

Promotion Strategies and Customer Patronage: A Study of Selected Business Schools in South East

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Abstract: *The study examined the effect of promotion strategies and customers patronage a study of business schools in south east Nigeria. As a survey research design , a structured instrument developed by the researcher to reflect such options as strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree popularly refereed as four (4) point likert scale was used to obtained information from the respondents. The population of the study comprised of 605 students of business school from the selected universities. A sample size of 116 employees was drawn from the population using Borg and gall's formular of (1973) of which 98 copies of questionnaires were duly completed and returned showing 96% response rate. Research hypotheses were tested using Analysis of variance (ANOVA) which was carried out with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. Findings from the study show that Sales promotion has significant effect on customer patronage in Business Schools in south east. Direct marketing have significant effect on consumer's patronage of Business Schools in south east. Advertising does not have significant effect on students' patronage of Business Schools in south east In view of the findings, the study recommended that that in order to achieve the objectives of developing favourable association as well as to impress customers a suitable strategy should be designed to promote the image of the particular business. Direct marketing as a tool of communication should be explore and properly entrenched in all areas of operation of the business school to increase the student's enrolment. There is need to determine advertising spending through the preparation of advertising budget. This can be based on advertising objectives which include increasing sales volume, informing customers of a new product or creating awareness of an old or new product in the mind of the consumers and customers.*

Key words: *promotion strategies, Direct marketing, Business Schools, advertising, customers patronage, Sales promotion*

INTRODUCTION

Organizations in present day challenging and fast pace environments need to strategically market themselves and promote their product or service offerings. These critical

awareness enhancing approaches and tactics (campaigning) of promotion does lead to customer patronage of any service or product being offered. Business school in Nigeria is no exception. In order for customers or participants/students to patronize such a business school, the promotion strategies or marketing approaches deployed must be such that the drive must lead to participants' uptake, and thus joining the academic programs.

Firms are today facing challenges on how to out-perform one another. As the business structure becomes more and more undulating, institutions like schools of business and their management continue to search for the right strategic bearing to navigate. On the other hand, the customer together with his own needs, desires and preferences remains the sole target of these institutions. As the customer's perception is ever changing, accessing him through the right strategy becomes every firm's priority. Consequently, in an attempt to gaining sustainable differential advantage over competing institutions, Porter (1985) evolves strategic options based on available resources, capabilities, and other distinctive competences to meet changing customer requirements. Successful and profitable operations by organizations demand that such strategic guide or pattern/ design must be appealing enough to elicit customer patronage (John, Adiele & Nkoro, (2013). To be sustainable, service providers must satisfy consumers' needs or otherwise they will become redundant and economically irrelevant (Nguyen & Phan, 2018). For an organization to remain competitive in the competitive market, the marketing strategies adopted are the key.

Customers/student should have unique expectations from business school and management. These expectations should always be satisfied by the school management; hence, customer patronage is most important to this institution. In view of trying to find out the promotional strategies best needed for business schools in Nigeria, we need to know how the institution's service benefits its customers/participants and how it (selling proposition) is unique or different from other institutions. Furthermore, we need to have an understanding about our competitors, the target market, and other factors that will impact the institution's ability to reach and entice participants to enroll. To this effect, this study aims at ascertaining the promotional strategies and customer patronage of selected business schools in Nigeria.

Surveys found that the major problem facing business schools, Nigeria was low awareness resulting to poor patronage of the institution's educational services (Ismail, 2013). Generally, the promotion activities used by the institution is only exhibitions and fairs with limited results. This situation necessitates the need for the management to design, adopt and implement marketing strategy that will not only reinforce customers' patronage but also encourage repeat purchases (Kotler, 2000). Therefore; there is need for context specific study on the factors predicting costumers' patronage of this said school of business.

Several promotional tool available to the marketing manager for promoting the institution and its offers ranging from the traditional tools like the television and the prints to the modern digital based new media. Designing an efficient promotion strategy for service based educational institution like business school it requires good knowledge of the nature of products offered the target market and the features of related promotional tools. A study is therefore required to evaluate the promotional strategy options with a view to determining the promotional tool or mix that will best improve customer patronage for business schools in Nigeria.

This school of business is famous for its specially designed programs, but the quality and standards of the programs are not regularly mentioned. Hence a procedure is needed for checking the unique quality standards of business school, like the offering of the world class case studies; live webinars to improve online executive education program etc., so that the students/participants are assured about all of these. So, these are the main issues facing business school in Nigeria. That is why the marketing Strategies of product/service, price, place, promotion and people are crucial factors that need to be examined to determine their effect and relationships with customer patronage of business school in Nigeria (Ismail, & Velnampy, 2013).

