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Book Promotion Efforts in Select Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

This study was guided by the functionalist theory which emphasises that the media help to co-ordinate various parts of the society by gathering and disseminating valuable information. It examined how book publishers used the newspaper medium to promote their books by content analyzing 164 entries on book promotion in three national newspapers for a four-year period between 2010 and 2013. The newspapers are The Guardian, The Punch and The Nation. Observable patterns in the

promotional efforts of the publishers indicate a high propensity towards the use of photographs and illustrations with a percentage rate of 37% and 27% respectively. The Nation had a leading position of 45%, while The Guardian and The Punch followed with 33% and 22% respectively. Further findings in the study revealed that product adverts (5%) and corporate adverts (4%) that can position a book and the publishers in the marketplace were the least explored areas. The study therefore, recommends that publishers should see the need to vigorously use the newspaper to embark on both product and corporate adverts. This has the potential of motivating people to buy and read books especially if they are effectively and consistently placed in the newspapers.

Key Words: Book promotion; Book publishing; Product promotion; Returns-on-investment

Introduction

Producing books and selling them to wholesalers or retailers who would hopefully distribute to the readers is but a fraction of the business of book publishing. Indeed a very crucial element in this business is that of promotion. It is the most effective way of creating awareness and eventual sales as it lets the target audience know about the existence of a publishing house, her books, the authors that write for such a house and the benefits of the books. Through promotion, publishing houses seek and attain visibility in the market place.

The place of promotion in the publishing chain is a strategic one. Christopher (2010) submits on this fact that publishing a book is irrelevant and a wasteful venture if no effort is made to let the target audience have information about its existence and its worth. Akpena (2007) had earlier stressed that applying effective and efficient book promotion techniques is *sine qua non* for achieving high sales of books and a key tool in achieving the way books are perceived. According to Amarchand and Varadharajan (1979) effective promotion requires effective communication with middlemen, dealers and consumers. Daiwan (1999:7) is of the view that promotion has a fundamental function which is 'to inform potential buyers of the problem-solving utility of a firm's market offering, with the objective of developing consumer preferences for a particular product.' It is right then to say that a beautiful cover of a book or any other device will not sell a book as much as if the target audience has adequate information about it. This is a sure means that will help them make informed purchase decision.

Hitherto, the dominant Nigerian publishers did not explore the mass media for product promotion compared to the efforts of manufacturers of consumer goods and other products. Perhaps, they were certain that any print-run designated for a

certain sales season would have no competitive market. But with the emergence of new and entrepreneurial-minded publishing houses in the country and also as a result of the harsh economic environment which no longer places book buying on the priority list of most people, there is the need for a re-consideration for book promotion.

This study therefore seeks to evaluate how Nigerian publishers have bought into the new design of book promotion through the newspaper medium. The study covered a period of four years, from January 2010 to December 2013. Three national newspapers namely, *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* were purposively selected for the study.

This study is guided by the functionalist theory of mass communication which explains social practices and institutions in terms of the 'needs' of the society and of individuals (MacQuail, 2005: 96-99). The study situates promotional activities by publishing houses within the general framework of the assumption of the functionalist theory which states that the media exist to help correlate or co-ordinate various parts of the social system by gathering and disseminating information and to act as powerful agents of socialization by transmitting society's cultural heritage and its basic systems of norms and values. This view is in tandem with Dominick's assertion that (2002:38) the media have the capacity to perform the function of linkage by joining different elements of society that are not directly connected. According to him, mass advertising attempts to link the needs of buyers with the products of sellers. The underlining factor therefore as it relates to the choice of the functionalist theory in this study is that if newspapers carry news about books, authors and other related information, they are in fact attempting to link readers and potential buyers with the book on the one hand and publishers with would-be authors on the other.

