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Digital marketing and its effect on consumer behaviour: A case study of the Nigerian telecoms

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Abstract

The widespread uses of Internet technologies have changed how firms around the world communicate their products or services to consumers. Understanding consumers' desires and creating products or services to cater to these needs remain the major concern of many organizations. Therefore, this study focused on the role digital marketing poses on consumers' behavior and satisfaction. The study further identifies the factors influencing the use of digital marketing in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. A survey research method was used and the Cochran formula enables an ideal sample size calculation since the total population size of online consumers is infinite. Based on this calculation 500 respondents were surveyed due to the researcher's convenience, cost, and accessibility to the respondents. Data were collected using both primary and secondary sources. An online well-structured designed questionnaire (Google survey) was attached via online platforms. The questionnaire elicited information on respondents' perceived usefulness of the digital adverts and other marketing platforms as well as the factors influencing their use. Interestingly, the results showed that digital marketing thus has a significant relationship with consumers' behavior and satisfaction. This further indicates that consumers appreciate regular and timely access to information provided on telecommunications products, services, and networks via digital marketing channels in making purchase decisions.

Keywords: Consumers behavior, digital marketing, digital advert, effect, service providers, telecommunications

1. Introduction

The year 1886 witnessed the establishment of Nigerian telecommunications facilities by the British colonial administration, though Oghojafor *et al.* (2014) ^[14] noted that the industry observed more liberalization as a result of more private-owned involvement in the provision of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services. The revolution in the Nigerian telecommunications industry began in May 1999, which fashioned the need for mobile telecommunications services. This is because not only did the monopoly previously enjoyed by the Nigeria telecommunication (NITEL) result in low-quality service for consumers, but also did not permit consumers to integrate into the global network system appropriately (Worlu, 2011) ^[22].

The arrival of new entrants into the Nigerian telecommunications business prepared consumers to be constantly faced with the option of selecting which telecommunications service firms are more advantageous and efficient. Consumers now switch among mobile telecommunications networks due to service quality, tariffs, and other benefits. Oyeniyi *et al.* (2011) ^[16] as cited in (Popoola, 2013) ^[17] reported that the Nigerian telecommunications industry's extreme competition readiness is a result of direct similar products and services offered by all telecommunications service providers within the industry. The telecommunications service providing industry in Nigeria is a highly competitive industry with a big market, NCC (2012) ^[12] revealed that the Nigerian telecommunication industry has speedily grown from its early days in 2001 by 400,000 subscribers to over 100 million subscribers presently (Animashaun, 2013) ^[4].

Digital marketing is the major innovative application of the Internet with other digital infrastructures for marketing activities and has indeed transformed the different sectors of society, including marketing telecommunications products and services. Digital marketing includes a wider variety of products, brands, or services advertising strategies that primarily utilize the Internet as a main promotional means in addition to traditional TV, radio, or mobile advertisement.

2. Background

The modern telecommunications service industry in Nigeria started in the 1990s and this was characterized by the tremendous entrants of new investors into the market. Digital communication technologies have become an important part of our daily lives with billions of users on the Internet, social media, and other mobile apps (Stephen, 2015) ^[19]. The biggest market share of Internet users in the mobile telecommunication industry are subscribers of 1G, 2G, 3G, and 4G mobile technologies. The number of people accessing the Internet has increased tremendously over the years in Nigeria according to statistics. For instance, Internet World Stats (2019) ^[10]; reported that Internet users as of March 2019 have increased to 111,632,510 on global system for mobile communications (GSM) and code division multiple access (CDMA) networks.

Modern technology emergence has made Nigerian telecommunications service providers appreciate more the importance of digital marketing especially in tracking the need, want, suggestions, trends, and behaviors of their consumers. Consumers have become more sensitive to the characteristics and attributes of telecommunications products and services rendered (Rahman *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, consumers' behavior in response to telecommunications service offerings remains a point of attention to the telecommunication service providers. Hence, digital marketing in the telecommunications industry is of great concern to the telecommunications service consumers and the telecommunications service providers. The sustainability of today's modern telecommunications firms depends on how they handle and treat their consumers.

