
EFFECT OF SALES PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES ON CONSUMERS PURCHASE DECISIONS OF SELECTED GSM SERVICE PROVIDERS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The research focuses on the effect of sales promotion activities on consumer purchasing decisions for selected GSM service providers in Benue State. The survey method was used to elicit data from the respondents. Using Cochran's (1977) sample size determination formula, the sample involves 384 active subscribers from a population of 4,627,589. It covers the four leading mobile telecommunications companies - Globacom, MTN Nigeria, Airtel, and 9Mobile - that operate in Benue State. A simple random sampling technique was used. The study used a structured questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each Statement. All items were measured on a five-point scale. Descriptive and inferential (linear regression) statistical analytical methods were employed to analyze the data. The result from linear regression analysis established that the rate of free-credit promotions by GSM providers significantly influences the choice of network subscription among people in Benue State. Similarly, linear regression analysis revealed that the rate of product discounts offered by network providers in Benue State has a significant impact on the rate of network switching among subscribers. Thus, the study recommends that telecom operators in the State should distinctively make clear their free credit promotion to guide their customers in choosing their network.

Keywords: Sales promotion, Purchase Decisions, GSM Service Providers, Benue State.

Introduction

Many observers agree that the business that succeeds and remains relevant in Benue State in the future will be the one that better understands its customers, delivers superior service based on that understanding, and keeps up with market developments in the expanding and fiercely competitive telecommunications sector. Furthermore,

the State's consumers' increased acceptance and adoption of digital technology has reshaped communication as well as social and individual behavior. This effectively necessitates a systematic study of consumer behavior, an endeavor aimed at comprehending how people, groups, and organizations choose, purchase, use, and dispose of products, services, ideas, and

experiences to satisfy their needs and desires. According to Aarker (2000), cited in Bayero (2019), one of the relevancies of this exercise is the creation of clues and insights for improving marketing programs like product or service introduction, setting prices, crafting messages, as well as other crucial marketing activities like branding and brand positioning.

In recent years, mobile communications have experienced significant growth rates in developing countries. For instance, during 1995–1998, mobile subscribers in developing countries registered an annual percentage growth rate of 117% compared to a rate of 47% for developed countries during the same period (Ashaduzzaman et al., 2011). Nigeria is not exempted from this trend in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the proliferation of mobile phones in particular in the telecommunications sector has compelled numerous mobile network operators to develop reliable, creative services and products in order to satisfy customers and retain them.

With 195,463,898 active subscribers as of December 2021, Nigeria is thought to be one of the largest telecommunications markets in the world (NCC, 2021). The subscriber base is consistently growing, and the industry has consistently produced high returns on investments (Nwakanma et al., 2018). The industry has grown to be a very competitive market with a population of 211.4 million people (World Bank, 2021), with market share spreads of 38.61 percent (MTN), 26.79 percent (Airtel), 27.78 percent (Globacom), and 6.81 percent (9mobile) (NCC, 2021), and has made a significant contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), accounting for about 12.45 percent of Nigerian GDP (NBS, 2020).

Nevertheless, despite the rise in GSM service providers, rivalry among them, and the launch of a variety of service packages intended to entice clients to join their business, customer choice and satisfaction

still vary from customer to customer dependent on certain features. It has also been noted that many mobile connection users sign up for specific GSM connections and then switch to others when they discover their current services do not meet their unique communication needs and other networks are offering better services, especially since the introduction of mobile number portability (MNP) in April 2013 in Nigeria (Ojukwu, 2017). As a result, telecom companies are looking for strategies to persuade customers to transfer to their brand, and one of them is by offering sales deals. One of the competitive strategies used nowadays in Nigeria's telecom business to maintain existing subscribers and attract new ones is the use of sales promotion packages.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2021), sales promotion refers to temporary incentives that are used to promote the purchase or sale of a good or service. Samples, vouchers, and premiums are examples of consumer promotions. Advertising and display allowances are examples of trade promotions (contests for sales reps). In order to increase instant sales, consumers, wholesalers, merchants, or other organizational clients may be given additional value or incentives, according to Rangan and Titida (2011). These actions could be taken in the anticipation of increasing product interest, trial use, or purchase. Examples of sales promotion tools include coupons, samples, premiums, point-of-purchase (POP) displays, competitions, rebates, buy-one-get-one-free (BOGOFF), and sweepstakes. Kotler and Armstrong (2021) define the consumer purchase decision as the point at which the buyer or the consumers actually make the purchase of the goods.

