AN EVALUATION OF THE MARKETING STRATEGIES USED IN THE MEDICAL PROFESSION: A CASE STUDY OF SIX HOSPITALS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The absence of a vibrant and effective marketing culture in any organisation is dangerous, especially if the organisation was originally established to generate income and make profits. This situation is quite dominant in the Nigerian healthcare sector at present and has resulted in the poor quality of marketing results and general performance currently seen in the hospitals. A marketing strategy is a marketing plan designed to achieve marketing objectives. Every organisation needs to have clear marketing objectives and the major route to achieving organisational goals depends on these strategies. Using six hospitals in Lagos, Nigeria, this study explored the various marketing strategies used in the medical profession. The need to improve upon the various marketing strategies used and increase the efforts towards marketing in the medical profession to help increase the revenue and profits generated in the healthcare business necessitated this study. This study involved a qualitative approach that was carried out through the administration of interview-guided questions to 20 female marketers who ranged between 23 and 49 years of age. The results from the study revealed that the majority of the marketers failed to conduct market analysis before the conception of the business. In addition, these marketers often did not use a combination of more than one marketing strategy to achieve an increase in their patients’ turn out and organisational revenue and profit. The findings necessitated recommendations to the organisation and marketing employees, including interacting and working with financial departments to minimise risk and maximise opportunities and provide training and support for marketers to conduct effective marketing to benefit the hospitals.

INTRODUCTION
The first wealth of a nation is its health and the health of a nation enhances and has a reciprocal relationship with economic development (Berry, 2005:2). In Nigeria, nonetheless, it has been enunciated that the pursuit of better health should not await an improved economy. Rather, measures to improve health will themselves contribute to economic growth. According to Solomon (2009:1), an elementary marketing concept states that
organisations exist to satisfy consumers’ wants and needs and these wants and needs can only be satisfied by understanding the consumers that will use the product. Marketing has been defined and conceptualised in various ways, depending on the author’s background, interest and education (Jager, 2007:868).

Aim of the Study
The aim of this study is to evaluate the various marketing strategies used by the marketers in the six hospitals, to analyse the role of marketing in the healthcare services industry, to identify the shortcomings of the strategies, and offer solutions to such shortcomings.

Objectives of the Study
The research objectives are as follows:
- To determine the effectiveness of marketing strategies in six hospitals in Lagos, Nigeria.
- To establish the perceived relationship between the marketing strategies and performance at six hospitals in Lagos, Nigeria.
- To ascertain how the marketing strategies used by the hospitals affect the hospitals.
- To make recommendations to the hospitals and other stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW
A strategy is a fundamental pattern of present and planned objectives, resource deployments and interactions of an organisation with markets, competitors and other environmental factors (Berry, 2005:1). A strategy should specify what (objectives to be accomplished), where (on which industries and product-markets to focus) and how (which resources and activities to allocate to each product-market to meet environmental opportunities and threats and to gain a competitive advantage). A marketing strategy is, therefore, a marketing plan designed to achieve marketing objectives. Every organisation needs to have clear marketing objectives and the major route to achieving organisational goals will depend on these strategies. Developing a strategy involves establishing clear aims and objectives around which the framework for a policy is created. Having established its strategy, an organisation can then determine its day-to-day tools and tactics to meet the objectives. However, rather than a single comprehensive strategy, most organisations have a hierarchy of interrelated strategies, each formulated at a different level of the organisation.

A marketing strategy is a marketing plan designed to achieve marketing objectives (Certo, 2006:812). Organisational managers in many firms have applied the concept of marketing, which may be simple or complex. The concept of marketing and variants of it are essentially concerned with satisfying clients’ needs and wants and developing and implementing efficient and effective marketing strategies that incorporate relevant dimensions of the marketing concept involving the organic tasks of selecting a target market to operate in and developing an efficient and effective marketing-ingredient combination.

A literature review forms the foundation on which a study is based by providing an understanding and giving insight into relevant previous research and trends that have emerged (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007:57). The literature review presents the theoretical perspective of the study and past research that is relevant to the research questions. Theories are discussed within the broader research questions and within the context of the effectiveness of marketing strategy on hospitals and the relationship between marketing strategies and clientele growth and maintenance.
Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies in Nigerian Hospitals
Marketing is more than a series of business-related functions. It is a wide-reaching business philosophy designed to develop an attitude of mind that should be shared by everyone in an organisation and enhanced by both frequent and open communication. Developing such an attitude of mind reduces the likelihood of crisis and contributes to the development of the overall future of an enterprise at both strategic and tactical levels (Jager, 2007:868). The heart of marketing outlines the degree to which an organisation becomes marketing-orientated (Kirby, 2006:1). The more committed a company is to its marketing activities, the more it will be able to pursue its corporate objectives and develop and retain customers (Kollman, 2006:1433). Homan (2007:274) believes that marketing seems easy to describe but extremely difficult to practice. Every business in existence relies upon its customers for survival and those who best meet customer needs will always survive a period of change. The marketing function is, therefore, an essential ingredient of corporate strategy and the marketing focus should be communicated through marketing planning to all aspects of business activity. Marketing can also be seen as the process of developing and implementing a strategy to plan and coordinate ways of identifying, anticipating and satisfying consumer demands in a way that maximises profits. This is because it is increasingly apparent that, although making a profit is important, an organisation should also develop its market share and search for brand leadership as well (Libai, 2010: 282).

The primary focus of a marketing strategy is to effectively allocate and coordinate marketing resources and activities to accomplish an organisation’s objectives within a specific product-market (Solomon, 2008:2). Therefore, the critical issue concerning the scope of a marketing strategy is specifying the target market(s) for a particular product or product-line, as firms seek competitive advantage and synergy through a well-integrated program of marketing mix elements (the 4 Ps of product, price, place, promotion) tailored to the needs and wants of potential customers in that target market. According to Cowell (2009:223), to formulate a useful corporate strategy, management must address six interrelated decisions: the overall scope and mission of the organisation, company goals and objectives, sources of competitive advantage, development strategy for future growth, allocation of corporate resources across the organisation’s various businesses and the search for synergy through sharing corporate resources, intangibles or programs across businesses or product lines.

The core fundamentals of medical practice management are the same today as they were 30 years ago, but what has changed is that the market has become so saturated that the most successful medical practices have now learned to distinguish themselves from their competition by using more modern marketing ideas for medical practices. As healthcare needs of the population grow, the opportunities for healthcare organisations and providers also grow to meet these needs.

Competition in the healthcare industry is constantly becoming more challenging, requiring marketers to become more proactive in their approach to marketing as they need to effectively target potential clients with messages designed to increase awareness of their services in ways like:

- Targeting the Decision-makers: The decision-makers in healthcare are not always immediately visible. Some providers wrongly focus on the consumer market when other drivers of healthcare decisions may be overlooked;
- Understanding the Competition: Effective marketing strategies require that healthcare organisations and providers understand the competition, including indirect
competitors or psychic competitors, which represent any alternative choice to a product or service (Green-Pedersen, 2006:1039); and

- Embracing the Internet: The Internet and related technologies represent new opportunities for healthcare organisations and must be included in marketing strategies. Blogs, participation in social networking sites (like Twitter and Facebook), and a well designed and interactive website are ways that healthcare organisations can connect and build relationships with potential patients (Taylor, 2008:748).

According to Luan (2010:444), certain critics of healthcare marketing state that hospital marketing drives up the cost of healthcare and that medical centres should spend the money on patient care instead. With the plethora of medical choices that advances in technology provide, however, proponents of healthcare marketing refute this notion and insist hospital marketing empowers patients, is necessary in the face of increasing competition, and is geared towards educating patients and physicians about hospitals’ quality and services (Sheth, 2008:1). Before the advent of the Internet, many medical provider decisions were based on geographical considerations and referrals. In recent years, hospitals have begun advertising specialties, partnerships and advancements through social media, online portals as well as mobile devices. Hospitals have essentially evolved into unique brands that are accessible worldwide with their own marketing needs and consumer acquisition goals. According to Ned Russell, managing director for Saatchi and Saatchi Wellness, hospitals need to attract talent and get funding by increasing their patient base and advertising to lure patients (Douglas, 2011:415).

