



# **Marketing Finnish Higher Education In Nigeria**

A study on the best Marketing practices for the Nigerian Market

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Many Nigerian students have long opted to study in Finland because it is a country known for quality education and a good standard of living. However, the number of Nigerian students opting for Finnish higher education has dwindled. The purpose of this study is to examine the best marketing practice that Whiterock, as the case company, has adopted to market Finnish higher education. It aims to explore the marketing communication methods adopted and how an improvement in the marketing communication strategies can help the company grow its market of Finland as a study destination. The study was limited to marketing opportunities and communication means to its target audience—the main theories includes marketing strategies, marketing communication, the communication strategies, and framework. The empirical study was a qualitative semi-structured interview of the staff of Whiterock, both management and marketing staff of the company, and the material was processed through thematic analysis. The result showed that the company adopted various strategies to market its Finland market segment, including social media, commercial advertisement, referral, word of mouth marketing, which was the best practice for getting quality clients.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education is the fundamental instrument for creating knowledge, economy, and the development of human capital (World Bank 1999 in Asiyai, 2017). Higher education is the facilitator, the bedrock, the powerhouse, and the driving force for the socio-economic solid, political, cultural, healthier, and industrial development (Peretomode, 2007 in Asiyai, 2017). However, education in Nigeria has experienced some challenges and drawbacks. It does not meet the standard of education required to be innovative, which explains why Nigerian students want a Finnish education.

In contrast to the Nigerian education system, Finnish Higher education (FHE) ranked as one of the best in the world. The Finnish Higher Education was ranked Number 1 globally as the most effective educational system when metrics relating to the national income levels are considered (Studyinfo, 2020). It was why Nigerian students were increasingly seeking higher academic qualifications from Finland.

Nevertheless, there has recently been a sharp decline from students interested in Finnish Higher Education. A recent blog showed that 80% of Nigerian applicants who applied to study at Finnish Universities in 2019 had chosen a different country by 2020 (nairaland, 2012).

Therefore, using (Whiterock Educational Services Ltd- (An international student recruitments firm with operations in Finland and Nigeria) as a case study. The research method adopted is a qualitative semi-structured interview, a more personal form of research used to probe the director of the case company using a series of questions and in-depth discussions, which span over a series of several days. The research offered recommendations and best practices drawing from the company's website and the marketing communication material to successfully attract high-quality students from the Nigerian market. It also provides recommendations on how Whiterock (WR) can adapt its business model and restructure its strategy to project Finnish Higher educational (FHE) institutions in Nigeria.

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Finland is known worldwide for its quality of education; Finland is at the top when measuring higher education efficiency (Universitas21, 2020).

No wonder Nigerian students have opted to study in the country over the past decades. Whiterock educational Services has enjoyed placing students in Finland because they had successfully recruited qualified international students to study there.

However, there has been a decline in the number of students seeking access to Finnish universities in recent years. Then more recently, the covid situation may have been a factor that warrants a review of the company's marketing strategies in this market; it has led to several questions, one of which could be the company's marketing strategy or the communication method. This prompted a review and evaluation of the marketing communication strategies adopted by Whiterock Educational Services Ltd.

## 1.3 Research Question

**There are two research questions to be answered in this thesis, and they are as follows:**

1. How Whiterock Educational Services better capitalise on the Marketing opportunities while dealing with the challenges experienced in marketing the Finnish Higher Education in Nigeria?
2. What best marketing communication practice is adopted to address the lack of success in recruiting highly qualified students to the Finnish higher education in Nigeria?

## **1.4 Aim of Study**

This thesis explores the marketing communication methods the case company adopted and examine if the marketing methods and challenges inherent in the marketing communication practices of the company can attract quality students that want Finland as a study destination.

It also carefully analyses the challenges experienced by the company in marketing and the communication strategies deployed by the company till now.

Furthermore, it will also examine the marketing opportunities and strategies of Whiterock Educational Services as it concerns marketing Finnish Higher Education in Nigeria.

## **1.5 Demarcation**

This study only examines the forms of marketing the case company uses and what communication best practices they adopted in marketing the Finnish higher education in Nigeria.

The problems of the difficulty in getting a study permit, the challenges of international graduate students getting employment after study due to the language barrier, and bureaucracies connected to gaining admission into the Finnish universities are all beyond the scope of this study.

Since the background of the study is marketing and marketing communication best practice, the scope of the study is to look at what marketing opportunities are, and how it is communicated. The study is done by and is limited to interviewing the company marketing staff and Whiterock educational services management team.

## **1.6 Presentation of the company**

Whiterock Educational Services was founded in 2005. It is an education and travel consultancy firm headquartered in Nigeria. The company was established to offer international student recruitment services, providing marketing, advisory, recruitment, and consulting services for schools that intend to admit international students from foreign markets. In Nigeria, Sierra Leone, it is established as a Limited Liability Company; in Finland, it is a general partnership company. In Brazil, it is a sole proprietorship. Nigeria remains its biggest market to date, generating 90% of its revenue. Whiterock represents over 150 Institutions in 48 countries (Its institutional partners encompass Universities, universities of applied sciences, polytechnics, language schools, High schools, and exclusive pathway providers). To date, Whiterock' most challenging institutional country partner is Finland. This apparent lack of success recruiting highly qualified students into Finnish universities prompted the commissioning of this thesis.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that explores models and theories that help gain insight into the research questions, what marketing is, the marketing strategies, marketing communication, and marketing communication framework, as it is related to the case company. In addition, it addressed the marketing communication strategies.

### **2.1 Marketing**

According to Armstrong (2019) et al., marketing engages with customers and marketing profitable relationships. There are two parts to marketing: getting new customers by offering them better value and growing the existing customers by continuously satisfying



their needs and values. Modern marketing is no longer about advertising and selling but more about managing and keeping relationships by satisfying customers' needs and getting value from them (Armstrong, G., Kotler, P. and Opresnik, M. O. 2019).

Philip Kotler et al. (2021) defined “marketing as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have a value for customers, other stakeholders and society at large” (Kotler, Armstrong and Opresnik, 2021).

Many have seen marketing as just the act of buying and selling; that is why we see the television flooded with adverts and tv commercials and different kinds of marketing and selling on the various online platforms. However, much more is included in the meaning of marketing, as Philip Kotler et al. (2021) showed. Marketing is a process of the four Ps., in addition to advertising and selling, marketing also involves providing customers with what satisfies their needs. However, the definition of Armstrong et al. (2019) showed that managing and keeping relationships while satisfying customers need is a critical way to look at modern marketing. When companies know their customers' needs and values and can effectively promote their product that meets those needs, they have the chance to succeed. According to Kotler, ‘great marketing creates an automatic demand for the products (Kotler, Armstrong and Opresnik, 2021).

The American Marketing Association also defines marketing as 'the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (American Marketing Association, Approved 2017).

## **2.2 Marketing Strategy**

Strategies are all the plans or everything an organisation will do to achieve its goal. Effective and productive strategies make an organisation stand out and maintain a competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to copy (Principles of Marketing, 2015) easily.

The definition of marketing shows that customer value and satisfaction are the most important to a company that succeeds. After knowing the customers and what they value, the (marketing management) will have to put customer needs at the core of the plan of action. A successful marketing strategy involves two critical factors or questions that the manager will answer, and the first is the target market? The second question is 'how can they best be served? The marketer will then develop a marketing program that will convey the anticipated value to the customer in real-time; the marketing plan help to build customer relationships by converting the strategy into action.

The company's marketing action plan is the four Ps of marketing which includes

Product: The company must always make the offerings that customers need available.

Price: Customer needs should be satisfied at a given or agreed price

Place: The offering should be available to the targeted customer

Promotion: It must be communicated to the targeted customer. All the marketing mix(4Ps) must be combined in the marketing program to deliver the planned value to the target customers. (Kotler, Armstrong, and Opresnik, 2021)

### **2.2.1 Market Segmentation**

Market Segmentation is the process of dividing customers or potential customers of a target market into smaller groups so that they can be given attention according to their segmented needs (McDonald, 2012).

The goal of segmentation is to determine which customers should be served and how to serve them; they are segmented into smaller groups. The more profitable group becomes the centre of interest to satisfy and maintain the relationship. Not all segment of a market is beneficial though every market has their segment. 'A market segment is a group of customers that behaved similarly to a sales' (Armstrong, G., Kotler, P. and Opresnik, M. O., 2019).

