MARKETING AND 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES: THE NEED FOR CURRICULA REVIEW

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Abstract

Marketing had over the years served the dominant function of bridging the gap between production and consumption through a conceptualized, well structured programme of academic instructions. The dominant logic has been a model of exchange, but today new perspectives have emerged with a revised logic focused on the exchange but through technical and conceptual blending of marketing skills. The authors believed that the new perspectives are converging to present a challenge to marketing scholars, practitioners and marketing educators in fostering scholarly enquiry into the academic programme of universities and indeed determine its ability to meet the 21st century challenges in the global marketplace. It is our fervent hope that this will help our universities particularly of the developing and third world economies in the updating of their marketing curricula so that marketing graduates will be better prepared for many of the jobs available in this 21st century; and approach them with sophistication. This in a way is to catch up with global best practices. Therefore, moving to a technology orientation which this paper recommends clearly implies significant shift in focus and integration of syllabi.

Keywords: Marketing, technology, curricula, integration

Introduction

For the past few decades, there has been a growing tide of literature on the question of the future of marketing (see for example; Davis, 1993; Mitchell, 1994; Coopers and Lybrand, 1993 and Brady and Davis, 1993). Essentially these scholars have been concerned with whether the “traditional marketing theory and practice” will be appropriate for the conditions and challenges that now prevail in the 21st century. Galliven et-al (2004); Taylor 2003; and Davis et-al (2004) had since recognized that there have been some radical changes in the marketing environment but that the basic principles of marketing theory will still apply – that is the focus of the business on the satisfaction of customers needs, but argued further that the way and manner in which marketing is taught and practiced may need to change fundamentally owing to such issues like globalization and technological advances (kotler, 1994; Stalk and Hout, 1990).

The most significant change to impact marketing has been the growth of globalization. The 21st century has certain characteristics which mark it as being significantly different.

However, it must be noted that the primary objective in marketing training is the preparation of graduates that will be productive performers in business and organizations; but unfortunately, it appears that marketing curricula have been slow in adjusting to meet the challenges of technological developments in the teaching and practice of marketing. For example; Teer, Teer and Kruck (2007) observed that only 15.1% of the sampled institutions accredited by Association to Advance collegiate schools of Business (AACSB) offered a data base marketing course in the business schools. This situation is however not different in Nigeria. According to AACSB (2002) employers demand graduates who are prepared to have leverage technology in a scalable fashion to advance a firm’s marketing strategies and operations.

While the interest in and concern over technological marketing education appears to be growing (see for example; Davis et-al 2002; Gallivan, et-al 2004; and
Taylor, 2003), there seems to be little scholarly analysis of the structure and content of the curricula by which marketing graduates are produced. Universities, the world over are described as citadel of learning where excellence and best practices are designed to produce students with the requisite knowledge and skills for them to perform a useful function within the society. The need for curricula modification is also demonstrated by the professional school model articulated by Schibrowsky et-al (2002) who advocated for the blending of theoretical marketing knowledge with the skills needed for the job; and draws an analogy that marketing graduates who are not familiar with recent technologies are like medical doctors who do not know the applications of a new medical technology and medications.

Harraway and Barker (2005) in their Survey of business graduates and their job requirements discovered large discrepancies between what is taught at the university level and what is practiced at work; and specifically point to insufficient preparation of graduates for the emerging job challenges. It is against this background that this paper attempts to provoke scholarly efforts particularly at the university level to pay closer attention to employer requirements as they develop and revise marketing curricula.

The issues

Technological driven marketing practice has aroused significant interest among employers and academics alike. The ubiquity of marketing courses in both universities and polytechnics in Nigeria, suggest the importance of marketing to global economic performance. But how far are the marketing graduates able to meet current marketing challenges remains an unanswered question. If marketing is a meaningful profession to the society, then it should be supported by the requirements of the contemporary society vis-à-vis technology in the curriculum.