Despite the evidence that a market-orientation boosts performance (Solomon, 2008:1), many companies around the world are not very focused on their market environments (customers and competitors). The reasons for this include competitive conditions, which may enable a company to be successful in the short-term without being particularly sensitive to customer desires, and different levels of economic development across industries or countries, which may favour different business philosophies or firms suffering from strategic inertia. Nonetheless, the competitive conditions some firms face enable them to be successful in the short-term without paying much attention to their customers, suppliers, distributors, or other organisations in their market environment. Businesses facing such market and competitive conditions are often product-oriented because they focus most of their attention and resources on functions such as product and process engineering, production, and finance in order to acquire and manage the resources necessary to keep pace with growing demand (Walker, 2008:1). As industries mature, sales volumes level off and technological differences among brands tend to shrink as manufacturers copy the best features of each other’s products (Woodward, 2009:701).

Consequently, a firm must seek new market segments or steal share from competitors by offering lower prices, superior services or intangible benefits other firms cannot match (Wuyts, 2004:479). At this stage, management can most readily appreciate the benefits of a market orientation and marketers are often given a bigger role in developing competitive strategies. A given industry’s characteristics may make some components of a market orientation more crucial for good performance than others. For example, in an industry dominated by large, dynamic competitors (as in the global automobile industry), being responsive to competitor moves may be even more important than a strong customer focus. The bottom line is that an orientation towards the market (competitors, customers, and potential customers) is usually crucial for continued success in global markets. There are many ways a company might attempt to gain an advantage within the scope of its competitive
domain. In most cases, though, a sustainable competitive advantage at the corporate level is based on company resources (that is, resources that other firms do not have that take a long time to develop and are hard to acquire). Many such unique resources are marketing-related. For example, some businesses have highly developed market information systems, extensive market research operations and/or cooperative long-term relationships with customers that give them a superior ability to identify and respond to emerging customers’ needs and desires. Others have a brand name that customers recognise and trust, co-operative alliances with suppliers or distributors that enhance efficiency or a body of satisfied and loyal customers who are predisposed to buy related products or services. Even if a company possesses resources that its competitors do not possess, it is not alone sufficient to guarantee superior performance. The key is to develop a competitive strategy for each business unit within an organisation and a strategic marketing program for each of its product lines that convert one or more of the company’s unique resources into something of value to customers.

Often, the projected future sales and profits of an organisation’s business units and product-markets fall short of an organisation’s long-term growth and profitability objectives. There is a gap between what the organisation expects to become if it continues on its present course and what it would like to become. This is not surprising because some of its high-growth markets are likely to slip into maturity over time and some of its high-profit mature businesses may decline to insignificance as they get older. Thus, to determine where future growth is coming from, management must decide on a strategy to guide corporate development. Even when an organisation holds a commanding share of an existing product-market, additional growth may be possible by encouraging current customers to become more loyal and concentrate their purchases, use more of the product or service, or use it more often or in new ways. There are different ways a business can grow, which are explained below:

- **Expansion by Developing New Products for Current Customers:** A second avenue to future growth is through a product-development strategy emphasising the introduction of product-line extensions or new product or service offerings aimed at existing customers. For example, Arm & Hammer successfully introduced a laundry detergent, an oven cleaner and a carpet cleaner;

- **Expansion by Selling Existing Products to New Segments or Countries:** For many companies, this growth strategy has the greatest potential; it is the development of new markets for their existing goods or services. This may involve the creation of marketing programs aimed at non-user or occasional-user segments of existing markets;

- **Expansion into New Geographic Markets, Particularly New Countries:** This is also a primary growth strategy for many firms. For example, the strategic plan of Degussa, the large German speciality chemicals manufacturer calls for greatly increased resources and marketing efforts to be directed towards China over the next few years. While developing nations represent attractive growth markets for basic industrial and infrastructure goods and services, growing personal incomes and falling trade barriers are making them attractive potential markets for many consumer goods and services and even developed nations can represent growth opportunities for products or services based on newly emerging technologies or business models;

- **Expansion by Diversifying:** Organisations also seek growth by diversifying their operations. This is typically riskier than the various expansion strategies because it often involves learning new operations and dealing with unfamiliar customer groups. Nevertheless, the majority of large global organisations are diversified to one degree or another. Vertical integration is one way for companies to diversify. Forward vertical integration occurs when a firm moves downstream in terms of the product
flow, as when a manufacturer integrates by acquiring or launching a wholesale distributor or retail outlet. Backward integration occurs when an organisation moves upstream by acquiring a supplier. Integration can give an organisation access to scarce or volatile sources of supply or tighter control over the marketing, distribution or servicing of its products. However, it increases the risks inherent in committing substantial resources to a single industry. Concentric diversification occurs when an organisation internally develops or acquires another business that does not have products or customers in common with its current businesses but that might contribute to internal synergy through the sharing of production facilities, brand names, Research and Development knowledge or marketing and distribution skills.

The motivation for conglomerate diversification is primarily financial rather than operational. An unrelated diversification involves two businesses that have no commonalities in products, customers, production facilities or functional areas of expertise. Such diversification typically occurs when a disproportionate number of an organisation’s current businesses decline because of decreasing demands, increased competition or product obsolescence. An organisation must seek new avenues of growth. Selected organisations may move into unrelated businesses because they have more capital than they need in order to expand their current businesses or because they seek to discourage take-over attempts. Unrelated diversification tends to be the riskiest growth strategy in terms of financial outcomes. Most empirical studies report that related diversification is more conducive to capital productivity and other dimensions of performance than it is unrelated diversification. This suggests that the ultimate goal of a corporation’s strategy for growth should be to develop a compatible portfolio of businesses to which the organisation can add value through the application of its unique core competencies. An organisation’s marketing competencies can be particularly important in this regard; and

- Expansion by Diversifying Through Organisational Relationships or Networks: Recently, organisations have attempted to gain some benefits of market expansion or diversification while simultaneously focusing more intensely on a few core competencies. They try to accomplish this by forming relationships or organisational networks with other organisationss instead of acquiring ownership (Vag, 2007:904).

Corporate identity, together with a strong corporate brand that embodies that identity, can help an organisation to stand out from its competitors and give it a sustainable advantage in the market. Corporate identity flows from the communications, impressions and personality projected by an organisation. It is shaped by an organisation’s mission and values, its functional competencies, the quality and design of its goods and services, its marketing communications, the actions of its personnel, and the image generated by various corporate activities. One rationale for such corporate identity programs is that they can generate synergies that enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation’s marketing efforts for its individual product offerings. By focusing on a common core of corporate values and competencies, every impression generated by each product’s design, packaging, advertising and promotional materials can help reinforce and strengthen the impact of all the other impressions an organisation communicates to customers, employees, shareholders and other audiences, thereby generating more from its limited marketing financial investment. By consistently focusing on values and competencies associated with providing high-quality family entertainment, Walt Disney, for example, has created an identity that helps stimulate customer demand across a wide range of product offerings, including movies, television programs, licensed merchandise, theme parks and cruise ships.
Against this background, the present study attempts to assess the marketing strategies of Nigerian hospitals, the impact of environmental factors on such strategies, and the effectiveness of the marketing strategies. The healthcare system erects an array of barriers to each of these valuable types of innovation. More often than not, though, the obstacles can be overcome by managing the six forces that have an impact on healthcare innovation. The six forces (industry players, funding, public policy, technology, customers and accountability) can help or hinder innovation efforts (Valluri, 2009:331). Individually or in combination, the forces will affect the three types of innovation in different ways (Khouja, 2008:111). The healthcare sector has many stakeholders each with an agenda. Often, these players have substantial resources and the power to influence public policy and opinion by attacking or helping innovators. Healthcare marketing facilitates relationships among hospitals and physicians as well as between medical centres and patients. Medical costs have been on the rise since the 1980s, and, since the early 2000s, the amount spent on healthcare marketing and communications has doubled. According to a survey by the Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development in 2009, the budgets ranged from an average of $1.3 million for independent hospitals to $5.8 million for large health systems (Valluri, 2009:331). Increased medical provider competition and a surge in medical attention have contributed to an increased focus on healthcare marketing.

**Relationship between Marketing Strategy and Patients’ Growth**

Businesses are often involved in many small day-to-day decisions, strategy considerations and approaches to handle major issues that an organisation must overcome (either immediately or in the future). Strategy involves setting the organisational direction for the medium to long-term. These time frames are, of course, relative and vary according to an organisation and industry. Useful strategies take into account that short-term decisions do need to be made. Strategy, therefore, provides a framework for making those decisions within the context of an organisation’s long-range goals. The low-cost strategy is not just about pricing but how it is achieved through operational efficiency and standardisation. Therefore, a product found once at a particular store may not always be available there. To maintain low expenses, these stores also limit personnel (human resources). If customers want low prices, they must sacrifice a great deal of both choice and personal attention.

