

Influence of Advertising on the Porting Behaviour of Mobile Phone Subscribers in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Daniel Nwanmereni & Collins Kediehor

Department of Mass Communication, Wellspring University, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract: - In spite of the contributions of advertising to the critical sectors of the global economy, the practice has been misinterpreted as being deceptive and manipulative. Critics also argue that advertising predisposes people to materialism. These criticisms have left critics and promoters of advertising divided. This study investigated the influence of advertising on the porting behaviour of mobile network subscribers in Port Harcourt metropolis, Nigeria. Among other objectives, the study investigated the conditions that underlie subscribers' porting behaviour. The descriptive survey research design was used to study a population of 199, 585 from which a sample size of 383 was drawn. Findings of the study showed that the prime factor that underlies subscribers' porting behaviour was the quality of services provided by individual mobile network companies. The study recommended, among other things, that researches with verifiable results should be conducted to draw a line between materialistic tendencies and advertising influences with respect to consumers' buying behaviour.

Key Terms: Advertising, Mobile Network Porting, Mobile Network Subscribers, Port Harcourt Metropolis, Subscribers' Porting Behaviour

I. INTRODUCTION

The quest for information by humans to get along with events, occurrences and developments within and around the immediate and larger environments predates the invention of the mass media of communication - newspaper, magazine, radio, television, etc. This information need accounts for why primitive tribes appointed sentinels who watched the environment and reported occurrences, events, dangers, etc. Dominick (2009) states that man's information need existed prior to the Gutenberg's printing press and Morse's dots and dashes. This situation, Dominick (2009) reiterates, is because "for society to exist, certain communication needs must be met" (p.29). What this means is that information is critical in the management of the society (Smith, 1996). Just as regular media contents are relayed or reported to inform, educate, mobilise and warn members of the society, commercial contents are integrated to inform, entertain and persuade prospective consumers to make informed decisions about products and services that serve their needs and preferences.

Advertising is an ancient practice which can be traced to the growth of human population, towns and cities across the globe, the industrial revolution which ushered in enhanced production capacity and international commerce

through the invention of the means of transportation and advancements in information and communication technologies (Jefkins and Yadin, 2000; Thusu, 2006; George, 2006). It goes to say that just as the rise in human population and communities exacerbated people's information need, so the rise in production capacity and evolution of communities across the globe heightened the need to bring the availability of such goods and services to the knowledge of prospective consumers. This is the need to bring manufactures or providers of goods and services and consumers together. Jefkins and Yadin (2000) state that the need for advertising grew following the corresponding growth of human population, the continual spread of towns and cities and mass production. These changes consequently constrained the exploitation of the power of the mass media of communication and recently the internet and its associated resources. The use of mass media and the internet to convey advertising messages is not only due to the pervasive nature of these media but also due to their ability to inform quickly and extensively (McQuail, 2005).

The place of advertising in the current globalising economy and the changing competitive market environment is that the modern world depends on advertising. This is not only because advertising links manufacturers and their prospective market (consumers) together but also because it encourages the consumption of goods and services. For countries with a robust manufacturing sector, the production of goods and services serve as the engine of growth especially as it concerns the growth of Gross Domestic Product, the conservation of foreign exchange and the creation of jobs (Ohiagu, 2015; Obikili, 2016; Onyekakeyah, 2016). It is also important to note that robust taxes translate into higher government revenues which are crucial in the provision and maintenance of basic social infrastructure.

It, therefore, goes without saying that advertising is crucial to the social and economic life of a nation not only in the creation of awareness of goods and services or linking manufacturers to potential consumers, but also in its contribution to a country's national life. In telecommunication industry, advertising not only publicises the services of players in the industry but also provides economic opportunities for individuals and organised groups. It also aids

the government to generate taxes, especially through corporate and personal income taxes.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the acclaimed functions of advertising to the global economy, the practice has come under heavy criticisms. Among others, advertising is accused of encouraging materialism. Critics of advertising argue that advertising makes people to desire products that they do not need and cannot afford. It is also accused of being a source of rising expectation and frustration.

