LAFIA JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
Volume 4, Number 1, 2023.
Available online ***https://journals.fulafia.edu.ng/index.php/ljlis***
ISSN:Print - 2814-0702, Online - 2814-0710
LJLIS

PROMOTION AND STRATEGIC AIM FOR AWARENESS CAMPAIGN OF NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Patricia Ngozi Ofodu *Ph.D (CLN)*
Department of Library and Information science,
National Open University of Nigeria.

Smart E. Ambrose *Ph.D (CLN)*
Department if Library and Information Science
National Open University of Nigeria,

Abstract
Awareness creation for a novel higher education service is very vital as to inform about the packaged programmes to students, its availability and benefits. The paper examined the concept of promotion strategies for awareness campaigns of National Open University of Nigeria education programmes. The purpose was to highlight the role of promotion on their programmes so as to provide the framework for its adoption. The study revealed that National Open University of Nigeria is inherently creating awareness by using some advocacy methods like wearing of T-shirts occasionally, using NOUN carved shopping-bags as a gift, sales-campaigns, etc. The promotion channels available for National Open University of Nigeria to explore as discussed are: advertisement, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relation and publicity among others. The study determined the significance of using integrated promotion strategy as a crucial element for effective awareness creation for NOUN programmes. Benefits of implementing a result-oriented promotion strategy include: more Nigerians will be educated, contribution to national economy will increase growth of internally generated revenue, achievement of education for all in future, etc. Challenges affecting promoting NOUN programmes are: inconsistent organizational culture, marketing myopia, inadequate resources, and more. Suggestions to the challenges are: promotion strategies, creation of marketing desk/unit, provision for separate budget for diversification of promotion programmes and establishing of workable information-gathering system among others.
Keywords: *Awareness campaign, Education programmes, National open university, Promotion, Strategy.*

Introduction

Education is very vital to both the country and the citizenry, though its attainment is becoming illusion without strengthening its survival in Nigerian

educational system. Lots of individuals that did not have educational opportunity are now missing out, because they cannot at their late stage go back to the classroom. This called for the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria to be an alternative for them, which serves as a good foundation and building block to attain the desired level of education. More so, Jonathan (2014) inferred that education is core to whatever an individual or a nation generally will desire to achieve. The National Open University of Nigeria was created to bridge the gap left by conventional universities and meet increasing demand for higher education. The finding of Ofodu (2023) opines that the conventional system of education predominantly among Nigeria's tertiary institutions, proved to be incapable of meeting the aspirations of the teaming population of Nigerians for higher education.

The vision and mission of NOUN is to provide the most accessible, value-added, functional, cost-effective and flexible higher learning through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) platform to all who desire knowledge (Ifeanyi, 2014). It is a Federal open and distance learning (ODL) Institution, the first of its kind in West Africa which was established and came to stay on April 2001. This has renewed a focus to make education available to many people that have the ability, and are willing and ready to benefit from the quality of education provided through flexible and qualitative distance learning. Furthermore, Tenebe (2014) emphasised that e*xcept there is mass education of the populace, there will be a time when the uneducated will not allow the educated to have peace. The most viable method for educating the masses in a country that is populated like that of Nigeria, is through the distance learning, like that of ODL method.*

Looking at the strategic role of NOUN to the realization of the Nigerian vision of education for all by year 2025, coupled with the novelty of the ODL method of learning that suits a lot of learners in Nigeria, this paper is set out to recognize integrated promotion as an effective marketing tool to be adopted by NOUN to adequately create awareness of its ODL education programmes and services to the Nigerian large populace. Popoola (2008) viewed education services as intangible goods which NOUN supplies to the benefit of Nigerian distance learners. The students who patronize education services supplied by NOUN are regarded as customers in marketing perspective (Koontz, 2002). Marketing is naturally a strategic ingredient to all organizations to create awareness to their target audience. Just like Jain and Bhardwaj (2016) posits that website of every institution is a vital tool to share both the vision and mission activities for advocacy, as it serves as a handy tool to publicise the new addition of the university programmes and services. To this extent, it is imperative for NOUN to whole-heartedly welcome marketing thoughts and the same time employ integrated promotion strategies, to capture a good number of learners and a huge study centre environment that promote learning.

