



## INTERNAL MARKETING AND STUDENT'S ENROLMENT IN AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY: A CRITICAL INTERROGATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *Being that private universities are, to a large extent, run on tuition generated from students, the issue of ensuring that students continually flow into such institutions has created anticipation among the management team, which has also thrown up issues on marketing. In view of this situation, the study examines internal marketing with respect to student enrolment at Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State. The study deployed qualitative methodology with emphasis on key informant interviews. The study found out that the management of Ajayi Crowther University is conscious of the import of IM in the enhancement of the student's enrolment programme as a strategy and has, in so many ways, taken steps to ensure internal marketing practice. The study also discovered that with measures taken by management to boost internal marketing in the institution, a reciprocal effort is also noticeable among the staff team to ensure the sustainability of student enrolment and other means of generating IGR for the institution.*

**KEYWORDS:** Internal Marketing, Student's Enrolment, Ajayi Crowther University, Private Universities.



## INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to ascertain how Internal Marketing (IM) can contribute to the increase of enrolment potentials of students in private universities in Nigeria, with an emphasis on Ajayi Crowther University. The essence of this study is made manifest against the background that private universities do not have as much source of revenue as much as public universities, except for IGR from tuition fees. Meanwhile, public universities have government intervention funds, grants and other sources of revenue (Olawure & Ajayi, 2016).

Presently, Nigeria operates a service-oriented economy where companies, institutions and organisations must generate funds through services or products, and to a large extent, surviving in this system requires patronage of customers or clients (Bansal et al. 2001, 61). This situation makes the credibility of marketing and advertising apt and essential. In view of the above, it is pertinent to note that companies and institutions cannot do without measures to sustain clients/customers around the clock. This aspect, perhaps, seems to be the most tasking and challenging because it also requires efforts to develop and sustain an organisational culture that emphasises both internal and external capacities in order to raise customers' well-being, which is tantamount to keeping clients and customers (Obasi, 2007). Marketing, in general, especially for service-providing organisations, is in tandem with high-quality service, which must be embedded in the quality and performance of human resources (Bansal et al. 2001, 61). This paper argues that improving internal marketing strategies in an organisation, especially in private universities, can enhance student enrolment.

## LITERATURE

This paper reviews literature in the following areas: marketing, private universities, and student enrolment. These areas constitute the key variables in the paper, and it is pertinent that we look at earlier works and the gaps therein.

**The concept of Marketing:** the idea of marketing instils in one the consciousness of product sales and service provision to consumers or clients (Sreemoyee, 2021). To a large extent, it symbolises the making of products and services available to consumers who are primarily outside the production sphere of the producer (Cardy, 2001). However, the marketing concept is referred to as the “right” principle and is the basis for all marketing strategies. In view of this principle, Salomão (2010) states that marketing is thus:

Marketing is the process of getting the right goods or services, or ideas to the right people at the right place, time, and price, using the right promotion techniques and utilising the appropriate people to provide the customer service associated with those goods, services, or ideas.

The above definition sees marketing as a process which requires steps and techniques to achieve a set goal which is making goods and services attractive to customers. Furthermore, marketing can be seen as trying to find out the needs and wants of potential buyers (whether organisations or consumers) and then providing goods and services that meet or exceed the expectations of those buyers.



One of the most important parts of this process is overtly creating a favourable image of a product or service before intending consumers. As important as this is, it is pertinent to assert that a product is equally as good as the source it comes from. That gives a second thought to various internal arrangements, not only the externals.

Significantly, marketing can be categorised into two broad spectrum; internal and external. This study is interested in internal categorisation. Out of the two categories, much emphasis is not often laid on internal marketing as much as it is on external marketing. In contrast, internal marketing is a crucial part that cannot be ignored. Thus, this study becomes imperative at a time when both categories are supposed to be emphasised to achieve a holistic approach to customer sustainability.

**Internal marketing:** there is no generally acceptable definition for internal marketing. However, several definitions have been given by scholars so far (Mohammed; Ahmed, 2000, p. 449). The variety of interpretations as to what IM constitutes has led to a diverse range of activities being grouped under the umbrella of (IM). IM, according to Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003), is the promotion of a company's objectives, products and services to employees within the organisation. From this assertion, therefore, the aim or pursuit of internal marketing is to increase employee engagement with the company's Goals and foster brand advocacy among them.

There is no singular acceptable definition for internal marketing. However, many definitions have been available from diver scholars in recent times. According to Cardy (2001), IM is the promotion of a company's objectives and products and services to people within the organisation. The promotion aims to increase employee engagement with the company's goals and foster brand advocacy among them.