Segmentation helps a company adjust/improve some parts of their offer, increasing the customer base. This process can also help avoid head-on competition with other firms and redistribute money and sales efforts to focus on the most profitable client. There are two types of segmentation, namely: the target segmentation that refers to the group of

customers an organisation decided to sell its services to, while the mass segmentation involves selling the same product/services to everybody, it is like rolling out as many marketing messages as possible on every medium available as often as can afford (Kotler, Armstrong, and Opresnik, 2021).

### **2.2.1.1 Bases for Segmentation**

Segmenting a market is based on a knowledge of who customers are and what influences their decision and buying behaviour. The company will know how the market can best be grouped so that it can stand out and succeed. Segmenting according to the knowledge of the market will help keep the market close, and to best serve the customers, it will also help reduce waste (Proctor, T. 2000). Segmentation is commonly based on the following.

- 1. Geographic:** As the word implies, segmentation according to the geographical area is the grouping of the market or business according to region, that means various countries, cities, and neighbourhoods, and this is further grouped into the size of city or town population density, and the climate.
- 2. Demographic:** This refers to segmenting according to age, income, gender, family size, ethnicity, occupation, education, and family life circle as a basis for the grouping.
- 3. Psychographic:** Psychographic segmentation involves using activities, interests, opinions, values, attitudes, and lifestyles to segment.
- 4. Behavioural:** It uses the benefits sort from the product, how often the product is used, the usage situation and buyers' status and loyalty to the product as a dimension. (Kotler, Armstrong, and Opresnik, 2021)

### **2.2.2 Targeting**

A target is that part or group of the market identified to meet and satisfy their needs. Targeting helps to know what direction or position of the market, with the company goals

and vision in view; Target marketing helps to apply the marketing strategy plan is successful. Furthermore, it helps the company be better placed to serve the target customers better; in other words, it helps know where to focus, it shapes the product's features, resulting in better pricing. (Lee, Monle, and Carla Johnson, 2005)

### **2.2.3 Positioning**

Positioning is how a company product or service is viewed or placed in the minds of consumers in contrast to competitors. An organisation would not want their product just to be seen as one of the products in the market but must have a special place in mind compared to the competitors offer then they will be willing to give good value for it. In relation to competitors, so be in a unique position in the market.

Positioning is helping a company stand out relative to competitor's market; the perpetual map helps a company know where they stand in the market (Principles of Marketing, M. Libraries, 2015)

Positioning is how a consumer views a product in relation to the competition. Positioning creates an image of the products in consumers' minds, highlighting the essential benefits that differentiate the product from similar products in the market. Positioning must pass a message to the customers about why the product should be preferred over the other competitors' similar products. Product positioning enables a company to meet particular needs of a particular value that competitors may not provide. How to position a company is by using a perpetual map to know the present position in the market. It can be moved to a different place in the consumers' mind, and this process is called repositioning (Principles of marketing, M. Libraries, 2015).

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## 2.3 Market Communication

Many have seen market communication from the marketing mix's promotion, informing why there is no universally accepted definition. According to Fill, C. et al., "market communication are all the processes, methods, perceptions, and actions that consumers and organisations undertake to present, consideration and action that is an association with products and services, and brand" (Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. (2019). This definition alludes to the fact that market communication is not a one-sided action, where one party gives and the other takes, or where organisation sorts after just the businesses or marketing goal, but it is imperative also to involve the audience because that is the only way to succeed in marketing (Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. 2019)

Closely related to the above definition of marketing communication, Varey, R. (2002) analysed market communication differently. He defined market communications as not just informing customers of the availability of offers. However, it involves having excellent and continuous relationships between the company and the customers. Market communication in this context is extensive in scope. It is not just about informing customers or prospective customers of the availability of a specific product/service. However, it involves everyday activities or actions that are seen and coordinated to a certain point, such as brand renewal, image redefinition, product repositioning, and sponsorship. He sees communication as every aspect of the organisation that sends a message about the business to the public. Every company has a website that gives information about the business to help customers find their needs (Varey, R., 2002).

Because there is no generally accepted definition has given rise to what is now known as integrated marketing communication. Integrated marketing communication is a shift from traditional face to face or one to one marketing. It is a more customer-oriented, technology-based system of communication. Since it is customer-oriented, it is targeted at treating customers differently; in other words, it is personalised communication (Varey, R. 2002). "The marketing communication allows brands to engage audiences in order to pursue their marketing and business objective" (Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. 2019).

As can be seen from Fill, C. et al., marketing communication Engages customers and prospective customers, and what is the scope of engagement? First, engagement is a link or connection system that allows established or upcoming brands and organisations to connect with their intending target audience, ensuring that all parties achieve their objectives.

A successful engagement shows understanding and meaning in the information conveyed effectively, that the communications have value.

There are three types of engagements activated by marketing communication. These types of engagement touch the extent to which an individual is absorbed in the message passed, and this is cognitive engagement. Then the relational engagement is about how much a person is connected to his surroundings. The final one is behavioural engagement which shows how much an individual feels involved and is part of the activities. (Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. 2019).

## **2.4 Market Communication Strategy**

Varey, R. (2002) referred to MCS as the “component of the marketing plan that provides the communication system to enable and facilitate the planning, implementation, and control of the marketing system”. Marketing managers use it to provide the necessary communication environment to make the exchange possible (Varey, R. (2002).

The MCS also highlights communicating effectively with the target market to attract them to purchase.

The marketing communication strategy must align with the organisation’s business and marketing strategies. The communication strategy must align with the organisation’s brand, using communication that best portrays the brand. The communication strategy should also be aligned with customers, meaning that products and services must be where the target audience is. Finally, it must be with the planned budget to be efficiently executed (Varey, R. (2002).

There are two primary marketing communication strategies that Marketers and organisations can choose from, the Push and pull strategies considering the specific communication tool to be used.

According to Radd Interactive (2021), choosing between Push and pull strategies, the company must first determine its long and short-term goals for its success. It is necessary because there has been high innovation in the business world that reduces the physical presence of customers to an online presence. Another factor that has made most businesses adjust their business strategy is the presence of the Covid-19 pandemic; it is more crucial now than before for businesses to establish firm online marketing to keep the business up to date. Hence, the income is determined by choice of strategy; if a business wants quick cash-flows, the best strategy is the "Push using paid advertisement. On the other hand, for businesses that need to increase and keep their customer base, the "Pull" option will be it. (Radd Interactive, 2021)

#### **2.4.1 Push:**

Using the push strategy means that the product or services are not directly marketed to the final consumers but are pushed through a marketing channel, promoting the product to the final consumers. The channel used includes personal selling and trade promotion. These channels now use various tactics such as point of sale display, giving customers incentives such as discounted prices to buy the products (Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. p425. 2020).

The main aim of push marketing is to get the product brand to the customers deliberately; this makes push marketing more confrontational, which is good for a business that must make quick sales within a short time. It is a good strategy when launching a new product when promoting and campaign. It is an approach that helps make services most conspicuous to customers to get the excellent result possible. One of the perfect ways to do push marketing is by placing adverts across various platforms for fewer expenses, and another is through social media marketing (Radd Interactive, 2021).

##### **2.4.1.1 Personal Selling**

Personal selling is one of the best tools for the Push strategy. It is the use of in-person to interact with customers. It is a very effective way of communication with customers because it creates room for a one-to-one interaction so that customers are observed closely, and quick adjustments are made when there is a need for it. Personal selling creates room for near- and long-term customer relationships, be it selling or personal relationship. A good salesperson always keeps (Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. p425. 2020).

The customers' interest is at heart and is readily available to solve their problems. They are also good listeners, respond to customers' needs, and sometimes have to say no and mean it even if they have to politely. Personal selling is the most effective source of feedback yet the most expensive communication tool.

#### **2.4.1.2 Trade Promotion**

Trade promotion is a sale promotion directed at an organisation. It is a sale activity that gives special offers as an incentive for customers to buy. Trade promotion does not happen every time, and it is not a part of the regular organisation sale but offers additional reasons for buying. They are directed at the distribution partner and the organisation sales force. There are several motivations given to persuade purchase; some of them are samples, this when the customer tries the product, Coupon is given to give the customer discount from purchase, Loyalty program and more.

