

Implicit and Explicit Marketing Communication in the Visibility of Small and Medium Enterprises in a Developing Market

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Abstract: This study investigated the implicit and explicit marketing communications in the visibility of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies such as Nigeria. The methodology adopted for this study was a descriptive research design based on data collection through survey method with a sample of 320 respondents chosen by means of stratified sampling technique across market regions in Lagos state such as Yaba, Lagos Island, Oyingbo and Ikeja. Data was collected through a questionnaire administered to SMEs' customers in selected areas in Lagos state. The data was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation, and Regression analysis. The outcomes from this study indicated that implicit promotion such as branding and sponsorships significantly affect customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. Furthermore, explicit promotions such as advertising, sales promotions, and public relations have a significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. Finally, the study found that there is a significant positive relationship between implicit and explicit promotion and customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. In conclusion, IMC has a significant and positive effect on organisational visibility by facilitating customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. It was recommended among other things that business owners, executives and management should prioritize the utilisation of IMC based on promotion mix elements which can enhance the creation of awareness, interests, desire and action of their products to affect consumer buying behaviour.

Keywords: Customer Awareness, Explicit, Implicit, Promotion, Marketing, Organisational Visibility.

I. Background of the Study

Emerging economies are known to have increased because of thriving small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that are pushing the boundaries of becoming more visible for customers in a highly competitive global business environment using integrated marketing communications (IMC) (Sharma, Mahajan & Kapse, 2024). Nigeria as an emerging economy has diverse opportunities and challenges for contemporary business organisations especially SMEs that make up 70% of economic activities (Etale & Bibiere Light, 2021; Oluremi & Maku, 2024). The 21st century vagary marketing environment coupled with availability of vast number of products and substitutes and intense and complex competition; SMEs' IMC decisions need to be further strengthened for enhanced business performance (Khizar, Farooqi, Rehmat & Naz, 2016; Abashidze, 2017; Sharma, Mahajan & Kapse, 2024). Organisational visibility metrics such as customer awareness, engagements, patronage satisfaction, retention and loyalty have been known to be fluctuating due to the dynamics in the business environment (Mohd Suki, 2016 as cited in Cahaya, Winarti & Erasashanti, 2023).

The construct of integrated marketing communication (IMC) has emerged in the past two decade as a powerful tool that guides business and marketing practitioners in formulating and implementing marketing communications in a more consistent and effective manner (Rehman & Ibrahim. 2011; Coffie, Anning-Dorson, Hinson, Bosah & Anani-Bossman, 2022). IMC has moved beyond communication to the process of using promotional elements in a unified way so that a synergistic communication effect is created, developed and achieved. It is currently dominating and influencing the communications of contemporary businesses with their target markets based on successful impact on appeal, equity and performance of brands (Rehman & Ibrahim. 2011; Rehman, Gulzar, & Aslam, 2022).

According to Oana (2018) IMC represents the combination of implicit and explicit promotions to give a formidable promotional strategy for organisations to create awareness, interests, desire and purchase action for their products. The implicit promotion is referred to as any form of marketing communication embedded in the product such as branding, labelling, packaging and information on the product. On the other hand, explicit promotion is referred to as communication through the promo-mix elements such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions, personal selling, celebrity endorsements, sponsorships as well as their electronic variants (Oana, 2018; Kotler & Armstrong, 2020).

Today, it has become necessary that organisations comprehend the essence of IMC programs in providing a platform for other traditional marketing mix elements (product, price, place) to thrive (Olimpia & Mihaela, 2015). The linkage between IMC components and consumers has been considered at varying levels because how organisations in a highly competitive capitalize IMC to ensure the creation and maintenance of long-term relationships with current and potential customers. In addition, the evolving consumer behaviours whereby consumers are not responsive to forced and intruding marketing communications has made continuous research into how IMC is an important marketing strategy for enhancing organisational performance in terms of

customer awareness, engagements, satisfaction, retention and loyalty (Olimpia & Mihaela, 2015; Martin, 2017; Orzan, Tița, Chivu, Oanță & Coman, 2017). In other words, for customer to be loyal to an organisation or its product there has to be consistent, unified and purposeful IMC that engages and interacts with customers. Based on the foregoing this study seeks to investigate IMC as it affects organisational visibility of SMEs in Lagos state, Nigeria.