Ordinarily, one would have thought that the choice of products and services should be a consequence of one's desire for such products or services as well as the ability to afford same. Nobody thinks anybody can buy a product or secure a service that does not hold some gratification for them. Thus, the central questions that this study seeks to answer are: can advertising make people to purchase products or desire services that they do not need? How does advertising influence the porting behaviour of mobile network subscribers in Port Harcourt metropolis?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. investigate factors that underlie subscribers' porting behaviour;
2. investigate the factors that underlie subscribers' loyalty to preferred mobile networks; and
3. Ascertain the role of advertising in subscribers' preference of mobile networks.

Definition of Terms

Role of Advertising: The role of advertising implies how advertisements by mobile network providers influence the choice of mobile network by subscribers. It is to determine whether it is advertising or the quality of services offered by mobile network providers that lead subscribers' preferences.

Subscribers: These are individuals who use the services of mobile network providers for calls, data and other transactions.

Port Harcourt Metropolis: This involves Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas. The study investigated the porting behaviour of residents of the Metropolis with respect to advertisements by mobile network providers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. Some related concepts were also reviewed to highlight the direction of the study.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 (Miller, 2002). Quoting Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974),

Miller (2002) states that the Uses and Gratifications theory articulates the social and psychological needs which constrain peoples' exposure and consumption of mass media or other products based on the gratifications that underlie their consumption of such products. What this means is that exposure and consumption of messages from the mass media or any other sources is not done in isolation. People seek and consume mass media or other contents with particular interests or goals in mind.

McQuail (2010) avers that the Uses and Gratifications theory sheds light on the nature of underlying audience demands, interests, needs or preferences which govern exposure and consumption of media contents. Various individuals have various motivations which constrain not only their exposure and consumption of messages but also how these messages are interpreted and evaluated. DeFleur (2010) argues that audience members do not simply consume whatever contents that are disseminated by the media but have different motivating needs that determine the messages and products that are sought and consumed.

The thesis of the Uses and Gratifications theory is that people do not consume media products or any other products for the sake of doing so. The choice or preference of one product over another by an individual is constrained by the satisfaction that is derivable from the use of a preferred product or service (Okunna, 1999; Dominick, 2002). The implication is that the preference of media channels and media products is driven by the needs and gratifications that an individual seeks.

Advertising

Many scholars have defined advertising in different ways. However, this study restricts itself to the definitions postulated by Baran (2009) and the American Marketing Association (AMA). According to Baran (2009), advertisements are mediated messages paid for and identified with an organisation or institution which seeks to increase the likelihood that those who consume the messages should act or think in a particular way. What this means is that advertising messages are disseminated through a medium or media that have the capacity to reach the target audience and that this message should be able to make its consumers to behave in a particular way or take particular actions. The expected action is usually to buy a product or service. In its conceptualisation, the American Marketing Association (AMA), cited in George (2006), defines advertising as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor" (p. 405). It is important to examine the different components of these definitions in order to shed light on the unmistakable task of the advertising message.

Advertising messages are paid for: What this means is that advertising space (for print media) and airtime (for broadcast media) are bought by the organisation or advertiser that wishes to use any of these media (print or broadcast) to reach prospective consumers. It also means that since the

advertiser pays for the placement of his message in the media, he has control of what the message says, where it goes and at some point, when the message is disseminated (Hanson, 2005; Belch and Belch 2006; Ohiagu, 2015).

Advertising messages are non-personal: This simply means that advertising messages are directed at the prospective market (consumers) and not at a particular individual (Jefkins and Yadin, 2000). In other words, the message is to whom it may appeal to; it is not for the man that does not need the product or service being advertised. This accounts for why the message is directed at “prospective consumers”.

Advertising messages involve ideas, goods and services: This means that advertising messages are not strictly concerned with the presentation of consumer goods. The messages also involve the presentation of services and promotion of ideas. Advertising can be used to sell the candidacy of an individual or political party during elections. Advertising messages can also be used to endear the corporate image of an organisation (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty, 2000). The receiver of the message has the freedom to do what the message says or otherwise.

Advertising messages are identified with a sponsor: Whether the advertiser advertises a product, service, idea or involves in building corporate image, advertising messages bear the identity of the advertiser (Ohiagu, 2015). Associating the advertising message with a sponsor gives the message credibility since the message must not be anonymous.