The goal is to increase sales and to increase customer base (Lumen Learning, Principles of Marketing, 2021)

#### **2.4.2 Pull:**

Pull is the second strategy marketers use to get products and services to their customers. In this method of communication, the marketing activities are directed to the final consumers using such means as advertising, promotion, and digital media (Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. p425. 2020).



### **2.4.2.1 Advertising**

Advertising is one of the best ways to reach customers that influence their buying decision. It has the most significant level of control. The message's appeal can inform the audience as a reminder or about the product's benefit. The reaction to the advertisement is evident in the buying of the advertised brands or visiting the website. Understanding the different contexts of the message informs the message's content. Advertising can reach a large audience with a simple message. Moreover, a successful advertisement is when the targeted audience is motivated by the message, thinks about it, and takes action about the product's features and service, that is, engagement.

According to Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. (2019), “Advertising is excellent at differentiating and positioning a brand, it helps to reinforce brand messages by reminding, reassuring or even reflecting an individual perception of a brand” (Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. p30, 2019).

### **2.4.2.2 Sales Promotion**

*Sales promotion* is a short-term activity that motivates customers' interest in immediately purchasing products or services. Furthermore, there are some kinds of benefits attached to every purchase, such as cashback, sample, or free triers, so the targeted group can be motivated to make an immediate decision to buy. The perceived values, limited time for the offer, and the good qualities attached to the product usually attract people's responses. Sales promotions are usually short term, sale-oriented, price saving, and easy to measure (Juska, J. p18 2017).

### **2.4.2.3 Digital Media**

It is many ways of marketing through various digital platforms, and the various forms include email, telephone marketing, social media marketing, mobile marketing, and catalogue. It focuses on a specific audience, so the message can be prepared to have a group in mind. Message can sometimes be for an individual customer, and it is possible to interact between customers and the marketers, thereby getting instant feedback. Digital marketing is a good tool for (creating customers engagement and building relationships) (Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. p425. 2020).

## **2.5 Market Communication Framework**

According to Fill, C. et al., “The planning framework is focused on bringing together the various elements into a logical sequence of activities. The idea behind the decisions is that information comes at previous levels in the framework. Furthermore, it also provides a checklist of activities that are considered essential.

However, it does not make the marketing communication plan perfect because sometimes, there may not be planned events but are really (unpleasant) that occurred.

The marketing communication decision-makers are responsible for considering essential elements as they make plans.

The target audience at this is the first and vital step in the planning process; knowing the surrounding scope will help reach the marketing communication objective. It will significantly impact the organisation and the product /service. The next element of the framework is the objective to accomplish; with the communication objective in focus, it will help to know the plan's scope, the campaign's time frame, the issue of positioning, and how the marketing communication is measured. Content and quantity of the communication/message, when the content of the message is known, will help strategize it to suit every category of the recipient or audience and in the right way. What method is the message passed to the target audience? This plan is according to the needs of the target audience is to be reached. Significant to consider is the financial cost of the anticipated impression; this includes the available resources to reach the required objective. What control is in place upon process implementation, and with what objective? The success of the communication plan depends on the achieved goal. (Fill, C. et al. 2019, Ch. 7).

Kotler also identified six key components in planning the framework, but four of his theories was detailed following his marketing communication framework theory. He identified these components as ‘steps in developing effective marketing communication (Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. 2020).

Moreover, the Resources and Feedback component of the framework is according to Fill's theory, C et al.

### **2.5.1 Identify the target audience.**

There must be a clear target audience in drafting the framework. The audience can be current clients/customers or potential customers, and this audience can be the public, individual, group, or notable public. Identifying the audience is important because the audience affects the communication decision. It determines the message, how it is presented, the appropriate time to communicate the message, the right place, and who should communicate it.

According to Drummond, G, & Ensor, J (2005), a focus communication segmentation allows an organisation to identify media channels to reach a specific target group. Rather than spending more money on mass-market media that reaches more groups without any specific group. For example, Whiterock Educational Service spends on a specific communication platform that reaches highly qualified students that want quality education in Finland. Segmenting this target group helps Whiterock Education Services to target their money and effort on media that focus directly on the potential quality students. (Drummond, G, & Ensor, J 2005 p68)

### **2.5.2 Objective**

After the marketer has identified the target customer, the next will know what their response will likely be. They may have to buy the brand, but there is much more than just purchasing; helping the audience through the customer journey will help to keep them as not just loyal customers but will have to advocate for the product. There are five steps in the customer journey, and marketer can help their customers through them. They must know about the brand and the benefit, then show that they are interested in the

product, then ask to make a purchase and buy the product, and if satisfied, they will then be an advocate of the brand.

Hence the goal is to keep them, all the way from awareness to buying, then become advocates.

### **2.5.3 Message:**

After identifying the target audience and the objective of the communication, the marketing manager will give attention to planning what the content of the message will be, which means “what to say” and “how to say it,” which is the structure of the message. The marketer can appeal to the audience’s emotion by making the message either positive, bringing joy and happiness or negative; all to motivate the audience to purchase. The communication can also appeal to the audience moral sense of what is proper, using it to encourage people to (support social causes).

The message can also bring out the product’s benefit, thereby making the audience think about themselves and their interest.

Talking about how to say it, which is the structure of the message, Kotler et al. (2020), highlighted three ways the message can introduce; it can be as a one-sided argument, i.e., is presenting only the benefit or strength of the product, on the other hand, it can as well be a two-sided argument where both the strength and the shortfall of the product is. The second way the message may be structured is to draw a conclusion or leave it to the audience. A one-sided argument is usually most effective.

Planning the message format is to consider what headline, illustration, and picture to be used, an eye-catching picture, size of the message, the position colour, and the shape are all decided by the marketing communicator.

#### **2.5.4 Channel**

The channel is the means of communicating the message. There are two ways to reach an audience: personal and non-personal. Personal means have people talk to one another in various ways to speak about the product, by chatting, email, or phone, and using salespeople to talk to customers. It is a very effective way to address whatever issue face to face and faster. Other channels of communication are bloggers on social media, consumers talking about the product, thereby advocating it.

Another channel of communication is the nonperson channel; as the name implies, it has no known or direct communication, and the means of non-personal communication include media. There are various forms of media, including radio, newspaper, website, and social media. This method affects buyers and creates room for more personal communication (Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G. 2020)

#### **2.5.5 Resources**

According to Fill et al., the theorist sometimes avoids the resource part of the marketing communication framework. However, this component is crucial because knowing the cost while considering the client organisation's size, in line with the level of advantages and the size of the market it operates, is vital to consider during planning. The resources are not just about the financial aspect, the quality of the available market, and the time required to achieve the expected result.

Understanding the general cost with the purpose of the marketing communication activities are an essential part of the communication framework.

#### **2.5.6 Feedback**

Feedback is expected from the audience to know the effect of the communication. Feedback helps to know the performance of every component of the plan. To know if there have been enough resources to all parts, changes to any aspects of the plan, and what the organisation should learn from for the next marketing communication planning (Fill, C. et al. 2019, Ch. 7).

## **2.6 Summary**

Thus far, the term marketing cover two aspects of relationships. It is maintaining an existing customer base and getting new ones by satisfying their needs. Marketing means more than just buying and selling services. It involves using all the tools available to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange services of value to customers.

Targeting identifies a specific market group and focuses on the best way to satisfy them with the company mission in mind. Positioning of organisation products or services refers to the place a brand occupies in customers' minds compared to an alternative product against its competitors.

The communication strategy is all the plans to communicate the company products. There are two approaches identified, namely, Push and Pull. A preferred technique is determined by what goals the company want to reach. An excellent strategy to use if the company like a fast inflow of cash is the push strategy, by placing paid ads.

Push marketing is a way of bringing the product or services face to face with customers/clients. It is an excellent way to make quick sales. Pull strategy is when a company needs to increase and maintain its customer base by trade promotion, personal selling etc. Finally, the Market communication framework brings all communication elements into an order of activities. Six components of planning identified: Identifying the target audience, the channel of communication, the company objective, the message, the available resources, and feedback from the audience, which helps to know the effect of the marketing communication and the performance of every component.

