

THE MARKETING MIX AND SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN NIGERIA: THE CARNIVAL CALABAR AS PARADIGM

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Abstract

The economic potential of carnivals as a product of cultural tourism is immense. The cultural tourism subsector can yield substantial revenue and raise Nigeria's GDP. This research examined the marketing strategies adopted for carnivals using the Carnival Calabar programme as a paradigm, it explored ways of improving the status quo for optimal results. Hence, Philip Kotler's 7Ps marketing mix was applied in interrogating the problem. The study adopted the participant observation method for primary data collection. It was found that though Carnival Calabar is a model in cultural tourism promotion in Nigeria, the fiesta still costs the government a lot due to ineffective marketing strategies that fail to generate enough revenue from the private sector. The study recommends a policy review to give the private sector a free hand to manage and market the carnival while the government focuses more on making supportive policies and creating an enabling environment for the cultural sector to grow. It concludes that if the present marketing structure is decentralized and revised to apply the 7ps marketing mix and "push and pull" concept, Calabar Carnival would actualize its potential as an economic resource for the people and their government.

Introduction: The Carnival and Marketing Objectives

The carnival is not only a theatrical and cultural event but equally a product. However, theatre scholars often concentrate on

the costumes, visual designs and aesthetic spectacle that characterize the carnival presentation and give less research attention to the marketing of carnival as an artistic product. Indeed, marketing this cultural product requires many creative approaches. The cardinal factor to be noted in this regard by the promoters is the need for adequate planning. Developing a marketing plan for the carnival event requires proper marketing research and application of the marketing mix to achieve effective results (Kotler 25).

Following global best practices, carnival producers often make some initial investments to enhance the marketing project. This includes funding for market research, publicity and promotions, public relations, opening and maintenance of sales outlets outside the carnival destination (liaison offices), security arrangements and audience engineering approaches. These measures will constitute part of the unique selling points of the carnival product.

Professional carnival marketers usually develop a marketing strategy based on their knowledge of their target consumers. This will be shaped by the results obtained from their thorough market surveys or audience research. The application of the marketing mix helps the carnival production team to strategize and put their product at the right place, time, and price. According to Philip Kotler, a marketing mix is a powerful tool that is hinged on a Seven-P (7Ps) pedestal. These 7Ps often associated with marketing in the service industry are “Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process and Physical Evidence” (9).

The carnival event falls within the service industrial subsector but its unique appeal is that consumers do not pay directly to the producers. On the other hand, the consumers pay indirectly for the product and the value is spread across various sectors and ancillary service providers in both public and private sectors. Some of the dividends are immediate such as payment for goods purchased and services enjoyed during the carnival

programme. But some of the gains are indirect and take some time to materialize, such as new business investments, bilateral trade agreements and subsequent employment of people in the tourism/carnival destination community. The marketing mix can be applied to carnival marketing as follows.

Product

In applying the 7Ps marketing mix to carnival marketing, the producers could first consider the Product; the carnival performance itself, and ensure that it is properly packaged and has qualitative content enough to attract tourists and give them value for their money. Kotler observes that there is nothing more frustrating and counterproductive than trying to market a bad product. In one of his famous quotes reprinted on the cover of his book, Kotler explains that:

Marketing is not the art of finding clever ways to dispose of what you make. Marketing is the art of creating genuine customer value. It is the art of helping your customer become better off. The marketer's watchwords are quality, service and value. (cover page)

Following this principle, product patronage is expected to add value and be sustainable.

Price

On the factor of Price, the carnival marketers could focus on support services in the host city to reduce the cost of visitors' stay and participation in the carnival programmes. For instance, if transportation, accommodation, food and souvenirs are available, accessible and affordable in the host locality, then the carnival has the potential of attracting more tourists. The combination and application of the marketing mix would expectedly enhance the

patronage of the carnival product at the right price, particularly from international customers.

