ROLE OF SPORTS MARKETING IN PROMOTING UNITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined the potentials of sports marketing in promoting unity and social responsibility among Nigerians. The objectives of the study were to find out the effect of sports marketing on the growth and development of particular sport in Nigeria, like football, to examine the relationship between sports marketing indices (product, price, site, and promotion) and Nigerians' unification through sports (football). The population of this research consisted selected residents in the South-South Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria who are 18 years and above; and the sample size of this study was 400 respondents drawn from 6 cities (Benin City, Asaba, Port Harcourt, Uyo, Yenagoa and Calabar) from South-South, Nigeria and a stratified sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents. The study adopted descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages and tables) and inferential statistics (p-value, t-value and F-statistics) as its major statistical tools for data analysis. The analysis established that that sports marketing has significant effect on the growth and development of a particular sport in Nigeria, like football; that sports marketing indices (product, price, place, promotion) has significant relationship with the unification of Nigerians through sports and that marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations has significant influence on the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public. Finally, the study recommends the enhancement of infrastructural development, and the adoption of a holistic marketing mix that incorporates product development tailored to local preferences.

Key words: *Sports Marketing, Marketing Strategies, National Unity, Sport Development, Social Responsibility, Human Connection.*

Introduction

Nigeria, a country with immense diversity and intricate socio-political dynamics, has long struggled to promote harmony among its many ethnic groups, faiths, and geographical areas. While a source of pride, the nation's diverse cultural mosaic has also contributed to a number of disputes and divides that have impeded national

advancement (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). Growing evidence has shown in recent years that sports have the power to unite people, breaking down social barriers and uniting them around a sense of shared experiences and national pride. Throughout history, social solidarity and nation-building have been greatly aided by sports. Football in particular has demonstrated signs of this unifying power in Nigeria, where fleeting national triumphs have brought people from all walks of life together (Onwumechili & Akindes, 2014). But in Nigeria, the full promise of sports as a vehicle for fostering national cohesion is still largely unrealized. This is where marketing plays a critical role. Sports' unifying qualities can be amplified and turned into long-lasting societal impact through marketing's capacity to alter perceptions, affect behaviour, and forge emotional connections (Chalip, 2006). Through the deliberate application of marketing ideas and practices, Nigerians can foster a sense of shared duty and human connection, in addition to promoting sports events and sportsmen.

The ability of sports marketing to promote harmony and connection has been further enhanced by the digital era. More direct and individualised fan interaction is made possible by social media platforms and digital marketing strategies, which help to create virtual communities that cut over social and geographic divides (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria, a very diverse country, has long struggled to promote social cohesion and national unity. The nation faces challenges related to geographical inequities, religious conflicts, and ethnic tensions that impede its progress towards becoming a cohesive nation, given its diverse population of over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religions (Ojo, 2016). These differences frequently take precedence over a feeling of national identity, resulting in rivalry for power and resources and hindering cooperative attempts to address shared problems (Onapajo & Babalola, 2020).

Although Nigerians have been known to temporarily come together through sports, especially football, during international games, these moments of unity are frequently brief and do not have a lasting social impact (Onwumechili & Akindes, 2014). The incapacity to use sports' unifying force to build long-lasting social cohesiveness and a sense of national pride is the root of the issue. Furthermore, there exists a noteworthy deficiency in the tactical application of marketing to enhance the cohesive capacity of sports in Nigeria. Nowadays, commercial goals are the main focus of sports marketing initiatives rather than social impact (Okpalaoka & Olaniyi, 2022). Redirecting these initiatives to support social responsibility, national cohesion, and enhancing interpersonal ties amongst Nigeria's various communities presents a challenge. Additionally, the digital divide in Nigeria restricts the efficacy and reach of digital

sports marketing programmes, which could worsen already-existing divides rather than heal them (Okocha & Edafewotu, 2022). Profit has frequently taken precedence over social impact in the commercialization of sports, resulting in a rift between local communities and sports organisations (Eze, 2015).

