

VISUAL CONTENT ENGAGEMENT AND MARKETING PERFORMANCE OF RESTAURANTS IN PORT HARCOURT

¹Nkpurukwe Obabuike Ikeni and ²Chukundah, Tutah Tonye (Ph.D)
Department of Business Administration, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State,
²Department of Marketing, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Email: obason@ymail.com, tonyetutah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to empirically examine the relationship between visual content engagement and marketing performance of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt. The cross-sectional survey design was used in accessing the study's subjects, with questionnaire as major instrument for data collection. The research population comprised of 72 staff of the 15 registered restaurants operating in Port Harcourt the Rivers State capital. A total of two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The hypotheses were tested with Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient statistical tool. Results revealed positive and significant relationship between visual content engagement and sales growth as well as market share of the restaurants. It was concluded that visual content engagement has become a veritable marketing tool to achieve cost effectiveness and business success in terms of sales growth and market share. Based on the above findings and conclusions, the study recommended that businesses particularly restaurants should encourage the use of visual content engagement as this social media marketing strategy enable firms product to be visible online with useful information that helps them acquire market share and improve sales.

Key words: *Visual Content Engagement, Market Share, Sales Volume*

INTRODUCTION

The modern marketing world makes room for visual content engagement on all media channels. It has become most important marketing strategy as lack of it leads to diminishing market share and low sales. Seeing they say makes customers believe, thanks to social media as visual content engagement has to do with the use of images and videos to show consumers what a product can do for them. Schultz and Peltier (2013) observed that social media marketing refers to activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions about a brand using conversational media. More so, Shabnoor and Tajinda (2016) refers to social media as online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interaction, collaboration, and the sharing of product information, which is popularly known as contents. It stands that social media has driven visual marketing through the roof. There are 95 million Instagram photos posted every day, with Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, TikTok, and Pinterest garnering their audiences of hundreds of millions of users, which implies that visual content engagement is growing by the second.

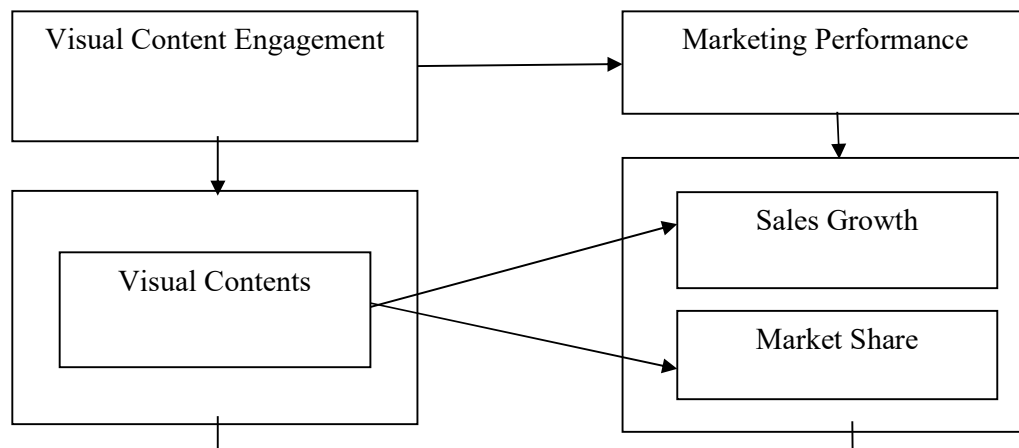
Blanco, Sarasa and Sanclemente, (2010) opined that both visual content and textual information on the social media site has a significant influence on recognition and sales, as well as business performance. They further revealed that a combination of visual contents with a moderate level of complexity has a greater influence on the profitability than textual information with a low level of complexity. In addition, Stelzner, (2015) who investigated the effect of visual content engagement on business success, found that visual content has a strong and positive relationship with profitability and sales volume. Interestingly, successful firms have recognized that modern-day visual content marketing has democratized the content creation process, as most authentic, and meaningful, content is created by the customer. Visual content has to be one of the longest-standing marketing strategies to exist. It's close to impossible for visual

content just to stop working because humans are so visual. When we scroll Instagram, images and videos make their way to our minds, we decide if we want to keep scrolling or stop and watch more. When we walk into a restaurant, we immediately look around the lobby to get familiar with our new surroundings. When we drive on the highway, our eyes are drawn to the large images on the billboards around us. As humans, we love visuals, as marketers, we have to remember this, and this study is centered on visual content engagement and marketing performance of restaurants.