Consumer behavior is vastly changing in terms of their choice or taste which poses a threat to the telecommunications service industry to know their consumers in a better way and build appropriate marketing strategies to keep the present consumers and capture the potential market. Kumar (2016) ^[11] identified consumer purchase behavior as those acts exhibited by individuals, groups, and organizations directly or indirectly when probing, acquiring, purchasing, utilizing, and disposing of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires (Engel *et al.*, 1986) ^[8]. Telecommunications offerings and operations are constantly evolving to support the sales and delivery of telecommunications services/networks. According to the Adobe blog (2016) ^[2], telecommunications service providers were advised to invest meaningfully in digital marketing to combat competitive threats and differentiate their products/services within the crowded marketplace (Adobe blog, 2016) ^[2].

The purchasing behavior of consumers in the telecommunications service industry is largely influenced by numerous factors, and these factors often affect the firms to match the needs of the consumers. Telecommunication service firms are not new to changes in technological development and rising globalization; the availability of advanced technologies as well as wide accessibility of digitally sourced information has driven many industries to digital change (Stephen, 2015) ^[19] and the Nigerian telecommunications service industry is not excluded. These technological advancements have made outstanding influences on marketing theories and practices which include; the emergence of capturing improved quality

customer data, enhanced providers' consumer relationships, promoting consumers' insight, and customer resource management (CRM) in the Nigerian telecommunication industry.

Hence, digital marketing holds a capable strategy for telecommunications service providers to comprehend their consumer behavior, since consumers are at their disposal to merge data from numerous sources for a better understanding of their consumers (Vinerean *et al.*, 2013) ^[21]. This tremendous growth cannot be matched up with that of traditional marketing, as an industry providing public services (such as the telecommunications firms) needs to understand the changes in consumers' needs and preferences to create services, tariffs, and products accordingly, efficiently and timely. This study was drawn from the consumers' (telecommunication service users) point of view. The study investigated the influence of digital marketing on consumers' purchase decision-making and behavior.

This study helps telecommunications service providers understand the dimensions that consumers (subscribers) consider the most effective means to communicate their experience with a service or network. The consumers' views on digital marketing priorities, use, opportunities, and challenges were investigated. It is important because the Nigerian telecommunications industry is an extremely competitive market.

2.1 Consumers' behavior in the digital environment

Consumer behavior varies from person to person. Amruta (2014) ^[3] identified the constant change in consumer behavior is due to global transformation in terms of technology usage and marketing strategies. Consumers have diverse biological, physiological, and social needs and their purchasing decision making is prompted by both internal and external factors around them.

Vineran *et al.* (2013) ^[21] revealed that understanding consumer purchase conduct is important for marketing success as consumers have embraced exploiting the Internet and online socializing tools. Consumer's attitudes, opinions, and feelings about the product or service determine if the consumer will purchase such a product and use the service or not. Attitudes are enduring values and beliefs that vary from people and it is hard to change. These factors are beyond product or service price and experience but are socio-cultural factors. Abhishek *et al.* (2015) ^[1] emphasized that for a telecommunications service provider to be successful, it must understand the factors influencing its consumer's behaviors and tailor its marketing strategies to accommodate those factors.

2.2 Digital marketing in the Nigerian telecommunications industry

Mobile number portability (MNP) enables subscribers to switch among the available telecommunications service providers for better service quality. With this, the telecommunications service firms need to develop strategies to attract, satisfy and build a relationship with their consumers. Nwakanma *et al.* (2018) ^[13] emphasized the role of online promotion to attract and compel consumers to purchase such telecommunications products or services. Understanding consumers' choice, need, and interests, via digital channels promote organizations' brands, products, or services. Today, in the profoundly created and innovatively propelled society, customers have a lot of decisions and

alternatives (which are frequently close and contending) to settle on. In the light of this serious challenge, the significant test going up against every one of the telecommunications firms in Nigeria is therefore the use of different advertising activities or procedures that would prompt the fascination of new subscribers, and retain the existing ones who might then end up loyal consumers.