The problem this research focuses on can be attributed to the challenges SMEs are facing in becoming more visible to their customers to get their products and services in the market. Furthermore, this problem is exacerbated because contemporary business organisations are faced with challenges of comprehending the demands and preferences of customers in order to adequately pass across the right communication in manner that keeps them loyal (Tannady & Purnamaningsih 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). It has been observed in the business environment, globally and locally in Nigeria, organisations are constantly faced with tremendous challenges in terms of fighting competition and changes in consumer behaviour as well as adapting to the changes in the external business environment (Awunyo-Vitor, Ayimey & Gayibor, 2013; Khizar et al., 2016; Adnan, Khan & Hayee, 2021).

The problem in this research is to determine which of the IMC categorization (implicit and explicit) affects organisational visibility in terms of creating awareness, interests, desire and action (AIDA) in SMEs in emerging economies such as Nigeria a study of customers in selected areas in Lagos state. In light of the above, the following research questions:

- i. What is the effect of implicit promotion (branding and sponsorship) on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action?
- ii. What is the effect of explicit promotion (advertising, sales promotions, public relations) on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action?
- iii. What is the relationship between implicit and explicit promotion on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action?

The findings from the study would be of significant value because of its usefulness to organizations, business leaders, managers and marketers by enabling them to recognize how the operations of IMC in terms of implicit and explicit communications have the ability to affect level of organisational visibility. The insights from this study would be relevant for comprehending connections of implicit and explicit promotions as IMC for driving organisational visibility. Furthermore, the study is of importance for the policymakers and regulating bodies to better understand the role of IMC with respect to how customers recognize and respond to SMEs. Finally, this study can generate outcomes and findings that are of significance to academic researchers, scholars and students by providing additional materials for understanding how to effectively utilize promotion mix elements as IMC to boost customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

II. Literature Review

Concept of Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is the holistic term used in portraying promotional approach of an organisation consisting of promo-tools such as sales promotion, advertising, public relations, personal selling, sponsorships, direct marketing (Miremadi, Samsami & Qamsari, 2017). IMC represents promotion mix elements combined as a fundamental, holistic and complex application of a company's marketing efforts towards communicating with its target market that has been evolving since 1990s providing benefits to company in the form of creativity, consistent messages, recommendations, marketing (Orzan et al., 2017; Oana, 2018). In other words, the marketing communication of an organisation that promotes unified and valuable message to its target audience is known as IMC (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). IMC is defined as an all-inclusive term expressing implicit and explicit components of promotion used to effectively reach the target audience of an organisation (Todorova, 2015; Enitilo, Ajayi, & Famuagun, 2017), it is thus considered as an essential element of the marketing mix by which organizations aim to build good communication about company image and favorable public image to enhance business prospects for the organization (Todorova, 2015). Adefulu (2015) described IMC as a promotional tactic involving disseminating information about a product, product line, brand or company seeking to inform, remind and persuade target audience about the organisation and its products. The recognizable goal of IMC is to facilitate the individual elements of promotion mix are combined coherently to attain the organisation's overall marketing outcome (Adefulu, 2015; Oana, 2018). In addition, Iyad (2016) asserted that IMC provides targeted information, messages and communications to consumers about the organisation's products offering through diverse methods of communicating carrying effective message which leads to satisfy both organizational and consumer needs.

According to Sangeetha, Rajamannar and Devi (2017) IMC involves broad blend of various promotional techniques and tools to maximize organisational communications through concise and consistent messaging that fosters familiarity and consumer affinity thereby yielding customer satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, IMC as a concept that describes the strategies used by an organisation to integrate and coordinate holistically various channels of communication to transmit a consistent, compelling and convincing marketing message about the organisation and its products (Kanagal, 2016; Adnan et al., 2021).

