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Sustainable Marketing Communication Practices in Nigeria's Digital Landscape: Emerging Trends and Current Issues

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ABSTRACT

The 21st-century digital era has introduced innovative AI-driven technologies that have revolutionised the marketing communication practice, making communication with the consumer faster, easier and more personalised. Hence, it has become increasingly important to explore how Nigerian businesses can engage in sustainable marketing communication practices to stimulate consumers' interest and purchase of goods and services, in this era of rapidly evolving technologies. Using the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and Medium theories, this paper adopts a qualitative case study method with four Nigerian organisations, to explore their strategies for implementing ethical and sustainable marketing communication practices in their marketing operations. Secondary data was collected and analysed thematically to provide a deeper understanding of the emerging trends and current issues that are shaping marketing communication practices in Nigeria. The findings provide valuable insights for marketers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to develop effective strategies which could promote ethical and sustainable marketing practices.

KEYWORDS

Artificial Intelligence, Digital Marketing, Digital Technology, Marketing Communication, Social Construction of Technology

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has introduced massive technological innovations that have impacted all spheres of life, including marketing and marketing communication. These innovations are founded upon digital technologies and, subsequently, the birth of the Internet in the Third

Industrial Revolution, enabling faster, wider, and cheaper avenues for brands to reach their consumers. Essentially, digital marketing communication has aggressively pushed traditional marketing communication into the background by facilitating rapid dissemination of information and real-time interaction with consumers (Idrysheva et al., 2019). This has led to increased competitiveness for businesses within the markets they serve (Latyshev et al., 2023). Similarly, Nesterenko et al. (2023) noted that digital marketing communication has led to a shift towards more specialised marketing strategies, enhanced customer engagement, and created new opportunities for businesses.

Sustainability in digital marketing involves utilising digital tools such as digital advertising, search optimisation, and social media platforms to connect and interact with users, while providing credibility and motivating them to complete a purchase (Izakova et al., 2021; Carlsson and Vikingsson, 2022). According to Sandi (2023), sustainable marketing communications should communicate messages that align with consumers' values and choices over time, while being engaging in their content. They should exhibit authenticity, inclusivity, be socially responsible and mindful of the impact that their business activities have on the environment. This builds trust and loyalty with customers. Basically, sustainable marketing communication in the digital era is a continuous process aimed at building consumer loyalty, increasing competitiveness and fostering a positive brand image while at the same time, reducing environmental impacts, marketing and promotion costs (Burrell et al., 2021).

As the digital landscape evolves, it has become increasingly necessary for Nigerian businesses to adopt sustainable marketing communication strategies to thrive. However, they often face challenges such as poor ICT infrastructure, unstable and expensive Internet access, as well as insufficient funds to procure innovative IT equipment (Horsfall, 2020). Some other challenges, as noted by Reuben et al. (2024), include a lack of digital literacy skills among target audiences, especially in rural areas, and the diverse languages and ethnicities in Nigeria which makes it challenging to create marketing communication messages in one language and insufficient knowledge of AI tools to create personalised consumer messages.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With changing consumer needs and rapid technological evolutions, marketing communication channels have continued to evolve, necessitating the need for organisations to be creative in their use of digital tools to communicate their products and service offerings to their target consumers. It has led to a shift towards more specialised marketing strategies that enhance customer engagement and improve brand loyalty (Nesterenko et al., 2023). Most Nigerian consumers are not Internet savvy, and the diverse ethnicities necessitate that marketing communication messages include individual preferences (Reuben et al., 2024) to build trust, engagement and profitability for businesses. With these unique demands of Nigerian consumers, it has therefore become necessary for organisations to explore the inclusive marketing

communication practices that resonate with Nigerian consumers while giving them a competitive advantage in the nation's business environment. Similarly, there have been recent calls for sustainable marketing communication practices globally (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012; Sandi, 2023), which are devoid of bias and resonate with diverse audiences.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The broader aim of this paper is to determine the sustainable marketing communication practices in Nigeria's digital landscape. More specific objectives include:

- To assess the current issues that are shaping digital marketing communication practices in Nigeria
- To ascertain the emerging trends in digital marketing communication practices in Nigeria
- To determine the ethical strategies that will promote responsible and sustainable digital marketing communication practices in Nigeria

