

Assessment of Marketing Strategies Adoption and Competitiveness among Quantity Surveying Firms in the Digitisation Era

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ABSTRACT

The ability of business outfits to successfully connect end-users to their goods and services determines their success. Business success in this sense is regarded as the longevity, profit, ability to be constantly engaged, among others. Like other professionals, the quantity surveying practice is bound by different ethics, which include how QS firms can carry out marketing. This study aims at investigating how the different marketing strategies adopted by QS firms and the factors affecting the adoption. Data was solicited through well-structured questionnaires. 74 formed the respondents; this is a mixture of indigenous, expatriate and mixed ownership. The factors were divided into internal and external microeconomic and macroeconomic environmental factors. The results showed that business philosophies of the owner (internal environment), national economic blueprint (external macroeconomics environment), competitive conditions of the market and state of the economy (external microeconomics environment) are the most important factors affecting the adoption of marketing strategies by quantity surveying firms. The study, therefore, recommends that Quantity surveying principal managers should be versed and open in their business philosophies so as to be able to change with the technological trends and changes in the economy (external microeconomic and macroeconomic factors).

Keywords: Competitiveness, Dynamic capability, Marketing strategy, QS firms

INTRODUCTION

The survival of firms is mainly hinged on the competitive edge gained over competitors. This includes and is not limited to the adoption of the latest technology, long term and short term plans and projections, among others. The ability of the firm to remain afloat mostly is dependent on the client base it controls, market share dominance, profitability, and competitiveness. Put succinctly, the firm's ability to "sense and shape opportunities and threats, to seize opportunities and to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and when necessary, reconfiguring the

businesses intangible and tangible assets” (Teece, 2007). The ability of the firm to achieve this has a great influence on the client and its turnover.

Achieving competitiveness, according to Porter, (1985) fundamentally is an offshoot of the value the firm is able to give the clients. The study went further to submit two types of competitive advantage: cost leadership and differentiation. A firm can only achieve these when it offers the client value, efficiency, and productivity. Other researchers have postulated other strategies for achieving competitive advantage. This includes qualities that can be achieved through technological adoption (e.g BIM), firm capability, and dynamic capability among others (Adekunle *et al.*, 2021; Aghimien *et al.*, 2021).

The American Marketing Association has defined marketing as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society. Marketing is the whole activity a business engages in to acquire customers and maintain a relationship with them. These activities include small tasks like writing thank-you letters, playing golf with a prospective client, returning calls promptly and meeting with a past client for coffee, among others. The ultimate goal of marketing is to match a company’s products and services to the people who need and want them, thereby ensuring profitability. Generally, businesses revolve around marketing for business continuity.

Marketing as a management function has received wide acceptance in various industries as essential for increasing market shares, building long-term relationships, satisfying clients, ensuring profitability, strengthening competitive advantage and achieving firm performance (Naranjo, Pellicer & Yepes, 2011). Connor and Davidson (1990) indicated that the success or failure of an organisation largely depends on the focus and direction of its marketing efforts. This implies that the marketing strategy adopted by the firm determines the growth or failure of a firm. Ojo (2011) supported this position stating that effective marketing is critical for business growth in a competitive open market environment like Nigeria. It is established in literature that marketing is positively related to higher firm performance and success (Jaakkola, Möller, Parvinen, Evanschitzky, & Mühlbacher, 2010). Marketing is a very critical factor for business growth in a large and competitive market like the Nigerian construction industry.

Odediran, Babalola and Adebisi, (2013) identified Nigeria as one of the largest construction markets in Africa. Thus, it can be said to be rife with competition. Competition in the Nigerian construction market has increased, fueled by higher client expectations, risks, turbulent economic and technological environments, internationalisation of the construction trade, dearth of skilled operatives, and increased population of professionals, among others. Despite the advancement in technology, the construction industry is still considered to be stuck to traditional means of marketing (Preece, 2003). This has rendered their marketing of no effect.

Competition and the fight for market share placed a challenge on construction firm viability survival, with some companies becoming smaller in size or specialised (Odediran, *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, inability to survive has left to high construction firm mortality globally, but with more emphasis

on developing countries (Egesa, 2011). It is noted that developing countries are most hit by high rate of firm mortality. The construction industry and in extension quantity surveying firms experience these challenges.

