SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CUSTOMER BRAND AWARENESS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study is concerned with social media marketing and customer brand awareness in the hotel industry in Delta State Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: determine the effect of customer engagement on brand awareness in the hotel industry; ascertain the influence of social customer relationship management on brand awareness in the hotel industry; examine the effect of word-of-mouth communications on brand awareness in the hotel industry; evaluate the influence of social customer trust on customer brand awareness in the hotel industry; and determine the effect of online brand community on customer brand awareness in the hotel industry. The study adopted survey research design and the population was unknown. The sample size was statistically determined to 246 respondents out of which 160 or approximately 65% responded. Questionnaire was used to collect primary data while the data was analysed with the aid of JASP software using multiple regression analysis. The results show that there is a statistically significant relationship between social customer engagement, social customer relationship management, word-of-mouth communications, social customer trust, and online brand communities. The implications of the findings were discussed and recommendation were also made including modernising and improving service quality to the customers.

Key words: social media, social media marketing, customer brand awareness, hotels,

1.   INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing (SMM) has become the most preferred methods in the wake of internet development Singh and Diamond (2012). Business firms have realized the use of online media to promote their services and products. Entrepreneurs have also found it cheaper to market their products and services online where there is ease in looking for specific products and lenient return policies Lee (2015). Social media marketing has been adopted on a wide scale among business entities that advertise their goods and services in a bid to improve the client's knowledge of the goods. In the case of the hotel industry, there has emerged a variety of services being offered, ranging from catering to accommodation services. It also stands as an online platform where the users can easily participate, share, and create any content such as banner, posters, videos and advertisement.

For hotels, marketing has taken to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and also major online marketing platforms such as Booking.com, Jumia Travel, and Air BnB Gössling and Lane (2015) Social media provides a way to connect people, share our opinions. Picture and video extensions on social media are a great way of passing time similar to TV, hence it has

gained much importance in the field of marketing. Most of the companies in recent times are showing interest on interacting with their customers via social media and promoting their products on different platforms of social media. Moreso, business outlets have realized the use of online platforms to promote their services and products. Recently, media have been categorized into traditional and non-traditional approaches. TV and newspapers are examples of such traditional media. Customers are now increasingly using social media to connect, look for, and exchange information, thoughts, and experiences of brands and companies. Just as one can confirm that Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter are used to share experiences whether good or negative. Product and company profile and information on social media networks are assumed to be reliable and credible sources, more dependable and proper than the traditional marketing. According to researchers in traditional marketing, consumers will tell seven to ten individuals about the product, but now social media permits consumers to share experiences with other customers in no time. The use of these online communication platforms based on the usage of the Internet and mobile-based technologies in marketing actions by businesses is critical in two aspects. The first is the effect that consumers have on their products and brands and the share they create on other consumers (Sigala and Dimosthenis, 2009; Chen et al., 2011). Research has also shown that social media influences the intention of trust and purchasing and facilitates sharing of knowledge and experience among consumers (Lu & Hsiao, 2010; Hajli, 2013).

Thus, in today's competitive environment, branding is an important competitiveness factor that differentiates similar goods and services which are produced by different firms in the minds of the consumers and makes them preferable for consumers. Social media was found that it plays a vital role in building a brand as well as Consumer-based brand equity is the intangible evaluation of the brand and subjective for consumers, as a result it's objectively perceived value. The majority of marketers would agree that the operation of a successful online community is now highly relevant to successful marketing activities for many companies, social media is seen as a medium that can available to anyone with an internet connection, it should be a platform that can be recommended to the hotel industry to increase their brand awareness and facilitate direct feedback from their customers yet studies regarding online communities have been rarely conducted in the hotel industry. Therefore, the present study is aimed at examining the effect of social media marketing brand awareness in the hotel Industry in Delta State, Nigeria.

With penetration of social media in business activities, most organization have run to adopt marketing through social media as the only method to make their products well known by customers. Since the content on social media is user generated. Anyone can post whatever they want. While this is good for people to find authentic comments, reviews and feedback, it also means anyone can fabricate things to post on social media. According to the findings, social media is a double-edged knife especially when there is negative feedback, customers can be very exaggerated online on different channels, which can be harmful to the online reputation of the hotel. Brands do not have control over online social activities of online users. After all, in a social online setting, users are the ones who take various roles and have the upper hand and their influence on shaping public opinions through user-generated content. (Information Resources Management Association 2018 p. 676) This can pose a challenge that requires the marketing team to be agile and flexible when handling tricky situations, so that customers are satisfied, and negativity will not be spread. Similarly, social media is very erratic and unpredictable. One platform can be here today but it may not be the next. The constant movement and ever-changing nature of technology as well as evolvement and emergence of different social media platforms means that there will be shifts in usage from one channel to

the next very quickly. This means that brands have to be able to assess the risks of using social media platforms and be prepared to face unpredictable changes and new trends emerging on the Internet and know how to handle them. After all, in a social online setting, users are the ones who take various roles and have the upper hand and their influence on shaping public opinions through user-generated content (UGC). Despite of this, there has not been evidence on the effect of social media marketing on brand awareness in hotel operations.