Five Players of Advertising

Apart from the regular definition of advertising as the presentation and promotion of an idea, a product or service, it can be further described in terms of the groups that play key roles in packaging and delivering advertisements to the consumers. These groups, referred to as the five players of advertising, include:

The Advertiser: Advertising begins with the advertiser. That is, the individual, organisation etc that has a product, service or an idea to be presented to prospective consumers or subscribers (George, 2006). The advertiser is the owner of the idea, product, service, etc that is being advertised. The advertiser makes decisions about the target market, the media to convey the message, the size of the advertising budget and the duration of the advertising campaign.

The Advertising Agency: The advertising agency is usually an organisation hired by an advertiser to plan and implement an advertisement (Wells et al, 2000; Ohiagu, 2015). The agency develops the advertising plan, sometimes writes the advertising copy which may determine the type of media to convey the copy to prospective consumers. This is done under agency-client partnership with the aim of producing and delivering an effective advertisement that should sell the advertiser's product, service or idea.

The Media: These are mass communication channels that are used to convey advertising messages to the target audience (prospective consumers). Advertising media are divided into above-the-line and below-the-line media (Jefkins and Yadin, 2000; Wells et al, 2000; Ohiagu, 2015). Above-the-line media are mass communication channels such as radio, television, newspaper and magazine. Below-the-line media involve communication channels such as bill boards, posters, flyers, etc.

Vendors: These are individuals or firms that assist advertisers, advertising agencies and the media in producing and developing advertising copies (Wells et al, 2000). Examples of vendors include freelance copywriters, artists/designers, songwriters, market researchers, public relations consultants, photographers, etc.

Target Audience: The target audience is also referred to as the advertising market. It is the prospective consumers. The consumers are those (individuals, groups, organisations etc) that purchase the products or subscribe to the service or idea being advertised (Wells et al, 2000; Ohiagu, 2015). The desire for a product or service is based on the benefits the consumer hopes to derive from the product or service.

Mobile Number Portability

Mobile number portability is a telecommunication and computing process which allows mobile telephone subscribers to port or switch to a preferred network without necessarily changing their mobile lines (Kimutai, Kimutai and Mzee, 2013). It allows the transfer of data and conversion of a subscriber's identification module (SIM) card to accept the identity of a different mobile network through an interchange system.

The mobile number porting system became operational in Nigeria after the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) approved the kick-off date for SIM number porting from the first quarter of 2013. To ensure the effective implementation of the mobile number porting scheme, the Commission issued a licence to a consortium of three companies in 2012 to act as the number portability clearing house for the telecommunication industry in Nigeria (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2012). With SIM porting, a subscriber still receives calls and carries out normal mobile telephone transactions regardless of which network or mobile service provider he may have ported to without having to change his subscribers' identification module (SIM) card.

The advantage of mobile number porting is that just as individuals and groups have the choice and control of products or services they prefer, subscribers can simply switch to the mobile operator they feel offers better services (Nimako, Robert and Oppong, 2016). Mobile number portability is an activity orchestrated by the electronic converging system. It is a furtherance of the advancements in information and communication technologies which make

possible the manipulation of smart electronic gadgets for different forms of interface.

III. METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study necessitated the use of the descriptive survey research design in conducting the field exercise. Survey involves the study of a sample whose characteristics can be attributed to the larger population (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). Survey provided the room to investigate the porting behaviour of residents of Port Harcourt metropolis (18 years and above). The population of adult residents (18 years and above) in Port Harcourt metropolis was 198,787. This figure is about 36.73% of the 541, 115 population figure of Port Harcourt metropolis published in the 2006 Population Census exercise (National Population and Housing Census, 2006). An annual population increase of about 2.5% (between 2007-2018) brought the study population to 199, 585. A total of 383 formed the sample size for the study. This sample size was based on Keyton's sampling system (2001). The study adopted the probability sampling system, using the systematic sampling technique. Data were collected through the questionnaire. Data presentation was done in statistical tables using simple percentages.

