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LAPAI INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Volume 4, No. 1

June, 2011

- The Legislature and Democratization Process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**
Joseph 'Yinka Fashagba 1
- Facility Management and Profitability:
The Place of Administrative Management**
P. B. Maidoki 20
- The Military and Bureaucratic Corruption in Nigeria:
A Historical Perspective**
Nse Etim Akpan 33
- African Value System and the Effects of Globalization**
Julius O. Owoyemi 50
- ✓ **Modeling Banks Service Positioning and Performance in Nigeria**
Olalekan Asikhia 59
- An Evaluation of Employer's Role in the Timely Remittance of Employees' Contributions to Pension Fund Administrators in the New Contributory Pension Scheme in Nigeria**
Jimoh Ayanda Oladipo, M. A. Fasagba and J. A. Akindele 78
- The Dilemmas of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria:
The Experience of Fourth Republic**
Aderonmu Jonathan A and Aliu Monday 91
- * **An Analysis of The Service Dimension of Politics**
Rowland E. Worlu 108 ✓
- Echoes from the Grave: The Economic Reform Programme and Healthcare Delivery System in Nigeria Under President Olusegun Obasanjo; (1999-2007)**
Marietu Tenuche 124

The 'Group Interaction Theory' of Management: A Framework for Bridging the Rivalry Gap Between the Public and Private Sectors in Nigeria	151
Aidelokhai, Dennis Idonije and Victor Egwemi	
The State and Political Patronage: Implications for Sustainable Development in Nigeria	164
Yakubu O. Dauda	
Export Led Growth Hypothesis and Nigeria Economic Growth 1975 -2006	173
Sam S. Enimola	
Environmental Challenges Facing Nigeria	187
Akor Linus	
Good Governance in Nigeria: A Panacea for Political Stability and Economic Development	200
Ahmed Letswa Mohammed	
Improving Nigerian Women Entrepreneurs' Quality of Life: The Place of Business Support Services	215
Chinonye Okafor, Faboyede Samuel and Oluremi, Hezekiah Abimbola	
Impact of Ilorin Metropolitan Expansion on Suburb Rural Areas of Ilorin South	225
Ogunleye Adetona C.I and Fashagba I.	
Democracy and Electoral Violence in Nigeria	235
Kayode Adeniran Omojuwa	

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SERVICE DIMENSION OF POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Politics is service to the society and will best be provided in a marketable form. Thus, a marketable service is a plus to politics because they share the same features. One of the characteristics is the 'reputation' of the service provider. This is why the electorate worry about the profile of the political candidate before taking a decision to offer their mandate. Again, like the marketable service, politics is pivoted on 'promise'. The politician makes a promise and entreats the voter to believe him. This is where the issue of 'trust' comes in. The customer must trust the service provider to deliver and it is on the basis of trust that the transaction occurs. The focus of this paper, therefore, is to identify the common threads that permeate politics and marketable service so that politician and public office holders will appreciate their responsibility to the citizens, just the same way the banks, airlines, private educational institutions do to their current customers, and extend a promise of superior value to potential customers in order to remain relevant. The paper thinks that our politicians or public office holders should be voter-focused or citizen-centred in order to improve the quality of service provided by politics/politicians.

Keywords: *Services, Marketing, Politics, Governance, Political marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

A service is commonly conceptualized as an intangible product. So many scholars refer it to as "a deed, a performance, or an effort". Others see it as activity, benefit, or satisfaction which is offered for sale, or provided in connection with the sale of goods". Yet Egan (1999) defined it as "any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and which does not result in ownership of anything.

Be that as it may, a service is aptly seen as a separately identifiable intangible activity which provides want satisfaction to customers. This includes legal service, medical care, insurance, repair service, entertainment, etc.