Some scholars argue that research is needed to demonstrate the effectiveness and need for technological courses in marketing, (Taylor, 2003; Schlee and Harich, 2010). Again while this is probably an honest concern for some scholars, others are not still sufficiently convinced by the evidence. If these scholars were interested in marketing technology topics, they would be publishing a significant quantity of articles on technological marketing which would be spawning additional research. Yet, in the premier Journal of marketing education, between the period 2000-2012, less than 5% of the published articles were on the subject of marketing technology (Berman, 2009; Zumbrum, 2008). Such a low figure is a demonstration of a lack interest in technology driven marketing by the academic community and supports Hansen and Hansen (2009) earlier report that the academic community significantly play down on the concerns and realities confronted by practicing marketing professionals today. Helyar (2005) and Hansen and Hansen (2009) had noted that a discipline specific technology course in marketing is essential to the education and training of students preparing for the profession. Within such a course, marketing students should be exposed to real life dilemmas that capture the complexities and technicalities they will likely confront in the course of their profession.

Technology and marketing are inextricably related, the challenge being to integrate reasonable technological content into the curriculum. In a survey of marketing programmes in Nigerian universities, Adekunle (2008) indicated that only one-third included basic computer studies in their first or second year courses. Thus, the growth of globalization underscore that ignoring technology in marketing should no longer be an option. In 2002, the Association to advance collegiate schools of Business recommended that technical standards be an integral part of marketing education. Similarly, Atlanta Business Chronicle (2008) had called for greater emphasis and inclusion of computer training in every business and marketing course. Accordingly, Barr and McNeilly (2002) recommended that marketing education should focus more on conceptual and technical training.

Despite this significant agreement among scholars that technological training should be an integral part of marketing education; implementation has not always been very successful in Nigeria. Several surveys conducted found little integration of technological components into the marketing curriculum. A recent survey by Mimiko (2009) found that only 12% of the institutions in Nigeria offered courses in technology related courses. Even the few that offered did not provide adequate coverage to include basic programming skills. Lawal (2006)
reported that the average time covering technology training in marketing course was just three hours per week. A review of universities websites and curricula of marketing programmes in Nigerian universities by Edmond (2008) revealed that new courses are being introduced like corporate governance, relationship marketing, entrepreneurial marketing etc, without sufficient inclusion of technological courses. But despite this neglect, many studies have concluded that technology education does have a positive impact on marketing practice (Berman, 2009; Arora and Stoner, 1992; Sodhi and Son, 2008; Schibrowsky et-al 2002; and Davis, Misra and van-Auken, 2002). Thus, despite evidence that technological education can improve marketing skills, many marketing programmes continue to avoid teaching technological courses. Therefore, considering the current business climate today, marketing scholars and educators can no longer continue this inertia.

Technology driven marketing is more than studying a course in computer, but rather it’s a whole process whereby individuals are made to become more consciously involved in using latest technological skills in their respective profession. Hansen and Hansen (2009) concluded that one of the main goals of technological marketing education is to encourage students to recognize emerging technological developments and apply them within their profession. While Raymond, Carlson and Hopkins (2006) listed the developments of technical skills needed to deal with critical technological uncertainties as key objectives in marketing education. It is therefore disappointing to note that although the average of three credit hours in basic computer course may be acceptable for introductory level; the cumulative average over a four year programme in the university seems to be grossly inadequate. Several courses in technology in both the undergraduate and postgraduate level would ensure adequate coverage and demonstrate its importance. Therefore teaching and stressing the importance of the fundamental skills in computer software, and programming should be part of marketing education. This would produce more awareness of the need for appropriate professional behaviour by marketers and also help to ensure that marketing students graduate with at least some of the expertise they will need to function effectively.

