

**CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTION OF THE
MARKETING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY CONSTRUCTION
FIRMS IN ABUJA, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Effective marketing plays an important role in the overall success of companies and it is critical for any business to grow in the competitive environment. However, construction firms are unyielding to the complete adoption of comprehensive and effective marketing strategies to improve their performance and position in competition within the construction industry. This study assessed the perception of construction professionals regarding the marketing strategies adopted by construction firms in Abuja, Nigeria. The study adopted a questionnaire survey approach and a random sampling method was used to administer the questionnaire to 415 construction professionals. The response rate was 45.3%, and frequency, percentile, relative importance index and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to analyze the data collected. The study revealed that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image, developing non-economic or social bonds with clients, including 'political' offers in bids, having a project signboard, developing a marketable name as well as equipment branding, claim aversion, and free design contribution are the specific marketing strategies employed by construction firms. The major marketing strategies for improving the performance of construction firms are third-party-based strategies, project performance-based strategies, and client-based strategies. The study concluded that there is no significant statistical difference in the perception of respondents regarding the marketing strategies used in their firms. The study

recommended that construction firms should ensure that there is continuous management support targeted towards improving their overall marketing strategies.

Keywords: Construction firms, Construction industry, Construction professionals, Marketing strategies, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is a crucial part of any economy because of its size and the potential role it can play in the development efforts of the economy (Nisa et al., 2006; Nnadi et al. 2016). The construction industry is the driving force behind the socio-economic development of any nation; and the industry takes a huge amount of money, time and energy (Saidu & Shakantu, 2016a; Saidu & Shakantu, 2016b; Nnadi et al. 2016; Meshksar, 2012). Its contribution to the national economy is well represented through the construction value addition, investment, employment, trade balance and sectorial linkages; as such, its importance is recognised in all communities (Meshksar, 2012; Nnadi et al., 2016). Construction firms which operate in the construction industry must strive to survive as they cannot exist without competition. According to Dulaimi and Shan (2002), the construction industry in most countries exists in a competitive business environment driven by the lowest cost mentality. The dynamics of demand and supply influence and shape the activities and performance of every construction firm. Construction projects are usually awarded based on the lowest tender sum, as well as the commercial and technical capabilities of the construction firm. Therefore construction projects are procured through the competitive bidding process.

Marketing is practised all over the world and it is referred to as the activity of getting the company to sell goods or services to customers (Ojo, 2011). Ogbu (2017) defined marketing as "...the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". The importance of marketing for the survival of companies cannot be ignored (Arslan et al., 2009; Nnadi et al. 2016). Therefore effective marketing plays an important role in the overall success of companies and it is critical for any business to grow in the competitive environment (Polat & Donmez, 2010). Thus the main objective of marketing construction firms is to create a positioning strategy within the entire construction market.

It has been observed that marketing has attracted only scant attention among construction contractors and professionals (Nnadi et al., 2016). In the same vein, the Nigerian construction firms have been generally known to be lagging in the adoption of marketing strategies to improve their performance, despite increasing pressure from competitors (Ogbu, 2017). Furthermore, marketing has not been completely

embraced in the construction industry because the concept is yet to be totally understood by construction practitioners (Ogbu, 2015; Mahmood et al., 2017). This has impacted on their publicity and their ability to secure and maintain construction projects. As a result, construction firms have been criticized for their unwillingness to employ effective and efficient marketing strategies to boost opportunities to secure and maintain construction projects. Mahmood et al. (2017) are of the opinion that the neglect of marketing in construction is due to the difficulty in applying conventional marketing in the industry, accompanied by inadequate research on the nature of marketing, marketing theories and strategies tailored to construction work.

Studies exist on the concept of marketing in the construction industry. However, many studies show that construction firms are slow in adapting marketing principles and marketing is not integrated into the structure of the firms (Winter & Peerce, 2000; Bennett, 2005; Adegbile, 2008). Alwashi et al. (2017) assessed the use of marketing strategies in the Nigerian construction industry. The study was aimed at identifying the impact of marketing management on the construction industry in Nigeria with a view to ensuring an effective marketing system in the industry. The study that examines the views of construction professionals found out that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost a company image was the most widely used among the marketing management strategies.

Ogbu (2017) studied marketing strategies and the performance of indigenous construction firms in Nigeria. The study focused on the influence of marketing strategies on the performance levels of indigenous construction firms (ICFs) in South-South Nigeria. The study utilized data collected from CEOs and managers of ICFs and found that maintaining a pool of professionals to boost company image was most frequently employed among the identified marketing strategies, and that the groups of marketing strategies that influence the ICF level of performance are third-party-based, client-based, firm-based, and publicity-based strategies. Ogbu (2017) also reported that a significant difference exists in the frequency of use of the marketing strategies by the different firm groups.

