

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CUSTOMER FULFILMENT OF AIRLINE OPERATORS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between social media marketing and customer fulfilment of airlines in Nigeria. The aim was to examine the influence of social media marketing on customer fulfilment. In addition, based on the nature of the research, descriptive research design was adopted in accessing the research subjects. While the population of the study comprised of 547,972 passenger traffic of airlines in Nigeria, a sample size of 400 was determined with the help of Taro Yamen formular. Descriptive statistics such as tables, charts, percentages, averages etc; Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to test the various hypotheses. Cronbach Alpha test was used as a measure of reliability while face validity was conducted in order to scrutinize the instrument of the various constructs. The results indicated a significant positive and strong relationship between social media marketing and customer fulfilment. Based on the findings in the study, it was concluded that social media marketing significantly relates to the measures of customer fulfilment (Customer engagement, electronic loyalty, and electronic word-of-mouth). Specifically, social media marketing has been confirmed to be a veritable business tool to not just create followership, but also improve customer engagement and e-loyalty. We therefore, recommends that, owners and managers of airlines in Nigeria should understand and develop a holistic approach of implementing an overall social media programme, as this research has confirmed its strategic importance in improving customer fulfilment.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Customers Fulfilment, Customer Engagement, E-Loyalty and E- WOM

INTRODUCTION

The usage of social media marketing not only helps an organization to create product or service awareness, it allows an organization to create and maintain business correspondence with their customers; it helps firms to develop relationship with business partners; and it generally facilitates communication in a large scale (Ogbonnaya, 2019). Furthermore, using social media platforms for marketing purposes help saves consumers' time; it serves as a source of getting reliable information from an organization, reduces the costs associated with getting information from an organization, and enhances communication between an organization and their consumers. For the purpose of this study, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube were used as sub dimensions of social media variable. Airline operators have identified digital technology as a major opportunity to tackle changing customer expectation effectively, manage customer experience and to reengineer the structure of the industry (Nkpurukwe, et al, 2020; Nelson Smartphone, 2018).

However, as technological innovations continue to influence different phases of marketing activities, it has equally affected the way and manner with which firms offer their products and communicate with their customers. As Lawal (2021) rightly puts it, advancement in technological innovations have forcefully changes consumers' needs and wants. As such, the widespread uses of technological developments, in the form of social media, have changed how firms communicate its products or services to consumers and relate with them accordingly (Sarah, 2018). Social media marketing has

revolutionized the traditional ways of marketing products and services to modern technological developments, which, if not properly managed, may serve as a serious threat to most telecommunication firms that operate in a highly competitive market.

Tarn (2005) stated that customer fulfilment is a measure of how well customer need expectations are met or exceeded. Customer fulfilment is best explaining where actual service performance is equal to/exceeds expected service performance. Giese and Cote (2000) describe the concept from a value co-creation point of view. To this author, customer fulfilling is a business strategy that is anchored on creation of value for customers by determining, managing their expectations, and demonstrate the willingness and ability to satisfy their needs. Airline operators that are able to meet customer expectations of service performance improve profit than those that do not meet customer satisfaction. It is pertinent to mention that this research measured customer fulfilment with customer engagement and E-WOM. In view of the above reviewed studies and other related ones, this research combined social media marketing, as dimensions of digital marketing strategies with the intention of evaluating their influences on customer fulfilment as it relates to airline operators in Nigeria.

Technology Acceptance Model

The theory upon which the present study was anchored is the Technology Adoption Model (TAM) propounded by Fred Davis in 1989. While this theory has been widely used in technology adoption studies, its strength lies on the simplicity of its model. The idea of the TAM model is the combination of theory of reason notion (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Basically, the TAM model was developed to determine user acceptance of a wide range of computing technologies (Dans, 1989). According to this author, two theoretical constructs were found useful in conceptualizing the TAM model. They are: perceived usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of use (PEOU). Both constructs according to this affects the intention to use a system. The author defined PU as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance. More so, PEOU was defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort.

