



Issue no: 1 | Vol no: 6 | March 2024: 14-23

## Market orientation and performance of private and public universities in Kenya: A comparative study

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### Article History

Received: 2024-01-23

Accepted: 2024-02-10

Published: 2024-03-06

### Cite this article in APA

Bowen, J. C. (2024). Market orientation and performance of private and public universities in Kenya: A comparative study. *Editon consortium journal of business and management studies*, 6(1), 14-23. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjbms.v6i1.466>

### Abstract

This study sought to find out the market orientation and performance of private and public universities in Kenya. The study examines whether there exists a significant difference between competitor orientation, customer orientation, market intelligence, inter-functional coordination and universities' performance in Kenya. Comparative research on market orientation and performance of Kenyan private and public universities has been carried out in many settings over the past several years, and specifically none in Kenya. The research adopted a descriptive research design. Primary data were gathered from 115 respondents using a survey questionnaire administered to students and staff of both Kenyan private and public universities. The purposive sampling approach was employed to sample respondents. Competitor orientation, market intelligence generation and inter-functional coordination are significant for both public and private universities. This implies that both universities have embraced market-oriented activities towards students' satisfaction, students' retention and student increase. Management of universities should embrace market intelligence generation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination components to improve university performance. This will enable them to improve and maintain their competitiveness in the competitive education sector. This study puts forward market orientation strategies which can inform policies and advise other academic institutions that wish to satisfy their students' needs and services. The study introduces the notion of market orientation for institutions that may not have embraced market-oriented practices in Kenya's university sector.

**Key words:** Competitor orientation, customer retention, customer satisfaction, market orientation, performance.



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## INTRODUCTION

Identifying and meeting customers' needs is a very important concept for organisations, irrespective of whether they are service- or product-oriented companies. Higher education marketing is well-established as a global phenomenon in both developed and developing countries. Market orientation (MO) is a term that emerged in the mid-1950s referring to the implementation of the marketing principle, which holds that the key to attaining organisational goals is by generating, delivering and communicating superior customer value to potential and current customers better than competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2009). In addition, performance in organisations has become an important factor in both the profit and not-for-profit sectors and universities are no exception.

Universities exist in a competitive and dynamic environment, and their long-term survival depends on how well they efficiently and effectively satisfy their customers' needs. Embracing market orientation in the higher education Institution sector could lead to a performance in terms of an increase in the enrolment of students, an increase in the retention rate of current students, improved quality of teaching and services and the establishment of more partnerships with the business community (Chaudhry et al., 2016; Hammond et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies on market orientation in the business sector have demonstrated that employing a market orientation strategy leads to a high level of organisational performance. This study, therefore, envisaged that market orientation strategies are also applicable in higher education institutions, and embracing them would lead to university performance.

Newman (2002) stated that universities currently are faced with threats, and for them to survive in a competitive environment depends on how well they respond to environmental challenges, such as competing for both students and resources from the same education target marketplace. Given the aggressive competition, globalisation and varying customers' needs and wants, universities need a strong market orientation and strategic marketing approaches to stay relevant in the competitive marketplace. Market orientation has emerged as a

significant concept of performance and has been found to contribute to the long-term success of organisations (Mokoena, 2019). Studies indicate that the marketing of higher education is a challenge because of diverse market characteristics that are different from other markets of goods and services, necessitating them to be proactive in their marketing practices (Canterbury, 2000). The existing literature indicates that most studies on market orientation factors and university performance have been conducted mostly in developed countries, with a few from developing countries. Despite the importance of research that has been carried out examining the market orientation components and organisational performance, not many studies have been explored sufficiently in the service sector like universities, and this remains an area that requires further investigation (Ashour, 2014).