Broad Categorization of IMC

Kotler and Armstrong (2020) opined that the combination of implicit and explicit promotion results in IMC. Rehman et al (2022) asserted that implicit promotion is a categorization of IMC representing any favourable persuasive communication about an

organisation, its products or both, that is inherent in the product, place of distribution or pricing. Also, explicit promotion is a categorization of IMC representing any favourable persuasive communication about an organisation, its products or both, that is transmitted through the promo-tools such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, sponsorships (Oana, 2018; Sinha & Fukey, 2021; Rehman et al., 2022).

Implicit Promotion Categorization of IMC

Kotler and Armstrong (2020) asserted that branding, product labelling and packaging represents implicit promotions that can be observed in the way organisations put information of the product, its price and channel of distribution on the product itself. These are sometimes covertly observed and can only be attributed as part and parcel of the product. The implicit promotion represents the internal communication aspects of the IMC such as product design, packaging, price tag and inherent messages to customers. (Pereira & Almeida, 2014; Enitilo, Ajayi & Famuagun, 2017). Implicit marketing communication entails transmission of information about product or an organisation subtly influencing consumer behaviour. The implicit promotion approach relies on imbedded marketing ques to create a positive perception, viewpoint and build a deeper communication connection with the audience (Fah. & Jobber, 2019). Implicit promotion involves the creation of positive communication about a brand through labelling, logo, symbol, packaging and design. Is part of the product and provides information to the consumer without overtly pushing the product. The objective of implicit promotion in SMEs can be traced to leading to increased recognition in the market, brand trust and loyalty among consumers (Lukáč *et al.*, 2021). It has been argued that implicit marketing communication has significant potential to support visibility and sustainability of contemporary organisations especially SMEs.

Explicit Promotion Categorization of IMC

From the other perspective the explicit promotions categorization represents the promo-tools combined in unison to inform and persuade the target audience. Promo elements such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, sponsorships and personal selling are categorized as external marketing communication vehicles that organisations utilize to create awareness and influence purchase (Pereira & Almeida, 2014; Fahy & Jobber, 2019; Adnan et al., 2021). For the purpose of this study the selected explicit promotions considered in IMC are those that are adequately overt in SMEs setting namely advertising, sales promotion and public relations. Firstly, advertising is defined as any paid form of non-personal marketing communication for a particular product, service, idea or organization by an identified sponsor (Enitilo, Ajayi & Famuagun, 2017). It is known as the most visible element of promotion, advertising is the process through which organisations create awareness, interest, desire and action for products and services of an organisation (Enitilo et al (2017; Adnan et al., 2021).

Accordingly, public relations encompass planned and designed communications outward or inward between an organization and its public, Contemporary public relations represents a sequence of activities and approaches that directly related with marketing function such as special publications, brochures, fundraisings, events, lobbies and other public works. (Enitilo, Ajayi & Famuagun, 2017; Adnan et al., 2021).

Sales promotion has been researched as the most strategic promo-tool used in times of critical situations to overcome competitors maintain favourable sales status quo or temporarily boost sales. It is a short-term value adding marketing activity in order to stimulate and be an incentive for consumer purchases over a limited period of time (Fahy & Jobber, 2019). Finally, sales promotion as a key IMC factor and strategy for marketers involves incentives and techniques directed towards customers and traders with intension to produce immediate or short-term effect in terms of consumer purchase (Enitilo, Ajayi & Famuagun, 2017; Adnan et al., 2021).

Concept of Organisational Visibility

The dependent variable of this study is the visibility of organisations in their target market in terms of customer recognizing them, identifying their products and services. Organisational visibility is the extent to which an organisation is recognized and identified by its target market. It can relate to how much a customer is aware of an organisation and its products. (Nyarko, Agyeman-Duah & Asimah, 2016). Organizational visibility represents the extent to which an enterprise is recognized and remembered in the market from the perception of its target audience and stakeholders (Justesen & Plesner, 2023). In essence, attaining high visibility can lead to better awareness and trust by customers, suppliers' partnerships and more opportunities. Organisational visibility can be translated into the cognitive behaviour of customers to repeatedly patronize a particular organization or its products because it is known, recognized and trusted. In other words, it is the propensity that customer will have positive attitude to engage, choose and purchase a particular brand or organisation as well as engage in purchasing behaviour repeatedly or consistently over a given period of time (Nyarko, Agyeman-Duah & Asimah, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2020).

