

Marketing Mix, a Therapy for low Enrolment in Private Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract:-Enrolment of students has become a challenge to the ever increasing number of private universities in Nigeria. Hence, the focus of this study is to prove the suitability of marketing theory in determination of student's choice and improved enrolment into Private Universities in Nigeria. There are two major contrasting attitudes regarding introducing marketing into higher education although literature on marketing higher education is mainly based in Western contexts and cultures, nevertheless, it is ripe for developing economy like ours because of what it stands to gain. Reasons that make marketing an important aspect in reflecting positively on an institution and the community are highlighted. It also highlights the paucity of literature combining strategies of marketing higher education and student choice of university. However, because of the service nature of private universities they are recommended to integrate the use of a set of 11ps of marketing toward achieving their marketing goal in this particular order: price, plus, programme, people, place, physical facility, politics, processes, post sale service, packaging and promotion.

Key words: Enrolment, marketing mix, higher education, private university and competitions

I. INTRODUCTION

The federal government of Nigeria licensed private universities to cushion the effect of growing population which leads to higher demand for higher education and to fill the vacuum created by government's inability to cater for higher education need of the nation. The development was greeted with mixed feelings because some scholars believe that university education is sacred, therefore, must not be deregulated while others opined that it was the best thing that has happened to the education sector in Nigeria because the private providers will have to compete for student enrolment among themselves, and will also set government on its toes by the state-of-the-art facilities provided in their institutions.

However, the competition among private universities is getting rather tougher and tighter than one could have imagined. Filip (2012) submitted that competition between higher education organizations has dramatically increased and currently the market has become saturated. Hence, management of these institutions needs to give their best to attract students' enrolment to their schools. It is no longer news that the operators of the private institutions scuttle for candidates to be able to meet up their bills. Therefore, to maintain its competitiveness, the public relations department research desk and the advancement centers of the first

generation private universities in Nigeria monopolized the market in the early 2000s. During this period, the market was big enough and there was no need for any marketing strategy to be put in place for these universities to go extra mile to remain in business. Nowadays, sourcing for students has become very competitive such that a private university must leave no stone unturned if it will retain its competitive advantage. As at 2017, the heat of competition was already being felt, for the number of accredited private universities had grown to 74 and many more are still in the pipeline.

II. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Considering the stiff competition among private universities in Nigeria most especially in the area of student enrolment vis-a-vis the traditional belief that 'education is not a commodity' so marketing not necessary, the present paper intends to bridge the gap and make it obvious that it is imperative to identify viable options available for managers of private universities to maintain their competitiveness among other institutions. This paper in particular explores the prospect of adopting marketing-mix as a means to improve the performance of private universities and also to outline suitable marketing tools for higher education in Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the study since it attempted to study the applicability of marketing tools in higher education. Students and parents provided answers to carefully worded questionnaires that were designed for this research. The survey was carried out in Bowen University, Iwo in Osun State. Bowen University is one of the foremost private universities located in the South-Western geo-political zone of Nigeria.

III. MARKETING PRINCIPLES AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Adetayo (2012) sees marketing as a process of identifying, creating, delivery of satisfiers, within societal constraints profitably in the exchange for something of value in the arena of business competition. However, Kotler (1995) offers this specific definition for higher education marketing: Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives. Marketing involves designing the institution's offerings to meet the target markets' needs and desires and using effective pricing, communication and

distribution, to inform, motivate and service these markets (Kotler & Fox, 1995, 6). It is therefore crucial to discuss marketing in education the way it is perceived. There has been a considerable amount of debate over whether educational institutions should get involved in marketing e.g. Bartlett, *et al.* (2002), and Newman (2004). One of these arguments, for example, is over whether or not students could be considered as customers or consumers in the first place (Sharrock, 2010). Attitudes opposing marketing education believe that it is not suitable to talk about this subject and it is even 'shameful' to call students 'customers' (Holbrook, 2005, 144). Others believe that the introduction of market forces into the area of education evokes feelings of concern, even mistrust, within the world of education (Gibbs & Knapp, 2002). This opinion is supported by the idea that education is not to be marketed as this would create major social and economic problems (Sharrock, 2010). What these philosophers advocate is more obvious in countries where educational institutions are not experiencing market forces and do not have to compete, such as many of the third world countries. This case in third world countries is to be contrasted with the case in the UK and

