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About the Journal

The Journal of Creative Media (JCM) aims to promote multidisciplinary research of creative industries in the global community. In addition, the journal aims to contribute valued knowledge about the use of media systems and communication structures to advance policy and sustainable development in developed and developing countries. Furthermore, this journal serves as a repository of academic and industry knowledge in the field of media and communication studies. This journal is primarily an online journal with an e-ISSN number. This journal operates an open-access (OA) approach to increase access and visibility of the research outputs of authors.

Scope of the Journal

The journal covers topical areas affecting the creative industry across the globe. These topical areas are journalism, broadcasting, film and cinema studies, information science, media studies, public relations, advertising, media ethics, literary studies, music, performing arts, and cultural studies.

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The journal is published bi-annually i.e. April and October. Not more than ten articles are published per issue and not more than twenty articles per volume. The journal focuses on research articles with local relevance and global reference points.

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Introduction

The advent of digital technologies has revolutionised the marketing communication landscape, presenting both challenges and opportunities for businesses (Nesterenko, et al., 2023). The disruption has also altered the understanding of the concept of marketing communications with several significant changes in how businesses interact and communicate with consumers (Sandi, 2023). This has consequently necessitated a change in approach to the study and practice of marketing communication globally.

The new era, particularly in the field of marketing, has been regarded as 'Marketing 3.0' (Sandi, 2023). This novelty in approach emphasises the importance of sustainability values in marketing communications (Sandi, 2023). This, in essence, implies business must communicate their commitment to these issues and demonstrate concrete actions that support those values (Sandi, 2023; Nesterenko, et al., 2023). Therefore, the need for relevant knowledge in this dimension has become a necessity for scholars and practitioners in marketing communication and related fields.

Importantly, sustainable marketing communication involves the adoption of marketing communication to promote sustainable business practices in the global community (Eagle et al., 2020; Kumari, 2024). It consists of a broad area that covers corporate communication, advertising, branding, marketing, Public Relations, and social media management. In addition, the recent emergence of Artificial Intelligence is promoting the significance of sustainable marketing communication in the world of business (Vlačić, et al., 2021; Hermann, 2022). Hence, sustainable marketing communication can be regarded as a catalyst for the promotion of sustainability in most modern societies.

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Redefining Internal Communication for Sustainable Organisational Management: A Critical Review of Studies

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ABSTRACT

Communication is currently undergoing an unprecedented transformation with adverse effects on organisational sustainability. It is therefore important that organisations pay attention to their internal communication to ensure that management, employees, and other stakeholders are kept informed throughout the change. Internal communication refers to the communication that takes place within an organization and is an essential way of communicating policies and projects to employees. This paper examined the concept of internal communication for sustainable organizational management, focusing on the communication channels currently in use by organizations in Nigeria. The paper used the media richness theory (MRT) to understand the different perspectives of internal communication in Nigerian organizations. Particularly, it reviewed the appropriate channels for employee communication and concluded that internal communication is vital to the sustenance of any organisation and should be managed effectively.

KEYWORDS

Critical Review,
Internal
Communication,
Media Richness
Theory (MRT),
Sustainable
Organizations,
Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Communication is crucial in organisations, but it has undergone significant changes in recent times. Countries are facing a changing socio-political and economic landscape, which in turn affects organisations. To mitigate these challenges, organizations are always on the lookout for ways to overcome the negative impacts. Technology is also advancing rapidly, and only organisations that can adapt to these changes can remain competitive (He, Huang, Choi, &

Bilgihan, 2023). Additionally, generational differences are now prevalent in many organizations, and this also affects how communication is carried out.

One of the driving forces that help organizations to keep abreast of changes is effective communication (Bagga, Gera, & Haque, 2023). Communication in organisations today needs to be apt so that management, employees, and all stakeholders are carried along through this course of change. Organisations that have realised the importance of communication constantly find ways to put the interplay of these forces into use as a competitive advantage. This realisation implies that corporate communicators and public relations practitioners whose jobs should be managerial need to improve their competencies to deliver much-needed results constantly. Key aspects of this job function include establishing mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between organisations and their stakeholders (Sancar, 2016).

Communication within an organisation, often regarded as internal communication, is an important aspect of the overall communication of that organisation. Though different aspects of corporate communication add to the overall communication of an organisation, internal communication stands out since several studies have shown that organisations with robust internal communication have better-performing staff (Musheke & Phiri, 2021; Dhoni & Sarwoko, 2022). Academics and practitioners have defined internal communication from different standpoints, but some keywords are prevalent in many of them. They include relationship management within organisations (Ledingham and Ledingham, 2015), communication among employees in an organisation using words effectively to communicate ideas (Sarmiento-Guede, *et al.*, 2018), thoughts and decisions, and meaningful interactions between management and employees of an organisation.

Though the term internal communication is used throughout this research as preferred by communication theorists like Stehle (2023) and Verčič, Verčič & Špoljarić (2022). It is important to note that some literature uses alternative names for it, and sometimes interchangeably. Welch and Jackson (2007) have pointed out several of these alternative nomenclatures include: internal relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984); employee communication (Argenti, 1996); internal communications (Cornelissen, 2004); employee relations (Quirke, 2000); internal public relations (Jefkins, 1988), and staff communication (Stone, 1995).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organisations that have strategic internal communication often motivate their staff by the way they communicate (Adetipe, 2020). This is made better by the roles the communicators play and the channels they use. To determine the nature of internal communication it is often necessary to hinge it on appropriate theories that provide a proper footing and a basis on which to rest. These theories should be appropriate in reflecting on the nature of internal communication in organisations. Although many communication theories apply to internal corporate communication, the Media Richness Theory (MRT) also referred to as the Information Richness Theory (IRT) was postulated by Daft & Langel and seems to provide a better framework in this study (Ngugi, 2023).

The theory states that any medium chosen for communication can carry information in such a way that if the content is rich, the understanding is also rich for the receiver. The converse is also true. For example, if the channel of

communication is face-to-face, which they consider rich, the recipients of the message receive very rich communication. They thus classified different mediums based on their information-carrying capacity and whether they provide understanding and meaning for the receiver. Daft & Lengel (1984) and Daft & Lengel (1986) underlined that the richness of the MRT lies in the fact that communication should be clearly defined while having in mind the understanding of the receiver (Ching, Lee & Salazar, 2023; Ngugi, 2023). This should come from reducing uncertainties and ambiguities as well as equivocality that may arise. They concluded that their level of equivocality and uncertainty should determine media designation. Equivocality was explained as communication that is ambiguous, messy, paradoxical, and unclear as there were no answers directly available. They thus advised that rich media should be used for communication with high equivocality and lean media for those with lower equivocality.

Since the advent of the MRT, different researchers have studied it and made recommendations. He, *et al.* (2023) confirmed that communication is changing and that these changes take place, particularly in information creation, compilation, transmission, and storage. Ching, *et al.*, (2023) stressed that communicators in organizations need to find ways to pass on their messages. To achieve this, they suggested that some uncertainty reduction mechanisms will have to be put in place. This reduction mechanism could be based on the four criteria of a rich media proposed in MRT – the speed of feedback, variety of communication channels employed with multiple cues (verbal or non-verbal expressions), ‘*Personalness*’ of source, and richness of language. They highlighted that the theory proposes that individuals choose the communication channels that match the ambiguity level of the message that they want to communicate. Furthermore, they noted other challenges of MRT like the impact of the geographical separation of the communicators, time pressures that bind the communication, and unavailability of some recipients of the communication in computer-based networks.

A common criticism of MRT is that it does not consider the social and political context in which media choice decisions are made in organisations. The need for a much broader social and political framework to complement media richness theory arises. Webster and Trevino (1995) suggest that rational theories for media choice, such as media richness theory, should be complemented by social theories.

ORGANISATIONAL INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal Communication is that distinct strategic management role that is answerable for the total communication activities generated by an organization for its internal stakeholders to establish, maintain, foster, and keep open lines of communication that are directed toward the overall strategic intent of the organization. Internal Communication channels today range from traditional methods like notice boards, and town hall meetings to computer-assisted channels like video conferencing, emails, and social media platforms (Wuersch, Neher & Peter, 2023). Preferences for these channels differ depending on the knowledge of use, availability of tools, interconnectivity, and so on. The channels used by managers in an organisation for employees may not necessarily be the channels the employee prefers and vice versa.

This is sometimes evident where there is a demographic divide – the younger generation’s preferences may not necessarily be in tandem with those of the older generation (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b; Constantinescu-Dobra, & Coțiu, 2021). This does not only play a critical role in organizational sustainability but also implies strategic internal communication must be designed to establish a congruent platform of communication between employees and employers. There is no gainsaying the fact that internal communication that is properly done should lead to fostering employee engagement and thus, better success in organizational performance (Musheke & Phiri, 2021).

On the contrary, a study by Vokic and Vidovic (2015) revealed the differences in the preference for digital channels between Generation X and digital natives in Croatia are not significant. They found out that the preferences exhibited by Xers of “Human Touch” in communication apply to digital natives. The study reaffirms the view that considerable generational and demographic differences do not exist in organizations and recommends that there is no need for any special action to be taken toward relating channels to any generation. They concluded that there are more similarities than differences in the preferences of different generations. The research is profound, but the conclusions may not be universal for this will likely vary from organization to organization, and will depend on the sector, organization culture, national culture, industry, exposure and adoption of new technology, availability of internet support – both human and technical, and other factors.

Likewise, the channel of communication impacts its effectiveness. Conrads and Lotz (2015) investigated the effects of various channels of communication on dishonest behaviour through simple truth-telling experiments. With a total of 246 participants from a pool of 2000 students, they found dishonest behaviour across all communication channels. However, the partial telling of lies decreased with the distance of communication and with anonymity. In another study, Men (2015) showed that a link exists between the CEO, communication, and the organization’s image, reputation, and other attributes. The research was to determine the most frequently used channels by CEOs and to know the level of their presence on social media. Also, it looked at their style of communication, i.e., how assertive, or responsive they are while communicating with their employees. The determinants considered are ‘being good listeners, responsive, empathetic, compassionate, understanding, friendly, warm, sincere, and interested’.

In times of economic stress and challenges in achieving organizational goals, email is one of the commonest channels of communication as it is fast and can be read “on the go.” It can also have necessary details for both the sender and the receiver that can be read later and acted upon. However, it is common knowledge that both employees and employers must deal with email overload. This prompted the work of Pignata *et al.* (2015) to find out what leads to email overload and the strategies that staff use to manage it. Working with an Australian university with 193 academics and 278 professionals, a survey was conducted to achieve the research objectives. The choice of a university was attributed to the claim that email has changed the nature of communication in the institution. The researchers drew this decision because it facilitates

networking and collaboration between universities, academics, students, and other stakeholders.

The importance of internal communication for organizational sustenance cannot not overemphasized. Vora and Patra (2017) highlighted the positive effects and impact it has on long-term productivity and sustainability. The study sought to determine the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement, the key factors of employee engagement that lead to commitment and determine key factors of internal communication that drive and impact employee engagement in globally successful organizations. They carried out a semi-structured interview of 12 professionals working in different organizations across sectors. To further validate their result, they surveyed 50 respondents 23 years of age and above, including current employees and students with work experience. From the interviews, they found the following key points among many others: there is awareness of internal communication tools in organizations as most of the respondents are used to robust internal communication channels; there is a wide range of tools in use from traditional ones to the new media; internal communication has a direct impact on employee engagement.

With the ever-changing face of technology, internal communication practitioners have the challenge of channels to use, and which give the best result measured against those preferred by employees. Among all the available channels, social media has been studied to determine which should be deployed for what purpose, and the effect they would have on the goals of internal communication practices. It is for this reason that Ewing *et al.* (2019) have studied the value Internal social media (ISM) can have and how it affects employee engagement. Specifically, they explored the role ISM plays in engaging employees and what technology an organisation can use to achieve this. They conceptualise ISM as Enterprise Solution Media (i.e., a third-party design or proprietary social media like Yammer, discussion forums, video interfaces, blogs, etc.) and General Social Media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, used internally).

CHANNELS OF ORGANISATIONAL INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The channels of communication in organisations have changed in recent times not just because of the socio-political and economic environment but due to technological and generational changes (Lacarcel & Huete, 2023). While employers are focusing more and more on the bottom line, cost-cutting measures, and seeking overall corporate survival and sustainability. Employees, on the other hand, desire to have more meaning in their lives and many are worried about their jobs. This shaky and uncertain situation has led to a lack of trust and declining loyalty leading to employees seeking more information and control about their organisations. Employees want to be engaged, be part of the processes, be motivated, understand their roles, and are constantly looking for what is in employment for them. These factors have greatly influenced the recent change in organizational communication channels.

For instance, the work of Friedl and Verčič (2011) investigated the channels that are preferred by digital natives – those born approximately after 1980. They assessed the capabilities and expectations of respondents as well as their attitudes towards existing internal communication channels and new

communication channels. The research was an online survey of an IT multinational company, and out of the numerous copies of the questionnaire distributed, 310 were useable. It was found that for general organisational information, employees prefer email newsletters and intranet news to social media. They also found that employees born after 1980 visited social media sites a lot and used them sometimes for communication, but they do not prefer emails and intranet. It was also discovered that contrary to popular opinion, not all employees below the age of 30 are completely immersed in digital technology. It supports the view that age is not the real determinant of the adoption and usage of new communication technology.

In so many organizations, some of those born after 1990 and even after 2000 (maybe currently in schools but also undertaking internship programs, work/study activities, etc.) are already employees. It will be helpful to conduct this research for these new groups, as Friedl & Verčič have suggested. Besides, there is an unanswered question on whether those studied by them with an average age of 27 fall under the category of '*digital natives*'. The respondents to the questions are 68% males and 32% females. There was no mention of gender having any effect on the results. This calls for new considerations. Similarly, though the percentages of the nationalities sampled were mentioned, the specific areas for 13% of the respondents were not mentioned. There was no mention of the possible effects of cultural differences or early exposure to communication technology on the results.

Welch (2012) views internal communication as a pivot for organisational effectiveness if it is properly carried out using the right channel (s). The fact that poor internal communication may become counterproductive is undeniable. It is the author's understanding that doing internal communication properly through the appropriate channel (s) means having an appropriate message that will lead employees through mediums that are useful and acceptable. The work of Welch (2012) is on getting an insight into employees' preferences of channels used in a large UK higher educational institution. It emphasises that beneficial internal communication relies on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them. Welch (2012) highlighted a few questions, comments, and resources on channel preferences: she wondered if employees have expectations of communication media that influence their evaluations of internal communication and if Internal communication can be facilitated by a range of media which, taking a receiver's point of view can be categorized by formats. Her results found these in the affirmative from her qualitative research carried out on a total of 64 staff in an academic institution comprising 28 academic and research staff and 36 support staff.

For internal media formats, it was found that electronic formats and channels were most preferred by 47% of the respondents including receipt of internal newsletters via email, PDF files, and via the organisation's intranet; 16% of the participants expressed a dual preference for both electronic and print. It will be interesting to find out why this group prefers blended channels. It is interesting to note that the driver for the preferences highlighted above is their concern about wasted resources and the financial costs of printed materials to which 69 % responded as such. Another concern is environmental

sustainability. Other interesting results of this research abound, but all have emphasised the usefulness of considering the channels the employees prefer. This predicated a research question for the current study.

Some academic discussions have taken place on the need for the management of organisations to give room to listen to their employees. Many practitioners have realised from knowledge acquired from good and bad experiences that there is a need to listen to their employees. In the current days when their employees want to know more about their jobs, the organisation they work for, all forms of disclosures, and so on, managers may not have much choice other than to listen and hear their employees. With this as the background, Burris, Rockmann, and Kimmon (2017) sought to determine what employees speak about or should speak about, and the ways to implement them. More specifically, their framework included “identification,” which considered the employee’s profession and work unit, what they say (voice content), and how much value the management puts on them. For the voice content, they reflected on the importance of the issue being addressed, the resources needed to effect the recommended change, and the effects of such changes on things that are interdependent.

Using both quantitative and qualitative research in different measures, for each of their frameworks, they conducted the study in the emergency department of a large hospital in the United States. Amid finite results that they obtained, they could ascertain that employee voices varied on the content – those with strong voices often brought up issues related to the work and the managers’ perception of their implementations was varied. Though the complexities of this research are not required in the current study, it throws up the challenge for organisations of how important the employee voice is even if they do not want to consider it in detail as this work. More and more, there are calls for organisations to be mindful of the benefits of giving an ear to their employees. On the side of employees too, the level of awareness, and desire to learn, understand, and know the organisation they work for is important and on the increase. This led to the study of Emelifeonwu & Valk (2019) to investigate the state of employee voice in the Nigerian telecom industries.

With two multinational companies and a local one, they interviewed 30 employees. They found that culture was the most important factor that impacted the employee’s voices. However, the respondents proffered ways to manage this. It includes having town hall meetings, periodic meetings, meetings with the CEO, union intervention, team meetings, and other face-to-face activities. Another reason for low employee voice is the fear of losing one’s job. This is the fallout of the high unemployment rate in the study population. This report is of importance for multinationals based on its focus even though it may not be applicable in other areas. The work of Emelifeonwu and Valk (2019) could be criticized in the sense that it is founded on the assumption that low employee voice is prevalent in the study area and the industry. It would have helped if an initial investigation determined that a low voice exists and showed the extent.

ORGANISATIONAL INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

Weaving through literature related to internal communication in Nigeria, Udegbe et al., (2012) identified that there could be a relationship between business communication and organisational performance and sustainability. They, therefore, studied Nigerian companies to see if there are relationships

with these variables. With a survey method, they investigated 100 small and large manufacturing and service companies operating in Lagos, Nigeria, to determine the extent to which they emphasise effective business communication; and determine the relative effectiveness in achieving set goals and objectives through business communication. With a total of 484 copies of their questionnaire received, the results were analysed. They found that effective business communication is emphasised in the organisations surveyed even though the extent of the “emphasis” is not clear for each organization. It was also found that the extent of the practice of effective business communication was dependent on the type of organization. Though this study is on business communication and not internal communication, it helps relate communication with performance. However, the research did not clearly state the nature of business communication as this is a wide subject on its own. Furthermore, there is the need to unbundle the companies since their diverse nature may not bring out salient differences that may arise based on the peculiarities of industries.

Gabriel and Gabriel (2014) followed these lines but specifically dealt with how internal communication affects the commitment of employees. They emphasized that, though commitment is of three types – Affective, Normative, and Continuance, they are investigating affective commitment. This is so because practitioners make it their choice since employees are emotionally identified with an organization. The research, which was focused on five selected telecom companies in Nigeria by surveying 106 employees, showed that there is a substantial and effective commitment in the organization. In other words, the employees in the organizations are emotionally attached to it because there is a robust internal communication system originating from employees’ knowledge of what happens in their organizations. It was also specifically noted that everyone is provided with the information they need to do their jobs through their Internal line managers, Internal team peers, Internal project peers, and Internal corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The research concluded that these resulted in the employees having a sense of belonging, being involved, and being job-satisfied. They have affective commitment. This result brings to the fore the benefit of internal communication which is not one of the usual impacts of internal communication. Affective commitment serves to expand the role internal communication plays in organizations.

Organisations develop their businesses in such a way that they are strategic to achieve desired goals. It may include having a long-term view of its activities and progress. Unfortunately, few organisations address their internal communication as such. Internal communication strategies are usually reactive, i.e., developed to solve immediate issues like crises, events, and conflict. At other times when they are planned, it is to solve issues like major organizational changes, layoffs, technology changes, etc. It is a common practice that when such issues are over, internal communication is relegated to the background again thus facing “unorganized incoherent processes (Okuneye *et al.* 2014). Their research believes that why this phenomenon occurs in many organizations is a mystery. They opined that this could probably be so because they do not see the real value of internal communication or find it difficult to relate it with performance and the bottom line. This prompted them to test the hypothesis on the relationship between internal communication and organizational performance in some Nigerian companies. By survey, they distributed 100

questionnaires to managers in 100 Nigerian companies. They found a strong correlation between internal communication strategy and organizational performance. They extrapolated this result and concluded that it is strongly correlated with profitability.

Nwokah and Hamilton-Ibama (2016) studied how internal communication influences market orientation in mobile telecom companies in Nigeria. They followed available market orientation literature and hinged their research on certain perspectives. The decision-making perspective is where it is expected that all marketing information should permeate all corporate functions and be available inter-functionally and interdependently. The culture perspective is where all marketing behaviour is entrenched in the organizational culture. They sought to determine if there is any relationship between internal communication and customer focus, internal communication and competitor focus, and internal communication and inter-functionality and interdependency.

They surveyed 374 employees in four telecom companies and found that there is a very high relationship between internal communication and customers' focus. This means that the higher the internal communication measures, the higher the customer focuses. A similar highly positive relationship exists between internal communication and competitor focus meaning that focus on competition is dependent on the ability to exchange both informal and formal information between management and employees. Because there are some positive results for inter-functional coordination, the authors infer that internal communication plays a very significant role in market orientation. They advised operators to be mindful of this and therefore enhance the quality of their informal and formal information exchanges between management and employees. This is good research in terms of its results and the gap it fills in the literature. However, no mention was made of the nature, conditions, and attributes of the internal communication that was measured. The channels for employee/management communication were not discussed and the likelihood of the impact of employee feedback was downplayed.

The study of Ugoani (2016) was principally on human resources to determine if there is any relationship between employee turnover and productivity in small business enterprises in Nigeria. The aspect related to the current work is the emphasis of the author on the importance of internal communication. He thinks that high employee turnover can be reduced by good internal communication and therefore should not be ignored. Though he did not define what good internal communication means, he suggested that it ensures that employees are allowed to voice out their suggestions and fears, and depending on the organization, they may accede to the comment by acting on it. Bodunde *et al.* (2017) have synthesised an encompassing definition of communication from the literature they reviewed. They likened internal and external communication to blood that flows in humans. It was defined as a process of creating, transmitting, disseminating, and interpreting ideas, facts, messages, opinions, feelings, and information between one person and another.

CONCLUSION

This research has brought to the fore, like so many others, the importance of communication in organisations. Communication is the livewire of every activity and therefore its management is very important for organizational

performance and sustenance. Cascading it downwards towards specific communication efforts carried out by organizations, internal communication stands out because the way it is done creates the atmosphere for employees to become well-informed, and are ultimately led through the route of engagement, satisfaction, motivation, and commitment that will eventually lead to organisation success. As divulged, internal communication in Nigerian organisations is therefore on a roadmap towards meeting the global best practices. While some of these organisations can be said to be ‘doing internal communication’ others need to brace up and be more proactive. Since most of these organizations recognize and understand its meaning and what it can do for the organization, what is left is to develop willpower, and then draw the numerous benefits, especially from their employees to guarantee their organisational success.

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Mike Okolo has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in the format submitted to Pan-Atlantic University Press.



Strategic Communication and Socio-Ecological Imperatives for Re-Marketing the Nigerian Brand

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ABSTRACT

The thrust of this paper is to examine select factors within the social and ecological realms that are attributed to the image crises of Nigeria and to proffer sustainable strategic communication solutions to re-marketing the nation as a brand. The de-marketing process of the brand Nigeria is a function of some obvious factors like corruption, bribery, ethnicity, communal and ethno-religious clashes. Consequently, almost everything 'Nigerian', whether human beings or products, is questioned or received with greater comparative scepticism, especially within the international community. Nigeria is no doubt in dire need of a corporate reformation and a review of the nation's socio-ecological posture and experience will offer a headway for the re-marketing of the brand. This paper adopts the analytical methods for the review of strategic communication and the Socio-Ecological Model, using selected scenarios in Nigeria as units of analysis. Findings reveal that Nigeria's albatross as an unattractive brand is the moral decadence of her citizens occasioned by a lack of adequate information of citizens, absence of motivation and ability to act, and the inherent norms that the people live with. This has thwarted the nation's (re)branding management efforts. This paper recommends that the Federal government of Nigeria should re-orient her citizens from the now youngest generation and re-order her communication architecture to communicate a renewed Nigerian brand that will help the nation's image to be attractive for a convincing patronage within the international market.

KEYWORDS
Brand,
Demarketing,
Nigeria,
Re-Marketing,
Socio-Ecological,
Strategic
Communication

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a popular brand not only in West Africa or the whole of Africa but in the world at large. Known by numerous nomenclatures as “the most populous black nation on Earth”, “the Giant of Africa” and many more, Nigeria is famous for its exploits including her contributions to international peace and security in notable places like Liberia and Sierra Leone. The nation is famous for its vast fertile land, agricultural production and even spiritual commitment exemplified in its status as one of the nations with the highest number of churches on earth. Nigeria indeed is the name; a brand.

The Nigerian brand, once marketable internationally, has become reportedly unmarketable. Local media journalists, both online and conventional, share in the blame for demarketing Nigeria at the expense of development communication and positive image building. Ezeji (2020) reported a widely publicised raid and arrest of Ramoni Igbalode, popularly known as Ray Hushpuppy, in Dubai over alleged fraud. Shortly after his arrest, Ososanya (2020) reported that companies in Dubai had begun to exclude Nigerian applicants from job vacancies apart from being barred from applying for tourist visas. Tostevin (2009) further reported in an online medium that Nigerians are imprisoned in Asia and Europe for drug trafficking while others are fraudsters, kidnappers, oil thieves, election riggers, and bribe givers and takers.

The negative reports or information about Nigeria has further complicated Nigeria’s identity crises, de-marketed the nation, and constituted further hardships for her citizens abroad, especially those who seek to travel to Europe and America. Observably, Nigerians’ international passport was ranked the 99th questionable travel document in the world in 2023. This implication is that Nigerians seeking to travel abroad would be heavily scrutinised, while those seeking resident permits to work abroad would be treated with a high level of scepticism and pessimism.

Iyorza, Ojorgu and Anweting (2020) also corroborated that there is hardly any crime committed in some parts of the world without the mention of a Nigerian. Is it fraud, theft, or prostitution in Dubai, Lebanon, or Italy? Let us draw closer to home. The Nigerian Embassy in Ghana, Africa, was pulled down sometime in April 2020. That act was a great one of utmost disregard for Nigeria and her citizens. Ghanaians had closed down Nigerians’ shops and demanded that they leave the country on several occasions. In South Africa, Nigerians were the greatest casualties of xenophobic attacks in 2019. Although some media claims purported that the Nigerian citizens were guilty of crimes that warranted assassinations and extra-judicial killings meted out to them, there was scanty proof to that effect and most victims were never subjected to fair trials. Incidentally, Nigerians were flown back to their country in droves.

In reality, the media, both local and international, have remained solid instruments, especially in a dysfunctional manner, of de-marketing Nigeria. These channels of communication have been at the forefront of reporting news stories of Nigerians involved in crimes more than those making exploits. The international media of communication, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), and Aljazeera, before now, have been at the forefront of transmitting more negative developments from Africa than positive events.

For instance, the news about Nigerians’ illegal migration to Libya and parts of Europe including Italy, Spain, and England, Nigerians’ deportation from foreign countries owing to their involvement in one criminal act or another, news about Nigerians’ involvement in drug trafficking, their arrests and most of the time their execution under the laws of the judication of foreign nations, have de-marketed more than marketed the nation to the world. The list of involvement in crime, including

prostitution, and human or child trafficking among others abroad, is endless and alarming. Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation (2024) is mandated with the management of the image, reputation, and promotion of the Nigerian brand. Specifically, the ministry is saddled with the duties of executing strategic communication of government policies and programmes as well as getting feedback and building a positive image for the country while promoting national consciousness among others.

There is a clear indication that Nigeria needs a new name (image); a new international perception; and a change in her citizens' behaviour and attitude from those that were internationally considered problematic to those that are socially acceptable. At the launch of the "Rebrand Nigeria Project" in March 2009, a former Minister of the Information in Nigeria under the former President Obasanjo's regime, Late Dora Akunyili, expressed the urgency for Nigeria "to commence a re-branding of her battered image" (Aririesike, 2009, 1). Iyorza (2014:15) described the former Minister's remark as an obvious misplacement of priorities regarding the term "rebranding", which she intended to "market Nigeria's image (irrespective of how battered it was) to the international community" using the achievements and exploits of the nation and her citizens in some areas like sports, economic intellect, and international peacekeeping and security. It became very clear that the reputation of Nigeria and the image of her citizens within the international community had suffered a setback. A critical examination of Nigerians' unfortunate predicament points to the absence of the nation's compliance with the demands of the socio-ecological model.

Nigeria is in dire need of a socio-ecological approach to change as well as a strategic communication methodology for effective remarketing of the brand within the international community. Nigerians need to be accepted and their nation and her product (human and non-human) need to be embraced with confidence bereft of distrust. Nigeria needs international patronage to grow and develop beyond its present status. Nigeria needs investors who will flock to the nation to create more job opportunities for her citizens but information about insecurity, bribery, corrupt practices, and other negative stereotypes, as well as the Nigerian government's inability to strategise her communication with the international community, her lack of motivation to encourage her citizens to be patriotic and her inability to satisfy the citizens' social and economic needs, which informed series of protests against the government in recent times, are growing socio-ecology concerns that seem to scare away the patrons or consumers of the Nigerian brand.