Finally, there is a dearth of thorough study on how, in the Nigerian context, sports marketing, national unity, and social responsibility intersect. Although these components have been the subject of individual studies, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how sports marketing can be strategically used to encourage responsibility and togetherness among Nigerians (Efebeh, 2020).

By examining how sports marketing can be effectively used as a vehicle for creating social responsibility, national unity, and personal relationships in Nigeria, this study seeks to solve these interconnected challenges.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the role of sports marketing in uniting Nigerians, fostering responsibility, and promoting human connection. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. find out the effect of sports marketing on the growth and development of a particular sport in Nigeria, like football.

2. examine the effect of sports marketing indices (product, price, site, and promotion) on Nigerians' unification through sports

3. evaluate the effect of marketing strategies used by Nigerian sports organisations on the feeling of collective identification and accountability among supporters and the larger public.

Literature Review

Sports and National Unity in Nigeria

Sports have the unique ability to transcend cultural, religious, and regional differences, uniting people under a shared passion and national pride. According to Enoh (2024), sports play a profound role in shaping national identity and fostering social cohesion in Nigeria. The author emphasizes that sports have the power to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds, promoting understanding and solidarity among the people.

In Nigerian society, football in particular has a special place. When the Nigerian football team won the gold medal in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, it was clear that the sport could bring Nigerians together. Oluremi (2013) contends that Nigerian national teams' accomplishments in international contests have continuously functioned as a focal point for fostering national cohesion. Social divides are momentarily suspended during these times of collective celebration, enabling Nigerians to unite around a shared sense of patriotism. Efebeh (2020), however, issues a warning: while athletics can foster moments of oneness, maintaining this harmony after sporting events is very difficult. According to the author, concerted efforts are required to fully use sports' capacity for national unification and long-term development. Nigeria's soft power has benefited from its athletes' accomplishments in a variety of sports. Iwuagwu, Ekoh, Ngwu, and Gyimah (2023) draw attention to the way Nigerian football players who compete in elite European leagues have elevated their nation's profile and appeal internationally by acting as unofficial ambassadors.

Sports Marketing and Sports Development

In Nigeria, sports marketing has been instrumental in the growth and development of numerous sports, football being one especially noteworthy example. According to Akarah (2014), successful marketing strategies have played a significant role in raising this sport's profile and financial sustainability, which has aided in its overall growth. Regarding football, Bari, Ismail, Islam and Bari (2023) draw attention to the ways in which private businesses and the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) have promoted the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) through marketing campaigns. These initiatives have included stronger branding, more media attention, and well-thought-out alliances with business sponsors. The authors point out that by drawing in better players and enhancing facilities, these marketing initiatives have not only raised income streams but also improved league quality.

Product, pricing, price, and promotion are the four-sports marketing mix (indices) that are correlated with sports development. The four Ps of traditional marketing—product, pricing, place, and promotion—have been modified for the sports industry, with each component being essential to the growth of sports. The relationship between these marketing metrics and the growth of sports in Nigeria is examined by Akarah (2014):

a. **Product:** When discussing sports, the term product refers to the activity itself, players, teams, and related memorabilia. According to Sedky, Kortam, and Abouaish (2020), sustainable development depends on raising the standard of the sports product through improved facilities, organisation, and training.

b. **Price:** Ticket prices, merchandising expenses, and broadcasting rights are all included in sports marketing pricing plans.

c. **Place:** Here, we're talking about the outlets and locations where sports are watched. Grix, Brannagan, and Lee (2019) investigate how Nigerians' access to sports has grown as a result of the construction of contemporary stadiums and the proliferation of broadcasting alternatives.

d. **Promotion:** Effective promotion, according to the author, has been essential to drawing sponsors and expanding the sports sector.

