

Marketing Construction Business: Problems, Prospects and Strategies

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Abstract

Many construction enterprises still often fail to realize that marketing entails more than just playing with few isolated promotional tools, such as distributing brochures, advertising, promotional videos, which they often employ without following a structured marketing plan formulated in line with the organization's aims and objectives. Such ad hoc approach to marketing in the construction industry has resulted in an uphill struggle with little to no success. This paper identifies the problems that has led to the ad hoc approach to marketing in the construction industry and examines the prospects for improving the situation. It discusses the strategies to be adopted to improve the effectiveness of implementing marketing in the management of construction business. The study adopts descriptive research design and the use of literature review as a method to identify, summarize and synthesize extant literature on construction marketing to show why the need exist for marketing in the management of construction business. The paper finds that gaps exist in existing construction marketing research knowledge in general and Ghana in particular. There is the need for scientific research which focuses on development of frameworks or models to guide the marketing of construction businesses in developing countries. Construction enterprise owners, construction marketing/management researchers, construction education curriculum developers and managers of construction business organizations will find this paper useful. Future research work must focus on developing construction industry specific frameworks or models to guide the marketing of construction businesses.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has manifested in an inflow of investments into Ghana. The twin effect have been the creation of work opportunities while subjecting the local construction consultants, contractors and individual practitioners under greater competition from their foreign counterparts which are likely to have greater experience and resources (Ofori, 2012). Again, the opportunities offered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has a negative impact such as an influx into Ghana of firms from the other member countries to compete for the few jobs available in the country (Ofori, 2012)

As a result all construction business organizations, regardless of their size in terms of number of employees, age in terms of years of existence and the type of work undertaken, are all confronted with intense competition in their business environment. Such situation threatens the growth and survival of construction firms that operate under this kind of business environment and that ultimately have a negative impact on the development of the construction industry. This compels the firms to constantly seek ways to outbid their competitors and also explore new and /or less crowded areas that are likely to provide more jobs and higher profits (Polat and Domnez, 2010). In this context, market differentiation becomes a key tool for securing a greater share of the available and potential market, and that becomes indispensable for the growth and survival of the firm. This according to Arditi *et al.*, (2008) and Chen and Mohamed (2008), can be achieved with the help of marketing. Marketing, according to Arditi *et al.*, (2008) is imperative for firms that want to achieve market differentiation as a way of achieving competitive advantage.

However, the ad hoc nature that characterizes the industry's approach to marketing has resulted in an uphill struggle for effective marketing performance with little or no success. Extant literature on construction marketing reports mainly on the essence of marketing in construction, perception of the industry on the importance marketing, marketing practices in the construction industry, and the constituents of marketing in construction.

One way to improve the situation is by focusing research efforts at developing frameworks/models for marketing construction businesses. This will serve to guide managers of construction businesses to overcome the ad hoc approach that has yielded abysmal results of marketing performance in the construction industry. This will improve the firms' competitiveness and enhance their performance and ultimately contribute greatly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of the country.

The section that follows discusses contribution of the construction industry to GDP growth of a nation, what marketing is and the need for it in achieving GDP growth. The focus of this paper is an explication of the problems with the adoption and implementation of marketing in construction, discussions on the prospects of solving these problems, as well as strategies to be adopted to ensure the adoption and effective implementation of marketing in the management of construction businesses.

1.1 Construction industry and economic growth of a nation

The construction industry has been considered as the key sector of economy of every nation that drives a country's social-economic development (Lopes, 2012; Ofori, 2012; Winch 2010, Wong *et al.* 2010; Hillebrandt, 2000; Halpin and Woodhead, (1998). The industry is responsible for providing and maintaining physical assets which are beneficial to the nation to achieve social and economic goals (Winch 2010; Gann and Salter 2000), it also contributes greatly to the GDP growth of a nation and also employs a larger percentage of the working population of a nation (Ofori, 2012). Construction contributes between 5 and 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in all countries, employs up to 10 percent of the working population, and is responsible for about half of the gross fixed capital formation (Lopes, 2012). It is estimated that investments in housing alone account for 2 to 8 percent of GNP; between 10 and 30 percent of gross capital formation; between 20 and 50 percent of accumulated wealth; and between 10 and 40 per cent of household expenditure (Badiane, 2001). Owing to its large size, the construction industry has the potential to contribute directly to the growth of the national economy (Ofori, 2012).