The Socio-Ecological Model is a reference point for planning and implementing change communication. It was designed by Mckee, Manoncourt, Chin, and Carnegie in the year 2000 for the individual level of change but can be applied to all levels including people, organisations, institutions, and national entities. The model has three rings, and a section of cross-cutting factors that explains how information and other factors can lead to individuals' changes in behaviour and perception. Certainly, Nigeria's strategic communication approach, if any, seems not to have given attention to socio-ecological concerns, which explains further Nigeria's predicament as a brand.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

There are two objectives of this paper, and they include:

- i. to examine strategic communication lapses that have de-marketed the Nigerian brand, and,
- ii. to find out socio-ecological approaches required for the re-marketing of the Nigerian brand.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will therefore guide the structure of this paper:

- i. What strategic communication lapses have de-marketed the Nigerian brand?
- ii. What socio-ecological concerns are required to re-market the Nigerian brand?

CONCEPTUALISING THE NIGERIAN BRAND

The term ‘brand’ is often misconstrued by many scholars in the field of marketing communication. To marketing professionals, Twin (2024) stated that “a brand is a product or business that has a distinct identity in the perception of consumers.” Thus, marketing professionals have identified distinct elements of design and packaging that distinguish a company’s products from the competitors as a brand. By extension, a brand can be simplified to mean a name, a term, a design, a symbol, or any feature or characteristic that distinguishes a product, a corporate organisation, a person or a nation from another. A nation may purposefully choose to create a brand identity to attract the patronage of other nations while another nation may earn a brand perception based on how other nations perceive their citizens’ attitudes and character or behaviour. Thus, a national or country’s brand can be positive or negative. Nigeria’s perception is borne out of other nations’ perception of the country’s foreign policy and the extent to which it has pursued it; how the citizens behave and what they believe in. In this context, branding a nation is more of an international perception than national or local views.

Nigeria is a sub-Saharan African nation known to be the most populous black nation on earth. The country boasts of more than 250 ethnic groups with an estimated population of 220 million persons as of the first quarter of the year 2024. Nigerians, according to Dickson (2023) have a rich cultural heritage that has become an envious brand to the world and parades rich arts, music, dance, and traditional ceremonies; rich film industry – Nollywood, entrepreneurship and innovative spirit, cuisines and many more brands that are appreciated by the international community. They are known to be blessed with rich natural and human resources even as civil servants, businessmen and women, farmers, industrial workers, and students.

From the period of Nigeria’s independence, the country has produced great men and women of international repute in the likes of Late Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Late Chief Mrs Ransome Kuti and Dr Mrs Ngozi Okonjo Iweala. Consequently, Nigeria has been truly known as a powerful brand by the international community and as a great nation with a rich oil reserve, rich agricultural history, and brilliant and industrious youths who excel in all ramifications in any part of the world where they are engaged whether as sportsmen and women or as hired labourers and scholars. Many Nigerians are known to be industrious and hard-working, including the likes of Dr Ngozi Iweala (economist and global development expert), Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun (a.k.a. Wizkid – musician), and Tiwa Savage as well as most Nigerian football players such as Victor Moses, Victor Osimhen and others who ply their trades abroad.

Whereas one can no longer overemphasise the very elements that define the Nigerian brand because of the nation’s glaring positive history, recent reflections on Nigeria in the local and international media as well as in the attitudes of the nation’s citizens, indicate that the Nigerian brand is currently considered as ‘criminal’, ‘deceptive’, ‘fraudulent’, ‘poor’, ‘hungry’, ‘corrupt’ and ‘redundant’. The re-conception of the Nigerian brand from a positive history to a negative stereotype is a function of emergent trends in the increasing negative reports on the country and the persistent anti-social behaviours of the citizens occasioned probably by the growing poor economic status of the nation. The National Bureau for Statistics (2024), reports that

133.3 million Nigerians, representing 63 percent of the country's population are suffering from multi-dimensional poverty – an indication that poverty is a Nigerian brand. The African Development Bank Group (2023) identified unemployment and inflation, crime as well as illegal migration as some of the factors confirming Nigeria as a negative brand.

By November 2023, Oyebade (2023) placed the Global Peace Index ranking of Nigeria as the 144th out of 163 safest countries in the world. Premium Times News (2024) also reported Transparency International (TI)'s ranking of Nigeria as the 155th out of 180 transparent countries in the world, citing cases of massive corruption, bribery, challenges to the justice system, extortion and political interference as yardsticks. Ephraim (2024) reported the 2024 International Air Transport Association's (IATA)'s ranking of Nigeria's international passport and pegged it at 95th out of 194, with South Africa pegged at 53rd, Ghana at 76th, Benin at 79th, and Togo at 83rd. Japan was pegged at the first position.

Iyorza (2014:15) stated:

Before then and even now, most Nigerians are labelled and stereotyped negatively at most international airports while others are subjected to intensive security checks anywhere they go. The international community considers most Nigerians to be fraudsters, racketeers and criminals.

With the above view and the current situation in Nigeria, the confirmation of the Nigerian brand as a negative stereotype is consolidated. Dickson (2023) shared the opinion that national brands influence the attitudes, perceptions and purchasing decisions of patrons and consumers from the international market and opined that Nigeria is a case of mixed brands. It is however necessary to agree with this position but to quickly add that Nigeria strives in the negative light as a brand with nomenclatures of terrorism, insurgency, armed banditry, and ethnic bigots; a nation known to live in affluence with poor infrastructure, poor income, political instability and poverty of her citizens. Nigeria's quest for international marketability points to the need to address socio-ecological concerns for strategising her communication architecture to prepare her for remarketing.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The concept of strategic communication has remained unclear to scholars, just as communication professionals have continued to offer unsatisfactory demystification of the term. Understanding certain terms can be made easier with the sense of deconstruction of compound terms. 'Strategy' is widely known to be a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim; the art of planning. Planning by extension, according to Agarwal (2020), is a management function which involves decision-making about vision, mission, and goals including what is to be done, when to do it, who to do it, and where and why it should be done in order to achieve set objectives. Characteristically, strategy as a planning managerial function is goal-oriented and pervasive. It is a continuous process that involves the intellectual or application of empirically derived knowledge in the process of deciding on future performance, a strategy can be equated to a method of planning which can be long-term or short-term.

The concept of communication on the other hand involves a social function (interactive), psychological functions (thinking out ideas), physiological functions (sighs, body language), and traditional functions (localised, ethnically based). Ober (2006) defines communication as the sending and receiving of messages – sometimes through spoken or written words and sometimes through such nonverbal means as facial expressions, gestures, and voice qualities. Communication is, therefore, the

transmission of information, ideas or beliefs from the encoder to the decoder with the aim of achieving a common understanding, promoting a course or reacting to giving stimuli in the communication encounter. Communication aims at promoting understanding between or among two or more persons (subjects) or non-humans with a view or achieving set goals (change, persuasion, information, promotion of a cause, caution, convincing or winning over, gaining acceptance). Communication involves the sharing of information, or transmitting ideas, knowledge or faults from one or more persons to others.

Iyorza (2021) also divides communication into two broad categories: Verbal and Non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is divided into oral and written communication. Oral communication involves the use of human speech organs in producing meaningful sounds that represent meanings. Written communication involves the documentation or use of symbols, alphabets or some form of signs that represent peculiar meanings. Communication scholars have identified four main communication skills namely: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Non-verbal communication on the other hand involves the use of body movement, distance or para-language for information transmission purposes.

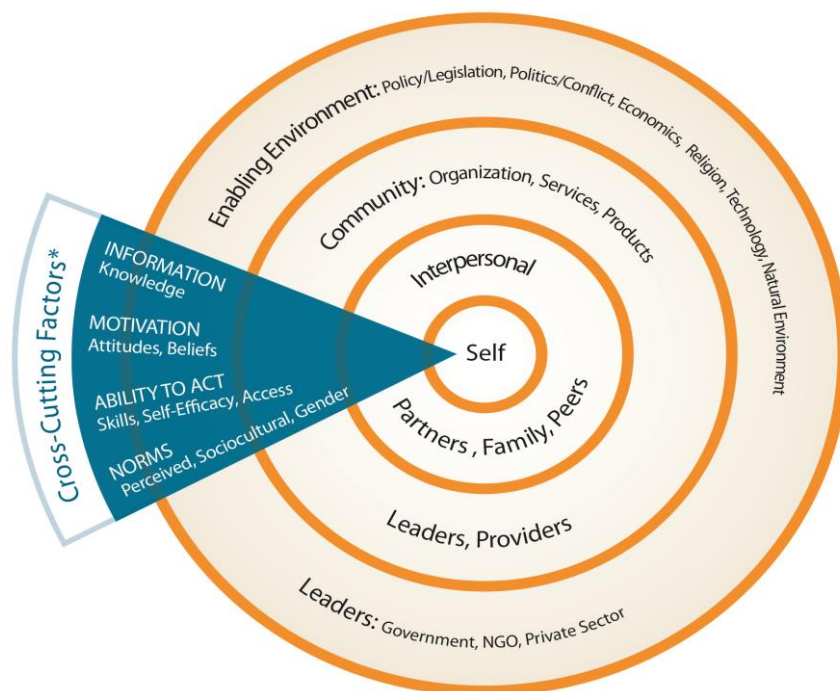
The acceptance of new ideas can be transformed through creation of an atmosphere of participatory communication involving dialogue, cooperation, mutual respect, and sharing of initiatives. Communication can be seen as a catalyst in the development process of any nation. Communication is necessary for projecting development just as development defines, modernises, and improves communication. Communication can also be viewed according to the nature that defines it. Intra-personal communication, for instance, occurs within an individual who is both the encoder and the decoder. Group communication occurs among three or more persons of a sizeable number, especially in a given location. Mass Communication occurs between the sender and a heterogeneous audience spread over a wide geographical area. Transnational or international communication occurs between two nations in various forms while organisational communication occurs within an institution based on set standards.



SOURCE: Adapted from: Health Communication Partnership, CCP at JHU (2003) the P-Process; McKee et al (2000) the ACADA Model; Parker, Dalrymple, and Durden (1998) the Integrated Strategy Wheel; Roberts et al (1995) the Tool Box for Building Health Communication Capacity; and National Cancer Institute (1989) Health Communication Program Cycle.

The diagram above confirms strategic communication as a planned process that begins with understanding the citizens’ present situation and focusing the message to target their information needs before creating and implementing, then evaluating the entire communication intervention. It involves making effective decisions about the sender (encoder) of the information, the message (ideas) itself, the channel (media of communication), and the receiver (decoders or the audience) to effectively achieve set goals. Strategic communication involves launching inquiries about the message sender (why he wants to communicate, who is he, where he lives, what he believes with regards to his communication encounter).

Socio-Ecological Model for Change



*These concepts apply to all levels (people, organizations, and institutions). They were originally developed for the individual level.

SOURCE: Adapted from McKee, Manoncourt, Chin and Carnegie (2000)

The above model confirms a series of definitions of strategic communication.

Bahn (2023) defines strategic communication as sending the right message by determining what to say, who to say it to, and where and when to say it to maintain a good reputation and achieve brand reputation for all the right reasons. The Arkansas State University (2022) corroborates the above definition and considers strategic communication as communicating the best message through the right channels, measured against well-considered goals; a method of delivering calculated, purposeful content, involving planned tactical forethought, implementation, and correct positioning around the organization’s mission. Hallanhan et. al. (2007) also define strategic communication as the “purposeful use of communication by an organisation (or a nation) to fulfill its mission. It identifies key concepts including audience analysis, goal setting, and message strategy.

This implies that strategic communication investigates the nature of the message (ideas) to be transmitted, how to transmit the message or how to code the idea), what medium (or media) to use, and when to use them. It studies the audience and their likes or dislikes and investigates their cultural standing in order to get them to

embrace the transmitted ideas. Strategic communication involves content creation, and implementation, monitoring, evaluation of progress, and re-planning when the initial strategy fails. From the failed strategy, the strategic communication traces or evaluates the input and the output and correct lapses in the initial plan.

THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL AND REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

The 'self' represents the citizen in this context. The 'partners, family and peers' possess the power to encourage and influence the citizen towards change in behaviour through daily interaction, family meetings and informal associations. The individual citizens are also influenced by their 'local community, services and products' by the 'leaders and providers' at one level and the 'national enabling environment and leaders' at a higher level. The socio-ecological model describes the relationship between the citizen and environmental factors that enable him to respond positively to change communication appeals for behaviour change.

Thus, the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) explains that human behaviour is influenced by three tiers of societal system namely the microsystem, the exon-system, and the macro system. The constituents of the microsystem are family, classroom, peer group, etc., those of the exon include the school community, donor agencies, medical centres, the religious organisations while the macro system includes legislation, politics, the economy, culture, and nationality. The spectacular nature of SEM is the segment that bears the cross-cutting factors.

Cross-cutting factors include information, ability to act, motivation, skills, and norms which are all communication-based based, which are capable of encouraging positive or negative drives to certain behaviours. The cross-cutting factors can be instrumental in planning communication messages for the effective attainment of set goals. The entire SME explains the reason for the failure of most national policies and failed reputation and can be a model for promoting national commitment, citizenship, and national identity.

The model has been applied to investigations of many different health issues and community-based interventions such as the prevention of unsafe sex and risky sex behaviour, prevention of alcohol, tobacco drug abuse and related risky behaviour. UNAIDS (2020) states that in the United States of America, the Socio-Ecological Model was applied to reduce the rate of Americans who were having unprotected sexual intercourse and the result showed a decrease in unprotected sexual intercourse from 47% to 26% of men who were reached. In rural Thailand, the socio-ecological model was applied to a community-based program for motorcycle rider education to reduce risk behaviour and motorcycle-related injuries among motorcycle riders. After the intervention, the annual number and rate of fatal motorcycle-related injuries decreased significantly.

The socio-ecological model emphasises that a well-informed citizen can be easily persuaded to be committed towards a particular course like refraining from anti-social behaviours such as corruption, drug abuse and child trafficking. Such citizens can acquire a positive mindset if the cross-cutting factors, the right information, adequate motivation, ability to act and critical communication of societal norms are factored into the communication strategy. There exists a strong relationship between the socio-ecological model, Uses and Gratification Theory and Abraham Maslow's Motivation Theory of 'Hierarchy of Needs.

According to Iyorza (2018), the Uses and Gratification Theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. The core assumption of the theory states that individuals use media messages to gratify their information

needs, and have alternate choices to satisfy their needs. Thus, media audiences scan the radio or television programmes that they prefer to see and listen to or watch based on the utility they derive from them. In the context of strategic communication, media planning, based on preferred channels that will gratify the audiences' information needs, will include a selection of communication media that will encourage the audience to patronise media messages as intended. The application of the Uses and Gratification Theory under strategic communication in the bid to market the Nigerian brand is a factor to be examined in this study.

Under the Socio-Ecological consideration, Rachman and Mescon (2009) identified Abraham Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs, considered the theory as one of the sub-sets of Motivational theories and postulated five basic levels of human needs, arranged in a hierarchy based on their importance namely: 'physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation needs' as corroborated by Larson (1992) and Belch and Belch (2001). The citizens need a satisfaction of physiological and psychological needs to develop the right mentality and act positively in the desired way. This implies that socio-ecological compliance from the Nigerian citizens requires a great deal of motivation which may not have been inherent in the Nation's efforts at marketing her brand.

DISCUSSIONS ON SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES NIGERIA'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Citing the American Marketing Association, which represents marketing professionals in America and Canada, Belch and Belch (2001), defined marketing as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational (and by extension national) objectives. In application, Nigeria is a key player or trader at the international market, with objectives of promoting and protecting her national interest and African integration respectively (Ephraim, 2024). The crux of Nigeria's foreign policy is only enshrined in the Nigerian brand promotion which is the fourth element of the marketing mix after product, price and place, which Belch and Belch (2001, GL 10) define as is the "coordination of all seller-initiated efforts to set up channels of information and persuasion to sell goods and services or to promote an idea.

Extract of the Nigeria Foreign Policy as stated by the Ephraim (2024) include:

...promotion and protection of Nigeria's national interest, promotion of African integration and support for African Unity, promotion of international corporation for the consolidation of international peace and mutual respect among nations and elimination of discrimination in all manifestation, ...promotion of a just world economic order – Foreign Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In achieving these imperatives, for instance, Nigeria needs an attractive image, a worthy reputation and a deserved integrity, which must be communicated strategically to the international community. If Nigeria and Nigerians perpetuate and condone, or tolerate crime, corruption, ethnicity, bribery, drug trafficking, child abuse and human trafficking, then Nigeria is conspicuously a bad brand and cannot be marketable internationally. Strategic communication, from the foregoing, is more than packaging and transmission of information to the audience on what the nation wants the international community to know about her (Nigeria). Without confirmed acts of integrity, trust and true identity, strategic communication cannot thrive. A devised communication strategy is therefore anchored on truth and sincerity of appeals as enshrined in the basic codes of public/international relations and advertising.

According to Johnson and Alao (2013), strategic communication is the communication policy of any nation, which guides the decision of the authorities, usually, the government or any other agency to harness the benefit of the process for the well-being of all Nigerians. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation has among its mandate, to promote the image, reputation and culture of Nigerians within the international community using credible information, and to execute strategic communication of government policies for the purpose of building a positive image for the country while promoting national consciousness among others, one can adequately infer that Nigeria has failed in the evolvement and utilisation of the very tenets of her strategic communication policy; a policy that focuses on the legal, ethical, political, infrastructural and social system within which public communication and the media systems operate and function in.

From the preceding analysis, one can infer that Nigeria used to be a sought-after brand when international reports had it that the nation was rich in human and natural resources. Next came de-marketing – the deliberate or unconscious decreasing of patronage of a brand or discouragement of customers in general towards a product or service (Olatunde, Niyi & Adejimi, 2020 and Oluwatoyin & Ayeni, 2021) – with reports that reflected Nigeria as one of the most unsafe countries to live in, and one of the poorest nations on earth.

The Socio-ecological exploration shows that there have been campaigns informing Nigerians about the need to be responsible citizens, such appeals like “do not give or take bribes”, “shun money laundering” and “Andrew” (a commercial that earlier discouraged Nigerians from unnecessary migration to foreign lands). However, there has been a dearth of motivation exemplified in poor pay packages for jobs, unemployment, embezzlement of funds by politicians and many more. The Nigerian government has not made available the ability for her citizens to act responsibly; a trend that has compelled many Nigerians to flee abroad in droves, hence the *japa* syndrome, legally and illegally. Nigerians have adopted the norms that the pasture is greener out there and the best way for an average African to find relevance in life is to travel and live and if possible, work in Europe, America or Asia.

Unfortunately, most Nigerians who migrate to other parts of the world or foreign lands bear with then luggage of acquired or socially influenced criminal behaviours. In South Africa, most Nigerians have been labelled as drug traffickers and criminals and in Europe mostly as fraudsters. Remarketing Nigeria as a brand is therefore a herculean task that demands the fulfilment of the socio-ecological requirements of truthful information, motivation and the political will of the government to act in terms of concretizing her promises to the citizens in addition to strategic communication approaches.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR RE-MARKETING THE NIGERIAN BRAND

Nigeria is truly a brand that has undergone a cycle of marketing and de-marketing occasioned by a combination of moral decadence on the part of the citizens; failure to motivate and provide basic necessities of life for citizens by the Federal Government and the international reportage by both local and international media at the expense of the nation’s integrity, image and market value. Following the craving desire of nations of the world to find value at the international market, Nigeria has sought to be patronized by investors; to sell her material products such as clothing, food and cosmetics and her non-material cultural products including their beliefs and ideas. Nigeria only has a cultural policy with the objective to “promote and protect”

her interests internationally without a comprehensive and well-articulated strategic communication policy to conduce a functional national communication system.

Inferentially, the road to achieving the marketability of the nation through communications and promotions seems to be far from realistic. This is because the marketing process of any brand, Nigeria inclusive, must be based on truth, trust and confidence of the consumers in the international market. No consumer would want to patronize a product that is communicated to be rotten or of lower standard or value. Nigeria's image internationally has been however challenged by the unthinkable acts of many other Nigerians at home, known for acts of election violence, high level of corruption, failed judiciary system, pronounced and reported forgeries by public officials, bribery, insecurity, banditry, communal clashes, armed robbery and kidnapping; and abroad with acts of drug trafficking, drug abuse, advanced fee fraud and human trafficking.

As a panacea for re-marketing Nigeria, this paper recommends that:

- i. The Federal Government of Nigeria, led by the President and members of the executive council should motivate her workers through payment of what the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) terms "living wage"; pay packages of workers that would make them self-content in terms of meeting up with basic needs of man, beginning from the physical needs of food, clothing and shelter to the social and psychological needs of self-esteem and self-actualisation as propounded by Abraham Maslow's Theory of Motivation in Rachman and Mescon (2009).
- ii. The Federal Government of Nigeria should fund social infrastructure and invest in the building of high-quality roads, schools and other social amenities and should create more job opportunities that would endear her citizens to work under similar job and financial atmosphere comparable to their counterparts in other advanced nations in Europe and America. In sum, the Government should focus on developing its citizens' abilities to act in a desired direction that would increase their market values nationally and internationally.
- iii. The Federal Government of Nigeria should re-organise her national information and National Orientation Ministry and evolve a local information work plan that would sustain the information of Nigerians from rural to urban areas; Nigerians of all ages especially the younger generation. This is to enable them to grow with a healthier mentality of maximum morality in terms of living and relating with others. Such orientation, featured on various media of communication should be implemented, sustained and evaluated periodically for efficacy.
- iv. Nigerians should develop personal beliefs in themselves once the Federal Government of Nigeria begins to show commitment to the course of social, human, economic, and infrastructural development. Nigerian citizens should disregard certain beliefs that have become a norm, such as the 'japa' syndrome. Through the concerted efforts of the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, Nigerians should feel encouraged to support the efforts of the Federal Government towards national development.
- v. After all these have been done, the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation should intensify its national and international communication agenda; coordinate all local channels of communication by directing them to see the need to re-market Nigeria through positive news

reports based on the transformational efforts of the nation and her citizens to reposition themselves at the international market. Movies, editorials, news commentaries, features, billboards, and all communication programmes transmitted locally and abroad should adopt a paradigm shift from entertainment, information and education alone to all-encompassing development communication.

- vi. Local media should plan their communication, especially for the international audience; they should understand what perception their audience has about Nigeria through research and project information that will promote Nigeria and Nigerians more than those that will position the nation's image at the detriment of international pessimism.

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Towards the Effective Utilisation of Influencer Marketing in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Advances in technology and the increased use of social media have made brands' usage of influencer marketing more widespread. Social media users no longer want to hear only from brands; they also want to listen to what others say about the brands and what their favourite influencers say. However, if brands do not understand how to utilise influencer marketing effectively, they cannot harness its benefits and minimise its drawbacks. Therefore, this position paper explored how organisations can gain desired results from well-planned influencer marketing efforts. It used the desk research methodology to gather secondary data on this subject matter. It discovered that organisations stand to benefit significantly from intentional and strategic influencer marketing campaigns if they consider several crucial factors such as the loyalty the influencer garners, how the influencer can persuade their audience, source credibility, content congruence, trustworthiness, values alignment, content informative value, content entertainment value, and the like. It was recommended that before working with influencers, organisations should be clear on their brand values and objectives to derive desired results. They should also develop influencer marketing guides, be more strategic and intentional when selecting influencers, and develop systems to monitor influencer marketing efforts effectively.

KEYWORDS

brand communications, influencer marketing, marketing communication, message acceptability, social media marketing

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is rapidly increasing in the marketing landscape as brands look for more authentic ways to connect with their target audience. Brands have found that more efforts must be made when promoting their products or services to gain the attention of their target audience. In the opinion of Ormond (2023), influencers help global businesses humanise their messaging and build more intimate communities. Influencer marketing is now a prominent form of marketing that has recently been gaining popularity, significantly enhancing companies' reach and performance (O'Toole, 2023). According to Pinkerton (2022), influencer marketing works because people want to buy from those they trust. This paper argues that influencer marketing

can effectively help organisations connect with their target audience if done effectively.

The marketing landscape is saturated yet result-oriented for brands that understand how to maximise it effectively. One of the ways to achieve this is by understanding the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Research has shown that people like to hear what others say about a brand rather than what the brand says about itself. A GeoPoll Survey in 2020 revealed that 53% of Kenyan and Nigerian consumers would believe an influencer's word above a brand's advertisement. The same survey showed that almost all respondents (96%) said 'yes' or 'sometimes' to whether they trust product reviews or recommendations from influencers (Kibuacha, 2020).

When marketing, brands try to influence the opinions of their ideal audience to accept their messages; influencer marketing is one such way to achieve that. According to Olajojo (2020), the media is important in developing and shaping public opinion. However, today, anyone can do this on social media. Fakeye and Ayoola (2022) observed that influencer marketing is becoming popular among advertisers due to its ability to set trends and boost product sales.

It is not enough to understand the importance of influencer marketing; organisations need to find ways to gain the proper Return On Investment in their influencer marketing spend. Jarrar, Awobamise, and Aderibigbe (2020) revealed that as the internet's popularity grows, a new class of "celebrities" or influencers emerges, and marketers must seize the chance or adapt to the new reality. Consumers today are significantly impacted by reviews and recommendations from trusted friends, family, peers, and influencers (Patni, 2024). Research has shown that some social media users are willing to purchase goods and services after an influential person or group of people they follow provides positive recommendations, reviews, or feedback regarding those products and services. Contrary to popular belief regarding marketing communication messages, brand messages seem readily acceptable when they come from certain quarters and are done in a certain way.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Effective influencer marketing will either result in success or otherwise; however, organisations must understand the factors that contribute to the success of influencer marketing campaigns to harness the benefits fully. A lack of understanding in this area can result in the wastage of the brand's resources, time, and efforts. According to Barker (2023), while it has many advantages, influencer marketing also has some risks and pitfalls that might affect one's reputation and financial standing.

Several studies focus on the importance of influencer marketing in today's marketing landscape. Pinkerton (2022) opined that today's organisations can leverage social media influencers into their PR and communications initiatives to fully leverage the current media landscape and efficiently reach target audiences. In addition, Cohen (2023) mentioned that influencer marketing allows one to reach potential customers at every stage of the decision-making process, from the moment they become aware of a brand until when they are considering making a purchase. However, this paper opines that it is essential to focus not only on the benefits of influencer marketing but also on how to get it done effectively to derive value from it.

The efficacy of influencer marketing efforts determines whether brand goals are met. However, this paper opines that questions arise about how effective this form of marketing is and how brands can do it better to produce desired results. Collaboration with influencers that do not share one's brand's values or target audience might have a negative impact. Their behaviours, controversies, or misaligned content can harm

one's brand's reputation and credibility (Barker, 2023). Fuller (2020) observed that influencers have built deep credibility with their followers by providing valuable and relevant content, significantly impacting their recommendations.

Do customers readily accept and act on influencer marketing messages? Do brands benefit from this endeavour, or is this just a moving train everyone is jumping on? What makes an influencer marketing effort succeed over the other? Influencer marketing has inherent risks owing to factors beyond one's control (Barker, 2023). Hence, this study contributed to the developing literature on fostering the effectiveness of influencer marketing and its significance to organisations in Nigeria. It also provided brands with an understanding of how to maximise influencer marketing activities. Rather than adding to the numerous literatures regarding the importance of influencer marketing, this study focused on how organisations can derive better value through influencer marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Source Credibility Model

Source Credibility helps to understand how messages are perceived through the lens of their source. According to Hovland and Weiss (1951), there is a higher level of agreement when statements are ascribed to high-prestige sources. Octaviani and Hartono (2023) opined that when it comes to celebrity endorsements, source credibility is a construct made up of three components: competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Likewise, in their research, Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that when a trustworthy source presented a material, opinions were largely more likely to change in the direction advocated by the communicator compared to untrustworthy sources. This model served as the basis for this work because it explains how the audience perceives, filters, and receives marketing messages from influencers. If the audience perceives the influencers as credible, there is a higher chance of them accepting and trusting their messages.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Evolution of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing may seem like a new term due to social media; however, it has existed in different ways over the years. According to Suciu (2020), influencer marketing can be traced back to ancient Rome when gladiators endorsed products. Brooks (2019) expressed that influencer marketing is not a new concept, and one has always gained knowledge from the experiences of their friends and family or sought inspiration from aspirational individuals when deciding what to purchase. Patni (2024) opined that due to the progression of influencer marketing from the days before the internet to the advent of social media, influence has been democratised, helping brands connect with their consumers on a more personal level and build meaning and long-term relationships.

