



Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Performance of Soft Drink Companies in Port Harcourt

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Abstract: *This study focused on passive viral marketing and brand performance of soft drink companies in Port Harcourt. Its goal was to investigate the relationship between the variables, with soft drink companies in Port Harcourt serving as the database. The study used a correlational research design and a questionnaire as the primary research instrument. The study's population consists of the two soft drink companies in Port Harcourt. Five (5) elements (Managers) were chosen from each of the two (2) companies using a simple purposive sampling method. As a result, the number of respondents increased to ten (10). The statistical tool Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used to test the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables. All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS version 22.0. According to the findings of the study, active viral marketing has a positive and statistically significant relationship with brand performance. The study concludes that passive viral marketing is an imperative for a positive brand performance and that brand performance depends on how appropriate the viral message is applied. The study therefore recommends that soft drink companies in Port Harcourt that seek to survive, improve, and stand out in their brand performance should consider passive viral marketing as one of their top strategies.*

Keywords: *passive viral marketing, brand salience, brand performance*

INTRODUCTION

A company cannot be said to be successful if its brands are underperforming in the marketplace. This is a key factor in achieving marketing objectives (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006). Before moving on to recall at the point of purchase, optimal brand performance begins with awareness of the brand and its functions. Traditional methods of accomplishing this included word of mouth and print advertisements; but, technology advancements ushered in new forms of marketing, particularly mass marketing. For starters, radios were utilized to reach tens of thousands of people. Then there was television, which drew a broader audience. Today, the internet has supplanted traditional marketing strategies (Wilson, 2012). In today's marketing, the internet plays a critical part in establishing a brand's reputation. As the internet's development, spread, and universality has modified and altered the interaction between organizations and customers, organizations now engage with their customers in a different way than in the past (Singha, Vero-Jackson, and Cullinane, 2008). The internet has also aided in shifting companies and consumer relationships to an interactive level, allowing brands to be

established through the formation and maintenance of long-term customer relationships (Richardson & Domingos, 2012). Organizations realized at the turn of the century that traditional marketing strategies were no longer as effective as they had been, and that something had to be done to reach out to more potential purchasers on a wider scale (Keller, 2002). Marketers soon grasped the power of word-of-mouth in an online context, and they began to contribute to the early emergence of viral marketing (Hassan, 2018).

Passive viral marketing is a type of marketing that makes use of pre-existing social networks such as social networking sites, video sharing sites, email providers, online forums, and blogs. It usually gives consumers something free and valuable in exchange for forwarding and spreading the marketing message to others. Viral content is usually presented as a commercial in the form of a viral video, song, image, meme, or message (Rechman and Stewart, 2013). Smaller organizations and businesses are drawn to it because it has a reputation for being effective and is a reasonably inexpensive alternative to traditional marketing media. Many businesses are using active online viral marketing as one of their primary marketing techniques in order to reach their objectives. The viral "sharing a coke" effort is an example of this. According to Muala (2018), viral marketing taps into human tendencies for communication, knowledge sharing, and socializing. The benefit of viral marketing is that individuals nowadays spend more time online, even more than watching television, thanks to the use of friends-based social media.

This marketing method can readily penetrate any individual's social network with a single mouse click that sends information to others in the circle (Lescovec, Adamic, and Huberman, 2007). When an advertisement is prominent, well-designed, and appealing, it might be shared on other social media platforms. As a result, it spreads like a viral infection online, replacing word of mouth with word of mouse. Almuala (2018) emphasizes that positive brand performance is unavoidable when this is done effectively. This is because viral marketing increases the brand's visibility. To that purpose, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge by determining the association between active viral marketing and brand performance, using soft drink businesses as a database. The soft drink market in Nigeria has continued to grow, having millions of daily drinkers and sales worth billions of dollars per year. The fast growing population of Nigeria, its climate and urbanization drives a continuing demand for soft drinks. Some of these locally made drinks are seen to have gained a widespread acceptance. This is evident in the presence of these brands in grocery stores of even developed countries. That notwithstanding, Soft drink companies in Nigeria are seen to be faced with fierce competition among players as brand owners struggle to be heard in a marketplace surrounded by an alarming rate of new product introduction and modification of existing ones. "The uncertain and dynamic nature of the marketplace has brought challenges to brands in the soft drink sector" (Goldsmith, 2017), ranging from low brand awareness, salience, and patronage, (Ojoma and Bello, 2017). This observed prevalence of poor performance may be attributed to the brand owner's inability to inculcate active viral marketing strategy in their marketing plan. This assumption is based on the conviction that viral marketing is effective in

