

Marketing and Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Improving Not-For-Profit Organisation's (NPO's) Service Performance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) around the world continue to increase considerably featuring in many sectors and pursuing their set goals and mission objectives in the most effective and efficient ways. A not-for-profit organisation (NPO) is a legal entity that aims to promote a particular social cause or serve a specific community, rather than maximizing profits for its members or owners. The work of NPO is essentially to provide and maintain the much needed services typically not provided by the for-profit sector or government. NPOs are established to meet both customers' (contributors and beneficiaries) satisfaction as well as its mission objectives. These can only be achieved if the operators and owners understand and apply marketing principles and logics using information and Communication Technology (ICT) to complement their activities as practiced by for profit organizations. The study is essentially a qualitative research focusing on both conceptual as well as empirical review to examine the extent to which NPOs handlers understand, appreciate and apply marketing and ICT to their operations. It was revealed that NPOs are yet to move from organizational centred-mindset to customer orientation in the pursuit of their mission goals. This position negates the marketing concept principle which the study concluded is inevitable for any success-focused NPO. The study recommended among others that NPOs should dedicate a unit or department to specifically handle marketing related functions to be powered and complemented by a functional ICT in their organizations and that these tasks should be performed by formally trained personnel.

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KEYWORDS: Information communication technology, not-for profit organisation, marketing, service, market- orientation, customers

1. INTRODUCTION

An organization is established to achieve some certain objectives. While a business organization is set up to achieve maximum profit through customers' satisfaction, the not-for profit organisation (NPO) is out to accomplish its mission objectives and satisfaction of the people it deals with (Alasiri, 2014). A NPO deals with 2 groups of people while doing its business. One of these is the contributors (volunteers, donors, sponsors, advocates, trustees), referred as 'resource attraction' (Stanton, Etzel &

Walker, 1991). The other target group is the organisation's clients (recipients of the NPO's services), called beneficiaries (Alasiri, 2005, 2016; Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009). According to Modi, (2011), NPO cannot successfully achieve its mission objectives if it is not able to satisfy the beneficiaries' needs. Satisfied beneficiaries he noted show more involvement, participation and enthusiasm in the NPO's activities, which is crucial to improving the overall effectiveness of the organisation. This is

because like in business enterprise, not-for profit organisations (NPOs) are increasing in number, hence competing to reaching and retaining their target markets; hence, handlers of NPOs must apply marketing using ICT with regards to their service deliveries in order to combat target markets pressure and competition (Alasiri, 2016).

Not-for-profit organisations play a vital role in promoting social welfare and community engagement. Their unique characteristics, benefits, and impact underscore the importance of NPOs in addressing critical social issues and serving specific communities. With the power of ICT transactions in terms of time and space have become less complex due to easier and faster means of communication and service delivery. ICT has altered the ways people and organisations do business, and has a significant role in their daily activities and service deliveries. NPOs use different forms of ICT products, such as mobile phones, social media and internet to improve on their service delivery (Ogunjimi, Adebayo, Adesanya, Alasiri & Bamgbose, 2024). Due to increased competition, the NPOs like other organizations have been compelled to function 24 hours around the globe using the ICT in order to continue to stay as a going concern entity.

ICT has not only helped in speeding up decision making process, but has made the institutions to remain customer-focused, cost saving, efficient in performance, improved on service delivery, logistics, and marketing communication programmes. ICT has strengthened the value chain among the organizations, beneficiaries and providers. More than ever the NPOs utilize the power of ICT to improve on their service deliveries (Alasiri, 2014; Oghojafor, Aduloju & Achimugu, 2011)

However, rather than the NPOs embracing the marketing concept and begin the marketing process with the customers(targets) and investigating through research using the power of ICT on what the customers actually need and want, many of NPOs managers pursue an organisation -centered mindset and falsely believe that their products are needed by the market (Alasiri, 2016; Andreasen, Goodstern & Wilson, 2005). This notion negates the general belief that an organisation should be customer oriented (Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Very few NPOs engage in any kind of strategic marketing, including marketing research (Andreasen *et al.*, 2005). The negative effect of this position is that many of the NPOs are not performing effectively because they left some marketing functions undone (Alasiri, 2016) and this conversely affect their service deliveries and performances.

This study examines the extent to which NPOs utilize marketing and ICT in their service deliveries and satisfaction of the two categories of customers they deal with (contributors and beneficiaries). The study makes a contribution on the need to utilize ICT with an understanding of marketing in its entirety and unravel areas where NPOs still need to apply the logics and principles of marketing in order to be more effective in their operations and mission accomplishment as it is done in for-profit organisations. It discusses the indispensable need for training in marketing and ICT. Two questions are used to guide this study : To what extent can customer- orientation significantly help to improve NPO's service deliveries in the pursuit of their mission? (ii) How can training in marketing using ICT help handlers of NPOs achieve the organisation's mission objectives ?

