



E-Marketing Management Strategies and Consumer Behaviour for the Tourism Industry in Nigeria

¹Abdullahi Marshal Idris, ²Habiba Mohammed & ³Iliya Bawa

^{1&2}Department of Hospitality Management, Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa

³Department of Marketing, Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa

Abstract

Consumers and investors continue to rely heavily on a country image to make their economic decision. The Technological revolution of the 1990s has brought about many new opportunities for the tourism and hospitality industry. In Nigeria, with tourism having global industry information as its life-blood, information technology has become a basis for the industry to operate effectively and competitively. Therefore, the objective of this study is assessing the importance of E-marketing in promoting tourism in Nigeria and to examine the use of information technology in enhancing customer service. Data for the study are obtained from secondary source, information from these source are weighed and the paper gives an insight into the importance of electronic branding and the application of information technologies in tourism and hospitality industry in Nigeria giving strategic frame works, providing analysis of the internet and its impact on these sectors. It was recommended that E-marketing is no longer a choice but a necessity, it is no longer conceived as a function to be performed individually by the state, associations or individual private companies, but as an integrative and concerted effort by all interested stake holders.

Keywords: *State Branding, Technology, Destination, Marketing, Tourism, Products, Strategies.*

Corresponding Author: Abdullahi Marshal Idris

Background to the Study

Communication technology plays a considerable role in travel and tourism, as much of modern tourism revolves around the ability of tourist destinations to communicate their benefits to potential visitors and the ability of those visitors to reach out to points of interest at the destination. According to the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), the communication technology that powers systems like the Semi-Automated Business Research Environment (SABRE) airline reservation system has driven a considerable increase in tourism since 1953. In addition, more modern communication technologies that employ Internet connectivity continue to exhibit profound effects on the tourism industry.

E-marketing is any process that a business organization conducts over a computer-mediated network it refers to exploiting the combined power of the internet and information technology to fundamentally transform key business strategies and process (Jones, 2002). In 1953 a joint venture between American Airlines and the computing giant IBM introduced communication technology that linked airline reservation systems directly with travel and booking agents. As more and more airlines capitalized on this technology, the entire booking process became more streamlined and efficient. Today, automated airline systems and the customer-facing Customer Reservation System (CRS) enable considerably greater volumes of airline passenger service than previously considered possible. Just as SABRE technology exhibited considerable influence on the accessibility of air travel, a number of communication technologies have improved traveler access to information about, and at, the travel destination. Modern Internet directories allow tourists to quickly and easily research lodging and dining options at the destination, and the proliferation of telephones, mobile phones and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) voice channels allow travelers to quickly contact hotels and restaurants to establish reservations.

In a world where the information technology is changing the way business are conducted, the decision to start an e-marketing is not something that one can postpone it for future. Today, e-marketing is not only a good business idea, but it is a business imperative, because it brings fundamental alterations to the way entire business relationships are conducted (Asikhia, 2009).

Some facilities allow customers to view up to the minute wait times, review menus or selections, read reviews and make reservations all before departing for the destination. In addition, automated call distribution (ACD) systems in place at large reservation call centers allow tourists to make reservations by phone without ever experiencing a busy signal. Also, online and call-center based payment systems can instantly collect payment from prospective travelers.

Statement of the Problem

Regional and international events are choreographed under the pretext of tourism, searching for uniqueness of Nigeria as a product and the brand story to package tourism themes that will provide different experiences has become an issue. With hundreds of

destinations competing for attention in consumers' minds, a one-stop website becomes an essential tool of a country's tourism branding effort, especially for niche destinations. While many countries have put up a national tourism website, few realize that an attractive design, ease of use and user-friendly interface are just as important as the objective product being offered, if not more.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study is to:

1. Assess the importance of E-marketing in promoting tourism in Nigeria
2. Examine the use of information technology in enhancing customer service.
3. Evaluate the contribution of E-marketing to successful tourism and hospitality industry.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the use of secondary data and explored published and electronic materials, journals, seminars papers and other materials related to the study. Information from these sources are weighed in relation to the topic from which conclusion and recommendation are made.

Literature Review

Place Branding As a Marketing Management Strategy

Branding and indeed branding of places has been around for some time. Anholt (2004) had earlier indicated that destination branding is one face of national branding. One of the issues discussed here draws from examples and questions how Nigeria can present a situation to readers and interested parties the opportunities to place destination branding in a wider context and to recognize the complex challenges facing decision manager (Hospitality, Travel Trades entrepreneurs) and tourism brand proponents with responsibility for boosting the nation image and increase in patronage by investors, local and foreign consumers.