Place

The Place is the location of the service being marketed. The carnival host city or environment will need to be part of the marketing campaign. The carnival destination should be easily accessed through air, rail, road, and water transportation where possible and at affordable costs. According to Stephen Page, tourism officials often overlook “the contribution of economics and geography to the analysis of tourism transport”. Similarly, practitioners including researchers do not often see and analyze the link between tourist transport and marketing. Page thus observes that “in the case of marketing, the number of studies focused on tourist transport is limited because there is a tendency for marketing to be more visible and result-oriented than based on the impact of transportation or academic analysis of good practice” (61). On their part, Horner and Swarbrooke affirm that:

The diversity of transport modes used in tourism (i.e. air, rail, water, road and off-road transport) makes it difficult to generalize about transport and marketing. This is further complicated by the private, public and voluntary sector organizations involved in transport for tourism that all have different marketing objectives. (319)

Therefore, even though the transportation is controlled by various operators, it should still be considered as part of the carnival package because good and affordable access to the carnival venues is a selling point. Following the “Push and Pull” concept of tourism as advanced by Crompton, transportation consideration is vital in attracting tourists to a place and can be one of the “pull factors” that should be exploited in marketing the

carnival event (411). Since a venue can make the event, the carnival place itself should be clean, safe and attractive to tourists.

Promotion

Promotion is at the heart of marketing. This will involve various techniques of direct and indirect advertising campaigns using traditional and new media channels such as print, radio, television, and social media as well as other Internet-based platforms to promote the carnival event. Page observes that tourism promotion generally can be situated midway between advertising, public relations and propaganda. Since “promotional material and advertising campaigns constitute a major investment in time, money and creative thinking, with companies reluctant to highlight good practice that might undermine their future business potential, the tourism marketers combine different advertising and promotional techniques to highlight their selling points and mask their challenges” (62).

People

A carnival event is about people and their cultural productions and heritage. Thus, marketing a carnival product is not merely the promotion of a cultural event located at a place but also the projecting of the people and their positive values as part of that cultural fiesta. The carnival marketers could focus on the positive attributes of the local communities, their proud history, heritage, hospitality, unique traditions, peaceful disposition and warm reception of visitors. This is complemented by an attitudinal reorientation programmed for the people to adopt friendly attitudes towards visitors, especially during the carnival period.

Process

The Process of the carnival can also be built into the overall marketing strategy, beginning from the planning meetings and workshops, media interactive programmes, the stages of the

rehearsals, costume design and production processes, the processional Dry Runs and the launch of the programme of activities before the Opening Day. Each stage of the carnival programme and production process offers a diversity of materials to marketers with immense potential for promoting the event and stimulating the artistic appetite of potential tourists.

Physical Evidence

Physical Evidence is the root of marketing in the service industry because it provides the conviction required by potential patrons to use the service. Unlike products which could be distributed, tested and confirmed in different parts of the world, the service industry needs the patron to visit the location and use the service. The physical evidence of the carnival marketing campaign lies in the testimonial techniques. This should focus on the testimony of different tourists from various regions, countries and cultures who have visited, participated in the carnival programmes and are not only satisfied but willing and eager to visit again.

Therefore, marketing the carnival event is not only about securing funding partners and service support agencies; it is mainly about making the event an attractive brand that will yield returns on investments.

Marketing the Calabar Carnival

The Calabar Carnival is a programme of artistic and cultural activities that are hosted in the city of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The event takes place in December, lasting for one month, and culminating in the main carnival event, tagged “Street Party” which features a procession of hundreds of performers, drawn from five major Bands, dressed in colourful, magnificent and peculiar costumes accompanied with music and dance (Odigha 8). The Calabar Carnival has become an annual programme since 2004, managed by the Calabar Carnival Commission with the support of other government agencies in Cross River State.

Although the five official Bands are responsible for raising funds and managing their participation and activities, it is the Carnival Commission that manages the entire programme with the Executive Secretary of the Commission serving as the Director. The Commission is primarily responsible for marketing the carnival events, raising funds, supporting the Bands, setting rules and standards, negotiating sponsorship and entering into partnership agreements with various local and international groups and agencies.

Over the years, the Carnival Commission has adopted a marketing policy and pattern which focuses on steadily increasing the involvement of the private sector in funding the programme and attracting more international partners and participants by increasing the global media visibility of the events through promotional strategies. The idea was to reduce the financial burden on the State government which had been a major financier of the programme since inception.

The cardinal marketing policy of the Commission is to treat Carnival Calabar as a brand, a product that will be patronized by individuals, agencies and corporate organizations and thus yield dividends in different ways. The government believes that the carnival is the property of Cross River people hence the dividends obtainable from the programme should primarily circulate among the citizens in different ways such as youth empowerment, increased return on private investments, employment opportunities, and increased sales and higher turnover in the patronage of goods and services offered by residents.

