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THE DYNAMICS OF MARKETING STRATEGIES IN NIGERIAN PARTY POLITICS.

BY

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ABSTRACT

The institutional context of political marketing in Nigeria is essentially different from the situation in the United States and other European countries. As a result observers of Nigerian democratic system have argued that the outcome of recent elections in Nigeria indicate that our democracy is witnessing a decline in vitality, leading to reduced civic engagement, a decreasing voter turnout, and significant decline in party membership. This worrisome situation is a pointer to the fact that our political parties are yet to maximize the benefit of marketing strategies in politics. This paper confirms the inherent capabilities of marketing strategies to increase a party or candidate’s share of the vote through depth interview with political strategists.

First a hypothetical deductive model was developed based on the recent development in American and British political marketing management and was tailored to political marketing scenarios in Nigeria to make the framework more realistic. Based on the result, this paper advocates for a more painstaking adoption of marketing strategies by Nigerian political parties for the sustenance of democratic ideals in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Dynamics, Marketing strategies, Nigeria party, politics.

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists, and in particular those studying marketing, have so far not given much systematic attention to the dynamics of marketing strategies in a competition among political parties. As a result, political parties are simply thought of as full-time image selling agencies. This means that politicians and political parties can be likened to firms that produce an image of themselves as their major product.

Much as the image is made up of public statements and policy promises, it has no production costs. It does, however, have selling costs in issues of time, effort and
opportunities cost. To the extent that this stylized view of political parties is interesting, it might tell us something about political behaviour generally, and in particular the dynamics of marketing strategies in this image selling process.

The overriding purpose of this paper is to determine whether the dominant parties in Nigeria adopt marketing strategies (which are embedded in the political marketing process) in election-winning situations. This is done with a focus on the 2007 general elections and by studying four dominant parties that participated in that election.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

A marketing strategy is a consistent, appropriate, and feasible set of principles through which a particular organization hopes to achieve its long-run customer and profit objectives in a particular competitive environment (Kotler 2002). Marketing strategies consist of the “overall programme of actions which the marketer, under adverse or conflict conditions, adopts in order to achieve a desired outcome or series of outcomes”.

Craven and Piercy (2003) agreed with this definition but contrasted it with the components of strategic marketing which they listed as the analysis, strategy development, and implementation activities which require developing a vision about the market of interest to the organization. Selecting target market strategies, setting objectives, implementing, and managing the marketing programme for positioning strategies designed to meet the value requirements of the customers in each market segment. Marketing strategy seeks to recover superior customer value by combining the customer influencing strategies of business into a co-ordinated set of market-driven actions.

Essentially, politics is about power, but the struggle for power results in conflict and competition. Therefore, under girding political practice is the struggle for power which creates disagreement and conflict. Nevertheless, the effects of politics which are conflict and disagreement are never permanent, and must be managed for the improvement of society to be achieved. To this end Ajayi (2006) argues that politics connotes a process of making purposeful good at society. From another dimension, politics is about policy. Extending this view, Bruce Miller in Nzimiro (1992) states that “policy is a matter of either the desire for change or the desire to protect something against change”. This also leads to conflict as it asserts the age-long view of politics as the authoritative allocation of value ‘or who gets what, how and why’.

According to Nzimiro (1992), politics in modern society is expressed through political parties which are created to achieve the goals of society. This is why political parties are organized around specific ideas often called ‘ideologies’. Originally, they
were formed from local communities and the spread of their influence evolved from the establishment of the electoral system. The history of human civilization shows clearly that class conflict is an inherent characteristic of human societies. Whereas in the past, this conflict derived from disproportionate ownership of land capital, today it is basically expressed in the control of state apparatus and media.

What is more? Each class saw marketing as a weapon to be employed in the ideological war of politics. The result is that political parties have now become the platforms for rearing leaders who are keenly interested in the contest for power through the electoral system.