Though, studies on the impact of sales promotions on consumers' buying decisions have been done, however the findings have been contradictory and inconsistent. In his research, Darko (2012), for instance,

discovered that loyalty among telecom users is influenced by sales promotions. Consumer sales promotions, according to Mbaga (2016), have a big impact on customer loyalty and can outlast any rivalry. In addition, prior studies have demonstrated that different market segment client profiles respond incongruently to sales promotions (Emma et al., 2019). According to research by Esfahani and Jafarzadeh (2012), psychological factors and sales promotion are significantly correlated. Amusat et al. (2013) report that corporations invest a sizeable amount of resources in boosting customer purchases. The goal of doing this is to raise the attractiveness and value of the product. Only 40% of sales promotion initiatives, according to Amusat et al. (2013), are successful, though no success or improvement has been noticed. According to other study, sales promotions do not have a sustained impact on an organization's sales volume, which typically declines or stays at the same level as before the sales promotion was given (Ashraf et al., 2014). In order to address this, Malik and Sachdeva (2015) found that consumer sales promotions stimulate customers to make quick purchases and had a favorable influence on consumption volume.

It is therefore necessary to conduct a study to fill up these gaps because of the inconsistent and conflicting findings found in earlier studies. Moreover, the telecommunications business was not the primary focus of many of these studies. In light of the foregoing, this study aims to assess how sales promotional efforts in Benue State, Nigeria, affect consumers' decisions to purchase specific GSM service providers.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to examine the effect of sales promotional activities on consumers purchase decisions

of selected GSM service providers in Benue State. The specific objectives were to:

- i. Ascertain the effect of free-credit sales promotion on the choice of network subscriptions among GSM subscribers in Benue State.
- ii. Evaluate the effect of product discounts offered by the network providers on network switching by subscribers in Benue State.

Research Questions

The research questions set out to guide the study are thus;

- i. To what extent do free-credits sales promotions by network providers influence the choice of network subscriptions among people in Benue State?
- ii. How do product discount offered by network providers in Benue State influence network switching among subscribers?

Research Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant relationship between free-credits sales promotion by network providers in Benue State and network subscriptions.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between product discounts offered by network providers and network switching among subscribers in Benue State.

Literature Review

Sales Promotion

Sales promotion has been researched and documented in marketing literature over the years. Kotler and Armstrong (2021), for example, described it as a range of short-term incentives to promote trying out or buying a good or service. This perspective was supported by Amusat et al. (2013), who claimed that sales promotions are a temporary incentive offered to buyers to make a purchase "right now." Companies

launch sales promotions campaigns primarily to provide consumers with incentives to purchase their goods. Furthermore, sales promotion is a very effective marketing strategy that helps many businesses be more competitive in a worldwide marketplace, according to Oyedepo et al. (2012).

Sales promotions, according to Dixon-Ogbechi (2015), are marketing strategies used by businesses to communicate a change in the price/value of goods and/or services perceived by a brand's target audience, resulting in immediate sales and influencing the brand's long-term value. The first feature of this description is how a sales campaign induces a buyer to make an immediate purchase by decreasing prices or adding value. Second, sales promotions target a direct behavioral level rather than a level of cognition. This definition emphasizes the idea of a target audience as a result. It suggests that sales campaigns should always target a certain demographic of clients rather than the whole public.