Integrated promotion is a result-oriented process of communicating

services to target audience using all available and relevant channels judiciously to deliver a clear, consistent and appealing message to influence customers, then build favorable corporate image of an organization (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Integrated promotion variables available for NOUN to use include advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, publicity and direct marketing, interactive marketing, events and experience and word- of – mouth marketing. For Universities to strategically promotes their operations is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of creating awareness to user community through people, process, technology and data so that a desired goal can be achieved (Qaqish, 2018).

Awareness

Awareness is having knowledge of the existence of product or services of a particular thing, so as to attract attention of the needed individuals. Whenever the awareness is on the high side, the rate of usage will be on the increase. Ani and Ahiauzu (2008) noted that awareness is knowledge about something that exists or understanding of a situation based on information or experience. The awareness of ODL is one of the most essential means by which to achieve the objectives, in that case, there should be more advocacies on ODL for a greater enrollment for programmes. Ochegwe and Anaehobi (2015) stressed that marketing services of academic institutions will boost the interest and morale of target audience if they become aware that such services and programmes are being offered in such institutions. Such will be an upgrading opportunity for all.

Marketing

Marketing is a basic management task that cannot be considered a separate function, it is the whole business seen from the point of view of its final result, from the market's point of view. Organizations must recognize that unique brands always have an edge over brands that blends in with the competition, so the stronger your culture is, the stronger your brand can perform and achieve positively. Tiller (2012) inferred that the most powerful factors in determining a company's/ institution's culture are those internal and external influences that emanate from both the customers and organizations with whom a company must interact. As a result, goal-oriented administrators should not leave their promotion activities to chance and be played with, such can be dangerous.

The promotion function for NOUN is to analyze the higher-education market in Nigeria, segment it and discover tertiary education needs of the selected segments of the market. Having discovered the needs of target audience, appropriate academic services which will adequately satisfy those needs must be created. Furthermore, the academic services should be well priced and distributed through an appropriate channel to get directly to the needed individuals. The next promotion effort is to plan for aggressive integrated marketing communications

to inform, persuade and influence the target audience to patronize the academic services. Modern marketing calls for more than innovating a novel education service, ODL programmes and making it available and accessible. It demands organised integrated promotion to adequately communicate with needed consumers and the general public. Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2014) defined promotion as a channel of communication used by marketers (NOUN) to influence opinion and elicit positive response from intending customers. Moreover, Perreault and McCarthy (2005) viewed promotion as a means of communicating information between seller (NOUN) and potential buyers (students) in the channel to influence attitudes and behavior. Besides, Kotler and Keller (2009) proposed that promotion is the "voice" of an organization, a means of establishing dialogue and building strong relationships with customers, showing consumers how and why a service is used, and where it can be purchased. Accordingly, Kotler and Armstrong (2010) described it as a process of informing, persuading and reminding consumers of available market offers and its benefits. Promotion helps to create brand image in the mind of would-be customers, drives sales and profits. Importantly, smart organizations also explore it to improve on their corporate image.

Promotion Strategy

Promotion strategy is a goal-oriented plan to effectively create awareness of a service to all stakeholders in a marketing channel. It seems to be one of the aspects of marketing that is most dynamic as a result of technology and other marketing trends. Promotion channels available to NOUN include: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, publicity, interactive marketing, events and experiences and word-of-mouth marketing among others.

Advertisement: Advertisement is creating awareness of certain good and services to the needed consumer. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) observed that advert is any paid type of non-personal promotion, of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor. NOUN may adopt one or more affordable form of advert, such as billboards, bold sign-boards, electronic media (Radio, TV), website, telemarketing (use of bulk SMS), posters, flyers, newspapers, and magazines among others.

Personal Selling: This is being noted as one of the most important tactics of market communication. It entails face-to-face interaction with one or more prospective customers for the purpose of making presentations, answering questions and procuring orders. Also, personal selling provides a good opportunity for NOUN desk officers (librarians, security staff, study centre managers, store-officers and student counselors) to verbally communicate services and favorable corporate image of NOUN. This involves rendering prompt services to actual and

prospective students with professional smile by well-dressed desk officer.

Sales promotion: A marketer may decide to engage in varieties of short-term incentives to encourage customers to purchase a product/service. NOUN has many options of sales promotion: sales campaign, wearing of advocacy shirt with NOUN logo on specific recommended days, rebates of chargeable fees for bulk enrolment by staff of an organization, giving out gifts, etc.

