

THE ROLE OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE SALES OF BEVERAGE (TEA) IN JOS METROPOLIS OF PLATEAU STATE

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Abstract

The study was on the role of persuasive communication in the sales of beverages (tea) in Jos metropolis, Plateau State. The purpose of the study was to ascertain whether the use of persuasive communication as a promotional strategy could lead to a significant increase in the quantity of beverages sold. The study was anchored on social judgment theory. The population was all the tea makers (Maisha) located at major bus terminals in Jos metropolis. The sample was 120 tea makers in the study area. The study adapted the descriptive survey. Data were collected by means of a self-designed questionnaire tagged persuasive communication and beverages sales questionnaire (PECABSQ) with test-retest reliability of 0.79. The mean and Chi-square were used for data analysis. Results showed that, Milo is the most widely sold tea item in Jos metropolis. Also, the use of persuasive communication was found to improve the quantity of sales of beverages. The study also identified the challenges of using persuasive communications such as competition and difficulty in convincing customers. The study recommended among other things that marketing managers should train their sales agents on the use of persuasive communication weapons to achieve maximum results. The study concluded that the use of persuasive communication significantly impacted on the sale of beverages (tea) in the study area.

Keywords: Beverages, Consumers, Persuasive Communication, Sales, and Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world of business, competition is fierce. Therefore, many manufacturers are daily confronted with the activities of competitors which tend to affect their market share and profit ratio. The essence of competition is to break the power of monopoly (Ebel, 2014).

In the midst of strict competitions, manufacturers (through the help of their marketing managers) device avenues of improving the quantity of their sales or patronage of their companies' products. Managers of companies adopt many strategies to do this. One of such strategies is persuasive communication (PC).

Persuasive communication (PC) is a marketing strategy where by consumers are convinced (through word of mouth, verbal descriptions, advertising and captivating packaging) to patronize a particular brand or product and abandon similar brands (Nnaka, 2012). The main purpose of PC is to alter the belief system and confidence customers may have had about a particular brand or product so as to accept the new brand being presented. Persuasive communication uses oral, or verbal descriptive, convincing words, descriptions

and explanations (sometimes with demonstrations) by marketers of a product to persuade consumers to take positive decision about their product at the detriment of other competing brands (Gabriel, 2013). The technique seeks to make available information and to determine cognitive change. Specifically, the objective is to create product/service awareness, knowledge, and change of action/attitude.

In our modern day, persuasive communication can be carried out through many forms. Greene (2014) documented that practical demonstration, advertising, use of social media, market survey, symposia and internet are platforms which companies could utilize as vehicles for persuasive communication. In another dimension, persuasive communication could be an avenue for consumers to express their pleasure or otherwise about a product, service or a process. The whole essence of PC is to gain customers' confidence on a product so as to make huge sales through patronage (Heinz, 2013).

Persuasive communication is a two-way process with the customers as active seekers of information. The communication host, on the other hand, seeks to create and sustain brand awareness, increase brand market shares, build brand reputation/image, develop new markets, persuade prospects to switch patronage, sustain sales of cash cows of businesses, change organizational culture or implement a change project e.t.c.

Whatever the purpose of Persuasive communication, according to Ackerson (2013), the technique uses four elements to deliver results namely structural communication, story telling, copy writing and neuromarketing. This means that PC must be based on planned and controlled conversation/dialogue, a compelling and engaging storyline that evokes emotional responses, with the choice of right diction, phrases, captions, headings, product descriptions. Finally, the application of appropriate visual cues to activate/trigger the desired moods and effects on the target audience is an effective psychological weapon to produce the desired results.

Similarly, as Basu (2016) argues for Persuasive communication to influence positively, it must adopt the following weapons:

- i. **Reciprocation:** This means, the communicator must oblige customers emotionally by offering them something
- ii. **Commitment:** The communicator must seek to secure a commitment from his audience and then build on it.
- iii. **Social Proof:** Concerned with testimony of peers
- iv. **Authority:** The communicator must be perceived to be an authority, an expert on the subject matter.
- v. **Liking:** The communicator must be friendly, courteous, and generally likeable/attractive.
- vi. **Scarcity:** The product/service, offer or time must be perceived to be scarce to have value.

