

Sales Promotion as a Strategy in Service Marketing: Exploring the Believability Dilemma and Consumer Purchase Decision

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Abstract

This study investigates the indirect impact of sales promotion as a marketing strategy on consumer buying decision in the marketing of services, sieved through the challenge of believability dilemma. Primary data, collected through questionnaire were used for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique consisting of purposive and random sampling methods was used to select 150 customers of GSM operators and banks in Lagos. From the 150 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 124 were retrieved. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including tables, frequencies, percentages, and regression. The study finds that majority of the customers sampled believe that winners of the star prizes announced or advertised in promos are most times pre-determined, and that sales promotion is a tool for exploiting unsuspecting consumers, which negatively influence their believability of the promos, their future participation, and patronage of the brand. Results also show that sales promo has negative impact on consumer purchase decision ($\beta = -.480$, $t = -5.506$ ($P < 0.05$)). The study concludes that as sales promo is increasingly used, consumers may purchase less of the firm's product(s). The study therefore recommends that service providers should use sales promotion sparingly and in conjunction with other promotional strategies in order to be effective.

Keywords

Service Marketing, Purchase Decision, Sales Promotion, Believability Dilemma, Marketing Strategy

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1. Introduction

As a result of globalization and stiff competition, service providers in Nigeria have become more aggressive in their marketing approaches. This is a sharp departure from the past when sellers offered goods and services to consumers with little regard for quality assurance and satisfaction. Adugu (2007) stated that most of the service providers (e.g. banks, telecoms, retail outlets) have realized that advertising and personal selling, even when combined with the other marketing strategies, may no longer be sufficient to sustain customers' satisfaction. In order to compete successfully in this situation therefore, they have developed critical promotion strategies. The aim of such

strategies is not only to beat the competition and retain the customers; it also triggers the new customers by offering attractive packages (Aderemi, 2003). There is no doubt that the ultimate objective of every company is to generate certain level of sales that may create profit to continue the business activities. Every business develops the sales estimate and develops the strategies to achieve it, especially in the service industry. This is the critical link between the sales promotion and customer retention and/or loyalty (Alvarez & Casielles, 2005).

Sales promotion is the function of marketing which seeks to achieve given objectives by the adding of extrinsic, tangible or intangible value to a product or a service. Jerkins (1990) defines sales promotion as "comprising those activities

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additional to above-the-line media of advertising which support the sales representative and the distributor". "It encompasses those specialized activities other than personal selling, advertising and publicity which are calculated to make mass advertising and personal selling more effective in bringing about transfers in ownership and in moving goods expeditiously from the manufacturer to the consumer" (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Sales promotion includes communication activities that provide extra value or incentives to ultimate customers, wholesalers, retailers or other customers. It also stimulates sales product trial (Kotler & Keller, 2009). It is an initiative undertaken by to promote and increase sales, usage or trial of a product or a service (Aderemi, 2003). Sales promotion is an important component of an overall marketing strategy along with advertising, public relations and personal selling. Thus, sales promotion is a helping function designed to make all other marketing activities more effective and efficient, rather than being a palliative. Sales promotion therefore covers a wide variety of short term incentive tools aimed at stimulating consumers, the chains of distribution and the sales force. It could take different forms such as giving away free samples of product, reducing the usual price tag, coupons, rebates, free sample, point of purchase techniques or such other promotional strategies being employed by service providers today (Olujide, 2006).

Sales promotion activities are impersonal and usually non-recurring and are directed to ultimate consumers, industrial users and middlemen, particularly current and prospective customers. Its primary purpose is to increase profit by increasing sales volume (Kotler 2003) but because of its non-personal nature, the measurement of its effects can be difficult. Besides, in Nigeria, several allegations have been levelled against sales promotion efforts in the past due to the activities of some unscrupulous companies. There have been cases where prizes promised to winners were not given to them. There have also been claims of cases where some people were paid to stand as winners of the star prizes to deceive consumers. Due to these bad practices, it is important to confirm if consumers see any sales promotion drive as a farce and as an attempt to take consumers for a ride. Most consumers have vowed never to participate in any sales promotion programme in the future. With this situation on ground, it seems that the service providers who spend millions of Naira on these promos, which is a very important element in marketing communication, may not be able to achieve their set objectives. Therefore this study attempts to ascertain the extent to which consumers still believe in sales promotion and are likely to take action based on the promo(s).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sales Promotion as a Concept

