

Enhancing Not-for-Profit Organizations' (NPOs) Effectiveness through Marketing: an Empirical Study

By

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Abstract

Not-for-Profit Organizations (NPOs) around the world have grown considerably featuring in many sectors. The work of NPO is essentially to maintain the much needed services typically not provided by the for-profit sector or government. It has a mission as well as customers' satisfaction to accomplish. These can only be achieved if the operators understand and apply marketing principles and logics in their activities as practiced by for profit organizations. The study used cross sectional survey to examine the extent to which some selected NPOs understand, appreciate and apply marketing 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. The study recommended among others that NPOs should dedicate a unit or department to specifically handle marketing related functions in their organizations and that these tasks should be performed by formally trained marketers.

Keywords: Not for profit, organization, marketing, effectiveness, market- orientation, customers.

1. Introduction

An organization is an establishment or institution formed to achieve a particular purpose. It involves the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit goals, through division of labour, function, hierarchy of authority and responsibilities. An organization is established to achieve some certain objectives. While a business organization is set up to achieve maximum profit through customer satisfaction, the Not-for profit organization is out to accomplish its mission objectives/goals

An organization, whether private, public, profit or not-for-profit, cannot exist independently. As a system its existence and activities affect the people and environment in which it operates. Conversely, the organization too is affected by the variables and socio-structural forces around it. As a two-way system the organization sells its products to the target market with the aim of attaining results. What it can market includes goods, service, ideas, events, information, experiences, organization, person, places and properties (Kotler, 2000).

Marketing as a management process and function seek the satisfaction of both parties in the exchange transactions. It is thus inevitable in the successful operations of any organization, not-

for profit inclusive. To champion its mission course marketing remains the kingpin. This is because like in business enterprise, Not-for-Profit Organizations (NPOs) are increasing in number, hence competing to reaching and retaining their target markets which include sponsors, volunteers, donors, beneficiaries etc. The managers of NPOs can combat this market pressure by applying techniques and tools of marketing.

However, rather than the NPOs embracing the marketing concept and begin the marketing process with the customers (targets) and investigating through research what the market actually need and want, the managers pursue an 'organization centered mindset' and falsely believe that their products are needed by the market (Andreasen, Goodstern & Wilson, 2005) thus relying more on the production- era philosophy. This notion negates the general belief that an organization should be customer-oriented inline with the marketing concept (Kotler & Keller,2006), rather than 'organization-centered'

Dolnicar and lazarevski (2009) believe that NPOs should conduct their operations by applying the concepts and techniques of marketing into their activities. Only a small proportion of the NPOs understand and apply the marketing tools, techniques, methods and logics in the activities and pursuit of their missions (kotler,2000). Many NPOs and their managers still demonstrate a distinct lack of understanding of what the principles and techniques of marketing are and largely focus their efforts on selling and promotional activities especially advertising. Very few NPOs engage in any kind of strategic marketing, including marketing research (Andreasen et al.,2005).

The work of NPOs is essentially to maintain the much needed services typically not provided by the for-profit sector or the government, hence the marketing tools and methods are as applicable in them just as found in for-profit organizations. Despite the importance of marketing in an organization, NPOs consider only a part of the functions as important and necessary for them. This ought not to be. The negative effect of this position is that many of the NPOs are not performing effectively because they left some marketing functions undone. This study aims to explore the extent to which marketing is practiced by NPOs. It will make a contribution on the 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 organizations. It discusses the indispensable need for training in marketing. The paper addresses two questions: (1) Can market- orientation significantly increase the effectiveness of NPOs in the pursuit of their mission? (2) Can training in marketing help handlers of NPOs achieve greatly?

This study is organized as follows: section one is the introduction; section two deals with review of relevant literature; section three presents methodology of research while section four discusses the findings. Section five considers conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature review

Conceptual framework:

Not-for-Profit Organisations (NPOs) An organization can be seen as a social unit, an entity established to achieve a predetermined objectives. Organization may be classified according to Stanton, Etzel, and Walker (1991) as private versus public (government): profit seeking versus not -for- profit; and business versus non-business.

