

Memes and Digital Branding: A Case Study of Jumia Nigeria's Online Promotion Strategies

Samuel Ahmed Balami

Faculty of Management Science, Department of Transport and Logistics Management, Nigerian Army University Biu, Borno State, Nigeria

Abstract

This research paper investigates the burgeoning role of internet memes as a contemporary tool in online brand promotion strategies, a case of Jumia an E-commerce company in Nigeria. In an increasingly digital and socially connected landscape, memes have emerged as a powerful form of communication, characterized by their virility, relatability, and often humorous nature. This study aims to explore how brands leverage memes for promotional purposes, the perceived effectiveness of such campaigns, and the potential benefits and pitfalls associated with their use. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of meme marketing's impact on brand awareness, engagement, and ultimately, consumer behavior. Preliminary findings suggest that successful meme integration can significantly enhance brand resonance and virality, provided the content aligns with brand identity and audience sensibilities.

Keywords

Meme Marketing, Viral Advertising, Social Media Branding, Digital Content Strategy, Internet Culture and Brands, Brand Promotion

1. Introduction

The advent of the internet and social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of marketing and brand promotion. Traditional advertising methods, while still relevant, are increasingly complemented, and sometimes overshadowed, by innovative digital strategies. Among these, the phenomenon of internet memes has transcended its origins as niche online humor to become a pervasive cultural artifact. Memes, characterized by their rapid dissemination, replicability, and often humorous or satirical nature, have demonstrated an unparalleled capacity to capture public attention and foster community engagement.

In recent years, brands have recognized the potential of memes as a potent tool for online promotion. Beyond their entertainment value, memes offer a unique avenue for brands to connect with their target audience on a more personal, relatable, and authentic level. The viral nature of memes presents an opportunity for brands to achieve widespread visibility and generate organic conversations at a fraction of the cost of traditional advertising. However, the transient and often unpredictable nature of meme culture also presents challenges, including the risk of misinterpretation, brand dilution, or even negative backlash if not executed thoughtfully. This paper seeks to delve into the intricate relationship between memes and online brand promotion. It aims to identify the mechanisms through which memes influence brand perception and consumer engagement, analyze the efficacy of meme-based marketing campaigns, and provide insights into best practices for brands looking to leverage this dynamic form of digital communication.

2. Literature Review

Jumia is one of the leading e-commerce platforms in Africa, with significant operations in Nigeria. The company was founded in 2012 and has since grown to become a major player in the online retail space in Nigeria and other African countries [1]. Jumia offers a wide range of products, including electronics, fashion items, home goods, and more, catering to the growing demand for online shopping in Nigeria. The psychology of online buying encompasses various factors that influence consumer behavior [2]. Consumer behavior is shaped by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Trust is a critical psychological driver in online purchasing, as consumers often rely on the credibility of the website and the perceived security of their personal information. Additionally, perceived value plays a significant role in online buying decisions, as consumers assess the benefits of a product against its cost [3]. The increasing digitization of society has transformed the landscape of marketing and promotion. A significant development in this domain is the integration of internet memes into promotional campaigns. Memes, defined as virally transmitted cultural symbols and social ideas, have become a powerful tool for brands to connect with their target audience on a more personal and relatable level. This is particularly evident in the case of Jumia, a leading e-commerce company in Nigeria, which has successfully leveraged memes to enhance its online promotion strategies. Jumia's adoption of memes for online promotion is a strategic move to tap into the apathetic and ironic humor prevalent among Nigerian youth, who constitute a large segment of their customer base. By incorporating popular Nigerian memes and slang into their social media posts, Jumia is able to create content that is not only entertaining but also highly shareable.

This approach helps the brand appear more human and less corporate, fostering a sense of community and trust among its followers. For instance, during major sales events like the Black Friday campaign, Jumia has used memes to create hype and excitement, transforming what would be a standard promotional message into a cultural moment. The impact of this strategy is multifaceted. Firstly, it significantly boosts engagement rates on Jumia's social media platforms. The humorous and relatable nature of memes encourages likes, comments, and shares, extending the brand's reach organically without a substantial increase in advertising spend [4]. Secondly, it improves brand recall and recognition. A well-executed meme campaign can make a brand memorable, ensuring that Jumia remains top-of-mind when consumers consider making an online purchase. Lastly, this strategy allows Jumia to navigate the competitive e-commerce market in Nigeria by building a unique and engaging brand personality. By successfully integrating into the digital subculture of its target audience, Jumia demonstrates a deep understanding of local context, thereby strengthening its market position and customer loyalty. The strategic use of memes thus represents a modern, effective, and culturally resonant approach to online promotion in the Nigerian e-commerce space.