Salomão (2010) lays emphasis the purpose of IM to be that of increasing employee engagement with the company's goals and also to foster brand advocacy among them. The Crux of internal marking is within the company or institution and not outside. However, the internal market has a severe impact on the image of a company or institution, and that is why it should be taken u seriously. One of the reasons why strategic planning to achieve internal marketing is this:

Employees who are enthusiastic about their companies and what they offer are likely to share those enthusiasm with their social networks. And as a result, IM can be an effective part of external branding and marketing efforts. However, IM can only go so far if an employee's attitude toward the organisation is affected by every element of that individual's experience. Thus, keeping employees happy has the ability to enhance their external marketing efforts.

The above assertion corroborates the postulation that IM can contribute effectively to external marketing outcomes. Again, emphasis is placed on making employees happy, being that when they are happy they carry out brand advocacy, which, without doubt, contributes immensely to external image and subsequent external patronage. However, it is imperative that companies or institutions consciously or unconsciously engage in internal marketing in various ways. Be that as it may, the following points, as stated by Salomão (2010), make it clear that certain efforts aim to ensure that internal marketing is achieved in an organisation or company. The following common internal marketing efforts are essential:



- a) Ensuring that all employees know that their contributions are essential to the company's success.
- b) Educating all employees about the company's products and services.
- c) Reinforcing the concept that customers are, when all is said and done, the source of employees' salaries.
- d) Providing adequate salaries and benefits, plus a pleasant work environment.
- e) Encouraging employee input on corporate policies, management and operation – including criticism.
- f) Acting on employee suggestions that have merit and publicly acknowledging the value of the input.
- g) Confirming that the corporate mandate and objectives are clearly described and disseminated throughout the organisation.
- h) Providing opportunities for advancement, professional development and promotion.
- i) Ensuring that the corporate culture is consistent with work-life balance.

Fostering communication and collaboration among employees through various methods, from formalised settings to casual areas for gathering, such as lounges. Internal marketing operates on the idea that customer opinions of a company are based on their experiences with the business, not just on the products. By treating employees as "internal customers", internal marketing helps employees align with the company's vision and operations. In turn, they provide their customers with a consistent and valuable experience. Internal marketing campaigns are often led by a company's human resources department, which is responsible for distributing information and providing training on the company's objectives and strategies.

**Private Universities:** the concept of private universities is a recent development in Nigeria, unlike Federal and State universities, which have existed for over forty years. Many scholars and commentators have aver that private universities are non-public or independent universities that do not receive government funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards; others are universities operated for profit (Belfied and Lerin in Ajadi, 2010). Some refer to private universities as those universities that are solely owned, financed and managed by private individuals with intention to recover costs in a short time and make a profit (Olaniyan in Ajadi, 2010). This is without prejudice to the fact that education is regarded in Nigeria as an instrument for affecting national development. This conscientiously means that despite the acceptance of education at several quarters, which has led to a population explosion in terms of the number of people opting for formal education, lowering the standard of education is unacceptable, even when the primary essence is profit maximisation. This portends a great challenge, especially to the teeming number of private universities in Nigeria.

Essentially, Adediran and Gbadamosi (2012) attempted to classify ownership of private universities in Nigeria into three categories, namely sole proprietorship, faith-based, and hybrid. The sole proprietorship, as the name implies, is a one-man enterprise established by individuals operating as a person or as a corporation. Adediran and Gbadamosi (2012) state that this type of university possesses all the paraphernalia of a university, such as Governing



Council, Board of Regents etc., yet the university depends on the financier who exercises complete control over his business. In this category, we find such universities as Igbinedion, Afe Babalola, Lead, and many others.

In the same vein, fate-based universities belong to the churches. Presently, several churches have established universities, which, to a large extent, imply that the proliferation of the church is evident and also that there seems to be a renewed interest in education. According to Adediran and Gbadamosi (2012), in fate-based universities, financial support comes from the church, but the day-to-day running of the institutions is in the hands of the council and management. They include Babcock University (Seventh Day Adventist), Wesley University of Science and Technology (Methodist Church), Bowen University (the Baptist Convention), and Ajayi Crowther University (The Anglican Communion).

The next category of private universities as identified in the categorisation, is the hybrid. Adediran and Gbadamosi (2012) state that these universities are mission-oriented but are personally driven. The owners of these universities founded the mission but also established the universities. That is to say, the universities are the extension of the churches. It is pertinent to note that despite the fact that these universities also have Boards of Regents, the founder of the church assumes supreme status in terms of control. Included in this category are: Madonna University, Benson Idahosa University, Covenant University, and Redeemer University, among others.