Studies on social media marketing have advanced from the initial research that relied on the effective implementation of social media (e.g. Culnan et al. 2010). Streams of research are emerging (Dwivedi et al. 2015; Kapoor et al. 2018) as social media marketing continues to generate academic and practitioner interests. Researchers and practitioners have also developed metrics for measuring the impact of social media marketing in business organisations. Lal, et al. (2020) noted that marketers should develop social media programmes which can help to deal with their companies' objectives such as customer awareness, customer engagement, customer relationship management and word of mouth communications. Other studies, Ibrahim et al. 2021 study identified among others perceived ease of use personalisation while Algharabat, et al (2020) relied on social trust and customer value co-creation. Extant literature on online brand communities (Dabholkar and Sheng 2012; Kamboj et al. 2018; So et al. 2014) asserts the positive relationships between customers' participation, interaction, and trust. This study adopts Lal et al. (2020), customer engagement, customer relationship management and word of mouth communications; Algharabat, et al (2020) social trust; and online brand community from Pretish Panda blog: how to measure and score success of your customer community as independent variables and customer awareness from Lal et al. (2020) as the dependent variable. The main objective of this study is to examine social media marketing and customer awareness in the hotel industry in Delta State, Nigeria.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1   Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social media is simply a tool while social media marketing refers to one of the ways one utilizes this tool. According to (Cormier 2013), When marketers turn to social media to enhance brand awareness, the act of using the social media platforms for this purpose as well as other marketing purposes, from increasing sales to driving traffic website, is known as social media marketing. (Buffer n.d). Social media marketing is identified as the process of creating awareness of products on social media platforms. It is a type of online marketing that employs social media networks to accomplish branding targets Assaad and Gómez (2011). Couldry (2012) defines social media marketing as a type of marketing that employs networking websites to market products and services It entails sharing of information such as articles, photos, and videos for marketing, in addition to paid social media advertising.

Social media marketing is the marketing strategies that successful businesses are using in order to be a part of a network of consumers online. Also, it could be defined as employing the social media as instruments of communication, direct sales, customer gain, and customer retaining. Social media is the online environment where people with common interests come together to share their thoughts, comments and ideas (Weber, 2007: 4). social media is utilized by businesses as a platform through in which direct marketing actions are carried out. In this sense, social media is pushing the boundaries of time and space in the interactions of businesses with potential consumers and promoting the feeling of closeness (Mersey et al., 2010). One of the leading classifications of social media marketing activities has been carried out by Kim and Ko (2012). They categorized social media marketing activities for luxurious brands as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth communication.

Research has shown that social media influences the intention of trust and purchasing and facilitates sharing of engagement, knowledge and experience among consumers (Lu & Hsiao, 2010, Hajli, 2013).

Similarly, Social Media Marketing is the new approach to communicate with the consumers. It is a well-known fact that method of communication is being shifted from one way to two way through technology. It can also be defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Belch, 2015). Mangold and Faulds, (2009) stated several authors proposed that one of the excellent forms of communication between the company and customers is social media marketing. Companies can use social media to their advantage to reach consumers in receptive ways. They further elaborated that social media has huge range of online word of mouth platforms which include discussion boards sponsored by the company, blogs, consumer to consumer email, chat rooms, consumer rating websites for products and services, moblogs, internet discussion forums and boards and social media websites.

The importance of social media can be realized with the low-cost interactive and immediate communication between the consumers and the companies. In this era, internet communities, blogs and social media networks have become an important part of people's life. Their importance can be judged from the fact that these media act like alternative tools of communications, which support the existing relationships and activities enriching the experience of users. The dimensions of social media marketing as used in this study are: social customer engagement, social customer relationship management, word-of-mouth communications, customer trust and online communities, and customer brand awareness which is the dependent variable. Brand awareness is paramount for the hotel industry as customers have a stronger association with famous brand names that are more familiar to them, and therefore are more likely to choose those brands over the others. Therefore, brand awareness refers to the level of consumer recognition, acceptance, and recall of a brand in any case (Percy and Rossiter, 1992; Perreault et al., 2013: 199). Keller (2009) has stated that brand awareness is about track or crowd power in consumers' memories that reflect consumers' ability to remember or recognize a brand in different conditions.