Influencing others to take a desired action did not just start today; however, the dynamics and platforms for achieving such have been greatly altered over the years. According to Suciu (2020), the first well-recognised "influencer" partnership dates to 1760, when Wedgwood made a tea set for King George III's wife. Wedgwood swiftly promoted his brand as having "Royal" approval. Patni (2024) observed that before the internet, celebrities and other well-known personalities endorsed goods and services through print, radio, and television in the early days of influencer marketing. Leali

(2023) opined that influencer marketing reached a turning point in the early 2000s. MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram transformed things and influence, making them more accessible and less reliant on celebrity status.

Influencer Marketing in Nigeria

Influencer marketing has become widespread in Nigeria and other African countries. Statista Market Insights (2023) revealed that in Nigeria, influencer advertising market ad spending is projected to reach US\$4.8m in 2024. Likewise, a 2020 GeoPoll Survey discovered that, on average, 69% and 55% of Kenyans and Nigerians, respectively, said their purchasing decisions were directly influenced by influencer referrals (Kibuacha, 2020). It is evident that influencer marketing is on the rise and has enormous potential for the marketing communications industry. Jarrar et al. (2020) observed that influencer marketing has become so prevalent that it is difficult to scroll through an Instagram feed without encountering some form of such marketing. This is also obtainable in developing countries like Uganda, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Who Is an Influencer?

An influencer is an individual that persuades another to take an action. Peker (2020) mentioned that an influencer is someone who can influence prospective buyers' decisions. An influencer can be a fictional character, a public figure, a sports person, a celebrity, or a reliable friend. Huhn (2024) opined that influencers show how they use your product using their voice and on their own blogs or social media platforms. The concept of an influencer has evolved slightly in tandem with the growth of social media usage. A person might be considered an influencer if they have a considerable amount of followers on social media, friends, and the like (Peker, 2020).

Influencers must also meet certain criteria to be deemed as one. According to Mathew (2022), influencers must maintain a loyal following and be credible personalities in their niche. They also usually have knowledge or experience with what they are advertising. Influencers are content creators with a strong reputation and a large social media or blog following who promote a business (Huhn, 2024). According to Duran (2022), an influencer is someone who has developed a social media following based on a specific niche interest.

Types of Influencers

Influencers fall into different categories based on their number of followers. Olagboye (2023) highlighted four types: nano-influencers with 1,000 to 10,000 followers, micro-influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, macro-influencers with 100,000 to 1,000,000 followers, and mega-influencers with at least 1,000,000 followers. Fuller (2020) stated that nano-influencers are great for highly targeted, community-oriented campaigns, and they are reasonably priced; micro-influencers are suitable for generating high engagement rate conversions; macro-influencers are great for expanding visibility and trust in particular industries; mega-influencers or celebrities for large-scale, well-publicised brand awareness initiatives.

Influencer Marketing Vs Brand Ambassador

Some people often confuse influencer marketing with brand ambassadorship, so it is crucial to distinguish between both terms clearly. According to Huhn (2024), brand ambassadors and influencers help a brand share its product with their audience, thereby growing the brand's customer base. Duran (2022) noted that brand ambassadors and influencers have many similarities in that they all strive toward the same goal: to generate excitement for your brand. Their main differences are a brand's

goals and approach. However, Huhn (2024) observed that brand ambassadors are loyal customers who have a long history with a company and serve as its long-term representatives. Meanwhile, influencers work with a brand for a brief period and may not have used the brand's products prior to becoming an influencer for the brand.

Message Acceptability

Influencers leverage their large following to build community, garner loyalty, and increase engagement. Influencers who can generate authentic and genuine engagement through their content will likely produce the desired brand results. According to a 2020 GeoPoll Survey earlier mentioned in this study, influencers who provide relevant content continue to have a strong following as they gain and maintain consumer trust, eventually influencing purchasing decisions. Social media influencers, who are trusted and have a significant following, continue to have a key impact on customers' purchase choices (Kibuacha, 2020).

As such, the degree to which marketing or brand messages from influencer marketers are acceptable is crucial to the success of influencer marketing. Furthermore, a study by Olajojo (2020) found that the informativeness of the influencer's post, the facilitative nature of the content, and the persuasive strategies used impact how followers receive the message passed across to them. According to Fuller (2020), follower count and engagement rates may provide some insights but do not ensure success.

This paper posits that employing influencer marketing is not enough; organisations must carefully select influencers in line with the brand's values, personality, goals and objectives to achieve desired results. When influencers build loyalty, their messages are readily accepted by their audience. Thus, the key to influencer marketing success is the degree to which the audience accepts and engages with their messages. Fuller (2020) opined that engaging with the proper influencer can boost one's brand's trustworthiness and attract new clients. Mgiba and Nyamande (2020) also noted that an influencer must be able to convince people to take a desired action to be useful in a marketing program. It is essential to carefully select influencers to maintain brand integrity and trust with consumers because bad publicity about an influencer can directly impact the brand they represent (Fuller, 2020).

Influencer Marketing as an Effective Tool for Organisations

This paper opines that organisations stand to benefit from influencer marketing if done well adequately. Fuller (2020) emphasised that carefully choosing influencers consistent with one's brand can help leverage their influence to meet substantial marketing objectives. Palmer (2023) noted that one of the benefits of influencer marketing is that one can see results quickly because influencers are prepared to get started immediately, distributing a brand's message to its target market instantly and generating excitement about the brand's goods. Lammertink (2024) mentioned that beyond the numerical gain, influencers gain an inherently trustworthy following. They are viewed as familiar peers rather than far-off stars, providing insightful opinions and authentic viewpoints.

Downsides of Influencer Marketing

The benefits of influencer marketing are numerous; however, it also has its downsides, some of which were reviewed in this section. Likewise, this paper provided suggestions to combat such challenges. According to Pfund (2019), one rarely mentioned challenge of influencer marketing is the saturation of the influencer space on social media. This paper opines that one way to address this issue is to take

time to ensure no compromises are made with the influencer selection. This will enable brands to choose the right fit and get their messages out there, even in the crowded influencer marketing space.

Another downside to influencer marketing is that organisations may find it challenging to determine how influencers create content around their brand messages. According to Mathew (2022), influencers work autonomously, creating their content while incorporating a company's advertising demands into it. The influencer has authority over the brand's message and can choose how to convey it. Palmer (2023) also expressed that collaborating with influencers means losing some brand control; this can only be avoided if everything is very scripted, in which case some authenticity is lost. On the other hand, this paper states that organisations must balance their brand values with influencers' creativity to maintain some form of control over what is being portrayed about their brand while incorporating the influencer's creativity.

There is also the challenge of authenticating the real impact of influencers. Pfund (2019) emphasised that instead of building real audiences, some social media accounts have become influencers by purchasing fake followers. These accounts have no influence over their followers, so unintentionally partnering with one would not help a brand get results. This paper notes that although this may happen in some cases, it differs for some influencers. In addition, a way to avoid falling prey to such is for a brand to thoroughly research an influencer and their platforms before engaging them.

It is also impossible to neglect the brand reputational risks that may be obtainable in influencer marketing. Fuller (2020) observed that there are inherent risks to a brand's reputation when working with influencers. Thus, alignment between an organisation's values and an influencer's public image is key. This paper agrees with the position of Fuller (2020); however, it is essential to note that when organisations select the right influencer who is consistent with their brand values and brand personality, they are likely to avoid such risks.

This paper posits that organisations must constantly analyse their market efforts to ensure they are updated with the best practices in the industry. This does not mean organisations must change the influencers they use every time, but they must be strategic with their choice, even if they have to repeat or change the influencers used at different points. Lammertink (2024) noted that trends drastically change the most popular influencers of the day, making it a perpetual challenge for brands to stay current and adapt their influencer campaigns accordingly.

Influencer Marketing Done Right

To ensure organisations get the best from their influencer marketing efforts, here are some things to keep in mind:

- 1. Plan:** Effective planning is the first step in any influencer marketing efforts. Brands must ensure they have a plan for how they want to engage influencers and their goals and objectives. Kuzminov (2023) explained that before one can begin the search for the right influencers, one must first understand the core principles representing their company.
- 2. Selection:** The selection of influencers is critical to ensuring that an organisation works with the right person. According to Kuzminov (2023), one must determine which influencers are genuine and credible with their target audience and focus on how many people engage with their content and how good it is. Mathew (2022) opined that a brand must ensure that the influencer's content is in line with its overall image, as unpleasant content can negatively impact the brand's reputation. Fuller (2020) observed that it is vital to partner with influencers who are already engaging with brands similar to

one's brand to ensure that influencer marketing efforts resonate with the ideal audience.

3. **Agreement:** Every detail must be written and agreed upon before embarking on any influencer marketing efforts. According to Lammertink (2024), once an influencer has been selected, a clear and detailed contract is essential.
4. **Guidance:** A brand must establish an influencer marketing guide to guide the actions of the influencer working on the brand's campaign. According to Fuller (2020), strategic planning, genuine collaborations, and consistent evaluations help ensure that influencer marketing campaigns bring the expected results.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Influencer marketing does not stop when a brand commissions an influencer to work on a project. A brand must put monitoring and evaluation systems in place to ensure that the influencer's activities are monitored and course-corrected if need be. Also, to ensure that each influencer marketing effort is analysed and measured through evaluation.

Ethics in Influencer Marketing

1. **Transparency:** Influencers need to be truthful in disclosing that they are being paid to promote a product or a service. Some social media platforms now ensure that partnership posts accurately reflect that they are sponsored. Leali (2023) recommended that influencers explicitly state any sponsored partnerships or collaborations in their content.
2. **Social Responsibility:** Influencers also need to be socially responsible to ensure that the product or service they are promoting is not harmful to the public or will harm anyone in any way.
3. **Integrity:** Influencers need to promote products or services with the utmost integrity, ensuring that what they promote does exactly what it says it does without exaggerating the facts. In addition, influencers must ensure they do what they have been commissioned to do and not fail to fulfil their agreement.
4. **Honesty:** If an influencer is not honest, the audience may not trust their reviews or recommendations. According to Kuzminov (2023), honesty is one of the most important qualities to have as an influencer. Influencers' marketing strategy is based on authenticity and sharing personal stories and ideas with their target audience.
5. **Stereotypes:** It is vital that influencer marketing messages do not contain any form of stereotype. Kuzminov (2023) observed that when conducting influencer marketing, it is critical to consider gender stereotypes and how people often expect men and women to act in particular scenarios.

Influencer Marketing Case Studies

Jumia

A study by Fakeye and Ayoola (2022) investigated the role of influencer marketing in promoting organisations, using Jumia Nigeria as a case study. They used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. Jumia Nigeria's marketing team and major influencers were interviewed, while consumers were surveyed. Interviewee responses confirmed that Jumia Nigeria extensively markets with influencers. They concluded that influencer marketing is crucial for lead generation due to social media's role as a nexus between brands and potential customers/clients. Interviewees agreed that social media makes it easy for brands to reach consumers, generate leads, and improve their social media presence. Interviewees said Jumia Nigeria's use of social media influencers has increased brand recognition and visibility. However, the

survey found a major determinant in respondents' goods purchases to be online product specifications/details (on Jumia or blogs).

Pepsi

Chain Reactions (2023) observed that a successful Nigerian influencer marketing campaign was Pepsi's "No Shakin' Carry Go". It targeted Nigerian millennials to raise brand recognition and engagement. Pepsi worked with six well-known Nigerian influencers, such as musicians and comedians, to make a set of fun and engaging videos. These videos showed influencers drinking Pepsi while cooking or shopping. For a chance to win rewards, fans were asked to make their own "No Shakin' Carry Go" videos on social media. More than 22 million views and 76,000 user-generated films made the campaign a success. The campaign raised brand awareness and interaction among Nigerian millennials, helping Pepsi stand out.

Cake App

According to Dogtiev (2024), the free Cake app helps non-English and non-Korean speakers learn English or Korean globally. The Cake app team had been utilising YouTube to introduce the app with short films outlining its benefits before approaching an influencer marketing agency. Help was needed to reach South American English-learning app seekers. They contacted five Latin American personalities for a two-week ad campaign to promote the app's educational and enjoyable features. On YouTube, the influencers creatively demonstrated the app's functions and benefits. The campaign was successful since all influencers introduced the software from an educational perspective, explaining how it may help people learn English. App viewers totalled 1.2 million.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used for this study was desk research, which explored secondary data to gain a broader and better understanding of the industry and the subject matter. This method was used because it was easily accessible, the researcher also wanted to discover what had been done in this area, and it was time- and cost-efficient. The research examined and synthesised different research, studies, and content to come up with the findings.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Majidian, Mahmoudzadeh Vashan, and Hakimpour (2021) studied the effective factors and consequences of influencers' behaviour in social media marketing. They utilised a qualitative sample size based on theoretical saturation (20 people), while the quantitative sample size was based on Cochran's formula (384 people). The study found 10 components and 63 indicators influencing influencer behaviour in social media marketing, including influencer attitude, influencer identity, personal branding, and important social events. Additionally, 6 components that affect the consequences of influencer behaviour in marketing: influencer loyalty, follower persuasion, lifestyle, advertising effectiveness, follower awareness, and entrepreneurship were among the topics covered on social media. The study also identified seven criteria influencing influencer behaviour on Instagram: attractiveness, reliability, content, reputation, expertise, credibility, and nationality of the influencer. Their study showed the importance of some subject areas that this paper discussed, such as the influencer's credibility, reliability, and reputation.

Using the parasocial connection, credibility, and immersion theory, Liu (2021) studied how influencer marketing on social media impacts customer engagement. The author utilised an integrated model to demonstrate how influencer marketing

improves customer engagement on social media platforms in two directions. According to the model, the parasocial relationship between an audience and an influencer improves source credibility, and then source credibility improves brand credibility. The author concluded that Influencer marketing should be analysed through the lens of parasocial relationships and content absorption. The study examined source credibility in relation to influencer marketing and customer engagement, which are key aspects of this paper.

On the other hand, Ezenwafor, Olise, and Ebizie (2021) examined the effect of social media influencers on purchase intention among social media users. Their study population was active social media users in Anambra state, and they used a sample size of 220. Their findings show that trustworthiness, attractiveness, and influencer product fit all have a favourable and substantial effect on purchase intention. In addition, purchase intentions are not influenced by expertise. They concluded that when the need for social media influencers arises, organisations should look for those who have a high level of trust with their audience, are attractive, and align with the product being promoted. The position of this paper on how proper care must be taken when organisations are working with influencers aligns with the findings of Ezenwafor et al. (2021).

The study by Ao, Bansal, Pruthi, and Khaskheli (2023) on social media influencers' impact on customer engagement and purchase intention revealed that influencer marketing has increased in popularity in the era of social media, and marketers are widely using it to persuade potential customers. The research emphasised eight key characteristics of social media influencers, including homophily, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, credibility, informative value, entertainment value, and congruence with the product. Their study was based on 176 effect sizes generated from 62 separate investigations, with the aggregate sample consisting of 22,554 individuals. Findings revealed that social media influencers have moderate to high relationships with both purchase intent and customer engagement. As customers become active on social media platforms and follow influencers, the researchers advised practitioners to tap into these influencers to engage customers and generate buy intent. Their study emphasised the need for more intentional influencer marketing efforts, which aligns with this paper's position.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This paper discovered that several factors affect the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Some of these include the loyalty the influencer garners, how the influencer can persuade their audience, source credibility, content congruence, trustworthiness, values alignment, content informative value, content entertainment value, and the like. This finding aligns with the position of Olajojo (2020) that the informativeness of the influencer's post, the facilitative nature of the content, and the persuasive strategies used to impact how followers receive the message passed across to them.

In addition, the findings align with the proposition of the source credibility model because it shows that the credibility of the source is a major factor in whether a brand message being conveyed by an influencer is accepted or not. Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that when a trustworthy source presented a material, opinions were largely more likely to change in the direction advocated by the communicator compared to untrustworthy sources.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing is effective for organisations, provided they develop strategic and intentional plans towards such campaigns while ensuring they select the right influencers. Organisations that want to effectively stand out online and connect better with their ideal audience need to consider strategic influencer marketing in their brand plan. If done well, influencer marketing can help organisations achieve their marketing goals. Some of the things brands must consider when embarking on influencer marketing include finding out if the influencer represents the brand's value, has an engaging and loyal audience, if the influencer's audience is similar to the brand's audience, if the influencer is authentic, and the like.

This paper also examined some downsides of influencer marketing and provided solutions to such challenges. It looked at influencer marketing through the lens of the source credibility model; it also highlighted the importance of message acceptability in influencer marketing, the downsides of influencer marketing, how to do influencer marketing right, and ethics in influencer marketing. Thus, brands that want to achieve their desired results online need to connect with influencers with high message acceptability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. Before working with influencers, organisations should be clear on their brand values and objectives to derive desired results. This helps them ensure that the influencers' marketing activities align with their organisation's values and goals.
2. Organisations should develop influencer marketing guides before embarking on influencer marketing campaigns to foster successful efforts. These guides aid in the smooth working relationships between influencers and organisations.
3. Organisations should be more strategic and intentional in selecting influencers while ensuring brand fit. This would ensure that the influencer marketer selected represents or aligns with the organisation's positioning in the market.
4. Organisations should develop systems to effectively monitor influencer marketing activities by the influencers they partner with. Without measuring the marketing efforts of influencers, organisations may not know if they are succeeding at their campaigns.

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Leveraging Marketing Techniques for Disseminating Malaria Messages in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Malaria intervention in Northern Nigeria had several gaps because transmission of the disease was aggravated by the warm weather which promoted mosquito breeding, and social determinants like malnutrition, which weakened immune systems, making people more vulnerable to illness. This study examined the application of marketing principles within the Community-led Monitoring (CLM) project, a Global Fund initiative to improve malaria interventions. CLM, among other things, was a development, health communication project that employed principles of marketing to communicate malaria prevention and treatment in some communities across Nigeria. The study used Social Cognitive Theory to analyse how health communication and community engagement influenced behaviour change. The CLM project used the four Ps of marketing – product, price, place, and promotion - to address gaps in existing interventions that focused on preventing and treating malaria. The results showed that the project empowered communities, leading to improved health systems driven by community members. This integration of marketing and health communication effectively mobilised community action and achieved positive health outcomes. Thus, the research demonstrated the potential of combining marketing strategies with health communication to combat important public health issues such as malaria. Considering the CLM model's success, incorporating marketing principles in health communication was recommended.

KEYWORDS

Community Engagement, Community-led Monitoring, Health Communication, Marketing Techniques, Public Health, Social Cognitive Theory

INTRODUCTION

Malaria is so pervasive in Nigeria that it is not uncommon to hear it referred to as “ordinary malaria”, a testament to how little we regard it as a health challenge, having individually recovered from it countless times. Thanks to advances in medical and pharmaceutical sciences, this disease can be prevented and treated. That is why it is distressing to note that malaria is still affecting and killing people. In 2022 for

instance, out of the 249 million people who were infected with malaria, approximately 608,000 died (World Health Organisation, 2024).

According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d), Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by Plasmodium parasites spread to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes, also called "malaria vectors". The disease causes very unpleasant symptoms such as weakness and fever among other things in its victims (Buck & Finnigan, 2023). Beyond these terrible effects, malaria is the largest cause of death among children under the age of five in Nigeria (Ekure, 2024).

It has been estimated that about one-quarter of all malaria cases globally occur in Nigeria (Oyibo, Ntadom, Uhomoibhi, Oresanya, Ogbulafor, Ajumobi, Okoh, Maxwell, Ezeiru, Nwokolo, Amajoh, Ezeigwe, Audu & Conway, 2021). Also, about 80% of malaria cases and 90% of the deaths caused by this disease in the world are in Africa, with most of them being among pregnant women and children below the age of 5. Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo account for over 40% of the estimated total of malaria deaths in the world. The situation is so bad that a child under five dies of malaria almost every minute (UNICEF, 2024).

Beyond medical intervention, communication plays a key role in malaria interventions (Nyiam, 2020). The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2022) reveal that this disease can be prevented through the adoption of certain health behaviours such as sleeping under mosquito nets, but if people do not know this, they cannot do it. The Nigerian government has also been able to secure partnerships with international bodies that provide free malaria medicines in some states (U.S. Mission Nigeria, 2024), but if the people who are supposed to take these medicines are not adequately informed about this, they cannot take advantage of it.

Malaria prevalence is higher in Northern Nigeria than it is in other parts of the country. This is due to some climatic factors and other social determinants of health (Ugwu & Zewotir, 2020; Akinbobola & Hamisu, 2022). Mosquitoes - the vector for malaria - thrive in warm temperatures in this region, therefore the Plasmodium parasites within these vectors do the same. Also, conflict and humanitarian crises that ravage this region limit access to healthcare. They also bring about poverty and malnutrition which weaken the people's immune systems, making them more vulnerable to malaria. According to The Federal Ministry of Health, malaria causes a financial loss of about ₦32 Billion yearly, with the largest share from the northern geopolitical zone despite the poverty there (Yusuf, Yusuf & Oladunni, 2019).

Overview of the Community-led Monitoring Project

The Community-led Monitoring (CLM) project started as a health communication intervention for malaria in Nigeria in 2019. At first, it was called the "Accountability and Advocacy Project". It was funded by The Global Fund and encompassed thirteen (13) states in the country namely Yobe, Kaduna, Katsina, Delta, Niger, Taraba, Adamawa, Jigawa, Kwara, Osun, Gombe, Ogun and Kano States.

The project was designed by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called the Civil Society for Malaria Control Immunisation, and Nutrition (ACOMIN). ACOMIN is one of the implementers of CLM for malaria in Nigeria (The Global Fund, 2022); and works in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, National and State Malaria Elimination Programmes, Primary Health Care Development Agency (PHCDA) and the Roll Back Malaria project, alongside several other international NGOs.

The CLM initiative involved gathering regular feedback from healthcare providers, patients, and community members in selected communities regarding the malaria interventions they had access to. This information was used to advocate for improved malaria services and resource allocation in those communities. The initiative tackled three areas: ensuring that malaria services were available, accessible, and of high quality; advocating for increased government funding and community investment in malaria interventions; and improving the availability of qualified healthcare workers.

The CLM project made use of Community-based Organisations (CBOs) which were vetted, selected, and trained to facilitate Focused Group Discussions (FGD), conduct Client Exit Interviews (CEIs), and pay advocacy visits to relevant stakeholders. The CBOs provided individuals who formed “Community Accountability Teams” that were primarily responsible for implementing the project in the selected communities. The teams used FGDs and CEIs to gather information from the community members and leaders, concerning malaria. They also identified issues hampering malaria services at selected health facilities, as well as gaps in the health behaviours of the community dwellers. Using this feedback, they carried out root-cause analyses to decipher the real reason why the issues were there. Then they conducted targeted advocacies to the relevant stakeholders who could resolve the identified issues.

One of the objectives of the CLM intervention was to empower the community members to be proactive about their own health and learn to find solutions to challenges hindering that, as opposed to waiting for the government or other stakeholders to do this for them. Each Community Accountability Team was tasked to work with representatives from each community so that the person would learn their methods and distil them among the community’s leaders. This was a strategy aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the project’s successes.

The successes of the project included the following:

1. According to a Facebook post on ACOMIN’s handle, on the 18th of July 2022, the Comprehensive Health Centre of Ungwan Maichibi community in Kaduna State had been neglected for four (4) years by the government and had gotten dilapidated as a result of that. This affected patronage of the Centre, leaving the community vulnerable to malaria attacks. The Community Accountability Team working in that community identified this as an issue that needed to be resolved and got to work on it. After a series of advocacy efforts from them, the state government finally awarded a renovation contract for the Health Centre, leading to its revitalisation.
2. Another Facebook post on the same handle, dated 30th January 2023, narrates the following story: A primary health centre called “Maternal & Child Health”, at Bage Ward, Funakaye Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State was “very deplorable beyond renovation” because of poor routine maintenance. The community members in that region had increasingly shunned the health centre because of how bad the structure was. This was significant because low patronage could lead to drugs expiring without being used at the PHC, while the people who needed them suffered or even died without them - among other disadvantages. The Community Accountability Team working in that community identified this as an issue and began to pay advocacy visits to relevant stakeholders who could help the situation. They were able to get the buy-in of some stakeholders at the local government level as well as a philanthropist in that community. The combined efforts of these people led to

the re-building of the health facility, leading to increased community trust for the health services rendered there.

3. One of the stories documented on ACOMIN's official website on the 19th of May 2022 reveals that a Community Accountability Team working at Mamudo health facility in Mamudo Community, Potiskum LGA, Yobe State identified that the facility's supply of long-lasting insecticide treated mosquito nets had been exhausted for about a month. Normally, the facility should have received a supply of these, which they were to give to pregnant women in the community for free. The absence of it meant that their pregnant clients would not get it, and be exposed to mosquito bites, increasing their risk of falling ill with malaria – a very dangerous condition which could lead to the illness or even death of these women and their babies. The Community Accountability Team advocated for a fresh supply among the relevant stakeholders who promptly delivered a fresh supply of the nets to the health facility.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Given that malaria is such a significant health challenge in Nigeria, and several approaches have been taken over time to tackle it through health communication, it is worthwhile to investigate innovative communication-based solutions that yield desired results. By studying the application of marketing principles within the CLM project, this study will provide valuable insights into how strategic health communication and community engagement can drive behaviour change and enhance the effectiveness of malaria interventions.

Therefore, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine how the four Ps of marketing - product, price, place, promotion - were embedded into health communication in the case study.
2. To analyse the effectiveness of the marketing principles used in the CLM project.
3. To examine the influence of Social Cognitive Theory on health communication in the case study.
4. To evaluate the role of communication in community empowerment for improving health systems in the case study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How were the four Ps of marketing - product, price, place, promotion - embedded into health communication in the case study?
2. How effective were the marketing principles used in the CLM project?
3. What influence did the Social Cognitive Theory have on health communication in the case study?
4. What was the role of communication in community empowerment for improving health systems in the case study?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) serves as the theoretical framework for this research, particularly in understanding the dynamics of health communication and behaviour change within communities affected by malaria in Northern Nigeria. According to Bandura in Schunk (2012), Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the interplay between cognitive, environmental, and behavioural factors in shaping human functioning. It highlights the importance of vicarious learning, where individuals observe and model behaviours of others, symbolic processes such as language and

imagery in representing experiences, and self-regulatory mechanisms in guiding behaviour.

Bandura (2001) further states that social cognitive theory posits that people have some control over their lives and they exercise this through forethought and self-regulation. Within the context of this research, the theory is used to portray how members of the selected communities in Northern Nigeria use the information provided by the communication campaign under study, to exercise control of their behaviours and choices regarding malaria prevention and treatment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of communication in health interventions

Health communication simply means transferring information that promotes health in one way or the other. It encompasses communication efforts such as advocacy, behaviour change communication, social mobilisation and the like. In addition, Corcoran (2010) reveals that communication in the context of health takes place on several levels including the individual, group, organisation, community and mass media levels. The individual level refers to intrapersonal communication. It is a process through which a person processes the health information received into a decision about that issue. The group level is where interpersonal communication takes place - involving two or more people discussing a health matter. The organisational level of communication can take place at seminars, lectures and the like, where health professionals give and receive health information. The community level of health communication can involve public health campaigns within local communities; while the mass media level of communication is the type of communication that is facilitated by widespread channels such as television and newspapers.

As a field of study, health communication is offered as a specialised course - influenced by several other academic fields - in many universities. It generally involves constructing, transmitting and measuring communication campaigns aimed at promoting health. Health communication initiatives target preventing disease, affecting people's behaviours regarding health, and influencing health policy among other things (Ratzan, 2010).

Health agencies and programs are also increasingly finding health communication relevant because transmitting important information concerning health issues has been found to contribute positively to disease prevention, positive behaviour change, and improved quality of life (Rogers, 1994; Rimal & Lapinski, n.d). For instance, many departments of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Health have their own "ACSM units" - meaning Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilisation units. These units oversee the communication efforts that are crucial for the prevention and treatment of each disease.

Furthermore, health communication has been known to be relevant in disease prevention and control. For instance, it has been discovered that greater exposure to health messaging may be associated with greater behaviour change (Friedman, Kachur, Noar & McFarlane, 2024). However, the receivers of the health messaging need to have some level of trust for the sender to comply effectively with the message's call-to-action (Cairns, de Andrade & MacDonald, 2013).

Marketing techniques in health communication

Healthcare establishments provide essential services that enhance quality of life and save lives, profoundly influencing their communities and driving economic growth. Effective communication is crucial for maximising the impact of healthcare services,

ensuring that patients are well-informed and health institutions can thrive (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020).

In line with the above, marketing techniques are sometimes used in health communication. The marketing approach to health communication involves a comprehensive understanding of the target audience and strategically addressing their behaviours and motivations, rather than relying solely on conventional messaging techniques. This has been called, “marketing communication in the health sector”, and defined as, “the communication of products or services produced by health organisations to the potential users and convincing them about the benefits to be provided” (Ekiyor & Altan, 2020, p. 173).