The intense competition in the telecommunications servicing industry has no doubt brought about the use of digital marketing in the industry. Digital marketing in the Nigerian telecommunications service industry involves the use of online strategies (such as; the Internet, web, blog, social media, and search engine) and other technological tools as a means of advertising telecommunications products and services.

Aremu and Lawal (2012) [5] stated that in recent years, the Nigerian telecommunications industry has witnessed intense competition which resulted in the use of various forms of marketing strategies. According to the World economic forum (2017), telecommunications service-providing firms are currently leveraging the adoption of a digital platform for promoting their brands, services, and products. The four most popular dominant players in the Nigerian telecommunications industry are greatly investing in online strategies to connect with their millions of consumers across the country regardless of the consumer's location, settlement, and time.

2.3 Challenges of digital marketing in Nigeria's telecommunications industry

The emergence of new technologies such as digital marketing, the Internet of things (IoT), big data (BD), artificial intelligence (AI), and other advanced technologies changes how brands and firms carry out their business activities. However, with these huge benefits, it is somewhat unfortunate that brands and firms in Nigeria are yet to fully make use of these potentials.

Despite the advantageous nature of the digital marketing, it however has its challenges, particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. Trust is one of the challenges faced by digital marketing in Nigeria. The fear of Internet scammers and distrust of online advertisements (information) fueled this problem. On this note, Richard (2012) revealed that less than two percent of online users trust or believe online banner adverts.

Another fundamental flaw of the Internet as a medium of advertising is the untidy and invasive nature of its appearance. Some online adverts can be messy and hard to read, over information at a time could lead to misinformation as well as interrupt the user's online experience (Tavor, 2011). The Internet Society Nigeria Chapter (2016) further identified lack of technical know-how as one of the major factors influencing Internet and other digital technologies usage in Nigeria among other factors identified. Over time, television viewing habits of individuals are greatly reduced due to lack of time and availability of Internet connectivity, now we spend more time on the Internet visiting social network sites such as Facebook, Email, Twitter, Youtube, and Skype to mention but a few. Therefore, brands should pay more concentration to this trend in their marketing approach.

3. Research Methodology

The study was restricted to only consumers with an online

presence (Internet users) who are consumers of Nigerian telecommunications products or services. This was because only consumers with an online presence can largely access these digital marketing technologies.

3.1 Research Questions

The study research questions are as follows;

1. What effect does the use of digital marketing have on consumer behavior and satisfaction in the Nigerian telecommunications industry?
2. What are the factors influencing the use of digital marketing in the study area?

3.2 Sampling Technique

The study adopted the qualitative and quantitative methods of research, with the aid of an online questionnaire (Google form) for an adequate understanding of the phenomenon under study. The convenience sampling technique was employed because of the complexity of the population under study. The Cochran formula was used to calculate an ideal sample since the total population size of consumers with an online presence in the Nigerian telecommunications industry is infinite.

3.3 The Cochran formula is

Where:

e is the desired level of precision (i.e. the margin of error) of 1%,

p is the (estimated) proportion of the population that has the attribute in question,

q is $1 - p$.

From the calculation determined at a 99% confidence level, assuming half (50%) of the telecommunication consumers are online (this will commute the maximum variability), therefore, $p = 0.5$ and keeping the error margin as 1%, the needed respondents was 557 based on precision and estimation. Due to researcher convenience, cost, and accessibility to the respondents only 500 responses were collected. The sample size was drawn from all users of telecommunications services in Nigeria (Mtn, Glo, Airtel, 9mobile, and others).

