

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Evaluating the use of internet as a medium for marketing and advertising messages in Nigeria

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Nigeria's active internet subscriptions (GSM), as at February, 2015 stand at 83,209,380 (NCC, 2015). The Internet is the modern marketers' choice. Despite its great potentials, it is still largely under-utilized in Nigeria. This study surveyed the popularity and acceptance of the Internet as a medium for communicating marketing and advertising messages; the category of people who seek advertising and marketing messages online, the extent of their internet usage and possible challenges associated with the use of the Internet as a medium of marketing and advertising in Nigeria. Findings revealed that young people between the ages of 18 to 45 years form the substantial majority of internet users in Nigeria. Although, majority of the respondents claim to be aware of the availability of marketing and advertising messages online, only 4%, majorly working class between the ages of 32 to 45 claim they use the Internet basically to seek advertising and marketing messages. Others obviously use the Internet more for social networking than seeking advertising and marketing messages.

**Key words:** Internet, Marketing, Advertising, Medium, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Promotions, Marketing Mix, Marketing Strategy, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The essence of any product or service is the patronage by the target market (customer/consumer). A product, service or idea is not good; if it does not meet the needs/wants of the people for which it was produced; if the product does not reach the target market as at when needed; and if the target market is not willing or capable of meeting the price tag.

Advertising and other promotional tools are therefore deployed to create awareness, provide information and persuade the target market to purchase or/and use the product or service. Competition has increased the need

for marketing and promotions; organizations and individuals consciously strive to differentiate and position their products through branding to win the minds and pockets of their target market. Among the most important decisions advertisers have had to grapple with, is determining the most effective and efficient means of expressing their message (getting the right appeal) to their target customers and prospects, considering the fact that the emotions, attitudes and motives that drive individual customer in their target market differs. It is important that advertisers must invest in locating and

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understanding their customer and prospect's needs, wants and desires; create products to satisfy those desires; and finally communicate that information in a way that connects and resonates with them.

To communicate the values and characteristics that differentiate a product/service, and create a unique image for the brand, media selection is of critical essence. Marketers and advertisers carefully select media that can best deliver their message to existing and potential customers. In reaching a decision as to the medium or combination of media to use, marketers and advertisers are mindful of the cost effectiveness of their choice. As much as sellers (marketers and advertisers) have found it advantageous to send messages to target buyers in the most economical manner possible, customers also search for information about products and services at the lowest possible cost to themselves. "When the amount spent to attract a customer exceeds the amount that a customer contributes to revenue, the business will not be around for long" (Arens, 2004).

Advertising has gone beyond print as suggested by Albert Lasker "advertising is salesmanship in print, driven by a reason why" (Arens, 2004). It has also gone beyond "making known in order to sell" as advanced by Jefkins and Yadin (2000). The era when stallholders displayed and shouted their products to passers-by, or when print, radio and later television were the only media through which advertisers could communicate their messages to the target customer is gone. The nature of business has since changed (Akinola, 2010). If factory outputs are to be maintained profitably, mass production must be complemented with mass-sales. Advertising must become powerful and continuous; it must shift from monologue to dialogue. Arens et al. (2008) define advertising as the structured and composed non personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media. The Internet, a world-wide broadcasting and information dissemination tool has revolutionized communication and business transactions. It has facilitated the collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computer without regards for geographical location (Baran, 2002). With the Internet, there is more information than ever available to the society.

The Internet beats all other media (radio, television etc.) with its features of up-to-date information availability and the ability to deliver contents to the user on the go. Practically, users of the Internet can view information and also access archives, read consumers' reviews at the click of the button. Even today, radio and television are taking advantage of the Internet by creating websites for live streaming and other possibilities where viewers and listeners can hook up via their mobile applications. By offering true interactivity, the Internet enables commercial and non-commercial organizations to develop and nurture relationships with their customers and other

stakeholders like never before. Unlike other media, it is actually a hybrid of media; allowing companies to create awareness, provide information, influence attitudes and such other communication objectives. Without mincing words, the Internet is also a medium of commerce, allowing users to buy and sell products online without having to physically visit each other in a particular geographical location. Yet, with its vast audience, interactive nature, global convergence of other medium, and other great potentials of the Internet as a medium of advertising and marketing, it appears that it is still largely under-utilized in Nigeria.