In many Quantity Surveying firms, it has been found that restricted codes of ethics/set of principles, insufficient marketing know-how, and difficulty in the measurement of marketing performance is found to be among the factors that could hinder the adoption of marketing by Quantity Surveying firms in Nigeria (Ogbu, 2015). Preece (2003) found out that most quantity surveying firms are not adopting the latest form of technology as they still rely on traditional company brochures. Marketing by quantity surveying firms has been hampered by many factors, including slow technological adoption.

The relevance of marketing to the performance of Nigerian indigenous construction consultancy firms (QS firms inclusive) has hardly been explored in literature (Ogbu, 2015). Marketing research is deficient in the construction industry especially Quantity surveying practice. The American Marketing Association defines marketing research as the function that links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information-information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process. This function has been lacking. This portends an inability to attract the competent manpower that can exert sufficient influence to command the respect of construction contractors and clients, and provide adequate services for complex project situations. Additionally, stereotyped Quantity Surveying firms with little knowledge of contemporary clients' demands are bred due to poor marketing research and the associated poor firm performance among these firms. Therefore, the adoption of marketing by Quantity Surveying firms in Nigeria will potentially improve their firm performance and survival.

Many quantity surveying firms have played down the importance of marketing (Ogbu, 2015). Likewise, Morgan (1992) observed in practice that marketing in professional Quantity Surveying firms is viewed as less critical to the management and survival of the firm than finance and personnel issues. According to Rutland (1991), the reasons for the neglect of marketing by firms are the facts that marketing is seen as unimportant and unprofessional, the necessary skills are lacking, crisis management prevails in the firms, the discipline for a sustained marketing effort is lacking, and there are no written, measurable marketing plans. In Nigerian Quantity Surveying firms, marketing is treated with even more levity; marketing expenditures are often viewed as short term costs rather than long term investments; and as such, financially unaccountable (Schulz & Gronstedt, 1997).

QUANTITY SURVEYING KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A Quantity Surveyor is a professional in the construction industry who has the ability to analyse both cost components and practical physical construction works of a project in a successful way so as to be able to apply the results of his analysis in solving problems peculiar to each project (Badu & Amoah, 2004). Traditionally, Quantity Surveyors are expected to conduct initial cost

planning and quantify all elements of a project, control costs throughout construction, give procurement advice and prepare financial documents accounts and valuations (Ashworth, 2010). This is further explained by Fanous (2012) that its function is known as a simple measure and value system and still remains the main. The majority of the functions traditionally carried out by the quantity surveyor are: Providing Approximate Cost Estimates, Advice on Procurement, Cost quantity surveyors is based upon the measuring and pricing of construction works (Olatunji, Sherard & Gu, 2009). Furthermore, the quantity surveying functions include planning, measuring items on site, preparing bills of quantities, preparing schedules of works, and controlling costs throughout the project, assessing and negotiating tenders. According to Ibrahim (2011) the top three competencies that the Nigerian Quantity Surveying professionals requires to meet the requirements of the professional's current clients and to take advantage of future areas of opportunities are: Quantification and costing of building construction works, project financial control and reporting, project evaluation.

The Quantity Surveying profession has evolved and diversified into new areas of practice. The modern quantity surveyor provides a wider range of services covering all aspects of project cost management, procurement and contract management (Lee, Trench & Willis, 2011). This is evident in all sectors of Quantity Surveying including consultants, main contractors and sub-contractors. The evolved roles and responsibilities of the Quantity Surveying profession according to Fanous (2012) are: Investment appraisal, analysis of financial risks, project planning, contractual dispute resolution, facilities management, project management, insurance valuates, providing insolvency services, measuring environmental impact and costs, managing maintenance programs, cash flow accounting forecasts, and value management.

INCREASING QUANTITY SURVEYING SERVICES THROUGH MARKETING STRATEGIES

Marketing strategy can be defined as a managerial process of assessing market opportunities and choosing marketing position that serves the company's aims and objectives. It is the company's response to external environment and consistent set of principles through which company hopes to achieve its long run customer and profit objectives in a competitive environment. Marketing strategies are ways by which professional firms sell their services to their intending clients. They have an essential role in the success of a construction company in this highly competitive industry. Ganah et al., (2008) offered generic strategies to be adopted by any business but this may not always be applicable to the construction industry due to its nature but it can be adopted. There are some marketing strategies identified by different construction firms and researchers such as:

Location of the Firm

This is of importance to professional service firms. There are areas where services are regularly in demand especially areas of high concentration of

construction activities like Lagos, Abuja, Owerri and Kaduna. It will, therefore be of benefit to the firms if they are located in such places to make effective sales. However, Zeithaml et al., (1995) included the use of multi-site locations to cater for firms which have projects in different locations at the same time. However, there is need for caution in terms of proper monitoring of these locations for well representation of the firms. It is observed that most clients in the rural areas do not seek professional services in their project execution.

