

DIGITAL MARKETING, PERSONAL SELLING AND CONSUMER BUYING DECISIONS OF LOCAL AGRIPRODUCTS IN NORTH CENTRAL, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The preference of local consumers for foreign agriproducts over locally produced ones has threatened the existence of local ones and this necessitated this study which examined the effect of promotional mix on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in the north central, Nigeria. The study adopted the cross-sectional research design whereby structured five-point Likert scale questionnaires were administered to a sample of three hundred and eight-four (384) respondents. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses formulated. The study found a negative and insignificant effect of digital marketing on consumer buying decisions but a positive and significant effect of personal selling on consumer buying decisions. Based on these findings, the study recommended that local agribusinesses should employ the use of verified social media accounts in interacting with customers. This will create a sense of trust in the customer as it is only authentic brands that are verified by media handlers. Similarly, the study recommends that local agribusinesses should expand the scope of the personal selling by employing the services of more trained and abled hands as sales representatives who will cover more geographical locations, convince more customers to patronize their products

Keywords: Promotional Mix, Digital Marketing, Personal Selling, Consumer Buying Decision.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world which is characterized by rapid changes and advancements in diverse spheres of life especially with changes arising from the rapid transfer of information, businesses are challenged to consider media and communication as a tool for the transfer of new ideas that reflect on the concept of competitive struggle between organizations towards ensuring survival and growth (Abdullah & Nuri, 2019). Every business organization therefore, desires to create and maintain a reliable, cost-effective and accessible medium through which their goods and services are known and patronized by the target customers so as to provide for the attainment of their stated objectives. It is therefore understandable to state that business organizations are established to accomplish objectives of improving performance leveraging on their interactions with the customers (Ibojo & Akinruwa, 2014).

Promotional mix has been posited to mean an optimal combination of various types of promotional tools and strategies or the selection of the most effective ones to influence consumers' decisions to buy a company's product (Budianto, et al., 2020) or increase patronage/sales (Suliyanto, 2006; Ederm, et al., 2002). Promotion is an all-inclusive term that covers the entire scope of advertising, public relations, personal selling and sales promotion. These and other forces have been identified as key elements in the present competitive business environment that businesses need to pay attention to should they desire survival in the market (Abedin & Ferdous, 2015). Therefore, promotion can be analyzed as a strategy deployed by businesses to place their goods and services as adequately provided to satisfy customer demands as well as assisting the buyer or prospective customer to make purchase decisions.

Buying decision of consumers are attributed to certain elements such as product/service offering, location of such product, discount, product value, brand name, warranty, among others. It is therefore considered that these decisions may be aided by marketing activities since marketing create opportunities through the provision of effective means of determining the desires and needs of customers and obtaining their satisfaction (Abdullah & Nuri, 2019). Hence, promotional mix elements are seen to be effective in guiding customers to decide whether to purchase a product or try a service (Neha & Manoj, 2013). This informed the choice of personal selling and digital marketing in this study with the need to examine how they affect consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in north central, Nigeria.

Personal selling extends its hands into activities bothering around other elements of the marketing mix. It is a face to face communication activity between company representatives and prospective buyers. Personal Selling is very effective and attracts a lot of customer attention and patronage (Olumoko, et al, 2019). The utilization of digital channels (like email, phone, fax), to achieve stronger consumer patronage has turned into a need in today's turbulent and aggressive business market. It is being utilized more operationally, as an apparatus to increase wider customer reach, maintain good communication and provide cost-effective products or services to the clients (Sin, et. al, 2012).

The agricultural sector in Nigeria has received lots of support from government and relevant stakeholders in recent times especially in the last decade. These supports include but not restricted to border closure for food importation, high tariffs for imported agriproducts, foreign exchange restrictions among others. This led to what seem like a revolution in the sector as seen in the emergence of many firms seeking to boost domestic production of agriproducts at a profit. However, recent happenings have shown a continued decline in the performance of local agribusinesses in the country as customers continue to show preference for foreign agriproducts such as rice, tomato paste among others over locally processed ones leading to low patronage of the locally made agriproducts. Since it is said that the success or failure of any business organization is hinged on how best such organization can fulfill its customers' demands, it becomes pertinent for agribusinesses to review their marketing activities with a view to improving patronage and hence the need for this study.