This study aims at ascertaining the popularity and acceptance of the Internet as a medium of communicating marketing and advertising messages; the category of the people who seek advertising and marketing messages online, the extent of their internet usage and possible challenges associated with the use of the Internet as a medium of marketing and advertising. This study was approached from the perspective of the customer (buyer) and not the marketer or advertiser (seller). To achieve these aims, the researcher raised the following questions:

1. Which category of the public visit the Internet most for marketing and advertising messages?
2. Which is/ are the most visited marketing or advertising sites?
3. What are the hindrances to the use of the Internet for marketing and advertising message?
4. Which medium do the respondents prefer most for marketing and advertising messages?

## METHODOLOGY

The study set out to collect data on, and describe in a systematic manner, the attitudes and behaviour of the chosen population in relations to the use of Internet as a medium for marketing and advertising. Hence, the descriptive survey method was adopted. Survey, not only provides useful information on population distribution, it is best when investigating problems in its real setting (Tejumaiye, 2003).

The population of the study were literate members of the public residing or working in Ogun and Lagos states, who have access to and use the Internet. The study locations were strategically chosen: Lagos remains the commercial nerve center of Nigeria; hosting many corporate headquarters despite the relocation of the federal capital to Abuja. Ogun states shares border with Lagos state and it is also an elitist state hosting the highest number of tertiary institutions in the country.

Respondents were purposively selected from Ibara and Onikolobo areas of Abeokuta, and Yaba and Ikeja areas of Lagos. Trained research assistants administered a 21 item questionnaire divided into two sections; Section A (eliciting information related to demographic data); Section B (seeking responses to answer the research questions). In all, 200 literate respondents (100 from Ogun and 100 from Lagos State) provided data for this study. The quantitative data collected from respondents were coded in line with the research objectives/questions; analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) programme and result presented using frequency distribution tables.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's competitive market, the old saying 'Make a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door' (Perreault and McCarthy, 2002) is no more relevant. A better mousetrap will not sell itself unless the manufacturer designs, packages, prices it appropriately such that willing buyers are capable of acquiring the product, make it available to buyers where and when it is needed; bring the existences and benefits of the mouse trap to the attention of the target market and convince them that it is indeed a better mouse trap. There are a number of misconceptions about marketing; some see marketing as sales, some, advertising; and some as retailing activities. For others, marketing suggests; market research, distribution, pricing, product planning and development. While all these activities are part of marketing, it encompasses more than just these individual elements (Boone and Kurtz, 2012).

### Marketing concept

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives (AMA, 1960). Effective marketing requires that managers recognize the interdependence of such activities as sales and promotion and how they can be combined to develop a marketing programme. The American Marketing Association (AMA) definition recognizes that exchange is central to marketing. For exchange to occur there must be two or more parties with something of value for one another, and a way to communicate with each other. Marketing is therefore a process of exchanging utility for values between the provider and consumer of a product or service.

Advertising plays an important role in the exchange process by informing consumers of an organization's product or service and convincing them of its ability to satisfy their needs or wants. However, not all marketing transactions involve the exchange of money for a tangible product or service. Non-profit organizations such as charities, religious groups, the arts, and colleges and universities receive millions of Naira in donations every year. Nonprofit organizations often use advertising to solicit contributions from the public. Donors generally do not receive any material benefits for their contributions; they donate in exchange for intangible social and psychological satisfactions such as feelings of goodwill and altruism (Malhotra and Birks, 2010). This study however focused on the uses, benefits and challenges of the Internet as marketing and advertising media in Nigeria, hence the restriction to basic marketing, advertising and the Internet in the review of literatures.

