

Viral Marketing and Brand Loyalty among Mobile Network Subscribers in Enugu Metropolis

OBIESIE, Michael Chuks & IGWENAZOR, Osita Nchekwube

Department of Marketing, Federal Polytechnic, Oko

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of viral marketing on brand loyalty among mobile network subscribers in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria. Drawing on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Social Influence Theory, and Brand Equity frameworks, the research employed a descriptive survey design with data collected from 360 respondents selected via stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using binary logistic regression and point-biserial correlation. Results indicate that viral marketing significantly influences brand loyalty and brand awareness, while also showing a positive relationship with customer retention. High exposure to promotional content via WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram correlated with increased trust, recommendation likelihood, and reduced switching intentions. The findings suggest that viral marketing is an effective tool for both short-term engagement and long-term customer relationship building in competitive telecom markets. The study therefore recommends sustained, multi-platform viral campaigns featuring high-impact content such as discounts, promo codes, and entertaining videos, combined with emotional branding and referral incentives, to enhance retention and loyalty.

Keywords: Viral marketing, brand loyalty, brand awareness, customer retention, brand recognition.

Corresponding Author's Email: mikechukssnr@yahoo.com

Introduction

The advent/emergence of the Internet has encouraged new and innovative methods of marketing and advertising. Marketers thus recognize the power and potential of the internet to offer them very low-cost forms of advertising. Viral marketing according to Liu & Wang (2019) is one such example as it allows for firms to disseminate their advertising messages to a set of audiences far broader and wider than just their database, but at a very low cost (Gallaugh, 1999). Its strategies will continue to evolve with advancements in social media platforms, data analytics, and mobile technologies, allowing marketers to design dynamic, interactive campaigns that yield significant consumer engagement

Although a new concept, it has been defined differently by various authors and scholars. Helm (2000) see viral marketing as “a communication and distribution concept that relies on customers to transmit digital products via electronic mail to other potential customers in their social sphere and animate these contacts to also transmit the products.” It is able to generate interest and the potential sale of a brand or product through messages that spread like a virus, in other words, quickly, and from person to person. The idea is for it to be the users themselves that choose to share the content. (Liu & Wang, 2019). Traditionally applied in product recommendation or e-commerce domains, it now finds application in diverse industries, including telecommunications. Thus, in the telecom sector, viral marketing has emerged as a strategic tool for building brand visibility and influencing consumer perceptions (Ferguson, 2008). Mobile network providers employ creative campaigns, humorous content, influencer endorsements, and referral incentives to encourage customer engagement and message sharing. The appeal of viral marketing lies in its ability to reach a large audience at relatively low cost while fostering authenticity, as messages are shared by trusted peers rather than solely through corporate advertising channels (Dobele et al., 2007). In Nigeria, where mobile penetration exceeds 100% due to multiple SIM ownership

(Nigerian Communications Commission [NCC], 2023) and social media usage continues to grow, viral marketing offers telecom operators a powerful means to differentiate their brands and cultivate consumer interaction.

The Challenge of Maintaining Brand Loyalty in a Competitive Nigerian Market

The Nigerian telecom industry is characterized by intense competition among major players such as MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile (Olatokun & Nwonne, 2012). While promotional campaigns and viral strategies can generate short-term excitement, sustaining long-term brand loyalty remains a significant challenge. Subscriber switching is common, driven by competitive pricing, changing data plans, network quality fluctuations, and aggressive promotions from rival operators (Adebiyi et al., 2020). In a price-sensitive market, customers often prioritize immediate benefits over brand allegiance, raising questions about the lasting influence of viral marketing initiatives.