It is important to consider the admission policy of private universities because it depends largely on the fact that owners of private universities have invested in education; and, therefore, expect returns on their investment. That is to say, the cost recovery plan in such institutions affects their admission policy. This is paramount because private universities' main income source is tuition fees and other levies on students. Presently, it seems that admissions into private universities are not highly competitive. This is partly because most students seeking admission into private universities do not meet the public universities' admission standards (Ajadi, 2010). In other words, the criteria for admission into most private universities in Nigeria are lower than that of public universities to attract more students, which means more tuition fees and more profit.

Ajadi (2010) further asserts that most private universities offer admission to candidates once their parents show the capacity and willingness to pay the tuition fee without proper scrutiny of the intellectual competence of the candidate to cope with the concomitant academic rigours, thereby affecting the quality of such private universities. This assertion might not be the case in all private universities. It is important to debunk this claim in the sense that some universities stipulate equivalent standards to students as much as public universities.

Several writers and stakeholders have identified funding as one of the challenges impeding private universities in Nigeria. Private universities rely heavily on tuition fees and other internally generated revenue (IGR) to meet their expenditure. However, there are other sources that universities can derive IGR as enumerated by Owolabi and Okwu (2012), including investment income, contract research and sales of services.

Incidentally, given the myriads of challenges facing private universities, one may want to ask if private universities have justified their establishment. Some scholars have argued that private universities have positively impacted Nigeria's education and socio-economic development.





Isibor in Olawore and Ajayi (2012) posited that before now, there were incidences of strike actions in public universities, no regular academic calendar, and a programme that should last for four years could end up causing a student six to seven years. In fact, students then could only know the year of admission but could not predict their year of convocation.

In the views of Morenike (2003), frequent strike actions in public universities have plunged the education system into pungent soil and have made university degrees become mere certificates armed with which a job might be obtained at a later date. Overcoming incessant strikes paved the way for private universities to thrive.

Interestingly, the entrance of private universities into the Nigerian academic terrain has brought stability into the system. It is also correct to state that private universities have reduced admission pressure in public universities. Though access to university education is still low, private universities have afforded Nigerians the opportunity to seek admission alternatives. For Osokoya (2007), establishing private universities has also brought about employment opportunities for Nigerians. Again, the establishment of private universities has assisted the government in funding education, which has always been a problem facing university education in Nigeria because of the increase in the demand for it (Ajadi, 2010).

**Student's enrolment in private universities:** it is important to note that ensuring that students enrol in any academic institution cannot be overemphasised. The student becomes the centre of all academic institutions. They are the central attraction, of which, without them, there is no learning. Students are the so-called customers of academic institutions, just as customers. It is against this backdrop that the issue of strategies to ensure that student enrolment does not constitute a challenge. In view of this, there are several enrolment strategies that private universities deploy. The following are some examples as presented by James & Botimi-Slaboh (2020).

Firstly, private universities in Nigeria tend to ensure that admission policies and procedures are based on merit and not on the financial biceps of the parents. Secondly, private universities in Nigeria have tried to prove their mien and make a difference by avoiding replicating the conventional programmes or courses offered in the public universities, thereby focusing on specialisation in certain disciplines to establish themselves as the centre of excellence. Thirdly, private universities have put in place processes, standards and support infrastructure that enhance the training and retraining of their staff so as to enable them to compete propitiously with their contemporaries in public universities. Fourthly private universities provide incentives for their faculty members to encourage them to show commitment to their work and spur them to engage in continuous professional development and publishing in high-impact and reputable journals.



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## **Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo: Historical Perspective**

Ajayi Crowther is one of the first-generation private universities owned by the Anglican Church. The Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, was established by the Supra Diocesan Board (West) of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). It has its origins in the defunct Christian Missionary Society (CMS) training institution, Abeokuta and the defunct St. Andrews College, Oyo.

The University started as CMS Training Institution in Abeokuta in 1853, from where it was relocated to Lagos (1868 to 1896). In March 1896, it was transplanted to Oyo retrospectively in 1920. At inception, St. Andrews College, Oyo, produced holders of Grade II Teachers Certificate while the Divinity Course for training church ministers was added to the curriculum between 1910 and 1942, and the proprietorship of the College was transferred from CMS, London to the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).