There is no single universally accepted definition of marketing. Business professionals and scholars have

offered definitions and explanations that indicate the diversity of perspectives of scholars about marketing. In 2004, the AMA once again reviewed its definition of marketing. This time, defining Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders. This 2004 definition has generated considerable interest and reactions (both positive and negative) from scholars and practitioners. Apart from formal and informal commentaries by practitioners, scholars have also expressed their views at conferences and through Journal publications. The 2007 Fall Issue of Journal of Public Policy and Marketing (JPP&M) dedicated a special section to the issue. The nine journal papers submitted and assessed, reflected, identified and raised concerns on the various perspectives and elements of the 2004 definition (Gregory, 2007).

Hunt (2011) defines Marketing as the process by which companies create customer interest in goods or services. It generates the strategy that underlies sales techniques, business communication and business developments. It is an integrated process through which companies build strong customer relationships and create value for their customers and for themselves. For Armstrong (2012), Marketing is used to identify the customer, to satisfy the customer, and to keep the customer. Armstrong's definition suggests and rightly too, that the customer is the focus of all marketing activities. To attain organizational business objectives, an organization must anticipate the needs and wants of consumers and satisfy the needs more effectively than competitors. Marketing precedes productions; it determines the direction of production and other business activities. Market research findings such as; what the target market need and want, how and when they will need and want it, where they will want it and the price they are willing and capable of paying determines to a large extent the marketing strategy to be deployed in any market.

### Marketing strategies

Any organization that wishes to exchange its products or services in the market place successfully should have a strategic marketing plan to guide the allocation of its resources. A strategic marketing plan usually evolves from an organization's overall corporate strategy and serves as a guide for specific marketing programs and policies. Marketing strategy is based on a situation analysis - a detailed assessment of the current market. From this situation analysis, a firm develops an understanding of the market and the various opportunities it offers, the competition, and the market segments or target markets the company wishes to pursue (Eric, 2012).

Marketing strategy process starts with a broad look at a

market, paying special attention to customers' needs, the firm objectives and resources and competitors. This helps the firm to identify new and unique opportunities. A firm is not likely to get a competitive advantage if all it strives for, is meeting the needs of the customer the same way the competitors do. To have a competitive market advantage, Perreault and McCarthy (2002) suggest that a firm must analyze the market to determine existing market conditions and look for opportunities that will differentiate the firm and its products from that of the competitor. Today's market cannot and should not be viewed as one large homogeneous group of customers; rather, as many heterogeneous groups, or segments. Wise firms usually identify market opportunities through careful examination of the marketplace; noting demand trends and competition in various market segments and tailoring their marketing strategy to meet the needs and demand trends of specific market segment(s).

### Marketing mix

Marketing mix are the controllable variables that a firm puts together to satisfy a target market (group). A typical marketing mix includes some product, offered at a price, with some promotion to tell potential customers about the product, and a way to reach the customer's place (Perreault and McCarthy, 2002).

For years, marketers accepted product, price, place (distribution), and promotion as the 4 P's of marketing. As years go by, some scholars have proposed alternative framework; while those who accept the role of the 4Ps often proposed modifications, suggesting in some cases the addition of new elements to the classic 4Ps. Their arguments according to Constantinides (2006) range from the fact that: external and uncontrollable environmental factors are very important elements of the marketing strategy programs (Kotler, 1984); the 4Ps Marketing Mix is too much internally oriented (Robins, 1991); the market places today are customer oriented. The 4Ps have less relevance today, they made sense the time they were invented (Schultz, 2001). Marketing experts and scholars have proposed, and continue to propose the expansion of the marketing mix to include; customers, competitors, environmental variables, employees among others (Schult, 2001; Doyle, 1994; Ohmae, 1982; Kotler, 1984; Mercer, 2012). Whether we subscribe to 4, 5 or 9Ps, the fact remains that the effective blending of the various controllable elements requires a clear understanding of the target market. Whatever is done at the level of product, price, place, promotion and people are done in the interest of the customer (the only uncontrollable element that controls other elements).

The basic task of marketing is combining these four elements into a marketing program to facilitate the potential for exchange with consumers in the marketplace. The proper marketing mix does not just happen.