unsolicited electronic referrals that creates awareness, triggers interest and product adoption. Even in fierce competitions, successful viral campaigns are seen to help companies stand out (Granata and Scoozzeze, 2017). Based on the foregoing, the study sought to scan the relationship that exist between passive viral marketing and brand performance of soft drink companies in Port Harcourt.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Viral Loop Marketing Theory

The theory was developed by Adam Penenberg in 2008; it outlines how cultural products or networks gain popularity. According to Lane (2017), viral loop marketing theory describes how consumers are the primary marketers of a product. Companies employ viral loops in their marketing tactics because they want to reach as many people as possible for the least amount of money. Small and medium-sized firms are more likely to use viral marketing and viral loop theory since they have less expenditure than larger companies (Hassan, 2017). The advantages of employing viral loops stem mostly from their low cost – high spread factor, which allows a company's marketing message to reach a broad audience. As a result, employing viral expansion loops is viewed as a straightforward method to address the challenges marketers encounter when identifying the components of content that go viral. The establishment of viral expansion loops is the most essential component of the Viral Loop marketing idea. User Actions, Notifications, and Conversion are the three types of loops. These loops rely on their members' willingness to share and collaborate.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G Theory)

Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler formulated this theory in 1974. It emphasizes the sender and the message, focusing on interactive communication. This theory is used to understand motivations for using a media; it focuses on individual use and choice of media. It views individuals as purposeful and active, specifying that people select media based on needs. It asks the reason people attend to media content and what they get from it. The theory shows that motivations influence individual behavioral intention through attitude (Miller and Berry, 1998). It is seen that consumer needs and motivations induces message virility. The significance of uses and gratifications is brought to the fore because of the appearance of computer-mediated communication. Marketers will seek effective marketing messages that can satisfy targeted or desired motivations and thus influence forwarding behaviors that will birth a positive brand performance on the long run, if they understand what motivations drive consumer behaviors. The content of the viral marketing campaigns may likely encourage transmission and consumers may vary in their motivations to pass on viral marketing campaigns.

Passive Viral Marketing

Passive viral marketing is the process of “promoting or broadcasting a brand through some type of media without it being the focus of the content. This can be likened to a viral video. This method has been adopted by many Facebook pages. The result of this is that a vast amount of people will be exposed to, and then see the watermark, not minding that what is happening in the video is indeed the subject of interest (Jakob Ahlberg, 2018). According to Kaplan and Haenlain (2011), passive viral marketing involves a distribution of a message in a frictionless manner. The message is transmitted by the use of an application or service. This can be seen with email providers that integrate the name of a brand or an advertisement automatically at the end of each email. With this, every user of the email service passively distributes the message or advert. In passive viral marketing, the user advertises via the use itself. An excellent example of this is the Hotmail. Here, there was a clever implementation of the principle of virility back in 1996.

There was a call included in the attachment to create a free address for every mail sent with Hotmail. The aftermath of this was the registration the millionth user after seven (7) months. Yang (2012) noted that “the advertising messages and services offers are being spread when using a service. E.g. free email providers, such as Web.de or Hotmail.com”. In the process of sending an email, signatures that include advertisements will be automatically attached. In this case, the advertising message is received by the recipients, and it tells him to make use of the service as it clearly works very well. Since the sender is a user of the service as well. One of the good things about passive viral marketing is that you only get to see the message when the adopted platform is used, in this way.