Achumba (1995) drew a line between two basic types of service: the service product" which offers the customer an intangible series of benefits which cannot be stored for future use; and the 'product service' which is vital to the functioning of the product and therefore an intrinsic part of it. In addition, service

tends to be people intensive, non standardized and perishable (University of New Orleans 2003).

Politics, on the other hand, is simply the service or art of government (Hornby,1974). This art or service is often conducted by political parties (in a democratic system) which have to compete among themselves to be elected by the electorate in a particular society. In order to be elected, political parties engage in political marketing activities. According to Baines et al (2003), political parties (especially in U.K. and U.S.A) are beginning to embrace the marketing concept. This is because electorates are becoming more enlightened. They have realized the importance of their votes. And this has stimulated the development of political marketing (Kavanagh, 2003).

Political marketing is defined as the pursuit of political (elective) office through the marketing process. The marketing process begins with the analysis of the electorates concern, moves through the packaging of political entities (parties and candidates) who generously apply the marketing techniques to address those concerns.

Succinctly put, political marketing is the application of marketing in politics- the root of which is service. This paper explores the various features of a marketable service and indicates how politics share from these features. Secondly, the three types of marketing prevailing in a service firm are shown to be practiced by political entities. Thirdly, a political entity employs the seven marketing mix elements as a firm. This paper concludes by discussing the implications of these relationships.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: POLITICS AS A SERVICE

Political marketing is often treated as an aspect of commercial service because it shares the same characteristics with service. In this connection, Harrop (1990) and Scammell (1999) theorized that service and politics have two things in common: image (reputation) and promise. According to them, reputation based on record of leadership, is the only thing of substance parties can offer to voters in support of their 'promise' to govern.

Other characteristics of service which are also found in politics are:

Intangibility

Politics as a service, is intangible because the success or otherwise of a political entity cannot be readily displayed, so it cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelled before the mandate is given in the form of vote. Because political performance lacks tangible characteristics that the voter can evaluate before voting, uncertainty is increased. To reduce this uncertainty, voters look for 'signals' which come from the reputation of the political entity (i.e. candidate or

party). The political entities (politicians and parties) can influence such signals by ensuring that their membership is dominated by credible citizens with proven track record of excellence in service.

Inseparability

Service inseparability in politics means that performance cannot be isolated from the political entities or service provider concerned- be it the party or the candidate. Securing debt relief for Nigeria is now associated with Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and Obasanjo's government. Green revolution as a programme in Nigeria will ever be linked to Shagari and National Party of Nigeria government.

Variability/ Heterogeneity

Service variability or heterogeneity means that quality of service rendered by a political entity depends on who is involved, as well as when, where and how they are provided.

The implication is that service quality is difficult to control, even where the politicians belong to the same party. For example, the governor of Ogun State may distribute certain amenities to his people in the various Local government at varied quality levels . This means that political services (like other services) can hardly be standardized.

Perishability

Service perishability means that political services cannot be stored for later use. Any service that is not provided at a point in time perishes with that time. If a political entity fails to secure the mandate of the electorate in a particular tenure, the service that would have come with that tenure cannot be stored for later delivery.

However, since the market for service fluctuates considerably overtime, the same politician or party may be voted in some other time, and another circumstance for him to deliver his service to his people. This time, a fresh dimension of service may be required as the previous idea may no longer be tenable.

LACK OF OWNERSHIP

This means that service product can neither be enjoyed for an unlimited period of time nor can it be resold by someone who has received it. For example, the River State government introduced the free school transport system for school children in 2000. It is doubtful whether that program is still alive. Governor Jakande of Unity Party of Nigeria introduced mass education program in Lagos State and this saw the rise of many public schools in the early eighties. But that

was only associated with UPN government and not the monopoly any citizen consumer, as it were.

Again, those who enjoyed the afore-mentioned programmes while they subsisted cannot 'resell' what they received. This shows that a service consumer often has access to the service for a limited time, unlike the case of tangible product.