Contributions of the construction industry to the growth of a nation may even be greater in developing countries than those reported for the developed countries owing to the greater needs for infrastructures in developing countries. In Ghana, for instance as the case may be for many other developing nations, the construction industry's contribution to GDP has risen from 8.5% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2013 (GSS, 2014). Ghana as a developing economy has a great need for physical infrastructures which are built through construction activities. Such infrastructure includes schools, hospitals, airports and seaports, bridges, roads, houses etc. which contributes to the socio-economic development of the country. The enormity of such needs attracts construction firms both within and outside which also makes the country ripe for competition. The opportunity offered by ECOWAS and globalization further increases the intensity of the competition.

1.2 Competition in the construction industry

High competition and high risk have been identified as the construction industry's greatest challenge (Schaufelberger 2009). Mochtar and Arditi (2001) contend that, the construction industry is typically characterized by extreme competitiveness, high uncertainty and risks, and generally low profit margins when compared to other industries. The rapid changes in project procurement and implementation processes and the pervasive utilization of information and communication technology (ICT), changing client needs in the construction industry, advances in technology, and the particular needs of the country as a developing economy have also added to the woes of the construction industry (Matzdorf *et al.*, 1997; Jaafar *et al.*, 2008).

In Ghana, this effect of competition resulting from globalization has taken a toll on the efforts to develop the construction industry. In the report on developing the construction industry in Ghana, Ofori (2012) admits that;

“The constraints on the construction industry in Ghana will be exacerbated by several wider trends. Globalisation will be manifested in an inflow of investment into Ghana which will create work opportunities. However, the local construction consultants, contractors and individual practitioners will face greater competition from their foreign counterparts which are likely to have greater experience and resources. Another challenge will be for the local construction industry to exploit the opportunities offered by the Economic Community of West African States, and address its possible negative impact such as an influx into Ghana of firms from the other member countries” to compete for the few jobs available in the country. (Pp. 17)

Again, the enormity of changes and the intensity of competition that are being experienced in the Ghanaian construction industry coupled with the quest for growth, profitability and survival of firms in such a fast changing highly competitive business environment have made the adoption and implementation of marketing in the management of construction business/enterprise indispensable. These challenges arising out of globalization which has given rise to competition can better be addressed through the implementation of effective marketing programs (Arditi *et al.* 2008; Chen and Mohamed 2008) by the local construction consultants, contractors and individual practitioners in the construction industry in Ghana.

However, the *ad hoc* nature that characterizes the industry's approach to marketing has resulted in an uphill struggle for effective marketing performance with little or no success. In the construction industry, the lack of understanding of marketing has limited its application. This situation has resulted in the need for studies that will yield outcomes that are relevant to improving the understanding of marketing in the construction industry to enhance its utilization in the industry. The out such studies are expected be marketing performance framework that will guide construction businesses towards effective implementation of marketing in management of construction businesses.

Such framework will result in these benefits: (i) avoid competition between firms being based solely on price, leading to reduced profitability, and, (ii) provide a mechanism to enable firms to cope with the changing environments within which they find themselves. This will ensure that such firms are profitable and able to survive and the same time the nation will also get appropriate and quality services from the construction industry.

1.3 Theoretical explanation of marketing

According to Namon and Fellows (1993), a wider variety of definitions of marketing exist even among marketing professionals. This argument is supported by two definitions leading marketing experts. Kotler (1984) defined marketing in terms of human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange, and Ohmae (1988) saw marketing as discovering what customers want and orienting the firm to satisfying those wants. Scanlon (1988) simplified the definition of marketing to 'the concept of matching services to wants in the market place'. Scanlon (1988) elaborates further that businesses can be regarded as having three main common components, namely:

'(i) markets, providing opportunities to supply services or products and so generate revenue, (ii) activities, constrained by resources and limiting business transactions to specific services and products, and, (iii) competition, setting price and service expectations and so tending to limit further the sales opportunities of the business.'

