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2022/2023 PhD Thesis Abstract

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AB: The Carbonated Soft Drinks (CSD) market has continued to grow in leaps and bounds amidst fierce competition for supremacy in the market place. They hold tenaciously to the leadership position in the soda market, having successfully shrugged off challenge from competitors with a combination of product quality, relentless consumer engagement and aggressive advertising. However, studies have established that CSD are faced with persistent purchase decrease over incidents related to negative consumer reviews, changing consumer attitude, shifting consumer lifestyle, increased consumer awareness, and negative referrals. Studies indicated that CSD companies tend to prioritize traditional advertising over viral marketing despite the potential benefits of the latter. Therefore, this study investigated the effect of viral marketing on consumer purchase intention of selected CSD companies in Nigeria.

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population was 3,987 employees in sales and marketing departments of the selected CSD companies in Nigeria. A sample size of 518 was determined using Cochran's formula. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting respondents. A structured and validated questionnaire was used to obtain data. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged between 0.76 and 0.98. The response rate was 82.8%. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential (multiple linear and hierarchical regression) statistics at 5% significance level.

Findings revealed that viral marketing had a significant effect on consumer purchase intention of selected CSD companies in Nigeria ($Adj.R^2 = 0.87$, $F(4, 425) = 576.12$, $p < 0.05$). Viral marketing significantly affected consumer reviews ($Adj.R^2 = 0.63$, $F(4, 425) = 148.70$, $p < 0.05$), consumer awareness ($Adj.R^2 = 0.60$, $F(4, 425) = 126.75$, $p < 0.05$), consumer lifestyle ($Adj.R^2 = 0.78$, $F(4, 425) = 309.58$, $p < 0.05$), consumer attitude ($Adj.R^2 = 0.75$, $F(4, 425) = 262.04$, $p < 0.05$), referrals ($Adj.R^2 = 0.79$, $F(4, 425) = 322.64$, $p < 0.05$). Viral marketing and consumer purchase intention was significantly moderated by trust ($\beta = 0.12$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.004$, $t = 23.86$, $p < 0.05$), and brand image ($\beta = 0.02$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, $t = 7.82$, $p < 0.05$).

The study concluded that viral marketing improved consumer purchase intention of selected CSD companies in Nigeria. Trust and brand image further enhanced the influence on consumer purchase intention. This study recommended that management of CSD companies should focus on viral marketing to enhance consumer purchase intention. Furthermore, management of CSD companies should pay attention to building trust and brand image as these were important in influencing the relationship between viral contents and consumer behaviour towards purchase intention.

Keywords: Consumer awareness, Consumer lifestyle, Consumer purchase intention, Consumer reviews, Carbonated soft drink, Referrals, Viral marketing

Word Count: 418

Abbreviations: RFN: Researcher's Full Name, RD: Researcher's Department, RS: Researcher's School, RE: Researcher's Email, RAE: Researcher's Alternate Email, RP: Researcher's Phone Contact, RT: Registered Title, MS: Main Supervisor, ME: Main Supervisor's E-mail Address, SP: Main Supervisor's Phone Contact, CS: Co-Supervisor, CE: Co-Supervisor's E-mail Address, CP: Co-Supervisor's Phone Contact, AB: Abstract

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