Clients' Participation in the Marketing of Quantity Surveyors' Professional Activities

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ABSTRACT

The quantity surveyors' roles in executing infrastructure development has expanded from cost management to other professional activities which include managing project risks, project planning, facilities, economic, commercial, and legal framework. Despite the expansion, quantity surveyors' services are not fully utilised in these areas. Most clients are concerned with achieving their project expectations using professional services mainly other sister professions. Marketing is an effective tool to link clients or customers to understand and accept the value of quantity surveyors' professional services. Previous studies have investigated the marketing strategies as it relates to practising quantity surveyors but failed to consider the importance of clients' participation in selecting effective marketing strategies. The paper assesses the influence of clients' participation in the selection of marketing strategies for quantity surveying profession services. Using quantitative questionnaire survey, data from potential clients and consultant quantity surveyors in Rivers State were analysed with the help of inferential and descriptive statistics which include Kruskal-Wallis test, as well as, Pearson correlation. The research findings reveal marketing research, marketing planning, and marketing intelligence as the most influential marketing strategies. The study further reveals that assurance, reliability, and responsiveness as the most significant dimensions of quality service in selecting a service provider. The paper recommends that practising quantity surveyors should adopt the three significant dimensions of quality service for effective marketing of their services to potential clients.

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Introduction

Over the years, quantity surveying practices have revolved around procurement and cost management where their services include preparation of tender documents, tender appraisals, valuation reports, and final accounts. The evolution of technology and increasing demand of best practices have propelled quantity surveying profession to diversify into other activities with a focus on project risks, project planning, facilities, economic, commercial, and legal framework. Quantity surveyors operate in an extremely competitive market, which require more effective marketing and business development strategies. Marketing is considered as a cornerstone for servicing the needs of clients and customers. Clients, as the end users, set their expectations for any desired services. It is important to note their values can change over time, and this requires more innovative ways to develop business relationships with clients or customers so as to meet their needs. Emphasises that marketing of professional services is a continuous ongoing process of communicating with end users to develop business ties [1-3].

The quality and professionalism of marketing will influence the client to prefer the services of a particular organisation over others. Proper understanding of clients' expectations and where their priority lies will result in profitable marketing. In order to achieve profitable marketing, the potential clients or customers stand in the right position to be asked on how to meet their expectations. Marketing of quantity surveying has attracted several scholars from different countries, such as Malaysia, South Africa, and Singapore.

Similar studies have been conducted in Nigeria also to investigate the marketing of quantity surveying services [4-9]. These have failed to consider the importance of clients' participation in selecting effective marketing strategies. The survival of any profession depends mostly on the clients or customers, therefore there is a need to have effective marketing strategies that can compel consumers to utilise the professional services of quantity surveyors. To bridge this gap, the study assesses the influence of clients' participation in the selection of marketing strategies for quantity surveying profession services. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are considered: (a) to identify the clients' dimensions of quality service and quantity surveying professional services, and (b) to evaluate the relationships between dimensions of quality service and marketing strategies.

Literature review

Application of marketing strategies

Marketing in the professional services industry is less developed when compared to the role of marketing in the consumer goods industry. Although professional services industry is one of the largest and most diverse sector of modern economies, marketing has attracted little attention among professionals. Most of them believed that good work will always sell your services that may be true, but reaching out to the end users in a highly competitive market will require more than just a good work. The earlier perception of marketing within the construction industry that it is unprofessional since it's just responding to clients' needs, has created a loophole in the mind-sets of construction professionals

[10-12]. Recently, many professional bodies have adopted this concept to create professional codes of ethics that has limited the marketing of services. It is important to note that construction professionals were few in the earlier days, where clients or customers can easily reach out for their services. In this highly competitive market structure, there is a need for professionals to promote themselves proactively in the relentless search for business opportunities.

Marketing is a tool that has the potential of increasing sales. As previously stated, marketing of professional services requires a continuous ongoing process, therefore it helps to find new and sustain old consumers, and also create long-term business relations. Construction marketing is paramount because loss of a single sale can create direct and significant financial impact on a firm. Specific marketing strategies are identified as marketing research, marketing planning, advertising, public relations, in-house marketing education, and marketing intelligence [13]. These specific marketing strategies are further discussed as:

Marketing Research

It is a process of reviewing the marketing environment that is the market, customers, competitors, and the macro-environment to find out which areas to improve and how to have competitive edge over others [14].

