

AN ASSESSMENT OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOL IN OUTDOOR CATERING SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental assumption is that Marketing Communication (MC) concept has been founded on the large organisations and by implication such concept may not explain MC practices among small businesses. It is on this basis that this quantitative study assesses the application of MC tool of advertising in Outdoor Catering Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research was adopted with a structured questionnaire to elicit relevant information from the respondents. Of the 200 copies of questionnaires distributed, 196 were properly filled and returned. The gathered data were analysed using both the descriptive and inferential statistics. Based on the analysis, our findings reveal that, firstly, more than 80% of the respondent outdoor catering SMEs use the online/internet advertising medium compared to other traditional mediums. Secondly, critical factors that affect outdoor catering SMEs application MC tool of advertising, despite plethora of factors, include finance, lack of qualified marketing manager/expert, the owner/manager style, cost of advertising and competitors' advertising activities. However, future research can examine these factors in another geographical locations and industries.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, Advertising, outdoor catering, SMEs

1.0 Introduction

The explosion in the mass media as a result of the monolithic impulse of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is opening up new frontiers in marketing communication (MC) channels. The traditional MC channels are becoming more fragmented, shifting transaction powers away from the firms to the consumers (Winer, 2008). The internet, for example, has transformed MC channels into two-way communication model, away from the one-way model that characterised the traditional channels. This suddenly has

necessitated the need for enterprises to exploit new communication channels so as to increase consumer public as well as creating wider awareness for their products and services.

However, despite this explosion, enterprises, especially Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) from the developing economies, often lack the capabilities to exploit these new MC channels. This is due to their unique and inherent attributes such as owner-manager style (Resnick, Cheng,

Simpson & Loureno, 2016; Gilmore & Carson, 2000), lack of finance, lack of skilled marketing professional, poor internal communication, competitors' activities and stereotypical perception of MC tools as costly (Ogechukwu et al., 2013; Asikhia, 2010; Henrikki, 2000). These challenges have continuously been argued as those critical factors that hinder SMEs capability the used MC tools. Yet, Gronoos and Finne (2009) reckon that SMEs must develop the technical know-how to communicate their product and service offering to the consumers effectively.

More challenging is the assumption that conventional MC tools and their practices are based on large enterprises from the developed economies (Resnick et al, 2016). By implication such MC practices may not be applicable to SMEs, especially those from the developing economies. They are seemingly too fragile in the adoption of MC tools or capabilities due to these unique characteristics (Gilmore & Carson, 2000). And even when they try to adopt these tools, they often adopt them without structure spontaneously and haphazardly which is far from industry standard of practice. MC tools, sometimes, due to their meagre finance, MC tool is a luxury that can be avoided (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996).

If SMEs must build product or service preference with consumers, create awareness of their product or service offerings as well as differentiate these offerings from competitors and convince potential consumers, they must do MC and adopt its tools. These tools are not only for the privilege of the large enterprises, SMEs must recognise the critical roles for their product or service survival (Rabova, 2015). Importantly, SMEs must reckon that MC tools are the nucleus to increasing brand loyalty, sales revenue and customer retention (Bacik, Fedorko & Sinova, 2012). For example, advertising as an essential MC tool has been argued to be the central element in MC (Danahar & Rossiter, 2011; Cioppi & Buratti,

2009) as it helps enterprises to boost sales revenue and profitability (Nthenge, 2016).

But for most SMEs, due to their unique characteristics, it is observed that they disregard the MC tools, especially internet advertising as they assumed that it is quite costly and sophisticated (Preda and Furdiu, 2009; Simpson and Taylor, 2002). These perspectives are obvious in the developing economies where the World Trade Organisation (WTO) report of 2016 shows that, of the formally registered SMEs, less than a quarter has a website for internet advertising compared to 85% in the developed economies. This challenge is due to the inability of the SMEs to integrate and comprehend the implementation and measurement of MC tools. Thus, the study examine the application of MC tool of advertising by outdoor catering SMEs in Lagos State Nigeria by examining usage of advertising as MC tool as well as those critical factors that affect the usage.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Marketing Communication (MC)

Despite the lack of consistency in the conceptualisation of MC among scholars, there are obvious overlaps in the way it is defined. The common used definitions emerged from the United Kingdom's (UK) Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and the United States' (US) American Marketing Association (AMA). The former describes MC as an 'organisational process' of "identifying, anticipating and supplying customer requirements efficiently and profitably" (CIM) while the latter sees it as organisational process of "planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create an exchange and satisfy individual and organizational objectives." The understanding from these definitions is that the MC activities are aimed at satisfying customers' need

toward achieving the organisational objectives (profit or value creation).