In 1977, Government took over the control and administration of all schools in the Nigerian Federation and with this development, the Church of Nigeria was divested of her Proprietorship of the College. However, the St. Andrews College Old Boys Association (SACOBA) interest, and by extension, that of the Church, in the growth and development of St. Andrews did not wane. Thus, in response to SACOBA's petition, the erstwhile Oyo State Government upgraded the Institution to an NCE campus in 1980 and to the full-fledged College of Education in 1985.

On 7 September 1999, the Church of Nigeria granted SACOBA's request for the establishment of Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, at the site of the former St. Andrews College, Oyo, under the proprietorship of the Church. Having satisfied the rigorous criteria prescribed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for the establishment of Universities in Nigeria, Ajayi Crowther University (ACU) was granted the license to operate as a Private University in Nigeria on 7 January 2005.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to generate data for the study, it is pertinent to deploy qualitative methodology with an In-depth Interview (IDI). The importance of IDI in a study is it requires in-depth expression of the issues, which cannot be measured in other forms but through exposition, discussion and probing of the issues on a “one on one basis” (Ihemeje, 2006). In-depth Interview, as earlier stated, is for the key management staff of the institution, which is aptly so because the principal officers are in a position to provide the desired answers to the questions from the study. These questions were administered at random without any particular order. And the questions border on how the institution has been able to enhance internal marketing to ensure a large turnover of students.



## DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to examine internal marketing with respect to student enrolment at Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State. Thus, this part discusses the internal marketing and sustenance of students' enrolment at Ajayi Crowther University. Having established that the university under study relies on tuition and other levies from students to generate IGR does not negate the fact that it has other sources of revenue but not as a mainstay income source. During the interviews, it was gathered that an internal marketing strategy has always been deployed to cover for enrolment of students in the past and at present. That is to say, the importance of internal marketing was upheld. In clear terms, a principal officer of the university stated:

Internal marketing cannot be over-emphasised as far as student enrolment is concerned. As a matter of fact, achieving good enrolment index is tied to so many factors and internal marketing is a key factor. The reason is that some of the students presently in school are directly here because of some of the staff. Parents look at the quality, character and status of the staff they know to be assured of the quality of education given here. Therefore, making the staff of the institution comfortable is as good as making them market the school to their network of acquaintances.

As clear as the above statement is, two issues are important here; the first one is that the staff of a university are part and parcel of the admission drive. Also the calibre of the staff team also attracts parents to a given private university. This is quite unlike the federal and state university, where parents might not be so involved to the point of knowing the calibre of staff, both academic and non-academic. This is a differentiating factor between private universities and public universities.

On the issue of empowering staff of the university or rewarding staff, it was learnt during the interview that in 2020/2021 session, staff were given 5,000 for each student that registered in the university through staff. This was a motivation for staff to work towards bringing in qualified candidates into the university. In view of this, the incentive is part of measures that institutions or companies deploy to sustain customer and client base. It was also learnt that staff welfare contributes to enhancing staff contribution by bringing in students to the institution. This is in agreement with James & Botimi-Slaboh's (2019) position that:

Private universities should put in place processes, standards and support infrastructure that will enhance the training and retraining of their staff so as to enable them to compete propitiously with their contemporaries in public universities.

The incentive is not only limited to financial gain only, but it extends to research grants and sponsorship of conferences and research publications. The emphasis on research grants, sponsorship of local and international conferences as well as sponsorship of research publications are parts of internal arrangements to encourage staff to project the goals and objectives of the university with a view to enhancing students' enrolment. Another principal officer posits that:

The essence of internal marketing is to also let staff understand that without their due commitment; the school cannot generate enough revenue to cater for the demands of the institution, especially salaries.





The above assertion is in line with Mudie's (2003) position that IM is to increase employee engagement with the company's Goals and foster brand advocacy among them. By engaging in an advertisement for the purpose of enhancing student enrolment, staff in an institution is seen to respond to the goals and aspirations of his Institution, company or organisation.

In conclusion, it could be stated that student enrolment is an important issue that has dominated several discourses of private universities as a result of its crucial nature. Looking at the study, it is pertinent to note that IM has a direct bearing on students' enrolment at Ajayi Crowther University. The idea of focusing on IM for the enhancement of student enrolment is not unconsciously but deliberately done based on its importance. The study, however, shows that the management of Ajayi Crowther University is conscious of the need to enhance IM, knowing fully well its importance in enhancing student enrolment in the institution.

## RECOMMENDATION

Being that the study discovered that with measures taken by management to boost internal marketing in the institution, a reciprocal effort is also noticeable among the staff team to ensure the sustainability of student enrolment as well as other means of generating IGR for the institution. It is recommended that management continue to lay emphasis on improving IM at Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.

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