According to Spacey (2017), brand awareness refers to the level of awareness of the customer about brand-associated factors, such as reputation, culture and value. Brand awareness encompasses all the information about the brand that when mentioning the brand, a customer can recall information, emotions, experience and overall impressions with the brand. Based on the above, the conceptual framework for this study is given:
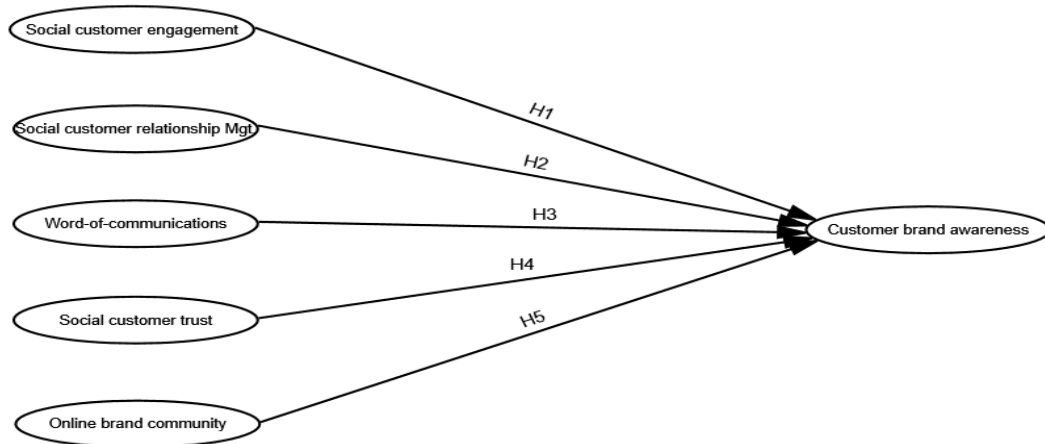
Figure 1: The Research Conceptual Framework/Model

Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are formulated for the study and they are stated in alternate forms:

Ha$_1$: There is a significant positive relationship between social media customer engagement and customer brand awareness in the hotel industry.

Ha$_2$: There is a significant positive relationship between social media customer relationship management and customer brand awareness in the hotel industry.

Ha$_3$: There is a significant positive relationship between word-of-mouth communications and customer brand awareness in the hotel industry.

Ha$_4$: There is a significant positive relationship between social customer trust and customer brand awareness in the hotel industry.

Ha$_5$: There is a significant positive relationship between brand community and customer brand awareness in the hotel industry.

2.2   Empirical Review

A study by Razak (2015) focused on Facebook, Instagram and twitter platforms on brand awareness where he found out that the three platforms were commonly used by most firms to market their brands. Chu (2011) elaborated in his study that engagement and group participation with online ads needs a high level of personal information and the reason behind this is that users openly disclose their connections with groups on Facebook and products and brands are automatically promoted when they share the ads with their friends.

Chang (2012) and Barreda et al. (2015) have stated that high brand awareness contributes to other brand factors such as brand image and brand loyalty and significantly affects the market share of the brand. In other words, brand awareness and brand image are significant source of brand loyalty for businesses (Baldauf et al., 2003). Perera and Dissanayake (2013) have found that there is a high positive correlation between brand awareness and brand loyalty in their research on foreign makeup brands in Sri Lanka. Sharma and Verma, 2018: 20). Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) have revealed that brand awareness is one of the major outputs expected from businesses' social media marketing activities.

The findings that pointed out by Fanion (2011) have shown that social media is a significant tool in constituting and increasing brand awareness. Seo and Park (2018) have found out that social media marketing activities in the airline industry positively affect brand awareness and brand image. Finally, A study by Haslam (2017) on age and attitude in social media found out that users who were between the age brackets of 18-28 had strong attitude towards video, blogs and brand channels. The users claimed that the advertisements on the

social sites were informative, eye-catching and amusing. This showed positive attitude towards age on social media marketing.