However, Gronoos (2002) reckon that marketing practice has always been conceptualised based on American textbooks. These definitions may not necessarily be the standard definition in other parts of the world. Jobber (2013) believed that the aim, like the CIM and AMA, is to attract and retain customers at a profit by meeting and exceeding their needs and expectation better than the competitions. Fill and Jamieson (2006) also describe it as a management process of how enterprises engage with their audience. This audience are often the consumers which the enterprises aimed to influence their attitudinal and behavioural responses. Importantly, the attitudinal and behavioural responses from the consumers is a positive or satisfactory response to the enterprise' product or services.

But contemporarily, MC is not about identifying consumers need and creating the product to satisfying that need. It is not only an attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers - directly or indirectly - about their products and brand they sell (Keller, 2009). Rather, it is concern with what Bacik, Fedorko and Sinova (2012) see as the interactive dialogue between the enterprise and the consumer in the stages: prior to sales, during sales in course, use of products and continue to the end-use product. The enterprise's interaction with their customers as well as providing the platform for the customer interacts with them too (Winer, 2008). MC can tell or show consumers how and why a product is used, by what kind of person and where and when (Keller, 2009).

But due to the unique characteristics and constraints of SME's such as owner/managers structures, the dynamic business environment and the lack of resources, marketing within SMEs is almost certainly context specific and market driven (Gamble, Gilmore, McCartan-Quin & Durkin, 2011) and marketing theories

or models used by large organisations cannot be easily applied to SMEs (Reijonen, 2010). O'Dwyer, Gilmore & Carson (2009) reckon the lack of formal and conventional marketing concepts can be misconstrued as a lack of marketing in some instances, especially in SMEs. These characteristics are inherent in the experiential knowledge of owner/manager - distinct managerial style, independence, ownership and limited resources.

The truth, however, is that regardless of the nature and the characteristic of an enterprise, what is evidence is that it carries out one form of MC or the other. This is because MC is a mix of marketing activities that are engendered toward informing the consumers about the organisation and its offerings. Importantly, it is aimed at creating sales (Reijonen, 2010). Its objectives include building a product preference with a potential customer, informing customers about products or services and their benefits, differentiate their offering from competitors, to convince potential buyers to purchase the products or services (Bacik et al, 2012). Based on the above, MC can be describe as all activities that is engender by an enterprise aimed at convincing consumers to purchase and repurchase its product and service. These activities are encompassing as it is aimed at increasing sales for profit; retaining the consumers so as to come again; gaining feedback from the consumers about the product or service quality; and doing better than the enterprise close competitors.

McCarthy (1998) espoused the various types of MC - these are often referred to as MC tools which include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations (PR) and direct marketing.

Sales Promotion: This usually involves a diverse collection of incentive tools mostly short-term, design to stimulate quicker and greater purchase of a particular product or services by consumers or the trade (Kotler,

2000). It includes marketing activities adding value to products for a limited period of time in order to stimulate consumer purchases and effectiveness of intermediaries.

Public Relations (PR): This is made up of all activities aimed at promoting the image of an enterprise and its product. Todorova (2015) summaries it as those set of activities that include any of the following activities and aspects directly related to the marketing function of an enterprise: special publications, participation in community activities for fundraising, sponsorship of special events, lobbies and other public works to improve the image of the enterprise. Importantly, PR sought to generate goodwill and interest about an enterprise. It is more like a communication strategy to build good relationship and connect constructively with the public at large.

Direct Marketing: Direct marketing is an interactive system of marketing, which uses one or more advertising media to effect a measurable response and or transaction at any location (Hoekstra & Schijns, 1995). It is seen as a two-way communications; in which customised MC elicit a measurable response from individual customers. It is one of the fastest growing sectors in the global economy especially with the advancement in information technology which allows the use of the internet. This makes it possible to apply new and attractive forms of direct marketing that contain the potential for branding and generating sales including web marketing, email marketing; direct mail, web seminars, telemarketing promotions, sales channels and a whole lot more.

Personal Selling: This involves a direct contact with the buyer, a two-way communication and immediate feedback from the customer. It is used to support other means of the promotional mix while being supported by

them. Personal presentation is done by a firm's sales force for the purpose of making sales and building customer relationships. It allows modification of the message as per the client, control over the audience and achieved delivery of information about consumer behaviour and market trends.

