1**

*Number of Zimbabwean Students Studying in American Universities*

Year	Number of Students
2012	1170
2013	1206
2014	1295
2015	1330
Total	5001

*Note.* Adapted from United States Embassy in Zimbabwe (2017). Number of Zimbabwean Students Studying in American Universities, 2017 Report.

According to the United States Embassy in Zimbabwe (2017), the number of Zimbabwean citizens studying with American universities continues to grow, as shown in the above Table 1.1. This is attributable to a strong desire by Zimbabweans to gain useful career skills and connections before returning home (USA Embassy, 2017).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was driven by the fact that universities that are owned by the state in Zimbabwe are constantly losing students to foreign universities, with negative implications on the Zimbabwean university sector. (Argenti, 2000; Bunzel, 2007; Jevons, 2006) postulate that branding, particularly in the university sector seems mainly to revolve around promotion, mottos, logos, names and advertising without a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a university brand. Therefore, this study sought to establish the impact of 2customer-based university branding as strategy to enhance the survival of state-owned universities in the face of competition from foreign universities.

### *Aim of the Study*

The overall aim of the study was to analyze the impact of customer-based branding as a survival strategy used by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition.

### Objectives of the Study

- To determine the impact of university brand elements in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.
- To assess the impact of university marketing programs in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.
- To assess how the management of university communications can enhance the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition.
- To examine how relationship management can enhance the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.

### Research Questions

- What is the impact of university brand elements in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition?
- What is the impact of university marketing programs in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition?

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- How can the management of university communications enhance the survival of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition?
- What is the impact of relationship management in enhancing the survival of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The underlying hypotheses were as follows:

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between university brand elements and Zimbabwean state-owned universities' capacity to survive foreign competition.

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between university marketing programs and Zimbabwean state-owned universities' capacity to survive foreign competition.

H3<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between the management of university communications and Zimbabwean state-owned universities' capacity to survive foreign competition. H4<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between relationship management and Zimbabwean state-owned universities' capacity to survive foreign competition.

### **Significance of the Study**

Current studies on university branding have mainly focused on the establishment of names and logos, whilst neglecting the need for a holistic approach to university branding through the adoption of the customer-based branding. This study significantly contributes to advancing the frontiers of knowledge, particularly in the area of customer-based branding of universities.

The study will help planners in government to seriously consider coming up with policies that guide efforts by state-owned universities to brand themselves and encouraging them to provide financial resources to ensure the success of these efforts. The study will make recommendations on how customer-based branding can be employed by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe to enhance their capacity to survive foreign competition.

### **Ethical and Legal considerations**

In this study, respondents were not forced or made to feel compelled to provide data under any circumstances (Saunders et al. 2009). The findings of the study were presented comprehensively without prejudice and misrepresentation to the participants as well as other stakeholders indirectly involved.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Branding is a process adopted by any organization which entails assigning a name, symbol or design or in some cases using a combination of these in order to differentiate an organization and its product(s) from those offered by competitors (Dibb et al. 1997; Farquhar, 1989). In Zimbabwe, all universities have a name and logo to clearly distinguish themselves from others. Other scholars (Keller, 2003; Keller et al. 2013) also concur in their assertion that each time a marketer or a business develops a new name, logo or symbol for a product, he or she has developed a new brand.

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model which was developed by Keller (1993) presents the primary variables for constructing brand equity as follows:

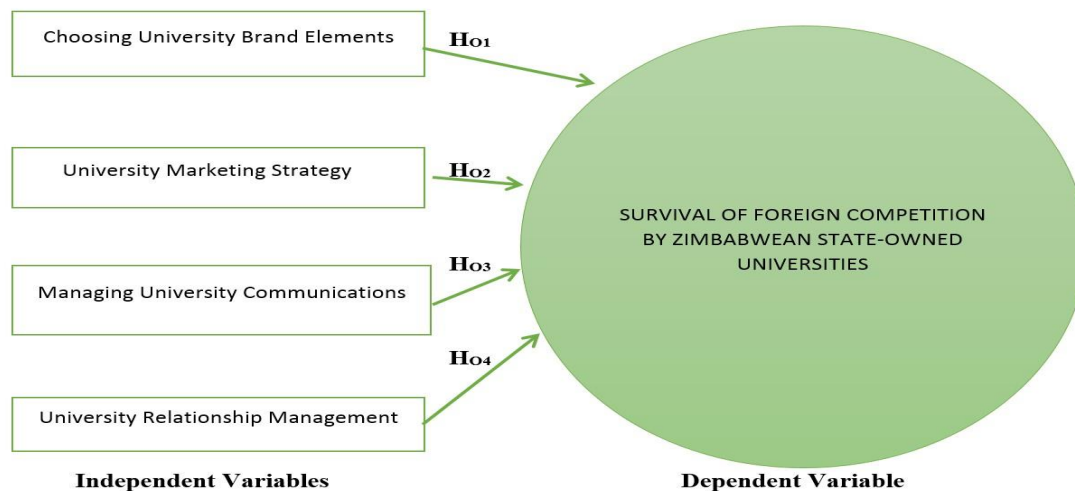
- The initial choice of the brand elements that make up a brand.
- Marketing activities and the designing of the marketing programs
- Leveraging of secondary associations that link the brand with other aspects such as a university, geographic region, another brand, person or event.

The study proposed a conceptual framework for university brand building to enable state-owned universities to survive foreign competition. The conceptual framework has four main variables as follows: choosing university brand elements; university marketing strategy; university communications strategy and university relationship management strategy. The aforesaid components of the model are independent variables, which

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a university has to carefully manage in order to attain the brand equity necessary to survive foreign competition. University brand equity (Survival of foreign competition) is a dependent variable in this study.