A cross sectional study by Gichunge (2018) on connections between social media marketing and organizational performance. A methodology of this review survey design was embraced. The review revealed that adverts organization with good showcasing systems was improving on brand perception. A descriptive study by Bankole (2012) on the small microenterprise growth was done focused on small enterprises without a focus on age orientation. His outcome showed that social media is widely used for marketing. He also established a strong connection between performance and social media marketing.

A descriptive study by Owino et al. (2016) on the social media effect of marketing on small enterprises growth in Nairobi county found out that these platforms have positive results on sales revenue and several customers. He recommended that micro-enterprises should adopt the use of various platforms in business to achieve desired levels of performance. A longitudinal study by Hutter (2013) on social media activities focused on car assembly Facebook book fan page and its interaction strategy with its users and how all that affect brand awareness of its products. The survey target population involved the car assembly Facebook fan page users focusing on customer views on the content from the car assembly firm. The data from the study was analysed using SPSS version 19 and the findings showed that user's engagement with the page had a positive effect on brand awareness. Also, the findings from the research showed that annoyance of fan page users due to overload messages and leads to negative effect on brand. Through the review of past literature on Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness, it is observed that there was limited existing study in social media marketing as it relate to brand awareness of hotels in Asaba. Moreover, none of the existing study seems to be targeted in Asaba metropolis. Hence, this study aimed to fill this gap in literature by examining the effects of social media marketing on brand awareness of hotel industry in Asaba, Delta State. Nigeria.

3.   METHODOLOGY

This study adopted survey research design which is associated with quantitative methods/designs. Survey involves asking questions and recording responses on a defined research problem using a specified instrument usually the questionnaire (Okeke, Olise & Eze, 2014). The kind of survey research design employed in this study is cross sectional, which means data for the study will be collected at a point just once. The instrument for primary data collection is the questionnaire administered to the target respondents/participants. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents who are staff of the hotels visited in major cities of Delta State like Asaba, Warri, Sapele and Effurum. Each of the five independent variables (IVs) were measured with a number of items thus: social customer engagement (SCE)-7 items; social customer relationship management (SCRM)-6 items; word-of-mouth communications (WOM)-4 items; social customer trust (SCT)-6 items and online brand community (OBC)-4 items. The DV (dependent variable) customer awareness (CA) was measured with 5-items. The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The population for this study comprises all the staff and management of the hotels in Delta State used for the study which is an infinite population. Because the population is an infinite population, the researcher used the Cochran formula for sample determination to determine the sample size. The formula is n= $(Z^2 * P * Q)/e^2$. Where: n = sample size; Z = standard normal deviation which 1.96 at 5% margin of error; P and Q are the proportion of success and failure respectively. Based on a pilot survey conducted by the researcher with only 10 respondents who were not part of the main study, in

which 8 or 80% returned positive responses and 2 or 20% gave negative responses. Hence P=0.8 and Q=0.2. Based on this n=$(1.96^2*0.8*0.2)$ is approximately 246 which is the sample size for this study. Content validity was assured by making sure that the questions cover all aspects of the constructs of the study as well as the select socio-demographics. The researchers' supervisor also went through the draft copy of the questionnaire to ensure that the research instruments were in line with the variables of the study. My supervisor's comments were incorporated in the final draft that was used for the study. Scale summation was done and multiple linear regression (MLR) was used to test the hypotheses. Regression analysis is one of the most frequently used analysis techniques in market research. It allows researchers to analyse the relationships between dependent variables and independent variables. The analysis was done with aid of JASP 0.13.0.0 software.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample size for this study is 246 and that is to say that 246 copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents who are staff and management of the hotels in major towns of Delta State that the researcher visited in the course of the field work. Out of this number 160 copies representing approximately 65 per cent of the number distributed were returned as duly filled and usable, thus giving us a captive sample 160 respondents. Ana analysis of this response show that 55 per cent are males while the remaining 45 per cent are females. In terms of hotel types, majority of the hotels are 2-star to 3-star hotels and the majority of the respondents, 72 per cent have tertiary educational qualifications hence educated enough to understand the import and the study and offer valid responses.