Ganah et al. (2008) investigated marketing strategies in the construction industry and the challenges facing small and medium enterprises in the development of these strategies. The study found that there is a lack of understanding of construction marketing and strategies within small and medium enterprises in the construction industry. The study also found that a strategy for marketing is non-existent in most instances (Ashworth & Hogg, 2007). Other studies have focused on marketing quantity surveyors' professional services or other professions in the built environment. Nnadi et al. (2016) evaluated the marketing practice of quantity surveying in South-Eastern Nigeria. Ogbu (2015) carried out a study on the application of marketing strategies in Nigerian quantity surveying firms.

Therefore, evidence in literature has shown that studies comparing the views of construction professionals regarding marketing strategies adopted by construction

firms, especially in the geographical area of this study, are non-existent. Thus, this study assessed the perception of construction professionals regarding the marketing strategies adopted by construction firms in Nigeria with a view to recommending strategies that will improve their publicity and ensure that they remain in the competition. The specific objectives of the study are to assess the marketing strategies employed by construction firms, and to identify the major marketing strategies employed by construction firms. The hypothesis that guided this study states that there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of construction professionals regarding the marketing strategies adopted by construction firms.

The outcome of this study would add to the body of knowledge available on construction marketing and management literature. The outcome of this will also assist construction managers in making decisions regarding the adoption of the most value-adding and suitable marketing strategy in line with a company's culture, and with respect to prevailing economic conditions. The twenty-first century construction companies and firms need to implement and maintain attainable marketing strategies if they must survive competition within the construction industry that is already flooded with foreign construction companies.

2. MARKETING IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Marketing is critical to the survival of businesses, firms, and individuals as it offers opportunities for employment (Olaniyi et al., 2011) and impacts on the standard of living of individuals. It has been accepted that marketing ability influences financial success (Ode, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2009), thus financial flows and business success are dependent on the choice and implementation of suitable marketing strategies. According to Ojo (2011), marketing is important for the existence and survival of companies. Therefore, the overall success of companies and the ability of any business to grow in the competitive environment are dependent on the effective marketing of firms' services (Polat & Donmez, 2010). Marketing, according to Olaniyi (2014), is the function that links the consumer, customer, and public in identifying and defining marketing opportunities and problems; generating, refining, and evaluating marketing actions; monitoring marketing performance, and improving an understanding of marketing as a process.

The construction industry, like any other sector of the economy, faces keen competition for survival and sustenance. Despite the existence of many studies on the concept of marketing in the construction industry (Ojo, 2011), the concept has not been fully embraced by construction firms. Ojo (2011) concurs that many construction professionals face difficulties in selling their services owing to failure to embrace the marketing concept. For instance, Morgan (1990) confirmed that only a few engineering service consulting firms had a marketing department.

Similarly, in his study of marketing practices among Nigerian construction firms Adegbile (2008) concluded that there was little or no marketing in the Nigerian construction industry. The majority of the contractors, according to Dikmen et al. (2005), do not regard the marketing capability as a strategic success factor. Also, Ganah et al. (2008) asserted that the majority of construction firms are yet to adopt marketing as the cornerstone of strategy and management. This was supported by Jaafar et al. (2008), whose report showed that in Malaysia many civil and structural consultancy firms had neither marketing departments nor employees specifically responsible for marketing.

According to Polat and Donmez (2010), Turkish contractors made use of marketing management functions to some extent. This may be attributed to the lack of understanding of marketing principles within small to medium enterprises (Ganah et al., 2008). It is important to state that small and medium construction firms dominate the construction space of the construction sectors of many countries. Company image and customer satisfaction are vital factors for successful marketing in the construction business (Arslan et al., 2009). Therefore, Adegbile (2008) suggested the need for awareness of the importance of marketing as a tool to withstand the fierce competition in the Nigerian construction business environment. Also, Yisa et al. (1996) proposed a framework for improving the effectiveness of the marketing function within construction enterprises. Yisa et al. (1996) suggested that a practical approach for formulating, implementing and evaluating corporate marketing programmes could be represented in the framework.

2.1 Marketing strategies in construction

A strategy is a general plan or set of plans designed to achieve a targeted goal over a long period of time (Olaniyi, 2014). According to Akpan (2003), at the most macro level, marketing strategies focus on manipulations of the marketing mix variables; they involve picking a target market and selecting a marketing mix to serve that market. According to Ojo (2011), a marketing strategy is a managerial process of analysing market opportunities and choosing a marketing position that serves the company's purpose and objectives. It is the company's response to the external environment and consists of a set of principles by means of which a company hopes to achieve its long-term customer and profit objectives in a competitive environment. Marketing strategies are the means by which professional firms sell their services to their intending clients. They play an important role in the success of a construction company in this highly competitive industry (Ojo, 2011).