Copies of the questionnaire were administered with the aid of social media shared across four major social media networking sites namely; Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram via the form link (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1IbGWtNHt4IYZCNQY>). The questionnaire elicited information on telecommunications consumers' characteristics, consumers' knowledge of different digital marketing tools, and rating the consumers' extent of usage of the various digital marketing technologies available to them. A six-point Extent-Likert scale was used to elicit information from the consumers on rating their usage extent of the different types of digital marketing technologies, various factors affecting the usage of digital marketing technologies, problems encountered, as well as suggestions on how these technologies can be improved. Secondary data were collected from online publications, journals, and website contents. The data obtained were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics using IBM statistical package for social science (SPSS) tool.

To ensure the validity of the instruments used for this study, the questionnaire was given to experts in the field of Global

innovation and marketing whose research interest includes Consumer behavior, digital marketing, and E-business. The comment and suggestions of the experts lead to the re-modification of the instrument, helped authenticate the content validity of the instrument, and logical linking of all items on the research instrument used was achieved in line with the objectives of the study. Also, a pilot study was done before the main data collection. This was done to orientate the researchers on the research project and provide insight into the phenomenon. This also ensures that errors can be rectified at little cost.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the results obtained based on the questionnaire filled by the respondents is presented in this section. A targeted total of five hundred (500) responses were obtained, although four-hundred and eighty-four (484) (96.8%) the respondents’ responded adequately and were the valid ones used for the analysis. The percentage of valid respondents is 96.8%, and it’s a fair representation of the total number of the copies of questionnaire administered. Findings and analysis provide a comprehensive analysis of the data obtained via Google forms and a well-detailed discussion of the analysis.

The study explains the impact consumers’ access to digital marketing technologies does have on changing the mindsets to purchase telecommunications products, services, or networks themselves. To address these objective consumers’ perceived usefulness of the digital platform, ease of use, consumers’ online experience, cost of accessing other strategies, and the role of online promotional strategies were investigated.

Firstly, the perceived effectiveness of digital marketing strategies was accessed. Analysis of the respondents’ opinions towards digital adverts and platforms was obtained. The analysis revealed that 244 (51%) of the respondents sometimes have positive thoughts towards adverts on digital marketing platforms, and 67 (14%) most of the time have a positive attitude towards digital advertisements on the Internet. In assessing consumers’ negative thoughts towards digital advertisements, out of the 484 respondents 158 (33%) of the respondents rarely have negative toward telecommunications service providers’ adverts while 103 (22%) of the respondents never had such distrust negative thoughts towards such form of marketing. The above result indicates that digital adverts by telecommunications service providers possibly are positively influencing consumers’ purchase decision on telecommunications products an opting for new service/networks.