In Jos metropolis, beverages especially tea is one of the most consumed brand of food due to the weather condition of the area which is most times cold. Also, tea is ideal for both children, youths and the aged. In Nigeria, there are many manufacturers of beverages which include, Cadbury Plc, Nestle foods Plc, UAC Food and others. Each of these manufacturers need to compete with fellow manufacturers in the open market to sell their products. The level of patronage of a product therefore depends on the extent to which manufacturers or their representatives are able to convince or win the confidence of

customers (Bray, 2012). Every manufacturer depends on sales to make progress through profits. When sales are low (due to poor patronage), companies are usually at the risk of fatality. This underscores the importance of persuasive communication in marketing (Haruna, 2018).

Persuasive communication uses human psychology to develop techniques to market products or services (Anderson, 2017). In this case, it specifically applies to the promotion aspect of the marketing mix that builds on a customer's impulsive behavior to lead them to purchase (Brooks, 2018). In terms of internet commerce, persuasive communication includes web page design. Again, applying human psychology, PC focuses on the part of the decision-making process that is consciously controlled using elements such as layout, copy and typography in conjunction with the right promotional messages. This encourages website visitors to follow pre-planned pathways on the website and take specific actions rather than giving them free reign of choice on how to interact with the website.

Invariably, PC strategies work on the minds of customers. The mind is therefore constantly being pulled in different directions and the bigger influencer usually determines the processes that the brain prioritizes based on the best persuader. Understanding how the brain works enables brands to become a key influence on customers' minds. This is important because all marketers want customers to take certain actions. Thus, they use PC to guide their thoughts and create emotional responses favourable to their products.

Adole (2018) argued that effective PC has the capacity to boost sales when customers' confidence is won. On the contrary, if not used effectively may lose meaning leading to low patronage. In Jos, different brands of tea are on sale in the market. Against this background, it is necessary to examine how the use of PC affects the way some consumers react to a product (tea). Could the use of PC make consumers to change to a particular brand of beverage or not? In the same vein, it is worthwhile to examine whether the use of PC could lead to more sales of beverages and improve companies' gains. All of these are the points of interest of the present study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As far back as 1930s, Dale Carnegie was concerned about the problem of how to persuade others in the book titled, "How to win friends and influence people". The rise of the mass media coupled with the imperatives of opinion manipulation for political and business purposes, have heightened concerns and interest in the actual role of persuasive communication in attitude change including brand switching.

Today, the avalanche of competition in the business land scope of especially consumer goods have made the search for continuous insights into the power of persuasive communication more compelling, (Kilbourne, 1999). The dynamics of customer behaviour and the daily inundation of competing messages of persuasion and influence compound the challenges of effectively manipulating the opinions of customers towards the desired direction.

Even though, Tea, is a common drink for both adults and children in Nigeria, it is a consumer product with different brands and substitutes. The profound competition in the beverage industry in Nigeria including Jos metropolis makes it important to carry out a study to gain insights into the level of influence of persuasive communication as a marketing technique on customer patronage of Tea products. The problem of the study

therefore is to ascertain whether persuasive communication is a significant influencer of brand loyalty.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on attitude theories that postulate the underlying principles and activators of positive attitude changes on the part of target audiences of persuasive communication.

There are several functional theories concerned with attitude manipulation which include:

- i) Utilitarian (i.e. concerned with reward and punishment)
- ii) Value Expressive (i.e. how a person views himself or herself and how buying a product can change a person's mood or values)
- iii) Ego Defensive theory (i.e. buying to deflect or reinforce ego)
- iv) Functional Theory (concerned with knowledge when dealing with a new product) etc (Solomon, 2012).

