

Viral Marketing and Brand Equity in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between viral marketing. The study was underpinned by the viral loop marketing theory. The study adopted a survey research design. The study was based on the telecommunication industry and purposive sampling method was used to select MTN. The Cochrane method was also used to determine the number of consumers who made use of MTN data. Primary sources were mainly employed. The collected data are analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. It was revealed that electronic word of mouth, social media platforms and brand influencers all had positive and significant relationship with perceived quality. Electronic word of mouth had a positive and significant relationship with response. Social media platforms and brand influencers both had negative and non-significant relationship with response. Only brand influencer had a positive and significant relationship with value outcomes. Electronic word of mouth and social media platforms both had non-significant relationship with value outcome. The study concluded that viral marketing play important role in enhancing the brand equity of organizations. It was recommended among others that pragmatic online strategies be embarked on by organizations their product go viral and enhance the expected consumer response and value outcome

Keywords: Brand Equity, Electronic Word of Mouth, Perceived Quality, Social Media Platform, Viral Marketing

Introduction

Traditional marketing techniques have been regarded as ineffective in recent times. Organizations have disputed the efficacy of physical means of reaching consumers, claiming that they lack speed and coverage and the huge expenditure expended on them fails to provide the expected return on investment (Ndinatsei, 2019; Goodie-Okio, 2022). Organisations have thus sought how they would innovate technologies that would make their brand to go viral and enhance their brand equity (Olannye & Onobrakpeya, 2020).

Brand equity involves value advantage derived by organisations arising from the unique nature of their product offering. Brand equity is a reflection of consumers' perception of brand quality, the consumers' response rate and their value outcome (Alhadad, 2014; Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito, & Singh, 2016). Viral marketing on the other hand is the use of social media platforms to enhance the growth of brand messages and increase the organisation's sales (Olannye & Onabrakpeya, 2020). The inventors of Hotmail are said to have created the phrase 'viral marketing' (Goodie-Okio 2022). It was a term used to characterise Hotmail's practice of inserting advertisements into forwarding user messages. The idea was that the adverts would get to those who were more prone to reading messages, and the message would infect them, that is it would arouse their interest to know more and in the process, they will register by creating an account and subsequently infect additional people who are to use the social media.

Since the privatization of the Nigerian telecommunication sector and the subsequent licensing of Global System for Mobile communications (GSM) activities in 2001, the industry has experienced rapid expansion (Olaoluwa, 2019; Akpoviroro, Amos, Oladipo, & Adewale 2020). The spread of the telecommunications industry in Nigeria has made a substantial contribution to the country's growth of economy. Furthermore, due to the booming status of the industry, the industry's network operators have recognised it as an opening to enhance their brand equity. For their brand equity quest to be achieved they have over the years devised marketing communication strategies that would spread across the country, and increase their brand equity. They have sought the usage of viral marketing through the electronic word of mouth, social media and brand influencers to achieve it.

Statement of the Problem

In the last two decades, there have been efforts by the telecommunication industry in Nigeria to supplant traditional marketing strategies with the use of digital technology such as the social media platform, electronic word of mouth and brand influencers to enhance brand equity. The assumption is that these constructs would help to grow their brands all around the world and revolutionize the conduct of marketing activities. As a result, they have employed brand influencers especially in the entertainment industry to endorse their brands and enhance viralness through the social media platforms. The extent to which the celebrities, consumer electronic word of mouth and the use of social media have effectively influenced the brand equity in the telecommunication industry has not been well researched. Previous studies on the discourse have been carried out in other industries, but studies that focused on the telecommunication industry in Nigeria are non-existent (Mehran, Shahram & Kiandokht, 2013; Ndinatsei, 2019; Olannye & Onabrakpeya, 2020; Goodie-Okio, 2020). To close the underlying gaps in the literature, the current study examined the relationship between viral marketing and brand equity in the telecommunication industry in Edo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the relationship between viral marketing and brand equity. The specific objectives were to:

- i. determine the relationship between viral marketing and perceive quality;
- ii. examine the relationship between viral marketing and response; and
- iii. evaluate the relationship between viral marketing and value outcome.