Not-for-Profit Organizations (NPOs) do not have profit making as their goal. However, the NPOs do need to identify their goals, plan strategies and tactics to attain these goals, effectively executive their plans and evaluate their performances. Most NPOs market services rather than tangible products (Stanton et al.,1991; Kotler & Keller, 2006). NPOs products according to Freitas-da-costa, Silva, Paula, Silva & Vieira (2011) are the idea, knowledge, belief, attitude, habit or behavior that one wish to convey to the target markets.

Gonzalez, vijande, and Casielles (2002) defined private non-profit organization as ‘any organization without financial objective, under private control, which aims to generate a social benefit for a specific sector of society’. Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) agreed with above definition but added that NPOs could include public sector. Most social–course and Non Governmental voluntary Organizations (NGOs) are NPOs (Stanton et al., 1991; Mc Grath,1997; Agaraj, Pjero, Sokoli & Remaj, 2013).

Though there is no universally accepted definition of NPOs, scholars agreed they posses certain unique characteristics which include: non financial objectives, mission-drive, multiple customers, worthwhile returns for sustenance, competitive – cooperative relationship with others, multiple stakeholders (Stanton et al., 1991; Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009). These characteristics Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) argued could lead NPOs to their disregard to marketing.

NPOs around the world have grown considerably. The non business field has expanded to include thousands of organizations spanning to include activities in educational, cultural, religious, charity, social, philanthropic, mutual - aid, health care and political activities (Stanton et al.,1991; Kotler, 2000; Anheier, 2005).

While ‘running their business’ NPOs deal with 2 groups of people unlike the for - profit organizations. One of these is the contributors (volunteers, donors, sponsor, advocates, trustees) to the NPOs; this, Stanton et al. (1991) referred to as ‘resource attraction’. The other target group is the organization’s clients (recipients of the NPOs services). The recipients in for - profit organization are called ‘customer’, but Bruce (1995) and Alasiri (2005) preferred the term ‘beneficiary’ for NPOs. Kara, Spillan and Deshield (2004) as cited in Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) stated that there is a difference between the non – profit market for customers and the market for resources.

NPOs are selective in their choice of word/ terms as used by profit making organization. Organizations such as churches, political parties, boys scouts, hospitals, museums and educational institutions, for instance, would prefer the terms parishioners, electorates, members, patients, audiences or students respectively as against the term customer in their dealings. A religious

organization 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 organizations in bad light (Stanton et al.,1991; Kotler, 2000; Dolnicar & Lazarevki, 2009).To many of them marketing is used to sell to people things they do not need (Bruce,1995) yet these organizations are seriously in need of effective marketing application in their activities (Stanton et al.,1991; Kotler & Andreasen, 1996).

3. Not-for-profit organisations marketing

Marketing is encompassing and involves all activities and transactions that bring about satisfying customers of goods and services through exchange process for profit making and other objective attainment (Alasiri, 2005; kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

Not-for-profit, private and public organizations do engage in marketing because they too run a business and employ business management techniques (Stanton et al., 1991; Kotler, 2000; Goerke, 2003). Thomas (1983) as cited in Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) viewed marketing as those activities performed by individuals or organizations 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.

These NPOs have missions hence like all other organizations they must set strategies and tactics to reach these goals, through proper management and marketing. NPOs employ accounting system, financial controls, personnel management and labour relations and other business management techniques (Stanton et al., 1991; Goerke, 2003; Andreasen et al.,2005).

They employ marketing techniques consciously or otherwise (Sargeant & Bennett, 2004; Freitas–da-costa et al., 2011). 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 treat marketing in part as tantamount to advertising, selling or promotion (McGrath, 1997; Kotler, 2000; Akchin, 2001). According to Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009), and Kotler(2000) many of the NPOs are still production- oriented rather than market or customer oriented.

Non -profit organization or social marketing according to Thomas (1983) as cited in Dolnicar and Lazarevki(2009) is concerned with the application of the marketing concept to organizations whose goals are defined not by profit but by other yardsticks of performance. Kotler and Keller(2006) captioned it from social area and defines it as the design, implementation and control programs that seek to increase the acceptance of an idea in a focus group. Atucha and Lora (1992) as cited in Freitas- da – costa et al. (2011) say 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. Bruce(1995) as cited in Novatorov (2011) stated non-profit marketing is the analysis, planning, 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.

