Evaluation of the Effective Marketing Strategy in Revitalizing Religious Newspapers in Nigeria Study of Enugu Catholic Diocesan Flame Newspaper

EVARISTUS I.A. OFFOR
Lecturer; Department of Mass Communication, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), P.M.B 01660, Enugu, Nigeria

CLEMENTINA O. OKAFOR, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer; Department of Mass Communication, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), P.M.B 01660, Enugu, Nigeria

ANDREW C. APEH
Lecturer; Department of Mass Communication, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), P.M.B 01660, Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract
To survive in this era of competitive marketing, practitioners need to reassess, or if need be, reconstruct the whole concept of its marketing strategies and allow effective communication as it progressively move from a sellers’ market to a buyers’ market. In the words of the economists, It is either he works creatively hard to keep his clients or have them kick him out. Being able to identify the consumer and his needs is the starting points towards success in any business. The Flame Newspaper has been facing a lot of problems and challenges in the church print media category. The paper has not achieved much success in the church print media niche market due to some existing unsatisfied needs of consumers. However, this study therefore seeks to find out effective marketing strategies in revitalizing religious papers, (a study of Flame newspaper) so as to attract brand awareness, quality, affordability and profitability by gaining more customers in the ecclesiastical regions of Onitsha and Owerri. A qualitative method was used in order to evaluate and find out more about The Flame and ways to revitalize it. The process of information collection was carried out through phone in-depth interviews conducted with some selected parishioners as well as the newspaper's management. Data generated were presented in prose-like manner for analysis. Findings indicate that Flame newspaper has to engage in an integrated marketing communication program targeting its segment market; this has been its major setbacks from its inception in 1992. Therefore, lack of a proper internal organization and positive external presentation of the paper and its product was found to have reduced the paper's popularity, value, and sustainable ranking among other church papers in the region. The results of the data generated also showed the need to provide good customer services and better welfare packages for the staff. In order to treat these problems accordingly and achieve sales growth, awareness, consistency and quality, the following recommendations were made: The paper should engage in consistent promotional efforts that will focus on the consumers and their needs through innovative product and services that can satisfy their unique goal or motives. In other to target effectively their male and female urban and rural segments: There has to be a budgeting policy. It must engage both traditional and internet marketing tools to achieve their mission statements, business philosophy and vision.


INTRODUCTION
Since papers had to compete with one another for attention and patronage in the open marketplace of the street, editors went out of their way to find original and exclusive news that would give their papers an edge. In a struggle to occupy the market space, newspaper management had to redefined the concept of news, hiring people to go out and look for news. Reporters were assigned to special beats such as: government house, sports, religion, politics, finance, police, education and so on. In the view of Joseph R. Donmick (2009, p85) so many newspapers changed their emphasis from the affairs of the commercial elites to the social life of the rising middle classes. This shift meant that news became more of a commodity, something that had value. And, like many commodities, fresh news was more valuable than stale news. Consequently, any scheme that would get the news into the paper faster was tried and embraced for positive results. In all, the important of speed in news collection was given priority and prime attention so far one wants to last in the newspaper business.

With the vast news and the limited space available, new reporting technique emerged, thus, “inverted pyramid” style of reporting was developed. As the newspaper business continues to grow, it attracted a number of dailies and circulation showed a fivefold increase. Therefore, newspapers became big business, and some big-city papers were making very sufficient profits. The thriving newspaper business also attracted several powerful
and outspoken individuals who had a profound influence on journalism. As these people delve into the business of journalism, they embraced different marketing management formulas to achieve success as it was obvious that no one survives in any business without a good management of marketing promotional mix. Pulitzer who transformed New York World and St. Louis Post-Dispatch into success stressed accuracy. He also introduced practices that appealed to advertisers: more advertising space and advert price on the basis of circulation. Moreover, he aimed his paper at large population of immigrants then living in New York by stressing simple writing and many illustrations. Pulitzer also reintroduced the sensationalized news format of the penny press, as the World’s pages carried stories about crime, violence, and tragedy. Finally, Pulitzer endorsed the notion that a paper should promote the welfare of its readers, particularly the underprivileged. The paper crusaded against unsanitary living conditions, corrupt politicians, and big business, all topics that gained Pulitzer many supporters among the working class. Joseph R. Donmick (ibid).

