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The Role of Social Media Advertising in Shaping Consumer Patronage in Abuja: A Study of MTN

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of social media advertising in shaping consumer patronage in Abuja, Nigeria, with a focus on MTN's advertising strategies. Guided by the technological determinism theory, the study sought to determine whether MTN's social media advertising creates adequate awareness of its products and services and whether it effectively inspires consumer patronage. A survey research design was employed using an online questionnaire administered to a sample of 384 respondents. Findings revealed that respondents are widely exposed to social media, and MTN's social media advertising successfully creates awareness of its products and services. The advertisements were also found to significantly influence consumer patronage, with Facebook emerging as the most effective platform in inspiring consumer engagement, although its effectiveness was rated at an average level. The study concludes that MTN's social media advertising is effective in both awareness creation and driving patronage, thereby positioning social networking sites as crucial tools for brand competitiveness in Nigeria's telecommunications sector. It recommends that advertising agencies and companies adopt Facebook as a primary channel for social media advertising while also exploring other platforms to maximize reach and effectiveness.

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Keywords: Social Media; Advertising; Consumer Patronage; Telecommunications; MTN

INTRUDUCTION

Advertising is "any form of nonpersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods & services that are paid for by an identified sponsor" (Pahwa, 2024). Advertising is "a paid form of impersonal communication to disseminate business information about a company's products and services through different communication channels by an identified sponsor" (Frolova, 2014).

With the alternative being a business languishing due to a lack of awareness, advertising is a potent means through which companies, industries, or organisations create awareness for the patronage of their products, and services. Historically, advertising has served as one of the major tools of promotion of any brand, product and service.

The world of advertising, has taken a different dimension and height in recent years due to technological developments made possible by the growth of communication through social media. Thus, the advertising industry has long sought to go where consumers go. The industry has followed consumers online and has developed new forms of advertising to reach consumers in their virtual world. Social media are a new version of corporate advertising which have been adopted as new techniques by many companies.

On social networking sites (hereby referred to as SNS), Sharma (2012) in Obiniyi et al. (2014), explain that they are basically social media, and they include, though are not limited to, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter (now known as X), YouTube, Google+, Flickr, Bing, Ning, Skype. These SNS create platforms for virtual interactions, data communication: chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging and discussion groups.

Telecommunication companies: Globacom (GLO), Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN), 9Mobile and Airtel, leverage the power of social media to reach their consumers/customers and potential ones.

MTN, right from the advent of social media in Nigeria has been maximising social media to advertise its products and services and also enhance its competition with other telecommunication brands in the country.

MTN has the widest network in Nigeria; its services cover every major town and city in the nation because it had captured millions of customers before other competing telecommunication companies came on board.

MTN Nigeria has a strong presence on all social media platforms which it uses to push its offerings and continue to inspire consumer patronage. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the different dimensions social media advertising has inspired the patronage of MTN products and services in Abuja, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

MTN's social media advertising aims to strategically position its products and services to customers and potential customers in different ways that would boost and inspire patronage. To accomplish this, social media advertising is tailored to captivate attention.

However, empirical studies addressing the effectiveness of MTN social media advertising are scanty. Hence, this draws questions on whether or not social media advertising really boosts and inspires consumer patronage

Existing studies on this topic are geographically fragmented, with minimal focus on Abuja, Nigeria. Has MTN social media advertising helped in growing its customer base in this region?

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of social media advertising in shaping consumer patronage in Abuja: A Study of MTN

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include:

1. To determine whether or not MTN social media advertising creates adequate awareness of its products and services in Abuja, Nigeria.

2. To ascertain the effectiveness of MTN social media advertising in inspiring consumer patronage in Abuja, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Social media

Social media is a widespread tool for communication and exchange of ideas which aids individuals and organisations with just causes to reach a phenomenally vast audience that could hitherto not be reached by traditional media (Onomo, 2014). "Social media has expedited unparalleled growth in human interaction in modern times. This new media has caught the attention of organisations, communities and individuals through their ability to facilitate the collaboration of virtual communities and to provide a productive environment for mutual sharing and interaction," (Ohajionu et al., 2015, p. 335).

The growth of social media has impacted the way companies/organisations communicate. With the emergence of Web 2.0, the Internet provides a set of tools that allow people to build social and business connections, share information and collaborate on projects online (Corruthers, 2010 in Nyekwere et al., 2013). Social media advertising, thus, is the practice involving the use of paid adverts on SNS like Facebook, X, YouTube, blogs and other content (The Social Media Advertising Industry Report, 2013).

