

Private Investment and University Ranking: The Role of Media Coverage in Africa

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Abstract

This study examined the role of media coverage in the ranking universities and its influence on the private investment decisions in University in Africa. Using the descriptive survey design and purposive sampling technique to select 62 respondents comprising of 42 students and 20 parents/Guardians to ascertain their perception on the extent to which media coverage, with particular reference to university ranking reports correlates with education consumer investment decisions in university education. An online questionnaire tagged "Questionnaire on Media Ranking Reports and Private Investment in University Education (QMRRPIUE)" and secondary data from available literature were used as instruments to collect the data for the study. The data collected were analysed using the correlation statistical analysis. Media coverage, university ranking in particular had a significant positive correlation with education consumers' investment decision in University education. A balanced media coverage of universities issues; creation of deeper awareness and effective communication network with news reporters as an investment in public understanding of what is happening in the school and partnership with grassroot global media outlets for effective information dissemination as a way forward amongst others.

Keywords: Private Investment, University Ranking, Media Coverage, Africa.

Introduction

In recent times, the attitude of private consumers of higher education has been primed by the type and quality information received from the different media access points ranging from the newspapers to personal telephone handset. The role of media in Higher Education from an African perspective with special reference to universities in developing nations is that of an influential intermediary medium which has power to translate information to inform and enlighten the consumers of University education with the view of guiding their understanding and investment decisions. Also, the media has the powers to also exclude certain information from their reportage thereby making the issues reported on to seem unfamiliar or even threatening. Amongst others, the education stakeholders of Universities in Africa are challenged on how ensure quality university education as well as make informed education investment decisions in the mist of the low-ranking results. Furthermore, the cost of university education in Africa has escalated beyond the income of an average household due the cost sharing policy adopted by most African countries (Imogen, 2016; Teferra (2014); Randriamahenintsoa, 2013; UNESCO, 2011; Chikeziri, 2009). However, students, parents and guardians want to have real value for their investment in education; they want to compare the cost and value added among their institutional choices. An average prospective consumer or shopper of higher education be it the students, parents, government, or employer of labour will frequently supplement their search by turning to the media (Print, audio and visual) via publications (newspapers), radio, television and internet or may refer to one or more ranking publications for information. This is because the media through their coverage of universities and rankings reports is believe could provide the public with direct up-to date information and in-depth understanding of happenings in higher education systems and the place values of these universities to guide them in making rational investment decisions; but they have often than not been very frustrated as the content of media coverage of universities in Africa has been very scanty and most unbalanced(Arun, 2019; Ofem, 2015 and Mockler, 2012); mostly reactive rather than proactive. The global ranking positions and reports have also not favoured African universities, making ranking results to appear unreliable and even more difficult for the stakeholders to make their school /career choice. This study examined the role of media coverage in the ranking universities and its influence on the private investment decisions on University in Africa.

Literature Review

The Concept of Media Coverage

Media coverage as a concept has been viewed from different dimensions. The Collins dictionary sees media coverage as the reporting of something in the television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. While the Lawinsider (2020) sees media coverage as any reporting, recording, broadcasting, narrowcasting,

cablecasting or webcasting of events by the media using television, radio, photographic, recording, or other electronic devices. Furthermore, the term media coverage is used to refer to all blog articles, RSS feeds, video content or other types of digital content (produced by individuals or organisations other than your own company) where your brand, products or services are discussed or shown (Shine and O'Donoghue.2013). Also, Atinternet, (2020) aver that analysing media coverage can help in the understanding of performance in terms of brand awareness and market presence. Simply put, media coverage is whatever the media decides to broadcast. The power of media is extensive and huge; ranging from educating and influencing people at a very little cost, to informing the people about the latest happening around them and the world. Hence, expected should perform a noble mission of enlightening people and discourage sectarian, communal and divisive trends, Preeti (2014).