Customer awareness, interests, desire and action are combined objectives of IMC that can be key results of organisational visibility (Alao, Akinola & Akinbobola, 2020). The extent to which customers would patronize an enterprise is based on the degree of visibility in the market Oseyomon and Ibadin (2016) opined that customer patronage is dependent on level of satisfaction and loyalty from usage of products from visible organisations. Hence, organisations that are able to attain high visibility to customers will continue to enjoy levels of loyal patronage (Oseyomon & Ibadin, 2016; Oana, 2018).

IMC and Visibility of SMEs in the Market

Sharma et al (2024) explored the impact of integrated marketing communication on the performance of SMEs in India. The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional analysis using data collected through a structured questionnaire from a sample of 845 SME owners and managers selected using purposive sampling technique. The data was analyzed using panel least square and structural equation model. The outcomes from this study indicated strong correlation between critical dimensions of IMC contributing to business performance. The conclusion shows that SMEs can enhance their performance by incorporating IMC to make customers aware and engaged.

In comparison, Rehman et al (2022) studied the impact explicit elements of (IMC) such as social media (SM) on customers' loyalty level. The study adopted a qualitative research approach by form of theoretical framework through systematic review of a sample of 100 literature selected using purposive sampling technique. The data was collected using secondary sources and analysed based on thematic analysis. The results of the study indicated that SM serves as a springboard for effective applications of marketing communication mix in order to build strong foundations of the brand physically as well as virtually in the mind of customers.

Adnan et al (2021) examined the connection between IMC in terms of branding and customer satisfaction. The methodology followed survey design with a sample of 200 respondents selected based on convenience sampling approach. The data was collected using a questionnaire and the partial least squares structural equation modeling was used as an analysis tool for the quantitative data. The outcome of the study was that IMC through implicit promotion was used to communicate novel and unique characteristics of brands that assist in making customers loyal within customers. From the perspective of Oana (2018) IMC was investigated as a veritable tool for navigating the current extremely fiercely competitive markets for the purpose of attracting and retaining several consumer sectors. The study used qualitative study based on secondary data to explore IMC as the most visible part of organisational and marketing activity for capturing buyers' attention and intention to inform their purchasing decisions. The outcome of the thematic analysis indicated that integrated marketing communication establishes continuous and efficient contact with both prospective consumers and actual consumers.

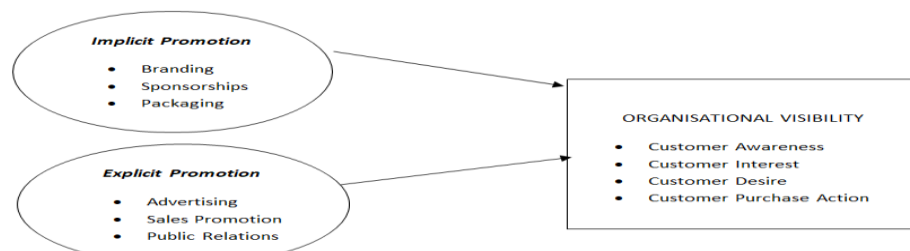
Enitilo *et al* (2017) study evaluated the influence of explicit promotional activities on consumers' patronage of insurance business in Ado-Ekiti metropolis, Nigeria. Using exploratory research design to gather information from a sample of 392 respondents selected through purposive sampling procedure. The data collection was via questionnaires and the analysis was done using multiple regression technique at 0.05 level of significance. The result from the study showed a strong and positive relationship between media advertising and consumer patronages; also, that personal selling has significant effect on consumer patronages. The study stated that there is a significant relationship between sales promotion and consumer. The results further showed that there is a strong and positive relationship between direct marketing and customer's patronage.

Miremadi *et al* (2017) studied the influence of integrated marketing communication on Iranian consumer buying behaviour for imported branded cars in Datis Khodro. The study used exploratory research design with a sample of 197 respondents chosen through simple random sampling technique. The data collected was based on a structured questionnaire and analysis was done by regression method applied to understand the influence of independent variables (advertising, word-of-mouth, internet marketing, direct marketing, public relations, and sales promotion) on the dependent variable (IMC) in Datis Company. The study found that online marketing Communication (OMC), web and social network is discovered as the most effective way of placing the advertisement for Datis Company in the Iranian market.