Scanlon (1988) argues based on these components of a business that, marketing strategy formulation is the process of relating markets to activities. Strategy formulation results in a 'mix', being the specific profile of services/products and clients/customers that make up the marketplace for the organization. Selling is the process of creating volume by placing services/products into marketplace in a competitive environment. Operational management is charged with producing adequate services/products in a competitive environment and its success in doing this is a measure of performance (Scanlon, 1988).

Based on the foregoing, Rwelamila and Bowen (1995) conclude that marketing is therefore the process of orchestrating these dynamic relationships. In view of Rwelamila and Bowen (1995), the two main purposes of marketing may be seen as:

1. *'the development of services or products that will meet client or customer needs in a profitable and competitive manner, and,*
2. *communicating an awareness amongst clients or customers in the marketplace of the services or products that are on offer from the organization'.*

Arditi and Davis (1988), described marketing as consisting of activities such as contacts with potential clients, gaining information regarding conditions, potential customers, and projects: prequalifying with clients: estimating project cost: submitting proposal: entering into contracts, negotiating changes and claims, and finally, developing new technology of different contract forms. The indications of the foregoing are that marketing has been a subject of various definitions articulated by different individuals to suit various situations.

This situation is no different in the construction industry. Cicmil and Nicholson (1998) noted that definitions of marketing are broad and varying, with a proliferation of concepts and misconceptions about its nature. Fisher (1989) identified an unbalanced view of marketing, and noted that to a larger number of firms, marketing appears to be synonymous with selling, business lunches, and double-glazing type. Shearer (1990) brought to light the problem of conceptualizing marketing in construction. The research also found a prevalence of the view that marketing in construction is in essence selling promises, because the client is normally being asked to buy something that does not exist. Morgan and Bernicle (1991) noted that many construction enterprises still often fails to realize that marketing entails more than just playing with a few isolated promotional tools, such as distributing brochures, advertising, and film shows, which they often employ without following a structured

marketing plan formulated in line with the organizations aims and objectives. It also appears that the conceptual difficulty is only a part of the wider debate about the meaning of marketing.

1.4 The need for marketing

Chinowsky (2001) points out that construction companies tend to apply prudent and conventional management in their businesses in many ways. To achieve long term success, construction companies need to implement the right corporate strategy (ibid). This paper argues that marketing is an important strategy that can be applied to managing construction businesses. This is so because, these challenging circumstances in the construction industry compel companies to constantly seek ways to outbid their competitors and also explore new and/or less crowded areas of construction that may provide more jobs and higher profits (Polat and Domnez, 2010). In this context, marketing may help construction companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors, cultivate and/or keep clients, and thereby create competitive advantage necessary for successful competition (Arditi *et al.* 2008; Chen and Mohamed 2008). Marketing, therefore, becomes imperative for firms that are operating in the construction industry.

Marketing is a business philosophy that puts the customer at the centre of all the organization's considerations (Dikmen *et al.*, 2005) and this enables the firm to effectively service the need of customers, which in the view of Levitt (1983) is the purpose of business-to create a customer. To achieve that in the view of Dikmen *et al.* (2005) involves identifying needs in the market place, finding out which needs the firm can profitably serve, and creating an offering that can convert potential buyers into customer. This assertion explains the rationale for marketing by stating its ultimate desired outcome (Dikmen *et al.*, 2005).

The benefits of marketing are countless. Friedman (1984) describes marketing as an activity with a potential for increasing sales. In line with this opinion, Arditi *et al.* (2008) described marketing as an 'investment for creating a competitive edge-an empowerment for competitive advantage'. In their book *In search of excellence*, Peters and Waterman (1982) pointed out that the most successful US firms were characterized by a common dedication to marketing, more specifically the key to their success lies in keeping close to the customer. These assertions further reveals the main benefit of marketing that makes it indispensable for the survival and the desire for greater profitability for firms operating in such a highly competitive business environment as the construction industry.

