



GSJ: Volume 10, Issue 4, April 2022, Online: ISSN 2320-9186
www.globalscientificjournal.com

UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AS MARKETING STRATEGY IN RETAIL BUSINESSES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social media marketing is a process of gaining customers' attention and traffic for a business aimed at an increased brand presence through the Internet. Social media marketing enhances brand awareness in addition to customer retention and satisfaction. Social media enables marketers to interact with customers, friends, families and groups. It helps in search engine optimization and increases rankings of company websites. It was in the light of the cardinal aim of social media that this study investigated the utilization of social platforms as a marketing strategy in retail businesses in the South East States of Nigeria. The study was guided by five specific purposes which hinged on determination of the acceptability, accessibility, effectiveness, efficiency, as well as preference of utilization of social media platforms as a marketing strategy in retail businesses in the South East States of Nigeria. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher, with the help of five research assistants. A population of 100 shop owners and customers obtained from internet was used for the study. There was no sample as the entire population was used since it was manageable. The research questions were answered on individual basis using the mean and standard deviation statistics, while the t-test and ANOVA statistics were used to test the null hypotheses. The study found among others that social media platforms that were generally accepted for retail businesses in the South East States of Nigeria included: WhatsApp, imo, google, LinkedIn, youtube, yahoo, Facebook, Reuters, 2go, and BBM. It was also found that the social media platforms were efficient, very effective, easily accessible and preferred platforms for retail marketing in the South East States of Nigeria in online businesses. There was no significant difference in the mean responses of shop owners and customers in location in the South East States of Nigeria. The study recommended that Business Education Departments in institutions of higher learning in Eastern States of Nigeria should organize workshops and seminars from time to time for private and public business organization operators and retail customers to abreast them with goings on in internet marketing via social media. .

KEY WORDS: Social media, utilization, marketing, platforms

INTRODUCTION

Marketing activities are aimed at making goods reach the consumers, suppliers, industries, groups and individuals for effective utilisation and satisfaction of their wants and needs for production purposes in the world of commerce. In economics, production is said not to be complete until the goods reached the final consumers or buyers who make use of the products, (Udu and Agu, 2008). The quest for faster ways and means marketers, consumers and producers send messages requesting the availability of goods and their prices led to the use of recent inventions on technology that achieves that objective. Social media platforms are among the latest technology in that regard. Kuruk (2007) and Oholakiya (2013) stated that social media brought about innovations in the ways and means in the usage of internet, through which information reached the consuming public. Such innovations include use of mobile phones on the location and prices of goods.

Furthermore, Oholakiya (2013) stated that the consumers are the latent majority and media outfits were no longer the gatehouses of information. More so, the author reiterated that small scale retail businesses can now engage in both receipt and passage of information to potential customers without going through the old medium of passing information to middlemen, or retailers then to consumers. This gave modern e-commerce site an opportunity that never was available at the disposal of small retail businesses. Social media platforms are used not only in easing off tension in customers' day-to-day dealing (Poole,1985), but also in communicating with friends both old and new and sometime lost but found classmates and school mates and as a tool that helps to achieve a business's and marketing goals (Atkin, 2012). Haithgoin (2009) encouraged people to take advantage of the unique role played by social media connections that influenced and mobilized the public. To Haithgoin (2009) social interaction and creation of highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques are carried out through social media. More so, Haithgoin asserted that social media support the human need for interaction through the use of Internet- and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). The author further reiterated that social media supports the democratization of knowledge and information, transformation of people from content consumers into content producers. That is why Joseph (2009) in his opinion referred to social media as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM).

Social media according to Glik (2007) has three components: (a) Concept (art, information, or meme). Meme means any unit of cultural information such as a practice or idea that was transmitted verbally or by repeated action from one mind to another. Secondly, meme means something that is copied or circulated online with slight adaptation including basic pictures, video templates, etcetera. (b) Media (physical, electronic, or verbal). This refers to the channel of dissemination of information, art or idea. (c) Social media deals with social interface (by way of intimate direct, community engagement, social viral, electronic broadcast or syndication, or other physical media such as print), as arguably stated by (Glik, 2007). Common forms of social media; use concepts, slogans, and statements with a high memory retention quotient, which tended to excite others to repeat, (Johnson, 2005). Johnson (2005) further stated that social media directed grassroots action information dissemination such as: public speaking, installations, performance and demonstrations.

