

## **Analysis of the Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt, Rivers State**

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### **Abstract**

*Owing to the emergence of more beverages and their competitiveness in the market, this study analysed the integrated marketing communication strategies adopted by the Seven-Up Bottling Company in its quest to remain relevant in the Port Harcourt market. The objectives of the study were to: identify the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt, investigate how the integrated marketing communication strategies affect the company's marketing goals and find out whether customers' patronage of the products in Port Harcourt depends on the strategies of the company. The study was premised on Cognitive Response theory. The sample size for the study is 393 which was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table and management staff of the company. From the findings, respondents agreed that the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt were utilised in terms of advertisement, sales promotion, personal selling, direct selling and corporate gifts. They also agreed that the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt have positive impact on the marketing goals of the company in areas of brand identification, brand loyalty of the consumers among other findings. It was therefore, recommended that the Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt should review its integrated marketing communication strategies to include the utilisation of the social media and the quality of their products. It was also recommended that the Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt should explore other means of differentiating their marketing strategies to avoid repetitive messages on the part of the consumers.*

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### **Introduction**

From its emergence in the mid-1990s, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has continued to attract considerable attention among scholars and practitioners in marketing and allied disciplines. Integrated Marketing Communication helps companies to initiate, develop, and nurture relationships with important groups, especially, customers (Arens, Weigold & Arens, 2013). The Integrated Marketing Communication covers both the traditional and the contemporary marketing communication strategies which include: advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, personal selling and direct-response marketing for the traditional aspect. Contemporary Integrated Marketing Communication elements include a wide variety of new options, such as online marketing, social media, cell phone marketing, buzz marketing, viral marketing, branded entertainment, product placement and guerrilla marketing. These new marketing communication elements and online media have changed the interface between consumers and organisations, where there has been a shift in power between the media and the consumer, with consumer-generated media turning consumers into content creators.

In Nigeria, the soft drink industry is dominated by the Nigerian Bottling Company

(franchise of Coca-Cola of the US) and Seven-Up Bottling Company (franchise of Seven-Up and Pepsi, both of the US). The market dominance of these companies reflects the length of time they have operated in the country. They maintained their investments in the Nigerian market throughout the difficult military era when their competitors either pulled out or failed to enter. The dominance is also a testimony to the vast size of the multinational parent companies backing these Nigerian companies. Seven-Up Bottling Company is controlling part of the largest market share within the soft drink industry in Nigeria. Hence, a research on the marketing communication strategies is important.

### **A Brief History and Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies of the Seven-Up Bottling Company**

A Lebanese Mohammed El-Khalil who came to Nigeria for the very first time in 1926 founded Seven-Up Bottling Company. Mohammed was the father of the Company's Chairman, Faysal El-Khalil (Faysal El-Khalil served as the Chairman of the company in 2018 when this study was carried out). Seven-Up was incorporated in Nigeria in 1959 as a Private Limited Liability Company under the name Seven-Up Limited. Its name was later changed to Seven-Up Bottling Company Plc in 1991 to comply with the Company and Allied Matters Act, 1990 (Seven-Up, 2018). The company metamorphosed from a very successful transport business (El-Khalil Transport—the then largest transport company in the entire West Africa) to a soft drink manufacturing company.

Nooyi (2006) states that Seven-Up Bottling Company Limited is one of the largest independent manufacturers and distributors of the well-known and widely consumed brands of soft drinks in Nigeria. He reports that the Company's brands are *Pepsi*, *7UP*, *Mirinda*, *Teem* and *Mountain Dew*, which are produced and marketed in all the nine manufacturing plants, namely: Aba, Ikeja, Ilorin, Enugu, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna and Benin while Ijora remains the headquarters. The Company also markets their products all over their 200 distribution centres also known as depots spread over Nigeria. The company has staff strength of about 3,458. On October 1, 1960, the exact day Nigeria won her independence, Nigerians also experienced the birth of the first bottle of 7Up rolled out from the factory located in Ijora, Lagos. Since then, the company has continued to grow in leaps and bounds. In the early 1990s, when Pepsi International took over 7Up International, Pepsi brand was introduced to the Nigerian people. Beirut is the global headquarters of Seven-Up Bottling Company. It has its operational bases in three African countries—Nigeria, Tanzania and Ghana. The majority of the company's shares (72%) are held by the El-Khalil family, which has moved the business from distributorship to sole manufacturer and marketer of Pepsi-Cola brand in Nigeria.

