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Use of Social Media Platforms for Consumer Information on Green Household Products by Online Marketers in Selected Faculties in the University of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study explored the use of social media platforms for consumer information by online marketers on green household products by online marketers in selected faculties in the University of Nigeria. Two research questions were formulated for this study; (1) what are the social media platforms useful for consumer information on green household products. (2) to what extent are social media platforms used to enhance consumers' awareness in patronising green household products. Two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population for the study was 60 online marketers; 30 male and 30 female post graduate students of two selected faculties in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in Enugu state Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection and was validated by three experts. The data collected was analysed using SPSS version 23. Based on the findings, it was observed that a good number of the student online marketers of green household products do not make use of all the social media platforms available. It was also revealed that the only social media platforms highly used to inform consumers about green household products were YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The study recommends, among others, that due to digitalisation, marketers of green household products can tap into diverse social media platforms for creating awareness on the health benefits of using green household products and their sustainable effects on the environment.

Keywords: Green Household Products, Consumers, Environmental Sustainability, Social Media Platforms.

Introduction

The high rate of population increase and the indiscriminate consumption patterns have brought challenges to the environment, including pollution, global warming, and depletion of natural resources. These challenges directly affect sustainability of economic development, the environment, and human health. In a mission to mitigate the aforementioned challenges, the term 'green product' emerged. Green products are ecologically safe products that facilitate the long-term objective of protecting human lives and preserving the natural resources. These products minimize unfavourable impacts on the environment and humans, conserve energy and reduce the use of toxic agents during product design and actual

production, and are certified by an acknowledged organisation (Kumar & Ghodeswar 2015; Diglel & Yazdanifard 2014; Eneizan & Wahab 2016). Green products come in various forms; some are recycled from former goods and then reused. Some are considered efficient by saving water, energy, gasoline, and money. The American Marketing Association (2012) listed household products to include: baby care items, kitchen equipment and utensils, beddings, laundry equipment, electronic devices and other household furniture and fixtures.

Compared to the conventional household products, green household products are organic, conserve energy, renewable, give a better quality of life, reusable, recyclable, healthy and have little impact on humans and the environment at large (Dangelico & Pontrandolfo, 2017). Other similar terms used in the literature for green products include environmental products, ecological products, eco-friendly product, and sustainable products. For the purpose of this study, green products include organic soap, virgin coconut or carrot oil, Shea butter (vitellaria paradoxa) moisturizer or shampoo, led bulbs (energy-saving bulbs), solar panel/phone charger, energy saving refrigerators/freezers, rechargeable fan, silicone reusable food bag, reusable bamboo kitchen utensil, biodegradable dental floss, solar lantern and cloth or cotton shopping bag among others.

Green products offer high quality and are characterised by efficient use of natural resources with low risks to the environment when compared to the non-green products (Albino, et al. 2009). The characteristics of these products have encouraged the environmentally conscious individual to shift their consumption preferences from non-green product to the environment-friendly green products (Deng, and He, 2020). There is, therefore, a need for adequate information on green household products and why these are better than non-green household products. Companies must encourage interactive marketing activities in which marketers provide consumers with information about the company's green household products via various social media platforms.

Through social networking sites, marketing activities have been transferred from the physical to the virtual world. Umekachikelu (2013) asserts that many Nigerians, including the rich and the poor, educated and illiterate, young and old, irrespective of religion, now enjoy social media services. As a result, companies consider social media platforms vital for creating awareness of any product available (Ebrahim, 2020). Social media comprise internet-associated applica-tions anchored on technological Web 2.0 principle. Social media enable the production and sharing of contents generated by users due to their interactive characteristics that facilitate knowledge sharing, collaborative, and participatory activities available to larger communities than traditional media such as radio, television, and print. Social media platforms include blogs, internet forums, consumer's review sites, social networking websites like Twitter, Instagram, Blogger, LinkedIn, and Facebook and Wikis (Arrigo, 2018; Cheung et al., 2021). Most marketers use online marketing

strategies such as blogger endorsements, advertising on social media sites, and leveraging contents generated by users to build product awareness among consumers (Wang & Kim, 2017; Agha 2017; Nur, 2021). Nguyen, Nguyen, and Hoang, (2019) found out that the information on green products would increase people's behavioral intention to use these products and consequently become green consumers.