According to Morgan Pitchard and Pride (2004) places offer the greatest untapped branding opportunities. In recent times, the choice of a holiday destination has become a significant lifestyle indicator that can result in emotional appeal, provide high conventional, capital and even celebrity values.

Consumer Behaviour: Kotler and Armstrong (2004) defined consumer behaviour as the study of how people buy, what they buy, when they buy and why they buy it. It is a sub-category of marketing that blends the element of psychology, sociology, sociopsychology, anthropology and economic. It is the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires.

It studies the characteristics of individual consumers such as demographic, psychographics and a behavioural variable in an attempt to understand people wants, it also tries to access influences on the consumer from groups such as family, friends,

references groups and society in general. In the 1990s, it is the era of 'value driven' customers and suppliers. Consumers are exposed to more mass media. Commercial media becomes sources of useful information on the ever increasing number of products and brands. Sources of information diminish in importance. In addition, traditional consumers become more experience and their ability to distinguish between brands is sharpened. Marketers today need to understand that consumer satisfaction is about 'attitude' and customer value is about behaviour (Butz and Goodstein, 1996).

The process of branding itself evolves a set values, qualifications and emotional triggers in consumers (tourists) mind both local and foreign. Already a range of countries and cities have adopted the destination branding building concept (Caldwel and Freire, 2004). Although Travel to Africa (The cities inclusive) often exerts different meaning to different people, travel to most destinations is dedicated by climate, scenery, amenities and cultural attributes vindicating this representative facet of emotional trigger. While branding of places takes from the branding of products, it is a relatively new discipline that puts together competitiveness, brand strategy, communication and leadership to the development of places. Various studies have dealt with the competitiveness and branding of geographic areas using strategic management concepts (Porter, 1990). In fact, the administration of a place may be compared to that of a business, with both benefiting from the adoption of a strategic management approach and appropriate branding.

In general, the principles and outcomes of successful place branding ensure that the strengths of the place and the opportunities that exist are properly identified, promoted, and marketed in the global tourism market place. The exercise will also ensure that the place acquires sustainable advantages in addition to acquiring positive and distinctive reputation. A positive place brand encourages inward investment and tourism is a magnet for investment. In recent years, Nigeria has made admirable progress in polity and governance bringing along steady economic growth. Looking beyond the traditional sales of petroleum and other natural resources, tourism in Nigeria has found itself into the coffers of decision makers. Despite the fact that a large percentage of the country is still rural, urban areas can be packaged as tourism destination to serve both domestic and inbound tourists. Within Nigeria, brands are growing their business alongside social media, encouraging customers to engage with them on these platforms, while also providing services through those platforms. In this way brands are realizing the significance of being a part of these networks and connecting with their customer base in non-traditional ways. In addition, through a redefinition of brand hierarchy, people are becoming the brands, and beyond that, they are becoming the media. Content creation is no longer top-bottom, but is truly becoming a synergy between people and entities indifferent spaces. Over the last decade a significant amount of branding has taken place. When successful, a destination brand can direct tourist attention and ultimately shape tourism experience. (Marafa,2004). Although destination (place) branding is a new concept, there is a general agreement that places can be branded in much the same way as consumer goods and services (Hall 2002; Caldwell and Freire, 2004).

E-Destination Branding Techniques for Tourism and Hospitality Businesses in Nigeria. As travelers exchange emails about upcoming trips, for example, advertising software can interpret key words in the email communication to display relevant targeted advertisements about the destination. Developments in mobile telephone technology allow attractions at popular tourist destinations to target the mobile phones of visitors with location-based advertising designed to deliver promotional material only to tourists while ignoring mobile devices owned by locals. Amongst these strategies are the followings:-

Social Networking

A social networking service is a platform that builds social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service, though in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network.

This is one of the strategies that can aid tourism Destinations Bridge this gap. There is minimal cost, attributed with networking which allows business of any size to participate. The driving factor of the success of the vehicle is in the continual need for participation by the operator of the destination, many of the operators are wary of participating because of lack of knowledge and ability to navigate within the existing social networks.