The observation by Kotler and Conner (1977) that marketing, far from being a negligible function, is now recognized as one of the more important functions for helping firms to meet the unprecedented challenges they face is therefore heart-warming. However, a lack appropriate framework that can serve as a guide for the utilization of marketing in the construction industry has stifled the construction businesses of the benefits of marketing and has rather led to a situation where construction businesses at best practices marketing in an ad hoc manner and at worst not practiced at all. Several research reports paint a gloomy picture about marketing in the construction industry.

1.5 Evidences from reported construction marketing research

Moore (1984) noted that marketing management has not yet been applied to any greater extent in the construction industry. Morgan and Morgan (1990) also stated that marketing is less developed in the professional industry and often performed in most firms in an *ad hoc* basis. According to Morgan and Morgan (1991), marketing within the professional sector is considered at worst as an alien concept, and at best as a new development that is viewed with skepticism. Similarly, Pheng (1991) observed that marketing has attracted only little attention among professionals, a situation which is in direct contrast to the role of marketing in the consumer goods industry (Gummesson, 1979), where marketing is accepted as one of the cornerstones of servicing the needs of clients and customers. Peck (1994) further indicated that some consulting firms are still struggling to understand and implement effective marketing programmes. Marketing therefore, has received far less than the needed utilization than can bring about the needed benefits.

Unfortunately, construction management researchers have been silent about the need for marketing in the management of construction business. The literature available on marketing in the construction industry is more generic in nature (Kotler and Conner, 1977; Lidstone, 1984) and mostly combines construction firms with several other professional services such as accounting, medicine, brokerage, insurance etc. (Rwelamila & Bowen, 1995). However, the distinctive business environment of construction makes the assumption that marketing approaches used in other commercial settings will necessarily work in the industry inappropriate (Morgan, 1994). Morgan and Morgan (1991) reports that such literature are prescriptive in nature and are also

based on the experiences and observation of American practicing marketing consultants rather than an academic research.

2 THE PROBLEMS WITH MARKETING IN CONSTRUCTION

The subject of marketing has received more attention in the construction field over recent years (Winter and Preece, 2000) and many firms have realized the importance of marketing in this industry (Arditi and Davis, 1988). Yet the common theme that is running through available construction marketing literature is that the construction industry has performed poorly in marketing its products and services (Yisa *et al.*, 1995). Although, marketing has been established in manufacturing and many other service industries, in construction it is either been ignored or grossly misunderstood (Yisa *et al.*, 1995).

The conception of marketing in construction can best be described as follows:

“The challenge of marketing to many professional service firms represents a large ‘black box’ filled with myths and half-truths, ambiguity in terms of the role of professionals and marketing, a dearth of information from both within and outside the profession, budget implications for the partnership and above all a surrounding background of uncertainty . Unable to face the uncertainty around the marketing ‘black box’ the responsibility is shifted from senior management of firm to individual partner, from marketing partner first to outside consultant and then to internal marketer who will further delegate many marketing tasks to subordinates and outside consultant.” (Morgan, 1991, p.21).

Further, Pheng and Ming (1997: 273) support this view saying that,

“...many quantity surveyors have misinterpreted what marketing is all about. Some see it as manipulative, wasteful, intrusive and unprofessional, while most will see it as plain advertising and selling.”

In Ghana, concerns similar to this have been expressed by major industry leader in recent times. In his acceptance speech as the president elect of the Ghana Institution of surveyors (GhIS), Surv. D. K. Kyere, a fellow of the GhIS with 40 years experience notes that:

There is the need for us (Quantity Surveying, Land Surveying and Valuation and Estate Surveying) to ensure that each aspect of our service is truly relevant and secondly, we need to communicate such service more effectively by simple but positive marketing strategies. (Annual report of GhIS, 2012/2013 p.1)

He adds that:

Marketing is very much in vogue, and it is difficult to deny its importance for any service – profession today. (Annual report of GhIS, 2012/2013 p.1)

In a related development, the president of the Association of Ghana Industries and the chairman of the Council of the University of Ghana, Legon, Dr. Tony Oteng –Gyasi has also noted that “Architects in Ghana have not successfully marketed themselves as well as they could”. This remark he made at the 8th induction ceremony of the Architects Registration Council. Such statements from such industry leaders underscore the fact that marketing is at best approached in an ad hoc manner and at worst not applied at all in the construction industry.