Consumers are critical to the survival and growth of manufacturing companies. Any company that wants to exist and thrive must provide valuable and unique products that meet the wants and needs of consumers. Chiang, et al. (2019) referred to a consumer as a person who has specific needs and demands to be fulfilled and has to purchase a product traditionally or online to satisfy the requirement. Consumers are becoming more conscious of environmental and health issues as they become more focused on green marketing and green product purchasing. (Sawnt 2015, Singh &Mehra, 2020). Choshaly and Mirabolghasemi (2020) opine that when a consumer purchases or consumes a product, it directly or indirectly affects the environment. Consumers are motivated to reduce health issues and environmental harm by considering their purchase decisions and consumption patterns in this modern time (Samarasinghe, 2012).

Due to the increase in environmental pollution and degradation, environmental sustainability is fundamental to the survival of our planet and the human beings who occupy the planet. Human beings, including marketers and consumers, are dependent on the environment and its resources to survive; at the same time, the protection of the environment is dependent on human beings. The environment refers to consumers' objective and subjective physical and social circumstances and includes man and his interaction with water bodies and aquatic life, landmass, forests, grasslands, deserts, and animals (Gana & Toba, 2015). Environmental sustainability has increased consumers' sensitivity towards purchasing environment-friendly products (Kumar, 2020). People who have concern for the environment are more likely to buy green products (Lestari et al., 2020). To increase consumption of green products, marketers are encouraged to use diverse methods, including social media platforms, to create awareness about green household products and their importance in protecting and conserving natural resources.

Literatures abound on research works conducted on the uses and influence of social media on consumers, indicating that social media has become an important component of marketing information throughout the current business environment. Al Amin et al. (2020) revealed that various social media platforms used for consumer information need to be in agreement to deliver a holistic and effective message that will satisfy both organisational and consumer needs. In the same vein, Al-Abdallah, et al. (2021) opined that social media activities may undoubtedly assist with green products awareness, consumer opinions and crowd sourcing and also plenty of branding chances. According to Zuhdi et al. (2019), consumers share and exchange

knowledge, information, and experiences about a product on social media platforms. Again, Zuhdi et al., (2019) also expressed that the benefit of comments and likes from other consumers helps potential and prospective consumers to choose between different online business pages for different green household products. On the other hand, Al Amin et al., (2020) strongly recommend that companies can greatly boost the consumption of green products and encourage sustainable environment by using the huge reach of consumers through social media. In today's environment, social media plays an important role in influencing what people think about green products, which eventually influences the success factor of various businesses (Al Amin et al., 2020). Chiang, et al. (2019) also mentioned that consumers' online buying patterns are trending with the impact of social media platforms. In many cases, social media influences people to buy impulsively. Again, Al Amin et al., (2020) expressed that online businesses are now engaging consumers through social media platforms by raising awareness of green products and, subsequently, affecting businesses positively, thereby, increase the level of environmental sustainability.

Unfortunately, despite digitalisation, online marketers of household products operating in Nigeria, particularly in Enugu state seem to under utilise the social media platforms available in providing valuable information on green products for environmental sustainability. They also lack consistency in adequately informing consumers about a green product, suitable media platforms for business posts, signing in regularly to link up with consumers for networking, making individual business posts with creative information, posting relevant images or captions to consumers, and building good customer engagement for enquiries and quick responses. Therefore, this research becomes necessary.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the use of social media platforms for consumer information on green household products for environmental sustainability in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to;

- determine the social media platforms that are used to inform consumers about the purchase of green household products, and
- examine the extent of using of social media platforms to enhance consumers' awareness and for purchasing green household products.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female marketers of green household products on social media platforms that are useful for consumer information.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female marketers of green household products on the extent of using social media platforms to enhance consumer awareness and for patronising green household products.

Methodology

Study design: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. According to Nworgu (2015) descriptive survey research design is that in which information is gathered from unbiased representative group of interest using questionnaire, interview, and observation. Descriptive survey design was found suitable for this study because data were collected from the respondents using questionnaire. The study was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Population for the study: The population for the study comprised all the postgraduate students of Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Faculty of Business Administration, University of Nigeria, Enugu campus within the 2020/2021 academic session. Out of these students, 60 persons identified as online marketers/retailers who deal in green household products.

Sample size selection: Due to the manageable size of the population, the entire population was involved in the study. Therefore, there was no sampling of the respondents.

Instrument for data collection: The questionnaire titled Using Social Media Platforms for Consumer Information on Green Household Products (USMPCIGHP) was developed by the researcher from relevant literature and used for data collection. The questionnaire items were rated on a 4-point scale – strongly agree (4), agree (3) disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1).

Validation and reliability test of the instrument: The questionnaire was subjected to face validation by three lecturers in the Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to test the reliability of the instrument and coefficient. 0.85 was obtained, which indicates that the items of the instrument had high internal consistency.