Linear Regression

Model Summary – Customer Awareness

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE	Durbin-Watson Autocorrelation	Statistic	p
H_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.080	-0.104	2.194	0.068
H_1	0.750	0.563	0.557	0.053	-0.132	2.243	0.023

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
H_1	Regression	1.252	5	0.250	88.617	< .001
	Residual	0.972	144	0.005		
	Total	2.224	159			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
H_0	(Intercept)	0.582	0.004		136.456	< .001
H_1	(Intercept)	-0.160	0.037		-4.265	< .001
	Social Customer Engagement	0.152	0.035	0.184	4.338	< .001
	Customer Relationship Management	0.241	0.088	0.161	2.736	0.007

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
Word-of-Communications	0.166	0.078	0.129	2.129	0.034
Social Customer Trust	0.163	0.051	0.142	3.159	0.002
Online Brand Community	0.528	0.057	0.392	9.212	< .001

Multiple linear regression was used to analyse the data and test the five hypotheses formulated for the study and the output of the MLR are as shown. The first output in the MLR is the model summary and here we see that the analysis the coefficient of multiple correlation R is 0.750 which is high. The R Square is 0.563 while the adjusted R Square is 0.557. This means that between 55.7% and 56.3% of the variations in the DV, customer awareness is accounted for by the five IVs. The R, adjusted R Square values for alternate hypothesis are all statistically significant with p-value of 0.023 well below the 0.05 margin of error. On the other hand, the values for the null hypothesis have p-value of 0.068. This implies that the variations and the impact of the IVs are significant and acceptable. The second output is the ANOVA table and from this we see that the ANOVA value represented by F is 88.617 with p-value $<.001$. This means that the coefficient of multiple correlation is significantly different from zero and shows that the model is a good fit on the data. The next output in the MLR analysis is the coefficients which show the constants and the intercepts. Social customer engagement ($\beta = 0.152$, t = 4.338, p-value = $<.001$); customer relationship management ($\beta = 0.241$, t = 2.736, p-value = .007); word-of-mouth communications ($\beta = 0.166$, t = 2.129, p-value = .034); social customer trust ($\beta = 0.163$, t = 3.159, p-value = .002); and online community ($\beta = 0.528$, t = 9.212, p-value = $<.001$). Thus, all the five hypotheses formulated for the study are statistically significant at .05 and are all validated and accepted.

Through the review of extant literature, findings showed that the dimensions of Social Media Marketing such as online communities, interactions, accessibility, credibility, share of content have effects on brand awareness. This study has established that social customer engagement, social customer relationship management, word-of-mouth communications, social customer trust, and online communities are statistically significant in influencing and defining customer awareness in the hotel industry in Delta State, South-south, Nigeria. these findings agree with Perera and Dissanayake (2013). The findings also agree with Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) that brand awareness is one of the major outputs expected from business' social media marketing activities. The findings equally agree with Fanion (2011) and Seo and Park (2018) that social media is a significant tool in constituting and increasing brand awareness. Social media can help hotels generate more brand awareness among young as well as older customers and find new leads that later become customers. Overtime, the Hotel industry in Delta State has built a reputation for itself through brand awareness brought about mostly through social media, for customer retention and maintaining a positive brand image in the customer's mind.

5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the effect of social media marketing on brand awareness among hotels in Asaba. The study shows that the use of social media marketing to increase brand awareness is beneficial to hotels in Asaba. However, it increases customer outreach hence increasing sales

which are evidenced by an increased number of hotel bookings in these platforms. Each social media marketing platform is important in its aspect. Towards achieving higher brand awareness, the study further recommends;

i. a social media marketing strategy plan that considers all social media activities such as hiring a social media expert, responding promptly to customers' inquiries and holding up a high reputation of the hotel.

ii. The social media pages should be interactive as this keeps customers engaged on the platform by giving them clarification on their questions as most of the customers relied mostly on the most reliable platforms.

iii. Furthermore, hotel brands should aim at establishing long-lasting relationships with customers on social media; consumers will become loyal to a brand they perceive as having a high brand reputation and willingly participate in its social media activities which may lead to actual purchase.

Recommendations

i. hotels should pursue social media marketing to increase brand awareness of brands as it is cheaper and faster.

ii. Hotels should assign a marketing manager to do marketing activities as they are time consuming. The businesses should incorporate internet-based strategies in their strategic plans as is best ways of sourcing customers and establishing a long-lasting relationship with its users.

iii. social media platforms can be used to carry out customer satisfaction surveys, ask

Users which services they would like to see improved or introduced, get feedback and

inform them of promotional activities like price cuts and discount offerings. Given this, the hotel industry can perform better than before.

iv. The findings from the study will particularly be useful in the application of social media marketing theory on increasing brand awareness. Scholars and business researchers will also benefit from this study as they could use it in further related research.

v. This study will also be of most helpful to the marketing managers of the hotels as it will bring on the most reliable sites and most common features in each platform which could increase brand awareness. They will also appreciate the positives and negative effects associated with social media marketing on improving brand awareness.

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