Politics now becomes the struggle to control the power base, as the state establishes its machinery for controlling the populace. The control of the populace is not always obvious for human nature abhors absolute dependence. Thus, political control is often disguised when the winning group controls political power, its constituent members, and operatives become the ultimate beneficiaries. Today, the electoral process has become the expression of the democratic form of struggle within a given class system.

A participant in this power struggle who is aptly called 'a politician' and whose aim is to be in government has to market himself and his party's manifesto. He must be able to convince his electorate that his party's programme is more relevant to their needs than his competitors'. In addition, he must convince them that he can ably represent them and ensure that his party's programme is implemented.

According to Ohiwerei (2002), the political party can be likened to a company, the party ideology to a company's mission statement, the party manifesto to a company's marketing strategy/plans, and the party candidate to a brand. The logical conclusion following from this thought process is that a political party, if it is to be effective and successful, should operate like a business or a company. Given this analogy, there is no gainsaying the relevance of marketing in politics.

The success of any company depends on the success of its brands or services. Similarly, the success of a political party in an election depends on the success of its candidates. It is imperative therefore for the politician to have a close look at what makes a brand successful.

In brand marketing, the key to success is a thorough understanding of the market, the consumer and the competition, by the help of the market research. The knowledge thus acquired helps in having a clear vision of the role the brand will play in the market. That role must meet a particular need better than competing brands. In other words, the adoption of a marketing approach in politics promises to bring about rationality in our political processes.
In a further attempt to clarify the interface of marketing with politics, Butler and Kavanagh (1977) observed that parties are like business seeking to promote their products, except that one seeks votes and the other sales. All these have been incorporated in figure 1.1 below which illustrates ideal political marketing process.

Figure 1: The Political Marketing Process

There are five stages in the political marketing process:

STAGE 1: Analysis of Political Environment: This is concerned with the analysis of the political environment. This would include information gathering about the political tradition (e.g. zoning arrangement) and constituency identification. Also in this stage, constituencies that are most likely to change their allegiance are identified since such constituencies are particularly important to all the various parties and resources can be targeted more effectively at these constituencies, thereby saving political parties both money and time (Baines, 1996).

Other issues in this stage include:

**Historical Data:** These are reviewed to show the party's vote-share and major source of competition at the previous election (i.e. if it is an existing party).

**Census Statistic:** This shows the demographic structure of the constituency. It reveals changes in the constituency's demographic and partisan profile. With this revelation appropriate targeting of relevant voting groups can take place.

**Constituency Ranking:** Knowing where each constituency stands in the electoral federation helps to determine the swing needed to gain a seat. If the persuadable voters are less than the required swing in that constituency then the constituency should not attract the attention and resources of the party in question.

**Constituency Research:** This is vital for a full understanding of the current position of the major parties within a constituency since historical voting data does not give any idea of recent changes in the partisan nature of the constituency.
**The Dynamics of Marketing Strategies in Nigerian Party Politics**

**Worlu Rowland**

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**Canvas Records:** Canvassing should be undertaken in order to determine the supporters of the particular parties (or even floating voters), so that the constituency organizations can tailor specific strategies to the relevant sections of the electorate.

The combination of constituency research, census statistics, canvass records and historical data allows the political strategists to determine the principal competition and the relevant voting groups to be targeted.

**STAGE 2: Competition Determination and Voting Group Identification**

This stage involves determining the main competition and segmenting the various voter groups as well as incorporating all the recent data from canvassing and constituency research.

**STAGE 3: Strategy Development**

This concerns a decision on how the seven variables of marketing will be combined to gain effect. These variables are commonly referred to as 7Ps or components of marketing strategy. They are products, promotion, price, place, people, process, and physical evidence. They have been briefly explained as part of the theoretical underpinning of this paper.

**STAGE 4: Product Positioning and Voter Group Targeting**

Product positioning gives voters reasons to favour a particular party or candidate. This reason derives from the policies, issues and the reasoned argument of the political marketer.