Statement of the Problem

Studies on the nexus between visual content engagement and marketing performance are relatively few. Blanco, Sarasa and Sanclemente, (2010) agreed that visual content and textual information on the social media site has a significant influence on sales, as well as business performance. The question is, how do you create visual content that stands out in a loud, chaotic social media environment? Stelzner, (2015) who investigated the effect of visual content engagement on business success, found that visual content has a strong and positive relationship with profitability and sales volume. However, most of these studies are Eurocentric and needed to be replicated in our environment. Moreover, there are a few differences between what used to work well in visual content marketing and what works well now as firms begins to cope with post COVID-19. For example, before the COVID-19 pandemic, bars and restaurants promoted their businesses with the visual content of their packed bars and dining room. Post COVID-19, has proved that this is no longer a working content marketing strategy, in that consumers don't want to see a packed bar. They want to see how they'll be safe if they were to come in for dinner or a drink. As with all marketing, it's essential to know your audience and relentlessly keep up with their values, goals, and pain points. Part of which is to know where to post your visual contents, consider right demographics as the target. More worrisome is the fact that food and beverage firms-created content doesn't work the way it used to. Rather visual content created by happy customers is getting much more attention from consumers. To Brainrule.net there's an increase of 29% in web conversions when websites feature user-generated content. Consumers are overwhelmed and bombarded by highly-produced adverts, which before now catch their attention, but today users care less about huge product budgets and more about what the product can do for them (Manic, 2015). Indeed the trend in visual content marketing is something else and firms have to strike a balance to remain competitive, offer eye-catching videos of their product mix. It is against this backdrop this study is set to empirically investigate visual content engagement and marketing performance, drawing our analysis from registered food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researchers Desk, 2022

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to empirically examine visual content engagement and marketing performance of restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Specifically, the following objectives are to:

- i. Determine the extent of relationship between visual content engagement and sales growth of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt.
- ii. Determine the extent of relationship between visual content engagement and market share of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt

Research Questions

With respect to the specific objectives of this study, the following formed our research questions:

- i. To what extent does visual content engagement relates with sales growth of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt?
- ii. To what extent does visual content engagement relates with market share of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt?

Research Hypotheses

In view of the specific objectives and research questions, the following null hypotheses were tested for this research:

H₀₁: Visual content engagement has no significant relationship with sales growth of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt

H₀₂: Visual content engagement has no significant relationship with market share of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Visual Content Engagement

Visual content engagement is increasingly having a huge momentum in social media marketing. Bennett (2013) defined visual content engagement as the practice of using images, video and other visual content (e.g. infographics) to more effectively reach social media audiences in ways that bring favourable feedback. Many scholars have considered visual content as a necessary social media feature in today's information technology (IT) world, while stressing its acquisition and retention capabilities to digital lovers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Organizations use visuals to depict diverse types of content, which may be product/service information.

Content is defined as the appearances or signs and symbols presented visually in their totality (Beck, 2015). The author stated that visual content can be conveyed through a metonymic or a metaphoric perspective. While the former refers to all image attributes representing themselves and should be described based on appearances; whereas the latter treats visuals as symbols and examines what an image signifies beyond mere appearances. To consolidate on the potential of visuals content engagement in social media, Bennett (2013) mentioned that organizations need to develop comprehensive visual strategies that take into account the complexity and embodiment of visual communication. Hsieh and Tseng (2017) found that visual contents are more effective than text in stimulating consumer responses due to their capability of increasing the vividness of online content and of exhibiting high information richness.

Manic (2015) opted that engaging visual is a must in the modern marketing world. It's considered a new paradigm in marketing promotion, providing wide access to mass communication devices, with extended visuals enhancements, which has made visual content an important point of interest for successful firms on all media channels. The decreasing costs and huge variety of types are premises for an easy and effective marketing investment, with strong benefits for any company and its brands. Moreover, loyal customers are achieved and kept through visual content, and the lack of it in the general marketing strategy of any producer is a question mark that can lead to a diminishing market share (Manic, 2015).