Professional-Client Relationship

Good relationship between the client and the professionals makes a good strategy, as courteous service and reliability of the firm's past performance encourage the clients to come back for further services. Zeithaml et al., (1995) recommended managing consumers (clients) as one of the strategies to solving the problem of inseparability in construction services. Winter and Preece (2000) stressed the need for relationship marketing as a strategy for improved performance in construction industry. Jafaar et al., (2008) identified client relations/contact as the most important category of marketing strategies because professional services usually involved a high degree of interaction with the client. Polat and Donmez (2010) recognised the importance of building strong relationship with customers and marketing partners to achieve the desired objectives.

Business Promotion

This is a method of securing understanding between the client and the professionals for the purpose of bringing about a favorable buying action and at the long run, a lasting confidence in the firm. Zeithaml et al., (1995) described this as part of specific effort to encourage customers to tell others about their services. It is worth noting that promotional techniques adopted in other sectors may not be applicable in the construction industry due to the uniqueness of this sector. Polat and Donmez (2010) listed various promotion parameters that can be used in the construction industry.

Professional Contact

This strategy may involve members of other related professions to form a link with prospective client who needs their services. Ganah et al., (2008) referred to this as partnering. Construction Industry Institute (CII, 1991) highlighted the expected benefits of partnering to include improved efficiency, cost-effectiveness, increased opportunity for innovation, and the continuous improvement of quality products and services. Ganah et al., (2008) established that construction industry is shifting toward partnering which can lead to adding value to the professional organisations. This can also take the form of a professional recommending another professional colleague to a prospective client.

Rebranding their Roles/Public Awareness of the Profession

It should however be observed here that several practicing Quantity Surveyors firms in Nigeria have shown remarkable improvement in this area. However, much could still be done in the area of dedicated websites. Instead of maintaining their conservative posture, Ashworth (1982) stated that Quantity Surveyors must correct the false opinion of society about their profession. According to him, some of these misconceptions include the notion that Quantity Surveying is nothing more than the preparation of bills of quantities and squinting through a tripod telescope. Onyeri (1989) observed that the profession must be promoted and marketed through advertising to dispel society's misconception about it. In the long-run, the inability of Quantity Surveyors to let people know what Quantity Surveying is all about, the range of professional skills and services they can offer and possibly where to find them stands as the greatest handicap to public awareness of the profession.

Marketing Mix (4 PS)

The marketing mix is a rational approach based around transaction cost and has dominated marketing concepts and practice over for a long period of time (Smyth, 1996). Polat and Donmez (2010) opined that companies should create a successful mix of the right product, sold at the right price, in the right place, and using the most suitable promotion when marketing their products or services. They established that marketing mix theory has been successful in the manufacturing industry. However, it provides little help to the construction industry due to the fact that construction is mainly service oriented (Polat & Donmez, 2010). It is composed of the four P's: product, price, place (distribution) and promotion. These elements appear as core decision variables in any marketing plan. In construction, place is determined by the project's location, the spread of the offices should be the primary marketing decisions for the professionals to attract clients. Price, in this case the fee is obviously important, yet the significance of the fee is less important than the contribution the product makes to the overall project price (Smyth, 1996).

In addition to this, promotion is important in the sense that the professionals in the construction industry enhance the services offered to the client through effective communication of the benefits of product.

BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE MARKETING

Many benefits of effective marketing to construction have been highlighted by researchers (McNamara, 1999; Ngowi et al., 2000; Stewart et al., 2003; Dikmen et al., 2005; Ganah et al., 2008; Arslan et al., 2009; Polat & Donmez, 2010). This includes survival of the firms, growth sustainability, increase in profits, increase in sales, increase in client satisfaction, development of company image, development of products/services, better competitive advantage, creation of opportunity to acquire knowledge and understanding of Quantity Surveying marketing (business link), entrance to new markets, creation of new markets, improvement of customer loyalty, improvement of reputation, improvement of total quality. Hence, properly used strategies will result in increase in profit, creation of awareness, professional appreciation by the

public, increase in integration between related professionals, introduction of new trends and new development that makes the professional more attractive and therefore leads to competitive advantage.

