ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Influence of Social Media Platforms on the Sales of Phones in Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja

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Abstract

The study deals with the effects of social media platforms on the sales of phones in FCT Abuja. The study sought to determine the outcome of the use of social media space as strategic tools of marketing in the study area. The study was based on McLuhan's technological determinism theory because of the overwhelming influence of new technologies in the social media phenomena. It is a descriptive survey study that was based on a sample size of 40 phone dealers that were purposively selected. Data was obtained through the use of questionnaire designed by the researcher and validated by a senior academic in Marketing Department of a Nigerian University with a cronbach-alpha reliability index of 0.71. Frequency distribution tables were used for data analysis. Results indicated that WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube are the most popular social media platforms used by phone dealers in FTC for sales of phones. It was also found that the use of social media platforms for phone marketing activities has some advantages such as convenience, cost, feedback, safety and access to a large number of customers. The study recommended that in addition to traditional marketing instruments, social media platforms should be used as a key complimentary marketing strategy by phone dealers to improve their sales performance. It was also recommended that the social media space in Nigeria needs to be sanitized through some form of regulation by owners, users and government agency to safeguard the sanctity of the medium for maximum results.

Keywords: Social media, platforms, phone, sales, computer, and Internet.

Introduction

Comparatively, social media is a young marketing instrument that is unique because of the transparent and two-way potential of interaction. It provides robust opportunities to engage customers on individual basis as well as generate leads in a well-focused manner.

Social media is an internet or mobile-based social space where people can connect, communicate, and create and share content with others (Boyd,2007). Adeleje (2014) also defines social media as social software which has the power to mediate human communications or online networking service. In the same manner, Ibidapo (2014) sees social media as the new media that speed up conversation in a more interactive way that makes communication more effective and worthwhile. They are beyond the limitations of the traditional media. Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people or companies to create, share or exchange information, career, interests, ideas or pictures/video in virtual communications. It could be seen as platforms or sites that focus on facilitating communication among people who share common interests, activities, background or real life connection. They have the capacity of boosting participation because of their openness, conversation nature, connectedness, and textual and audiovisual characteristic appeal (Abubakar, 2011). They are media which allow users to manage, build and represent their social networks online, usually (but not always) made up of other individual–networks. They might also include the profiles of events, companies, even political parties. They may let one add anyone in the network as a friend or contact, or might ask for all connections to be agreed by both parties. They typically support the public display of networks - although they may offer privacy restrictions, or facilitate closed communities.

Users of social media are connected to one another regardless of national boundaries, culture

or religion within fields and across industries (Ranjiha, 2010).The use of social media in business has a lot of advantages which include reduction of stress, fast delivery of goods and ability to address large customers within the shortest possible time among others (Ajayi, 2012).

Social media has the advantage of connecting a producer to wider and larger audience within few seconds in addition to being cheaper than the traditional means of sales. The use of social media as a tool for marketing equally saves costs as one may not really need volumes of space to sample goods. Gabriel (2017) argues that pictures of samples of goods could be taken and sent to different customers using different social media platforms for them to make choices from. In this regard, the cost of space or sales outlet is saved.

In the same manner, one does not need to physically see the buyer or seller before transacting businesses using social media platforms. This means that the issue or barrier of travelling long distances to meet buyers is removed as distance is being mediated using communications via social media (Yusuf, 2014).Moreover, payment of purchased goods can be effected via online platforms which is faster, convenient and safer (Gusen, 2013). The speed at which business transactions is made via social media platforms makes most people to crave for social media businesses.

In Nigeria and FCT in particular, everybody is very busy. People battle with time to meet deadlines and appointments. In that spirit, there is hardly much time left for traditional business transactions. Also, considering the high risk associated with conventional mode of sales, vis-à-vis the advantages of using social media platforms, one would see the reason why most people go for social media platforms for business dealings.