Advertising: This is usually any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor (Kotler, 2000). It is a form of MC, which aims to encourage, persuade, or in some cases even manipulate the audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to take or continue to take an action (Todorova 2015). Kotler and Keller (2012) describe it as any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services from the sponsor evident by the print media, telecommunications/network communications, electronic media and display media. Advertising mediums include the press, television, direct mail, outdoor and transit, radio, cinema and the internet.

Regardless of the MC tool that is employed by any enterprise, whether small or large, it is very important to incorporate the marketing mix (Product, Place, Promotion, Price, People, Process and Physical evidence). This is usually a combination of marketing activities that are engendered toward not only to identify consumers need but also to connect, psychologically with these consumers beyond mere purchase and repurchase. The assumption is that the marketing mix (7P's) allows adaptation to uncontrollable external environment (McCarthy, 1998).

2.2 Importance of MC

From the reviewed literature (Reijonen, 2010; Opoku, Abratt, Bendixen & Pitt, 2007; Carson & Gilmore, 2000) it is obvious that the underlying motivation behind enterprises, especially SMEs embracing MC include but are

not limited to, the need for differentiation of product or service that is, branding due to competitive market conditions, the need for market dominance/security and the need for sales/revenue maximisation of shareholders and other stakeholders of the business. For example, one critical issue about MC for SMEs is that it allows the enterprises to create a unique product or service – branding (Opoku et al., 2007).

Branding is the process of creating a brand image that engages the hearts and minds of customers and is what separates similar products from each other (Duncan, 2005) and there is much more to a corporate brand than a single unifying tag line or logo. According to Hatch and Schultz (2001), there are three critical interdependent elements that go into making an effective corporate brand; vision, culture, and image. Vision will come from top management, usually, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and often time with SMEs is the owner-manager. Culture reflects the internal organisation's values and behaviour and how employees feel about the company. The image is how the rest of the world sees the enterprise (Percy, 2008).

Another rationale for MC, especially in SMEs, is the fact that it brings the enterprise in constant and direct contact with its customers (Beverland & Lockshin, 2004) which will invariably make the SME successful and attain the level of a market leader which inevitably affords it some level of security in the competitive market environment. Many enterprises employ MC in order to be well known and to remain as market leaders. Fuller (1994) argues that through marketing a firm aims to achieve competitive advantage by satisfying its customers more effectively and efficiently than its competitors and thus ensures long-term profitability. SMEs successfully use marketing to generate sales (Guersen, 1997; Romano & Ratnatunga, 1995). The MC tools are strategic tools of identifying customer needs (Asikhia, 2010). For example,

Preda and Furdie, (2009) believe that, if SMEs are open to modern marketing tools, SMEs can increase the number of customers.

However, marketing scholars and practitioners have long been concerned about the accountability of MC expenditures, that is, advertising and sales promotions. The principle of diminishing returns and how it might invariably affect MC activities and as Rodger (1965) emphatically explains marketing effort is normally intensified in the belief that more output can be sold. To a certain extent, increased marketing expenditure does seem to lead to rising sales but at a reducing rate. Beyond that point, increased inputs to marketing efforts will not improve sales any further.

SMEs challenges in the adoption of MC tools

The problems faced by SMEs with regards to MC ranges from a downright meaning of the word to how to employ meaningful MC in practice. SMEs are uniquely different from large organisations and most SMEs do not have established internal marketing department. Some scholars have argued that due to the uniqueness of SMEs MC strategies employed in large organisations might not be effective in a SME (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996). The marketing practices at SMEs involve relying on personal contacts and are often driven by the certain way they do business (Simpson et al., 2006). SMEs lack appropriate tools for responding to increased market competition and for dealing with competitors in the national and international market (Percy, 2012).

SMEs are also often weak in marketing management capability due to time constraints (Gilmore et al., 2001), financial shortage (Carson & Gilmore, 2000; McCartay-Quinn & Carson, 2003) and lack of long-term perspective (Laforet, 2008) and marketing at SMEs has been characterised as haphazard,

informal, loose, unstructured, spontaneous, reactive, built on as well as conforming to industry norms (Gilmore et al., 2001). They are faced with limited resources related issues, finance, time and limited marketing knowledge furthermore owner-managers of small firms tend to view marketing narrowly (Reijonen, 2010). With day-to-day pressures, marketing can be considered as an unnecessary luxury (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996.) In addition, it is argued that SME marketers may consider marketing as a synonym of either selling or advertising (Marcati et al., 2008). Consequently, complex theories and sophisticated processes seem to be inappropriate in small enterprises (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996).