Sales promotions can be loosely defined as 'special offers' which essentially aim to stimulate demand during the period in which they are set (Lehman & Winer 2002; Walsh, 2000). The potential benefits of using sales promotion can range from attracting new customers from competitors, to persuading customers to switch to brands with higher profit margins or simply inducing existing customers to buy more with a view to retaining them. Although sales promotions take up a large share of total marketing expenditure in most consumer goods firms, they remain an area given less strategic consideration or attention than any other aspect of the promotion mix (Srinivasan & Anderson, 1998).

Many scholars suggest that the consumer goods manufacturer has long seen sales promotions as a necessary evil, with price-based sales promotion often said to have the potential to erode the image of the company, because consumers often use price as a substitute measure of quality (Tellis & Gaeth, 1990). Those who advocate brand advertising claim that sales promotions are a bad thing since they don't contribute to the brand building needed for future success and profitability (Dawes, 2004) but those involved in running the sales promotion focus on the tactical issue of getting the greatest amount of short-term sales for the least promotional investment (Davies, 1992). In order to better understand whether sales promotions, and specifically price-based promotions, are useful to the consumer goods and service marketers, it is essential to first explore likely customer satisfaction with such tools.

2.2. Customer Satisfaction with Sales Promotions

Customer satisfaction is known to have a positive impact on market share (Magi, 2003) and satisfaction levels may be moderated by factors such as price sensitivity and perceived value (Rajagopal, 2007). Established means of evaluating sales promotions as developed in the US are said to be "inadequate to guide formulation of sales promotion strategy internationally" (Foxman, Tansuhaj & Wong, 1988). There is therefore the need to deepen our knowledge of how satisfaction with different forms of promotion is likely to be exhibited in different markets around the world especially the developing economies (Kaynak & Mitchell, 1981).

Satisfaction, or indeed pleasure, with a promotion can not only be linked to repurchase, but may in fact be able to be linked to a transfer of satisfaction to the brand or company offering the promotion (Tat & Schwegker, 1998). When consumers are satisfied, this generates positive word of mouth and purchase recommendations and thus the sales

promotion achieves its target by directly impacting buying behaviour and attitude (Alvarez & Casielles, 2005).

Transaction utility theory tells us that consumers will make overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction judgments about a price-based promotion after the experience, driving their intention to repeat the process in the future. Overall judgments about price promotion are formed through consideration of the acquisition utility of the deal (satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the intrinsic utility of the item purchased less its price) and transaction utility (pleasure or displeasure associated with the deal) (Tat & Schwepker, 1998). This suggests that not only is general observed satisfaction of the consumer important, in that it can impact on perceived acquisition utility, but overall pleasure with the price-promotion should be considered in relation to forming transaction utility, and thus intention for repeat behaviour or uptake of future price promotion offers.

One issue that causes some problems with regards to transaction utility theory and price promotions however is the fact that many consumers have become so used to experiencing price-based sales promotion that they are effectively conditioned to expect them (Tat & Schwepker 1998), and thus may not process pleasure or satisfaction signals in association with them.

2.3. Sales Promotion as a Promotion-Mix Element

Sales promotion is the function of marketing which seek to achieve given objectives by adding of extrinsic tangible value to a product or service. In consumer marketing, it is used to denote any below-the-line advertising expenditure and having close connection with in store advertising.

Sales promotions are those marketing activities other than the personal selling, advertising and publicity that stimulate consumer purchase and dealer effectiveness, e.g. display, shows, exhibitions, and non-recurrent selling efforts not in the ordinary routine.

Sales promotion deals basically with motivation and persuasion of a particular group to act in a desirable manner to the interest of the initiator. Aderemi (2003) defines persuasive communication as “communication, which takes place when a communicator consciously arranges his messages and choice of channels to have a calculated effect on the attitude or behavior of a specific audience. He further says that there are two types of communication instruments:

- (a). Inducements- these are positive motivators and concessions offered to the other party e.g. flattery, promise, rewards.
- (b). Threats- these are negative motivators e.g. boycott,

exposure, banishment.