12 other European countries (Agasisti & Catalano, 2006) where state intervention is at a lower level and the idea of marketing has been 'normalised' especially after the universities have had to compete for funding and more students (Bridges & Husbands, 1996; Pugsley, 2004; and Drummond, 2004). Missionaries and government were the first set of education providers in Nigeria and their aim was not to make profit hence, there was no need for any marketing approach. Some of the opposing attitudes argue that since marketing places more weight on customers' needs and satisfaction, this has placed a shift in the system of accountability.

When education is marketed, there would be a shift of accountability towards being measured primarily by customer satisfaction (Pierre, 1995, 71). However, deregulating education has necessitated the need for market forces and institutional competition.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF MARKETING MIX

The term "marketing mix" became popular after Neil H. Borden published his article, the marketing manager as a "mixer of ingredients". He refers to marketing mix as the set of actions, or tactics, that a company uses to promote its brand or product in the market. The 4Ps then, made up a typical marketing mix - Product, Price, Place and Promotion. However, nowadays, the marketing mix has included several other Ps like Packaging, Positioning, People and even Politics as vital mix elements.

Kotler and Fox (1995) developed a version of a marketing mix designed specifically for educational institutions, and which seems to address the limitations set by Palmer (2001). Kotler and Fox's (1995) model depicts this marketing mix in educational context to be consisting of seven marketing tools, "7Ps: 'programme, price, place promotion, processes, physical

facilities, and people'". There are other suggestions of other elements for the marketing mix such as in Ivy and Naude (2004) '7Ps' and Ivey (2008) "7Ps, 'programme, prospectus, price, prominence, people, promotion, premiums'". It is noticed that all these models have similar component elements; nonetheless, they are clustered and grouped differently.

If a university will remain one of the market leaders, it must move with time by consolidating on its strength and work aggressively on its weakness, recognizing the fact that we are in an era where things do not happen unless people make them to be so, marketing strategies is therefore, inevitable.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chart 1 shows the result of analysis conducted on 100 respondents to test the suitability of the 11ps in enhancing the competitiveness of a university through enrollment.

Product/programme, the issue of what programme to offer and how to structure and design it within an institutional marketing strategy have been addressed in the literature by Frumkin *et al.* (2007). An institution usually begins by identifying the programmes and services being offered and made available to the market and customers, whether they are students, companies or grants providers. An institution also questions whether its programmes match customers' needs. Universities with similar programmes will find their markets and public differentiating between them on the basis of their programmes and their quality (Kotler & Fox, 1995, 277). There is a strong relation between the programmes offered and the institution, as these establish the institution's identity. Gibbs and Knap (2002, 54) explain that such identity positions the institution in the minds of its customers and determines how they will respond to what is being offered. Chart 1 shows that 90% of the respondents chose a university because of variety of programmes; this explains Filip's (2012) submission which says that such programmes should not be historically developed, with the organisation producing the programme concepts, but rather researching customer's request in order to meet students' and employers' specific needs. This however, cannot be without its demerits as the programmes will meet the students' expectations at the expense of their needs, and that may account for the reason why academic programmes in Nigeria are widely criticized for lacking content of self sustainability but tailored towards getting white collar jobs.

Price, despite the increasing role of non-pricing factors in the modern marketing process, price remains an important element in the marketing mix. A leading university must offer the most competitive price as school fees. This does not necessarily mean that it should offer the lowest, it only means that there should be value for money, there should be justification for whatever it charges either high or low depending on the pricing strategy embarked upon. It is also pertinent to note that price policy embarked upon by a

university has an impact whether positive or negative on the image of the university. Hence, other means of generating revenue should be looked into so as to maintain the most competitive price. 98% of respondents chose a university on account of price, discount and sponsorship.