The following information highlights some of the factors contributing to the status of marketing in the management of construction business which includes but not limited to the following:

2.1 Reluctance to adoption and integration of marketing in construction businesses

Pheng (1991) observed that marketing has attracted only little attention among construction contractors and professionals alike. Morgan and Bernicle (1991) noted that the U.K. construction industry has been slow in adopting marketing principle. This Morgan and Morgan (1990) believe is due to the fact that marketing is still a new phenomenon viewed with scepticism.

Many studies have shown that construction firms’ aside being slow in adopting marketing principles, marketing when adopted is not integrated into the structure of construction firms operations (Winter and Preece, 2000; Bennett, 2005; Yisa *et al.*, 1996; Cicmil and Nicholson, 1998).

2.2 Misconceptions and misperceptions and lack of understanding about marketing in construction

Other studies have reported existence of many deeply held misconceptions or misperceptions or misunderstandings about the appropriateness and value of general management skills and marketing skills in particular, in the construction industry (Fisher, 1989; Richardson, 1996). According to Fisher (1989) the result of this is that, construction firm owners do not seem to be aware of the economic payoff to be derived from the appropriate use of modern management systems and are, as a consequence, unwilling to incur the cost of operating these systems on their construction projects.

Although marketing is a much larger idea than selling, professional firms show little interest in it because they equate it to selling which the professional body place ban against. Fisher (1989) similarly found that to a large number of firms marketing is seen as synonymous with selling. Yisa *et al.* (1995) attributes this to ignorance or misunderstanding of the concept of marketing in the industry. Dickman *et al.* (2005) similarly described equating marketing to selling as one of the misconceptions about marketing in the industry. This in the view of Yisa *et al.* (1995) can be attributed to the fact that literature on marketing in construction is sparse, suggesting that the industry's professionals are being educated without a systematic study of marketing which is an important aspect of management.

Bell (1981) also noted of the existence of a wide misconception/perception that only clients can create demand for work, and that the firm themselves are not capable of doing so. Other researchers also argue that the industry is not capable of being planned, citing the dynamic environment as a reason that prevents any long and medium term planning (More, 1984; Pearce, 1992). Peck (1994) further indicated that some consulting firms are still struggling to understand and implement effective marketing programmes. Morgan and Morgan (1990) also stated that marketing is less developed in the construction industry and often performed in most firms in an *ad hoc* basis.

2.3 The beliefs in the construction industry

Freidman (1984) is of the view that the construction firms in the past have not met with difficulties in obtaining the required level of works to maintain survival and profit. So they rely on their reputation and quality of their work to continue winning new order. This prevents them from recognizing the essence of marketing. Pearce (1992) pointed out the most popular belief in the industry, that is, the most important part of the organization is the production side. Yisa *et al.* (1995) explains that the professionals look for opportunities that fit their capabilities rather than adapting their capabilities to suit current and future market opportunities.

2.4 Lack of In-House Marketing Expertise

The findings of Yisa *et al.* (1995) revealed that, in a larger percentage of firms marketing is managed by a partner/director/senior manager, in addition to other responsibilities. Yisa *et al.* (1995) indicated the percentages as 95%, 80% and 22% for architects, engineers and contractors respectively. This indicates a lack of importance placed on marketing and as a result, no expert is employed to oversee it, rather it is added to the responsibilities of others who may even have no knowledge about it. The lack of in-house marketing expertise can also be attributed to the issue of low consultation fees that reduces the firms' revenue thereby making it difficult for the firms to pay for the services of a marketing expert.

2.5 Engineers Paradigm

Dikmen *et al.* (2005) explains that the presence of cultural barriers in the industry is a resistance to marketing-oriented approach to management of in the industry. Seymour and Rooke (1995) observe that management practices are dominated by the engineers' paradigm which has resulted in the limited use of market-driven strategic management. This in the view of Richardson (1996) is a hurdle that needs to be overcome if marketing can be adopted and implemented in the industry.