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses are stated in the null form:

1. Perceived quality is not significantly influenced by a) electronic word of mouth b) social media platforms and c) brand influence
2. Response is not significantly influenced by a) electronic word of mouth b) social media platforms and c) brand influence
3. Value outcome is not significantly influenced by i) electronic word of mouth; ii) social media platform; iii) brand influence and value outcome

Literature Review

Brand Equity

Brand is used to refer to the distinctiveness in identifying a product (Goodie-Okio, 2022). In the description of a brand, Goodie-Okio, (2022:113) states that: “On one part it is seen as a name, a trademark, a symbol, a logo, or an identity, and at the other part, brand includes both tangible and intangible attributes of an organization”. The definition indicates that a brand represents a unique characteristic of a product and this could be the physical or non-physical aspect of the product.

Brand equity describes the value advantage that organizations earn because their products have distinctiveness (Godey et al., 2016; Ndinatsie, 2019). That is, brand equity denotes what a product is worth. Due to the ability of an organization to build brand equity, it enjoys a price advantage and the consumers are ready to spend more money on the purchase of products with a favourable brand equity, even if the product could be purchased at a lesser price from rivals. This is because the brand has succeeded in achieving recognition, respect and admiration from consumers when compared with rivals. This suggests that organizations with positive brand equity tend to achieve profitability than their rivals.

A brand possesses a set of attributes that include differentiation, loyalty, perceived quality, leadership, perceived value, brand personality, association with the brand, awareness, market share, and market price and distribution coverage, awareness, association, loyalty and perceived quality (Mehran, et al 2013; Godey, et al., 2016). These attributes are expressed as perceived quality, response and value outcome of the current study.

Perceived quality is the consumers rating of a brand based on what they know and what they have experienced about it. Perceptual includes an evaluation of the brand quality, personality, leadership, awareness and distribution (Baltas, & Saridakis, 2010; Alhaddad, 2014). Consumers’ perceptual quality of a brand can impose favourable or unfavourable response towards the brand (Alhaddad, 2014). The response to the brand implies consumers’ loyalty and association with the brand. When consumers have a poor evaluation of a brand, their response towards the brand may become unfavourable or negative. On the contrary, a good evaluation a brand is more likely to bring about positive disposition or favourable response towards the brand. Furthermore, consumers’ favourable or unfavourable responses towards a brand translate into value outcomes.

The value outcome refers to the tangibility of the consumers’ response. It denotes the market price and market share (Olannye & Onabrakpeya, 2020). Positive response through purchase

and re-buy processes would imply an increase in the organization's revenue and profitability. Where the consumers do not make an immediate purchase, their positive disposition towards the product would translate as an intangible outcome, which in this case implies the goodwill of the organization.

Brand equity is often approached from a cognitive psychological and information economics approach (Baltas, & Saridakis, 2010). Based on the cognitive psychological approach, brand equity is seen as the consumers' perception of the attributes of a brand and how the consumers become associated with such brand. Brand equity also provides information to organizations with respect to demand for a product, the elasticity strength of the product and the level of investment that should be made on the product (Goodie-Okio, 2022).

The current study approaches brand equity from the cognitive psychological approach. The approach intends to identify the consumers' thoughts to determine the connections of the consumers in relation to the brand. It aims to assess the level of awareness or the extent to which the consumers recognize the image of the brand, which is often a general estimation of the brand by the consumers. It identifies both the tangible and intangible features and consumers' attitudes towards the brand.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing refers to a tactic in which consumers receive and spread promotional material that is supplied by marketers to stimulate communication (Eltaj & Mohammed, 2017; Goodie-Okio, 2022). Devi (2015) describes viral marketing as a type of online business that stimulates people to spread advertisements to other people, while (Lekhanya, 2014) describes viral marketing as a phenomenon whereby potential and existing buyers of a product share and distribute marketing-related material that has been originally sent purposely to promote and emphasis personal referral actions. Venkatesh and Vinoth (2016) are of the view viral marketing is a marketing mix strategy that utilizes current social media platforms for communication and to boost revenue.