This paper provides valuable insights for academics, digital marketers and government regulators on the ethical and sustainable marketing communication strategies that are best suited to the peculiar Nigerian environment, as well as the Nigerian consumer. Subsequent sections of this paper present a brief review of literature, followed by case studies of the marketing communication practices adopted by four Nigerian organisations. It ends with a conclusion and recommendations for both academics and practitioners in the marketing and marketing communication discipline.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical underpinnings of this paper are the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and Medium theories. The SCOT was proposed by Pinch and Bijker (1987) and posits that there exist social structures that influence technology development. The SCOT approach to technology development views technology as a social construct driven by a consensus between social groups and technology developers, with conflicts and flexibilities arising among them (Lee, 2023). It is also understood as how the society shapes the use of technology within certain cultural contexts. According to Kang & Dong (2023), SCOT argues that technology developments are not predetermined by scientific principles alone, but also by the influences of social factors like public health, social and cultural norms, causing delayed and limited evolution in certain societies, despite advances.

The Medium theory was proposed by Marshall McLuhan in 1964 and has been applied in media psychology and communication studies. It proposes that the type of medium used in a communication is just as important as the message transmitted by the medium. This is because it shapes the user's perception of the message as well as societal patterns. Essentially, medium theory considers the content, the medium and the cultural environment where the media is being used (McLuhan, 2017).

There have been several definitions of marketing by notable bodies and institutions. The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM, 2023) in the UK defines marketing as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying consumers properly. Similarly, according to Philip Kotler, popularly called the *father of modern marketing*, marketing is the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value that meets the needs of a target market to make a profit (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). There are four major elements of a marketing strategy (also called the 4Ps of marketing), which are Product, Price, Place and Promotion (Jarek and Mazurek, 2019). The 'Promotion' strategy of marketing is also referred to as Marketing communication and executed as an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy. The IMC campaign is defined as a strategic approach to brand promotion that involves coordinating and integrating different communication tools such that the message delivered is consistent, clear and resonates with the brand's target audience (Belch and Belch, 2018).

Marketing communication deals with how firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind their customers (directly and indirectly) about the products and brands they sell. The communication tools that make up an IMC strategy include Advertising, Sales Promotion, Direct Marketing, Personal Selling and Public Relations (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010; Belch and Belch, 2018; Kotler et al., 2019). Formerly, these promotional activities were carried out either manually or via flat, analogue or electronic mediums (Gelashvili, 2021). With the advent of digital technologies, marketing communication strategies have evolved into online advertising, blogs, social media and influencer marketing (Millagala and Gunasinghe, 2024), driven by digital platforms such as email, websites, mobile and wearables. Digital technologies have transformed marketing communications by allowing for wider, rapid dissemination of information and real-time, targeted, cost-effective interaction with consumers, which has increased competitiveness (Mulhern, 2009; Latyshev et al., 2023).

TRENDS AND CURRENT ISSUES IN DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION

The increasingly lower cost of smartphones has enhanced communication and interaction on the Internet, making it easier for digital marketers to carry out marketing communication activities via social networking sites and reach consumers anywhere, anytime (Sandi, 2023). According to Statista (2024), there are approximately 6.9BN smartphone subscriptions worldwide, making up about 85% of the world's population, which stands at approximately 8BN. Nigeria recorded about 224M active mobile subscribers as at December 2023 (NCC, 2024). This trend has enhanced mobile marketing efforts, making them more targeted using tools like Quick Response (QR) codes (Dushinski, 2009) on digital platforms for advertisements and sales promotions.

The ubiquity and ease of using smartphones for accessing social media platforms have directly influenced their utilisation as a tool for sustainable marketing communication practices (Sharmin et al., 2021). Statista reported that there were approximately 65M social media users in

Nigeria at the end of 2023 (Statista, 2023d), which is the highest number in Africa. This creates huge opportunities for Nigerian organisations to communicate with a vast and diverse group of consumers. According to Adedeji et al. (2018), social media tools in conjunction with mobile marketing, are the most widely used by Nigerian organisations and digital marketers to promote their goods and services.

