

## Viral Marketing on Consumer Reviews of Selected Carbonated Soft Drinks Companies in Nigeria



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**ABSTRACT:** The Carbonated Soft Drinks (CSD) market has continued to grow in leaps and bounds amidst fierce competition for supremacy in the market place. They hold tenaciously to the leadership position in the soda market, having successfully shrugged off challenge from competitors with a combination of product quality, relentless consumer engagement and aggressive advertising. However, studies have established that CSD are faced with persistent purchase decrease over incidents related to negative consumer reviews. Studies indicated that CSD companies tend to prioritize traditional advertising over viral marketing despite the potential benefits of the latter. Therefore, this study investigated the effect of viral marketing on consumer reviews of selected CSD companies in Nigeria.

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population was 3,987 employees in sales and marketing departments of the selected CSD companies in Nigeria. The sample size of 518 was determined using Cochran's formula. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting respondents. A structured and validated questionnaire was used to obtain data with Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged between 0.76 and 0.98. The response rate was 82.8%. Data were analyzed using Partial least square Structural equation modelling.

The results, however, revealed that electronic word of mouth ( $\beta = 0.156$ ,  $t = 2.168$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Influencer ( $\beta = 0.149$ ,  $t = 2.793$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Reliability ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $t = 2.065$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and social media ( $\beta = 0.336$ ,  $t = 4.749$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), have a positive and significant effect on the Consumer Review of some selected carbonated soft drink in Nigeria.

Based on the findings, this study concluded that viral marketing affected consumer reviews of selected CSD companies in Nigeria. Therefore, this study recommended that management of CSD companies should focus on informativeness, electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability and social media to enhance consumer reviews.

**KEYWORDS:** Consumer reviews, Electronic word of mouth, Influencer, Informativeness, Reliability, Social media, Viral marketing.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The global carbonated soft drinks market is a section of the non-alcoholic beverage industry, that includes regular and diet fizzy drinks, as well as energy and sports drinks. It is a highly competitive marketplace. Over the years, the carbonated soft drinks market has been experiencing challenges spurned out of negative marketing activities. Several carbonated soft drinks companies have seen purchase decrease over incidents related to negative consumer reviews.

The European soft drinks industry saw a decline in sales volume according to Union of European Beverages Associations (UNESDA) which showed that sales decreased by -0.39% from the previous year, reaching a sales volume of 120,067.3 million litres (UNESDA, 2021). According to the European statistical system (Eurostat) (2020), in 2019 approximately 130 billion litres of soft drinks were produced in the European Union, a decrease of -1.13 % compared to 2018.

In Great Britain, despite an unprecedented year for many retail categories, consumer demand for soft drinks (that is, non-alcoholic drinks such as juice, carbonated drinks, or non-carbonated drinks but excluding coffee and loose-leaf tea), experienced a marginal decrease in purchase intention from 2019 to 2020 (Nguyen, 2021).

In America, precisely in the United States of America, Aga Jarzabek, research analyst for Chicago-based Euromonitor International, revealed that the Carbonated Soft Drinks (CSD) market has been challenged by volume declines because of the unhealthy perception of carbonates among consumers which in turn has stirred to negative reviews, thus, leading to falling consumption rates (Beverage Industry, 2020).

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In South Asia, notably in India, consumer awareness and preference for non-sugary healthier beverages and a proliferation of B-brands have led to tepid demand, with growth falling to low single digits for seven quarters (Bhushan, 2017).

In East Africa, particularly in Kenya, production of soft drinks declined in 2020, the first time in nearly a decade caused by the health safety measures imposed to contain the spread of Covid-19 which included closure of restaurants and bars as well as the prohibition of social gatherings (Njau, 2021).

In West Africa, the carbonated soft drinks market in Ghana was equal to 102.00 million USD (calculated in retail prices) in 2015 and it is forecasted to reach 534.05 million USD (in retail prices), thus increasing at a projected CAGR of 13.15% per annum for the period 2020-2025, which however, is a decrease, compared to the growth of about 25.00% per year, registered in 2015-2019 (Market Research, 2021).