Persuasive communication is used by the source in bringing about yielding. However, the message and how it is said do go a long way in determining whether the communication attracts attention or rejection.

2.4. The Persuasive Power of Sales Promotion

Cartwright's (2004) findings on mass persuasion reveal that any campaign designed for persuasive purposes must be concerned with cognitive and motivational structures. Cognitive structures refer to the opinions, beliefs and “facts” the individual holds. Motivational structures are the individual's needs, goals and values. Behaviors, he says, is determined by the momentary control over the individual's action by given features of the cognitive and motivational structures. The conclusion is that communication campaigns (including sales promotion) are not likely to have effect on intended targets, unless the effects being desired are in the same direction as those being stimulated by other influences. In other words, sales promotion as a stand-alone strategy may not be effective.

According to Hovland (2003), the effectiveness of the persuasive message depends on a number of factors. The organizers of sales promotion must take these factors into consideration when they are planning promotional campaigns. They are:

1. The credibility of source: The effectiveness of a communication is commonly assumed to depend to a considerable extent upon who delivers the message. The trustworthiness and the intentions of the communicator must not be in doubt.
2. The content of the communication: Motivating appeals that can arouse emotional states or which are capable of providing strong incentives for acceptance of the message by the audience must be used.
3. The type of arguments employed and their manner will influence what the audience thinks during exposure to the message and may have a marked effect on its acceptance or rejection.

Hovland (2003) also opined that source credibility is one of the factors that are more likely to be able to persuade. One of the factors that determine the effectiveness of communication therefore, is the credibility of the source.

3. Methodology

The data for this study were obtained from primary sources through the use of questionnaire. The target population

consisted of the subscribers of GSM operators, and bank customers in Lagos state whose actual number is indeterminate. From the study population, which covers Lagos state because it has the highest concentration of GSM subscribers and bank customers who may have participated in sales promos at one time or another or who may not have participated in any promo but are aware that GSM operators and banks run sales promos. From across the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Lagos state, a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents were selected for the study based on quota, purposive and accidental sampling procedures.

Data were analyzed with the use of both descriptive statistics such as tables, frequency distribution, and percentages, as well as inferential statistical techniques including regression analysis.

4. Results and Discussion of Findings

A total of one hundred and fifty (150) copies of the questionnaire were distributed out of which one hundred and twenty four (124), representing about 82.66%, were returned and analyzed.

Table 1. Sales Promotion and the Search for Information.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	28	22.6	15.0	15.0
	Little extent	26	21.0	23.0	38.1
	Undecided	38	30.6	33.6	71.7
	Large Extent	16	12.9	14.2	85.8
	Very Large Extent	16	12.9	14.2	100.0
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 1 shows what extent sales promo helps in information search. Out of the 124 respondents sampled, 28 (22.6%) did not search, 26(21.0%) searched to a little extent, 38(30.6%) were undecided, 16(12.9%) search to a large extent while

16(12.9%) searched to a very large extent.

This implies that majority of the customers sampled were either undecided on whether sales promos helped in information search or had had limited search for the brand.

Table 2. Sales Promotion and the Conviction to Continue to Patronize the brand.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	23	18.5	20.4	20.4
	Little extent	27	21.8	23.9	44.2
	Undecided	35	28.2	31.0	75.2
	Large Extent	20	16.1	17.7	92.9
	Very Large Extent	8	6.5	7.1	100.0
	Total		113	91.1	100.0
Missing	System	11	8.9		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 2 is on the influence of sales promo to continue to patronize the brand. 23(18.5%) of the respondents were not influenced, 27(21.8%) were influenced to a little extent, 35(28.2%) were undecided, 20(16.1%) were influenced to a large extent, while 8(6.5%) were influenced to a very large

extent. This shows that majority of the customers sampled were undecided on the influence of sales promo on continuous patronage while majority of those who could decide had not patronized the firm.

Table 3. Sales promotion and Respondents' Decision to Buy Firm's products.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	9	7.3	8.1	8.1
	Little extent	33	26.6	29.7	37.8
	Undecided	34	27.4	30.6	68.5
	Large Extent	27	21.8	24.3	92.8
	Very Large Extent	8	6.5	7.2	100.0
	Total		111	89.5	100.0
Missing	System	13	10.5		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 3 is on the influence of sales promo on purchase of firm's products. Out of the 124 respondents, 9(7.3%) were not influenced, 33(26.6%) were influenced to a little extent, 34(27.4%) were undecided, 27(21.8%) were influenced to a

large extent while 8(6.5%) were influenced to a very large extent. This means that majority of the customers could not confirm that sales promo influenced them to purchase the firm's products.