The 21st century marketing in perspective

Several studies have been published in the marketing education literature examining the knowledge and skills required for success in the workplace from the perspective of employers (Barr and Me Neilly, 2002; Davis et-al 2002; Taylor, 2003 and Raymond et-al 2006). Many of these studies document the importance of training in quantitative analysis, Data base Marketing, Internet analytics, e-marketing skills and other technology. Others point at Oral and written Communication and critical thinking skills. The increasing importance of technical skills in marketing has been documented in academic studies but the issue of variations in marketing skills required by employers has not been addressed in the marketing literature. However, as the types of businesses and organizations vary by size and location, it is reasonable to assume that variations in required job skills also exist. Accordingly, Gallivan et-al (2004) categorized marketing skills into two groups: technical skills which refers to knowledge of specific software (Excel, Power-point, SPSS; SAS etc), programming languages such as SQL, Java, Flash, XML etc and meta skills which they described as broad based skill types that are applicable to all jobs in business. Such skills include; Oral and written Communication, team management skills and time management. Thus, they maintained that it is mostly conceptual marketing knowledge that is found in most marketing curricula. The conventional marketing curricula is typical of teaching and training graduates in such areas as: marketing communication, marketing research, advertising, Consumer behaviour, public relations, international marketing, Supply chain management, merchandising etc, with little or limited knowledge of marketing technology. The introduction of marketing technology oriented curricula will require training in such areas as Ms office skills, statistical software, Database analysis, customer relationship management, data mining, internet marketing tools, oral and written communication skills, public speaking and presentation, team / relational and leadership skills, time management, digital field reporting, creative problem solving, statistics and quantitative analysis, ethics, global marketing , operations research etc.

Arora and Stoner (1992) however, advised that marketing graduates of today need to be sharpened in both conceptual, technical and Meta skills for them to function effectively with the 21st century marketing
demands. The traditional, functional or conventional marketing training of yesterday is thought by many to be unable to meet the challenge of today’s volatile and sensitive markets. Instead the Universities imperative is to become pacesetters by responding rapidly to technological changes in the society they serve; and adjust their marketing curricula to break away from tightly constrained marketing training. Indeed, in the new competitive paradigm technological marketing training becomes an essential pre-requisite for success in the labour market (Mitchell, 1994).

Towards a more technological oriented marketing curricula

Despite the few technological oriented courses offered in marketing curricula of only a very few universities in Nigeria, the existing curricula still require the solution of a number of methodological issues and have the need for content review for future teaching and research directions in marketing. Therefore, overcoming the limitations of the current marketing curricula is essential if marketing is to increase its strategic relevance in the 21st century. The proposed technological driven marketing curricula should incorporate, at the minimum, three focal points.

- Development of sound, strategic and operational marketing oriented technological courses like internet computer software and information services etc.
- Examination of the impact of the technological marketing perspective on new concepts and methods within the field of marketing and
- Review of existing curricula based on its impact on corporate performance as well as the economy as a whole.

Altogether, the boundaries of a technological driven marketing programme will be clearly defined for the future challenges. Therefore, incorporating technological concerns in the current marketing curricula of universities would require either a modification of current programmes and methods of course delivery or development of an entirely new curricula and programme of instruction. The content of most marketing courses should be modified or new ones designed to have e-marketing perspective and content.

The incorporation of the technology driven perspective into marketing would involve not only the modification of current or existing programme or the development of new course delivery methods, but also the development of a research programme and interest aimed at assessing the impact of these new orientations on the performance of marketing graduates and of all relevant corporate entities – the business and the larger society. This will help to balance conceptual skills needed to perform specific marketing task, thereby bridging the gap between what is taught at the university level and what is practiced at work.

Implementing the technology driven-marketing curriculum

The success of any programme is determined by the success with which it is implemented. This is also true in the case of amending an existing curriculum. Therefore, implementing the necessary adjustment in the curriculum requires that the universities and its associated agencies agree in order to facilitate its success. Successful implementation of technology driven marketing education requires specific actions on the part of the universities. First, is the identification of respective employers of marketing graduates and their requirements? This will enable the universities to select those employers that they regard as being strategically significant and who they believe can partner together to ensure the success of the proposed programme. These employers have unique labour needs and would want graduates developed to meet these needs. Secondly, is the differentiation of university graduates? This implies that as there are many universities, the only differentiating factor is the quality of its graduates and so the ability of university to produce graduates that will meet the specific needs of the employer is a differentiation strategy. Thirdly, is the importance of interacting with the employers in capacity building efforts through a variety of communication tools and technologies? Such interactions will reveal employers needs, perceptions of our graduates and what is expected of the universities. This is necessary for a sustained relationship. This would involve proactive Communication regarding the university’s marketing programme and quality of its graduates. Finally, is the customization of marketing curriculum in line with employer’s requirements. Customization is necessary to ensure that employer’s needs are met. It requires that the university adapts its curriculum in
marketing in such a way that it has something unique for every employer. The purpose of customization is to increase employers satisfaction with the quality of products turned out by the university.