Voter group targeting can be conducted through door-to-door canvassing, telephone, direct mail and local meetings, etc.

**STAGE 5: Post-Election Analysis**

The essence of good marketing in politics is to learn from previous successes and failures, and to build these into future planning and strategy. This stage attempts to determine what lessons can be learned from previous stages.

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**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**POLITICAL MARKETING ORIETATIONS AND STRATEGIES**

Parties can use political marketing to increase their chances of achieving their goal of winning general elections. They alter aspects of their behaviour, including policy, membership, leadership and organization structure to suit the nature and demands of their market. They can do this by being product, sales or market oriented (Lee Marshment, 2001).

**A PRODUCT-ORIENTED PARTY** argues for what it stands for and believes in. It assumes that voters will realize that its ideas are the right one; and therefore vote for it. This type of party refuses to change its ideas or product even if it fails to gain electoral or membership support.
A SALES-ORIENTED PARTY focuses on selling its argument to voters. It retains its predetermined product design, but recognizes that desired support may not automatically want it. Using market intelligence to understand voter response to its behavior, the party employs the agent advertising and communication techniques to persuade voters that it is right. A sales-oriented party does not change its behavior to suit what people want, but tries to make people want what it offers.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

1. **Competitive Marketing Strategy**

Kotler (2003) noted that marketing strategy depends on a firm’s size and position in the market place. He imagined that a competitive market will produce a competitive structure that also applies to political marketing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market Leader</th>
<th>Market Challenger</th>
<th>Market Follower</th>
<th>Market Niche</th>
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<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Figure 2: Competitive market structure. Source: Kotler (2003).

A competitive market requires at least 40% of the vote market in the hands of a market leader. The firm has the largest market share in the relevant product market. The firm is in the hands of a market challenger. A market challenger is a runner-up party that actually wants to expand its share using highly aggressive tactics. Another 30% of the market is in the hands of market segmenters, a small market segment that serves small market nichers which serve small market nichers that they hope will not attract the interest of the larger organizations.

MARKET LEADER STRATEGIES

Almost every industry contains one firm that is acknowledged to be the market leader. The firm has the largest market share in the relevant product market. It usually leads the other firms in price changes, new-product introductions, distribution coverage, and promotional activity. The leader may or may not be admired or respected, but other firms will acknowledge its dominance. The leader is an orientation point for competitors (i.e., a firm to either challenge, imitate, or avoid). Kotler, et al, 1999, Kotler 2003

The life of a dominant firm is not altogether easy. It must maintain constant vigilance. A market-oriented party will not simply offer voters what they want, or simply follow opinion polls, because it needs to ensure that it can deliver the product on offer. If it fails to deliver, voters will become dissatisfied, and the party will lose electoral support in the long term. It also needs to ensure that it will be accepted without the party and what needs to adjust its product sufficiently to take account of this. A market-oriented party therefore designs a product that will actually satisfy voters’ demands, that meets their needs and wants, is supported and implemented by the internal organization, and is deliverable in government.

MARKET CHALLENGER STRATEGIES

1. **Innovation Strategy:** This means that the dominant firm refuses to be content with the way things are and leads the industry in new-product ideas, customer services, means of distribution, and cost-cutting discoveries. By continuously creating new customer values, the dominant firm takes the fruits of the competition.

For the dominant firm keeps its prices reasonable in relation to the perceived value of its offer and competitors’ offers. If the dominant firm can do the discipline upstream firm is two fold: from a military perspective, they can try “brinkmanship,” “massive retaliation,” limited warfare; “graduated response,” “diplomacy,” “diplomacy of violence,” “terrorist system,” and so on. From a business point of view, they do practice:

1. **Fortification strategy:** Here the dominant firm keeps its market value reasonably in relation to the perceived value of its offer and competitors’ offers. It produces its business in a variety of sizes and forms as to cover the varying preferences of the market instead of letting competitors get a foothold. It creates additional brands to fortify its hold on shelf space and dealers’ effort.