The above suggests that viral marketing is a marketing communication approach that emphasizes distributing messages and views concerning products, particularly through unusual digital channels. They also imply that viral marketing depends on social media platforms and the speed with which the brand message spreads. Due to the way message spreads, viral marketing has been equated with living organisms virus, especially for the fact that the method, similar to viruses, makes use of intensive replication for spreading the message to a large number of people within a short time. It is akin to a situation in which consumers by virtue of their exposure to a set of viruses (in this case promotional programme) might readily spread the promotion to those who will come in contact with it. It is a promotional activity that affects users with an online advertisement that is expected to get to the next user in a similar way in which a pandemic disease would spread.

The creators of Hotmail regarded viral marketing as a critical driver for Hotmail's meteoric rise. The phrase was coined due to the technique of fast usage over other social media at the time, but had nothing to do with a virus in the real sense (Goodie-Okio, 2022). The inventors saw viral marketing as a method of turning electronic mail into a kind of face –to-face

recommendation or endorsement. The method seeks to leverage on personal referral as the most powerful tool to get consumers.

For the brand message to be spread as fast as possible, certain factors, elements or characteristics often regarded as the viral marketing mix need to be considered (Devi, 2015; Olannye & Onabrakpeya, 2017). They include: i) Usage of freeway. The brand message should be capable of reaching the people less expensively; ii) Provision of easy communication to others. The brand message should be relevant enough to avoid unnecessary criticisms; iii) Diffusion capability. The brand message should be capable of spreading from small stage to large stage within a short time; iii) Exploitation of motivation and action. It should be capable of motivating the consumers to act positively towards the brand; iv) Utility of communication platform. It should be appropriately connected to a functional social media platform and; v) Exploiting resources. It should be able to combine graphics, websites, images and other resources for attractiveness (Devi, 2015; Olannye & Onabrakpeya, 2020). Goodie-Okio (2022) also emphasizes on the improved communication system and how the brand message is structured to achieve its intended objective. Viral marketing thrives on Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), social media platforms and the usage of brand influencers (Kaplan & Haenlein 2011; Ndinatsei, 2019). Each of these constructs is discussed below

E-WOM makes it possible for a brand message to be communicated as exponentially as possible. Terms such as marketing buzz and referral marketing are also used to explain the e-WOM process (Eltaj & Mohammed, 2017). E-WOM creates buzz marketing because controversial information which creates gossip is usually spread. The information is regarded as gossip when it enters the public before its official release. Gossip can spread at an unpredictable faster rate and leak to other countries. This view is also shared by Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) who contend that viral marketing strategy is likened to personal communication, but in this case electronic- hence the term e-VOM and that with e-VOM brand message spread geometrically.

To incorporate the gossip strategy of e-WOM into marketing communication, Goodie-Okio (2022) suggests that a strategy that can stimulate controversial discourse that will spread as quickly as possible within and outside the country has to be developed. Viral messages are developed to assume an unusual event; they are not intended to provoke negative perception but to indicate that a product is undergoing advertisement. The database is built on the idea that consists of those who use a social media platform to send invitations to people on the platform. Through this process, personal contacts are created and managed through database provision by internet service providers (Olannye & Onabrakpeya, 2020; Goodie-Okio, 2022). As a result of this process, viral platform is created that helps in spreading and increasing contacts by encouraging more people to also join the platform.

The structure of relationships among a set of participants in a social media technology is known as a social media platform (Olotewo, 2016; Owusu, 2020). As explained by Kenton (2021), a social media platform is the usage of internet-based sites to communicate with others. In a social network, individuals link with one another to maintain community relationships such as exchanging ideas and engaging in other useful activities. As emphasized by Oluseye and Joseph (2018), the essence of social media platforms is to initiate