One of the leading causes of the shift in consumer preference is the negative reviews available especially online black listing of carbonated soft drinks, thus, shifting consumers' preferences to more natural products with "clean label", including fermented drinks, teas, lower sugar beverages and fortified drinks with health benefit claims (Atorkey et al., 2021). As a result, the major players have been significantly challenged (Bragg et al., 2017).

The carbonated soft drinks market in Nigeria has continued to grow in leaps and bounds amidst fierce competition among players for supremacy in the market place due to increased competition and poor economy resulting to low purchasing power for consumers (Ekwujuru, 2018).

In today's marketing, the internet plays a major role in building the reputation of a brand (Hajli, 2014). Organizations now communicate with their customers differently from the past as the emergence, spread and universality of the internet has transformed and altered the relationship between organizations and customers (Al Muala, 2018).

This study will take on the stance of the consumers' perspective and establish the effect of viral marketing on consumer reviews. In marketing literature, consumer reviews are often used, although it is not easy to ask about consumer reviews in questionnaires. The results of this study will show this effect. In this study, the main objective was to investigate the effect of viral marketing (informativeness, electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability, social media) on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria

The final goal of the research was to use the empirical results to form useful recommendations for marketing practitioners wishing to utilize viral marketing as an advertising tool to effect consumer reviews.

The remaining of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the main literature. Section 3 develops the research framework and research hypothesis. Section 4 discusses the empirical results and analysis. Section 5 presents the concluding remarks.

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Viral marketing was defined by Wang and Street (2018), 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 product. Viral marketing is a marketing technique that aims to make people voluntarily want to convey marketing messages to others (Kotler & Keller, 2018). Viral marketing is seen as a vital electronic extension of word-of-mouth (WoM) communication, which involves the principle of passing on or referring news, information, or entertainment to another person (Ahmad et al., 2018). Also, Hsiang-His and Yu-Ning (2019), describe viral marketing as any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, thus creating the potential for exponential growth in the exposure and influence of the message. Viral marketing is a promotional method used by organizations where marketing messages are designed to be widespread from one person to another through encouraging or rewarding them (Alhelberg, 2018). Viral marketing has been compared by some analysts with the living biological virus because of its contagious nature and can be described as like a digitalized sneeze, and as millions of tiny particles that can infect others who meet them (Goodie-Okio, 2022). Just like viruses, the strategy uses intense multiplication to pass on the campaign to many individuals that could run into millions (Darel, 2017). This can be likened to a case where customers who are exposed to the virus (campaign) can easily pass it on to others who they meet (Mishra & Vashiath, 2017). According to Granata and Scoozzeze (2017), viral marketing technique can be likened to a virus that extends a company's information and its product message, to its customers, is that they spread the word to other similar opportunities and eventually create a great network very quickly. In a similar vein, Deepa and Thenmozhi (2015), explain that the term viral marketing describes a kind of marketing practice that affects customers with an advertising message which they should pass from one customer to the next like a rampant flu virus. A variety of terminologies have been used to explain what viral marketing is. Therefore, the various definitions above refer to viral marketing as a message that spreads to other people because the first recipient liked it and chose to send the message on to others.

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Sutanto and Aprianingsih (2016) defined consumer review as a form of electronic word of mouth and can be said to be a new marketing communication that can influence and play a role in the purchase decision process. Online consumer reviews and ratings have a relationship with consumer buying interest because review and ratings are one of several factors that determine the emergence of online buying interest. Consumer reviews provide information about products and recommendations from a consumer's perspective, which is important for consumers in making online purchases. Online consumer reviews are the mainstay of consumers in assessing a product personally (Nathania, 2018).

An online review refers to a review that has been made by a customer who bought a certain product or service (Chua & Banerjee, 2015). It is from these sources that potential customers rely on gathering information about the product or the service they want to buy (Fan & Gordon, 2014). In a digital marketplace, most businesses have embraced these eras by ensuring that they have a digital platform where their customers can enquire or post reviews regarding the product of that business (Wang et al, 2020).