Another dimension is that a political party member can enjoy the rights and privileges of belonging as long as he is a member. Once he defects, he seizes to lay claim to such right and privileges. (Osugwu, 2008).

Besides the above characteristics which indicate that politics is service, another way of establishing this fact is by exploring the mechanics of marketing in a service firm and comparing this with the nature of political marketing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: RELATIONSHIP MARKETING THEORY.

Marketing is broadly tenable in two areas-tangible and intangible goods. That aspect called intangible goods is referred to as services marketing (Kotler, 1995:464). Service marketing deals with the performance of business activities, which direct the flow of services of any kind, including politics, from service providers to the consumer (Achumba and Dixon-Ogbechi, 2004:78). Thus, the theoretical underpinning of this work derives from the Relationship Marketing Theory

The appearance and rapid growth of interest for relationship marketing were due to the many changes which have occurred in the international business environment from the beginning of the 1970's until the present period of time. These changes known also as key drivers in the development of the relationship marketing concept can be resumed as: the maturing of many markets, especially in the United States, European Union countries and other advanced economies, the decrease in population growth rate, a greater consumer power and sophistication in the decision buying process, the technological developments and the increased competition in many business areas. Therefore, a greater number of markets were saturated which means that consumers, faced with a surplus of products that were becoming more demanding and less easily persuaded by seller's promotional messages. This has affected brands positioning leading to a decline in market share and implicitly in the manufacturers' economic profitability, because consumers perceived little difference between competitors' goods and services. In this new business context, marketers realized that the methods, techniques and instruments of traditional marketing (named also classic or transactional marketing) were no longer adequate for helping companies to plan their activities and predict their future market position.

The starting point of relationship marketing is considered to be a new stage in the development of marketing theory, as it is shown in figure 1, According to Christopher et. al. (1991:8-9) during the 20th century there had been a number of major developments that can be associated with differences in research emphasis. From the beginning the marketing science was dominated by the consumer's good area. During the development of business to business and service marketing, there have been identified many and significant differences between these economic sectors and consumers marketing, which generate the need to find new strategic and tactical methods for adapting to this specific environment. The main peculiarities were referring to the nature of the product offered, the customers' buying behavior and the type of business relationships established between the manufacturer or the services supplier and its customers.

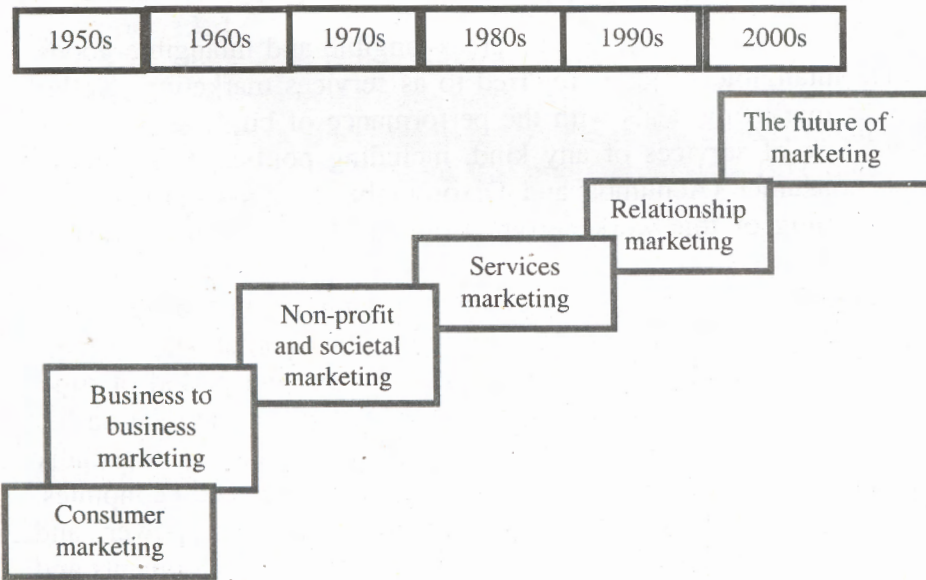


Figure 2:0 Developments in Marketing Theory

Source: Adapted from Christopher, M., Payne, A., Ballantyne, D. 1991:54.