Moreover, despite the studies on the operationalisation of market orientation on organisation performance in many contexts, there are limited studies that have specifically compared the performance of market orientation components in private and public universities. It is important to consider how each component of market orientation, which includes customer orientation, competitor orientation, marketing intelligence and inter-functional coordination identified in the study, manifests itself in relation to university performance. Therefore, the gap exists as to how these components of market orientation influence performance in private and public universities and this gap remains of interest to the current study. To the researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted to compare the significance of market orientation components in private and public universities in Kenya. In addition, the importance of considering how market orientation manifests itself in relation to university performance warrants this study. It is against this background that the study seeks to conduct a comparative analysis of market orientation components and performance of private and public universities in Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While diverse definitions of market orientation exist in the market orientation literature, the Narver and Slater (1990) cultural dimension and Kohli and

Jaworski's (1990) behavioural dimension have had far-reaching impacts on the market orientation arena and have been extensively used in the marketing literature. According to Narver and Slater (1990), market orientation consists of customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination, which is key for maximising long-term profit. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) explained market orientation in three dimensions, namely intelligence generation, information dissemination and responsiveness.

Previous research studies on market orientation and university performance have focused more on business firms, with limited empirical research conducted on service sectors like universities. Mokoena's (2019) study on comparative analysis of MKTOR and MARKOR scales of market orientation on university performance established significant similarities between both scales and that market orientation positively and significantly influences university performance. Chaudhry et al. (2016) investigated the impact of market orientation components on the performance of private universities in Pakistan. The study was based on performance measures developed specifically for universities. The results revealed that there was a significant and positive connection between market orientation components and performance measures such as student retention, student growth and market share.

In a different study, Zebel and Goodwin (2012), for example, investigated 314 faculty members from 15 private universities in Bangladesh. The study combined both Narver and Slater's (1990) and Jaworski and Kohli's (1993) market orientation constructs and examined the private university performance regarding teaching and service quality, the growth of students, market share, and overall

performance. Their study found all four performance measurements to be statistically significant and positively influencing the market orientation of the private universities in Bangladesh. In a related study, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2010) examined market orientation in universities comparing two national higher education systems in England and Israel and found that both universities in these two countries were oriented towards meeting students' needs and desires, caring for students' well-being and teaching and learning. In addition, the respondents indicated that the performance of their universities is because of their contribution to internal marketing in their institutions through their own work tasks and performances. Chandler et al. (2021) carried out a study that aimed at comparing perceptions and values of market orientation components subcultures in a higher education institution in Hungary. Market orientation was found to be affected by variables such as level of support, attitudes towards performance appraisals and some external forces.

Based on the vast literature, most studies on market orientation variables focused mainly on organisational performance. However, comparative studies on market orientation components among different types of universities, like private and public universities, have not been studied from a Kenya perspective. This study, therefore, sought to establish whether there is a difference between market orientation components and the performance of private and public universities in Kenya.

In this study, we use the four market orientation dimensions of Narver and Slater (1990), Kohli and Jowaski (1990), as well as performance indicators by Caruana et al. (1998) of customer satisfaction, student increase, and student retention. We conceptualise our variables as shown in Figure 1.