Organizations in this group are not set out for the purpose of making profit. However, in their operations especially publicly funded service organizations, it is expected that the investment in them should provide worthwhile 'returns' so that they can be sustained.

4. Not-for-profit organisation effectiveness

Stanton et al.(1991); Dolnicar and Lazarevki (2009); Freitas-da-costa et al.(2001) argued that the effectiveness of NPOs can be improved through the application of marketing logics and principles in the operations of these organizations. 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. These organizations have missions that are well defined in advance and cannot change in dependence of market needs (Modi, 2011). Scholars such as Mc Grath (1997); Andreasen et al. (1997); Brennan and Brady(1999) argued that NPOs need to be market oriented, by observing the marketing concept and apply the other marketing strategies/tools to allow efficient operations without affecting their true mission goals. The NPOs are usually evaluated for effectiveness in terms of their stated objectives (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Pope, Isely & Asamoatutu, 2009; Greiling, 2011).

Such strategies as market segmentation, product positioning, advertising, marketing communication and research, niche etc are applicable in NPOs. Marketing is necessary to check and improve market place problems (Kotler, 1998, 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 organizations.

According to Modi (2011), NPO can not successfully achieve its mission objective if it is not able to satisfy the beneficiaries' needs. Satisfied beneficiaries he noted show more involvement, participation and enthusiasm in the NPOs' activities, which is crucial to improving the overall effectiveness of the organization. Marketing helps in satisfying the 2 groups of customers to the NPOs (contributors and recipients/beneficiaries).NPOs activities must be geared towards their satisfaction at all times.

5. Empirical framework

A number of empirical studies have been carried out on the subjects of NPOs and marketing. This section discusses some of the findings of these 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 (1995, 1998, 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 which support Andreasen and kotler (2003) assertion that NPOs have an organization- centered mindset. Kotler (1998) concluded that marketing lagged dramatically in adoption by NPOs compared to the other business practices such as accounting, financial management and planning.

Stanton et al.(1991), Harvey(2001),Georke(2003) & Greiling(2011) found out that NPOs operate in a highly competitive environment hence have started to adopt business like techniques in their approaches to combat the market place pressure just like in the for- profit organizations. 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 operation had better and effective performance vis- a vis their mission goals and beneficiary satisfaction than NPOs that do not adopt marketing approach to their operations. This submission support the claims by Terblanche(2001), Sargeant and Bennett (2004), Kotler and Keller(2006) and Shapiro (1974) as cited by Dolnicar and Lazarevki,(2009) 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.

6. Methodology

The study was a cross sectional survey. Sixty six NPOs were randomly selected in four out of the twenty local government council areas in Lagos state, Nigeria. The local governments were selected based on their locations, population and commerce, and they formed four out of the five administrative divisions in which the state is divided. These local government are Epe, Ikeja, Ikorodu and Lagos Island. The NPOs categorization proposed by Stanton et al.(1991) was adopted in this study where six NPOs were randomly selected in each category (appendix 1). All the selected NPOs have been established more than ten years and applied some forms of marketing in their operations.

A modified survey instrument titled Not-for-profit Organizations Marketing Practice Questionnaire (NPOMPQ) was developed from the one designed by Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) for this study. A validated survey instruments were administered on the selected NPOs between the period 7th and 17th February, 2014. All the sixty six questionnaires administered were retrieved. Prior to the collection of the main data for the study a pilot study using 20 NPOs in the Isolo local government area of Lagos state was conducted a month earlier, 4th and 6th January, 2014. The face and construct validity of the instrument was established using experts' opinions to evaluate the

suitability and appropriateness of each item and the adequacy of the instrument. The final survey instrument benefitted from their useful comments, corrections and suggestions. After two weeks, using the same survey instrument and 20 NPOs, a test- retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated using the Pearson moment correlation and a 0.767 coefficient was obtained. In all 20 questions were sent to the target respondents. Apart from questions on demographic characteristics, all others were structured and measured on 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree(5) to strongly disagree(1).The questions were drafted to determine the extent to which the NPOs understand, utilize, practice and apply marketing concepts/ tools in their operations.