Concept of Brand Performance

In most marketing literature, performance is frequently employed as a dependent variable (Tran Quan Ha Minh, 2006). A brand's performance refers to how effective a brand is in the marketplace and attempts to assess a brand's strategic accomplishments (Kapferer, 1997). Brand performance refers to how effectively a product or service satisfies the functional demands of customers. In the opinion of Chaudhuri and Moris (2001), a brand's performance is determined by its attractiveness and profitability. The goal of brand performance is to increase top line revenue while lowering costs to improve the bottom line. Some researchers examined brand success in two ways. They are the market performance of the brand and the profitability of the brand. They are the market performance of the brand and the profitability of the brand. They come to the conclusion that brand profitability performance is a representation of a brand's financial share in relation to retail profits. Profit and profit margin are used to determine this. Brand market performance, on the other hand, examines market needs and assesses indicators such as sales volumes and market share (Baldauf A, et al 2003).

Aaker (1996) suggested various indices for evaluating brand success that are connected to market behavior evaluation. He regarded market share, pricing, and distribution coverage to be

indices of brand performance assessment, and he said that measuring brand performance using market share typically offers a widespread and realistic picture of a brand's or consumers' situation. When a brand has a competitive edge in the minds of consumers, its market share should rise or at the very least remain stable. He also emphasizes that distribution coverage has a significant impact on market share and sales data. The sale of a brand will be greatly influenced whether it has a primary market, loses it, or is emerging in a new location. Keller and Lehman (2003) consider the price elasticity, price premium, market share, cost structure, profitability and the success in category extension as the main indices of brand performance measurement. Their research shows that the brand premium is in fact the added price that a customer pays for the brand of a product and the price elasticity is the increase or decrease of brand demand as a result of rise or decline in prices.

Market share indicates an index that measures the success of marketing programs in brand unit sales. Cost structure or the ability to reduce the expenditures of marketing programs of a brand is as a result of the prevailing customer mindset. What it means is that, any aspect of the marketing program is likely to be more effective for the same expenditure level, because customers already have favorable opinions and knowledge about a brand. In addition, according to Keller and Lehman, the profitability and the development of opportunities are other factors of performance measurement and demonstrate the brand success in supporting line and category extensions and new product launches to the related categories. It indicates the potential ability of a brand for development and increase of income flow. Chaudhuri and Morris (2001) emphasized on relative price and market share as the result of the performance. To them, relative price is the ratio of a brand price to that of the leading competitors. In the same vein, they introduced the brand market share as the percentage of a brand sale to total sales of all brands of a product. Bradly and Hony (2007), suggest that the effect brand marketing has should be assessed by mixed methods such as financial and consumer-oriented measures. Their interrelatedness stems from the fact that consumer-oriented measures (e.g. consumer based brand equity) are seen to be positively associated with financial performance measures (e.g. brand market share and revenue). Lee et al. (2008) support two types of brand performance measures: financial performance measures (e.g. sales growth, margin, market share, and return on investment) and customer-based performance measures (e.g. customer acquisition, customer maintenance, customer satisfaction, brand awareness, brand recall, and brand salience).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the capacity of consumers to recognize or remember a brand. There is an existence of a link between the brand and the product class, but the link does not have to be strong. Brand awareness begins with a process where the brand is just known to a particular level up till when it has gotten to a higher rank; it becomes the "top of mind" (Aaker, 1991). There are few purchase decisions that can be done without knowledge about the product. Moreover, without being recognized, learning about the character and advantages of the new merchandise will be difficult. Product identification makes it easy to create a new relationship

to the product. Familiarity is what people like, and knowledge makes the product and brand more well-known and familiar.

Keller (2008) defines brand awareness as “fostering people’s ability to recall or recognize the brand in sufficient detail to make a purchase”. He sees brand recognition as consumers having prior exposure to the brand, able to recognize the brand when given it as a cue. Brand awareness is seen as a prerequisite of peoples’ buying decisions (Lee et al, 2008). It has been held for a while now that generating and maintaining brand awareness one of the main goals of marketing. According to Mcdonald (2000), “the brands that enter consumer’s consideration set, is strongly affected by the brand awareness”.