2. **Confederation strategy:** As Kotler (1999) noted, the dominant firm faces an extremely aggressive challenger whose actions demand a quick and direct response. The dominant firm can wage a promotional war, engaging in massive promotional expenditures which the aggressive cannot match. It may also engage in price war.

3. **Harrassment strategy:** The dominant firm might go to major suppliers and threaten to reduce its purchase of the latter supply the upstart firm. Or it might put pressure on distributors not to carry the competitor’s product. Or it might hire the better executives of an aggressive firm. The dominant firm can also refuse to cooperate through legal devices. It might refuse legislation that would be more disadvantageous to the competitors than itself.

MARKET CHALLENGER STRATEGIES

Kotler (2003) noted that firms which occupy second, third, and fourth places in an industry can be called runner up or trailing firms. They may be quite large in their own right although smaller than the leader. In political marketing, parties take the place of these firms, and they collectively form the opposition (Kotler, et al, Marshment.
1999; Baines, 2003). Here in Nigeria, challenger position can be ascribed to ANPP, AD, and APGA; while PDF is the leader.

The run-up firms or in our case the opposition parties can adopt one of two postures. They can decide to attack the leaders and others in a good for further market (vote) share (i.e. market challenger). Or they can be content to play ball and not rock the boat (market follower).

Market challengers can attempt to gain market share in three ways:

- Direct Attack Strategy (also called head-on strategy) Here the challenger tries to box the market leader through sheer doggedness and fight.
- Backdoor strategy (also called end-run or blindsided) in which the challenger runs among the dominant firm rather than into it.
- Gappy strategy of attacking smaller competitors rather than the market leader.

Several other strategies are available to the market challenger who is seeking an advantage vis-a-vis competition. These are pre-discursion strategy, cheaper goods strategy, prestige goods strategy, prestige position strategy, product innovation strategy, successful-cost-reduction strategy, intensive advertising strategy. A challenger does not only depend on one strategy element but a combination of strategies to improve its position overtime.

MARKET FOLLOWER STRATEGIES

Not all run-up firms choose to challenge the market leader. Sometimes in favor of following rather than attacking the leader. Kotler (1999) cautioned that a run-up follower must be clear on how it is going to build on current competencies and win a fair share of its market. Each follower must work a set of target markets to which it can bring distinctive advantages location, service, financing. It must be ready to enter new markets that are opening up.

Kotler et al (1999) warned that follow-up is not the same as duplicating a brand. Follow-up has to define its own path to growth, but decides to do this in a way that does not create intense competitive retaliation.

MARKET NICHER STRATEGIES

Nearly every industry includes a number of minor firms that operate in some parts of the market and try to avoid clashing with the majors. These smaller firms attempt to find and occupy market niches that can serve effectively through specialization and the majors are likely to overlook or ignore. These are variously called market nichers, market specialists, threshold firms, or foothold firms.

An ideal market niche according to Kotler (1999) will have the following characteristics:

i. The niche is of sufficient size and purchasing power to be profitable
ii. The niche has growth potential
iii. The niche has been bypassed or neglected by major competitors
iv. The firm has superior competencies to serve the niche effectively
v. The firm can defend its position against an attacking major because of the goodwill it has built up.

Market niches often become specialists in some end-use, vertical level, consumer size, specific consumer, geographic area, product or product line, product feature or service.

MARKETING MIX STRATEGIES

Generally, political organizations use marketing strategies in such activities as image building, issue-tracking, the targeting of voters, party members, party funders, etc. Marketing strategies are also needed as short-term tactical devices (information-gathering in the run-up to elections) and a long-term or permanent managerial activity to ensure sustained governance (Nimmo, 1999; Smith & Hirst, 2003). It stands to reason that political parties wanting to gain long-term competitive advantage must aspire to design marketing strategies that will achieve the satisfaction of relevant target audiences (voters, party members, party funders, etc.).

