

# Evaluation of Sales Promotion Campaigns on Customer Patronage in Nigeria's Telecommunication Market



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## Abstract

This study evaluates sales promotion campaigns on subscribers' patronage of telecommunication products and services - and to what extent. It also seeks to examine whether communicative elements utilized in promotion campaigns help to stimulate subscriber patronage. Four research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The data for the study were collected through interviews with the Airtel Area Business Manager and a survey of 380 subscribers of the company's network in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Findings suggest a correlation between awareness of sales promotion campaigns and subscriber patronage. Below-the-line media offer more mileage than traditional mass media when sales promotion campaigns are used to create product awareness. The study concludes that sales promotion campaigns if properly executed, are environmental or conditioned stimuli that reinforce favourable behaviour towards the promoted product or service. It is recommended that Airtel and allied firms be creative in the combination of promotion mix that they present to the subscribers to stimulate patronage and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage over many other network service providers in the competing environment.

*Keywords: Sales promotion, campaigns, communicative elements, telecommunication, customer, patronage*

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## Introduction

Achieving marketing objectives in this highly competitive business environment will require a total integration of marketing communication tools capable of building brand image, sales, and relationships with consumers (Oke, 2017). Firms are seeing the need to grow their business by reducing costs, winning new customers, and retaining existing ones. These firms engage in marketing activities capable of earning them more mileage than a 60-second television commercial, radio jingle, or full/half-page print advertising. Promotional elements such as personal selling, direct or online marketing, public relations, publicity, and sales promotion, are usually deployed to boost patronage. A key marketing communication tool capable of boosting sales and attracting the attention of customers in the face of stiff competition is sales promotion. This marketing communication tool is the propeller that pushes products off the shelves and drives the sales numbers. It is necessary in positioning a brand and building its promise as well as personality, and image (Belch & Belch, 2001 in Oke, 2017).

Consumers, however, tend to be less concerned about a promise or brand image; they want the image to be accompanied by an offer or extra incentive (Spethmann, 1999). Sales promotion offers extra incentives, (i.e. bonuses or rewards) that are meant to stimulate the ultimate consumers or customers to buy a specific brand sooner, more frequently in large quantities, or to engage in some other behaviour that will benefit the manufacturer or retailer that is promoting the brand (Shimp, 2000). Companies tend to have realised that much of the real action in marketing occurs below the line. There is pressure to build brand image and sales that come from serving consumers. Companies want to see sales and profits, while consumers love their brands, but also want some extra incentives to buy them (Spethmann, 1999).

The availability of competing networks in Nigeria has increased competition in the telecommunication industry, motivating all telecom service providers to adopt assortments of promotional strategies to retain existing subscribers and woo new ones. As (Tseng, 2007) observes, when competition becomes fiercer, organisations deploy several strategies to keep loyal customers who might contribute long-term profit to them.

Airtel was the first telecommunication service provider to launch commercial Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) services in Nigeria on August 5, 2001. Since the launch, the company has gone through a series of name changes. From Econet Wireless at inception to Vodacom, V-Mobile, Celtel, to Zain before changing to its current name, Airtel. The company has also implemented many promotional campaigns aimed at selling its products in Nigeria. These campaigns appear to have integrated sales promotion activities such as coupon/text and win, competitions, cash rewards, gift items; price offs, reduced calls/SMS tariff, borrow and pay later, free MB data on every recharge, trade shows, point of purchase displays, celebrity endorsement, and events marketing/sponsorship, to increase awareness, sales, expand the target market and stimulate demand for the network.

This study investigates the extent to which the sales promotion activities of Airtel Nigeria have influenced its subscriber patronage, particularly in Akwa Ibom State. While several studies have investigated the effectiveness of sales promotion as a marketing tool (see: Chandon, Wansink & Laurent, 2000; Nijs, Dekimpe, Steenkamps, & Hanssens, 2001; Gilbert & Jackaria, 2002; Alvarez & Casielles, 2005; Bridges, Briesch & Yim, 2006; Delvecchio, Henard, & Freling, 2006; Luk & Yip, 2008; Estenban-Bravo, Mugica & Vidal-Sanz, 2009; Miguel, 2012), only a few (see: Owemero, 2007; Omotayo, 2011; Obasan &

Soyebo, 2012; Akande & Alo, 2015, Oke, Ihejirika, Benson and Samson, 2023) have focused on the Nigeria's telecommunication sector. Particularly, these few examined the influence of sales promotion on customer loyalty and the influence of service quality on customer satisfaction, with little or no attention paid to the influence of sales promotion on patronage.

