



The relevance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to marketing in a developing nation

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ABSTRACT

In recent time, Information Technology (IT) has become a major tool for economic, social and technological development in both developed and developing nations of the world. Marketing is one of the professions that the IT explosion has complimented in various ways to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing practitioners. The importance and usefulness of information, telecommunication and marketing infrastructure of the growth and development of any nation within the present globalised world cannot be over emphasized. This paper will therefore discuss the interrelationship of IT and marketing education in Nigeria, and examine the impact of IT and marketing education in the social, economic and business environment. It will also look at the inhibitions to IT development in Nigeria, the various cyber crimes, on-line marketing, e-commerce and make recommendation on how it and marketing education can further be developed to improve our economic, social and technological advancement as a developing Nation.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MARKETING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AN APPRAISAL

PREAMBLE

Information Technology (IT) in recent time has become a major tool for economic and social development in both the developed, underdeveloped and the developing nations of the world including Nigeria. While the communication gap between institution and within groups in the society had been widening steadily to the point where it threatens to become an unbridgeable gulf of total mis-understanding there suddenly came IT explosion in all ramifications. Every professional, every executive suddenly catch the Info-Tech bug except the deaf and the mute. Many professionals, Academicians, Artisans etc suddenly have access to data in an inexhaustible Abundance. The advent of in IT has come to improve the world- Technologically, socially and economically.

The IT explosion also affects and has its implication on most professions and professionals. In this regard, marketing as a profession is not an exception. In fact marketing which has as part of its major element s-the dissemination of important information through marketing research and the marketing information system (MIS) to both producers and consumers, has a lot in common with It has enhanced and will continue to be a useful tool in the hands of marketing professional as its serves as a major infrastructure in the areas of good and efficient product and service delivery.

Marketing according to Stanton (1997)“ is an interpersonal or inter-organizational relationship involving an exchange i.e a transaction. This is to say that the essence of marketing is a transaction-an exchange-intended to satisfy human needs and want.” Consequently marketing occurs any time one social unit strives to exchange something of value with another social unit. Marketing therefore consist of all the activities designed to facilitate that exchange.

If marketing therefore includes the exchange system as a major element it therefore means that Information Technology (IT) and marketing must go parri-passu.

Nigeria as a developing Nation has imbibed this Millennium bug like other Nations. But how far have we gone in the area of IT and marketing education?

DEFINITION AND EVOLUTION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Technology (IT) is the use of various modern electronic and digital infrastructures to deliver information with ease to various audience and respondents. It means the use of hardware, software, services, and supporting infrastructure to manage and deliver information using voice, data, and video. Information Technology include; All computer with human interface and the Internet-Websites.

The Global Telecommunication Network called the Internet is one of the IT breakthroughs. The internet that was created by 1983 with 100 Networks has today grown by leap and bands. By 1993, there were approximately 10,000 network attached to the internet. Today there are over 700,000 networks attached to the internet. Since each of the connected networks can be as many as tens of thousands of computers, the total number of individual users of the internet is today estimated at over 800million worldwide.

The internet actually become very popular in the western world between 1983 and 1995 but it did not become popular in Nigeria until 1999-the eve of the present 21st century. Since then people have been very eager to know more about Information Technology and particularly about the internet. Today most organized institutions and companies in Nigeria are working hard to be **IT** literate and spending a lot of money to be internet connected.

What is internet?

Since of the major elements or tools of using internet is the computer, let me give a brief definition of the computer and possibly some types.

A computer is an electronic device that is capable of solving problem by accepting data, performing prescribed operations on the data accepted using set of instructions known as programs and either storing or supplying results of these operations called output as usable information in a precise form. Computers are electronic devices because they are made up of Digital electronics and internally they respond to two kinds of electrical state i.e 'on and 'off'. Based on the data processed-computers can be classified into Digital, Analogue and Hybrid Computers. We also have special purpose computers, and general purpose computers. We also have in terms of size micro computers, Mini computers, mainframe computers and super computers built to minimize distance between points for every fast operation and use for extremely complicated computations.

The computer is a system consisting of inter related parts. It is a combination of Hardware devices and Programs (software) assembled to accomplish some specific task. The Hardware refers to the electronic and mechanical components of computer system

i.e the pieces of equipment that make up a computer. These are usually physical devices assembled together to constitute the computer system.

The software refers to all programs that run on the computer, telling the computer what to do and how to do it. A computer program is a set of instruction coded in a programming language to accomplish a task.

Another important element necessary for a brief discuss/mentioning in this paper is a Telecommunications. It is impossible to discuss internet and marketing Education without understanding telecommunication. Telecommunication is the ability for computers to exchange information over distance. (Information itself is processed data). This is usually done with a pieces of hardware called Modem. Modem translates the digital information that a computer uses into analogue, or sound information that can be transmitted over telephone lines. Once transmitted a computer equipped with a modem at the other end of the line receive the analog information and translates it back to its digital form.

Computer can use this connectivity to exchange documents, programs, or mail or even control each other.