**Justification for integrating the proposed marketing-technology curriculum**

Indeed, universities need to find a balance between the knowledge and skills that graduates need and the knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively. This suggests that Nigerian universities must remain current in the teaching of business as it requires continuous monitoring of developments and trends in business environment and adapt to improve the business curriculum. This implies that our universities should get information about the skills valued by business organizations to prepare marketable graduates needed by employers. It is hoped that this thesis will help in the updating of marketing curricula so that our marketing graduates are better prepared for many of the jobs available in this century.

Incorporating technology concerns in the current traditional marketing programme of the university would require either modification of content and delivery methods or development of new programme and methods. The marketing curriculum currently in use should be modified or new one designed to develop or incorporate the technological components. The interdependency between marketing and technology has received little attention in the literature. Considering the marketing technology interface for example; much of what is taught in marketing never goes beyond simple introduction to computer science or at most data processing. Marketers are often unaware of the technical consequences of their decisions. Therefore changing the isolatory focus of marketing would require new linkage between marketing and technology. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the web of inter-relationships between marketing and technology requires:

(i) Finding solutions to the inherent barrier between marketing and technological training.
(ii) Developing new marketing curriculum that explicitly incorporate marketing and technological considerations.
(iii) Developing an integrated marketing technology synergy in the design, and training of marketing graduates.
(iv) Developing an integrated strategic framework offering an operational approach to the generation, monitoring and evaluation of marketing strategy alternatives and to offer an agenda for marketing – technology research aimed at increasing relevance of marketing to its users and enhancing the intellectual value of the profession.

**Concluding remarks**

The thrust of this paper is that the present marketing curricula in our university system is in need of extension and needs to be reviewed from time to time and in line with current trends and developments. Underlying these discussions is the view that the traditional marketing curricula may not be as strong in the eyes of the employers as they once were. The concept of technology marketing implies that what makes a good marketer today is the person’s ability to manipulate technological drives amidst marketing skills and that the presence of this skill imparts some utility. There is a strong body of research supporting the idea of technological marketing as a source of value to employers.

Nigerian universities must understand that like in any other organization, they are in a competitive market attempting to sell their products to the same customers who have wider options to select from. What makes the whole difference is their differential advantage which can be reflected in their curriculum development. Tracy and Wiersema (1993) identify three value disciplines which can give competitive advantage to include: operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy. The emerging philosophy of globalization is a reflection of the growing recognition that long term competitive advantage is gained by creating superior value in the market. This transition will require a shift from a conceptual training to Meta-technical training of marketing graduates. The universities that understand this paradigm shift and are prepared to make the change are those that will become the leaders in the increasingly demanding markets we now confront.

The implication of this is that our universities should incorporate more technical courses in the marketing
Such technical courses should among others include; e-marketing, digital field reporting, database management, and various other computer programming languages including analytical skills. What this means is that there is need for ongoing review and training in technical skills as well as in areas of marketing knowledge for marketing graduates to function effectively in the 21st century.

The task of marketing educations therefore, has to be expressed in terms of market value of our graduates. It begins with an understanding of the job requirements by employers; and then it seeks through cross functional curriculum development processes to deliver a labour market driven value through specific content regimentation. The need to find a solution to this is urgent and is a challenge that the university system must respond quickly and effectively. The barrage of ill-trained, technology illiterate marketing graduates do not auger well for the country. In all, our universities must rise up to its expectations and the level of best practice expected of them.

The question marketing educators need to answer is – are the present curriculum standards in marketing enough to meet current global practices? This indeed, is the most crucial challenge of the century, which we must all confront with vigour. In conclusion, the emergence of the technology – marketing perspective stems from a number of limitations that have become obvious recently within the marketing discipline. The tasks of scholars and marketing educators would seem to include consultation with potential employers of labour on marketing technological issues, the conduct of curricula audit, development of a new integrated technology driven curricula regime, and the provision of staff expertise in teaching technology oriented marketing. This will call for intellectual ferment by prompting marketing scholars and educators to develop and integrate technological and marketing theories and methods into the discipline.

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