Finally, Olimpia and Mihaela (2015) investigated the influence of IMC on consumer loyalty behaviour. The study was based on qualitative research using extensive literature. The study used a sample of 50 empirical studies selected using the purposive sample method. The content analysis reinforced the fact that integrated marketing communication has grown considerably based on strengthening explicit communication tools for favourably influencing the behaviour of the target audience. The study established that any explicit communication approach must be tailored made to fit consumer consumers' decision

Conceptual Model of the Study

The model of this study is based on the independent variable IMC and dependent variable is organisational visibility based on the AIDA model as adapted from prior research such as Orzan et al (2017), Adnan et al (20221) as well as Sharma, Mahajan and Kapse (2024). The model showcases the broad categorisation of IMC with proxies' implicit promotion and explicit promotion based on their effect on organisational visibility, this is shown in the image below:



Source: Researcher (2025) adapted from Adnan et al (2021) and Sharma et al (2024).

III. Methodology

Research design specifies and presents an overview of the sequential activities necessary for appropriate execution of a study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). It entails plan, action, structure, pattern and strategy of investigating and obtaining adequate answers to research questions and hypotheses. For the purpose of the study, a descriptive research design was used, and data collection was through cross sectional survey method with the aid of a structured questionnaire. This method was found suitable for this study as it has been considered veritable for gathering insight from a large sample and yield objective generalizable research results (Saunders et al 2019).

This study adopted a deductive research approach to test and validate the theories underpinning this study in order to establish the connection between IMC metrics and SMEs' visibility. The first theory used in this research study is on the Hierarchy of effects theory by Lavidge and Skinner, 1983 as cited in Adefulu (2015). The theory describes the effectiveness of promotion as a form of marketing communication to initiate series of customer driven events needed before a consumer will buy a product and ultimately achieve the organizational marketing objectives (Adefulu, 2015). This theory is important to this current study based on illustrating how IMC garners a positive set of behaviours and attitudes from customers whenever they are exposed to them.

The population of interest to the study is the consumers in Yaba, Lagos Island and Oyingbo in Lagos state. This population is qualified based on customers of SMEs in Nigeria. However, this population of the study can be considered to be infinite because of the disparity of the target audience and their unique buying behaviour. Based on the scope and coverage of this study, the targeted sample size was derived using the Cochran (1975) formula. Simple random sampling technique was utilised in this study to give equal chance of participation by the respondents. The study arrived at a sample of 320 respondents based on an adequate buffer to capture a sizeable number of respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study utilized major primary data gathered from a structured questionnaire to gauge respondents' perceptions of IMC and organisational visibility in SMEs in Nigeria. The study tested the validity of the research instrument using expert content and construct validity. The researcher forwarded the structured questionnaire to the supervisor who is an expert in the area covered by the research for editing and reviewing to ensure validity. Reliability is the overall consistency of a measure in a research instrument (Kothari, 2018). The Alpha values for each variable under study should not be less than 0.6 for the statements in the instruments to be deemed reliable (Kothari, 2018). The pilot survey was carried out on 20 respondents bearing similar characteristics with that of the surveyed participants. The results of the pilot study are shown in the table below:

Variables	Question Items	Cronbach Alpha
Implicit promotions	4	0.77
Explicit promotions	4	0.79
Organisational Visibility	4	0.80

Pilot Study (2024)

Data was analysed and presented through descriptive and inferential statistics in terms of frequency distribution, simple percentages, means and standard deviations while Regression Analysis was used for the hypotheses testing with the aid of statistical packages for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0.

Data Analysis

This study investigated the implicit and explicit marketing communications (IMC) and organisational visibility based on insights from customers towards SMEs in selected areas in Lagos state. The sample size of the study was three hundred and twenty (320) respondents and the same number of copies of questionnaires were distributed, out of which two hundred and ninety-four (294) usable copies of the questionnaires were sorted, edited and coded for data analysis. The research instruments were checked to confirm that only adequately and sufficiently filled copies of the questionnaire were enacted for the data analysis, this gives response rate of 91.9%. The data analysis was executed based on descriptive and inferential statistics. The questionnaire was divided by subsections according to the research variables. The responses were evaluated through Likert scale statements with points awarded based on scale ranging from 1 to 5 and were interpreted as in terms of strongly agreed measured between 4.45 and above, agreed measured between 3.45 to 4.44, fairly agreed measured between 2.45 to 3.44, disagreed measured between 1.45 to 2.44 and strongly agreed measured from below 1.45.