MTN maximises social media in advertising its products and services. The telecommunication company also leverages on it to ensure a healthy and favourable competition with other telecommunication brands.

The implication of this review, therefore, is that social media has been established as a veritable/fruitful tool for wide dissemination of information of products and services.

Advertising

Advertising encompasses a group of activities targeted at disseminating information in a paid non-personal form concerning an idea, product or service all geared towards ensuring consumers' patronage (Fashomi, 2013).

Advertising is a structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services, and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media.

Advertising plays a vital role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. The partnership between producers and consumers through advertisement is solely aimed at achieving certain mutually beneficial objectives. They are:

i. To introduce a new product: One of the roles of advertising is to inform consumers about the existence of a new product in the market i.e. creation of awareness.

ii. Persuade customers to buy: Advertising helps in arousing the customer's interest and by doing so persuades them to buy the product.

iii. Creation of demand: Advertising stimulates demand by constantly reminding potential consumers about the availability of the product in the market.

iv. To create brand loyalty: The demand of the consumers can be maintained by constantly arousing their interest on a particular product and this will ultimately create brand loyalty.

Consumer Patronage

Advertising is aimed at attracting consumers and maintaining their patronage. A consumer is a person or organisation that buys a product or service. Consumers are usually the end-users in the distribution chain of products and services. They do this for personal use. Thus, they do not buy for them to manufacture or resale. They are the key figures in the marketplace as all the activities of the manufacturers and sellers are focused on consumers (Nordqvist 2016).

Therefore, purchase intention is found to be influenced by product or service value. Consumers' intention to purchase can also be seen as a connection between their attitude towards a product and its actual purchase. It is important to note that purchase action by a customer entails psychological principles that have been developed to harness an understanding of consumers' needs so that products can be developed, designed, and communicated in a rightful manner that can reflect the relevant needs of consumers.

MTN

MTN is one of the leading telecommunication companies in Nigeria. It is a South African company listed on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange (JSE) under the Industrial Telecommunication Sector launched in 1994. The company is a multinational telecommunication provider with its core operations in 21 countries in Africa and the Middle East. The emergence of Global System of Mobile Communications (GSM) in 2001 in Nigeria under the administration of the then President Olusegun Obasanjo paved way for the coming of MTN in the country and thus, played a key role in the revolutionization of the Nigeria's telecommunication sector (Ojini & Ohaja, 2021).

MTN consumers in Nigeria seem to react to products' advertising and the products positively or negatively. This depends on their ability to recite or recall the slogans of the products advertised. Yet, it is not certain if recall is a bye-product of exposure and, or if it leads to patronage. It is therefore pertinent to ascertain the value of slogans recall in product advertising and product patronage.

Literature Review

Social Media as an Advertising Tool

Social media has transformed into a veritable tool for advertising and building of brands for businesses across the globe in recent years. This has attracted extensive research by scholars. On this note, Okorie et al. (2021), aver that in today's technology driven world, social media has become an avenue where business operatives can extend their marketing campaigns to a wider range of consumers. Nowadays, consumers trust more user reviews and online consumer recommendations on social media websites rather than traditional media before making a purchase decision or patronising a given product or service (Kwakya, 2016).

Meanwhile, the growing popularity of social media has without question brought about a paradigmatic shift in the way advertisers and marketers seek to promote their goods and services and affect the purchasing decisions of their customers and targets (Otugo, et al., 2015).

Also, the adoption of social media for advertising by corporations worldwide is on the rise. Many corporations today have official Facebook pages, X accounts as well as corporate blogs. All these are signs that social media has become a vital part of consumers' daily lives as well as the day-to-day operations of corporate organisations (Ohajionu et al., p. 335).

In further description, Ohajionu et al. (2015), note that social media serve as a general stage where individuals worldwide relate and offer information and experiences about products. Social media allows companies, business organisations and industries to interact with their customers. This does not only allow them to advertise their products but it gives them the opportunity to share information with their customers as well. Through this way, they build understanding and rapport with them. Therefore, using social media,

companies have had the ability to build relationships with existing as well as new customers and form communities that interactively collaborate to identify problems and develop solutions for them.