Phone is one of the widely used communication gadgets. In our today's, world of information and communication, a phone is a necessity especially to businessmen, youths and students. The need for phone will be seen in the dangers of not having one. Living without a phone will mean an isolated life style as such a person will be disconnected from friends, associates, colleagues and family members. One of the most important features of a phone is the ability to communicate with it. In essence, without a phone, one may be disconnected. Due to the exigency of phones, it is one of the most widely purchased commodities in the market (Oghene, 2016). The reason may be connected to the numerous activities one can do with a phone. The convenience and portability of phones make it more desirable to be used. This has led to a great demand for phones especially in FCT Abuja.

In order to meet the ever-increasing demands for phones, there is need to use a more flexible, faster and trusted medium to effect sales. The incorporation of social media platforms in business has given boost to sales lately (Aboiyar,2018). Many customers can conveniently order products of any type using social media platforms and get such order in few minutes. It is against this background that the study is set to examine the role of social media platforms on the sales of phones in FCT Abuja.

Statement of Problem

There is great demand for phones in FCT Abuja. This is because of the obvious benefits and need satisfaction associated with phone ownership. These benefits include communication, taking photographs, sending messages/images and transacting business (Aboiyar, 2018). The platforms can be used to order goods online, make payments, advertise goods, place orders, etc.

Invariably, the social media platforms have become critical marketing tools as their users depend on them daily not only for social purposes but most importantly for business transactions. This is because of their enormous powers as enablers of customer loyalty and customer retention. As Gbam (2017) rightly argued, the social media can be effectively used to generate brand awareness through viral content, or paid advertisement on Facebook, etc.

Inspite of the over whelming arguments in

favour of the social media as the back bone of modern marketing, there are many who opine that social marketing medium is fraught with distrust, fake news, unsubstantiated claims (Gbam, 2017) and therefore has integrity and credibility deficits.

Consequently, it is worthwhile to reassess the actual influence of these platforms on the marketing activities of enterprises. Specifically, the problem of the study therefore is how does social marketing impact on the sales of phones in FCT Abuja?

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on Technological Determinism Theory. The theory which was propounded by McLuhan in 1964 contends that the nature of media technology prevailing in a given society at a particular time determines how the members of that society think and believe (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach,1984; Anderson & Ross, 2002).

Obviously, the emergence of new technologies such as the Internet, new media as well as ICT infrastructure have had profound impact on ways of conducting marketing activities worldwide. The theorists rightly argued that "the medium is the message" which underscores the importance and impact of the medium on the message.

Apparently, social media is a new marketing instrument that evolved from new digital technology. Its platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, WhatsApp, etc. have become new beautiful brides in the online marketing landscape of Nigeria and other countries of the world.

Many scholars and experts such as Fc Social Media (2013) contend that the new technologies are the backbone of the social media. Consequently, it is technology that drives social media content, and provides personal data and behaviour patterns of its audience to marketing activities to leverage upon.

Therefore, this study utilized the principles of the theory because of the profound impact of new digital technologies as enablers of the current revolution (i.e. the social media) in marketing activities worldwide.

Purpose of the Study

The study is designed to:

1. Identify the widely used social media platforms for phone business transactions in FCT.
2. Examine the advantages and disadvantages in social media transactions.
3. Ascertain how the use of social media platforms influences the sales of phones in FCT Abuja.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most widely used social media platforms for phone business transaction in FCT Abuja?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using social media platforms in phone business transactions in FCT Abuja?
3. To what extent does the use of social media platforms influence the sale of phones in FCT Abuja?

Significance of the Study

The following stakeholders will hopefully gain from the study:

1. Phone dealers
2. Phone users
3. Phone producers
4. General public
5. Phone marketers

Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey. This is because it was purposed to describe the opinions of a group of people using data obtained from a selected few within the area of study. The study population consists of all phone dealers in FCT Abuja. There is no formal data regarding the numbers of phone dealers within FCT Abuja. Hence the population is not certain. The study sampled 40 phone dealers using the convenience sampling technique. The convenience sampling technique is recognized in

literature because Awotunde and Ugoduluwal (2004) documented that in some studies, researchers may need to use only participants who are conveniently available and willing to participate in the study as at the time of data collection. Hence in the present study, the researcher selected only the phone dealers who were readily available and were willing to participate in the study. Data were obtained using a questionnaire designed by the researcher which was validated by a senior academic in the Marketing Department of a Nigerian University. The Cronbach-alpha reliability of the questionnaire was 0.71 which is considered adequate based on the submission of Nworgu (2016) that reliability values of 0.70 and above is ideal for a research instrument. The percentage was used for data analysis and the cut off mark was 50%.