Place, this element refers to the system of delivery and channels of service distribution (Brassington, 2006, 31). That is making education available and accessible in terms of time and physio-geographical distribution of teaching and learning (Kotler & Fox, 1995). It is not restricted to the physical and geographical location of an institution, as it stretches, with the help of information technology, to some virtual limits. El-Khawas, (1999) for example, highlights how competition between educational institutions has encouraged them to offer alternative ways of delivery or to create e-markets niches. In order to gain market share and target, those consumers who perceive geographic or time difficulties in physically attending university courses avail themselves of these e-market niches to achieve their academic objectives. . Making a product or service available to buyers requires building relationships not just with customers but also with key suppliers and resellers in the supply chain. The University Campus, University Website and Social Media should be put into maximum use. All these outlets, identified as place must be easily accessible and simply irresistible, because either directly or indirectly, they speak for the product. The survey conducted showed that 80% of the respondents made their choice decision on account of place.

Promotion is all the communications that a marketer may use in the marketplace. It has five distinct elements: personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and public relations. Personal selling implies that every staff must be capable of selling the product of the University; a sense of ownership must be developed in all and sundry; all must be ready to defend management's decisions in the spirit of collective responsibility; advertisement must involve promotional campaigns (pre-selling projects) which will be launched and be able to compete in the future and must be quite attractive to prospective students in terms of output that would be obtained after finishing their study. The university can draw attention to their products or service by hosting special events, such as interviews, lectures, seminars, exhibitions, competitions and contests in order to reach the wider community. On sponsorship, a competitive university can market its products by being a sponsor of sporting events or cultural events which can benefit the university. High school competitions can be organized and hosted by the university, and when this awareness is being created, potential enrollees are exposed to the beauty of the university. Electronic media should be put to maximum use; Facebook twitter, Google plus etc. 60% of respondents made their choice decision based on promotion.

People are the transactional interface between an organization and the consumers. In most of the cases, people buy from people; this is why Customer Relationship Management plays

an important role in today's business culture. People, (staff) of the university must be highly creative and customer friendly. Right from the first point of call, the gate, customers should be treated with utmost level of professionalism coupled with kind words. A simple 'welcome to our university' from the gate can make a lot of difference. No staff must leave a customer unsatisfied. The survey shows that 84% of stakeholders made their choice decision based on people.

Process is the procedure, mechanism and flow of activities to produce a product or service and to make these products or services available to consumers. The customers do not like any cumbersome process; they prefer a very smooth flow of activities that will earn them a delightful result. Therefore, organizations must ensure their processes are designed to meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders in their fields. Admission process for instance must not be cumbersome likewise other processes. 72% of the respondents chose a university for its smooth process.

Physical facilities helps an educational institution to increase the tangibility of its offerings and include every aspect related to built-environment, equipment, technical infrastructure, course books etc. 76% of respondents chose a university for physical facilities. Often, these are the most visible issues perceived by students in their intention to differentiate between various universities Filip (2012).