Also lacking are studies on the influence of promotion communicative elements on customer patronage. However, this present study addresses these gaps by providing answers to the following questions: (a) what is the level of awareness of Airtel's subscribers regarding the various sales promotion campaigns of Airtel? (b) Through which medium/media do Airtel subscribers become aware of the sales promotion campaigns of Airtel? (c) To what extent do Airtel's sales promotion campaigns stimulate patronage of its products and services? (d) What are the other factors/communicative elements that contribute to subscriber patronage of Airtel products and services?

The following hypotheses have also been developed for the study:

H<sub>1</sub>: Patronage received by Airtel in Akwa Ibom State is significantly related to subscribers' awareness of the sales promotion campaigns of the company.

H<sub>2</sub>: Airtel in Akwa Ibom State gains greater patronage through sales promotion campaigns more than other factors/communicative elements.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This study is anchored on behaviour theory. Proposed by Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner in 1957, the theory suggests that changes in behaviour are the result of an individual's response to events (stimuli) that occur in the environment. Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008) observe that the theory is relevant to habit development and the conditions of learning. Pavlov and Skinner used classical conditioning and operant conditioning to explain the behavioural forces influencing human beings, especially the buying attitude. The classical conditioning was used to demonstrate that hungry dogs would always salivate in the presence of food. Pavlov conducted an experiment in which he rang a bell whenever he fed the dogs. Soon after, the sound of the bell alone made the dogs salivate. The dogs associated the sound of the bell (conditioned stimulus) with food (unconditioned stimulus), making the same response (salivation) to the bell alone without any food arriving.

Concerning sales promotion, it is the idea of association that underlies the concept of branding in modern marketing. Constant repetition can build associations between needs, products, and brands (Williams, 1989 Oke, 2017). Sales promotion uses classical conditioning in practice. A brand often associated with premium and contexts (for example Airtel sales promotion campaigns) may serve as the conditioned stimulus, the resulting response could be the development of favourable brand attitudes and hopefully, purchase behaviour.

Operant conditioning explains that behaviour is a function of its consequence. If behaviour is reinforced, it is more likely to recur. In terms of customers' purchase behaviour, marketers (Airtel) intend to stimulate consumers (subscribers) to buy a particular brand, and a premium, coupon, or price-off becomes the reinforcement tool. A coupon inside the product pack is a good example of operant conditioning. The coupon is the reward that the customer receives. The customer's response - buying the product - is reinforced by the coupon, which is the reward. Having reinforced the purchase

behaviour, it is likely to be repeated. The task of sales promotion, therefore, is to energize or stimulate specific needs to motivate the consumer toward purchase.

### **Understanding Sales Promotion**

In the competitive marketing environment, business enterprises employ sales promotion strategies to attract and retain customers. The sales promotion methods are often targeted at the consumers, wholesalers, and retailers - to stimulate demand. Quite strikingly, it is only consumers with repeat purchases that are profitable (Nagar, 2009). However, not every repeat purchase is linked to consumers' commitment to a brand. Yet, consumers' commitment is important for a repeat purchase. Sales promotion does not only reinforce the commitment of consumers, it also encourages repeat purchases (Nagar, 2009). Burnett (2002) explains sales promotion as the whole of marketing activities that make up the basic values of a product or service for a limited time and directly stimulate consumers' purchasing (for example coupons and product sampling), encouraging the middlemen to carry the product and/or promote the product or services (e.g. trade and spiff) or drive the efforts of the salespeople. Sales promotion has effects on various aspects of consumers' purchase decisions such as brand choice, purchase time, quantity, and brand switching (Nijs et al., 2001); consumers' sensitivity to price (Bridges et al., 2006) and influences buying decisions of customers (Awunyo-Victor, Ayimey & Gayibor, 2013).