Lee et al. (2008) identified the marketing strategies of Korea's housing construction firms and classified them as green, well-being and ubiquitous. Zeithaml et al. (1985) suggested various strategies for problems stemming from unique service features. These include creating a strong organisation image, using cost accounting to help set prices, engaging in post-purchase communication, managing consumers, and

using multisite locations, among others. Alwashi et al. (2017) identified 28 marketing strategies adopted by construction firms, and grouped them into six major headings, namely the location of the firm, professional client relationship, professional contract, price and other user strategies, business promotion and education strategy, and research as a marketing strategy. Alwashi et al. (2017) found that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost a company's image, packaging a company's documents to look attractive, outsourcing supervision to more competent professionals, writing of proposals, and maintaining a cordial relationship between client and other professionals as well as staff competence, site architecture, competition, and navigation audit were the highest-ranking marketing strategies used by construction professionals. Alwashi et al. (2017) concluded that offering seasonal gifts to the client, the use of Internet-based advertising, being listed in the business directory, and offering branded notepads, pens, and other items to the client are least practised strategies in the construction industry. However, irrespective of the level of adoption by professionals, they should be encouraged to improve performance.

Ogbu (2017) identified 43 marketing strategies used by indigenous construction firms and grouped them into five major strategies. They are third-party-based strategies, client-based strategies, publicity-based strategies, firm-based strategies, and project performance-based strategies. Ogbu (2017) reported that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image, the use of project signboards and the development of non-economic or social bonds are the three most frequently used marketing strategies; the least used marketing strategy was the location of the firm close to the client. Also, the groups of marketing strategies that influence indigenous construction firms' level of performance are third-party-based, client-based, firm-based, and publicity-based strategies. This study adopted the marketing strategies identified from Ogbu (2017) and Alwasi et al. (2017).

Marketing strategies are centred on a competitive marketing strategy, the internal and external business environment in which the firm operates, and a relationship marketing strategy. Available studies on marketing strategies in construction mostly focus on firms and professionals. While there are very few existing studies that compare the views of construction professionals on marketing strategies in Nigeria, there are no studies that have assessed the perception of construction professionals of marketing strategies used in the construction industry within the study area of this study. This study critically examined the relative views of construction professionals of the marketing strategies adopted by the construction firms in which they found themselves.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study covered the assessment of the perception of construction professionals regarding the marketing strategies adopted by construction firms in Abuja, Nigeria.

Abuja was chosen for the study based on the premise that Abuja is the administrative headquarters of the country with many construction firms having their head office or branches in the country's capital (Aje et al., 2015). In addition, there are many construction projects being executed on a daily basis. Furthermore, most of the professional bodies related to construction works have either their head office or liaison office in Abuja. According to Saidu and Shakantu (2016c), Abuja is one of the metropolitan cities in Nigeria with the highest population of construction professionals practising in either constructing or consulting firms within the built environment.

A quantitative research approach was adopted for the study, and structured questionnaires were used to collect data on the perception of the various professionals regarding the marketing strategies adopted by construction firms in Nigeria. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers and through the help of trained field assistants who were properly briefed about the research topic and given the necessary information on how to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in two sections using information derived from the review of the related literature. The section labelled 'A' covered the general information of the target respondents. Information gathered from the section labelled 'A' served as a quality check and verification of the data from the other part of the questionnaire. The section labelled 'B' covered the views of the professionals on the marketing strategies adopted by their firms. A total of 43 marketing strategies identified from Ogbu (2015), Ogbu (2017) and Alwashi et al. (2017) were adopted for this study. Respondents were requested to rate these strategies base on the level of efficacy in improving the public image of the company and on their ability to secure new jobs and maintain relationships with parties on existing projects. This was based on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = very ineffective, 2 = ineffective, 3 = average, 4 = effective, 5 = very effective.

A pilot survey was adopted to test the suitability and appropriateness of the questionnaire in meeting the study objectives as suggested by Fellows and Liu (2008). Twenty (20) of the draft questionnaires were randomly distributed to the selected construction professionals and academics, and the final draft was adjusted based on their feedback. A total of 415 questionnaires were randomly distributed to construction professionals within the study area. A total of 188 of the questionnaires were retrieved out of the 415 distributed, representing a 45.3% response rate, and were deemed fit for the analysis. This response rate is above the usual response rate of 20-30% for questionnaire surveys in construction management studies as suggested by Akintoye (2000). Furthermore, the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire was carried out using Cronbach's alpha test. This test measured the reliability of each of the fields of the questionnaire and the mean of all the fields of the same questionnaire. The acceptable value range of Cronbach's alpha is between 0.0 and +1.0 and the more the value tends toward 1, the higher the degree of

internal consistency is. The Cronbach's alpha value for the variables is 0.825, thereby implying that the questionnaire is credible and has a high degree of reliability. According to Moser and Kalton (1999), a research instrument is perfect if the value of the Cronbach's alpha tends towards 1.0.