The political parties in Nigeria use marketing mix strategies as follows:

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

Marketing concepts, principles, frameworks and strategies in the area of product (e.g. design, launch, etc.), have been substantially adopted in line with the need for political parties wishing to gain a competitive advantage.

- **Promotion Strategies**: Political products are promoted via all channels consistent with the target audience. These channels have been enumerated by Savvate (1999) as advertising (e.g. print advertisement, audio-visual advertisements, etc.), publicity (e.g. write ups, reporting in print and audio-visual media), public relations, lobbying etc.; personal selling (door-to-door visits, group meetings, public rallies, telephone calls etc.); sales promotion (e.g. exhibitions, letters, and stickers etc.).

- **Distribution Strategies**: The distribution strategy is concerned with the conditions regarding the availability of 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 (Harmon, 1990; Palmer, 2001).

- **Pricing Strategies**: In political marketing, ‘price’ tends to be redefined as an element of ‘costs’ or ‘sacrifices’ (Hummerberg, 2001). Inhibitions (e.g. caused by...
opportunity cost considerations) can prevent voter decision process as well as electoral act itself. Therefore, political strategies try to reduce the necessary (monetary and non-monetary) efforts for votes in previous political information, from opinion, evaluate alternatives, and participate in politics in a 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 offers several strategies that can be applied to different parts of the electorate, such as single issue groups and party members, and party activities. These strategies can be used to manipulate the perceptions of voters about the party and its candidates. The internal cohesion team is concerned with the relationship between the party members and party leaders, and how this relationship can be used to improve the party's image and reputation.

The Process Strategies: The political marketer can choose among different processes to deliver the product to the electorate: such process could be democratic, non-democratic, friendly or unfriendly, encouraging or threatening, etc (e.g. whether you vote or not). The purpose of this study is to determine the marketing strategies currently employed by Nigerian political parties and to assess whether or not they could be refined into a political marketing framework model. Thus, a deductive model was used.

Development of Measures

To measure the dynamics of marketing strategy in politics, a ten-item measure adapted from previous studies (Douglas and Craig, 1983; Menon, Bharadjvaj and Howell, 1996) was used to capture the perception of differences between the respondent's understanding of marketing strategy and politics.

The measures used to assess the effectiveness of marketing strategy in politics were chosen on the basis of literature surveyed (Obasanjo, 2003; Lens-Martin, 2001; Red, 1988; Wong, 1999; O'Cass, 2001; O'Conner, 2001; Samuels, 1997; Shama, 1976; Numina, 1999; Numina, 2000). In both cases, a five-point scale from very similar to very different was used.

Instrumentation

In addition to the interviews, 870 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the state officers of the 4 participating parties to confirm from their experience whether marketing strategies apply to their political operations, and if so, what strategies were used. The measures used to assess the effectiveness of marketing strategy in politics were chosen on the basis of literature surveyed (Obasanjo, 2003; Lens-Martin, 2001; Red, 1988; Wong, 1999; O'Cass, 2001; O'Conner, 2001; Samuels, 1997; Shama, 1976; Numina, 1999; Numina, 2000). In both cases, a five-point scale from very similar to very different was used.

Validity and Reliability Measures

The possibility of threat to validity in this study was reduced by presenting a qualitative adaptation of the ten hypotheses proposed in this study in a 5 item Likert scale based on 7p's of marketing strategy (Monet, Bhadjvaj and Howell, 1996), and that collecting data for such a country-wide study with a large population is difficult due to numerous physical factors (Douglas, 1988; Worley, 1999; O'Cass, 2001; O'Conner, 2001; Samuels, 1997; Shama, 1976; Numina, 1999; Numina, 2000). The measure used to assess the effectiveness of marketing strategy in politics were chosen on the basis of literature surveyed (Obasanjo, 2003; Lens-Martin, 2001; Red, 1988; Wong, 1999; O'Cass, 2001; O'Conner, 2001; Samuels, 1997; Shama, 1976; Numina, 1999; Numina, 2000). In both cases, a five-point scale from very similar to very different was used.
This study assumed that there is an explanatory relationship between marketing strategy and political practices. This relationship was captured in our explicative political marketing model, and in operationalizing the marketing strategy components while focusing on electorate.