Promotion as an Essential Function in Book Publishing

Lavine and Wackman (1989:255-6) regard promotion as "all the tools aimed at convincing customers (audience members and advertisers) to buy or use a media product. When applied to the book publishing industry, it translates to all the methods used by a publisher to let the world know that a book exists, and to make people buy or want it" (Smith, 1990:122). It involves creating awareness for the existence of the book and the subsequent efforts in persuading the audience to acquire it. The success of the publishing house depends so much on the success of book promotion. It is a specialised activity that plays an important role as a determinant for book sales

Brookins (2014) describes book promotion as an essential element in the marketing mix. It's a tool used by businesses, both large and small, to inform,

persuade and remind customers about the products and services they have to offer. Without business promotion, companies would be stagnant and lack substantial growth because their brands would have low visibility in the market. According to businessdictionary.co (2014), in the context of marketing, promotion refers to the applied communication used by marketers to exchange persuasive messages and information between the firm and its various prospective customers and general public. A basic understanding in these definitions is the fact that promotion goes beyond exchanging information with the target audience. It rather entails an entire set of activities, which communicate the product, brand or service to the user.

Continuing on the essential benefit of promotion to the book publishing industry, Brookins (2014) maintains that promotion allows businesses to reach out to consumers using various forms of media, techniques and strategies to capture their attention. Promotion delivers a brand marketing message to consumers' television screens, radios, in the stores where they shop, online, in billboards and in magazines. However, while marketers strive to bring their product to the public, they must factor the media to be used and must further determine where their target gets the majority of information from in their marketing plan. This explains why Ward (2014) **holds the view that it** is important to let people know about the books of an author because it helps to increase sales in a competitive market and thus, increase profits:

It helps to introduce new products in the market by drawing the attention of potential customers. When a new product is introduced or there is a change of fashion or taste of consumers, existing stocks can be quickly disposed off and finally it stabilizes sales volume by keeping its customers with them. In the age of competition it is quite much possible that a customer may change his/her mind and try other brands.

To most publishers, a successful publishing effort ends with the production of the book. This is far from being the truth. Until the people are aware of the book, the content and the beautiful cover of the book will only be known to the publisher and the author of the book. As observed by Christopher (2010), many publishers in developing countries failed to understand that the process of publishing is not complete without creating awareness. Fortunately, the book publishing environment is changing. With the Internet making e-books possible, publishers can no longer afford to sit in their comfort zones without making conscious efforts on how to reach the readers and buyers through promotional activities. Publishers who fail to communicate with their existing and potential customers by using the media to create awareness are taking a risk with obvious consequence.

Why then do publishers not use the various media available to them to promote their books effectively? A ready answer may be the reasoning that books as

media products are expensive in nature. This being the case, publishers may be reluctant to incur additional costs more so that promotion may not occasion immediate returns-on-investment. Poynter (2003) seems to hazard an answer in defence of publishers. According to him, the “challenges are that books are a low ticket item (they do not cost much so you have to sell a bunch to pay for the promotion).” In addition, the subjects of books are targeted at a small group of people and there is no recurring consumption. That notwithstanding the onus lies on publishers to deliberately plan promotional strategies that will over-rule these apparent challenges. Glatzer (2004) corroborates this by maintaining that book promotion is not a temporary task. It’s an ongoing, long-term job that requires work on a consistent basis. What Glatzer (2004) and Poynter (2003) are saying is that the marketing technique the book marketer or the author adopts is critical to the overall success of a book and even the publisher image. An essential marketing technique in this regard is of course book promotion.

Promotion as a marketing strategy is the full responsibility of the publisher. The extent of promotion done by a publisher affects greatly the rate of order placed by booksellers. This is because; once adequate promotion has been done by the publisher, the book(s) will have a good market. Promotion forms a major link between the book and the author on the one hand, and the readers on the other. In promotion, the publisher’s voice is heard appealing to the reader by explaining to him/her why the book should be purchased. The uniqueness of the book as a media product is best seen in the promotional aspect of book publishing. No two books are promoted exactly the same way; each book, based on its peculiar nature may require a single promotional approach or a combination of several approaches. This is because an approach that sells one book may not augur well for another. In this regard, promotion requires a lot of creativity.