The two hypotheses tested in this study using Chi-square statistical formula at 5% level of significance are: (1) Operations in NPOs were not dominated by organizational centred mindset, and (2) Marketing functions in NPOs were not handled by formally untrained marketing personnel.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

7. Results and discussion

Below is the analysis of the responses from the 66 NPOs that participated in the study. The bio-data analysis shows that from the sampled respondents there were more male 44 (67%) than female 22 (33%) participants. A total 17 (26%) of the respondents were CEOs, 37(56%) were management staff and 12(18%) were senior officers in their organizations. From table 1 below, it shows that more of the management staff actually participated and this may mean that for most NPOs, activities involving outsiders are usually handled by experienced and staff in that cadre. However, all the respondents had worked in their various NPOs for an average of 5.3 years.

Table 1: Sample profile. source: Field survey,2014

| Demographic | items | no of respondents | %age |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|------|
| Gender | Male | 44 | 67 |
| | Female | 22 | 33 |
| Grade | Total | 66 | 100 |
| | CEOs | 17 | 26 |
| | Management | 37 | 56 |
| | Senior staff | 12 | 18 |
| | Total | 66 | 100 |

The result further indicate that NPOs are selective in some marketing areas they considered important for their operations, hence, provide training for their workers in that areas. Table 2 depicts these areas from the sample surveyed.

Table 2: NPOs marketing training areas. Source: Field survey,2014

| Functional areas | no of respondents | %age |
|------------------|-------------------|------|
| Advertising | 13 | 20 |
| Public Relations | 11 | 17 |
| Client services | 10 | 14 |
| Promotion | 11 | 17 |
| Publicity/Media | 16 | 24 |
| Others | 05 | 08 |

The position depicted above confirmed the NPOs perceptions where the respondents were asked to rate how some marketing functions are important to them (appendix 11). To them only a few marketing functions are essential and applicable to them. This position is consistent with finding by Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) that NPOs do not practice marketing in its entirety. The result also indicated that only 15(23%) of the NPOs had units specially dedicated for marketing/ related functions while 51(77%) did not have such units. Although not presented in the table, the survey showed that the NPOs sampled employed 23 (35%) people who are graduates of Business Admin, 11(17%) graduates in marketing or related field, 27(41%) graduates in other disciplines and only 5(7%) people who are not graduates. This finding reveals that NPOs employed people who are not trained marketers to handle marketing jobs for them.

On the issue of competition, 59(89%) of the respondents agreed their organizations faced competition in their market place, especially from organizations with similar missions. Competition was noted in areas of fund raising, membership, volunteers, publicity and government supports. On the number of times the organization conduct research to determine their 'targets' needs, 3(5%) of the respondents stated 'sometimes', 9(13%) indicated seldom, while 54(82%) indicated the organization did not do such research. This probably explained respondents' answers to the question that asked whether the organization places the owner(s) first in everything it does: 53(81%) of the respondents stated 'yes', only 9(13%) indicated 'no' while 4(6%) could not take a side. The responses on market research, competition drive, organization focus confirmed the fact that many of the NPOs marketing operations and strategies are to a large extent still heavily dominated by an organization -centered mindset which is consistent with the findings by Kotler (1998,2000) and Akchin (2001).

70% of the respondents stated NPOs needed marketing in order to stay competitive in the market place. However, 54(82%) agreed their organizations have interest but do not know how to apply marketing tools fully in their operations, when only 12(18%) disagreed with this statement. Unfortunately, 49(74%) of the respondents misunderstood the meaning/functions of marketing, also, 49(74%) of the respondents stated that marketing is synonymous with selling, hence not for NPOs but for profit- oriented organizations; this result confirmed the finding by Bruce(1995) as cited in Dolnicar and Lazarevski(2009) that NPOs are selective in marketing programmes for their operations.

The respondents agreed that marketing helps an organization achieve its mission and stay competitive but believed that marketing operations (applications) in profit and non-profit organizations differ. Only 44(67%) of the respondents agreed that their executives' attitude is supportive of application of marketing strategies, when only 15(23%) disagreed with the statement. This executive's support according to Narver and Slater(1994) is a necessity for a transition to a market orientation.