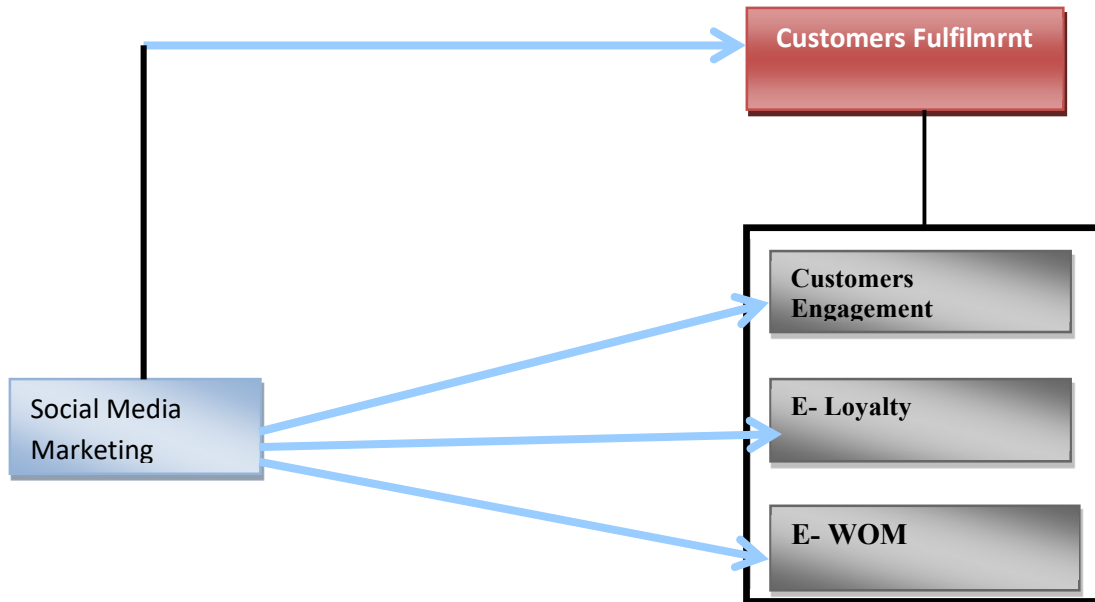
In relating this theory to the present study, underscores the importance of the use of digital marketing in shaping and directing subscriber purchase behaviour on one hand, and performance of the organisation on the other hand. The rate of adoption of digital marketing tools such as social media marketing, content marketing, mobile application, search engine optimization, and the rest of them; may be determined by PU and PEOU. This however goes a long way to determining their intention to patronize a particular marketer. The adoption behaviour determines the degree to which subscribers decide to use these technologies in their various activities. This is of primary concern to companies because if the adoption rate is not positive and favourable, then communicating product information and services to consumers via these systems may be hampered; hence, produces less result. It is however in view of this association; the researcher adopted the TAM as part our theoretical foundation.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses was tested in the later part of this research:

- H₀₁:** Social media marketing has no significant relationship with customer engagement of airline operators in Nigeria.
- H₀₂:** Social media marketing has no significant relationship with e-loyalty of airline operators in Nigeria.
- H₀₃:** Social media marketing has no significant relationship with E-WOM of airline operators in Nigeria.

Operational Conceptual Framework



Social Media Marketing

The concept of social media marketing has evolving, especially with the advancement of digital marketing applications. Conceptually, social media marketing refers to the use of internet platforms in creating product, service and organizational presence as well as building diverse relationships (Ogbonnaya, 2019). The author further conceived social media as a set of internet platforms that facilitate interactions and networking within and outside an organization. Adopting a precise view of social media marketing, Lawal, (2021) conceived it as the use of social media platforms, blogs, social news and bookmarking, micro-blog, forums and virtual worlds, media sharing, and rating and reviews pages for marketing purposes. Overtime, the development and application of social media platforms in marketing activities have been a welcome development. Currently, social media marketing is gradually gaining momentum as a strategic tool that could help business organizations in creating product and/or service awareness, take different market offerings to the target audience, as well as create marketing networks with other organizations (John et al., 2019). However, as technological innovations continue to influence different phases of marketing activities, it has equally affected the way and manner with which firms offer their products and communicate with their customers. As Lawal (2021) rightly puts it, advancement in technological innovations have forcefully changes consumers' needs and wants. As such, the widespread uses of technological developments, in the form of social media, have changed how firms communicate its products or services to consumers and relate with them accordingly (Sarah, 2018). Social media marketing has revolutionized the traditional ways of marketing products and services to modern technological developments, which, if

not properly managed, may serve as a serious threat to most telecommunication firms that operate in a highly competitive market.