Email marketing is the oldest and most cost-effective way of reaching consumers to inform them about the products and services of an organisation. It is a targeted form of marketing communication that can also be used to maintain long-term customer engagements and increase brand awareness in small, regular doses (Sayeed, 2023). According to Chahar & Chawla (2016), SEO marketing entails organically increasing the visibility of a brand, a product or a service in the unpaid results on the search engine result page. It is also a targeted form of marketing communication that pulls consumers with a defined need. Another targeted marketing communication strategy commonly used in the digital era is location-based mobile marketing to reach consumers within proximity of the business and send them promotional messages. It is done using either Bluetooth beacons or the GPS device on consumers' smartphones (Kim, 2020; Bernritter et al., 2021). The beacon technology is, however, not yet in use in Nigeria and is sparsely used in global retailing (Kim, 2020).

Notable scholars have argued that with the constantly evolving digital era, marketing communication campaigns need to be transparent, authentic, socially and environmentally responsible, in order to be sustainable in the coming years (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2020; Yang & Battocchio, 2020; Sandi, 2023). Transparency and clarity of goals in a brand's communication increase consumers' perceptions of the brand's authenticity, which positively impacts their attitude, trust, behavioural intention towards purchasing the product or service and brand loyalty (Yang & Battocchio, 2020; Sandi, 2023). Sandi (2023) further argued that marketing communication activities should be inclusive of consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, genders and ages, to avoid stereotypes and discrimination in their communication. This is particularly important in a country like Nigeria, with about 371 tribes.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION

In the 21st-century digital age, innovation has become a necessity for brands, not a luxury. The integration of AI in marketing communication activities has caused a huge shift in the way marketers aim to stay competitive in enlightening consumers about their products and services. Marketers are increasingly relying on AI to design marketing campaigns, as well as the use of AI-generated content to communicate their offerings to consumers, thus creating a competitive edge over non-AI content marketers. AI integration has enabled marketing activities to become more personalised and predictive of consumers' online behaviour, using tracking cookies to study their preferences on social media, and offering them products and services that suit their needs (Kumar et al., 2019; Capatina et al., 2020). Some AI-driven marketing tools include predictive

algorithms, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), AI-driven chatbots and Generative AI Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Gemini and CoPilot. LLMs are capable of generating highly tailored advertising copy and designs quickly and easily, while VR tools give customers an immersive 3D experience of a product or service, thereby facilitating the purchase process (Odoh, 2024). Chatbots are used to provide 24/7 online responses to customer queries about products and services, either on websites, blogs or social media platforms. However, their unsatisfactory responses to consumer queries have reduced their acceptance amongst Nigerian consumers (Abdulquari et al., 2021).

Digital advertisers are increasingly using techniques such as text mining and behavioural data to monitor the user preferences, search and browsing history of consumers on their websites and social media platforms. This information sends consumers targeted digital advertisements on these platforms (Pandey, 2021). The problem with this strategy is that it is mostly done without users' consent. Social media platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn have enabled organisations and digital marketers to have interactive conversations with consumers during marketing communication activities, increase awareness, create a positive brand image and build lasting customer relationships (Sandi, 2023).

Popular social media platform, TikTok, introduced AI-powered innovations driven by predictive algorithms that allow advertisers greater control over the visibility of their advertisements in users' 'For You' feeds. This new feature has enabled a Category Exclusion such that advertisers can control the alignment of their content to others like gambling and violent video games, which may not be related to their brand's philosophy and positioning, helping brands maintain a consistent and impactful advertising message (TikTok, 2024). Advertising practices that promote safety and suitability to the brand's image can be described as ethical and sustainable.

TikTok is currently upgrading its algorithms to allow businesses deploy virtual influencers (akin to AI clones or deepfake avatars) on its app, who will promote and sell the business' products and services via videos and live streams on the app. This feature is already active on the Chinese version of TikTok and is positioned as a cost-effective means of marketing. However, there are ethical concerns regarding the deployment of deepfake avatars, which have affected the receptiveness of this innovation by Western audiences (Hutchinson, 2024).

CHALLENGES

There are several challenges facing digital marketing in Nigeria. According to Reuben et al. (2024), the major ones include inadequate Internet Infrastructure, high interconnectivity costs, insufficient knowledge of AI tools, diverse languages and ethnicities, as well as ethical issues of data privacy. Inadequate, unreliable and costly interconnectivity in remote parts of Nigeria limits the reach of marketing communication messages to those regions. Developing LLMs for predictive targeting is a scarce programming skill in Nigeria (Odoh, 2024). Furthermore, marketing communication messages that are developed in English may

not be sustainable because of the mass illiteracy rate in Nigeria (Reuben et al., 2024).