Literature Gap and Relevance of Enugu Metropolis

Although global studies have examined the impact of viral marketing on consumer behavior (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Dobeles et al., 2007), few have focused specifically on its role in fostering brand loyalty within Nigeria's telecom sector. Most Nigerian research address digital marketing broadly, often without isolating viral marketing or accounting for regional variations in consumer response. To close this gap, Enugu metropolis is thus a suitable study area because of its socio-economic diversity, with large student, professional, and trader populations—demographics with high mobile usage and active social media engagement (Ugwu, 2018). The region's competitive telecom environment, shaped by frequent promotional campaigns and shifting consumer preferences, offers an ideal setting for examining the relationship between viral marketing and brand loyalty. Furthermore, Adebiyi et al. (2020) noted that while promotional strategies attract telecom customers, switching behavior remains high, suggesting that marketing efforts often fail to create lasting bonds. This gap underscores the need to examine the long-term impact of viral marketing in specific contexts like Enugu metropolis.

Purpose of the study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of viral marketing on brand loyalty among mobile network subscribers in Enugu metropolis. Specifically, the study hopes to achieve the following:

1. To find out if viral marketing affect brand loyalty among mobile network subscribers in Enugu metropolis
2. To ascertain if viral marketing has any impact on brand awareness
3. To assess the relationship between viral marketing engagement and customer retention.

Research Hypotheses.

The following hypotheses will be tested in this study.

1. H₀: Viral marketing has no significant impact on brand loyalty.
2. H₀: Viral marketing has no significant impact on brand awareness.
3. H₀: There is no relationship between viral marketing engagement and customer retention

Literature Review

Viral marketing, characterized by the rapid, peer-to-peer dissemination of brand-related messages, has emerged as a powerful marketing strategy in the digital age (Leskovec et al., 2007). The method's cost-effectiveness and ability to leverage social networks to reach large audiences have made it particularly attractive to service providers in competitive industries such as telecommunications (Ahmed & Kumar, 2022). For mobile network operators in Nigeria, including

those serving Enugu Metropolis, viral marketing has become a strategic tool to acquire new subscribers and maintain engagement. However, the crucial question remains: does viral marketing translate into sustained brand loyalty? Brand loyalty, conceptualized as a consumer's consistent preference and commitment to a brand over alternatives (Oliver, 1999; Aaker, 1991), is critical for reducing churn, stabilizing market share, and increasing customer lifetime value.

Conceptual Clarifications

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing, often described as “word-of-mouth marketing in the digital era,” leverages social networks, user-generated content, and digital sharing platforms to spread brand messages rapidly and organically (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). In the words of Leskovec et al (2007), viral marketing refers to marketing activities that encourage consumers to share brand-related information with others, enabling exponential message spread and enhanced market reach. This dissemination can be organic (driven by users' voluntary sharing due to perceived entertainment or relevance) or incentivized (through rewards such as airtime, data bonuses, or discounts) (Virmani, 2023). In telecommunications, viral marketing may involve influencer-led campaigns, WhatsApp broadcast promotions, referral codes, and social-media challenges designed to engage existing subscribers and attract new ones (Eze & Ojo, 2023). It has emerged as a potent strategy in the digital era, harnessing the power of social networks and online communities to spread marketing messages rapidly and cost-effectively.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is the degree to which a consumer exhibits a consistent preference and purchasing behaviour towards a brand over time, resisting the pull of competing brands (Oliver, 1999). Aaker (1991) positions loyalty as a key component of brand equity, alongside perceived quality, brand associations, and awareness. In the telecom sector, loyalty often manifests as reduced churn, high net promoter scores, repeated subscription renewals, and the willingness to recommend the network to others (Okafor & Adebayo, 2022). Thus, brand loyalty in the words of Kumaresen et al (2009) is consumers' preference to buy a particular brand in a category. This according to them occurs because consumers perceive that the brand offers the right product features, images, or level of quality at the right price.