It is clear from the aforementioned comments that there are numerous kinds of sales marketing activities. Consumer sales promotions are the standard term used to describe sales promotion programmes that are aimed at consumers. Salesforce sales promotion is the term for a sales promotion campaign that targets sales people, whereas trade sales promotion refers to a programme that targets wholesalers and retailers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021; Abdulmajeed & Haseena, 2015). However, our main focus here is on consumer-oriented sales promotion (free premium or free credit and product discounts).

Free-Credits or Premium

This is equally called free airtime or free premium. Free credit is a sales promotional technique where telecommunication operators allow their subscribers to make calls or send messages without paying usually for a specific period. Free credits are

often given as incentives to subscribers with the aim of making them to stick to a particular brand or try out a new offer. Free premiums are consumer sales promotions that let customers receive a free gift with the purchase of a product; in- or out-package premiums are premiums where gifts are already packaged with the product purchased; and self-liquidating premiums are premiums where customers must spend a minimum amount on a gift item (Nochai & Nochai, 2011).

Product Discounts

Discounts are a strategy for lowering the cost of goods and services in order to influence customer purchasing behavior, according to Santini et al. (2015). In a related development, Zmyslony (2012) asserted that sales promotion through discounts offers customers a brief price decrease (often even below expenses) and, therefore, an immediate value, therefore it represents a clear incentive to purchase. Discounts are a sort of savings, according to Alowi and Kani (2018), and how they are presented can affect how customers see products and how they decide what to buy. It has been demonstrated by various research that it promotes a temporary spike in sales. Osman and Chan Yin Fah (2011) assert that only discounts have a discernible effect on consumer behavior when they make purchases, and that these discounts are especially effective at promoting purchase acceleration and product trial (especially in the case of new or redesigned products). This will inadvertently draw in clients who have never used that product before and also those who have bought a similar one.

Consumer Buying Behaviour

Individuals and households that purchase goods from businesses for their own use rather than for resale or manufacture are known as consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). On a deeper level, the term

"consumer" can refer to two distinct categories of consuming entities: personal consumers and organizational consumers (Huang & Symonds, 2012). Personal consumers are individuals and households that purchase goods and services for direct personal consumption. Organizational consumers on the other hand are corporations that buy goods for organization usage. Consumer behavior is the set of actions that these consumers take to acquire, use, and discard goods and services. However, Kotler and Keller (2014) defined consumer behavior as the research of how people, groups, and organizations choose, purchase, utilize, and discard products, services, ideas, or experiences to satiate their needs and wants. In agreement with the aforementioned definition, Adeoye and Ibiyinka (2015) noted that the study of consumer behavior focuses on how people decide how to spend their available resources (time, money, and effort) on consumption-related things. Consumers purchase decisions are part of consumer buying behaviour according to Kotler and Armstrong (2021).

Consumer Purchase Decisions

Kotler and Armstrong (2021) define the consumer purchase decision as the point at which the buyer or consumers actually make the product purchase. Actually, the consumer chooses between a variety of brands at this point. What to buy, whether to buy or not, when to buy, where to buy, and how to pay for it are additional terms used to define purchasing decisions (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). It is important to remember that decision-making is a type of psychological construction, which means that even though a decision cannot be seen, it may be assumed from observable behavior that one has been made and that a psychological "decision-making" event has taken place (Aprih & Audi, 2021). It is interesting to note that most choices consumers make about goods or services

are mental decisions. In light of this, Kotler and Armstrong (2018) Stated that the consumer's mind is a "black box," demonstrating the interaction of stimuli, consumer attributes, decision-making processes, and consumer responses. Finally, Aprih and Audi (2021) asserted that the expectations of a fully rational economist are frequently exaggerated. Numerous factors greatly impact consumer purchasing. Cultural, social, personal, and psychological traits are the most prevalent, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2021). It should be mentioned that while most of the time marketers cannot control these aspects, they still need to take them into consideration.