Consumer reviews are always independent opinions regarding certain products or brands that are presented to consumers (Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Chen et al., 2011). Consumer reviews are equally undertaken by opinion leaders who can sometimes compare the same brand or product to competitors within the market environment (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). The concept of consumer reviews has been significantly fuelled by the rise of electronic commerce as a strategic sales strategy that businesses use to distribute their products to their consumers (Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

Consumer reviews can come in the form of posts on the different brand websites or electronic commerce platforms by independent consumers on their experiences with different products that they purchased from the brand (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). These reviews are always open to those customers who make purchases from the electronic commerce platforms to give their opinions regarding their experiences with the service or the product itself and whether they would recommend the same product to other individuals (Huang, 2015). These consumer reviews are independent of brand or organizational influence as in the case of those present on the electronic commerce websites (Cui et al., 2012). These consumers are always given a chance to express themselves regarding their experience with a given product (Chua & Banerjee, 2015).

These reviews can always be in the form of text and graphics where they can write their opinions regarding the product and as well post pictures or videos of the same product and post to the platform for the other consumers to see what they experienced with the product (Cui et al., 2012). It is worthwhile to note that the different consumers do not always review the products that they receive only, however, in many cases, they also go ahead and evaluate other intricate aspects such as customer service within the organization. The other users are always able to see the same within these electronic commerce platforms or the official websites of these brands or business organizations that operate on the internet. Also, reviews come in the form of stars which rank the level of satisfaction that consumers have with the products they bought (Saumya et al., 2018).

In many instances, reviews are out of five-star ratings where five stars depict high-quality products or services while one star indicates the contrary which could be a dismal performance of the commodity or poor customer service that failed to satisfy the customer (Saumya et al., 2018). So, the consumers will leave behind their ratings and the sites average all the ratings to come up with a general rating for the product or service (Saumya et al., 2018). Other than the electronic commerce platforms, these users can always make reviews of the products or services on dedicated online review platforms such as Yelp, and these platforms are impartial and strive to capture the accurate opinion of the different users of the products that are reviewed on the platform for the legitimacy of the practice and to avoid misinformation (Gaillot, 2021). On the other hand, some dedicated online reviewers choose to review different products on their social media platforms such as YouTube of the purchases that they make (Gaillot, 2021). It is important to mention here that there is a slimline between such consumer reviewers and the influencers because in some cases, they are not always independent in their opinion given that they are always contracted by brands and offer products that they are supposed to review (Cui et al., 2012).

In this study, consumer review is a review of a product or service made by a consumer who has purchased and used, or had experience with, the product or service. Consumer reviews are in form of consumer feedback on electronic commerce and online shopping sites.

### **2.1 Underpinning Theory**

This study was anchored on AIDAS theory. Organizations create attention, interest, desire, and attraction of their products in the market using appropriate channels of communication to reach the mass market thus stimulating demand of existing and new products in the market. Therefore, adoption of the theory by firms promotes tremendous growth of the companies in terms of client base and revenue (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). It is very important to design a good message for the products because this increases the opportunity for it to become profitable. It is hard to construct a successful viral message, but if you succeed with it, you can get a big success from a small investment (Bazadona, 2000). The AIDAS model is a well-known model, which can be used to influence consumers purchasing behavior. A viral message according to AIDAS has a good chance to take the consumer all