Method of data collection: Sixty copies of the questionnaire were hand distributed to the respondents with the help of two research assistants. They were given about ten minutes to respond to the questions, after which all the copies of the questionnaire were immediately collected back. This gave a return rate of 100%.

Data and statistical analysis: The data collected were analysed using SPSS version 23. For research question one, any questionnaire item with the mean value of 2.50 and above indicated that the respondents agreed while any item with mean value below 2.50 indicated disagreed. For research question two, any questionnaire item with mean value of 2.50 and above indicated used, whereas any item with mean score less than 2.50 was taken to indicate not used. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test.

Results

The data in Table 1 show that 12 out of 19 items had their mean values range from 2.58 to 3.89 above the criterion value of 2.50. This implies that the respondents agreed that Instangram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google, Myspace, Linkedln, YouTube, Tumblr, Pinterest, Skype, Squarespace, and Twiter are useful social media platforms for marketing green household products while they disagreed that Plurk, Yookos, Flickr, Vimeo, Stumble upon, Snapchat, and Walmart are useful social media platforms for marketing green

household products. The table also revealed that the items had their standard deviations ranged from 0.18 to 1.01. This showed that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their opinion. The table also shows that platforms such as; Plurk, Flirkr, and Squarespace had significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondnets ($p < 0.05$). Mean responses on Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google, Myspace, Linkdln, YouTube, Tumblr, Yookos, Pinterest, Vimeo, Stumble Upon, Snapchat, Skype, Walmat and Twitter showed no significant difference ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis one was not rejected on those items as postulated because no significant difference existed in the mean responses of the respondents on the social media platforms used for consumer information on green household products.

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviations of respondents on social media platforms useful for consumer information on green household products N=60.

Item	Means	Standard deviation	t-values	Remarks	Decision
Instagram	2.58	.91	1.38	A	Not significant
WhatsApp	3.77	.69	.80	A	Not significant
Facebook	3.89	.62	1.45	A	Not significant
Google	2.93	.58	1.81	A	Not significant
Myspace	2.62	.89	1.40	A	Not significant
LinkedIn	3.60	.79	1.08	A	Not significant
YouTube	3.84	.66	.71	A	Not significant
Tumblr	2.71	.77	.81	A	Not significant
Plurk	1.60	.00	.00	D	Significant
Yookos	1.32	.32	1.46	D	Not significant
Flickr	1.99	1.01	-1.63	D	Significant
Pinterest	2.92	.99	1.11	A	Not significant
Vimeo	1.06	.23	3.08	D	Not significant
Stumble Upon	1.21	.48	1.48	D	Not significant
Snapchat	1.47	.18	1.49	D	Not significant
Skype	3.09	.88	1.42	A	Not significant
Squarespace	2.60	.80	-1.10	A	Significant
Walmart	1.75	.77	1.64	D	Not significant
Twitter	3.01	.99	1.28	A	Not significant
Cluster mean	**2.52**	**0.66**	**1.04**	**A**	

The data in Table 2 show that only Facebook and WhatsApp were highly used with mean value of 3.59 and 3.75. This implies that the respondents used these two social media platforms more than others. The rest of the platforms were slightly used with mean values of 1.00- 1.83. The standard deviations for all the items ranged from -1.37 to 1.15. The values of the standard deviation indicated that the respondents were close to one another in their opinions.

The table shows that the mean responses of male female respondents showed no significant difference except in the use of Squarespace, Pinterest and Google ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, null hypothesis two was partly rejected and partly upheld.

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviations of respondents on the extent of using social media platforms by marketers to enhance consumer awareness and for patronising green household products (N=60).

Item Statement	Mean	Std. dev	t values	Remarks	Decision
Marketers use skype for consumers.	1.41	.80	.45	Slightly used	NS
YouTube is being used to communicate with consumers.	1.48	.86	1.64	Slightly used	NS
Squarespace is applied by marketers for consumers.	1.00	.00	.00	Slightly used	S
Facebook is used for interaction between marketers and consumers.	3.59	.62	1.20	Highly used	NS
Marketers use WhatsApp to inform consumers about a product.	3.75	.67	.94	Highly used	NS
Marketers use Pinterest for consumers.	1.00	.00	.00	Slightly used	S
Marketers use Google to communicate with their consumers.	1.48	-1.37	-1.37	Slightly used	S
Myspace is used by the marketers for awareness creation.	1.34	1.07	1.07	Slightly used	NS
Twitter is a platform used by marketers for consumers.	1.37	1.04	1.04	Slightly used	NS
Tumblr is use by marketers to communicate with their consumers.	1.18	.68	.68	Slightly used	NS
Instagram is a platform used by marketers.	1.83	1.10	1.10	Slightly used	NS
LinkedIn is used to call consumers attention.	1.74	1.15	1.15	Slightly used	NS
Cluster mean	1.76	0.55	.46		

