



WhatsApp and Facebook Marketing Communication: Sustainable Tools for the Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on WhatsApp and Facebook marketing communication as sustainable instruments for the performance of SMEs in Cross River State, Nigeria. It was carried out to examine the impact of Facebook and WhatsApp as sustainable marketing communication tools on the performance of SMEs in Cross River State. The study used a cross-sectional survey research approach. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data from 289 small and medium-sized firms in the Calabar Metropolis. The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics, and hypotheses were evaluated using simple linear regression in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The study findings demonstrated that WhatsApp and Facebook usage had a considerable beneficial impact on the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar. Therefore, the study proposed the following: SMEs should adopt Facebook as a marketing

KEYWORDS

Sustainable
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communication,
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SDG

channel to reach a large population of customers, advertise available products/ services, and direct customers to locate their shops for patronage. SMEs should consistently employ WhatsApp to interact more closely with customers, advertise available products and services, and deliver customers' orders for greater satisfaction and repeat patronage, ultimately enhancing sales performance.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sustainability is a process, and it's about being intentional in the actualisation of set goals, taking into cognisance the environment, economics, and social aspects. Sustainable policies emphasise the future effect of any given policy or business practice on humans, ecosystems, and the wider economy (Mollenkamp et al., 2023). It is glaring that marketing and marketing communication are changing, with new insights, tools, opportunities, and challenges (Smith et al., 2010). In the 21st century, consumers act and reason differently compared to what was available twenty years ago. Customers and business organisations understand this fact, and they are tilting towards the era of new technology. Smith et al. (2010) assert that there are six billion consumers, and almost four hundred million business customers are now accessible. This and many more have made social media marketing communications tools such as WhatsApp and Facebook more relevant than ever before.

At its rise, online entertainment was created to work with the correspondence of data and the sharing of items between and among individuals in social orders all over the planet (Tuten, 2020). The underlying aim was to have a virtual stage that would incorporate the world into a worldwide local area where people could interface, mingle, gain from one another and share contents implied for individual use (Juan et al., 2016). Be that as it may, as online entertainment devices turned out to be further developed, extensive, intelligent, and generally flowed, business associations acknowledged new chances to target, reach, and carry their items and administrations more like many clients in a fast, more affordable, and more viable way. Its application by business associations for the purpose of showcasing, subsequently finished in the development of another promotional communication and sustainable tools such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and so on (Carlos, 2018).

Its adoption has also drawn the attention of business community, with the intention of harnessing it to improve the performance of business organisations (Nyambu, 2013). As indicated by Altaf (2014), virtual entertainment is a wide assortment of web-based instruments and stages that grant and work with collaborations, interchanges, and trades between and among online members over cell phones, PCs, or other viable electronic gadgets. As a showcasing specialised device, it is used by business associations to inspire clients' input with respect to their items and administrations, convey promotional efforts to specific interest groups, evoke and determine clients' protests and requests, and convince clients to disparage their items and administrations (Bernard et al., 2013). It deserves note that online entertainment is progressively acquiring noticeable quality in the business world as it gives a huge chance to organisations to intently associate with a great many clients, speak with them, and recover clients' criticism about their items, administrations, and limited time crusades in the range of a couple of moments (Zawadi and Makena, 2019). In cutting edge social orders, online entertainment stages like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp have been answerable for the development of little and medium-scale

endeavors; nonetheless, the use of virtual entertainment by SMEs in non-industrial African nations, like Nigeria, is as yet defied by obliging variables like PC ignorance and an absence of specialised skill (Adegbuyi et al. 2015). Facebook is an informal communication site that permits enrolled clients to make individual profiles and business pages for correspondence, cooperation, and trade of items like messages, recordings, photographs, and sound (Watson, 2013). WhatsApp is a free online entertainment stage that permits clients to send and receive instant messages, voice calls, video calls, pictures, records, and client area data (Chris et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, with respect to SMEs in Calabar, there is a lack of experimental proof to decide if the utilisation of web-based entertainment apparatuses has brought about huge upgrades in their promoting execution. Hence, the review was conducted to examine the connection between Facebook and WhatsApp on promoting execution of SMEs in Calabar.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As a sustainable communication tool, social media has been a significant catalyst for growth and improved performance in business organisations worldwide (Smith & Mogos, 2013; Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun, 2017). It is used to target, reach, communicate, and promote products and services. However, the application of social media by small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Calabar is limited due to their lack of full adoption of technology in the daily operation of their business. Again, the failure of SMEs in Calabar to use social media might be attributed to a lack of computer literacy, which means they may not have an understanding of how to successfully sell their products and services on social media platforms. Furthermore, the risk of hacking and theft of corporate information online may deter SMEs from using internet marketing platforms like social media. For the aforementioned reasons, several SMEs in Calabar lack a reliable social media platform through which to engage with clients and generate rapid purchases. Consequently, most of them still practice the traditional marketing methods in Calabar, such as word of mouth and personal relationships. Consequently, this may negatively impact their performance in terms of market visibility, customer patronage, and sales volume. Hence, the study aims to determine the effect of WhatsApp and Facebook on SMEs' performance in Calabar.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the study was to assess the effect of social media on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar. Its specific objectives were to:

1. Determine the relationship between WhatsApp usage and marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.
2. Ascertain the relationship between Facebook usage and marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was conducted to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Does WhatsApp usage affect marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar?
2. Does Facebook usage have a relationship with marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

HO₁: WhatsApp usage is not significant on the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

HO₂: Facebook usage has no significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the unique hypothesis of development, propounded by Taylor, Tunnels, and Logan (2002). This hypothesis was created in light of the great pace of disappointment experienced by moderate business associations welcomed on by ecological changes and globalisation. The hypothesis emerged to give a clarification regarding the reason why moderate business associations were abandoned as the climate developed with time. The essential supposition of the powerful hypothesis of development is that associations exist in a unique climate that is quick, changing, and developing. In this manner, accomplishing economic upper hand in such a unique climate requires associations to adjust, change, and develop to stay up to date with the most recent patterns in the business. As per this hypothesis, a fruitful association is one that is continually during the time spent adjusting, changing, and improving to accomplish a feasible upper hand. The hypothesis states that associations can adjust and advance in four (4) ways: innovation, strategies and cycles, corporate direction, and staff.

This theory is relevant to the study because to achieve sustainable marketing communication, SMEs should be able to adjust and leave their comfort zone of traditional marketing communication, such as the usage of radio, television, and so on, and employ Facebook and WhatsApp marketing, which forms aspect of innovation in the 21st century. Furthermore, the theory was developed in response to the high rate of failures experienced by business organisations, which were caused by industry factors and broader environmental factors. Hence, for an organisation to achieve sustainable advantage, it must look out for and adopt new technologies.

CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL AND SUSTAINABLE MARKETING COMMUNICATION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, approved by all United Nations Member States in 2015, lays out a shared vision for peace and prosperity for people and the planet today and in what's to come. At its middle are the 17 Economical Improvement Objectives (SDGs), an earnest source of inspiration

including all nations, created in a global organisation. They perceive that finishing destitution and different hardships should remain inseparable with techniques that further develop wellbeing and schooling, diminish disparity, and promote financial development (Joined Country, 2024). Therefore, this study was carried out keeping in mind Sustainable Development Goal 8, which emphasises economic growth. WhatsApp and Facebook marketing communication bridge this gap by making it seamless for SMEs to carry out their businesses despite all odds. For example, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, businesses had hopes and were able to thrive as a result of these communication tools.

WHATSAPP AS A SUSTAINABLE MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL

WhatsApp Messenger is a free social media platform developed by WhatsApp Incorporated and owned by Facebook Inc. (Newmann, 2018). It was acquired for around \$19.3 billion in 2014 (Bryan, 2018), and users may send and receive text messages, phone calls, video calls, photos, documents, and location information, according to Chris and Walker (2017). The application works on both mobile devices and desktop computers, but it requires a standard cellular phone number. According to Newmann (2018), WhatsApp has a global user base of over 1.5 billion people, making it one of the most popular messaging programs. The platform has expanded into Brazil, India, Africa, and Europe, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and France. WhatsApp began as a social messaging network where individuals and groups could connect, communicate, and exchange information and material including images, short videos, and documents (Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2016). However, in recent times, a new version of WhatsApp called "WhatsApp Business" has been created for corporate discussions and transactions. This has expedited WhatsApp's acceptance and use as a business tool by many organisations, including SMEs. The usage of WhatsApp for commercial reasons has been shown to considerably improve marketing success for businesses. The above assumption is corroborated by the findings of (Wadalla, Imran, & Saleem, 2017; Abu-razari, Hajji, & Mutaz 2018) who discovered that WhatsApp had a considerable beneficial influence on the marketing efficacy of small-scale businesses in Islamabad and Jordan respectively.