According to Landro (2006:D8), one important problem many healthcare organisations face is fragmentation and a lack of inter-operability among its functional information systems. For example, the heart of the internal records system for any healthcare service organisation resides in the clinical and financial functions, which are often not integrated. For most health service marketing managers, however, finding, reconciling and ensuring the accuracy of the clinical and financial data is often a challenge. The Nigerian healthcare environment is characterised by internal and external environmental factors. The marketing strategies of the Nigerian healthcare industry are expected to be used to adapt to these environmental factors in order to achieve set performance measures. Healthcare is still an astonishingly fragmented industry. It has been discovered that hospitals’ strategic emphasis has changed significantly between 1996-1997 and 2000-2001. In the mid-1990s, hospitals primarily competed on price through wholesale strategies (that is, providing services attractive to managed care plans). By 2000-2001, non-price competition was becoming increasingly important and hospitals were reviving retail strategies (that is, providing attractive services to individual physicians and the patients they serve). Three major factors explain this strategic shift: less than anticipated selective contracting and captivated payment arrangements, the freeing up of hospital resources previously devoted to horizontal and vertical integration strategies, and the
emergence and growth of hospital competitors (inpatient and outpatient). The current emphasis on non-price competition, retail strategies and service mimicking is suggestive of the fact that there is an emergence of this strategic shift. However, there are some important differences between the medical arms race today and the one that occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s. In particular, the current hospital market is more concentrated and price competition remains relatively important.

A strategy frequently and primarily used by teaching hospitals has been the creation of unique services to attract patients with specific diagnoses to their facilities. These niche services are highly specialised and depend on the capabilities of specialists that few other hospitals have the resources to recruit and retain (Pham, 2005:101). Niche services can differentiate hospitals from competitors and be aggressively marketed to smaller, specific consumer or patient segments. Much like academic medical centres, hospitals advertise these services to consumers through traditional media and the internet in an effort to establish brand loyalty and attract more patients to their highest paying services. Another closely related strategy is developing and designating certain specialty areas of the hospital or system as a centre of excellence. Most often, hospitals determine that they have a centre of excellence after investing in the service (for example, new technology or facilities) or marketing. However, the fear that other competing hospitals or for-profit specialty organisations might lure away specialists who perform relatively lucrative services has recently led some hospitals to begin constructing new specialty hospitals. For example, cardiologists in Phoenix convinced a hospital to partner with them to build a freestanding inpatient facility using discussions with a national company to advance their negotiations. The new joint venture became the second cardiac hospital in Phoenix in which physicians held stakeholder ownership. Recently, in Indianapolis, two competing hospitals’ decisions to expand and enhance their cardiology services was motivated, in part, by the threatened entry of a for-profit company that planned to build an inpatient facility with local cardiologists as equity partners (Knorr, 2005:489). There are also a variety of general acute care facility enhancements and expansion services that also increase patient growth:

- Inpatient Capacity: Enhancements and expansions to intensive care units (ICUs) and operating rooms primarily designed to attract and retain physicians who used these facilities on a daily basis and to increase hospital efficiency. Enhancements and expansions to general medical and surgical beds are primarily designed to increase patients’ healthcare service satisfaction;
- General Hospitals: About 14% of hospitals also built new general hospital facilities, which were built to replace old inefficient buildings, attract physicians and patients and maintain or increase market share by expanding into attractive geographic sub-markets (that is, growing a well-insured population); and
- Emergency Rooms: About 12% of hospitals also enhanced and expanded emergency room capacity. In some markets, delayed access to emergency care was a problem, in part, due to prior emergency room closures and changes in the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labour Act (EMTALA; Woodward, 2009:701). Hospitals also sought to improve the front door of their facilities and customise emergency rooms for important patient subpopulations (for example, children and their parents; Roehrich, 2007:621).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Introduction
Methodology can be defined as the methods that researchers intend to use to collect data (Troititzsch, 2004:23). Methodology is used to develop and provide a clear idea about the type of research and the manner in which the research will be conducted. In order to plan accordingly, timeously and to ensure that research is conducted appropriately, methodology provides a platform for researchers to map out studies and design them in a way that will achieve the objectives. Research methodology guides researchers to become involved and be active in his/her particular field of enquiry (Sanford, 2008:4).

Target Population
A target population is the entire set of units for which the survey data is to be used to make inferences (Maxwell, 2006:28). It can also be defined as the eligible population that is included in research work or a description of the population a study is examining (Maxwell, 2007:3). The term target population denotes the ecological resource about which information is wanted and requires a clear and precise definition.

The first hospital (Brodie-mends Maternity Clinic) had twelve people in the marketing department, consisting of one marketing manager, one assistant marketing manager, and two supervisors. The second hospital (Jonken Medical & Eye Centre) had twenty eight people in the marketing department, consisting of one marketing manager, one assistant marketing manager and two supervisors. The third hospital (Lucy Memorial Hospital) had fifteen people in the marketing department, which encompassed one marketing manager and three supervisors. The fourth hospital (Modupeoluwa Maternity Home & Clinic) had fifteen people in the marketing department, which included one marketing manager and three supervisors. The fifth hospital (Esther-Stephens Clinic) had fifteen people in the marketing department, consisting of one marketing manager, one assistant marketing manager and two supervisors. The sixth hospital (The Eko Hospitals) had fifteen people in the marketing department, including one marketing manager and three supervisors.

The sample size for this study was twenty participants. The target population was comprised of the marketers who are involved in the day-to-day marketing activities of their organisations.

Limitations of the Research
Though the emphasis and methodology of research may differ between different fields and disciplines, most fields share the following concerns: discovering the relevant facts of an event, issue, procedure or problem, reviewing and evaluating contrasting explanations for the topic being researched, especially explanations which may differ from what the current research has concluded, reviewing the consensus (or lack of it) of the research findings among researchers and disseminating the findings and conclusions for critical review (Brutus, 2013:48). Some possible methodological limitations include sample size, a lack of available or reliable data, a lack of prior research studies on the topic, the measure or instrument used to collect the data or self-report data bias. Some possible limitations on the part of a researcher might include access to participants, longitudinal effects, language fluency problems, the ability to generalise results and reliability (Carley, 2003:1).

Some of the limitations associated with this particular study included inadequate prior research studies on the topic in question and the expansive loss of time, especially when waiting for the participants in their various offices to make themselves available to complete the interviews.
RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction
The purpose of any research study is to collect data, analyse it and present and discuss the findings from the analysis to arrive at conclusions and recommendations. The previous chapters in this study introduced the study, reviewed the relevant literature and described the research methodology used in the study. This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings of the results based on the data that was gathered from the participants.

Data Presentation
The data presentation is done with the use of tables, and, thereafter, is analysed. The interview questions were categorised into sections A, B, and C. Section A comprises the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the hospitals, section B covers the impact of the marketing strategies on the hospitals and section C comprises of the impact of marketing strategies on the profit ratio of the hospitals. Content analysis was carried out on all questions and the results are presented in the manner allowing for valid conclusions. The presentation of the findings follows the same format as the interview guided questions (attached as Appendix K). There was a response rate of 100% from the participants.

Section A: Effectiveness of Marketing Strategy in the Hospital
This section intended to determine the effectiveness of the marketing strategies used in the hospitals, whether or not targeted customers are interviewed and the findings documented, whether the hospitals carefully study the positioning, marketing tactics, strength and weaknesses of other hospitals, whether opportunities are identified to meet short and long term goals and objectives, whether there are any forms of documentation of each hospital’s unique selling propositions, whether or not the hospitals are developing and maintaining a voice or face (which is the hospital), and whether they take inventory of the hospital’s current products and programs and audit the content of such products and programs.

Interview and Documentation of Targeted Customers
A challenge for many hospitals in the state of Lagos has been the inability to identify their target customers. As a result, interviewing or documenting customer interactions and interviews are relatively nonexistent. Consequently, there is a loss of privileged or vital information due to improper documentation. This question was used to explore whether or not each of the hospitals have conducted interviews and documented such interviews with the targeted customers before the conception of the organisation or type of enterprise. The findings to this question are discussed below.

