



Prospect of Online Marketing of Private Off-Campus Hostel Accommodation

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Date of Submission: 26-08-2022

Date of Acceptance: 11-09-2022

ABSTRACT

The exponential increase in students' admissions profiles of tertiary institutions every year has made it impossible for universities and other higher institutions, to keep up with the provision of adequate hostel accommodation for the resultant bloated students' population. Consequently, off-campus hostels have become the only solution to the university hostel accommodation shortages for both new and existing students. The study aims at evaluating the online marketing potentials of off-campus hostel accommodations with a view to finding out if the advantage and strategy of digital tool is effectively deployed towards resolving students' accommodation problems, with the University of Benin environs as a case study. The study population consists of students residing off-campus in three communities purposively selected: Edo Development Property Association (EDPA), hostel accommodations, and Osasogie in University of Benin environs. A total of 296 questionnaires were randomly administered to students; while 216 representing 73% response rate were retrieved and analyzed using statistical tools such as frequency count and percentage distribution, mean score and relative importance index (RII). The study found that a large number of students have access to the internet and hence, do know the potentials of online marketing with a large proportion of them securing hostel accommodation through this avenue. It was also discovered that although, online marketing tools are preferred by students, other traditional marketing techniques such as the use of banners and signboards, are still being used in the advertisement of private hostel accommodations to students.

Keywords: Hostel Accommodation, Marketing Techniques, Social Media, Private Off-Campus, Advertisement of Hostel

I. Introduction

The continued growth in tertiary education (Sharma 2012) due to the significance of higher education; consequently giving rise to increase in students enrolment in recent years has resulted in difficulties providing and developing housing for student in several universities in many countries of the world (Hubbard 2008; Universities UK 2006; Smith 2005; Rugg et al. 2002). This has become a major concern, since institutions are often not bound to provide hostel accommodation for students anymore after admission, now resulting in students seeking to be accommodated off-campus after the few available on-campus accommodation slots have been exhausted.

The student housing situation has therefore provided incentive to potential investors (private developers) in housing, to bridge the glaring shortfall in student housing, which creates a huge business for them. The students on the other hand find solace in this opportunity to solving their accommodation problems.

In modern times, the means of providing these accommodations for students, as well as students getting to know about these vacancies, is referred to as marketing of accommodation. In Real Estate practice, the marketing of accommodation is the process of getting customers' requirements across to them efficiently and profitably (Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM)). It has also been seen as the method of preparing and implementing concept, pricing, advertisement and circulation of ideas, goods and services to generate exchange and gratify individual and organizational goals (American Marketing Association (AMA), 2017). Broadly, marketing, according to Kotler (2012) is "the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit". Marketing is the process of managing markets in order to create successful consumer relationships identifying unsatisfied needs and meeting the needs.



With the emergence of the Internet, more and more of our daily lives is influenced by the Internet and websites; hence it has become the practice of most companies to use web-based platforms to communicate messages about their goods and services to prospective clients which is today recognized as online advertising. Email, social media, display ads, search engine enhancement, Google Ad Words, and other devices and approaches are used in online marketing.

Specifically, the concern and traffic in the usage of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Whatsapp, TikTok, LinkedIn etc. across all areas of nation's economy has grown overtime, Real Estate Practice and Marketing is not an exemption to this growth, hence Social media marketing is an important part of any real estate business (Shepardson, 2018).

Other marketing techniques such as traditional marketing, which include the use of print, billboard, television, and radio ads etc., differs from online advertising, Optimizely (2021). Preceding the advent of online marketing platforms, the cost of marketing goods and services was often prohibitively costly and impossible to quantify. But today, any individual or organization with an online company (also most offline businesses) can now engage in online marketing with low amount money by designing a website and creating customer purchasing strategies.

The increase in student enrolment in universities and the increased mobile phone Internet usage, knowing that there are limited spaces in the university student hostels and student's preference to live off campus has led to the question of "if the Internet influences students' choices of hostel accommodation lease". It is against this backdrop that this study assesses the potentials of online marketing of students' off-campus private hostel in University of Benin environs.

The study is restricted to private off-campus housing of students of University of Benin, Benin City, the study area covering three popular communities of EDPA, Ekosodin and Osasogie.

II. LITERATURE

In many countries around the world, including Nigeria, there has been an increase in the enrolment of university students; those institutions are not able to accommodate, hence the increase in off-campus students housing needs giving opportunities to private developer to bridge the gap. (Akingbohugbe and Akinluyi, 2012)

Off-campus student housing has been described in several ways. It has been referred to as housing temporarily occupied by 90% or more students, not financially connected or subsidized in any way by a university (Fields, 2011; Hostelgeeks, 2020).