Another breakthrough was reported by Kotler and Keller (2016) who claimed that marketing academics had created a "five-stage model" of the purchasing decision process, consisting of problem identification, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Aprih and Audi (2021) corroborated this view and maintained that a framework for assessing the consumer purchasing decision process is provided by the five stages. Though many buyers go through these steps in a predetermined order, other phases, like the appraisal of alternatives, can happen at any point during the purchasing process. The amount of time and effort put into each stage depends on a variety of elements, including perceived risk and consumer motivation.

Additionally, Kotler and Keller (2016) pointed out that two factors—the degree of motivation to accept or comply with the input and the negative feedback from other customers—can influence the choice to make the final purchase. According to Swastha and Irawan (2014), there are six dimensions to buying decisions: Decisions on product type, brand, supplier, amount, timing of the purchase, and method of payment. For this study, the consumer

purchase decisions of interest are product type decisions - network subscription and network switching among subscribers of GSM companies in the area of study.

Choice of Network Subscription

Choice of network subscription is a customer decision about which network provider to use or adopt. This is arrived at after a careful consideration of many variables among which are availability, reliability, dependability, cost and promotions. A lot of scholars attested to the fact the choice of network subscription among consumers of telecommunication product are a function of so many factors. For instance, Micheal et al. (2013) opine that free-credit promotion significantly influence customers' choice of network in Ghana. Equally, findings of studies made by Humayun et al. (2010), Ajayi et al. (2010) established a significant contribution of free-credit promotion on customers' subscription to network services.

Network Switching

According to Nimako (2012a), consumer switching behavior (CSB) is the process by which a consumer abandons his/her relationship with a current service/product provider and replaces it with a competitor partially or entirely for a given time period. This comprehensive definition suggests several dimensions and typologies of the CSB phenomenon, notably, the fact that switching is a process and could be partial or total. In many research contexts, the idea of switching represents a complete or total switch from one service provider to another (Nimako, 2012b). Previous research in different service contexts indicates that consumer switching intention is influenced by determinants such as high prices, low satisfaction, poor service quality, low perceived value, unethical behavior of service provider, poor corporate reputation, critical incidence, ineffective complaint handling, among others (Sawat et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) has mostly been referenced in Information Systems and ICT studies, but principally in the sense that it prepared the ground for theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Technology Acceptance Model [TAM] to emerge (Odoyo et al., 2018). This theory has its roots in social psychology, and some view it as a unique application of the TPB (Ajzan, 2010). In order to define the connections between people's beliefs, attitudes, norms, intentions, and behaviors, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) developed TRA.

According to TRA, a person's behavior is determined by their behavioral intention to carry it out, and that intention is determined by their attitudes and their subjective norms regarding the activity. The term "subjective norm" refers to a person's view of what the majority of key people in his life believe he should or should not do (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In an effort to comprehend how attitude and behavior relate to one another, this TRA was introduced. It makes an effort to elucidate how beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior are related. TRA claims that behavioral intention is the best predictor of behavior. The attitudes people have about engaging in the behavior and the arbitrary norms attached to the behavior are the direct drivers of people's behavioral intents. A person's beliefs about the results or qualities of engaging in a certain behavior, as well as their assessments of those results or qualities, are what shape their attitude. When performing a behavior, a person's subjective norm is decided by whether or not significant referents (i.e., normative beliefs) approve or disapprove, with the incentive to adhere to those referents being given weight in the calculation (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2002).

In a scenario where the client is totally and directly responsible for his own behavior

and is considerate, TRA can forecast whether the consumer will perform or not. In this regard, consumers in Benue State who acquire telecommunications products are totally and directly accountable for their choices. Their choice of network is based on the value propositions communicated by the network providers through sales and promotional efforts. TRA has demonstrated its strength in predicting the relationship between attitude toward the behavior and behavioural intention as one of the most systematic and widely used approaches to attitude and behavior research (Sheppard et al., 1988).

However, this theory has come under fire for making the erroneous premise that it is the sole theory that can explain behavior and that any additional elements can only affect behavior in a circumstantial way by way of the constructs of attitude and subjective standards (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Additionally, TRA holds that: (1) behavioral intention cannot change before the behavior is carried out; (2) the theory only applies to actions that an individual chooses to carry out and does not account for actions that may be required of them in some way or that are impeded by flaws or external obstacles (Ajzen, 1991).

