

Traditional Nigerian Economic and Marketing Systems: In Search of an African Perspective

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ABSTRACT:- This is an attempt at bringing focus and clarity to traditional Nigerian marketing systems and their economic and social settings they were embedded in. The objectives are to identify the marketing system existing prior to the advent of European and Arab trades. The paper attempts to identify the environments in which they operated and the structures and agencies that existed including governmental involvement and their relevance, functions and methods that explain their survival against all odds. It also attempts to identify the traditional practices and institutions that survived in order to make them more understood and appreciated. The significance of this paper is it's rendering possible answers to why the Nigerian marketing system has experienced stunted development and why there is lack of significant positive impact of governmental policies. This paper identifies the Socio-economicus concept as more relevant to the understanding of the past. It identified three schools of thoughts in the debate about origins of trade in Africa; 'Substantivists', 'Formalist' and 'Middlelist'. Traditional use and ownership of factors of production, banking, and credit as well as the structure of the economic and marketing systems existing prior to European and Arab trades were also explored. It discusses the effects of colonial interferences and concludes that significant aspects of our traditional Nigerian economic and marketing system still exist, and in future, policies should consider this and make it pivotal in getting future policies right. For marketing academics this paper also broadens the frontiers for research into African marketing thought and its expansion.

Keywords:- Nigerian Marketing System, European and Arab Trades, Sectoral Dualism, Traditional Institutions, African Marketing thought

I. INTRODUCTION

Scholars, like Dalton (1962), have long since observed that economic academics are seldom interested in the abundant available anthropological literature concerning the economic organization of what they refer to as *primitive* societies pre-western contact. If the existing system does function unlike those in western cultures they were regarded as primitive or native thereby denigrating the systems, their operatives and owners. Ballantyne, Williams and Aitken (2011) opined that as Vargo and Lusch observed in their lead article, S-D logic widens the manner in which exchange and value creation are perceived. Its implication is that all socio-economic actors in exchange relations; like the firm, households and so on, provide service, and are involved in value-creation. They further observed that, this is important for understanding of how and when service relations are engaged in, and the active link between service interaction and value. Meaning that exchange goes beyond transaction at point of sale, where value is fixed and responsibilities determined, but instead, exchange is consequent upon "and includes prior value propositions negotiated on the basis of reciprocal benefits" (Oluwabamide, 2015).

"The cultures and social structures of contemporary African societies are a mixture of both traditional and modern elements. However, the proportion of the traditional elements is higher". (Oluwabamide, 2015)

Oluwabamide (2015) points out that if nothing is done, this higher proportion enjoyed today might not survive unless the general tendency by Africans to imbibe foreign socio-cultural systems completely is eliminated. The author further submitted that in the sub-Saharan African region, long held cultural traits and social structures regarded by some people as outdated and unimportant are still essential components of contemporary socio-cultural institutions particularly in the rural setting and these constitute the solid foundations of African communities.

In this paper, we argue that the basis of exploring the Nigerian (African) marketing system would have been on a premise other than the *homo-economics concept*, hence the erroneous perception by western style economists and other authors in the past. The advent of the *Socio-economicus* (O'Boyle, 2007) also has given us

a new perspective on how marketing systems may be viewed so that the African marketing systems may be conceptualized into useful perspective. Therefore, this paper aims primarily to bring to focus and understanding, the traditional Nigerian marketing system, markets and their socio-economic systems they are or were embedded in. Other specific objectives are to identify the marketing system(s) existing prior to the onset of European and Arab trade; identify the environments in which they operated and the structures and agencies that existed and their relevance, functions and methods that explain their survival against all odds and finally what traditional practices and institutions remaining can be recognized and understood to render them clear and useful. In this direction, we would ask what nature of economic and marketing systems could be identified in traditional Nigerian societies? If these perspectives had been in place in the past, would the present misconceptions of the nature and presence of an economic and marketing system, albeit, markets in traditional African setting have occurred?