Direct Marketing

The Internet and worldwide web is a useful resource which most of the companies use to improve their overall performance and profitability of the company. The Internet is an ideal medium in the business world that helps to promote the company as well as their services and products. The Internet marketing is one way of promoting the hospitality industry to the entire world which is also flexible and interactive; it helps to deliver all the required information to the Consumers or the Customers Most of the companies in the hospitality industry have created their own homepages on the web which helps to get in contact with millions of people all over the world. It is helpful in one way or the other for the small companies to compete with larger ones.

Direct Online Selling

Nowadays people are not required to go to some shopping centers or malls to do their Shopping. They can do all that at convenience from their house, companies have got their virtual experience into the web, where the customers can browse through the entire range of catalogs, and also examine whereas in the tourism and travel trade industry, customers air tickets, rail tickets, etc are browsed through and events have customized options. One good example of online selling will be companies like Dell and Amazon.

Mobile Marketing

Tourism and hospitality industries are branches of an industry in which it is not necessary to emphasize the importance of mobile technology and mobile marketing for their business. With more than one billion smart phones in use in the market today (Business Wire, 2012), the tourism and hotel industry should not drop the advantages provided by mobile marketing in terms of placement information and finally sales. The fact that the mobile device is always with her owner is very important from the perspective of advertisers and brands that exist on the market. It is a new marketing channel that applies simple and fast two-way communication between brands and consumers' no matter what time of day and location of the consumer at that moment. Furthermore with the possession of an appropriate database of permanent guests, there is great possibility of targeted advertising in relation to their demographic data and consumer habits. In addition to the above, mobile marketing is cheaper and easier for the preparation, implementation and monitoring of efficiency.

Depending on the basic goal of marketing campaigns there are different types of mobile marketing and these include SMS (text) marketing, mobile web and Bluetooth proximity marketing, MMS. Below will be explanations of some types of mobile marketing channels that can be useful for tourism and hospitality industry, depending on their target audience preferences (Rayfield, 2010):

SMS (short message service) Advertisers can send relevant marketing messages in form of texts;

MMS (multi-media message service) Marketing messages that utilize multiple, rich media elements such as images, video and audio.

Mobile Applications: apps are a good way to connect with consumers, as they can be easier to use than the mobile web. Some apps allow for adverts within the applications design too;

Bluetooth Proximity Marketing: utilizes Bluetooth to connect with a marketers broadcasting station and station is programmed to automatically deliver content to the consumer's phone. It automatically authenticates its make and model and sends the content;

Location-Based Marketing: Delivers multi-media directly to the user of a mobile device dependent upon their location via GPS technology;

QR Codes (Quick Response Barcodes) Allows customers to quickly learn more about a business, by visiting a mobile version of their business page on a mobile phone that is enabled to scan the bar code;

PPC (Pay Per Call) Mobile Marketing These are usually advertisements that require the customer to perform a certain action like making a phone call usually with the provided number that the ad gives. If the customer makes a call to that number they are then billed;

Voice Marketing: Voice broadcasting calls numbers from a computer managed list and plays a pre-recorded message to the customer;

Mobile Web: Having a mobile friendly version of your website is increasingly important as more and more people start to use their mobiles to search.

Mobile Banner Ads: Like standard banner ads for desktop web pages but smaller to fit on mobile screens and run on the mobile content network.

As you can see there are lots of ways into mobile marketing. Mobile web and banner ads are good for finding new customers, whereas SMS marketing and MMS are great for interacting with your existing client base and directing them to your mobile site or apps. In the coming years a major trend in this industry will represent the advertising via social network on mobile devices. In other words, the potential of this market is really huge and leaders in the tourism and hospitality industry are slowly become aware of it.

Mobile Advertising via Social Networks

Social networks have become an integral part of the lives of most people who can no longer imagine life without them. And while they use social networks to communicate with friends and colleagues, to like and tweet, they tend to forget that these same networks could be used in business. Despite still being somewhat of a mystery to managers, social networks should be placed, this very day, in the centre of communication with clients/guests of the future. Because social networks can be used free of charge, they are becoming an excellent channel for mobile advertising and promoting activities in tourism. The lesser cost of social networks is opening up numerous opportunities for advertising Web sites or businesses, or for having a presence on the Internet at low cost. In the tourism sector, this refers to opening profiles that will provide information and help promote business, rather than joining a network for fun.

The advantages of social networks as enumerated by Marketing (2009) include:

1. Promoting business to thousands of users at lesser cost whatsoever
2. Connecting with people who mean something and meet potential clients/partners.
3. Receiving instant feedback about products or services. Increasing the weight of business name through on-line presence.
4. Building a group network that will aid to promote products or services.