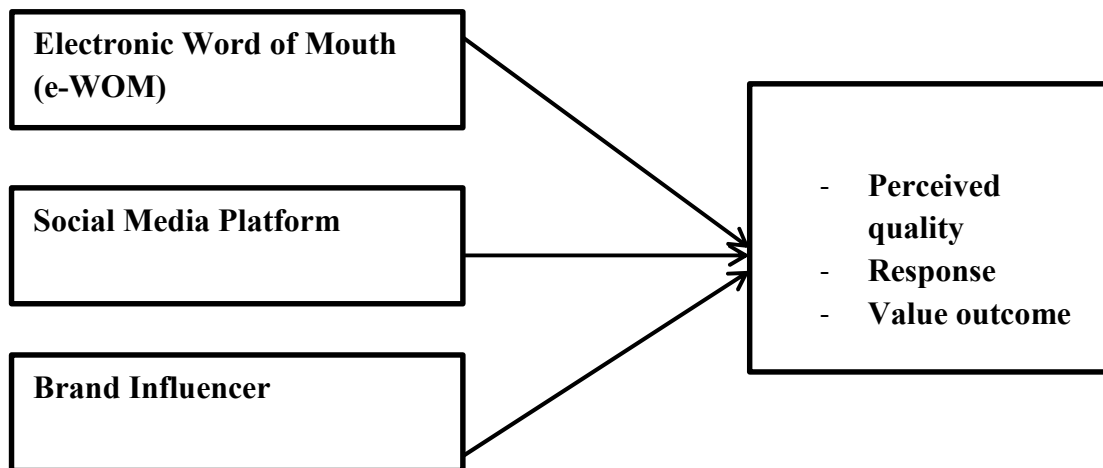
a relationship, especially with strangers and to build social relationship. The social media platforms can be used to promote brand awareness, improve quality perceptions, establish an attitude and stimulate purchase actions. It can also be used for developing long - -term customer relationships (Owusu, 2020).

Persons or organizations who have established a name in a certain field and have a sizable following or fan base are considered brand influencers (Mettenheim & Wiedman, 2021). Abidin (2016) is of the view that brand influencers are normal social media users who have been able to use the platform to create an extra-ordinary large number of fans possibly due to the nature of their lifestyle and how they present the brands which they have endorsed daily. As a result of their powerful impact on their fans, they have the potential to act as powerful social influence, persuading their fans to act a certain way. Brand influence entails the identification and activation of people who have some sort of power over a target audience to affect their purchasing decisions (Nurfadila & Riyanto, 2020).

It is an interaction method in which organizations use third-party endorsers to pique the attention of consumers and keep them coming back. Brand influencer is the utilization of persons who have achieved a certain level of celebrity or popularity status in society to attract potential consumers via mass or social media (Ndinatsei, 2019). Influencers are said to have a large number of fans who are willing to listen to them as they exert their opinion leadership over them (Ndinatsi, 2019). Brand influence requires the use of social media platforms for the brand message to go viral.

Research Model

Viral Marketing



Source: Researchers' Conceptualisation

Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by Penenberg (2009) Viral Loop Marketing (VLM) theory. VLM explains the process of gaining fame from social platform usage. As explained by Lane (2017), viral loop marketing theory assumes that consumers are the primary marketers of a product. As a result, the consumers will disseminate a brand's messaging by continuing to use

it and by motivating close colleagues to do likewise. Furthermore the theory introduces stages or loops which determine the spread of messages. They include: acting, notifying and converting. First the consumer needs to take action to buy a product that has been promoted. This is followed by notifying other potential consumers to also buy the product, while conversion is the loop where the potential consumers translate to existing consumers, but where there is no conversion, the loop becomes terminated at the notification loop.

The theory also suggests that viral marketing is utilized when there is need for organisations to deliver their promotional messages to consumers for the least cost. The theory also proposes that brands that perform better than other brands have faster loops than brands which perform poorly (Goodie-Okie, 2022). The viral loop theory has been applied in studies on viral marketing (Penenberg, 2009; Lane, 2017; Goodie-Okie, 2022).

The theory therefore lends support to the current study by providing explanation on how the viral marketing operates. It suggests that products do not just go viral but pass through a set of phases and characteristics that enhance the spread of the message. These characteristics are similar to the e-WOM, social media platform and brand influencer to enhance the spread. In other words, the process of notifying, acting and converting as explained by the VLM must possess elements that are connected with word-of-mouth referral and the ability of promoters to convince potential users about the product.