## **3 METHOD**

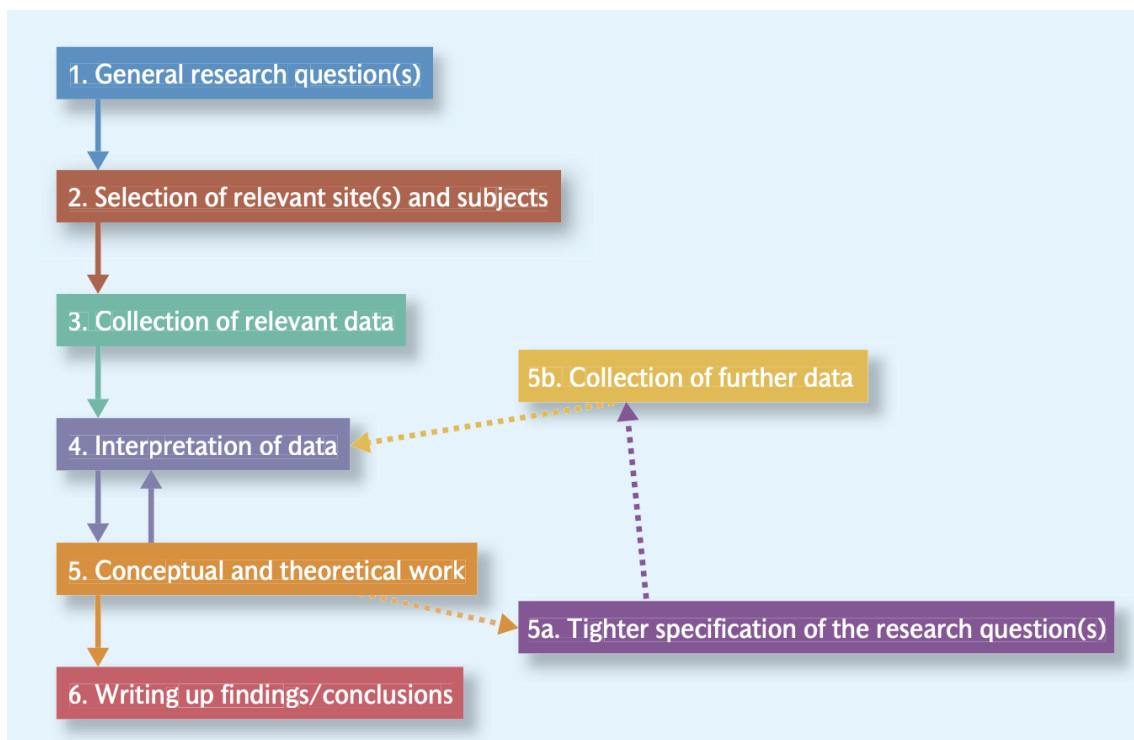
This chapter presents the method and approach used in the research. This part also explains how the respondents were selected and why they were chosen. It shows an analysis of the non-numerical data collected and why they are trustworthy and reliable.

### 3.1 Choice of method

The writer adopted a qualitative case study design to give Whiterock Educational Service's case company a detailed and intensive analysis. It is to answer the research question through an intensive examination of the problem statement. In this study, WR market communication is the object of interest, and the aim is to provide an in-depth clarification. A deductive approach is fitting because it is context-specific, and there are four aspects to the deductive approach. It starts with a broad general theory from the researcher making a hypothesis about the social world based on the theory. Then, the researcher conducts research that tests the hypothesis. The evidence gathered is used to either confirm the theory or reject it (Tracy, S. 2019 Ch. 2).

The qualitative research method is more communicative and descriptive. It is the right fit for market research because it allows for in-depth questioning and more examination of respondents' responses, revealing their behaviours and perception.

Because of the flexibility of method in getting qualitative data to analyse, following the six steps of qualitative research, according to Bryman (2012), as shown in figure 1, is used to prepare, gather, and analyse data (Bryman, 2012).



*Figure 1: The main steps of qualitative research, Adopted from Bryman (Bryman, 2012. P384)*

Figure 1 above shows how the steps of qualitative research can be ‘virtualised; it clearly outlines the six steps, which are:

**General research question(s):** A hypothesis raises questions that need researching and questioning.

**Selection of relevant site(s) and subject:** this involves determining the location of the research and the ‘participants.

**Collection of relevant data:** At this stage, the actual fieldwork of the research is interviewing and gathering data.

**Interpretation of data:** After the data is collected and interpreted, and if there is a need for more data, a further interview, as shown in (5b.).

**Conceptual and theoretical work:** The findings are brought together and compared with the theory at this stage. More data may be needed to clear any doubt; possibly more interviews (5a) in figure 1.

**Writing up findings:** After collecting all data and the significant data attained, the findings written, conclusions are made on the hypothesis.

Following the steps, data were collected through a semi-structured interview, allowing the interviewer to follow a list of prepared questions that allows for a discussion.

Though the questions were not asked in any specific order, the interviewer can make a follow-up question that allows for a free-flowing discussion between the interviewer and the respondent.

### **3.2 Respondents**

Secondary data was collected from the various literature, which forms a part of the theoretical framework of the research. This is also the secondary data collection, but primary data was collected from a systematic qualitative face-to-face and zoom interview where the case company's employees were the respondents. A semi-structured interview allowed



the respondents to give a subjective opinion, with follow up questions and open-ended questions.

The sample were employees of the case company. Neither age nor gender is revealed to grant anonymity, but they have different years of working experience. They were chosen from two company locations though they all do the same work, management staff each from a location to understand the problem from different perspectives, and their various experiences. Three marketing staff, one from the operations and two management staff, were interviewed following the interview guide that is in 3.3.

Questions were not asked in any specific order, but the researcher paid attention to the responses according to the responses.

### **3.3 Questionnaire - Interview guide**

The interview guide is structured based on the theory; it is a semi-structured interview, so the questions are in a way that allows for obtaining answers and learning about what questions to ask next. Considering that the interview questions are not the same as research questions, the questions are categorised into five themes so that the subject can be understood from different perspectives.

The interview was conducted in English and face-to-face, and through zoom, because the case company has branches in different cities, so all respondents cannot be reached face-to-face. The interview questions were designed to answer the research questions and understand the respondents' views and opinions on its marketing communication strategy, whether it is effective enough to attract quality Nigerian students to Finland as a study destination.

The interviewer used open-ended questions to allow for detailed answers. Moreover, the study took place in the Nigeria office of Whiterock Educational service, so the respondents interacted naturally in their natural working environment.