Moreover, the contemporary development brought in so many changes in the quest for survival in the newspaper industries. Throughout the 1990s and into the new century, the newspaper industry wrestled with the problems of decreasing circulation especially the younger readers tailing off the most, increasing competition from the web, and rapid shifts in social and market conditions. Modern newspapers have to compete for audience attention with online news sources,

In the case of producing a church newspaper as a marketing brand, it means creating memorable experiences or impressions in the minds of consumers by making a unique and different personality in popularity, reputation, consistency, value and quality. For example, The Leader Newspaper that belongs to Owerri archdiocese is popularly identified with quality, outreach and consistency, while Trinitas of Onitsha archdiocese is known for its consistency, price leadership, affordability and The Flame has long been known for catechetical ingenuity, inconsistency and high price policy.

Although these church papers are geographically situated in the same ecclesiastical region, each is attracted to the consumer's consciousness for their different attributes and services. The Onitsha and Owerri ecclesiastical provinces are popular in the production of church newspapers in the Nigerian church newspaper market. Both the Onithsa and Owerri provinces are made up of 10 most read newspapers that try to satisfy more than 7 million Catholics who can read and write. Since the expansion of Catholicism, the size of the regions has developed and grown by over 40% and the population by 35% (Agu, 2005). The parishes, therefore are the main sources of market and patronage by more than 7 million Catholics who can read and write. Today, the universal economic crisis and ethnic clashes in Nigeria have some side effects on the number of products and readability. Consequently, the two provinces need to analyze these situations in order to create effective promotional policies with regard to target segmentation. This analysis will help them in their production output and the reality on ground regarding their reading audience. Three major Church Newsprints in Onitsha and Owerri Ecclesiastical Provinces are The Leader, Trinitas and The Flame.

The researchers therefore, seek to find how The Flame newspaper established by the Catholic Church Enugu Diocese can be revitalized to achieve its set goals through quality management pattern and customer relations. As well, the study finds out the process of marketing to ensure survival in a technological age where emphasis has shifted from a traditional or product based services to customer based.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The main purpose of this investigation is to evaluate the effective marketing strategies in revitalizing religious newspapers in Nigeria. A Study of Flame newspaper. However, this research aims at achieving the following specific goals:

i. To establish whether The Flame Newspaper brand founded by the Catholic Diocese of Enugu is perceived to be strong, unique and consistent.

ii. To ascertain if the Flame newspaper serves its target audience via availability, quality productions and promotional efforts.

iii. To identify the general challenges facing the Flame newspaper, vis-a-vis religious newspapers in Nigeria.

iv. To indentify the possible ways to revitalize the newspaper not only for evangelization but also for profitability.

v. To establish how the paper shall be positioned to be strong, attractive and effectively managed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The following research questions were accordingly raised consequent upon the research objectives:

i. Is the Flame Newspaper brand founded by the Catholic Diocese of Enugu perceived to be strong, unique and consistent?

ii. Does the newspaper serves its target audience via availability, quality productions and promotional efforts?
iii. What are the general challenges facing the paper?
iv. What are the possible ways to revitalize the newspaper not only for evangelization but also for profitability?
v. How shall the paper be positioned to be strong, attractive and effectively managed?

LITERATURE REVIEW

‘The Flame’ Newspapers

The Flame Newspapers founded in 1992 is the premier diocesan newspaper. It is located close to Ogbete main market and inside the Holy Ghost Cathedral Ogui-Enugu. The Flame emphasizes the value of interaction between the church and parishioners primarily for pastoral purposes. The paper was to serve their consumers to achieve their spiritual and physical development through a catechetical, socio-cultural and moral motivations and mobilization. As a small church paper, with only six members of dedicated staff they try to make memorable experiences on consumers while facing big challenges. The Flame offers a bi-weekly paper that deals on catechesis, news, society and business opportunities to customers. The Flame provides its consumers with pastoral information, services that broadcasts diverse spiritual, cultural, moral, arts, entertainment and educational benefits.