Marketing Planning

It involves creating business plan of a product or service to target potential clients or consumers. It involves identifying target markets, specifying marketing objectives, ensuring the integration of all marketing activities and assisting in the creation of programme for succeeding in the market place [15].

Advertising

It provides a platform to communicate through media about products, services, ideas paid for by an identified sponsor [17].

Public Relations

It is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public [18].

In-House Marketing Education

It involves marketing education conducted within the same business environment, such as conferences and workshops.

Marketing Intelligence

It involves a set of procedures and sources used by marketers to get their daily information on relevant developments in the environment which they operate [18].

Marketing of Quantity Surveyors' professional services

In most countries, quantity surveying practices are governed by professional bodies. Each professional body makes its own moral principles or codes to govern the conduct of its members. Quantity surveying profession in the United Kingdom is being encouraged by certain codes to promote marketing of their professional activities [19]. Similarly, since year 1985, the South African Council of Quantity Surveying Profession (SACQSP) has lifted certain codes to permit marketing as long as such activities are professional, not self-laudatory, and does not praise one practice above others [6]. In Malaysia, strict rules associated with advertising and sales promotion of quantity surveying services are put in place to refrain them from canvassing for business in

an unprofessional atmosphere. Members of Canadian Institute of Quantity Surveyors are mandated to advertise or promote their services in a manner that is not injurious to the public or to the dignity of the profession. In Nigeria, certain marketing-related provisions are made by Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors to allow practicing firms to promote their services in modest ways [20,21]. Their codes of conduct does not forbid profitable marketing especially in Nigeria, they are to regulate honesty and dignity in quantity surveying practices.

Ling (2014) stipulates that poor marketing has become a major threat to quantity surveying profession. The expansion of quantity surveying professional activities, from traditional technical skills to more sophisticated management of infrastructure developments, has created new skills that potential clients may not be aware of. Therefore, marketing has remained a tool that has the potential to sale the new skills to clients. The concern of quantity surveyors to achieve value and enhance productivity has diversify their professional services. The literature review revealed the principal professional services of quantity surveyors as cost planning, tendering, life cycle costing, valuation of construction work, preliminary cost advice, procurement methods, contractual advice, cost control and financial management, value management, facilities management, and insurance advice [22,23,24,25].

Clients' Priorities in the Utilisation of Products and Services

Expectations vary from industry to industry, and also from one client to another. Clients or customers hold explicit and implicit performance expectations for attributes, features, benefits of products and services. Understanding of clients' expectations enables the service provider, not only to get business opportunity, but also provide superior service to their clients. Service is praised or criticised because of expectations, if service meets expectations, it is doing what's expected. Therefore, for service to be praised, it must not only meet but exceed expectations. This will drastically increase the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing of such service. It costs more to acquire a new consumer than it does to repeat a sale with an existing consumer. Most organizations, however, struggle to manage clients' expectations and there is a danger of a gap being created in what is expected by management and what actually happens on the front line, a struggle between quality service and productivity [26,27]. In the construction sector, marketing has not been maximized effectively to improve business opportunities, likewise the recruiting of marketing professionals is not considered important [10].

Clients or customers are not generic, and therefore it is required that service providers should go out there, recognize their priorities and respond flexibility to them. The extensive research conducted by [26] has remained the fountainhead in customer service quality research. The study developed five dimensions customer use when evaluating quality service that is named SERVQUAL. These dimensions are:

- Reliability- Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;
- Tangibles- Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials;
- Responsiveness- The willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
- Assurance- Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence; and
- Empathy- The caring, individualized attention provided to the customer.

Research Methodology

Questionnaire Design

As previously stated, the study assesses the influence of clients' participation in the selection of marketing strategies for quantity surveying profession services. To achieve the research aim, data were collected using quantitative questionnaire survey. A pilot study was conducted using a draft copy of questionnaire to evaluate the feasibility and statistical variability of the study so as to predict an appropriate sample size and improve study design. Stipulates that the sample size of a pilot study should be 10 percent of the projected for the larger parent study [28]. Based on this suggestion, a total number of 5 practitioners including project participants and experts in the field were selected for pilot study. The content validity was carried out to ensure that questions are clear, relevant and free of any ambiguity, as suggested if a good response rate is to be achieved. The questionnaire was revised based on the outcome of content validity process and returned back to the pilot study team for final approval.