There are price or monetary and non-monetary forms of sales promotion. The price or monetary sales promotion seeks to elicit short-term results (Yi & Yoo, 2011), encourage brand replacement, and induce product trials (Teunter, 2002). Non-monetary sales promotions are appropriate for long-term actions, such as the improvement of a brand's image, the enhancement of market share or strategic actions, adding excitement and value to brands, and may increase brand attractiveness (Teunter, 2002). These two types of sales promotion provide consumers with both utilitarian and hedonic benefits (Omotayo, 2011). Luk and Yip (2008) refer to utilitarian benefits as benefits derived from quality, convenience in shopping, and saving in time, effort, and cost. Hedonic benefits refer to value expression, exploration, entertainment, intrinsic stimulation, and self-esteem (Chandon et al., 2000). Monetary sales promotions are incentive-based and transactional and provide hedonic benefits but weaker utilitarian benefits (Kwok & Uncles, 2005). It could also lead to a negative impact on brand preference and trust (Manaled, Jose & Zacharia, 2007). This is because it can divert attention to financial incentives which may stimulate brand-switching behaviour, increase price sensitivity and make quality criterion less important (Pauwels et al., 2004). While Luk and Yip (2008) as well as Kwok and Uncles (2005) note that monetary promotions tend to be preferred to non-monetary promotions across all consumer goods - in terms of their ability to elicit purchase intentions -, Pauwels et al., (2004) argue that price or monetary promotion elicits temporary changes in brand and product choices and purchase quantity for established brands in mature markets. These temporary changes occur because up-market brands are associated with prestigious brands with a high level of reliability, a low level of risks, greater concerns for customers' needs, and stronger hedonic benefits (Luk & Yip, 2008).

Gedenk and Neslin (1999) argue that sales promotion seems to have a double-edged impact on consumer behaviour depending on the consumers' level of commitment. A committed consumer is less susceptible to sales promotion activities. But, a less

committed consumer is prone to sales promotion influence (Mariole & Elina, 2005). Some studies point to the positive effects of sales promotion to firms (Gilbert & Jackaria, 2002; Alvarez & Casielles, 2005; Esteban-Bravo, Mugica & Vidal-Sanz, 2009); whereas, others claim that promotions are harmful (Pauwels et al, 2004). The contradictions in the findings of these authors suggest a need to further evaluate the effectiveness of sales promotion and the extent of its influence on consumers' patronage.

### **Consumer Awareness**

Consumer awareness implies the alertness of a potential or current consumer to a particular product, service or company. It means a consumer being aware of his/her rights and responsibilities in the marketplace. Consumers who are aware of their rights and responsibilities make deliberate purchase decisions that protect them against exploitation by businesses (Rousseau & Venter, 1995). Awareness and knowledge are essential elements in changing the attitude and behaviour of consumers towards products which are required for growth in the market (Solar, Gil, & Sanchez, 2002). It is stated in the literature that consumer awareness and knowledge, as well as consumption of products, are significantly higher in developed countries rather than in developing countries (Abdolvand, Farzin, Asl, & Sadeghian, 2016). Many studies have indicated that consumers' awareness and knowledge impose significant influence on different types of consumer behaviour (see: Chartrand, 2005; Thomas & Mills, 2006; Guo & Meng, 2008; Donoghue & Deklerk, 2009; Farzin & Gholamiazizi, 2014). Consumers with comprehensive knowledge have a greater capacity for processing promotional messages (Ma & Glynn, 2005).

Brand awareness is a basic aspect of the entire brand knowledge system in consumers' minds, reflecting their ability to identify the brand under different conditions: the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which it does so (Keller, 2008). It is an important metric for new brands, whereas brand knowledge and brand opinion become relevant for well-established brands (Cifci, Ekinci, Whyatt, Japutra, Molinillo, & Siala, 2016). But even well-established brands face new category buyers, where awareness still needs to be established. Awareness is thus necessary for all brands, whether large or small in market share (Romaniuk, Wight & Faulkner, 2017). It increases the likelihood that the brand will be a member of the consideration set. It influences consumer decision-making by affecting brand associations that form the brand image (Keller, 2008); and encourages the perceived quality of the brand and its credibility due to lower perceived functional risk for the brand (Rubio, Oubina & Villasenor, 2013). Repeat brand exposure in stores as well as distribution contributes to the establishment of brand awareness, recall, and trial (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012).