FACEBOOK AS A SUSTAINABLE MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL

Facebook is an online social network where registered users build personal profiles and company pages to communicate, connect, and trade material such as text, video, photographs, and audio files. Registered users can submit photographs, videos, and status updates, as well as watch, like, comment on, and share other registered users' postings (Watson, 2013). Bryan (2018) claims that Facebook is one of the world's most popular social networking platforms. It was the first social networking platform to exceed the milestone of 1 billion user accounts in 2012. According to Omar and Marwan (2016), in addition to networking with friends and family, users may use various Facebook software programs to sell online and market or promote their business, brand, and products through paid Facebook adverts. According to Agwueche (2019), Facebook is the most popular social networking site in Nigeria, utilised by Nigerians of all ages, but notably by young people. Individuals and groups in

Nigeria use it to communicate about a variety of personal and societal concerns, as well as to share and trade information, including images, messages, audios, and videos. The author goes on to say that Nigerian businesses use Facebook for marketing purposes such as connecting with customers, eliciting and resolving customer inquiries/complaints, advertising available products/services to customers, creating and following up on leads, encouraging patronage, and taking customer orders. As a result, the use of Facebook as a marketing tool has been shown to greatly improve the marketing performance of businesses throughout the world. This assumption is supported by the findings of Zawadi et al. (2019) and Kizulusa and Wumetha (2017), who discovered that Facebook marketing is relevant and beneficial to SMEs performance in Kenya and Rwanda.

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SCALE ENTERPRISES (SMES) IN NIGERIA

Small enterprises founded by individuals, organisations, firms, and cooperatives dominate the Nigerian business environment and activities (Okpara, 2009). According to SMEDAN (2017), there are around 41.5 million SMEs in Nigeria. Lagos, Oyo, and Kano States are Nigeria's top three states for SMEs. Most businesses start small, but with appropriate planning and management, they develop and flourish.

SMEs have been instrumental in the growth and development of industrialised nations worldwide, and they are one of the most powerful drivers for emancipation and growth in any economy (Agwu, 2018). Thus, they are individuals or groups between 1 and 50 with an asset base of 1.5 and 200 million who have made up their minds to make a living. The survival of SMEs is determined by the extent to which any economy maximises them, and their inputs are heavily influenced by the enabling and prevailing environment created by the availability of necessary infrastructural facilities, tax incentives, business-friendly regulatory measures, and essential structural services such as legal system provisions (Apulu and Ige, 2011).

In Nigeria, SMEs account for more than 80 percent of the business sector, but the failure rate is high due to economic shocks. On average, 50 percent of SMEs that are established within the first five years fail due to factors such as a good transport network, a stable electrical power supply, a strong telecommunications network, a sound legislative structure, and the provision of credible credit facilities and policy (Ufua, Olujobi, Ogbari, Dada & Edafe, 2020; Gbandi & Amissah, 2014; Apulu & Ige, 2011). Large firms, such as manufacturing, aviation, and agro-allied exporting industries, appeared to receive greater support than SMEs in Nigeria. This pattern has shifted since 1990, when the government implemented improved SMEs' support measures targeted at developing and promoting them (Ezeagba, 2017). Despite the importance of SME contributions to economic growth, SMEs in Nigeria continue to confront several problems that impede their growth and contribution to the Nigerian economy (Ikem, Chidi, & Titus, 2012). However, it is crucial to highlight that most SMEs face one or more of the following challenges: a lack of initial capital, a lack of land and a decent location, unfavourable government regulations, etc.