Characteristics of respondents

The research was carried out in Rivers State, which is an oil-rich and sixth most populous state in Nigeria. Due to the nature of research, the study population includes potential clients and consultant quantity surveyors who are self-practising, not quantity surveyors who are paid for employment. The research is focused on evaluating clients' responses on their priorities/expectations in the marketing of quantity surveying profession. This study also considers that it's important to compare responses from both respondents in order to provide a link. To achieve this, purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. A number of 23 potential clients and 15 consultant quantity surveyors were selected for the field survey. Questionnaires were distributed by hand and each respondent was given three weeks to complete. Additional one week extension was given to respondents. Out of 35 distributed, a number of 33 questionnaires were returned and the valid responses were 32 including 20 potential clients and 12 consultant quantity surveyors. The field survey was carried from June to July, 2017, the response rate is 94 percentage and it considered acceptable based on the suggestion of [29].

Variables and Measures

Using the six marketing strategies highlighted, the respondents were asked to use a 5 Likert scale to rank these strategies based on their responsiveness to the marketing of quantity surveying profession services [13]. The scale is represented as: 1 = Not influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 4 = Influential; 5 = Highly influential. A number of eleven principal professional services of quantity surveyors were identified from the literature review, the potential clients were asked to select services procured through quantity surveying professionals in the last five years. Consultant quantity surveyors (CQS) were asked to select the services that they have rendered to the clients in last five years. Five dimensions of quality service (SERVQUAL) as stipulated were used to measure the expectations of potential clients from their service providers (CQS) [26]. The respondents were asked to rank their responses using 5 Likert scale and it is represented as: 1 = Not important; 2 = Slightly important; 3 = Moderately important; 4 = Important; 5 = Highly important.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected were analysed using IBM SPSS 22 to determine frequency counts, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, Kruskal-Wallis test, and Pearson correlation. Table 1 reveals the profile of respondents, the analysis of years of experience shows that 47 percent of respondents have between 11 to 25 years of

work experience, 25 percent of respondents have between 26 to 50 years of work experience, 22 percent of respondents have between 5 to 10 years of work experience, only 6 percent of respondents have above 50 years of work experience. The analysis of number of projects participated by respondents reveals that 37 percent of respondents had participated in more than 15 projects while 32 percent of respondents had participated in number of projects ranging from 6 to 10. This implies that a high number of them have ample experience that are relevant to achieve the objectives of study. In terms of academic qualifications, 78 percent of respondents have obtained tertiary education certificates while 16 percent have post graduate certificates.

Table 2 reveals the influence of marketing strategies on the marketing of professional services. From the clients' responses, the highest ranked marketing strategy is "marketing research" with a mean score of 4.680 followed by "marketing intelligence" with a mean score of 4.435. The third ranked is "marketing planning" with a mean score of 4.234. From the CQS, the highest ranked is "marketing research" with a mean score of 4.877 followed by "marketing planning" with a mean score of 4.349, and the third ranked is "marketing intelligence" with a mean score of 4.349. The overall result reveals "marketing research" as the highest ranked with an average mean score of 4.779 and standard deviation of 0.782 followed by "marketing planning" with an average mean score of 4.401 and standard deviation of 0.889. "Marketing intelligence" is the third ranked with an average mean score of 4.392 and standard deviation of 0.896. The least ranked is "advertising" with an average mean score of 3.636 and standard deviation of 0.799.

The analysis of clients' responses based on dimensions of quality service in selecting a service provider reveals that "assurance" is ranked highest with a mean score of 4.980 and standard deviation of 0.785 (see Table 3). The second highest ranked is "reliability" with a mean score of 4.867 and standard deviation of 0.803 and the third ranked is "responsiveness" with a mean score of 4.790 and standard deviation of 1.039. The overall Cronbach's alpha score of all five items is 0.898, it is considered acceptable in line with the rule of thumb as stipulated. Kruskal-Wallis test is a rank-based non-parametric test used to determine if there are statistically significant difference between two or more independent groups in distributions that are not normally distributed. This is used in this study to determine the difference between groups, in terms of type of organisation and years of experience, in assessing marketing strategies and the results are presented in Table 4. Based on chi-square distribution, the decision rule for Kruskal-Wallis test statistic is that null hypothesis is accepted if the significant level presented as asymptotic significance is greater than 0.05. Where it is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is accepted while null hypothesis is rejected. Although there is no hypothesis testing in this study, Kruskal-Wallis test is used in this study to determine if type of organisation and years of experience can significantly influence the marketing strategies. In type of organisation, 5 of the 6 strategies are significantly influenced by type of organisation while "advertising" is not significantly influenced. From the years of experience, all the 6 strategies are significantly influenced by years of experience.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength and direction of association between independent variables. In the study conducted, results of Pearson correlation analysis were interpreted based on strength and direction. The strength is based on the following ranges: 0.1 to 0.3 or -0.1 to -0.3 (weak strength of association); 0.3 to 0.5 or