This study is organised as follows: section one focuses on the introduction; section two deals with review of both the conceptual and empirical literature; section three discusses the conclusion and recommendations

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Not-for Profit Organisations (NPOs)

Asgari, Khademi and Mehriyari (2015) described non- profit organisation as any volunteer and non profit group of global citizens that has been established at the national, local and international level for the cultural, social, charitable and professional purposes. The NPOs are important tools for organising public participation in order to achieve their social goals. Gonzalez, Vijande and Casielles (2002) defined private non-profit organisation as 'any organisation without financial objective, under private control, which aims to generate a social benefit for a specific sector of society'. Dolnicar and Lazarevskin (2009) agreed with the above definition but added that NPOs could include the public sector. Most social-course and non governmental voluntary organisations (NGOs) are NPOs (Agaraj, Pjero, Sokoli & Remaj, 2013; Stanton *et al.*, 1991).

Many authors have attempted definitions on the concept not- for profit organisation, however, scholars agreed they possesses certain unique characteristics which include: non financial objectives, mission driven, multiple customers, worthwhile returns for sustenance , competitive-cooperative relationship with others, multiple stakeholders (Alasiri, 2016; Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009; Stanton *et al.*, 1991). These characteristics Alasiri (2016) and Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) argued could lead NPOs to their

disregard to marketing. Not-for profit organisations (NPOs) do not have profit making as their goal. Most NPOs market services rather than tangible products (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Stanton *et al.*, 1991). NPOs products according to Alasiri (2014); Freitas-da-costa, Silva, Paula, Silva and Vieira (2011) are the idea, knowledge, belief, attitude, habit or behavior that one wish to convey to the target markets. The non business field has expanded to include thousands of organisations spanning to include activities in educational, cultural, religious, charity, social, philanthropic, mutual - aid, health care and political activities (Alasiri, 2016; Anheier, 2005; Kotler, 2000; Stanton *et al.*, 1991). However, the NPOs do need to identify their goals, plan strategies and tactics to attain these goals effectively, execute their plans and evaluate their performances.

2.2. Not-for-Profit Organisations and Marketing

Marketing is about exchange transactions that gives mutual benefits and satisfactions to the parties involved in the relationships. Marketing is not only practiced for profit making purpose. Non-profit organisations engage in marketing because they also run a business and employ business management techniques (Alasiri, 2016; Goerke, 2003; Kotler, 2000; Stanton *et al.*, 1991). Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) stated that marketing involves those activities performed by individuals or organisations either profit or non-profit, that enable, facilitate and encourage exchange to the satisfaction of both parties. It is all about mutually satisfying exchange relationship, in which both parties are satisfied with the outcome. Non profit organization or social marketing is concerned with the application of the marketing concept to organisations whose goals are defined not by profit but by other yardsticks of performance. Kotler and Keller (2006) captioned it from social area and defined it as the design, implementation and control programs that seek to increase the acceptance of an idea in a focus group. Freitas-da - costa *et al.* (2011) stated that social marketing is a tool democratic and efficient system that applies the principles and tools of marketing to create and grant a greater social values to the proposal, finding again the consumer through interactive dialogue, creating conditions for the build process of reflection, participation and social change.

Dolnicar and Lazarevki (2009) posited that non-profit marketing is the analysis, implementation and evaluation of non-profit services, designed to facilitate reciprocative arrangement within a community or target publics that were established by a grant- givers and expedited by qualified personnel who are committed to pursuing them in the mission

interest. By this definition, it means NPOs managers should accept the mission and objectives set by grant-giver and operate within the parameters and priorities. These NPOs have missions hence like all other organisations they must set strategies and tactics to reach these goals, through proper management and marketing. NPOs employ accounting system, financial controls tools, personnel management and labour relations and other business management techniques (Alasiri, 2016; Andreasen *et al.*, 2005; Goerke, 2003; Stanton *et al.*, 1991). They employ marketing techniques consciously or otherwise (Alasiri, 2019; Freitas-da-costa *et al.*, 2011; Sargeant & Bennett, 2004). However, many NPOs rarely understand the concept of a total marketing program, where in a planned product offering is effectively priced, promoted and distributed to provide satisfaction to the various markets (public). Many NPOs treat marketing in part as tantamount to advertising, selling or promotion (Akchin, 2001; Kotler, 2000). According to Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) and Kotler (2000) many of the NPOs are still production- oriented rather than market or customer oriented.