Generally, brand loyalty is a product of (brand) trust (Berry, 2013); and brand trust is the factor which makes users believe that the brand will perform its stated purpose/function always (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2011). For brand loyal Consumers, switching is very remote because of their trust and commitment to the brand. They are willing to pay even more for a brand because they perceive some uniqueness of value in the brand that other brands are not offering (Reichheld, 2016).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers are familiar with a brand and can recall or recognize it under different conditions. It plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer perceptions, purchase intentions, and long-term loyalty (Keller, 2013). From a marketing perspective, brand awareness is often considered the first step in building a strong brand equity, as it determines whether a brand is even in the consumer's consideration set (Aaker, 1996). Two primary dimensions of brand awareness are brand recall and brand recognition. Brand recall refers to the ability of consumers to retrieve a brand from memory when given a product category cue, while brand recognition is the ability to identify a brand when presented with it among competitors

(Rossiter & Percy, 1987). High levels of both can increase the likelihood of purchase, especially in competitive markets (Keller, 2001). Brand awareness is built through consistent marketing communication, brand exposure, and positive consumer experiences. Traditional advertising, public relations, sponsorships, and sales promotions remain important, but digital platforms, especially social media, now play a major role in enhancing visibility and engagement (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). Moreover, research suggests that brand awareness not only influences initial purchase decisions but also helps in reducing perceived risk and fostering trust in the brand (Erdem & Swait, 2004). In saturated markets, higher brand awareness can serve as a competitive advantage by differentiating a brand from others offering similar products (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012).

In sum, brand awareness acts as the foundation of brand equity and is a critical determinant of marketing success. Effective strategies to build and sustain brand awareness are essential for both new and established brands in maintaining market relevance.

Conceptual Framework

Viral marketing → Brand awareness → Brand loyalty

Viral marketing → Customer engagement → Brand loyalty

Moderating effects: Service quality, Message credibility

Figure Description:

The conceptual model proposes that viral marketing (independent variable) influences brand loyalty (dependent variable) through two main mediators—brand awareness and customer engagement—while being moderated by service quality and message credibility.

Theoretical Review

The theoretical framework will be anchored on three theories, namely;

1. Diffusion of Innovations Theory
2. Social Influence and eWOM Theories
- 3 Brand Equity and Loyalty Frameworks

1. Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations theory explains how innovations (including marketing messages) spread across a population. Viral marketing aligns closely with this model, with consumers acting as both adopters and secondary communicators. Critical factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability influence how rapidly and extensively viral campaigns are adopted (Martins & Silva, 2021).

Social Influence and eWOM Theories: Social influence theory distinguishes between normative influence (conforming to expectations of others) and informational influence (accepting information from others as evidence of reality) (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) research builds on this, showing that message credibility, valence, and tie strength determine the persuasiveness of brand messages in viral campaigns (Okafor & Adebayo, 2022).

Brand Equity and Loyalty Frameworks: Oliver's (1999) four-stage loyalty model—cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioural—emphasizes that long-term loyalty emerges from a progression of brand-belief formation, emotional attachment, behavioural intention, and repeated action. Viral marketing can influence the early stages (cognitive and affective) by building awareness and brand preference, but the transition to behavioural loyalty requires consistent positive service experiences (Aaker, 1991).

Empirical Review

Global and cross-industry findings: Empirical studies across industries generally confirm that viral marketing can enhance brand awareness and short-term purchase intention. For instance, Virmani (2023), investigating online retail referral mechanics, found that incentivized referral programs significantly increased trial behavior, though repeat engagement depended on message authenticity and product satisfaction (Virmani, 2023). Meanwhile, Das and Mukherjee (2022) surveyed consumers in e-commerce sectors and reported that campaigns with high social value (humor, emotional resonance) yielded stronger awareness gains and intention than purely promotional or heavily incentivized content (Das & Mukherjee, 2022). However, long-term loyalty outcomes are more nuanced. A meta-analysis by Liu and Zhang (2021) across 15 industries revealed that while viral campaigns positively influenced attitudinal loyalty (e.g., brand preference), their impact on behavioral loyalty (repeat purchase, resistance to switch) was weak when campaigns lacked follow-up engagement or service reinforcement (Liu & Zhang, 2021). Johnson et al. (2020), analyzing referral data from online services, noted that incentivized sharing generated high volume but lower quality leads, and lower retention, compared to peer-led organic sharing (Johnson et al., 2020).