Consumer awareness involves measuring sales, tracking consumer preferences, and determining a show of interest for the product or service. Whether you want to measure consumer awareness for a single product or a complete product line, Keller (2008) suggests three classical measures of brand awareness in a given product category: Spontaneous (unaided) awareness, top-of-mind awareness and aided awareness. In spontaneous awareness consumers are asked, without any prompting, to name the brands they know in the product category - in this case, the unaided awareness of a brand is the percentage of interviewees indicating they know that brand. In top-of-mind awareness (using the same question), the percentage of interviewees who name the

brand first is considered. However, in aided awareness, brand names are presented to interviewees – in this case, the aided awareness of a brand is the percentage of interviewees who indicate they know the brand (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012).

### **Communicative Elements**

Visual communication has become one of the potent tools in carrying out sales promotion campaigns. It involves the use of visuals to convey information via visual signs, symbols, text, drawings, personalities and pictures which provide communication with the social environment and build up connections with the audience – the target group (Hambree, 2008). Several communicative elements enhance consumers' attraction to the products or services being promoted. Such elements include colour, logo, trademark, endorsers (testimonials or ambassadors), text and visuals (pictures and illustrations), aimed at shaping the message into a complete communication experience that appeals to the senses as well as the mind. They contribute to promotional success - attention-getting, offering relevant appeal, creating a favourable impression of the product or company, and arousing the audiences' interest (Arens & Bovee, 1994).

**Colour** – Colour should be appropriate to the product class and to the prevailing culture of the area where the product or service is to be promoted (Arens, 2006).

**Logo** – is a graphic mark, emblem, or symbol commonly used by commercial enterprises and even individuals to make instant public recognition easier (Wheeler, 2006). It is used to create a positive impression about a product and company, give a product the uniqueness that separates it from its competitors, give product individuality and provide quick recognition at the point of purchase, and attract buyers' attention and stimulate their interest to buy the product (Newsom & Carrell, 2001).

**Trademarks** – include words, phrases, symbols designs, or a combination of all, which indicate the source of the products of one marketer, distinguishing it from those of others (United States Patent and Trademark Office, 2016).

**Visual information** – a visual could be an illustration, photograph or drawing of the product. It draws more attention and stimulates buying emotion (Wang & Chen, 2007).

**Endorsers** –when celebrities endorse products, consumers' attitudes or perceptions of quality are enhanced (Shimp, 2000).

### **Methodology**

The survey design was used for this study while interviews and copies of questionnaire were the data-gathering instruments. The questionnaire items were closed-ended, using variations of the Likert scale. The Area Business Manager, Airtel, Uyo Zonal Office, Akwa Ibom State, was also interviewed for the study. The study drew its sample from amongst Airtel subscribers in Akwa Ibom State, South-South, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State has a 2022 projected population of 6,497,967, residents. Airtel was the first telecommunication company in Nigeria to establish its presence in Akwa Ibom state, with its coverage extending to the entire 31 councils of the state. Airtel has unified subscribers' population data for the federation and not for each state. According to the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), the data stood at 369,800,000, as of the first quarter of 2023. Thus, with Nigeria's projected population of 223,800,000, as of 2023 and that of Akwa Ibom state of 6,497,967, the subscribers' population for Airtel in Akwa Ibom State was derived as follows:

National Airtel subscribers = 369,800.000

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Proportionately} &= \frac{223,800,000}{369,800,000} \\ &= 0.61 \end{aligned}$$

For Akwa Ibom state, Airtel subscribers' population figure was = =  
= 6497,967

The population of the study, therefore, was 6497,967 subscribers and the Area Business Manager, Airtel.