Results

Research Question One: What are the various social media platforms used for phone business transactions in FCT Abuja?

Table 1: Social media platforms for phone business transactions in FCT Abuja

S/NO	Statement Media Platforms	Agreed		Disagreed	
		N	%	N	%
1	Face-book	25	62.5	15	37.5
2	Instagram	18	45.0	22	53.0
3	Whats App	38	95.0	02	5.0
4	Twitter	14	35.0	26	65.0
5	You tube	21	52.5	19	47.5

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Result in table 1 reveals that Whatsapp (95%) is the widely used social media platform for the sale of phones. Other widely used platforms are Facebook (62.5%) and You Tube (52.5%). However, Instagram (45%) and Twitter (35%) were not accepted as being useful for sales of phones since their percentage responses are below 50%. Hence it could be deduced from the results above that phone dealers in FCT mostly used WhatsApp to sell their phones.

Research Question Two: What are the advantages of using social media platforms in business transactions in FCT Abuja?

Table 2: Advantages of social media platforms in business transactions in FCT Abuja

S/NO	Statement	Agreed		Disagreed	
		N	%	N	%
1	Social media platforms are cheaper most times	28	70.0	12	30
2	It is more convenient and safer to transact businesses using social media platforms	32	80.0	08	20
3	Social media relieves stress of travelling and travelling expenses	24	60.0	16	40
4	Business transactions are faster on social media platforms	35	87.50	05	12.5
5	One can attend to a larger number of customers within a limited time using social media platforms	38	95.0	02	5.00
6	Social media platforms transcendgeographical and location barriers	30	75.0	10	25.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Data in table 2 shows that reaching lager number of customer faster (95%) is the most widely accepted advantage of using social media to transact business. Other advantages include speed (87.5%), convenience (80%) and others.

Research question Three: To what extent does the use of social media platforms influence the sale of phones in FCT Abuja?

Table 3: Influence of Social media platforms on the sales of phones in FCT

S/NO	Statement	Agreed		Disagreed	
		N	%	N	%
1	As a phone dealer you prefer traditional market to social media market	13	32.5	27	67.5
2	You prefer social media sales to traditional market sales	38	95.0	02	5.0
3	You make more sales on the traditional market than on social media	08	20.0	32	80.0
4	Most of your sales are on social media platform	29	72.5	11	275
5	You have more customers on social media platforms than on traditional market	28	70.0	12	30.0
6	Your main customers are from the traditional market	10	25.0	30	75.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

A cursory look at data in table 3 reveals that 95% of the respondents (38 out of 40) prefer social media sales to traditional market. In the same vein, 72.5% (29 out of 40) agreed that most of the sales are made on social media platforms even as 70% opined that they have more customers on social media than in the traditional market. It could then be deduced from the above analysis that the use of social media platforms gives a boost to the sale of phones in FCT Abuja.

Research question Four: What are the disadvantages of using social media platforms in business transactions in FCT Abuja?

The table below indicates 55% of the respondents believe that social media has integrity issue while 45% disagreed. Similarly, while 33% of the respondents agreed that social media make false claims about product performance, 67% disagreed asserting that the accusation is untrue.

Table 4: Disadvantages of social media platforms in business transactions in FCT Abuja.

S/NO	Statement	Agreed		Disagreed		Total
		N	%	N	%	
1.	Social Media has integrity issue	22	55	18	45	40
2.	Social media makes false claims about product performance	13	33	27	67	40
3.	Testimonials are doctored	14	35	26	65	40
4.	No comment	Nil				

Source: Field Survey, 2019

On the issue of doctoring product testimonials, 65% of the respondents disagreed while 35% agreed.