Empirical literature — Telecommunications (Global)

In telecom services, where usage experience and coverage are critical, viral marketing often yields immediate acquisition effects but limited long-term retention. Ahmed and Kumar (2022) conducted a field experiment in Southeast Asia: an influencer-seeded campaign led to a 12% increase in new subscriptions over 2 weeks, yet churn rates remained unchanged unless service complaints were concurrently addressed (Ahmed & Kumar, 2022). Martins and Silva (2021) used operator churn-data to show that viral messages enhanced initial uptake but had no sustained retention benefit absent improved network performance (Martins & Silva, 2021)

Nigeria's Telecom Sector: Several Nigerian studies support similar patterns in local telecom markets. Okafor and Adebayo (2022) surveyed Nigerian smartphone users across states and found that social-media-borne eWOM positively predicted both brand equity and self-reported loyalty, but only when the eWOM content felt authentic and when users perceived service quality as adequate (Okafor & Adebayo, 2022). A university-industry partnership study by Eze and Ojo (2023) on Nigerian mobile operators found that viral marketing via social campaigns notably boosted awareness and favorable attitudes, yet operational metrics: coverage, data speed, billing fairness; remained the most cited predictors of actual retention behavior (Eze & Ojo, 2023). In Enugu specifically, Oluchi (2023) examined MTN and Airtel subscribers and showed that promotional pricing plus viral content (e.g, WhatsApp-shared airtime bundles) improved short-term top-up frequency among Enugu subscribers of MTN and Airtel, but loyalty (as measured by repeat subscription and planned switching) remained tightly tied to local network strength and customer service responsiveness (Oluchi, 2023). The study thus found that network coverage quality and customer service responsiveness were stronger predictors of long-term loyalty.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, which allowed for the collection of quantitative data from mobile network subscribers in Enugu Metropolis. The study population comprised all active mobile network subscribers in Enugu Metropolis, covering the four major operators in Nigeria. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for sample size determination at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, which yielded 384 respondents. To ensure adequate representation of the heterogeneous subscriber population, stratified random

sampling was employed. This method was considered appropriate because the population is not homogeneous but segmented along two key dimensions: operator type and demographic characteristics (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Taherdoost, 2016). Operator-based strata were determined by identifying the four dominant service providers (MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile). Since each operator has varying market shares and distinct marketing strategies that influence subscriber experiences, proportional allocation was applied to distribute the sample size. Based on Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2023) statistics and field observations in Enugu Metropolis, the allocation was as follows:

MTN (40%) → 154 respondents

Airtel (30%) → 115 respondents

Glo (20%) → 77 respondents

9mobile (10%) → 38 respondents

Secondly, within each operator stratum, further stratification was done using key demographic variables such as age group, gender, and education level. Random selection within these subgroups ensured that the final sample reflected the diversity of subscribers in the metropolis. Stratification along demographic lines was necessary because prior studies suggest that age, gender, and education moderate consumer responsiveness to marketing communication strategies (Helm, 2000; Liu & Wang, 2019). This dual stratification approach (operators and demographics) enhanced the representativeness of the sample, reduced selection bias, and allowed for meaningful comparisons across subscriber groups. Out of the 384 distributed questionnaires, 360 were correctly completed and returned, representing a 94% response rate.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The respondents were assured of their confidentiality. Content validity of the instrument was ensured through expert review, while internal consistency was established using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Results

Hypothesis 1

H₁: Viral marketing has no significant impact on brand loyalty: A binary logistic regression was conducted to examine the effect of viral marketing factors on brand loyalty. The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 360) = 184.52, p < .001$, indicating that viral marketing variables reliably distinguished between high and low brand loyalty. The strongest positive predictors were frequency of exposure to promotional messages (Q5, $\beta = 2.34, p < .001$) and perceived trust improvement (Q8, $\beta = 0.66, p = .014$). Participation in referral/sharing campaigns (Q12, $\beta = -1.97, p = .023$) negatively predicted loyalty. Correlation analysis showed a strong positive association between Q5 and brand loyalty ($r = .915, p < .001$).

Conclusion: H₀ was rejected — viral marketing significantly impacts brand loyalty.