Direct Marketing: This entails dealing directly with the user of the services in order to convince them. Kotler (2001) observed that direct marketing is the means of direct link with careful individual customer (through mail, phone, fax, e-mail) for an immediate response or dialogue and cultivate lasting customer relationship. It is interesting to note that NOUN had begun deliberating "diplomatic positions" on some prospective customers as a type of direct marketing strategy. The setting up of special *study* centres hosted by some organizations to attract prospective customers is another step in the right direction of direct marketing.

Public Relations: A public relation (PR) is a major element of awareness creation suitable for NOUN. Okpoko (2013) described public relations as activities by which an individual or organization creates favourable image to facilitate beneficial relationship with target audience. It may be adopted as a philosophy of management, good management, basis for policy formulation and as well as instrument for establishing and maintaining good rapport with target public. Public relation may serve as a means of heading off unpalatable rumours, stories, etc, aimed at tarnishing the good image of an organization and its services. For instance, the recent prompt response of the far-sighted Vice Chancellor of NOUN to allegations of some aggrieved students on an FM Radio programme is a good public relation strategy. Furthermore, NOUN principal officers may pay a courtesy visit to some very important personalities/ rulers of various study centres communities which can be captured by the media for the sole aim of establishing and maintaining good customer relationship. Again, giving of charitable donations, community relations, speeches, seminars, etc.

Publicity: The concept of publicity is the dissemination of new and promotional materials designed to bring favourable attention to a product, person, organization, place, etc. It contrasts with advertisement in that the message is carried in media without payment and explicit indication of the source. Many non-profit organizations adopted this medium to promote their activities. NOUN chief executive may delegate a staff or hire an expert to write stories of interest about the organization and get the media to use them. Publicity is usually an important method of awareness creation adopted by organizations without promotion

budget. Creation of awareness by alerting the customers with the relevant information on newly available programmes/services, thereby bringing it closer to the needed audience (Ofodu, 2019).

Interactive Marketing: This consist of online activities and programmes tailored towards engaging customers and prospects to directly or indirectly raise awareness, improve image, or elicit sales of services. Interactive-learning service of NOUN is a good, since it has taken another shape of more specialized and technological-based, such as ZOOM facilitation interaction with students.

Events and Experiences: An organization can sponsor activities and programmes designed to create daily or special brand related interactions. Good examples of such activities and programmes by which NOUN may use to create brand awareness are: sports, quiz and essay writing competitions. Also sponsoring of popular cultural festivals, involvement in social welfare efforts (public enlightenment activities on disease prevention and eradication), entertainment (special dinners), factory/ organization tours, street showcasing activities etc.

Word- of- Mouth Marketing: This promotion method is associated with people-to-people orally, written, or electronic communications directed towards the merits or experiences of purchasing or using products/services. Marketers should understand that an organization marketing communication go beyond these specified tactics. The product styling, price, shape, and packaging, sales-staff manners and dress, store decorations, company's stationery, all communicate to consumers. Most importantly, every "brand contact", that is, every contact of staff with customers, delivers an impression that can strengthen or weaken a customer's view of an organization. Summarily, the two basic aims of promotion or marketing communication is to create brand equity and drive sales.

Integrated Promotion Strategy

Integrated promotion concept otherwise called marketing communications is the marketer's "bag of tools" for communicating with customers and other stakeholders. It is made up of a combination of tools (advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, publicity, interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, events and experience) by which an enterprise persuasively communicate market offerings and build a rewarding customer relationship. An organization should diligently manipulate all these elements based on the concept of integrated marketing communications in order to deliver a coherent and compelling message. In addition, availability of funds, composition of the target market and type of products/serves should inform choice of combined integrated marketing communication tools.