The Flame is in the category of a neglected pastoral print media that spreads the gospel and secular news to Nigerians especially, Catholics of Enugu diocese in Nigeria. We shall consider this category in the perspectives of business and evangelization. In their business enterprise, The Flame lacks the necessary financial and human capacities to provide consumers with their needs, thereby failing to make huge returns on investment.

Having in mind church newspapers, it is obvious that as faith-based, they are primarily created not for profit making but being part of the printing industry, they must work to satisfy the needs of their customers as well as brand themselves for future sustainability. Church papers need to fight hard to maintain quality and popularity as well as affordable price in order to survive in the competition.

Therefore, church papers with good reputation are able to attract a wide range of consumers and maintain circulation even in the phase of economic crisis in the country. Reputation plays a major part in the economics of church newspaper industry. Effiong (2008) insists that “reputation depends on good quality and cost effectiveness and much less than quantity. All the successful papers are able to enhance their reputation by spending more on quality and services, training and expansion. From a marketing perspective, small church newsprints are operating in a difficult market.

Most papers are facing problems attracting new consumers because the leadership cannot develop creative organisational cultures that understand the value and impact on marketing innovation with their program delivering options [Effiong, (2008)]. Moreover, the contest is hard for small church newspapers because of their attachment to their traditional organisational structure, approaches, and program offerings targeted to their parishioners only. However, the main reason that some of these privately owned church papers are not sustainable is their inability to adapt their institutional marketing programs to be more responsive to the competitive marketing environment for new entrants.

Financial hardship and hierarchical negligence have derailed the efforts of some of the church papers like The Flame. They are facing a huge challenge in attracting customers as well as new product lines because they have a propensity to be more expensive compared to community papers. Church papers charge from 80 Naira to 100 Naira per a copy, which is lower than any national daily, but much higher than other privately owned community papers. To be competitive in the market and gain more customers, church papers need to be adaptive, business oriented, and internet based. The success for these church papers depends on creativity, discovery, and marketing innovation through cost leadership and promotional efforts. Furthermore, an effective reaction to changing external forces leads not only to changes to individuals, and their behaviour, but also to innovative changes in organisations to ensure their survival (Reed, 1996). Information and knowledge are priceless resources for church papers when competing in mature markets like the newspaper industry.

Church Newspapers that are unable to appropriately identify emerging marketing trends will not be in a position to take full advantage of them as they continue to emerge as explicated by Burrel. Marketing strategy can be changed, but any delay in pursuing competitive advantage for the future allows competitors to gain advantage for themselves (Burrel, 2008). As for the church hierarchy, they need to realize that without a huge financial involvement and support in the industry, the survival of their papers is fragile, hence their mission statements unrealistic. By implication it is important for the leaders to help their staff understand the competitive market place and communicate it clearly to members of staff (Hill and Jones, 1997). That is to say, that it is the role of the hierarchy to influence the culture in the newspaper organisation in order to be more creative, innovative, and more responsive to demographic shifts that have occurred in the church and technology by engaging in on-going marketing planning, collaborative ideas, and creative business programs. By applying this approach, church papers will be enabled to grow not only within ecclesiastical milieus, but also in the public domain, and possibly become threats to national newspapers.
For Rennie, it is important to note that church papers can do well when their owners understand the benefits of transforming them into core business tools both for evangelization and humanization. To do this, they ought to integrate the spirit of entrepreneurship into the promotional media objectives of their papers. They ought to realize that entrepreneurship, leadership, and engagement have a number of desirable attributes that lend themselves as an integrating force:

1. Creativity
2. Communication
3. Strategic thinking
4. Decision making in the face of uncertainty and incomplete information (Rennie, 2008)

For the Church hierarchy these are values that church papers and their staff must imbibe in their professional work to become more business-oriented and well focused in the competition. For Rennie (ibid), incorporating entrepreneurship can definitely differentiate a firm from another, and bring with it a competitive advantage in the market environment. Journalism and professional training are compatible and entrepreneurship has the ability to bring church hierarchy, staff, management and the community together with a common purpose. This brings about success and expertise in creating market growth and return on investment.

