

## ADOPTING AND UTILIZING MARKETING CONCEPT IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

BY

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper investigated the challenges of accepting and using the marketing concept as a planning tool and business philosophy in Nigerian universities. It was discovered that universities are business organizations and they practice marketing inherently. Therefore, it is imperative for managers of universities to welcome and apply the marketing concept to direct all marketing decisions and activities successfully and serve their customers adequately. However, the study noted several factors that will hinder the full introduction of the marketing belief into planning and programmes of a university. Some recommendations proposed include, the need for universities managers and staff to be trained on marketing fundamentals, a marketing or research and development (R&D) unit should be created and managed by an expert (who will report directly to the chief executive), universities policies should be reviewed to reflect market and societal changes, and a separate budget should be developed for marketing activities, etc.*

**Key words:** Marketing, customer, management and university.

**INTRODUCTION**

An organization (profit or non-profit) is established to serve a specific section of society with its offerings and meaningfully contribute to the well-being of individuals, groups and the nation in general, Kotler (1975). Stakeholders, i.e. investors (corporate and individual), the public and target users of an organization's offering expect good returns in forms of profit (tangible and intangible), quality service delivery and satisfaction to justify its existence, Stanton (1994). Ajibola (2008), argued that globalization and turbulent market environment are currently forcing enterprises into keen competition. Consequently, organizations are seeking for survival strategies to remain competitive and succeed.

Rowley (2001), Achumba (2000) and Kotler (1989) agreed that, in such scenario, marketing ideas and skills are urgently required to do so. According to British Institute of marketing in NIM (2005), marketing is a management task of identifying, anticipating and meeting consumer needs profitably. Moreover, Kotler (2003) opined that the marketing concept is a business philosophy and planning tool which emphasizes consumers' needs satisfaction as the key to achieving set goals of an organization. In others words, all marketing decisions and activities in an organization should be guided by a keen focus on the consumer (market).

To this extent, this paper is set out to support adoption and use of the marketing concept as a planning philosophy and business strategy to facilitate proper

management and survival of universities in Nigeria. Universities are as crucial as the birth place and drivers of social change and national growth, Ogidi (2015). Kotler (1975), Berry and George (1978) opined that universities are inherently involved in marketing though marketing as a concept is novel to them. Koontz (2002) stressed that students (actual and prospective) including the employers of labour (who absorb university graduates) are regarded as customers or target market of a university in marketing perspective. A non-profit marketing scholar asserted that university managers must regard students as revenue units (Prichard, 2000). It is therefore imperative for university leaders to welcome marketing and acquire the appropriate marketing skills to enhance innovation, calculated decisions, obtain competitive edge and guarantee continual survival.

However, introducing the marketing philosophy will certainly encounter stiff resistance. This is so because universities are conventionally regarded as non-profit enterprises that do not require marketing ideas and skills for their operations.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Pride and Ferrell (2010) affirmed that a market is not a physical entity but rather an existence of beneficial exchange relationship brought about by forces of supply and demand. In the words of Kotler and killer (2010), a market is a community of real and prospective customers of a product/service. A market therefore, is the meeting-point of supply and demand which leads to rewards for all stakeholders. In this context, as long as a university provides exchange relationships, that is, supplies academic products and services to employers, staff and students (actual and intending) it means a market exist. Therefore, universities are unconsciously engaged in marketing and they should deliberately use the marketing concept to enhance their planning processes.

### MARKETING- A MANAGEMENT TASK

The existence of rewardable exchange relationships enhances marketing activities. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) advanced that marketing is a social, business and managerial task by which individuals and groups obtain their needs and wants via creating and exchanging products/services with others. Moreover, according to Kotler and Keller (2005), marketing is simply managing profitable customer's relationship. Perreault, Waldman and Zhao (2002) also viewed marketing as a set of activities or processes done by an organization to satisfy identified needs of customers that it serves. Also, Nonyelu (2000) described marketing as a vital human invention which encompasses activities involved in satisfying social and economic needs and wants in various forms. Therefore, the key marketing task for university managers is to establish profitable relationship with customers (students, staff and employers), present and potential ones and continuously maintain same by supplying superior products/services (employable graduates and academic programmes).