2.6 Resource Constraint

Yisa *et al.* (1995) looked at resources for managing marketing in an organization in terms of manpower, skills and budget. The adequacy of these resources can guarantee a successful marketing program in the industry. However, because of the low consultation fees charged (Jaafar *et al.*, 2008) the firms are not able to allocate adequate funds to support marketing activities. Much attention is paid to the production side (Pearce 1992) than the management side of which marketing is key (Dikmen *et al.*, 2005).

The limited budget prevents the firm from sourcing the services of external marketing experts. Because the available funds are used to cover operating costs and production related issues such as supervision (Jafaar *et al.*, 2008) that are considered as most important part of the firm (Yisa *et al.*, 1995). Regarding the skills in terms of

marketing skills the professionals are handicapped because their education and training are geared towards production of highly scientifically trained profession with little or no management training (Harris 1991) because the professionals believe that the important part of the organization is the production side but not the management side (Pearce, 1992) of which marketing is an important tool.

3 PROSPECTS OF MARKETING APPLICATION IN CONSTRUCTION

It is obvious from the foregoing that the problems of marketing in construction are hinged on a lack of understanding, misunderstanding and misperceptions about the true meaning of marketing and most importantly a lack of appropriate framework to guide the application of marketing in managing construction businesses. This calls for two main approaches to deal with the problem:

1. Review of the education and training of construction professionals,
2. Framework to guide construction businesses on effective marketing implementation

3.1 Education and Training of construction professionals

Construction education in the past has not given attention to marketing in the training of construction professionals. Yisa *et al.* (1995) noted that comparing to other contraction management functions such as estimating, scheduling and cost control, literature on marketing in construction is very sparse. This according to the author suggests that the industry's professionals are being educated without a systematic study of this important aspect of management. Harris (1991) noted that professional education and training have always been streamlined and narrowed down to production of highly scientifically trained professionals from the universities with little or no management training. This points to lack of marketing education and training as being part of the wider problem.

It is encouraging to note that construction education today has incorporated some elements of business management courses such as marketing in the education curriculum. The recognition of the importance of marketing that has led to its inclusion in construction education is a sign of great prospect for marketing application in the construction industry. The education in this regard is necessary for erasing the erroneous impression about marketing which is the pivot of the neglect of marketing in the construction industry.

In Ghana, for instance, the Higher National Diploma (HND) in Building Technology programme offered by the polytechnics has a course 'Marketing of construction products' which focus on the application of marketing in construction. The main aim of this course is to develop in the student, a comprehensive understanding of the marketing techniques used in the built environments. Topics taught in the course are considered in the context of current and best professional practice. Detailed Course outline includes: Nature and practice of marketing of construction products; Commercial; housing and industrial buildings. Others include study of marketing strategy and factors such as consumer behaviour. Policies and techniques and their application to the selling problems of construction enterprises are also discussed as part of the course. In the same vein, Bachelor of Science (BSc.) programmes such as BSc. Quantity surveying and economics, and BSc. Construction technology and management offered by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) also have marketing courses in their syllabi in addition to general management courses. Although the course content for the bachelor programmes are a little different from that of HND programme, the aims are similar to those outlined above for the HND programme.

This approach sound promising but may take time for the effect to be realized. This is because education process takes time for the students to complete and come out for employment. Again, even when the graduates are in employment it will time for them to reach senior management levels where they can influence decisions which are likely to include adoption and implementation of marketing in the management of construction businesses. Such approach may be described as a long term solution to the problem. But given the intensity of the prevailing competition in the construction industry, a need therefore exist for short term measures that will sustain the industry until the long term strategy begins to yield results.

3.2 Framework for marketing construction business

An alternative option requires an effort at research to find solution to the problem with marketing adoption and implementation in the management of construction business. Yisa *et al.* (1995) concluded from a review of extant literature on construction marketing that there is no significant research interest in marketing in the construction industry prior to the 1970s. It is encouraging to note that lately, within the last four decades there

have been various attempts at research in this area. However, Yisa *et al.* (1995) further indicates that virtually all construction marketing research have concentrated on the following subjects:

1. Essence of marketing in construction,
2. Perception of the industry on the importance marketing,
3. Marketing practices in the construction industry, and
4. The constituents of marketing in construction.