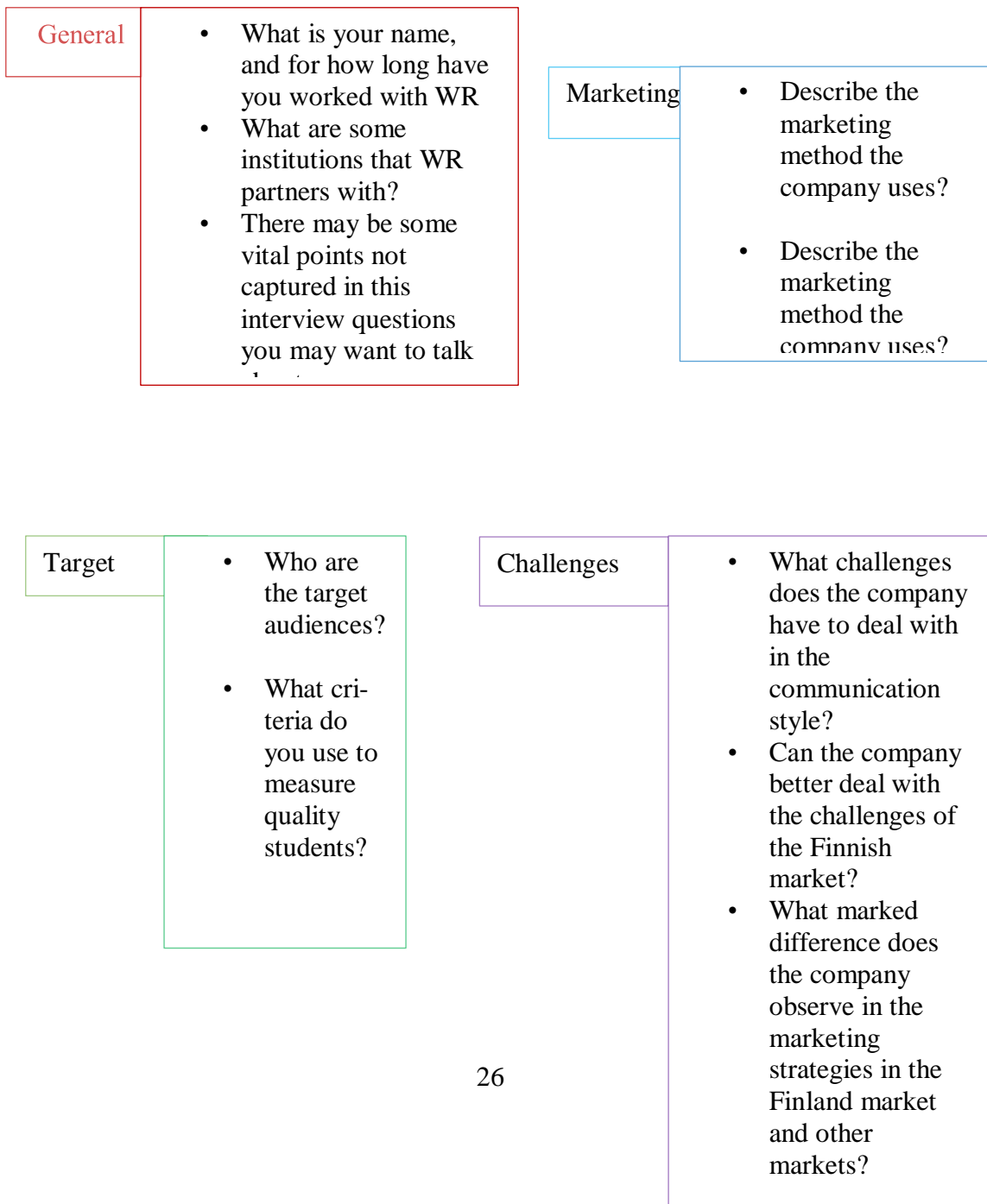
All data with a recording allowed the researcher to pay attention to and follow through with the responses. The recording can be returned for data accuracy and avoidance of bias or influenced by the researcher's values (Bryman, 2012 p482).

The themes categories are *Marketing, Communication Strategies, Challenges, General about the Company*, and the *target audience*.

The general question, introduction, focuses on knowing about the respondents' background and information about the company.

The other themes explore answers to specific questions directly related to the research questions, such as relating to the company's chosen form of marketing and how they communicate the services to the target group. Furthermore, what has been the result of the marketing communication strategies?

The third theme focused on the challenges the case company faces with their chosen form of marketing communication if it reaches the target audience and the feedback from the marketing effort. The Themes are presented in Figure 2.



Communication Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there specific marketing communication styles to the different destinations, including Finland?</li> <li>• What communication strategies does the company presently use in marketing, including Finland?</li> <li>• How have the company changed its market communication strategy with the Finland market over</li> </ul>
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*Figure 2: The interview questions*

### **3.4 Research approach**

The researcher has approached the study qualitative semi-structured interview because it allows getting in-depth first-hand information that answers the study question. The aim is to get the subjective opinions or viewpoints of the individual respondents involved. It

focuses on getting the people involved in their real working experience and a natural setting. There are differences between people and objects of natural science because the object cannot express or attribute meaning to the things happening in their environment, but people do. One of the best ways to qualitative research is to interact with people. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), it is like viewing events and the social world through the people's eyes and interpreting events from their perspective will lead to finding the answers to the research questions. (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p402)

**The study:** The study was presented as in the interview guide, flexibly so that according to Bryman (2012), such flexibility is essential in the area of varying the order of the questions, following up with lead questions, and clearing up inconsistencies in answer (Bryman, A. 2012 p487).

The interviewer used open-ended questions to allow for detailed answers. Moreover, the study took place in the Nigeria office of Whiterock Educational service, so the respondents interacted naturally in their natural working environment.

**Participant:** Staff of Whiterock from various years of experience participated in the interview, and they responded according to their perspective of the research question. In Nigeria, the study was carried out fourteen days, with each interview session lasting between 26 minutes to 45 minutes. Two of the participants were interviewed face to face, while the others were done via zoom meeting.

**Collecting Data:** It was face to face, and via zoom process, with a recording done to allow the researcher to pay attention to and follow through with the responses. The recording can be returned for data accuracy and avoidance of bias or influenced by the researcher's values (Bryman, 2012 p482).

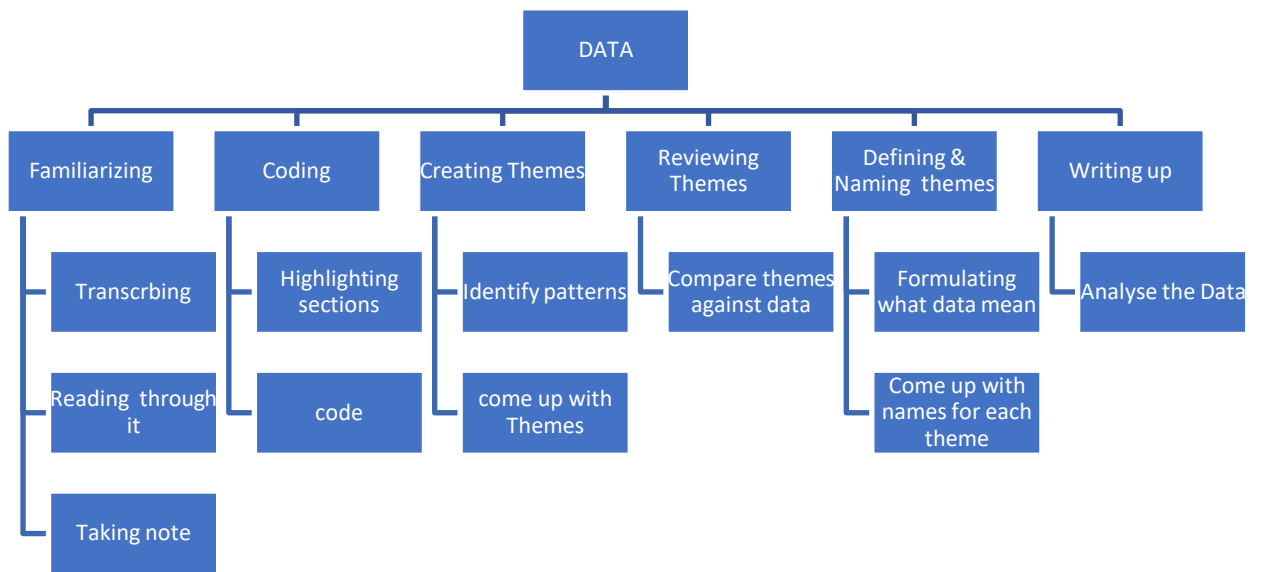
### **3.5 Analysis of the data**

After collecting the data according to the qualitative research interview, the raw data, that is, the recording from the interview, was transcript as collected to maintain the validity. Then the researcher adopted the thematic analyses. It is suitable not only because of the flexibility of the method but also because it is suitable for analysing qualitative data and text like those transcripts from an interview.

Thematic analysis is a suitable approach as it helps answer the research questions. It is worthy of note that thematic analysis allows the flexibility in interpreting the data, 'approach large data easily by sorting them into broad themes' and enables the researcher to survey the data find 'patterns of meaning that reoccur repeatedly.

There are two approaches to thematic analysis, namely inductive and deductive. The researcher adopted the deductive approach to approach the data with a "preconceived theme". The thematic deductive approach to data analysis is the right fit for the data, though it is subjective. (Caulfield, J., 2021)

According to Braun & Clark (2016), the thematic data analyses follow six stages which the researcher followed. The steps can be seen in the diagram in (figure 1).



**Figure 3: Main Steps of Thematic Data Analyses (Braun & Clark, 2006).**

From the diagram in figure 3, the phases of thematic data analysis include first getting the data, then following the steps from familiarising with the data by transcribing to taking note. Furthermore, the final stage is the writing up, which involves analysing the data.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

The data in the theory chapter was retrieved using various sources and research material and evaluated by analysing and comparing various sources with the understanding that validity and reliability are critical in the research material.