In essence, social media marketing has shifted the power from advertisers to consumers, because regarding to the democracy allowed in social media all users as consumers can now be in contact with each other exchanging information about products and services, which push advertisers changing their old methods to match the new needs of consumers, and contact them individually as soon as possible, especially in their level of patronage by using social media as a marketing waterway in both free as word-of-mouth and paid as social media advertising.

MTN has long taken advantage of the limitless opportunities inherent in social media advertising. This is why the company has a presence in all the major SNS used in Nigeria. It uses social media not only for advertising, but for engaging the consumers of its products and services, all in a bid to encourage patronage.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) used for MTN Social Media Advertising

Social networking sites SNS is an online service that attracts a community of users and provides such users with a variety of tools for posting personal data and creating user-generated content directed to a given user's interest and provides a means for users to socially interact over the internet, through email, instant messaging or otherwise.

"Some popular SNSs are Facebook, Twitter (X), and LinkedIn. Social Networking Sites provide users with a platform for establishing and maintaining relationships from different points of life. Most of these SNSs are specialized and dedicated to particular fields of life which includes academies, research, religious, workforce, and social platforms" (Obiniyi et al., 2014, p. 1).

Facebook is a SNS with the highest level of registered users. It boasts of over 1.15 billion registered users with about 751 million accessing their account from mobile devices. Most of these registered users of Facebook check their account at least five times daily, and they make up about 21% of the total users. More so, 74% of marketers believe Facebook has profited their lead generation strategy (Bernstein, 2013 as cited in Obiniyi et al., 2014).

Facebook pages provide a powerful set of online tools for engaging with customers. Every day, 3.5 million people become fans of a Facebook page of friends. While

commercial messages posted on a company's Facebook page and their events are restricted to their fans, the paid advertisement appears on the right-hand side of a Facebook page whose owner falls within the target market of the advertiser as indicated during the creation of the advertisement.

X, which was formerly known as Twitter, is a SNS that is seen as a micro blogging site. The fastest growing demographic on X is the 55-64-year age bracket and this has grown since 2012. The 45–54-year age bracket is the demographic on Facebook and Google+ (Cooper, 2013 in Obiniyi et al., 2014). Active users on X are averaged to be over 288 million. Over 400 million tweets are sent per day with an average of 208 tweets per account and 28% of retweets by users is as a result of an inclusion of please RT. Like Facebook, 60% of X's users access their account from their mobile devices, though it was also observed that around 20 million users' accounts on X are fake (Bernstein, 2013 in Obiniyi et al., 2014).

MTN has 1.3 million followers on its X account. It leverages on it in reaching social media users who are more attached to X.

Instagram, another SNS, owned by Meta Platforms, is a photo-sharing and video-sharing social network with over 300 million members. It is part of the Facebook family. Instagram gained rapid adoption because of its ability to easily apply multiple filters to a photo, which can be posted to different social networks, like Facebook and X (Nsude et al., 2017).

One other SNS which MTN uses for advertising is TikTok. The SNS is owned by its Chinese parent company: ByteDance which is based in Beijing, the capital of China. However, the company is not registered in China, but it is incorporated in the Cayman Islands. According to Geyser (2024), TikTok is a video-sharing app that allows users to create and share short-form videos on any topic. It is mainly mobile-based, although one can watch TikTok videos using the web app. The SNS allows users to get creative with their content using filters, stickers, voiceovers, sound effects, and background music.

The Use of Social Media Advertising Appeals on Consumer Patronage of MTN's Products and Services

Advertising appeals work to inspire consumer patronage. Advertising agencies study the audience for any product or service that would be advertised. This aids to know

the kind of appeals that would be injected in the advert in order to get the desired awareness that would generate patronage.

An appeal is majorly the actual idea advertisers want to communicate to the audience. Advertising appeal, according to Holbrook and Batra (1987), in Shan et al. (2023), denotes the content that should be used in an advertisement. Furthermore, Quach et al. (2021), in Shan et al. (2023), add that companies use different advertising appeals to achieve effective communication with consumers and the expected advantage of a brand in the marketplace. Consumers are mostly influenced into making a purchasing decision when appropriate advertising appeals are used in a given advert.

Advertising appeal refers to the direct or indirect delivery of certain benefits or incentives or the explanation why consumers should consider buying a product in an advertisement. It is an application of a psychological motivating power to arouse consumer's desires and attraction for a product. Hence, advertising appeals are applied to attract the consumer concept of the product and to affect them emotionally about a specific product or services. Consumers are attracted and show interest due to the communication of advertising messages (Kotler, 1997 as cited in Nwankwo et al., 2013, p. 230).