Such studies largely originate from industrialized countries where the construction industries are relatively mature. The indication is that the need for marketing in construction business management is being increasingly realized, even in such countries where the construction industry is relatively competitive in comparisons with other newly industrializing and developing countries. There have been major studies mostly in the UK and US construction industry with a few coming from other countries such as Turkey, South Africa, etc. Bell (1981) examined and compared attitudes to, and the organization of, marketing within construction firms within the UK. He thought at the outset of the research that marketing strategy could be developed based on the distinctive service industry features. However, the search for such features relevant to construction industry was not fruitful. Similarly, Hardy and Davies (1983) discovered that many firms exhibited an indifferent attitude to marketing. Fisher (1989) also commented on the unbalanced view of marketing and found that, to a surprisingly large number of firms, marketing appears to be synonymous with selling, business lunches and “double-glazing hype”. Yet the science and business philosophy of marketing, according to the author, is taught as a serious subject to the cream of business managers and other professionals in almost every other industry. Morgan and Morgan (1990) concluded from a study of marketing communication in the UK construction industry that marketing is still a new phenomenon viewed with scepticism.

Shearer (1990) highlighted the problem of conceptualizing marketing in construction. That research also found a prevalence of the view that marketing in construction is in essence selling promises, because the client is normally being asked to buy something which does not exist. Pheng (1991) observed that marketing has attracted only little attention among construction contractors and professionals alike. Similarly, Morgan and Burnicle (1991) noted that the UK construction industry has been slow in adopting marketing principles. Many construction enterprises still often fail to realize that marketing entails more than just playing with few isolated promotional tools, such as distributing brochures, advertising, promotional videos, which they often employ without following a structured marketing plan formulated in line with the organization’s aims and objectives. The conceptual difficulty is only a part of the wider debate as to what marketing is. For example, Namo and Fellows (1993) found a wide variety of definitions of marketing even among marketing professionals and supported their argument with two definitions by Kotler (1986) and Ohmae (1988). Kotler defines marketing in terms of human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange, while Ohmae saw it as discovering what customers want and orienting the firm to satisfy those wants. Payne (1988) views marketing as the responsiveness of an organization to its market needs.

In their book ‘*In Search of Excellence*’, Peters and Waterman (1982) pointed out that most successful US firms were characterized by a common dedication to marketing. Arditi *et al.*, (2008) buttressed this by describing marketing as ‘an investment for creating a competitive edge – an empowerment for competitive advantage’ which is essential for a firm’s survival and to be profitable. While research has been conducted on marketing communication (Morgan and Morgan, 1990), attitudes towards and organization of marketing function (Bell 1981; Hardy and Davies, 1984), meaning of marketing (Namo and Fellows, 1993; Kotler, 1984; Ohmae, 1988; Payne, 1988; Arditi and Davies, 1988), studies on the need for a framework to guide the marketing of construction businesses appears to be nonexistent.

The few academic research works that have been conducted in different countries comprises that of Morgan (1990) in the United Kingdom, Rwelamila and Lethola (1998) in South Africa, and Marr *et al.* (1996) in New Zealand. Morgan (1990) found that very seldom firms have their own marketing departments or specific individuals responsible for marketing and also concludes that even when marketing department exists, the firms still struggle to implement marketing functions effectively. Marr *et al.* (1996) measured the perception of marketing by private engineering consultancies in New Zealand and found that competing on price is one of the major barriers to the consulting engineer’s adoption of the marketing concept. The result obtained by Rwelamila and Lethola (1998) gives support to Morgan (1990) and Marr *et al.* (1996).

Such reports suggests that implementation of marketing in construction is a problem. Surely, almost all the research reports indicate an indifferent attitude to marketing in construction. Frameworks to guide the effective

implementation of marketing in construction have not been the focus of such studies. That makes the need for an industry specific framework that will guide the marketing of construction business indispensable in order to improve the situation especially in developing countries where intensity of competition threatens the survival of many firms operating in the built environment.