Frequencies, percentages, and the relative importance index (RII) were used to analyse the collected data. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the general information of the respondents; RII was used to assess the views of the respondents regarding the marketing strategies adopted by their firms, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to determine the relationship in the view of the respondents regarding the variables, and to test the hypothesis. The rule for accepting or rejecting the hypothesis is accept the hypothesis if the P-value ≥ 0.05 , and reject the hypothesis if the P-value < 0.05 . These analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the respondents' characteristics showed that in terms of their designation in their organization project 37.23% are project managers, 20.74%, and 9.57% are contract managers or administrators and quality and safety managers respectively, 2.13% are project directors and 30.32% of them are project team members. Moreover, 48.40% of the respondents have between one and ten years of experience, 39.89% have 11-20 years, 9.04% and 2.66% of them have 21-30 years and 31-40 years' experience respectively, while none has more than 40 years of experience. Most of the participants hold a bachelor of science or a bachelor of technology degree (46.28%). This was followed by those with a higher national diploma (29.79%) and then a master of science or a master of technology degree (21.81%), and lastly, doctorates number 2.13%. This implies that the respondents are experienced and academically qualified to give reliable information in a construction-based study.

In addition, according to the respondents, 76.6% are always involved in marketing the services of their firm, 23.94% of them sometimes do marketing, and 3.72% of them have never been involved in marketing. This implies that the respondents are aware of the role marketing plays in construction firms. The analysis also revealed that 32.45% (61) of the respondents are registered quantity surveyors with the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NIQS). A total of 27.13% (51) are engineers (civil and services) registered with the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), and 23.40% (44) are architects registered with the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA). In addition, 17.02% (32) of the respondents are builders registered with the Nigerian Institute of Building (NIOB). The rationale behind the high proportion of quantity surveyors is that they have been enlightened on matters associated with marketing their professional services and the services of their

employers which are most times construction and consulting firms. Evidence of the professional membership of the respondents shows that they are professionally qualified to give expert opinions on the subject of this study.

Table 1 shows the result of the analysis of the construction professionals' perception of the marketing strategies practised in their firms. From Table 1 and under the third-party-based strategies, the builders and engineers are of the opinion that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image (RII = 0.975) and (RII = 0.969) and conflict management (RII = 0.913) and (RII = 0.953) respectively were best among the sub-group. The quantity surveyors are of the opinion that the most important marketing strategies are conflict management (RII = 0.938) and maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image (RII = 0.836), whereas the architects are of the opinion that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost company image (RII = 0.959) and outsourcing project supervision to more well-known external personnel (RII = 0.936) are the most effective strategies among the sub-group.

Overall, the most important and effective marketing strategies adopted by construction firms are maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image and conflict management. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Ojo (2011), Alwashi et al. (2017) and Ogbu (2017). Ogbu (2017) reported that highest among the most frequently used marketing strategies by indigenous construction firms is the ability of the firms to maintain a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image (with a mean = 3.79) and Alwashi et al. (2017) ranked maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image first with RII = 0.93. This strategy is therefore critical to the survival and existence of any construction firm.

Similarly, under the client-based strategies, the builders rated 'more communication with clients' first, the quantity surveyors ranked it third, the architects ranked it second, and the engineers are of the opinion that it should be ranked fifth. There seems to be agreement among the respondents regarding 'inclusion of "political" offers in bids'. This strategy was ranked second by the builders, quantity surveyors, and engineers, but was ranked third by the architects. Also, 'development of non-economic or social bonds with clients' was ranked first by the quantity surveyors, architects and engineers, but ranked third by the builders. Also, the builders, quantity surveyors and architects ranked 'project co-development strategy / public-private partnership' fourth, but this was ranked third by the engineers. 'Ensuring client feedback' was ranked fifth by the builders, quantity surveyors and architects, but was ranked fourth by the engineers. Overall, the development of non-economic or social bonds with clients, inclusion of 'political' offers in bids, more communication with clients, project co-development strategy or public-private partnership, and ensuring client feedback were ranked first, second, third, fourth and fifth respectively. This finding corroborates the reports of Ogbu

(2017), Alwashi et al. (2017) and Ojo (2011). Ogbu (2017) reported that the development of non-economic or social bonds with clients (mean = 3.63), project co-development strategy or public-private partnerships (mean = 3.62) and the inclusion of 'political' offers in bids (mean = 3.62) are the most frequently used marketing strategies under the client-based strategies. According to Ogbu (2017), client-based marketing strategies are mainly focused on directly improving firm performance. The establishment of social bonds with potential and existing clients, more communication and a feedback system will enhance client trust and could lead to repeat business.