Review of Literature

Sean and Xlaoquan (2013) carried out a study to determine whether a typical social media platform, Wikipedia improved the information environment for investors in the financial market. The design was a survey research and the population was 400. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the request questions. The t-test was used in the analysis of the hypothesis. The results showed that Wikipedia improved the information environment market and underscored the volume of information aggregation through the use of information technology. The relationship between this study and Sean and Xlaoquan's was that both studied social media platforms and the studies used survey design. The missing link was that while their study was carried out among companies in the United States of America this researcher carried out his in Nigeria among retailers and customers in the South East states of Nigeria. Kim, Sin, Sei and Tsai (2014) carried out a study on individual differences in the use of social media platforms of social media in Taiwan. It focused on the adoption of web2.0 by companies. The population of the study was 800 students. ANOVA as well as t-test statistics were used for the analysis of the study. Survey research design was used for the study. Four point Likert scale was adopted for the questionnaire items. The relationship between Kim et al study and this study is that both studies hinged on social media platforms. The gap is that while Kim et al studied students in Taiwan as the respondents this researcher in this present study made use of retailers and customers with a population of 100 and it was carried out in Eastern Nigeria, in Africa.

In a study conducted by Hilbert and Halperm (2016) on the accessibility of digital marketing. 200 respondents was used as the population. Survey method as adopted. The data analyzed with chi-square. The results showed easy accessibility of social media. The study was carried out in China while this study was carried out in South Eastern Nigeria. The population was 100. Both studies are similar since the hinged on accessibility of social media. The missing link is the different locations. More so the previous study did not make use of many social media tools but e-mail. Mihail and Andy (2012) carried out a study on the use of social media in Australia. The population consisted of 4000 social media platforms users. The methodology adopted was cross sectional experimental study using Twitter. It was an empirical study. Since there as control group. The analyses were done using percentages and graphs (histograph). The similarities between the previous study and this present study is that both studied social media utilization. The respondents were online in collection of data. This study analysis was with ANOVA and t-Test. The missing link was the location and method of data collection. The former was a n experimental study for a period while the present was on the spot for the data used.

Zhogyu, Junwen, Binyang, Kam and Yulan (2013) carried out an experimental study on the identification of social media tools that were popular . The study was on social media based platforms of: Twitter and Facebook. They formulated four hypotheses. The population was 26,747. They used t-test in data analysis and the results showed the social media platforms could improve individual identification. The relationship with that their study and this present study is that all the studies were on social media platforms. The missing link in their study is on the individual identification using social media platforms while the present study is on social media platforms as a marketing strategy. Besides, their study was carried out in Birmingham, United Kingdom while this study was in Eastern Nigeria. Rouhan and Ayoung (2015)also carried out a study on factors influencing information technology on social media platforms: evidence from Facebook pages. The study was an experimental design. The data was analyzed using t-test. The population was 400,000 Facebook users in Hongkong. The results showed that social media platforms were content creators. The gap between their study and this study was that they studied the social media compared to the traditional method of communication. Hence the

experimental and survey method was used. The relationship was that both studied Facebook as social media platform.

Henquen (2011) carried also out a study on consumer activity on social media. The study dealt on social media platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, Youtube It as a survey of adolescents in alcohol consumption. The study made use of sample collected in 2011. The author adopted Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS). The study made use of variables like age, interest, male and female. All of which showed varying percentages in the data collected from the sample. The similarities between both studies are that both dealt with social media. The tools being facebook. The respondents were consumers and users of the products. The missing link is that both did not use the same sample and location. The results showed that the previous study used one factor model in the analysis. It also used latent profile analysis while the present study used ANOVA and t-test in the analysis of the research questions and hypotheses.