Sports Marketing and Social Cohesion

Nigerian sports organisations have employed many marketing strategies with the objective of cultivating a collective identity and sense of accountability among supporters and the larger public. These strategies have not always been successful, though; there have been some clear obstacles as well as some victories. In her analysis of the Nigeria Football Federation's (NFF) marketing initiatives, Akarah (2014) notes how national team performance-based advertisements have proven to be especially successful at fostering feelings of collective national pride. The article points out that marketing campaigns that capitalise on the Super Eagles' triumphs in international tournaments have momentarily brought Nigerians from different ethnic and regional backgrounds together. In his assessment of the present marketing strategies used by Nigerian sports organisations, Hamafyelto (2018) claims that instead of fostering a long-lasting feeling of shared identity and responsibility, these strategies frequently place an undue emphasis on celebrity players and quick money. According to the authors, this strategy reduces sports marketing's ability to foster long-term societal cohesiveness.

Sports marketing contribution to Nigerians' development of human connection and responsibility: Though it isn't always fully realised, sports marketing has the ability to significantly contribute to the development of human connection and responsibility among Nigerians. According to Akarah (2014), sports marketing has the potential to be an effective instrument for advancing moral principles and conscientious conduct, especially when it is in line with larger social goals.

Theoretical Framework

Two main theoretical frameworks form the foundation of the study:

i. Social Identity Theory (SIT): Developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), SIT offers a framework for comprehending the ways in which sports marketing can impact the creation of group identities and relationships between groups. This notion is especially pertinent when analysing the ways in which varied Nigerian people might develop a feeling of common national identity through sports marketing strategies.

ii. 2. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): Developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), ELM provides information about how people interpret persuasive messages, including those found in sports marketing campaigns. This model will be used to evaluate how well various marketing strategies encourage ethical behaviour and interpersonal connections.

Methodology

This study made use of descriptive survey research design. The population of this research consists of all residents living in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria which is about 28 million (28, 153, 979). This study used the primary source of data collection. The sample size of this study was arrived at by using the Taro Yamane (1967) which was 400 respondents from a population size of 28,153,979. The questionnaire was administered in six (6) cities representing the capitals of south-south which include: Benin City, Asaba, Port Harcourt, Uyo, Yenagoa and Calabar. However, a stratified sampling method was used in selecting the respondents as follows: Port Harcourt (101), Asaba (76), Uyo (76), Benin City (60), Calabar (54), and Yenagoa (34). The study adopted descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages and tables) and inferential statistics (p-value, t-value and F-statistics) as its major statistical tools for data analysis.

Result and Discussions

The demographic characteristics of the respondents is hereby presented:

There were 298 (74.5%) males and 102 (25.5%) males. This suggests that there may be gender-related insights in the context of sport marketing views, as the sample has a strong male majority.

Ages 18 to 25: 197 (49.3%); 26 to 35: 93 (23.3%); 36 to 45: 51 (12.7%); 46 to 55: 51 (12.7%); and 56 and older: 8 (2 %). Nearly 50% of the sample is composed of people

between the ages of 18 and 25. This might represent the opinions of younger people on national unity or social connection, especially those pertaining to sport marketing.

From the responses, 24 (6.0%) had WASSCE/NECO, 123 (30.7%) had NCE/OND, 200 (50%) had HND/B.Sc, 48 (12.0%) had PGDE/MBA/M.Sc, and 5 (1.3%) had Ph.D certificates. A large portion of respondents holds higher educational qualifications (50% with HND/B.Sc.), suggesting that marketing messages could be tailored to appeal to a more educated audience, potentially focusing on the intellectual aspects of sports.

With respect to respondents' favourite sport, 359 the respondents (89.79%) admitted that Football is their favourite sport.

Hypothesis Testing

Regression analysis (t-test) was used in this study to assess the hypotheses at the 5% significant level. The p-value determines whether or not we accept a hypothesis. If the p-value is >0.05 (more than 5%), we fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning we accept it. If the p-value is <0.05 (less than 5%), we reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: There is no significant effect between sports marketing and the growth and development of particular a sport in Nigeria, like football.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model 1	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.423[a]	0.179	0.173	0.55982
a. Predictors: (Constant), Sport marketing				

The value of R^2 which is 0.179 indicates that the independent variable (Sport marketing) explains only 17.9%; 82.1% of the dependent variable's (the growth and development of particular sports in Nigeria) systematic variation goes unaccounted for. After adjustments of the R-squared, this percentage drops even lower to 17.3%. This indicates that the growth and development of particular sports in Nigeria is determined by factors other than the independent variable (sport marketing).

