INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES ON THE MARKETING OF RETAIL FIRMS' OPERATIONS IN IMO STATE

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Abstract

The influence of social media technologies on the marketing of retail firms' operations in Imo State cannot be under-estimated. Social media marketing is the process of gaining customers' attention and traffic for a business, aimed at increased brand presence through the internet. Social media marketing enhances brand awareness in addition to customer retention and satisfaction. Social media enable marketers to interact with customers, businesses, friends, families and other groups. It is important in that it helps in search engine optimization and increases rankings of websites of different companies. It was in the view of the importance of social media that the study was carried out to examine the influence of social media technologies on the marketing of retail firms' operations in Imo State. Two research questions were raised by the researchers to guide the study in line with two specific objectives. The questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data and administered to the respondents by the researchers with the aid of four research assistants. A population of one hundred (100) retail shop owners within Owerri Municipality was used for the study. The entire population was used since the population was small and manageable. The mean and standard deviation statistics were used for the analysis, while the t-test and ANOVA statistics were used to test the null hypotheses. It was found out among others that the social media technologies that were generally used by retail shop business operators in Imo State among others were: Google, whatsApp, imo, Linkedln, youtube, yahoo, Facebook, Reuters, BBM, and 2go. It was also found that the social media technologies were very effective and efficient, easily accessible and preferred platforms for retail marketing businesses. There was no significant difference in the mean responses of shop owners and customers in Imo State. The study recommended among others that workshops and seminars from time to time should be organized for private and public business organization operators to keep abreast with current trends on internet marketing through social media technologies.

Keywords*: Social Media, Technology, Influence, marketing, Retail firms*

Introduction

The influence of social media technologies as marketing strategies on retail firms' operations in Imo State cannot be over emphasized. Marketing activities are aimed at making goods reach the consumers, suppliers, industries, groups and individuals

for effective utilization and satisfaction of their needs and wants for production purposes in the world of Commerce. In Economics, production is said not to be complete until the goods get to 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 for the availability of goods and their prices led to the use of recent inventions on technology that achieves that goal. Oholakiya (2013) stated that the consumers are the latent majority and media outfits were no longer the gatehouses of information. Social media platforms are among the latest technology in that regard. Kuruk (2007) and Oholaktya (2013) mentioned 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.

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). 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 an organization'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 (2009) 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), aimed at satisfying the costumers.

Social media according to Glik (2007) has three components; (i) 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. Meme also means something that is copied or circulated online with slight adaptation including basic pictures, video templates, etc. (ii) Media (physical, electronic, or verbal). This refers to the channel of dissemination of information, art or Idea, (iii) 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) (Gllk, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the influence of social media technologies on the marketing of retail firms' operations in Imo State. Specifically, the research was out to:

1. Examine the level of accessibility of social media technologies on retail shop business owners in Imo State.
2. Find out the extent to which social media technologies can improve sale in Imo state.

Research Questions

The following two research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of accessibility of social media technologies on retail shop business owners in Imo state?
2. To what extent do social media technologies improve sale in Imo State?

Hypotheses

The following two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

Ho_1: There is no significant difference on the level of accessibility of social media technologies on retail shop business owners in Imo state.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference on the extent to which social media technologies can improve sale in Imo State.

Related Empirical Studies

Technology is the use of scientific knowledge for practical purposes or applications, whether in industry or in our everyday lives. Basically, whenever we use our scientific knowledge to achieve some specific purpose, we are using technology, (www.brltanica.com, 2021). Zhogyu, et al (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 that 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 Imo State. Rouhan and Ayoung (2015) also carried out similar study on factors influencing information technology on social media platforms: evidence from Facebook pages. The study was an experimental design and the data were 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 was a survey of adolescents in alcohol consumption, while the study made use of sample collected in 2011. The author adopted Bergen Facabook Addiction Scale (BFAS). The study made use of variables like age, interest, mate 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 respondents were consumers and users of the products. The missing link is that both did not use the same sample location. The results showed that the previous study used one factor model in the analysis, and latent profile analysis while the present study used ANOVA and t -test in the analysis of the research questions and hypotheses.

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 research 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 one is carried out in Nigeria Imo State, 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 present study made use of retailers in Imo State, Nigeria.

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 were collected from a population of 15 banks. The data collected was analyzed 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 adapted a qualitative research methodology. Using a survey design and interviewing method. The data were 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 shopping as seen in Ibarra, (Andrews, 2005).