However, this study utilizes social judgment theory created by Sherif and Associates in 1961. Although, the theory was originally based on cognitive process, it has many implications for marketing campaign purposed to persuade or influence target markets.

Specifically, the theory contends that knowing a person's attitudes on subjects can provide the marketing campaign planner with clues about how to approach a persuasive effort.

Social judgment theory suggests that people make judgments or evaluations concerning promotional content from the premise of their stance or anchors on the subject matter at stake. The authors of the theory consequently identified three categories or levels of attitudes, which include:

- i) Latitude of Acceptance (i.e. all those ideas that a person finds acceptable)
- ii) Latitude of Rejection (all the ideas the person finds unacceptable)
- iii) Latitude of non-commitment (Ideas for which the person has no opinion) neither reject or accept).

Therefore, a person's response to persuasive campaign is a function of his/her stance on the subject matter. Other important parameters include the ego of the recipients of the persuasive marketing campaign.

The decision to adopt Sherif's social judgment theory for this study is because of its acknowledgement that persuasion is most effective when a communicator builds on existing values and beliefs of its target audience. This means that the attempt to influence the target audience towards a desired direction must be based on deep insight into their value and belief system to achieve maximum results. It is therefore often difficult, if not impossible to radically transform an existing culture.

These principles of the theory are relevant, revealing and instructive. This means that persuasive communication purposed to influence target market must be planned/systematic and situated within parameters consistent with the value/belief system of the target audience. Therefore, audience research is key and provides the pathway on how to approach the persuasive communication effort. This study is an effort to validate, reject or modify the principles of this theory.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is designed to:

1. Find out which brand of beverage most tea makers buy in Jos metropolis.
2. Find out if PC will lead to more sales of tea in the study area.
3. Ascertain the challenge of using PC to boost beverage sales in Jos.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the influence of persuasive communication on the sale of beverage in Jos metropolis?
2. How does the use of PC influence the sales of beverages (tea) in Jos metropolis?
3. What are the challenges associated with the use of PC in the sales of beverages in Jos metropolis?

HYPOTHESES

1. Persuasive communication has no significant influence on the brand of beverages purchased by tea sellers in Jos metropolis.
2. Persuasive communication has no significant influence on the quantity of beverages sold in Jos metropolis.
3. The challenges of persuasive communication have no significant influence on the quantity of sales of beverage in the study area.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant to marketers, companies' managers, customers, advertising agencies and the general public who will gain from the data, findings and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Jos, Plateau state. It was a cross-sectional survey which collected data by means of a structured four- point questionnaire titled "Persuasive Communication on Beverages Sale Questionnaire" (PECABSQ). The questionnaire (PECABSQ) was well-structured by the researcher and validated by two senior lecturers from Marketing Department of the University of Jos. The test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was found to be 0.79 which is high enough for a research instrument. The mean was used for the research questions while Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses. The study population was all the men selling tea (popularly referred to as Maisha) at the four main bus terminals in Jos. There are a total of 120 tea spots at the four major bus terminals in Jos; hence the population was 120. In the same vein, due to the small size of the population (120), all the tea sellers were used, hence there was no sampling. The benchmark mean was 2.50 which is the mean of the scale. Due to some communication barriers, the researcher used pidgin English and Hausa language to interpret some of the items of the questionnaire to some respondents.

RESULTS

Research Question One: which brand of beverage do most tea makers in Jos metropolis buy?

Table 1: Most Purchased Tea by Tea Sellers in Jos Metropolis

S/NO	Brand of Beverage (Tea)	Mean	Remark
1	Bournvita	3.50	Accepted
2	Ovaltine	3.20	Accepted
3	Milo	3.95	Accepted
4	Dano-chocolate	2.50	Accepted
5	Lipton	2.30	Rejected
6	Toptea	2.25	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

Data in table 1 show that most tea sellers in Jos metropolis use Milo which has a mean response of 3.95. Other most purchased beverage are Bounvita (3.50) and Ovaltine (3.20). However, Lipton (2.30) and Toptea (2.30) were rejected as their mean scores are below the bench mark (2.50). It could then be deduced from the above that Milo is the most purchased beverage by tea sellers in Jos metropolis.