Business Sales Growth

Organizations Make effort to achieve a number of different performance objectives simultaneously (Greve 2003). From a balanced scorecard perspective, goals and objectives are determined, and processes initiated to monitor performance using financial, customer, internal, and learning based metrics. The degree of importance attached to a particular metric depends on the firm's marketing plan and strategy (Ambler, 2003).

According to Ateke and Kalu (2016), business success explains the well-being of an organization as an outcome of marketing programmes and activities measured against predetermined objectives. It is a measure of the extent to which the firm achieves its marketing objectives in relation to its marketing programmes and activities (Ateke & Iruka, 2015). The authors further opined that marketing success assesses the contributions of the firm's marketing efforts to its corporate objectives. Marketers have developed and used various marketing success measures to assess the impact of marketing (Terblanche, Gerber, Erasmus, & Schmidt, 2013). Business success could be measured from two broad perspective, which include; financial and non-financial measures otherwise known as quantitative and qualitative measures. O'Sullivan and Abela (2007) in their work, emphasized on the qualitative measures, which consists of customer satisfaction, referral, loyalty, etc. On the other hand, Ambler (2003) argued that financial measures reveal the true picture of the organization's growth, because it deals with market share, sales volume, profitability, cost reduction.

Sales growth is an incremental change in the sales of a firm's product over a given time interval, often expressed as a percentage. It is an important indicator of business wellness and sustainability, and is closely associated with the marketing function (Morgan & Rego, 2006; Ambler, 2003). Sales growth is a strong metric of marketing performance and by implication, business wellness. The wellness of an organization may be evaluated by the rate at which its sales grow (Chendall & Langfield-Smith, 2007). Successful products contribute to company profit via sales growth. Sales growth is therefore an essential parameter of business wellness (Farris et al, 2010).

Sales growth describes the rate at which a firm's sales revenue increases. It is a key metric that firms must monitor over succeeding accounting intervals in order to have a fair grasp of trends because it is an essential component of forecasting and is instrumental in decision-making. Sales growth as a metric of business wellness provides executives and sales directors with an assessment of the firm's performance (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007). However, this metric can also be broken down to indicate how salespeople can contribute to the achievement of organizational goals.

Research Methodology

The study adopted cross sectional survey due to its emphasis in studying groups of individuals located in a geographical area at a particular point in time. Basically, the population of this research consists of staff of food and beverage firms in Rivers State. Some of the well-known/popular firms here are; Nigeria brewery, Dangote foods, UAC foods, Dufil Prima foods, Unilever foods, JBS foods, Tyson's food, etc. The study was therefore limited to food and beverage firms that have at least a known and functional operational base in Port Harcourt. According to Nigeria Directory (2020), there is a total of 18 registered food and beverage firms operating in the city of Port Harcourt (obtained from <https://www.directory.org.ng/list-food-beverages?st=rivers>). In addition, designated positions across these firms who were administered copies of questionnaire were office/branch managers, marketing/sales heads, operations managers, accountants/bookkeeping personnel. In total, 72 staff were accessed. Hence, 72 is the research population size.

Basically, data for this study were obtained from two principal sources: primary and secondary. While the former were obtained in the field through questionnaire administration, the latter were gotten from internet publications, journals articles, textbooks, etc. More so, the research instrument was subjected to expert evaluation in the field of marketing research. A pilot study

was carried out in order to identify weakness in the design of the instrument and restructure accordingly. More so, Cronbach's Alpha test was done in order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. Lastly, two levels of data analyses were carried. The first was at the primary level, which adopted descriptive statistics such as tables, charts, graphs, etc. On the other hand, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was adopted at the secondary level in testing the hypotheses as proposed earlier in the study. It is important to mention that all data analyses were done with the help of SPSS (Version 21.0).

Variables Entered	Cronbach Alpha Scores
Visual Content Engagement	0.852
Sales Growth	0.880
Market Share	0.863

Data Analysis and Discussions

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percent (%)
No. Administered	72	100
No. Returned	66	92
Not returned Copies	6	8
Usable Copes	61	85

Source: Field Survey Data, 2022

Table 1 revealed a total of 72 administered copies of questionnaire; however, 66 copies representing 92% were returned. In addition, 6 copies were not returned, but 61 representing 85% were both returned and usable.