The quest to attract the scarce attention of digital consumers with valuable offerings has led brands to engage in unethical practices that violate consumers' privacy so that they can gain unauthorised access to their data for targeted marketing. Predictive algorithms monitor consumers' online behaviour and conversations in order to show them targeted advertisements (Abdulquadri et al., 2021). These marketing communication practices are unsustainable because they are not socially desirable (Sandi, 2023), and consumers eventually lose trust in the brands' messages and product offerings.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a within-case study method to establish inferences in accordance with in-case patterns, to arrive at conclusions about sustainable marketing communication practices in Nigeria (Pandey, 2021). A 4-part case study of leading players in Nigeria's banking and telecoms sectors was undertaken using secondary data to determine their marketing communication strategies and the sustainability of these practices in contemporary times. The selected banks have been in existence for over 35 years with branches outside Nigeria in the UK, US, France, UAE and several African countries, while the telecommunications companies have existed for over 20 years in Nigeria. These case studies are discussed in the following section below.

Access Bank

Access Bank, one of Nigeria's leading banks, with total assets of approximately US\$28.8 billion as of March 2022 (Statista, 2023a), operates over 700 branches and service points, leveraging digital marketing strategies to promote sustainability and ethical communication. Its branches span three continents and 18 nations, with over 63 million customers and 28,000 employees in Nigeria alone. It has subsidiaries in African countries, the UK, UAE, China, France, Lebanon, and India (Access Bank, 2021).

Access Bank Nigeria uses a variety of digital marketing channels in its marketing communication strategy to communicate with its employees, customers, and other stakeholders. This includes their website which, according to Similarweb (2024a), receives significant traffic, estimated at around 2.5 million visits per month. By June 2024, the bank's website had a global ranking of 57,373 and 387 in Nigeria. Notably, the bank's website is the fifth most visited in Nigeria. The bank also uses email marketing, mobile marketing (SMSs, Access Bank mobile app, QR codes), pay-per-click (PPC) display advertising and social media marketing. Access Bank uses these tools to promote financial literacy, company-sponsored events, address complaints, show appreciation to customers, raise awareness about fraud prevention, and conduct surveys and polls. Customers can make complaints, report service interruptions, and manage relationships via these digital channels (Access Bank, 2021).

Access Bank endeavours to be transparent, inclusive, socially and environmentally responsible and ethical in its marketing communication practices, which has enhanced the sustainability of its campaigns. Their inclusive communication spans from children (early savers account) to the elderly (Access evergreen account), to the use of both traditional and digital tools to reach their customers in rural and urban areas, respectively. Access WhatsApp banking offers banking services and improves banking relations with customers in rural areas with limited digital access (Famuyiwa, 2018). This service can be activated on Internet-enabled mobile phones. Access Bank engages in corporate social responsibility initiatives, such as educational and financial literacy programs, the Access Bank marathon, and the “W” initiative, which have collectively given more visibility to the bank.

Access Bank also utilises the brand ambassador model. Neku Atawodi-Edun, a renowned Polo player and advocate, serves as the bank's W Brand Ambassador. She champions women's empowerment and healthy lifestyles, which resonate with Access Bank's broader commitment to corporate social responsibility (Access Bank, 2021). All these promotional efforts are sustainable initiatives that aim to increase brand awareness and brand loyalty.

United Bank for Africa (UBA)

United Bank for Africa (UBA) is one of Africa's leading financial institutions. The bank has over 30 million customers across 20 African countries, including Nigeria. According to UBA (2022), the annual reports show that the institution boasts one of the largest distribution networks in Africa with over 1,000 branches, 2,676 ATMs and 303,703 fully deployed POS machines. The bank has about 24,000 direct and support staff. As of 2022, the bank was the second most profitable bank in Nigeria after Zenith Bank, boasting about \$380 million in profits, and assets reaching approximately \$24.3 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2023a; Statista, 2023b).