### MARKETING CONCEPT-A MODERN BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY AND PLANNING TOOL

Marketing concept is a new business philosophy and vital decision-making element that successfully drives all profitable exchange relationships, marketing plans and programmes in a future-looking organization. Suffice it to mention here that a university is a business organization competing with other local and international institutions in the global competitive higher-education industry. Having this in mind, Kotler (2003) rightly proposed that the marketing orientation regards satisfaction of consumer needs as the key to realizing organizational goals. Rowley (2001) viewed the marketing concept as a philosophy that places customers and their needs at the heart of what an organization does. The assumption is that organizations

should use the knowledge about customers to shape its marketing decisions and actions. Also, the philosophy holds the view that customers are seeking for the offering that best fit their needs, and will pledge more loyally to the organization with such offerings.

Interestingly, other management scholars had argued for adoption and use of the marketing philosophy as crucial planning factor for university managers, if they must adequately satisfy customers' demands. In particular, Cyert, Simon, and Throw, (1956) sees management as a series of decision-making processes which is the heart of executive activity in business. Mintzberg (1973) opined that university managers had some universal roles involving monitoring, filtering and using market information to make significant and strategic organizational decisions. Porters (2008) identified the need for university administrators to use the philosophy to glean relevant, timely, precise and accurate customers' information to make calculated decisions concerning new business opportunities, academic courses, tuition fees, and other issues relating to students very quickly. Peter & Olson (2010) emphasized the changing nature of customers and society at large and encouraged university authorities to constantly embark on market research and analysis to keep abreast of important trends. The essence of the marketing concept is to regularly find out customers' needs, demands, perceptions and expectations, and then formulate student-oriented academic services, redesign old ones or design new ones that will yield the highest satisfaction to students and win their continued loyalty.

In view of this, Kolter (2003) asserts that the marketing doctrine evolved in the mid-1950s to challenge the preceding concepts by which organizations related with their markets. He then proposed four related pillars of the marketing philosophy, viz, target markets, customers' needs orientation, integrated marketing and rewards.

## **ADOPTION AND USE OF THE MARKETING CONCEPT**

The incorporation of any strategic plan in an organization had always been fraught with stiff internal and external resistance. That notwithstanding, future-looking chief executives can, most of the times, have their way to implement it. Accepting the philosophy requires, a deep interest, followed by a dramatic change of attitude towards target markets coupled with willingness to welcome consumers' complaints, suggestions, demands, and perceptions. University managers should establish adequate information-gathering systems to indicate customers' responsiveness.

Following this, University managers can now proceed to use it. To start with, they should acquire fundamentals of marketing and endeavor to thoroughly grasp the marketing philosophy. Besides, managers of universities must visualize some changes which may occur and muster the business acumen to put the philosophy into action. Vice-chancellors should convene series of meetings with all stakeholders to analyze the meaning and rewards of the concept. From the experiences of many organizations, Kotler (1975) and Rowley (2001) suggest four basic steps to take in the implementation process, namely, pre-planning, top management support, education and training and evaluation mechanism.

## **CHALLENGES OF UTILIZING THE MARKETING PHILOSOPHY**

The university is a typical bureaucratic organization managed by stiff rules and regulations. As a result, there is hardly any chance for flexibility and innovations. Managers of most universities are not business-oriented coupled with the traditional view that universities are not for profits. Hutton (2004) argued against applying marketing ideas in university operations. The following setbacks had been recognized

as reasons for stiff resistance. The setbacks fall, into internal and external factors.