The connectivity may go with some networks. A computer network is any two or more computer that are linked so that they can communicate with each other. Networks are usually hardwired meaning they do not need modems to communicate. You may have a Local Area Network (LAN), which is the connection of computers at a common site like a school or a business.

These LANs can be attached to a Wide Area Network (WAN) like a district or country network. Many cities and countries including Nigeria with the development of the Nigeria SAT have begun to attach their networks to the internet. The software by which you access the internet resources is known as the Browser with which you access the site file.

With the above background, it will be easy to explain the internet is as a major element and substance of IT.

The internet is a global web of computer network that has made instantaneous and decentralized global communication possible. The internet is the network of networks. It is a global technology made up of many small contributing networks. They all speak the same language called Internet Protocol (IP). This system gives immediate access to information. It is like being able to open any book in any library from you computer. You can look at and print articles, documents and pictures as well as review current facts bout news, weather, and sports that you may use in your homes, office or classroom.

Using the internet, allows the use to retrieve information, media and even software from all over the world almost instantly. The internet is a tool for business and career development in the new Millennium. The internet, which was developed by the united State of America (USA) in the 60s, was initially to link up computers with the telephone. It developed gradually first by the Us Military and later Academic Institutions and finally business and home users. What began as a link between few computers now links over 40 million computers in over 185 countries of the world.

In recent times the internet usage has surge with the latest development of the user-friendly World-Wide-Web (www) and Web browser software such as Nescape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. Users can now surf the Internet and experience fully integrated texts, graphic, images and sound. Users can send e-mail, exchange views, shop for products, and access news, recipes, art and business information. The internet is even free though users may need to pay for acquire an Internet service providers to be hooked up to it.

The most technological breakthrough since the 1980s is the It. The transformation in information technology over these years in most countries is by far the most profound.

Now with the aid of IT, it is possible for one to find out information on nearly any topic at the touch of a finger upon a keyboard or mouse.

Today IT is an instrument of Technological Development. It is now a major and important infrastructure necessary for any technological breakthrough anywhere in the world.

CONSTRAINTS

In Nigeria there are many factors inhibiting IT and consequently marketing education. Some are:

1. Poor state of our infrastructures. Less than 2.5m out of about 120m Nigerians have access to telephone and without phone less people will be connected with the internet. With internet access almost nonexistence results in every body scrambling for wireless access with the effects that the charges are very high.
2. Poor or epileptic supply of power resulting in high purchase of generators.
3. It education is still low-resulting is many people NOT to know about It industry-The only thing they think one can do with Internet is to send and receive mails. This is just a minute and infinitesimal part of the opportunities available on the Internet.
4. IT is capital intensive. Cyber cafes may fold up or merge for lack of capital. Poverty is still spread instead of being alleviated in most African countries because of bad leaders and corruption which has eaten deep into fabric or our culture.

SOLUTIONS

Despite the limitation many Nigerians have embraced IT to exchange commercial information and to sell distinctive products abroad. Educational institutions now bring top quality scientific training to many students lurking them to classrooms and libraries worldwide. Moreover, the potential for overcoming distance barriers to acquired education has barely been tapped.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO?

1. The first step is mass education for the populace on IT and marketing education i.e in the are of web surfing, internet boot camp, internet training for journalist, layer doctors, accountant, marketers, engineers, architects Administrators, etc. to teach them on how to use the Internet to enhance their career. If one is not IT knowledgeable nowadays he/she will become irrelevant.
2. Government should create a better enabling environment for rural telecommunications.
3. Regional cooperation is necessary and should enhanced to harmonize regulations, increase competition and rationalize the use of scarce bandwidth to enhance good business transaction.
4. Marketing education should be taken more seriously in most of our tertiary institutions.

IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

1. The use of the IT in organization is expected to galvanize companies worth and values in most marketing places. It will enhance product/brand campaign for appropriate value, which it promise.
2. The IT impact positively on enterprises operations as the strength efficiency and effectiveness of an enterprises, operations cannot be achieved outside the dynamism of the internet.
3. It will enable the organization to focus on consumer choice in all ramifications.

MARKETING EDUCATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

To emphasize more on Information Technology and marketing education, two more areas shall be explored briefly. These are the on-line consumer and e-commerce.

The Online Consumer

Marketing Education has become easier with the advent of IT. These days, there is a growing population on On-line users and the marketers is a major part of this. Based on the important of marketing information system and the imperative of marketing Research to the Marketer the IT is of great advantage to make him more efficient and effective in doing his work as a major segment of any profitable or useful sector of the economy. Though some youths use the internet for entertainment and socializing, more than 45% of the population of internet users still use it for investment and more serious matters particularly in the marketing of various offerings and marketing information. As a matter of fact, in On-line Marketing the consumer not the marketer gives permission and controls the interaction. On-line Consumers have more access to marketing information through the Internet "search engines" such as yahoo, info seek, and Excite. All these make them to be better informed.