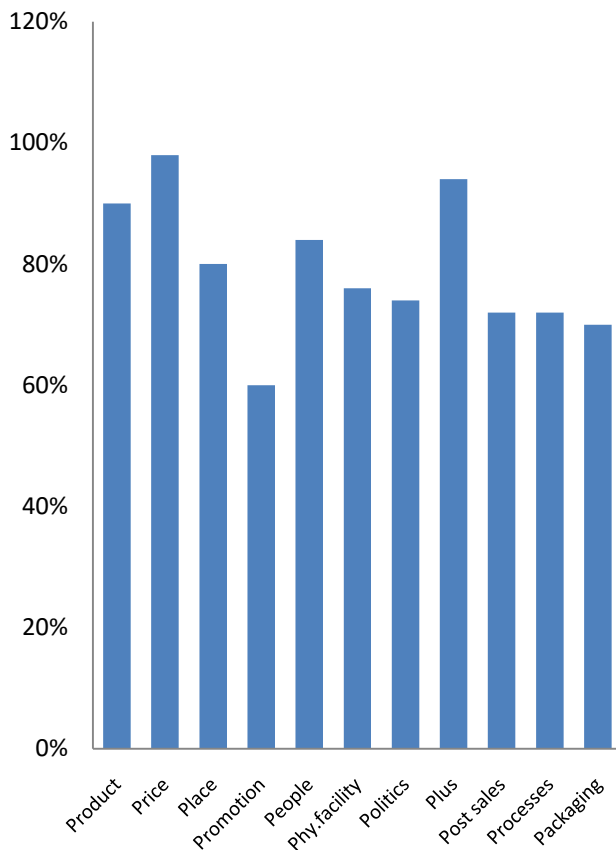
Packaging is the process of enclosing or protecting products for distribution, storage, sale, and use. They are the concrete factors that allow the consumers to make decision about the organization. Examples are: Prospectus, which must be concise, attractive and all-encompassing. The campus must be beautifully laid out and serene, with functional amenities. Websites must be cute, efficient, and attractively interactive. Paperwork (such as receipt) must be sizable and well designed. Payment is the consideration for the delivery of products and services. It can be in different formats: cash, cheque, credit and even barter or loyalty program points. Terms of payment affect the ease of transaction which may also affect the buying behaviour of the consumers. A 21st century university must adhere to the best practice in this regard because a cumbersome payment process may bring about 'dissatisfier' in customers. 70% of the respondents made their choice decision on account of packaging.

In relation to politics, the political environment should be well scanned to get the favour of the powers that be. A competitive university must do all that is in its power to be a toast of the regulatory body, the National Universities Commission (NUC). This in no small measure will boost the image of the university and make it readily come to mind when we think about enrollment in private universities in Nigeria. 74% made their decision for the subject of politics.

Post sales services, are the services a student will require after graduation, it ranges from collection of certificate, forwarding transcripts to other institutions and provision of reference letters. These after sales services could be

frustrating and time wasting in some universities. A competitive university should consider these services as part of the key roles of staffers of the university and try as much as possible to make it customer friendly. 72% of the respondents made their choice decision because of post sales services.

Plus in university education is a combination of lots of extra packages; entrepreneurial skills, leadership training, marriage seminars, cooking trainings and general mentorship and so on. It will be surprising to know the percentage of students/parents who really want these extras. 94% of the respondents made their choice decision based on plus, which are unearned benefits on the part of students/parents and a catalyst for enrollment because these 'extras' are not everywhere.



Source: Field Survey, 2018

Chart 1. Education Marketing Tools

The result shows that competitive pricing is key. That was why 98% of the respondents made a choice decision because of price. 60% of the sample which was the lowest made enrollment decision because of promotion; this may be as a result of the old orientation that education is not a commodity so it needs no promotion or marketing. 94% of the population made choice decision because of extra packages universities have to offer. In fact, the chart above shows that all the 11ps

are good marketing tools for education service delivery and can inform choice decision.

VI. CONCLUSION

Reasons for providing education has changed from non-profit to profit orientation, therefore, marketing approach and implementation in higher education is indispensable. However, because of the service nature of private universities they are recommended to integrate the use of a set of 11ps of marketing toward achieving their marketing goal in this particular order: price, plus, programme, people, place, physical facility, politics, processes, post sale service, packaging and promotion. If these variables mentioned are well harnessed to form the guiding marketing philosophies for a private university, it will not just remain as one of the leading private universities in Nigeria in terms of student enrolment but would have also carved an unbeatable competitive niche for itself in the league of private universities in Nigeria.

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