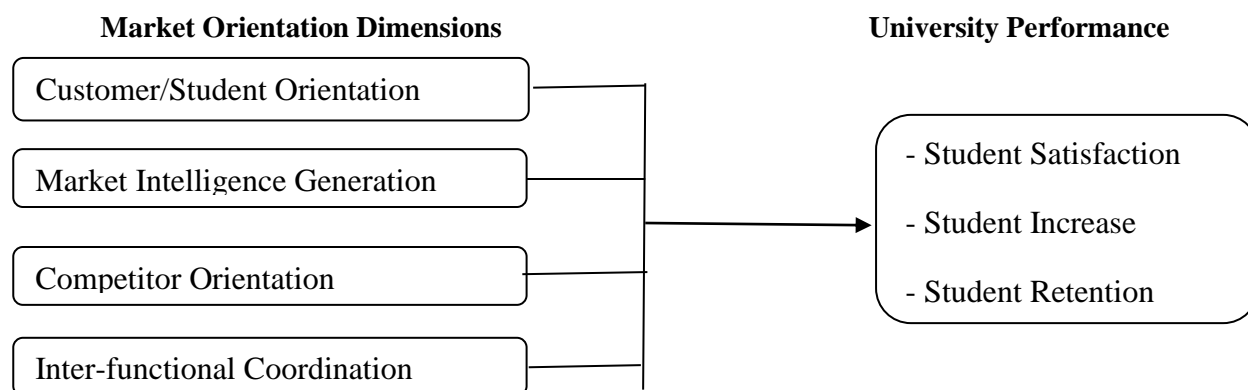


Figure 1: Measuring Market Orientation

### METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research approach to identify whether there is a difference between private and public universities' performance with respect to market orientation components. A stratified sampling technique was used, and a sample size of 23 universities was sampled and stratified into two strata: public universities and private universities. From each stratum, one key respondent from three sections of the 23 sampled university offices, which included the faculty, admissions, and marketing/corporate affairs. Two participants from the students' affairs office, represented by students' leaders, were included in the sample and purposively selected. A systematic self-administered questionnaire was employed to gather data from the respondents. A total of 115 questionnaires were delivered to the key respondents in all the sections.

Reliability and validity values of the construct indicated that Cronbach's alpha coefficient values for all the measurement items surpass the acceptable benchmark of 0.70 and 0.50, which justified the internal consistency of the measuring instrument according to Malhotra et al. (2010) and (Bankson & Stroke, 2000) respectively. Content validity was ascertained through pilot testing of the questionnaire before the main study was undertaken with two universities to establish where changes had to be made. The participating universities were not included in the main study.

The collected data were first analysed using the factor analysis method to identify the market

orientation components that lead to the performance of universities in terms of student satisfaction, student retention, and student increase. Furthermore, after the factors had been identified, their effect on the performance of private and public universities was determined by running a regression analysis of the following form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where  $\beta_1$  represents coefficients to be estimated, and  $X_1$  represents customer orientation, market intelligence generation, competitor orientation and inter-function coordination, respectively. The coefficient  $\beta_1$  is the change in probability of performance given a unit increase in  $X_1$ . One regression model, a multiple regression model, was estimated.

In the regression analysis, the factors used are those whose factor loading is  $>0.55$ . High factor loadings show that the variables are the best-choice representatives of the corresponding factor (Antony et al., 2002). The factors used are as presented in Table 1, which were used in the regression analysis. The use of factors analysis is significant because it has the ability to reduce a big number of variables into smaller numbers of factors by extracting maximum common variance from all variables and putting them into a common score (Sureshchandar et al. (2003). Customer orientation, marketing intelligence generation, competitor orientation, and

inter-functional coordination are factors that will be examined in the study.

Analysis was carried out to better understand the underlying variance structure of a collection of correlation coefficients by conducting for all the 5-

point Likert scale items in each variable. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data, the hypothesis was tested using regression analysis, and data was analysed using Stata.