Additionally, the marketing function in SMEs is hindered by constraints such as poor cash flow, lack of marketing expertise, business size, tactical customer-related problems, and strategic customer-related problems (Chaston, 1998; Carson, 1985). SME owner-managers have individual management styles and in the absence of a marketing plan, they can find themselves using 'self-marketing' of themselves as a means of promoting their businesses. However, within the context of marketing decisions, there is an instinctive understanding in SMEs that networking with outside individuals, associations and organisations enable SMEs to be successful and so they use networking as an inherent marketing tool (Gilmore and Carson, 1999). Beyond these challenges, scholars have continuously argued for the role of MC in organisation performance. Gummertssohn (2002) is of the opinion that marketing is such a captivating, confusing and rich field that no one has been able to sort out its constituent elements and their links on a higher conceptual level suggest a more general and

systemic theory. Much of marketing stays put on a descriptive level, with traces of analysis and conceptualisation but still closer to the substantive data than to a general theory.

3. Methodology

To achieve the purpose of this study, a descriptive survey design with quantitative method is adopted. This method is seemingly most appropriate for this study as noted in Abah and Olohiliye's (2015) investigation of the effect of advertising on the sales volume of Benue Brewery Limited in Nigeria. We developed a self-administered questionnaire to elicit important information needed for achieving the main aim objectives of this study. The adopted questionnaire is a combination of both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaire and was structured in three parts - Part One: contains the demographic information (Business Attributes) of the outdoor catering SMEs; Part Two: contain information on the application of Advertising as a Marketing Communication (MC) tool; and Part Three: the choice of the advertising medium (Outdoor, internet/online, Print and Broadcast).

3.1 Data Collection

Due to the nature of the research and its instrument, this study adopted the primary data collection method through the use of a survey questionnaire. Though, this method of data collection is quite challenging and the cost implication is relatively high, especially moving around Lagos State to meet outdoor catering SMEs owner-managers/managers. We distributed a total of two hundred (200) copies of questionnaires and ninety-six (96) were filled and returned. This constitutes 98% (Table 1) of the respondent.

Table 1: Sampled Population

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lagos Central	105	52.5	53.6	53.6
	Lagos East	25	12.5	12.8	66.3
	Lagos West	66	33.0	33.7	100.0
	Total	196	98.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	2.0		
Total		200	100.0		

In order to make sure that the research instrument was valid, we subjected it to content validity reliability. For the validity, copies of the questionnaire went through peer review process by statisticians and experts, both in the field of study and those not in the field of study. Their suggestions were taken and used to review the research instrument. We also subjected the instrument to reliability test using the Cronbach's Alpha. The outcome of the test analysis showed the instrument to be reliable with the Cronbach's Alpha calculated (0.81) to be greater than the 0.70 benchmark. Importantly, strengthen the reliability and content validity the study; statements in the instrument were drawn from prior empirical studies (Nthenge, 2016; Alex-Onyeocha, 2015).

Based on the quantitative research design of this study, the statistical tools of descriptive analysis and inferential statistics are used to analyse the collected data. Similar analytical technique was noticed in Nthenge (2016) and Alex-Onyeocha (2015) study of SMOCEs. This level of research requires great degree objectivity in drawing inferences. It is in this regards that extreme measures are taken to ensure that sample respondents not only represent a significant account of the study but also, the choice of sample technique used is justified.

4. Analysis of Data

The first of the data analysis focuses on the adoption/application various advertising

medium as a MC tool by outdoor catering SMEs in Lagos State. In assessing the usage of the various mediums of advertising, that is, internet, outdoor, print and broadcast advertising, the study reveals, for example, that 90.3% of the respondent outdoor catering SMEs use internet/online advertising while only 9.7% did not. Of the 90.3% users, 26.5%, emails; 42.5, social media; 17.5%, web banners; and 10% use e-newsletter. For broadcast advertising, only 13.3% use it whereas, 86.7% are not using broadcast advertising medium. Of the 13.3% users, 55.1% use the TV medium while the remaining 44.9% use the radio broadcasting medium. The print advertising reveals that only 31.6% use the medium while the remaining 68.4% of the respondents are not using it. Of the 31.6% using the print advertising medium, 31.6%, newspapers; 28.6%, magazine; and 39.8%, In-house newsletter. None claim to use fliers. As for the outdoor advertising, 39.8% of the respondent SMOCEs use the medium, while the remaining 60.2% is not using the medium. And out of the 39.8% users of the outdoor advertising medium, 21.4% use the billboard; 35.7%, banners; and 42.9%; signpost.