Promotion comprises certain marketing activities such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion and direct sales. The need for book promotion is informed by the understanding that the book as an information product is faced with competition by other information products. Since these alternative products are responding to technological advancement, and consequently improving their aesthetics, and communication effects, the book therefore needs to be responsive. Book publishers need to explore means of making the book as an information product compete favorably in the market place. Smith (1990:123) lists six items of promotion that book publishers may consider as strategic marketing plans. These are:

1. The jacket or printed cover of the book itself
2. Review copies for newspapers and magazines

3. Presentation copies for selected individuals
4. Announcements to the book trade,
5. Sales representative calls, on bookshops, schools and so forth; and
6. Printed advertising of some sort.

According to the author, the list is not exhaustive. He suggests that, based on the prevailing circumstances, publishers may design other items that may facilitate sales.

The jacket as a promotional strategy serves as an eye-catcher. It helps to catch the attention of the prospective buyer. With the information about the book displayed on the jacket (i.e. the blurb), the customer's interest is gradually being aroused. It is for this reason that the blurb on the jacket should contain such information as the kind of book, who the author is, what qualified critics have said about the book. The jacket contains simple and honest information, about the views of informed readers.

Review copies often serve as very good and cheap means of book promotion. This is especially so, if they are used judiciously. Review copies may be sent to mass media writers like magazine and newspaper columnists, art and entertainment editors as well as reviewers working with the radio and television. Publishing houses determine in advance what should constitute review copies. They decide way before press time how many copies that should be given out as review copies and which media houses that should be given copies. The various media houses that are given review copies are monitored for their various reviews. When receiving media houses consistently fail to review the books on which copies are sent them, there may be the need to delete such media houses from the review list.

The number of review copies may be determined by the size of the readership. A book that is targeted at readers in a wide geographical area needs to be given wide publicity through reviews. This is done by sending review copies to a reasonable number of media houses. The rate of growth of media houses and their interest in book review also accounts for the number of review copies that publishers may give out. Where there are many media houses with a defined book review department, the publishers would necessarily place such media houses on their book review list.

Presentation copies are similar to the review copies except that the recipients of presentation copies are not media houses. They are individuals and organizations whose opinions can influence the attitude of the public towards the book. In sending the presentation copies, the publishing houses usually request in writing the favorable

opinion of the recipients. Smith (1990:125) lists the following as recipients of presentation copies.

1. Leaders of public opinion in either civic or intellectual life.
2. Special authorities on the subject matter of the particular book.
3. Lecturers or other public speakers whose references to the book will influence others;
4. Important figures in education, library work, and so on, whose good opinion of a book may influence officials who make selections for textbook adoption, library purchase, and so forth,
5. Chief booksellers who will be good customers for the book if they like it; and
6. Newspaper editors who may decide to publish editorials on the subject matter of the book.

In sending presentation copies, the publishers need to co-operate with the author, but where author's personal interest (i.e. desire to maintain goodwill with friends and acquaintances) is likely to jeopardize the business consideration, the publisher may have to insist on sending presentation copies only to persons whose influence can guarantee wider readership of the book and by implication prospects for higher revenue. The cost of presentation copies is charged just the same way as the review copies. Presentation copies should be determined in advance and deducted from the sales copies. The number of copies for presentation depends on the nature of the book and the anticipated revenue accruing from the presentation. Where publishers foresee wider acceptability for the book (especially school textbooks) the limit of number of copies will only depend on the judgment of the publisher based on the various organs that need to make input in the adoption of the book.

Promotion as a communication process has far-reaching persuasive effect on the intended audience. When properly designed and executed, the returns are unquantifiable. No wonder, Ward (2014) sees it as communicating with the public in an attempt to influence them toward buying your products and/or services. This assertion is no less true for the book publishing industry. The essential role of promotion in the book publishing industry is underscored in the expression 'and of promoting its ultimate use' in Okwilagwe's classical definition of book publishing (Okwilagwe, 2001). It means therefore that without the promotion function, every book publishing effort is incomplete.

Prospects of the Newspaper as a Book Promotion Medium

The flow of books from the publishing house to the target buyers and readers is a factor of promotion. It is for this purpose that book publishers and even book authors adopt various promotional strategies to ensure the flow of their books whether they are on the active or back list or even forthcoming titles. According to Glatzer (2004), it is up to the author (and by extension the publisher) to find the target market and make sure they hear about the book again and again. One sure way of finding the target market and reaching them with the books through promotion is by creating space in the newspapers for this exercise. Because of the close affinity between the readers of newspapers and books, utilising the newspaper medium for book promotion is a logical device of creating awareness about the authors, the publishing houses and their books.