A marketing objective of the Commission is to reduce the amount of taxpayers' money that goes into the running of the carnival programme. In addition, the carnival is projected to attract foreign and local investors to boost the economy of the State to the benefit of the people. The Commission, therefore, focuses on selling the carnival to corporate organisations who take up sponsorship deals in return for publicity and patronage of their

products and services by the public. As a project of the State government, the underlying idea is that its patronage and sponsorship by the corporate establishments will also bring the sponsors some goodwill and enhance their chances of doing business with the government.

Critical Perspectives

A critical evaluation of the Carnival Calabar marketing policy shows some shortcomings which affect their ultimate impact on the creative industry and the local people. The ideal marketing objective should have been to move the carnival away from government bureaucratic control and make it private-sector driven. The Commission is an agency of the State and still relies on the government for many things, including funds. As a product, the carnival should be a marketable brand and the programme should be self-sustaining. Even though the Bands are funded by private sources, including the procurement of their costumes and accessories which is capital intensive, the Commission struggles yearly to raise funds to run the carnival programmes. Hence, the government often comes in to assist by mandating different agencies of the State to offer their services free to enable the carnival to survive. Many of these agencies such as CRBC, Cultural Centre Board, Calabar Municipal and all Local Government Councils, Clean and Green Agency, State Tourism Board, and others, including security agencies, will still need the assistance of the government to be able to deliver the required services during the carnival period.

The pricing of the carnival product is also another challenge in its marketing approach. Since the product is intangible, the marketers do not have a standard value for each prospective sponsor. The amount of publicity given to all sponsors is virtually the same, despite the amounts they contributed. The only difference is that such companies like Dangote Group and First Bank Plc are regarded as “major” sponsors for the year but their

company flags, logos and billboards are displayed alongside other “minor” sponsors. From business analysis, this may not encourage future investment as investors usually analyze the actual and potential returns on investments before committing funds in future. The only difference between the “major” and “minor” sponsors is in the potential recognition and patronage which such “major” sponsors could get from the State government in future. There should be a clear difference in the publicity and business deals offered to major and minor sponsors to encourage investors.

Furthermore, the partnerships should have a value to the Commission which can be monetized and thereby reducible to specific amounts. But at present, the Carnival Commission’s foreign partners constitute some financial strain to the establishment. The Commission has to raise money and pay them for their services, often in foreign currency, then pay for their flight tickets, accommodation and daily maintenance when they arrive. But, if the relationship is a “partnership”, and not patronage, it raises a question about what the partners are giving the Commission in return. The marketers of the carnival will need to analyze the financial implications of their partnerships and work towards a better deal that will bring in foreign investment as well. It was expected that the local professionals would take over from the foreign partners after a few years of mentorship, to save costs but this has not happened yet.

The reputation of Calabar, the venue of the carnival, as a clean, safe, serene and hospitable city has endured over the years even before the carnival programme was initiated. Indeed, it appears the carnival benefits from this status and image of Calabar city. Hence, the marketers have not done much to sell the city. It was expected that marketing deals could have been explored with airlines, road transport companies, and Inland Waterways to offer special services during the carnival period and add value and additional attraction to the event. At present, these organizations

merely make profits from the carnival event due to increased patronage but do not give something back to support the event.

The Carnival Commission has put in place, a network of promotional activities to market the carnival to investors and tourists. This ranges from direct advertising to public relations and product promotions using the traditional mass media, satellite television channels, carnival website, Tourism Board website, press agency and associated publicity strategies. The objective is to keep the carnival alive in the minds of target audiences all through the year. The promotional activities heighten and reach a peak in the last quarter of the year.

However, field observations show that the promotional activities for the carnival are virtually inactive until the last quarter when they are activated using the carnival theme launch, which is a media event, as a springboard. The promotions are gradually increased as December approaches. This faulty marketing strategy may be attributed to insufficient funds. Throsby emphasized the economic importance and implications of planning and early decision-making for tourists before choosing a tourist destination to visit (12). The carnival promotion should be active on prime-time television all through the year, to keep them in the consciousness of the target tourists to enable them to plan towards patronizing the brand. It was also observed that the promoters are not using frontline satellite television channels like CNN, BBC and ALJAZEERA for a wider global audience reach which will attract more international tourists and potential investors. This is the norm across many countries in the world that market their tourism potential.