Empirical Review

Previous studies have demonstrated relationship between viral marketing and brand equity. Mehran, et al (2013) conducted a study on the effect of viral marketing on brand equity of mobile product. The study adopted a survey research design and population of the study was made up of 500 users of mobile products in Tehran, Iran. Questionnaire was the research instrument. Data were analyzed through Lisreal and structural equation modeling. The results revealed that perceived quality positively influenced brand awareness and loyalty.

Ndinatsei (2019) conducted a study on influencer marketing on brand equity of products sold online. A survey research design was adopted in the study. The population of the study was made up of 229 online buyers in South Africa. The primary source of data was the questionnaire. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. It was revealed that influencer marketing positively and significantly influenced brand equity.

Olannye and Onobrakpeya (2020) studied the effect of viral marketing on brand equity. A cross sectional survey research design employed. The population of the study was made up of 289 employees of selected food and beverage firms in Lagos State. The findings show that viral marketing through e-WOM positively influenced brand equity.

Goodie-Okie (2022) conducted a study on viral marketing and brand performance of pharmaceutical firms in Southern part of Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted and the population of the study comprised of 60 pharmaceutical operators. Questionnaire was administered and the data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. It was revealed that viral marketing was a significant predictor of brand performance.

Methodology

In carrying out this research, the study made use of descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises consumers of telecommunication brands in Edo State. As reported by John (2021), Mobile Telecommunications (MTN) has the highest mobile market of more than 39.5%. The second is Global communications (GLO) (27.7%), followed by Airtel (26.3%) while 9mobile comes least with 6.5%. Purposive sampling was used to select the telecommunication company on the basis of their market share for the year 2021. As a result, MTN telecommunication firm was selected because it had the widest coverage (in terms of the number of subscribers or market share) in Nigeria as of December 2021. Since data on the number of only users of MTN data in Edo State as of April, 2021 could not be ascertained, the Cochran (1963) formula for determining sample size with unknown population was used. Cochran's sample estimation formula with unknown population is given as: $\frac{Z^2pq}{e^2}$

Where: n = sample size, e = sampling error, Z= Z-statistics at 95%, hence Z = 1.96, p= 50% and q = 1-p

$$\frac{1.96 \times 1.96 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.0025} = 385$$

Therefore the sample size of the current study was 385. This indicated that 385 consumers of MTN data only were administered questionnaire.

Source of Data Collection

Primary sources of data was mainly employed in this study. The primary source was the questionnaire The questionnaire was closed-ended questionnaire and employed the Likert 5-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Strongly disagree (SD) and Disagree (D).

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

The research instrument was validated when copies of the questionnaire were given to colleagues in the research area for face validity. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, pilot testing was carried out in which 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered to some users of data of other networks as they made up consumers outside the sampling unit. The questionnaires retrieved were subjected to the Cronbach Alpha reliability test to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire statements. Table 1 shows the Cronbach alpha values. The Cronbach Alpha values were higher than 0.7 which indicated that the research instrument was reliable.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Electronic word of mouth	4	0.811
Social media platforms	4	0.781
Brand influencer	4	0.800
Perceived quality	4	0.777
Response	4	0.901
Value outcome	4	0.811

Source: Researchers' computation based on the field survey 2022 using SPSS 22.0

Administration of Research Instrument

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, Google form online survey was used to administer the questionnaire. In the administration of the Google form, the WhatsApp contacts of MTN users were sought through referral within Benin City. The researcher requested that the MTN users should refer her to other MTN users. The designed Google form was sent to the referred the MTN users.

Model Specification

Three econometric models for the study were specified as:

$$PEQ = \beta_0 + \beta_1EVM+ \beta_2SMP +\beta_3BIF+ e..... (1)$$

$$RES = \beta_0 + \beta_1EVM+ \beta_2SMP +\beta_3BIF+ e..... (2)$$

$$VAO = \beta_0 + \beta_1EVM+ \beta_2SMP +\beta_3BIF+ e..... (3)$$

PEQ = Perceived Quality; RES = Response; VAO = Value Outcome; SMP= Social Media Platform; BIF= Brand Influencer; and e = error term. The a priori expectations are stated as: $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 > 0$. The collected data was analysed by using descriptive and inferential statistics through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0.