In the respondents' assessment of the importance of advertising to the business, the descriptive statistics (Table 2), the mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation for "the need for advertising of the business" are 4.88 and 0.33 respectively, suggesting that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs found advertising to be very important to the business. When

assessing the important of advertising activities as a function of the business, the mean (x) value is 4.76 and a standard deviation of 0.45 indicating that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs agreed that advertising is a very important activity as a function of the business. Similarly, when

asked of the satisfaction with their choice of advertising medium, the mean (x) shows 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.88 indicating that the respondent SMOCEs are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their choice of advertising medium.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Importance of Advertising as a MC tool.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a need for advertising of the Business	196	4.0	5.0	4.878	.3286
How do you see advertising activities as a function of the business	196	3.0	5.0	4.760	.4514
I am satisfied with the choice of the business medium of advertising	196	1.0	5.0	3.832	.8813
Valid N (listwise)	196				

The finding in Table 2 above is further supported by the result of the T-test in Table 3 (T-test), which shows a P-Value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant of the mean

value. This simply implies that advertng as a MC tool is statistically significant to the business, as a function of the business and as a choice of MC medium for the business.

Table 3: T-Test: Importance of Advertising as a MC tool

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
There is a need for advertising of the Business	207.781	195	.000	4.8776	4.831	4.924
How do you see advertising activities as a function of the business	147.643	195	.000	4.7602	4.697	4.824
I am satisfied with the choice of the business medium of advertising	60.870	195	.000	3.8316	3.707	3.956

The second part of the data analysis examines those critical factors affecting outdoor catering SMEs application of advertising as a MC tool. From the literature review, issues identified include: cost of advertising; poor

internal communication; finance; lack of marketing manager/expert; stereotypical thinking that advertising is complicated; advertising is time consuming; and marketing activities of competitors.

Table 4: *Descriptive statistics: Factor affecting the adoption of advertising as a MC tool.*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cost of Advertising	196	1.0	5.0	3.199	1.2915
Poor Internal communication	196	1.0	5.0	4.189	1.0955
Competitors Activities	196	1.0	5.0	4.102	1.0669
Owner/manager Style	196	1.0	5.0	4.107	1.0783
Lack of qualified manager/expert	196	1.0	5.0	3.041	1.2314
Stereotypical thinking of					
Complication	196	1.0	5.0	3.301	1.2009
Finance	196	1.0	5.0	4.189	1.0955
Time consuming	196	1.0	5.0	3.240	1.3430
Valid N (listwise)	196				

From Table 4, the descriptive statistics of factors affecting the adoption of advertising as a MC tool, the mean (x) for “cost of advertising” is 3.2 with a standard deviation of 1.29. This suggests that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs are undecided on whether the cost of advertising is expensive for their business. With a mean (x) of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 1.1 for “poor internal communication”, this suggests that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs agreed that poor internal communication affect the advertising medium of their business. Also when respondents are asked if the “advertising activities of their competitors” affect their choice of advertising medium, the mean (x) is 4.1 and a standard deviation of 1.07. This suggests that respondent outdoor catering SMEs agreed that the advertising activities of their competitors affect their adoption of advertising medium. On “owner/manager style” influencing the adoption of advertising medium of the business, the mean (x) is 4.1 and a standard deviation of 1.07. This suggests that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs agreed that the choice of advertising medium is determined by the owner/manager style.

For “lack of qualified marketing manager/expert”, the mean (x) is 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.2, suggesting that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs are

undecided as to whether the lack of a qualified marketing manager/expert is a factor that affect their adoption of advertising in their business. The stereotypical assumption of advertising as a complicating activities show a mean (x) of 3.3 and a standard deviation of 1.2. This simply suggests that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs are uncertain about advertising being a complicated activity. However, finance as a factor tends to suggest that the respondent outdoor catering SMEs agreed that the business does not have enough financial resources to fund advertising activities. This is based on the mean (x) of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 1.1.