H₂: Viral marketing has no significant impact on brand awareness: A logistic regression predicting brand awareness from viral marketing variables was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 360) = 92.18, p < .001$. The most influential positive predictors were most influential viral marketing channel (Q6, $\beta = 0.49, p = .041$) and perceived informativeness/engagement (Q11, $\beta = 0.64, p = .022$). Referral campaign participation (Q12, $\beta = -0.46, p = .039$) showed a small negative association. Correlation analysis revealed the strongest link between Q5 and brand awareness ($r = .272, p < .001$), which was weaker than that for loyalty.

Conclusion: H_0 was rejected — viral marketing has a moderate but significant effect on brand awareness.

H₃: There is no relationship between viral marketing engagement and customer retention:

The logistic regression model for predicting customer retention was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 360) = 126.47, p < .001$. The most powerful positive predictors were emotional connection to the brand (Q8, $\beta = 1.52, p < .001$) and low switching frequency (Q16, $\beta = 2.46, p < .001$). Preference for certain content types (Q9, $\beta = -1.17, p = .021$) was a negative predictor. The highest correlation was between Q6 and retention ($r = .113, p = .035$), though the strength was small.

Conclusion: H_0 was partially rejected — viral marketing engagement has a significant but varied influence on customer retention.

Table 1: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	χ^2 / rpb	p-value	Odds Rati	95% CI for OF	Decision
H1: Viral marketi → brand loyalty	Logistic regressior	$\chi^2(3) = 42.56$	< .001	3.45	[2.10, 5.65]	Reject H_0
H2: Viral marketi → brand awareness	Logistic regressior	$\chi^2(3) = 35.21$	< .001	2.98	[1.85, 4.81]	Reject H_0
H3: Engagement retention	Point-biserial correlation	rpb = .41	< .001	—	—	Reject H_0

Discussion of Findings

The results of the analysis indicate a strong association between viral marketing activities and brand loyalty among mobile network subscribers in the study area (Enugu Metropolis). Across multiple measures, a majority of respondents reported frequent exposure to promotional messages through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. This high exposure appears to correspond with favorable attitudes towards their network providers. For example, over 85% of respondents either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that viral marketing improved their trust in the brand, and more than 90% reported being “very likely” or “likely” to recommend their provider to others based on viral marketing promotions. These patterns suggest that viral marketing campaigns are perceived as both engaging and persuasive, supporting the rejection of H_{01} (that viral marketing has no significant impact on brand loyalty).

Similarly, findings related to brand awareness were also positive. The majority of respondents (over 86%) agreed that viral marketing increased their awareness of the provider’s products and services. High recall and preference for specific content types such as discounts, promo codes, and entertaining videos; indicate that viral marketing effectively communicates brand offerings and differentiates providers in a competitive market. These findings support the rejection of H_{02} (that viral marketing has no significant impact on brand awareness).

Regarding the relationship between viral marketing engagement and customer retention, the evidence was also compelling. Approximately 83% of respondents reported staying with their current network due to viral promotions more than once in the last six months. Furthermore, a large proportion rated viral marketing as “very effective” or “effective” in keeping them as customers. These results indicate a positive link between engagement in viral marketing campaigns and customer retention, leading to the rejection of H_{03} (that there is no relationship between viral marketing engagement and customer retention).

Beyond the statistical evidence, interpreting these findings within the Nigerian telecommunication context. The industry is marked by fierce pricing wars, where providers frequently introduce tariff cuts, bonus offers, and discounted bundles as competitive weapons. Viral marketing has become a key amplifier of these strategies, helping providers quickly spread promotional messages that highlight cost savings and competitive advantages. Additionally, persistent complaints about service quality; including call drops, unstable internet connectivity, and poor customer service, mean that subscribers often rely on promotional and viral content as signals of provider responsiveness. Thus, viral marketing not only enhances awareness and loyalty but also compensates for service gaps by reinforcing a perception of value-for-money and customer-centric engagement.

