

ADVERTISING STRATEGIES AND CUSTOMERS' RETENTION OF TELECOMMUNICATION MESSAGES AMONG USERS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to investigate the advertising strategies and customers' retention of telecommunication messages among users in Port Harcourt. The objectives of this study include among others are to determine the advertising strategies used by the telecommunication firms, to find out if the advertising messages of the telecommunication firms lead to users' retention of the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt, and what factors in the advertising messages that influence users to retain and patronize the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt. The study is anchored on persuasive theory of mass communication. The descriptive survey method was adopted and the population was 3,171,000, while the sample size of 384 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The snowball sampling technique was used for the study. Questionnaire was used as the research instrument. The questionnaire was designed in line with the research topic. The findings revealed that the telecom firms employed various promotions using both-the-above and below-the-line media as their advertising strategies. The study therefore, concludes that telecommunication service providers use below-the-line advertising media as their media-building block for marketing and promotion of their services in Port Harcourt. Consequently, this study recommends that telecommunication firms should complement the below-the-line and above-the-line advertising strategies with a multi-media advertising strategy to sustain the patronage of their subscribers or users of their networks. That brand should always meet customers' satisfaction to continuously attract and retain the patronage of their target market in Port Harcourt. That advertising messages of telecommunication firms should always integrate edutainment and infotainment messages to draw the attention, interest and stimulate the desire of the subscribers to action in the marketing environment in Port Harcourt. That telecom service providers in Port Harcourt should complement their promotional mix with free text messages and free call/internet frequently to enable users retain their services in Port Harcourt.

Keywords: Advertising, Strategies, Customers' Retention, Telecommunication, Messages

INTRODUCTION

The telecommunication industry is probably one of the most novel and fastest growing industries in Nigeria. As an important factor that drives trade and the economy in general, it is a major player in the economic development of the country. The process by which companies determine the products or services that would be of interest to customers and the strategies to employ in sales, communication and business development is known as 'Marketing'. In their contribution, »

Kotler & Saunders (2008) defined Marketing as an integrated process through which companies create value for customers and build strong customers relationships in order to capture value from customers in return.

It is imperative for firms to create and implement the right strategies in order to carve a niche or

advantages within the market segment for themselves. As it has always been the tradition, firms have typically steered the marketing strategies in the direction of profits increase by increasing the market share of new customers. With the nature of competition and number of companies in the globe, most companies are forced to keep changing their strategies to sustain their market - keep their customers. As a result of this reality advertising strategies become the answer to this fact. Advertising strategy is an overall plan for a particular advertising campaign. It encompasses specific tactics designed to meet certain goals and objectives determined (Joyce, 2013). As countries continue to shift from agricultural based economy to the service orientation, the demand for service holds further potential. Additional factors that contribute to the growth of the service sector are: higher per capita income, increased time pressures, advances in product technology, spiraling competition, rise of industrialization, globalization, competition, greater life expectancy, cost effectiveness drivers, growth of service chain networks and service quality movements. Thus tremendous growth of the service sector implies that the role of marketing in terms of vast opportunities and implications, marketing opportunities arising from new technology, in franchising from fewer regulations and professional restrictions, in servicing physical goods and international markets cannot be overemphasized (Jobber, 2011). Customer retention has been advocated as an easier and more reliable source of superior performance, competitive advantage and a success factor for surviving in the emerging competitive market of telecommunication.

Statement of the Problem

There is no doubt that the telecommunication sector is faced with a great challenge of retaining their market share by retaining their customers because with the new service providers now in the market with their attractive and enticing features, it becomes quite difficult to make sure that once customers remain loyal and also to develop 'brand loyalty'.

This research was undertaken to establish the relationship between advertising strategies and customers' retention of telecommunication messages among users in Port Harcourt, with special focus on how the media and advertising message strategies help customers' retention telecommunication firms advertisement messages in Port Harcourt. It is on this backdrop that this study was out to find out the advertising strategies used by the telecommunication firms to make customers retain their advertising messages.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were developed to guide the conduct of this study which include to:

1. Determine the advertising strategies used by telecommunication firms in marketing of their services.
2. Find out if the advertising messages of the telecommunication firms are retained by users in Port Harcourt.
3. Ascertain the factors in the advertising messages that influence users to retain the sales messages and patronize the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the following questions were developed to guide this research:

1. What are the advertising strategies used by telecommunication firms in marketing of their services?
2. To what extent are the advertising messages of the telecommunication firms retained by users in

Port Harcourt?