In the initial development of business to business marketing (named in the first phase industrial marketing) the emphasis was on defining and classifying industrial goods, the mechanism of price setting and rational buying models where marketing played only a marginal role. However, this approach wasn't appropriate for revealing the complexity of how industrial markets operated; fact which resulted from the work of Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP). The empirical research realized by these specialists had to get to the

conclusion that many inter-firm transactions are conducted within enduring business relationships where mutual trust and adaptation are essential for both partners. In the same time it appears that business to business marketing involved not just managing exchanges between organizations but much more complex human interactions. On the basis of IMP's research activity, it has developed the theory of network interaction marketing defined by Christopher as all activities undertaken by the firm to build, maintain and develop customer relations (in Egan, 2004:14).

The services marketing literature, was similar to the business sector, one of the first areas for the development of relationship marketing research. The spectacular growth of the services economy in many countries of the world (which accounts, in present, for 56.6 percent of worldwide gross national product and, at the same time, it absorbs a large part of the labour force shed by traditional industries) has favourably influenced the review of some marketing instruments in domains like: banks, assurance, tourism, and politics. These main differences that can be identified between goods and services are: the intangible elements that dominate value creation, the fact that service product cannot be invented, the variability in the operational inputs or outputs and the inseparability of services consumption from the contact personnel, which means that customers may be involved in the production process. Services characteristics and typology determine a specific way in which the marketing mix tools will be defined and thereby become a favorite domain for the applicability of relationship marketing theory. This is the reason why many researchers (Berry, 1983:201; Gronroos, 1991:5; Gummesson: 60, 1987) sustain the point of view that in services marketing, buyer-seller interaction must be considered as part of marketing's task.

The concept of relationship marketing was first mentioned by Berry (1983:77), in a conference paper on service marketing, as "attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships". While recognizing that customer acquisition was and would remain part of marketer's responsibilities, this viewpoint emphasized that a relationship view of marketing implied that retention and development were of equal or even greater importance to the organization in the long term, than customer acquisition. After a period of time, the same author (Berry, 1995:236) described relationship marketing as a "new-old concept" continuing that "the idea of a business earning the customers' favour and loyalty by satisfying their wants and needs was not unknown to the earliest of merchant". At the centre of the relationship marketing perspective, however, is the idea that customers have continuing value over the period they stay in business with a specific organisation. The focus is, therefore, on the relationships rather than transactions. The duration of the exchange is a core element in distinguishing the two terms. A transactional exchange involves a single, short time exchange with a distinct beginning and ending. In contrast a relational exchange involves multiple

linked exchanges extending over time and usually involves both economic and social bonds.

Another definition of relationship marketing was proposed by Gronroos (1990:5), who affirms that: "The role of relationship marketing is to identify, establish, maintain and enhance relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all other parties involved are met; and that this is done by a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises". Gummesson (1996: 6) defines relationship marketing as "marketing seen as interactions, relationships and networks". As most definitions imply, relationship marketing is first and foremost a process. Thus the relationship marketing approach is multifunctional and integrative because it "views marketing as an integrative activity involving functions across the organization, with emphasis on and facilitating, building and maintaining relationship overtime" (Coviello et. al., 1997:23). Relationship marketing has developed even more; at a micro level, the concept is concerned with the nature of the relationship between the firm and customers that emphasizes a long-term relationship that takes into account the customer's needs and value. At a macro level, the term describes the relationship within which the organization engages with all stakeholders, thus the strategic issue is to establish the mix or portfolio of the relationship that is essential for the firm (Stewart and Durkin, 1999 mentioned in Rao and Perry, 2002:599).

