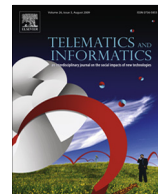




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## Capturing consumers' experiences of unsolicited mobile advertising

Ibeawuchi K. Enwereuzor

Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

The increasing numbers of telecoms subscribers in Nigeria and the concomitant spate of mobile advertising suggest that the time is ripe to begin to pay research attention to this area. Newspaper and anecdotal evidence in Nigeria suggest that consumers view such advertisements pejoratively since they are usually unsolicited. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to use phenomenological design and semi-structured interviews to empirically examine consumers' experiences as recipients of unsolicited phone call-based mobile advertising and efforts they have made thus far in addressing the issue. Twelve mobile subscribers (six males and six females) within the ages of 25 and 49 years participated in the study. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that consumers are generally resentful about unsolicited phone call-based mobile advertising. They may, however, be receptive to such advertising depending on whether they are informative and entertaining, permitted, and personalised to suit their mood, time, and context. Also, some consumers have not attempted to address the issue of unsolicited phone call-based mobile advertising whereas those that have tried before are reluctant in doing so again since previous attempts were unsuccessful. The implications of these findings to consumer satisfaction in telecoms sector in Nigeria were discussed. It was recommended that telecoms network operators in Nigeria should allow consumers to make their own choice and also consider consumers' personal interests and preferences when designing mobile advertisements.

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### 1. Introduction

The deregulation of the telecoms sector in Nigeria facilitated the advent of the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) operations in Nigeria in the year 2001. Since then, Nigerians have witnessed tremendous transformation in the telecoms industry like never before. Telecoms became easier as individuals no longer have to rely on the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL), the sole body formerly saddled with the responsibility of providing telecoms services in Nigeria.

Following the deregulation, GSM operators such as Econet Wireless (now known as Airtel), Mobile Telecommunications Network (MTN), Globacom, Etisalat, among others, decided to invest in the Nigerian telecoms sector. Though initially very expensive, the cost of GSM services has considerably reduced over time. For example, during its inception in Nigeria, the pioneering mobile networks operators initially pegged a call at ₦50 per minute since there was no per second call rate then. However, the granting of licenses to other mobile network operators in Nigeria, perhaps, brought about competition that ultimately culminated in per second billing. Today, most of these GSM operators in Nigeria offer their subscriber identity

E-mail address: [gr8kice2@gmail.com](mailto:gr8kice2@gmail.com)

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module (SIM) only for a paltry sum of money or even free of charge, making it affordable to many individuals. Many mobile network subscribers even own and operate multiple SIM cards. What is more, Nigerians now have access to services that were not possible before, including but not limited to mobile banking, online payments, cheaper local and international call rates, and cheaper data bundles. Currently, the telecoms industry in Nigeria is said to be one of the fastest growing both in Sub-Saharan Africa (Afolabi and Ojo, 2015) and the world at large (Olatokun and Ojo, 2015). Since its introduction in Nigeria, the number of consumers has witnessed unprecedented growth. As of December 2016, the number of active GSM lines in Nigeria stood at 154,124,602, Code Data Multiple Access (CDMA) was 217,566 while fixed wired/wireless was 154,513 (Nigerian Communications Commission; NCC, 2016).

### 1.1. Trends of mobile advertising in Nigeria

As the mobile technology advances, its functions are also evolving to accommodate the demands of consumers. One of the emerging trends in mobile communication is mobile advertising. The advent of GSM has paved the way for mobile advertisement as a new medium of advertising in Nigeria. According to Leppäniemi et al. (2004), mobile advertising involves persuading individuals to buy products and services through the use of mobile devices. Herein, it refers to a form of advertisement that conveys advertising messages to users through wireless communication devices such as mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), or any other wireless communication apparatus (Mobile Marketing Association, cited in Chen and Hsieh, 2012). Such advertisements aim to elicit patronage from individuals. The message contained in such advertisements may focus on brand imaging, coupon, promotion, information transfer, direct purchase, or voucher. The message can also be text or voice-based.

Mobile advertising has two types: push- and pull-type (Leppäniemi et al., 2004; Zhang, 2007). The push-type approach refers to traditional advertising which involves sending information directly to recipients through the radio and television, which attracts low level of involvement from recipients (Liu, 2008; Park et al., 2008; Tsang et al., 2004). In push-based, the way in which the information is transferred lies with the advertising agency involved. However, for the pull-based strategy, the information received by the consumer is sent based on the permission of the consumer (Nasco and Bruner, 2008). That is, in pull-based advertising, information on specific products and services are sent to consumers based on their consent. This approach helps in reducing the impact of such message constituting a disturbance to the consumer (Ünal et al., 2011). Succinctly stated, mobile advertising may be considered pull- or push-based depending on whether it was solicited or not.

In respect to mobile advertising in Nigeria, a pull-based mobile advertising refers to adverts that are sent to the consumer based on their permission, such as those pertaining to health tips, football updates and the like, especially through subscription. Unlike the pull-based, the push-based mobile advertising are advertisements that are sent to the consumer without their permission. They are unsolicited and not based on subscription, for example, an unexpected phone call conveying advertisement about goods and services. Such calls usually come from four, five, six, or eleven-digit numbers. It is easier for consumers to discern that calls coming from these types of numbers are for advertising purposes even before picking such calls than those that stem from eleven-digit number. Hence, they can easily choose to ignore such calls because the conventional SIM in Nigeria comes with eleven-digit number. Sometimes, it is only after consumers have picked the eleven-digit phone call-based mobile advertising that they eventually realise that it was meant to convey advertisement. In most cases, consumers in Nigeria usually get the unsolicited mobile advertisements which have continued to generate lots of concerns from consumers (see Olaleye, 2016).

Mobile advertising can also come in the form of short messaging service (SMS), multimedia messaging service (MMS), or phone call. However, the present study opted for phone call-based mobile advertising because not much scholarly attention has been given to it.

As it stands, mobile advertising is now a new form of advertising in Nigeria. This may be attributed to the size and portability of mobile phones, and the importance of staying connected throughout the day by its users, which may have made advertisers to seize the opportunity to deliver advertisements. These suggest that whenever and wherever consumers are, advertisements can reach them on the go. It could also be attributed to attempts by advertisers to gain competitive edge over competitors, and to attract new customers as well as retain old ones. For mobile network operators in Nigeria, this competition may have been intensified by the mobile number portability (MNP) which enables subscribers to switch their mobile network provider without having to change their SIM number.

As the number of mobile phone consumers continues to increase coupled with the emergence of mobile advertising in Nigeria, there is need for researchers to understand the experiences of consumers since the consumers are the recipients of such advertisements. Newspaper (see Olaleye, 2016) and anecdotal evidence in Nigeria suggest that consumers hold negative attitudes toward mobile advertising, as consumers have complained that such advertisements were unsolicited and impinge on their privacy. The advertisements sometimes even indicate that consumers have been enlisted into some services without their consent. However, it seems that there is a dearth of studies that have subjected such claims to empirical scrutiny in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, previous studies on mobile advertising in other climes have made great strides in enriching our understanding on putative factors that influence consumers' adoption and attitudes toward mobile advertising (e.g. Gao and Zang, 2016; Hsiao and Chang, 2014; Izquierdo-Yusta et al., 2015). However, in spite of the remarkable progress made so far in this area, the current state of knowledge appears to be incomplete. For instance, majority of these studies (see Table 1) focused only on SMS-based mobile advertising, or failed to even specify the type of mobile advertising. Hence, attitudes of

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