The phrase "Online marketing" usually denotes a third-party perspective on how the Internet usage in combination with conventional media to find and distribute services to a larger number of customers and is designed to appeal to a variety of demographics (Chaffey et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2015).

Alternatively, on-line marketing has been termed "e-marketing or electronic marketing which has a broader scope since it refers to digital media such as web, e-mail and wireless media, as well as management of digital customer data and electronic customer relationship management systems" (e-CRM systems).

Social media communication is the latest, most effective and distinguished method of doing business which has become renowned over the time as it draws shoppers, rises capacity, and increases reputation of organizations (Chary, 2014). Consequently, with the increase in number of Internet users, online marketing will develop into a main measure of growth in the future (Demishkevich, 2015). In effect, social media marketing are designed to create a powerful web existence which is a must for attaining larger clients positively, consistently, and proficiently (Chary, 2014). Hence, Social Media is an effective tool for supporting businesses in developing and understanding customer demands (Kim & Lee, 2015).

In other words, internet marketing has become the present. Any hostel advertising strategy (or any commercial enterprise advertising for that matter) is incomplete barring enticing on the social media. With the unbelievably returns that it has, it is an essential part of hostel accommodation promotions and a splendid way to interact with customers and provide them the peculiar touch that they expect or desire.

The real estate industry is not now left out in the new wave of online advertising of businesses. According to Yusoff & Ying (2020) the rise of digital advertising in land and property business aids real estate agents and buyers in effectively and efficiently disseminating and obtaining relevant property information. Because of time minimization, many property companies have taken the Internet as advertising and communication tool with consumers (Gbonegun, 2019).



The findings of Shaibu & Taiwo's (2015) literature review revealed that strong track records, a large client base, and a firm's credibility are the three most significant factors that influence the effectiveness of real estate marketing practices. Steve (2009) conducted research into the impact of I.C.T on the residential real estate industry and how its use affects real estate agents. The study's findings indicated that I.C.T. was a useful tool for forming social relationships and facilitating real estate transactions.

University of Benin students' on-campus hostel accommodations are Hall 1, Hall 2, Hall 3, Hall 4, Hall 5, and Hall 6 including Dental quarters and the Medical Hostel. Despite these hostel accommodation there is still a shortage of students' hostel accommodation due to continuous increase in students' population. Private developers have taken up the challenge to meet the housing demands in the surrounding community of the University of Benin (Ogeah & Ajalaye, 2011). Popular among these off-campus hostels provided by private market are Benin Development Property Authority (BDPA), Ekosodin and Osasogie communities (Edoaffairs, 2020) which form the study area of this research

III. Material And Methods

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey. The population of study consists of students occupying private off-campus hostels in University of Benin environs in which three communities namely EDPA, Ekosodin and Osasogie were purposively selected. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire.

Gbadegehin, et al. (2021) reveal that there are 216, 639 and 134 hostels accommodations in Ekosodin, EDPA and Osasogie communities, respectively giving a total of 989 hostels accommodation in the three environs. Through a quota sampling method, 15% of the hostels in each location were earmarked which resulted to 32 in EDPA, 96 in Ekosodin and 20 in Osasogie, totaling 148 randomly selected hostels. Two students at least were randomly sampled with questionnaire in each selected hostels, resulting to 64 students in EDPA, 192 students in Ekosodin and 40 students in Osasogie, totaling 296 respondents (students) served with the questionnaire in the three locations. A total of 216 questionnaires were retrieved representing 73% response rate.

Table 1: Target Population

Location	Randomly selected hostels	Questionnaire Distributed	Questionnaire Retrieved	Response Rate	Questionnaire
BDPA	32	64	53	83%	Distributed = 296
Ekosodin	96	192	132	68%	Retrieved = 216
Osasogie	20	40	31	74%	Response Rate = 73%
Total	148	296	216		

Source: Researcher field work 2021

Statistical method such as frequency count and percentage distribution, mean item score and Relative Importance Index (RII) were used in the analyses of data retrieved.

$$\text{Mean item score} = \frac{5n_5 + 4n_4 + 3n_3 + 2n_2 + 1n_1}{5N}$$

$$\text{Relative Importance Index (RII)} = \frac{\sum w}{A * N} = \frac{5n_5 + 4n_4 + 3n_3 + 2n_2 + 1n_1}{5}$$

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Respondents Profile.