From this population figure, Yard's formula by Taro Yamane (Uzoagulu, 1998) was used in arriving at a sample size of 400 thus:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{where } n &= \text{sample size,} \\ N &= \text{population, and} \\ E &= \text{error limit (The standard is either 0.01 or 0.05).} \end{aligned}$$

Hence,

the 400 subjects who formed the sample size of the study were drawn using the multi-stage cluster sampling design. The state was clustered along three regions: Akwa Ibom North-West, Akwa Ibom East and Akwa Ibom South. Three towns, Ikot Ekpene, Uyo and Eket were purposively selected from the regions. In each of the towns, three areas were randomly selected, using a two-digit table of random numbers.

To administer the questionnaire to the respondents, the 400 copies were divided proportionately among the three towns selected, which resulted in Ikot Ekpene and Eket having 133 copies each, while Uyo had 134 copies. 133 copies of the questionnaire were further divided by the three selected areas in Ikot Ekpene and Eket which yielded 44 copies per area. Two of the selected areas in Uyo - Uniuoyo and Idongesit Nkanga Secretariat got 44 copies each, while Ewet Housing had 45 copies of the questionnaire. Accordingly, copies of the questionnaire were administered (through the help of four trained research assistants) to the respondents drawn from the selected areas in each of the towns who were subscribers to the studied network with active phone lines. The Area Business Manager, Airtel, was interviewed based on being in charge of the promotional programmes of the company.

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 380 copies were filled, returned and used for analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as tables, percentages, frequencies, and score ratings/weighted mean. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Co-efficient statistics to determine the correlations of variables.

## Results

**Table 1: Subscribers' awareness of Airtel sales promotion campaigns' activities**

Activities	SA	A	D	SD	WMS
Coupon/text & win	85	250	23	22	3.04
Free calls/SMS	235	79	42	24	3.38
Free gift items/cash rewards	162	172	23	23	3.24
Bonus/reduced calls tariff	210	116	30	24	3.34
Competitions/sweepstakes/contests	155	175	29	21	3.29
Price offs/discounts on sim-	210	125	24	21	3.37

cards/airtime recharges					
Borrow and pay later/free midnight calls	165	177	25	15	3.30
Free MB data on every recharge	164	194	15	7	3.35
Trade shows/events sponsorship/celebrity endorsement	155	166	39	20	3.20
<b>Total Mean Score</b>					<b>3.27</b>

In Table 2, respondents 3.27 were aware of all the sales promotion campaigns' activities listed.

**Table 2: Subscribers' levels of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns' activities**

Activities	Very Aware	Moderately Aware	Somewhat Aware	Slightly Aware	Can't Say	Weighted Mean
	n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	
Coupon/text & win	99(26%)	165(43%)	66(17%)	44(12%)	6(2%)	3.80
Free calls/SMS	57(15%)	171(45%)	92(24%)	52(14%)	8(2%)	3.57
Free gift items/cash reward	82(22%)	177(47%)	76(20%)	37(9%)	9(2%)	3.76
Bonus/reduced Calls tariff	96(25%)	169(44%)	72(19%)	41(11%)	2(1%)	3.83
Competition/ sweeps takes/contests	90(24%)	183(48%)	85(22%)	20(5%)	2(1%)	3.89
Price off/ discount on Sim cards/recharges made	84(22%)	187(49%)	86(23%)	19(5%)	4(1%)	3.86
Borrow & pay later	90(24%)	157(41%)	71(19%)	56(14%)	6(2%)	3.70
Free MB data on every recharge	66(17%)	161(42%)	96(25%)	50(13%)	7(2%)	3.60
Trade Shows/events sponsorship/celebrity endorsement	100(26%)	77(20%)	57(15%)	133(35%)	13(3%)	3.31

In Table 3, the weighted mean scores suggest that respondents had moderate levels of awareness of the various sales promotion campaigns' activities except in trade shows/events sponsorship/celebrities' endorsements, which scored 3.31, suggesting subscribers' 'somewhat aware' level of awareness of this activity of the sales promotion campaigns.