The development of relationship marketing theory and practice can be examined from service marketing perspective. A service is therefore defined as separately identifiable intangible activities which provide want- satisfaction when marketed to consumers and/or industrial users; and which are not necessarily tied to the sale of a product or another service. We include such services as medical, legal, entertainment, repair, insurance, and more importantly politics.

Achumba (1995:76) further differentiated between two basic types of services: The service product which offers the customers intangible benefits which in most instances cannot be stored for future use; and the "product service" which is vital to the functioning of the tangible product and therefore an integral part of it. In other words, services are activities, not things.

Political marketing, which is the application of marketing techniques and processes to politics, is often treated as an aspect of services marketing (Bradshaw, 1995:57; Achumba & Dixon-Ogbechi, 2004:119). This is because it shares the same characteristics with service marketing. These characteristics are intangibility, inseparability, variability, perishability, and lack of ownership.

In addition to the foregoing, service marketing theory has provided some valuable insights for research of political marketing (Harrop, 1990:77; Scammel 1999:100). While thinking of politics and governance as a service, these researchers theorized the importance of image reputation in politics, not just as an effect of television, but as imperative of the market place (Achumba and Dixon-

Ogbechi, 2004:78).

One striking feature of the Relationship Marketing which is situated in the services industries is that production and consumption are part of the same process. The customers are seen as co-producers of the service offering and they interact with the service provider (and also with one another) in the production process. According to the Relationship marketing paradigm, the focus of marketing is on value creation rather than the value distribution emphasized by the MMM paradigm. That is, the facilitation and support of a value creating process, rather than simply distributing ready-made value to customers. Gronroos (2000:20) has argued that value for customers is not embedded in products. Products are only facilitators of value. Instead, value for customers is created through the relationship and interactions between the customers and service provider. Thus, from service marketing perspective, there is no gap between production and consumption that needs to be filled by a separate activity or function. Hence, marketing is an integral part of the entire process.

Furthermore, the fact that our customers are seen as co-producers necessitates the establishment of long-term relationships between the service provider and its customers-otherwise both process and outcome might be seriously jeopardized. This customer retention is of course central to relationship marketing and explains its growing popularity at the expense of the 'old' paradigm (Ferguson, 1991:137; Gronroos, 2000:20; Gummesson, 1999:6).

At the heart of any definition of marketing is the 'marketing concept', an approach that puts the customers at the production- consumption cycle (Baker 1991:65). This creates opportunities for the consumer to effectively transform the market such that it is now the consumer, not the producer who is the hunter. Increasingly, producers will have to find products for customers, not customers for pre-determined products. Kotler et al (2002:87) insist that organizations will have to focus increasingly on individual customer requirements, and develop strategies for keeping existing buyers (customer life time value) because the cost of attracting new consumers is much greater than the cost of building loyalty.

Kotler et al's new marketing paradigm, of 'customer relations management' comes close to an older, European tradition of marketing, from the Nordic school of services. According to Scammell (1999:100), its distinguishing feature is its emphasis on services. It claims that marketing orthodoxy, associated with North American business schools and theorists such as Kotler, referred primarily to packaged goods and durables. But developed economies are services dominated, with the service sector accounting for some two-thirds of GNP in the western world (Gummesson, 1990:63).

The sustainable success of services requires a form of marketing which differs from packaged schools in significant respects. First, services tend to be more reliant on promise and reputation. This is the only thing that the seller can

offer in advance of sale unlike in the sale of goods where there is physical evidence before sale. Second, services are often long-lasting (e.g. banking mortgages, insurance, etc). At the onset, customers buy into potential years of provision from the service provider. Such services often depend for profit on long-term custom. This is the basis of 'relationship marketing', in which the retention of existing customers determines sustainable profits. Third, there is often no separation, as there is with packaged goods, between production, sales and delivery. Face-to-face contacts with customers are handled by employees who produce the service and they exert some influence on customer perception of the product in markets that are almost reliant on reputation.