Even though quite a number of the participants demonstrated an awareness of interviewing and documentation of targeted customers, there were contrasting views about documentation. Ten of the participants provided negative opinions concerning the interviewing and documentation of targeted customers. The quote below represents the opinion of Grace (Female, 47 years), who was one of the participants with a negative opinion: “...No I did not interview or document targeted customers....I did not see any reason to do so, considering the stress involved. Besides you know how a lot of Nigerians are, everyone is security-conscious, especially in Lagos.... ”

On the other hand, Judith (Female, 33 years) was optimistic about interviewing and documenting targeted customers. Her comment, which follows, shows this:
“The interview and documentation of targeted customers, I believe, is the first right step to take even before the business starts….it makes work easier for you and enables you preserve vital or privileged information, for future use or reference....”

The remaining four participants were neutral in their answers. Below is Lucy’s (Female, 25 years) comment:

“I am just two months old in this organization ....so I do not know anything about it and cannot answer your question....”

The findings from the interview questions may offer some explanation for the constant loss of privileged or vital information in some hospitals, especially due to improper documentation (Zhang, 2007:912).

Positioning and SWOT Analysis of Other Hospitals

A formal written marketing plan is essential as it provides an unambiguous reference point for activities throughout the planning period. However, perhaps the most important benefit of marketing plans is the planning process itself. This typically offers a unique opportunity and a forum for information-rich and productively focused discussions between the various managers involved. The plan, together with the associated discussions, then provides an agreed context for subsequent management activities, even for those not described in the plan itself (Osuagwu, 2009:114). This question sought to establish whether any careful studies of the other competing hospitals were conducted. The question findings are presented below.

Five of the participants demonstrated an awareness of studying the positioning and SWOT analyses of the other hospitals. However, there were many more contrasting views. Seven participants demonstrated a negative view about the statement, whereas eight of the participants demonstrated difficulty recalling whether or not any SWOT analysis was conducted. The following quote represents the view of Mercy (Female, 40 years), one of the participants with a negative view about studying the positioning and SWOT analyses of other hospitals:

“...the process of studying the positioning and SWOT analysis of the other hospitals is very stressful and can be confusing, especially if you do not have any inside source of information in the marketing department of the hospital in question ....and this makes the entire work burdensome....”

On the contrary, Ruth (Female, 37 years) was optimistic about studying the positioning and SWOT analysis of other hospitals. Her comment below does not only reflect her diligence and vibrant nature, but also demonstrates her attitude towards her work. She appears to be enjoying her work so much that she performs to the best of her ability to ensure she gets good results:

“I think it is the right thing to do, considering the fact that laying the right foundation in any business would guarantee you a solid structure in the end....”

Of the eight participants that stated that they could not remember studying the positioning and SWOT analysis of other hospitals, Rita (Female, 24 years) stated that she was only recently employed in the organisation where she works. Below is Rita’s comment:

“I just started working with this organization; but I know I have asked the head of operations once or twice about this same issue .... I was not given any concrete answer. I cannot remember hearing comments on them studying the positioning and SWOT analysis of other competing hospitals ...”
Studying the positioning and SWOT analysis of the other hospitals seemed to be peculiar to middle-aged female marketers. The small sample size and the fact that only females were used in the study may prevent the generalisation of this observation to other settings. However, this observation may offer explanation for the affinity of organisations to employ more middle-aged females for marketing positions than their older or younger counter-parts (Valentine, 2008:159). Middle-aged female marketers appear to have a better understanding of their marketing responsibilities and a better grasp of marketing skills. Perhaps, as demonstrated in this study, experience on the job might be a contributing factor.

**Identified Opportunities to Meet Short and Long-Term Goals and Objectives**

In a recent study by Pham (2005:101), a strong correlation was found between a company’s financial performance and effective goal setting processes. Organisations that more closely aligned goals across their organisation enjoyed much higher levels of financial success. The study also found that employees in the weakest-performing companies did not clearly understand the connection between their individual efforts and the overall goals of their employers. These same people also reported feeling confused as to their roles at the company, which naturally resulted in unfocused, and, therefore, less productive work activity. The question included in this study wanted to establish whether or not opportunities to meet short and long term goals and objectives were identified. The findings to this question are presented below.

The participants displayed an awareness of the process of identifying opportunities to meet short and long term goals and objectives. However, there were contrasting views in this area. Eight of the participants gave a negative report about identifying opportunities, whereas seven of the participants were neutral in their responses. The quote below represents the opinion of Cathy (Female, 45 years), one of the participants who responded with a negatively associated comment:

“….I did not do this....I actually forgot this part....”

A second participant, Kelly (Female, 43 years), responded with a negative comment, as outlined below:

“….I did not....at the time this hospital was started, marketing was not as sophisticated as it seems now. Then, we did not have to advertise to anybody; as long as we were opened for the day, customers kept patronising us....”

The comment below represents the response of another participant, Lovelyn (Female, 25 years), who had a neutral response:

“....I do not know how to answer this question....I just joined the organization....”

On the contrary, Maria (Female, 34 years), who was more optimistic in her opinion, commented as follows:

“....Yes I did....it helped me determine the market share of the business and its performance; and by this single step, I was ahead of all the other competing hospitals....”

The findings, above, may offer explanation for the reason why some of the hospitals enjoy much higher levels of financial success than other competing hospitals.

**Agreed and Documented Unique Selling Propositions**

A unique selling proposition can be described as what an organisation stands for, provides or offers that sets an organisation apart from others. Instead of attempting to be known for
everything, organisations with a unique selling proposition stand for something specific, which becomes what an organisation is known for (Goodwin, 2011:50). A business can situate its unique selling proposition on product characteristics, price structure, placement strategy (location and distribution) or promotional strategy. Selling propositions are manipulated to give a business a market position that sets it apart from the competition (Butler, 2006:420). This question wanted to ascertain whether or not the hospitals agreed and documented their unique selling propositions and the findings to this question are presented below.

Although the results were contrasting between the participants, a few of the participants demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of documenting the agreed unique selling propositions of the hospital they worked for. Only three of the participants had a positive view about documenting the agreed unique selling propositions. Below is a quote from Angela (Female, 35 years), one of the three participants that had a positive view about documenting the agreed unique selling propositions of the hospital:

“.....as the team leader of this project then (while she pointed at the entire hospital), I took up the responsibility of making the other team members document the agreed unique selling proposition of this business....and for us here, ours is hospitality and affordability....initially it was challenging but it is definitely worth the hassle....”

On the contrary, nine other participants reported negative views about agreeing and documenting the unique selling propositions. Below are three quotes from Betty (Female, 42 years), Lisa (Female, 44 years) and Kate (Female, 40 years), respectively, who gave one reasons justifying their failure to agree or document the unique selling propositions of the business.

Betty (Female, 42 years) said: “I did not think it was necessary to document the agreed unique selling propositions of the business, although we reached a conclusive decision on what ours....since my team and I already knew the actions to take....I felt documenting again was a waste of the time we never had ....”; 

Lisa (Female, 44 years) said: “I did not even think of documenting the agreed unique selling propositions of the business because it was additional work for me and no extra compensation....considering the nature of my job and the fact that I already had a lot of other jobs handle and sales targets to meet ....”;

Kate (Female, 40 years) said: “Sometimes I feel guilty that I did not did not document the agreed unique selling propositions of the business and I wish I had done that ....but the deadline given to me by the management to round-off work and open the hospital for business activities was so close, I intentionally neglected the unique selling propositions ....”

The remaining eight participants, due to their recent employment in their organisation, stated that they did not know anything about documenting the agreed unique selling propositions of the hospital. Below is what Martha (Female, 28 years) said:

“.... actually I am a new staff here, I just resumed last week Monday. I do not anything about this and I cannot make any comments concerning it....so far I have been to the company's archive but have not seen any evidence of documenting their agreed unique selling propositions....”
One of the newly employed staff, Susan (Female, 25 years), expressed her disappointment at not finding any information that could help her ascertain whether or not the hospital has identified its unique selling proposition. Below are her comments about this area:

“…..It is really disappointing that there is no documentation whatsoever of the hospital’s unique selling propositions…..it shows that a lot of marketers are not well grounded on their jobs. Maybe if I were here then, I would have done things differently and rightly....”

Documenting the agreed unique selling propositions seemed to be consistent with the middle-aged female marketers. This observation may offer explanation for unique selling propositions being the key to effective selling. Unless marketers are able to pinpoint what makes a particular organisation unique in a world of homogeneous competitors, it is challenging to target sales efforts (Butler, 2006:420).