Although the newspaper may be available for book promotion, some publishing houses and authors may still not be aware about the specific promotional strategies to adopt using the newspaper medium. They may be in tune with general promotional strategies which Akpena (2007) identifies to include media reviews, exhibition/book fair, new arrival list, trade announcements, sales representatives' calls, direct mail advertising, complimentary copies, window/shop display, author's interview on radio/television, posters/publishers catalogue. Glatzer (2004) adds book signings, spending one to two hours every day working on book publicity until the goals are achieved.

From this maze of promotional strategies spanning nearly every communication context, the conscientious publisher should be able to streamline those that would be appropriate for the newspaper medium. Such strategies include, book reviews, book news, author interviews, serialization, product advertisements, and corporate advertisements among others. Book reviews is a very familiar activity. Most Nigeria newspapers have a page dedicated to book reviews or arts and life style where editors of the page do a review of a bestselling book. Independent persons, especially, literary critics and analysts also write the reviews and then forward them to the newspapers. In some cases, publishing houses or even authors themselves may commission such reviews.

Besides reviews, newspapers also carry news on books as well as author interviews. Such news may centre on a publishing house, a particular book author especially as it concerns events dealing with the publishing house, the author or the book itself. Some Nigerian newspapers carry short news stories across a column strip on the right hand side to inform the public about books, or a book that has been or would be adapted for feature film. Authors Interviews are regular features in television talk shows which provide an avenue for authors to promote their works

with the host of the programme where they give their publics insight into their life and works. Newspapers editors, columnist and reporters can make good out of this by interviewing bestselling authors. They can also use it as a way of projecting new, young and emerging authors. The exercise plays a double function of projecting the author and the book as it creates visibility for the publishing house and her products. A further advantage of this is that it can lead to serialization of certain books of the publishing house. In this case, the newspaper may decide to obtain serialization rights from the publisher to present the book in parts in its editions. Most often, works of narrative fiction lend themselves to this. By so doing, the newspaper attracts more readers for itself and also creates awareness about the book, the author and the publishing house.

Product adverts and corporate marketing are other promotional strategies that publishers can explore using the newspaper medium. Product advertising goes beyond placing adverts in the newspaper; it is rather a type of advert that features detailed information about specific products that a company or author has for sale. According to educational-portal.com it is any method of communication about the promotion of a product in an attempt to induce potential customers to purchase the product. It is highly informational because it is often used for new products to the market. The focus of product adverts therefore, is to introduce a new product or books to the market so as to promote its name, benefits and uses. Corporate marketing on its own encompasses a number of activities, including branding, advertising, communications and promotions. By focusing the promotional effort on the corporate entity responsible for the product, the organisation is tending towards branding which has the potential of creating lasting impressions in the minds of the audience as they come in contact with the iconic elements and symbols that identify the organisation (Kotler, 2003; Wells et al, 2002; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2001).

Indeed, the newspaper is a very functional medium that publishers can use to call attention to their existence, their books and their authors. By adopting these promotional strategies among others, they would be laying a strong foundation for the continuity of the publishing industry as a major contributor to the task of nation building.

Discussion/Findings

This is a four year study (2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013) of three leading Nigerian newspapers (*The Punch, The Guardian, and The Nation*). They were purposively selected out of the 49 registered newspapers in the country at the time of the study because of their wide national reach and deliberate accommodation of book related matters. This discovery was made in a pilot study that the researchers carried out before settling for the three newspapers. Three contiguous months (August,

September and October) were purposively selected for each year because they fall within the book season months. Two other months (June for 2010 and 2012, and May for 2011 and 2013) were randomly selected without replacement to cater for the months outside the book season (see **Table 1**). The researchers purposively selected the days in which articles related to book promotion appeared in the selected papers (see **Table 2 and Table 3**). For *The Guardian*, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were selected. *The Punch* had Tuesday and Friday while *The Nation* had Wednesday and Thursday. Saturday and Sunday as weekend selections were common to the three newspapers. The newspaper editorial contents of news, book reviews, features, interviews, serializations, photographs, illustrations, announcements, product adverts and corporate adverts constituted the units of analysis (see **Table 4 and Table 5**).