In these circumstances, the 'marketing function' cannot be satisfied by a specialized marketing department alone, it extends to all employees whose activities affect customer perception. Employees therefore, form a vital audience- an 'internal market' in Gummesson's phrase- who must be persuaded by the company's mission and product quality, since their performance crucially influences external customer perception and continued loyalty.

Services marketing theory has provided some valuable insights for researchers of political marketing. While thinking of politics and government as a service, Harrop (1990:277) and Scammell (1999:100) theorize the importance of image (reputation) in politics, not just as an effect of television, but as an imperative of the market place.

Reputation, based on record and leadership is the only thing of substance parties can offer to voters in support of their "promises" to govern (Scammell, 1999:100). Equally, the elevation of reputation to a key variable helps explain why voters may vote for one party while apparently preferring the policies of another; or indeed why it was that the conservatives crashed to defeat in 1997 despite presiding over an improving economy; or why AD failed, in south western Nigeria during 2003 general elections despite its acceptance by the Yoruba's. However, the significance of the ideas of internal marketing has been almost completely ignored, both in the practice and theory of political marketing. Besides, the idea of external market in the Nigerian political marketing environment leaves much to be desired.

In fact, in practice, Scammell (1999:44) observed that parties might have been following the polar opposite strategy to that recommended by "relationship marketing" by neglecting their memberships and core supporters. Members, activists, ordinary parliamentarians and general constituency activities have become relatively peripheral to media- focused, leader- centred strategies intended to promote the party's reputation among the weak- aligned target voters.

The result is greater distance between the organisation and its customers. It becomes more remote from the market and is discounting a vital resource of influence on customers' perception. In the long-term, unless the organisation finds

other ways to stay close to its market, competitive strength may decline (Scammell, 1999:110). A similar point from a more orthodox political stand point is emphasised in Seyd, and Richardson's Studies (1992:19; 1994:44) of Labour and Conservatives' memberships. They argued that there are clear political and electoral gains associated with robust memberships and local organisation.

There are three types of marketing in a typical service firm like bank, airline, insurance, etc. These three typologies of service marketing are internal marketing, interactive marketing, and external marketing. (Kotler, 1999)

They are illustrated as follows:

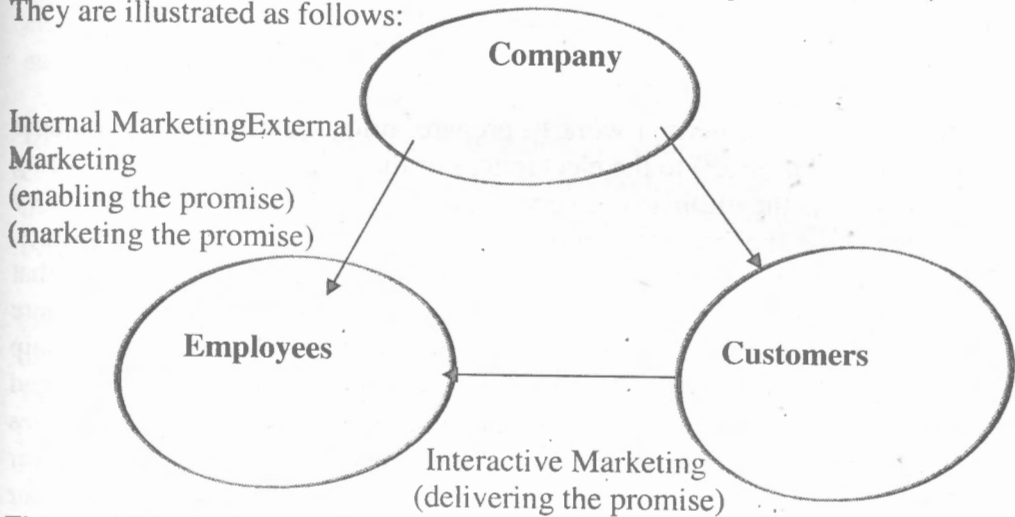


Figure 1. Three types of marketing in service firms' Source: Kotler et al (1999).