Methodology
This section examines the process of investigations concerning the reasons for the backwardness and possible strategic means of revitalizing The Flame Newspapers. A qualitative method was used in order to evaluate and find out more about The Flame and ways to revitalize it. We investigated how The Flame established by the Church can be beneficial to the public from both management and customer viewpoints. This work also tried to find out the process of marketing The Flame in a technological age where emphasis has shifted from a traditional or product based services to customer based. The process of information collection was carried out through phone in-depth interviews conducted with some selected parishioners as well as the newspaper’s management. The researchers purposely told the interviewees the proposed IMC Plan to revitalize The Flame brand by first establishing its true status.

The interviews were done through phone calls to diocesan of Enugu whose phone lines are enlisted in the Diocesan Directory. This was carried out to help the interviewer produce an IMC blueprint for the revitalization of the newspaper in a one-year, “Path to Growth” strategy. The accessible population for this research included parishioners in the catholic diocese of Enugu, as well, customers who are interested and have the desire to buy the paper. They were contacted through phone, asked questions in order to understand what factors or previous promotional factors mostly affected their decision to buy or not to buy. The questions were specifically made for both old and new customers, as they still have the clearest recollection of the factors that affected their decisions to buy or not to buy.

The researcher carried out in-depth interviews with both the management and 50 customers in Enugu and its environment to find out their views, attitudes, perceptions and intentions regarding The Flame. These investigations were organized priorly through the Diocesan Director of Communications, Rev Fr Joseph Offor who encouraged the parishioners and key management to cooperate by indicating their areas of concern about the paper. The advantage of this in-depth research is its exploratory nature that provides more information than quantitative approach. In qualitative method, there are emphasis on constructive meaning, explanations and perceptions. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were organized with the Diocesan Director of Communications, some members of staff of the paper and finally a cross section of 50 customers, randomly selected. The interviews were carried out in the most honest, free and standardized manner allowing interviewees to answer the questions without bias or intimidation.

All the interviews were done in 3 weeks and each lasted approximately one hour via an enabled
international call service provider with a reduced price for subscribers.

**Data Analysis**
The investigative information collected were summarized and recorded by the researchers both in oral and written form. The interviews were made into parts with a specific theme. Interpretative and evaluation of results of the research are presented, followed by a discussion.

**The Outcome of the research**
The results were based on individual opinions, knowledge, and experiences about the newspaper. This section therefore presents the results of the interviews starting first with the management.

**Opinions of the Management**
*The Flame* is mandated by the Church to produce a marketable newspaper that will offer great services and quality productions to consumers, however, it lacks basic infrastructures and financial base to achieve the above. All the staff interviewed pointed out the need for a standard offices to be equipped in both human and material resources in order to be unique in style and be able to promote its individuality in the competition. They stated most of the problems and challenges of the print media as follows:

- Lack of facilities, such as vehicles, steady supply of energy, and enough trained staff.
- Lack of budgetary policies, therefore the paper is expected to survive on its own
- The challenges posed by competing papers that have printing machines and other necessary infrastructures.
- The staff works hard but without adequate remunerations from the management.
- Most of the clergy and elite in the lay organizations show grave apathy to the paper; as a result out of 2000 copies produced on a bi-weekly basis only 1200 copies are sold.
- Therefore, for the paper to be revitalized it must have strong attractive characteristics or personalities that can make it stand out among others.

Religious papers with the intent to survive market competition have to develop their own niche strategies in order to meet their “customers’ changing preferences if the diocese provides the office with a budget.

Consequently, the data generated accepted that a good site and aesthetic attributes add to competitive advantage in the market. Accordingly, the paper must gain popularity and return on investment through perceived equity, consistency and cost leadership.

Another interesting point that may help revitalize the paper according to the IMC program is to bring back *Flame's* memorable past reputation. This was an ecclesiastical print that was instrumental to bringing a democratic culture to Nigeria in general through critical writings targeted at dictators and their agents.