Conditions for Promoting NOUN ODL System

Though there is a massive support for the promotion of higher-education ODL services in marketing literature, NOUN cannot afford to communicate low quality services as it makes nonsensical all promotion efforts. NOUN authority has started before now to wax strong with the under-listed conditions while embarking on awareness activities, Eke and Njoku (2012).

i. Well-developed hybrid libraries in all study centres.
ii. Well-packaged and blended academic programmes that will meet student's academic needs and employers' expectations.
iii. A well-established information-gathering system (E-Ticketing) to receive complaints, suggestions, demands and queries of students, prospects and public.
iv. A workable marketing feedback and evaluation mechanism for measuring effectiveness of promotion activities.
v. A deliberate and continual market research on the changing needs of students.
vi. Availability of separate budget for promotional activities
vii. Employment of qualified academic and non-academic staff for quality assurance.
viii. Training and retraining of all staff that is promotion-oriented.
ix. Provision of policy framework for promotion activities.
x. Establishment of a marketing unit been managed by a marketing expert for supervision.

Reasons for Promoting NOUN ODL System

The conventional perception that education services are free social services thereby requiring no use of marketing ideas, notwithstanding, it is interesting to understand that NOUN operates in a competitive higher-education market place with conventional universities and other ODL institutions in Nigeria and West Africa. Consequently, there is obvious need for NOUN to promote its novel ODL platform to adequately capture a large share of the higher-education market and actualize the vision of education for all. Below are some good reasons for promoting NOUN ODL System (Armstrong, 2010).

i. Changing tertiary education needs of students.
ii. Design of new academic product/services (courses) and re-packaging of existing ones.
iii. To ensure continual survival in a turbulent higher-education market environment.
iv. Need to grow IGR and harness more statutory funds and support.

v. To create a favorable corporate image before the sponsors, students, prospects and general public.
vi. To inform, persuade, and influence the higher-education market for increased patronage of NOUN ODL Platform.
vii. To achieve the vision of Education for all in the near future.

Benefits of Promoting NOUN ODL System

Inazu (2008) proposed some benefits of promoting NOUN ODL services:

Contribution to National Development: The more educated citizens of a nation become, the more they contribute to nation building. Also, it is much easier to govern educated citizens than uneducated ones as suggested by Socrates.

Improvement in fund (IGR) generation: As the Public becomes aware of NOUN ODL services, students' enrolment will increase which accumulates increase of funds for NOUN and government.

Achievement of education for all in future: The realization of this vision will in no small dimension add value to the society and citizenry.

Increase of relevance: Certainly, aggressive use of promotion as an awareness creation strategy will activate and inculcate the strategic role of NOUN ODL System on the minds of intending candidates, the public and government.

Increase of manpower: Undoubtedly, NOUN will contribute significantly to human capital development and production of qualified and employable workforce for industries and public organizations.

Challenges in Promoting NOUN ODL **System**

Promotion as a marketing tool is not too novel to NOUN as they had adopted some passive awareness creating strategies to communicate their market offerings. However, embarking on aggressive promotion activities may encounter some challenges internally and externally.

Resistance to change: Public servants are generally too rigid to accommodate changes occasioned by emerging development in the higher-education market in Nigeria. A good number of staff holds the belief that higher-education services need not to be promoted because its relevance ought to be apparent to the public.
Ignorance of marketing and its benefits: Some managers are experiencing "marketing Myopia", not knowing exactly what marketing entails and equally digress means of marketing their products/services.

Organisational culture: Organisational culture resists strategic thinking and necessary innovation which should assist organizations to focus on the market and survive. Changing the culture of a public institution is never a short-term task, however, customer-oriented organizations will always overcome such set-back posed by culture in order to move forward for effectiveness.

Limited Resources: Aggressive marketing communication programmes require a separate budgetary allocation, especially where a marketing expert is not among the organization's staff and as such may need to either hire a marketing expert or consultant and possible pay the expert.

Political factors: Since NOUN was established, it has been under funding by the Federal Government thereby necessitating political interferences.

Bureaucratic Management Style: Government agencies are being managed by stiff-obsolete rules and regulations that cannot accommodate strategic change which goal-oriented promotional activities may bring.

Leadership: The adoption and utilization of a marketing policy and programme solely depends on the degree of interest put into it by the chief executive of an organization. Generally, administrators of public establishments are not from business background thereby paying lip service to marketing ideas.