The people of Cross River State, as the hosts of Carnival Calabar, regard the fiesta with some pride due to its relative success and popularity. But the marketing strategies for the carnival should also focus on youth empowerment to give the people sustainable livelihood all through the year rather than targeting bumper sales during the carnival period only. The marketing strategy should aim

at binding foreign partners from alienating the local community but to localize and domesticate their expertise and technology to enable the local people such as artisans, designers and other creative artists to become more involved in the carnival productions. Indeed:

African carnival executives could where necessary, hire the services of foreign experts to teach new or emerging technologies to local designers. The Indigenous designers can then teach the skills and techniques to others. This train-the-trainers approach will engender sustainability in the industry, develop the local human capital and save the much-needed foreign exchange which can then be ploughed back into other sectors of the creative industry. (Nwadiuwe and Nwadiuwe 57)

In this regard, the marketing campaign for the carnival would include selling the indigenous creativity, productive endeavour and artistic heritage of the local people thereby enabling them to take full ownership of the carnival. A cultural product does not exist in isolation. It is a part of the people that create it, their identity and heritage. Hence, marketing a carnival is invariably marketing the host city and its people who all together make the carnival fiesta brand by creating a warm and friendly atmosphere for visitors. The tourist can thereafter go back to testify that they had a great experience at the carnival. This becomes a credible testimonial and a strong selling point to market the carnival to others. It is the physical evidence that customers need to convince them to patronize a product or service in future.

Policy Directions

The staging of a carnival is capital-intensive and therefore requires a sustainable funding structure to thrive. As an annual event, there are always some expectations that each year's production should equal or surpass that of the previous year in

terms of glamour, creativity, attendance and organizational standard. This requires more work in aggressive marketing, increased funding and prudent management of resources.

Carnival programmes across the globe are predominantly private-sector driven. Governments cannot sustainably carry the funding responsibility every year without a serious impact on their statutory duties to their citizens given competing demands in other sectors of the economy. This is a major reason why some State governments in Nigeria were unable to sustain or even launch their carnival programmes despite their lofty objectives and attractive concepts. A government that is struggling to pay workers' salaries can hardly consider the funding of carnivals as a priority.

There is therefore the need for policy directions and re-focusing to give the private sector the job of managing the carnival while the government focuses on making supportive policies and creating the enabling environment for the cultural sector to grow. Even in situations where a public-private partnership exists, the government should not go into yearly funding of carnivals, especially in developing countries where resources are lean and the political climate unstable. The danger is that it may not be sustainable because if subsequent governments fail to finance the carnival project, the programme will fold up, to the detriment of practitioners in the industry.

The Calabar Carnival needs competent and creative marketers who must set high targets that will be pursued aggressively. The present marketing structure, concentrated on Okhma Global Limited which is the official marketing company for the carnival, is not quite effective. Hence the Commission keeps going to the State government to bail them out financially. A revised funding policy is required to make the carnival self-sustaining and yield profits in due course. The Commission should rethink the monopoly of Okhma Global Limited and decentralize the marketing structure. One way to achieve this is by breaking the carnival programme into segments and inviting other marketers to

come into the programme through a transparent bidding process. With different companies marketing the various segments and events of the programme, there will be healthy competition among them and this will likely produce better results for the Commission. In doing this, marketing team(s) should seriously consider applying the 7Ps marketing mix which gets good results in service industries.

The partnership agreements being entered into by the Carnival Commission should ideally be part of the marketing strategies. Hence, it should give profitable deals to the Commission rather than draining its resources. The foreign partners should, as a clause in the agreements, train local artists, producers and managers over a specified period to develop their skills to become experts and self-reliant. This will in the future yield significant dividends by saving the huge funds being spent on foreign partners every year as well as empowering the local people sustainably. This model is also suggested for the Bands that still import their costumes, accessories and designers either from abroad or outside the State. It is a welcome development that some new Bands such as CalasVegas are coming into the Carnival Calabar programme but they should focus their marketing strategies on creating homegrown models and continue to build the capacity of local designers, artists and artisans to make their skills marketable beyond the carnival season.