Advantage of on-line Marketing

1. Both small and large firms can afford it.
2. No limit on advertising space-in contrast to print and broadcast media.
3. Information access and retrieval are fast.
4. The site can be visited by anyone in anyplace in the world.
5. Shopping can be done privately and swiftly.

THE E-COMMERCE

Of recent the electronic commerce (e-commerce) has become one of the direct marketing channels. The e-commerce is a variety of electronic platforms, which assist marketers for instance in:

1. Sending of purchase orders to suppliers via electronic data interchange (EDI).
2. The use of ATMS, EFTPOS, and smart cards to facilitate payment and obtain digital cash.
3. The use of fax and e-mails to conduct transactions.

4. The use of the Internet for On-line services.

All the above involve doing business or carrying out business transactions in a 'Market space' as different or compared to a physical 'market place' They have become good tools in the hand of the Marketer today because of *IT*.

As at present, the most popular consumer purchases over the Internet are in the computer hardware, and software, airline, tickets, books and music. There is also growing e-commerce in food, flowers, wine, clothing and electronics.

These days business transactions over the internet are at higher volumes and cover a large variety of goods and services like in the area of financial transactions such as stock trading, home banking, insurance sales etc.

Benefits to Buyers

Through the IT particularly as it relates to on-line marketing, the following benefits can be derived by buyers:

1. Buyers can get objective information for multiple brands including costs, prices, features, and quality without relying on the manufacturers or Retailers.
2. Customers can order their product more conveniently and have 24hours access without the risk of travelling for their shopping.
3. Buyers can also design the offering they want.
4. Customers can enjoy the availability of various information and carryout comparative analysis on prices, quality and competitive advantage before making their choice(s).
5. Customer avoid the risk of waiting, queues and the emotional factors of listening and facing salesmen, who are always, determined to persuade them to buy on their terms.
6. Initiatives and request for information and advertisement can easily be made from manufacturers/producers.
7. Software agents can be used to search and invite offers from multiple sellers.

Also marketers can derive the following benefits;

1. Quick adjustment to market conditions.
2. Lower cost—No store, No rent paid.
3. Easier and enables the marketer to size up his audience regularly.

The Internet serves as an excellent tool for investors, allowing them to easily and expansively research investment opportunities.

CYBER CRIMES

As good as the Internet is to both investors, marketers, consumers, academicians, students and even children; it is also an excellent tool for fraudsters. Criminals could use the facility to perpetrate nefarious activities. This is why one should always think twice before investing money on any opportunity through the Internet.

Cyber crimes include '419' mails and; internet fraud: The use of computer has now become the home of scammers who busy themselves daily sending all sorts of computers cyber crimes.

As example of a web site Internet scam: Internet scammers develop new methods of defrauding bank customers daily of their hard earned money. They also impersonate banks and financial institutions/houses in various countries. It is now common to see scammers adding 'l' or 's' to On line etc to bank names on the internet-in order to re-direct bank customers to rogue or fraudulent web-sites which have identical features as the original one. For example; Osogbo Trust bank Ltd. With authentic web-site address: www.osogbotrustbank.com. Will suddenly become www.osogbotrustbankonline.com. Unsuspecting customers of Osogbo Trust bank Ltd. May easily be deceived if any of them mistakenly types any of the fraudulent names. The features that will appear will be similar to that of the original site and in this instance the customers could easily divulge sensitive information, which will later be used to empty his bank account, or even used to transfer illegal money in or out of the country.

Children are also daily exposed to pornographic and immoral behaviours on the Internet leading to juvenile delinquencies and wrong upbringing which increase social vices like drug peddling / addiction and lost of moral values. The openness of the Internet through IT provide all the above.

Recommendations

There is the need for vigilance and proper orientation on the part of security agencies to enable them cope with the peculiar nature and demands of various cyber crimes. Youths should be monitored and cautioned against harmful experiences no matter how pleasurable. Cyber crimes are serious threat to the socio-economic fabric of any nation. Nigeria should therefore take advantage of

IT and the Internet and its many possibilities for national growth and development. With good knowledge of IT, Marketing education will become more useful as a means of improving our exchange process.

CONCLUSION

With a population of about 120m people, and with enormous human and material resources which the country is blessed with, Nigeria need adequate Computer and Marketing education to enhance its productive sector. With sound knowledge of the IT, Marketing education will become more useful in the hand of our citizens to enhance out economic and technological development and boost the investment capacity and potentials of our Nation. This will solve the problem of mass unemployment and the disguised employment prevalent in our country today.

Nigeria has a big market that will attract the activities of other neighboring countries if out information Technology and Marketing infrastructures are improved to meet the demand of such a large and fast growing market. We should not allow the world to leaves us behind. More money should be diverted to the improvement of marketing education and Information Technology in the areas of training, research and development, as this is a major necessity for our rapid economic and technological development. Any money invested on such education is not a waste rather it is a good investment, which will boost out economy positively later.

The promotion and marketing of our various products to enable us gain from a globalize world can only be achieved with adequate investment in marketing and IT infrastructure.

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