Table1: Selected months and weeks

MONTHS/WEEKS			
2010	2011	2012	2013
June (week 4)	May (week 1)	June (week 1)	May (week 3)
August (week 4)	August (week 2)	August (week 3)	August (week 1)
September (week 2)	September(week 1)	September (week 2)	September (week 4)
October (week 1)	October (week 3)	October (week 2)	October (week 4)

Source: Field survey

Table 2: Selected days and weekends for 2010 and 2011

DAYS		WEEKENDS	
2010	2011	2010	2011
June (week 4) 22 nd , 23 rd , 24 th , 25 th & 28 th	May (week 1) 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th	June 26 th , 27 th	May 7 th , 1 st
August (week 4) 22 nd , 25 th , 26 th , 27 th & 28 th	August (week 2) 8 th , 9 th , 10 th , 11 th & 12 th	August 28 th , 22 nd	August 13 th & 14 th
September (week 2) 8 th , 9 th , 10 th , 13 th & 14 th	September(week 1) 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th	September 11 th & 12 th	September 2 nd , 3 rd
October (week 3) 15 th , 18 th , 19 th , 20 th & 21 st	October (week 3) 17 th , 18 th , 19 th , 20 th & 21 st	October 16 th , 17 th	October 15 th , 16 th

Source: Field survey

Table 3: Selected days and weekends for 2012 and 2013

DAYS		WEEKENDS	
2012	2013	2012	2013
June (week 1) 1 st , 4 th , 5 th , 6 th , 7 th	May (week 3) 17 th , 20 th , 21 st , 22 nd , 23 rd	June 2 nd , 3 rd	May 18 th , 19 th
August (week 3) 15 th , 16 th , 17 th , 22 nd , 24 th	August (week 1) 6 th , 7 th , 8 th , 9 th , 12 th	August 18 th , 19 th	August 10 th , 11 th
September (week 2) 10 th , 12 th , 13 th , 14 th , 17 th	September (week 4) 22 nd , 23 rd , 24 th , 25 th , 26 th , 27 th	September 15 th , 16 th	September 28 th , 29 th
October (week 2) 5 th , 8 th , 10 th , 11 th , 12 th	October (week 4) 25 th , 28 th , 29 th , 30 th , 31 st	October 6 th , 7 th	October 26 th , 27 th

Source: Field survey

Table 4: Book promotion strategies in the newspapers

Promotional strategy	The Guardian	The Punch	The Nation	Total
Book news	3 (2%)	7 (4%)	6 (4%)	n=16 (10%)
Book reviews	5	4	8	n=17 (10%)
Features	3	5	7	n=15(9%)
Interviews	3	1	8	n=12 (7%)
Serialization	4	-	7	n=n=11 (7%)
Photographs	13	8	20	n=41 (25%)
Illustrations	7	4	13	n=24 (15%)
Announcements	8	2	6	n=16 (10%)
Products adverts	4	2	2	n=8 (5%)
Corporate adverts	1	3	-	n=4 (2%)
Total	51	36	77	n=164 (100%)

Source: Field survey

Table 5: Consistent pattern of book promotion in the newspapers

Observable pattern of promotion	The Guardian	The Punch	The Nation	Total
Photographs	18 (11%)	15 (9%)	27 (17%)	60 (37%)
Illustration	13 (8%)	6 (4%)	19 (11%)	38 (23%)
Book reviews	8 (5%)	3 (1%)	10 (6%)	21 (13%)
Announcement	10 (6%)	3 (2%)	6 (4%)	19 (12%)
Features	4 (2%)	4 (2%)	8 (5%)	16 (9%)
Book News	2 (1%)	5 (3%)	3 (2%)	10 (6%)
Total	n=55 (33%)	n=36 (22%)	n=73 (45%)	n=164 (100%)

Source: Field survey

Table 6: Space allocation for book promotion in the newspapers

Newspapers	Column inches	Percentage (%)
The Guardian	689	38.6%
The Punch	261.5	14.6%
The Nation	836.5	46.8%
Total	1,787	100%

Source: Field survey

The two research questions that guided this study are:

RQ1: What are the observable patterns of book promotion in the studied newspapers?