The variables concerned are promotion strategies and customer patronage for business schools. Few researches have been done on promotion Strategies and customer patronage individually (Ismail & Velnampy, 2013). There is need to link the gap between these two variables. This study will attempt to address the gap and identify the promotion strategy elements and their effect on customer patronage for business school. In other words, the study will attempt to identify and link the cause and effect of promotion strategies on customer patronage for business school in Nigeria. Overall, there is no evidence of any study on promotion strategies on customer patronage of business schools in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Direct Marketing

Brassington & Pettit (2000) opine that direct marketing is an interactive system of marketing, using one or more advertising media to achieve measurable response anywhere. Direct marketing is a form of advertising which allows businesses and nonprofit organisations to communicate directly to customers through a variety of media including cell phone text messaging, email, websites, online adverts, database marketing, fliers, catalog distribution, promotional letters and television, newspaper and magazine advertisements as well as outdoor advertising. .

Advertising

Kotler and Keller (2006) defined advertising as any paid form of non – personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor. Advertising can be a cost –effective way to disseminate message and to educate people. (Salami, 2007). Siegel (1996) defines advertising as non personal persuasive marketing communication mostly conveyed in the mass media and paid for by an identified sponsor who controls the message.

Personal Selling

Personal selling is a strategy that salespeople use to convince customers to purchase a product. The salesman uses a personalized approach, tailored to meet the individual needs of the customer is given the opportunity to ask questions, and the salespersons, and the salesperson addresses any concerns he has about the product (Owomoyela et al, 2013). Personal selling is where businesses use people (the sales force) to sell the product after meeting face-to-face with customer.

Theoretical Framework

Commitment-Trust Theory and the Nature of Commitment

Morgan and Hunt (1994) posit that business-to-business relationships require commitment and trust. Their results imply that commitment and trust are key mediating variables to understanding the relationship development process between buyers and sellers. According to the theory, consumer commitment to the vendor has been found to mediate the effects of a number of variables such as quality, shared values, communication and trust on a number of consumer behavioral intentions, including customer retention, advocacy, and acquiescence. Trust serves as a governance mechanism that limits opportunistic activities as well as a facilitating mechanism for developing commitment. Commitment includes the desire to continue the relationship and work to ensure its term orientation of a party toward a partner (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

In this study, the theory of commitment and trust is used to analyze business school and student patronage relations in the universities, as this theory postulates a number of psychological factors that may be important. Trust and shared values form the basis of school and students relationships, especially in a competitive marketplace. Wilson (1994) suggest that commitment and trust are central constructs in marketing relationships as they positively influence cooperative behaviors.

Empirical Reviews

Naude & Ivy (2015) examined the marketing strategies of universities in the United Kingdom. The Universities in the UK are facing huge changes to their environment, in terms of both supply of funding and level of demand for their courses. In order to find out how both old and new universities are responding to this rapidly changing environment, questionnaires were sent to a number of senior staff. Based on 131 responses (81 from old universities, 50 from new).The research clearly indicates that these two groups of institutions have fundamentally different approaches to operationalizing their marketing strategies.

Bawa & Safrana (2015) in their study “impact of marketing strategy on customer retention in Handloom industry” attempts to know the relationship between marketing strategies and customer retention in handloom industry. This study selected a nonprobability sampling technique i.e. convenience sampling to collect data from a sample size of 100 customers. In this study, there is strong positive relationship between marketing strategies such as product, price, place & promotion and customer retention/satisfaction.

Arante, Adalia, Autor, Cuya, Hernandez, Panganiban & Lyceum (2016) studied effectiveness of marketing strategies of LPU-High school.. The researchers came up with the idea of studying this in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of LPU-High School marketing strategies. This study is descriptive in nature. The said instrument is divided into three parts which asked the participants to indicate their assessment regarding the marketing strategies of LPU High School and the factors that encouraged them to enroll in the aforementioned school, and the problems encountered by them. This was participated by 205 high school students of LPU-High School. The results were tallied, encoded, and interpreted using frequency distribution and weighted mean. The obtained data were treated using PASW Version 18 for further analysis. As a result, the marketing

strategies are generally effective.