Another pertinent question would also arise following Ebitu (2016) observations that the direct competition from the large British and other European colonialists' conglomerates, seemed to have extinguished the enterprising spirits of the small indigenous marketing firms. This loss of entrepreneurial spirit could have occurred if our fore bearers, did not tenaciously grasped the indigenous theories and practices of market days, and locations, relationship and community marketing as well as specialized markets/crops. These practices are still present today in full practice or did not disappear completely. Since the structures had not all been destroyed, can an enquiry of this nature afford the opportunity to conceptualise a system that brings back the fundamental nature of such traditional systems or can the current existing duality (existence of western and traditional) be put to better practice?

The importance of these questions is underscored by the evident stunted development of the Nigerian marketing system as we know them and the lack of significant impact of policies that have been embarked upon by a majority of post colonial African governments in general (Nigeria inclusive), on the marketing system and specifically the welfare of its citizens (Uzoka, 2008, Ebitu, 2016). A paper of this nature is expected to reveal structural defects as well as strong points in the dualistic marketing systems we presently operate.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 African traditional economic and marketing systems structures and agencies

Ecoma and Ecoma (2014) have identified three distinct emerging schools of marketing thought resulting from "spate of arguments and counter arguments on the origins of trade and marketing in pre-colonial African societies which they listed as the substantivists, the formalists ... and the middlelists".

a) The 'substantivists' were described by Ecoma and Ecoma (2014) as a school of thought took a pre-1950 approach to pre-industrial economies (especially African economies). Economies such as these were identified by the nonexistence of markets that are self-regulated, farming and demand- supply mechanisms. Some of the proponents of this school, (Andah, 1980; Vansina, 1977; and Konczaki and Konczaki, 1977), argued that there was absence of such things as tools, land, in African economies that could be assigned to the category of 'capital goods'. In this manner they heavily lean towards the hypothetical views on distribution and exchange, giving credit to the development of local trade solely as a result of the emergence of foreign impact. (Ecoma and Ecoma, 2014). In this way, they argue that the great concentration of traditional markets in West Africa was as a result of its geographical position on the coast of Guinea in the South and the Trans-Saharan routes found in the North (Konczaki and Konczaki, 1977).

b) The second school of thought according to Ecoma and Ecoma (2014) was the *formalist* school of thought that provides a completely orthodox opinion on the genesis of markets in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. This school takes a post-1950 approach and its interest is mainly with the forms and organization of the methods of a society's material life and with its economic structures. They are of the view that local trade and exchange were as a result of the individual's propensity to barter; concerning the need for local exchange, that arise from either deficits in one area or surpluses in another. In this way the system internal phenomena may create and promote a conducive environment for the evolution of trade (Gray and Birmingham, 1970). In this manner an internal economic stance, solely and wholly developed by the society in which the activity exists, was adopted by the formalists. They criticize Vansina's categorisation of trade patterns in Africa, they make the argument that geographical extent and objects of exchange are not to be regarded as 'very unreliable indices' indices for the determination of development of trade.

c) The third school of thought (the *Middelist*) was proposed by Ecoma and Ecoma (2014). Their argument was that Economists devoted little interest in the huge anthropological literature available in respect of the economic institutions of primitive societies before western involvement. They believe that adopting "a middle approach by focusing attention on the pre-existing forces within the region ... which paved the way for the development of trade and marketing activities well before 1800" (Ecoma and Ecoma, 2014) should be the case.

Dalton (1962) had observed that there was utter lack of knowledge, of the marketing and economic system that existed in a form totally alien to western ideology. This lack of understanding led to the erroneous view of the traditional marketing system as challenged or inadequate, unjust, volatile and devoid of avenues for active participation of the beneficiaries of the products. When this *Middlelist* school of thought's propositions are followed then one would be able to disentangle the mind to find a more composite and meaningful understanding of the traditional economic and marketing systems that existed pre- external trade with foreigners from outside Africa.