UBA utilises a variety of digital marketing channels to enhance its customer, employees, and other stakeholders' engagement and service delivery. Similar to Access Bank, the UBA website provides necessary information about their services and products. It receives a monthly traffic of over 4 million visits and was ranked 29,940 globally, 208 in Nigeria. It is also the most visited bank website in Nigeria (Similarweb, 2024b). UBA uses email marketing to keep customers informed about new services, promotions, and important updates, while SMS notifications ensure timely communication regarding transactions and security alerts. UBA's mobile banking app enables customers to seamlessly perform a wide range of financial activities on their smartphones. QR codes are also used to facilitate quick and secure payments. Display advertising on third-party websites helps UBA reach a broader audience and attract potential customers, while social media marketing on platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram fosters engagement, brand awareness, and community interaction (UBA, 2022). Moreover, UBA employs social media influencer marketing as one of its key marketing communication strategies. In 2019, it partnered with

prominent Nigerian artiste, Wizkid to enhance the brand's visibility and appeal to the younger demography (Blogmgr, 2019).

The bank promotes financial literacy through online content, webinars, and interactive tools, empowering customers with sufficient knowledge to make informed financial decisions. As part of efforts to deliver innovative value to customers, UBA launched its chatbot and artificial intelligence (AI) digital assistant, Leo, on January 11, 2018, which was the first of its kind in the Nigerian banking sector (UBA, 2024). The bank's ethical and integrated marketing communication emphasises transparency and inclusivity, catering to diverse age groups in both urban and rural areas through traditional media such as the radio and television and other digital tools.

UBA engages in Public Relations (PR) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) educational initiatives, such as the UBA Foundation's National Essay Competition that targets senior secondary school students across Africa; the financial literacy ("UBA Read Africa") initiative which involves mentoring and empowering the youth with financial literacy skills to make informed financial decisions; community development projects such as "Each One Teach One" initiative, where UBA staff volunteer their time to teach students various subjects in different schools; and the health awareness campaigns where UBA foundation partners with health organisations to conduct health awareness and screening programs. All these highlight UBA's commitment to societal well-being as well as its PR efforts which aim at sustainable initiatives to increase brand awareness and brand loyalty (UBA, 2022).

Airtel Nigeria

Airtel is one of Nigeria's leading telecommunications service providers with over 50 million customers. It is ranked among the top 3 mobile service providers in the country. According to Omeje et al. (2022), it was the first GSM operator to access rural areas in Nigeria. Airtel uses its strong presence on social media platforms as well as social media influencer marketing to increase brand awareness, promotions, customer service, and consumer engagement. Airtel leverages email, mobile marketing services (SMS, USSD, mobile app and QR codes) for targeted campaigns and promotions and also to give customers quicker access to their data bundles and services. They strive to be ethical by not taking advantage of their large database of customers' data to spam them with unsolicited emails and texts. Airtel utilises display advertising on third-party websites. Airtel's website plays an important role in its marketing strategy, with a monthly visit of over 400 thousand. It was ranked 218,844 globally and 1,035 in Nigeria (Similarweb, 2024c). Airtel still utilises traditional media like television and radio for wider reach, particularly in rural areas.

A defining pattern in Airtel's marketing communication strategy has been the use of 'stories' for their marketing campaigns, which are deployed across both online and offline channels. These 'stories' are designed to create informative, entertaining and engaging content to educate consumers about social issues and promote responsible citizen

behaviour. This strategy commenced in 2018 with series like *Meet the in-laws*, *Data is life*, *A reason to imagine*, which were positioned to increase brand awareness about their products and services and build strong online relationships with current and potential consumers. Airtel 'stories' captivated consumers such that they looked forward to the next 'episode' of the story that aligned with a particular campaign. Their 'stories' campaign demonstrates how Internet connectivity can enrich people's lives and keep them connected regardless of age, tribe or gender (The Society, 2018).

Airtel uses 'stories' to portray the values of authenticity and diversity regarding their products and services, in order to demonstrate Airtel's commitment to inclusive marketing that is socially and environmentally responsible. This strategy aligns with the claim by Sandi (2023) that brand stories should reflect the social and environmental values of consumers in the society. Airtel used paid, owned, and earned media across websites and social media platforms to promote these campaigns. They use paid media advertisements on Google search, YouTube, third-party websites and sponsored social media advertisements to foster awareness about their products and services.

MTN Nigeria

MTN is the largest mobile telecommunications operator in Nigeria, with a market share of about 37 percent. In 2022, MTN earned a revenue of \$4.54 billion from Nigeria alone—the largest in Africa's telecommunications industry (Sherif, 2024). MTN commenced operations in Nigeria in 2001, and within its first six months, it had approximately 250,000 subscribers (Odey et al., 2023). In a report by Statista (2024e), the total number of registered SIMs in Nigeria currently exceeds 301 million, with over 123 million subscribers (41%) attributed to MTN.