Chen (2016) studied the impact of marketing strategies and satisfaction model approach. The dynamic changes in higher education observed over the last 20 years have transformed the educational market. This study investigates the directions and strengths of the relationships among marketing strategies, student satisfaction, and loyalty in Taiwanese higher education. Structural equation models were used to validate the measure and test the proposed relationships. The target population comprised students in Taiwanese higher education institutions. Using purposive sampling, the author selected 20 universities (out of 161 higher education institutions in Taiwan) for study. One month later, the author had collected 692 responses. After data screening, 21 questionnaires were excluded from the analyses, resulting in a total of 671 valid questionnaires. The findings indicate that students' satisfaction is a key intermediate variable for marketing strategies and student loyalty.

Akekua, Kalu and Ezema (2016) evaluated positioning strategies and customer patronage of fast food firms. The authors' focus was to investigate the relationship between positioning strategies and customer patronage of fast food firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Nigeria. Descriptive research design was applied, using cross sectional survey. A self-administered questionnaire was employed with a sample size of 123 which is conveniently extracted from fast food employees out of which, 110 copies were found useable. In analyzing the relationship between variables of interest and to test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was employed with the application of SPSS 20.0 and GRETL software packages. Findings showed an insignificant relationship between all positioning strategies and customer patronage. Although the estimated relationship of interest was not spurious but only 2.5% of the variation in Customer patronage was explained by the joint influence of customer expectation, location, service quality and assortment.

Adefulu (2016) examined promotional strategy impacts on market share and profitability in Coca-Cola and 7up companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study population were the staff in marketing positions in the selected companies. Questionnaire was administered on the samples from Coca-Cola and 7UP companies, totaling about 172 respondents. The statistical tool employed was the univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the statistical significance and the extent to which promotional strategy brings about variation in market share and profitability in the selected companies. The study concluded that promotional strategy is suitable to a business caused variations in market share and profitability.

Olowe (2016), noted that one of the controversies in existing marketing literatures is on how to retain existing and new customers to have repurchase intention in the long-run; however, empirical answer to this question is scanty in existing studies. Thus, this study investigates the moderating effect of consumer loyalty on long-run repurchase intentions in telecommunication industry using Lagos State environs. The study adopted field survey research design using questionnaire to elicit responses from 250 respondents who were selected using random and stratified random sampling techniques from the telecommunication industry in Lagos State, Nigeria. The test of the research hypotheses was analyzed using Pearson Product Method of Correlation (PPMC), simple regression analysis and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science version 20.0 (SPSS). The study confirmed that customer satisfaction has a significant

relationship with customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry.

Jiahui, Jing, Shuo, Wengxing & Yiwei, (2017) evaluated marketing strategy of school of professional studies in China. Chinese students are the most visible international presence at many universities across the United States, and the number continues to grow. Since 2010, the number of graduate students studying abroad has entered the period in which the increase has been declining. Under the circumstance of the weak global economy and high cost of education, the administration needs to attract the attention of Chinese students. In the process of competing for applicants, how to develop marketing strategies to attract students' eyeballs has become an important means of trying to increase school income through Chinese students. The marketing strategy mentioned in this article comes from the authoritative reports, the personal experience of Chinese students studying in the United States and the bold vision of the members of this group.

Ogunbangbe, (2017) evaluated marketing strategies and business performance of domestic airlines in Nigeria. Marketing strategy embraces major fundamental components of marketing practice. This study adopted survey research design. Target population comprised 488 staff of the selected airline and total enumeration method was adopted. Data was collected through the use of structured questionnaire titled: "Marketing Strategies and Business Performance Questionnaire" (MSBPQ), adapted and validated for the study. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential (Pearson Product moment correlation, regression analysis) statistics. The result revealed that marketing strategies have significant effect on business performance.

Milian, (2018) studied legitimacy at the "margins": promotional strategies in the Canadian for-profit college (FPC) sector. Through this study, an examination of a sample of 751 Canadian for-profit colleges (FPCs) is performed, revealing the presence of an alternative logic. Rather than conformity, organizations within this sector engage in niche-seeking behavior, using promotional materials to carve out unconventional identities. They do so by directly drawing on symbolic resources and affiliations from the industrial sectors which they service. These findings are interpreted through the prism of contemporary theorizing within organizational sociology.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design that was adopted in this study is the survey design which involves personal observation, interview and questionnaires was used in this study to seek clarifications and convenience on the part of the respondent given schedules.