As the world has become a global village through the wonders of technology, religious papers must move with the trend vigorously. Accordingly, since the youths are moving away from traditional media to the internet and social media platforms, *The Flame* should be provided with a strong website and mobile marketing programs to attract the young and marketers to their online catechetical teachings through blogging, discussions and forums. By engaging them online, they will get more knowledge about the paper and their services and through word-of-mouth become their apostles or ambassadors.

The respondents, explained how consumption trends are changing, and youths are mostly hooked unto their preferred social networking sites for hours each day engaging their cherished hardware or mobile phones. They were of the opinion that *The Flame* should try to direct them to their websites with interesting spiritual, moral and scientific discoveries, movies, games and rewarding online competitions. So in the future they will build strong presence in those enabling sites in order to attract young people who are mostly students and low income earners.

**Marketing creativity**
This section dwells on the firm's future marketing creativity that will help drive sales to their financial base. Data generated explained that well branded newspaper should engage in ongoing promotional strategy in order to expand its unique selling points. *The Flame* can do this by providing the needs of consumers, which include products and services based on quality, credibility, affordability and consistency. *The Flame* can also attract prospective consumers through well-furnished offices, sign posts, billboards and radio jingles, well packages papers and posters.

Apart from these, they will engage in internet advertisements not only to attract prospective customers via social networking but also to get useful feedback from their collaborative relationships. This is also important because such websites and social networking pages are promotional and convey and create social and economic bonds with customers. *The Flame* office needs to be financed by the hierarchy of the diocese if they want to meet up with its mission statements as well as consumers' requirements in good papers. Since they do not have budget both for their advertising and productions, *The Flame* survives via church announcements and from little gains that accrue through sales.

Sometimes, many priests who are in control of these parishes, their only major outlets for the survival of the paper disallow either sales or advertising of the paper in their churches, and this attitude is one of the most
critical obstacles to the paper. However, it was argued that any revitalization plan without the active collaboration of the hierarchy and the clergy, would not generate the desired promotional success.

When the management were asked which of the promotional strategies they would prefer if the diocese gives them a budget of about N5 million, all the respondents/management listed the five IMC programs but laid much emphasis on the radio, internet and mobile marketing due to their mass influence on the masses. For example, almost every family and adult has a radio while millions of Nigerian youths engage in internet and mobile activities. Such sites are very essential to build strong and committed relationships with potential consumers who as apostles can promote the paper's values via powerful blogging and buzz. Therefore maintaining vibrant sites would give important information about their products and services. Respondents agreed that they need to establish those major platforms in order to re-brand and position the paper in a competitive manner.

Finally, on how to position the paper, they all agreed on the following points:

- The office needs infrastructural development, such as printing machines, standby generator due to challenges in energy crisis
- Every parish must be entitled to a number of copies of the paper depending on their numerical strength and purchasing power
- Workers' entitlements need to be addressed as they are not happy with the little packages they are offered
- They want to extend their services and products beyond the frontiers of Enugu diocese as other brands are currently doing
- They also want a budgetary policy that will help them reduce their price of paper and establish an effective network of paid distributors who will be dedicated and accountable
- They want strong and effective websites and social media platforms for online catechesis and business
- They believe that well-trained personnel in media courses will help in the plan of revitalization
- They also believe that with a realistic budget that they will engage in communication and promotional efforts that will bring more awareness and profitability to the paper
- They called on the Church authority to appoint some educated priests and seminarians to form a board of directors to help in the management as well, contribute their expertise to the quality of the paper.
- They also prefer mergers and alliances with all the diocesan publications that are one threat to the paper.
- A road to growth can be realized through unification of all the diocesan publications with the The Flame under the leadership of the Director of the Communications Commission.
- Finally, the revitalization of the paper can also be achieved via a well-coordinated IMC promotional plan to be organized by the board of directors and the Communications Commission office.

Discussion and Analysis

The investigation has achieved a better comprehension of the process through which church newspapers in Enugu and its environs are perceived and portrayed, and how The Flame as main concern can be revitalized to cope with the needs of prospective consumers. The following below indicate the ratings of the three major papers in the competition by consumers interviewed.