Table 2: Sex Distribution

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	28	45.9
Female	33	54.1
Total	61	100

Source: Researcher's Data Survey, 2022

Table 3: Highest Educational Qualification of Respondents

Details	Frequency	Percentage %
SSCE	6	10
OND/HND	14	23
B.Sc/B.A	19	32
M.Sc/MBA	13	21
Ph.D	9	14
Total	61	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Table 3 also indicated that 6 (10%) of the respondents have obtained SSCE, 14 (23%) respondents have OND/HND as their highest educational qualifications, this was followed by 19 respondents with B.SC/B.A degree certificate representing 32%, 13 (21%) respondents were Master's Degree (M.Sc/MBA) holders while 9 respondents representing 14% had PhD as their qualifications.

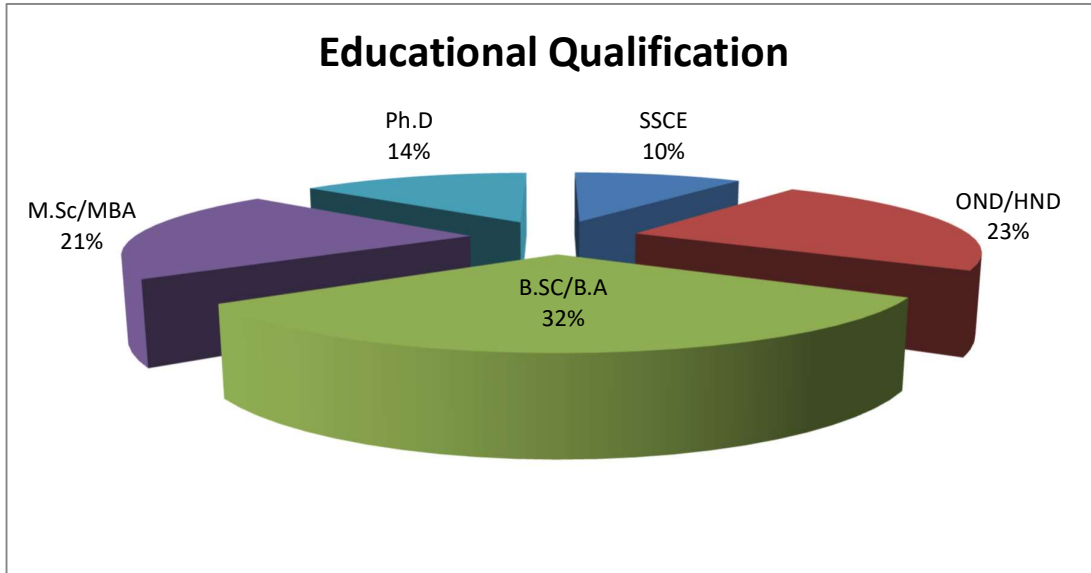


Figure 1: Graphical Presentation of Respondents Highest Educational Qualification

Table 4 Respondents Nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nigerian	57	93.4
Foreigner	4	6.6
Total	61	100