Table 4. Sales Promotion Campaigns as Reward for Consumers' Patronage.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	7	5.6	6.0	6.0
	Disagree	20	16.1	17.1	23.1
	Undecided	15	12.1	12.8	35.9
	Agree	37	29.8	31.6	67.5
	Strongly Agree	38	30.6	32.5	100.0
	Total	117	94.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	5.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 4 shows that out of the 124 respondents, 7(5.6%) strongly disagreed, 20(16.1%) disagreed, 15(12.1%) were undecided, 37(29.8%) agreed while 38(30.6%) strongly agreed with the notion that sales promotion is a reward for

customers. This shows that majority of the customers that were sampled strongly agreed that sales promo campaigns are done to thank customers.

Table 5. Sales promotion as a tool for Exploiting Unsuspecting Consumers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	6.5	7.0	7.0
	Disagree	9	7.3	7.8	14.8
	Undecided	29	23.4	25.2	40.0
	Agree	27	21.8	23.5	63.5
	Strongly Agree	42	33.9	36.5	100.0
	Total	115	92.7	100.0	
Missing	System	9	7.3		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 5 above is on whether or not sales promo is a tool for exploiting unsuspecting consumers. Of the 124 respondents, 8(6.5%) strongly disagreed, 9(7.3%) disagreed, 29(23.4%) were undecided, 27(21.8%) agreed, while 42(33.9%) strongly agreed. This implies that majority of the customers sampled

strongly agree that sales promotion is a tool for exploiting unsuspecting consumers, which will go a long way in shaping their believability of the promos, their future participation, and patronage of the brand.

Table 6. Reality of the Prizes Promised in Most Sales Promos.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	21.0	22.2	22.2
	Disagree	35	28.2	29.9	52.1
	Undecided	18	14.5	15.4	67.5
	Agree	31	25.0	26.5	94.0
	Strongly Agree	7	5.6	6.0	100.0
	Total	117	94.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	5.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 6 is on whether the prices promised in sales promos are moderate and realistic. 26(21.0%) of the 124 customers sampled strongly disagreed, 35(28.2%) disagreed, 18(14.5%) were undecided, 31(25.0%) agreed, while 7(5.6%) strongly agreed. This shows that majority of the customers disagreed that the prizes promised in most sales promos are moderate and realistic. This would further dampen their interest in participating in the promos.

Table 7. Impression of Prizes promised in Sales Promos.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	22	17.7	18.8	18.8
	Undecided	12	9.7	10.3	29.1
	Agree	23	18.5	19.7	48.7
	Strongly Agree	60	48.4	51.3	100.0
	Total	117	94.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	5.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 7 is to determine whether prizes promised are bogus and unrealistic. Out of the 124 respondents, 22(17.7%) disagreed, 12(9.7%) were undecided, 23(18.5%) agreed while 60(48.8%) strongly agreed. This shows that majority of the customers that were sampled strongly agreed that prizes promised are sometimes bogus and unrealistic.

Table 8. Transparency of Methods Used in Determining the Winners of SalesPromos.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	24	19.4	20.7	20.7
	Disagree	29	23.4	23.4	42.8
	Undecided	26	21.0	22.4	50.9
	Agree	9	7.3	25.0	75.9
	Strongly Agree	28	22.6	24.1	100.0
	Total	116	93.5	100.0	
Missing	System	8	6.5		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 8 is on whether the procedures for choosing the winners of sales promos are transparent. Out of the 124 respondents returned, 24(19.4%) strongly disagreed, 29(23.4%) disagreed, 26(21.0%) were undecided, 9(7.3%)

agreed, while 28 (22.6%) strongly agreed. This shows that majority of the customers disagreed that the method(s) used in determining the winners of most sales promos are transparent.