MTN leverages a variety of different marketing channels, some of which are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs. In 2023, MTN was honoured with The Africa-America Institute's 2023 Corporate Responsibility Award, for its strong contributions to Africa's progress and for demonstrating its commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth, while positively impacting communities and industries (MTN, 2023). The MTN website is an integral part of the company, serving as a comprehensive resource for all essential information about the company and its activities. Currently, the website receives over 5.6 million visits monthly, and it is ranked 29,967 globally, 144 in Nigeria, and 528 in the industry (Similarweb, 2024d).

Mobile Ads: With the widespread use of mobile phones, MTN Mobile Ads is an advertising service designed to leverage this trend. Using SMS and mobile web channels, these services help the brand reach its target customers more efficiently and effectively than traditional advertising channels. The MTN mobile ad strategies include Push SMS, CRBT/IVR (branded messages to callers or staff), MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service with pictures, audio, or video), Flash SMS (pop-up messages), and

Location-Based Advertising (reaching customers near specific locations) (MTN, 2022a).

Thryve Ads: This service enables businesses to easily create and manage advertising campaigns to reach their target audience on MTN platforms. The MTN thryve Ads leverages Google Ads for targeted online advertising with features like data bundles, campaign execution tools, and performance optimisation (MTN, 2022b).

Social Media Marketing: A check across MTN Nigeria social handles as of July 11, 2024, shows that MTN has a very strong presence on all social media platforms. With over 4.8 million followers on Facebook, more than 800k followers on Instagram, and over 1.3 million followers on Twitter (now X), MTN can boast of over 6.9 million followers. They use these platforms to promote campaigns, engage with customers, and build brand awareness.

Traditional Media Marketing: MTN is known for its catchy and captivating advertisements across TV and radio, which they use to connect with a vast Nigerian audience, particularly beyond urban centres. The *I Don Port* commercial is an iconic MTN Nigeria television advertisement that gained widespread attention. This advertisement, released in 2013, featured the popular Nigerian actor and comedian, Saka, who was previously an ambassador for a competing network, Etisalat (now 9mobile). In the commercial, Saka sings and dances while announcing his switch to MTN, with the catchy phrase *I don port o, I don port go MTN* (meaning I have ported, I have switched to MTN). Another catchy advert was their iconic *Yello, Yello* Radio jingle campaign which is still ongoing.

DATA ANALYSIS

The secondary data from the case studies was analysed thematically. The data reduction involved coding the data, categorising the codes, linking categories to form themes and writing up a coherent report (Ghuari and Grønhaug, 2005). The coding and categorisation were done according to the research objectives on digital marketing communication practices in Nigeria, to arrive at two overarching themes namely, emerging trends in digital marketing communication practices in Nigeria, and ethical strategies that will promote responsible and sustainable digital marketing communication practices in Nigeria. The themes are discussed in the sections below.

EMERGING TRENDS IN DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Access Bank and UBA employ various digital marketing tools suitable for the peculiar needs and requirements of diverse Nigerian consumers, based on their social and cultural consumption patterns. These include website marketing, email, mobile marketing (SMS, mobile apps and QR codes), Search Engine Marketing (PPC), social media (Facebook,

Instagram, LinkedIn, X, TikTok), and influencer marketing to facilitate timely communication regarding the banks' services, financial transactions and security alerts. According to Statista, social media users in Nigeria were about 31.6 million in January 2023 (Sasu, 2024). Hence, the banks utilise social media platforms for real-time engagement with current and potential customers to resolve complaints and raise awareness about sales promotions and new products or services. Although Access Bank has not been successful in deploying a chatbot in the Nigerian market due to poor reception in support of the claim by Abdulquadri et al. (2021), they effectively utilise WhatsApp banking since WhatsApp is the most used social media platform by Nigerians. This finding supports the claim by Famuyiwa (2018) that WhatsApp banking is used to offer banking services and improve banking relations with customers in rural areas with limited digital access. UBA, however, was the first bank to deploy an AI chatbot in 2018 (Leo), which handles its WhatsApp banking services.