Concept of Customer Fulfilment

Tarn (2005) stated that customer fulfilment is a measure of how well customer need expectations are met or exceeded. Customer fulfilment is best explaining where actual service performance is equal to/exceeds expected service performance. Giese and Cote (2000) describe the concept from a value co-creation point of view. To this author, customer fulfilling is a business strategy that is anchored on creation of value for customers by determining, managing their expectations, and demonstrate the willingness and ability to satisfy their needs. Airline operators that are able to meet customer expectations of service performance improve profit than those that do not meet customer satisfaction. It is pertinent to mention that this research measured customer fulfilment with customer engagement and E-WOM.

Customer Engagement

The concept has evolved among practitioners as well as academics. A collection of definitions suggests that there are differing conceptualizations of the term customer engagement. Practitioners look at customer engagement from the perspective of the organization and defined it as activities facilitating "repeated interactions that strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in a brand" (Sedley, 2010). But academics in information systems look at customer engagement as the "intensity of customer participation with both representatives of the organization and with other customers in a collaborative knowledge exchange process" (Wagner and Majchrzak 2007). A more recent framework of customer engagement in marketing segments existing customers based on their transactional relationship with a brand (Bowden 2009). Bowden (2009) provided a conceptual framework of customer engagement that, although focusing only on existing customers, suggests that customer-brand relationships and strategies for engaging customers might differ based on whether the customers are first-time or repeat purchasers. Considerable conceptual and descriptive work on engagement across various disciplines exists. However, there are gaps as to what engagement means to marketing and its stakeholders. It is evident from the review of the literature that no agreement exists as to the exact nature of engagement and its role in marketing. However, practitioners appear to relate it to building relationships with customers through programs aimed as getting individuals involved with and connected with their brand. Thus, next we address how CE can aid in filling the potential gaps in RM research priorities.

E-Loyalty

A very crucial element in a service firm's customer base is extent to which its customers are loyal (Ganesh et al., 2000). Several online consumer behaviour researchers have confirmed that e-loyalty to the service organization is conceptualized as a combination of customer's intention to maintain an ongoing relationship with the service organization, and to electronically recommend to others through content sharing, post and re-post, etc (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Alexander, 2002; Moutinho & Smith, 2000). Alexander (2000) argued that e-loyalty is an important criterion for a service firm to obtain competitive advantage, because it determines users repeat patronage and referral. Moutinho and Smith (2000) pointed that perceived quality stimulates satisfaction, and in-turn increases e-loyalty. The authors argued that in recent times service firms implement sales-force ethical strategies to attract, retain, and sustain customer patronage and loyalty. Firms' expectation of business continuity indicates customer intention to manage the relationship and the likelihood of repeat buying and referral.

Varying definitions of e-loyalty have been put forward by plethora of scholars. Lin, Wu and Chen (2013) defined the concept as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronise a preferred product or service online consistently in the future. Leverim and Liljonder (2006) defined e-loyalty as a powerful commitment to shop online again, the offering of a service organization in the future. The authors argued that initially, users purchase a brand tentatively with a known trademark, and after satisfaction from it, they tend to repeat and continue with the brand because of its positive consumption experience. According to Ndubisi (2007) the loyal user helps the performance of the service organization lower cost of advertising as this group of customers is likely to engage in word-of-mouth referral by encouraging non-users of the brand to start using it. Again, the author mentioned that e-loyalty has become powerful marketing tool through oral (mouth to mouth) advertising and advising the brand to friends and family.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM)