The media can affect the scope and form of public knowledge, values, and action via its agenda setting, issue framing, and audience priming functions. The media can propagate better public knowledge by providing more information that reflects an accurate understanding of issues and problems in any particular field (McCluskey, and Swinnen, 2011; and Prat & Strömberg 2011). Media outlets, whether publicly or privately owned are believed can provide the required supportive coverage and messages in to enhance the visibility of education programmes, broaden its audience and lend added credibility to the message. In other words, it can aid in the decision making through their story lines. According to the UN Women Virtual knowledge Centre (2020), media coverage can either be placed or earned. It is Placed coverage when paid for and are produced by a public relations (PR) agency of a specialised organization hired for a particular purpose. While the Earned media coverage is usually not paid for but produced by journalists, or a free contribution submitted by the campaign (e.g. letters to the editor, open editorials). Despite these importance and diversities of media coverage for public understanding of education, news reporting on universities in Africa is said to be highly biased.

Media Coverage and University Ranking

With the globalisation of higher education with international press coverage, the impact that rankings on universities in the developing world is worth exploring. Generally, ranking of universities are mostly done by the webometrics, Times Higher Education (THE) and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) also known as the Shanghai ranking (Salmi, 2011). While ranking reports most often than not serve as a strong determinant of educational policy competition and a catalyst for improvements in quality; they also tend to signal and showcase high quality universities from which prospective consumers can readily demand from.

Table 1: 2019 Webometric ranking of First 10 African Universities

Ranking	World Rank ▲	University							Excellence Rank*
1	276	University of Cape Town							251
2	425	Stellenbosch University							447
3	433	University of the Witwatersrand							357
4	448	University of Pretoria							492
5	621	University of Kwazulu Natal							462
6	668	Cairo University							521
7	822	University of Johannesburg							563
8	937	University of South Africa							1118
9	944	University of the Western Cape							1054
10	1016	Alexandria University							837

Source: 2019 Webometric of Universities

However, about 65% of Africa's higher education system are universities and the 2019 Webometric ranking result shows that the best university in Africa has a World Rank of 276 and Excellence Rank of 251 as shown on Table 1. From inception, global ranking systems are criticized for favouring certain types of universities and certain aspects of higher education (e.g. science and research) without understanding the context in which HEIs operate and their unique missions and goals in dealing with social and economic priorities of their region (Okebukola, 2010). This led to the establishment of the African Quality Rating Mechanism to mitigate the challenges facing African Higher Institutions African Union Commission (2008). Despite these realities of the challenges of African universities reported by the media, it is pertinent to note that, what is not represented or is excluded can just be as important or more so than that which is included in the media coverage. For instance, there are significant development efforts in higher education in Africa geared towards promoting quality higher education and fostering the African Unity.

Some of these efforts include:

- The harmonisation of higher education to:
 - Foster collaboration and partnerships among higher education institutions particularly in the area of research in pursuit of solutions to both African and global problems.
 - Promote inter-regional and internal cooperation in the fields of recognition of studies, certificates, degrees, etc
 - Facilitate exchange programmes which encouraged the mobility of students, teachers, and researcher in the region.
 - Encourage the efficient use of human resources available in Africa and of the diaspora to help speed up development in the individual countries and limit African brain drain.
- Introduction of African credit system
- Introduction of the African Reform Qualification framework (License – Master – Doctorate Reforms)
- African Quality Rating Mechanism
- Creating regional centres of Excellence
- African Higher Education Research Space (AHERS)
- Pan African university

For most African universities, global rankings results are used as opportunities to increase efforts at quality improvement and capacity building which have stimulated efficiency, promoted accountability and enhanced proprietor funding. At the regional and national levels, African Scholars, have reported that while good ranking results improves institution's self-esteem and quality improvement efforts, it like to receive too much attention at the detriment institutional goals and missions; and violation of academic integrity whereby institutions falsify information and manipulations to increase their ranking scores which will by extension misguide the consumers of university education (Adeyemo, 2015; Liu, 2011; Okebukola, 2010 & Oyewole, 2010).