Source: Researcher's Survey Data, 2022

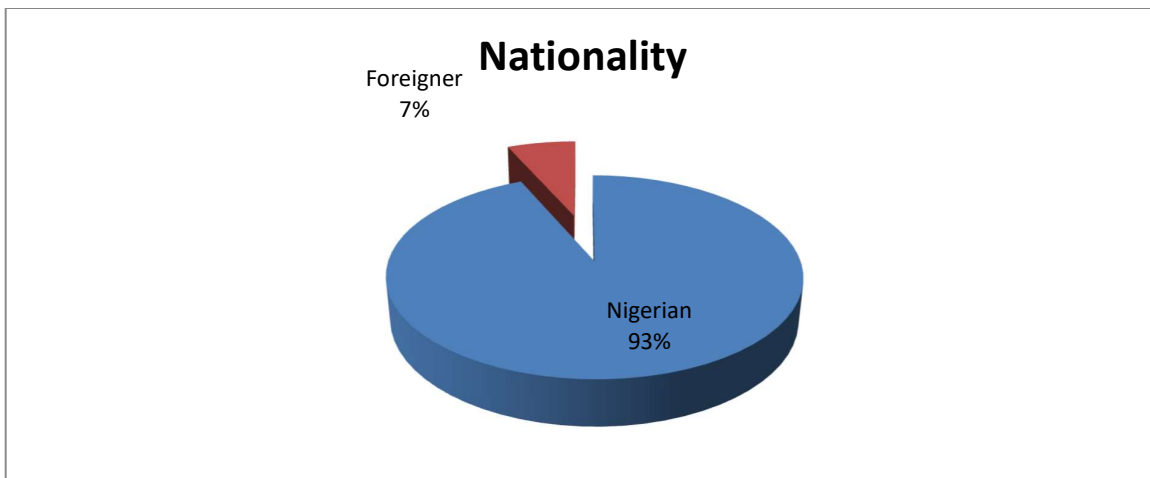


Figure 2: Graphical representation of Respondents' Nationality Distribution

Table 5 and figure 2 shows the nationality of the respondents, of which 57 representing 93.4% of the total respondents are Nigerians while 4 respondents representing 6.6% are foreigners.

Univariate Analysis of Visual Content Engagement and Marketing Performance**Univariate Analysis of Visual Content Engagement****Table 5: Frequencies on Item of Visual Content Engagement Responses**

S/N	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Remark
VCE1	Infographics bring about favourable feedback.	32 52.5% 160	25 41% 100	4 6.5% 12	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	61 100% 272	4.5	Agree
VCE2	Visual contents have on our sites have yielded results.	28 45.9% 140	33 54.1% 132	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	61 100% 272	4.5	Agree
VCE3	Visual content is effective in stimulating consumers positive response.	26 42.6% 130	23 37.7% 92	9 14.8% 27	3 4.9% 6	0 0% 0	61 100% 255	4.2	Agree
VCE4	Visual content helps us achieve our communication goals.	31 50.8% 155	30 49.2% 120	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	61 100% 275	4.5	Agree
	Total	139	135	20	8	3	305	4.3	Agree
		695	540	60	16	3	1314		

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Table 5 shows the mean of the statement items of the study in the sample of 61 respondents used for analysis. Since all the mean of the variable are greater than 3, we can argue that visual content engagement has significant association with marketing performance of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

Univariate Analysis of Marketing Performance**Table 6: Frequencies on Item of Sales Growth Responses**

S/N	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	Remark
SG1	Our preferred mode of digital communication for products has resulted to sales growth.	31 50.8% 155	30 49.2% 120	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	61 100% 275	4.5	Agree
SG2	Engaging customers with visual contents have resulted to increase in sales.	29 47.5% 145	25 41% 100	5 8.3% 15	2 3.2% 4	0 0% 0	61 100% 264	4.3	Agree
SG3	Information accessibility is an indicator for sales growth in our	30 49.2% 150	31 50.8% 124	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	0 0% 0	61 100% 274	4.5	Agree

	company.								
SG4	Attractive videos and pictures contents have helped in boosting our sales.	22 36.1% 110	28 45.9% 112	5 8.2% 15	3 4.9% 6	3 4.9% 3	61 100% 246	4.0	Agree
	Total	139	136	16	9	5	305	4.2	Agree
		695	544	48	18	5	1269		

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Table 6 shows the mean of the statement items of the study in the sample of 61 respondents used for analysis. Since all the mean of the variable are greater than 3, we can argue that sales growth has significant association with visual content engagement of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

Tests of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Visual content engagement has no significant relationship with sales growth of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of Visual Content Engagement and Sales Growth

Correlations					Visual Content Engagement	Sales Growth
Spearman's rho	Visual Content Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			.914
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.			.000
		N	61			61
	Sales Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.914			1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			.
		N	61			61

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2022, SPSS 20 Output

Decision: Table 7 above revealed a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.914 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between visual content engagement and sales growth of food and beverage firms in Rivers State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Visual content engagement has no significant relationship with market share of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

Table 8: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between Visual Content Engagement and Market Share

Correlations					Visual Content Engagement	Market Share
Spearman's rho	Visual Content Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			.903*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.			.000
		N	61			61
	Market Share	Correlation Coefficient	.903*			1.000

Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
N	61	61

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2022, SPSS 20 Output

Decision: Table 8 above reveals a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.903 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between visual content engagement and market share of food and beverage firms in Rivers State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

This section focused on the highlighting various findings with a view to comparing them with previous related findings. Result from hypothesis one (**H₀₁**) revealed that there is a strong and positive relationship between visual content engagement and sales growth of food and beverage firms in Rivers State with $Rho=0.914$. In hypothesis two (**H₀₂**), it was revealed that visual content engagement is positive and significantly related to market share, with a $Rho=0.903$. These findings however corroborated with the research of Stelzner, (2015) who investigated the effect of visual content engagement on business success, found that visual content has a strong and positive relationship with profitability and sales volume. Also, Blanco et al. (2010) found that visual contents with a moderate level of complexity has a greater influence on the profitability and marketing performance than textual information with a low level of complexity. In addition,