The advances of information technology and the emergence of online network sites have profoundly changed the way information is exchanged and have transcended the traditional limitations of WOM (Shin, 2007; Heyne, 2009; Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Magalhaes and Musallam, 2014). Nowadays consumer can share their product-related experiences on the internet through email, bulletin boards, chat rooms, forums, fan clubs, brand and user groups (Horowitz, 2006; Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Wu, 2013). This new trend is named electronic word of mouth. Literature on word-of-mouth came to lamplight in the 1960s (Arafin, 2018). During the early years of inception, word-of-mouth was defined as informal face-to-face communication between two or more parties or individuals concerning evaluations of goods and services (Andreas 2019). However, the growing application of digital technologies have ushered in the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM), and this has become a part of user generated content. In this digital age, Phelps, et al, (2005), stated that E-WOM started to be considered as an influential marketing tool because consumers started to seek information on products and services, which was posted online by previous users before purchasing the product, in order to review information and, in some way, relieve anxiety towards the product or service.

Empirical Review on Social Media Marketing and Customer Fulfilment

John, et al. (2019) studied social media adoption and customer commitment of telecommunication firms in Nigeria: from innovation diffusion theory to technology acceptance model. The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between social media practices and the performance of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. Survey research design was applied in the study. The population of the study 1472, while the sample size was 306 which was determined using Krejcie and Morgan sampling size determination technique. Results from the study showed that there is a relationship between perceived ease of use, attitude towards the use of social media, and employees' attitude and performance of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. The researchers concluded that there is a positive relationship between social media adoption and commitment of the studied telecommunication firms in Nigeria. Based on these findings, it was recommended that managers of the studied telecommunication firm should periodically train their employees as it would sharpen their social media skills and make it easier for them to use.

Etim, et al, (2018) examined social media usage and e-loyalty; a reflection from the Nigerian telecommunication sector. The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between social media usage and e-loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication sector. The population of the study was 95, while 76 of the respondents were used as sample size. Structured questionnaire was used in generating the required primary data. Pearson Moment Correlation was used in testing the formulated null hypotheses. Result from the study showed that social media usage has positive and significant

relationship with e-loyalty of the telecommunication firms. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that management of the studied telecommunication firms should consider using social media platforms extensively in providing services to their customers; all sorts of advertising and promotion should be carried out in the organization using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace; customer services in the organizations should be carried out using social media platforms; and information about products and services should be available to the customers using different social media platforms.

Harrison, et al, (2019) carried out a study on effectiveness of social media platforms for product marketing in southwestern Nigeria: a firm-level analysis. The objective of the study was to find out firm-level effectiveness of the use of social media platforms in product marketing in the southwestern region of Nigeria. A total of 400 firms were selected as the target for the study. The needed primary data was generated using structured questionnaire. The data generated was analyzed using Pearson Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis. Results from the analysis showed that the use of social media platforms brought increase in total sales, sales revenue, increase customers and quick feedback. The researchers concluded that social media platforms are vital tools for product marketing. Based on this finding, it was recommended that firms aspiring to grow their increase their sales and market share should leverage it on the usage of social media platforms.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study is the cross-sectional research design. The population of this study comprises of flight passengers in the Port Harcourt international airport, which according to FAAN (2020) has 547,972 passenger traffic. In view of the above population figure (547,972), this research adopted Taro Yamen formula in determining the sample size of 400 passengers. To obtain relevant and reliable information needed for this study; both secondary and primary data were used. The secondary data were collected from newspapers, academic journals, periodicals, text books, internet publications, etc; while primary data were sourced from the field through the use of fully structured questionnaire. The Cronbach Alpha test of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) were used to measure the study variables in order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument.

Table 3.1: Summary of Reliability Analysis

Constructs	N	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha
Social Media Marketing	25	4	0.880
Customer Engagement	25	4	0.819
E-Loyalty	25	4	0.833
E-WOM	25	4	0.861

Source: Cronbach Alpha output, 2021

The research adopted Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient and Regression Analysis. These tools were adopted in order to determine whether the dependent variable has a relationship with the dependent variable, and the magnitude and direction (positive or negative) of the relationship.