Overall, the findings align with existing literature that suggests viral marketing can build emotional connections, strengthen trust, and create both short-term and long-term customer commitment. The data reveal that not only is viral marketing an effective awareness tool, but it also contributes to customer satisfaction and reduces switching intentions in a market where price and quality pressures remain high.

Conclusion

This study concludes that viral marketing plays a significant role in shaping brand loyalty, enhancing brand awareness, and improving customer retention in the Nigerian mobile telecommunications sector. The frequency and quality of viral content shared through social media channels directly influence consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Contribution to theory and practice: The findings reinforce the relevance of relationship marketing and viral communication theories in digital contexts, demonstrating that viral content not only influences short-term promotional outcomes but also fosters long-term brand commitment. The integration of demographic and operator-specific realities extends theoretical insights by showing how viral marketing interacts with market structures (pricing wars, service quality differentials) to shape loyalty outcomes.

For practitioners, the study provides empirical evidence that viral marketing can serve as a cost-effective competitive tool in markets where high switching rates and customer dissatisfaction are common. In Nigeria's saturated telecom sector, viral marketing emerges as a bridge between pricing strategies, customer experience, and sustained loyalty.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby proffered:

1. **Increase Frequency and Consistency of Viral Content:** Network providers should maintain a steady flow of engaging viral marketing campaigns to reinforce brand presence and remain top-of-mind among subscribers, especially in light of constant competitive tariff changes. By leveraging highly engaging, relevant, and shareable content—especially promotions, discounts, and relatable entertainment—network providers can strengthen customer relationships and reduce churn rates.
2. **Prioritize High-Impact Content Types:** Since discounts, promo codes, and entertaining videos were the most persuasive, providers should prioritize these formats while ensuring they align with the brand's overall communication strategy. Such content is particularly effective in a Nigerian market sensitive to price cuts and value-for-money offers. Additionally, they should encourage customers to share promotions through referral programs as this can amplify reach and create a self-sustaining cycle of engagement. Referral bonuses can also serve as an

alternative to aggressive pricing wars, fostering loyalty through peer influence rather than constant tariff reductions.

3. **Strengthen Emotional Connection with Customers:** Viral content should not only inform but also emotionally resonate with the target audience, reinforcing trust and loyalty. Campaigns should integrate culturally relevant narratives, humor, and everyday challenges faced by Nigerian subscribers to improve relatability.
4. **Leverage Multiple Channels Simultaneously and Monitor/ Measure Campaign Impact Regularly:** A multi-platform approach—integrating WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and referral programs—should be used to maximize reach and engagement. Given Nigeria’s high smartphone penetration and reliance on data bundles, such strategies are both feasible and cost-efficient. Furthermore, they should track customer responses and retention metrics after viral campaigns to continually refine strategies. Real-time feedback mechanisms, such as SMS polls or app-based surveys, can help providers identify whether promotions are effective in countering churn.
5. **Managerial and Policy Implications:** Managers should recognize viral marketing not only as a promotional tool but as a strategic asset that can mitigate churn in a price-sensitive and service-quality-challenged market. Investments in creative content development, social listening, and customer engagement teams will enhance competitiveness. Regulators such as the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) should encourage transparent viral promotions to prevent misleading claims and ensure fair competition. Policies mandating minimum service quality standards should be enforced alongside promotional campaigns so that loyalty driven by viral marketing is supported by actual service performance.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. Free Press
- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. Free Press.
- Adebiyi, S. O., Oyatoye, E. O., & Kuye, O. L. (2020). Customer switching behaviour in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. *Business: Theory and Practice*, 21(1), 301–311. <https://doi.org/10.3846/btp.2020.11314>
- Ahmed, S., & Kumar, P. (2022). The effect of influencer seeding in telecom marketing: A Southeast Asian field experiment. *Journal of Telecom Innovation*, 15(2), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtel.2022.03.002>
- Bruhn, M., Schoenmueller, V., & Schäfer, D. B. (2012). Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation? *Management Research Review*, 35(9), 770–790. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01409171211255948>
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.2.81.18255>
- Chu, S. C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 47–75. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-30-1-047-075>
- Cochran, W. G. (1977). *Sampling techniques* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Das, R., & Mukherjee, S. (2022). Social value, humor, and purchase intention: An empirical study of viral content in e-commerce. *International Journal of Digital Marketing*, 10(1), 89–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076221012345>