Figure 2.1. Customer-Based University Brand Building Conceptual Framework



### ***Choosing University Brand Elements***

According to (Keller, 1998; 1997; 1993), the main components of a brand are brand names, logos, symbols, characters, spokespersons, slogans, jingles, packages and signage. (Ghodeswar, 2008; Gray et al. 2003; Kim et al. 2003) argue that the university brand name is a factor that normally influences the choice of a university in situations where prospective students have never had any meaningful contact with a particular university. Keller (1993) postulate that when choosing brand elements, it is prudent that those responsible for coming up with an organization's brand elements should embrace the following criteria, namely: memorability, meaningfulness, likeability, transferability, adaptability, and protectability.

### ***University Marketing Strategy***

According to Kotler et al. (2009), a strategic plan basically articulates an organization's mission statement as well as its objectives. A state university could improve its market position by considering coming up with well thought out marketing strategy. The university marketing strategy could include many important aspects such as the quality of its degree programs (product offerings); tuition levels (price) to ensure that its prices are competitive and fair; a well thought out promotional strategy to cater for aspects such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion activities, direct marketing, personal selling and web based marketing (promotional mix).

### ***University Communications Strategy***

Ghodeswar (2008) has observed that positioning a brand helps when considering communication objectives relating to the type of message, brand differentiation through themes and slogans, which appeal to the target consumers. Universities should consider investing in advertising, because advertising that is innovatively executed can help the university to break the clutter and impact strongly on the target market.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) argue that through communication, wrong perceptions of a brand can be effectively changed and positive attitudes towards a brand can be reinforced. The major tools of brand communication used to position the brand(s) in the minds of consumers are advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, sponsorships, endorsements, public relations, the internet and integrated brand communications.

A university can build a successful brand through the creative repetition of themes using various types of media. Ghodeswar (2008) has noted that the use of emotive adverts that appeal to the hearts or minds of the

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people is likely to result in an emotional relationship with customers. Keller et al. (2013) indicates that in order to advertise optimally, there is need to understand all the variables impacting the brand, such as new consumer trends, new competition and new technological breakthrough.

Ghodeswar (2008) posits that successful brands usually keep up with competitors by coming up with points of parity in areas where competitors have an obvious advantage, while simultaneously attempting to create points of difference in order to achieve advantages over competitors in other areas. A university needs to develop and implement a sound integrated communication strategy that clearly demonstrates the brands value to the target students. This can be achieved effectively if the message being communicated to the target students is in tandem with the brand value, brand personality and other brand identity dimensions.

In addition to forming the desired brand knowledge structures, marketing communication programs can also provide incentives for eliciting the differential response that makes up customer-based brand equity (Keller, Parameswaran and Jacob, 2013). Brand equity helps marketers to determine how to design and implement different marketing communication options (Keller et al. 2013).

### ***University Relationship Management Strategy***

The establishment of mutually beneficial relationships has helped some companies to retain both customers and employees (Beneke, 2010; Lovelock et al. 2011; Zeithmal et al. 2006). A university that is actively seized in establishing and maintaining relationships is likely to be able to retain its existing students as well as being able to attract new students. According to numerous scholars (Gronroos, 2000; Gummesson, 2002; Herbig and Milewicz, 1995; Klassen, 2002), customer retention implies that two parties that are in a relationship are in a better position to know each other's needs and expectations. A university should be in a position to understand fully what students are expecting from its programs.

According to several scholars (Beneke, 2010, Beneke, 2011; Gronroos, 2000; Drummond and Ensor, 2001), there is a different strategy for each market and marketers need to be careful when selecting customers who are likely to enter into a long-term relationship with them.

Mupemhi (2013) argues that universities should establish relationships with stakeholders such as alumni networks, professional bodies and the industry.

### ***University Branding in the United Kingdom***

In their study to explore the rationale for branding UK universities, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) are of the view that the increase in competition among universities in the United Kingdom for both domestic and international students has driven these universities to focus on clearly articulating their brands through communicating to audiences the performances of the university. Their study just like this one adopted a customer-based branding model which emphasizes the importance by any organization branding to embrace the needs of the customers.

### ***Managing Consumer-Based Brand Equity in Higher Education: Slovenia***

The researcher focused on the applicability customer-based equity to higher education. This is just like this study whose focus is on how state-owned universities in Zimbabwe can make use of customer-based brand equity model to enhance their competitiveness in the face of foreign competition. The purpose of the study by Vukasovic (2015) was to establish the key elements of brand equity for international students by exploring customer-based brand equity theory in its applicability to international higher education.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Research Design***

Causal/explanatory research was chosen for this study to enable the researcher to establish a meaningful relationship between customer-based branding and survival of stateowned universities in the face of foreign



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competition. In this study, customer-based branding is an independent variable, while survival of foreign competition is a dependent variable.

Research Methodology

The researcher found that the quantitative research method was appropriate for this study as the study sought to establish the impact of customer-based university branding as a strategy for enhancing the survival of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition.

The total population of university students in enrolled in state in state-owned universities in Zimbabwe stood at about 72, 262. In this study, probability sampling was adopted. This was achieved by using by random sampling of four (4) state universities out of twelve (12) state universities in Zimbabwe. Sampling was done to ensure lower cost, greater speed of data collection, the availability of population elements and greater accuracy of results. University students were drawn from four state universities in Zimbabwe as follows: One state university (Coded University A) in Harare; one state university (Coded University B) in the Midlands Province; one state university (Coded University C) in the Bulawayo Province; and one state university (Coded University D) in Mashonaland Central. The students were drawn across all levels of study, from undergraduate, masters, through to doctoral level. University students were selected as respondents for this study because they are the most important stakeholders as far as university branding is concerned.