Table 9: Summary of Findings

Statement of Hypotheses		Results	Decision
H₀₁:	Visual content engagement has no significant relationship with profitability of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.	0.914	Rejected
H₀₂:	Visual content engagement has no significant relationship with market share of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.	0.903	Rejected

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

From the look of things, social media is more like the next big thing in not only the food and beverage industry, but also, across divers industry, which explains that the digital media will not lose prominent any moment soon. This is in line with Jenkins (2016)'s view when the author predicts that visual marketing will continue to grow and that it will become increasingly critical for marketers to customize visual content for each social media platform and to use visual content as the anchor that drives cross-platform engagement. Visual content engagement therefore goes beyond mere pictures or images in social media posts; instead, it entails a comprehensive visual social media strategy that takes into account where, how and when their target audience want to engage with visual contents, and hence, getting a favourable feedback. In furtherance of this point, visual content engagement has become a veritable marketing tool for food and beverage firms to achieve enhanced sales and market share. It was further proved that the benefits of having access to useful information via social media marketing, has helped food and beverage firms to improve sales and market share.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, this research advanced the following recommendations:

- i. Management of food and beverage firms who want to improve their business success are encouraged to pay attention more on visual contents, as these features of social media have a way of attracting and engaging customers, which in-turn enhances sales growth and market share.
- ii. Again, food and beverage firms are advised to see social media as a veritable channel to gather marketing intelligence from target market, competitors, and even track environmental changes, as access to these Information put these firms on a strategic advantage among rivals in the area of sales growth and market share.
- iii. Firms to remain competitive should have visual content with eye-catching image, graphics and video contents of their product mix, to achieve desired reach and trust that converts prospects to customer, increase sales and market share.

REFERENCES

- Ambler, T. (2003). *Marketing and the bottom line*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Ashley, C., & Tuten, T. (2015). Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32 (1), 15-27.
- Ateke, B.W. & Iruka, C.H. (2015). Investigating the relationship between customer involvement management and marketing performance in the manufacturing industry. *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, 2 (9), 22-34.
- Ateke, B.W. & Kalu, S.E. (2016). Collaborative marketing and business wellness of global system of mobile-communication (GSM) service providers in Nigeria. *International Journal of Marketing and Communication Studies*, 1(1), 14-26.
- Beck, M. (2015). Pinterest Says It Has 100 Million Monthly Active Users. (December 8, 2015) <http://marketingland.com/pinterest-says-it-has-100-million-monthly-active-users-143077>.
- Bennett, S. (2013). What Is Visual Social Media Marketing And How Does It Raise Engagement <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/visual-social-marketing/479112>
- Chendall, R.H. & Langfield-Smith, K. (2007). Multiple perspectives of performance measures. *European Management Journal*, 25 (4), 266-282.
- Greve, H.R. (2003). *Organizational learning from performance feedback*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Manic, M. (2015). Marketing engagement through visual content. *Series V - Economic Sciences*, 57 (2), 89
- Morgan, N.A. & Rego, L.L. (2006). The value of different customer satisfaction and loyalty metrics in predicting business performance. *Marketing Science*, 25 (5), 426-439.
- O'Sullivan, D. & Abela, A.V. (2007). Marketing performance measurement ability and firm performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 71 (2), 79-93.
- Schulz, D.E., & Peltier, J. (2013). Social media's slippery slope: Challenges, opportunities and future research directions. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 7 (2), 86-99.

Shabnoor, T. & Tajinda, V. (2016). Social media its impact positive and negative aspects. *International of Computer Application, Technology and Research*, 5 (2), 71-75.

Stelzner, M. A. (2015). Social Media Marketing Industry Report: How Marketers Are Using Social Media to Grow Their Businesses. <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/social-media-marketing-industry-report-2015/>.

Terblanche, N.S., Gerber, C., Erasmus, P. & Schmidt, D. (2013). A marketing perspective on the impact of financial and non-financial measures on shareholder value. *Review of European Studies*, 16 (2), 216-230.