Furthermore, finding in this survey revealed that NPOs still focus only on small proportion of marketing tools as appropriate to them despite the suggestion for them to be more market oriented in their approach (Kotler,2000). Only a few of NPOs engaged in need assessment and market research as found by Akchin (2001) and Andreasen et al.(2005). This is probably because the mission statement is defined in advance, hence can not be changed (Modi,2011).

Findings from above clearly showed that NPOs have interest in marketing operations because of its importance to their success, however, their marketing operations and strategies are still heavily dominated by an organization-centered mindset. Secondly, the NPOs still don't allow trained marketers to handle their marketing activities for them. For instance, only 11(17%) people possessed relevant marketing qualifications / training in the sampled survey in this study. These two assertions were further confirmed in the 2 hypotheses tested where the null hypotheses were rejected (Table 3 below).

Table 3: Chi square test. Source: Field survey, 2014

| Hypothesis | sample size | degree of freedom | level of sig. | x ² cal | x ² tabulated | decision |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| HO ₁ | 66 | 2 | 0.05 | 21.55 | 5.99 | Reject |
| HO ₂ | 66 | 3 | 0.05 | 60.95 | 7.81 | Reject |

Hence, we conclude that (1) Operations in NPOs were not dominated by customer- oriented mindset, and, (2) Marketing functions in NPOs were not handled by formally trained marketers.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

A cross sectional survey was adopted in this study to among other allow close-monitoring of the application of marketing principles and logics by the NPOs.

NPOs now operate under intense market pressure and competition hence it is expected they should have adopted a market- oriented approach to their marketing operations like for- profit organizations as advocated by Kotler (2000) and, Sargeant and Bennett(2004). Many of the NPOs still lack an understanding of the application of marketing, though, they believe it could help them in achieving their mission objectives effectively. Rather than focus and apply the marketing principles and concepts 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 organizations. To achieve greatly NPOs need to change their perceptions on what marketing functions are by being more customer- oriented than organization- focused.

Based on the findings in this study the following are hereby recommended:

- i. Marketing is everywhere, therefore, NPOs should as a matter of necessity employ formally trained marketers to handle their marketing operations as practiced by the for-profit organizations.
- ii. A unit/department should be created by each NPO dedicated to deal with all marketing operations/functions for the organization.
- iii. 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 (market- orientation) while not loosing focus on achieving the organization' mission objectives.

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Appendix 1: NPOs
and questionnaire

| | Nos | % |
|------------------------------|-----|---|
| Educational | 6 | |
| Cultural | 6 | |
| Religious | 6 | |
| Charitable and Philanthropic | 6 | |
| Social Cause | 6 | |
| Social | 6 | |
| Health Care | 6 | |
| Political | 6 | |
| Government Agencies | 6 | |
| Association/ Union | 6 | |
| Others | 6 | |
| | 66 | |

Areas of operation
distribution (final)

Appendix 11: NPOs assessment of marketing areas and most important task for them

| | A Marketing Function | non Marketing function | most important | B important | not important |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Public Relations | 37 | 29 | 49 | 17 | --- |
| 2. Advertising | 64 | 02 | 57 | 9 | --- |
| 3. Funding Raising | 39 | 27 | 58 | 6 | 2 |
| 4. Assessment of Consumer/ Volunteer/Donor Level | 47 | 19 | 4 | 10 | 52 |
| 5. Image Building/ Positioning | 21 | 45 | 18 | 34 | 14 |
| 6. Event Planning | 12 | 54 | 14 | 52 | --- |
| 7. Market Segmentation | 66 | --- | 6 | 29 | 31 |
| 8. Marketing Strategy | 66 | --- | 5 | 18 | 43 |
| 9. Distribution | 37 | 29 | 5 | 24 | 37 |
| 10. Media Relations | 22 | 44 | 36 | 15 | 15 |
| 11. Product Development | 66 | -- | 16 | 39 | 11 |
| 12. Pricing | 41 | 25 | 7 | 51 | 8 |
| 13. Marketing Research | 66 | -- | 11 | 14 | 41 |
| 14. SWOT Analysis | 17 | 49 | 17 | 39 | 10 |
| 15. Promotion | 36 | 30 | 48 | 14 | 4 |