**Table 3: Subscribers’ level of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns via the media**

SR	Television/ Radio		Newspaper/ Magazine		Friend/Phone Line		Social Media/ Websites		Fliers/Posters/ Billboards	
	Distribution		Distribution		Distribution		Distribution		Distribution	
	X	%	X	%	X	%	X	%	X	%
VA	92	24	89	23	84	23	96	25	95	25
MA	163	43	133	35	169	44	175	46	174	46
SoA	60	16	76	20	76	20	55	15	66	17
SA	37	10	64	17	31	8	36	9	26	7
CS	28	7	18	5	20	5	18	5	19	5
TT	380	100	380	100	380	100	380	100	380	100
<b>R</b>	<b>3.67</b>		<b>3.56</b>		<b>3.70</b>		<b>3.78</b>		<b>3.79</b>	

Key: VA= Very Aware; MA = Moderately Aware; SOA= Somewhat Aware; SA = Slightly Aware; CS = Can’t Say; TT= Total; R= Decision from Rating.

In the table above, the score ratings of 3.56 and above suggest respondents’ moderate level of awareness via the media listed.

**Table 4: Subscribers’ level of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns via non-traditional media**

SR	Seminars/ workshops		Outbound team/ entertainment shows		Events sponsorship/ distribution outlets		Customer service/ gift items	
	Distribution		Distribution		Distribution		Distribution	
	X	%	X	%	X	%	X	%
VA	85	22	91	24	89	24	99	26
MA	145	38	158	42	161	42	183	49
SoA	100	26	83	22	76	20	70	18
SA	29	8	30	8	32	8	12	3
CS	21	6	18	4	22	6	16	4
TT	380	100	380	100	380	100	380	100
<b>R</b>	<b>3.64</b>		<b>3.72</b>		<b>3.69</b>		<b>3.88</b>	

The data in Table 5 show that respondents had moderate levels of awareness via the non-traditional media.

**Table 5: Success of sales promotion campaigns in stimulating subscribers’ patronage of Airtel network.**

Activities	Very Great Extent	Great Extent	Some Extent	A Little Extent	Very Little Extent	Weighted Mean
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Coupon/text and win	81(21%)	176(46%)	64(17%)	37(10%)	22(6%)	3.68
Free calls/SMS	93(25%)	182(48%)	52(14%)	33(8%)	20(5%)	3.78
Free gift items/cash reward	73(19%)	168(44%)	84(22%)	41(11%)	14(4%)	3.64

Bonus/reduced calls tariff	110(29%)	191(50%)	54(14%)	17(5%)	8(2%)	3.99
Competition/sweepstakes/contests	115(30%)	186(49%)	63(17%)	11(3%)	5(1%)	4.04
Price offs/ discounts on sim card/ recharges made	67(18%)	150(39%)	95(25%)	59(16%)	9(2%)	3.54
Borrow and pay later/free midnight calls	185(49%)	98(26%)	60(16%)	30(7%)	7(2%)	4.11
Free MB data On Every Recharge Made	100(26%)	183(48%)	61(16%)	24(6%)	12(4%)	3.88
Trade Shows/ Event Sponsorship/Celebrity Endorsement	92(24%)	178(47%)	70(20%)	23(6%)	13(3%)	3.79

In Table 6, respondents indicated that, to a great extent, the various sales promotion campaigns' activities stimulated their patronage of Airtel network.

**Table 6: Factors/communicative elements which also contributed to patronage**

Factors/Elements	SA	A	D	SD	WMS
Availability of the network	135	200	23	22	3.17
Moderate tariff charges	130	129	67	64	3.08
Clarity of the network	140	145	50	45	3.00
Friends' influence	150	146	45	39	3.07
Logo	155	175	29	21	3.22
Photograph/ Illustration	125	145	59	51	2.90
Colour	145	165	40	32	3.12
Celebrity Endorsement	144	160	39	37	3.08
Company Slogan	150	163	42	25	3.15
Trademark	135	151	48	45	2.98
<b>Total Mean Score</b>					<b>3.07</b>

The data in the Table show that logo (3.22), availability of the network (3.17), company slogan (3.15), and colour (3.12), also contributed to subscribers' patronage of the Airtel network in Akwa Ibom State.