The primary data was via zoom and face to face interviews, which means that the data was raw, directly from the interviewee and was transcript as recorded in a fully transparent way. At the same time, the researcher also took note during the interview, making the data come from more than one source and being consistent, thus confirming the study's reliability.

The raw data was collected when the respondents were at their best, making the data free from error.

The process was done in a quiet place free from bias because the researcher's view did not influence any part of the process. Data retrieved from the interview addressed the research questions, which further strengthened the validity and reliability of the research when measured.

## **4 RESULTS**

This chapter presents the results of the empirical study. The interviews were done according to the interview guide and are analysed based on the predetermined themes and other specific themes that came up during the interview responses. The interview questions were based on the theoretical framework; however, only relevant materials are included by coding.

### **4.1 The interviews and Questionnaires**

The interviews went smoothly, and the respondents expressed themselves and their understanding of the case company marketing strategies' Whiterock Educational Services'. They were able to identify very well with the company, what it does, and the means the company uses to promote its services. The questionnaires are related to Whiterock to complement the interview, and the themes are predetermined, but other categories came up from the main themes during the interviews.

Respondents were staff of Whiterock educational services, two management staff, and four marketing staff. Because of the pandemic, five of the interviews were over the zoom platform on different days convenient for the respondents. However, only one was face to face. It took two weeks to get the respondents interviewed, starting from the 9th of December to the 20th of December 2021, and each session spanned between twenty-six to thirty minutes.

The researcher reproduced only relevant facts; and strived not to express personal opinions, to keep the result's credibility, and allow the reader to create their own opinion and

the analysis and conclusions based on this review. The author identifies six themes related to the study topic; presented in figure 4.

***THEMES***

General	Finland	Target Audience	Communication Strategies adopted	Communication Channel	Challenges
theme 1	theme 2	theme 3	theme 4	theme 5	theme 6

*Figure 4: Predetermined and Identified Themes*

#### **4.1.1 General (Whiterock market)**

The first and common topic discussed during the interview was the market and the company's positioning. All six-interviewee demonstrated by their response how much they love what they do, which was also evident by the number of years each interviewee have spent working with the company. When asked the general question about the company's market, their responses reveal their knowledge of the company. The company is responsible for providing recruitment services for schools, which they do in developing countries. Some of their responses are:

*“So basically, what we do is we aggregate opportunities, education, international education opportunities around the world.”* (Interviewee 4)

*“What Whiterock does is international education placements for students in Nigeria.”* (Interviewee 5)



*"Whiterock is an international educational recruitment organisation that recruit international students to study in different destinations across the world." (Interviewee 6)*

#### **4.1.2 Finland as a Study Destination**

Among the several countries that Whiterock have a partnership with is Finland. Finland is one of the best countries that most students from Nigeria want to study. In time past, Whiterock has done well with that market; to date, clients still come and request Finland as their study destination. Because of being one of their excellent markets, the interviewees noted the following:

*"Finland is a country most students, especially in Nigeria, want to further their education in Finland, reasons being the ranking of Finland ranked among the best countries in terms of peace, in terms of their economy, and terms of life expectancy, conducive learning environment." (Interviewee 1)*

*"Finland usually is a good marketing option for students and Nigeria because they used to have free education."*

*Finland has been an extremely attractive market for a lot of international students, especially from Nigeria, which is our primary market." (Interviewee 3)*

#### **4.1.3 Target Audience (Quality Clients)**

Regarding their customers, it was clear from the responses of all interviewees that the company focuses on excellent and serious kinds of clients they target in the market. When asked about the target audience, the reactions were unanimous with all interviewees. The respondents noted the following:

*“Our target mainly are young scholars, students who are high school leavers. We also have students who are already taking their first degree in Nigeria. And they want to further their studies by going for their masters or postgraduate programs.”(Interviewee 1)*

*Our target student markets, or target audience is students who want to study in the university undergraduate programs. Students who have completed universities here, who have completed first, students who have completed high school, want to go into bachelor’s degree overseas. We have students who have completed their first degree as a bachelor’s degree who want to do masters overseas.” (Interviewee 4)*

By extension, two interviewees mentioned others, not students, as part of their target audience. Their responses were:

*“These are the target market, schools, parents, and we also keep links with previous clients because they are always a good point of referral for new clients for us.”(Interviewee 5)*

*“We have three different spectrums of the target audience. So, the first one is individuals who aim to study abroad. So, and this could practically be anyone, it could be students seeking this program, postgraduate program, or certificate programs. The second one is the schools themselves, the schools reaching out to us, who aim to recruit from our market, so we provide consulting for them. The last one is a public sector, often government agencies that aim to offer scholarships for their citizens.”(Interviewee 3)*

All respondents also spoke about what kinds of clients they recruit as quality students that meet the requirements for admissions to various partner institutions, including schools in Finland. Their goal is to get quality students to apply to the universities. Hence, they focus on students with sound academic backgrounds, and such students accessed by having them take the International English Testing System (IELTS) or another external English

test. Some schools in some countries like Finland also go further to test the quality of students by testing them further with the entrance examination.

Furthermore, quality students that want quality education will have to travel as far as other countries to take the exam. When the question about how they identify quality clients that they target; The respondent answered saying:

*“There are two major criteria for quality students. Number one is their academic ability; we assess their academic background. Furthermore, the second one is their financial proficiency. Do they have a sponsor? What kind of sponsor do they have?”(Interviewee 2)*

*“First, it is a business of figures of payments. So, first, applicants who can afford not just tuition fees or living expenses of where they go, finance wise, are credible. Now, it doesn't end with finance alone, we also check the academic credentials. We have interviews with students; we speak with them to assess them. We can assess how motivated they are.” (Interviewee 4)*

#### **4.1.4 Communication strategies adopted**

The marketing communication strategies that the organisation adopted to get their clients/customers were highlighted clearly from the interviewee's responses. Regarding the marketing and communication strategies, a typical response is a personal relationship they maintain with existing clients or successful students who have travelled to refer clients or tell their friends and family about the company. They said it is the most successful marketing strategy that the company has used over the years.

*“So, we have seen that one vital component of a marketing strategy is through referral. So, something we do is we leverage on the relationship we have with our previous clients, those are students who have already travelled, so we leverage on the relationship with them.”(Interviewee 3)*

*“We make sure any student that wants to travel, we make sure that they get the best services from us and that has been our great marketing point. We satisfy them and through, and those referrals.”(Interviewee 6)*

*“We have relationships with local high schools, where we do target marketing, we do attend events and organise our events. During covid, now we especially are doing a lot of webinars, where we meet different student, and sometimes attend educational fairs where we pitch opportunities available in our partner schools.”  
(Interviewee 4)*

Another form of market communication strategy is personal selling. One Respondents noted the following:

*“Some marketers also have sub-marketer that they use. Whiterock has training for the main marketer, and then those marketers now distribute information to their sub-marketers to direct people from different markets. It has been working so well too.” (Interviewee 5)*

Another form of marketing communication strategy noted by the respondents is content marketing, especially regarding Finland. They would need to speak to the country's benefit, unlike in times past when students did not need to pay any tuition fee to study in the country. Now they market the benefit of studying in Finland, the quality of education, quality of living standards available in the country. One respondent noted the following.

*“Finland requires a lot more public relation kind of communication, really speaking to the benefit in the country, why all of these hurdles, all of the challenges, the sacrifices, why they are worth it.” (Interviewee 3)*

#### **4.1.5 Communication Channel**

When asked about the market communication channel, the respondents showed that Whitrock thrives in the various channel of communication that they use to reach their target audience, which has positively impacted their marketing strategies. The channels of communication used were well highlighted by all the interviewees, as noted in the following responses.