Business Performance in Quantity Surveying Firms

Construction is a risky business, and thus firms should continuously monitor and compare their current and past business performance to determine where improvement is needed. The business performance of firms should also be evaluated to gauge the position of the company in the industry (Betts and Ofori, 1992; Dikmen & Birgonul, 2003; Warszawski, 1996). In Quantity Surveying firms, business performance can be evaluated through the number of contracts awarded, the number of projects at hand, profits, project turnover, the number of firms, the number of employees, new clients, existing clients and the expansion of services. By evaluating the performance of the firm, one can justify the suitability or non-suitability of the adopted competitive strategy. Firm performance can be evaluated using financial indicators such as profit and project turnover. Profit indicates the measure of success of a firm. Kale and Arditi (2002) noted that growth in the number of contracts awarded is related to the choices a firm makes vis-à-vis competitive strategies to provide a better understanding of and stabilise firms' positioning in the construction industry.

The number of employees is also another indicator of firm performance. An increasing number of employees over the years indicates positive growth for the company. It also indicates that the firm may have expanded the scope of their services or have a broader range of skills and expertise (Ling and Chan, 2008). A high level of motivation among employees can be translated into high organisational performance.

Clients are the most important assets of a firm. An increase in the number of new clients and the ability to maintain existing clients contribute to a firms' business success. Rosenberg and Czepiel (1984) concluded that the cost of winning new clients is usually higher than maintaining an existing client.

Table 1. Indicators of business performance in firms.

Business performance	Source
Number of contract awards	Kale and Arditi, 1998; Yongtao, Shen and Langston, 2012
Number of projects in hand	Lu, Shen and Yam, 2008
Total costs of projects	El-Mashaleh, Minchin and O'Brien, 2007; Lu, Shen and Yam, 2008
Profits	Lu, Shen and Yam, 2008
Project turnover	Jusoh, 2010; Morgan, Strong and McGuinness, 2003
Number of firms	Jennings and Betts, 1996
Number of employees	El-Mashaleh, Minchin and O'Brien, 2007
New clients	Yisa and Edwards, 2002
Existing clients seeking services	Yisa and Edwards, 2002
Expanding services	Zamberi and Kitchen, 2008

Kujala and Ahola (2005) explained that firms that are more competent in delivering value to customers could survive in a highly competitive environment where client's satisfaction has significant effects on a firm's financial performance. Customer satisfaction and trust will promote loyalty from existing clients, and reputation built from that will secure more new clients (Low & Tan, 2002). The number of firms is another indicator to measure the business performance of a QS firm. Establishing business branches either in new demographic areas or other countries indicates the ability of the firm to grow (Ling & Chan, 2008). The indicators of business performance are listed in Table 1.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey research method was adopted for the study. After an extensive literature review, the instrument for collecting data was produced – a structured questionnaire. Questions were designed to elicit data in accordance with the research questions. This questionnaire were distributed among respondents in Lagos state. A non-probabilistic sampling technique was adopted for the study.

The questions this research posed using a well-designed questionnaire. Yin (2009) states that this approach is best when prevalence and the incidence of a phenomenon is of interest.

Questionnaires were distributed by hand and email to key personnel involved in quantity surveying organisations. Personal visits and phone calls were made to operation offices of firms and respondents to deliver and also retrieved the questionnaires. Data for the study were processed and analysed with the aid of the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 14.0).

According to Tables 2 and 3 above, a total of 74 respondents were examined. 63.5% of the firms were fully indigenous, 14.9% were fully expatriate

Table 2. Organisational ownership and management.

Organisational ownership and management	Frequency	Percent (%)
Fully indigenous	47	63.5
Fully expatriate	11	14.9
Partly indigenous/expatriate	16	21.6
Total	74	100

Table 3. Number of years experience of the organisation in construction industry.

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent (%)
1 – 5 years	21	28.38
6 – 10 years	6	8.11
11 – 15 years	6	8.11
16 – 20 years	14	18.92
Above 20 years	27	36.49
Total	74	100

while 21.6% were of joint expatriate and indigenous ownership. Also, most respondents has been players in the construction industry for more than 20 years.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE ADOPTION OF MARKETING STRATEGY BY QUANTITY SURVEYING FIRMS

The factors affecting the adoption of marketing strategy by Quantity Surveying firms are listed below (Table 4). The result from the findings in Table 4

Table 4. Factors affecting the adoption of marketing strategy by quantity surveying firms.