### Hypotheses Testing

To test the hypotheses, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Co-efficient statistics were used to determine the relationship between the tested variables. Hypothesis 1 predicted that the patronage received by the Airtel network in Akwa Ibom State was significantly related to subscribers' awareness of the sales promotion campaigns of the company. The result largely supports this assertion; the calculated Pearson's correlation analysis ( $r=0.77$ ;  $p=0.666$ ) showed a significant relationship between the patronage received by the Airtel network in Akwa Ibom State and the subscribers' awareness of the company's sales promotion campaigns.

The second hypothesis predicted that Airtel sales promotion campaigns yield patronage more significantly than other factors/communicative elements in Akwa Ibom

State. The result affirmed this prediction, as the calculated Pearson's correlation analysis ( $r=2.786$ ;  $p=0.666$ ) showed that sales promotion campaigns induced greater patronage than other factors/communicative elements.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The respondents' awareness and levels of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns of the Airtel network are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The respondents with an overall weighted mean score of 3.27 had awareness of all of the sales promotion campaigns' activities of the company. To determine the respondents' level of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns, their responses were rated based on their awareness of the activities of the campaigns. Results showed that respondents were moderately aware of the various activities of the sales promotion campaigns, except in trade shows/events sponsorship/celebrities' endorsements, in which they showed a 'somewhat awareness' level, with a rating score of 3.31. Respondents' levels of awareness via the media of communication used for the sales promotion campaigns were also evaluated and the result indicated that the respondents' moderate levels of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns came through the traditional, social, and non-traditional media used for the campaigns. These are in line with Csiszar's (2009) five ways to increase brand awareness: leverage the web, create a social media presence, advertise using traditional methods, sponsor public events and display the product prominently in stores. Brand exposure in stores improves consumers' recognition and recall of the brand (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012) as well as influences consumer buying decision-making (Keller, 2008).

The Area Business Manager of Airtel, during an interview, stated that "the subscribers had a considerable level of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns and that this was measured by assessing the increase in new subscribers, usage of the service or product, response to the promotion tools, expansions in subscribers' database," which is consistent with Keller's (2008) methods for measuring brand's awareness. The study, thus, established that subscribers in Akwa Ibom State had a moderate level of awareness of the various sales promotion campaigns of Airtel.

In Table 3, respondents with a rating score of 3.67 became aware of the sales promotion campaigns via television and radio; 3.56 became aware through newspapers and magazines, 3.70 via friends and phone lines; 3.78 via social media and websites; and those with a score rating of 3.79 gained awareness via fliers, posters and billboards. In Table 4, awareness via attendance in seminars and workshops recorded a score rating of 3.64, awareness via outbound team and entertainment shows had 3.72; events sponsorship and distribution outlets received a score rating of 3.69; awareness via customer service and gift items recorded 3.88.

The results of this study suggest that respondents' awareness through friends'/phone lines, social media/websites, flyers/posters/billboards; outbound team/entertainment shows, events sponsorship/distribution outlets, gift items as well as customer service were higher than the traditional media of broadcast and print. According to the Airtel Area Business Manager, "These non-conventional media were frequently used for the sales promotion campaigns because the target audience was mainly young adults." He noted that "Airtel had consistently engaged in sales promotion campaigns to win the patronage of subscribers and had done so using the media/forms already identified." Therefore, regarding hypothesis 1, there is a

correlation between patronage received by Airtel and subscribers' awareness of the firm's products and services through sales promotion campaigns.

The study also examined the extent to which sales promotion campaigns could stimulate respondents' patronage of the Airtel network in Nigeria. The scales/ratings created for this were 'very great extent', 'great extent', 'some extent', 'a little extent', and very 'little extent'. The data presented in Table 6, as well as the interview responses, provided the answer to this question.