The researcher employed structured questions in order to collect data owing to magnitude of this study. The main advantage of structured questions is that they are easy to collect, tabulate and analyze and quantify (Churchill and Lacobucii, 2002; Leedy and Ormrod, 2006; Malhotra, 2004). Data gathering for this study took a period of three (3) months: February to April 2018. A total of 1000 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 700 were retrieved.

RESULTS

Reliability of the Instrument

Cronbach Alpha was used as an index of reliability and it provides a measure of internal consistency of a scale or test expressed as a number between 0 and 1. Before the research instrument was used to collect data, a pilot study was carried out to assess the reliability and validity of the research instrument using the Cronbach Alpha statistic. The Cronbach Alpha of 0.801 (normal cut-off =0.60) was obtained for all the Likert scale questions based on customerbased branding as a strategy to survive foreign competition by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe. Table 4.1 shows the Cronbach Alpha.

Table 4.1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.801	.801	59

Response Rate

For the purposes of this study, 1000 questionnaires were distributed to the selected 4 state universities in Zimbabwe. The sample of the students in each of the 4 state universities from which the data was collected is shown in the table 4.2 overleaf. Raosoft (2010) postulates that the recommended sample size for a population greater than 20 000, at confidence level of 95 percent, is 377. In this study, a sample size of 1000 was used, which far exceeded the recommended Raosoft (2010) sample size of 377. This therefore justifies the suitability of the total sample size of 1000 students extracted from 4 (four) state universities. Out of a total of 1000 self-administered questionnaires, 700 (70%) were responded to, and this validates the research study, allowing the

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researcher to make deductions about customer-based university branding as a strategy for enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition

Table 4.2

### Response Rate

University	Sample		Respondents	Response Rate
A	300	200	67%	
B	400	300	75%	
C	150	100	67%	
D	150	100	67%	
Total	1000		700	70%

Note. Key

- A - One large state university based in Harare Province
- B - One state university based in Midlands Province
- C - One state university based in Mashonaland Central Province
- D - One state university based in Bulawayo Province

### Respondents

This section discusses demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of the following: distribution of respondents by gender, distribution of respondents by age, distribution by nationality, distribution of respondents by current level of studies, distribution of respondents by university and distribution of respondents by student status.

Gender, age group, nationality, current level of studies, student status, university enrolment and employment status represented the demographic variables for which the data was collected. Demographic information was collected in order to give insights about characteristics of the respondents. The findings are presented in Table 4.4 overleaf.

Table 4.3

### Distribution of Respondents by Gender n=700

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	337	48.1	48.1	48.1
	Female	363	51.9	51.9	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

Female students surveyed in this study constitute the larger group of respondents (51.9%) and male students represented the smaller group of the respondents (48.1%). Hence from the above results, there are more female students in Zimbabwe's state universities as compared to male students.

Figure 4.1. Distribution of Respondents by Age (n=700)

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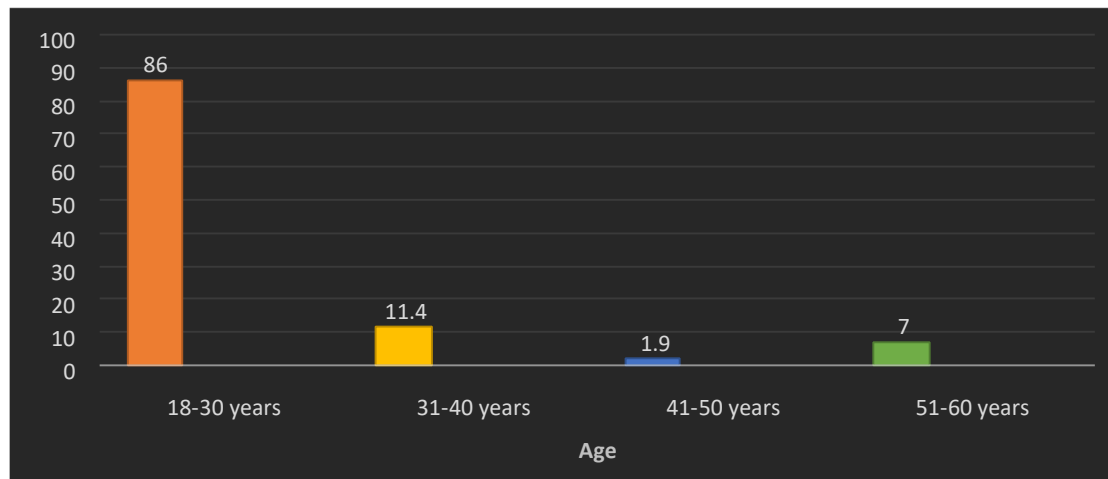
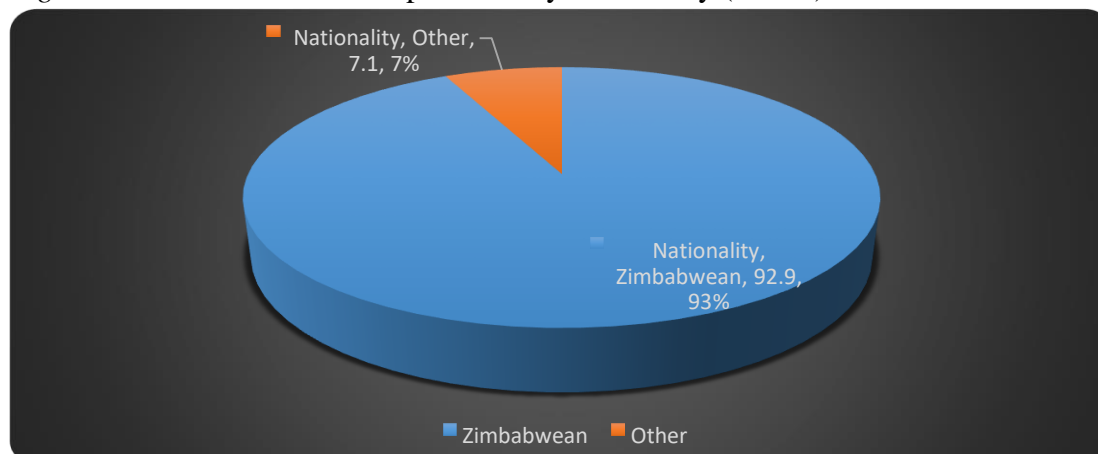