Brand awareness helps a consumer get familiar with the brand, and recalls some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations. This focuses on the individual consumers and his reactions to marketing of a particular product. Aaker (1991) presented three levels of brand awareness. Brand acknowledgement that involves the capacity of shoppers to recognize a certain brand among others i.e. Supported review, which involves a circumstance where individuals are asked to recognize a perceived brand name from a rundown of brands from the same item class. Brand review that has to do with a circumstance where a buyer is relied upon to name a brand in an item class. It is also referred to as "unaided review" as they are not given any piece of information from the item class. The third is top of psyche that is seen as the first brand that a customer can review among a given category of products.

Brand Salience

Typically, brand salience is seen to be “the prominence or level of activation of a brand in memory” (Alba and Chattopadlyay, 1986). This shows that brand salience involves easy accessibility of a brand in the memory of a consumer. Keller (2001) sees brand salience as “the aspect of the awareness of the brand e.g. how often and easily, is the brand evoked under various situations and circumstances?” From a psychological point of view, brand salience is associated mostly with the level of degree; a brand stands out from its environment (Petrescu, 2012). In simple terms, some items are easily noticed, while some easier to retrieve from long-term memory, with this, there is a higher chance of entering working memory. Brand salience is seen to be often neglected in marketing literatures and research. Instead concepts such as brand image, attitude and recently brand equity are the prevailing ones. This is because “salience is conceptualized as Top of the Mind (TOM) awareness and thus, frequently used either interchangeably with, or as a subset of brand awareness” (Keller, 1993).

Increased salience is effective in retrieving probability of a brand in the choice of consumers. When solving a problem, consumers use the information most salient to them (Wyer and Srull, 1989, Domke, Shah and Wackman, 1998). The meaning of the concept stems from accessing the brand in memory through recall, associative strength, recall position, or the position in the consideration set of the consumer (posovac, sanbonmats and Fasio 1977, Fasion, Powell and Williams, 1989, Miller and Berry, 1998, Leong, Ang and Tham, 1996). According to Salancik &

Conway (1975), salience has an effect on consumer judgment, as it is seen that consumers make judgments based on information salient to them at the decision arena. On a crowded shelf, Pechmann & Stewart (1990) posits that salient brands are more likely to be perceived.

Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Performance

As a truism, it is believed that passive viral marketing if properly applied, will enhance brand performance. (Yang 2012; Al Muala, 2018; Muala 2018). Although Petrescu (2012) argued that the capacity of the success of this competitive tool is not always guaranteed, Yang (2012) noted that properly matching and applying it will help in achieving brand awareness, recall, and salience. In the study on the importance of passive viral advertising in telecommunication firms, Yang (2018) pointed out that brand success is inevitable if the source of campaign is reliable and properly matched. Pechman and Stewart (1990), postulated in his study on the influence of passive viral marketing on brand conspicuousness, carried out in Jordan, that there is a positive relationship between passive viral marketing and the conspicuousness of a brand. This confirms the importance of passive viral marketing. The study shows and concludes that the genuinity and transparency of the platform adverts placed bring about trust and this trust births salience at the point of purchase.

Another remarkable contribution on the influence of passive viral marketing on brand salience was made by Al Muala in 2018. On his study on frictionless viral marketing and brand recall, he stated that recall or salience is mostly achievable through an active viral campaign but that passive viral campaign can also be transformed to active viral message. On this, he stressed that the campaign is done by a customer as he/she will be the one to pass it on to his/her close associates and they in turn pass it on and on until it becomes viral. He concluded that for this to be possible, the customer must have been satisfied with the brand.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand performance. The study adopted a correlational research design. The two soft drink companies in Port Harcourt quoted in the Nigerian Stock Exchange Report in 2019 constitute the population of the study. Given that the population is below thirty (30), implies that they were all considered. The purposive sampling technique was used to select five (5) managers each in the two (2) companies which amounted to ten (10 managers). This constitutes the total number of respondents that participated in the study.

Questionnaire was used as the instrument of primary data collection. Respondents were required to tick from 1-5 on a Likert scale, where 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree; and 5= strongly agree. To determine the reliability of study instrument, the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used and the values were high, with a threshold of 0.7. The opinion of scholars and practitioners with relevant experience on the study constructs was used to validate the instrument.