The vision of Seven-Up is to become the most admired and innovative company in Nigeria. The mission is to inspire and refresh a youthful lifestyle. The core values are: commitment and ownership—people will describe the business as “our company”, reflecting the entrepreneurial spirit and sense of ownership. “Caring and rewarding” as the people in the company experience a feeling of brotherliness and freshness in their relationship with one another to build the organisation. In addition, achievements by people are recognised and rewarded appropriately. Seven-Up has the following marketing objectives: Teamwork – Each of the employees recognises the value of the skills, abilities and co-operation between relevant persons and the units towards delivering seamless and superior values. Integrity—Our people are reputed for unflinching uprightness and high ethical standards. Trust—The management has confidence that employees will act in the best interest of the company. Employees also believe that management will not harm them but will do everything possible to protect and further their interests.

The Company adopts aggressive marketing, constant technological innovation,

introduction of new products to increase its share of the beverage market and boost its profitability, a wide distribution network (200 distributors); boost sales by enhancing manufacturing capacity and strengthening its sales and distribution; and regular promotions.

### **Statement of the problem**

Observation showed that many consumers found it difficult to differentiate Seven-Up Bottling Company's products outside of the packaged bottles or cans, colours, contents and perhaps tastes. As a result, preliminary studies were conducted by the researchers on the consumers of Seven-Up Bottling Company's products, with some selected brands such as: Pepsi versus Coke, Miranda versus Fanta and 7up versus Sprite and served consumers in glass cups according to their choices of the colours. Forty consumers in schools, families, eatery and neighbourhood were experimented upon. At the end of the experiments, only 40% of the consumers were able to identify the brands that they took. In spite of the consumers' inability to differentiate the tastes of the products, they showed differences in the choice of the products they patronised. This show of loyalty to the respective brands by the consumers has questioned whether satisfaction derived from the consumption of the products or the marketing communication strategies adopted by the company could be the foundation of the choice of the company's products and loyalty held by the consumers to the products.

Thus, the problem of the study can be stated: to what extent do the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company contribute to consumers' patronage of the company's products?

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The aim of the study is to analyse the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- 1 What are the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt?
- 2 How do the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company affect the company's marketing goals?
- 3 Does the customers' patronage of Seven-Up Bottling Company products in Port Harcourt depend on the integrated marketing communication strategies of the company?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical framework**

The Cognitive Response theory formed the theoretical foundation for the study. The cognitive response theory was advanced by Lutz and Swasy (1977). Bobby (1978) explains that the new idea of cognitive response theory is that beliefs or the thought underlying attitudes cannot be treated as "objective". The beliefs which are processed to yield an attitude are neither just those originating in external communication; nor can they be in any sense standardised across people.

According to Bobby (1978), beliefs should be treated as any thought which might come to mind in a situation. Furthermore, the cognitive response variable has stimulated research because it predicts interesting effects. There have been demonstrations that distraction can increase persuasion by inhibiting the negative thoughts which would otherwise accompany an attitudinally consistent message (Petty, wells & Brock, 1977; Petty, 1977; Bobby, 1978). In essence, information from a message, along with other incoming

information, is initially represented in short-term memory as cognitive responses. These cognitive responses in turn trigger retrieval from long-term memory and the registration in short-term memory of further cognitive responses (Bobby, 1978).

The biggest problem of the theory, according to Kale (2015) is that “it tries to discover how certain attitudes are formed in response to persuasive messages, but this is a difficult discovery to make” (p.19). It is difficult for a researcher to collect all the thoughts a person has after viewing an advertisement on the television for instance. Despite its limitations, cognitive response theory offers significant lessons about how to produce marketing communication messages that will result in favourable responses. The theory does not provide a precise formula for achieving a successful marketing communication message, but it does give information on how to produce target audience-specific successful marketing communication. The theory also tells us how to get positive responses from an initial negative attitude through the use of distractions. This may be one of the most valuable information that comes from the cognitive response theory.

Advertisers today are looking for the best strategy to produce advertisement that will result in favourable responses to products. Kale (2015) suggests that the first step to couching an enduring marketing communication message is to look at the product’s category attitude. This is because of the belief that consumers who are initially favourable towards a product will be more receptive and less critical of advertisements on that product compared to consumers who are initially critical of the product. This, results in the consumers of the product being more inclined to having positive cognitive responses which lead to more positive attitudes for the advertisement and the product brand.