Table 9. Winners of the star prizes are most times pre-determined.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	11.3	12.0	12.0
	Disagree	8	6.5	6.8	18.8
	Undecided	31	25.0	26.5	45.3
	Agree	26	21.0	22.2	67.5
	Strongly Agree	38	30.6	32.5	100.0
	Total	117	94.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	5.6		
Total		124	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 9 is on whether winners of star prizes are pre-determined. Out of the 124 respondents that were returned, 14(11.3%) strongly disagreed, 8(6.5%) disagreed, 31(25.0%) were undecided, 26(21.0%) agreed, while 38(30.6%) disagreed. This implies that majority of the customers sampled strongly agreed that winners of the star prizes are most times pre-determined.

The following hypothesis was tested:

H_0 : Sales promotion has no significant effect on consumer's decision to purchase.

H_1 : Sales promotion has significant effect on consumer's decision to purchase.

Different aspects of the consumer buying behaviour such as awareness, information search, conviction and action were employed to test the hypothesis, which may be stated in an equation/ model format as follows:

$$Y=f(x)$$

Where y is the dependent variable and x is the independent variable.

Therefore,

$$PD=f(SP)$$

Where PD = Purchase Decision

SP = Sales Promo

This can further be expanded as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

Where

Y = Purchase Decision

β_0 = Intercept (Constant)

β_1 = Coefficient of x

X_1 = Sales Promo

ϵ = error term

Therefore,

$$PD = \beta_0 + \beta_1(SP)$$

The following tables present the outcome of the analysis:

Table 10. Model Summary^b.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.480 ^a	.231	.223	2.88554	2.213

Source: Field Survey, 2017

a. Predictors: (Constant), SALES PROMOTION

b. Dependent Variable: PURCHASE DECISION

Table 10 presents the summary of the model. The adjusted R^2 of 0.22 indicate that only 22% of the variation in the dependent variable is accounted for by explanatory variable. This means that sales promotion can account for only 22% of the variation in purchase decision. The remaining 78% is accounted for by other variables not included in this model.

Table 11. ANOVA^a.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	252.417	1	252.417	30.315	.000 ^b
	Residual	840.962	101	8.326		
	Total	1093.379	102			

Source: Field Survey, 2017

a. Dependent Variable: PURCHASE DECISION

b. Predictors: (Constant), SALES PROMOTION

Table 11 presents the ANOVA statistics which shows that the F statistics, (F1, 102, = 30.315P<0.05) is significant. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative is accepted, meaning that sales promotion has significant effect on consumer's decision to purchase.

Table 12. Coefficients^a.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	22.520	2.126		10.595	.000
	SALES PROMOTION	-.286	.052	-.480	-5.506	.000

Source: Field Survey, 2014

a. Dependent Variable: PURCHASE DECISION

Table 12 above contains the coefficients of the regression analysis. It shows that the constant value of 22.52 and the t value of 10.595 (P<0.05) were significant just as the coefficient of the dependent variable is -.480 and the t value of -5.506 (P<0.05), were also significant. However, the contribution of sales promo to consumer's decision to purchase is negative. This implies that as sales promos is increasingly used, consumers may purchase less of the firm's product(s).

5. Summary of Findings

Sales promotion practice is a very prominent feature in the service industry and consumers are very much aware of the

various sales promotional strategies practiced by service providers. The sales promotion strategy that consumers were mostly aware of was the contest and sweepstakes. There was a significant influence of sales promotion on consumer purchase decision. However, this influence is negative in nature. This implies that only an improvement in the sales promotion strategies will lead to a corresponding improvement in consumer buying behaviour towards the brand, at least in the short term.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, consumers are aware of the information around them concerning sales promotion but are always

skeptical in looking forward to participating in the sales promotions run by the service providers. Hence, in order to attract and influence the purchase decisions of the telecom consumers in today's competitive market, sales promotion should be carefully crafted and run in a way that is transparent and can instil confidence and believability in the minds of the consumers.

Recommendations

The following are recommended:

Service providers must use sales promotion sparingly and in conjunction with other promotional strategies as study has shown a possibility of consumers being negatively influenced by sales promotion activities.

Sales promotion has short term effect, and as a result service providers need to do a continuous follow up to establish long term relationship with new customers acquired during sales promotion period.

Service providers should engage in continuous research to correctly evaluate consumer expectations and plan to meet them to reduce consumer complaints particularly in the area of honoring promo prizes promised.

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