The study centered on examining the effect of personal selling and digital marketing on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria. The following hypotheses stated in null form guided the study:

Ho₁: Personal Selling has no significant effect on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria.

Ho₂: Digital marketing has no significant effect on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personal Selling

According to Olumoko et al. (2019), personal selling is an individualistic approach that is designed to meet specific needs of prospects, unlike advertising and sales promotion which focus are to create awareness about the existence of a product brand or service. Personal selling is also referred to as a two-way flow of communication between a potential buyer and a salesperson that is designed to identify the potential buyer's needs, match these needs to one or more of the firm's products or services and convince the buyer to purchase the product (Olumoko, et al., 2019).

Personal selling is a direct spoken communication between sellers and potential customers, usually in person but sometimes over telephone. Personal selling serves as a communication bridge between the organization and the target audience (Adebite, et al., 2019). Personal selling is where businesses use people (the sales force) to sell the product after meeting face-to-face with customer (Enidom, et al., 2019), take objections from prospective buyers that need to be further addressed, to satisfaction in order to clear possible areas of doubt or ambiguity. Indeed, personal selling aims at clearing possible doubts in target consumers.

Further, Iwunze (2018) described personal selling as an interaction between buyers and sellers, for purposes of gaining product awareness, among others. What happens in these interactions is crucial because the behavior of the salesman will impact on the buyers' perceptions of product quality and other profiles. Personal selling is defined as a face-to-face or person-to-person communication. It involves presentation of goods, services, ideas, activities and emotion from sellers to buyers and is usually done in a persuasive manner.

Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing can be described as conducting the activities of selling and buying using electronic platforms or devices, such as personal computers, iPad, email, smart phones, fax and other automated

gadgets. It is a marketing communication system that is or can be prosecuted even in motion and not in a physical market "space", as it can be carried out in the comfort of an office, home, open environment or seclusion/privacy; indeed, it can be conducted anywhere except underneath water. Digital marketing achieves personal convenience and timeliness because both the seller and buyer don't necessarily have to converge in a specific place called "market", to transact. Neither do they have to do transaction within a period of time. Digital marketing also achieves transparency because transactions in the system are done openly on the electronic platform only to the acceptance and satisfaction of the parties involved. This modern marketing communication system entails the conduct of buying and selling activities is through knowledge and skills in computing.

According to Oluwadamilola (2021), digital marketing is a revolutionized and conventional way of marketing products and services to modern technological society. According to Abdel-Fattah and Khaled (2021), digital marketing is an electronic communication channel used by marketers to support products and services towards the market. Also, Amira and Nermine (2020), view digital marketing as a form of marketing that utilizes electronic devices like personal computers, smart phones, cell phones and game consoles to involve the stakeholder to be a part of the procedure. Diez-Martin, et al. (2019) posited that digital marketing is the act of advancing items and administrations utilizing computerized conveyance channels through PCs, cell phones, PDAs, or other automated gadgets. Digital marketing is defined as the sale and purchase of information, products, and services through a computer or internet network (Rao & Ratnamadhuri, 2018). Diyana and Jasni (2018) held that digital marketing can be defined as a projection of conventional marketing which its tools and strategies are on internet.

Consumer Buying Decisions

Kotler and Keller (2016) define purchase decision as a decision-making process that includes determining what to buy or not from a seller which is reliant on the other activities which precedes the decision-making process. The purchasing decision process has stages to achieve purchasing decisions made by customers; this include recognizing needs, seeking information, evaluating alternatives, purchasing decisions, and behavior after purchase (Syaparudin & Hertati, 2020). Kotler and Armstrong (2012) also stated that the purchase decision is a purchase process related to the brand to be purchased. They posit further that purchasing decisions are individual activities that are directly involved in the decision-making process to make purchases of products offered by the seller. While decision making is an individual activity that is directly involved in obtaining and using the goods offered, consumers will consider various aspects before deciding to buy or not (Hertati & Safkaur: 2020; Syafarudin, 2020).