In line with the medium theory, the banks recognise the significant impact that different communication channels (mediums) have on the effectiveness, reach, and perception of their messages. Thus, they ensure that they use the right digital media tools to communicate with different demographics of customers, such as the Internet-savvy Gen Zs and the older generation of digital immigrants. Using a variety of mediums, which are tailored to different audiences and contexts, demonstrates their strategic approach to leveraging the unique characteristics of each medium to enhance communication outcomes.

MTN and Airtel Nigeria utilise similar digital marketing communication tools, such as Access and UBA banks. Additionally, their mobile marketing strategy was expanded to include location-based advertising where they send SMS or in-app push notifications to customers within their fibre data network zones. In line with the medium theory, Airtel and MTN both have a diverse marketing strategy which includes social media, email, SMS, USSD, mobile ad services, and traditional media like television and radio, catering to the varied needs of Nigerian consumers and their preferences across different regions, ethnicities and demographics. This finding is consistent with the view of Millagala and Gunasinghe (2024) that the advent of digital technologies has caused marketing communication strategies to evolve into online advertising, blogs, social media and influencer marketing. The above findings address the second research objective.

ETHICAL STRATEGIES THAT WILL PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Access and UBA banks deploy their integrated marketing communication activities in an inclusive, ethical and socially responsible manner. They deploy digital tools that can reach digitally underserved rural areas like WhatsApp mobile banking and other traditional marketing communication media. While Access Bank engaged a female Polo brand ambassador to encourage more women to bank with them, UBA uses PR and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) educational initiatives to

promote financial literacy in youths and health awareness campaigns. These communication strategies are ethical, sustainable and responsible initiatives that give the banks a competitive advantage.

Going by the SCOT theory, Access Bank and UBA employ various digital marketing tools to suit the peculiar needs and requirements of diverse Nigerian consumers, based on their social and cultural consumption patterns. In line with the argument by Sandi (2023) that marketing communication activities should be inclusive of consumers from diverse ethnicities and ages, the banks' inclusive initiatives and social responsibility programs demonstrate their commitment to adopting digital marketing communication tools to communicate their offerings to customers, according to the different social contexts of technology development within the community.

MTN and Airtel Nigeria recently incorporated 'stories' in their online marketing communication campaigns. The stories are part of their integrated marketing communication activities designed to promote socially responsible citizen behaviour, gender and cultural inclusivity while creating brand awareness with current and potential consumers. This finding aligns with the claim by the Society (2018) that 'stories' campaign demonstrates how Internet connectivity can enrich people's lives and keep them connected regardless of age, tribe or gender. Moreover, Airtel and MTN's use of different mediums for their storytelling campaigns reflects the medium theory, and highlights the significant impact that the choice of communication channel has on the effectiveness and perception of messages.

Furthermore, to ensure that their marketing communications resonate with a wide audience and remain sustainable, Airtel and MTN have structured their campaigns along the social and cultural consumption patterns of Nigerians. This finding espouses the argument by notable authors (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2020; Yang & Battocchio 2020; Sandi, 2023) for sustainable marketing communication campaigns to be transparent, authentic, socially and environmentally responsible, in order to achieve brand loyalty and positively impact consumers' behavioural intention towards purchasing the product or service. The above findings address the third research objective.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper has highlighted that digital marketers, brands and organisations in Nigeria have begun deploying digital marketing tools in their marketing communication strategies that enable more personalised connections with consumers, while promoting their products and services in order to be competitive in the 21st-century digital era. The case studies of Access Bank, UBA, Airtel, and MTN have shown that these organisations share similarities in their use of website marketing, email, mobile marketing (SMS, mobile apps and QR codes), Search Engine Marketing (PPC), social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, TikTok and influencer marketing to facilitate sustainable marketing communication practices. Additionally, in their quest to reach a diverse demography, these organisations have synergised the use of both traditional and digital media tools. While some organisations deploy

corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives such as engaging in educational and community development programs to support societal well-being, some leverage storytelling in their marketing communication campaigns to create engaging and informative content that resonates with consumers. Having a strong social media presence allows them to foster engagement and enhance brand awareness. Ethical marketing practices are upheld by these organisations, ensuring transparency and respect for customer privacy, which builds trust and loyalty among their customers.

Summarily, in order to ensure the sustainability of their marketing practices, businesses need to use digital media inclusive of Nigerians of different ages, genders and cultural backgrounds. They also need to ensure that their marketing communication is ethical, transparent, socially, and environmentally responsible, in order to build lasting relationships with consumers and remain competitive.

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