**Developed and Maintained a Voice or Face for the Brand**

Gerard (2013:10) suggests that branding is about winning, keeping customers and influencing their choices. A brand stands for the relationship between a business and its customers, and a business without customers in no longer a business. The best brands create a special relationship with customers based on intangible qualities that evoke strong emotional responses. Perhaps, the most important brand management activity is positioning the brand properly, as a well-positioned brand addresses important consumer benefits in unique and compelling ways, creates an emotional connection to the consumer and provides flexibility for future growth (beyond current product and service categories). This question aimed to establish whether or not the hospitals have developed and maintained a voice for their brand (which is the hospital) and the findings are outlined below.

Many of the participants demonstrated strong knowledge of developing and maintaining a voice or face for the hospital brand, even though not all of them were unable to provide specificity. Six of the participants were neutral in this regard, and the quote below from Patricia (Female, 26 years) illustrates this:

“….I just started working here last month....that is why I cannot be of much help in this scenario....”

Nine participants declined developing and maintaining a voice or face for their hospital brand, which is seen in Mary’s (Female, 40 years) quote below:

“….I had the intentions of developing a face for the hospital but in the process I got discouraged and frustrated because I was told by the management that they did not have adequate resources (money) to go round....and every department wanted one thing or the other at the same time, so they would prioritise all the needs....and after waiting for some months, I decided to forget about the idea....”

Another participant, Martha (Female, 44 years) stated:

“....Well I did not bother to developing a face for the hospital because I did not think it was necessary to do so....I believe that the hospital is both an essential commodity and a perishable good; you do not need advertisements for clients to patronise you....”

However, some of the participants agreed to developing and maintaining a voice for their hospital brand. Some of their comments below reflect their thoughts and actions regarding this.

Queen (Female, 34 years) noted:
“Absolutely, I did. Developing a brand can be challenging but when you succeed at it, the name of the hospital readily comes to the minds of the customers....”

Jane (Female, 38 years) stated:
“Yes I did. I think that developing a brand is one phase, maintaining a brand is another phase....the two phases definitely aim to achieve one goal....and that is customer’s loyalty to my company....”

These observations and findings may offer explanation for why some clients exhibit strong emotional responses towards a particular hospital (Levitt, 2013:22), a finding that is similar and demonstrated in this study.

**Inventory Taking of Each Hospital’s Current Activities**

Inventory taking and auditing of a company’s products and program contents helps to minimise business risk and enables marketers to understand the problems and opportunities facing an organisation and the opportunity to identify sales opportunities and plan the marketing approach (Reeves, 2011:46). Hence, the need for this question arises in order to establish whether inventory was taken and each hospital’s products and programs audited. The findings are presented below.

Very few participants demonstrated an awareness of inventory taking in their organisations. Many more of the participants had a negative opinion of inventory taking, whereas the remaining seven participants either did not know or were unable to remember taking any inventory whatsoever. The quote below represents the opinion of Alice (Female, 40 years), who was one of the participants with a negative opinion of inventory taking:

“...No I did not take any inventory of the hospital’s current activities; I did not see any need for that rigorous exercise....besides I do not think it is part of the marketing team’s responsibility to do stock-taking....”

Apart from this group of participants, there was another group that stated that they did not know anything about taking stock. Below is Daniella’s (Female, 26 years) comment:

“....Please I am relatively new in this organization...and I am so sorry about that because I cannot help you much here....”

The last group of participants had a positive opinion of stock taking. Princess’ (Female, 33 years) comment reflects her passion to make a formidable impact in the organisation she works in:

“Yes I did. It helps me as a marketer to determine my take-off point, appreciate the progress and achievements on my job and know at what point to take a break....”

These findings may offer explanation for the reason why a lot of the hospitals are vulnerable and exposed to very high business risks (Reeves, 2011:46).

**Section B: The Impact of Marketing Strategies on the Hospital**

This section determines if the marketing strategies used by the hospitals have resulted in increased awareness of the hospitals, if the marketing strategies used by the hospitals have resulted in increased patient numbers and positive perception of the hospitals’ by stakeholders, if the marketing strategies used by the hospitals have resulted in increased revenue and profits, whether the use of marketing strategies by the hospitals have increased
investor interest in the hospital and how the marketing strategies used by the hospitals have resulted in increased enquiries for the products and services offered by the hospitals.

**Effectiveness of the Marketing Strategy on Awareness of the Hospital**

One very important way of creating awareness about a product or service is either by consistently developing new ways of delivering the same product or service to the customer or by developing entirely new products and services to provide to the customer. Whichever path a company takes, the most important thing is that a company is constantly abreast with changes in the market and ahead of competitors (Solomon, 2008:44). Many hospital-businesses have developed in the last decade, many of which did not introduce new ways of doing business or new products to enhance their awareness (a trend that presently continues). This reality highlights the need to establish the effectiveness of the marketing strategy on awareness of the hospitals. The findings are discussed below.

Only very few of the participants gave either a positive or negative response. Many more of the participants provided a neutral response because they are newly employed. The quote below represents the opinion of Alice (Female, 40 years), who was one of the participants who had a negative opinion:

“...Well, I did not see any visible difference....even though I did some marketing. I am beginning to think that it is either the marketing strategies I used were not appropriate or marketing in the hospital business does not work....”

In addition, below is the comment of Martha (Female, 28 years), who provided a neutral response:

“.... actually I am a new staff here, I just resumed last week Monday....”

Of the three participants that had a positive opinion, this is what Princess (Female, 33 years) said:

“....For me, marketing is the secret of every thriving business and I engage in it from time to time. When I first started, it was tense in the office because I was given a very big target....I was very anxious too because I did not know what exactly to expect from the outside world....but now the story has changed....”

Another participant, Angela (Female, 35 years), expressed an optimistic opinion:

“....Yes I did....and although initially I was not getting the results I desired, I continued....now I can boldly tell you that we have the name of our hospital on the lips of a lot of patients and in this location, they all know that we exist....”

A third participant, Maria (Female, 34 years), also had a positive response, reported as follows:

“....Yes I actually did a lot of marketing....and now it is paying off really good....”

Marketers who are unable to effectively create adequate awareness of a company’s products can be considered as underperforming in their supposed area of speciality (Walker, 2008:22). Hence, the failure of marketers to innovate may have detrimental effects on an organisation. The findings above may offer explanation for why many of the hospitals are not constantly abreast with changes in the market and other competitors (Solomon, 2008:44).

**Effectiveness of the Marketing Strategy on the Number of Patients**

Businesses that do not result in the creation of new products and services do not add value to both the customer and the organisation. Companies that do not meet these requirements will
be of little value to their patients (Wilson, 2010:159). This question, therefore, wanted to establish the effectiveness of the marketing strategy on the number of patients in the hospital. The findings to this question are discussed below.

Many of the participants demonstrated an awareness of the effectiveness of the marketing strategy on the number of patients. Seven of the participants stated they did not know whether or not the marketing strategies are effective in increasing the number of their patients or not. Below is the comment provided by Daniella (Female, 24 years):

“….Please I am relatively new in this organization…so you do not expect me to have access to such information....”

Another seven participants stated that there was no difference in the number of patients that come to their hospital. Martha (Female, 44 years), who was one of the participants with a negative opinion, stated this:

“...No I did not see any difference...and the thing is that I do not have any paper work to prove that the numbers of patients are on the increase....”

Of the participants that had a positive opinion, Princess (Female, 33 years) reported this:

“Yes I did…and from the records now, the number of patients patronising this hospital is higher than before....”

The findings may offer explanation for why many of the hospitals have very low patient-patronage. Hospitals that do not add value to their customers are likely to be of little or no value to their patients (Wilson, 2010:159).

**Effectiveness of the Marketing Strategy on Revenue and Profits**

Uncontrolled costs and expenses should be minimised and avoided by all means necessary. Bordley (2008:39) indicates that cost control is concerned with resources flowing into the business and financial resources held by the business and those flowing out of the business. This question, therefore, wanted to establish the effectiveness of the marketing strategy on revenue and profits. The findings to this question are discussed below.

A lot of the participants demonstrated an awareness of the effectiveness of the marketing strategy on the revenue and profit. Seven of the participants stated that they did not know anything about the state of their hospital’s revenue and profit. Below is Daniella’s (Female, 24 years) comment, which was a neutral position on the issue:

“....Please I am quite new on the job here…I do not know much....”

Another seven participants stated that there was no difference in their hospital’s revenue and profit. Martha (Female, 44 years), another participant, had a contrasting opinion to Daneilla’s position, as indicated below:

“...No I did not see any difference...and the thing is that I do not have any paper work to prove that the numbers of patients are on the increase....”