Area of the Study

The area of study was the five South East universities such as The selected university is Enugu State University, Imo State University. Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka, Ebonye State University, Abia State University. South East is one of the six Geo political zone in Nigeria.. The study was directed to the students of the selected business schools in south east Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprises of all the students of the selected institutions whose age group falls between 30 years to 61years. The population for the study is the business school students of Enugu State University which is one hundred and

forty-five (145) , Imo State University is one hundred and fifteen (115). Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka is one hundred and eighty-six (186), Ebonye State University is eight-nine (89), Abia State University is seven (70) which is 605. Sources is the students affaire of business school of the selected universities.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Given the nature of this study, it was difficult to cover the entire population of (605), so a fair representative sample of the population therefore was imperative. Accordingly, the sample size for the study was determined by using the Borg & Gall (1973) formular for calculating sample size as follows

$$n = (1.960)^2 (0.05) [605]$$

$$n = (3.8461) (30.25)$$

$$= 116.34 \implies 116$$

$$n = 116$$

Method of Data Analysis

Statistics such as frequency count and percentages were put to use in the analysis of research questions while research hypotheses were tested simple regression analysis. The research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Analysis was carried out with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

PRESENTAION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents the data obtained from the respondents through the administered questionnaire. One hundred and sixteen (116) questionnaires were administered; however, Ninety-eight (98) questionnaires were retrieved. 84.5 was the percentage rate of returned questionnaire. Therefore the analysis and interpretation of data were only based on the returned questionnaires. The method used was the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression technique. The method was adopted because it possesses unique estimating properties which include unbiased, efficiency and consistency when compared with other linear unbiased estimates.

Bio-data Analysis of Respondents

		GENDER			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MALE	57	24.5	58.2	58.2
	FEMALE	41	17.6	41.8	100.0
	Total	98	42.1	100.0	

The above table reveals that the 58.2% of the respondents which represents fifty-seven ninety-four (394) persons were male respondents, while forty-one (41) respondents which

represent 41.8% were female respondents. By implication, male respondents were more than female respondents by 16.4% in our selected population sample for this study. The implication of this is to enable us to know the number of female and male that successfully returned their questionnaire.

STATUES

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MARRIED	16	6.9	16.3
	SINGLE	21	9.0	21.4
	WIDOWED	59	25.3	60.2
	DIVORCED	1	.4	1.0
	Total	98	42.1	100.0

In the table above, out of the ninety-eight (98) respondents, sixteen (16) of the respondents, representing 38.8% are married while twenty-one (21) respondents which represent 21.4 percent are single. While the is fifty-nine respondents (59) which represents 60.2 were widowed, while divorced only one, which represent 1. It is therefore glaring that the majority of the respondents were widowed as at the time of this study. Thus marital status table help us to know the number of single, married, and divorce respondents that answered the distributed questionnaire

Category of program

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MBA	36	11.2	36.7
	BA/BSC	23	9.9	23.4
	Certificate course	39	.9	39.8
	Total	98	30.1	100.0

The table above indicates that thirty- six (36) respondents which representing 36.7% percent maintain to acquired MBA while 23.4% percent of the respondents which represents twenty-three (23) have BA/BSC. While thirty-nine which represent 39.8 percent either have certificate course

AGE

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30--40 YEARS	1	.4	1.0
	41-50 YEARS	24	10.3	24.5
	51-60 YEARS	45	19.3	45.9
	61 - ABOVE	28	12.0	28.6
	Total	98	42.1	100.0

The table above shows that respondents whose age bracket falls between 30-40 yrs were one (1) which represent 1 percent. This is followed by those with age bracket of 41-50 years with twenty-four (24) which represents 24.5%. Also those within age bracket of 51-60 yrs were forty-five (45) which represents 45.9%. Lastly, those within 61-above were twenty-eight which represents 28.6 percent. The implication of this age distribution is to enable us to check if the questionnaire was directed to the right age group.

Nature of program

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Full-time	57	24.5	58.2	58.2
	Part-time	41	17.6	41.8	100.0
	Total	98	42.1	100.0	

The table above shows that respondents who are in full-time service are fifty-seven (57) which represents 58.2 percent. This is followed by those in part-time service who are forty-one (41) which represents 41.8%. The implication of years in-service is to enable us to have a clear view of those who have been in service for a particular period of time.

TYPE OF BUSINESS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	CIVIL SERVANT	48	20.6	49.0	49.0
	SELF-EMPLOYED	50	21.5	51.0	100.0
	Total	98	42.1	100.0	

From the above table it was observed that ninety-eight questionnaire was distributed. Forty-eight which represent 49%, were civil servant, while fifty which represent 51% were self employed.