*“Our communication methods include webinars, flyers; we use soft copy flyers. When marketing online was not very popular, we printed hard copies of flyers. We have brochures of our company; we use our website; we use our social media handles.”(4)*

*“We use all available social media platforms, and we are very active on Instagram. We do a lot of paid and sponsorship ads on Instagram. We also have a website that is search engine optimised.”(3)*

*“So specifically, then, we use radio jingles in addition to other marketing strategies for Finland.” (2)*

*“We have also been massively using social media handle, we have Facebook, we have Twitter, we have Instagram handle, and by this means we have been able to reach out to the general public about our services.” (1)*

#### **4.1.6 Challenges (Finland market)**

As it is inevitable with all markets, most of the interviewees emphasised the challenges they experience with the Finnish market as a study destination, which according to them, has discouraged many students who would have loved to choose that study destination. Some of the challenges they mentioned connect to the delay in the study permit process, and more discouraging is that they would have had to pay tuition against years before

2017. Students must travel to another country to take an entrance exam, which will take months to get their feedback. Very importantly, as they noted, it is becoming even more difficult for international students to get a job after studying. They noted the following:

*"For now, though, because of the change in rules and regulations for international students, there is low recruitment of students to Finland."(6)*

*"For Finland, because the process is a bit different from other destinations, for example, Finland require you to write entrance exams out of Nigeria. In addition, students are interested in securing study permits to travel and embark on their studies. It has not been an encouraging response from the Finnish embassy in Nigeria, and they do not respond on time."(2)*

*"But after 2017, when Finland charged tuition fees, then it lost its competitiveness. Finland had not also been able to create many opportunities for international students upon completion of their studies." (Interviewee 3)*

*"Covid was a factor, and I must say that because how countries responded to covid was different. Some countries like Finland were locked down." (Interviewee 4)*

The interviewees noted a shift in clients' interest from the Finnish market to other destinations that were more international student-oriented by streamlining the study permit application process to make it more accessible by quality students. Another challenge mentioned by the interviewee (1) and (4) is the outbreak of the global pandemic Covid. They noted that most countries shot down, which affected most markets, especially Finland, because they shut down while some other countries still grant study visas to allow the students to travel.

## **4.2 Summary of Result**

The interview result reveals that the company adopts various strategies to market its educational consultancy services. These strategies include; The use of Commercial advertisement through radio jingles, television broadcast and newspaper magazines whenever they are hosting an event. The company also uses social media very extensively to reach their target audience. As most of their client demography are young people with heavy social media usage and consumption, they have observed that mainstream social media platforms have proved effective in promoting their services. These marketing communication channels resonate with their target audience effectively. Most of their potential clients had a pre-existing positive impression about Finnish education as being of a very high standard and Finland as a stable, safe country that provides a considerably better standard of living than their home country.

However, the interviewee also highlighted a few challenges precipitating the decline in the number of students who eventually make their way to Finland despite their willingness and enthusiasm for Finnish education. Some of the challenges cited are.

The introduction of tuition fees in Finland for degree programs, the lack of centres in Nigeria for students to take entrance, and the arbitrary immigration policy, prolonged processing time for a study permit.

It was noted that the company's best strategy in reaching high-quality clients is through Referral Marketing. They ensure that existing customers get quality services, which makes them refer their friends, families, and others to the company, the word-of-mouth initiative remains their best marketing strategy to increase their customer base.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to find out the marketing strategies and the Communication methods Whiterock educational services limited adopted, and how the Company can better capitalise on the marketing opportunities and deal with the challenges they experience. Another aim was to discover what marketing Communication practice is adopted to

market Finland as a study destination and deal with the Challenges. This chapter presents the findings and discusses the answers to the research question from the qualitative research and theoretical framework.

Through the interview, the researcher was able to identify the company market and services and categorised the findings into themes: (1) Whiterock market and partnerships, (2) Finland, (3) Target market, (4) Communication strategies adopted, (5) Communication channel, and (6) Challenges.

### **5.1.1 Whiterock Market**

The respondents' responses showed that they all enjoy marketing the company products in various ways. The result of the empirical study indicated that the company aggregate international educational opportunities around the world. Whiterock has an enormous scope of its market. As a service company, the organisation is positioned well in international student recruitment companies, with all employees enjoying what they do. The company has a partnership with most countries where students want to study. Whiterock educational services have a good market share in the industry of student recruitment. As indicated by the theory of (Kotler et al., 2021), the company is well-positioned to satisfy its customers, not just sell its services. However, they have created long relationships, having loyal customers who also become its marketers. It showed that the company has created and delivered satisfying services to their clients, so they later become stakeholders with Whiterock educational services.

The result of the first research question clearly showed that the company meets the modern definition of marketing, which is providing customers with what satisfies their needs and keeping relationships.

Putting customers' needs at the core of the business also makes the company expand in their relationship with many countries, including the Americas, the United Kingdom, Australia, over twenty countries in the EU, and others. This strategy ensures that every



client has what they need in whatever country they like at an affordable price. Clients and marketers are informed about the new offer whenever new destinations are included in the market spectrum, which is in line with the theory of the four Ps of the marketing strategies of (Armstrong et al. 2021) and that Whiterock engages in great marketing, increasing the demand for their services.

### **5.1.2 Finland As a study destination**

As indicated by the result of the study, three themes stood out when the interviewee answered the question about Finland as a study destination. (a) best education, (b) excellent quality of life, (c) Tuition-free before 2017. Finland is one of the destination countries Whiterock educational services have sent students over the years; it is a segment of the market that students with low income but wanted a quality education had been processed to study.

According to the study, the country is a desirable destination and market that many international students from Nigeria are interested in. Finland is a country known for quality education especially K12 education; this has led many to generalise the education system to include Finnish higher education. Whiterock educational service had promoted the Finnish higher education bachelor's degree offered by the universities, and the university of applied sciences, because the university of applied science programs is about skills acquisition.

It was noted also that Finland is one of the happiest countries. Before 2017, the Finnish universities were assessable by all, especially low-income families and wanted their children to acquire an excellent education. The Nigerian market comprises different clients; families with higher income can afford education in the USA, United Kingdom, Canada, and more. There are also families with medium income who are but also want quality education. These segments are the ones that Whiterock gives options of countries with low tuition or families with low income for tuition-free destinations like Finland before 2017.

Knowledge of the Nigerian market helps group clients according to what they can afford; such segmentation, according to the market's knowledge, helps Whiterock satisfy every customer. So, every client has a destination based on knowing who they are and what influences their destination choice (Proctor, T. 2000).

### **5.1.3 Target market**

Having a target audience helps to direct the marketing effort properly. When an audience is known, the marketing strategy is also focused on satisfying the audience's needs in harmony with the company's vision—targeting as part of the communication framework help to focus the marketing communication on the right audience and frame the marketing message rightly. (Principle of advertising by (Lee, Monle, and Carla Johnson. 2005). The company's goal is to reach the right audience with the right message and the right channel to reach them. In harmony with the company's service product of international education placement company, they target students who want to further their education overseas, either at a bachelor's degree level or postgraduate programs. The study also shows that they target private school owners who may want to encourage their students(parents) to plan the possibility of students abroad for quality higher education. In this case, Whiterock does a B2B marketing whereby the message and communication framework is different. Furthermore, the third segment of their target audience is the government and government agency they consult for to offer scholarships to intelligent citizens who qualify to study abroad.

Having that targeted audience helps Whiterock create a market framework and direct channel that helps save funds and adequately direct their marketing effort, according to the theory of Drummond, G, & Ensor, J (2005) of the elements of marketing communication framework.

### **5.1.4 Communication strategies adopted**

The market communication strategy of Whiterock educational services is directed at the clients(students) because the goal is to reach the target audience with any study opportunity that may appeal to them and with the right message. About scholarships and school fees discount opportunities and tuition-free countries at the right time, as the responses from the interviewee showed. The empirical study showed that the company uses push and pull marketing strategies. The marketing communication strategies that help them bring the services to clients through what one of the respondents identified as sub-marketing, which means that the company markers also have other marketers working for them. These sub-marketers are the ones that sell the services to the final consumers.

The theory of Kotler and Armstrong (2020) indicated that it is a very effective way of communicating with clients. It is possible to interact with clients one-to-one, maintaining a good customer relationship.

Another push marketing tool the company uses is the trade promotion directed at private school owners for their final year high school students. When there are scholarship opportunities, it is promoted to them, and they sell the opportunities to their students.

Most respondents stated that referral is an effective marketing communication strategy the company uses to reach a larger audience. Leveraging on their relationship with satisfied customers, who also inform their friends and families to buy Whiterock educational services products, the company has used this very effective tool. It makes the company's services more visible to customers. They get a good result, more so as due to the covid 19, they have reduced their physical contact with people, and do much online marketing.