Personal Selling and Consumer Buying Decisions

Wirya and Syah (2022) conducted a study on the analysis advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and direct selling on purchase intention vegetables in retail west Jakarta. The purpose of the study is to test if organic vegetables are offered through advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and direct marketing is possible for consumers to intend to buy so that organic consumers expand and the number increases. With the addition of organic consumers, the farmers will increase their profits and by helping farmers change non-organic farming into organic vegetables. In accordance with the theory if a marketing strategy is developed into a holistic possibility, consumers who do not know about organic information will consider consuming organic products. It is hoped that farmers will increase innovation with appropriate technology and promote training in both rice and organic vegetables. This study uses a survey method, with respondent housewives or fathers who are concerned with family health. The research sample is consumers who have never consumed organic and are shopping at a retail store in West Jakarta. The research sample amounted to 113 consisting of 51 men and 62 women. The results of the study show that advertising and direct selling affect consumer purchase intentions, while sales promotion and personal selling do not affect consumer purchase intentions.

Prayogi (2019) examined the Influence of Personal Selling and Quality Products to purchase Decision. The study aims to analyze simultaneously between personal selling and quality of product to decision simpati card purchases in the city of Medan. The method used in this research is quantitative method by using techniques Non-Probability sampling, which is a sampling technique that does not provide

opportunities or equal opportunity for each element or member of the population to be selected into the sample. It is based on the types of accidental sampling (accidental) that anyone who happens to see Or Wear a simpati card totaling 70 samples. The technique of analyzing the data used in this research was multiple linear regressions. The study found that personal selling and product quality has positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions simpati card in Medan. The implication of this research is further enhanced promotion methods and the quality of existing products in order to face the competition between existing competitors.

Ho-Taek, et al (2021) studied effects of sales-related capabilities of personal selling organizations on individual sales capability, sales behaviors and sales performance in cosmetics personal selling channels. Data was collected from 151 salespeople, their sales organizations, and their visiting customers, in South Korea. The proposed hypotheses were tested through the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique. The study found that both types of sales-related capabilities (sales force management capabilities and personal selling capabilities) have significant positive effect on the individual sales capabilities, respectively. Further, the individual sales capability of salespeople has a stronger impact on customer-oriented sales behavior than on selling-oriented sales behavior. Similarly, selling-oriented sales behavior has a negative effect on customer satisfaction while customer-oriented sales behavior has a positive effect. It would be necessary to study more diverse organizational capabilities that affect sales capabilities at the individual level.

Sanjay and Subhadeep (2020) examined "sales strategies of banks: an empirical study of select private sector banks in India". This is an empirical study based on exploratory research design. Self-administered questionnaire was designed separately for customers as well as employees of the banks. Responses were collected from 100 samples of customers and 100 samples of employees of the five selected private sector banks of the region, using convenience sampling. The study revealed that personal selling is important for the banks as well as customers. It helps the banks to understand customer needs very easily and at the same time it helped the customers to resolve all their queries and doubts due to face to face interaction with bank employees. This study failed to indicate its method of data analysis, thereby voiding the reliability of its outcome.

Digital Marketing and Consumer Buying Decision

Abdel-Fattah and Khaled (2021) examined "effect of digital marketing on purchasing decisions: a case study in Jordan". Primary data was collected using simple sampling technique and acquired in the Jordanian market with a sample size of 220. Descriptive analysis, reliability test, correlation test, and multiple regressions were used in this research. The study's results demonstrated that digital marketing, such as social media marketing and mobile marketing, has a profound impact on consumer buying decisions. The results of this study recommended that firms should adopt strategies to leverage on the digital world and technology, increase brand awareness to continue competing in today's commercial environment. The marketer could embark on training and providing capacity to brand prospects to be able to have skills in effective marketing communication.

Dash and Chakraborty (2021) investigated "digital transformation of marketing strategies during a Pandemic: Evidence from an Emerging Economy during COVID-19". The study adopted the use of primary and secondary data. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to study 535 responses of life insurance customers. The normality of the data was confirmed through skewness and Kurtosis tests. The study revealed that Customer satisfaction significantly affected purchase intention and played a good mediator between digital marketing practices and purchase intention. The study also stated that the digital channel managers expressly understood their key areas of strengths regarding the five dimensions of digital marketing strategies. The study review however, never mentioned the effect of the pandemic in digital marketing, in the life insurance context.