MARKETING PERFORMANCE AND ITS DIMENSIONS

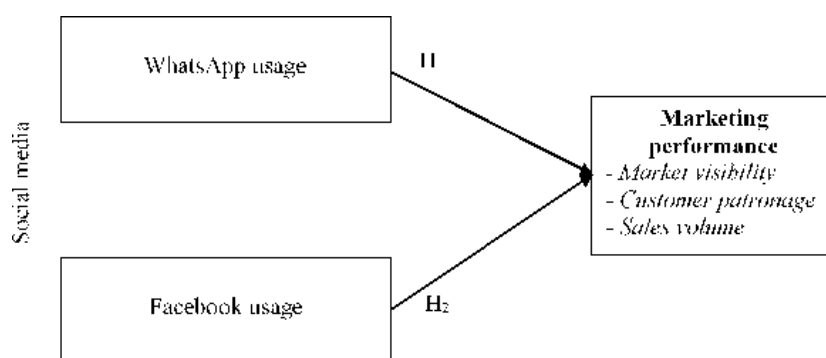
Marketing performance refers to the efficacy and efficiency of an organisation's marketing function or activities over time (Zawadi & Makena, 2019). It is the cost-efficiency and revenue-effectiveness of an organisation's marketing efforts in relation to its marketing objectives and goals. It assesses the extent to which a company's specified marketing objectives and goals are met by its marketing actions over time. Abdul, Munyoki, and Burugu (2016) identify the following aspects of marketing performance measurement: return on investment, profitability, sales volume, market share, customer patronage, customer retention, and innovation. However, this study concentrated on market visibility, client patronage, and sales volume.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

The research looked at how social media tools affected the marketing effectiveness of Calabar's small and medium-sized firms (SMEs). The goal was to see how the independent variable (social media) affected the dependent variable (SMEs' marketing performance). The study defines social media usage among SMEs in order to conduct an effective analysis of the link between the study variables. The study divided social media usage into three categories: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, and looked at how it affected SMEs' marketing success, which was assessed by market visibility, client patronage, and sales volume.

Based on the findings of previous researchers reported in the empirical review section, a conceptual model was created for the study to graphically illustrate the link between social media and marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar, as hypothesised in the study. This hypothesised link was examined throughout the study to see whether or not the model is applicable to SMEs in Calabar, Nigeria.

FIGURE 1: Description of Image



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. This research design enabled the researcher to obtain data from operators of small and medium-sized enterprises in Calabar at once for analysis purposes. It was carried out in Calabar,

which is the state capital of Cross River State. The population of the study comprised all registered small and medium-sized enterprises in Calabar Metropolis as of 2021. However, all attempts to obtain up-to-date information about the total number of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis from the Corporate Affairs Commission proved abortive. Hence, the researcher adopted the 2018 population figure of SMEs released by the Corporate Affairs Commission as obtained by Attah et al. (2019), which revealed that there are 1,123 registered SMEs in Calabar Metropolis. After which, Taro Yamane's formula was applied to determine a sample of 295. Since the actual locations of all SMEs in Calabar Metropolis were unknown, the researcher adopted a cluster random sampling technique to select SMEs to participate in the questionnaire survey. The study area (Calabar) was broken down into two (2) distinct clusters, namely: Calabar South and Calabar Metropolis, which were further broken down into major streets for targeting by the researcher. Following this procedure, a total of 295 SMEs were selected. The primary data collection method was utilised with a five-point Likert scale questionnaire type: strongly agree (SA = 5), agree (A = 4), undecided (U = 3), disagree (D = 2), and strongly disagree (SD = 1). The null hypotheses developed for the study were tested statistically using simple linear regression in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23).

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis one

HO₁: WhatsApp usage is not significant on the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

HO₂: Facebook usage has no significant influence on the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

Table I: Model summary of the effect of Facebook marketing communication on performance of SMEs in Calabar

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.560 ^a	.629	.125	.49520

a. Predictors: (Constant), Facebook usage

Table II: ANOVA^a of the effect of Facebook usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.362	1	7.362	30.023	.000 ^b
	Residual	49.536	202	.245		
	Total	56.898	203			

a. Dependent Variable: Marketing performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Facebook usage

Table III: Coefficients^a of the effect of Facebook usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.365	.186		12.714	.000
	Facebook usage	.284	.052	.360	5.479	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Marketing performance

INTERPRETATION

The results in Tables I, II and III show the linear regression analysis of the effect of Facebook usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar. Table I, which is the model summary, reveals that the connection between the two factors (Facebook utilisation and promoting execution) is 56.0 percent (as found in the R section), which shows serious areas of strength for the connection between the factors. The coefficient of assurance (R²) of 0.629 demonstrates that up to 62.9 percent of the changeability in the reliant variable (advertising execution) is represented by the free factor (Facebook use). This suggests that a unit change in Facebook use will influence the showcasing execution of SMEs in Calabar by up to 62.9 percent when different variables are held steady.