Acquiring important hyperlinks to pages, which will help in Google's page rank. In the tourism industry in Nigeria, social networks are seen as an enormous challenge, which will, according to the predictions of many analysts, bring about radical changes to the image of the industry in the future. In the opinion of experts, although social networks are not the only channels through which users can obtain information and book travels, they are becoming increasingly important for communication during travels. This is demonstrated by the fact that in 2011 more than 55 percent of travelers in the world used Facebook, which is clearly the most widespread network in this sense (Miscancuk 2012). At the global level, analysts agree that the connection between social networks and travel is still in its early stage.

Mobile Advertising Strategies

Mobile market and advertising is about the use of cell phones and other mobile and other device to market a brand or a message. It is an emerging form of marketing that can play a powerful role as part of an integrated advantage of mobile advertising or a message. The major advantage is that it can reach the target customers anywhere anytime, in order to promote the selling of tourism produce or service (Karthikeyan and Balamurgan 2012). If hotels and destinations don't have a mobile strategy-they need one.

There are almost endless possibilities for Communicating with mobile guests, but their business needs to adopt a strategy to be successful. It goes beyond simply identifying all possible revenue and service touch points. They need to understand guest preferences for interacting with their brand and what they expect in return. Mobile guests are maturing quickly and have high expectations Mobile advertising is one of the most important elements of integrated marketing communications. Advertising can be used to create images or associations and brand positioning in the minds of consumers. The advertising strategy is based on several factors, including the identification of the target market, the key problem or Issue of advertising, definition of key ideas, as well as creating and positioning of the advertising message.

Observed from the angle of marketing experts, advertising message is a way to present the message about the product or service in order to solve certain problem and meet the needs and achieve goals. The media plan as part of the advertising strategy represents the best way to send a bulletin to the tourism market.

The biggest obstacle in the business world is the inability of users to access information on the move. The solutions of this problem are mobile applications. Mobile application designed for users on the move. Provide access to desired information regardless of where the user is located and thus greatly facilitate the work. In some cases, the user does not require access to the Internet; it is possible to make any modifications locally. Mobile applications are an exciting new medium that can be used to attract potential customers while on the move. Google Mobile Ads appear on mobile devices in Google search results, on content websites and in apps. Hotels can use them to put your own business in front of people as they use their phones and tablets throughout the day. AdMob is a platform by Google Corporation. It is the first choice of mobile application developers because it is one of the most trusted mobile advertisement providers.

Furthermore, Apple has developed an advertising platform called iAd. It is Apple's native advertisement platform, which provides ease in earning advertisement revenue through apps created for iGadgets.

Mobile web is expected to grow significantly and will offer new opportunities to promote hotels on the Internet with smart investing and developing mobile webcan capitalize on mobile users because if they offered specific tourism product or service they are looking for, it increases the ability to sell, and at the same time achieves the satisfaction and loyalty of customers/ guests. Website that is not specifically adjusted to mobile users drastically

reduces the potential ROI (return on investment) if the destination have a service that targets on the mobile audience. Once the mobile website is live, destinations can promote it through a variety of channels based on their budget and characteristics of their target audience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, though communication technology has radically transformed the tourism industry, some limitations remain. Communication technology systems sometimes require considerable financial investments, and some cash-strapped tourism bureaus debate whether the return justifies the investment. In addition, tourist destinations must continue to produce innovations in customers' service attractions and economic development to produce an attractive destination despite the numerous avenues for promoting the area. Therefore, this study is recommending that:-

- i. The world tourism and travel industries are today spending only small amounts on marketing through social networks and via the Internet. They should also exploit work on networks, such as low costs, the speed of feedback from clients and users.
- ii. Destinations and companies should seek to foster the development of this connection by investing considerable resources in marketing activities on social networks and by reinforcing the trust of users, because credibility and reliability are still critical in this area.
- iii. The hotels and other tourism companies need to get use to social networks because the number of active users is growing by the day.
- iv. In order for tourism to be established, flourish and be beneficial at a destination place such as Nigeria, a policy should be articulated where both government and business community could help implementation.
- v. E-marketing is no longer a choice but a necessity, it is no longer concerned as a function to be performed individually, by the State, associations or individual private companies, but an integrative and concerted effort by all interested stakeholders.
- vi. The government should ensure that peace and security prevailed in the country. No tourist would want to come to a country where there is little confidence in the safety of his life or investment.

Map of Nigeria showing some Eco Tourism reserves/National Parks



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