Consumers' perception of the three major Church Newspapers in 2011 and 2012

From the interviews conducted among the customers across the three dioceses, the above figures represent the percentage of ratings according each paper's levels of awareness, value and availability. The Leader Newspaper was rated as the most circulated church paper in all the dioceses under review from 2011 to 2012. Among the 50 parishioners interviewed, the paper's awareness levels in 2011 were 45% and had an increase of 4% growth in 2012. Secondly, Trinitas' perceived awareness among the consumers in 2011 was 25% and in 2012 it increased to 26%. This shows 1% increase in awareness between 2011 and 2012. Finally, The Flame's awareness growth had 5% in 2011, and in 2012 fell to 4% and this was an indicator of inconsistency, backwardness and need to be re-positioned.

Interviews conducted, in which 50 respondents contributed what values they think The Flame should uphold in order to be revitalized and remain strong in the competition. The results showed that “quality products” and “hierarchical interest” as main factors to determine the papers growth. “Share gains with employees”, “return on investment” and “create awareness” all had a larger majority than employ more staff” (See Figure).
Conclusion

There are many factors that influence customers to buy religious newspapers. The findings of this research indicate that quality, awareness, locations and finance are important when establishing a newspaper. It is not only vital for owners to establish big budget but the employment of qualified personnel, distribution networks and employee welfare. The Flame is located in a nice setting inside the cathedral city of Enugu which allows customers and visitors to engage in buying process. Also the close proximity to the Ogbete main market and many tertiary institutions also provide opportunities to patronize them via paid ads or purchases. These factors are important when choosing a church newspaper. Also using all the six deaneries of the diocese as outlets is an important part of the distribution and sales and The Flame needs means to attract more customers by bringing the papers to the parishioners doorsteps. Many church papers are influenced by the amount of financial involvement, sponsorships and grants when targeting their consumers in their different locations/parishes. It is necessary for The Flame/diocese to consider this factor when marketing their products and programs to prospective consumers. Nice and attractive papers are drivers to sales. Also well equipped offices with media gadgets, vehicles and qualified staff could also enhance the attributes of the paper for a higher consumption rate.

It is important that The Flame accommodates the needs of customers via attractive, consistent and low cost strategies which can be tools for consumer's choosing the paper. The Flame can offer a variety of quality and interesting news, catechesis and lifestyle articles, cultural and theological issues that help consumers get satisfaction. The Flame could allow customers collaborate in their productions through well researched articles, blogging in their websites, instead of doing all by one or two persons in their office. This would create positive reactions among buyers. Prospective buyers will be influenced and may want to become loyal consumers because The Flame management now offers more interesting news, articles, via internet marketing and social media interactions with the public.

The research found buzz (word-of-mouth) being imperative medium to promote The Flame. The failure of The Flame to have a strong presence in the internet and social media, has negative impact on the paper. Getting engaged with the stakeholders or community will create goodwill, social value and enhance its image and identity. Also providing consumers with online games, coupons, rewards will help them to spread further the word about their organisation and products. Rather than becoming “devils”, they will become “apostles” of The Flame Good News.

Recommendations

1. The paper should engage in consistent promotional efforts that will focus on the consumers and their needs through innovative product and services that can satisfy their unique goal or motives.
2. In other to target effectively their male and female urban and rural segments: There has to be a budgeting policy. It must engage both traditional and internet marketing tools to achieve their mission statements, business philosophy and vision.
3. The lacuna between The Flame organization and the church hierarchy need to be closed, as cordial relationship, understanding and collaborative involvement will build a stronger bond between them, and by extension, the consumers.
4. To get better insight about consumers' motives, more research can be done, this will give better indication whether there needs to be change in certain practices for more innovative ones.
5. In addition, survey research should be carried out when the Organization begins it promotional programs to study the effectiveness of promotional efforts in customer services and return on investment.
6. We need to use a variety of advertising media platforms to support our public relations and sales promotion themes of the medium.
7. In order to bring about return on investment and brand popularity, there must be increase in customers' high level involvement density and creation of beneficial bonds and affinity with them, since highly involved customers are more likely to remain loyal and engage in a long but profitable relationship with the newspaper.
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