Amira and Nermine (2020) studied the impact of digital marketing on consumer buying decision process in the Egyptian Market. The questionnaires were administered based on a simple sampling method and obtained from the Egyptian market. 285 questionnaires were distributed, and 213 available samples were

collected. SPSS software V. 23 was used to analyse the data, and to get the descriptive statistics. Cronbach's Alpha (α) was used to test the strength of internal consistency reliability and correlation coefficients. Findings indicate that the mobile phone, as a digital marketing channel, had a negative impact on consumer buying decisions throughout all the stages of the consumer buying decision process in the Egyptian market. Future analysis may be accomplished on entirely different industries within the various markets, and specific organizations and customers. The method used in arriving at the sample size is unknown and the study population is not given.

Planned Behavior Theory (PBT)

Ajzen (1991) developed the Planned Behavior Theory. He shows a model that has been widely applied in diverse studies on behavioral intention (Lee et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 2010). PBT explains that voluntary human behavior is preceded by a preconceived intent to engage in such behavior. This can be shown in the figure below, adapted by Ajzen to explain this model. This theory postulates that behavioral intention, in turn, is determined by three significant determinants; Attitude towards Behavior (AB), Subjective Norm (SN) and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC).

"This means that the degree to which individuals see a certain behavior positively (that is attitude), or foresees that substantial others want them to engage in the behavior (that is the subjective norm) and believe that they are capable of carrying out the behavior (that is perceived behavioral control), serve as direct determinants of the extent of their intention to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991).

The PBT is one of the best-supported social psychological theories for predicting human behavior. The central premise is that behavioral decisions result from a reasoned process in which the action is influenced by attitudes, norms, and perceived behavior control (Smith et al., 2007). This theory is largely useful in Marketing Communication discourse because marketing can affect one or more of the factors that this theory describes, to control potential consumers' intentions to use a product, and by extension, perceive and plan control of potential patronage decisions.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the cross-sectional research design. Data was collected with the aid of a five-point Likert questionnaire from a conveniently selected sample of 384 consumers in north central, Nigeria. The sample figure was gotten using the Cochran sample size determination formula since the population is infinite. The questionnaire items were adapted from the works of Wahyudi and Melinda (2018) and designed using likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" The data were analyzed using the multiple regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

$$CBD = \beta_0 + \beta_1PSL + \beta_2DGM + e \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad - \quad (i)$$

Where: CBD = Consumer Buying Decisions, PSL = Personal Selling, DGM = Digital Marketing, e = Error term (5% = 0.05), β_0 = Intercept, $\beta_1\beta_2$ = Coefficient of independent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study distributed a total of 422 copies of the questionnaire which is a 10% increase in the sample size to provide for attrition. Out of the 422 distributed, a valid response of 396 representing 94% was received and used for the analysis subsequently.

Table 1: Correlations

	DMK	PSL	CBD
DMK Pearson Correlation	1	.048	.041
Sig. (2-tailed)		.415	.486
N	396	396	396
PSL Pearson Correlation	.048	1	-.053
Sig. (2-tailed)	.415		.374
N	396	396	396
CBD Pearson Correlation	.041	-.053	1

Sig. (2-tailed)	.486	.374	
N	396	396	396

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Direct marketing (DMK) showed a weak and positive relationship with personal selling (PSL) which stood at 0.048 which is insignificant at 5% level of significance. DMK showed a weak but positive relationship with consumer buying decision (CBD) which stood at 0.041 and is insignificant at 5% level of significance. Also, PSL showed a weak and negative relationship with CBD which stood at -0.053. All the variables under study satisfy multicollinearity as though none of the independent variable is strongly related to another.