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the steps from awareness of a need to purchase decision in the consumer buying process. AIDAS stands for getting Attention, maintaining Interest, arousing Desire, obtaining Action, and attaining Satisfaction. A good message about the product in the centre catches the peoples; Attention; A strong headline and letting people know they can afford it creates an Interest; Make the customer wanting it and how it will satisfy their life. To create a Desire; Tell the customer how easy they can get it, Action towards purchase; Make the customers Satisfied so they will recommend and pass along the message to others such as friends and family (Cudmore, 2010). The theory linked the X (Viral Marketing) with Attention grabbing and Interest creation while at the same time connecting with the Y (Consumer Reviews) on Desire and Action. When the customer is satisfied or not, they will either recommend or pass along the message or their disapproval to others such as friends and families. The Satisfaction bit creates the virality of the message whether it is positive or negative.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research design in examining the effect of viral marketing on consumer reviews. A major assumption of survey research was standardization, which related to whether the nature of questions and responses had the same meaning across groups (Oppong, 2013). As such, this study being quantitative in nature, made use of a questionnaire due to the reliability of guiding question design and response options (Creswell, 2013). This research design was suitable for the study because it described the effect of the variables extensively. It also provided detailed information about the population of the study and gave a clear picture of how an event occurred in real-life situations. With respect to the period over which data were collected, which was at one point in time in the company and in the industry, survey research was found appropriate. Further, it was ideal because the researcher collected descriptive data that was accorded statistical treatment to allow for hypothesis testing to produce objective conclusions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). The population of this study was three thousand nine hundred and eighty-seven (3,987) employees in the marketing and sales department of the selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria. The sample size of the study was 518 determined using the Cochran's sample size formula (1977). A structured and validated questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the constructs ranged between 0.756 and 0.981. The overall response rate for this study was 82.8%. Data was analysed using Partial least square Structural equation modelling.

A self-administered questionnaire survey was conducted to collect empirical data. The questionnaire was pretested and revised to ensure content validity. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is viral marketing which is consisted by five variables such informativeness, influencer, electronic word of mouth, reliability and social media. The second part is consumer reviews. All items in these two parts are measured by a 6-point Likert-type scale from 'very high' to 'very low'. viral marketing and consumer reviews implying that the scales are relatively reliable. The researchers developed a structured model for the study using the main constructs, and the data was analysed using PLS SEM.

#### 3.1 Model Specification

In order to determine the effect of viral marketing (X) on consumer reviews (Y), an econometric model was developed.

$$Y = f(XZ)$$

Where: Y = Dependent Variable (Consumer Reviews)

X = Independent Variables (Viral Marketing variables)

$$Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4, x_5) \text{-----(eqtn.1)}$$

$x_1$  = Informativeness

$y_1$  = Consumer reviews

$x_2$  = Electronic word of mouth

$x_3$  = Influencer

$x_4$  = Reliability

$x_5$  = social media

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study examined the effect of viral marketing on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis with viral marketing as the independent variable, and consumer reviews as the dependent variable. The data for viral marketing variables were generated by adding all the responses of all items for informativeness, electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability and social media while that of consumer reviews was generated by adding scores of responses of all items for the consumer review variable only. To test the hypothesis (Viral marketing has no significant effect on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria.), multiple linear regression analysis was used. The independent variable of the study was viral marketing variables while the dependent variable

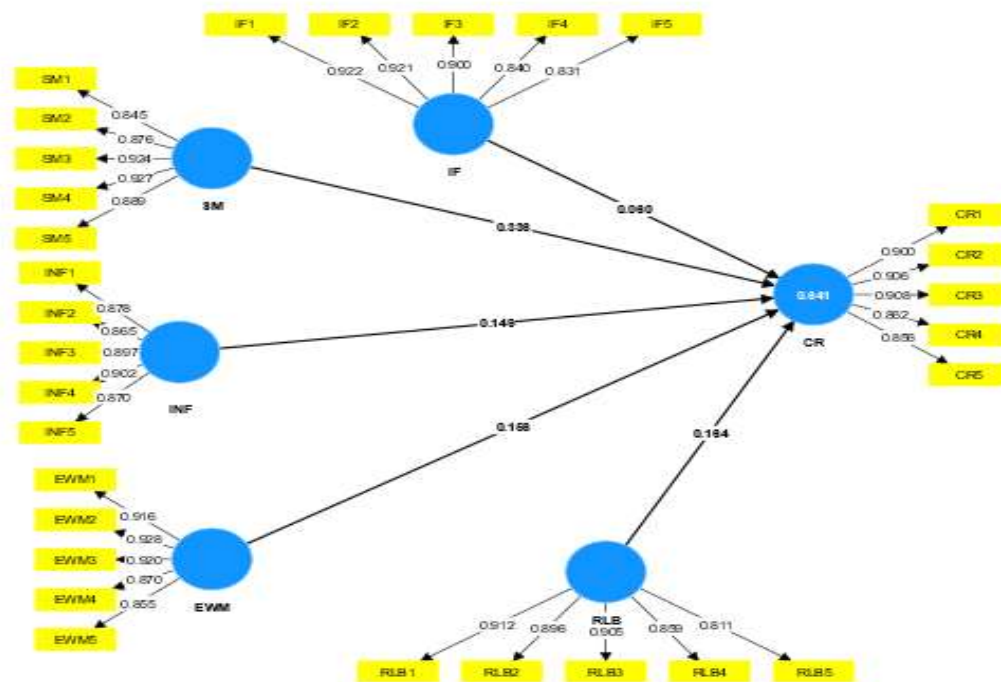
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was consumer reviews variable. Data from four hundred and twenty-nine (429) respondents were gathered and analysed using PLS SEM. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are shown in Table 1.