In a study conducted by Bend and Gattel (2016) in Germany. It was an empirical study on the efficiencies of social networks in Germany. The study made use of e-mailing technique in the social network. They formulated two hypotheses. The population was 47 recruiters. It made up of 22 partners and 27 consultants for the study. The similarity is that both studies were on social media. The missing link is that based on the previous work while the present study had never been done. In another study conducted by Dargar and O`siri (2017) on the preferences of social media usage. It explored the associations between the social media usage at home and shopping preferences. The population was 247 respondents. Survey method was adopted for the study. Logistics progression was used for the analysis. The previous study and this present study are similar in as much as the made use of social media usage tools. The missing link is that both locations were not the same and the statistical analysis were not the same. While the previous study made use of progression for the data analyses this study made use of t-test as well as ANOVA in testing the reseach questions and hypotheses. Brenner and Smith (2013) carried out a study on the technology acceptance model (TAM). TAM was used as a loose framework that combined trust and the factors associated with TAM (i.e. perceived enjoyment, ease of use, and usefulness). The TAM determined that consumers, specifically students, hold a hierarchy of trust when using social media such as Facebook. Student`s trust `real` friends, then Facebook friends, followed by expert blogs and independent review sites and lastly celebrities and e-retailer sites (Brenner and Smith, 2013) on an 11 page layout. Overall, online advertising formats with positive attributes are welcomed by users; however, ads that are intrusive or interfere with online social networking activities, such as pop up, expandable, or floating formatted advertisements were disliked by network users (Cox, 2010). Baruah (2012) had earlier carried out a study on the Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study. He adopted a survey design for the study. The result of the study showed that Social media have the potential to fundamentally change the character of our social lives, both on an interpersonal and a community level. Index Terms: Social media, communication tool, publicity, branding, Social media tools are indicators for effective communication. The area of study was Guwahati city which is fast becoming an industrial region in the north-eastern part of India. A sample survey was carried out among the residents of Guwahati city. A total of randomly selected 200 sample of people residing in the urban areas of Guwahati city was taken into consideration.

Ayda (2012) also carried out a study on the efficiency of social media in Turkey Istanbul in TRNC local banks. Survey design was adopted and the data was collected from a population of 15 banks. The data collected was analysed using content analysis. The result showed that social

media were very efficient means customers were reached by the banks. Ashwork (2010), consequently carried out a study on the impact of social media on SME online retailing in the Fashion sector in United Kingdom. It was an exploratory study. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Using a survey design and interviewing method. The data was analyzed using a thematic template analysis. The result showed that social media is adopted as a policy for retail fashions in the United Kingdom for firms nascent survival as customers migrate to e-shopping as seen in Ibarra, (Andrews, 1993).

Another study was carried out by Ruba, Osama, and Badr (2009) on the Influence of Social Networking on E-Business: A Quantitative Study. This study was carried out in Jordan. The population was 2500. T-test was used in the analysis, The methodology adopted for research was quantitative survey. The research philosophy for this study was “Positivist”. While the methodology adopted here was descriptive survey. The relationship between this and the researcher’s study is both are on social media. Both used t-test in the analysis of the research questions. The gap between the former study and this one is that the former concentrated in e-business using e-mail as mainly the source. While his study used a lot of social media plat forms for the study. The location is also different. While the former was carried out in Jordan this one was carried out in Eastern Nigeria.

Jacques and James (2011) carried out a study on the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool. The study used descriptive research design. A questionnaire was designed to elicit views of respondents regarding the extent of usage of social media tools that help consumers in decision making process of buying products. First part of the questionnaire contains information regarding demographics and usage pattern of social media of the respondent. Second part has series of close-ended indirect questions which are based on impact of social media in making consumer buy a product and expectation from such media. The survey was conducted online through social networking sites and responses of 150 social net-workers were collected. The instrument (questionnaire) was put over Google docs and the link was sent to users to fill the instrument through various social networking sites like Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, LinkedIn, Hi5, Bebo etc. The respondents and the link was sent to users to fill the instrument through various social networking sites like Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, LinkedIn, Hi5, Bebo etc. They used regression analysis for testing of hypothesis. For visual representation of finding and results bar charts, pie charts and tables etc. The relationship between that study and this one is that both are on social media effectiveness as a marketing tool. The gap is that there are other tools of utilization that Bashir study did not cover such as preference, efficiency, etc which this research covered. Besides, their study used regression for the analysis while this study used t-test and ANOVA for the analysis of the hypotheses and research questions.

5

Junco, Heibergert, and Loken (2012) completed a study on social media. The population of the study was 132 students. The aim was to examine the link between social media and student engagement and social media grades. It was an experimental survey. The students were divided into two groups: the experimental and the control group. The experimental group used Twitter, while the control did not. The Twitter was used to organize the study, post class assignments, etc. they used t-test for the analysis. They discovered that those students in the Twitter group had higher GPAs and greater engagement scored than the control group. The relationship between the former and this study was that both made use of social media technologies. While the missing link is the classroom engagement while this study was aimed at consumers and retail owners utilization of social media for retail businesses.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, as it elicited the opinions and perceptions of the respondents. Survey design is such that a group of people was studied by collecting and analyzing data from a few or small people that represents the entire group or population. Similarly, Baxter and Babbie, (2004), Griffith, (2014) posited that the primary purpose of survey is to describe the self-reported characteristics of a population.