It has long been held that all economic exchanges took place in a societal, religious and political setting. There existed ideologies which governed the market mechanism other than free market European ideology proposed by Adam Smith and other economists that followed him. Specialisation of production occurred as a natural reaction to the environment and resources available. (Ariyo, 2014)

Exchanges of ownership and consumption of products were frequently of marketable commodities and therefore a money mechanism was already in place prior to trade development between Africans and Europeans. Market –place exchanges was found widely in Africa as a peripheral pattern in those societies in which output and factor flows were carried on via reciprocity and redistribution. There existed infrastructure like markets, trade routes and other media for communication as a result of internal trade transactions within communities and among existing empire states. Also as stated by Raji and Abejide (2013) there were market regulatory and control agencies. Furthermore, as was in place in significant parts of the African (Nigeria) context, “*The proper co-ordination of the varied economic processes or practices in pre-colonial Yorubaland was the direct responsibility of the guild system*” (Raji and Abejide, 2013). The guilds' operations ensured legitimacy, efficiency and qualities in respect of delivery of service and best traditional practices in production methods. it functioned in a very special way through its promoting change, growth and progress in the economy of Yoruba states before colonial rule. (Raji and Abejide, 2013).

Therefore, having established viable structures, Africans before 1800's were actively involved in various levels of exchange relations amongst themselves and with neighbouring regions before the advent of the Europeans. This was supported by Ariyo (2014) stating that a major feature of the economic history of the areas, now designated Nigeria, before the introduction of modern economic system existed an active and lively exchange and wide spread business activities involving the people of Nigeria and citizens at the borders. According to Ecoma and Ecoma (2014) for example, there was trade and economic development in the Upper Cross River Region before the Nineteenth century and the subsequent trade with Europeans in the nineteenth century was built upon earlier form of trade in the region. The *kinship, political and religious institutions* constrained and directed all phases of production, in the same sense that market structure and machine technology constrained and directed production in Western economies.

2.2 Traditional system of usage and ownership of factors of production

As described by Dalton (1962) and supported by Ecoma and Ecoma(2013) the major difference between African and European economic systems post industrial revolution was the absence of sophisticated machines and market dependence. Oluwabamide (2015) describing the traditional African Society stated that, “there does not exist a labour market, or a system of distribution for factors of production”. In support of this description Ecoma and Ecoma(2013) further stated that predominantly, natural resources including Labour had no separate economic setup. They further state that social obligations, affiliation and rights were the basis on which factors, investments and appropriations are expressed. Entry of factors, land and labour, into production line, occur through varied traditional channels (i.e structured social relationships). Furthermore, they stated that the price (value) mechanism had no significant role in terms of reallocation of factors among lines of production. This was “because labour and land do not enter the market as *tradable*” (Ecoma and Ecoma, 2013). This description was also in line with Pauw (1996)'s earlier submissions. It was for instance common for an African to receive substantial amounts of factors, goods and services as gifts or in forms other than remuneration for work performed (i.e. labour) or on basis of kinship or community ownership.

Land utilization was structured distinctively from labour utilization. According to Ifediora (2014) “Customary land tenure systems in Nigeria are based on family and inheritance systems, which in turn are based on the concept of group ownership of absolute rights in land, with individuals acquiring rights to use. Indeed Ifediora (2014) comments, affirms that traditional land rights create the basis for access to land and the chance of land use for production”. More importantly Ifediora (2014) clarifies that “*under the customary rules of tenure, three principles were observed: first, each individual member of a landholding family was entitled to a portion of land – enough to feed himself and the members of his family; second, no member of the community could dispossess another of his or her stake in family land; and third, no one could alienate family members interests in family land without the knowledge and consent of those members.*”

Ecoma and Ecoma(2013) reiterated that mostly land was not for sale or submitted for a price in terms of money. Capital as tangible assets and production tools were again only obtainable only through family or through belonging to a group or guild. The conditions that applied to labour and land also were applicable in the case of capital formation, ownership and usage. Entrepreneurship existed and thrived in the context of the group as were other factors of production. This brought changes like those in tradable goods, forms of trading methods, governance of the trade routes, administration of markets, both local and international, as well as security for business people operating within the rules established for trade and other relations.

In essence, according to Pauw (1996) “in terms of economic activity, trading or exchanging valuables, the upholding of harmony, of equilibrium, of common well being, was of primary importance”. Making deals would require aiming for optimum equal advantage and ensuring the satisfaction of all parties involved. “Human dignity and self-respect were to be maintained; there were to be no *losers* nor *winners*” (Pauw, 1996).