Marketers must be knowledgeable about the issues and options involved in each element of the mix. They must also be aware of how these elements can be combined to provide an effective marketing program. The original 4 P's of marketing along with the fifth P added to marketing mix are elaborated further:

**Product** - The product is a combination of tangible and intangible aspects of the products offered by the manufacturer to the customers. Kotler and Armstrong (2012), describe product as anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. The products can be classified as durable and non-durable, consumers and industrial goods, perishable and non-perishable, finished and semi-finished etc.

**Price** – Price is the amount of money charged for “something” of value (Perreault and McCarthy, 2002). Kotler and Armstrong (2012) define price as the amount of money customers pay to obtain the product. In arriving at a price for a product or service, certain factors are put into consideration: the entire cost of production and marketing, purchasing power of target market, customer's perceived value of the product, competitors price and of course, profit margin to the company. The price should therefore be a fair estimation of the utility possessed by the product.

**Place** - Place represents the point or location where the product is made available for purchase. It is only when the product and the customer meet that sale can take place. A product is not good if it is not available where and when it is needed by the target customer. Place includes warehouse and channels of distribution. Osunbiyi (2009) identifies four possible channels of distribution: M – C (manufacturer to consumer); M - R – C (manufacturer to retailer to consumer); M – W – R – C (manufacturer through a wholesaler to a retailer to consumer); M – W1 - W2 – R – C (manufacturer through two levels of wholesalers to the retailer and then the final consumer).

**People** - The services are being provided with the help of employees and to the customers. There is direct contact for delivery of the services to the customers. The type of people providing the service matters a lot from business point of view. The people are to be selected, trained and motivated to keep the customers very happy. So the people are very important for service marketing and they must be managed effectively.

**Promotion** - Boone and Kurtz (2012) describe promotion as the function of informing, persuading and influencing the consumer's purchase decision. However, promotion as an element of the marketing mix is the communication of information between sellers and potential buyers and others to influence attitudes and behaviors. It goes

beyond mere purchase. The wish and joy of any brand is to create and nurture brand loyalist and move them to the level of fans. The promotional strategy of any firm will be determined by the firm/brand objective(s).

The basic tools and strategies used to accomplish an organization's communication objectives include among others; personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion and advertising.

### **Advertising**

The word Advertising was derived from the Latin word 'advertere' which means turning attention to. Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or service by an identified sponsor (Kotler et al., 2007). Arens (2004) defines advertising as "the structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by sponsors through the media". Daniyan (2005) describes advertising as branding; identifying and differentiating products, she reasons that advertising provides information about a product and educates consumers on its usage; it creates awareness, induces trial purchase and stimulates increase in a product's use and acceptance. Whatever may be the objective of an advertising campaign, the advertiser's message is disseminated through the media. Advertising media can be broadly grouped into two (2); traditional and new media. While the print and the broadcast medium have been with us for decades, the Internet is relatively new. Arens et al. (2008) classified the Internet under the digital interactive media. The Internet as a medium is distinguished from the conventional advertising media in several aspects. Firstly, it can serve as not only a communication channel but also as a transaction and distribution channel. Consumers can get information and make payment and purchase all through the Internet. Besides, it has the capacity for multimedia content. It can carry not only text and graphics but also audio and video content. According to Belch and Belch (2003), with the interactive nature of the Internet, users can initiate a shopping process by visiting a website and then clicking on hyper linked text for more information. It is also a two-way communication medium that promote dialogue rather than monologue. The multimedia nature of the Internet also makes it suitable for high impact advertising.

### **Internet as a medium of marketing and advertising**

Since the beginning of this millennium, marketing and advertising, and indeed promotions generally have experienced dynamic and revolutionary changes. These changes are being driven by advances in information and communication technology (ICT) which has grown communication through the interactive media, particularly the Internet. Interactive media allow for a back-and-forth

flow of information whereby users can participate in and modify the form and content of the information they receive in real time. Unlike traditional media of marketing and advertising which are unidirectional, the new medium allows users to perform a variety of functions such as receive and alter information and images, make inquiries, respond to questions, and, of course, make purchases (Stewart and Pavlou, 2011).