#### **5.1.5 Communication channel**

Most of the respondents spoke very much about its communication channel to reach its audience. As part of the marketing communication strategies, they claim to have increased their customer base by using advertising. They have got many clients through radio jingles, newspapers, paid ads, with messages that appeal to them and influence their decisions Fill, C. and Turnbull, S. (2019).

Another channel is through social media; most respondents claimed that they have a very active presence on various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

Another effective channel they have used over the years is Whiterock's website and partner school's website, which includes Whiterock Educational Services as their agents and searches through search engine optimisation. These marketing communication channels have helped increase their customer base over the years because they affect buyers and create room for more personal communication. It agrees with the theory of Kotler and Armstrong (2020) that digital marketing is a good tool for creating customer engagements and building relationships.

### **5.1.6 Challenges**

Challenges are one of the themes that came up during the empirical study of this thesis. The respondent noted very firmly that the organisation has challenges, as in the case of every business that they need solutions to; it was clear from the feedback they got from customers.

Feedback helps the marketing manager identify what aspect of the marketing to improve or even include in their marketing plan (Fill, C. et al. (, 2019).

The challenges that the company experience seems to be more related to their Finland market as a study destination. While challenges are about not having the admission process comes as fast as some clients may want, or not having students that they termed as quality students. It means that some students may not have good sponsors for their chosen destinations or may not have the funds required for a specific destination, as one of the respondents stated.

Some challenges also relate to changes in the destination market, such as government policies about student admissions and visa processes or changes in admission procedures of educational institutions.

A case in question is the Finnish market; when the government of Finland enacted the rule that international students must pay tuition fees, it affected the market so much that the company must change the message in their market communication plan.

The company worked hard to meet its marketing target by adjusting its marketing communication plan. Worst yet is the bureaucratic procedure of the study permit at the immigration level, as stated by most respondent, even after the company get students that can afford the fee, after passing through the huddles of taking the entrance exams in a neighbouring country. Furthermore, Students will wait months for the result of the entrance exams and wait for Months for the study permit to be processed after that by the Finnish immigration, which very often eventually results in a resident permit rejection. All of these made the Finnish market less competitive, resulting in a change in the marketing communication strategy.

Another challenge that affected the Whiterock market of Finland as a study destination is the pandemic that ravages the whole world. It affected the choice of students that were planning to study in Finland. The pandemic affected all businesses worldwide, but some countries opened for business after one year.

However, the best practice is adjusting the communication strategy to an intensive online presence. It will help keep the business robust, scalable and relevant despite any crises affecting the world. Following the theory of Radd Interactive (2021) of the marketing communication strategy

## **5.2 Discussion of method**

The chosen method to analyse the study went as expected for three out of the four respondents, but one did not go as expected because of an internet network that interrupted the interview toward the end of it, which may have affected the result of the study, that thought was insignificant. Also, the research would have been able to see the interviewee's emotions better if the interview was in person.

However, the remote interview through zoom was the option because of the pandemic. But overall, it went well, and the interviewee expressed themselves in their natural working situation. The recording from the interview is transcribed as recorded, which makes it retain credibility and validity.

The researcher could not think of a better method than a qualitative semi-structured interview. Because the aim is to have the interviewee in their natural day to day working situation, that would allow them to express themselves so that their qualitative responses

could satisfy the aim of the study. To explore the market communication best practice that the case company adopted to market the Finland higher education in Nigeria and to answer the research question. Analysing the result show that the researcher achieved the aim of the study, and the chosen method was correct.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

The study examines Whiterock's marketing communication method and how improving the marketing communication strategy can help grow its Finnish market as a study destination. Furthermore, to answer the research questions:

1. How does the company capitalize on their marketing opportunities while dealing with the challenges they experience in marketing the Finnish higher education in Nigeria?
2. What best marketing communication practice is adopted to address the lack of success in recruiting highly qualified students to the Finnish higher education in Nigeria?

Based on the qualitative research, it can be suggested that Whiterock educational services use various forms of communication to reach their audience about the company's services.

The research shows that many Nigerian students still see Finnish higher education as one of the best. Whiterock educational services have adopted a wide range of strategies in its marketing approach in order to attract eligible students. Furthermore, these strategies have specifically been geared toward attracting students that want to study abroad, parents who want to send their children for quality education, and even government agencies remain the right target for the services.

Therefore, capitalizing on the available market communication opportunities, such as making a good impression on their existing and new clients, could build the market base because most market comes from existing satisfied clients.

By properly segmenting the market, they could reach every client with what they can afford according to the favourable market at that time. It also helps to build their communication style or strategy according to each segment of the market, making it

possible to identify which market is not productive or declining, as in the case of the Finnish market.

While the researcher may not make a generalized conclusion, the study suggests that the decline in students' interest that wishes to study in Finland may not depend on Whiterock's marketing communication strategy. However, the study shows that it is dependent on three factors.

First, which started when the country started requesting that international students pay tuition; the second was when the country stopped arranging for the entrance exams in Nigeria. Students have to go as far as another country to take the exams. Thirdly, the challenge of the bureaucratic study permit process on the side of the Finnish immigration usually takes too long, thereby dwindling the interest of students who were once interested in studying in that country. Even after students sacrificed the first two hurdles, the study permit process is the biggest challenge that does not depend on the company, which all interviewees alluded to.

Students who have made up their minds to travel are usually very impatient and agitated, especially as they wait for the visas to be processed. They, therefore, would not want to experience the delay or even the unfavourable decision that Finnish immigration brings, thereby losing interest in the country.

## **6.1 Limitations of the study**

Though the research was successful, the researcher experienced limitations. First was a time constraint, and the process went so fast that the researcher would have made more research and more sample respondents to participate in the empirical study.

The covid was also a factor for not meeting with the interviewees in person, which would have helped to see their feeling physically. The importance of meeting people and shaking hands with them cannot be overemphasized. It helps to feel close, and they could have expressed themselves more by giving more information.

Another limitation is that there was so much research material to choose from; hence, it was not easy to make it concise, and time was also a factor in this.

Finally, As much as possible, the researcher has tried to be objective and avoid bias in this research work to avoid own ideas during translation and interpretation of data, it is possible that some thoughts may have been affected by her ideas.

## **6.2 Suggestions for further studies**

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A suggested subject for research could be a study into how the company can build a standard customer management system through a structured incentive by offering rewards.

How Whiterock educational services can adopt a stronger data-driven marketing approach, ensuring that a higher marketing budget is allocated to its marketing channels that deliver optimum results.



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# **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### ***GENERAL***

1. What is your name, and for how long have you worked with the company?
2. Tell me about the company, how they market their services?
3. What are some of Whiterock's partner institutions Countries?

#### ***TARGET***

1. Who is the target audience?
2. What criteria are used to measure them?

#### ***MARKETING***

4. Describe the marketing method the company used to reach its audience?
5. Talk about Finland as a study destination

#### ***MARKETING COMMUNICATION***

6. Tell me, what are the specific marketing communication style to market the different destinations including Finland
7. How have the company changed its market communication strategies over the years with the Finnish Market?
8. What communication strategies does the company presently use in its markets, including Finland?

## ***CHALLENGES***

9. What challenges does the company have had to struggle within their communication style
10. What marked difference does the company observe in its marketing strategies in the Finland market and other markets?
11. There may be some other important details not captured here, tell me about it

## APPENDIX 2

### Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Bridget Simon from Arcada University of Applied Sciences. I understand that the project is to gather information about academic work to conduct a research project.

1. My participation in this research project is voluntary. I understand that there is no payment for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. There will be no consequences if I decline to participate or withdraw from the study.

2. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question in the discussion or to end the interview immediately.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by Bridget Simon from Arcada University of Applied Sciences. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and the researcher will take notes during the interview—an audiotape and subsequent dialogue. If I do not want the recording, I will not participate in the study.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview. My confidentiality as a participant in this research will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies that protect individuals' and institutions' anonymity.

5. Faculty and administrators from Arcada University of Applied sciences will not be present at the interview but will access raw notes or transcripts if needed. This precaution will prevent my comments from having any negative repercussions. 6. I have read and understood the explanation provided to me. I have answered all my questions to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ My signature Date

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My printed name    Signature of the investigator

For further information, don't hesitate to get in touch with Bridget Simon Akinremi at  
simonakb@arcada.fi