For the publicity-based strategies, a project signboard was ranked first by all the professionals. Equipment branding was ranked second by the builders, architects, and engineers, but was ranked fourth by the quantity surveyors. Packaging company documents to look attractive was ranked third by all the professionals. Writing of proposals was ranked fourth by the builders and architects, but was ranked fifth by the quantity surveyors and engineers. The company website was ranked fifth by the builders and architects but was ranked second by the quantity surveyors and fourth by the engineers. Overall, project signboards, equipment branding, packaging company documents to look attractive, company websites, and writing of proposals were ranked first, second, third, fourth and fifth respectively. This finding supports the reports of Ogbu (2017) and Alwashi et al. (2017). Ogbu (2017) reported that project signboards (mean = 3.76) and packaging company documents to look attractive (mean = 3.46) are the most frequently used among the publicity-based strategies. Alwashi et al. (2017) report ranked packaging companies' document to look attractive in the second position with (RII = 0.91) and written proposals were ranked fifth (RII = 0.84). Publicity plays a major role in improving a firm's performance. This is because if what is being produced or the services being rendered are not marketed, they cannot be patronized. In addition, a well-packaged company document will always look catching and appealing. This will improve a company's public image.

For the firm-based strategies, the builders ranked the development of a marketable name as first, the use of promotional products and claim aversion occupied the second place ranking, market segmentation and product differentiation were ranked fourth, and use of information and communication technology (ICT) in service delivery ranked fifth. The quantity surveyors, architects and engineers ranked claim aversion as first; the development of a marketable name was ranked second by both the quantity surveyors and the engineers, but was ranked third by the architects. The quantity surveyors ranked market segmentation and product differentiation third; the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in service delivery was ranked second by the architects, and the use of promotional products was ranked second by the engineers. Overall, claim aversion, the development of a marketable name, market segmentation and product differentiation, the use of promotional

products, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in service delivery were ranked first, second, third, fourth and fifth respectively. This finding agrees with the findings by Ogbu (2017) who reported that claim aversion (mean = 3.35) and the development of a marketable name (mean = 3.34) are the most frequently used among the firm-based strategies. Adequate control and monitoring of projects by construction firms should be ensured to avoid unnecessary claims arising. This will avoid claims that could even lead to legal tussles. Firms should develop a name that could be marketed to the public and ensure that buildings are properly finished on time, within budget, and meet the specific client requirements.

Information and communication technology (ICT) generally covers the harnessing of electronic technology for the information needs of a business at all levels. It refers to the automation of processes, controls, and information production using computers, and telecommunication software (Emmanuel & Adebayo, 2011). ICT in construction entails the use of computer systems that are capable of capturing, organizing, storing, analysing, exchanging, transmitting, and sharing information (Perkinson & Ahmad, 2006).

Nowadays, many ICT products are progressively being used in the marketing of construction firms and professional services owing to the sophistication of construction clients. For instance, the use of the Internet via a personal computer (PC) and mobile phones, email marketing, websites, social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Whatsapp, among others), and telephone marketing have changed the face of marketing in the construction industry. The Internet serves as an important medium for reaching a wider spectrum of individual contractors and suppliers, construction and consultant firms and organisations. Internet marketing involves the use of the Internet for the marketing of construction firms' products or services, utilising either the Internet or traditional channels (Bengtsson et al., 2007). Email marketing involves the use of emails in marketing; it entails the sending of direct promotional emails to secure new clients or persuade existing clients to patronise again (Alexander, 2009).

Construction companies and construction professionals have to capitalise on the revolution in Internet marketing through social media to market their products and services. This has positively affected the revenue and productivity of construction firms. Ibrinke et al. (2011) observed that there is increasing awareness of the importance of information technology in improving service delivery and productivity among construction professionals

Under the project performance-based strategies, improvement in project performance and free design contribution were ranked first and second respectively by the builders. The quantity surveyors, architects and engineers ranked free design contribution first, and improvement in project performance was ranked second by the quantity surveyors and engineers. A free maintenance service offer was ranked second by the architects. Overall, free design contribution and improvement in

project performance were ranked first and second respectively. This finding is in line with that of Ogbu (2017) who reported that free design contribution (mean = 3.52) and improvement in project performance (mean = 3.30) are the most frequently used among the project performance-based strategies used by indigenous contractors. Construction firms should at no extra cost to the client do free designs as a way of contributing to the progress of the building under construction. This will ensure speedy construction and that the client will be relieved of the financial burden.