**Table 1: Factor Loading for Market Orientation Factors**

Variable	Questions in questionnaire	Factor Loadings
Customer Orientation ( $\alpha=0.902$ )	The university constantly monitors the level of commitment and orientation to serving customers' needs.	0.8708
	Universities are quick to look for ways to create student value in their courses or services.	0.7587
	University responds to student's feedback on teaching and learning	0.7578
	University monitors students' academic progression from the time of enrolment to completion	0.6486
	University tries to understand the needs of customers (students)	0.8427
	University always strives to provide customer (student) satisfaction	0.8427
	University gathers a wide market intelligence information pertaining to current and future needs of (students)	0.7223
Market Intelligence Generation ( $\alpha=0.618$ )	University regularly asks our students about their needs, wants, and expectation	0.5996
	We are fast to detect changes in our students' course preferences	0.8038
	University is quick	0.7324
Competitor Orientation ( $\alpha=0.547$ )	to respond to competitive actions that threaten the university	0.7118
	The university is fast at responding to changes taking place in other universities	0.6464
	The university focuses on programs where they have or can develop a competitive advantage	0.7238
	University quickly act upon information on competitors' strategies	0.8206
	University is quick to develop appropriate strategies to counter competitors	0.7913
Inter-functional coordination ( $\alpha=0.658$ )	There is coordination of all university activities across all departments/sections of the university	0.7188
	There is coordination in all sections/departments towards achieving and sustaining competitive advantage	0.7514
	There is synergy among all the departments/sections in the university towards the creation of value for its customers (student	0.5779
	There are meetings being held by the faculty members/departments with students to discuss students' needs	0.8168
Performance Student Satisfaction ( $\alpha=0.573$ )	The students have been satisfied with the level of services received in the past five years	0.7896
	The students have been satisfied with the level of friendliness in service provision from university staff in the past five years	0.8496
	The students have been satisfied with the decrease in students' complaint levels in the past five years	0.7983
	There has been an increase in student numbers over the past five years	0.8475

Student Growth/ Increase $\alpha=0.933$ )	compared to previous years	0.8733
	There has been a remarkable growth in students over the past five years	0.8385
	There has had a wider market share in the past five years compared to previous years	0.8385
	University has had an improved students' retention rate over the last five years	0.5819
Student Retention ( $\alpha=0.782$ )	University has had the ability to satisfy its customers, leading to loyal customers in the past five years	
	The university has managed to increase the recruitment rate of students in the past five years	
Note: The values below the variables are the Cronbach's $\alpha$ for each variable		

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Background Information**

Out of the total 115 questionnaires distributed to respondents drawn from both public and private universities, a total of 106 questionnaires were returned and duly filled. The members of staff were drawn from academic/faculty, Academic Registrar/Admission officer, Marketing/Corporate affairs and dean of students (student representative). Most of the respondents, fifty-nine per cent, were from private universities, while forty-one of the respondents were from public universities. As to length of service, 18 respondents in Private universities forty-nine per cent are less than 5 years into their service, while 8 respondents in Public universities thirty-two per cent are less than 5 years into their service. With regard to the number of years worked, in Private universities, forty-one per cent and thirty-six per cent in public universities have worked between 6 to 10 years, while eight per cent in Private universities and eight per cent of the respondents in Public universities have worked for between 11 to 15 years. Also, in Private universities, three per cent of the respondents have worked for 16-20 years, while eight per cent in Public universities have worked between 16 – 20 years. Finally, six per cent of the respondent in Public universities have worked for their institutions for over 20 years, while there were none in Private universities. This indicates that public universities have existed for many years since the time of establishment.

**Customer Orientation**

The respondents were asked to indicate the scope of customer orientation, which is the extent to which employees interact and get involved with students in

their respective universities. The results indicate the respondents' rating on the scope of customer (student) focus, ranging from ninety-two per cent (highest) to three per cent (lowest). From the findings, it is evident that all university employees, irrespective of whether they are public or private, tend to interact and get involved with the customers (students) and try to satisfy their needs. The results of the study on whether universities conduct student need assessment surveys indicate that seventy-eight per cent of the respondents in private universities conduct needs assessment while ninety-two per cent in public universities conduct needs assessment. Respondents were also required to indicate the extent to which the outcome of the analysed data on the student needs assessment survey was utilised to improve customer (student) satisfaction. The findings show that thirty-five per cent of the respondents in Private universities use the analysed data to a great extent, while forty-eight per cent of respondents in Public universities use it to a moderate extent. On whether universities conduct student satisfaction surveys, seventy-two of the respondents in Private universities and twenty-four in Public universities conduct student satisfaction surveys every semester.