The implication of the above is that while majority of the sampled respondents disagree with the perceived deficits of social media platforms, a significant percentage of the respondents are yet to believe fully in the platforms because of perceived integrity issues.

Since the study has confirmed the positive role of social media in the sales of phones, it is important to clear any doubts in the minds of users concerning the sanctity of the medium to enable it serve business transaction seamlessly and maximally. Therefore, some form of regulation of the social media by owners, operators and even government organs or agency will be helpful. In this direction, we note that the recent move by the 8th Senate of Federal Republic of Nigeria to regulate the social media space should not be entirely discountenanced as evil and gagging of freedom of expression of the citizens. Rather, responsible mechanisms should be introduced to ensure sanctity and decorum by operators/users to safeguard the social media space itself for profitable use for business purposes and social interactions.

Discussion

The study is on role of social media platforms in the

sales of phones in FCT Abuja. The study was designed to examine how the use of social media platforms influences the rate of sales of phones in the study area. The study discovered that Whatsapp and Facebook are the most widely used social media platforms by phone dealers in the sale of phones. This is not surprising because Cheng (2018) notes that Whatsapp and Facebook have gained popularly lately and are being used for all kinds of electronic transactions. In addition, Whatsapp and Facebook give room for flexibility as one can upload videos, pictures, and advertisements using them. Whatsapp and Facebook images could be downloaded and saved. The reason for their popularity may be due to simplicity, cost and ease.

In a similar view, some advantages were found accruing to the use of social media platforms for business transactions. One of the advantages is that a large audience of customers could be attended to in a short while. This is a plus to social media platforms because as Zih (2012) noted, all businessmen crave for larger customers, hence any avenue that could expose a business man to a lot of customers will lead to better business dealings. Social media platforms are not limited by geographical barriers or distance. One can transact business anywhere in the world using social media platforms. Unlike the traditional market, one does not need to travel or come in physical contact with the customers before making business transactions on social media platforms. This advantage gives social media platforms an edge over traditional mode of sales. This may be the reason why more sales are made using social media platforms (Gusen, 2013).

The use of social media platforms was found to influence the sale of phones. Most phone dealers make more sales on social media platforms than on the traditional market. This follows from the advantages of using social media platforms for business transactions. Yusuf (2014) contended that in the use of social media for business transactions, distance is never a barrier as the barrier created by geographical location is effectively mediated via social media. This means that the challenges of traditional mode of sales are being taken care of by social media platforms which turn out to be a big advantage (plus) for social media businesses' transactions.

Summary of Findings

1. Social media platforms used for the sale of phones in FCT include Whatsapp, Facebook and You Tube.
2. Advantages of using social media platforms for business include convenience, speed, more sales and access to larger audience within a short period of time.
3. The use of social media platforms for sale of phones has a positive influence on the sales of phones in FCT Abuja.
4. Social media has credibility issues.

Conclusion

The study investigated the role of social media platforms on the sale of phones in FCT Abuja. The study was designed to examine how the use of social media platforms could cause an increase in the quantity of phones sold in the study area. From the results obtained, it was gathered that Whatsapp, Facebook, and You Tube are the most popular social media platforms used by phone dealers in FCT for sales of phones. Also, the use of social media platforms for phone business transactions has some advantages which include but not limited to convenience, safety and access to a larger number of customers. Finally, the use of social media platforms was found to positively influence the sales of phones in FCT Abuja.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings from the study, the following are recommended:

1. Since phone dealers use Whatsapp, Face Book and You Tube for phone sales, other product dealers could equally use these social media platforms to sell their products.
2. The study found a lot of advantages of using social media platforms for sale of phones, so

other dealers could equally gain from social media platforms.

3. The use of social media platforms was seen to positively influence the sale of phones in FCT. It is necessary that other product dealers utilize social media platforms to boost the sales of their products.
4. Social media space should be regulated to safeguard integrity of the channels.

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