### Restatement of Research Hypothesis One

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Viral marketing has no significant effect on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria.

To test hypothesis one, Partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was deployed with Viral Marketing (Informativeness, Electronic word of mouth, Influencer, Reliability and Social media) as an independent variable and Consumer Reviews as the dependent variable.



**Figure 1: PLS-SEM Structural Path Coefficient of Viral Marketing and Consumer Review**

Figure 1 shows the viral marketing variables' structural path and how it affects the consumer review of some selected carbonated soft drinks company in Nigeria. The diagram shows how the individual dependency arrow is connected to the dependent variable (consumer review). The individual variable regression weight or estimate is represented on the path-dependent arrow indicating the influence of viral marketing on the consumer review.

**Table 1a: Path Coefficients for the Viral Marketing variables and Consumer Reviews**

	Original sample ( $\beta$ )	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( $ O/STDEV $ )	P values
EWM -> CR	0.156	0.154	0.072	2.168	0.030
IF -> CR	0.06	0.063	0.075	0.809	0.419
INF -> CR	0.149	0.15	0.053	2.793	0.005
RLB -> CR	0.164	0.165	0.08	2.065	0.039
SM -> CR	0.336	0.334	0.071	4.749	0.000

**Source:** Author's computation, 2023 underlying data from Field Survey

The Results presented in **Table 1a** above shows the path analysis of the effect of Viral Marketing (Informativeness, Electronic word of mouth, Influencer, Reliability and social media) on the Consumer review of some selected carbonated soft drink in Nigeria. It contains the values of the path coefficients, standard error, t-statistics, and p-value.

The results, however, revealed that electronic word of mouth ( $\beta = 0.156$ ,  $t = 2.168$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Influencer ( $\beta = 0.149$ ,  $t = 2.793$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Reliability ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $t = 2.065$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and social media ( $\beta = 0.336$ ,  $t = 4.749$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), have a positive and significant effect on the Consumer Review of some selected carbonated soft drink in Nigeria. On the other hand, Informativeness ( $\beta = 0.06$ ,  $t = 0.809$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), did not. Consequently, it is strongly advised that carbonated soft drinks companies should deliberately pay more attention to electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability and social media

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R-square (Table 1b)

	R-square	R-square adjusted	
CR	0.641	0.637	

Source: Author's computation, 2023 underlying data from Field Survey

The adjusted  $R^2$  as shown in above table (Table 1b) indicates that Viral marketing variables explained 63.7% of the variances in the consumer reviews of some selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria. It indicated that putting all the constructs together tends to influence a 63.7% change in the consumer reviews of some selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria, which depicts an excellent effect of the value, with the remaining 36.3% making up for the other factors explaining the difference in the consumer reviews of some selected carbonated soft drink companies in Nigeria. Meanwhile, the R-squared ( $R^2$ ) value was used to calculate the amount of variance explained by exogenous variables in the endogenous variable (predictive accuracy of the model). According to academic research focusing on social sciences,  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can be classified as considerable, moderate, or weak (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2013).  $R^2$  values of 0.24 are deemed poor in SEM-PLS. However, because  $R^2$  frequently overestimates their corresponding population values, particularly with small samples, the Adjusted  $R^2$  will be employed to adjust for such bias (Mertler et al., 2021). Furthermore, Electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability and social media have effect size (F-Square) 0.015, 0.023, 0.015 and 0.062 respectively (Table 1c) on the R-Square if they are removed from the model. The effect size of these variables (Electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability and social media) could therefore be seen to have a tiny effect. In the meantime, when an exogenous variable is removed from the model, F-Square ( $f^2$ ) is the change in R-Square ( $R^2$ ). Cohen  $f^2$  was used to calculate the changing effect of  $R^2$ . Effect sizes of  $f^2$  equal to 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate tiny, medium, and large effects, respectively (Hair et al., 2013; Hair et al., 2019) hence the listed variables above have effect sizes that falls within the tiny range.