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Social media marketing has no significant relationship with customer engagement of airline operators in Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between Social Media marketing and Customer Engagement

Correlations

Spearman's rho	Social Media Marketing	Correlation	Social Marketing	Media Customer
		Coefficient	1.000	Engagement
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.914
	Customer Engagement	N	332	.000
		Correlation	.914	1.000
		Coefficient	.000	.
		Sig. (2-tailed)	332	332
		N		

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021, SPSS 20 Output

Decision: Table 2 above reveals a spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.914 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive and significant relationship between social media marketing and customer engagement towards airline operators in Nigeria. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Social media marketing has no significant relationship with e-loyalty of airline operators in Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of Social Media and E-Loyalty

Correlations		Social Media Marketing	E-Loyalty
Spearman's rho	Social Media Marketing	Correlation	1.000
		Coefficient	.903*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	E-Loyalty	N	332
		Correlation	.903*
		Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	332

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021, SPSS 20 Output

Decision: Table 3 above reveals a spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.903 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive and significant relationship between social media marketing and e-loyalty towards airline operators in Nigeria. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Test of Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: Social media marketing has no significant relationship with e-WOM of airline operators in Nigeria.

Table 4 Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of
Correlations

		Social Media Marketing	Referrals
Spearman's rho	Social		
	Media Marketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.911*
		N	.000
			332
			332
Referrals		Correlation Coefficient	.911*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	.000
			.000
			332
			332

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

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021, SPSS 20 Output

Decision: Table 4 above reveals a spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.911 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive influence/significant relationship between social media marketing and E-WOM towards airline operators in Nigeria. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Customer Fulfilment

The first hypothetic statement (H_{01}) was such that examine the significant relationship between social media marketing and customer fulfilment of airline operators in Nigeria. social media marketing was statistically tested against customer fulfilment using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis tools. The analysis was aimed to examine the significant association between social media marketing and customer fulfilment for which result showed that a significant relationship exists between the variables ($\rho=0.917$). Our analysis revealed the existence of a strong and positive significant relationship between social media marketing and customer fulfilment. The second hypothetical statement (H_{02}) was designed to examine the relationship extent between social media marketing and e-loyalty of airline operators in Rivers State. The result revealed the existence of a significant relationship ($\rho=0.915$). The analysis showed the existence of a strong and positive significant relationship between social media marketing and e-loyalty. The third hypothetical statement (H_{03}) was designed to examine the relationship extent between social media marketing and e-WOM of airline operators in Rivers State. The result revealed the existence of a significant relationship ($\rho=0.909$). The analysis showed the existence of a strong and positive significant relationship between social media marketing and e-WOM. It is however crucial to mention that the above findings of reiterate the position of John et al, (2018), who examined social media usage and sales performance; a reflection from the Nigerian telecommunication sector; found from their study that social media usage has positive and significant relationship with promotion and profitability, and market share of the telecommunication firms

CONCLUSIONS

Social media marketing has been confirmed to be a veritable business tool to not just create followership, but also improve customer engagement, e-loyalty and e-WOM referral.

The results on the social media marketing contribute significantly towards achieving sales performance of airlines in Nigeria. In the light of this, the study therefore concludes that, the predictor variable can when effectively implemented significantly increase the level of customer engagement, e-loyalty, and e-WOM among airlines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made available for customers/passengers of airline in Nigeria for effective implementation.

1. Owners and Managers of airlines in Nigeria should understand and develop a holistic approach of implementing an overall social media programme, as this research has confirmed its strategic importance in improving customer fulfilment.
2. Secondly, management should coordinate and synchronise various social media platforms with traditional promotional activities for the purpose of achieving a successful integrated marketing communication.
3. Lastly, given the research evidence we have so far with respect to the rate at which customers prefer friendly and entertaining websites, we therefore advise management to optimise their search engine systems; which in-turn improves user loyalty and positive WOM.

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