Hypotheses Testing

Test of Hypotheses

To further justify the results, ANOVA test was conducted to measure the examine the relationship between promotion strategies and customer patronage a study of selected business school in south east Nigeria.. The results were shown in the ANOVA Table below;

Hypotheses one

Ho₁: Ho1:Sales promotion does not have significant effect on customer patronage in Business Schools in south east.

Table 1: Evaluation on whether Sales promotion affected customer patronage

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.374	3	2.458	14.027	.000
Within Groups	16.473	94	.175		
Total	23.847	97			

Source: SPSS Version 20, 2019

The test table reveal that small significance value (F. sig<.05) indicate group differences. Since the F- value of 14.027 which has a significance of .000 is less than .05 (i.e .001<.05), there exist significant difference among the variables. Therefore, There is significant relationship between Sales promotion and customer patronage.

Ho₂: Direct marketing does not have significant effect on consumer's patronage of Business Schools in south east

Table 2: Evaluation on whether direct marketing has an impact on consumer's patronage

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36.189	3	12.063	33.048	.000
Within Groups	34.311	94	.365		
Total	70.500	97			

Source: SPSS, Version, 20 2019

The small significance value (F.sig<.05) indicates that there is a group difference. Since the F-value of 33.048 which has a significance value of .009 is less greater .05 (i.e 000<.05). this implies that There is significant relationship between a direct marketing and consumer's patronage

Hypothesis Three

Ho₃: Advertising does not have significant effect on students' patronage of Business Schools in south east

Table 3: Evaluation on whether Advertising has significant impact on students' patronage

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	56.102	3	18.701	9.418	.000
Within Groups	186.643	94	1.986		
Total	242.745	97			

Source: SPSS, Version, 20 2019

The test conducted revealed that the large significance value (F.sig<.002) indicate no group differences. Since the F-value of 9.418 with a significance of .000 is less than .05 (i.e .002<.05), Advertising have significant effect on students' patronage of Business Schools in south east

Hypotheses Four

Ho4: Personal selling does not have significant effect on students' patronage of Business Schools in south east

Table 1: Evaluation on Personal selling and students' patronage

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	56.102	4	10.701	34.035	.008
Within Groups	16.643	94	1.986		
Total	70.745	97			

Source: SPSS Version 20, 2019

The test table reveal that small significance value (F. sig<.05) indicate group differences. Since the F- value of 34.035 which has a significance of .008 is less than .05 (i.e .001<.05), there exist significant difference among the variables. Therefore, there is significant relationship between Personal selling and students' patronage.

Discussion of the Findings

From the analyses it can be concluded that the objective of the business school is to satisfy customers and make profit, therefore the business school uses more promotional tools. It is observed that the business school has all groups of people from different economic status as the school target market. This is a very promising strategy a school can adopt to have a great market shares over its competitors. It can be concluded that the motivating factor of customers' patronizing business school is because it offers satisfactory services to its clients.

It can be concluded that the schools seeks information from their students concerning their needs and desires. The result also shows that the schools get to know whether their customers are satisfied or dissatisfied through increase and decrease of admission intake. Conceptually, the decision reach in this hypothesis is to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that promotion strategies has significant positive effect on customers patronage. This finding is in line with study of Oke (2012), Onyejiaku, Ghasi, Okwor (2018), Olalekan Ajayi & Folasade (2017)

Conclusion

Advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and direct selling combined together as a promotional strategy exhibited a better influence on the customer patronage. Universities see marketing strategy as a way of providing quality products and services that satisfy students needs, offered at affordable price. Thus, performance of the universities is further enhanced adopting effective promotion strategy under a wider distribution network. The ultimate goal of promotional strategy is to deliver greater value to customers and the university at a lower cost so as to increase student's enrolment.

Recommendations

From the findings, it is recommended especially for developing countries, arising from Nigeria's experience that;

- Sales promotion significantly affects consumer's patronage of business school; the sales promotion objectives of the school should determine its promotional strategy. The researcher suggest further that in order to achieve the objectives of developing favourable association as well as to impress customers", a suitable strategy should be designed to promote the image of the particular business.
- Direct marketing significantly influence consumers" patronage of business school; direct marketing as a tool of communication should be explore and properly entrenched in all areas of operation of the business school to increase the students enrolment.
- There is need to determine advertising spending through the preparation of advertising budget. This can be based on advertising objectives which include increasing sales volume, informing customers of a new product or creating awareness of an old or new product in the mind of the consumers and customers.
- Personal selling is a significant determine of customers" patronage of business school; that is business school must now go out of their offices to meet good clients, and even present such prospective customers with gifts and other incentives in order to attract their patronage.

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