Table 1: Construction professionals' perception of marketing strategies

S/N	Factors	Bldr.		Q. S		Arch.		Engr.		Overall	
		RII	Rk	RII	Rk	RII	Rk	RII	Rk	RII	Rk
Third Party-Based Strategies											
1	Outsourcing project supervision to more well-known external personnel	0.438	4	0.354	5	0.936	2	0.827	4	0.64	4
2	Investments in networking with other firms	0.888	3	0.718	3	0.9	3	0.929	3	0.86	3
3	Conflict management	0.913	2	0.938	1	0.895	4	0.953	2	0.92	2
4	Maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost company image	0.975	1	0.836	2	0.959	1	0.969	1	0.93	1
5	Corporate social responsibility/ sponsorships of events in your area of operation	0.263	5	0.679	4	0.791	5	0.812	5	0.64	5
Client-Based Strategies											
1	Financial and non-financial rewards for staff	0.838	6	0.646	7	0.664	10	0.859	6	0.75	7
2	Relational marketing	0.756	8	0.548	10	0.832	6	0.847	7	0.75	8
3	Granting of credit/flexible payment options	0.756	8	0.672	6	0.832	6	0.847	7	0.78	6
4	Offering seasonal gifts to clients	0.313	12	0.485	11	0.327	12	0.475	11	0.4	11
5	Development of non-economic or social bonds with clients	0.944	3	0.98	1	0.991	1	0.965	1	0.97	1
6	Project co-development strategy/ public-private partnership	0.913	4	0.925	4	0.923	4	0.937	3	0.92	4
7	Inclusion of 'political' offers in bids	0.975	2	0.948	2	0.932	3	0.945	2	0.95	2
8	Offering branded notepads, pens and other items to clients	0.794	7	0.607	8	0.768	8	0.769	9	0.73	9
9	Ensuring client feedback	0.906	5	0.918	5	0.864	5	0.898	4	0.9	5
10	More communication with clients	0.988	1	0.928	3	0.936	2	0.894	5	0.94	3
11	Customisation of projects to suit clients	0.694	10	0.574	9	0.695	9	0.706	10	0.67	10
12	Location of firm closer to clients	0.338	11	0.348	12	0.35	11	0.294	12	0.33	12
Publicity-Based Strategies											
1	Packaging company documents to look attractive	0.906	3	0.869	3	0.905	3	0.973	3	0.91	3

2	Affinity marketing (combined marketing with firms offering complementary projects or products)	0.438	9	0.328	10	0.477	8	0.471	9	0.43	9
3	Use of Internet-based advertisements	0.469	8	0.656	6	0.332	9	0.522	8	0.49	8
4	Being listed in business directories (Yellow Pages)	0.656	7	0.63	7	0.605	6	0.714	6	0.65	6
5	Writing of proposals	0.881	4	0.662	5	0.855	4	0.914	5	0.83	5
6	Project signboard	0.963	1	0.98	1	0.977	1	0.992	1	0.98	1
7	Company websites	0.794	5	0.941	2	0.755	5	0.961	4	0.86	4
8	Use of print media advertisements	0.713	6	0.469	9	0.582	7	0.667	7	0.61	7
9	Equipment branding	0.956	2	0.852	4	0.95	2	0.976	2	0.93	2
10	Broadcast media	0.269	10	0.564	8	0.305	10	0.231	10	0.34	10
Firm-Based Strategies											
1	Development of a marketable name	0.9	1	0.934	2	0.914	3	0.773	2	0.88	2
2	Transactional marketing	0.35	11	0.734	5	0.482	9	0.624	11	0.55	10
3	Environmental scanning/research	0.825	6	0.689	9	0.65	8	0.667	7	0.71	7
4	Market segmentation/product differentiation	0.844	4	0.918	3	0.877	4	0.757	4	0.85	3
5	Use of promotional products	0.881	2	0.823	4	0.795	6	0.773	2	0.82	4
6	Use of information and communication technology (ICT) in service delivery	0.831	5	0.705	6	0.918	2	0.686	6	0.79	5
7	Acquisition of personnel and equipment	0.806	7	0.702	7	0.868	5	0.667	7	0.76	6
8	Registration with client bodies	0.519	10	0.692	8	0.427	10	0.757	4	0.6	9
9	Claim aversion	0.881	2	0.961	1	0.955	1	0.847	1	0.91	1
10	Corporate social responsibility/charitable initiatives	0.719	8	0.682	10	0.7	7	0.667	7	0.69	8
11	Marketing plan	0.638	9	0.407	11	0.35	11	0.627	10	0.51	11
Project Performance-Based Strategies											
1	Improvement in project performance	0.925	1	0.925	2	0.773	3	0.847	2	0.87	2
2	Free maintenance service offer	0.594	4	0.813	4	0.85	2	0.667	5	0.73	3
3	Selling the benefits not the features	0.625	3	0.869	3	0.65	5	0.757	4	0.73	4
4	Supply chain management	0.344	5	0.793	5	0.755	4	0.796	3	0.67	5
5	Free design contribution	0.781	2	0.928	1	0.932	1	0.969	1	0.9	1

