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.

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. Perceive 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 that 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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