-0.3 to -0.5 (medium strength of association); and 0.5 to 1.0 or -0.5 to -1.0 (high strength of association). The significant level is deemed acceptable when it is less than 0.05 (5% level of significant difference). For the direction, a value greater than 0 indicates positive associations while a value less than 0 indicates negative associations. Table 5 reveals the Pearson correlation coefficients of dimensions of quality service against marketing strategies. The results show that all items have significant levels less than 0.05, the analysis further reveals that both independent variables have either high or medium strength of association except advertising that has a weak association with reliability. The analysis of quantity surveying professional services procured or rendered in the last five years reveals that all respondents have either procured or rendered the services of quantity surveyors for tendering, preliminary cost advice, and valuations of construction work. From the clients' responses, 80 percent have procured their services in contractual advice, 90 percent have procured in cost planning, 75 percent have procured in cost control and financial management while other services have not been utilized by them. From the CQS, 100 percent have rendered their services in contractual advice, 67 percent have rendered in cost control and financial planning, 66 percent have rendered in cost planning, 42 percent have rendered in procurement methods, 2 percent have rendered in insurance advice, while they have not participated in other services.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Demographic information	Client	Consultant QS	F	%
Years of experience				
5-10 years	3	4	7	22
11-25 years	8	7	15	47
26-50 years	7	1	8	25
Above 50 years	2	-	2	6
Total	20	12	32	100
Number of participated projects in the last five years				
1-5	-	4	4	13
6-10	5	5	10	32
11-15	3	3	6	18
Above 15	12	-	12	37
Total	20	12	32	100
Qualifications				
Diploma certificates	2	-	2	6
Tertiary education certificates	15	10	25	78
Post graduate certificates	3	2	5	16
Total	20	12	32	100

F = Frequency count; % = Percentage

Table 2: Influence of Marketing Strategies on the Marketing of Professional Services

Marketing strategies	Clients	R	CQS	R	Av. mean	R	SD	p-value
Market research	4.680	1	4.877	1	4.779	1	0.782	<0.05
Marketing planning	4.234	3	4.567	2	4.401	2	0.889	<0.05
Advertising	3.583	6	3.688	6	3.636	6	0.799	<0.05
Public relations	4.042	4	4.234	4	4.138	4	0.890	<0.05
In-house marketing education	3.984	5	3.798	5	3.891	5	0.903	<0.05
Marketing intelligence	4.435	2	4.349	3	4.392	3	0.896	<0.05

CQS = Consultant Quantity Surveyors; Av. Mean = Average mean, R = Rank; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 3: How Will You Consider These Dimensions In Selecting A Service Provider?

Dimensions of quality service		Mean	SD	Rank	α
Items	Variables				0.898
Reliability	Ability to perform desired service accurately	4.867	0.803	2	
Tangibles	Availability of physical facilities, personnel & equipment	4.599	0.995	5	
Responsiveness	Willingness to provide prompt service	4.790	1.039	3	
Assurance	Ability to convey trust and confidence	4.980	0.785	1	

Empathy	Caring and sensitivity to consumers' needs	4.680	0.796	4	
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Table 4: Results of Kruskal-Wallis Test on Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategies	Job description		Years of experience	
	X2	p-value	X2	p-value
Marketing research	21.265	0.000x	35.865	0.000x
Marketing planning	17.578	0.000x	27.112	0.000x
Advertising	0.739	0.694	8.389	0.001x
Public relations	8.988	0.000x	16.595	0.001x
In-house marketing education	24.411	0.000x	32.796	0.000x
Marketing intelligence	7.398	0.000x	23.173	23.173

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients of Dimensions of Quality Service and Marketing Strategies