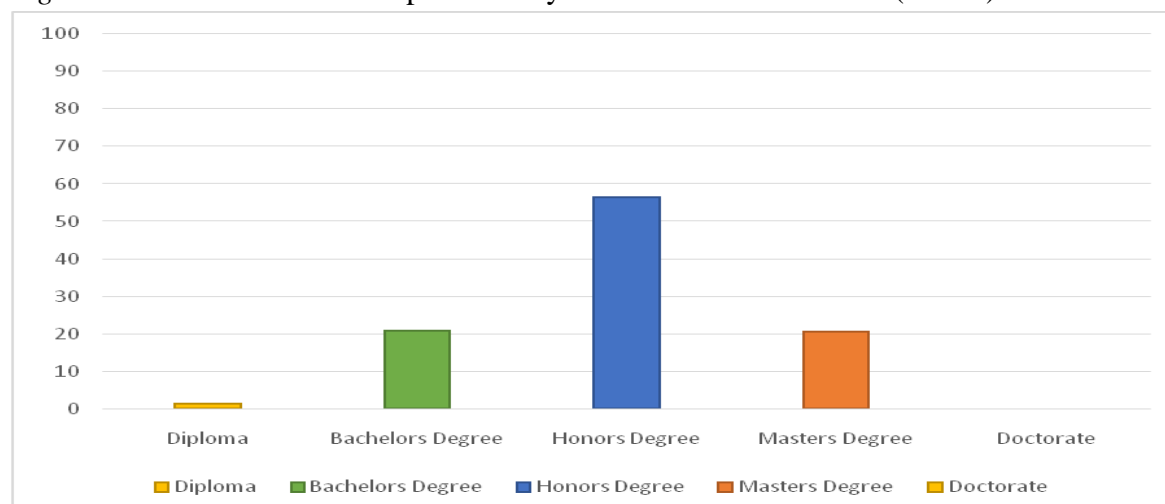
Figure 4.1 shows that most research respondents were in the age range 18-30 years (86%). This is because most people are enrolled at colleges from 18-30 years of age. Respondents aged 31-40 years represented 11.4%, whilst those aged 51-60 years represented only 7% of the 700 respondents. Those in the age range 41-50 years deviated greatly from the sample, with a representation of only 1.9%.

Figure 4.2. Distribution of Respondents by Nationality (n=700)



Zimbabwean students represented the majority of the respondents (92.9%) and foreign students represented only 7.1% of the respondents, as highlighted in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.3. Distribution of Respondents by Current Level of Studies (n=700)