Of the participants that had a positive opinion, Princess (Female, 33 years) had this to say:

“The marketing strategies I used are very effective and the revenue and profit of the hospital has increased on a daily and monthly basis....it is working like magic....”

Bordley (2008:39) indicates that cost control is concerned with resources flowing into the business, financial resources held by the business and those flowing out of the business. The
findings above may offer explanation for the reason why a lot of the hospitals need to target and ensure that costs and expenses are minimised and controlled.

**Impact of the Marketing Strategy on the Positive Perception of Stakeholders**

It is obvious that new markets are beneficial to enterprises and it is in the interest of organisations for marketers to identify such markets. The importance of developing new markets for organic growth cannot be overstated, as they offer opportunities to extend the innovative capabilities of enterprises (Woodward, 2009:705). This question wanted to establish the impact of the marketing strategy on the stakeholders perceptions of the hospital. The findings to this are outlined below.

Although only a few of the participants indicated a positive opinion about the impact of the marketing strategy on stakeholder perceptions of their hospital, more than half of the participants were neutral in their response. The following quote from Patricia (Female, 26 years), is an example of a neutral response:

“….I just started working here last month….that is why I cannot be of much here….”

Alice (Female, 40 years), is an example of a participant that gave a negative response:

“….I have not really been doing marketing as it should be done….here I found out that there are a lot of compromises to be made and excuses are always given by the management as to why funds would not be released….“

The following are the verbatim descriptions of the participants that had positive opinions relative to this particular issue.

Queen (Female, 34 years) stated:

“The marketing strategies I used have really affected a lot of business activities in this hospital and I am not surprised at all….you know, it is like building a house, when you get the foundation correctly, it is easier to put up any other structural designs you desire…..”

Jane (Female, 38 years) also commented as follows:

“No businessman wants to be associated with an unserious personality….and the marketing strategies you use as a business, determines the picture the stakeholders and the public would have of you….so for this hospital that has been using the right marketing strategies; YES – there has been an increase in the positive perception of the stakeholders and the public…..”

The need for good ideas is increasing, as such ideas can differentiate one hospital from its competitors (Woodward, 2009:705). The finding in this study may offer explanation for why many of the customers have negative impressions concerning some of the hospitals and the patronage they offer.

**Impact of the Marketing Strategy used by the Hospital on Investor Interest**

Wilson (2010:159) denotes that financial analysis is an important prerequisite for strategic management. The ability of an organisation to perform financial analysis enables an organisation to foresee impending dangers and guide investors regarding how to recognise investment opportunities. This question sought to establish the impact of the marketing strategies used by the hospitals on increased investor interest. The findings to this question are presented below.
Even though a number of the participants demonstrated an awareness of the impact of the marketing strategy used by their hospital on investor interest, there were contrasting views. Seven of the participants were pessimistic about the impact of their hospital’s marketing strategy on investor interests. The quote below represents the opinion of Grace (Female, 47 years), who was pessimistic:

“...I do not think that the marketing strategies I have used so far, have been able to attract investors....not to talk of an increase in the number of investors....”

Only three of the participants were optimistic in their response, and, Judith (Female, 33 years), had this to say:

“....I would really like to be discrete in this matter because it is a management issue...but all I can say is that we have been getting good responses from investors, both locally and internationally, and we look forward to reach an agreement very soon....maybe sign a memorandum of understanding....”

Another participant, Maria (Female, 34 years), had an optimistic opinion comment:

“....There has been an increased awareness of investors’ interest....and I can boldly say that it is as a result of the marketing strategies I have used....”

Ten other participants were neutral in their answers. Below is Lucy’s (Female, 25 years) neutral comment:

“I am just two months old in this organization, so I do not know anything about it and cannot answer your question....but even if I were old enough, I do not think I would have been privileged enough to be given such information....”

Venter et al. (2010:52) submit that marketers with high entrepreneurship skills view the environment as more opportunistic in their ability to influence the achievement of goals. This mindset creates a positive and optimistic atmosphere to create adequate awareness of the business to investors. The findings above may offer explanation for the reasons why the awareness of investors’ interest in some of the hospitals is relatively low.

**Impact of Marketing Strategy on Enquiries for the Hospital's Products and Services**

The innovation of new products and services are vital and essential in an economy characterised by rapid change (such as Nigeria’s). This question aimed at establishing the impact of the marketing strategies on enquiries for the products and services offered by the hospitals. The findings to this question are discussed below.

Many of the participants demonstrated an awareness of the impact of the marketing strategy on enquiries for their hospital’s products and services. Five of the participants stated that they could not tell whether or not the marketing strategy they use has an impact on the patients’ enquiries for their hospital’s product and services. One of the participants, Daniella (Female, 24 years), expressed herself as follows:

“....I am quite new here, I just started working with this company....”

Nine participants stated that there was no difference and some of the participants had an underlying tone of anger in their comments. Martha (Female, 44 years), who was one of the participants with a negative opinion, had this to say:

“...Sometimes I really wonder how marketing works. I feel like I put in a lot of energy and efforts and nothing seems to be working out as planned....I have not even seen any sign of
increased enquiry for the hospital’s products and services by the few customers that patronize us....”

Some of the other participants had an underlying tone of guilt in their comments. Below is the comment from Alice (Female, 40 years), a participant with a negative response:
“...Honestly I feel that all of this stagnancy on the job that I am experiencing now is my fault....had I done things properly from the onset, I would not be struggling to achieve results as I am doing now....”

Some of other other participants had a tone of non-chalancy in their comments. Below is a comment from Grace (Female, 47 years):
“...I do not think there is any impact because I have not whole-heartedly been involved in marketing in this hospital....but even if there were; we would not be told....you know no business would like to disclose such information because of the fear of demanding for an increase in our salaries or commissions....”

Of the participants that had positive opinions, Angela (Female, 35 years) reported:
“There has really been an increased in the patients’ enquiries for the hospital’s products and services....before now, we did not have a customer care department, but because of the increased calls, we created a customer care unit to handle these calls and much more....”

Another participant, Maria (Female, 34 years), reported a more optimistic view:
“....Activities are really looking bright and even brighter for the organization right now....and we have been able to develop new products and services and also improve on the old products....we make sure that our patients always leave us satisfied and happy at the end of their enquiries....”

The findings above may offer explanation for the reason why a number of the hospitals appear to becoming obsolete. The start of any business is based on the ability of a marketer to develop a new product or to add value to the existing product. As such, a business that fails to develop new products and services or improve upon already existing ones exposes itself to the market risks of becoming obsolete.

Section C: The Impact of Marketing Strategies on Profit Ratio
This section reports on the marketing strategies that are used in the various hospitals to increase patient results, whether the hospitals use competent marketing teams, whether the resources spent on hospital marketing are considered to produce returns, whether hospital marketing activities are integrated with other areas of the organisation to ensure that promises made by the marketing team are delivered, and, if there are any on-going processes, assess and update marketing strategies to the changing needs of customers.

Effectiveness of Different Marketing Strategies on Patient Turn-out
Publicity refers to the materials used to create awareness of an organisation’s products and services. Promotion, on the other hand, refers to the processes used to pass the message across to customers. A combination of effective publicity and promotion is the key to getting the attention of customers. One of the elements that contributes to the success of any business is the number of patients’ turn-out in the organisation through effective publicity and promotion (Reeves, 2011:46). This question aimed to establish the effectiveness of different marketing strategies on patient turn-out. The findings to this question are presented below.
The participants demonstrated an awareness of the effectiveness of the marketing strategy on patient turn-out, although there were arguments about which marketing strategy is considered the most effective. Although some participants stated using only one marketing strategy would produce the desired results, others reported that a combination of more than one marketing strategy is better. Below is the response of a participant, Jane (Female, 38 years):

“...It might be expensive but I think that combining more than one marketing strategy is more effective....for example, combining fliers with discounted rates on products and services, and then using the word of mouth and seasonal promotions to seal it up....”

Alice (Female, 40 years) had this to say:

“...I would rather use one marketing strategy and see to it that something good comes out of it....I think it is better that way than using all the marketing strategies at once and you do not achieve your desired results or you get just the same results you would have gotten; had you used only one marketing strategy ....”

Martha (Female, 28 years) stated that:

“....The use of fliers is the commonest. For me, there is nothing wrong in using more than one marketing strategy....provided the company can afford the costs....”