3. What factors in the advertising messages influence users to retain the sales messages and patronize the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt?

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the persuasion theory of mass communication. This theory was founded by Carl Hovland in 1940. The thrust of this theory is that media messages especially advertising have the capacity to influence, inform, convince, convert or calls to action of the audience or consumers. This theory is aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviour of receivers of media messages subtly or subliminally. The purpose of persuasive theory is to convince or influence the audience in a manner that the designer of the message has intended especially in advertising.

Conceptual Review

Overview of Advertising

The business of buying and selling can neither exist nor flourish without advertising as advertisement has become indispensable for both sellers and buyers. The fact remains that in this age of large scale production, manufacturers cannot sell their products without advertising. Advertisement is a non-personal communication of information about products, services or ideas usually designed to persuade audiences to take action now or in the future and normally paid for by specific sponsors through a variety of media forms (Arens & Weigold, 2011). To be specific, advertising aims at groups of people rather than at individuals, thus it is non-personal. Besides, one of the purposes of advertising is to identify its sponsors and that is why they pay for advertising.

Also, people are exposed to advertising through channels of communication called media. In other words, an advertising medium is a non-personal avenue of delivering advertisement to audiences. There are many different forms of communication channels or media including traditional mass media, addressable media (such as shopping carts); (Richards & Curan, 2012).

Advertising strategy is a plan of an advertising campaign developed by a company that stimulates consumers to purchase its goods or services. When forming an advertising strategy, advertisement should pay attention to four key elements, which are target audience, product concept, advertising message and communications media. There are five steps in forming an advertising strategy: conducting advertising research, setting advertising goals, formulating budgets, creating advertising messages and selecting media (Clow & Baack, 2014)

Media planners require an intricate understanding of the strength and weaknesses of each of the main media options. The media industry is dynamic-new advertising media options are constantly emerging digital and social media are changing the way that consumers use media and are also influencing how consumers acquire product information.

Concept of Media Advertising/ Commercial

Television advertising offers the benefit of reaching large numbers in a single exposure. The reason for having a large number is that this advertising method can reach the household level consumers (Briefly, 2005). Television networks are attempting to improve their target efforts. Networks operating in the pay-to-access arena in particular such as those with channels on cable and satellite television are introducing more narrowly themed programming (i.e TV shows geared to specific interest groups) designed to appeal to selective audiences. However, television remains an option that is best for products that are targeted to a broad market (Kotler, 2007).

Advertising through radio has been a viable advertising option for over 80 years. In Nigeria, such networks for children programming, sports programming broadcast nationally either through a group of company stations or through a syndication arrangement (i.e. business agreement) with partner stations. Finally, the potential for national and international advertising have become more attractive as radio stations allow their signals to be broadcast over the internet.

Print publications such as magazines, books, newspapers and special issue publications (such as annuals) offer a variety of advertising opportunities (Hooper, 2012), Magazines especially those that target specific niche or specialized interest areas are more tightly targeted compared to broadcast medium. Additionally, magazines offer the option of allowing marketers to present their message using high quality imagery (e.g. full colour) and can also offer advertisers the ability to integrate interactive tactile experiences through the use of scratch papers impregnated with scents (e.g. perfume).

The fastest growing media outlet for advertising is the internet. Compared to spending in other media, the rate of spending for internet advertising is experiencing tremendous growth not in the U.S only newspaper and television advertising in terms of total spending. Internet advertising influence continues to expand and each year, more major marketers shift a larger portion of their promotional budget to this medium. Two key reasons for this shift rest with the Internet's ability to: (1) narrowly target an advertising message and (2) track user response to the advertiser's message (Rodgers & Therson, 2012).