The F-test (30.023, $P < 0.05$) measurement in Table II shows that the general expectation of the reliant variable by the free factor is measurably critical; in this way, the relapse model gives meaningful proof to reason that Facebook use altogether affects showcasing execution of SMEs in Calabar. Additionally, the coefficient table (Table III) shows that the free factor (Facebook use) essentially adds to the model as the P esteem (0.000) is under 0.05 blunder edge, and the t-test result ($t = 5.479$) makes sense of that the relationship between both variables is a direct and positive one. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which leads to the conclusion that Facebook usage has a significant positive effect on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

HYPOTHESIS TWO

H₀: WhatsApp usage has no significant effect on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

H₁: WhatsApp usage has a significant effect on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar.

Table IV: Model summary of the effect of WhatsApp usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.562 ^a	.316	.313	.43896

a. Predictors: (Constant), WhatsApp usage

Table V: ANOVA^a of the effect of WhatsApp usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.976	1	17.976	93.292	.000 ^b
	Residual	38.922	202	.193		
	Total	56.898	203			

a. Dependent Variable: Marketing performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), WhatsApp usage

Table VI: Coefficients^a of the effect of Whatsapp usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.672	.178		9.392	.000
	WhatsApp usage	.464	.048	.562	9.659	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Marketing performance

The results in Tables IV, V and VI show the linear regression analysis of the effect of WhatsApp usage on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar. Table IV, which is the model summary, reveals that the relationship between both variables (WhatsApp usage and marketing performance) is 56.2 percent (as seen in the R column), which indicates a strong degree of association between the variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.316 indicates that up to 31.6 percent of the changeability in the reliant variable (showcasing execution) is represented by the free factor (WhatsApp use). This suggests that a unit change in WhatsApp use will influence the showcasing execution of SMEs in Calabar by up to 31.6 percent when different variables are held consistent.

The F-test (93.292, $P < 0.05$) measurement in Table V shows that the general expectation of the reliant variable by the free factor is genuinely huge; hence, the relapse model gives meaningful proof to reason that WhatsApp utilisation altogether affects showcasing execution of SMEs in Calabar. Likewise, the coefficient table (Table VI) shows that the free factor (WhatsApp use) essentially adds to the model as the P esteem (0.000) is under 0.05 mistake edge, and the t-test result ($t = 9.659$) makes sense of that the connection between the two factors is an immediate and positive one. Consequently, the invalid speculation is dismissed, and the elective theory is acknowledged, which prompts the conclusion that WhatsApp use meaningfully affects advertising execution of SMEs in Calabar.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The test of hypothesis one revealed that Facebook marketing communication has a significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs in Calabar. This finding is supported by the study of Zawadi et al. (2019), which revealed that Facebook marketing had a significant positive effect on the sales performance of Safaricom Limited in Kenya. Similarly, the finding is reinforced by the study of Kizulusa et al (2017), which revealed that Facebook had a significant positive influence on the marketing performance of fashion-based enterprises in Rwanda. The implication of this finding is that the usage of Facebook as a marketing channel has resulted in significant improvements in the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar, just as it has in previous studies.

The test of hypothesis two revealed that WhatsApp usage has a significant positive effect on marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar. This finding is substantiated by the study of Wadalla et al. (2017), which revealed that WhatsApp had a significant positive impact on the marketing effectiveness of small-scale cosmetics dealers in Islamabad. The finding also corresponds with the study of Abu-razari et al (2018), which revealed that WhatsApp has a significant positive relationship with the marketing performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Jordan. It implies that through the usage of WhatsApp as a marketing channel, SMEs in Calabar have been able to substantially improve their marketing performance, thereby providing new evidence confirming the statistical association between WhatsApp usage and marketing performance of SMEs.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of social media on the marketing performance of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Calabar, Nigeria. Data from registered businesses were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that using Facebook and WhatsApp considerably increased the marketing performance of SMEs in Calabar, implying that social media had a beneficial influence on SMEs' marketing performance in Cross River State.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The survey suggests that SME should utilise Facebook as a marketing platform to reach a big client base, advertise products and services, and offer directions to their businesses. This will improve market awareness and exposure while minimising expenditures.
2. SMEs should also employ WhatsApp to communicate more intimately with clients, market products and services, and successfully deliver orders, resulting in increased customer satisfaction and repeat business, eventually boosting sales performance.

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