**Market Intelligence Generation**

The study sought to establish whether universities are concerned with gathering market intelligence on the current and future needs of students. The findings show that fifty-six per cent of the respondents in Private universities and forty-seven per cent in Public universities are concerned with gathering information regarding the current and future needs of students. Both Private and Public universities

indicate that they analyse the gathered market intelligence information with eighty-nine per cent and eighty-eight per cent, respectively. With respect to whether the universities collect information on students' perception on the quality of courses, the results indicated that seventy-three per cent of the respondents in private universities and fifty-six per cent in public universities collect information on students' perception of the quality of courses once in a calendar year.

**Competitor Orientation**

Respondents were asked whether they gather information on competitors' strategies as part of monitoring competitors' moves and actions and how frequently; forty per cent of respondents in Private universities do it when the need arises, while fifty per cent in public universities gather information on competitors' strategies on a continuous basis. On whether universities respond to new initiatives and developments that take place in other universities, both in private and public universities, respond to new initiatives taking place in other universities, ninety-five per cent in private universities and

eighty-eight per cent in public universities, indicating that they do respond by seeking better initiatives and developments.

**Inter-functional Coordination**

Regarding inter-functional coordination, eighty-nine per cent of the respondents in private universities and eighty-eight per cent in public universities share information gathered across all the university's departments. Private and Public universities fifty-one and sixty per cent, respectively, also indicated that they have a service charter in which they evaluate the delivery of services as per the service charter in a calendar year. Respondents were also asked whether their respective universities solicit ideas on student satisfaction and how frequently; thirty per cent of the respondents in private universities and forty-eight per cent in public universities frequently solicit information on student satisfaction..

Regression results were categorised into private and public universities. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Regression Analysis Results per University Category**

Variable	Public Universities			Public Universities		
	Customer (student) satisfaction (D1) Model 1	Student increase (D2) Model 2	Students Retention (D4) Model 4	Customer satisfaction D1 Model 1	Student increase D2 Model	Student retention D4 Model 4
Customer orientation	.07672 (0.38)	-.05334 (-0.20)	-.3196 (-1.57)	-.0913 (-0.70)	0.2079 (0.98)	-.06953 (-0.29)
Market Intelligence	-.04695 (-0.32)	0.4098 (2.07)**	0.0175 (0.12)	-.0352 (-0.20)	0.2599 (1.09)	0.7197 (2.45)**
Competitor orientation	-.03120 (-0.19)	-.2001 (-0.90)	0.1070 (0.64)	0.4660 (2.54)**	0.2990 (0.70)	0.2839 (0.84)
Inter-functional coordination	0.9812 (4.65)***	-.1675 (-0.59)	0.3681 (1.73)*	0.3656 (2.71)***	0.2194 (0.87)	0.0509 (0.20)
F						
R <sup>2</sup>	0.0000	0.2852	0.3921	0.0005	0.0447	0.0105
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.5522	0.1412	0.1170	0.6140	0.3725	0.4668
Root MSE	0.4963	0.0339	0.0066	0.5368	0.2470	0.3602

No. of Observation	0.6818 37	0.9108 37	0.6874 37	0.5031 25	0.8191 25	0.9275 25
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The t-values are in parentheses. The asterisks \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent significance at 10%, 5% and 1%, respectively. Dependent 1 captures questions on customer satisfaction; Dependent 2 captures questions on student growth; Dependent 3 captures questions on a number of programmes; and Dependent 4 captures questions on student retention. Models 1, 2, 3 and 4 were run without the effect of intervening variables.

Source: Researcher 2018

When universities are categorised into private and public universities, the results show that in private universities, market intelligence is significant, and improvement in market intelligence generation will lead to the likelihood that there will be an increase in student numbers. Likewise, improvement in competitor orientation would lead to improvement in customer satisfaction and student retention. These results imply that private universities are more into continuous collection and generation of information, either internally or externally, than trying to satisfy the needs of their students. The results also show that private universities emphasise internal marketing as they collect information and disseminate all the collected information across all the university units/departments. This is reflected by the fact that the results have indicated inter-functional coordination leads to customer satisfaction as well as student increase.