Objectives of Advertising

Jobber (2001) and Gupta (2008) identify the following as advertising objectives:

1. To draw consumers or customers attention to an advertised products, services, ideas, individuals or organizations.
2. To market products, services, ideas, individuals or organizations.
3. To maintain or reinforce consumers' loyalty.
4. To announce product modification.
5. To increase sales of product.
6. To increase product network distribution.
7. To announce rebranding of product.
8. To induce or persuade consumer for product patronage.
9. To market the image and reputation of a product or organization.
10. To remind consumers about the existence of a product.
11. To stimulate consumers attention.
12. To maintain consumers loyalty.

Empirical Review

This section aims to provide a review of the empirical literature on the advertising strategies and customers' retention of telecommunication messages among users and those related the study. The first here is Abedin and Ferdous (2015) who carried out a study on "Promotional Strategies of Telecommunication Industries and Customers Perception using Airtel Bangladesh Limited as a case study." The study revealed that promotions are very significant elements of marketing activities. All over the world, the large multinational corporations and even small firms recognize that there is no best alternative than promotion to communicate with consumers and motivate them to purchase their products or services. The study actually reveals the state of promotional activities level and the customer perception on this perspective and whether the promotional activities, its standard and

customer perceptions are able to increase market share in the industry. The study also focused on the extent to which promotional activities can work and how the defined customer perception can create positive impact on customers mind and be able to create positive contribution on the building of brand image of the company. The study found that different promotional activities and its quality dimensions bound customers to perceive promotional value differently and its promotional strategies are moderate through it is leading telecommunication in the country. Thus a company should analyze the customer expectations first and then should make a diagram so that the company can give the best promotional values to the customers.

Onsongo (2016) investigated the "Effects of Marketing Strategies on Customer Retention: A study of the Health Insurance in Kenya". The research study was done to establish the association among marketing strategies and customer retention in health insurance industry in Kenya. To achieve this, information was gathered by use of structured questionnaire. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 28 health insurance firms that are registered with the Association of Kenya insurance using the drop-and-pick technique. Analysis of information involved reducing accumulated information to a convenient size, coming up with summary and looking for patterns hence administering statistical techniques through descriptive statistics. The study established that there is a link or association among marketing strategies and client retention in the health insurance sector. Based on this, the study recommends that health insurance companies should start adapting principles of strategic marketing for those that are reluctant or have not implemented marketing strategies. Marketing strategies should be formulated in light of the external environment which is made up of elements that are uncontrollable to an organisation. The research further recommends that similar studies be done on other spheres of insurance specialization such as life and general insurance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey method of investigation as the research design for this study because of its relevance to the work and used the questionnaire as its research instrument of data collection. This study was restricted to the subscribers of the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. The population of this study was drawn from users of telecom firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. According to the (2006) National Population Commission (NPC), the population of study stands at 3,171,000, in 2021 at a growth rate of 2.5 population projection. In Port Harcourt, there are four major organizations that are providing telecommunication services to the customers namely, MTN, Airtel, Globacom and 9-Mobile (Etisalat). The study focused on users of the services of the telecommunication firms.

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Calculation was used to determine the sample size of 334.

The snowball sampling technique was used for this study. Deepak and Neena (2018, p. 261) opined that snowball sampling is generally used when it is difficult to identify the members of the desired population. Under this design each respondent, after being interviewed, is asked to identify one or more in the field. The sampling points were the companies' offices and other telecommunication users found within and outside the companies' premises. The researchers distributed self-designed questionnaire among the users of MTN, Airtel, Globacom and Etisalat in Port Harcourt.

The questionnaire had two parts: the first part consists of demographic questions regarding the gender, age, level of education, telecom network which they use and duration of usage. The second part of the questionnaire accommodates the psychographic data of the study. The instrument was designed in line with research topic and the research questions to assess the users' perception of advertising strategies

and customer' retention of telecommunication advertising messages in Port Harcourt. The copies of the questionnaire were filled and 300 copies were returned out of the 384 copies administered to the respondents resulting to 78% percent response rate. Before processing the responses, the completed copies of the questionnaire were edited for completeness and consistency. In analysing the data collected, the data gathered were computed into tables analyzed using simple percentage statistical method.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data were gathered exclusively from the administered and collected copies of the questionnaire as research instrument which were designed in line with the objectives of the study.