Bldr. = Builders; Q.S = Quantity surveyors; Arch. = Architects; Engr. = Engineers; Rk = Rank

Based on the average ranking of the major grouping of the marketing strategies in Table 2, the builders ranked client-based strategies and firm-based strategies as first and second respectively. The quantity surveyors ranked project performance-based strategies and firm-based strategies in the first and second positions respectively. Similarly, the architects and engineers ranked third party-based strategies and project performance-based strategies first and second respectively. On overall, third-party-based strategies, project performance-based strategies and client-based strategies are the most vital marketing strategies for the improved performance of construction firms. This is in agreement with Ogbu (2017), who suggested that areas of emphasis when selecting a marketing strategy to adopt

are a third party-based strategy, client-based strategy, firm-based strategy and publicity-based strategy.

The relative difference in the opinion of the different professionals is an indication of the existence of differing marketing strategies adopted by the different organisations. This is relevant in marketing as it reveals why some firms are constantly being commissioned for new jobs and others rarely secure jobs in a given business year. The success of a chosen set of marketing strategies is dependent on the effective implementation and commitment from top management and a company's strategic marketing policy. The organisational type and strategic objective to a very large extent influence the choice when adopting marketing strategies. Thus, a construction-based firm will certainly adopt a different marketing approach when compared to a consultant firm. Regardless of the differences, marketing strategies are targeted towards attracting potential clients and securing new or maintaining existing projects. For adaptive marketing strategies to be developed, it is necessary to have an adequate knowledge and understanding of the business environment of the organisation as opined by Bamber et al. (2004) and Yan and Chew (2011).

Table 2: Average ranking of marketing strategies based on major sub-group

S/N	Marketing strategies	Bldr.		Q. S		Arch.		Engr.		Overall	
		RII	Rk	RII	Rk	RII	Rk	RII	Rk	RII	Rk
1	Third party-based strategies	0.695	4	0.705	4	0.896	1	0.898	1	0.799	1
2	Client-based strategies	0.768	1	0.715	3	0.759	3	0.786	3	0.757	3
3	Publicity-based strategies	0.704	3	0.695	5	0.674	5	0.742	4	0.704	5
4	Firm-based strategies	0.745	2	0.750	2	0.721	4	0.713	5	0.732	4
5	Project performance-based strategies	0.654	5	0.866	1	0.792	2	0.807	2	0.780	2

Table 3 shows the Kruskal-Wallis test carried out at 95% confidence level. The test showed that there is no significant difference in the ranking of the marketing strategies used in the construction firms. There seem to be consistencies in the perception of the various professionals regarding the variables. In all the major groupings of the marketing strategies, the test shows that there is no significant difference in the ranking as perceived by the respondents. These strategies recorded a significant p-value of above 0.05. Since 100% of the strategies are effective for improving performance and helping firms maintain and secure projects when implemented, it was then concluded that there is agreement among the respondents regarding the strategies in the construction industry. This was supported by a further analysis in Table 4 using the RII of each group for all the strategies: this showed a P-value of 0.895. Based on this, the hypothesis was therefore accepted.

Table 3: Comparison of professionals' perception regarding the marketing strategies of construction firms

S/N	Marketing Strategies	Overall Average		Kruskal-Wallis				
		RII	Rank	Respondents	Mean Rank	Chi Sq.	P-value	Decision
1	Third party-based strategies	0.7986	1	Bldr.	9.40	3.137	0.371	Accept
				Q. S	7.20			
				Arch.	12.40			
				Engr.	13.00			
2	Client-based strategies	0.7571	3	Bldr.	25.25	0.562	0.905	Accept
				Q. S	22.08			
				Arch.	24.50			
				Engr.	26.17			
3	Publicity-based strategies	0.7039	5	Bldr.	19.90	1.093	0.779	Accept
				Q. S	19.30			
				Arch.	19.00			
				Engr.	23.80			
4	Firm-based strategies	0.7323	4	Bldr.	24.50	1.922	0.589	Accept
				Q. S	24.23			
				Arch.	23.36			
				Engr.	17.91			
5	Project performance-based strategies	0.7796	2	Bldr.	6.30	4.669	0.198	Accept
				Q. S	14.30			
				Arch.	10.20			
				Engr.	11.20			