Conclusion

The paper had rigorously stressed the significance of using integrated promotion strategy as a crucial element for effective awareness creation for NOUN programmes. It was discovered that marketing is natural with NOUN activities as it is already adopting some advocacy methods to promote the new ODL and its programmes. Therefore, the vice-chancellor together with his management team should deliberately apply more relevant promotion techniques to aggressively create awareness for NOUN patronage's sake. The researcher is hopeful that *if* NOUN authority can adopt a goal-oriented integrated promotion strategy in planning and implementing its public enlightenment activities, the ODL System will soon become very popular both for the young and old thereby leading to the timely achievement of education for all in the near future, hence all education minded adults hope in NOUN ODL system for upgrading themselves.

Suggestions/Way Forward

The under-listed suggestions are proposed for considerations:

1. Top management should be trained and retrained on marketing skills. This will enhance their understanding that a university is a business enterprise,
2. All staff must be trained and retrained on marketing to facilitate proper

access of "Think Customer" culture into NOUN.

3. A separate budget must be created for promotion and its activities.
4. New academic programmes should be designed and old ones repackaged according to results of market surveys.

References

Ani, E. O., & Ahiauzu, B. (2008). Towards effective development of electronic information resources in Nigerian University Libraries. *Emerald, 29*(6/7), 504-514.

Eke, F.M. & Njoku, I.S. (2012). A survey of librarians' attitude toward marketing of library and information services in academic libraries in Imo State, Nigeria. *Int'l Journal of Info/Comm. Tech.* (ICT), 9 (1).

Hotton, J. (2009). Narrowing the marketing concept. *Library Quarterly* 91(10)

Ifeanyi, P. A. (2014). *NOUN Profile* Lagos-Nigeria, vice-chancellor's office

Inazu, I.Q. (2008). Marketing and promotion of library products & services: National library of Nigeria experience. *Marketing Information to the Management & Users* (Workshop Sponsored by PARP, N/Assembly), Abuja.

Jain, P. K & Bhardwaj, R. K (2016). Marketing of library resources and services: A structured Literature Review. *DESIDOC Journal of Library and Information Technology*. 36(3). file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/10027-Article%20Text-27729-1-10-20160426.pdf

Jonathan, E.G (2015). Varsity's strides attract presidential accolades. The Guardian Newspaper, Thursday, 21st May, 31(13,292)

Koontz. C. (2002). Stores and libraries: Both serve customers marketing library services. Retrieved via: www.urg.es/-alozano/translation/koontz retrieved pn 12/3/12

Kotler, P. (2001). *Marketing Management*. India, Prentice-Hall.

Kotler, P & Armstrong, G (2010). *Principles of marketing*. Upper Saddle River -USA, Pearson, 13lh edd.

Kotler, P. & Keller, K. L. (2009). *Marketing Management*. London - England, Pearson Prentice-Hall, Int'l Edition, 13th ed.

Lamb, C. W; Hair, J. F & McDaniel, C (2014). Advertising, public relations and sales promotion. https://slideplayer.com/slide/4896331/

Ochegwe, A & Anaehobi, S (2015). Academic librarians' perception and attitude towards marketing of library services in Delta State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*

Ofodu, P. N. (2019). Promotion of Information Resources and Services to Distance Learners in Nigeria: The Role of an Embedded Librarian. *Library Philosophy and Practice.* https.//digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac

Ofodu, P. N. (2023). Use of online public access catalogue (OPAC) by distance learners for effective information retrieval in open and distance learning Federal University libraries in Nigeria. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Okpoko, J. (2013). *Understanding Public Relations*. Zaria-Nigeria, A.B.U. Press.

Perreult, W. D. & McCarthy, E. J. (2006). Essentials of marketing: A global – managerial approach. https://bit.ly/2Pf4rXV

Popoola, S. O. (2008). The use of information sources and services and its effect on the research output of social scientists in Nigerian Universities. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. https.//digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac.

Qaqish, (2018). The role of strategic marketing operations in addressing today's Top 3 CMO Challenges. https://bit.ly/30nX2fk

Renborg, G. (2008). Library Marketing. *Library Quarterly*, 90(5)

Sharma, P. (2004). *Knowledge Management*. New Delhi India, APH Publishing

Tenebe, V.A. (2014). *NOUN Profile*. Lagos-Nigeria, Vice Chancellor's Office.

Tiller, S. R. (2012). Organizational Structure and Management System. *ASCE/LIBRARY*. https://ascelibrary.org/doi/full/10.1061/(ASCE)LM.1943-5630.0000160