Demographic Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire

Network	Distributed	Retrieved
Airtel	96	70
GLO	96	80
MTN	96	78
9 Mobile (Etisalat)	96	72
Total	384	300

Three hundred and eighty four (384) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents but three hundred (300) copies were returned in usable condition.

Table 2: Analysis of Respondents' Demography

Demographic attributes of respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	138	46
Female	162	54
Total	300	100
Age		
15 years and above	15	5
16-24	64	21.33
25-35	84	28
36-50	52	17.33
51-65	47	15.65
66 yeas above	38	12.67
Total	300	100
Educational Qualifications		
SSCE/GCE/NECO	59	19.67

Diploma/NCE/OND	88	29.33
HND/B.Sc./B. A	104	34.67
Post Graduate & Professional Qualification	49	16.33
Total	300	100

The females are more in the usage of GSM Network. Similarly, those within the Age bracket of 16 to 35 years are more active, while decree holders were highest subscribers of telecommunications in Port Harcourt.

Table 3: GSM Network Usage and Duration

GSM Network	Network Usage	Percentage %
Airtel	21	7
MTN	128	42.67
GLO	103	34.33
9 Mobile (Etisalat)	48	16
Total	300	100
GSM Network Duration of Usage		
Below one year	21	7
1-5 years	121	40.33
6-10 years	136	45.33
11 -years and above	22	7.33
Total	300	100

The above shows that MTN and GLO have the highest number of subscribers, while the Airtel telecommunication has the least. And that 6-10 years is the highest duration of GSM Network using in Port Harcourt.

Psychographic Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the advertising strategies used by telecommunication firms in marketing of their services in Port Harcourt?

Table 4: Advertising Strategies used by Telecommunication Firms in Marketing of their services in Port Harcourt

Options	MTN	GLO	9 Mobile	Airtel	No of Resp.	%
TV Celebrity-endorsement	13	12	8	17	50	16.67
Radio Jingles	14	15	13	13	55	18.33
Newspapers wrap-rounds	11	11	10	13	45	15
Billboards	17	14	13	16	60	20
below-the-line	25	16	20	29	90	30
Total	80	68	64	88	300	100

The table shows that the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt engaged several advertising strategies to enable them retain their customers through the use of media and below-the -line media. They include SMS, street dance, recharge and get more, gift items etc, as their promotion.

Research Question 2: What is the extent to which the advertising messages of the telecommunication firms are retained by users in Port Harcourt?

Table 5: The extent to which the Advertising Messages of the Telecommunication Firms are Retained by Users in Port Harcourt

Options	MTN	GLO	9Mobile	Airtel	No of Resp.	Joint Total	%
Very high	30	27	25	29	111	215	71.67
High	28	31	23	22	104	-	-
Low	16	14	12	10	52	85	28.33
Very low	8	6	11	8	33	-	-
Total	82	78	71	69	300	300	100

The table clearly indicates that 111 respondents with a percentage of 71.67% said the extent to which the users of telecom services retain their sales messages after been exposed to them is "very high" while 84 respondents with a percentage of 28% said the extent of retention of the message is "high." Similarly, 77 respondents with a percentage of 25.67% said the extent of retention of the message is very 'low' whereas 49 respondents with a percentage of 16.22% said the percentage of retention of advertising message is low' From the overall result of the data analysis, the respondents that subscribed to a very high option polled the highest number of respondents (90) and percentage (30%), hence table 5 answered the research question 2 of this study.

Research Question 3: What factors influence users of telecom service to retain the sales messages and patronize the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 6: Factor that influence users of telecom service to retain their sales messages and

Patronize the Telecommunication Firms in Port Harcourt

Options	MTN GLO	9Mobile	Airtel	No of Resp.	Joint Total	%
Edutainment message	30	27	25	29	215	71.67
Captivating message	28	31	23	22	0	0
Infotainment message	16	14	12	10	85	28.33
Promotional message	8	6	11	8	0	0
Total	82	78	71	69	300	100

The table indicates that 215 respondents polling a percentage of 71.67% opined that the factor that influenced the retention of sales messages and the patronage of the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt is the engagement of "edutainment message" in the advertising of telecom service while no respondent subscribed to "captivating message" therefore, polling a percentage of 0% . In the same vein, 85 respondents polling a percentage of 28.3% subscribed to "infotainment" as the type of advertising sales message that influence the users of telecom service providers to retain and patronize their services but no respondent subscribed to "promotional message" hence the 0%. From the overall result of the data analysis the respondents that subscribed to "promotional message" hence the 0%. From the overall result of the data analysis, the respondents that subscribed to edutainment message polled the highest respondents (215) and percentage (71.67%). Hence table 6 answered the research question 3 of this study.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is done in line with the research questions developed to guide the conduct of this research.