In the same vein, to effectively apply marketing techniques in health communication, a deep understanding of both the issue and the target audience is crucial (Wymmer, 2015). This is because the communication initiative will have to be strategically tailored using methods that may be unconventional – for instance, the mass media may not be appropriate for use in certain locations, and innovative means will be needed to spread information to a large group of people simultaneously.

It is worthy of note that, beyond the theoretical underpinnings of this subject, marketing techniques have been used successfully in various health communication initiatives. One notable example was when social marketing techniques were employed to increase awareness of syphilis in eight U.S. cities (Vega & Roland, 2005). In this case, it was found that the strategies promoted awareness and encouraged health-promoting behaviours. Also, Snyder (2007) found that health communication was found to be effective at changing people’s behaviours regarding nutrition when the campaigns paid attention to some factors which include but are not limited to the specific behavioural goals of the intervention, communication activities and channels, and the message content and presentation.

METHODS

A case study – the Global Fund CLM malaria project - was selected for this research. This study focused on the implementation efforts in three (3) states in Northern Nigeria: Kaduna, Gombe, and Yobe States, between 2019 and 2023. These were selected because of the states’ data availability on the digital platforms from which they were sourced.

The study utilises secondary data sourced from ACOMIN’s official website and social media handles, focusing solely on the CLM project. Contributions from stakeholders directly involved in the project and data that provide significant insights into the implementation efforts and outcomes were also included.

The secondary data included articles, news reports and success stories from the organisation. The analysis involved identifying key themes and patterns related to the implementation efforts of the CLM project in Kaduna, Gombe, and Yobe States between 2019 and 2023. The data was then systematically reviewed to assess the effectiveness, challenges, and outcomes of the project, providing a comprehensive understanding of its impact in the selected states.

RESULTS

Some marketing principles and elements were found in the health communication activities of the CLM project. These can be classified under the four “Ps” of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion.

1. Product

The CLM project aimed to address gaps in the malaria intervention landscape in Northern Nigeria, focusing on advocacy and community relations rather

than drug and commodity distribution. The “product” it introduced was strategic knowledge about malaria, which was highly effective due to its uniqueness, necessity, and ready market among stakeholders.

2. Price

The resources deployed in the CLM intervention included human resources, transportation costs, feeding allowances, communication materials, and time.

3. Place

The CLM project was implemented in 13 states supported by the Global Fund for malaria intervention in Nigeria, with this research focusing on Kaduna, Gombe, and Yobe States.

4. Promotion

Promotion involved communicating malaria information to relevant stakeholders, conducting root cause analyses to identify and address bottlenecks, and engaging in advocacy at multiple levels. Community workers affiliated with local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) effectively conveyed messages tailored to their communities' languages, literacy levels, and cultures. Key promotional strategies included consistent messaging aligned with national guidelines and combining message frames to enhance effectiveness. Interpersonal channels were predominantly used due to the limited mass and social media access among the target audience.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that integrating marketing principles into health communication activities can significantly enhance the effectiveness of public health interventions. The unique product strategy of providing strategic knowledge about malaria addressed critical gaps and met a clear need among stakeholders, demonstrating the importance of tailored, context-specific interventions. The deployment of resources (price) was essential for the project's implementation, highlighting the multifaceted investments required for successful health communication initiatives.

The targeted approach to place ensured that the project reached the communities most in need, while the promotion strategies effectively engaged community members. The use of local CSOs and interpersonal communication channels leveraged existing social structures and cultural knowledge, which proved more effective than external interventions. Consistent and combined message frames contributed to clear and compelling communication, facilitating better understanding and adoption of health behaviours. This corroborated the findings from the literature review which stated that the use of multiple frames in communication messages is more effective than using single frames (Florence, Fleischman, Mulcahy & Wynder, 2022). It also supports the assertion that the content of messages should clearly capture the sender's goals because of its potential to influence behaviour - the behaviour being modelled is likely to be reflected in the audience upon exposure to the message (Saleh & Pratomo, 2014).

The findings from this research also corroborate the Social Cognitive Theory's emphasis on the interplay between multiple factors in shaping human behaviour. For instance, several members of the benefiting communities of the CLM initiative found and adopted the desired, healthy behaviours through the combination of learning processes that the project introduced to them. Overall, the study underscores the value of applying marketing principles in designing and executing health communication projects to achieve meaningful and sustained impacts.

CONCLUSION

Through its focus on community engagement, tailored messaging, and strategic channel selection, the CLM project applied key marketing principles to promote malaria prevention and treatment behaviours in Northern Nigeria effectively. The initiative successfully empowered communities with strategic knowledge which they used to take charge of their health interventions, yielding notable outcomes. There were several communities where health facilities got built, renovated and/or supplied with malaria commodities as a result of CLM – the best part being that these developments were spearheaded by the community members themselves, after the Community Accountability Teams had inspired them with relevant information.

RECOMMENDATION

Considering the success of the CLM model in malaria intervention, it is recommended that the incorporation of marketing principles into health communication strategies become standard practice. Additionally, research should be conducted into how marketing principles can further boost desired results in malaria and other disease interventions. It will also be worthwhile for governments at all levels to consider funding CLM interventions as part of their health communication endeavours.

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Exploring the Power of Images and Videos in Visual Storytelling and Content Marketing: Airtel Ovajara as a Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the significant power of images and videos in visual storytelling and content marketing using Airtel Ovajara as a paradigm. In today's digitally saturated landscape, the inability of content marketers to capture attention, convey complex ideas, and build brand authenticity using good images and videos has left some businesses in constant battle for audience/customer acceptability. Employing the Consumer behaviour theory which provided insights into the psychological processes that influence consumer responses to images and videos in visual storytelling, the paper explored the strategic ways in which Airtel Ovajara used images and videos to craft compelling narratives that not only showcased the brand but also fostered genuine connections with customers. The study adopted the mixed research methodology of content analysis and Key Persons Interviews (KPI) to understand the common themes, strategies and elements that position Airtel Ovajara's visual storytelling as a successful marketing strategy. The use of images and videos as part of this strategy has revolutionized how brands engage with consumers, offering a dynamic way to communicate messages and evoke emotions. The study recommended a valuable insight into the strategic use of visual content to build stronger connections with audiences, demonstrating that effective visual communication was key to contemporary marketing.

KEYWORDS

Content Marketing, Ovajara, powerful images, storytelling, video

INTRODUCTION

An adage says that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. What this implies is that a good story is not always about words; it can be about images which portray how powerful images can be. Corroborating this view, Clarke (2023) posits that “a compelling photograph speaks volumes, often doing the heavy lifting in storytelling by setting the tone, mood, and context”. Wikipedia (2024) also admits that “complex and sometimes multiple ideas can be conveyed meaningfully by a single still image,

more effectively than a mere verbal description” In the contemporary digital landscape, visual storytelling stands as a pivotal element of successful content marketing strategy. The use of images and videos not only captivates and maintains the attention of audiences but also enhances message retention and emotional engagement (Smith, 2021). Also in his submission, Clarke (2023) writes:

If you’ve ever been captivated by a photograph, you already understand the immense power of images. A single photo can evoke emotions, trigger memories, and even compel action – much like a good story can. As a Personal Branding Photographer, I often find myself in between photography and storytelling. Today, I want to dive into how these two crafts intertwine and how quality images can make your story memorable, but also relatable and impactful (n.p.)

The above views support further the captivating power of a good and quality image or video in telling a story and ensuring resonating effects on the users of the image or video especially as there are a thousand and one images and videos at the disposal of the audience. Moriarty (2005) defines visual storytelling as the art of conveying messages, ideas and narratives through visual elements such as images, graphics, videos, or films. Visual storytelling is also, the use of images, graphics, and other visual elements to craft narratives that are engaging and easily understood by the viewer. This method exploits the human propensity to process visual information faster and more effectively than text, enabling storytellers to convey complex ideas quickly and memorably (Moriarty, 2005). The rapid evolution of media consumption habits, influenced by the proliferation of internet access and the existence of social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn etc. has heightened the importance of visual content. As a result, marketers are increasingly leveraging the power of visual storytelling to differentiate their brands in a crowded marketplace (Jones & Taylor, 2020). Visual content basically serves as a critical driver of user engagement and interaction. Studies have shown that posts incorporating images produce 650% higher engagement than text-only posts (Williams, 2019). In line with this thought, World Train (2024) adds that visuals have the capacity to convey complex messages and evoke emotions more efficiently than text. They provide an instant connection with the audience. Expounding on the psychology of visual communication, Pinnacle College (2024) posits that:

In an age where attention spans are shrinking and information overload is the norm, the power of visual storytelling has emerged as a critical tool for effective communication. Images and videos have the unparalleled ability to capture attention, evoke emotions, and convey complex messages in a succinct and engaging manner (n.p).

Similarly, video content is not just preferred by users; it is also more likely to inspire trust in a brand and motivate consumer action. According to recent research, 64% of consumers make a purchase after watching branded social videos (Khan, 2022). This underscores the significance of integrating visual media into comprehensive marketing and strategies. Furthermore, the psychological impact of visuals cannot be underestimated. The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text, which means that viewers can comprehend visual information more quickly and easily (Lee, 2018). This rapid processing makes videos and images ideal for conveying

complex information succinctly and effectively. Emotional resonance, facilitated by visual cues, plays a substantial role in enhancing consumer connections to a brand. Emotive storytelling through visuals can lead to stronger emotional responses and greater brand loyalty (Peterson, 2021). However, the challenge for marketers lies in not only creating visually appealing content but also in crafting narratives that resonate deeply with their target audience. It involves an understanding of the cultural and psychological factors that influence audience perceptions and behaviours (Zhang, Kim, Gatti & Escalos, 2019).

As the digital media environment becomes increasingly visual with the aid of technology, which includes the use of short-form videos on platforms like Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, Brown (2020) argues that emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are set to redefine the ways in which brands engage with consumers. All of these interestingly have redefined how brands connect with customers. In today's digitally saturated landscape, businesses face increasing challenges in capturing audience attention and conveying complex messages effectively. Airtel Nigeria, a leading telecommunication company, has used images and videos in their content marketing efforts to stand out in the market. However, the impact of these visual storytelling strategies on customer engagement, brand awareness and ultimately, business outcomes remain unclear. The inability of content marketers to capture attention, convey complex ideas, and build brand authenticity with the use of good images and videos has been a major challenge to content marketers which is why most brands are in constant battle for audience/customer acceptability. The effort to effectively utilize images and videos in storytelling is now becoming more crucial for content marketers. This study therefore explored the compelling potential of using images and videos to weave narratives as a transformative force in content marketing. It provided a comprehensive analysis of the strategies adopted by Airtel Ovajara to enhance viewer engagement, investigated the effectiveness of visual storytelling in engaging audiences as well as identified some best practices for incorporating visuals into storytelling for marketing purposes. Visual storytelling therefore offers unique strengths, allowing the network company to tailor its message for maximum impact. The emotional resonance fostered by Ovajara visual storytelling no doubt heightens brand identity, simplifies complex ideas, and ultimately drives engagement and conversions. Through the strategic integration of images and videos, marketers can enhance brand visibility, drive user engagement, and ultimately influence consumer behaviour.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on **the** consumer behaviour theory propounded and shaped over time by John Dewey, Harvey Leibensten and James Engel. The theory explores the processes and influences that drive individuals and groups to select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods, services, experiences, or ideas. This theory helped in understanding how audiences perceive and engage with visual content as this is essential in content marketing. Consumer behaviour theory provides insights into the psychological processes that influence consumer responses to images and videos in visual storytelling (Solomon 2018). It examines how individuals make decisions to purchase and interact with products or services. According to Solomon Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg (2019), consumers often rely on visual cues, such as images and

videos, to form perceptions, emotions, and attitudes towards brands and products. Gummerus Liljander & Weman (2012) have shown that customers are more likely to engage with brands that create an emotional connection with them than others. This emotional connection can be created through various means, such as storytelling (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2017), brand identity (Aaker, 1996), and customer experiences (Schmitt, 2011). In content marketing, visual storytelling leverages these consumer behaviours by strategically using compelling visuals to evoke emotions, create brand associations, and ultimately influence consumer decision-making processes. Moreover, Kotler and Keller (2020) emphasize that understanding consumer behaviour in response to visual stimuli is essential for marketers to design effective content marketing strategies. The theory offered the basis on which Airtel Nigeria analysed how individuals interact with images and videos in visual storytelling, tailoring its content to resonate with the target audience, enhance engagement, and drive desired consumer actions.

In the context of this study, the theory played a crucial role in understanding how audiences perceive and engage with visual content. For instance, understanding that consumers value convenience and variety, some companies that offer subscription services such as Airtel Nigeria, Netflix, MTN, Spotify etc. offer monthly subscriptions that provide unlimited access to their services. This aligned with the theory that consumers prefer easy access and ongoing satisfaction rather than a single purchase. Also, some companies that manufacture smartphones such as iPhone and Samsung Galaxy continually add new features such as better cameras, facial recognition and AI capabilities, banking with the latest technology and convenience as well as social status. Each of these product types demonstrates how deeply consumer behaviour theory such as perceived value, convenience, self-concept and lifestyle compatibility are integrated into product development and marketing strategies. Thus, the theory provided a valuable background into how consumer behaviour is affected by the compelling images in Airtel Ovajara video to subscribe to the brand. Using this theory also, consumers can interpret and respond to visual elements in Airtel Nigeria's Ovajara campaign, highlighting the significance of utilizing images and videos to captivate and influence consumer perceptions and behaviours in visual storytelling marketing.

IMAGES AND VIDEOS IN VISUAL STORYTELLING

Images and videos have a profound impact on visual storytelling. This is because they possess the ability to convey complex information and evoke emotions more effectively than text alone (Lester, 2013). In his study, Tahir (2023) argues that human brains process visuals 60,000 times faster than text and can understand a picture much faster than reading a sentence. The same is applicable to video which can tell a good story without a single word. A good example is a two-minute no-sound video that trended recently on social media (WhatsApp) about an Indian teenager who arrives at a shopping mall and on hearing the sound of the exit bell, an indication that the door of the lift is about to shut, horridly dashes into the waiting lift already filled with people. The door of the lift which is technically configured to only accommodate a specific number of people could not close as the indicator light shows overload, suggesting that somebody has to drop. There is an air of uneasiness among the people as everyone expects the other to comply. But the young man whose presence

caused this uneasiness remains complacent and insensitive to the consequences of his action. After a few seconds of obstinate resistance to take necessary action, a physically challenged woman in clutches decides to alight from the lift. The door finally shuts and the lift ascends. Such a video tells a whole lot of powerful stories even without words. It successfully describes the nature of human life as being selfish, insensitive, loss of empathy, lacking manners, having poor ethics and always feeling right. Another example is *The Black Hole*, a short video produced by Future Shorts on YouTube with a single actor whose greed and avariciousness lead him to destruction. Rather than be contented with the money the *Black Hole* has released to him, he chooses to enter into the safe box and is eventually consumed by his greed. The video even without words symbolizes a void or insatiable desire on the part of man. It is his irresistible urge for more money that leads to his destruction. These two videos among many others, tell good stories without words in just a few minutes which therefore underscore the power of visuals in storytelling and attention-grabbing. In the context of digital media, Bryant and Pila, (2017) argue that videos, in particular, have proved to be effective in capturing audience attention and conveying information. Zetti (2008) identifies video as ‘conveying complex information that creates lasting impression’. The combination of moving images, sound, and music can create an immersive experience, further enhancing the impact of visual storytelling (Grodal, 2005). In other words, both images and videos serve as ‘powerful catalysts’ for storytelling encapsulating complex ideas and concepts in a single frame (Pinnacle College, 2024). Pinnacle College (2024) further argues:

...in marketing and advertising, images are instrumental in capturing consumer attention and conveying brand messages. With the rise of social media platforms like Instagram and Pinterest, visual content has become indispensable for brands looking to engage with their audience effectively. By crafting visually appealing campaigns that tell a compelling story, brands can forge authentic connections with consumers and differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace (para.6).

In view of this, businesses, marketers, content creators and network service providers have leveraged these powerful tools to create markets for their contents vis-à-vis products. Tahir (2023) identifies the benefits of visual storytelling as enhancing engagement, easy to remember, universal appeal as well as boosting shareability. An audience can easily relate to a video or image seen rather than remember a word heard or read. Studies have also shown that viewers retain 95% of a message when they watch it in a video compared to 10% when reading it in text, highlighting the unparalleled efficacy of video as a communication tool (Pinnacle College, 2024). As much as images and videos are powerful tools in visual storytelling, Tahir (2023) argues that blending them with a short word can make it even better. A good business strategist must learn to explore any available option that can enhance audience engagement. Hence some good videos and images are laced with few words which produce better results. An example is the Airtel Ovajara which combines video, images, texts and words to create appealing content which resonates with the audience. While images offer a snapshot of a moment, videos provide a dynamic medium for storytelling, allowing for narrative depth and emotional resonance while words and texts complement the narrative. With the proliferation of video-sharing

platforms like YouTube, and TikTok, video content has become ubiquitous in the digital landscape, capturing billions of views daily (Pinnacle College, 2024).

The art of visual storytelling in content marketing therefore calls for identifying your brand and target audience to engage them appropriately using the most effective tools in visual storytelling. This can be done through understanding audience demographics and tailoring it accordingly. Airtel, like many leading brands, such as MTN Nigeria, PZ Cussons and Jumia among others, emphasizes the power of visuals in storytelling to enhance marketing effectiveness through visual consistency ensuring that all visuals align with the brand's colour palette, typography, and overall design language. Consistency helps in reinforcing brand identity and making it easily recognizable across different platforms (Airtel, 2020). Authenticity is another key strategy to building trust with the audience as any bit of compromise can lead to audience distrust of the brand. This can negatively affect patronage and the image of the company which will subsequently require engaging the services of a good image launder to rebuild and regain trust in the brand and of course at a huge cost. Also, exploring a variety of visual formats such as infographics and animations to live videos and virtual reality can be an effective strategy for visual storytelling and content marketing. Nevertheless, images and videos have proved to be powerful means to connect with audiences and convey messages with impact. Therefore, effectively harnessing the emotive power of images and videos enables businesses and brand managers to maintain equilibrium between their brands and the target audience thereby achieving their objectives.

CONTENT MARKETING AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Content marketing is increasingly regarded as a vital development strategy for businesses aiming to establish a strong presence in their respective markets. This approach involves creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and engage a clearly defined audience, ultimately driving profitable customer action (Pulizzi, 2012). Effective content marketing strategy development requires that companies/ marketers conduct thorough audience research to understand their target audience's needs, preferences and pain points (Kotler & Keller, 2016). By means of focusing on delivering valuable information rather than direct selling, content marketing helps to build trust and credibility with potential customers, fostering long-term relationships (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). One of the primary reasons content marketing serves as an effective development strategy is its ability to enhance brand visibility and recognition. Through high-quality content, businesses can improve their search engine rankings, making it easier for potential customers to find them online (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). This increased visibility can lead to higher website traffic, providing more opportunities for conversion and sales. Airtel Nigeria, for instance, has leveraged multiple platforms to distribute the Ovajara videos, including television, social media, and YouTube. This multi-platform approach ensures maximum reach and visibility, allowing the campaign to engage with a diverse audience across different channels. The company's ability to optimize content for various platforms enhances engagement as well as reach a broader demographic. Valuable content addresses the needs and pain points of the target audience as businesses can attract qualified leads and guide them through the buyer's journey (Patrutiu Baltas, 2015). This process

often involves creating various types of content, such as blog posts, e-books, whitepapers, and webinars, tailored to different stages of the decision-making process.

No doubt, content marketing is a powerful development strategy due to its ability to boost brand visibility, generate and nurture leads, and enhance customer retention. When marketers/businesses focus on creating and distributing valuable content, they aim to build lasting relationships with their audience and drive sustainable growth. Therefore, this strategy can be a powerful tool in uncovering the potential of images and videos in visual storytelling and content marketing by providing valuable information about audience preferences, competitor strategies, content effectiveness, and opportunities for strategic development.

AIRTEL OVAJARA CONCEPT

“Jara” is a Hausa word meaning ‘more’. It applies when one buys an item in the market. The buyer usually requests for ‘jara’ to compliment the item bought. The concept, “Ovajara” is a Nigerian pidgin word meaning “excess” “abundance” or “more”. It is believed that Nigerians love to be given ‘jara’ whenever an item or product is purchased. It does not matter how small the ‘jara’ is rather what matters is the satisfaction and feeling of fulfillment that come with the ‘jara’. Therefore, it would not be entirely out of place to conclude that Airtel Nigeria conceived its Ovajara concept based on this premise because Nigerians love ‘jara’ so much so that satisfaction is derived when more is added. In most cases, companies record higher sales because of the ‘jara’ promo attached to it.

Airtel Ovajara video uses positive imagery that exudes positivity and warmth, smiling faces, friendly interactions, and vibrant settings are common features, conveying a tone of friendliness and reliability. The visuals often feature sleek, modern designs that reflect a contemporary tone. This includes clean lines, minimalistic layouts, and modern fonts, which appeal to a tech-savvy and forward-thinking audience. Ovajara campaign visuals also highlight people coming together, sharing moments, and staying connected. This emphasizes Airtel's value of fostering connections and building communities. Airtel in Ovajara video incorporates cutting-edge graphics and dynamic animations, showcasing commitment to innovation and staying ahead in technology. The campaign also features a diverse range of people from different backgrounds, highlighting Airtel's value of inclusivity and its dedication to serving a broad demographic. Airtel Ovajara advertisements typically show real-life scenarios where the Company services are making positive impacts. For example, a family using Airtel's network to stay in touch with a loved one abroad, or young professionals leveraging Airtel's high-speed internet to advance their careers. On platforms like Instagram and Facebook, Airtel Ovajara posts engaging content that resonates with a younger audience, behind-the-scenes looks at technology, and lifestyle posts that align with the aspirations of their audience. Airtel uses high-resolution images and professionally shot videos to maintain a high standard of quality. This visual clarity reflects the brand's commitment to excellence just as the dynamic animations and vibrant graphics are used to explain complex concepts simply and engagingly. This helps in making the brand appear innovative and customer-centric, ensuring a strong, cohesive, and recognizable brand presence.



FIGURE 1: Airtel Ovajara Image

(Source:<https://www.airtel.com.ng/voice/plans/Airtel-Ovajara>)

The image in Figure 1 above shows a young girl obviously from the Gen Zs standing beside a giant-sized number eight and X alphabet suggestive of the multiple benefits and convenience a customer stands to benefit from purchasing the tariff plan. The girl stands on one leg resting part of her body on the giant figure eight which portrays reliability of the product to provide support and convenience to the user. The Company's choice of a youth is symbolic and a reflection of the larger interests of the young generation's need for more data plans to satisfy their craving for online presence, according to Airtel (2021), 'Data is life'. Consequently, the company uses the image to reflect a brand's identity, tone, and values involving careful consideration and strategic choices.

FIGURE2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnmTL2vjdJs>

Figure 2 above provides the link to the Ovajara video which effectively captures stories that resonate with the Nigerian audience. Airtel Ovajara video showcases a visually engaging and emotionally compelling storytelling approach to promote a specific tariff plan that offers maximum benefits to customers as can be seen in the image and video which implies 'order 1 and get 8 instead'. The message inherent in

the Ovajara video/image is that a customer buys the tariff plan and is instantly rewarded with additional eight which enables the customer to enjoy more data for calls and browsing. On the other hand, the video story expounds the message in a more compelling manner. The story resonates around a young couple excited at the discovery of their expecting a baby. Unlike in most Nigerian families where men prefer male children, this young man chooses a girl child while his wife wants a boy child which brings their choices at equilibrium, an indication that no sex is superior to the other. With that same excitement, the couple begins preparation for the arrival of the baby, going shopping for baby apparel and house decoration. In line with Nigerian culture which values family bonding, the couple is surrounded by extended family and friends who are enthusiastic about the arrival of a newborn baby into the family. As labour sets in, the expectant mother is accompanied to the hospital and is delivered of quintuplets to her greatest amazement. The family rejoices because of this bountiful blessing contrary to the couples' expectations. The husband arrives at the hospital with joy and excitement and is further thrown into pleasant surprise at the turn of events. Ordinarily, their expectation is to have a baby but God in His graciousness gives them not just one or two as in twines but additional eight which is Ovajara. Airtel craftily uses the 'Ovajara' metaphor, which the audience can relate with, to create a compelling visual story to boost content marketing as depicted in this image.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed research methods of content analysis and Key Persons Interview (KPI) were adopted for this study. Content analysis is a systematic and transparent method for analysing texts, images or videos to identify patterns, themes or meanings (Bryman, 2020). It involves coding and categorising data to extract insights and understand the underlying messages or sentiments (Krippendorff, 2019). Through content analysis, researchers can uncover implicit meanings, cultural nuances, and communication dynamics that may not be apparent through conventional quantitative methods (Bryman, 2020). The other method is the key persons interview (KPI) which involves selecting and interviewing individuals who possess specialized knowledge or expertise relevant to the topic (Marshall; Rossman; & Vogel 2019). Through open-ended questions and probing follow-ups, researchers can gain rich, detailed insights from key persons that may not be easily obtained through other methods of data collection (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This study analysed the Airtel Ovajara video campaign which was launched into the Nigerian market on September 30th, 2021. Ever since then, the product has continued to influence customers with over 2.2 million views on YouTube in the last eight months. The key persons interview method involved the collection of data from Airtel staff and Customer Care who are knowledgeable about the Company's operational activities and marketing strategies. According to Mrs Chinyere Onuhalu, Branch Manager Airtel, Wetheral Road Owerri, Ovajara offers numerous benefits to customers even as the company clearly defined what it wants to achieve with the Ovajara campaign and how it measures success through increase in brand awareness, sales drive, and building a social media follower (Personal interview, 12 June 2024). Supporting this claim also is the Airtel Customer Care which identifies the key messages and values the brand aims to communicate through storytelling by developing a compelling story that resonates with the target audience as well as aligns with brand values. It also uses a variety of channels, such as video, social media, and email marketing, to tell Ovajara story and reach out to the target audience. It further states that Airtel from time to time measures the impact of its brand's storytelling efforts to understand what is working and what is not and make adjustments as

needed (Telephone interview 19, 2024). In his own contribution, Lucky Alabi in the Escalation Desk adds that the Ovajara video was designed to encourage social sharing and engagement, which helped amplify their reach organically. According to him, Airtel incorporated elements that prompt viewers to share the content with their networks (Telephone interview 19, 2024). Through the mixed methods, the Company's strategies which have been deployed over the years were identified and further analysed under the following sub-headings:

Emotional Engagement: The video engages different visual elements such as sound, imagery, words, text and colours to evoke emotional responses. Coding for emotional expressions or emotional cues in images like facial expressions to show surprise, body language, voice modulation and scene composition all help the audience understand how emotions are effectively conveyed through visuals. Under the circumstance, "Ovajara" video campaign showcases a visually engaging and emotionally compelling storytelling approach to promote a specific data plan. There are expressions of joy and happiness heralding the safe delivery of the babies. Usually, the arrival of a new baby (babies) into the family is a thing of joy. Family and friends of the couple are beside them to celebrate their bundle of joy. This is typical of a Nigerian family. The use of imagery is extant as in the display of the baby's shoes and clothing with the inscriptions, "It's a boy" and "It's a girl" on them. This is a message to families to accept whatever sex their baby is as no gender is superior to the other. The video displays beautiful colours and imagery. The colours are displayed as part of the decoration for the arrival of the baby. This is because colours are visually stimulating and attract attention. Children naturally love colours because it catches their attention. Generally, children's love for colours is a combination of innate biological factors, developmental stages and the influence of their environment. All of these are aptly captured in the video to emotionally engage the audience

Target Audience: Ovajara video seems to target a youthful demographic population, possibly Nigerian youths who are in the productive stages and require more data plans to perform their daily tasks. The present generation of youths is tech-savvy because of their early exposure to technology and devices like tablets, smartphones and computers. These devices offer a wide range of functions that appeal to the youth such as social media, streaming and gaming. To achieve this, they need a good data plan that can support their daily online activities. This increases their desire for more data plans to satisfy their needs. Airtel considered this strategy and came up with Ovajara data bundle (Customer Care 19 July, 2024). There is the use of contemporary energetic music and relatable scenarios suggestive of an appeal to a tech-savvy and socially active audience.

Narrative Technique: The Airtel Ovajara campaign video follows a linear narrative structure, which means that the story unfolds in a chronological sequence from beginning to end. This technique ensures clarity and ease of understanding for the audience, as events progress logically without jumping back and forth in time. The campaign uses a storytelling format to illustrate the benefits of the Ovajara service, combining visuals of family and friends connecting and sharing moments with the convenience and affordability of the product. This narrative approach aims to create an emotional connection with the audience, positioning the product as a solution that enhances relationships and experiences.