5. Discussion

The main aim of this study is to assess the application of marketing communication tool of advertising of outdoor catering SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, quantitative research method was used. A survey, both closed and opened, semi-structured questionnaire was used as the primary instrument of data collection. Based on the results of the study, the research findings are discussed as follows:

Outdoor catering SMEs, like every other SME, represent a critical business community in Lagos State and indeed Nigeria. However, in trying to create awareness as well as increasing their sales volume through

advertising, it is evidence that there are some inevitable factors that have effects on their effective adoption of some advertising mediums. Even when evidence suggests that they adopt some of these mediums, they often possess weak capabilities to explore all the mediums. It becomes imperative for SMEs to develop the know-how to explore the inherent opportunities of various advertising mediums to reach a large pool of customers. The internet, for example, has created a convenient, cheap and readily available platform for advertising to reach wider customers beyond local vicinity. It has provided opportunity to close those critical challenges they encounter in the application of traditional MC tools especially advertising. Though there are inherent challenges with the internet advertising medium, more importantly, the traditional advertising mediums are losing their grips. This is evidence from the study reveals that more than 80% of the respondent outdoor catering SMEs use the online/internet advertising medium compared to other traditional mediums.

In order to identify those critical factors that affect outdoor catering SMEs adoption of advertising medium as a marketing tool in Lagos, State, the questionnaire focused on aspects like cost of advertising, owner/manager style, lack of qualified marketing manager/experts, poor internal communication, competitors' advertising activities, time constraints and stereotypical thinking of complications. These findings could then be used to understand those issues or challenges, especially those critical ones, SMEs encounter in the adoption of advertising in the marketing of their products and services. The response from the outdoor catering SMEs in this study gave an indication that the level at which individual factors affect these SMEs tend to vary. The major factors however, according to the analysis, are finance, cost of advertising, poor internal communications,

competitors advertising activities, lack of qualified marketing manager/expert. Most of the respondent outdoor catering SMEs in this study reckon that advertising is a critical function of the business that can help increase sales and customers patronage (Attih, 2013). This means that outdoor catering SMEs may not be able to create enough awareness of their business because of these inherent critical factors. For example, it is a known and well researched fact that one of the critical challenges for SMEs in the developing countries is finance (Asikhia, 2010). By these findings, SMEs have limited financial resources to invest in such advertising activities. This is noted in the findings when a respondent outdoor catering SMEs claims that, as part of business advertising strategy, it gives out free meals. They assume to a certain extent that advertising activities are expensive and the financial resources should be allocated to other strategic area of the business rather than advertising activities.

The emerging patterns of information communication and technology have widened the frontier of how businesses around the world create awareness about their products and services. Just as these trends create opportunities, there are also corresponding challenges that firms will have to deal with, especially for SMEs in the developing countries that often lack the capabilities and competencies to absorb the global business impulses. SMEs in the developing countries, no doubt, encounter so many problems. These problems not only affect how they compete with similar firms in the developed countries but also their ability to market their products and services. The role of marketing is not only to create awareness about a firm's product or service offering but more critically is to redefine customers' experiences so as to generate sales.

6. Conclusion

This research presents a descriptive survey of advertising as a MC tool in outdoor catering SMEs. It examines the usage of various advertising mediums and those critical factors that affect the adoption/application of advertising by outdoor catering SMEs in Lagos State. Outdoor catering SMEs need to look into those factors that affect the adoption of MC tools. The key among these factors is finance, lack of qualified marketing manager/expert, the owner/manager style, cost of advertising and competitors' advertising activities. To deal with these, they need to come up with practices that consider the critical need of advertising for the business by first understanding the unique characteristics of its operating environment, then install strategic advertising mechanisms that connect with these unique characteristics of the environment, especially the customers.

However, several limitations need to be identified to open new opportunities for further research. The first limitation is that respondent outdoor catering SMEs in this research are representative of all SMEs in Lagos State. The entire sample, for instance, are drawn from the senatorial delineation of the State. This means that the result may not be transferable to other state and other SMEs industry. This is an intentional choice as Lagos State represents the commercial nerve of Nigeria and indeed the whole of West Africa. Moreover, why this study contributes to the extant body of knowledge in SMEs and marketing communication literature, it cannot be assumed that the findings can be generalised for other location or industry. It is important to understand that each society has their individual socioeconomic and sociocultural characteristics that shape the nature of their SMEs.

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