The relationship of this theory to the study is that organisations should be conscious of consumers’ eccentricities and attitude to their products and services, so that efforts must be consciously channelled towards first, ensuring that the advertised products address consumers’ idiosyncrasies and needs, as well as change their attitudes towards being positively disposed to using the products/services through the marketing communication message.

### **Conceptual Review**

According to Whalley (2010), marketing communication consists of messages from companies to the customers about the companies’ products, brands or in the case of corporate communications about the company itself. In a real sense, every marketing communication activity is a form of promotion that attempts to advance the interest of the company’s brand and product range.

Marketing communication channels focus on any medium business through which a business communicates a message to its desired market, or the market in general. Tomse and Snoj (2014) explain that “marketing communication tools comprises advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, sponsorship, communication, promotion and public relations” (p.245).

Kusumawati, Oswari, Utomo and Kumar (2014) differentiate between marketing communication in a service-based business and that of goods-oriented business. They explain that in the marketing mix, 4Ps (Price, Promotion, Place and Product) are for goods-oriented business, while 7Ps (Price, Promotion, Place, Product, People, Physical evidence and Process) are for a service-based business. According to Tomse and Snoj (2014), the marketing communications mix is “a set of tools that can be used to deliver a clear and consistent message to target audiences” (Tomse & Snoj, 2014, p.1). Crosier (1990) is of the view that “in the context of the 4ps (Product, price, place and promotion), each of the marketing mix is correlated. Price can send a message to the target audience” (p.1). Doyle (2011) identifies communication as one important aspect of the marketing mix. Marketing

communication is often the largest component of communication within a company, which may be to present company values, objectives or specific products or services to investors, customers or the general public. In the 21st century, communication objectives, focus on more customised messages, targeting customer groups or individuals to create high responses and greater brand interaction.

Doyle (2011) enumerates four different fundamental types of communication as “one-to-many, many-to-one, one-to-one, and many-to-many. One-to-one is more immediate, while the many-to-many channels tend to be less urgent but with greater longevity” (p.1). One of the primary goals of a marketing communication is to persuade consumers, by either changing their perception of a brand, product or service, or persuading them to purchase (or feel motivated or tempted to purchase) a product or service (Belch & Belch, 2012). In the above definition, integrated marketing communication is regarded as a theory or idea. It emphasises the added value feature of an integrated marketing communications plan, to combine and to integrate the various marketing communications functions (tactics) and vehicles in order to ultimately convey a unified and consistent message. This added value applies not only when integrating multiple marketing communication techniques (e.g., advertising is combined with public relations), but also when integrating multiple media (e.g., outdoor advertising is combined with transit advertising media). In other words, the combined effect of multiple activities exceeds the sum of their individual effects; this phenomenon is known as synergy. This definition has viewed integrated marketing communication from an agency perspective and referred to managing the traditional marketing communication mix in an integrated fashion, rather than seeing the whole as being constituted by separate practices. It does not, however, specify to whom integrated marketing communication should be directed, or what the intended measurable objectives should be.

According to Dahl, Low and Eagle (2015), the marketing environment was undergoing profound environmental changes with implications for marketing communication. Media proliferation, audience fragmentation, globalisation of markets, the advent of new communication technologies and the widespread use of database confirm the fact that the old methods and practices used in mass marketing were no longer relevant. In particular, the rise of digital and interactive media confirms the fact that marketers rely less on advertising as the dominant form of marketing communication. Amongst practitioners and scholars, there is an increasing recognition that new approaches to marketing communication are required. That new approach would become known as integrated marketing communication.

According to Chul, Han and Schultz (2004), integrated marketing communication unifies and coordinates the organisation’s marketing communication goals in order to promote a consistent brand message. Coordinating the brand’s communication makes the brand seem more trustworthy and sounds as it is seen as a 'whole' rather than a mixture of different messages being sent out. The integrated marketing communication perspective looks at the 'big picture' in marketing, advertising and promotions. Schultz (2004) believes that integrated marketing communication focuses too heavily on tactical implementation, attempting to make things look the same. He suggests that organisations need to find ways in which horizontal integrating processes and systems, including internal marketing communication and strategic planning frameworks, can be developed. Lancaster (2004) recommends two ways in which IMC might break through the communication clutter barrier. First, is the need for creativity to extend beyond its traditional role in communicating message formats into product and service innovation in order to achieve added value.