The interactive media that is having the greatest impact on marketing and advertising today is the Internet, especially through the component known as the World Wide Web (www). As the Internet is changing the ways companies design and implements their entire business and marketing strategies, it is also affecting their marketing communication programmes. Thousands of companies, ranging from large multinational corporations to small local firms, have developed websites and blogs to promote their products and services, by providing current and potential customers with information, as well as to entertain and interact with consumers (Coyle and Gould 2012).

Actually the Internet can be used to execute all the elements of the promotional mix. In addition to advertising on the Web, marketers offer sales promotion incentives such as coupons, contests, and sweepstakes online, they also use the Internet for market research, direct marketing, personal selling, and public relations activities more effectively and efficiently. The interactive nature of the Internet encourages effective communication with customers. Many companies recognize the advantages of communicating via the Internet and are developing web strategies and hiring interactive agencies specifically to develop their websites and make it part of their integrated marketing communications programme (Hoffman and Novak, 2011).

### **Attributes of internet as a medium of advertising**

There are different types and forms of advertising on the Internet; from Banners, Sponsorships, Pop-ups, Pop-unders, Links, Interstitials and a host of others. (SeeHofacker, 2010; Manchanda et al., 2013). The Internet has a number of positive attributes, such as the wide variety of budgets that can access the medium as well as the massive audience/readership base that is well-targeted; the Internet can target specific audiences and age groups (Tavor, 2011).

The strengths of the Internet also include; low cost, corporate legitimacy, creative flexibility, round-the-clock accessibility and easy documentation of effectiveness among others.

Marketing or advertising online is however not without its own challenges particularly in a developing nation like Nigeria. Apart from the fear of fraudsters, there are infrastructural challenges such as slow download and undependable power supply. A low-speed internet connection is a barrier; dial-up connections or mobile

devices users experience significant delays accessing companies or brands with large or over-complicated websites. Research has found that users trust less than two percent of banner adverts seen online (Richard, 2012). Another fundamental flaw of the Internet as a medium of advertising is the cluttered and intrusive nature of its appearance. Some online adverts can be messy and difficult to read; presenting too much information at a time and interrupting user's online experience (Tavor, 2011).

### Theoretical framework

Generational marketing theory was created by William Strauss and Neil Howe in 1991. The theory holds that consumers born of the same generation—defined as a 20-year period—have common attitudes and behaviours because of shared experiences that influenced their childhood and shaped their views of the world. The theory was developed to describe the history of United States, including the 13 colonies and their Anglo antecedent. However, scholars have also examined generational theory elsewhere in the world and identify similar cycles in several developed countries.

The relevance of generational theory to internet marketing is primarily in the ways in which each generation communicates and the online places where marketers can reach them.

For example, Pew Internet reported in a 2010 study that millennials (those who are 18 to 33 years old) are most likely to access the Internet wirelessly. Generation X (those who are between the ages 34 to 45) are more active than millennials in such activities as researching financial information.

However, Pew's research emphasizes increasing homogeneity across groups for such activities as researching health information, shopping, making travel arrangements and downloading podcasts. Furthermore, Pew notes, pre-baby boomers are shedding their "silent generation" image.

They are now the fastest-growing group of social network users, and they are just as likely as millennials to own smartphones.

The relevance of generational theory to this current study is that the Internet is a generational technology; it is mostly used by people of Generation Y, who are between 18 to 23 years of age. Internet marketing and advertisement message is assumed to captivate this generation due to their exposure to the social media networks.

### FINDINGS

Going by the information obtained from respondents, it can be categorically stated that young people between the ages of 18 to 45; mostly students of tertiary institutions use the Internet. A substantial majority of them access

**Table 1.** Internet as a medium of advertising will soon push the traditional media (radio & television) to the back seat.