Visual Elements: The video uses strong visual storytelling elements to enhance the narrative. High-quality visuals, including close-up shots of characters, scenic backgrounds, and dynamic transitions, create a visually appealing experience. The use of vibrant colours, energetic scenes, and expressive facial expressions further enhances the emotional impact of the story. The video employs high-quality production values, dynamic camera work, and seamless editing to capture the attention of viewers. The use of lively animations and authentic interactions between characters adds to the overall appeal of the campaign.

Brand Messaging: Airtel Nigeria's branding is strategically integrated throughout the video, with a clear emphasis on the Ovajara tariff benefits such as cost-effectiveness, convenience, and connectivity. The brand image showcases a young girl standing beside a boldly enlarged number 8 with the letter X capped with Ovarjara. The brand's logo, colours, and tagline are consistently displayed to reinforce brand recall and recognition. Clear and punchy brand statements accompany the end of the video as a mark of emphasis, for example, a voiceover saying "Get 8 times the values of every recharge plus 1000 naira welcome bonus with double data with Ovajara when you buy or activate a new cell". The Ovajara campaign video effectively communicates the brand's message of connectivity, inclusivity, empowerment, reliability, innovation, and positive emotional impact. Through compelling storytelling and relatable scenarios, Airtel reinforces its identity as a trusted telecommunications provider dedicated to enhancing the lives of its customers by keeping them connected.

6.6 Engagement and Call to Action (CTA): Whether the tariff plan is encouraging viewers to learn more, sign up, or make a purchase, effective CTAs guide the audience towards the desired action (Airtel, 2018). The campaign encourages viewer engagement through relatable scenarios, emotive storytelling, and clear calls to action such as signing up for the Ovajara tariff or visiting the Airtel website for more information. By creating a sense of urgency and offering a solution to a common need, the campaign positively affects consumer behaviour by effectively motivating them to take action.

No doubt, Airtel Nigeria's "Ovajara" video campaign effectively utilises visual storytelling techniques, emotional appeal, and clear messaging to promote the Ovajara tariff plan to a target audience. Through content analysis and KPI, the paper identified key strategies deployed by Airtel to captivate and persuade customers, ultimately driving engagement and action towards the desired outcome.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results from the analysis show that the company has focused on value which can be deduced from the title, Ovajara. This suggests that the campaign highlights how Airtel offers more value to customers, through data plans, recharge bonuses, or other features. People are always drawn to getting value for their money through recharge. Therefore, values involve making careful consideration and strategic choices in terms of colour palette which is red and consistently used across all visuals. This reinforces brand recognition as well as suggests passion. This paper made an effort to identify some best practices adopted by Airtel to incorporate visuals into storytelling for marketing purposes through brand consistency which ensures that visuals align with the overall brand identity and messaging. The consistent use of local relevance, colours, fonts, and design elements helps reinforce brand recognition and storytelling cohesion. The Ovajara video effectively taps into emotions, showcasing family bonds,

friendships, connections, and shared experiences. These universal themes resonate with the audience on a personal level, making it more memorable and engaging. The video's use of appealing aesthetics captures the viewer's attention. The high production quality and engaging cinematography contribute to making the campaign visually compelling and attractive to the target audience.

Airtel aligns the Ovajara campaign with current social trends and behaviours, emphasizing the effectiveness of visual storytelling in engaging audiences and the importance of staying connected and sharing moments with loved ones. This social relevance makes the campaign relatable and timely, increasing its appeal to the audience. The campaign effectively communicates the key benefits of the Ovajara tariff, highlighting its affordability, convenience, and connectivity features. The message is straightforward and easy to understand, ensuring that viewers grasp the value proposition quickly and are more likely to take action. The campaign incorporates interactive elements that encourage viewer engagement. This experience enhances brand-customer interaction and maintains brand consistency throughout the campaign. This consistency builds trust and recognition among consumers, reinforcing Airtel's position in the market and enhancing Ovajara's marketability.

One of the strategies for effective content marketing according to Airtel (2021) is the utilisation of emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to create immersive visual experiences. This immersive experience remains one of the best practices for incorporating visuals into storytelling for marketing purposes. These technologies can provide innovative ways to engage with the audience and enhance storytelling. The Ovajara's unique narrative sets Airtel apart from competitors and generates interest in the product. Nevertheless, Airtel Nigeria's Ovajara video stands out as a compelling and marketable brand due to its emotional appeal, vibrant visuals, social relevance, clear messaging, interactive elements, brand consistency, and innovative approach. By incorporating these key strategies, the campaign effectively captures audience attention, drives engagement, and strengthens the brand's market position. Also, the campaign is a huge success, with over 2,238,267 million views in the last six months, and 452,000 user-generated videos on the Airtel website. The campaign also increased brand awareness and engagement among Nigerian average families, helping Airtel Nigeria stand out in a competitive market.

CONCLUSION

Visual storytelling utilising images and videos are potent tool in content marketing, enabling brands to connect with audiences on a deeper and more emotive level. With the mixed methodology used for this study, Airtel Ovajara has proven to be a reliable product designed to unlock valuable insights into audience preferences, company strategies, content effectiveness, and strategic development opportunities. It has also proven that visual content is a key driver in engaging and influencing consumer behaviour. As brands continue to invest in visual storytelling, the power of images and videos in content marketing will remain a crucial element in building brand awareness, driving engagement, and fostering meaningful connections with target audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommended a valuable insight into the strategic use of visual content to build stronger connections with audiences, demonstrating that effective visual communication was key to contemporary marketing. To effectively engage customers/audiences and enhance brand messaging and content marketing, Airtel should adopt the User-Generated Content (UGC) strategy to encourage

customers to create and share their own content related to the brand, as user-generated materials enhance authenticity and credibility.

Airtel, in deploying visual storytelling techniques to engage target audiences, should focus on stories that reflect the values, aspirations, and challenges of its target audience as a way of enhancing viewer engagement and driving the marketing process.

Airtel should equally use all identifiable best practices such as professionalism and consistency in tone, identity and value to incorporate visuals into storytelling for marketing purposes.

Effective implementation of these strategic recommendations enhances the brand's visual storytelling and content marketing efforts, making Airtel more innovative in communication, engaging with modern consumers and driving business growth in the 21st century.

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The Evolution of Advertising in Nigeria: Promoting Local Content for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The complex relationship between advertising and local content promotion in Nigeria is one of the huge challenges to sustainable development. Cultural oversimplification, misrepresentation, and dominance of the West do significant damage to the representation of Nigerian culture authentically in the practice of advertising. This paper, therefore, reviews this relationship by incorporating historical evolution, and technological, cultural, and regulatory dynamics. The qualitative research design followed in this study generated primary data through the use of in-depth interviews conducted on key players in the Nigerian advertising industry. The primary data collected underwent a thematic analysis, while the historical analysis was supported by multiple sources, including historical records, publications from the industry itself, and scholarly literature. This research shall, therefore, be located within the understanding of the Cultural Imperialism Theory and the Development Media Theory as a lens to critically analyse the complexity of representations of local content in advertising. The results showed that there were positive and negative perceptions toward the integration of local content in Nigerian advertisements, as most consumers appreciate culturally authentic content. It identifies challenges and also shows how to use opportunities: bridging Nigeria's multicultural identity and digital platforms for sustainable development. This research underlines the need for a balance between global advertising practices and the local cultural nuances of impactful, sensitive campaigns that shall help lead the course of sustainable development and preserve the rich cultural heritage of this great nation.

KEYWORDS

Advertising,
Cultural
Authenticity,
Digital Media,
Ethical Practices,
Local Content,
Nigeria,
Sustainable
Development,
Technological
Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Though advertisement cannot be overemphasised, measuring it can be a very complex task. It performs persuasive and informative functions and also undertakes the role of knowledge and education transfer through forms of media that may influence sustainable development (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2019; Wołoszyn et al., 2021). Knowing the history of advertising and its influence on local content creation is important in promoting a sustainable and culturally sensitive advertising sector in Nigeria.

African traditional advertising used musical instruments with local customs, vibrant imagery, and word-of-mouth marketing. The invention of the printing press in 1450, together with the 1859 founding of Nigeria's first newspaper, revolutionised advertising. The first advertising agency was founded in 1928, while radio and television were introduced in 1932 and 1959, respectively, marking a major turning point in the 20th century. The Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria, later known as AAAN, was formed during the 1970s due to the rising number of professionals. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) was established in 1988 to further regulate the industry (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2019; Ezeah & Geve, 2020).

Advertising is one of the mixed elements of marketing, using various channels to communicate and persuade audiences. These can be traditional, such as print and broadcast, and non-traditional ones: human billboards or major internet platforms. It is this adaptability that helps advertising reach target audiences effectively. According to Wołoszyn et al. (2021) and Zhuang et al. (2022), the influence of advertising on the development of local content is rather complex. Evidence ranges from the use of Hausa, Pidgin, and Yoruba on the BBC to Google websites in African languages. The local cultures and their languages are thus taken gradually as relevant to the media. Advertisements are likely to spur regional cultures (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2019; Ezeah & Geve, 2020).

Local content refers to information authored by a community and relevant to them. Further, it engenders cultural understanding and identity. Notwithstanding, the infrastructural bottlenecks coupled with the funding constraints make the production of local content quite a challenge. In this respect, access to user-generated content platforms, as well as professional content platforms offering local content, may be improved upon (Ndubuisi-Okolo et al., 2022; Ogunyombo et al., 2023). Advertisement for the creation of local content is one way to pursue the goals of sustainable development. For example, companies can contribute to a more culturally rich and sustainable future for Nigeria by weaving some local culture and tradition into the advertising messages.

Although high strides have been made in the course of its development, vast deficiencies characterise the knowledge of how advertising relates to local content in Nigeria. The integration of local content within advertising campaigns has been limited by socio-cultural factors, technological developments, and regulatory strictures in a complex interplay that reduces the potential for advertising to reflect and sustain the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. This makes it imperative to engage in a critical review of the history of advertising in Nigeria for bridging gaps and creating information that will help in making and promoting relevant cultural advertising content. By learning how advertising has influenced the production of local content across a range of socio-cultural contexts in Nigeria, we can begin working out ways through which advertising can be used to promote local content within the context of Nigerian advertising and ultimately work toward a more sustainable and culturally diverse advertising sector.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Using the perspective of sustainable development makes analysing the influence of advertising on local content creation in Nigeria especially fascinating. Development Media Theory and Cultural Imperialism are two important ideas that provide useful frameworks for this investigation.

According to the Cultural Imperialism Theory, which was created in the 1970s and is still relevant today, developing countries are forced to absorb the values and narratives of dominating Western media cultures (Mirrlees, 2020). This can occur on a few levels in the context of advertising. A high quantity of Western-influenced advertisements may suppress local content, diminishing its reach and overall influence. International design trends could bleed over into Nigerian advertising and subtly dictate the visuals and audio utilised (Flew, 2018).

The potential impact of cultural imperialism in Nigeria can be understood by studying the advertisements themselves. One can see the visual and aural components for potential Western influences in design choices or stylistic approaches. More importantly, one could go further and track the unconscious meanings of cultural messages and ideologies that were played out in them. According to Thussu, in 2019, was the culture of Nigeria clearly captured or were foreign concepts at the forefront of the content? Such dominance can ultimately suffocate the growth of a dynamic and diversified local landscape of content. This leads to the weakening of cultural identity, which UNESCO (2021) recognised as essential for sustainable development.

On the contrary, Development Media Theory looks at the role of media in terms of national development (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). The theory first calls for projecting the national culture and its languages. According to this theory, advertising content should at all times actively project and showcase the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. This can be achieved through the use of regional languages, customs, and values in advertising. In addition, advertising should be made to support initiatives aimed at developing the nation by carrying issues on economic growth and social progress-related matters (Waisbord, 2019).

The application of the Development Media Theory in the case of Nigerian advertising raises some important questions. Does advertising advance local content with Nigerian languages, customs, and traditions? But also, does it further national development by transmitting messages which focus on topics relevant to national development priorities? But also, can collaboration or knowledge exchange with other developing countries in the field of advertising be witnessed? (Servaes & Lie, 2021).

Development Media Theory also acknowledges the state's contribution to promoting media content that furthers development. This brings into sharp relief the role of the government in Nigerian advertising. What effect does governmental regulation and censorship have on portraying local content? Are these interventions consistent with the advancement of sustainable development? (Mano, 2022)

It adds more value to apply Cultural Imperialism Theory and Development Media Theory in the examination of advertising. We could, for instance, view the threats that Western influence may have on local content creation. More importantly, we may identify opportunities through which advertisement could be used in promoting a future that is culturally rich and sustainable for Nigeria (Flew & Waisbord, 2020).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF LOCAL CONTENT

Lenin (1972), quoted by Kehinde et al. (2015), made the case that, in the face of survival pressure, some mass media favour sensational news above material that promotes development. Marxist theory holds that many media outlets are driven by class dominance and profit-making, which results in the continuous presentation of media owners' opinions and greatly helps the maintenance of inequality between the upper and lower classes.

Egbon (1989) said that a sizable portion of the media in Nigeria had used the medium to advance the personal agendas of influential groups' marginalised elite. The interests of a privileged few are eventually prioritised by this behaviour, which maintains the status quo.

Also, Olukotun (2002) highlighted that economic and social issues became more pressing for Nigerian media due to the economic downturn of the 1980s and 1990s. Negative authoritarian economic policies have had a significant impact on the media, causing difficulties in newspaper distribution.

Kadiri (2009) highlights the serious issue of urban and elite-centric bias in the Nigerian media. The study further explains that media outlets' adoption of contemporary technology worsens the gap between news coverage of urban and rural areas. The viewpoints of those who are frequently highlighted in the media are usually at odds with the urban elite class's control over media agendas. This problem is made worse by the fact that most media outlets assign their reporters mostly to cities, ignoring rural communities.

According to a report by Kehinde, Yinusa, Muhammed, Abdullateef, and AbdulRasheem Sulamian (2015), Nigerian media development is being hampered by a number of issues. The first idea was that development journalism's early affiliation with the government was the reason behind Nigerian media's suppression, particularly under previous military administrations. Media that criticises the government is suppressed or removed. The Nigerian press is impacted by persistent restrictions resulting from previous military decrees that limit access to development-oriented content. The study also showed that hiring "below standard" journalists based on their educational background and not meeting their demands as journalists have an impact on the growth of the media.

Kehinde et al. (2015) emphasised that Nigeria's press faces difficulties due to irregular power supply, which leads to dissatisfaction in newspaper creation. Media companies need generators, which adds to their costs. Fuel scarcity makes matters worse by increasing the possibility of corporate activities becoming completely or partially paralysed.

According to the Kehinde et al. (2015) assessment, Nigerian newspapers struggle to produce well-researched development news, which is frequently obtained from foreign sources. When investigative reporting is underfunded, important local perspectives that have an impact on people's lives are overlooked. Because of this reliance on outside sources, local nuances are ignored in news coverage. The attraction of foreign viewpoints stems from their inexpensive or free availability.

Furthermore, language barriers have an impact on the accessibility of both local and foreign information, including e-government services, according to a study done in 2016 by the International Society on the promotion of content in Africa. Legal limitations also affect content availability, putting pressure on foreign providers and encouraging domestic developers to self-censor. It further emphasised that there are

accessibility issues because big advertising platforms sometimes do not support African languages. Difficulties with infrastructure also make content dissemination less effective.

IMPACT OF ADVERTISING ON THE PORTRAYAL AND PERCEPTION OF LOCAL CONTENT

Advertising can have both beneficial and negative effects on society, depending on the message and how well it aligns with cultural ideals. The message's selection significantly impacts how consumers live, perceive their needs, and see themselves. The media outlets used to market advertisements are crucial, and language in ads (verbal and nonverbal) has considerable power to communicate ideas.

N. Anido Freire (2014) carried out a thorough investigation examining ads for two high-end products using rhetorical and semiotic analysis. The study found that the global coherence of larger luxury brands' creations, products, narratives, and advertising strategies strengthens their brand image and eventually draws in a more devoted clientele.

Su Jiangli (2015) examined American fast-food, automobile, and movie trailers in China, revealing that American businesses spread American culture and values through their marketing. This effect goes beyond converting intangible cultural soft power into concrete effects, especially on middle-class and Chinese youth. The study cautions that maintaining traditional Chinese culture and values may be difficult in the face of this widespread influence.

Nazari (2017) looked at advertisements in Iranian magazines and offered suggestions for successful commercial advertising in social and cultural media. The study identified problems such as stereotyping, lack of established cultural standards, lack of advertising experience, and the absence of professional associations for evaluation. These causes were found to harm Iranian periodicals. Performance analysis exposed a lack of representation of Iranian community ideals, with material more concerned with aesthetics than important moral lessons.

Using Adorno's theory, Yazdanparast (2018) investigated how mass media might be utilized to create negative social change by substituting pseudo-culture for the cultures of societies. The study, which analysed 48 years' worth of print advertisements using semiotic and content analysis, identified five major themes in the development of pseudo-culture and the corresponding advertising tactics. It also identified four instruments for the production of pseudo-cultures, providing information on how they are established, supported, and destroyed.

Noel JK's (2018) study examined the elements that affect the attractiveness of social media advertisements, such as source appeal, informative appeal, and emotional appeal. User-generated comments (UGCs), user engagement metrics, and modifications to the ad content were the main factors shown to be significant. With a particular focus on beer advertising on Facebook, Noel discovered that emotional appeal in non-compliant advertising dramatically increases ad recall and the likelihood that it will affect future drinking occasions.

Renah et al. (2019) compared concurrently exhibited Pepsi advertisements from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The research emphasized specific advertising tactics designed for each market. Pepsi used common values to strengthen its national identity and establish a connection with Saudi Arabian customers. On the other hand, the advertisement in Egypt leaned more towards amusement than cultural significance. While the Egyptian ad relied more on uncreative aspects like hilarious scenarios and footage from ancient Egyptian songs and movies, the Saudi Arabian ad made significant use of special effects.

These studies collectively highlight the complex relationship between advertising and cultural representation, demonstrating how advertising can both reinforce and challenge local cultural norms and values across different contexts.

METHOD

This study was researched to understand how advertising influences the creation and promotion of local content in Nigeria's multicultural landscape. This qualitative approach was selected since the aim was to understand intricate social phenomena and elicit rich, detailed insights into participant experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative methods are appropriate for understanding real-world experience and the interaction of fine grain between advertising and the creation of local content.

The purposive sampling method selected respondents who had relevant knowledge and experience in the subject area to provide rich insights. This was adopted because, according to Patton in 2015, with this sampling method, it is possible to select information-rich cases giving an insight into the research questions. Marketing executives, content creators, and consumers who were actively engaging in advertising made up the sample size of this study. The respondents were sampled from this heterogeneous group to express diverse views and experiences within the Nigerian advertising environment.

The collection of data was based on the use of multiple sources to gain a wide understanding of the phenomenon. The industry professionals were interviewed and recorded for reasons of accuracy. This structure of interviews was chosen due to the flexibility it provided, whereby there was a possibility of exploring themes as they emerged while maintaining consistency in structure across all the interviews conducted by this researcher (Brinkmann, 2014). Besides, historical documents, academic literature, and advertising media were gone through to provide an understanding of the context and triangulation of data.

Member checking has been done here to assure the accuracy of the data obtained from the interviews and also to adopt their feedback. This technique improves the credibility and validity of the findings since participants have a chance to review and confirm what has been interpreted by the researcher in Birt, Cavers, Campbell and Walter (2016).

In this study, triangulation of methods was achieved by combining interviews with historical records and analyses of various advertising media, similar to how Birt, *et al.* (2016) conducted it. This is to strengthen the research through cross-validation and further explanation of the phenomenon being investigated. According to Kern, in 2018, the analysis of data involved three methods:

1. Historical analysis: This would spell out a historical overview of the development of advertising in Nigeria and would spell out the understanding of the current situation (Practice and trend).
2. Thematic Analysis: This will identify patterns and themes from the interview data, helping to get an in-depth meaning of participants' experiences and insights.
3. Content analysis: This method was used to probe how local content is represented in Nigerian media. It gave an insight into ways in which cultural elements are used in advertising, just as Leckner and Severson (2019) had suggested.

This combination of analytical approaches will help in locating comprehensively a complex relationship between advertising and local content creation in Nigeria.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of interview data from 13 participants (advertising professionals, marketing executives, content creators, regulators, and consumers). The analysis revealed significant patterns and trends related to advertising's impact on local content creation in Nigeria.

The socio-demographic details of the participants are provided in the table below, showing the age range, gender distribution, professional experience (excluding consumers), and socio-economic status (consumers only).

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age group		
20-30 years	4	30.8%
30-40 years	6	46.2%
Over 40 years	3	23.1%
Gender		
Male	7	53.8%
Female	6	46.2%
Professional experience (Consumer exclusive)		
Less than 10 years	3	37.5%
10 years and above	5	62.5%
Socio-economic status (Consumers only)		
Middle-class	4	80.0%
Upper-middle class	1	20.0%

As revealed above, almost half (46.2%) of the study respondents are between 30 to 40 years of age while 53.8% of them are males. More so, of the eight professionals (including all but consumers), 3 (37.5%) of them have less than 10 years of working experience while majority (62.5%) of them have above 10 years of experience. Similarly, 4 (80.0%) of the consumers interviewed belonged to the middle-class socio-economic status.

Historical Progression of Advertising in Nigeria

This section explores the evolution of advertising in Nigeria, highlighting its impact on local content creation.

Early Forms of Communication: Before the printing press, Nigerians used various methods to promote goods and services, including town criers, product displays, and "hawking," where sellers called out to potential customers.

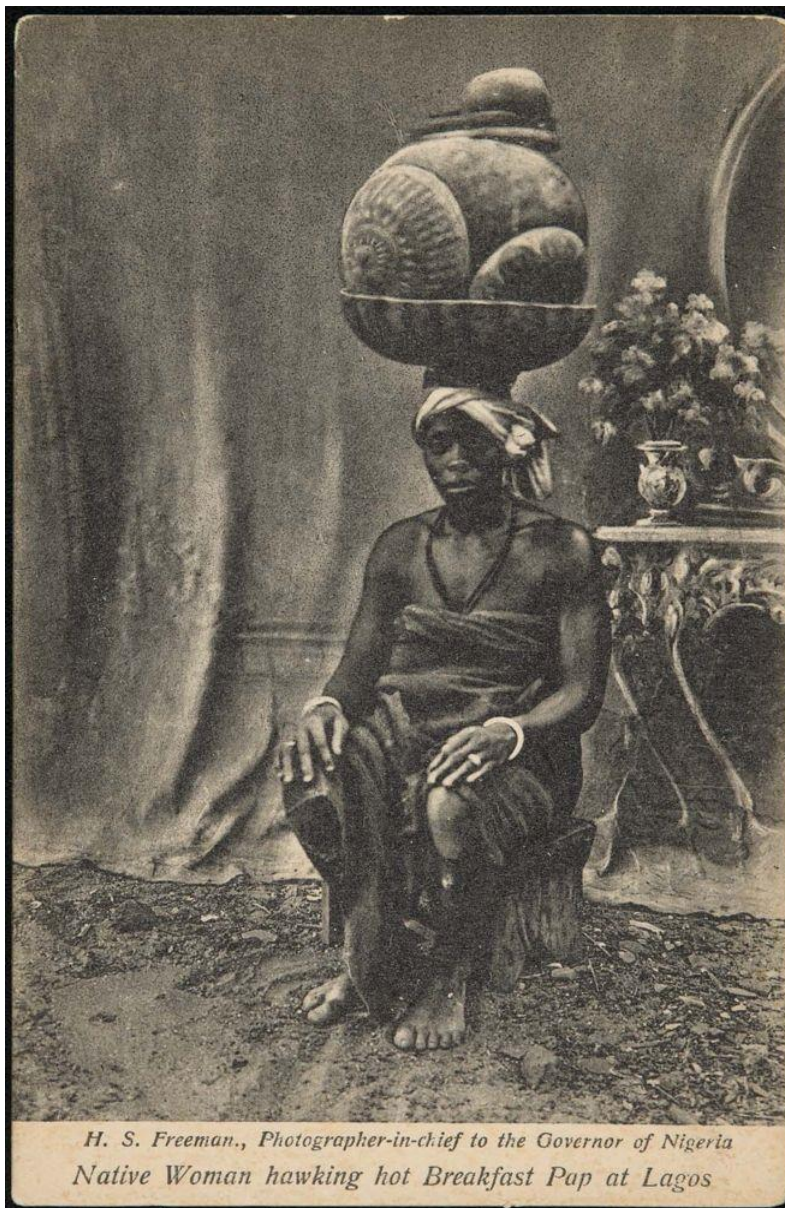


Fig. 1: Native woman hawking hot breakfast Pap in Lagos

The Printing Press Age (Late 19th Century – 20th Century): The invention of the printing press led to newspapers, the first mass media for advertising. Missionaries introduced printing technology to Nigeria in the mid-19th century. Iwe Irohin, the first newspaper in Nigeria, was founded in 1859 and contained advertisements. Other newspapers emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, providing more advertising space.

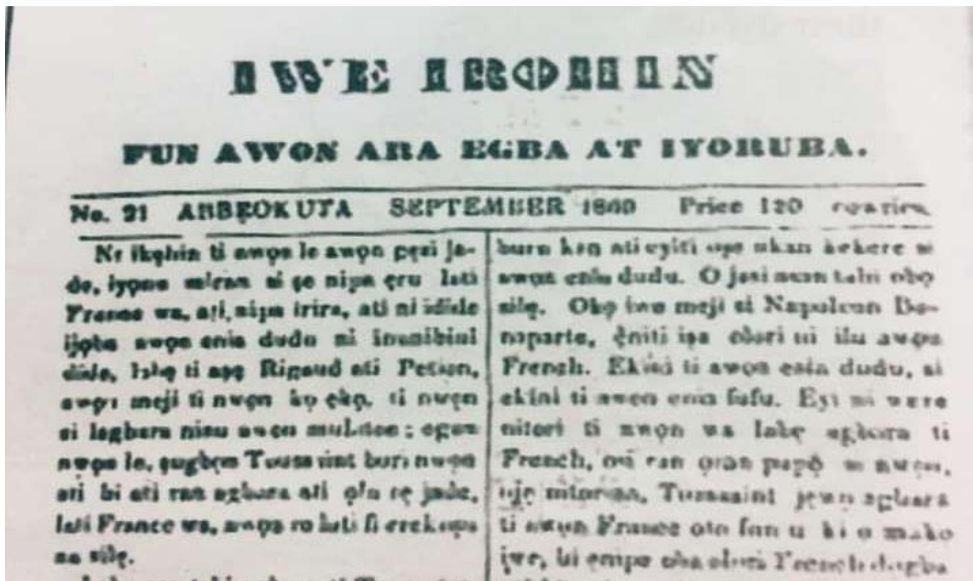


Fig. 2: A facsimile of *Iwe Iroyin*, the first newspaper in Nigeria

20th Century: The 20th century saw the rise of professional advertising in Nigeria. The United Africa Company (UAC) established the first advertising agency, West African Publicity Ltd (WAP), in 1928. Foreign advertising agencies also played a significant role. Radio broadcasting began in Nigeria in 1933, introducing a new advertising medium. The first radio advertisement aired in 1955. Television broadcasting started in Nigeria in the late 1950s, with the first commercial aired in the early 1960s.



Fig. 3: A signpost of WAP (Retrieved from: <https://m.facebook.com/brandeyemedia>)

Impact of Indigenization Decree of 1972: The Indigenization Decree encouraged the creation of more Nigerian-owned advertising agencies. This led to a rise in advertising that incorporated local content and languages. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) was established in 1988 to regulate the advertising industry.

21st Century: The internet revolutionized advertising in Nigeria in the early 21st century. Digital platforms like social media became prominent advertising channels. Advertisements increasingly focused on creativity, storytelling, and connecting with consumers on a personal level. There is a growing emphasis on integrating local content and cultural elements into advertising campaigns.



Fig. 4: Family Benefit Plan plus by Leadway Assurance

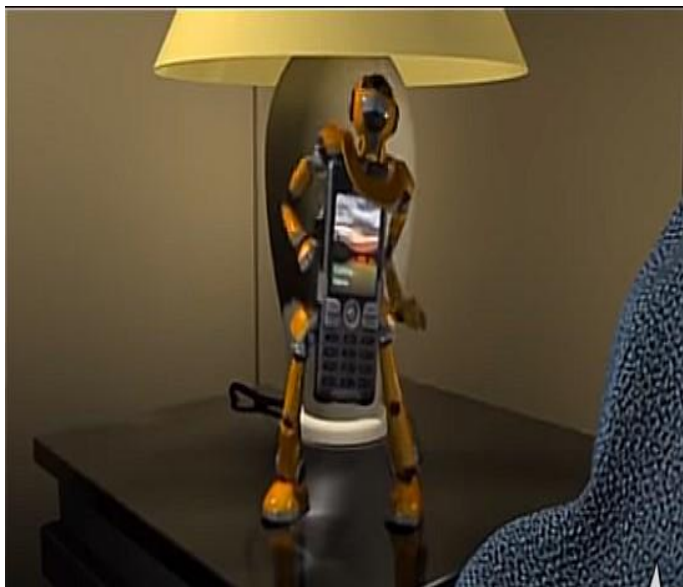


Fig. 5: MTN Caller Tune (Yori yori) animated advert



Fig. 6: Pepsi advert with Wizkid

Perception on Local Content

As regards consumers' perceptions on integration of local content in Nigerian adverts, this research found both positive and negative perceptions, each of which are shaped by the respondents' personal experiences. However, most consumers develop positive perceptions as revealed below.