It places emphasis on creativity within the whole marketing mix but not an over-reliance on the promotional elements to compensate for product deficiencies. Second, it

proposes customers' engagement with the use of various brands in order to form lifestyles and attitudes. Technological changes and the increased use of social media result in an improvement in marketing communication and the needs for the integration of social media into traditional marketing. These changes lead to a new concept of marketing communication called "Integrated Marketing Communication". Integrated marketing communication as a marketing concept has not only been around for some decades but has also been globally accepted across markets and economies (Belch & Belch, 2012; Kotler, 2003; Schultz, Chu, Kim & Jain, 2015).

Integrated marketing communication has been described as a customer-centric marketing communication concept which requires some sort of coordination of organisations' marketing communication tools. Integrated marketing communication is a process of communication that involves creating, planning, and implementing a number of marketing communication forms in order to deliver consistent messages to customers and prospects (Shimp, 2010). In addition, integrated marketing communication is also described as a concept of advanced marketing communication (Darmarjati, Kusumawati & Mawardi, 2016). The goal of integrated marketing communication is to influence consumers through communication, as it is a marketing approach that is used for influencing consumers buying behaviour by transmitting messages through a number of marketing communication channels (Chitty, Barker, Valos & Shimp, 2014).

Shimp (2010) points out that integrated marketing communication is about influencing the buying behaviours of target audience by combining a variety of communication channels and marketing tools to convey consistent messages to consumers. This is because a product or a brand which exists in consumers' minds does not merely happen because of consumers' experience, but it is also affected by a medium and long-term effect which consistent messages establish on consumers' expectations and preferences through several communication tools (Mihaela, 2015).

Therefore, integrated marketing communication is considered as a powerful business tool for transmitting persuasive messages to influence existing consumers, as well as gaining access to target audience and prospects. Apart from influencing consumers' buying behaviour, integrated marketing communication is also developed with the aim of reducing marketing budgets since integrated marketing communication could help enterprises to reduce the costs of advertisements and minimise duplicate advertising designs and photography (Csikósová, Antošová & Čulková, 2014). Applying integrated marketing communication effectively in businesses could increase marketing advantages for companies, as well as decreasing marketing costs since integrated marketing communication could improve the cost effectiveness of mass media and media fragmentation (Fill, 2002; Csikósová et al, 2014).

Moreover, integrated marketing communication is recommended as a crucial marketing approach for small and medium enterprises as it enables them to gain access to target audience directly with the low cost of marketing (Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010; Kokemuller, 2016). Today, there is a consensus between practitioners and scholars that the emergence of integrated marketing communication represents "a significant example of development in the marketing discipline which has influenced thinking and acting among all types of companies and organisations facing the realities of competition in an open economy" (Holm, 2006, p.23). Belch and Belch (2016) argue that "integrated marketing communication has become the dominant approach used by companies to plan and execute their marketing communication programs" (p.2), while other scholars have described integrated marketing communication as a paradigm shift from marketing (Ichul, Han & Schultz 2004). Percy (2008) argues that "the planning and execution of all marketing communication should be integrated" (p.40).

The most outstanding arguments on the concept of integrated marketing communications centre on definition and conceptual description (Kerr, 2006; Kliatchko, 2005; Shin, 2006; Kumar, 2009; Kitchen, Kim & Schultz, 2008). According to Schultz and Schultz (2003), there are eight guiding principles in the implementation of integrated marketing communication. These principles include: become a customer-centric organisation, use outside-in planning, focus on the total customer experience, align consumer goals with corporate goals, set customer behavioural objectives, treat customers as assets, streamline functional activities and converge marketing communication activities.

According to Laurie and Mortimer (2011), a customer-focused approach entails the process of organisation learning more about the habits of the customer so that they can identify opportunities for cross-selling. It is essential that an organisation's activities revolve around the final consumer as it is the customers who are the life-blood of an organisation. Failure to meet the ever-changing needs of consumers may signal the demise of an organisation. Scholars such as Belch and Belch (2003), Fill (2009), Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) agree on the fact that integrated marketing communication is adopted by organisations because of its strategic coordination of marketing functions; changing marketing environment; demand for return on investment on marketing communication spending. The scholars also noted that coordinated brand development, media and audience fragmentation as well as increased message effectiveness through consistency and reinforcement of core messages are some of the reasons for the adoption of integrated marketing communication.

## **Methodology**

The survey research design was adopted for this study. Survey research method has the right attributes that allow for guided systematic and objective collection of data and analysis. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), survey allows researchers to measure characteristics, opinions or behaviour of a population by studying a small sample from the groups, then generalising back to the population which is the group under scrutiny. The study area covered all the consumers resident in Port Harcourt metropolis using the products of Seven-Up Bottling Company. The population of this study comprised all residents of Port Harcourt metropolis. According to the Human Resources Manager in Seven-Up Bottling Company, all residents of Port Harcourt consume their products. The projected population of Port Harcourt for 2019, according to the World Population Review is 1,148,665.