MTN explores different appeals to gain patronage. This ranges from enticing customers with the benefits of using a particular tariff plan. For example, the MTN BetaTalk offers customers a 250% airtime bonus for N100 airtime recharge and above.

Other tariff plans: MTN Xtravalue Carte, MTN XtraSpecial prepaid plan, MTN AWUF4U, MTN YafunYafun, MTN TruTalk, MTN XtraSpecial postpaid plan, MTN Xtravalue and MTN XtraSpecial prepaid plan, equally have different benefits attached to using them. MTN capitalises on their benefits to customers.

In its deployment of appeals, MTN has, over the years, used different celebrities for its adverts. This is mainly channeled towards building a connection between the brand and its customers via the love they have for the celebrities. Some of the celebrities that MTN has endorsed for its advertising include, among others, Flavour, Tiwa Savage, Patience Ozokwor, Davido, Francis Odega, M.I, Iyanya, and Nkem Owoh.

The use of appeals for advertising by companies have been a long-followed culture. MTN leverages on this to gain consumer patronage and get glued to their customers. The

appeal used for advertising depends on the advertising message that is passed to the audience.

This implies that advertising appeals are a fundamental part of inspiring consumer patronage. It also underscores why advertisers cannot produce ads without the injection of appeals.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Technological Determinism theory.

Technological Determinism Theory

The term – technological determinism – is believed to have been coined by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) an American social scientist. Technological determinism is a reductionist theory that presumes that a society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values.

According to Hauer (2017), technological determinism is the belief that technology is the main initiator of the society's transformation. The supporters of the theory are of the view that any social changes are controlled by the technology, technological development, communications technology and media.

More so, Hauer notes that the modern information stems from the development of innovations, new technologies and their social and political implications. Thus, since the establishment of this direction in the early 20th century, the theory had been divided into two different branches: radical and moderate technological determinism.

Whereas, the radical branch affirms that technologies are a requirement for changing the society, the moderate branch notes that technology is as a key factor that may or may not mean a change. Today, Internet and the nature of social media has changed the structure of the society. Hence, the development and advancement of computers, networks and the Internet have radically transformed varied and many aspects of not only human communication, but also the entire society's life (Hauer, 2017).

The relevance of this theory to this work stems from the fact that the social media as a technological invention/development, based on its power of information dissemination on any issue of great essence, is making remarkable influences in advertising. Hence, its ability to serve as a veritable tool towards advertising MTN products and

services geared towards making residents of Abuja patronise them, cannot be over-emphasised.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the survey method using questionnaire to solicit responses from residents of Abuja that use social media. With a sample size of 384 respondents drawn from the estimated population of 3,048,356 as of 2023.

One Local Government Area (LGA), Abuja Municipal Area Council was selected from the Abuja senatorial district. And two towns/areas were selected from the LGA through simple random sampling which are Garki & Asokoro. The purposive sampling technique was then used in selecting the individual respondents, advertisers, ordinary users and other business organisations from the various clusters. Accidental sampling technique was used in sharing the questionnaire.

To determine he sample size for the study, the Cochran statistical calculator was used to determine the sample. All 384 copies of the questionnaire administered were returned, but 13 copies were not properly filled, giving rise to 371 valid copies of the questionnaire for analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: Social Media Presence

Present on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	371	100
No	-	-
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 shows that all the respondents have social media presence. This implies that all the respondents are on different social media platforms.

Table 2: Exposure to MTN Social Media Advertising

Exposure	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	371	100
No	-	-
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that all the respondents are exposed to social media advertising. This implies that the respondents all see MTN advertising on different social media platforms.

Table 3: Social medium where MTN advertising is seen often

Social Medium	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	134	36
TikTok	71	19
Instagram	89	24
X	26	7
YouTube	51	14
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data from table 3 shows that most of the respondents, 134 (36%), see MTN advertising often on Facebook. This was followed by 89 (24%) respondents on Instagram, 71 (19%) on TikTok, 51 (14%) on YouTube, while 26 (7%) were on X.

This implies that Facebook is where most of the respondents see MTN advertising.

Table 4: MTN social media advertising creates awareness

Creates Awareness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	297	80
No	13	4
Not Sure	61	16
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The above indicates that most of the respondents, 297 (80%), believe that MTN social media advertising creates awareness, 61 (16%) respondents were not sure, while 13 (4%) respondents did not believe that MTN social media advertising creates awareness.