RQ1: What are the advertising strategies used by telecommunication firms in marketing of their services in Port Harcourt? This study is designed to find out the advertising strategies of telecommunication firms in-marketing of their services in Port Harcourt. The answer to this question is presented in table 4 of this work. The result on the table shows that the telecom service providers mostly used the below-the-line advertising strategies in marketing their services to the subscribers or users of their services. However, they also use other strategies to complement the below-the line advertising strategies with the aim of influence consumers or subscribers choice of telecom service providers. This finding is in line with the postulation of the persuasive theory used as the theoretical framework of this study which holds that the essence of media content including advertising is to influence consumers buying behaviour and attitude in a competitive marketing environment.

RQ2: What is the extent to which the advertising messages of the telecommunication firms are retained by users in Port Harcourt? This question is designed to ascertain the level of message retention of users of telecom service providers' advertising messages after exposure to them. The answer to this question is presented on table 5 of this work. This result of the data analysis shows that the advertising messages of the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt are highly impactful on users or subscribers of their services are based the findings of this study.

This finding collaborates the persuasion theory used to underpin this study when the theory states that advertising message if used effectively can motivate, convince, convert and change the buying attitude and behaviour of the consumers. This result of the data analysis, also is in agreement with Marshall McLuhan, Canadian communication theorist's position in 1964 when he writes that : "the medium is the message" This means that what a copy writer in advertising needs is to design his or her message in a style that it persuade or influence consumers buying decision to achieve the intended goal of the message.

RQ3: What factor in the advertising messages influence users to retain and patronize the telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt? This question is designed to know the factor that can stimulate users of telecom service providers to retain their advertising messages after exposure. The answer to this question is presented on table 6 of this study. The result of the data analysis shows that edutainment message is one major type of advertising message that can influence users' retention of the advertising messages of telecommunication firms and the patronage of their services. This finding also gives credence to the persuasion theory which emphasizes that the nature of media message determines its influence on the audience. This finding further shows that when an advertising message is blended with educational and entertainment elements, such message has the potential of drawing attention and making great impact on the users of the message.

Findings

The following are findings of this study:

1. The study found that the telecommunication service providers adopt below-the-line advertising strategy in marketing of their services in Port Harcourt.
2. The study also found that the retention level of advertising messages of telecommunication firms by the subscribers and their attendant patronage of the telecom services in Port Harcourt is very high.
3. The study found that users of telecommunication services in Port Harcourt prefer edutainment message genre of advertising to other class of advertising messages.

CONCLUSION

The study centred on the investigating advertising strategies and customers' retention of telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Four telecommunication firms were used in the study: MTN, Airtel, 9mobile and Globacom. The data from the research questions show that they used below- the-line advertising media as the media-building block for marketing and promotion of their merchandize in Port Harcourt. This study confirms the study of Abed and Ferdo (2015) on "Promotional Strategies of Telecommunication Industries and Customers Perception: A Study of Airtel Bangladesh Limited" where they found that advertising is a major marketing tool for promoting and marketing of telecommunication service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made from the findings:

1. That telecommunication firms should complement below-the-line advertising strategy with multi-media advertising strategy to sustain the patronage of their subscribers or users of their networks.
2. That brand should always meet customers' satisfaction to continuously remain impactful on the users of their networks for sustainability of their target market in Port Harcourt.
3. That advertising messages of telecommunication firms should always complement edutainment messages with infotainment messages to draw the attention, interest and stimulate desire of the subscribers to action in the marketing environment in Port Harcourt.
4. That telecom service providers in Port Harcourt should complement their promotional mix with free text messages and free call/internet frequently to enable users retain their services in Port Harcourt.

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