S; significant, NS; Not significant, std. dev; standard deviation

Discussion

Today, social networking services are being used more widely in all industries throughout the world. This study identified various social media platforms through which online marketers of green household products can inform consumers about the products. As the use of technology is fast evolving around the world, most consumers especially the young ones prefer shopping online. This happens because, social media platforms allow consumers to gather and obtain information from various groups of people, including marketers and producers. Findings from the study revealed that both male and female marketer respondents indicated that majority of the social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google, Myspace, Linkedln, YouTube, Pinterest, Skype, Squarespace, and Twitter are used for consumer information on green household products. The finding is expected

because such social media are commonly used by young people for interaction with their peers. Those media are also easily operated with mobile phones, hence young people and families are more likely to source for products via those platforms.

The findings of this study are similar to that of Cheng and Qasim (2021) who found that there has been tremendous growth in the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook over the past decade in green products marketing. According to a study conducted by Edison (2016), a fifth of online social network users tracks their preferred products, businesses, and services on these platforms, with 80 percent of them using Facebook and brand accounts. The findings are in line with the submission of Alison (2012) that social networking sites like Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, Twitter, and Blog create advertising opportunities for businesses of all sizes to reach prospects and customers in a competitive landscape. Al Amin et al., (2020) also found out that online social networks like Facebook are flexible and based on various social interests. Chiang, et al., (2019) conducted a study and found out that social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, etc., have become a well-known communication and interaction channel among people worldwide. The study conducted by Sanchez-Casado et al., (2018) shows that Facebook is flexible due to comments, likes, and overall view of information; Consumers believed Facebook was easy to use and can save time; it is fast, convenient, and shared among most people. The user interface (design) of Facebook for all the different pages is the same; therefore, it is understandable, clear, and simple to use.

The findings also revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were highly used while Skype, YouTube, Squarespace, Pinterest, Google, Myspace, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Linkedln were slightly used to enhance consumer awareness and for patronising green household products. This implies that marketers/retailers are yet to take advantages of emerging technologies embedded in variety of social media platforms to create awareness on green product consumption and environmental sustainability. Chen and Bryer (2012) found out that despite the proliferation of social media sites, a low percentage of retailers use them in selling their products. The findings are similar to the findings of Egbe (2015) who found out that some organisations still refrain from using social media as official means of networking with their customers because of some perceived negative effects. Social media platforms facilitate people to share ideas, or thought, express their feeling and opinions with other people. It is therefore necessary for retailers to highly utilise variety of media platforms to get information across to their target consumers. Ebrahim (2020) and Budiman, (2021) revealed that marketers consider social media platforms as vital tools for succeeding in the online marketplace. Using social media for consumer information requires knowledge and a lot of patience, because social media, of course has its challenges and risk before achieving success that is worth to mention.

Conclusion

The economy is rapidly growing, and everything is almost on the verge of digitalisation. As a result, the environment is faced with many challenges such as pollution, global warming, and depletion of natural resources. These problems directly affect the sustainability of economic development, the environment and society. Green product marketers are making use of many of the social media platform for selling their products, however, there is still more room for expanded use. Many consumers are not yet aware of the emergence of green products; therefore, product marketers especially student marketers, must seize every available platform to inform people of the existence of green household products, their benefits, and how the products will help mitigate the challenges faced in our environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Considering the rate of unemployment in the Nigerian labour market, undergraduates studying Business Administration and Marketing on graduation should consider establishing online businesses to earn a living, through which they can effectively use the available social media platforms to market green household products for environmental sustainability.
2. Due to digitalization, the number of social media platforms and active users are rapidly increasing; therefore, marketers are encouraged to use diverse social media platforms to inform consumers of the benefits of consuming green products.
3. Our environment is gradually deteriorating consumers are therefore encouraged to consider green products during purchase as this will help conserve our natural resources.
4. Regular seminars aimed at creating awareness on the need to patronize green household products should be organised in Enugu state. This will enable the producers and marketers of green household products create awareness on consumption of green products for sustainability.
5. There should be social media accounts or blogs for official business posts, regular consumer networking, use of special brand name for consumers' patronage, irresistible offers with good customers' engagement for enquiries and quick response.

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