Positive perceptions

Respondents highlighted the relatability and appeal of advertisements featuring prominent local content. This aligns with the concept of cultural proximity in advertising, as discussed by La Ferle and Lee (2019), who found that culturally congruent advertisements tend to be more effective in engaging local audiences.

"Advertisements with prominent local content are appealing as they feel more relatable creating a stronger connection" (Respondent 9)

"...when ads are more localized, they become likeable and relatable" (Respondent 11)

"They reflect our way of life and traditions, making the products or services seem more unique and aligned with our cultural values." (Respondent 13)

These findings support the arguments of Development Media Theory (McQuail & Deuze, 2020), which emphasizes the importance of prioritizing national culture and languages in media content. The positive reception of localized content suggests that Nigerian advertisers are successfully implementing some aspects of this theory.

The perceived authenticity and trustworthiness associated with localized advertisements, as expressed by Respondent 12, echo the findings of Grayson and Martinec (2021), who demonstrated that cultural authenticity in advertising can enhance brand trust and consumer engagement.

It feels like the brand understands our values, making the products seem more trustworthy and captivating. When advertisements showcase locally produced items...it influences my preference. Also, the narrative and storytelling play a crucial role in capturing my attention. (Respondent 12)

Local content in advertising has positively influenced my purchasing decisions. For example, there was a time when a campaign showcasing traditional attire convinced me to purchase from that brand...I love arts. (Respondent 10)

Negative perceptions

Despite the generally positive reception, some respondents expressed concerns about the oversimplification of Nigerian culture in advertisements:

"Sometimes, it feels like the advertising industry assumes a one-size-fits-all approach, neglecting the rich diversity in our culture. The challenge is seeing ads that are relatable to our daily lives, addressing local issues, and featuring people who truly represent the Nigerian experience." (Respondent 11)

"...there was a negative instance where a brand misused cultural symbols, making me rethink purchasing from them. They need to find ways to amplify local voices without completely diluting our cultural identity in the face of international influences." (Respondent 9)

This critique aligns with recent scholarship on the complexities of representing diverse cultures in advertising. For instance, Oyedele and Minor (2022) argue that advertisers must move beyond surface-level cultural representations to truly resonate with diverse audiences.

The misuse of cultural symbols, as mentioned by Respondent 9, highlights the risks associated with cultural appropriation in advertising, a topic explored in depth by Taylor, *et al.* (2020). Their research emphasizes the need for advertisers to approach cultural elements with sensitivity and authenticity to avoid alienating consumers.

These findings demonstrate the delicate balance advertisers must strike when incorporating local content. While the use of cultural elements can enhance relatability and brand trust, as suggested by Development Media Theory, there's also a risk of oversimplification or misrepresentation. This tension reflects the ongoing challenges in navigating Cultural Imperialism, as discussed by Mirrlees (2020), where global advertising practices may sometimes conflict with local cultural nuances.

The overall positive reception of localized content suggests that Nigerian advertising is moving in a direction that supports sustainable development by promoting local culture. However, the critiques highlight areas for improvement, particularly in representing the full diversity of Nigerian culture and avoiding cultural misappropriation.

Impact of Evolving Advertising Practices

Technological advancements have significantly impacted advertising practices. Digital media allows for more targeted and interactive advertising. Regulatory bodies play a role in ensuring ethical advertising practices.

DISCUSSIONS

Analyses of Past Trends of Advertising in Nigeria

The history of advertising in Nigeria shows that it migrated from the traditional approach to the more contemporary platforms. This would be in line with the Development Media Theory, which explains that media have a role in national development, as explained by McQuail and Deuze (2020). As explained, the post-1972 Indigenization Decree period showed the emergence of local indigenous ad agencies that spearheaded content production, furthering the tenets of the theory on the projection of national culture expressed in its languages.

However, the involvement of foreign advertising agencies in the early 20th century also alludes to the tenets of the Cultural Imperialism Theory. In this regard, one questions the balance between globalization of advertising practice vis-à-vis representation of the local culture. This cultural tension spills into the 21st century.

Interpretation of Perceptions on Local Content

Perceptions on local content in advertising bring out the complex interplay between globalization and local cultural identity. Positive perceptions, such as increased relatability and closeness to the local traditions, are in agreement with findings made by Grayson & Martinec (2021) on the importance of cultural authenticity in ads. These positive responses suggest that localized content can enable the achievement of sustainable development goals through enhanced brand trust and consumer engagement for local businesses that preserve culture.

Conversely, negative perceptions about cultural oversimplification and misrepresentation reflect the concerns cited by Oyedele & Minor (2022) on how to represent the various cultures in advertising. This puts into sharp relief the need to arrive at a more nuanced manner for cultural representation as mooted by the Development Media Theory.

Implications of Evolving Advertising Practices

The shift to digital platforms and interactive advertising means opportunities and challenges for local content creation. Even though that would mean more targeted and more personalized advertising, it raises problems with digital divides and accessibility, as highlighted in the International Society (2016) study on the promotion of content in Africa.

This places regulatory bodies at the core in making sure only ethical advertising reigns supreme in this evolving landscape. It resonates with Development Media Theory's recognition of the State's role in encouraging media content to foster development.

These results clearly dot aspects of both theories, the Cultural Imperialism Theory and the Development Media Theory, that need to be reconciled in the Nigerian case. On one hand, there is evidence of Western influence in practice; on the other hand, there is a growing emphasis on local content and cultural representation. This dynamic reflects Flew & Waisbord's (2020) arguments about the continued significance of national media systems in the setting of contemporary media globalization.

Practical Implications for Sustainable Development

The research has also put forward how advertising can be used to drive sustainable development in Nigeria by:

1. Cultural diversity and heritage promotion by real exposure on billboards.
2. Encouraging the growth of local enterprises and digital content developers, thus driving economic growth.
3. Digital channel exploitation, taking into consideration the concerns of people living with disabilities.
4. Ensuring the advertising is ethical and respects local cultures while promoting them.

There are, however, challenges in juggling the global advertising trends against the local cultural nuances, infrastructural limitations, and representation of diverse cultures inclusive of Nigeria.

Precisely, the evolution of advertising in Nigeria opens up opportunities for the encouragement of local content in the quest for sustainable development while demanding sensitivity to culture and careful navigation through changing technological and regulatory frameworks. Future studies shall look at strategies that increase the effective integration of local content in these digital platforms of advertising and how such localized advertisements bear on consumer behaviour and cultural preservation in Nigeria in the long term.

CONCLUSION

This overview the research gave on the journey of Nigeria in advertising, right from the embryonic days through the digital age, is good foreground for building a sustainable future for the advertising industry. From an analysis of these trends over the years and stakeholder opinions using Cultural Imperialism Theory and Development Media Theory lenses, we are in position to come up with advertising strategies that support responsible consumption and boosting of local eco-friendly business enterprises.

The findings showcase a complex interplay of global advertising practices with local cultural representation. Conforming to the Development Media Theory, the receptiveness toward localised content, as expressed by the majority, suggests that cultural elements might increase the effectiveness of advertisements and therefore be a means to sustainable development by promoting local business and preserving culture. However, the fact that the critiques about oversimplification of culture and misappropriation of cultural symbols still abound is a testament to the fact that Cultural Imperialism remains an issue within the field of advertising (Mirrlees, 2020).

Understanding audience reception of local content allows one to craft more powerful campaigns that will truly resonate with consumers while educating them on sustainability and responsible buying. It agrees with the recent research by Oyedele and Minor (2022) which places nuanced cultural representation in advertising. The evolution of these advertising practices in Nigeria toward digital media opened new paths for both targeted and interactive advertising but also raised important considerations about ethical practice and cultural sensitivity in a digital age. According to Taylor, *et al.* (2020), this calls for authenticity on the part of advertisers in handling cultural elements so as not to alienate consumers. Apart from selling goods, it is possible for advertising to drive a culture of sustainability in Nigeria and other African countries by:

1. Accomplishing more technologically driven, relevant, and culturally aligned advertising
2. Ensuring respect for ethical standards and the accurate representation of the various cultures that encompass the pluralistic society of Nigeria
3. Integrating sustainability messages into ads.
4. Advertising campaigns that get the business local and support developers of local content.
5. Constant education for those involved in advertising on subtle nuances of Nigerian cultures so that stereotyping or misrepresentations can be avoided.

Future research could assess the potential that, in the long run, localized advertising has to influence consumer behaviour and contribute towards more sustainable development. The best ways of showcasing Nigeria's diverse cultures within the new digital forms of advertising can be explored.

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The Role of Instagram Videos on the Growth of Female-Owned Businesses in Lagos

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ABSTRACT

Although videos are a compelling form of content on Instagram, women entrepreneurs on Instagram exist within a highly competitive space, and they need to seek out approaches that will give them a competitive edge while creating content for promoting their businesses. The study aimed to explore how Instagram videos can engage potential consumers, promote products, and increase brand awareness. Twenty-three women entrepreneurs were chosen using a snowball sampling technique and were then interviewed in detail, using a qualitative approach. The study showed that Instagram videos and other marketing campaigns influence the growth of women-owned businesses. The key metrics that indicated growth were engagement rates, direct communication channels, lead generation and conversion rates, website traffic, testimonials, and follower growth and retention. These metrics helped women entrepreneurs assess and improve their marketing strategies, identify areas that need improvement, and make decisions to maintain and improve company success. The study recommends that future research should combine both qualitative and quantitative research designs to provide statistical validation for the study's findings as well as content analysis of Instagram videos used by women-owned businesses on Instagram.

KEYWORDS

Business growth, campaigns, female entrepreneurs, Instagram videos, marketing, women-owned businesses

INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that many female-owned businesses exist in the online ecosystem, particularly on social media platforms (Tahir & Raza, 2020). Instagram is a social media platform that effectively uses its features to help female entrepreneurs target and reach their potential customers. As a result, many women have grown their businesses by using Instagram to create content. Sasu (2024) states that there are 12.2 million Instagram users in Nigeria. This means that Instagram has become a crucial tool for Nigerian business owners who want to grow their market presence.

Entrepreneurs often develop products or services that are customised to meet the needs of their target market. This allows them to tap into a large customer base and maximise their potential for success. According to Umeh (2022), even though Instagram is mainly used for socialising and entertainment, many Nigerian brands, specifically 96%, use it as a platform for business activities. Instagram and other social

media platforms support the development of businesses led by women as social media plays a crucial role in the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, place and positioning) for ensuring business success (Pantano, Priporas & Migliano 2019).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the e-commerce industry in Africa was already growing steadily, however, the rapid advancement of this trend was greatly helped by social media platforms (Zou & Cheshmehzangi, 2022). The significant increase in the number of businesses owned by women in Lagos and other areas is largely due to the important role that Instagram and other social media platforms play in helping them grow and achieve success (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021). Women entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria are increasingly utilising social media platforms such as Instagram to promote their businesses (Mamodu, Moses, Ekeagbara & Peter, 2019).

Instagram and other social media platforms provide a strong platform for businesses to connect with potential customers, display their products or services, and improve brand awareness. A study by Chakraborty & Biswal (2023) highlights the role of social media presence in fostering entrepreneurship intentions and strong digital presence, without delving into the specific impact of Instagram videos on business growth; this portends a gap in existing literature. Similarly, an article by Ayers (2024) suggests guides and benefits of social media for female-owned businesses, likewise, SRC (2024) also focuses on usage and benefits of social media for female entrepreneurs but fails to address the impact of Instagram videos on customer engagement, brand visibility, and sales conversion.

Additionally, it has been proven that business owners consider Instagram videos as a great way to connect with potential customers, show off products or services, and increase brand recognition (Rahayu, Masduki, & Ellyanawati, 2023). More research is needed to accurately determine how Instagram videos affect the growth of businesses owned and operated by women in Lagos. Furthermore, there is a lack of precise understanding about how Instagram videos specifically impact the growth of female-owned businesses in Lagos, Nigeria.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the role of Instagram videos in the growth of female-owned businesses in Lagos. Specifically, the study seeks to do the following:

- Analyse how female entrepreneurs in Lagos utilise Instagram videos for business promotion.
- Determine the benefits and challenges associated with using Instagram videos for business growth.
- Understand how Instagram videos influence customer engagement, brand visibility, and sales conversion for female-owned businesses in Lagos.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do female entrepreneurs in Lagos utilise Instagram videos for business promotion?
2. What are the key benefits and challenges associated with using Instagram videos for business growth?
3. How do Instagram videos influence customer engagement, brand visibility, and sales conversion for female-owned businesses in Lagos?

SIGNIFICANCE

With the steady increase in the use of social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook post-COVID-19 era, more businesses now benefit from the use of social media platforms for promoting their businesses (Pantano et al., 2019). There is a significant number of female entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria, who use Instagram to expand their businesses and engage a broader audience (Mamodu et al., 2019). It would be of great benefit for different stakeholders to understand the role of Instagram videos and content in generating engagement and growth for businesses owned by women in Lagos. This information is essential for a variety of reasons including:

Economic Empowerment: The comprehension of the significance of Instagram videos for business success can encourage a greater number of women to utilise digital platforms for economic growth, resulting in a greater sense of financial stability and independence (Siegrist, 2022).

Policy Development: The findings from this study have implications for policymaking, specifically to promote and support the use of digital tools for female business owners. This could also serve as a basis for providing financial support to the businesses that require it.

Marketing practice: The field of marketing is fast evolving and insights from this study will further contribute to theories and practice of marketing in the era of social media (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). By exploring this topic, we can gain insights into what types of videos and content are most effective in driving engagement and sales for female-owned businesses in Lagos. This information can help policymakers and support organisations design programmes that address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and promote economic inclusivity.

Ultimately, this initiative could encourage more women to utilise digital platforms like Instagram to grow their businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

This paper adopts Social Marketing Theory to investigate, via Instagram videos, the contribution of female-owned businesses in Lagos' expansion. Social Marketing Theory applies marketing principles to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant as it helps understand how Instagram, as a social media platform, can be leveraged to promote and support female entrepreneurship.

Social Marketing Theory Overview

Social Marketing Theory is based on the principle of using marketing techniques to achieve social change (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Understanding the needs, preferences, and behaviours of the target audience is crucial. It's important to divide the broad audience into specific segments to effectively tailor messages. Offering something valuable to the audience in exchange for adopting a behaviour is a key strategy. It's also important to recognise and address competing behaviours that the target audience may find more appealing. Utilising Product, Price, Place, and Promotion strategies can be effective in influencing behaviour (Bhattacharya, 2022).

The theory focuses on understanding the needs, preferences, and actions of the target audience. It aims to offer value in return for their desired behaviour and address any conflicting behaviours. Highlighting the difficulties they face and their growth potential, the study applies the theory to focus on Lagos-based female entrepreneurs who have limited access to traditional marketing channels and a need for greater visibility.

Additionally, it considers demographic and industry segmentation. Instagram videos demonstrate the value of the company's expansion through content such as product tutorials and customer quotes. The study highlights the cost-effectiveness and wide audience reach of Instagram videos compared to traditional marketing methods. It also discusses competition from other social media platforms. Finally, the theory helps identify effective content strategies that attract the target market and drive business growth.

Social Media and Economic Development

Instagram has demonstrated its ability to support a wide range of entrepreneurial endeavours by promoting sectors like agriculture, tourism, art, and health, and by exerting influence on the political economy. The rise of Instagram as a platform for promoting digital entrepreneurship can be credited to several factors. One of the key reasons is the widespread availability of smartphones, which makes it easy for people to access the platform. Additionally, Instagram offers an affordable setup and operational costs, making it accessible to a wide range of entrepreneurs. Moreover, its global reach allows users to connect with people from all around the world, further enhancing its appeal (Adekunle & Kajumba, 2021).

Instagram offers a range of features including Stories, IGTV (Instagram TV), and the capability to share photos and videos. Videos enable businesses to establish connections with their target audience, showcase their products, and offer insights into their behind-the-scenes operations. Female entrepreneurs can leverage Instagram to enhance brand visibility and foster a customer base (Adekunle & Kajumba, 2021).

Female entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria, are increasingly leveraging social media platforms, particularly Instagram, to promote their businesses. Instagram videos offer a powerful way to engage with potential customers. While Cotter (2019) argues that social media platforms like Instagram offer great opportunities for women entrepreneurs, it's crucial to acknowledge the challenge of the digital divide and limited accessibility in emerging countries such as Nigeria. In these countries, a significant portion of the population lacks access to reliable internet and digital devices. Women, especially those in lower socioeconomic groups, may face a greater impact from this digital divide, which can hinder their potential to utilise Instagram and other social media platforms for business expansion (Hilbert, 2011).

Similarly, the algorithm of this platform gives priority to content that receives high user engagement. This engagement can be influenced by various factors, including the number of followers and interactions. It can be quite challenging for women entrepreneurs who are new to the platform or have fewer followers to gain visibility and reach, even if they produce high-quality content. This bias in algorithms can pose a challenge for aspiring female entrepreneurs who are looking to make their mark on Instagram (Cotter, 2019). Nevertheless, social media platforms like Instagram provide a cost-effective solution for marketing and reaching a broader audience, which is particularly advantageous for women entrepreneurs who often face challenges in accessing traditional advertising channels. A study by McKinsey and Company (2016) found that women entrepreneurs who use digital platforms experience a 50% increase in revenue compared to those who do not. This demonstrates how social media can

help women overcome financial and logistical barriers, enabling them to compete more effectively in the marketplace.

Instagram Videos and Customer Engagement

In their study, Rachmah & Mayangsari (2019) examined how consumers communicate with local fashion brands on Instagram and explored the relationship between the content posted by these brands and consumer engagement. The study utilised an online questionnaire to gather data from active Instagram users, categorising various types of content as entertainment, informative, or remuneration posts. According to the findings, the entertainment content category has a major impact on customer engagement. It is suggested that local fashion brands enhance their marketing strategy by creating more entertainment content alongside other forms. Although entertainment content can capture attention quickly, it may not be enough to maintain customer loyalty over time or ensure steady business growth. Creating a devoted customer following typically involves finding the right mix of informative and rewarding content to consistently captivate and please customers. Relying too heavily on entertainment content can result in short-term bursts of engagement without building meaningful connections (Hollebeek, 2011). Entertainment content often elicits emotional reactions like happiness, amusement, or enthusiasm. These emotions can foster stronger bonds between consumers and brands. When customers feel emotionally connected, they are more likely to remain loyal and engage with the content by liking, commenting, and sharing. According to research by Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2016), building an intense emotional connection with customers is crucial for fostering loyalty and advocacy. Entertainment content can be a valuable tool in achieving this, as it helps to create deeper relationships with the audience.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employed an exploratory study to delve into the impact of Instagram videos on female-owned businesses in Lagos.

Qualitative Approach: In-depth interviews were conducted for selected female-owned businesses on Instagram.

Sampling Strategy: The snowballing sampling technique was adopted to recruit participants for the study. This was done tactically to ensure that a diverse representation of female business owners was interviewed. A total of 23 participants were used for the study.

The snowball sampling technique was chosen for this study to get recommendations of participants that fit into the categories relevant to the study by leveraging the networks of the initial participants who are female entrepreneurs who have businesses on Instagram and use video content for promoting their businesses. The research continued until a saturation point was reached, whereby, the participants interviewed did not add any new information to the data already collated from previous participants. The snowballing sampling technique has been widely used for various qualitative research (Parker, Scott & Geddes 2020).

Data Collection Methods: One-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants via WhatsApp.

WhatsApp phone call was used to reach the participants as the participants found it convenient and natural due to the nature of their business which is always online. It also helped to create a relaxed setting for getting authentic responses from the participants (Salmons, 2014).

RESULT

The questions analysed consisted of open and closed-ended questions to enable the participants to clearly and easily provide answers to the questions that were posed. The questions asked are grouped and presented below:

Question: What type of business do you do on IG?

Table 1: Indicating the nature of business on Instagram

Type of business	Number of participants
Fashion	6
Education	2
Gifts	3
Real Estate	3
Health	4
Food	5
Total	23

Figure 1: Pie Chart showcasing how long participants have been using Instagram to promote their business/product

- How long have you been using Instagram to promote your business/product?

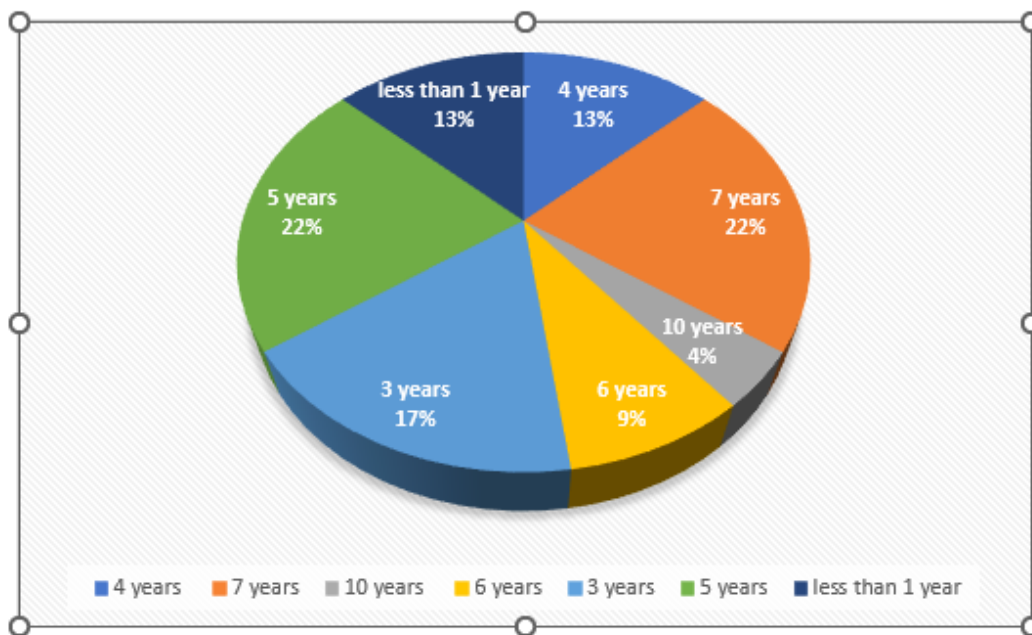


Figure 2: Chart showcasing content that resonates best with an audience on Instagram

- What kind of content do you think resonates best with our audience on Instagram?

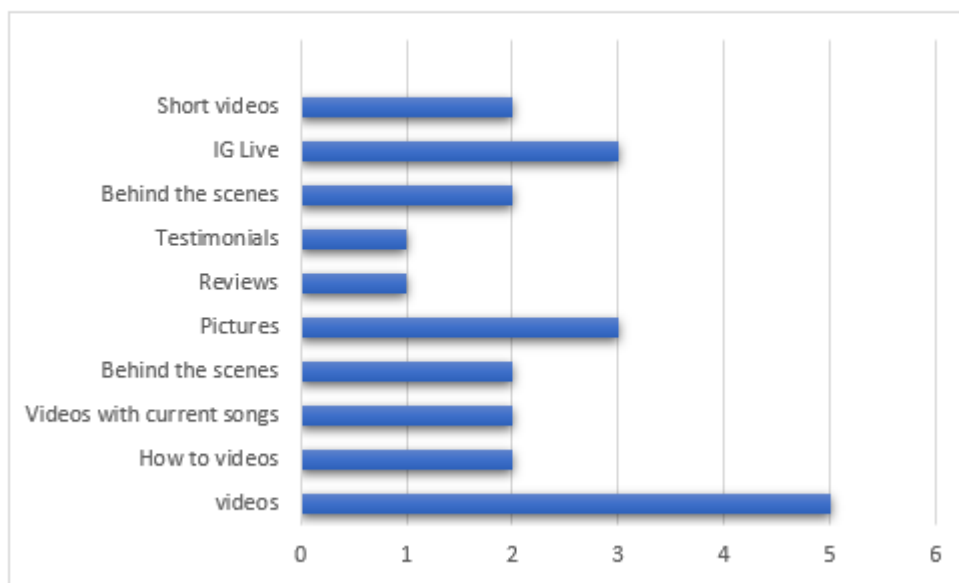


Table 2: The metric participants use for measuring the success of Instagram campaigns

Metrics for measuring the success of campaigns
Likes, direct messaging on Instagram, direct WhatsApp messages and leads from Google My Business
Likes, comments and reposts
Highlights
Likes and comments
Increase in followers
Conversions
Leads
Direct Messaging
WhatsApp messages
Comments, likes
Reposts
Website visits
Phone calls
Likes
New followers, direct messaging
Testimonials
Followers
Likes
Direct messaging
WhatsApp messages
Likes, comments, and reposts
Leads

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The qualitative study was carried out using interviews. Findings from the interviews conducted indicate that various indicators play crucial roles in assessing the effectiveness and impact of marketing efforts on Instagram and other platforms.

Engagement Metrics (Likes, Comments, and Reposts)

Receiving likes, comments, and reposts is a clear sign that the audience is actively engaging with and showing interest in the content shared by businesses owned by women. Having higher engagement rates is a clear indication of a strong bond with the target audience and greater visibility within the Instagram community. Other research has also emphasised the significance of these metrics. As an example, a study conducted by Rachmah & Mayangsari (2020) discovered a direct link between high engagement rates on Instagram and improved brand visibility and customer loyalty. This is especially advantageous for women entrepreneurs who want to create a powerful online presence and cultivate a devoted customer following.

Direct Communication Channels (Direct Messaging, WhatsApp Messages, Phone Calls)

Direct messaging on Instagram and WhatsApp, as well as phone calls, provide valuable opportunities for personalised interaction with potential customers. These channels facilitate direct engagement, allowing businesses to address inquiries, provide assistance, and build relationships with prospects. According to Adekunle and Kajumba (2021), personalised communication through direct messaging enhances customer satisfaction and fosters trust, leading to higher conversion rates. This finding underscores the importance of utilising multiple communication channels to maintain a personal touch with customers.

Lead Generation and Conversion Metrics (Leads from Google My Business, Conversions):

Leads generated from Google My Business and conversions represent tangible outcomes of marketing campaigns, indicating the effectiveness of promotional efforts in driving customer interest and action. By tracking leads and conversions, businesses can measure the return on investment (ROI) and assess the overall success of their marketing initiatives. Research by Cesaroni, Demartini and Paoloni (2017) supports this view, showing that effective social media marketing strategies can significantly enhance lead generation and conversion rates for female entrepreneurs in emerging markets.

Website Traffic and Testimonials

Website visits and testimonials serve as additional indicators of campaign effectiveness, reflecting the ability of marketing efforts to drive traffic to the business website and influence purchasing decisions through positive feedback and recommendations from satisfied customers. Studies have demonstrated the importance of website traffic as a metric for online business success. For example, research by Smith and Zook (2016) indicates that higher website traffic correlates with increased sales and customer engagement, while positive testimonials build credibility and encourage new customers to make purchases.

Follower Growth and Retention (Increase in Followers, New Followers)

The growth and retention of followers on Instagram signify the expansion of the business's audience reach and the establishment of a loyal customer base. Increasing

follower counts and attracting new followers indicate a growing brand presence and ongoing engagement with the target audience. This finding is consistent with the work of VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko and Roberts (2013) who found that follower growth on social media platforms is a critical indicator of brand popularity and market reach. For female entrepreneurs, maintaining a steady increase in followers is essential for long-term business growth and sustainability.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of marketing campaigns for female-owned businesses on Instagram and other platforms can be determined by examining a variety of factors. These include engagement metrics, direct communication channels, lead generation and conversion metrics, website traffic, testimonials, and follower growth and retention. By carefully analysing these metrics, businesses can assess the impact of their marketing strategies, pinpoint areas that need improvement, and make well-informed decisions to foster long-term growth and prosperity in the digital landscape.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study explores the impact of Instagram videos on the expansion of female-owned businesses in Lagos. It applies Social Marketing Theory to gain insights into the effective utilisation of social media marketing. The findings suggest that Instagram videos can be highly beneficial for female entrepreneurs. They have the potential to increase engagement, enable direct communication, generate leads, drive traffic to websites, and promote follower growth and retention. These advantages are in line with previous research, highlighting the diverse influence of social media on the success of businesses.

Measuring engagement metrics, such as the number of likes, comments, and reposts, is crucial in determining audience interest and establishing a solid online presence. Direct communication channels, such as direct messaging and WhatsApp, offer a chance for personalised interaction, which can greatly improve customer relationships and satisfaction. Lead generation and conversion metrics, obtained from platforms such as Google My Business, provide concrete proof of marketing effectiveness, allowing businesses to accurately measure their return on investment.