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender: Male	101	47
Female	115	53
Total	216	100
Age: 16-20 years	77	36



21 -25 years	103	48
26-30 years	36	16
31-35 years	0	0.00
Total	216	100
Educational Qualification		
SSCE/WASSCE	112	52
B.SC	84	39
MSC	20	9
PHD	0	0
Total	216	100
Area of resident		
EDPA	53	25
Ekosodin Community	132	61
Osasogie	31	14
Total	216	100

From Table 2, it shows that 47% of the respondents are males while 53% represent the female counterparts. The age profile reveal that 36% of the respondents are between the age of 16 and 20, 48% between the age of 21 and 25, 16% are between the age of 26 and 30. Educational qualification of the respondents shows that 52% had

SSCE/WASSCE, 39% had B.SC qualification, 9% of the respondents had MSC qualification and none for PhD qualification. The area of residence shows that 25% of the respondents reside in EDPA, 61% in Ekosodin Community; while 14% resides in Osasogie community.

4.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

4.2.1 Level of awareness of digital marketing of privately owned hostels

Table 3: Analysis of the level of Awareness of Digital Marketing of Privately owned Hostels

Level of awareness(Category)	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Access to internet	Yes	216	100
	No	0	0
	Total	216	100
Awareness of digital marketing	Yes	216	100
	No	0	0
	Total	216	100
Advertisement of Real Estate Product	Yes	208	94
	No	8	6
	Total	216	100
Adverts on Private hostels	Yes	194	90
	No	22	10
	Total	216	100
Have Advertisements aided in hostel acquisition	Yes	187	87
	No	29	13
	Total	216	100

From table 3, 100% of the respondents have Access to the internet and are aware of what digital marketing means. 94% of respondents are aware of advertisements of real estate products. On advertisements, 90% of the respondents have come across a form of Advert regarding privately owned hostels while 87% of the respondents have acquired private hostel accommodation through

advertisement of such properties. The above analyses suggests that majority of the students can access the Internet, are aware of digital marketing, and have acquired hostel accommodation with the assistance of advertisements. This goes to show that advertisements play an enormous role in bringing information on the availability of hostel accommodation to students.



4.2.2 Comparative Analysis of the effectiveness of some selected marketing methods in Real Estate

Table 4: Effectiveness of some selected Real Estate Marketing Methods

Marketing tools	Frequency	Percentage
Billboards and Signboards.	90	42
Property Bulletin/flyer	9	4
Social Media	110	51
Real Estate Website	7	3
Newspaper Advertisement	0	0
Total	216	100

From table 4, majority of the respondents (51%) opined that Social media platform was used in advertising their current student hostel accommodation. This is followed by 42% of respondents who think billboards and signboard are important marketing tools in advertising private student hostels; while 4% and 3% of the respondents opined that property Bulletin/Flyers and Real Estate websites were also social media used in marketing of private hostel accommodation. Newspaper Advertisements recorded no respondents as effective marketing tools. This analyses suggest that there is a

preference in using social media and that the traditional style 'to let' Signboards are also effective in bringing availability of vacant hostel accommodation to students in the study area.

4.2.3 How Effective is Online Marketing Tools in Marketing Real Estate Products

This Analysis was carried out using Relative Importance Index (RII) to determine the social media marketing tool utilization for real estate products

Table 5: Most Used Social Media Tools for Real Estate Ads./Marketing

Social media Platform	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low	Total Ef/Ewf	Ef/Ewf Mean	Rank
Facebook	136	69	9	1	1	986/216	4.57	1 st
linkedin	30	33	72	50	31	629/216	2.91	5 th
Instagram	115	69	3	11	18	890/216	4.12	2 nd
Twitter	100	60	25	16	15	862/216	4.00	3 rd
Youtube	60	50	20	36	50	682/216	3.16	4 th

Findings from table 5 show that, Facebook ranked first with a Mean score of 4.57, immediately followed by Instagram having a Mean score of 4.12. The third and fourth place where Twitter and YouTube having Mean scores of 4.00 and 3.16 respectively; while LinkedIn with a mean score of 2.91 came fifth, the last but not the list. This finding implies that real property advertisement is believed to be mostly done in Facebook. This is because Facebook is mostly used by students and are able to see marketing of real estate products there. However, Instagram and Twitter having mean

scores above 4.0 shows that these social mean are also being used by students for sourcing for their housing.

4.2.4 Challenges Encountered in using online Marketing Platforms in Acquiring Private Hostel Accommodation

This Analysis was carried out using Relative Importance Index (RII) and mean score to determine the challenges encountered using online marketing tools in obtaining private hostel accommodation.