The research was carried out in the South East Zone of Nigeria. South East is made up of five states of: Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia and Imo. However, the area covered comprised selected retail businesses situate in Onitsha in Anambra state, Enugu, Enugu in Enugu State Abakaliki in Ebonyi State, Aba in Abia State and Owerri in Imo State. In these areas, the people are predominantly, retail and small scale business owners as well as farmers. The choice of this location is informed by the indefatigable disposition of the owners of retail businesses and customers who had expanded the tentacles of their businesses to the trendy nature of technology in the operation of various businesses where internet was in vogue for marketing and merchandizing. This therefore gives a spread of the online retail businesses that are not only trendy but cut across the South East States of Nigeria. The population of the study was made up of a wide spectrum of 100 retailers and customers who used social media platforms, as seen in (www.onlineretailers.com, 2017)

RESULTS

To what extent are social media platforms acceptable as a marketing strategy used in small scale business? Data answering this question are contained in table one.

6

Table 1: Acceptable Social Media Platforms as a Marketing Strategy by Retail Businesses (N- 100)

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
1	WhatsApp	4.7	0.68	Very Greatly accepted
2	Imo	4.7	0.68	Very Greatly accepted
3	Google	3.5	1.23	Moderately accepted
4	LinkedIn	4.3	0.73	Greatly accepted
5	Youtube	4.0	1.13	Greatly accepted
6	Facebook	3.1	1.12	Slightly accepted
7	Yahoo	2.7	1.25	Very slightly accepted
8	Instagram	2.9	1.26	Very slightly accepted
9	2go	3.3	1.03	Slightly accepted
10	BBM	3.4	1.24	Slightly accepted
11	Hotmail	4.6	0.73	Very greatly accepted
12	Reuters	4.0	1.35	Greatly accepted
13	Twitter	4.1	1.99	Greatly accepted
Valid N (listwise)				
Cluster Mean		3.71		

Data from Table 1 reveal that all the social media platforms have mean scores above 3.0 except Yahoo and Instagram that had mean scores of 2.7 and 2.9 respectively. Therefore, Yahoo and Instagram had very little extent of acceptance as social media platforms as a marketing strategy for retail businesses in the South East States of Nigeria.

How accessible are social platforms as a Marketing strategy for retail businesses
Table 2: Accessible Social Media Platforms as Marketing Strategy in Retail Businesses (N-100)

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
Q14	WhatsApp	3.80	1.16	Accessible
Q15	Goggle	4.01	0.81	Strongly Accessible
Q16	Togo	4.04	0.68	Strongly Accessible
Q17	YouTube	4.14	1.02	Strongly Accessible
Q18	Imo	4.23	0.87	Strongly Accessible
Q19	Reuters	3.73	0.88	Moderately Accessible
Q20	Yahoo	3.98	0.98	Accessible
Q21	Face-book \	3.98	0.98	Accessible
Q22	BBM	3.98	0.98	Accessible
Valid N (list wise)				
Cluster Mean		3.99		

Data from Table 2 above revealed that all the items Nos. 14 – 22 had mean scores above 3.0 and were accessible as social media platforms as a marketing for retail businesses in the South East States of Nigeria.

Conclusions

The social media platforms are found to have very far reaching benefits which include: reaching a wide of people at the same time; the interactive nature could be personalized, and so on. Social media as a marketing strategy is very efficient, effective and cost-effective. Furthermore, this researcher was able to determine in the course of the research that retailers increased awareness of their brand by being creative when engaging customers on social media sites. As more shoppers use social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn) and rely on them for marketing shopping decisions, promotion through these media had become important. Social media sites such as Facebook are better than other advertising avenues because it stores information on all its users thus ensuring marketing reached a retailer's specific target market. Social media sites are great stage for retailers to create an experience and retailers could use information stored on social media sites to improve user experience with their brand.

Based on this study, it can further be argued that knowing which social media platform as well as a company's target market is another key factor in guaranteeing that online marketing become successful. Retailers go beyond the advertising aspect of social networking sites and found groundbreaking ways to use them as a way to conduct conversations with consumers, instead of a one-way communication network. Consumers through social media platforms are no

longer passive receivers of marketing messages; instead, they are using Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter to voice their opinions whether positive or negative.. Since social media sites could be exploited for the information it provided on consumers' preference with regards to their purchasing intentions, research further suggested that businesses should incorporate social networking platforms into their business model or promotional mix. Social media platforms are very accessible, accepted very efficient, very effective and preferred tools for carrying out retail businesses unlike the traditional open shops method of retail business in the South East of Nigeria.

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