Tests for Hypotheses

Hypothesis I: Implicit promotion (branding and sponsorship) has no significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

Table 4.5a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.869 ^a	.755	.704	.477

a. Predictors: (Constant), Implicit promotion (branding and sponsorship)

Table 4.5b: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.901	1	1.901	1.752	.010 ^b
	Residual	324.338	293	1.085		
	Total	326.239	294			

a. Dependent Variable: customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Implicit promotion (branding and sponsorship)

Table 4.5c: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.890	0.203	0.234	14.265	0.000
	Implicit promotion	0.268	0.056	0.0061	4.771	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

A close examination of the tables demonstrates that R-square value of 0.755 points to the degree of customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action can be accounted for by implicit promotions. This means that only 24.5% of the total systematic alterations in customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action may be left unexplained.

The ANOVA table shows that the overall model is significant using F-statistics (1.752) and probability value (0.01) which is less than 5% level of significance. Thus, the results of this analysis mean that the null hypothesis one should be rejected and alternative hypothesis one should be accepted. Hence, implicit promotion (branding and sponsorship) has significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

Hypothesis II: Explicit promotion (advertising, sales promotions, public relations) has no significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

Table 4.6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.909 ^a	.826	.804	.1247

a. Predictors: (Constant), explicit promotion

Table 4.6b: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.841	1	1.841	1.714	.030 ^b
	Residual	321.008	293	1.074		
	Total	322.009	294			

a. Dependent Variable: customer repeat patronage intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), explicit promotion

Table 4.6c: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.002	.1199		11.536	.000
	Explicit promotion	.151	.026	.269	2.201	.0012

a. Dependent Variable: customer repeat patronage intention

A close examination of the tables showed an R-square value of 0.826 points to the degree of customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action can be accounted for by explicit promotions. This means that only 17.4% of the total systematic alterations in customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action may be left unexplained. The ANOVA table shows that the overall model is significant using F-statistics (1.714) and probability value (0.01) which is less than 5% level of significance. Thus, the result of this analysis means that null hypothesis two should be rejected and alternative hypothesis two should be accepted. In essence, explicit promotion (advertising, sales promotions, public relations) has significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

Hypothesis III: There is no significant relationship between implicit and explicit promotion and customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

Table 4.7a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.991 ^a	.982	.945	1.227

a. Predictors: (Constant), implicit and explicit promotion

Table 4.7b: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.2001	1	6.2001	5.6344	.010 ^b
	Residual	329.038	299	1.1004		
	Total	330.039	300			

a. Dependent Variable: customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action

b. Predictors: (Constant), implicit and explicit promotion

Table 4.7c: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.003	.185		10.111	.000
	Sales promotion.	.176	.020	.233	2.100	.001

a. Dependent Variable: customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action

A close examination of the tables showed an R-square value of 0.982 points to the degree of customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action can be accounted for by both implicit and explicit promotions. This means that only 2.1% of the total systematic alterations in customer loyalty may be left unexplained. The ANOVA table shows that the overall model is significant using F-statistics (5.6344) and probability value (0.010) which is less than 5% level of significance. Thus, the result of this analysis means that the null hypothesis three should be rejected and alternative hypothesis three should be accepted. In essence, there is significant relationship between implicit and explicit promotion and customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action.

IV. Discussion of Findings

This study was done on the linkage between IMC and organisational visibility in Nigerian SMEs. Based on the data analysis and test of hypotheses the following findings arrived in line with previous studies.

Firstly, the study found that implicit promotion such as branding and sponsorships have significant and positive effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. The majority of respondents stated that they recognise and respond positively to SMEs when they communicate about products. In other words, the findings stated that implicit promotions assist make marketing of products in a unique and informative way to customers. This was in line with the studies of Ahmed et al (2012) as well as Adnan et al (2021) where integrated marketing communication is linked to customer awareness and recognition of products in the market.