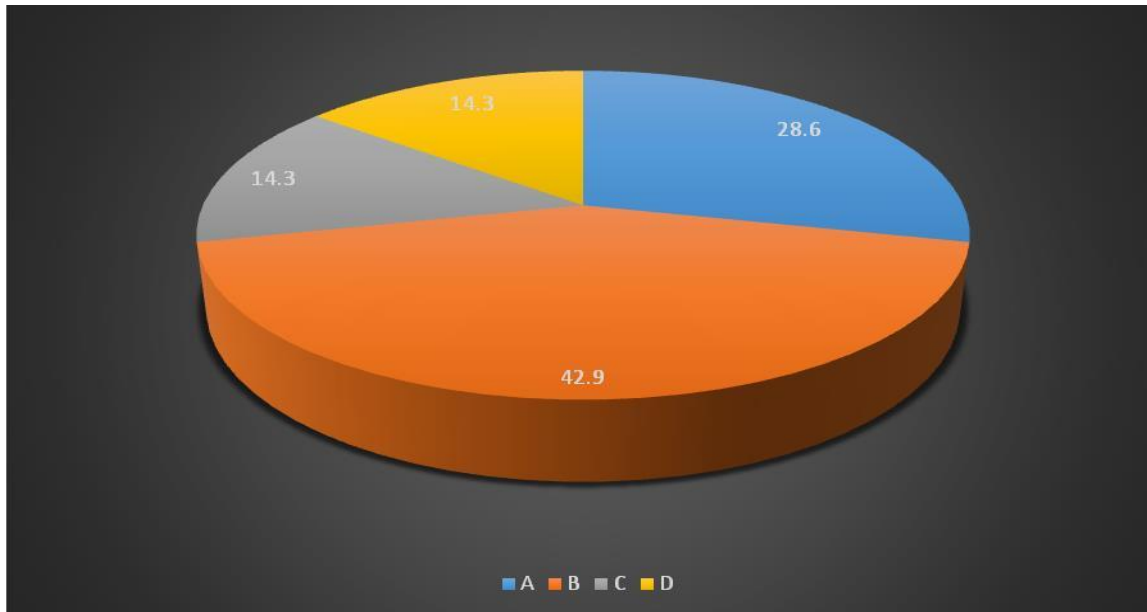




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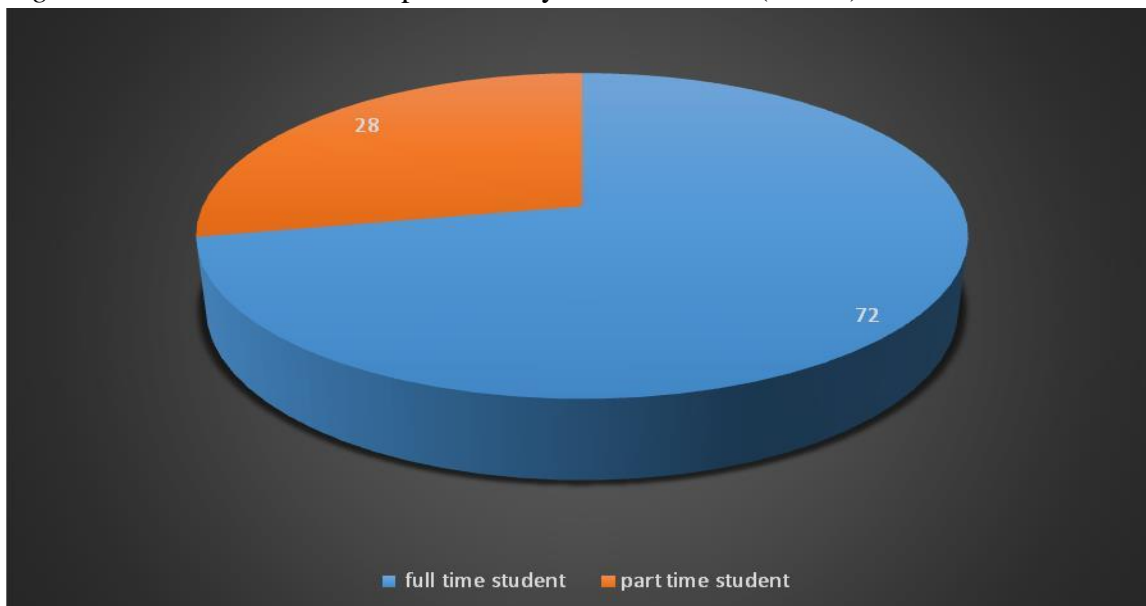
Results from Figure 4.3 indicate that more than half of the students are studying towards an Honors degree (56.4%). Students pursuing a bachelor's degree and master's degree were 20.7% and 20.4% respectively. Students who were studying towards a diploma and doctoral degree represented smallest proportion of the respondents, at 1.3% and 1.1% respectively.

Figure 4.4. Distribution of Respondents by University (n=700)



The majority of the respondents were from University B (42.9%), followed by University A, which had 28.6% of the respondents. Universities C and D had the same number of respondents (14.3%) respectively.

Figure 4.5. Distribution of Respondents by Student Status (n=700)



The majority of the respondents in the study were full-time students (72%), and part-time students made up only 28%, as depicted in Figure 4.5.

Table 4.4

*Distribution of Respondents by Employment Status (n=700)*

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		<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent Valid</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative Percent</u>
Employee nt Status	Self-employed	294	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Employed	143 49	20.4	20.4	62.4
	Business person	214	7.0	7.0	69.4
	Unemployed		30.6	30.6	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 4.4, the majority of the respondents in the study were self-employed (42%). Respondents who were unemployed represented 30.6% of the proportion. Respondents who were employed represented 20.4% of the proportion and those with businesses represented 7% of the total sample.

### Factor Analysis

This section discusses the testing conditions to justify the use of factor analysis and the following was done KMO and Bartlett's test. Factor extraction and principal component analysis are also discussed in this section. Factor analysis was used to analyze data. It helped to identify the main dimensions of customer-based university branding. During the analysis, 4 items on the customer 'based branding' construct were run on SPSS. SPSS output 2 showed several parts of the output, namely the Kaiser-Meyen-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO statistic varies between 0 and 1 and a value of 0 indicates that the sum of partial correlations is large, relative to the sum of correlations, and this will indicate diffusion in the pattern of correlations (Kaiser, 1974). A value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis will yield distinct and reliable factors. Field (2013) recommend considering values greater than 0.5 as acceptable, values between 0.50-0.7 as mediocre, values between 0.7-0.8 as good, values between 0.8-0.9 as great, and values above 0.9 as superb (Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy stood at 0.845. This value falls within the range of great values and this made the researcher confident that factor analysis was appropriate for this data.

Bartlett's measure tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix. For factor analysis to work, there is need for some relationships to exist between variables and this test should be significant (have a significance of less than 0.05). This tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix, so there will be some relationships between the variables. For this data, Bartlett's test of sphericity is highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). The value was significant enough to qualify the test as appropriate, as it indicates that there are some relationships between the variables being measured. There were no highly correlated factors.