RESULTS

Description of Demographic Characteristics

Table 2: Demographic Distribution

S/N	Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentages (%)
01	Sex	Male	181	61.36
		Female	114	38.64
		Total	295	100.0
02	Age	18-25	66	22.37
		26-32	85	28.81
		33-39	89	30.17
		40 and above	55	18.64
		Total	295	100.0
03	Highest level of Education	SSCE	67	22.71
		Diploma	88	29.83
		Graduate	140	47.46
		Total	295	100.0
04	Duration of being a user of MTN data	0-4	64	21.69
		5-9	66	22.37
		10-14	76	25.76
		15 and above	89	30.17
		Total	295	100.0

Source: Fieldwork (2022)

Table 2 shows the demographics of the respondents. As revealed, 181 (61.36%) male MTN users while 114 (38.64%) were female MTN users. This indicates that there were more male than female MTN users who participated in the study. The age distribution showed that majority of the MTN users were in the age group of 26-32 and 33- 39 with distribution of 85(28.81%) and 89(30.17%) respectively. This indicates that a large proportion of the active youth is a user of MTN. The table also revealed that majority of the MTN users were graduate (140, 47.46%) and diploma degree holders (88, 29.83%). This indicates that the respondents were enlightened enough to provide the required answers to the questionnaire items. Furthermore a large proportion of the respondents indicated that they had used MTN for a long period. This was represented by those who had used MTN for 15 years and above 89 (30.17%) and those who had used it for 10 to 14 years (76, 25.6%). This indicates that majority of the users had been loyal to the MTN brand.

Table 3: Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient for All Variables

	EVM	SMP	BIF	PEQ	RES	VAO
EVM	1					
SMP	.307**	1				
BIF	.726**	.383**	1			
PEQ	.510**	.495**	.515**	1		
RES	.619**	.099	.415**	.324**	1	
VAO	.483**	.293**	.577**	.342**	.247**	1

Significant** at $p < 0.05$

Source: Researchers’ computation based on the field survey 2022 using SPSS 22.0

Table 2 showed that Pearson correlation was used to assess the linear relationship among the variables. It showed that electronic word of mouth (EVM), social media platform (SMP) and brand influencer (BIF), all positively and significantly correlated with perceived quality (PEQ), response (RES) and value outcome (VAO) of telecommunication industry in Edo State. This implied that there was a direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 2: Viral Marketing and Brand Equity

Variables	Perceived Quality	Response	Value
C	1.754 .729 (2.408) [.017]	3.743 .741 (5.048) [.000]	-.180 1.295 (-.139) [.890]
Electronic word of mouth (EVM)	.247 .067 (3.663) [.000]	.636 .069 (9.282) [.000]	.205 .120 (1.713) [.088]
Social media platform (SMP)	.329 .052 (6.303) [.000]	-.091 .053 (-1.703) [.090]	.132 .093 (1.421) [.157]

Brand Influencer (BIF)	.162	-.036	.647
	.063	.064	.112
	(2.577)	(-.565)	(5.779)
	[.011]	[.573]	[.000]
R	.635 ^a	.627 ^a	.589 ^a
R-Squared	.403	.393	.347
Adjusted R-Squared	.395	.386;	.338
F-Statistic	54.191	52.054	42.600
Prob (F-Statistic)	0.000	0.000	0.000
No of Observation	295	295	295

Note: t-values are in brackets while p-values are in parentheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between i) electronic word of mouth; ii) social media platform; iii) brand influence and perceived quality

Table 2 showed that the multiple correlation (R) indicated that viral marketing had 0.635 relationships with perceived quality. This signified that there was a moderate linear relationship between viral marketing and perceived quality of the telecommunication industry in Edo State. The R-square which was 0.403 (40.3%) showed the model fitness. It specifically demonstrated that the combined variables of electronic word of mouth, social media platform and brand influencer in the regression model predicted and explained 40.3 % of the systematic variation in the perceived quality of telecommunication brands in Edo State, while other variables not included in the model captured 59.7% variation in the perceived quality of telecommunication brands in Edo State. The F statistic (F = 54.191; p= 0.000) indicated that viral marketing was a significant predictor of perceived quality as a group.