Research question two: How does persuasive communication influence the sale of beverage (tea) in Jos metropolis?

Table 2: Influence of Persuasive Communication on the Sale of Beverage in Jos Metropolis

S/N	Statement	Mean	Remark
1	Some beverage company marketers do visit our shop every time to check how much we use their product	3.30	Accepted
2	Most of them do market survey to find out what people say about their products	2.75	Accepted
3	Those whose products selling well do give discount on purchase	3.50	Accepted
4	Some beverage companies agents do promotion sales and give awards to best sellers	3.42	Accepted
5	Highest sellers are given awards, so they try to sell more	3.86	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

The above data show that persuasive communication helps to promote sales by giving awards to highest sellers (3.36) and giving of discount on purchases to highest sellers (3.50). Also all the items on table 2 have mean responses above 2.50, hence all the items are influential. This means that persuasive communication influences the sales of beverages (tea) in the study area.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges associated with the use of persuasive communication in the sale of beverage in Jos metropolis?

Table 3: Challenges of Persuasive Communication on the Sale of Beverages

S/N	Statement	Mean	Remark
1	Some customers do not want to change to another brand of products	3.00	Accepted
2	Some customers are hard to convince	2.86	Accepted
3	Most people go for cheaper brands no matter what they hear	3.55	Accepted
4	There is a lot of competition in the market with other brands	3.42	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

Table 3 reveals that competition with other brands of products (3.62) is the main enabler of persuasive communication in the sales of beverages. Others include unwillingness to change to other brands by customers (3.00) and the issue of the cost (3.35). It could be seen that all the four statements have mean responses accepted.

Hypotheses One: Persuasive communication has no significant influence on the brand of beverages purchased by customers in Jos metropolis.

Table 4: Chi-Square Summary of the Influence of Persuasive Communication on the Brand of Beverages Purchased in Jos Metropolis

Variables	Fo	Fe	Fo fe	(fo – fe) ²	(fo – fe) ²	X	Df	X ² _{cal}	Tab le
Bournvita	30	20	10	100	05				
Ovaltine	20	20	0	0	00				
Milo	50	20	30	900	45	0.05	5	64.1	13.4 4
Dano	10	20	-10	100	05				
Lipton	6	20	-14	196	9.8				
Toptea	04	20	-16	256	12.8				
					ΣX²= 64.1				

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

Data in table 4 show that calculated X² value of 64.1 is greater than 13.44 at 0.05 level of significance at a degree of freedom of 5, hence the null hypotheses is rejected. This means that persuasive communication has significant influence on the brand of beverages purchased in Jos metropolis.

Hypothesis Two: Persuasive communication has no significant influence on the quantity of sales of beverages in Jos metropolis.

Table 5: Chi-square summary of the influence of persuasive communication on the quantity of sales of beverage

Variable	Fo	Fe	Fo fe	(fo – fe) ²	(fo – Fe) ² /fe	α	Df	X ² _{cal}	Table X ²
Pers Com.	94	60	34	116	19.433				
						0.05	1	38.866	3.84
Quantity of Sales	26	60	-34	1166	19.433				

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

Evidences in table 3 show that calculated X² value 38.866 is greater than table X² value of 3.84 at 0.05 level of significance with a degree of freedom of 1, hence there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The study concludes therefore that there is a significant influence of persuasive communication on the quantity of sales of beverages in Jos metropolis.

Hypothesis Three: The challenges of persuasive communication have no significant influence on the quantity of sales of beverages in Jos metropolis.