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Reliability	1.000										
2 Tangibles	0.463* 0.000	1.000									
3 Responsiveness	0.605* 0.000	0.536* 0.012	1.000								
4 Assurance	0.526* 0.000	0.517* 0.000	0.507* 0.000	1.000							
5 Empathy	0.519* 0.000	0.408* 0.000	0.645* 0.007	0.587* 0.000	1.000						
6 Marketing research	0.534* 0.001	0.526* 0.005	0.508* 0.005	0.624* 0.004	0.607* 0.000	1.000					
7 Marketing planning	0.604* 0.000	0.514* 0.000	0.549* 0.006	0.593* 0.000	0.568* 0.000	0.546* 0.004	1.000				
8 Advertising	0.246 0.249	0.407* 0.000	0.328* 0.000	0.364* 0.000	0.408* 0.000	0.305* 0.005	0.334* 0.000	1.000			
9 Public relations	0.546* 0.000	0.506* 0.000	0.563* 0.003	0.657* 0.000	0.592* 0.000	0.545* 0.002	0.571* 0.000	0.589* 0.000	1.000		
10 In-house marketing education	0.577* 0.000	0.538* 0.000	0.535* 0.000	0.562* 0.000	0.532* 0.000	0.562* 0.000	0.542* 0.000	0.527* 0.000	0.658* 0.000	1.000	
11 Marketing intelligence	0.588* 0.000	0.512* 0.000	0.601* 0.000	0.622* 0.000	0.589* 0.000	0.524* 0.000	0.521* 0.000	0.677* 0.000	0.569* 0.000	0.551* 0.000	1.000

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 (2 tailed)

Table 6: Quantity Surveying Professional Services Procured or Rendered In the Last Five Years

QS Principal professional services	CQS	%	Clients	%	Total
Tendering	12	100	20	100	32
Contractual advice	12	100	16	80	28
Cost planning	8	66	18	90	26
Life cycle costing	-	0	-	0	-
Value management	-	0	-	0	-
Facilities management	-	0	-	0	-
Preliminary cost advice	12	100	20	100	32
Procurement methods	5	42	2	10	7
Valuation of construction work	12	100	20	100	32
Cost control and financial management	8	67	15	75	23
Insurance advice	2	6	-	0	2

Discussion

The findings from the influence of marketing strategies on the marketing of professional services reveal that majority of respondents (clients and CQS) ranked marketing research as the first. [30] Described marketing research as focusing your marketing strategy on potential consumers that want your products or services. The second highest ranked is marketing planning followed by marketing intelligence as the third highest ranked. Their individual responses reveal that both clients and CQS agreed that market research has the highest influence on the marketing of professional services. Further analysis on the effect of type of organisation and years of experience in selecting a marketing strategy reveals that type of organisation and years of experience can significantly influence the type of marketing strategies to adopt except advertising, which is not influenced by the type of organisation. This provides the need to go there and meet the potential clients and ask for their expectations. This is in line with the selecting of marketing research as the highest ranking marketing strategy.

The clients' responses on the use of dimensions of quality service in selecting a service provider reveal that assurance is considered as the highest priority followed by reliability as the second priority and the third priority is responsiveness. This in line the study conducted by [31] where assurance, empathy, and responsiveness were identified as the most significant quality service dimensions that influence customers' satisfaction in telecommunication usage in Malaysia. In this study, most potential clients agreed that assurance is essential to boost their confidence on the service provider. A service provider may be highly skilled and the potential clients may not see that, therefore it is necessary to communicate his or her expertise and competency before doing the work. Most clients value reliability, that's being able to count on the service provider to deliver their expectations. Responsiveness is considered as a priority by most clients, where they believed that the service provider should respond quickly to their requests.

The research findings from the relationship between dimensions of quality service and marketing strategies reveal that there exist both high and medium strength of association among independent variables except advertising that has a weak association with reliability. The findings from the quantity surveying professional services procured or rendered in the last five years, reveal that quantity surveyors have obtained above 50 percent utilization in areas such as tendering, contractual services, cost planning, preliminary cost advice, valuation of construction work. Their services have not been fully maximized in areas such as life cycle costing, value management, facilities management, procurement methods, cost control and financial management, and insurance advice.

Conclusions

The paper focuses on assessing the influence of clients' participation in the selection of marketing strategies for quantity surveying profession services. Literature review uncovers the five dimensions of quality service (SERVQUAL), which has remained the fountainhead in customer service quality research. Six specific marketing strategies were identified and principal professional services of quantity surveyors. The study reveals marketing research, marketing planning, and marketing intelligence as the three highly influential marketing strategies for marketing of professional services. The most significant dimensions of quality service that influence clients' expectation from service providers were identified as assurance, reliability, and responsiveness. The

study further reveals that there exist correlation between marketing strategies and dimensions of quality services. This implies that focusing on dimensions of quality services can propel effective marketing strategies. The paper concludes that the services of quantity surveyors have not be fully utilised in some areas. Therefore, it is recommended that practising CQS should develop the culture of assurance, reliability, and responsiveness to market their services effectively to their potential clients.

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