Furthermore, the findings indicated explicit promotion such as advertising, sales promotions, public relations all have significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. This study showed how advertising was identified as crucial in marketing communication for customer retention. The findings agreed with studies of Ibojo and Akinruwa (2014), Iyad (2016) and Enitilo et al (2017) based on the assertion that explicit promotions are essential in creating awareness and drives interest for consumer patronage. However, the findings disagreed with the studies of Awunyo-Vitor et al (2013) where it was stated that advertising was not effective in making customers aware of organisations. This study supported the arguments of Khizar et al (2016) based on effect of integrated marketing communication components on brand awareness and customer loyalty in beverage sector in Pakistan.

Finally, the findings revealed the significant positive relationship between implicit and explicit promotion on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action. It was stated that the respondents linked implicit and explicit promotion components for effective marketing. The findings align with the arguments of Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaite (2023) on IMC as what really drives loyalty in the fast-moving consumer goods market. In addition, the findings were in line with the studies of Iyad (2016) and Kanagal (2016) signifying the more enhanced use of marketing communication tool. The study findings also stated the most significant use of sales promotion in IMC on customer repeat patronage intention. Sales promotion was found as the most significant among the selected marketing communication tools. The respondents their banks used all kinds of free gifts and incentives to influences customer desire to continue patronizing. The findings were in line with Awunyo-Vitor et al (2013) and Kanagal (2016) shedding light on the role of sales promotion for boosting customer patronage. The findings of this study also further agreed with Pembi et al (2017) based on the significance of implicit and explicit promotional strategies on organizational performance in Nigeria.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations.

With respect to the data analysis in particular to descriptive and inferential statistics this study pointed out that; customers can identify and respond positively to the company when they communicate about their products via appealing branding and sponsorships. Thus, implicit promotion has significant effect on the level of customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action with R-square figure of 75.5%

Also, customers identify and respond positively to the company when they communicate about their products via their expressions of corporate social responsibility. Furthermore, explicit promotion such as advertising, sales promotions, public relations have significant effect on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action with R-square figure of 82.6%. Finally, there is significant relationship between implicit and explicit promotion on customer awareness interest, desire and purchase action with R-square value of 98.2%.

Based on the findings it can be concluded that organisational visibility, recognition and identification is significantly impacted by IMC. in Nigeria. Thus, the interaction between the implicit and explicit promotion for marketing communications makes customers aware, build their interest, drive desire and enhance purchase action of SMEs. In line with the research objectives and questions it is indicated that all the variables of implicit promotion (branding and sponsorships) as well as explicit promotion (advertising, sales promotions, public relations) were found to boost organisational visibility especially in SMEs market in Nigeria.

The study concludes that IMC has the most significant positive relationship with creating awareness, interests, desire and purchase action. This means that customers can easily recognize SMEs in Lagos state based on the variables of implicit and explicit promotions.

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study the following recommendations are made:

- i) Business owners, executives and management of SMEs in Nigeria should prioritize utilization of implicit promotion based on promotion mix elements which can enhance creation of awareness, interests, desire and action of their products to affect consumer buying behaviour.
- ii) It is also recommended that explicit promotion should aligned with other key marketing mix variables and decision areas such as product, price, place people, processes and physical evidence, to be employed for fighting competition in the Nigerian SMEs market.
- iii) Finally, organisations, business leaders, executives and management should ensure continuous feedback from customers for improving their implicit and explicit promotions for enhanced market visibility, recognition and interaction with SMEs in Nigeria.

This study focused on the effect of integrated marketing communication on organisational visibility in emerging economies based on a study of customers of SMEs in selected areas in Lagos state.

Thus, future studies should also consider examining potential moderating and mediating variables, such as digital marketing adoption, industry-specific factors, and competitive intensity, to provide deeper insights into the relationship between IMC and customer engagement.

Finally, this study focused on quantitative research approach, thus further studies can be conducted using qualitative research approach or mixed research approach such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could offer richer contextual understanding of customer perceptions and SME marketing strategies

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