NPOs are selective in their choice of words/terms as used by profit making organizations. Organisations such as educational institutions, political parties, boys scouts, hospitals, museums and churches, for instance, would prefer the terms students, electorates, members, patients, audiences or parishioners respectively as against the term 'customer' in their dealings. A religious organisation will name it missionary work and not personal selling when members evangelize, win souls and convert new members into the fold; many of the NPOs will resent the term advertisement but prefer to call it information notice or circular. This is because managers of these NPOs tend to have negative attitude toward marketing activities; to them it is, demeaning, unethical and present their organisations in bad light (Alasiri, 2019, 2016; Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009; Kotler, 2000; Stanton *et al.*, 1991).

To many of the NPOs marketing is used to sell to people things they do not need (Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009) yet these organisations are seriously in need of effective marketing application in their activities (Kotler & Andreasen, 1996; Stanton *et al.*, 1991). Organisations in this group are not set out for the purpose of making profit. However, in their operations especially publicly funded service organisations, it is expected that the investment in them should provide worthwhile returns' so that they can be sustained.

2.3. Influence of ICT and Marketing on NPOs

Dolnicar and Lazarevki (2009); Freitas-da-costa *et al.* (2011) and Stanton *et al.* (1991) in their studies argued that the effectiveness of NPOs regarding their service delivery can be improved through the application of marketing logics and principles in the operations of these organisations. This requires total marketing programmes integration beginning from orientation towards consumer needs. NPOs need marketing in order to reach, retain and satisfy the target market and accomplish their mission objectives (Alasiri, 2016). These organisations have missions that are well defined in advance and cannot change in dependence of market needs (Modi, 2011). Furthermore Alasiri (2016) and Andreasen *et al.* (2005) submitted that NPOs need to be market oriented, by observing the marketing concept and apply the other marketing strategies to allow efficient operations without affecting their true mission goals. The NPOs are usually evaluated for effectiveness in terms of their stated objectives (Greiling, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Pope, Isely & Asamoatutu, 2009;) and brand equity (Asgari, *et al.*, 2015). Strategies such as market segmentation, product positioning, advertising, marketing communication and research, niche marketing etc are also applicable in the operations of the NPOs. Marketing is necessary to check and improve market place problems (Kotler, 2000) faced by NPOs, for instance, decline in membership, soaring costs; threat to survival, growth and sustainability in the face of increasing and tense competition from peer organisations.

Researches revealed ICT can be useful for need identification, anticipation and satisfaction. The internet plays an important role in coordination of market and marketing researches, as additional channel by which customers can access information and make purchase; can be helpful in market penetration, market development, product development, marketing communication, advertising, sales promotion, public relations and product differentiation (Anamakiri & Adeola, 2006; Hamidi & Safabakhsh, 2011; Ogbojafor, *et al.*, 2011; Ogunjimi, *et al.* 2024; and Yannopoulos, 2011). According to Adesanya, Oginni & Adewumi (2022) ICT plays an important role in the coordination of research and development, production and marketing activities across borders; ICT can serve as facilitator for gaining competitive advantage in the international field (Deans & Ricks, 1991 cited in Hamidi & Safabakhsh, 2011). The internet serves as a powerful communication medium that can act as a 'corporate glue' that integrate the different functional parts of the organisation (Adesanya, *et al.*, 2022).

ICT and marketing have now become the key tools for strengthening the competitiveness of a national economy and improving the productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in both profit and Non profit making organisations (Oluwagbemi, Abah & Achimugu, 2011). The NPOs stand to gain a lot by integrating ICT into their operations, especially the marketing functions. The NPO needs to be more information - alert, customer driven and ready to improve on its brand equity. With mass of information (internal & external) at its disposal, NPO needs to improve on its services and product qualities, delivery, customer satisfaction and service performance, by taking the many advantages and opportunities that modern ICT offers (Ogunjimi, *et al.* 2024).

2.4. Empirical Review

A number of empirical studies have been carried out on the subjects of NPOs, ICT and Marketing. This section discusses some of the findings of these research works.

Modi (2011) studied 579 NPOs who were into service provision and found out that market orientation in NPOs improved peer reputation, beneficiary satisfaction and innovativeness. He concluded that contrary to the evidences from previous studies carried out in the developed countries, market orientation does not help in attracting more resources in India.

In their studies, Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) and Kotler (2000) concluded that NPOs managers indicated that the most important marketing activities are promotional in nature, only a small proportion of NPOs acknowledged the importance of marketing research on need assessment, product development and strategic marketing. This finding agreed with Andreasen, Goodstern and Wilson (2005) assertion that NPOs have an organisation- centered mindset. Kotler (2000) concluded that marketing lagged dramatically in adoption by NPOs compared to the other business practices such as accounting, financial management and planning.

Studies by Alasiri (2019, 2014); Georke (2003); Greiling (2011) and Stanton, *et al.* (1991) concluded that NPOs operate in a highly competitive environment hence have started to adopt business like techniques in their approach to operations so as to combat the market place pressure just like in the for-profit, organisations. Kotler and Keller (2006) concluded that NPOs must possess a satisfactory understanding of marketing in order to survive, grow and strengthen their contribution to the general welfare.