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Ibrahim (2020) looked at how consumer sales promotion affected customers' shopping habits in Tema, Ghana's retail market for consumer goods. The study demonstrated a substantial association between consumer sales promotion and consumers' purchasing behavior using data from a sample of 220 respondents in Tema, Ghana. The sorts of consumer sales promotion techniques used by shops selling consumer goods in Tema, Ghana were further found to rank price discounts first, extra packs (buy one, get one free) second, coupons third, free samples fourth, and contests and sweepstakes fifth. This study was conducted outside Nigeria and focused

on retail market for consumer goods. The present study was conducted in Nigeria and focused on the telecommunication sector.

In a similar vein, Antwi and Gideon (2019) conducted research on how promotional packages affected customer switching and retention in the Ghanaian telecommunications sector. Results from surveys completed by 150 customers of Mobile Telecommunication Network (hence, referred to as MTN) and Vodafone Ghana Ltd. reveal that promotional packages have a positive and significant impact on customer switch, customer retention, and customer satisfaction. Promotional packages are the primary drivers of customer retention because it has also been found that businesses without efficient promotional packages lose customers. This study is similar to the present study but due to differences in culture and consumer perception, findings may differ greatly, hence this present study.

More specifically, Akintan et al. (2018) looked into the connection between customer buying intentions and sales promotion techniques such price cuts, bonus packs, free airtime, competitions, and refund offers. The survey research design was used, and the instrument for gathering data was a questionnaire. In Abeokuta, Ogun State, 150 MTN subscribers were chosen using a practical sample technique. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to examine the data, and Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were employed to assess the hypotheses. The results of correlation showed that there is a small but favorable association between consumer purchasing motivations and price reduction, bonus packs, free airtime, and refund offers. Accordingly, the report advises MTN product operators to increase their usage of sales promotion techniques like free airtime and price cuts, which mostly influenced their consumers' purchasing decisions. Though this study was conducted in Nigeria

and focused on the telecom sector, using MTN alone may not reflect the true impact of sales promotions strategies on consumer purchase decisions.

In the mobile telecommunications sector in the Subin Sub-Metro, Kumasi, Ghana, Michael et al. (2013) evaluated the impact of sales promotion on consumer buying behavior. According to the study's findings, clients are aware that price reductions are a common sales promotion strategy. Sales marketing, it has been shown, influences consumer decisions to purchase mobile networks by providing information on mobile networks. Furthermore, it was discovered that customers' post-purchase behavior is influenced by their degree of pleasure when they use a certain mobile network under the impact of a sales offer. The report suggested, among other things, that businesses step up their sales campaigns in order to boost market share as well. Again, this study was conducted in Ghana and due to differences among consumer across cultures, there is need to conduct similar study in Nigeria.

Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted for this study. Studies that are concerned with describing the characteristics of an individual or group and determining the frequency with which something occurs or its association with something else fall under this design (Kothari & Garg, 2014). To effectively achieve this, the survey method was used to elicit data from the respondents. The study covers the four leading mobile telecommunications companies -Globacom, MTN Nigeria, Airtel, and 9Mobile - that operate in Benue State. The population of the study comprises customers of the four major GSM service providers in the area. Therefore, the population for this study comprises 4,627,589 subscribers (NBS, 2020). A sample of 384 active subscribers was ascertained using Cochran's (1977)

formula for populations that are large and finite. This yields a representative sample for proportions (Onodugo et al., 2010). A simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. This approach was deemed appropriate because all subscribers had an equal chance of being selected (Onodugo et al., 2010).