Table 2 shows that there was a significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and perceived quality ($\beta= 0.247$; p = 0.000). Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and perceived quality. Table 2 also shows that there was a significant relationship between social media platform and perceived quality ($\beta= .329$; p = 0.000). Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relationship between social media platform and perceived quality. Finally, Table 2 shows that there was a significant relationship between brand influence and perceived quality ($\beta= 0.162$; p = 0.011). Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relationship between brand influence and perceived quality.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between i) electronic word of mouth; ii) social media platform; iii) brand influence and response

Table 3 showed that R indicated that viral marketing had 0.627 relationships with response and signified that there was a moderate linear relationship between viral marketing and response of the telecommunication industry in Edo State. The R-square which was 0.393 (39.3%) demonstrated that the combined variables of electronic word of mouth, social media platform and brand influencer in the regression model predicted and explained 39.3 % of the systematic variation in the response of consumers towards telecommunication brands in Edo State, while other variables not included in the model captured 60.7% variation in the

response of consumers towards telecommunication brands in Edo State. The F statistic ($F = 52.054$; $p = 0.000$) indicated that viral marketing was a significant predictor of perceived quality as a group.

Table 3 shows that there was a significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and response ($\beta = 0.636$; $p = 0.000$). Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and response. Table 3 also shows that there was no significant relationship between social media platform and response ($\beta = -0.091$; $p = 0.090$). Based on the result, we did not reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant relationship between social media platform and response. Finally, Table 3 shows that there was no significant relationship between brand influence and response ($\beta = -0.036$; $p = 0.573$). Based on the result, we did not reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant relationship between brand influence and response.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between i) electronic word of mouth; ii) social media platform; iii) brand influence and value outcome

Table 3 showed that R indicated that viral marketing had 0.589 relationships with value outcome and signified that there was a moderate linear relationship between viral marketing and value outcome in the telecommunication industry in Edo State. The R-square which was 0.347 (34.7%) demonstrated that the combined variables of electronic word of mouth, social media platform and brand influencer in the regression model predicted and explained 34.9 % of the systematic variation in the value outcome of telecommunication brands in Edo State.. The F statistic ($F = 42.600$; $p = 0.000$) indicated that viral marketing was a significant predictor of perceived quality as a group.

Table 3 shows that there was no significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and value outcome ($\beta = 0.205$; $p = 0.080$). Based on the result, we did not reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and value outcome. Table 3 also shows that there was no significant relationship between social media platform and value outcome ($\beta = 0.132$; $p = 0.157$). Based on the result, we did not reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no significant relationship between social media platform and value outcome. Finally, Table 3 shows that there was a significant relationship between brand influence and value outcome ($\beta = 0.647$; $p = 0.000$). Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relationship between brand influence and value outcome.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the relationship between viral marketing and brand equity in the telecommunication industry in Edo State. It examined how viral marketing (proxied by electronic word of mouth, social media platform and brand influencer) influenced the brand equity (proxied by perceived quality, response, and value outcome) of the telecommunication industry in Edo State. The first objective of the study was to determine the relationship between viral marketing and perceived quality. It was revealed that electronic word of mouth ($B = 0.247$, $p = 0.000$), social media platform ($B = 0.329$, $p = 0.000$) and brand influencer ($B = 0.162$, $p = 0.011$) all had positive and significant relationship with perceived quality of

telecommunication brands in Edo State. This underscores the important role in which viral marketing plays in determining the consumers' perception of the brand quality. The outcome of study was found consistent with Olannye and Onobrakpeya (2017) and Ndinatsei (2019). The second objective of the study was to examine the relationship between viral marketing and response. It was revealed that only electronic word of mouth ($B = 0.636$, $p = 0.000$) had a positive and significant relationship with response. Social media platform ($B = -0.091$, $p = 0.090$) and brand influencer ($B = -0.036$, $p = 0.573$) both had negative and non-significant relationship with response. The third objective of the study was to evaluate the relationship between viral marketing and value outcome. It was revealed that only brand influencer ($B = 0.647$, $p = 0.000$) had a positive and significant relationship with value outcome. Electronic word of mouth ($B = 0.205$, $p = 0.088$) and social media platform ($B = 0.132$, $p = 0.157$) both had non-significant relationship with value outcome.