Factors	Mean	Composite Ranking	General Ranking
INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT			
Firm/owner characteristic			
company's resource strength and competencies	3.78	5	15
company's market opportunities	3.91	4	8
overall industry attractiveness	3.97	3	5
The business philosophies of the owner	4.18	1	2
The personal ambitions of the managers	3.73	7	20
Ethical beliefs of the managers	3.78	5	15
mission and vision statement of the company	4.11	2	4
EXTERNAL MACROECONOMICS ENVIRONMENT			
National capital budget	3.46	2	26
National economic blueprint/agenda	3.50	1	25
Foreign direct investment	3.46	2	26
population of quantity surveying firms	3.41	4	28
EXTERNAL MICROECONOMICS ENVIRONMENT			
Financial criteria			
Regulations governing marketing	3.88	4	10
The level of project value	3.91	3	8
Competitive conditions of the market	4.15	1	3
Availability of marketing/ financial resources	3.93	2	7
Cost incurred in promoting the services	3.74	6	19
Cost of the firms administration	3.80	5	14
Cost of internal marketing personnel	3.72	7	22
Client criteria			
Location/geographical area of clients	3.46	7	
Type of client- private or public	3.77	4	17
Client quality requirements	3.76	5	18
Client time requirements	3.97	1	5
Client cost requirements	3.85	2	11
Educational/ professional qualification of the client	3.82	3	12
Flexibility of the marketing strategy	3.73	6	20
Socio-economic criteria			
Level of competition in the market	4.18	2	2
Competitors' strategies	3.81	3	13
Geographical reach/ environmental factors	3.80	4	14
State of the economy (boom or recession)	4.34	1	1
The media available for marketing	3.72	5	22
Educational status of the populace	3.69	6	24

according to the general ranking reveals that the state of the economy (mean = 4.34) mostly affect the adoption of marketing strategy by Quantity Surveying firms in Nigeria. The factor that less affect the adoption of marketing strategy in Quantity Surveying firms in Nigeria was the population of Quantity surveying firms (mean = 3.46). According to the composite ranking, firm/owner characteristic reveal that The business philosophies of the owner (mean = 4.18) mostly affect the adoption of marketing strategy in quantity surveying firms in Nigeria while the personal ambitions of the managers (mean = 3.7) has less effect on the adoption of marketing strategy by Quantity Surveying firms in Nigeria. Under the External macroeconomics environment results show that the National Economic blueprint/agenda has more effect on the adoption of marketing strategy in Nigeria (mean = 3.50) and population of quantity surveying firms (mean = 3.41) has less effect. Under the external micro Economics environment (financial criteria) Competitive conditions of the market (mean = 4.15) mostly Affect the adoption of marketing strategy in Quantity Surveying firms while the cost incurred in promoting the services (mean = 3.74) has less effect, under client criteria the factor with most effect on the adoption of marketing strategy in Quantity Surveying firms was revealed to be Client time requirements (mean = 3.97) and Location/geographical area of clients has less effect (mean = 3.46), and finally under the socio- economic criteria state of the economy (boom or recession) mean = 4.34 has the most effect and Educational status of the populace (mean = 3.69).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study aims at articulating marketing strategy adoption and competitiveness of quantity surveying firms in the digitisation age. It observed the trend in the digitisation era and the factors that affect the adoption of marketing strategy through quantitative data collected from industry professionals. From the findings of this study, it is evident that the state of the economy chiefly determines the adoption of marketing. In addition, the boom or otherwise of the economy affects the financial wherewithal of firms to engage in marketing strategies and research. Even modern marketing tools and strategies require huge capital outlay. However, critical to adopting a marketing strategy and achieving competitiveness by Quantity surveying is dependent on the management and the client. The study has also shown that the level and condition of competitiveness in the industry determines the response of firms to innovative marketing. It means that established firms most times ride on their goodwill and choose not to market themselves. This trend continues until there arises stiff competition in the industry. In the era of digitisation, quantity surveying firms must be flexible and willing to be dynamic with the technological trends. Traditional marketing strategies might not be as critical in achieving dynamic capability in the digitisation era. Further studies can be conducted to cover the construction industry in this research area.

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