Table 4.5

*Testing Conditions to Justify Use of Factor Analysis (KMO & Bartlett's Test)*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling

.754

Adequacy Approx. Chi-Square 667.338

Bartlett's Test of

Df 6

Sphericity

Sig. .000

Table 4.6

*Factor Extraction*

Total Variance Explained

Component Initial Eigen values Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings

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Total Variance		% of %	Cumulative	Total	% of	Cumulative	Variance	%
1	2.334	58.351	58.351	2.334	58.351	58.351		
2	.651	16.266	74.617					
3	.578	14.458	89.076					
4	.437	10.924	100.000					

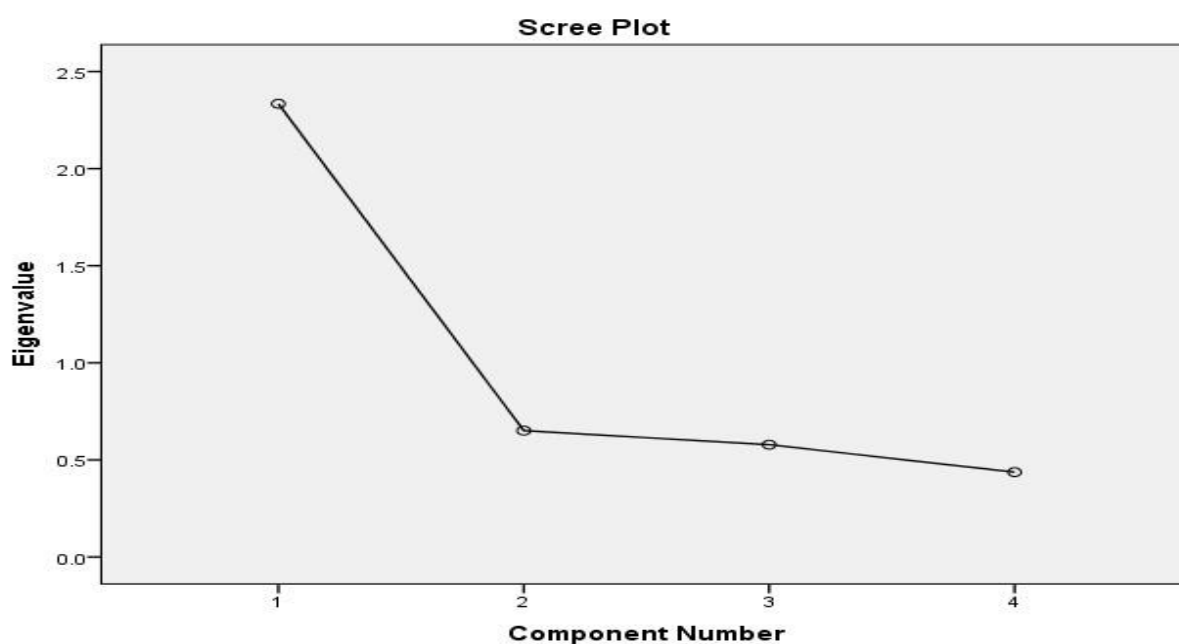
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

SPSS Output 3 listed the Eigen values associated with each linear component/factor before extraction, after extraction and after rotation. Before extraction, SPSS had identified 8 linear components within the data set. The Eigen values associated with each factor represented the variance explained by that particular linear component and SPSS also displayed the Eigen values in terms of the percentage of variance explained, such that factor 1 explains 58.3% of the total variance. Kaiser (1974) has noted that the first few factors explain relatively large amounts of variance, especially factor 1, whereas subsequent factors explain only small amounts of variance as shown by 16.266%, 14.458% and 10.924% respectively. SPSS then extracts all factors with Eigen values greater than 1, leaving only 2 factors, and the Eigen values associated with these factors are again displayed (58.3% for factor 1 and 16.266% for factor 2). In the final part of the table (rotation sums of squared loadings), the Eigen values of the factors after rotation are displayed.

### Principal Component Analysis

At this stage, SPSS has extracted 4 factors and the scree plot has been produced. The scree plot below indicates the point of inflexion on the curve. After a factor analysis was conducted on 4 different constructs of customer-based university branding as a survival strategy used by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe, this scree plot revealed that 3 of those factors explain most of the variability, because the line starts to straighten after factor 1. The remaining factor explains a very small proportion of the variability and is likely to be unimportant.

Figure 4.6. The Scree Plot



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Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was done using Pearson correlation coefficient in order to examine the relationship that exists between customer-based branding (Independent variable) and survival of foreign competition (Dependent variable). Pearson Correlation Coefficient measures the association or statistical relationship between two variables, and it was used because it is based on the method of covariance and gives information on the direction and magnitude of association between customer-based university branding and survival of foreign competition. Before the Pearson Correlation was done, all variables were transformed and recoded by grouping the categories (brand elements, marketing programs, relationship management, and the management of university communications) together.

Table 4.7

H1<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between university brand elements and Zimbabwean state-owned universities' capacity to survive foreign competition.

Branding competition by state-owned elements		Recode universities	Survival of foreign
Recode elements	Pearson	1	.650**
	Correlation		.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Survival of foreign competition	N	700	699
	Pearson	.650**	1
	Correlation	.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	700	700

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation coefficient analyzing university brand elements in relation to the survival of foreign competition by Zimbabwean state-owned universities yielded a coefficient value of .650. Since this value produced a significant difference at the 0.01 level, the researcher rejected null hypothesis 1 and accepted alternative hypothesis 1 that there is a relationship between branding elements and survival of foreign competition by Zimbabwean state-owned universities at 0.01 significance level.

Table 4.8

H2<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between university marketing programs and Zimbabwean state owned universities' capacity to survive foreign competition.