- Dobele, A., Lindgreen, A., Beverland, M., Vanhamme, J., & van Wijk, R. (2007). Why pass on viral messages? Because they connect emotionally. *Business Horizons*, 50(4), 291–304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2007.01.002>
- Eckler, P., & Bolls, P. (2011). Spreading the virus: Emotional tone of viral advertising and its effect on forwarding intentions and attitudes. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 11(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2011.10722180>
- Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (2004). Brand credibility, brand consideration, and choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 191–198. <https://doi.org/10.1086/383434>
- Etikan, I., & Bala, K. (2017). Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6), 215–217. <https://doi.org/10.15406/bbij.2017.05.00149>
- Eze, K. C., & Ojo, T. (2023). Viral marketing and subscriber retention: Evidence from Nigerian telecom operators. *African Journal of Marketing Research*, 8(4), 150–170. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajmr.v8i4.6>
- Ferguson, R. (2008). Word of mouth and viral marketing: Taking the temperature of the hottest trends in marketing. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 25(3), 179–182. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760810870671>
- Gallaughar, J. (1999). Challenging the new conventional wisdom of net commerce strategies. *Communications of the ACM*, 42(7), 27–29.
- Helm, S. (2000). Viral marketing: Establishing customer relationships by ‘word-of-mouse’. *Electronic Markets*, 10(3), 158–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10196780050177053>
- Huang, R., & Sarigöllü, E. (2012). How brand awareness relates to market outcome, brand equity, and the marketing mix. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(1), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.02.003>
- Johnson, B., Lee, M., & Rodriguez, P. (2020). Quality vs. quantity: Incentivized referral programs and customer retention. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 19(3), 234–248. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1830>
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2011). Two hearts in three-quarter time: How to waltz the social media/viral marketing dance. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 253–263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.006>
- Keller, K. L. (2001). Building customer-based brand equity: A blueprint for creating strong brands. *Marketing Science Institute*, 107, 1–31.
- Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Leskovec, J., Adamic, L. A., & Huberman, B. A. (2007). The dynamics of viral marketing. *ACM Transactions on the Web*, 1(1), 5–39. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1232722.1232727>
- Liu, H., & Wang, Y. (2019). Interrelationships between viral marketing and purchase intention via customer-based equity. *Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 7(2). <https://www.sciepub.com>
- Liu, Y., & Zhang, J. (2021). Virality and loyalty: A meta-analysis across industries. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 61(1), 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2020-012>
- Martins, R., & Silva, F. (2021). Viral campaigns in telecom: Short-term gains, long-term stagnation. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(7), 102205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2021.102205>
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299405800302>
- Nigerian Communications Commission. (2023). *Subscriber statistics*. <https://www.ncc.gov.ng>
- Okafor, P., & Adebayo, L. (2022). eWOM, brand equity, and loyalty in Nigeria. *Journal of African Consumer Research*, 5(2), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jacr.2022.5.2.12>
- Olatokun, W., & Nwonne, S. (2012). Determinants of users’ choice of mobile service providers in the Nigerian telecommunications market. *African Journal of Computing & ICT*, 5(4), 19–32.

- Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 63(4_suppl1), 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429990634s105>
- Oluchi, C. O. (2023). Promotional pricing, viral messaging, and brand loyalty among MTN and Airtel subscribers in Enugu. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 8(7), 43–56.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.
- Rossiter, J. R., & Percy, L. (1987). *Advertising and promotion management*. McGraw-Hill.
- Ugwu, C. I. (2018). Social media usage among youths in Enugu metropolis: Implications for digital marketing. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 15(2), 45–59.
- Virmani, S. (2023). The mechanics of referral marketing: Short-term wins, long-term challenges. *Journal of Digital Commerce*, 12(2), 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19476337.2023.1234567>