2.3 Traditional banking, credit and insurance institution

Prior to the colonial era general and specific well developed money were used which were indices of a viable economy. According to Ebitu citing Ogwu and Nkamnebe(2009) “At that time elaborate trading rules and norms, and a system of middle-manship had evolved with the use of cowries and other forms of money as medium of exchange.” There were traditional money lenders, cooperative societies and guilds that received deposits, granted credit and so on. In addition, in these traditional markets people may enter into the exchange mechanism with nothing more than the goodwill they or their families have garnered over time and leave with tangible goods or services and more goodwill! The situation today is that two sets of institutions exist side by side with this traditional financial system. Badiru(2010) categorized credit institutions into three categories; formal, (commercial, microfinance Banks; the Public sector banks and credit institutions owned by state government; semiformal, (microfinance institutions of nongovernmental nature- (NGO-MFIs) and cooperative societies; and informal, such as money lenders, self help savings and credit associations.

Peoples Bank of Nigeria was an attempt to bridge the gap between the western and traditional banking sectors of the Nigerian marketing system. However, the practicality of these previous efforts has been shown in reality to have been erroneous and unattainable, hence the significant financial exclusion of a majority of bankable adults in Nigeria.

2.4 Structure of the Economic and marketing system prior to European and Arab trades

Ecoma and Ecoma (2014) while establishing that African societies indeed had economic and market structure long before the European trade, stated thus; “*Inhabitants of the region fully participated at various levels of exchange relationships within and without, long before the advent of European traders*”. It was the position of their paper that there were infrastructural facilities, indigenous goods, and active participation of its people in trading and supported by its neighbours for the system in the Upper Cross River Region of Nigeria. According to Dalton (1962) “unlike the price mechanism in a market- integrated economy like the United States, prices formed in African market places do not serve to reallocate factors among production lines, because labour and land do not enter the market and basic livelihood is acquired in non-market spheres”. For example, labour was offered to the household for safety, food, shelter that was given by the head of each household, community leader and so on, while land were domesticated primarily in the household and was rarely sold as in western term. The land transited from head of household/community leader to the next generation or to in-laws as bride price for instance or payment for goodwill like in the case of a potential king giving land in exchange for support from titled persons prior to ascending the throne. According to Dalton (1962) as stated earlier “market-place exchange is found widely in Africa as a peripheral pattern in the same societies in which all important output and factor flows are carried on via reciprocity and redistribution”

To buttress this disparity between the western and African economies and marketing structures, Dalton (1962) states that “in Western economy, factors as well as products are marketable commodities. In tribal Africa, products are frequently marketed, but factors almost never.” Furthermore, the author states that a distinguishing feature of such economies is that labour and natural resources had no separate structures in the economy. Movements and appropriations of factor were engaged solely by social obligations, affiliation, and rights. Secondly and typically, land utilisation is organised again in a different way from use of labour. Factor ingredients may enter production lines through different traditional methods or structured social relationships in contrast to western market economies. This points to a basis for African traditional economies, that is a theoretical basis for its existence - *Homo socioeconomicus*. O’Boyle (2007) posits that *Homo socio-economicus* is used to replace the outdated *homo economicus* and in part to emphasize that it is intended for the economic agent to retain the human individuality that is the basis of *homo-economicus* and at the same time, infusing the human sociality that characterizes all human beings so clearly. This is the basis of the functioning of the traditional economic and marketing system found in Nigeria and other African states.

That the Europeans did not at that time recognise nor understand these existing institutional structures and agencies led to their dismissal of existing status quo and led them to introduce their own brand of exchange culture in the areas that they perceived as needing it in order to formalize their hegemony over the traditional societies. Now, the Europeans have started to seriously question the very premises through which they gained entrance, subsequent control to push toward the destruction of the existing traditional structures. That the traditional market and economic structure existed, pre European advent, from records and extant literature, is no longer in doubt.