4 STRATEGIES

4.1 Focus of future research

A change of focus or new research direction becomes imperative. Research efforts must be geared towards the development of frameworks that can bring improvement in the way marketing has been adopted and implemented in construction. Construction marketing researchers must change the current focus of identifying variables that indicate poor marketing performance and pursue research directions that will yield frameworks or models for marketing construction businesses, to serve as guide for firms that want to implement marketing management in the management of their businesses.

Such framework must first examine the current marketing practices of construction businesses/firms in terms of marketing planning, organisation of marketing functions, marketing resources and marketing activities. This will provide the necessary background information about the current state of marketing in construction in order to identify the areas that need improvement. Next, the means through which construction businesses firms generate their marketing information and the use they make of such intelligence deserves examination. Further, the guidelines which form the basis of the attitude towards marketing and strategy formulation within the firms must be investigated thoroughly. An examination of the typologies of marketing strategies being pursued by construction business firms, and the main tactical ingredients in such marketing strategies is very essential. Further assessment of the use of ICT in the marketing of construction businesses in Ghana will also reveal levels of modernization of the industry.

The outcome of these studies will lead to the formulation of an integrative framework for marketing construction business in Ghana. Such framework will make a lot of contribution to knowledge about marketing in the management of construction business. A variety of such contribution to knowledge is possible.

4.2 Contribution of such studies to knowledge

Contribution to social science knowledge: Such studies will contribute to knowledge by spanning two distinct areas of study/discipline. The study will bring together marketing and construction under one study. Such studies will bring marketing which is a strategic business tool into an industry that sees marketing as an alien concept and therefore view marketing with skepticism.

Application of Marketing in Construction: An industry specific framework can be developed out of such studies to guide the marketing of construction businesses. That framework will take into account and reflect the distinctive characteristics of the construction industry. That will also make the framework more appropriate to the construction industry than the existing business marketing models.

Contribution to Research Methodology: The nature of such studies, although multidiscipline, has an additional characteristic of involving two academic disciplines that are not cognate. That makes the multidisciplinary nature of construction marketing research unique with peculiar multidisciplinary research challenges. Studies aimed at developing construction marketing framework will be a breakthrough that will provide solutions to multidisciplinary research of disciplines that are not cognate.

4.3 Beneficiaries of such studies

Governments, policy makers, construction marketing researchers, construction firm owners and directors/managers, construction organizations and other similar institutions will find this as a solution to the unsuccessful outcomes of their marketing effort.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The problems identified in this paper included misconception/misunderstanding/misperceptions about marketing, beliefs in the construction industry, reluctance to marketing adoption and implementation in construction firms operations. The construction industry is under intense competition that threatens the survival of many firms which performance affects the growth of the national economy. The competition has resulted from such factors as rapid changes in project procurement and implementation, pervasive utilization of information and communication technology (ICT), changing client needs in the construction industry, advances in technology,

and the particular needs of the country as a developing economy. Adoption of marketing in the management of construction business/enterprise is a promising solution; however, the *ad hoc* nature that characterizes the industry's approach to marketing has resulted in an uphill struggle for effective marketing performance with little or no success

Prospects for the adoption and implementation of marketing in construction appear to be good. Construction education curriculum now has marketing courses with the aim to improve understanding and promote its application in the industry. Also, there is significant research interest in marketing in construction even though the current focus of research does not address the existing problems of marketing in construction.

The strategies identified include marketing education and training to focus on improving the future construction graduates understanding of marketing to enhance its adoption in the construction industry. This is seen as a long term strategy. In the short term research effort must be geared toward the development of an industry specific framework that will serve as a guide for the construction business owners in the application of marketing in managing construction businesses.

The need for an industry specific framework to guide the marketing of construction businesses has become imperative. Marketing is very much in vogue and no construction business can deny its importance in the successful performance of their business in such a competitive and ever changing business environment that characterizes the construction industry today especially in developing countries.

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