IV. DATA PRESENTATION

To obtain data for this study, 383 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the sample of the study. Of this number, 363 (95.27%) copies were properly filled and returned. Data were presented in tables using percentages.

Table 1: Factors that underlie subscribers' porting behaviour

Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Quality of services- call rates, data, bonuses, etc	291	80.16
Availability/wider coverage	43	11.85
Good customer relationship	29	7.99
Constant advertisement of products/services		
Total	363	100

Data presented in Table 1 indicated that the major factor that underlies subscribers' porting behaviour was the quality of services provided by mobile network companies. This is evident from 80.16% respondents who indicated that their choice of mobile network was informed by the quality of services provided by mobile network companies.

Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Quality of services- call rates, data, bonuses, etc	291	80.16
Availability/wider coverage	43	11.85
Good customer relationship	29	7.99
	0	0

Table 2: Factorsthat underlie subscribers' loyalty to preferred mobile networks

Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Enhanced mobile/data services	247	68.05
Introduction of trending innovations	116	31.95
Peer influences	0	0
Sustained advertisements by mobile network companies	0	0
Total	363	100

Data presented in Table 2 indicated that the factors that underlie subscribers' preference of mobile networks were enhanced services provided by mobile network companies and introduction of innovation by mobile network companies. This is evident from the account of 68.05% and 31.95% respondents, respectively.

Table 3: Influence of advertising on subscribers' preference of mobile network

Influence of Advertising	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Your preference of mobile network is due to advertisement by mobile network companies	0	0
Your preference of mobile network is based on the quality of services provided by mobile network companies	363	100
Total	363	100

Data presented in Table 3 showed that the condition that influences subscribers' preference of mobile network was the quality of services provided by mobile network companies and not mere advertisements by the companies.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings was done in the order the study questions were arranged.

Study Question 1: What are the factors underlie subscribers' porting behaviour?

Responses regarding subscribers' porting behaviour indicated that the factors that inform subscribers' choice of mobile network in Port Harcourt metropolis were the quality of services provided by individual network companies (call rates, data, bonuses, etc), availability/wider network coverage and good customer relationship. This report is evident from 80.16% respondents who indicated that the factor that underlie their porting behaviour was the quality of services provided by individual network companies. In the same vein, 11.85% and 7.99% respondents identified wider network coverage and good customer relationships as factors that informed their porting behaviour, respectively (Table 1).

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious that mobile network subscribers have particular gratifications that underlie their choice of mobile networks and porting attitude. What this means is that subscribers do not choose mobile network services in isolation. There are needs that the choice or preference of mobile services are expected to solve. DeFleur (2010) supports this view as he avers that consumers of goods and services have motivating needs that they seek to gratify through different products or experiences they prefer. It simply means that it is the supposed satisfaction derivable from the use of a product or service that accounts for or justifies the choice of one product or service and not the other.

Study Question 2: What are the conditions that underlie subscribers' loyalty to a particular mobile network?

Responses to this study question indicated that the conditions that underlie subscribers' loyalty to particular mobile networks were the quality of services or enhanced benefits and the introduction of trending innovations by mobile network companies. This report is evident from 68.05% and 31.95% respondents who stated that the condition that underlie their loyalty to their preferred mobile networks was the quality of services and the introduction of trending innovations, respectively.

This analysis also buttresses the fact that subscribers' preference of one mobile network company over another is governed by the desire to satisfy certain needs. Miller (2002) argues that it is the desire to satisfy these needs that gives rise to differential patterns of exposure to messages in the media and engagement or loyalty to products and services. It goes to say that benefits derivable from products or services is the underlying condition to consumer loyalty.

Question 3: What is the influence of advertising on subscribers' preference of mobile network?

Responses to this study question indicated that advertising does not induce subscribers to select a mobile network provider. This is evident from the respondents who generally and overwhelmingly held that the quality of services provided by mobile network companies was the condition that underlies their preference of mobile networks. Responses regarding the place of advertising in consumers' preference of mobile network lends credence to the definition of advertising by the American Marketing Association, cited in George (2006) and indeed the non-personal character of the advertising message. What this means is that the advertising message and the products or services being advertised are conveyed to who it may concern. The message is directed at no particular individual (Jefkins and Yadin, 2000, Wells et al, 2000). Consumer loyalty is only a function of the benefits the consumer hopes to derive from a product or service. It also means that this loyalty could be sustained as long as the product or service is gratifying to the consumer.