The study used a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. To ascertain the validity of the instrument, content validity was adopted, in which the researcher subjected the instrument to face validity by giving it to two executives of the Benue State chapter of the National Institute of Marketing of Nigeria (NIMN), who examined the items and made sure they were in line with the objectives of the study. The structure and language of the questionnaire were modified in light of their corrections. The reliability of the instrument was determined by a reliability test through the use of a pilot study. The test-retest method was also used to ensure that the measuring instrument provided a consistent result. This involves administering the same test instrument to the same group on two occasions and correlating paired scores. The reliability of their responses was established at 0.865 using Crombach Alpha, which was considered high enough (Hair et al., 2006). Descriptive and inferential (linear regression) statistical methods were employed to analyze the data. The null hypotheses were to be accepted if the calculated p-value was greater than the hypothetical p-value of 0.05 and otherwise rejected if the calculated p-value was less than the hypothetical 0.05 p-value.

Results, Interpretation and Discussion

A total of three hundred and eighty-four (384) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, of which three hundred and seventy-eight (378) were returned. This gave the overall response rate of 98.4%. The analyses were based on the returned copies of the questionnaire.

Research Question i: Do free-credits promotions by network providers influence the choice of network subscriptions among people in Benue State?

Table 1: Free-credits Promotions by Network Providers on the Choice of Network Subscriptions among People in Benue State

S/n	Item	SA Fx (%)	A Fx (%)	U Fx (%)	D Fx (%)	SD Fx (%)	Avg	Rmk
1	GSM providers that offer free-credit can make consumers decide to buy their new SIM pack	169(45%)	98(26%)	75(20%)	27(7%)	9(2%)	4.03	A
2	Offer of free-credit for weekend calls is making customers to prefer some GSM providers over others	78(21%)	198(52%)	87(23%)	15(4%)	0(0%)	3.90	A
3	The free-credit for calling family and friends is among the factors that make customers choose particular GSM service	157(42%)	88(23%)	76(20%)	35(9%)	22(6%)	3.85	A
4	Free-credit bonus on every loaded credit is one of the reasons, you choose particular GSM network	32(8%)	56(15%)	34(9%)	65(17%)	191(51%)	2.13	D
5	People rush to buy a SIM-card of any network that has enough free-credit for the subscribers	59(16%)	167(44%)	79(21%)	45(12%)	28(7%)	3.49	A

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 1 presents the results from the perspective of respondents on the influence of free-credit promotions by network providers on the choice of network subscriptions among people in Benue State. The results showed that those GSM providers that offer free credit are influencing consumers' decisions to buy their new SIM packs. This fact was established by 45% of sampled GSM network subscribers (average = 4.03). More so, 52% of sampled GSM network subscribers expressed their agreement with the assertion that the offer of free credit for weekend calls makes most customers prefer some GSM providers over others (average = 3.90). Furthermore, 42% of sampled

GSM network subscribers strongly expressed that the free credit for calling family and friends is among the factors that make customers choose particular GSM services (average = 3.85). However, 51% of respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion that credit bonuses on every loaded credit are responsible for subscribers' changing networks (average = 2.13). Also, 44% of the respondents agreed that people rush to buy a SIM card from any network that has enough free credit for the subscribers (average = 3.49).

Research question ii: Do product discount promotions by network providers in Benue State, influence network switching among subscribers?

Table 2: The Influence of Product Discount Promotions on Network Switching among Subscribers in Benue State

S/n	Item	SA Fx (%)	A Fx (%)	U Fx (%)	D Fx (%)	SD Fx (%)	Avg	Rmk
1	GSM providers that offer discounted services can make people decide to leave a network to another	158(42%)	88(23%)	56(15%)	45(12%)	31(8%)	3.8	A
2	Subscribers usually prefer to switch their SIM to any network that provide discounted international callings (Roaming)	35(9%)	67(18%)	43(11%)	157(42%)	76(20%)	2.5	D
3	People prefer switching their SIM for any network with discounted charges for Close User Group (CUG)	162(43%)	77(20%)	56(15%)	48(13%)	35(9%)	3.7	A
4	GSM providers that offer discounted business-to-business calls do influence switching of network among subscribers	45(12%)	89(24%)	88(23%)	3(1%)	153(40%)	2.7	D
5	Subscribers usually prefer network provider that offer discounted charges for family and friends calls.	45(12%)	178(47%)	45(12%)	90(24%)	20(5%)	3.4	A