Likewise, Stone-Gleisser Q-Squared ( $Q^2$ ) was used to assess the predictive importance of path coefficients (effect size of the coefficients). Q-square is predictive relevance; it determines if the model has predictive power or not.  $Q^2$  also establishes the endogenous components' predictive relevance. Q-square values greater than zero suggest that your values have been well reconstructed and that the model has predictive significance ( $Q^2$  greater than zero is desirable). According to Hair et al. (2017),  $Q^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate that an independent variable has a minor, medium, or substantial predictive impact on endogenous values construct, respectively. The blindfolding technique in SMART-PLS was used therefore to determine the Q Square value in this work. Based on this criterion, the independent variable (Viral Marketing) is a significant (0.628) predictor (Table 1d) of the dependent variable (Consumer reviews).

F-Square (Table 1c)

	CR	EWM	IF	INF	RLB	SM
CR						
EWM	0.015					
IF	0.002					
INF	0.023					
RLB	0.015					
SM	0.062					

Predict (Table 1d)

	$Q^2$ predict	RMSE	MAE
CR	0.628	0.613	0.426

Model fit (Table 1e)

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.047	0.047
d_ ULS	1.036	1.036
d_ G	1.507	1.507
Chi-square	3463.638	3463.638
NFI	0.789	0.789

Source: Author's computation, 2023 underlying data from Field Survey

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**Table 1e** shows the overview of the goodness of fit model, which was determined by the fit indices such as Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Normed Fit Index (NFI) values. From the structural model, the goodness fit values were SRMR = 0.047, and NFI = 0.789. Therefore, these values depict that a goodness fit is established because all the indices are within the threshold and acceptable range. For instance, a value less than 0.10 is very much accepted for the standardised root mean square residual as proposed by Hu and Bentler (1998), while Normed Fit Index (NFI), which represents an increment fit measure, takes a value between 0 and 1 but the closer it is to 1 the better the fit (Lohmöller, 1989). Therefore, the above result implies that the model can significantly predict the Consumer review change in some selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria due to Viral Marketing variables (Electronic word of mouth, Influencer, Reliability and Social media). The multiple regression model is, as a result of this, expressed thus:

$$VM = \beta_0 + 0.156EWM + 0.149INF + 0.164RLB + 0.336SM \text{ ----- eq. (4.2.1)}$$

Where:

VM= Viral Marketing

EWM= Electronic Word of Mouth

INF = Influencer

RLB = Reliability

SM = Social Media

The path regression model above revealed that when combining all the variables of the Viral Marketing together as the independent variable, it has positively and significantly predicted Consumer review.

Moreover, the unit of change in electronic word of mouth resulted in 0.156 improvements in the consumer reviews of some selected carbonated soft drink companies in Nigeria. Likewise, a unit of change or increase in the influencer would lead to a 0.149 improvement in the same consumer review. Furthermore, an increase in the reliability of 0.164 improved the consumer review of some selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria. Likewise, an increase in the social media of 0.336 improved the consumer review of some selected carbonated drinks companies in Nigeria

Based on the afore stated information, the null hypothesis one ( $H_{01}$ ) states that Viral marketing has no significant effect on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria, is rejected.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective examined the effect of viral marketing on (informativeness, electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability, and social media) on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria. The results showed that influencer, electronic word of mouth, reliability, and social media had positive and significant effect on consumer reviews, while informativeness had a positive but insignificant effect on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria.