Daniella (Female, 24 years) also stated:

“....There is no harm in trying more than one strategy; all that is important is that you get your desired results....”

A combination of effective publicity and promotion are keys to getting the attention of customers. One of the elements that contributes to the success of any business is the number of patients’ turn-out in the organisation through effective publicity and promotion (Reeves, 2011:46). The findings from this study may offer explanation for why many of the marketers are not obtaining their desired results. Perhaps, the hospitals need to try a combination of different marketing strategies instead of selecting and focusing on just one.

**Presence of an Experienced or Competent Marketing Team**

Oertig (2006:23) posits that traditional sales and marketing skills still remain an important aspect of sales competence. Marketers need to have an effective way to turn around sales objectives, as there is much more to closing a sale than asking for the order. This question sought to establish the presence of an experienced or competent marketing team. The findings to this question are discussed below.

The participants demonstrated an awareness of the importance of having a competent marketing team in their organisation. However, there were contrasting views about their expectations. Six participants had a positive opinion about the presence of a competent marketing team. Below is a quote from Angela (Female, 35 years), one of the six participants who had a positive opinion:

“....We have an experienced and competent marketing team, except for a newly employed staff in our department. It is very important to have a competent and experienced marketing team in an organization....some people think it is expensive initially, but in the long run, it is actually cheaper and cost-effective....”

Another participant, Jane (Female, 38 years) stated:
“….Our marketers are not only experienced but also competent....”

On the contrary, twelve other participants had negative opinions. Below are three quotes from Kate (Female, 40 years), Betty (Female, 42 years) and Lisa (Female, 44 years), respectively, who gave reasons regarding whether their organisations did not have a competent and experienced marketing team.

Kate (Female, 40 years) stated: “....Having a marketing team that is experienced and competent require a lot of spending....maybe that is the reason why most of the marketers here are young and new on the job....”;

Betty (Female, 42 years) reported: “....We do not have an experienced and competent marketing team here....we have a lot of new marketers and they are quite young at heart too....I am the oldest staff here and that is why the burden is much on me....”;

Lisa (Female, 44 years) indicated: “....No, a lot of them are not experienced....

The remaining two participants stated that they were not in the best position to ascertain whether their organisation possesses an experienced and competent marketing team as they were newly employed. Below is what Martha (Female, 28 years) said: “.... actually I am a new staff here and I just resumed last week....”

In a competitive market, organisations must continuously increase sales productivity and marketers must keep getting better, otherwise organisations will inevitably be overtaken by competitors (Hammer, 2013:421). This observation may offer explanation and reasons as to why many of the marketers are performing below average.

**Importance of Spending Money on Marketing**

An organisation’s core marketing role is to generate leads that convert to revenue. It is therefore self-evident that investing in marketing is important for the growth of a business. Developing a solid marketing budget is an important part of creating a plan of action that is realistic and will help improve revenues (Vag, 2007:904). This question wanted to establish the importance of the hospitals’ financial spending on marketing. The findings to this question are presented as follows.

The participants demonstrated an awareness of the importance of spending money on marketing. Eleven of the participants stated that they did not know anything about the state of their hospital’s revenue and profit. Below is Daniella’s (Female, 24 years) comment, who took a neutral position on the issue: “....Please I am quite new on the job here...I do not know much....”

Another five participants reported there was no difference. Martha (Female, 44 years), another participant, had a contrasting opinion, as stated below: “...No I did not see any difference....”

Of the participants that had a positive opinion, Princess (Female, 33 years) had this to say: “...It is important to spend money on the marketing....I see it as an investment and not spending....”
An organisation’s core marketing role is to generate leads that convert to revenue. It is therefore self-evident that investing in marketing is important for the growth of a business (Vag, 2007:904). The findings above may offer explanation for the reason why many of the marketers are performing below average.

Integration of Marketing Activities with Other Areas of the Organisation
Organisations are an amalgamation of individuals with different interests, and it is the task of management to steer these varying interests in a common direction and to motivate all the members of staff. Clarifying the roles to be performed and assigning responsibilities to individuals can be empowering to staff and contribute towards the attainment of organisational objectives. Lipnack (2012:44) suggests that authority and responsibility should be precisely determined so that whoever fills a position knows exactly what his/her duties, authority and responsibilities are. This question looked to establish whether or not the marketing activities are integrated with other areas of the organisation; the findings are discussed as follows.

The participants demonstrated an awareness of the integration of marketing activities with other areas of the organisation. One of the newly employed participants, Patricia (Female, 26 years), had this to say:
“....No comments....”

Another newly employed participant, Daniella (Female, 24 years), stated this:
“....I do not even know how to answer this your question....”

Some of the participants reacted negatively in their answers. Martha (Female, 44 years) had this to say:
“...No. In this organization, we marketers are treated like outcasts, especially when we do not meet the required target set for us....and we feel very bad and intimidated....”

Another participant, Lisa (Female, 44 years), also reacted negatively in her response:
“....Absolutely not. I do not know what obtains in other organizations but in this office, we are not been carried along, no regular updates except we go out of our way to ask for one; even during the management board meetings, we are not represented....they give the instructions and we are expected to simply obey without any hesitation....we are being treated like servants....”

Of the participants who had positive reactions, Princess (Female, 33 years), stated this:
“...We are constantly updated on current information in the office, we have full representation at the management board meetings....management understands the importance of team work amongst all departments and this had helped us greatly....”

Emphasising individual responsibility in an enterprise builds confidence, trust and accountability. Those that are unable to do so are likely to face consequences resulting from poor performance and ambiguity in communication (Wuyts, 2004:479). The findings from this study may offer an explanation for why the marketers are performing poorly.

On-going Processes to Assess and Update Marketing Strategies
Marketing strategies can be referred to as the engine-room of any business. It can, however, be expensive and requires a lot of creativity and initiative. It is the heart of operations
management in an organisation where the ever-increasing input costs and the availability of enabling technologies compel businesses to consider the most cost-effective marketing systems (Zhang, 2007:912). This question wanted to establish whether or not there are on-going processes in the organisations to assess and update marketing strategies to the changing needs of customers. The findings are presented below.

The participants demonstrated an awareness of the on-going processes to assess and update marketing strategies. Three participants stated that they did not know if there were on-going processes to update their marketing strategies, and their responses reflect this. Daniella (Female, 24 years) reported as follows:
“….I do not really know, I cannot tell….”

Lovelyn (Female, 25 years) stated:
“….I do not know, but I guess so…. ”

Rita (Female, 24 years) said:
“….I do not really know….I guess we have not reached that aspect…. ”

Twelve participants reported that no such process is going on in their organisation. Martha (Female, 44 years), for instance, said:
“….I am very sure that no such process is going on in this office….you see, the organization is running on a very tight budget right now and funds are really limited…. ”

Other participants had a contrasting view to this. Angela (Female, 35 years) responded in the following way:
“….There are currently processes. We have done an appraisal of our performances so far and it is encouraging, but we have also detected loose ends that require re-dressing….and all hands are on deck to ensure that our strategies are effective…. ”

The above findings may offer explanation for why selected hospitals are not able to impress and satisfy their customers by delivering additional value to them. There are old but efficient marketing strategies that are expensive and quite limited in their coverage. In fact, Younty (2009:10) notes that newer marketing strategies will offer a better opportunity as they can be used to deliver additional value to the customers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the Study
The findings from the study are discussed under the following sections.

Findings from the Literature Review
A well-developed strategy contains five components that are part of all strategies (Delre, 2007:827). However, rather than a single comprehensive strategy, most organisations have a hierarchy of inter-related strategies, each formulated at a different level of the firm. A marketing strategy is a marketing plan designed to achieve marketing objectives (Certo, 2006:812). Every organisation needs to have clear marketing objectives and the major route to achieving organisational goals will depend on the strategies.
Homan (2007:274) believes that marketing seems easy to describe but extremely difficult to practice. Marketers and organisational managers in many companies have applied marketing concepts that are essentially concerned with satisfying clients’ needs and wants in a mutually beneficial way. These concepts can also be applied for developing and implementing efficient and effective marketing strategies that incorporate relevant dimensions of the marketing concept, involving the organic tasks of selecting a target market to operate in and developing an efficient and effective marketing ingredient combination.