By also assuming an explanatory relationship between marketing strategy and electoral victory (citizens' mandate) within the construct of politics, the conclusion of this study, in specific instance of high proximal similarity, be used for extended theory based analytic generalization of marketing strategy in every political situation.

Results
The returned questionnaires constitute a high response rate and provide the confidence that non-response is not an issue (Weiss and Heise, 1993). Responses can be aggregated as follows:

Table 1: Relevance of Marketing Strategy to Politics

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<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion:
A systematic investigation into the relationship between marketing strategy and politics has not been reported in the literature; yet the results reported above suggest that political activities are strongly influenced and conditioned by marketing strategies. Accordingly, this study demonstrates the value of the marketing strategy construct as an important determinant of electoral victory and effective governance.

There are three segments of political activities by parties. Three segments are pre-election, during election, and post-election. Marketing strategies are crucial in each of these segments.

In applying the marketing mix strategies, it is instructive to note that a political product includes the political party, candidate, programmes, manifestoes, etc. The promotional programmes include all aspects of marketing promotion such as advertising, publicity/public relation, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing.

Distribution would include ward networking, party and campaign offices, etc. price here are redefined to mean the effort or cost that the electorate suffers to ensure that their candidate secures the mandate.

Strictly speaking, none of the parties in Nigeria qualifies to be called a market-oriented party because they hardly design their products to suit the needs of the electorate. For instance, the candidates that emerge in party primaries are often selected by party leadership and imposed on the membership, and by extension on the electorate.

All the respondents stressed the importance of the local factors. Each ascribed his or her party's dominance of some constituencies and state to the existence of strong, effective local candidates who had built a strong personal following.
There was a general consensus among respondents that Nigerian electorate and supporters find it difficult to resist monetary inducement due to abject poverty in the country and the fear that they might not be remembered after the candidates had served their mandate.

The study also revealed that most parties and candidates do not bother about the need to articulate quality programmes and ideologies since offering money to electorates could give them a legway. As a result, marketing strategies of political parties in Nigeria are part centred, non-issue centered, capital intensive, money driven and labour-intensive. Again, the parties and their candidates do not engage in serious pre-election analysis to know what went wrong, how and where. Even at that, the model generally applied.

Be that as it may, there are significant differences in the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of employed by parties. The differences are determined by the performance objectives of the parties. For example, the Leading Party tends to gauge its performance in terms of increase in votes which an indicator of growing electorate acceptance for its new political products. On the other hand, Challenger Party gauges its performance in terms of operational efficiency; whereas NaPro Party may pursue an objective of regional relevance.

Managerial and Policy Implications

It may be difficult to generalize from a single study. However, the results presented in this study help party managers and policy makers to enhance their understanding of the complex interface between marketing strategies and party politics. Our findings indicate that political activities are conditioned by marketing strategies. As a result, party managers and policy makers should allow themselves to be influenced by marketing strategies when making political decisions. Party managers can establish open communication channels both formally and informally as well as accepting marketing training to be aware of the significant dimensions of marketing strategies and how they impact on the electorate. 

All respondents stressed the importance of local factors. This means that political marketers should domesticate, rather than standardize, the application of marketing strategies in all political situations.

CONCLUSION

The overriding objective of this study is to draw scholarly attention to the nexus between marketing strategies and politics. Despite the importance of these two constructs in the literature, the relationship between them has received little or no research attention.

REFERENCES


The overriding objective of this study is to draw scholarly attention to the nexus between marketing strategies and politics. Despite the importance of these two constructs in the literature, the relationship between them has received little or no research attention.