N = 32 for Building, N = 61 for Quantity Surveyor, N = 44 for Architect, N = 51 for Engineering, df = 3

Table 4: Overall comparison of professionals' perception of marketing strategies of construction firms

Marketing Strategies	Kruskal-Wallis				Decision
	Respondents	Mean Rank	Chi Sq.	P-value	
Marketing Strategies	Bldr.	88.45	0.608	0.895	Accept
	Q. S	83.08			
	Arch.	90.36			
	Engr.	85.81			

N = 32 for Building, N = 61 for Quantity Surveyor, N = 44 for Architect, N = 51 for Engineering, df = 3

In order to confirm the observation of the Kruskal-Wallis test, the Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted to test for differences between two independent groups where the overall Kruskal-Wallis test is significant. According to Boduszek (2017), if the overall K-W test is significant, the Mann-Whitney tests should be conducted to compare the groups (to investigate which groups differ significantly). In all the pairs, the p-value is greater than 0.05 at 95% confidence level (Table 5). This observation leads to the conclusion that there is no significant difference among the perceptions of the respondents and between any pairs of the respondents.

Table 5: Result of Mann-Whitney U-test

Variable group	Z (calculated)	Z (critical)	P-value	Decision
Builders vs Quantity surveyors	-0.441	8	0.659	Accept
Builders vs Architects	-0.147	7	0.883	Accept
Builders vs Engineers	-0.276	8	0.782	Accept
Quantity surveyors vs Architects	-0.714	9	0.475	Accept
Quantity surveyors vs Engineers	-0.335	9	0.738	Accept
Architects vs Engineers	-0.454	8	0.650	Accept

N = number of respondents in each group; Bldr. = 32, Q.S = 61, Arch. = 44, Engr. = 51

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Construction firms and construction professionals are yet to fully appreciate and implement marketing strategies that could impact positively on their performance and drive revenue generation. The study adopted a random sampling technique in collecting data on the perception of construction professionals on the marketing strategies used by their firms. The outcome of this study would assist the industry's decision makers in making informed decisions regarding the most beneficial marketing strategies to implement. This study assessed the perception of construction professionals regarding the marketing strategies adopted by construction firms in Nigeria with a view to recommending strategies that will improve their publicity and ensure that they remain competitive.

The study revealed that maintaining a strong pool of professionals to boost the company image, the development of non-economic or social bonds with clients, the inclusion of 'political' offers in bids, more communication with clients, project signboards, equipment branding, packaging company documents to look attractive, claim aversion, development of a marketable name, market segmentation and product differentiation, and free design contribution are the specific marketing strategies employed by construction firms. In addition, the major marketing strategies for the improved performance of construction firms are third-party-based strategies, project performance-based strategies and client-based strategies. The study concluded that there is no significant statistical difference in the perception of the

respondents regarding the marketing strategies used in their firms or organizations.

Based on the findings and conclusion, the study made the following recommendations:

- 1) Construction firms should ensure that they always maintain the use of a strong pool of professionals to boost company image. This is critical to the success and performance improvement of any firm.
- 2) Construction companies should develop social or non-economical and political relationships with their clients, with strong and regular communications links. This will surely lead to trust and more or repeat patronage.
- 3) Construction firms must ensure that they erect project signboards on every site which will display to potential clients their name and project type, among other information. In addition, all their equipment should be branded and every company document should be neatly packaged so that they are appealing to the eye.
- 4) Construction firms should ensure adequate control to avoid unnecessary claims arising during construction. They should ensure that they develop a name that could be marketed to the public and that buildings are properly finished on time, within budget, and meeting the specific client requirements.
- 5) Construction firms should at their own cost do free designs as a way of contributing to the progress of the building under construction. This will ensure speedy construction and that the client is relieved of the financial burden.

Construction firms should ensure that there is continuous management support targeted towards improving their overall marketing performance. Studies that have completely exhausted the list of marketing strategies available either in corporate organisations or to be found among the marketing management functions of firms are still lacking. Therefore, a further study regarding construction professionals' perception of the marketing strategies employed by construction firms could be carried out, adopting other region or zone in Nigeria. This would enable more marketing strategies to be identified through interviewing, brainstorming or brainwriting, among others, in addition to the use of questionnaires. A study that would examine what triggers the adoption of certain marketing strategies should be embarked upon.

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