Table 6: Challenges Encountered Using online Marketing Platforms

Challenges	SA N=5	A N=4	U N=3	D N=2	SD N=1	Total Ef/Ewf	Ef/Ewf Mean	Rank
Card-data security	72	82	24	18	20	816/216	3.78	2 nd
Fraud and Charge-backs	45	81	30	35	25	734/216	3.40	4 th
Lack of alternate payment systems i.e peer-to-peer payment	33	38	75	30	40	642/216	2.97	5 th
Lack of trust	71	90	26	20	9	842/216	3.90	1 st
Need for physical inspection	82	72	9	35	18	813/216	3.76	3 rd

From table 6, lack of trust with a mean score of 3.90 presents the biggest challenge in using online marketing platforms by respondents. Card-data security with a mean score of 3.78 came second. The need for physical inspection and fraud and charge-backs with mean scores of 3.76 and 3.40 took third and fourth place; while lack of alternate payment systems (peer-to-peer payment) with a mean score of 2.97 came last (fifth place). The findings in this analysis emphasize the issue of trust in business that even marketing of real estate products on social media is not left out. In addition, card-data security and the need for physical inspection of property is another challenge in that

most clients (Students) would like to see what is to be purchased or rented as in real estate. Similarly, fraud and charge-backs and Lack of alternative payment mediums were other challenges facing the use of online marketing platforms to acquire private off campus hostel accommodation.

4.2.5 Effectiveness of Real Estate Marketing Techniques

This Analysis was carried out using Relative Importance Index (RII) and mean score to determine the effectiveness of real estate marketing techniques in the Advertisements of Private off-campus hostel accommodation.

Table 7: Real Estate Marketing Techniques

Real estate marketing techniques	S.A N=5	A N=4	U N=3	D N=2	S.D N=1	Total Ef/Ewf	Ef/Ewf Mean	Rank
Banners and signboards	111	43	30	9	23	858/216	3.97	3 rd
Property bulletin and flyers	55	31	42	36	52	649/216	3.00	4 th
Social media platforms	123	65	14	11	3	942/216	4.36	1 st
Real estate website	20	12	69	36	79	506/216	2.34	5 th
Online Advertisement	105	61	22	15	13	878/216	4.07	2 nd
Newspaper Advertisement	22	15	23	24	132	419/216	1.94	6 th

Table 7 presents some selected real estate marketing methods and how effective in informing the respondents on available hostel accommodation. From the analysis Social media platforms were found to rank first with a mean score of 4.36. Following this was online Advertisements with a mean of 4.07 thereby ranking second; while billboards and Signboards with a mean of 3.97 ranked third. Property bulletin and flyers and real estate website with mean scores of 3.00 and 2.34 ranked fourth and fifth respectively. The last but not the list is Newspaper Advertisements which ranked sixth with a mean of 1.94. Again this result corroborates the findings in table 4.3 that Social media platforms are becoming very effective in online marketing of real estate products including university of Benin environs. However, billboards and Signboards are still effective methods of

marketing real estate as in private hostel accommodation in University of Benin environs.

V. Conclusion

The study examined online marketing of private hostels in the University of Benin environs with a view to finding out how this modern digital tool are deployed to resolving students' accommodation problems. The results indicate that there is clear awareness of digital marketing of real estate products by students; that online methods (Social Medias) are more effective than traditional methods.

Online marketing has also been integrated into the tools majority of marketers of private student hostel accommodation use amongst other tools since most of the marketer's target market can also be reached online as it makes advertising easier



and more widespread. A new market exists in the digital marketing of hostels to students in the University of Benin environs.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness of online marketing developments is helpful to offer business organization or companies a platform for increasing product awareness, linking with customers and improving business viability hence its use for real estate marketing (Knorex, 2020). From the study findings and the conclusion reached, the investigator would recommend that marketers of private hostel accommodation who are yet to adopt online marketing strategies for their real estate products should create an online presence and maintain it by releasing content and engaging their followers. They should also employ a combination of both the traditional marketing methods as well as social media marketing tools in order to have a wider reach of clients and capture various segment of the market.

In order to minimize the negatives and further enhance the use of social media by real estate professionals in Nigeria, the paper also recommends that real estate professionals guide the confidentiality of their clients, follow guidelines and ethics, and be current on relevant ethical opinions and decisions.

Furthermore, on the issue of trust it is recommended that customer could scrutinize by doing a thorough search on the persons/organisations marketing, especially if there is a website and if the organization belongs to a credible professional body. This is to build trust because business thrives when there is trust, and service is about trust.

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