Ngarmwongnoi et al., (2020), opined that eWOM refers to remarks made via the Internet, which are available to users on the Internet, on products, brand, or organization. In the same vein, Reliability alludes to the extent to which users understand that an information source is credible, authentic, proper, and reliable (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). Reliability can influence persuasiveness and impact communications on the receiver. The receiver considers the source as credible when the information from it can be trusted (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). The reliability or believability of a source influences perceptions of information from that source, and vice versa (Mishra & S M, 2016). Typically, information provided by credible sources has a larger impact on recipients' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors than information provided by non-credible sources (Lin & Xu, 2017).

Baumöl et al. (2016), submitted that social media encourages user connection, participation, and collaboration, and the sharing of content which agrees with the definition of Elefant (2011), who also adds to this, the concept of information sharing. Kietzman et al. (2011), also remain on the same idea by stating that social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. For his part, Scott (2017), joins the latter definitions by defining social media as technologies that enable communication between users. Scott (2017) quotes that social media provides the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online.

A lot more consumers nowadays are active participants on social media. They follow certain personalities they consider influential and admire (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). As such, firms are leveraging on the mutual relationship between influencers and consumers to improve their sales (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Consumers are therefore stimulated to buy one product over the other (Chung & Cho, 2017). This activity is effectively achieved if the influencer propagates the information at the right time and at the right place (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Influencers share their lived experiences with their opinions concerning a certain subject, product, or service all to impact consumer buying decisions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). They do this through various media channels such as Blogs, Facebook,

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Instagram, Twitter and etcetera, a platform which consumers also share (Alsulaiman et al., 2015; Alhidari et al., 2015). Therefore, firms seeking to increase sales and popularize their product now delegate this aspect of their marketing activities to influencers, with the belief that they can influence their followers to like the products being endorsed by them (Solis, 2016).

The finding of this study demonstrated that viral marketing has a significant effect on consumer reviews which supports the magic bullet theory/hypodermic needle. Nwabueze, and Okonkwo (2018) indicated that the hypodermic needle or bullet theory sees the mass media as having a direct, immediate, and powerful effect on its audiences. The theory suggests that the mass media could influence a very large group of people directly and uniformly by „shooting“ or „injecting“ them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response (Mahlangu, 2017). Further, Hamat et al., (2012) suggest that online users engaging in social media interaction are generally motivated by similar factors which include: altruism, curiosity, sense of efficacy, pleasure of sharing, reciprocity, affiliation, power, collaboration, reward, and recognition. Influencers uses web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues.

### 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this was to verify if the purpose previously stated in the introduction had been fulfilled. The purpose of the study conducted in this thesis was to examine the effect of viral marketing on consumer reviews on of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria.

After reviewing the data collected in the interviews, one could see that there were many different factors that went into viral marketing and how it affected consumer reviews. The theories and model that had been discussed throughout this study still held their relevance, but one could argue that on their own, they did not manage to capture the entire spectrum of this complex concept. There needed to be a combination of other external factors such as the principles of viral marketing, the viral expansion loop, the emotions framework, the differentiation strategy as well as the observation and occasional interaction with online culture. All these worked as individual cogs in the viral marketing machine; together they made things happen.

Overall, the study concluded that viral marketing (electronic word of mouth, influencer, reliability and social media) had significant effect on consumer reviews of selected carbonated soft drinks companies in Nigeria.

Theoretically, the outcome of this study is in line with the AIDAS theory which was the underpinning theory for this study. The AIDAS theory was adopted to guide this study variables because its perspectives are tied to the focus of the study and the variables that were investigated. This research paper recommends that carbonated soft drinks companies should increase their commitment in adopting and practicing viral marketing to enhance consumer reviews. Future study should consider the relevance of viral marketing on consumer reviews in other sectors such as finance, insurance, health, manufacturing, and others to determine the interaction of the variables and establish if the outcome would be the same. Further study on viral marketing and consumer purchase intention should be conducted in other developing economies similar to that of Nigeria where this study was carried out for comparability of empirical findings.

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