Website traffic and testimonials provide additional evidence of the effectiveness of marketing efforts, demonstrating the ability to attract visitors and impact purchasing decisions through positive customer feedback. Ultimately, the growth and retention of followers play a vital role in determining a business' expanding reach and the development of a dedicated customer base. These factors are crucial for ensuring long-term growth and sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made for female-owned businesses in Lagos looking to leverage Instagram videos for growth:

High-Quality Content Creation: Female entrepreneurs should prioritise creating high-quality, engaging video content that resonates with their target audience. This includes product demonstrations, customer testimonials, behind-the-scenes footage, and tutorials.

Direct Communication Channels: Businesses should actively use Instagram's direct messaging feature and integrate it with other communication platforms like WhatsApp to provide personalised customer service, answer inquiries promptly, and build stronger relationships with their audience.

Leverage Metrics: Regularly monitoring engagement metrics, lead generation, conversion rates, website traffic, and follower growth is essential. This data will help businesses understand the effectiveness of their marketing strategies and make data-driven decisions for continuous improvement.

Influencer Partnerships: Collaborating with influencers who have a strong following on Instagram can amplify reach and credibility. Influencers can create authentic content that promotes the business to a broader audience, driving engagement and conversions.

Enhance Customer Feedback Mechanisms: Encouraging satisfied customers to leave testimonials and share their positive experiences on Instagram can boost credibility and influence potential customers. Businesses should actively seek and showcase customer feedback.

Continuous Engagement and Interaction: Maintaining an active presence on Instagram by regularly posting content, engaging with followers through comments and direct messages, and hosting interactive sessions like live videos and Q&A sessions can foster a loyal community.

Optimise Instagram Features: Businesses should make full use of Instagram's features, such as stories, IGTV, and shopping tags, to provide a seamless and engaging experience for their audience. These features can help showcase products more effectively and drive sales directly from the platform.

Conduct Regular Assessments: Periodic evaluation of marketing strategies through surveys and feedback from followers can provide insights into what is working and what needs improvement. This proactive approach allows businesses to stay aligned with customer preferences and market trends.

By implementing these recommendations, female-owned businesses in Lagos can maximise the potential of Instagram videos to drive engagement, growth, and long-term success. The study underscores the transformative power of social media marketing and provides a roadmap for leveraging Instagram as a strategic tool for entrepreneurial development.

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Sustainable Marketing Communication in the Digital Age of Advert Blocking: Implications for Telecommunication Service Providers in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The advent of digital technologies has revolutionised marketing communication, offering unprecedented opportunities for brands to engage with their target audience. As consumers increasingly seek to control their online experiences and mitigate interruptions, the adoption of advert-blocking techniques has surged, posing significant challenges for organisations, thereby inhibiting their sustainable marketing communication plans. This paper explores the implications of advert blocking on sustainable marketing communication practices. It examines the factors driving the adoption of ad-blocking and the strategies organisations can employ to navigate this phenomenon for marketing communication sustainability. Anchored on the Selectivity Factor and the Uses and Gratification theories, the study deployed a mixed-method approach, incorporating qualitative analysis of service providers and consumer perceptions as well as quantitative data on advert-blocking trends from a sample size of 163 internet users in South-West, Nigeria. Findings reveal the pervasive nature of intrusive advertising practices and the growing apprehensions surrounding privacy and data security, driving the widespread adoption of advert blocking. Moreover, analysis indicates a correlation between ad-blocking behavior and heightened levels of brand scepticism and avoidance tendencies among consumers. Based on findings, organizations are advised to adopt sustainable brand communication strategies, Alternative approaches such as other below-the-line channels, native advertising, branded content, and influencer marketing emerge as promising avenues for engaging audiences while circumventing advert-blocking barriers. The research work accentuates the necessity of adjusting marketing communication strategies to align with evolving target audiences' preferences, thereby promoting sustainability in the digital era's marketing landscape.

KEYWORDS

Advert-Blocking,
Digital Age,
Marketing
Communication,
Sustainable
Marketing
Communication

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable marketing communication in the digital age has important implications for service providers, particularly in relation to advert blocking/avoidance. The success or failure of companies in Nigeria depends on their ability to incorporate sustainable values into their marketing strategies, use digital technology to engage consumers, and implement innovative and successful marketing techniques in response to consumers' growing environmental and social consciousness. In the digital era, blocking or avoiding adverts has become a major worry for stakeholders, industry leaders, academics, and marketing communication specialists. Research by Farok (2017), Brinson and Britt (2021), Dinana (2022), Çelik, Mehmet, and Mehmet (2023) and others have shown that the exponential rise in digital marketing communication has caused consumers to be more exposed to commercials, which has caused them to block or ignore them. These days, internet users deliberately employ adblocking software to protect themselves from the incessant stream of advertisements that websites show. 94% of worldwide publishers surveyed by the Pagefair Adblock study in 2022 stated they were unable to exactly calculate the income loss brought on by adblocking.

In recent times, the term "sustainability" has gained popularity. Ideally, the goal of sustainable development is to satisfy current needs without endangering the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own (Blázquez and Peretti, (2012), Mahanayak, (2024)). Nonetheless, it is mistakenly associated with things that are only green or environmental. This perspective of sustainable development is deprived of much of its content and integral significance by such a reductionist vision because the subject has three complementary and interconnected aspects: sociocultural, environmental, and economic (Galarza, 2020 quoted by Lopez-Gutiérrez et al., 2022, Mahanayak, 2024)). Sustainability in relation to marketing communication requires companies to strategically plan their communication efforts for an enduring future in the committee of global brands, especially in the digital age. However, negative consumer dispositions such as blocking/avoiding adverts are an issue of concern to captains of industries. The implication of adblocking phenomena is that advertisers, publishers, marketing professionals and academics alike must make efforts to address the reason people block marketing communications promotional messages with a view to achieving better returns on marketing investments through consumer satisfaction.

Despite a significant increase in Western scholars' interest over the past couple of years in research on advert avoidance/installation of advert-blocking software and its impact on marketing communication, there is still limited empirical investigation of advert avoidance in developing countries like Nigeria. This has caused the body of knowledge on advert blocking/avoidance in the digital world to remain fragmented. It has become imperative therefore to devote research attention to the evolving adblocking adoption and the dynamic digital marketing communication environment in Nigeria.

OVERVIEW OF THE NIGERIAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS SUB-SECTOR

Nigeria has one of the largest telecommunication markets in Africa and the Middle East region, although most of the consumers rely more on mobile telephony for their communication needs, Okoyeuzu, Nkwor, Arize and Kalu (2023). At the moment, there are four major Global System for Mobile (GSM) service providers: MTN Nigeria, Airtel, Global Communication and 9 Mobile with subscriber figures of 58.3 million, 25.4 million, 24 million and 19.1 million respectively. Virtually all the major telecommunication service providers promote their services through a careful blend of integrated marketing communication tools, interactive marketing inclusive. Specifically, website services displays, search marketing, social media marketing, and online public relations are some of the tools that MTN, Airtel, Globalcom and 9mobile have deployed for their digital marketing promotions. Therefore, understanding consumer attitudes, behaviours, and the cognitive processes leading to advert blocking/avoidance is crucial for organisations to mitigate brand devaluation and wasted marketing communication expenditures for a sustainable business model.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In today's environmentally conscious world, businesses are increasingly realising the importance of integrating sustainability into their marketing communication strategies. One of the growing concerns is the avoidance behavioural disposition of the information and technologically empowered consumers to organisation's commercial messages on digital devices due to clutter.

The internet is flooded with lots of online advertisements. For example, a typical internet user is served up to 1707 banner advertisements per month, whereas the click-through rate is less than 0.1%. An average of 25- 34-year-old is exposed to 2094 banner adverts in a month (www.Marketing-trends-congress.com). The users of Internet through any digital device are constantly bombarded with advertisement, an individual on a day is exposed to 3000 to 20000 advertisements (www.Marketing-trends-congress.com). Again, the number of online video adverts has increased up to 205% since 2013. More than 5.3 trillion display advertisements were provided to the United States alone in 2013. In Nigeria, Internet users are exposed to digital promotions of over 3 billion mobile advert impressions in a month (Proshare Nigeria from Terragon insights cited in Digifacts 2013: 27)

Due to these, some customers now purposefully try to avoid digital marketing and advertising, costing genuine firms income and precious traffic. Literature has established that many times, consumers click on advert blocking and skip advert options on their desktop and mobile devices. Kotler and Keller (2013;498) affirm that technology and other factors have profoundly changed the way consumers process communications and even whether they choose to process them at all".

A recent study by Pagefair states that at the end of 2021, there were over 290 million monthly active users of desktop adblocking software globally, based on an analysis of over 10 billion pageviews across 9,453 sites. Although, desktop adblocking growth initially slowed in 2016-2018, then declined in 2018-2020; however, the last two years show a reversal of that trend. In addition, as of the first quarter of 2021, those that installed adblocker software on their mobile devices were 586M globally. Which tends to double the figure for desktop advert blockers. As of 2022,

only 8 percent of Nigerians have installed adblocker on their mobile devices, (Pagefair 2022) while other Nigerians use one manual adblocking/avoidance method or the other.

Many studies have been carried out on digital communication and achieving marketing goals through digital marketing generally. Few studies drew their conclusions focusing on the dynamics of adblocking in digital marketing communication. Besides, most of the studies on advert blocking/avoidance of digital promotions by consumers were carried out in other countries like United States, Poland, Germany, Japan, India, China and so on (PageFair 2022, Todri, 2020, Miroglio et al., 2018, Dinana, 2022, Jagan et al, 2018, Jayanthi, 2021, Rus-Arias et al., 2021, Franssen, Verlegh, Kirmani, and Smit (2015) and Li and Huag (2016).

In Nigeria, much of the literature on digital marketing communication and advertising focused on the use of digital marketing and consumer purchase behaviour to digital promotions. For example, Oluwasola (2020) researched into use of digital marketing communication for private higher education. Also, Wild Fusion and Lagos Business School (2016) studied digital channels' effectiveness for marketing. However, the studies of the implications of adblocking/advert avoidance on digital marketing initiatives of organisations by researchers in developing countries like Nigeria have been less than expected. This study intends to fill that gap in literature. The motivation for choosing to conduct research in this aspect of digital marketing communication is that it is an area commanding growing concern among industry players, marketing professionals and academics alike, especially in relation to sustainable marketing communication.

This work, therefore, intends to validate empirically, the impact of advert avoidance on the digital promotions of Nigerian firms with a focus on the telecommunication sector. This will enable the researcher to establish why consumers block or avoid digital promotions.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this research work is to evaluate the impact of advert blocking on the digital marketing strategies of corporate organisations in Nigeria.

Other specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate the advert blocking/avoidance method used by MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9Mobile subscribers in South-West, Nigeria;
2. Examine the factors driving the adoption of advert-blocking by MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9Mobile subscribers in South-West, Nigeria; and
3. Explore the strategies telecommunication organisations in Nigeria can employ to navigate advert blocking for marketing communication sustainability.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What advert blocking/avoidance method do MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9Mobile subscribers in South-West, Nigeria use?
2. What are the factors driving the adoption of advert-blocking by MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9Mobile subscribers in South-West, Nigeria?

3. What are the strategies telecommunication organisations in Nigeria can employ to navigate advert blocking for marketing communication sustainability?

MAPPING LITERATURE AND EXISTING STUDIES

Consumers Avoidance/Blocking Behavioral Dispositions to Digital Promotions

Marketing communication messages whether online or offline are meant to persuade consumers – by creating brand and product awareness and ultimately encouraging the purchase of such promoted products/services. Research has proven that consumers are, however, not always open to promotional messages as they often resist or avoid such messages. Clutter as stated earlier, can prompt undesired behaviours such as advert resistance, advert avoidance as well as attitudes contrary to those that the company's advertising campaign objectives hope to achieve. Zhao, Wang, Kalra, Vaks, Borcea & Chen (2017) citing Speck and Elliot (1997) said advert avoidances are 'all actions by media users that differentially reduce exposure to advert content. Although the use of adblocker is not so popular in Nigeria, in fact, statistics show that only 8% of Nigerians use adblocker while in the United States, 19%, United Kingdom, 18%, Ukraine 45%, India 15%, Croatia 55% and Poland 25%, use the adblocker to block adverts on their mobile and desktop devices (Page Fair (2022).

Today, almost everyone has an opinion about blocking/resisting or avoiding digital promotions whether as a layman or an experienced academic. Those against the blocking/avoidance of marketing communication messages online assert that commercial messages support organisations, content creators as well as publishers. This line of reasoning posits that avoiding/blocking commercial messages will prevent publishers and content creators from having financial gains since most revenues are received based on consumers' interaction with such messages (in the case of pay-per-impression). A marketer may be able to optimize digital advert spend, especially in a pay-per-click arrangement because those who block adverts would not click on the adverts.

On the other hand, those who support advert avoidance/ blocking (Manjoo (2015): Arment (2015) cited by Young (2016:16) maintain it reduces bandwidth consumption, increases internet user experience, eradicates accidental clicks as well as reduce reasonably the lack of privacy from the tracking and behavioral targeting in interactive marketing. More importantly, they reasoned that avoidance/blocking of commercial messages online will force publishers and advertisers to adapt to producing promotional messages that are less invasive of privacy and intrusive on user experience.

Besides, they argue that for consumers who are not interested in making purchases online, avoiding adverts can save time. This is because any promotional message that appears on a website consumes part of the user's attention budget since each advert enters the user's; field of view and as such may be consciously ignored (Cognitive avoidance) or dealt with in some other way. Shewan (2015) posits that while blocking or avoiding commercial messages has numerous benefits for consumers such as faster page load time and reduction in data usage, at the same time, he opines that avoiding adverts has a high negative effect on advertisers and websites owners who rely on promotional messages revenue to keep their sites running.

Past research – Dinana, 2022, Jagan et al, 2018, Jayanthi, 2021, Garimella et al, Rus-Arias et al., 2021 have established that consumers often develop negative attitudes towards marketing communication messages (whether online or offline) that they consider annoying, intrusive and irritating.), ultimately affecting advertisers' return on investment. For instance, Jayanthi et al studied the major reasons behind the ad-blocking practice of online consumers in Navi Mumbai, using crosstab and one-way ANOVA while Rus-Arias et al 2021 explored the sociological variables that prompt consumers to use ad-blockers for digital promotional messages. Res et al reiterate that Internet advertising can be very intrusive for many users adding that, all variables investigated, except marital status and education, influence users' opinions. In addition, Jagan et al (2018) in a study to understand the series of actions that lead to advert blocking, reported that advert avoidance and blocking are occasioned by irritation to intrusive digital advertising, which ultimately impacts brand image and valuation negatively.

Todri, 2020, Miroglio et al., 2018) reported that Ad-blockers significantly reduce online consumer spending by approximately \$14.2 billion annually, shifting purchases towards familiar brands and decreasing search activities across information channels, in contrast, Friik et al., 2021 in a lab experiment study on the impact of ad-blockers on product search and purchase behaviour established that users perceive advert blocking positively as it doesn't significantly affect search time or satisfaction with products, prices, or quality, indicating no compromise on consumer welfare for privacy and security benefits.

An earlier study by Malloy et al (2016) on Adblockers: Global Impact and Prevalence used a mixture of Proportion Estimation to investigate the impact and prevalence of adblocking software, the authors report that even though a user may have an ad blocker installed, they are still exposed to a significant number of adverts. Malloy et al study was however contrasted two years later in a study on the effect of advert blocking on website traffic and quality by Shiller et al., 2018). Shiller et al reported that users perceive advert blocking as reducing website traffic by 0.67% per additional percentage of advert-blocking software users, leading to decreased content quality and revenue loss thereby posing a threat to ad-supported web. The authors concluded that ad blocking poses a threat to the advert-supported web because it reduces visits, and remaining visitors blocking adverts do not generate revenue. A more recent study by Todri (2021) tends to align with Shiller et al's study. The study which focuses on the impact of adblockers on online consumer behaviour empirically analysed a consumer-level panel data set and found that adblockers have a significant impact on search and purchase behaviour.

This proves that the concepts of advert avoidance, advert blocking and resistance have been widely studied by diverse authors in relation to different medium. For example, resistance/avoidance behaviour towards television advertising has been called numerous names such as: zapping, flipping, zipping, flicking and so on. While in print medium, Rafian (2015) citing Dahleh and Edenius (2007) affirms that consumers simply avoid promotional messages by flipping past them. Speck and Elliot have been adjudged as leading authors in advert avoidance literature. Although they helped to lay a good foundation for the concept of avoidance, however, their study focuses on television, radio and print.

The different methods consumers adopt to avoid adverts reported by early researchers include avoiding television adverts by switching channels flipping through print adverts registering in Do-not-call lists to avoid telemarketing adverts and ignoring marketing emails. Rafian, (2015). Principally, past studies on avoidance/resistance disposition of consumers to promotional messages have identified different types of consumer dispositions which include physical avoidance, behavioural avoidance, affective avoidance, mechanical avoidance and cognitive avoidance (Speck and Elliot (1997) in Marieke (2015), Cho and Cheon (2004) and Seyedghorban et al (2016) cited by Zhao et al (2017).

Cognitive avoidance is the psychological defence mechanism that results in users intentionally ignoring promotional messages they are exposed to Prendergast, Tsang and Cheng (2014) cited by Li and Huang (2016: 948). In this case, consumers may engage in selective exposure and selective attention (the tendency to avoid or devote less attention to persuasive communications that are likely to contain messages that contradict existing beliefs and opinions (Fransen, Verlegh, Kirmani and Smit (2015).

According to Cognitive psychology researchers, when people are interrupted from an online task, they react negatively to the need to expend mental effort to process additional information. The interruption also interferes with the consumers' attention thereby limiting the amount of information that is received and understood (McCooy et al (2001), Johnson (2013). Consequently, a variety of techniques exist that allows consumers to avoid/resist marketing communication promotional messages from the time-tested ignoring of adverts or changing channels during television commercials to recent technological innovation such as; installation of advert blocker, manually blocking online adverts, skipping video adverts, filtering emails or subscribing to do not mail or do not track options.

Mechanical avoidance includes zapping, zipping or muting the television or radio when a commercial message is on. (Fransen et al, 2015). In relation to online media, advert blocker software usage belongs to the mechanical avoidance typology, Seyedghorban et al (2015) cited by Zhao et al (2017). Mechanical avoidance typology seems to be more empowered with technology. Advances in technology have consistently led to more sophisticated mechanical avoidance; just as remote control paved the way for resisting television adverts, so have spam filters emails and banner and pop-up adverts have paved the way for advert blockers.

In addition, physical avoidance entails a variety of strategies aimed at not seeing or hearing the advert: These include: leaving the room or skipping the advertising section in a newspaper or magazine and all modern methods of blocking online adverts such as filtering emails, do not track, call or email programmes (Johnson 2013 in Fransen et al (2015) while behavioural avoidance is consumers' avoidance/resistance actions to promotional messages other than lack of attention to the messages; Cho and Cheon (2004) such as scrolling over advert without paying attention, closing or intercepting online adverts.

The researcher is of the opinion that mechanical, behavioural and physical avoidance pinpointed by Fransen, Seyedghorban, Cho and Cheon and Johnson are basically expressing the same kind of avoidance but with different nomenclature. Much of the emphasis of this current research work is on mechanical/behavioural/physical avoidance. Affective avoidance on the other hand is

outright hatred for digital commercial messages which may in turn lead to a negative disposition towards the brands being promoted.

From the foregoing, one can infer that frustration of the internet user experience is one top reason that encapsulates all other reasons for consumer's avoidance/resistance behavioural disposition of customers to digital marketing communication promotional messages. Therefore, an intrusive message is a minus to an organization's marketing goals, since the consumer may not decode the message correctly (Smith, 2011:5). Invariably, advert avoidance/blocking constitutes a challenge that is costing companies billions on their returns on investment.



From the various findings by earlier researchers, we summarised their findings with the figure above.

Source: Author, 2024

Typical with most earlier studies on advert blocking, most documented evidences are based on the installation of advert blocking software; allowances have not been adequately made to investigate manual blocking/avoidance of adverts by users. To this end, this research work intends to assess through mixed research methods, the impact of avoidance behavioural disposition of consumers to the digital marketing strategies of selected telecommunication companies in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

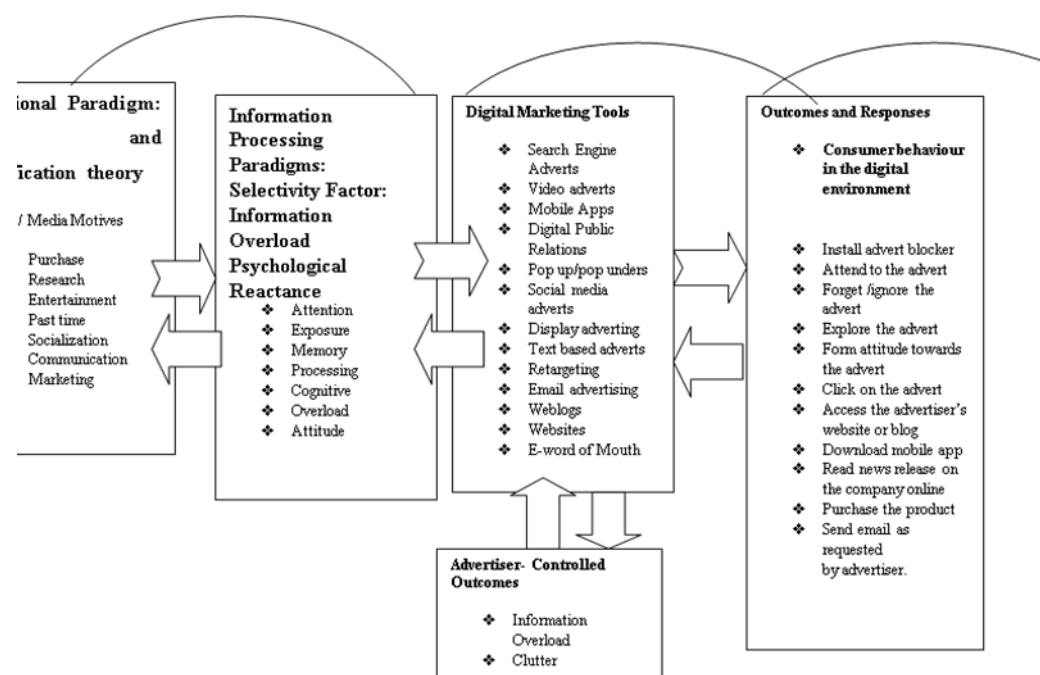


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Advert Avoidance/Blocking Towards Digital Marketing Communication.

Driven by the functional and information processing paradigm such as Uses and Gratification and Selectivity Factor theories, consumer behaviour in the digital age has also changed due to access to digital technology and exposure to a plethora of commercial messages from different organisations. This in turn influences consumers' disposition and reactions to such messages thus, making consumers either accept the marketing communication messages by attending to such messages (through purchase or taking specified desired actions) or to resist/avoid/block such messages altogether. All these interactions are of course shaped by the prevailing environmental issues for both the consumers and the companies involved.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-method approach, incorporating qualitative analysis of service providers and consumer perceptions as well as quantitative data on advert-blocking trends through an online survey from a sample size of 161 internet users and an interview of two industry experts in South West, Nigeria. Data from the online survey which was served to respondents in English language on WhatsApp was gathered through google form between January and April, 2024.

Multistage sampling procedure was used to draw the sample for the survey. In the first stage, the entire population was stratified into two, internet users and non-internet users. In the second stage, purposively, active adult users of the internet irrespective of their digital nativity (whether digital natives or digital migrants) were included in the sample that filled the online questionnaire. The researcher purposively used WhatsApp as the platform to disburse the online questionnaire to people because WhatsApp is used by almost all active internet users who can both read and write. Again, the platform is enabled by both the internet and a registered telecommunication line. This implies that nobody uses Whatsapp without being a

registered subscriber of at least, one of the telecommunication network providers. Two representatives of telecom service providers were also interviewed. Pre-established themes with narrative interpretation were developed from respondents in order to extract the linked thematic elements connected to blocking advertisements in the digital age. In order to address the study objectives, descriptive statistics; simple frequency counts and percentages were used to statistically evaluate the data and draw relevant conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The study empirically establishes why Nigerians in the digital age avoid/block adverts. The demographic distribution of the respondents, the index of people who avoid or block adverts in Nigeria as well as suggested strategies to ensure sustainability of marketing communication efforts of Nigeria firms. The data gathered is presented below.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information

Variable	Option	Percentage
Sex	Female	57.1
	Male	42.9
Age	18-29	68.3
	29-39	21.1
	40 and above	10.6
State	Lagos	26.4
	Ondo	12.1
	Oyo	12.2
	Ogun	8.0
	Osun	9.1
Education Level	Ekiti	32.2
	O'Level	47.2
	First Degree	34.2
	Others	18.6
Sampled Population		161

Source, Field Survey,2024

Demographics

Data represents diversity in the demographic constitution of respondents. In terms of sex, 57.1 % of females and 42.9% of males participated in the study. Youths and young adults (89.4%) dominated the surveyed respondents. Although respondents are all from the South West, the participants represent a varied population: 26.4% of them said Lagos was their permanent home, followed by 32.2% from Ekiti State, 12.2% from Oyo State, 12.1% from Ondo State, 8.1% from Ogun State, and 9.1% from Osun State. Demonstrating a noteworthy distribution of attendees from all six (6) South Western states in the nation.

Table 2: Advert Blocking/Avoidance Status and Method of Respondents

Variable	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision Rule	Remark
Advert Blocking/Avoidance Status	People Who Block /Avoid Adverts	129	80.1	0.80	0.39	≥ 0.5	Significant Majority
	People Who Do Not Block /Avoid Adverts	32	19.9	0.19	0.39	< 0.5	Significant Minority
Advert Blocking/Avoidance Method	Avoid/Block adverts manually	111	86.0	0.80	0.35	≥ 0.5	Significant Majority
	Install Advert Blocker	18	14.0	0.18	0.35	< 0.5	Significant Minority

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Surveyed participants are subscribers of MTN Telecommunications, Global Communication Nigeria, Airtel and 9 Mobile. Data presented in the table above reveal that most of the surveyed participants 129 (80.1%) disclosed they avoid adverts while 19.9% said they do not avoid /block advertisements. Out of the 129 that avoided or blocked adverts, (86%) did it mechanically/manually (closing, skipping) while only 14 % installed adblocking software. This could indicate that some people are generally not satisfied with internet adverts. The significant proportion of manual advert blockers suggests that internet adverts are actively managed. Besides, certain advertising may be so annoying or irrelevant to users that they need to be manually removed. The very low rate of ad-blocking software usage (14%) suggests a market for raising awareness and uptake of these technologies. This low number may point to perceived complexity, a lack of knowledge about these solutions, or a preference for managing advertisements on a case-by-case basis.

Table 3: Rationale for Blocking /Avoiding Advertisements

Variable	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision Rule	Remark
Intrusiveness/Obstruction of internet experience	43%	0.4	0.49	≥ 0.3	Significant
Too many adverts	12%	0.1	0.10	< 0.3	Moderately Significant
Data concerns	32%	0.3	0.46	≥ 0.3	Significant
Deceptive advertising / brand skepticism	11%	0.1	0.31	< 0.3	
Mismatch between adverts served and users' interests	2%	0.02	0.14	< 0.3	Insignificant

Source: Field Survey,2024

The findings reveal that the top two concerns among users are "Intrusiveness/Obstruction of internet experience" (43%) and "Data concerns" (32%). This suggests that users are primarily worried about advertisements interfering with their online experience and about their personal data being used without their permission. Response variation is moderate, as indicated by the standard deviations of 0.49 and 0.46, respectively. Significant worry is indicated by the mean values of 0.4 and 0.3 for these two categories, respectively, which are higher than the threshold of 0.3. In contrast, the concerns about "Too many adverts" (12%), "Deceptive advertising/brand scepticism" (11%), and "Mismatch between adverts served and users' interests" (2%) are less significant, with mean values below the threshold of 0.3. The results indicate that consumers are most worried about how advertisements may affect their online experience and personal information. Advertisers and online service providers should prioritize correcting these issues in order to improve the customer experience.