1. **Organizational culture:** Organizational culture (combination of individuals' and systems culture) is a huge hindrance to the introduction of a new strategic plan
2. **Interpersonal differences:** This factor stands tall against innovative thoughts in an organization
3. **Leadership style:** To use the marketing concept successfully in an establishment, much lies on the leadership posture of the chief executive.
4. **Organizational structure:** Some organizations have put in place structures that may not be easy to amend as demanded by implementing the concept.
5. **Resources availability:** Appropriate required human and financial resources for the smooth utilization of the belief may be lacking or inadequate. The unavoidable drastic changes occasioned by using the marketing concept may necessarily require additional resources.
6. **Obsolete Anti-Customer Policies:** There exist in all bureaucratically run organizations old-fashioned policies that may not welcome a more favourable attitude to customers.
7. **Role of the Marketing Expert:** A University do not have a marketing office managed by a marketing expert. The marketing expert ought to plan all marketing activities and report directly to the chief executive to facilitate smooth infiltration of the concept into the university. Therefore, the vital role of the marketing expert will certainly be hampered.
8. **Consumers' dynamic Needs:** Implementing the concept in an organization demands continuous study of target markets, analysis of market information and utilization of the same to take informed market and strategic decisions, Peter and Olson (2010). This may not be the practice in university management.
9. **Ever-changing environment:** The university market environment and society is becoming more complex coupled with fast on-going globalization which will require careful monitoring and quick decisions which the university may not be prepared for.
10. **Economic issues:** It's not gain-saying that universities are now competing in the uncertain national and global higher-education marketplace necessitate continual consideration of unfolding trends. The current administrative structure of universities cannot embrace this.
11. **Political Factor:** All universities (public and private) are being regulated by a government agency (National Universities Commission) thereby involving government active role and interference. This will hamper adoption of marketing ideas.
12. **Technological Development:** Generally, innovations in the world of technology are certainly and will ever affect university operations. This indeed, could portend a challenge to the use of the marketing concept as university administrator are ill prepared to handle such.
13. **Fear of Criticism:** Having in mind that negative criticisms may bedevil a new organizational strategy, there is the likelihood of university managers nursing fears of such.
14. **Labour Issues:** The management of a university may encounter a heavy opposition from staff and student unions.
15. **Delay and Fire-brigade Approach:** The phenomenon of long delay to execute policies associated with uncomfortable policy changes

in Nigeria, and the conventional practice of fire-brigade approach to important issues may hamper introduction of the marketing orientation.

16. **Issue of “who takes the glory”:** As a result of the involvement of so many stakeholders in the management of a university the question of ‘who wears the victory crown’ may ensue.

Despite the aforementioned hindrances, future-looking managers will definitely welcome this modern inevitable business and management philosophy for better innovations and timely achievement of goals.

## CONCLUSION

A university (though not established for profits) is a business organization involved in competition with other national and international institutions in the global higher education industry (marketplace). Universities produce graduates (products) for employers and provide academic services to actual and prospective students (public). Therefore, universities are practicing marketing without knowing it. Given that universities are inherently involved in marketing, it is imperative for the managers to welcome and use marketing ideas to improve their management task. Marketing as a concept is a process of managing profitable exchange relationships. Marketing decisions and activities can only be effective if the marketing philosophy is deliberately employed as both a business strategy and planning tool in a target market. The study noted that managers of universities are suffering from “marketing myopia” and cannot see the need to accept and utilize the marketing concept for better planning and actions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The followings are some practical steps university chief executives may take to surmount the

enumerated challenges of adopting and implementing the marketing belief.

- I. Administrators, Senate, academic staff, students’ representative and other relevant stakeholders must be trained and retrained on marketing.
- II. A marketing unit (R&D) should be created and managed by a marketing expert who will work directly with the chief executive.
- III. All frontline staff who directly relate with students and the public should be educated on public relations and customer service.
- IV. All legal framework and policies upon which a university is established and managed should be revisited and reviewed from time to time to reflect unavoidable market and societal changes.

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