RQ2: To what extent are Nigerian publishers demonstrating awareness about the indispensable role of the newspaper in book promotion?

Data in Table 4 and Table 5 and Table 6 provide answers to the first research question. Table 4 shows the kinds of book promotions available in the three Nigerian newspapers analyzed. A total of 164 items were examined with 10 patterns of promotional effort. These are book news, book reviews, features, interviews, serialization, photographs, illustrations, announcements, product adverts and

corporate adverts. Table 5 reveals that the most consistent promotional efforts are book news, book reviews, features, photographs, illustrations and announcements. Among these, photographs top the list with 37% followed by 23% for illustrations.

Another observable pattern in the promotional efforts is that that *The Nation* newspaper is leading the other two newspapers in book promotion. It has a total of 45% promotional effort while the *Guardian* has 33% just as the *Punch* takes the rear with only 22% promotional effort. In the area of advert, however, product adverts and corporate adverts were the least areas that publishers deployed as the percentages of product adverts and corporate adverts appear to be very low with 8% and 2% respectively.

The pattern across the week shows that *The Guardian* publishes on Mondays and Sundays book reviews, announcements, features, photographs and illustrations. *The Punch* newspaper publishes mostly on Tuesdays' features of authors which it merges with book reviews. *The Nation* newspaper on Wednesdays publishes book reviews, serialization, features (author) photographs and illustration. Data also revealed that book promotion efforts are more frequent in the months of August and October.

Table 6 shows the amount of space the newspapers analyzed devote to book promotion. The data above shows that *The Nation* is ahead of the other two papers with 46.8%. This is followed by *The Guardian* with 38.6% and *The Punch* with 14.6%. On the whole a total space allocation of 1,787 column inches is allocated for book promotion.

In answering research question two, inference has to be drawn from a summation of the issues raised so far as extracted from Tables 4, 5 and Table 6. The presence of book-related items in the sampled newspapers as indicated in these tables show that Nigerian publishers are aware of the indispensable role of the newspaper in performing the role of disseminating valuable information, transmission of society's cultural heritage and its basic norms and values alongside its entertainment function. The availability of book promotion items in the media also shows that the publishers play their role of promoting their titles or books. That is, to inform, persuade and remind potential and existing customers about new and existing books. By so doing, they have overtly demonstrated that they are quite aware that the newspaper when adequately utilised can serve as a very indispensable medium of book promotion. In this way, the functionalist theory which guided this study becomes very relevant and indeed quite appropriate. It therefore agrees with the views of scholars like Akpena (2007) and Christopher (2010) who posit that the essence of book promotion is to inform, persuade and remind potential and existing customers about books. This is also in line with the view of Amanda (2006) that the business of publishing has

changed over the years and it has become more important for publishers to also adjust along the same lie in promoting the titles published by their authors.

Book-related articles were mostly found on Sunday and Wednesday issues of *The Nation* newspaper, Monday issues of *The Guardian* and Tuesday issues of *The Punch* newspapers.

In the area of advert, however, product adverts and corporate adverts were the least areas that publishers deployed as the percentages of product adverts and corporate adverts appear to be very low with 8% and 2% respectively.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Book publishers embark on promotion as an essential tool of bringing to the knowledge of the society information about their active list, back list, and forthcoming publications as well as information about the publisher. This information helps both existing and potential customers (readers and buyers of books) know the essence of the books and where to purchase them. Although there are evidences of book promotion in the newspapers sampled, areas like corporate adverts and product adverts need more attention. When publishers embark on corporate adverts it affords the public the opportunity to have information about the publishers. Again, it provides a source of information for intending authors. On the basis of this therefore, it is recommended that publishers should see the need to increase the quota on corporate and product adverts as a way of arousing the interest of the public thereby motivating them to buy and read books.

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