INTERNAL MARKETING

The focus of internal marketing is to train and effectively motivate its customer-contact employees and all the supporting service people to work as a team to provide customer satisfaction. In other words, the internal market is made up of all employees who have contact with customers and have a direct influence on customer perception of the product in the market. Applying this to politics, the members of a political party constitutes the internal market of the party.

In Germany, political parties recognize the importance of the internal market. While citing Scarrow (1996), Achumba and Dixon-Ogbechi (2004) revealed that German parties encourage local activists and that party leadership place high premium on members activities as outreach workers, representatives of the parties in broader societies and even in casual conversation effectively, they are part-time marketers' of the party.

Neglect of internal market (party members) will most likely result in less commitment to, and diminution of core value; or even uncertain prospect of face to face contact with the electorate. The result is a greater distance between the

party and its electorate.

INTERACTIVE MARKETING

This is another type of service marketing and it means that perceiving service quality depends heavily on the buyer-seller interactions. For example, the voter judges the ability of the political candidate to perform after elections not just his rhetorical prowess nor the persuasive dexterity of his campaign manager, but also on his functional ability to show concern to the electorate and inspire their confidence. Thus all politicians need to master interactive marketing skills.

EXTERNAL MARKETING

This describes the normal work to prepare, price, distribute, and promote the service (political product) to the electorate. For the politician, this is the voting day and beyond. It is the ultimate delivery of the political product for adoption by the electorate. Once the political product has been adopted by the electorate, relationship marketing skills begin to count. The political entity must note that merely securing the mandate of the electorate does not end the transaction. There is need to aspire for the customer loyalty which brings about relationship marketing. Relationship Marketing is the process of creating, maintaining and enhancing strong relationships with customers and other stakeholders. It involves building value-laden relationships and marketing networks. The goal is to deliver long-term value to customers and the measure of success is long-term customer satisfaction. At the centre of the Relationship Marketing perspective is the idea that electorate have continuing value over the period they stay with specific politician. The focus, therefore, is the relationship. Thus, the Relationship Marketing paradigm as it relates to politics allows us to view the political party as a whole, places it in an interactive societal context, and may correspondingly provide a legitimate rationale for political parties to re-establish their important position, especially in parliamentary democratic systems.

Another point of convergence is that political entities like service organization employ the 7ps' of marketing i.e. marketing mix strategies.

In other words, political parties use marketing mix strategies to advance their cause.

MARKETING MIX STRATEGIES

Product strategies: A political party's product may include its candidates, leadership and executives, elected or appointed members in government positions, staff, party constitution, party conferences and policies, among others (Lees-Marshment, 2001a).

Marketing concepts, principles, frameworks and strategies in the area of the product (for examples, design, launch etcetera.), have been substantially

adapted in order to be of relevance in politics (Osugwu, 2008).

Promotion strategies: Political products are promoted via all channels consumed by the target audience. These channels have been enumerated by Worlu, (2005) as advertising (for example, print advertisement, audio-visual advertisements, etcetera), publicity (for example, write ups, reporting in print and audio-visual media), public relations (for example, lobbying etcetera), personal selling (for example door-to-door visits, group meetings, public rallies, telephone calls etcetera.), sales promotion (for example, exhibitions, leaflets and stickers, etcetera).

Distribution strategies: The distribution strategy is concerned with the conditions regarding the availability of the exchange offer (political product) to the exchange partner. There are two aspects involved: campaign delivery and offering delivery.

The campaign delivery aspect provides the primary exchange partner (the electorate) an access to all relevant information about political product. The offering delivery aspect refers to the fulfillment of political promises (Harrop, 1990; Palmer, 2002).