Table 2: ANOVA

Model 1		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.110	1	10.110	32.259	.000[b]
	Residual	46.382	148	.313		
	Total	56.492	149			
a. Dependent Variable: the growth and development of particular sports in Nigeria						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Sport marketing						

At 0.000, the F statistic of 32.259 is significant. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between sport marketing and the growth and development of particular sports in Nigeria.

Table 3: Coefficients

Model 1		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.919	0.228		12.793	0.000
	Sport marketing	0.311	0.055	0.423	5.680	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: the growth and development of particular sports in Nigeria						

Sports marketing is significant at the 0.05 level of statistical significance, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000. Therefore, with a t-value of 5.680 and P-values of 0.000, we reject the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant effect between sports marketing and the growth and development of particular a sport in Nigeria, like football. This implies that the growth and development of a particular sport in Nigeria, like football is statistically predicted by sports marketing.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between sports marketing indices (product, price, place, promotion) and the unification of Nigerians through sports.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model 2	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
2	0.529[a]	0.280	0.275	0.50078
a. Predictors: (Constant), Sport Marketing Indices				

The value of R^2 which is 0.280 indicates that the independent variable (Sport Marketing Indices) explains only 28%; 72% of the dependent variable's (the unification of Nigerians through sports) systematic variation goes unaccounted for. After adjustments of the R-squared, this percentage drops even lower to 27.5%. This indicates that the unification of Nigerians through sports is determined by factors other than the independent variable (Sport Marketing Indices).

Table 5: ANOVA[a]

Model 2		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
2	Regression	14.436	1	14.436	57.566	.000[b]
	Residual	37.116	148	.251		
	Total	51.552	149			
a. Dependent Variable: the unification of Nigerians through sports						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Sport Marketing Indices						

At 0.000, the F statistic of 57.566 is significant. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between Sport Marketing Indices and the unification of Nigerians through sports.

Table 6: Coefficients[a]

Model 2		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.591	0.204		12.697	0.000
	Sport marketing Indices	0.372	0.049	0.529	7.587	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: the unification of Nigerians through sports						

Sports marketing indices (product, price, place, promotion) is significant at the 0.05 level of statistical significance, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000. Therefore, with a t-value of 7.587 and P-values of 0.000, we reject the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between sports marketing indices (product, price, place, promotion) and the unification of Nigerians through sports. This implies that the unification of Nigerians through sports is statistically predicted by sports marketing indices (product, price, place, promotion).

Hypothesis Three

H_{03}: There is no significant influence between marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations and the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model 3	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
3	0.440[a]	0.194	0.188	0.55345
a. Predictors: (Constant), marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations				

The value of R^2 which is 0.194 indicates that the independent variable (marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations) explains only 19.4%; 80.6% of

the dependent variable's (criminal activity and social unrest among socioeconomic groups) systematic volatility goes unaccounted for. After adjustments of the R-squared, this percentage drops even lower to 49.1%. This indicates that the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public is determined by factors other than the independent variable (marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations).

Table 8: ANOVA[a]

Model 3		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
3	Regression	10.883	1	10.883	35.530	0.000[b]
	Residual	45.334	148	.306		
	Total	56.217	149			
a. Dependent Variable: collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public						
b. Predictors: (Constant), marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations						

At 0.000, the F statistic of 35.530 is significant. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations and collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public.