The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. According to the Krejcie and Morgan Table, the sample size for a population that is one million and above is 384. Therefore, the sample size for the first set of population which are the customers is 384. The sample also consisted of top management staff from the Marketing/Sales Department, Commercial Department and Public Relations Department of Seven-Up Bottling Company who were purposively sampled for the in-depth interview. Overall, the sample size for the study consisted of 384 customers and 9 management staff of the company making a total of 393 persons.

The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique. The researchers adopted the three parts division of Port Harcourt using the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) classification namely; Port Harcourt East, Port Harcourt West and Port Harcourt North to collect data for the study. The second stage was to select four communities from each of the divisions using purposive sampling to ensure that a number of recognised neighbourhoods were selected. The third stage was to select a given number of respondents from each of the neighbourhoods selected. This was done by taking a random starting point and a fixed periodic interval. This interval, called the sampling interval, was calculated by dividing the population size by the sample size. Convenient sampling technique was used to select the target respondents to whom the copies of the questionnaire were administered to.

Primary and secondary sources of data were also used for the study. According to Kent (2007), secondary data are data that already exist and can be used by the researcher, whilst Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) point out that some research questions could be answered only through the secondary research. In other words, secondary data were used at early stage in defining problems and also later help in interpreting data when embarking on the core dissertation analysis. The secondary research was carried out by using some Seven-Up Bottling Company's internal sources like reports, while the external sources involved the use of textbooks, journals and articles in integrated marketing communication and communication. Saunders (2009) points out that primary data are data collected specifically for the research project being undertaken but other research methods professionals like Sekaran (2010) posits that primary research attains data collection first hand for subsequent analysis to find solutions to the problem researched. On the whole, the idea of carrying out a primary research was based on collecting information that was related to the topic of study which helped the researchers in yielding a good result. For the objectives to be fulfilled, the primary research was focused on questionnaire for the consumers of Seven-Up Bottling Company, while an in-depth-interview was carried out by top management staff of the company whom the researchers had spoken with.

For data collection for this study, questionnaire and interview were used to elicit data for the study. The copies of the questionnaire were administered to consumers of Seven-Up Bottling Company to fill out and return to the researchers. Interviews were conducted with the management staff of Seven-Up Bottling Company in order to find answers to some questions that may not have been answered by the respondents in the questionnaire. The data were analysed using the Weighted Mean Score on a four-point Likert scale with a 2.5 decision rule. The data gathered from the interviews were analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Research Question 1: What are the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt?**

From the mean of the responses and interview on integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt, the company adopted the following strategies which include the use of gift items, advertisements, sales promotions, personal selling, guerrilla marketing and direct marketing. Seven-Up Bottling Company has social media handles, use celebrity endorsements, sponsor sporting activities, use branded gifts and sales promotions, among other marketing tools. These tools are deployed based on the results they get from frequent marketing research carried out by the company.

The result obtained corroborates Higgs and Polonsky's (2007) assertion which stated that consumers are increasingly in control of when, how and what media or content they want to attend to and consume. Consumers are no longer passive but active receivers of messages sent by marketers, but can now participate in creating messages, actively selecting the information they want to receive, and avoiding any unwanted and untimely messages.

The deployment of integrated marketing communication strategies to suit the demographic and psychographic peculiarities of the consumers acts as a form of empowerment to them. According to Shimp (2010) "customer empowerment is driven by technological developments, such as mobile devices, social networking and consumer-generated content and virtual worlds, allowing consumers to control the communication process" (p.12).

Interestingly, the integrated marketing communication strategies adopted by Seven-Up Bottling Company tacitly describes the definition of the term in itself. Integrated marketing communications has been described as a customer-centric marketing



communication concept which requires some sort of coordination of organisations' marketing communication tools. Integrated marketing communication is a process of communication that involves creating, planning, and implementing a number of marketing communication forms in order to deliver consistent messages to customers and prospects (Shimp, 2010).