Recode Survival of foreign competition marketing by Zimbabwean state-owned programs universities			
Recode programs	Pearson	1	.600**
	Correlation		.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Survival of foreign competition	N	700	700
	Pearson	.600**	1
	Correlation	.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		

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N 700 700

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation coefficient analyzing the marketing programs of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in relation to their capacity to survive foreign competition yielded a coefficient value of .600. Since this value produced a significant difference at the 0.01 significance level, the researcher rejected null hypothesis 2 and accepted alternative hypothesis 2 that there is a relationship between state universities’ marketing programs and their capacity to survive foreign competition.

Table 4.9

*H3<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between the management of university communications and Zimbabwean state-owned universities’ capacity to survive foreign competition.*

Recode Survival of foreign communications competition by Zimbabwean management state-owned universities

Recode management	Pearson		.718**
	Correlation	1	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Survival of foreign competition	N	700	700
	Pearson	.718**	1
	Correlation	.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	700	700

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation coefficient analyzing university’s communications against Zimbabwean state-owned universities’ competitiveness yielded a coefficient value of .718. Since this value produced a significant difference at the 0.01 significance level, the researcher rejected null hypothesis and accepted alternative hypothesis that there is a relationship between the management of university’s communications and their ability to survive foreign competition.

Table 4.10

*H4<sub>0</sub> There is no relationship between relationship management and the competitiveness of Zimbabwean state-owned universities*

Survival of foreign competition by Relationship Zimbabwean state-owned Management universities

Pearson Correlation	1	.692**
Relationship management Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	700	700
Pearson Correlation	.692**	1
Survival of foreign competition	.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)		
N	700	700

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation coefficient analyzing university’s relationship management in relation to their capacity to survive foreign competition yielded a coefficient value of .692. Since this value produced a significant

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difference at the 0.01 significance level, the researcher rejected null hypothesis and accepted alternative hypothesis that there is a relationship between universities’ relationship management and their capacity to survive foreign competition.

**Objective 1: To determine the impact of university brand elements in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

In order to determine the impact of university brand elements as a strategy for enhancing competitiveness of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition, regression analysis was used. Regression analysis was used because it was underpinned by the assumption that the correlation involving two variables (brand elements and competitiveness of state-owned universities) is linear, that is, an increase in the values on one variable is linked with either an increase (positive relationship) or decrease (negative relationship) on the other variable, and changes in the value on both variables occur at the same rate. In this case, branding elements were regressed against competitiveness of state-owned universities.

Table 4.11

Model Summary

Adjusted R

Model	R	R Square	Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.348 <sup>a</sup>	.781	.111	.79989

Predictors: brand elements

The model summary depicts that the interaction between branding elements and the competitiveness of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe represented 78.1% ( $R^2=.781$ ) while the remaining 21.9% is attributable to factors not included in the study.

Table 4.12

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	a. Dependent Variable:
1	Regression	39.053	11.847	347	.113	3.32	Competitiveness of state-owned universities
	Residual		352	.034		.003 <sup>b</sup>	
	Total	50.900	699				

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand elements

Table 4.13 illustrates that there is a linear relationship between brand elements and the competitiveness of state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition, which is highly significant ( $F=3.32$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Objective 2: To assess the impact of university marketing programs in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

In order to assess the impact of university marketing programs in enhancing the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition, linear regression was used, and the results are presented in the following tables.

Table 4.13

Model Summary

Adjusted R



Original Article

Model	R	R Square	Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.499 <sup>a</sup>	.249	.713	.87117

Predictors: University marketing programs

The model summary depicts that the interaction between university marketing programs and the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities represented 71.3% ( $R^2=.713$ ), the other 28.7% is attributable to factors not included in the study.

Table 4.14

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	167.727	33	5.083	6.67	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	505.457	666	.759		
Total	673.185	699			

a) Dependent Variable: Survival of foreign competition by Zimbabwean stateowned universities.

b) Predictors: University marketing programs

Table 4.14 illustrates that there is a linear relationship between university marketing programs and Zimbabwean’s state-owned universities’ capacity to survive foreign competition, which is highly significant ( $F=6.67$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Objective 3: To assess how the management of university communications can enhance the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

Table 4.15

Model Summary

Std. Error of the

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Estimate
1	.387 <sup>a</sup>	.650	.144	.90810

a. Predictors: (Constant), the management of university communications

The model summary reveals that the interaction between the management of university communications and the competitiveness of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe represented 65% ( $R^2=.650$ ), while the other 35% is attributable to factors not included in the study.

Table 4.16

ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	100.932	5	20.186	24.479	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	572.302	694	.825		
Total	673.234	699			

a. Dependent Variable: Survival of foreign competition by state universities in Zimbabwe

b. Predictors: (Constant), The management of university communications

Table 4.16 illustrates that there is a linear relationship between the management of university communications and the capacity of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe to survive foreign competition, which is highly significant ( $F=24.48$ ,  $p<0.05$ )

## Original Article

**Objective 4: To examine how relationship management can enhance the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

In order to assess how managing university relations can enhance the survival of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition, linear regression was used, and the results are presented in following section.

Table 4.17

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.247a	.061	.051	1.03404 a.	Predictors: (Constant), Managing university relations

The model summary depicts that the interaction between managing university relations and the survival of foreign competition by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe represented 61% ( $R^2=.061$ ), and the other 39% is attributable to factors not included in the study.