Media Coverage and University's Private Investment Decisions

Media coverage of universities has a strong impact on consumers' perception of the quality of education and viable programmes on offer in universities. DellaVigna & Gentzkow (2010) and Glynn & Huges (2014) aver that exposure to media can systematically alter beliefs and consumer behavior. This therefore calls for extra care to be taken by media outlets to ensure the university education consumer behaviour are well guided. The media outlets have been criticised for most times portraying Africa and her education system in a negative perspective (Shine, 2017; Alhamdan, Al-Saadi, & Baroutsis, 2014; Mockler, 2012). Since negative news are believed to sell best; could this in part explain why news coverage on higher education in Africa is predominantly on crime, disaster, student/staff unrest, school vacancies, sporting event, etc; rather than on the improvement and development efforts?; could it also be the reason why the African universities do not have a chance of appearing top on the global rankings? This is in line with Bellah (2020) that, most media outlets tend to cover issues that they assume will interest the public; focusing on processes and personalities; favoring reports regarding problems in schools rather than paying attention to what is actually happening in the education sector; explaining why it is happening and

highlighting what people need to know as well as focusing on student success and inspirational stories. McCluskey, Swinnen, & Vandemoortele, 2015; developed a simple theoretical model that explains the slant towards negative coverage in news media to how consumer preferences affect the information market and found out that where news is informative and consumers are risk averse, consumers derive higher utility from news with negatively biased information which drives the media's tendency to publish mostly bad news. This call for balance in media reportage. Balance is also central to reporting. Balance gives or articulate the views of both sides of a given story. The media plays an essential role in society, but surveys indicate that the public views the media as biased. In this context, the opposite of balance is bias. Media bias is said to lie in the eyes of the beholder. Baron (2006), defines Media bias as the absence of balance resulting in one side of a story receiving unwarranted attention.

Several scholars have identified the reasons for media bias to include: response to consumer references, pressure to attract attention, ideology for partisan politics in which the owner of the media outlet tend to support popular views, relationship between the Journalist and the source of information, and incentive to attract large number of readers (Baron, 2006; Groseclose and Milyo, 2005; Dyck and Zingale, 2002). This is supported by McCluskey et al. (2015; Dionne, Darrell and Whitehurst, 2009) who explained that negative news coverage has likely ability to dominate positive news stories. Their argument is based on the premise that consumers use the information from positive media stories to take advantage of opportunities from positive shocks and use the information from negative stories to avoid negative shocks. If utility is concave, the marginal loss in utility from not consuming the first bad news story is greater than the marginal gain in utility from consuming the first positive news story. As a result, consumers will choose to consume more negative stories than positive ones. However, Poortinga & Pidgeon (2004) have criticize these studies, warning about possible confusion between pure negativity bias and confirmatory bias in exploring the impact of new information and media reports on citizens' perception. Prior beliefs may play an important role in selecting and processing the information provided by media. Despite the bias that the media sources may represent, mass media can be considered as a good proxy for people's opinions in certain situations (Ofem, 2015; Baron, 2005).

Methodology

The descriptive survey and purposive sampling technique were used to select 62 respondents comprising of 42 students and 20 parents/Gaurdians to ascertain their perception on the extent to which university ranking reports influence their choice and investment in university education. An online questionnaire tagged "Questionnaire on Media Ranking Reports and Private Investment in University Education (QMRRPIUE)" and secondary data from available literature were used as instruments to collect the data for the study. The data collected were analysed using the correlation and Liner regression analysis statistical tool.

Research Questions

- i. Is there any significant relationship between private investment decisions in university education and media coverage of HEIs?
- ii. Is there any significant relationship between media coverage and ranking of universities in Africa?
- iii. Is there any balance in the media coverage of universities in Africa?

Research Hypotheses

- i. There no significant difference between private investment decisions in university education and media coverage of HEIs

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Status and Gender

Degree Type	Number	Male	Female
Students	42	22	20
Parents/ Guardian	20	11	9
Total	62	33	29

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by Status and Gender comprising of 42 students and 20 parents of which 33 were male and 29 were female.