**Research Question 2: How do the integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company affect the company's marketing goals?**

Responses of respondents on integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt revealed that the company has been able to identify the unique attributes of the consumers in line with the marketing goals of the company. This is a recipe for planning and execution of successful marketing campaigns which will ultimately grow the sales and output of the company. For example, there was the Pepsi-cola different from the conventional Pepsi soft drink. This was created to bridge the gap in terms of the product being used as a 'cola'. The word cola is also in allusion to Coca-Cola soft drink in supposition that the Pepsi can also serve in place of the Coke soft drink. But the Pepsi-Cola was mainly created to serve as cola for visitors, especially in fulfilment of the African hospitality culture. This positioned the Pepsi cola as a symbol of African culture. The result corroborates Kehinde's (2009) study which found out that respondents appreciated the inherent benefits that the use of integrated marketing communications brings over its non-use (the traditional approach). Such benefits according to the findings, included cost savings; effective and efficient marketing communication messages, sustained long term client-customer relationships, better consumer patronage, among others. This is further buttressed in Ikue's (2016) assertion. It was asserted in Ikue (2016) that after brand awareness has been created, the next thing to be considered is brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition reflects a relatively superficial level of awareness, whereas brand recall reflects deeper form of awareness.

Latif, Islam and Noor (2014) posit that building brand awareness in competitive markets can play an active role in modern marketing environment. Brand awareness will create a competitive advantage in the market place that will enhance their overall reputation and credibility. According to Keller (2008), brand awareness holds brand recognition and brand recall performance. In cooperation, both are important components in sustaining brand equity whose main aim is to achieve a strong brand image with long term relationship that indicates brand resonance.

A brand must be continuously managed to enhance equity and consumer loyalty. To achieve this, brand management is the key. Shemp (2000) describes brand management as the planning, implementation and control of a brand concept throughout the life of the brand. Brand managers should be able to create and communicate to the largest market the brand they represent. In successfully managing a brand, Shemp (2000) opines that brand managers should know the different categories of basic consumer needs and their ability to meet such needs.

**Research Question 3: Does the customers' patronage of Seven-Up Bottling Company products depend on the integrated marketing communication strategies of the company?**

Responses show that customers' patronage of the products in Port Harcourt depended on the integrated marketing communication strategies of the Company as the strategies adopted by Seven-Up Bottling Company were successful in driving consumer patronage of its products. For one, those products are still in the market today and selling. This shows that a lot of work had gone into keeping them active in the soft drink market. This is especially as there are other soft drinks from both local manufacturers and international competitors making in-road

to the Nigerian soft drink market daily, yet none have been able to successfully upstage the products of Seven-Up Bottling Company.

Modica and Hoffmann (2010) opine in their study that “Opinion leaders are consumers who have large influence over the purchasing behaviour of other consumers. Examples are: peers or celebrities, and often represent a desired state in the eye of the influenced consumer” (p.417). By following the consumption patterns of opinion leaders, consumers aspire to achieve a similar status or lifestyle, and project a similar image. Opinion leaders are regarded as powerful factors in marketing communications. For opinion leaders to endorse a brand, such endorsement increases brand awareness and sales. Also, large companies pay highly influential celebrities to endorse their products. The opinion leaders' thoughts or feeling towards the product/service can be received through paid advertising, social media, blogs, or any other form of written media. These can be direct or indirect influences.

### **Findings**

Based on the data gathered and analysed, the following findings emerged:

1. The various integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt were: brand advertisements, sales promotion, personal selling (face to face), direct marketing and give-a-away products such as cars, fridges and other gift items that are covered with their brand messages.
2. The integrated marketing communication strategies of Seven-Up Bottling Company affected the company's marketing goals. The reasons were that customers patronise the brand more because of the satisfaction and the taste of brand which enhanced their preference for the brand.
3. Customers' patronage of the products in Port Harcourt, depended on the integrated marketing communication strategies of the company, as well as the price of the product, availability and quality of the contents.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing findings, the researchers therefore, recommend that:

1. Seven-Up Bottling Company in Port Harcourt should use the identified integrated marketing communication strategies which include: advertisements, sales promotion, personal selling (face to face), direct marketing and give-a-away products such as cars, fridges, and other gift items that are covered with their brand messages. The company should also utilise the social media. Furthermore, quality (taste and satisfaction) which is one of the Seven-Up's marketing strategies can be an integrated marketing communication tool. This indicates that for the company to achieve its goals, the content of their products must be of quality for more increase in sales and growth.
2. Seven-Up Bottling Company should strive to maintain the loyalty of its customers to its brands by improving on its integrated marketing communication strategic goals to ensure the company's marketing goals are achieved.
3. Seven-Up Bottling Company integrated marketing communication strategies should be customers' patronage-centered to ensure the company's marketing goals are achieved.

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