Table 4.18

### ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	47.808	8	5.976	5.59	.000b
Residual	738.847	691	1.069		
Total	786.655	699			

a. Dependent Variable: Survival of foreign competition by state-owned universities

b. Predictors: (Constant), Managing university relations

Table 4.18 above illustrates that there is a linear relationship between managing university relations and survival of foreign competition by Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition, which is highly significant ( $F=5.59$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

**Objective 1: To determine the impact of university brand elements in enhancing the competitiveness of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

Every state-owned university in Zimbabwe has managed to come up with brand elements such as a university name, symbol, logo and other important brand elements to distinguish themselves from others.

**Objective 2: To assess the impact of university marketing programs in enhancing the competitiveness of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

It was established that the majority of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe do not have a marketing strategy to help them to market their academic programs at local, regional and at international level.

**Objective 3: To assess how the management of university communications can enhance the competitiveness of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition.**

The study established that most state-owned universities in Zimbabwe rely on advertising as their major communications method. In the majority of cases, state-owned universities merely advertise their programs when it is time to enroll new programs.

**Objective 4: To examine how relationship management can enhance the competitiveness of Zimbabwean state-owned universities in the face of foreign competition.**

## **Original Article**

The majority of state-owned universities in Zimbabwe are not fully exploiting relationship management in order to attract and retain students in the face of foreign competition.

### Recommendations to State-Owned Universities in Zimbabwe

Drawing from the findings and conclusions made, the following 10 recommendations are put forward:

1. State-owned universities should endeavor to come up with brand elements that will enable a university to be distinct in the eyes of its stakeholders, particularly prospective and existing students.
2. State universities in Zimbabwe could also consider crafting marketing strategies, which most of these universities do not seem to have.
3. It is recommended that universities establish marketing departments that are charged with crafting a university's communications strategy.
4. This study recommends that state-owned universities consider embracing public relations to the full. It is therefore recommended that universities have a fully-fledged public relations or corporate communications department, which is positioned to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between a university and its publics.
5. State universities could also consider sending their representatives or marketing personnel to countries in the region and internationally so that they can meet face-to-face with prospective students and their parents, government officials and other stakeholders. Face-to-face interactions have the advantage of giving university officials the opportunity to answer questions from prospective students and other stakeholders.
6. State universities in Zimbabwe should invest in providing adequate accommodation facilities for students. Most students at state universities in Zimbabwe struggle to get decent accommodation and most are forced to rent outside campus. Moreover, at most state universities, library facilities are not adequate to cater for the needs of students. The student population is always increasing against a background of limited facilities.
7. Universities are centers of research and it is imperative that state universities subscribe to journals to enable their students to access up-to-date journal articles so that they can effectively conduct their research activities.
8. State universities could also consider crafting and pursuing a relationship management strategy in order to be able to compete meaningfully at local, regional and international levels. Focusing on satisfying existing students may result in the marketing of a university and its products as students speak well of it to family members, relatives, friends etc., who might be considering a university to study with.
9. State universities could consider recognizing Diplomas and Higher National Diplomas, allowing entry into either year 3 of a degree program to someone with a Diploma and entry into year 4 for someone with a Higher National Diploma. Alternatively, state universities could come up with a one-year special Honors for students with Higher National Diplomas.
10. State universities in Zimbabwe could also consider internationally recognized professional qualifications to allow their holders to either do a one-year special honors degree or even progress to post-graduate studies. Although this is a common practice in most countries, at most state-owned universities in Zimbabwe, a professional qualification like IMM, CIM, CIMA, ACCA, etc. is considered equivalent to G.C.E. Advanced level.
11. State universities in Zimbabwe could consider accepting credits for studies done at other universities so that a student can simply continue or be exempted from doing courses/subjects already done at his/her previous university.

## Original Article

### ***Theoretical Contributions***

The study has revealed that customer-based branding is a powerful strategy to build a university brand and enhance a university to compete effectively at local, regional and international level. The aim of this study was to assess the impact of customer-based university branding as a strategy used by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe in the face of foreign competition.

The study came up with a conceptual model for building university brand equity, which is an easy to use road map that sets out how a state-owned university can build its brand in order to be competitive. The study adapted the customer-based branding to come up with a refined model that can also be used by universities and other players in the services industry.

The conceptual model adds value to university branding literature by filling the gaps in Keller's model and including the following variables:

- University brand elements
- University marketing programs
- The management of university communications
- Relationship management

### ***Methodological Contributions***

The contribution of this thesis to research methodology is related to the contributions of the theory. The study was based on the customer-based branding approach which is ordinarily used in the commercial world. The customer-based branding approach influenced the researcher to adopt a quantitative research method which is based on the positivism paradigm. The paradigm focuses on measurable variables, in this study, variables such as brand elements, marketing strategy, marketing communications and relationship management were measured. Hypotheses based on customer-based branding were also generated and tested.

### ***Practical Contributions***

The study also recommended strategies for branding state-owned to enable them to become competitive in the face of foreign competition. These strategies revolve around the following:

- University brand elements;
- University marketing programs;
- The management of university communications
- Relationship management

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study has focused on the impact of customer-based university branding as a strategy used by state-owned universities to survive foreign competition. However, it is prudent to note that research results of this study have highlighted some strong indicators of areas that require further research. The following areas are recommended for future research:

1. The impact of customer-based branding as a strategy for expanding market share by privately-owned universities in Zimbabwe.
2. The impact of university branding on the retention of academic staff: case of stateowned universities.
3. The impact of company-based branding as a strategy for generating revenue by stateowned universities in Zimbabwe.
4. The impact of company-based branding as a strategy for maximizing student satisfaction by state-owned universities in Zimbabwe.

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