This implies that the respondents acknowledged the awareness influence of MTN social media advertising.

Table 5: Extent of MTN social media advertising awareness creation

Extent of Awareness Creation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High Extent	110	29
Average Extent	218	59
Low Extent	43	12
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 shows that 218 (59%) respondents were of the view that social media creates awareness of MTN products and services to an average extent, 110 (29%) respondents said it was to a high extent, while only 43 (12%) respondents indicated low extent.

The data above implies that the MTN social media advertising awareness creation is neither high, or low.

Table 6: Effectiveness in inspiring consumer patronage

Influence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	192	52
No	63	17
Not Sure	116	31
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 6 data indicated that 192 (52%) respondents agreed that MTN is effective in inspiring consumer patronage, 116 (31%) respondents were not sure of the effectiveness, while 63 (17%) respondents said it is not effective in inspiring consumer patronage.

This implies that MTN social advertising is effective in inspiring new and existing consumers to the country.

Table 7: Most effective social medium

Influence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
TikTok	92	25
Facebook	105	28
Instagram	88	23
YouTube	17	5
X	69	19
Total	**371**	**100**

Table 7 data indicated that a majority of 105 (28%) respondents said Facebook is the most effective medium in inspiring consumer patronage, 92 (25) respondents ticked TikTok, 88 (23%) respondents pointed at Instagram, 69 (19%) respondents indicated X, while 17 (5%) respondents said it is YouTube.

This implies that Facebook is best for MTN social media advertising and that most Nigerians use the platform.

Table 8: Effectiveness rating

Effectiveness Rate	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	154	42
Averagely Effective	161	43
Lowly Effective	47	13
Undecided	9	2
Total	**371**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data in table 8 above shows that 161 (43%) respondents indicated that the effectiveness rating is on the average, 154 (42%) respondents said it is highly effective, 47 (13%) respondents ticked lowly effective, while 9 (2%) respondents were undecided. The data above implies that the effectiveness of social media advertising in ensuring patronage of MTN products and services is squarely rated average, or simply put normal.

DISCUSSION

In this section of the study, the findings from the study are discussed in line with the objectives designed to guide the study, the general literature as well as the theoretical postulations.

The first objective of the study was to find out if MTN social media advertising creates enough awareness of its products and services in North-Central Nigeria. In response to this objective, data evidence revealed that MTN social media advertising creates adequate awareness of its products and services in the region. This was affirmed by a majority of 297 (80%) respondents. The finding aligns with Olley & Gbenga (2022) finding that social media platforms create awareness easily for people to become aware of products online. The finding implies that social media has been an indispensable tool for companies that want their products and services known in this time and age.

Finally, the study sought to ascertain the effectiveness of MTN social media advertising in inspiring consumer patronage in North-Central Nigeria. Data from the study showed that most of the respondents, 192 (52%), were of the view that MTN social media advertising is effective. In this light, Odhiambo (2015) affirmed that social media are more effective advertising channels in inspiring patronage of products and services and the influence of this effectiveness is more than that of the traditional channels. The implication of the finding is that MTN social media advertising is doing well, though there is still room for improvement.

CONCLUSION

Social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, X and YouTube, guarantee easy access to information dissemination to people scattered in time and place. The beauty of social media is the opportunity it offers for people to interact and rub minds on issues that are important to them. It is based on this premise that MTN leverages the power of social media to advertise their products and services.

However, as residents of Abuja are often exposed to MTN social media ads, Facebook is the social medium where MTN advertising is often seen and the ads do create awareness of the telecommunication company's products and services. This speaks to the fact that advertisers in Nigeria should capitalize on using Facebook to run ads. MTN social media ads exert influence over other telecommunication brands and this influence is high. This affirms that the MTN online campaign is having the intended impact. Thus, social media, surely, is reliable as a means of awareness creation of products and services.

Recommendations

The study thus recommends that:

1. Advertising agencies and companies intending to embark on social media advertising in Nigeria should use Facebook the most. As the world's most popular social medium, it is common to see people who have a Facebook account. Therefore, people can easily access the medium and get exposed and influenced by ads running on it.

2. MTN should make use of trending content creators and influencers in pushing their brands. Having content creators and influencers who generate credible attention online stand to push further the MTN brand.

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