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Results from table 2 revealed the perspectives of respondents on the influence of product discount promotions on network switching among subscribers in Benue State. The results showed that 42% of sampled GSM network subscribers unanimously agreed that those GSM providers that offer discounted services make people decide to leave one network for another (average = 3.8). However, the respondents were not convinced that most network subscribers are switching their SIMs to any network that provides discounted international calling (roaming). This fact was established by 42% of sample subscribers (an average of 2.5). More so, 43% of respondents strongly agreed that people prefer switching their SIMs to any

network with discounted charges for Close User Group (CUG) members (average = 3.7). Discounted business-to-business calls offered by network providers have not been influencing network switching among subscribers. 40% of respondents (average = 2.7) agreed on this point. However, discounted charges targeting family and friend calls are playing an influential role in changing from one network to another. This was the opinion held by 47% of sampled GSM network subscribers in Benue State (average = 3.4).

Test of Research Hypotheses

HO1: The free-credits sales promotion by network providers in Benue State does not significantly influence network subscriptions.

Table 3: Results of Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Free-credits Sales Promotion on Network Subscriptions of GSM Services in Benue State

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.	Collinearity	
	Coefficients		Coefficients			Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tol.	VIF
(Constant)	2.614	.113		23.04	.000	.920	1.310
Free-Credits Sales Promo	.459	.034	.572	13.52	.000		
R	.572						
R ²	.327						
Adj. R ²	.325						
F. statistic	182.80						
F. sig	.000						

a. Predictors: (Constant), Free-Credits Sales Promo,

b. Dependent Variable: network subscriptions

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 3 presents the linear regression results on the influence of the rate of free-credits sales promotions on the rate of network subscriptions for GSM services among subscribers in Benue State. It is observed from the table that the free-credits sales promo has a coefficient value of 0.459, a p-value of 0.000, and a t-value of 13.52, which is highly significant. More so, the results on the table show an F statistic value of 182.80 with an F. sig of 0.000, which implies that the regression model is statistically significant at 5%. Furthermore, the adjusted R²-value (0.325) was calculated for the overall model fitness. Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis, which States that the rate of free-credit sales

promotions by network providers in Benue State does not significantly influence the rate of network subscriptions. Thus, the overall results from linear regression show a positive coefficient of 0.459 for the rate of free-credits sales promo, which signifies that an increase in the rate at which the GSM operators are improving on the free-credits sales promo is likely to influence about 46% of the subscription rate by customers in Benue State, Nigeria.

HO₂: The product discount offered by network providers does not significantly influence network switching among subscribers in Benue State.

Table 4: Results of Linear Regression Analysis on the Influence of Product Discount offered on Network Switching among Subscribers in Benue State

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.	Collinearity	
	Coefficients		Coefficients			Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tol.	VIF
(Constant)	2.352	.108		21.72	.000	.641	1.560
Product Discount	.531	.032	.644	16.33	.000		
R	.644						
R ²	.415						
Adj. R ²	.413						
F. statistic	266.65						
F. sig	.000						

a. Predictors: (Constant), Product Discount

b. Dependent Variable: Rate of Network Switching

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 4 presents the linear regression results on the influence of the product discount rate on the rate of network switching among GSM subscribers in Benue State. It is observed from the table that the rate of product discount has a coefficient value of 0.531, a p-value of 0.000, and a t-value of 16.33, which is highly significant. Also, the results on the table show an F statistic value of 266.65 with an F. sig of 0.000, which implies that the regression model is statistically significant at 5%. Furthermore, the adjusted R²-value (0.531) was calculated for the overall model fitness.

Therefore, the null hypothesis, which States that the rate of product discounts by network providers in Benue State does not significantly influence the rate of network switching among subscribers, is rejected. The overall results from linear regression that show a positive coefficient of 0.531 for the rate of product discount mean that an increase in the rate of product discount by GSM operators is likely to influence about 53.1% of network switching among subscribers in Benue State, Nigeria.