Ecoma and Ecoma (2014) posited that “Infrastructures like markets, trade routes and others that developed from these internal transactions, paved the way for external commerce with Europeans in the seventeenth century. Thus, the commercial economy of the region having been well developed made use of both general and special purpose currencies which are the indices of a viable economic system.” In furtherance to their argument that indigenous societies had well structured and functioning economic and marketing systems, they concluded that “It should therefore be clear that there was trade and economic development in the Upper Cross River Region before the nineteenth century and the later trade with Europeans in the nineteenth century, was built upon an earlier form of trade in the region” (Ecoma and Ecoma, 2014).

In terms of government involvement in the economic sphere in traditional African societies, Raji and Abejide (2013) posited for example that, “While it may seem plausible to suggest that a sort of *laissez faire* attitude generally prevailed in the economy, the state, in pre-colonial Yorubaland, still influenced the exchange process by exercising control over the markets and regulating the activities of traders”. The government’s involvement was evident in terms of determination of “the market cycles, the period of operation in the markets, the sort of goods and services for transactions, the provision of security and maintenance services in the markets, as well as the collection of market tolls and dues from those who conducted various forms of commercial activities in such centres” (Raji and Abejide, 2013). Government was also central in the appointment of market officials that were overseers charged with the administration of the markets. The market officials, so appointed by the government had the task of upholding laws, maintaining order in these markets and of course generating revenue for the state. In some instances, the duties of these administrators also included the monitoring of the activities of various interest groups of traders to ensure that they are in conformity with the rules and customary standards of their professional groups. Thus, the cumulative effect would be the assured development and growth for all. This could explain in part the fact that the western economic model practiced today could not take firm roots in Nigeria as it goes against the tenets of the traditional economic model of the African. Thus Pauw (1996) succinctly captured this as follows: “*The assumption that values can be changed at will and that development will follow in the footsteps of changed values, is not feasible. The western model, even after more than a century, has not taken root in Africa.*”

Pauw (1996) goes to comment that the question that needs to be addressed in light of these revelations should be to address to what degree the term *development* meets that of the *good life* as Africa know it. According to him, the difference is clear; the point of departure should be the indigenous values and technical knowledge that exists.

III. DISCUSSION

Effects of colonial interference in the traditional economic and marketing systems in Nigeria

The first effect, of the distortion and oftentimes outright destruction of the systems, which were in place to ensure the smooth dynamics of the markets, is on the basic structure and organisation of the factors of production. The factors were monetised by creating factor markets; markets that were specifically tailored to serve the purposes of the western style production culture. The production unit was forcefully moved from the family unit to factory/plantation style production unit. The factors that remained traditional were therefore removed from the western style economic setup.

The value system, that is the pricing system, was also destroyed by nearly extinguishing the system of reciprocity, fairness and compensatory mechanism based on communality and group welfare; replacing it with a system solely based on the western cultural concept of money, pricing and the concept of ‘homo-economicus’ (that assumes that attainment of individual interest will guarantee the interest of all). However, as noted by O’Boyle (2007) “the interest of the individual is the interest of all insofar as it is also held in bound by the interest of all”. This was not the case in the Nigerian context as determination of a ‘fair price’ that is value to consumers was left in the hands of the colonial masters and their agents. The concept of common good was relegated to the background. Little needs be imagined about the level of abuse that was perpetrated by these colonial agents. To make matters worse, beyond the handing over by the colonial government to African (Nigeria) administrators, corruption as an entrenched system has ensured that this pricing mechanism *has continued to work very well*, albeit against the rights and well being of the citizenry!

The second effect was the destruction of the trust systems and traditional guarantees of group and individual fundamental human rights; that is, right of citizens to own and determine use of such properties under established communal customary regulations, and traditional government laws and regulations. This was further made worse by the post colonial land use decree that expropriated land from the citizens to the state.