Table 9: Coefficients[a]

Model 3		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
3	(Constant)	2.811	0.226		12.463	0.000

	marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations	0.323	0.054	0.440	5.961	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public						

Marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations is significant at the 0.05 level of statistical significance, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000. Therefore, with a t-value of 5.961 and P-values of 0.000, we reject the null hypothesis, which states that There is no significant influence between marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations and the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public. This implies that the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public is statistically predicted by marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations.

Discussion of Findings

The research uncovers significant insights into the transformative role of sports marketing in Nigeria, emphasizing its ability to go beyond basic commercial goals and act as a powerful agent for social cohesion and national identity.

The initial finding indicates that sports marketing has a significant effect on the growth and development of a particular sport in Nigeria, like football. This implies that well-planned marketing strategies can greatly enhance the visibility, popularity, and infrastructure of sport such as football (Anorue, Ugboaja & Okonkwo, 2020). Marketing initiatives yield widespread benefits, including heightened fan engagement, better sponsorship opportunities for athletes, and increased investments in sports infrastructure.

The second finding highlights the important relationship between sports marketing indices—product, price, place, and promotion—and national unity. This illustrates how thoughtfully crafted marketing strategies can elevate sports from mere entertainment to a significant tool for social integration (Oluwatoyin, Olanrewaju & Sofyan, 2021). By fostering shared experiences and emotional ties, sports marketing can bridge ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic gaps, promoting a sense of collective national identity.

The third finding emphasizes the vital role of marketing strategies in influencing fans' perceptions of shared responsibility and identification. The strategic efforts of Nigerian sports organizations can nurture a sense of communal accountability and emotional

investment among supporters, moving beyond conventional spectator roles (Okpalaoka & Olaniyi, 2022). This suggests that sports marketing extends beyond event promotion; it is also about crafting narratives that inspire national pride and a unified purpose.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the role of sports marketing in promoting unity and social responsibility in Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to find out the effect of sports marketing on the growth and development of a particular sport in Nigeria, like football; to examine the relationship between sports marketing indices (product, price, site, and promotion) and Nigerians' unification through sports and to evaluate the influence of marketing strategies used by Nigerian sports organisations on the feeling of collective identification and accountability among supporters and the larger public.

The study concludes, based on the data, that sports marketing has significant effect on the growth and development of a particular sport in Nigeria, like football; that sports marketing indices (product, price, place, promotion) has significant relationship with the unification of Nigerians through sports and that marketing strategies employed by Nigerian sports organizations has significant influence on the collective identification and accountability perceived by supporters and the larger public.

The findings regarding the role of sports marketing in Nigeria highlight the need for strategic recommendations to enhance its effectiveness and foster growth, unity, and accountability within the sports sector. The key among these recommendations is the enhancement of infrastructure development, which involves significant investment in modern sports facilities such as stadiums, training centres, and community sports complexes. Collaboration between government agencies and private investors is essential to create an environment conducive to sports activities. Improved infrastructure not only attracts fans but also enhances the overall sporting experience, driving attendance and participation in events. Schools sports should be encouraged with more investment as a strategy for grassroot sports development as well as creating an avenue for building national unity.

Additionally, implementing comprehensive sports marketing strategies is crucial for maximizing the impact of marketing efforts. Sports organizations should adopt a holistic marketing mix that incorporates product development tailored to local preferences, flexible pricing strategies to ensure accessibility, strategic placement of events, and effective promotion through digital platforms and social media. Emphasizing themes of national unity in promotional campaigns can further foster a

collective identity among Nigerians. By collaborating with local influencers and community leaders, organizations can amplify their messages and encourage diverse participation across various demographics.

Finally, strengthening community engagement initiatives is vital for building relationships with supporters and promoting transparency in operations. Involving fans in decision-making processes through initiatives like fan forums and outreach programs can enhance accountability and encourage active support for teams. Furthermore, developing training programs for sports professionals will ensure sustainable growth within the sector by equipping individuals with essential skills. Encouraging private sector participation through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) will facilitate infrastructure development and promote sustainable business models, ultimately contributing to a vibrant sports industry in Nigeria.

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