Discussions

The findings of this study show that the free-credit promotions by GSM network

providers influence the choice of network subscriptions among people in Benue State. Furthermore, the findings show that free credit for weekend calls, credits for family and friends, and credit on every recharge influence more subscriptions among people. This finding agrees with that made by Michael *et al.* (2013), which established a significant effect of free-credit promotion on customers' choice of network in Ghana. Similarly, the findings of Akintan *et al.* (2018) studies established a significant contribution of free-credit promotion on customers' subscriptions to network services.

The findings from this study also revealed that product discount promotions by GSM network providers in Benue State are influencing network switching among subscribers. Precisely, the findings showed that the offers of discounted services as well as discounted charges for members of the Close User Group (CUG) are influencing people's choice of network. This finding concurs with that made by Ibrahim (2020), Antwi and Gideon (2019), and Akintan *et al.* (2018) that, in most cases, people conveniently switch from less discounted network service to full discounted network service. However, the current finding

disagreed with the conclusion earlier drawn by Rajpurohit and Vasita (2011) that most subscribers could not ascertain any discounted products from network providers and expected free airtime or other bonuses.

In all, the findings from this study established that price cuts and other discounted promotions discourage network switching and attract potential customers toward network services in Benue State. This agrees with the conclusion by Olukotun et al. (2012) that consumers are sensitive to any price discounts on products and services, which raise sales and promote repeat patronage.

Conclusion

The study looked into the effect of sales promotion activities on the purchase decisions of consumers in Benue State who use selected GSM service providers. The results from linear regression show a positive coefficient for the rate of free-credits sales promo, which signifies that an increase in the rate at which the GSM operators are improving on the free-credits sales promo is likely to influence the subscription rate by customers in Benue State, Nigeria. More so, results from linear regression show a positive coefficient for the rate of product discount, meaning that an increase in the rate of product discount by GSM operators is likely to influence network switching among subscribers in Benue State, Nigeria.

In view of the study findings, it is obvious that effective sales promotions attract and keep customers. This study backs up the research and conclusions of other authors, including Ibrahim, Antwi, and Gideon, Akintan et al., and many more. Network organizations should concentrate on offering promotional packages to draw clients and enhance their stay by retaining them with exceptional sale offers. Customers in the present day expect a lot from businesses, so those that are unwilling

to give back to them in the form of promotional offers run the risk of losing devoted customers. Businesses that prioritize customer connections always have a high rate of long-term client retention. This study concluded that network companies stand to lose customers when there is an absence of promotional packages. Customers these days are so price sensitive that if their current service provider does not provide incentives, they will switch to another network type to get more value for their money. Finally, the study concluded that sales promotional packages are key determinants of customers' intentions to remain or switch to a different network type.

Implication of Findings

The study found that the rate of free-credit sales promotions by network providers in Benue State significantly influences the rate of network subscriptions. It was equally revealed that the rate of product discounts by network providers in Benue State significantly influences the rate of network switching among subscribers. The implication of this finding is that network providers in the State stand to lose their customers to other players in the industry when there is an absence of promotional packages.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The mobile network providers in Benue State should distinctively make clear their free credit promotion to guide their customers in choosing their network.
- ii. Also, there should be a concerted effort by network providers in Makurdi, Benue State to ensure that their product discount promotions are unique with added value to boost the patronage of both existing and potential customers.

Limitations of the study

The sample size of this study was drawn from only Benue State and response mainly from the literate consumers. This could affect the generalization of the result. Moreover, there are other promotional strategies that were not included in this work. Further studies could focus on these factors to determine the influence on customer patronage.

Suggested areas for further studies

We suggest that further studies be carried out to determine the influence of other promotional strategies especially social media platforms like facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp etc on customer patronage of telecommunication services. Further studies can also be done to investigate the promotional strategy that have the most influence on consumer purchase decisions.

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