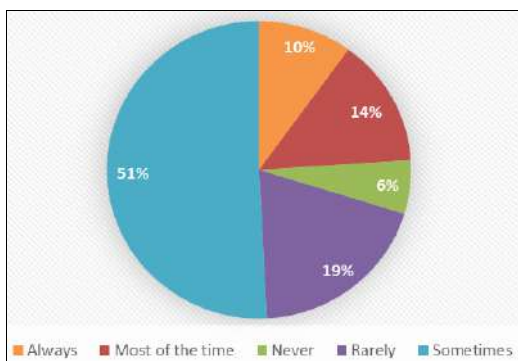


Fig 1: Positive Thoughts

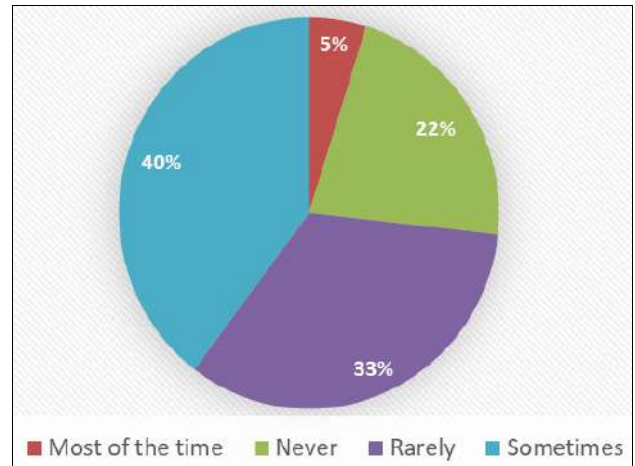


Fig 2: Negative Thoughts

To further understand consumers’ opinions towards online adverts, the consumers’ perception of online campaigns was evaluated. The result reveals that 214 (45%) of the respondents agreed that digital marketing adverts are informative and an innovative means for the respective chosen telecommunications service providers to reach out to them, and 175 (36%) of the respondents see digital adverts as an effective means of creating global reachable awareness on new telecommunications products or services while 17 (4%) of the respondents sees digital adverts as being annoying as it may obstruct their smooth online activities.

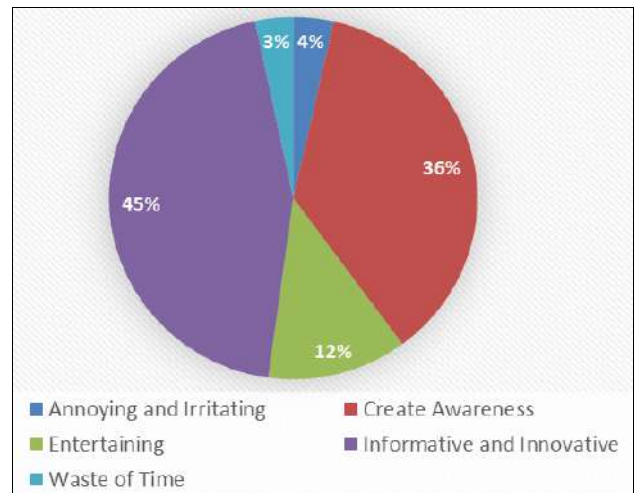


Fig 3: Perception towards Online Campaigns

Goldstein *et al.* (2014) [9] studied ‘annoying’ (e.g., obtrusive, low quality) website ads and showed how they create economic costs for advertisers and cognitive costs for consumers. From this review, it was noted that all these factors influence the extent to which digital platforms are viewed by the users in terms of searching and consuming products and services.

A reliability re-tests on consumers’ satisfaction level with digital marketing was conducted to check if the responses obtained from the respondents are adequate to assess the effect digital adverts have on respondents’ respective chosen telecommunications service providers. The table below indicates that the respondents understand the effect of a digital advert on their behavior while purchasing telecommunications products or services.

Table 1: Reliability re-tests on consumers’ satisfaction level with digital marketing

S/N	Variables	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Reviews, comments, influencing positive purchasing decision	3.52	1.40	Positive
2	Enhanced communication/feedbacks	3.66	1.37	Positive
3	Perceived effectiveness of the platforms	3.74	1.33	Positive
4	Digital media influences new product/services trial	3.72	1.37	Positive
5	Enhanced timely accessibility	3.58	1.41	Positive
6	Enhanced products/services comparison	3.59	1.42	Positive
7	Accurate and more reliable information on products/services rendered by service providers	3.51	1.35	Positive
8	Role of Digital marketing	3.75	1.33	Positive
	Grand Mean (GM)	3.63		Positive
Benchmark: Negative response = 1.5 - 3.45 Positive response = 3.50 – 5.00				

This result shows that on average, respondents’ agreed that digital marketing capabilities (variables) do have an effect on their satisfaction with digitally purchased telecommunications products or services with a positive (mean=3.63). It was revealed that digital marketing is a great influencer for respondents to try out new products or opt for a new service/network.

Digital marketing capabilities such as; its timely and unrestricted accessibility, prompt feedback and responsiveness, enhanced products/service comparison nature, exposure to others’ reviews, comments, and suggestions, ability to communicate with the providers directly via digital platforms as well as the quality of telecommunications products/services information provided have a positive influence on consumers’ behaviors. The result agrees that the effectiveness of a technology is measured based on the technology’s performance and outcome.

Furthermore, some respondents reported having switched between products or services on a particular network based on digital advertisements while some have switched from one telecommunications product or service based on the post, reviews, comments, and suggestions of previous consumers of such product or service.