The new marketing policy being suggested for Carnival Calabar should explore the possibility of exploiting local resources in production designs and service delivery. For instance, local transport operators can be brought in to give special services to registered tourists at a reduced cost. Such tourists may need to pay, register online and get slips or numbered tags for easy identification on arrival. This strategy can be extended to airlines, inter-state transporters and city shuttles. The ease of movement will not only attract more visitors but yield additional revenue for the Commission through a percentage-sharing formula. It equally

makes the local people feel proud as part owners of the carnival fiesta.

The Commission is currently diversifying the programmes of the carnival such as introducing the Food Fair, Bikers Festival and Old Skool Costume Parade. This is a step in the right direction. But the Commission and its marketers should also explore the opportunities that abound in the aquatic entertainment subsector. Calabar is a coastal city with abundant water resources such as creeks, rivers, harbour and the Atlantic Ocean. The waterfronts can be exploited to introduce aquatic events such as boat regattas, pleasure cruises for tourists, swimming competitions, and seafood bazaars. Globally, the water-based funfair is known to attract a lot of foreign tourists and Calabar has immense potential in that regard. Smith affirms that the “diversification of tourism products” ultimately leads to “an increase in demand for cultural activities, which are becoming an integral part of the visitor experience” (207). Such diversification would increase the “pull factors” and revenue generation capacity of Carnival Calabar.

The marketers will need to extend their media promotional campaigns to the frontline global media such as ALJAZEERA, BBC and CNN. This will help immensely to pull more international tourists to the event. Relying on the website and Internet Blogs may not get the results for international visitors because Nigeria still ranks low on the global and even the African tourism destination index. Foreign tourists usually rely on international ratings in the industry to make decisions about their vacation destinations. A country like Malaysia had a similar campaign on CNN for a long period. Today, Malaysia has become a choice destination for cultural, business and academic tourism. The Internet platforms can only support the international satellite television media in this competitive quest to capture international tourists.

Conclusion

Globally, cultural tourism has become a significant economic resource that adds substantial inputs to a country's GDP. The carnival remains a crowd-puller and revenue-generating resource for various sectors of the economy (Apeh 148). Nigeria and other developing nations can tap from this resource to support their national economy, tackle unemployment and promote their identity and heritage (Endong 13). Nigeria needs this diversification because of its economic challenges amid enormous cultural and tourism resources as well as the dwindling and unstable oil revenue in the global market.

To achieve this, the management of the Carnival Calabar and other carnival programmes in Nigeria will need to transform their marketing policies using professional marketing outfits and adopting innovative mixes and strategies for effective results. The Cross River State government has set a good example in promoting cultural tourism in Africa. But this is having a considerable strain on the government treasury because the marketers are not raising enough funding and sponsorship deals to meet the growing needs of the yearly fiesta. The Bands are already self-supporting and private-sector driven, thereby substantially removing government expenses on them unlike the case when the carnival was at an early stage of development. The private sector initiative should be extended to the carnival management.

The Carnival Calabar remains a model for arts and cultural promotion in Nigeria. The project should therefore be supported and sustained through policy frameworks and private sector participation. At present, the Carnival has assumed political relevance in Cross River State. Due to its popularity, successive governments in the State have been using it to win votes from the electorate. This is one of the key reasons why the governments have continued to finance it despite their lean resources having lost much of their oil wells to a neighbouring State which reduced their capital allocations from the Federation Account. But if a

government decides to withdraw funding in future, the carnival may not survive.

Therefore, the Carnival Commission must assume some autonomy and set up an effective and result-oriented management structure devoid of the current Civil Service laxity and bureaucracy. They can then launch an aggressive marketing programme as a private sector and profit-oriented agency, using different marketing outfits to market various segments of the fiesta, to take the carnival to greater heights without depleting the government treasury. Marketing strategies are constantly informed by consumer behaviour. The managers need to routinely conduct consumer behaviour research and apply creative techniques to audience engineering to achieve better results. It will be useful for the marketers to consider the “push and pull factors” in tourism promotion as advocated by John Crompton and focus their marketing campaigns in the direction of the “pull factors” applying Kotler’s 7Ps marketing mix in innovative ways for better results. The Carnival Calabar is promoting jobs and supports the livelihoods of many artists and the general public in the host community and beyond. It is a big boost to the local creative industry. Efforts should be made to sustain the product given economic uncertainties in the country and its potential impact on government funding and patronage of the culture and creative industries.

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