The third would be, that as a result of the monetisation of the labour and land markets, the problem of unemployment started to be a serious one. Families/communities could not, maintain overtime, the workforce which was so essential for the family labour requirements. Young and old alike abandoned their farmlands, workshops and villages to find money paying employment beyond their accustomed production units. The agricultural sector (its productivity and sustainability was hardest hit) as well as the crafts and primary tools production were the first production units to be hit hard by this migration of now unemployed population. With this migration came the explosion of urban population with its attendant consequences. Another sector that suffered from the displacement was the housing and shelter sector which used to provide housing for nuclear families through communal building teams. The trust which drove this communal practice also affected the repairs of already occupied houses.

Fourthly, guarantees that were in place because of the standards set and maintained by traditional governments, guilds and communities were wiped out and therefore the very basis of trade which was trust also almost but disappeared. This is a sore point that has hindered, to this day business and trading relationships which have suffered over time and this has ensured that the values of ethical behaviour governed by societal and cultural norms and laws for the greater good have all but disappeared.

The list of effects go on and on, however the cumulative consequences of the above effects got translated into the near destruction of the entrepreneurial spirit of the people of Nigeria and other African societies generally. This factor of production so vital to the growth and development of societies was both delicately and disastrously nearly extinguished by the colonial masters. Capital formation and maintenance across all sectors became erratic and stunted. Even after the departure of the foreign powers, this ugly and unhealthy state of affairs has till today continued, and is encouraged by corrupt behaviours of most successive indigenous administrations and entrenched by the ineptitude and often ill advised actions of significant number of its operators.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that a lot of significant aspects of our traditional African economic and marketing systems still exist. As noted, however, a lot of the positive practices and structures of these economic and marketing systems still stubbornly refuse to be 'killed and indeed survive and are vibrant till today. Therefore, there is need to look at these vis-a-vis our own indigenous traditional marketing systems, structures and practices as existed in the past and put into context the aspects that have survived and see how they relate or differ from the extant systems in place today and propositions to create, modify or overhaul our own systems to make them work better. After all, the existence of '*sectoral dualism*' i.e. traditional existing alongside modern marketing structures and agencies for instance in Nigeria, may explain the reason why economic and marketing policy initiatives *may not be having the intended impact* as envisaged on the focal sectors of the economy like agriculture, industry, power and so on. The fact that some traditional structures and agencies still exist after these dislocations caused by colonial displacement and destruction of the pre-existing marketing system even beyond the exit of the colonial powers, should embolden African academics and policy makers to have this fresh look at the surviving traditional market mechanisms. In making future policies these considerations raised in this paper are thought of as pivotal in getting our acts right and finally be able to make the systems in place work better for the vast majority of our citizens.

A good start would be to ascribe Esusu or traditional cooperatives the position of the '*foundational family unit*' of the old traditional system in respect of development efforts to provide for example housing to make the current ineffective National housing fund approach to the provision of housing for Nigeria's citizens more effective. A formal relationship between the formal financial sector and the Esusu could be formalised with the setting up of a body or an association under the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Esusu working as if they were working as guilds of old under the old traditional marketing system. Again starting and making operational a public sector bank solely dedicated to guilds found in markets, in cottage industries, farmers and general purpose cooperative groups, traditional Esusu/self help groups. This will reduce the problem of financial inclusion; bring in a greater number of unbanked individuals and ultimately merging the traditional and modern financial sectors of the Nigerian economy.

The possibilities of gains from formal financing meeting traditional institutions would be limitless. This would translate into a more vibrant marketing system with increased finance, more production of goods translating into more availability of products for trade and consumption; promote reducing imports, encouraging exports, promoting the indigenous entrepreneurial spirits and so on. In this way the government would reduce unemployment, encourage productivity, provide more housing and by these means provide better living conditions for its citizens and improve the revenue accruing from taxes and other sources of revenue as a result of increased marketing activities.

For marketing academics Ebitu (2016)'s recommendation that "marketing practitioners should apply and further extend the frontiers of indigenous brand of marketing thought of community marketing, relationship marketing of trust, fair play and accountability; and also credit-system marketing as practiced by the Igbo businessmen and women till today becomes important". This would ensure that the problems encountered uniquely by Nigeria marketing practitioners are brought into proper perspectives and focus. This paper is one of such efforts at widening the frontiers of indigenous marketing thought.

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