Table 2: Respondents telecommunication service switch

Parameters	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Within- network Switch		
Yes	324	66.9
No	157	32.4
No Response	3	0.6
Total	484	100.0
Inter-network Switch		
Yes	268	55.4
No	207	42.8
No Response	9	1.9
Total	484	100.0
Switch based on reviews and comments		
Yes	155	32.0
No	83	17.1
Maybe	236	48.8
No Response	10	2.1
Total	484	100.0

Oyeniye and Abiodun (2010) ^[15] emphasized that consumers switch among alternatives when not satisfied. Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) further emphasized that when consumers are fulfilled, they tend to have an ideal behavior and stay on their current telecommunications service or network but when they are dissatisfied; they show unfavorable conduct and defect. Therefore, this study suggests the need for telecommunications service providers to fully implement the capabilities of digital marketing to assess its consumer’s satisfaction.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the statement that digital marketing does not have a significant effect on consumer behavior and satisfaction. The result shows that an F-value of 2.030 with an associated significance value of 0.042 was obtained. This significance value of 0.042 was compared with a significance level of 0.05 and it was found to be significant. Therefore, the outcome of the test re-test reliability test shows that digital marketing has a significant effect on consumer behavior and satisfaction.

Table 3: Test of Variance on the effect of digital marketing on consumers’ behaviour and satisfaction

Source of variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	3.443	8	0.430	2.030	0.042 ^b
Within groups	71.019	385	0.212		
Total	74.462	393			

The below table analysis further explained which of the variables has a more significant relationship; the findings revealed that timely accessibility to digital platforms at (0.00 < 0.05), exposure to telecommunications service providers’ posts feedback, and previous consumers’ reviews (0.01 < 0.05) and consumers perceived effectiveness of the digital platforms (0.05 = 0.05) do have a significant relationship on consumers’ behavior and satisfaction. This indicates that consumers appreciate regular and timely access to information provided on telecommunications products, services, and networks via digital marketing channels.

Table 4: ANOVA Test of Variance on relationships between digital marketing and consumers' behaviour and satisfaction

Variables		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Effectiveness of platforms	Between Groups	10.426	2	5.213	2.975	0.05
	Within Groups	842.773	481	1.752		
	Total	853.198	483			
Timely accessibility	Between Groups	33.636	2	16.818	8.676	0.00
	Within Groups	932.380	481	1.938		
	Total	966.017	483			
Quality of online information	Between Groups	6.793	2	3.396	1.877	0.15
	Within Groups	870.174	481	1.809		
	Total	876.967	483			
Feedbacks and reviews	Between Groups	16.730	2	8.365	4.356	0.01
	Within Groups	921.870	480	1.921		
	Total	938.600	482			
Communication	Between Groups	.200	2	0.100	.053	0.95
	Within Groups	910.550	481	1.893		
	Total	910.750	483			
Cost of other strategy	Between Groups	3.436	2	1.718	.979	0.38
	Within Groups	842.750	480	1.756		
	Total	846.186	482			

Similarly, Cetina *et al.* (2012) [6] emphasized that a good online experience on digital marketing platforms affects the mental process of consumers as well as enhances their buying decision online. A good online experience on a particular digital marketing platform will initiate consumers to further access such a platform when faced with purchase decision-making.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings concluded that the proliferation of the Internet, as well as consumers, perceived usefulness of the various digital marketing platforms has been a great success in the widespread acceptance and usage of digital media as a form of advertisement in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. The study emphasized the role digital marketing plays in influencing consumers' behavior and satisfaction. How does this emerging digital environment enable important consumers' choices, needs, and wants? Has changed the way telecommunications service providers reach out to their consumers. The study also concluded that the majority of the respondents feel closer to their chosen telecommunications service providers' via digital platforms. Telecommunications service providers are advised to invest meaningfully in digital marketing to make their products and services well known to the consumers and as a means of communicating consumers' views and opinions.

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