Respondents' opinions on the extent to which sales promotion campaigns stimulated their patronage of the Airtel network could be rated as 'to a great extent'. This scale had the highest percentage of responses. The responses received a rating score of 3.50 and above, which suggests that respondents' patronage of the network, to a great extent, was stimulated by the company's sales promotion campaigns. The Area Business Manager, Airtel, stated that "sales promotion campaigns impacted significantly on subscribers' patronage of the network in Nigeria, and especially in Akwa Ibom State." Furthermore, he argued that "sales promotion campaigns built the company's brands." In other words, sales promotion campaigns influenced the patronage of the network amongst subscribers in Akwa Ibom state. In line with this finding, Pavlov and Skinner's (1957) behaviour theory, in Kazmi and Batra (2006), used classical conditioning and operant conditioning to explain the behavioural forces influencing human beings, especially buying attitudes. Sales promotion campaigns (as Airtel's) often associated with price-offs and contests, may serve as the conditioned stimulus, and the resulting responses could be excitement in consumers (subscribers), and the development of favourable brand attitude and hopefully purchase behaviour. This result also affirms Nijs et al's (2001) position that, sales promotion has effects on many aspects of consumers' purchase decisions, such as brand choice, purchase time, quantity and brand switching. However, Gedenk and Neslin (1999) argue that sales promotion seems to have a double-edged impact on consumer behaviour, depending on the consumers' level of commitment. A committed consumer is less susceptible to sales promotion ventures; a less committed consumer is easily moved by sales promotion activities (Mariolle & Elina, 2005). Sales promotion influences the buying decisions of customers (Awunyo-Victor, Ayimey & Gayibor 2013).

This study also identified other factors/communicative elements which could contribute to patronage such as availability of the network, moderate tariff charges, clarity of the network and influence of friends. Others are logos, photographs/illustrations, colour, celebrities' endorsements, company slogans and trademarks. The data in Table 6 showed that logo 3.22, availability of the network 3.17, company slogan 3.15, colour, 3.12, moderate tariff charges 3.08, and celebrities' endorsement 3.08, were identified as factors/communicative elements which also influenced and contributed to subscribers' patronage of the Airtel network in Akwa Ibom State. Friends' influence, trademarks and photographs/illustrations also stimulated, respondents' patronage in a small measure.

These findings reinforce Hambree's (2008) observation that "the use of visual communication to convey information through visual signs, symbols, drawings, personalities and pictures, provides communication with the social environment and builds up connections with the audience - the target group" (p.145). These communicative elements shape the message into a complete communication that appeals to the senses as well as the mind; contributing to promotional success (Arens & Bovee,

1994). The company's logo influence on respondents' patronage, might be due to its use to create a positive impression about a product, service and company; it gives a product the uniqueness that separates it from competitors; provides quick recognition at the point of purchase, stimulates interest to buy the product or service; and also promotes instant public recognition (Newsom & Carrell, 2001; Wheeler, 2006). The Area Business Manager affirmed that "these communicative elements made the company unique and contributed to the patronage of the network." However, the tested hypothesis showed that Airtel gained greater patronage through sales promotion, more than these factors/communicative elements.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

This study evaluated sales promotion campaigns on subscribers' patronage of Airtel Nigeria Limited, a leading telecommunication services provider in Nigeria. It was found that subscribers in Akwa Ibom State showed a moderate level of awareness of the sales promotion campaigns. The awareness was gained through various media of communication: traditional, social, and non-traditional. Below-the-line media offer more mileage than traditional mass media when sales promotion campaigns are used to create product awareness. Patronage received by Airtel correlated with subscribers' awareness of the sales promotion campaigns. Sales promotion campaigns to a great extent stimulated subscribers' patronage of the network in Akwa Ibom State. Airtel received greater patronage via sales promotion campaigns, more than other factors/communicative elements such as logo, availability of the network, company slogan, and colour. However, these factors/communicative elements also contributed to patronage. The study concludes that sales promotion campaigns if properly executed, are environmental or conditioned stimuli that can reinforce favourable behaviour towards the promoted product or service. It is recommended that Airtel and allied firms intensify the use of broadcast/print media in their sales promotion campaigns and be creative in the combination of promotion mix that they present to the subscribers to stimulate patronage and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage over many other network service providers in the competing environment.

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