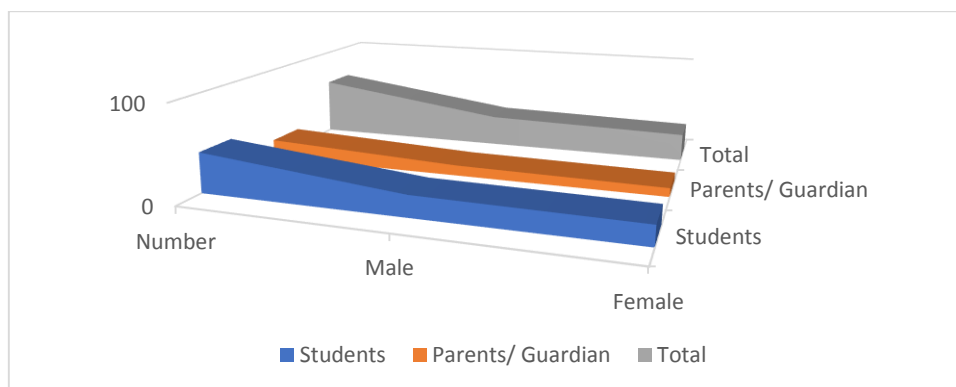


Figure 1: The 2-D line graph showing the distribution of Respondents by Status

Table 3: The Correlation Analysis of Private Investment Decisions in University Education and Media Coverage of Universities

		Private Investment Decisions	Media Coverage
Private Investment Decisions	Pearson correlation	1	.852**
	Sig (2- tailed)		.000
	N	62	62
Media coverage	Pearson correlation	.852**	1
	Sig (2- tailed)	.000	
	N	62	62

Source: Author’s computation **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows that, the Pearson correlation value of $r = 0.852$ with a significant value of $p < 0.000$ suggests that approximately 85 percent variation of Media Coverage of Higher Education is explained by the changes in the variation of the Private investment decision of University Education consumers. Hence, Private investment decisions of students and parents significantly correlates with media Coverage ($r = 0.852$, $n = 62$, $p < 0.00$, two tailed).

Table 4: The Liner regression Analysis of Private Investment Decisions in University Education, Ranking Status and Media Coverage of Universities

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	17.131	6.335		2.856	.006
	Private investment Decisions	0.265	0.041	0.471	5.963	.000
	Ranking Status	0.306	0.05	0.523	6.170	.000
	Balanced Media Coverage	0.162	0.056	0.251	2.953	.005
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.816 ^a	0.654	0.635	4.842		

a. Predictors: (Constant), Private investment Decisions, Ranking level, Balance Media Coverage

Media coverage explained the 65 percent variation in private investment decisions of university education consumers, therefore an important predictor of private investment decisions and ranking status. Also, the linear regression the values of $R = 0.816$; $R^2 = 0.654$ and $P < 0.05$ shows a high, positive and significant correlation media coverage and private investment decisions of university education consumers.

Conclusions

This study shows the interaction between media coverage and higher education consumers investment preferences. While efforts of media outlet at covering Higher Education globally, regionally and nationally are commendable; the depth of the coverage of African Higher Education will need to broaden to enable stakeholders ascertain the quality of education delivery and guide prospective higher education consumers in making informed career / institutional choices so as to enable them have value for their investment. To redressed these imbalances in media coverage of higher education as well as how global news outlets can better cover higher education all over the world and especially in developing nations.

Recommendations

The following are recommended as the way forward

1. Government and University Management should put in more efforts to create an awareness in the Universities and among the students on the importance of maintaining good communication network with news reporters as an investment in public understanding of what is happening in the school.
2. National, International and Global media outlets should partner with local media outlets who are close to the grassroots development. In this way, information disseminated at the global level can get to the local level and all over the world and vice versa.
3. The quality of media coverage can be improved by featuring the African perspectives through ensuring that more African Higher educational experts are interviewed. This will also enhance broader reporting and in-depth coverage of higher education issues thereby putting news from Africa in a clearer perspective.
4. Government through media regulatory bodies to ensure that Media outlets news reportage is more proactive and void of controversial issues with the ultimate purpose of enhancing quality information dissemination and education consumers' understanding of issues of interest being reported.
5. The University Management should encourage students' journalism, students' newspapers and reforms in African universities' social media outlets to provide the appropriate guidance for parents, employers and the society as a whole.
6. Government and Educational Managers to ensure media attention is drawn to school event and noteworthy reforms in African Universities.
7. The Government should encourage the transmission of global programmes in local languages as is the case of BBC broadcast in the three major Nigerian languages (BBC Yoruba, BBC Igbo and BBC Hausa).
8. Many African universities have websites and maintain webpages although most have low bandwidth which means webpages may be slow to load; however, media outlets should consider adding high quality education blog to their websites.

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