When it comes to public universities, the results show that market intelligence generation is significant when it comes to student retention, and it also improves student increase but it is insignificant. Results also indicate that competitor orientation is significant in terms of improving customer satisfaction. However, results indicate that competitor orientation improves the increase of students as well as student retention but is insignificant. This implies that public universities are more concerned with their students' well-being. The results show that inter-functional coordination is significant when it comes to customer (student) satisfaction. Though the results on inter-functional coordination indicate that it also improves the increase of students and student retention, it becomes insignificant with these variables.

Results for private versus public universities show that market intelligence generation and inter-functional coordination are significant factors for private universities, while market intelligence generation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination are significant in public universities. For both private and public universities, results suggest that customer orientation and performance of universities in relation to the dependent variable improves performance but is an insignificant factor. The results specifically reveal that improvement of market intelligence, competitor and inter-functional coordination in both universities will improve the likelihood of being market-oriented.

The results show that there is a significant difference between public universities and private universities respondents in terms of market intelligence, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. There is commonality when it comes to customer (student) orientation in both categories of universities in terms of insignificant variables.

Following the series of regression analyses and the subsequent findings in the above tests, the study established that customer orientation has a negative association with university performance for both private and public universities. This study thereby fails to reject H<sub>01</sub>: “There is no relationship between customer orientation/focus and performance of universities in Kenya”. This implies that customer orientation has not been fully embraced in universities as it is in business firms. Studies by Han et al. (1998) and Noble et al. (2002) also indicated the insignificance of the variable, which did not find the direct association between customer orientation and performance to be statistically significant.

The study also rejected the null hypothesis H0<sub>2</sub>: “There is no relationship between market intelligence generation and performance of selected universities in Kenya” when it comes to student increase in private universities and student retention in public universities. However, the study accepted the null hypothesis when it comes to customer satisfaction and the number of programmes in both university categories. This shows that market intelligence generation is significant when it comes to student increase and student retention but insignificant when it comes to customer satisfaction and a number of programs.

The study also rejected the null hypothesis H0<sub>3</sub>: “There is no significant relationship between competitor orientation and performance of selected universities in Kenya” when it comes to customer satisfaction and a number of programmes in public universities. This means that there is a positive significant relationship between competitor orientation and organisational performance in public universities, while in private universities, competitor orientation does not have any significant relationship.

The study also rejected H0<sub>4</sub>: “There is no relationship between inter-functional coordination and performance of selected universities in Kenya”. The null hypothesis is rejected when it comes to student retention and customer satisfaction in private universities, as well as customer satisfaction in public universities. This means that there is a significant positive relationship between inter-functional coordination and university performance, specifically in both private and public universities.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** In analysing market orientation and its relationship with the performance of private and public universities, this study found that universities in Kenya, irrespective of whether it is private or

public universities that consider market orientation concept as key in improving increase of students and student retention. In private universities, market orientation components of inter-functional coordination and market intelligence play a significant role in student retention, customer satisfaction and student increase. In public universities, inter-functional coordination, competitor orientation, and market intelligence generation lead to customer satisfaction and student retention. The study revealed an important element of customer orientation that is not considered significant in both private and public universities, which does not play any significant role in either student retention, student increase or customer satisfaction. This indicates that there is a relationship between market orientation and the performance of universities, especially when it comes to market intelligence generation, inter-functional coordination and competitor orientation. The results show that although customer (student) orientation is considered important, it is not a priority for respondents, and so being oriented towards students' needs is not crucial for universities the way it is for consumer goods in business firms.

**Recommendations:** The management of universities should embrace and adopt market orientation components of competitor orientation, intelligence generation and inter-functional coordination. Universities should constantly monitor students' satisfaction through surveys and pay close attention to current and potential students. Universities should also disseminate and respond to the collected information about students' needs and wants as well as competitor's strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the management of universities should encourage free and open communication from their students across all university departments/sections and embrace internal marketing throughout all departments.

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