VI. CONCLUSION

The porting behaviour of mobile network subscribers in Nigeria is a function of the quality of services provided by mobile network companies in the country. This is understandable since patronage and consumer loyalty are not direct consequences of advertising but that of the satisfaction and benefits consumers derive from using particular products or services. Advertising only enhances, promotes and sustains the market share of a product. This clarification circumspectly beams a searchlight on the rather misconception that advertising predisposes people to materialism - a conceptualisation that connotes the magic bullet perspective of the media and the AIDA advertising model which negate the rationality of the human person in making decisions that are consistent with their socio-cultural and economic conditions. Advertising provides awareness on the availability of products or services and woos prospective consumers with knowledge of the unique selling proposition of products and services, especially with respect to products or services that have comparative advantages.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were considered useful:

1. Mobile network companies in Nigeria and their advertising agencies must justify advertising claims with products and services that serve the need and preference of prospective consumers (subscribers). This is to obtain and maximally retain the market share of such products/services.
2. Like public relations, advertising must be based on truth, especially to keep consumers' loyalty. Dishonest claims are capable of compelling consumers to switch or port to another network or company whose products/services are perceived to be more reliable.
3. It is instructive to draw a distinctive line between materialistic and criminal tendencies and advertising influences regarding consumers' buying behaviour. This is essentially since materialism is arguably the character of those with excessive wealth.

REFERENCES

- [1] Baran, S.J. (2009). *Introduction to mass communication: Media literacy and culture (5thed)*. Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- [2] Belch, G.E. & Belch, M.A. (2006). *Advertising and promotion: An integrated marketing communication perspective*. Illinois: Irwin Professional Publishers.
- [3] DeFleur, M.L. (2010). *Mass communication theories: Exploring origins, processes and effects*. Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- [4] Dominick, J.R. (2002). *The dynamics of mass communication: Media in the digital age (10thed)*. New York: McGraw Hill Companies.
- [5] George, R. (2006). *Mass media in a changing world*. New York: McGraw Hill Inc.
- [6] Hanson, R.E. (2005). *Mass communication: Living in a media world*. New York: McGraw Hill Inc.

- [7] Jefkins, F. &Yadin, D. (2000). *Advertising*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- [8] Keyton, J. (2001). *Communication research: Asking questions, finding answers*. New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- [9] Kimutai, M., Kimutai, K. & Mzee, A. (2013). Mobile number portability in Kenya. *Technology and Investment* 4(4), 255-260.
- [10] McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (5thed). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- [11] McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (6thed). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- [12] Miller, K. (2002). *Communication theories: Perspectives, processes and contexts*. New York: McGraw Hill Inc.
- [13] Nigerian Communications Commission (2012). *Regulation of mobile number portability*. Abuja: Federal Government of Nigeria.
- [14] Nimako, S. G., Robert, K. & Oppong, A. (2016). Exploring consumer behaviour towards mobile number portability (MNP) in Ghana: Pursuing sustainable MNP adoption. *Journal of Business and Management Sciences* 4(5), 105-112.
- [15] Obikili, N. (2016, September 6). Recession confirmed: Now what? *The Guardian. Lagos*. p. 19.
- [16] Ohiagu, O. P. (2015). *Fundamentals of advertising and public relations* (2nded). Port Harcourt: Accuracy Prints.
- [17] Okunna, C. S. (1999). *Introduction to mass communication*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- [18] Onyekakeyah, L. (2016, September 6). How to diversify the economy for inclusive growth. *The Guardian. Lagos*. p. 17.
- [19] Smith, J. (1996). *Empowering people*. London: Kogan Page Limited.
- [20] Thusu, D. K. (2006). *International communication: Continuity and change* (2nded). London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- [21] Wells, W., Burnett, J. & Moriarty, S. (2000). *Advertising: Principles and practice* (5thed). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [22] Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction* (9thed). Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.