Table 6: Chi-Square Summary of the Influence of Challenges of Persuasive Communication on the Quantity of Sales of Beverages in Jos Metropolis

Variables	Fo	Fe	Fo fe	(fo – fe) ²	(fo – Fe) ²	X	Df	X ² _{cal}	Table X ²
Challenges of PC	82	60	22	484	8.066				
						0.05	1	16.13	3.84
Quantity of sales	38	60	22	484	8.066				
$\Sigma X^2 = 16.132$									

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

Table 6 shows that calculated X² 16.132 is greater than table X² of 3.84 at 0.05 level of significant at a degree of freedom of 1, hence there is enough reason to reject the null hypothesis. This leads to a conclusion that the challenges of persuasive communication have significant influence on the quantity of sales of beverages in Jos metropolis.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the role of persuasive communication on the sales of beverages in Jos metropolis. The study was designed to ascertain whether the use of persuasive communication by marketers of beverages (tea) has any influence on the quantity of beverage sold. The widely purchased brand of tea (beverage) is Milo. This means that most tea sellers in Jos buy mostly Milo tea (a product of Nestle Foods Nig Plc). The reasons may be due to its captivating packaging and colour (which have the propensity of attracting the attention of customers). Ibrahim (2012) noted that use of fancy and colourful labels, packs and containers to package a product may add value to it as most people (especially children and young adults) are attracted by bright colours. It could be that the marketers of Milo have won the confidence of customers through packaging and possibly incentives to customers.

In the same manner, it was gathered that the use of persuasive communication influences the sales of beverages. This result is not surprising because Adole (2018) notes that when persuasive communication is well-applied, it has the capacity to improve sales of a product. This follows from the ability of the marketers of a product to convince customers or consumers on why their brand of beverage is better than all others. In doing this, the marketers or sales agents must choose their words carefully in order to get the psyche of customers to the side of their products. Persuasive communication is mainly meant to change people's ideas, beliefs or notions about a product. When the marketers are able to work on the minds of consumers, such companies will witness an increase in their sales due to high patronage.

Some challenges associated with persuasive communication identified included difficulty in convincing some customers. In our world today, it is difficult to convince customers to switch brands. This could be because of long use of a particular brand of products. Another reason may also be connected with the high rate of fake products in the open market or existing value/belief system. There are many adulterated products sold in the market, as a result, most consumers find it difficult to change to other brands after being accustomed to a particular brand of product. It will take a well-planned effective persuasive communication to make customers think otherwise about such a product (Gabriel, 2013).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Tea sellers in Jos metropolis buy mostly Milo tea (beverage)
2. The use of persuasive communication (PC) helped to increase quantity of beverages sold in Jos metropolis.
3. Some of the challenges of using persuasive communication in sales of beverages include difficulty in convincing customers, presence of competitors, pre-existing values/beliefs of customers e.t.c..

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed the positive role of persuasive communication in the sales of beverages (tea) in Jos metropolis. The study affirmed strongly that the use of persuasive communication (as a marketing strategy) resulted to a significant increase in the sales of beverage (tea) in the study area. From the results obtained, it was gathered that the widely consumed beverage (tea) in Jos metropolis is Milo from Nestle Food Nig. Plc. Therefore there is a positive correlation between use of persuasive communication and the quantity

of sales of beverages in the study area. The study therefore concluded that persuasive communication is an effective competition strategy in the sale of consumer goods. Finally, some of the challenges associated with persuasive communication identified included, competition and difficulty in convincing customers among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the findings from the study, the following actions are recommended;

1. Tea sellers in Jos were found to mostly buy Milo tea, a product of Nestle food Plc. It is recommended that other companies producing tea adopt effective persuasive communication strategies and market survey to deal with the challenges of competition in the consumer market.
2. Since it was found that persuasive communication positively influence quantity of sales of beverages (Tea), it is recommended that manufacturers of consumer products should invest in the training of their sales force on best practices and use of persuasive communication weapons to assure their survival and prosperity.
3. Some challenges associated with the use of persuasive communication were identified. Therefore marketing managers should adopt creative devices including pulling and push strategies in the value chain to compete effectively in the study area.
4. It is further recommended that persuasive communication campaigns must be anchored on audience research and proper planning.

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