Conclusion

This study has shown that viral marketing plays an important role in determining the brand equity of organisations. The study has demonstrated that a significant relationship existed between viral marketing and perceived quality. As a component of viral marketing, social media has an impact on brand equity. The utilisation of social media can assist in reaching out to a wider geographic audience. The organization can strengthen its marketing strategy and build brand equity by connecting with several consumers. Brand equity is influenced by electronic word-of-mouth. Any favorable or unfavorable comment by consumers concerning the brand becomes available to a large number of individuals in the online community.

Recommendations

The research proposes recommendations on bases of the findings and they suffix. It is crucial for viral marketing strategy to become part of the marketing communication campaign of organisations. For this to be done, organisations need to guarantee that the well-crafted content reaches the consumers' and is able to captivate their attention to view, read, like, comment and share the posts on a daily basis. In other words, the approach for applying viral marketing should be with high level competence with the consideration of electronic word of mouth, which is what online users will say about the content of the brand, social media platform to use and the kind of brand influencer that should endorse the brand. Organisations developing viral campaigns have to be thoughtful of aggressively creating credibility, reputation and confidence in their consumers by establishing and maintaining a stronger connection with them. As a consequence, viral marketing strategies will become more effective. Electronic word-of-mouth should be incorporated into a comprehensive promotion plan. Since ethically questionable acts may be exposed and publicly disclosed by the online world, they should be avoided as much as possible, and assaults should be fiercely fought. This meant that by maintaining and developing viral marketing strategies, existing and future consumers' perceptions of the company will improve. The organisations also have to implement increasingly stricter policies which will assist them in addressing concerns relating to consumer responsiveness to brands. All of these factors will have a favourable or unfavourable impact on the value outcome. As the findings indicate, it is not the social media platform that matters, but rather what has been posted and what people are saying about them online.

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APPENDICES

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Sex: Male () Female ()
2. Age: 18-25 () 26-32 () 33-39 () 40 and above ()
3. Education: SSCE () Diploma () Graduate () Post-graduate ()
4. Duration of being a user of MTN data: 0-4 () 5-9 () 10-14 () 15 and above ()

SECTION B

S/N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
		5	4	3	2	1

Electronic Word of Mouth

- 5 People talk so much about MTN data online
- 6 Each time I see posts on MTN data online, I like to view them
- 7 What people say about MTN data online fascinates me
- 8 I share information about MTN data online

Social Media Platform

- 9 I use multiple social media platforms to connect with people
- 10 In each of the social media platforms I use, MTN data is highly talked about
- 11 The social media platforms enable me to relate faster with people about the performance of MTN data
- 12 I consider the social media platforms to be effective in spreading information about MTN data

Brand Influencer

- 13 Celebrities are often used to promote MTN data
- 14 Popular individuals talk much about MTN data online
- 15 I like the people who are used to promote MTN data
- 16 Brand influencers are often selected based on their credibility

Perceived Quality

- 17 I enjoy using MTN data
- 18 What I hear about MTN data online is not different from what I experience during usage
- 19 As it is often said online, MTN data can be used everywhere

20 Generally, I have a high rating for MTN data

Response

21 I respond promptly to all MTN online promotions on data bonus

22 I have become loyal to MTN data

23 I keep telling people about MTN data

24 I have a great testimony about MTN data

Value Outcome

25 MTN data is highly sought after by many people

26 MTN is strong enough to handle customer issues

27 MTN data has a strong reputation

28 I have many friends who are users of MTN data

Thank you for participating.