Freitas-da-costa, et al. (2011) in their comparative study of NPOs concluded that NPOs that adopted marketing in their operations had better and effective performance vis-à-vis their mission goals and beneficiary satisfaction than NPOs that do not adopt marketing approach to their operations. This submission supported the claims by Alasiri(2016); Kotler and Keller (2006); Sargeant and Bennett (2004) and Terblance (2001) that application of marketing techniques to the NPOs environment has created a shift in the mindset from realizing the advantages of applying marketing concepts and tools in the NPOs to the emphasis of a more systematic approach through the help of strategic planning.

Alasiri (2014) on the study 'enhancing not-for-profit organisations' (NPOs) effectiveness through marketing' used a sample size of 60 NPOs to establish the relevance of marketing in the success of NPOs to satisfy the target customers and achieve the organisation's mission objectives. He found that NPOs were yet to shift from organisation-mindset to customer oriented operations as found by Akchin (2001) and Kotler (2000) in their separate studies. Many NPOs selected only a fraction of marketing programmes which was consistent with Dolnicar and Lazarevski(2009) findings; Kotler (2000) and Sargeant and Bennett (2004) advocacies; many NPOs appreciated the power in marketing but did not know how to apply marketing tools and logics to their operations; many believed they needed marketing in order to stay competitive. Result of his hypotheses revealed that operations in NPOs were not dominated by customer-oriented mindset, and that marketing functions in NPOs were not handled by formally trained marketing personnel. He concluded that to achieve greatly NPOs needed to change their perceptions on what marketing functions are by being more customer-oriented than organisation-focused.

Hamidi & Safabakhsh (2011) in a bid to determine the impact of ICT on e-marketing collected data through questionnaires from 80 respondents from some selected government agencies, e-marketing users, designers, suppliers and from balance sheet and income statements of some companies in Golestan, Iran and found out that ICT provided opportunity at every place and time for advertisement, contribute to increase in company's income, decrease in environmental pollution and energy consumption.

Using a structured questionnaire among 35 top and middle senior management staff of 6 mega banks in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Anamakiri and Adesola (2006) sought to know the impact of ICT on the banking industry in Nigeria. Their studies revealed that ICT contributed greatly to the growth and

operations like for-profit organisations as submitted by Kotler (2000) and Sargeant and Bennett (2004).

The non utilisation of ICT by any target market oriented NPO will result in delay of services, loss of valuable customers(contributors and beneficiaries) increase in fraudulent activities by workers, dwindling brand equity, dearth of information on market target and global challenges. But if properly utilised, ICT can facilitate operational speed, better communication, improvement in service quality, speedy decision making, competitive advantage and motivation of personnel (Lawal, Adewunmi & Idiake 2022). It will positively affect the smooth operations and improvement in the marketing of service products of NPOs.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is purely a qualitative research to among other allow close monitoring of the application of marketing principles and utilisation of ICT by the not-for-profit organizations(NPOs).

NPOs now operate under intense market pressure and competition hence it is expected they should adopt a market-oriented approach to their marketing operations like for-profit making organisations as advocated by Kotlet (2000) and Sargeant and Bennett (2004).

Many of the NPOs still lack an understanding of the application of marketing techniques though, they believe it could help them in achieving their mission objectives effectively. Rather than focus and apply the marketing principles and concepts many NPOs prefer to stick to only a fragment of the tasks of marketing such as advertising, fund raising, selling and public relations, leaving activities such as marketing research, product development, SWOT analysis, distribution and pricing to the for-profit organisations. To achieve greatly NPOs need to change their perceptions on what marketing functions are by being more customer-oriented than organisation-focused.

The value of this paper could have been further enhanced if empirical data have been collected and analysed to validate the empirical review done. The authors hope to address this notable shortcoming in the future. Based on the review and findings in this study the following are hereby recommended:

1. Marketing is universal, inevitable and practiced by all, therefore; NPOs should as a matter of necessity employ formally trained marketers and ICT personnel to handle their marketing operations as practiced by the for-profit organizations.

2. For effectiveness in operations the NPOs should create a unit/ department to handle all marketing related activities / functions by leveraging on the power of information Communication Technology (ICT).
3. NPOs like their counterparts are also running a 'business', hence, all their activities must start and end with the customers (marketing concept) by ensuring that all their operations are geared towards satisfying these group of customers/ Clients / beneficiaries of NPOs services (market-orientation) while at same time not losing focus on achieving the organisation's (NPOs) and contributors' (Volunteers, Donors, Sponsors, Advocates, Trustees) mission objectives

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