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	37	18.5
Agree	81	40.5
Neutral	-	-
Disagree	29	14.5
Strongly disagree	53	26.5
Total	200	100.0

the Internet through their mobile phones and mostly later in the evening.

Majority of the respondents claim to be aware of the availability of marketing and advertising messages online, however only 4% who are majorly working class between the ages of 32 to 45 claim they use the Internet basically to seek advertising and marketing messages. The rest, obviously those who fall into the category of millennials use the Internet more for chatting and connecting with friends and relatives than seek advertising and marketing messages (Table 6). This is consistent with the generational theory which submits that Generation X (those between the ages of 34 to 45) is more active than the Millennials (those between the ages of 18 to 33) in online activities such as researching financial information. Although, 77% of the respondents claim to seek information about products and services online (Table 5), the researcher noted that the number of respondents who claim to seek information about product and services online does not correspond with the number of respondents who claim to visit Amazon.com and Konga.com.

From their responses, Facebook and Google were the most visited websites (41.5 and 35%, respectively) (Table 7). It should be noted that Facebook, 2go and Twitter are social network sites, Google is an educational and information website, BBC and Goal Soccer are news website, while Amazon and Konga are basically marketing sites. We are not ignorant of the fact that marketing and advertising messages are available on social network, educational and news websites listed; the fact remains that, while marketing is the primary concern and focus of websites such as Amazon and Konga, marketing and advertising are secondary to the other listed websites.

Table 4 shows that respondents of this study consider the fear of fraud, high cost of internet service, power outage, privacy and security concerns and slow download, in that order, as challenges limiting the Internet as a medium of marketing and advertising in Nigeria.

It is interesting to note however, that while 68% of the respondents agreed to the assertion that the Internet is a better medium of advertisement (Table 2), 74.5% still prefer the television as a medium of advertisement to a paltry 15.5% who prefer the Internet (Table 3). Table 1, however presents a picture of hope that the tide may

**Table 2.** Will you agree to the assertion that the Internet is a better medium of marketing and advertisement?

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	136	68.0
No	64	32.0
Don't know	-	-
Total	200	100.0

**Table 3.** Respondent's most prefer medium of advertisement.

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	15	7.5
TV	149	74.5
Internet	31	15.5
Outdoor	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

**Table 4.** Hindrances to the use of internet for marketing and advertising messsages.

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
High cost of internet service	61	30.5
Power outage	29	14.5
Slow download	18	9.0
Privacy and security concern	23	11.5
Fraud	69	34.5
Total	200	100.0

**Table 5.** Do you seek information about products or services online?

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	154	77.0
No	46	23.0
Total	200	100.0

change in the near future as 59% of the respondents are of the opinion that the Internet will soon push the traditional medium of Radio and Television to the back seat.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Amongst other things, this study has revealed that young men and women between the ages of 18 and 45 use the Internet more for connecting and chatting with friends,

**Table 6.** What do you use the internet for?

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Connecting and chatting friends	73	36.5
Research and education	51	25.5
Commerce / Business	8	4.0
All of the above	68	34.0

**Table 7.** Which site do you visit frequently?

Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Face book	83	41.5
2go	9	4.5
Amazon	2	1
Google	70	35
Twitter	17	8.5
BBC	3	1.5
Goal soccer	5	2.5
Konga	6	3
Others	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

and for research and educational purposes; hence, their preference for Facebook and Google websites. With this information, advertisers and marketers now know where and when to meet their target market/audience. Placing adverts and marketing messages on these websites must however be done strategically in order not to intrude and become a nuisance to the Internet user. Companies and brands in designing their websites or blogs should ensure that their websites and blogs are customer friendly and secured, interactive and customer oriented. They should put in place audit traits, periodic compliance checks, policies and procedures to spot, prevent and report suspicious fraudulent activities in internet transactions. With all these in place, it is envisaged that the Nigerian public will soon yield to the power and potentials of the Internet as a utility vehicle capable of carrying various messages and medium. Further studies are needed to ascertain the attitude and perspectives of advertisers and marketers towards Internet as medium for marketing and advertising.

## Conflict of interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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