Table 2: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.263 ^a	.513	.511	1.243	1.933

a. Predictors: (Constant), PSL, DMK

b. Dependent Variable: CBD

Table 3: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	167.344	2	.934	13.605	.000 ^b
	Residual	158.863	393	1.544		
	Total	326.207	395			

a. Dependent Variable: CBD

b. Predictors: (Constant), PSL, DMK

Table 4: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.296	.271		4.792	.000		
	DMK	-.053	.058	-.055	-.924	.356	.993	1.007
	PSL	.054	.121	.031	7.445	.000	.993	1.007

a. Dependent Variable: CBD

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

The result, as shown in the tables above revealed an R-square value of 0.513 which signifies that 51.3% of the variation in consumer buying decision (CBD) is explained by the combination of direct marketing and personal selling. The remaining 48.7% variation could be explained by other factors or variables not included in this study. The f-statistics stood at 13.605 and also the probability of the f-statistics was found to be significant at 5% level of significance (p 0.000<0.05) which therefore, indicates that the model is fit to measure the association between the variables under study.

Test of Hypotheses

From the table 4 above, the result revealed a significant effect of personal selling on consumer buying decisions as seen in the p-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance and as such the study accepts the alternative hypothesis which states that personal selling has significant effect on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria. However, the result indicates an insignificant effect of direct marketing (DMK) on consumer buying decision as seen in the p-value of 0.356 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance and hence the study accepts the null hypothesis and

accepts the alternative one which states that digital marketing has no significant effect on consumer buying decision of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the effect of personal selling and digital marketing on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria. The findings from the first hypothesis revealed that personal selling has a positive and significant effect on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria. This implies that direct engagements using sales representative has significantly influenced consumers' decision to purchase local agriproducts. This finding agrees with the findings of Ho-Taek, et al. (2021) and Egbule et. al. (2017) who both found positive and significant effect of personal selling on consumer buying decisions.

However, the study found a negative and insignificant effect of direct marketing on consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria implying that direct marketing efforts via digital platforms directed towards customers did not yield the desired impact on their decision to purchase products. This could also be a result of perception of online marketing by customers as being dubious and non-reliable as such, efforts made by these agribusinesses via digital platforms may have met same treatment. This finding agrees with that of Amira and Nermine (2020) who found negative effect of digital marketing on consumer buying decision but disagrees with the study of Abdel-Fattah and Khaled (2021) who found positive effect of digital marketing on buying decisions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its findings, the study concluded that personal selling was essential in promoting consumer buying decisions of local agriproducts in North Central, Nigeria. However, it has not stimulated buying decision on local agriproducts to the desired level due to the deficiency observed in direct marketing undertaken by the agribusinesses. The study therefore concluded that all both elements are important and should be implemented correctly in uniformity, to achieve a favorable outcome. Based on this, the study recommends as follows:

- i. That local agribusinesses should expand the scope of the personal selling by employing the services of more skilled and abled hands as sales representatives who will cover more geographical locations, convince more customers to patronize their products.
- ii. That local agribusinesses should employ the use of verified social media accounts in interacting with customers. This will create a sense of trust in the customer as only authentic brands are verified by media handlers. They may also engage the use of verified public figures as their brand ambassadors, and also train prospective buyers in digital verified social media handling

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Questionnaire

Respondents are required to express the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following questions.

Key: *SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree*

<i>Personal Selling (PSL)</i>		<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
PSL1	The sales representatives of agriproduct companies contact me frequently to buy their products					
PSL2	The sales representatives are knowledgeable to instill confidence on customers					
PSL3	The sale representative recommends to me customized products of their firm which suits my personality					
PSL4	Sincerity of the sales representatives influence me to buy their products					
PSL5	The sales representatives create friendly relationship with customers					
<i>Digital Marketing (DMK)</i>		<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
DMK1	Agriproduct companies update me about its product through my personal mail					
DMK2	Agriproduct companies use social media to promote new products					
DMK3	Agriproduct companies use phone calls to send clear messages regarding new product offers					
DMK4	Agriproduct companies' interactive communication persuades its customers to purchase					
DMK5	Digital marketing practice of agriproduct companies make me decide to use its service					
<i>Consumer Buying Decisions (CBD)</i>		<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
CBD1	I often prefer local brand of agriproduct					
CBD2	I will purchase local agriproducts amid foreign ones					
CBD3	I will always purchase local agriproducts					
CBD4	Local agriproducts are less harmful to my environment					
CBD5	I will recommend someone to buy local agriproducts					