The more committed a company is to its marketing activities, the more able it will be to pursue its corporate objectives and obtain and retain customers (Kollman, 2006:1433). Developing an attitude of mind reduces the likelihood of crises and contributes to the development of the overall future of an enterprise at both strategic and tactical levels (Jager, 2007:868). Organisations cannot rely on their past and current successes; hence, there is a need to introduce new products or services to respond to changing customer needs and increasing competitor challenges. The failure to innovate may lead to the suffering of customers, employees and the larger community;

Homan (2007:274) believes that marketing seems easy to describe but extremely difficult to practice. Every business in existence relies upon its customers for survival and those who best meet customer needs are more likely to survive a period of change. The marketing function is, therefore, an essential ingredient of corporate strategy. This marketing focus should be communicated through marketing planning into all aspects of business activity. This is because it is increasingly realised that although making a profit is important, an organisation should also develop its market share and search for brand leadership as well (Libai, 2010:282).

As industries mature, sales volumes level off and technological differences among brands tend to shrink as manufacturers copy the best features of each others products (Woodward, 2009:701). Consequently, an organisation must seek new market segments or obtain shares from competitors by offering lower prices, superior services or intangible benefits other companies cannot match (Wuyts, 2004:479).

Another important strategic concern at the corporate level is to increase synergy across an organisation’s various businesses and product-markets. Synergy exists when two or more businesses or product-markets and their resources and competencies complement and reinforce one another so that the total performance of the related businesses is greater than it would be otherwise. Some potential synergies at the corporate level are knowledge-based. The performance of one organisation can be enhanced by the transfer of competencies, knowledge or customer-related intangibles, such as brand-name recognition and reputation from other units within an organisation.

**Findings from the Primary Research**

The following are the findings from the primary study.

**Interview and Documentation of Targeted Customers**

The majority of the participants did not consider documentation and interviewing of targeted customers an essential part of the marketing plan. It is very important that these hypotheses are written down, as storing them solely in one’s mind may result in lost information or information alterations. The most significant goal of a start-up organisation is finding a
scalable and repeatable business model. The process starts by documenting a set of business model hypotheses and then systematically validating those assumptions against reality and make course-corrections or pivots along the way.

**Positioning and SWOT Analysis of Other Hospitals**
The majority of the marketers in the Nigerian medical profession lack core marketing skills to perform functions such as a SWOT analysis, an identification of opportunities to meet short and long term goals and objectives, and the ability to agree upon and document an organisation’s unique selling propositions to develop and maintain a brand for their organisation. The ability of an organisation to identify these opportunities enables an organisation to easily ascertain its market shares and easily determine its performance when compared to other competitors. The findings indicate that the majority of the marketers cannot perform market analysis and are vulnerable and exposed to risk since they do not know the problems and opportunities facing them. The inability to perform in this area may have a negative impact on other areas, such as setting and meeting market share and sales goals and establishing a position in the market place.

**Effectiveness of Different Marketing Strategies on Patient Turn-out**
The majority of the participants reported that they use one marketing strategy form or a combination of more than one marketing strategy. However, some of participants reported not indulging in any form of marketing or marketing strategy. Marketers who are unable to effectively create adequate awareness of a company’s products are not performing the requirements of marketers. Hence, the failure of marketers to market the services of an organisation may have detrimental effects on customers, employees and the community at large.

**Effectiveness of the Marketing Strategy on Revenue and Profits**
Surprisingly, more than half of the participants reported that they did not see any noticeable effect of their marketing strategies on the number of patients or on the organisation’s revenue and profits. It is important that these marketers should be able to develop financial systems in order to monitor and increase revenue and profits. This is an important function in each hospital’s success; the present findings are discouraging and should be improved upon.

**Presence of an Experienced or Competent Marketing Team**
There is a close relationship between the findings in section 4.3.1 and section 4.5.2, as it is quite apparent that it is the competent marketers that have the initial steps and processes to fulfill and complete.

**Conclusions**
Based on the findings, all the organisations have female marketers and no male marketers. The participants generally agreed that using one form of marketing strategy or the other is very important for increasing patient numbers, revenue and profits. It was also discovered that only the marketers who conduct an initial marketing plan and market analysis produce better results. It was observed that the young female marketers within the age range of 23 years to 29 years have little experience in marketing and produce unsubstantial results, possibly because they are all newly employed. The middle-aged female marketers within the age range of 30 years to 39 years have the most experience on the job, exhibit great passion and interest in their work and produce the best results. The oldest female marketers within the age range of 40 years to 49 years produce the least results, maybe due to diminishing return or little to no interest in their jobs anymore.
Recommendations
Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Marketers should be made to attend short courses and training programs where the importance of interviewing and documentation is buttressed. Such training may cost about two hundred thousand naira per participant (N200, 000) and they can be sent in groups. Initially, this might seem expensive, but longitudinally it will be beneficial;
- Marketers should work in collaboration with financial analysts and insurers to minimise risk in their organisations. Also, the educational syllabus for undergraduate marketing students should be reviewed and adjusted to accommodate courses that empower students in areas like SWOT analysis and risk management, financial management and control systems;
- A general marketing forum should be formed where marketers from different organisations come together to share ideas and solve challenging situations. These will help them develop their intelligence quotients and knowledge. This kind of forum is usually free, and, for a start, it can be held at least once every two weeks or on a monthly basis;
- In addition, practical live sessions at least once every six months with achievers in the field of marketing are highly recommended because this would help marketers to appreciate the practicality of combining different marketing strategies to achieve a particular result. Sessions like these can cost as much as three hundred thousand naira (N300, 000) to attend and organisations may be discouraged to pay for their staff. However, in the long-term it will yield even more higher returns;
- Organisations are also advised to open all forms of communication lines and maintain an open-door policy (examples of such policies include general staff assemblies where grievances are settled, free access to see the human resources manager or any of the directors). This will help ensure that all the members of staff are carried along and can obtain any information needed for them to be effective and productive in their work; and
- For the experienced and competent marketers, continuous education in professional marketing is advised to help them keep abreast of information and current marketing trends. In addition to this, professional certifications and specialisations are also recommended.

Contributions and Implications
The contributions of this study are as follows:
- Relative to the healthcare industry, this study shows that there are lapses in marketing. It also demonstrates that the current level of marketing is very low and most marketers do not take the time to conduct an initial market analysis or have a marketing plan to work with.

The implications based on the findings from this study are as follows:
- Due to the low level of marketing activities, the organisations are likely to experience reduced revenue and profit. To enhance profit and revenue, there might be a need for the government to review policies that do not encourage “above-the-belt” marketing (that is, marketing using television, radio and newspapers). This study has shown that hospitals that do not make use of marketing strategies to enhance their patients’ turn out are unlikely to increase their revenue and profits; and
- This study supports Kollman’s (2006: 1433) perspective, which states that the greater commitment a company displays to its marketing activities, the more it will be able to
pursue its corporate objectives and develop and retain customers. This notion coincides with this study, which has shown that marketing enhances profit and revenue.

**Areas for Further Research**
The rate of establishing new hospitals and other healthcare businesses is continuing to increase and there is a need for continued research in this area. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted with a larger population and combine both qualitative and quantitative research methods to gain an in-depth and enriched understanding on this topic. All the participants in this study were marketers; therefore, it is suggested that customers be included in further studies.

**Conclusion**
The aim of this study was to evaluate the various marketing strategies used, to analyse the role of marketing in the healthcare services industry, to identify the shortcomings of the strategies and offer solutions. In every organisation, marketing strategies have proven to be very important, especially since the purpose of any organisation is to make profits and increase clientele bases. This study reviewed the relevant literature on the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the hospitals included in the study. An interview guided questionnaire was developed, which was used for testing the level of professionalism of the Nigerian healthcare marketers, to explore the impact of the marketing strategies on the hospitals and to establish the impact of marketing strategies on the profit ratio of the hospitals.

The analysis of the results obtained through qualitative research methodology revealed the current marketing competencies of the Nigerian healthcare marketers and the strategies needed for generating and increasing profits and revenue in the organisations. Recommendations were made to these marketers in the hospitals with the state of Lagos. Despite its limitations, this study successfully answered all the research questions and it can be concluded that the study has achieved its aim of investigating the marketing strategies used in the medical profession and hospitals within the state of Lagos, Nigeria.

**Note:** This dissertation was presented to the Regent Business School, Durban, South Africa in 2014 by the principal author for the award of the Master of Business Administration Degree (MBA). The dissertation was supervised by Simon Hoabeb and edited by Professor Anis Mahomed Karodia for presentation as a journal article Both are attached to the Regent Business School.

Kindly note that the entire bibliography is cited in spite of the editing of the dissertation.

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