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. "i"-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 presents 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 on e- business using e-mail as mainly the source, while this study used a lot of social media platforms for the study. The location is also different, while the former was carried out in Jordan this one was carried out in Imo State, 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. The respondents and other people on different social networking sites were also requested to post the link from their profile. So the sampling technique used was non-probability convenience sampling. They used regression analysis for testing of hypothesis, visual representation of findings and results bar charts, pie charts and tables were used. 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. Junco, Heibergert, and Loken (2012) completed a study on social media. The population of the study was 132 students classroom engagement while this student was aimed at consumer and retail owners' utilization of social media for retail businesses.

In a study conducted by Hilbert and Halperm (2016) on the accessibility of digital marketing. 200 respondents were used as the population. Survey method was adopted and the data analyzed with chi-square. The results showed easy accessibility of social media. The study was carried out were 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.

A study was 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 research questions and hypotheses. Brenner and Smith (2013) carried out a study on the technology acceptance model (TAM). JAM 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.

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 using a micro-level study. A survey design was adopted 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 samples of people residing in the urban areas of Guwahati city was taken into consideration.

Methodology

This research adopted a descriptive survey research design, as it elicited the opinions and perceptions of the respondents. The study examined the influence of social media technologies on the marketing of retail firms' operations in Imo State. Two research questions were raised by the researchers to guide the study inline with two specific objectives. The questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data and administered to the respondents by the researchers, with the aid of four research assistants. A population of one hundred (100) retail shop owners within Owerri Municipality was used for the study. The entire population was used since the population was small and manageable. The mean and standard deviation statistics were used for the analysis, while the t-test and ANOVA statistics were used to test the null hypotheses. In the studied area, the people were predominantly, retail and small scale business owners. The choice of this location was informed by the indefatigable disposition of the owners of retail businesses 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 of their goods and services.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of accessibility of social media technologies on retail shop business owners in Imo state?

Table 2: Accessibility of Social Media Technologies on Retail Shop Business Owners in Imo State (N-100)

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1	Goggle	4,01	0.61	Very high accessibility
2	WhatsApp	3.80	1.16	Moderate accessibility
3	2go	4.04	0.68	Very high accessibility
4	YouTube	4.14	1,02	Very high accessibility
5	Imo	4.23	0,87	Very high accessibility
6	Reuters	3.73	0.88	Moderate accessibility
7	Yahoo	3.98	0.98	Moderate accessibility
8	BBM	3.98	0.98	Moderate accessibility
9	Facebook	3.96	0.98	Moderate accessibility
Cluster Mean		**3.99**		

Source: *Field Research, 2024*

Data from Table 1 shows that all the items from. 1-9 had mean scores above 3.0 and were accessible as social media technologies for marketing strategies the goods and services of retail shop businesses in Imo State.

Research Question Two: To what extent do social media technologies improve sale in Imo State?

Table 1: Extent to which social media technologies improve sale in Imo State (N-100)

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
10	WhatsApp	4.7	0.68	Very high extent
11	Imo	4.7	0.68	Very high extent
12	Google	3.5	1.23	Moderate extent
13	Linkedln	4.3	0.73	High extent
14	Youtube	4.0	1.13	High extent
15	Facebook	3.1	1.12	Low extent
16	Yahoo	3.4	1.24	Low extent
17	Instagram	4.0	1.13	High extent
18	2go	3.3	1.03	Low extent
19	BBM	3.4	1.24	Low extent
20	Hotmail	4.6	0.73	Very high extent
21	Reuters	4.0	1.35	High extent
22	Twitter	4.1	1.99	High extent
Cluster Mean		**371**		

Source: Field Research, 2024

Data from Table 2 reveals that all the social media technologies have mean scores above 3.0. Therefore, all the items from 10-22 reveal that social media technologies will go a long way in improving the sale of retail shop owners in Imo State.

Conclusion

The social media platform technologies are found to have very far reaching benefits to include reaching a wider range 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. The researchers were 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 platform technologies (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and Linkedln) 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 that marketing reach a retailer's specific target market. Social media sites are great stage for retailers to create an experience and they could use information stored on social media sites to improve user experience with their brand and creativity.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by the researchers based on the findings:

1. Social media sites such as Facebook are better than other advertising avenues because it stores information on all its users' thus ensuring platforms that marketing reaches a retailer's specific target market. Social media sites are seen as great stage for retailers to create an experience and retailers could use information stored on social media sites to improve user experience with their brands.
2. Businesses should incorporate social networking media into their business model or promotional mix. Social media platforms are very accessible, very efficient, very effective and preferred tools for carrying out retail businesses unlike the traditional open shops method of retail businesses

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