Table 1: Range of Values and Degree of Relationship

<i>Range of r values</i>	<i>Degree of relationship of r</i>
± 0.80 to 1.00	Very strong
± 0.60 to 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 to 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 to 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 to 0.19	Very weak

H Source: Adopted from Dunn (2001) degree of relationship categorization

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORT

Table 2: Questionnaire Response

Questionnaire	Number	Percentage (%)
Distributed	10	100%
Retrieved	10	100%
Not retrieved	0	0%

Source: Questionnaire administration (2019).

Ten (10) copies of the questionnaire were distributed. The ten questionnaires representing 100% of the distributed questionnaire were used in the final analysis, while none was lost or rejected.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Performance

(Correlations)

Type	Variables1	Statistics	Passive Viral Marketing	Brand Performance
Spearman's rho	Passive Viral Marketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.739**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	10	10
	Brand Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.739**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	10	10

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of Data Analyses on the Relationship between Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Performance (2019).

The information on Table 3 above reveals that the correlation coefficient of the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand performance is 0.739**.this shows that there is a relationship between the variables. The positive sign of the correlation implies a positive relationship between the variables, i.e. increase in brand performance is associated with an increase in passive viral marketing, while the probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.001 indicates that the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand performance is statistically significant.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Awareness

(Correlations)

Type	Variables1	Statistics	Passive Viral Marketing	Brand Awareness
Spearman's rho	Passive Viral Marketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.739**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	10	10
	Brand Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	.739**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	10	10

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of Data Analyses on the Relationship between Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Awareness (2019).

The information on Table 4 above reveals that the correlation coefficient of the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand awareness is 0.739**.this shows that there is a relationship between the variables. The positive sign of the correlation implies a positive relationship between the variables, i.e. increase in brand awareness is associated with an increase in passive viral marketing, while the probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.001 indicates that the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand awareness is statistically significant.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Salience

(Correlations)

Type	Variables1	Statistics	Passive Viral Marketing	Brand Salience
Spearman's rho	Passive Viral Marketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.631**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	10	10
	Brand Salience	Correlation Coefficient	.631**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	10	10

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of Data Analyses on the Relationship between Passive Viral Marketing and Brand Salience (2019).

The information on Table 5 above reveals that the correlation coefficient of the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand salience is 0.631**. This shows that there is a relationship between the variables. The positive sign of the correlation implies a positive relationship between the variables, i.e. increase in brand salience is associated with an increase in passive viral marketing, while the probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.001 indicates that the relationship between passive viral marketing and brand salience is statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

Data were analyzed and tested so as to determine the relationship that exists between the variables of the study. The strength and direction of the relationship between the variables were also identified. The collected data were analyzed and hypothesis was tested to determine the relationship between the variables of the study. The study found that passive marketing has a positive and statistically significant relationship with brand performance and brand salience as well. The study equally found that, there is a positive and strong relationship between passive viral marketing and brand performance in soft drink companies in Port Harcourt. The findings of the study were validated by extant literature which reveals that passive viral marketing if properly applied will enhance brand performance. (Yang 2012; Al Muala, 2018; Muala 2018). Yang (2012) also noted that properly matching and applying it will help in achieving brand awareness, recall, and salience. Recall or salience is also noted to be mostly achievable through an active viral campaign but that passive viral campaigns can also be transformed to active viral messages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that passive viral marketing is an imperative for positive brand performance i.e. brand performance depends on the virility of a firm's products. This is so because making a brand stand out in today's unpredictable, dynamic, and uncontrollable business environment that births an influx of varieties of brands every day, requires strategic activities like passive viral marketing. In other words, brands will stand out in the competitive sphere if t firms engage passive viral marketing appropriately.

The study also concludes that passive viral marketing relate to brand salience, and that brand salience also depends on passive viral marketing strategy. The study therefore recommends that soft drink companies in Port Harcourt that seek to survive, improve, and stand out in their brand performance should consider passive viral marketing as one of their top strategies.

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