[
Pricing strategies: in the political marketing, price tends to be redefined as an element of cost and sacrifices (Hennerberg, 2003). Inhibitions (for example, caused by opportunity cost considerations) can prevent voter decision process as well as electoral act itself. Therefore political marketers try to reduce the necessary (monetary and non-monetary) efforts for voters to process political information, form opinion, evaluate alternatives, and participate in politics in the wider sense.

The people strategies: The people dimension of political marketing instruments can be viewed from two perspectives:

- Parallel- campaign team
- Internal- cohesion team

The parallel- campaign team refers to organizations such as single issue groups (like Nigeria Labour Congress, Nigeria Bar Association, Afenifere, Nigeria Political Science Association, etc) that perceive an overlap of their agenda with that of the party.

The internal- cohesion team is concerned with the relationship with party members and Party activities as well as all the 'touch point' agents of the party (for example, front-benchers, spokes people, etcetera).

The process strategies: The political marketer can choose among different processes to deliver their 'product' to the electorate- be it democratic or undemocratic, friendly or unfriendly, encouraging or threatening, etcetera. (for example, whether you vote or not I'll win). In other words, the process of delivering service is judged from two dimensions- procedural and personal.

The procedural dimension is concerned with the procedure and the policies put in place to be followed in rendering service. The personal dimension refers to the behaviour and personal attitude of the service provider in his dealing with the customer.

Physical evidence strategies: In this case, the political marketer develops a picture of its intended voter value proposition. For instance PDP uses umbrella as its logo. Besides the reputation of the political entity (political party or candidate) serves as a physical evidence that service will be delivered as promised.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we have tried to make the point that politics is service, and political marketing belongs to the domain of service marketing. The sale of a political product is reliant on promise and reputation. These two constitute the things that the political marketer can offer in advance of sale. The political product can, at the same time, be the marketer. For example, a person who offers himself for election is a political product. When he begins to apply the marketing techniques to enable the electorate vote for him, he becomes the political marketer. In some countries of the world, politics is issue-oriented whereas in Nigeria it is finance-oriented. This explains why political products in Nigeria are sold to the people, rather than marketed to them.

If politics is service, there are a number of implications for policy makers and party managers. First, since the citizens' needs and interests are constantly changing, the politician must maintain a long-term relationship with them to enable him track these needs and interests with a view to satisfying them. Again, those who win the mandate of the people are expected to be solution providers, and not just engaging in service delivery.

In order words, it is not enough to offer routine service to the people, the service providers should think in terms of providing solution to a recurring problem. For instance, in Lagos and Port Harcourt where there is always traffic congestion, getting more traffic wardens is not a solution; but building more roads and providing other modes of transport such as rail service would be a more permanent solution.

Secondly, political service providers should know that citizens have expectations about two things. These are: The innate quality and relevance of the programmes they initiate and the process of service delivery. These two

dimensions are essentially ingredients that create value for the citizen.

Thirdly, service providers should understand the citizens' expectations by adopting two fundamental approaches; the reactive approach and the proactive approach

The reactive approach is reactionary, or responsive in nature. It depends entirely on the citizens in providing some form of feedback to help the service provider judge the citizens' expectations. Examples include: Unsolicited complaints; Writing petitions to leadership; Use of abusive words to officials etcetera.

In the proactive approach, the service provider actively solicits information and initiates a feedback system from citizens through a well structured and deliberate process. For example; Personal interviews, Focus group or citizens/stakeholders forum and Designed surveys/questionnaires, etcetera.

While the reactive approach may provide useful information, the proactive approach is recommended as being more effective in fully understanding the citizens' expectations.

Political managers and government functionaries can therefore establish open communication channels both formally and informally as well as accepting cross-cultural and marketing training to be aware of the most significant dimensions of the citizens' needs and expectations. This will increase socio-economic understanding that could be factored into the political decision for solution which builds the reputation of the provider.

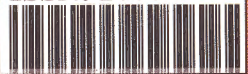
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