NAVIGATING ADVERT BLOCKING FOR MARKETING COMMUNICATION SUSTAINABILITY

This was an open-ended question that led to some interesting discoveries. For instance, advert blocking/avoidance seems to be linked to a decline in online sales as well as a bad perception of businesses. Conversely, using advert-blocking software seems to be associated with increased time spent on websites. Respondents were asked to recommend permissible strategies and digital marketing communication tools

that consumers find less nauseating. Common themes that emerged were quite eye-opening. The themes were grouped into subcategories. Specifically, respondents recommended interactive Short Messages (SMS), MMS, email marketing, influencers, proper targeting to avoid mismatch, websites, native advertising and reduced pop-up adverts on social media. Besides, industry experts added collaborative efforts and requisite regulation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The digital advertising ecosystem is seriously threatened by advert blocking/avoidance, which has an impact on sustainable marketing communication. Studies reveal that advert blockers lessen the amount of advertising, which lowers the quality of the material and ultimately harms consumers. Findings from research objective one established that respondents avoid/block advertisements online. The results show that a significant portion of respondents (80.1%) block or avoid adverts, while a smaller percentage (19.9%) do not. This suggests that there is a considerable need for advert-free experiences and that most users deliberately try to stay away from adverts. The mean value of 0.80 and the standard deviation of 0.39 indicate a high level of agreement among respondents, with most of them falling into the "block/avoid adverts" category. Research objective two yielded the following findings: 86.0 percent of respondents blocked or avoided adverts manually, whereas 14.0 percent used advert blocker software. The mean score of 0.86 and standard deviation of 0.35, which indicate a strong preference for, show that users are actively avoiding adverts, which points to a high preference for manual blocking and avoidance techniques.

Factor analysis was done for research objective three on why consumers block adverts and the finding was quite revealing. This involves identifying common patterns in responses and grouping them into different factors. The majority of respondents (80.1%) block/avoid adverts, indicating a significant preference for advert-free browsing experiences. The factors advanced are privacy concerns, clutter or too many adverts, inconsistency between the adverts that users see and their interests, data/internet speed concerns and scepticism towards brands. Research has indicated time and time again that people's key motivation to avoid or use ad-blocking software is the presence of obtrusive or bothersome advertisements. In line with earlier studies (Cho & As-, 2004; Frik et al., 2021; Respati & Irwansyah, 2020), our results show that 43% of respondents cite intrusive or annoying advertisements as the main reason for avoiding adverts or using advert-blocking software. This emphasizes the importance of redefining advert experiences to mitigate advert-blocking. In addition, the study's finding that 32% of respondents express concerns about privacy and data security as their main motivation for avoiding/blocking adverts corroborates Respati & Irwansyah, 2020 and emphasises the need for advertisers to address these concerns through transparent data practices and privacy-friendly advert formats. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the majority of our respondents were younger, with an average age of 18-39, indicating a considerable likelihood of using or avoiding ad-blocking software. This underscores the significance of targeting younger groups with non-intrusive ad experiences and is in line with previous research (Çelik et al., 2023; Rus-Arias et al., 2021, Abramek, Sołtysik-Piorunkiewicz and Strzelecki, 2019). In addition, empirical studies have consistently shown a rising trend in consumers

blocking /avoiding adverts via the adoption of advert-blocking software and manually ignoring or skipping adverts globally. As earlier stated, research by PageFair found that 820 Million global devices adopted ad-blockers in 2021 alone, indicating a significant and increasing trend. In fact, our study also found that consumers blocking/avoiding adverts are more likely to avoid websites with intrusive advertising, but they also tend to be more engaged with online content and spend more time on promotional messages that offer non-intrusive advertising experiences. The results of this study are consistent with the growing worldwide trend of individuals blocking advertisements, indicating that Nigeria is not an isolated case. In addition, one of the surveyed participants said: “Many people find adverts to be annoying and disruptive, especially when they are trying to focus on something else. Some people feel that adverts are intrusive and an invasion of their privacy. Some people are concerned about the security risks associated with adverts, as they can be used to distribute malware or phishing scams”. This contradicts experts’ opinion, who blamed improper targeting, unprofessional digital marketing communication service providers and misuse/non-usage of clapping as reasons why people block or avoid adverts altogether.

In addition, many themes were generated from the qualitative data gathered from surveyed respondents through the instrumentality of the open-ended question raised on marketing communication strategies that consumers can be comfortable with to avoid avoiding or blocking adverts. One theme that emerged conspicuous is that the Nigerian survey emphasised the importance of enhancing the user experience as a strategy for organisations to navigate advert blocking and sustain marketing communication. They highlighted the need for non-intrusive and relevant advertising that adds value to their online experience. One participant noted, "I appreciate when adverts are seamlessly integrated into the content, I'm viewing rather than disrupting my browsing experience." This finding resonates with research by (Abramek, Soltysik-Piorunkiewicz and Strzelecki, 2019) which emphasises the negative impact of intrusive advertising on user satisfaction and engagement. Their study suggests that prioritizing user experience leads to higher acceptance of online ads and can mitigate the effects of advert blocking.

Another interesting theme that emerged was the need to seek the consent or permission of users before serving them adverts. Respondents reiterated the need to grant permission before being exposed to promotional messages. To them, granting approval will militate avoiding blocking adverts on grounds of irrelevancy. For instance, one of the respondents proposed that: “They should signal before advertising their products or services”. Another respondent said: “Network service providers can always ask if the digital device user would love to view those adverts instead of just popping them up”. This result is consistent with studies by Wang and Tang (2018) and Brown, A., Jones, P., & Reffel, F. (2020), which advocated that open and honest communication increases credibility and trust among customers. According to their research, companies that place a high value on permission and openness are more likely to build strong bonds with their audience, which improves the durability of marketing communications.

Furthermore, in order to successfully reach consumers, respondents recommended that firms vary their marketing communication channels beyond conventional Internet advertising platforms. More specifically, respondents emphasized the value of investigating alternate channels including influencers, email

marketing, less pop-up advertisements on social media, interactive brief messaging, and interesting content on websites. "I'm more likely to notice brands that engage with me through multiple offline channels rather than bombarding me with adverts online," noted one participant. This finding is consistent with research by Abramek, Sołtysik-Piorunkiewicz and Strzelecki, 2019 which explores users' responses to advert blocking by diversifying marketing channels. According to their research, companies may continue to be visible and engage users even in the face of ad blocking by making investments in alternative channels. Besides, Pagefair 2022 reports that 82% of installed Adblock users globally prefer a lighter advert experience by default over receiving prompts to disable their adblocker or whitelist a site. Just as our findings reveal that respondents prefer reduced exposure to online advertisements stressing that they will prefer interactive Short Messages (SMS) instead and reduced pop-up adverts that will not impede their online journey.

Furthermore, collaboration among industry stakeholders emerged as a key strategy to address the widespread issue of advert avoidance/ blocking. One of the industry experts reiterated that: "There is need for collaboration and requisite regulation of practitioners involved in digital marketing communication campaign to sanitise the industry from quacks. This is a bid to ensure best practice and sustainability of the organisations in Nigeria"

While we acknowledge that the sampled respondents may not capture the behavioural dispositions of the entire population of Nigeria, the above findings offer valuable insights into the multifaceted strategies organisations employ to navigate ad blocking for marketing communication sustainability. These insights offer a thorough grasp of the changing digital advertising scene by correlating with the results of empirical research. They also emphasise the significance of flexible, user-centred, and cooperative methods in tackling modern marketing communication issues.

One fact that this study establishes is that most surveyed respondents physically and mechanically avoid adverts thus aligning with Fransen et al (2015) and Zhao et al (2017) that users avoid marketing communication messages cognitively, physically and mechanically. This empirically validates the fact that the installation of advert-blocking software is not so popular among Nigeria users and thus resonates with Pagefair 2022 adblock report that puts the percentage of Nigerians using adblocker software at 8% unlike the United States – 19%, United Kingdom – 18%, Ukraine – 45%, India – 15%, Croatia – 55% and Poland – 25%. These results imply that online service providers and advertisers should reconsider their advertising strategies in order to better suit user preferences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND THEORY

The findings of this study point to four major issues that underline the crucial question of why people block adverts and perhaps install ad-blocking software. These include data/security concerns, advert clutter, intrusiveness, and inconsistency between the adverts that users see and their interests. These results provide insights into the factors driving the adoption of advert-blocking by consumers in Nigeria and inform strategies for advertising agencies, organisations and policymakers to address consumer concerns and preferences regarding marketing communication in the digital age. Stakeholders may effectively adjust their plans by using data gathered to better understand how consumer behaviour is influenced by blocking or avoiding

advertisements. For example, to lessen the detrimental effects of ad blocking on consumers' perceptions of businesses, they could need to concentrate on alternate advertising channels or enhance the calibre and applicability of marketing communication messages on the internet.

CONCLUSION

Advert blocking/avoidance presents some obstacles to businesses' sustainable marketing communication efforts, particularly in the changing digital marketing communication environment. Some major themes that provide useful insights into practical tactics for overcoming advert blocking and advancing sustainable marketing communication in the digital age have arisen from the study. For example, enhancing user experience emerged as a paramount strategy, with consumers expressing a strong preference for non-intrusive and relevant advertising that adds value to their online interactions. To establish trust and credibility with customers, transparency and permission were emphasised, highlighting the significance of unambiguous communication and user control over ad settings. Furthermore, the importance of value-driven content and the expansion of marketing channels beyond conventional platforms highlighted the necessity for businesses to innovate and adapt in order to effectively reach audiences.

RECOMMENDATION

The results of objective one demonstrate the widespread use of invasive marketing communication strategies as well as the rising concerns about installing ad-blocking software and avoiding advertisements. According to the findings, the main concerns of consumers are related to the impact of ads on their online experience and personal data. In order to better accommodate consumer preferences, it is advised that internet service providers reevaluate their advertising strategies. The results of the study suggest that to engage audiences and get around obstacles to advert avoidance or blocking, organizations should implement alternative sustainable brand communication strategies. These include below-the-line channels, native advertising, fewer pop-up ads on digital devices, branded content, email marketing, and influencer marketing.

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Online Marketing and Advertising in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The study was guided by three research objectives and underpinned by two theories: Technological Determinism and Social Presence Theories. The study was tilted toward qualitative methodology while library research design was adopted in studying secondary data obtained from books, journals, and newspapers which were analysed. Among other findings, the study ascertained that the Internet and other communication technology channels are generally changing many aspects of consumers' buying behaviour all over the world, including Nigeria, to new goods and services and that the Internet and the World Wide Web have transformed how goods are bought and the way businesses are conducted. The study also found that despite the prospect of online marketing and advertising, unpredictable fixed line networks in Nigeria and unstable electricity supply, pose serious challenges to online marketing and advertising in Nigeria. The study concluded that these situations pose challenges to sustainable marketing communication in Nigeria. Given these findings, the study recommended among others that, the government and all the relevant stakeholders should improve internet infrastructure in Nigeria, constant electricity supply, and make data subscription affordable and that online advertising messages need to be compelling and engaging to be able to capture and retain audience attention, to achieve the desired result.

KEYWORDS

Advertising,
Challenges,
Internet,
Marketing,
Prospects

INTRODUCTION

Every human endeavour requires communication. Human beings and organisations (whether corporate or not), are strengthened by effective communication between and among the people involved. Oke, et al (2018) stated that the survival and development of any organisation depends largely on effective communication between such organisation and those that it transacts business with. In achieving this, organisations

adopt various strategies to receive, process and disseminate information to the publics. This can be seen as a promotion strategy which Nwogbo (2019) said has been recognised worldwide and is aimed at boosting products or services. Therefore, be it for Public Relations or marketing, promotion strategy is essential. In the view of Snyder and Aditham (2023), marketing involves every part of a plan by an organisation to make prospective consumers happy and satisfied. Marketing includes marketing research and advertising. Marketing research is an essential aspect of the marketing process which should be taken seriously. This is because the aim of marketing is to convince prospects that the product or service offered to them is worth patronising. Marketing, therefore, can also be seen as a communication process geared towards ensuring an exchange between a business organisation and its customers while advertising, according to Nwogbo (2019), is a well-known strategy and capable promotion approach used by organisations to reach large audience.

Advertising has gone digital as a result of the Internet. Stressing the effect of the Internet on marketing and advertising, Arens *et al* (2008) averred that in order to understand the effect of these interconnected networks of computer on marketing and advertising, we should imagine what life was like before radio and TV. The above-cited authors, by their submission, created imagery of the cumbersome nature of marketing and advertising in the time past while helping us to appreciate the contribution of the old media to marketing and advertising and then appreciate more, the impact of the Internet on marketing and advertising in the contemporary era. Obeta (2013) hinted that contemporary society is very digital-oriented, which has made people engage in several activities online. Referring to the Internet specifically, Hawkings *et al* (2004), in Olise (2006) stated that the Internet and other communication technology channels are generally changing many aspects of consumers' buying behaviour all over the world to new goods and services. Upholding this assertion, Ukonu (2022) posited that the dominant media technology of any age largely defines the characteristics of that age. Meanwhile, Seitell (2011) noted that the Internet and the World Wide Web have transformed the way work is done, how goods are bought and how business is conducted. Additionally, the Internet alone has radically transformed the way in which people can interact with each other. The latest designs from the Paris Fashion Show can be faxed to Hong Kong manufacturers within minutes of their display in France, and accurate copies of the clothing can be ready for sale in the United States within a very short time (Lustig and Koester, 2006, p.38).

The above effect is both on advertising and marketing which have migrated online. Online marketing also known as digital marketing, in the views of Alexander (2024), is about marketing efforts that take place on the internet, done through social media, email and search engines etc., to link with existing and future customers. This can also involve the use of text messages or multimedia. The need for online marketing in the 21st century cannot be overstressed because some customers, especially the youth, are mostly found online. Emphasising this point, Alexander (2024) asserted that driving sales cannot rely solely on offline marketing because there is a need to meet the audience where they are already spending their time online. Similarly, Olubodede and Nyam (2023) averred that in the post-lock era, the use social networking has increased. The popularity of such nuanced virtual interactions has inspired businesses to increasingly use WhatsApp status posts as a ready but nuanced marketing communication tool.

Amid online marketing is advertising which is the communication of information or messages that are intended to persuade the audience to patronise a product or service or to make the audience act in a way desired by the communicator. The

foregoing connotes that online marketing and online advertising are fundamental to the success of businesses in the 21st century. The strength of this assertion lies in the fact that in today's world, most customers and consumers are active online. As observed by Agbasimelo (2023), mobile technology offers advertisers and ever-growing global audience instantaneous access to their contextual information. It is believed that location-based, environmental and behavioural data are increasingly being utilised to apply novel targeting and creative strategies for the development of new forecasting models. This is based on the fact that there is pervasive dissemination and broad acceptance of mobile technology in the marketplace, as well as very promising opportunities for advertisers to engage with their customers in novel ways.

Amid the boundless opportunities which the Internet offers and its acceptance and application globally in almost every sphere of human endeavour, the situation in Nigeria is gloomy. This paper, therefore, is aimed at interrogating the situation with a view to providing a solution to the identified problem within the Nigerian situation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to examine the benefits and strategies of online marketing and advertising and the challenges surrounding this contemporary approach to online marketing communication, in Nigeria. Specifically, the objective of this study revolves around the need to:

1. Ascertain types of online marketing channels as well as their benefits;
2. Find out types of online advertising and strategies for effective online advertising; and
3. Investigate challenges surrounding online marketing and advertising in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model and Social Presence Theory. According to digitalcommons.unl.edu, the Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Davis in 1989, is one of the most popular research models to predict the use and acceptance of information systems and technology by individual users. Two factors are embedded in the theory which are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness is seen as the intending user's idiosyncratic probability that using a specific application system may enhance his or her work or life performance. Perceived ease of use, on the other hand, can be viewed as the degree to which the prospective user anticipates the target system to be free of effort. Explaining the theory, Morah and Uzochukwu note that the model suggests that some factors influence user's decisions about how and when they will use technologies when they are presented with new technology. These factors, according to Okoro and Omosotomhe (2017) are: Perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and attitude towards technology. David et al (1989) presented research to validate Davis's model. The research demonstrates that the link between the intention to use an information system and perceived usefulness is stronger than perceived ease of use.

The relevance of the theory to this work lies in the fact that awareness and usage of the Internet or the new media by the Nigerian populace, must start from their acceptance of the innovation or new technology before it can be used by them. Furthermore, the envisaged benefits of using the new media by the masses must account for its acceptance. Equally important is the availability and comfort that comes from the usage of the Internet. It is a known fact that the Internet is ubiquitous.

This work is also underpinned by Social Presence Theory. Asak and Ohiagu (2013) averred that the theory was established in 1976 by Short, Williams and Christie. The theory stresses the importance of awareness of the masses. Udenze et al (2020) observed that following the expansion in internet infrastructures, human beings are getting more opportunities to be aware of their environment. Explaining the tenets of the theory, Asak and Ohiagu are of the view that the idea is that a medium's social effects are principally caused by the degree of social presence which it affords its users. Social presence entails a communicator's sense of awareness of the presence of someone in the communication process. This re-enforces the transactional perspective of communication which recognises the fact that for every communication to take place there must be at least two persons whose frame of reference or field of experience must be taken into consideration. Also implicit in this theory is the social nature of the contemporary audience which is facilitated by the new media. Consequently, the new media establish social presence of the audience whose nuances must be put into consideration by online marketers and advertisers. This explains why the theory is also appropriate for this study, which was carried out between March and June 2024.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted library research design. Consequently, secondary data obtained from journals (both soft copies and hard copies), books and newspapers, were studied and analysed. Therefore, the study was tilted toward qualitative research approach in finding solutions to the identified problems which prompted the research. As a result, it adopted Critical Discourse Analysis in discussing the findings obtained from the secondary data. When adopted as a methodology, critical discourse analysis sees validation in the notion that what is presented in a text rests upon unsaid assumptions thus raising a challenge for textually based researchers to identify that which is assumed (Fairclough, 2003, in Amadi, 2015, p.4).

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING IN NIGERIA

One of the major challenges of online marketing and advertising in Nigeria is the inability of advertisers or content creators to create content that can capture and retain audience attention. Karanjia (2024) posited that creating a unique and new content which can make the audience stay glued to a message is a huge task in the era of digital marketing. Digital marketing and advertising messages may reach many people but if the message is not compelling and engaging, people may not read it let alone recall it. With the myriad of messages online people in most cases choose to pay attention to messages that are important to them. People tend to do a lot of selective exposure, selective attention and selective retention when online. So, for people to expose themselves to digital advertising and marketing messages, such message has to be compelling and engaging.

Another issue with online advertising and marketing is the inability of some target audience to read or those who may not understand the new technology. This means that Nigerians who are not well educated or lack digital literacy may find it difficult to read online advertising messages on their mobile device. In the opinion of Idoko (2023), low level of digital literacy among the target audience is a challenge to digital advertising and marketing. In Nigeria, mostly, in the rural areas, many people have little or no understanding of digital technologies and online platforms. Such people find it hard to engage with online advertising because they lack the required skills and knowledge that will carry them along.

Language and culture are another challenge to online marketing and advertising. In some parts of Nigeria, some citizens cannot communicate in the English Language. This, according to Idoko (2024) poses a challenge to advertisers when it comes to creating effective advertising campaigns. In a country with many ethnic groups, it is difficult to record complete success when advertising messages are disseminated in one language.

Consumer-centric marketing is another challenge of online marketing and advertising in Nigeria. Following the introduction of the new media, messages are becoming more personalised. This means that consumers expect to get personalised messages. Karanjia (2024) argued that marketers have adopted a consumer-centric approach and its anticipation is constantly evolving. This can be very difficult for a company that does not use Artificial Intelligence and data analytics to send out personalised messages.

Inadequate or poor internet facility is another challenge of online marketing and advertising in Nigeria. Idoko (2024) referred to this as limited internet access and connectivity issues. In Nigeria, there are places where people may have little or no internet service. People in such places may not be reached by online marketing and advertising. The foregoing connotes that the inadequacy of reliable internet infrastructure poses a challenge to the reach and effectiveness of online marketing and advertising in Nigeria. This position is echoed in Abimbola (2023) who noted that internet configuration in Nigeria is in short supply, therefore making it difficult for companies to deliver quality products and services through online advertising.

TYPES OF DIGITAL MARKETING CHANNELS AND BENEFITS OF ONLINE MARKETING

James (2024) identified the following types of online or digital marketing channels:

Website Marketing: This occurs when companies adopt their own website for digital marketing undertakings. The website shows the company's product in a clear and striking way.

Pay-Per-Click Advertising: This type of online advertising allows advertisers to reach audience on new and other websites as well as other digital platforms through paid advertisement. This can be seen on different social media platforms, and it is shown to people searching for terms related to a company's product or service.

Content Marketing: The purpose of content marketing is to reach out to prospective customers through content that is of interest to them. Such content may come in the form of written words like text, video and other visuals. The contents are usually published on a company's website and then promoted through the new media.

Email Marketing: It is one of the most effective channels of online marketing. Nonetheless, many individuals associate email marketing with spam and treat the message accordingly.

Social Media Marketing: Building brand awareness is the main purpose of social media marketing campaigns and establishes trust and benefit of using or identifying with such brands.

Affiliate Marketing: This type of marketing happens when social media influencers and individuals are used to promote a company's product or service. Their endorsement of such product or service comes with a fee. Companies like Amazon have affiliate programmes that pay out millions to individuals who help sell their products.

Video Marketing: Video marketing is carried out on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. Most internet users regularly visit such sites to learn how to do something before making a decision about what to purchase. Video marketing can achieve more success when companies integrate video with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Text Messages: This occurs when companies use text messages, popularly known as SMS or short messaging service, to send information about the latest products and promotions, to prospective customers.

One of the merits of online marketing is that it gives a product or brand worldwide visibility. Explaining this strategy, Frederiksen (2023) noted that online marketing is not tied to geography or time zones. This means that online marketing is boundless amid globalisation.

Online marketing is cost-effective when compared to the cost of doing marketing using traditional media. With online marketing business owners do not need to worry themselves about travel costs because materials can be distributed from the comfort of someone's bedroom.

TYPES OF ONLINE ADVERTISING AND STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE ONLINE ADVERTISING

There is a need to know the types of online advertising as this may help give more insight into online advertising. This will also help business owners know the kind of online advertising that may be suitable for their goods or services. In the contemporary world, business organisations cannot afford not to do their marketing and advertising activities online. This is because technology has altered the way human communication takes place today. Equally important is also the fact that the world is becoming more interconnected as a result of technology. As stated by Udenze et al (2020), advances in internet availability have neutralised the previous geographical distance that constituted a considerable obstacle in communication.

(I) **Product Listing Advertising:** Also known as shopping advertising, this refers to advertising messages that appear on search engines. They are pay-per-click advertisements, meaning that someone has to pay for the number of clicks he/she gets on the advertisement and not the number of times it is viewed. One of the advantages of this type of advertisement is that it can drive traffic to a relatively new site.

(ii) **Banner Advertising:** This type of advertising, according to BowNow (2021) is also known as display advertising. It allows pre-determined space on a website to be purchased online for the purpose of placing advertising messages.

(iii) **Demand-side Platforms:** This is a device that advertisers or marketers use to bid for Ad space in real-time which allows video Ads to be purchased from a single marketplace. With this, the advertiser does not need Ad inventory from different vendors, rather the advertiser can buy Ads from multiple channels all in one place.

(iv) **Search Engine Marketing (SEM):** This is the type of advertising that helps to enhance the visibility of advertisers' websites on the search engine result pages. This can happen when an advertiser pays to appear on search engines such as Google. Search Engine Marketing (SEM), which, according to Tidal Marketing (nd) is different from Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). While SEO deals with the art of appearing as high as possible within the search engines without having to pay for it, SEM on the other hand, is often called PPC (pay-per-click).

(1) **Choosing the Right Advertising Platform** is one way to achieve success in online advertising. The advertiser needs to know the advertising platform that can yield the most results for his goods, products or services. In order to choose the right platform, it is advisable that one identifies the objectives, and also knows who the target audience are. This will help you to choose the most appropriate platforms to advertise your brand. Single Grain (2024) identifies the following platforms and how they work:

Google Ads: Google is believed to be the most preferred search engine. Google Ads allows advertisers to place their advertisements on Google search result pages and other search partner websites. Google advertising is good for remarketing and for native advertisements. It is believed that more than 80% of searchers online still use Google (Single Grain 2024). For an advertiser who needs to create more awareness for his brand and attract potential customers, Google Ads may come in handy.

YouTube Ads: When an advertiser decides to do a video advertisement the best channel to use is YouTube. This is because YouTube Ads drive traffic and conversation rates. Commanding an average rate of 12% from video Ads, it is one of the best online advertising channels for video promotions (Single Grain 2024). Advertisers whose advertising message may require demonstrating how a product is used may need YouTube Ads.

Facebook Ads –Facebook is believed to be one of the largest social media platforms in the world. Facebook Ads can be used particularly to target audiences based on demographic characteristics, interests and behaviours. This type of Ads can also be used to generate buzz and drive engagement around a brand. An advertiser who intends to target audience based on interest, behaviour and demographic characteristics can use Facebook Ads to achieve his objective.

Instagram Ads: Instagram Ads are not too different from Facebook Ads. The major difference is that Instagram Ads are meant for Instagram and can best be used to target younger audiences and are usually laden with image advertisements.

LinkedIn Ads: An advertiser who intends to direct his message to people in a particular profession or industry can achieve greater results using LinkedIn. This type of advertisement, according to Single Grain (2024) allows you to target specific job titles, industries and company sizes

Amazon Ads: Amazon Ads are a kind of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. Pay-per-click means that the advertiser only pays when customers or potential customers click on their Ads. Amazon Ads allows businesses to promote their products, on Amazon search pages. Amazon Ads, according to Single Grain (2024), are ideal when an advertiser is trying to sell tangible products on the platform. More than 50% of searches on products start on Amazon rather than Google. Equally important is the fact that Amazon is also the third most popular platform behind Google and Facebook (Web FX 2021)

(2) **Creating Compelling Advertising Copy:** Being able to come up with a message that can grab your audience's attention is a fundamental advertising strategy that must not be toiled with. This means that your message should be compelling enough to allow your audience to engage with the brand. Note that even if you can choose the right channel but your message is not compelling enough, you may not achieve the desired result. To be able to come up with a compelling message your Advertising Copy, according to Single Grain (2024) must be clear, concise and relevant to the

target audiences. It should highlight the benefit of the product or service or the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and a strong call to action.

(3) **Use High-Quality Images and Videos:** The images and videos that should be used are to be of high quality. In addition, they should be appealing and able to capture the audience's attention. Most advertising platforms, according to Single Grain (2024) have a minimum resolution requirement of 180×180 pixels for 11 scaled images. It varies with different image sizes. Advertisers must therefore ensure that their images and videos meet the requirements of the various sizes and platforms

(4) **Use Bold Contrasts and Engaging Typography:** Advertisers should use contrasting colours and typography that are engaging. This can make your ads stand out and, at the same time, capture the attention of the viewers.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS/CONCLUSION

In the 21st century advertisers and marketers cannot afford not to use online marketing and advertising. This study concludes that there are several types of online marketing which include but not limited to website marketing, pay-per-click advertising, content marketing, email marketing, social media marketing, affiliate marketing and video marketing. This finding has answered research objective one which was to ascertain types of online marketing channels as well as their benefits. Furthermore, the study ascertained that there is a strong nexus between online marketing and online advertising, hence found the following types of online advertising: product listing advertising, banner advertising, demand-side platforms and search engine marketing. Beyond these advertising types, there are also platforms which help to strengthen them. These could be regarded as strategies and include the following google ads, YouTube ads, Facebook ads, Instagram ads, LinkedIn ads, and Amazon ads. The finding has equally provided answers to research objective two which was to unravel types of online advertising and strategies for effective online advertising.

Despite the prospects of online marketing and advertising in Nigeria, challenges abound. Some of the issues, according findings of this study, include the inability of advertisers or content creators to create content that can capture and retain audience attention, the incapability of some target audience to read or those who may not understand the new technology, language and culture is another challenge to online marketing and advertising and inadequate or poor internet facility which is another challenge of online marketing and advertising in Nigeria. This finding has provided answers to research objective three which sought to investigate challenges surrounding online marketing and advertising in Nigeria. They have also shown the relevance of the two theories upon which the study was anchored. These findings agree with the submission by Danaan (2006) that constant electric power outages in less developed countries pose a serious threat to the survival of ICT. The finding is also in tune with Reuben's (2019) opinion that computer literacy is lacking among most people in rural areas, as most of them cannot operate the computer and also lack knowledge about the use of smartphones and their software which enable internet-based communication to take place. Amid these challenges, sustainable marketing communication will be a flop. Sustainable marketing communication implies that all the principles, configuration and environment within which marketing communication takes place, must be enhanced and safeguarded to allow for future use and/or operation. Without constant electricity supply, affordable data and good internet service etc., sustainable marketing communication will be an illusion.

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) To achieve the desired result, online advertising messages need to be compelling and engaging to be able to capture and retain audience attention, as such the message should be brief, concise and relevant to the audience
- (2) There is a need for the government and all the relevant stakeholders to improve on internet infrastructure in Nigeria, constant electricity supply and also make data subscription affordable.
- (3) For online advertising messages to achieve bigger success in Nigeria, the advertiser must take into consideration the language and the culture of the online audience.

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