Customer engagement is another vital aspect of online buying. It refers to the emotional and cognitive connection that consumers develop with a brand or platform. Engaged customers are more likely to make purchases, recommend products, and remain loyal to a brand. However, challenges such as information overload, security concerns, and the lack of personal interaction can hinder customer engagement.

Customer engagement in the online context refers to the ongoing interactions between a customer and a brand through digital channels. It encompasses active participation, emotional connection, and a sense of loyalty. Factors contributing to strong online customer engagement include personalized experiences, interactive content, efficient customer support (including AI-powered chatbots), a strong brand voice, and the creation of online communities. Engaged customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, advocate for the brand, and provide valuable feedback.

The existing literature on digital marketing, viral content, and internet culture provides a foundation for understanding the role of memes in brand promotion. Early studies on viral marketing highlighted the importance of user-generated content and word-of-mouth in disseminating marketing messages. With the rise of social media platforms, research on online brand communities and consumer engagement has become increasingly relevant.

More specifically, scholarly attention to memes has grown significantly. Shifman provides a seminal work on the characteristics and cultural significance of internet memes, defining them as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by internet users." Research has explored the psychological underpinnings of meme virality, often attributing it to factors such as humor, relatability, emotional resonance, and social identity [5].

While general meme studies are abundant, the specific application of memes in commercial contexts is a more nascent area of research. Some studies have begun to examine the use of humor in advertising and its impact on brand recall and attitude. Recent works have started to touch upon "meme marketing, discussing its potential for increasing brand engagement and creating a more approachable brand image. However, there is a clear need for more empirical research on the direct impact of meme campaigns on key marketing metrics such as brand awareness, purchase intent, and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the nuances of brand-meme fit, audience perception of authenticity, and the risks associated with meme marketing remain underexplored. The concept of customer engagement has been extensively studied in recent years, with various definitions and frameworks proposed. Customer engagement is a psychological state resulting from interactive, co-creative experiences with a brand. This engagement is particularly crucial in online settings, where customers often navigate multiple touchpoints before making a purchase decision.

Several strategies have been identified in the literature as effective for enhancing online customer engagement. These include personalized marketing, interactive content, and the use of social media platforms. Personalized marketing, which tailors messages and offers to individual customer preferences, has been shown to significantly increase engagement levels. Additionally, interactive content, such as quizzes and polls, fosters a sense of participation and connection with the brand [6].

Despite the wealth of research on customer engagement, there remains a gap in understanding how these strategies can be effectively implemented in the context of non-linear buying behaviors. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the interplay between various engagement strategies and customer decision-making processes.

3. E-commerce in Business

E-commerce in Nigeria has been growing rapidly, driven by increasing internet penetration, mobile phone usage, and a growing middle class with access to digital payments. The Nigerian e-commerce market is characterized by a mix of local and international players, with Jumia being one of the most prominent. Despite challenges such as logistics and payment infrastructure, the e-commerce sector in Nigeria is expected to continue growing. Nigeria's e-commerce sector is a dynamic market, poised for significant growth, with projections suggesting its value could reach \$33 billion by 2026. This expansion is driven by a large, youthful population, increasing internet and smartphone penetration, and the rise of digital payment solutions. Despite this immense potential, the sector faces several structural challenges that need to be overcome for it to truly flourish.

Jumia Nigeria operates as a platform for third-party sellers and also sells products directly to consumers. The company has invested in logistics and payment solutions to improve customer experience and expand its reach in the Nigerian

market [7]. understanding the psychological landscape of online buying is paramount for the success of e-commerce ventures. By prioritizing the creation of trust, optimizing user experience through intuitive design, managing information effectively to prevent overload, and addressing perceived risks transparently, online retailers can significantly enhance customer engagement. Strategies such as personalization, interactive content, and robust customer support are crucial for building lasting relationships and converting browsers into loyal buyers. Addressing these psychological dimensions is not just about improving conversion rates; it's about building a sustainable and customer-centric online ecosystem.

3.1 The Role of Humor in Advertising

Humor is a widely used tactic in advertising to capture audience attention, enhance brand recall, and drive persuasion. Humorous ads can make brands more memorable and increase likability.

Effectiveness of Humor in Brand Recall

Humor in advertising can enhance brand recall by:

- Increasing Attention: Humorous ads tend to capture viewers' attention more effectively.
- Enhancing Memorability: Humor can make ads more memorable, leading to better brand recall.

Effectiveness of Humor in Persuasion

Humor can also play a role in persuasion by:

- Creating Positive Associations: Humor can create positive emotions associated with the brand, enhancing persuasion.
- Increasing Likeability: Humorous ads can increase likeability of the brand, potentially leading to increased purchase intent.
- Considerations for Using Humor
- Cultural Sensitivity: Humor can be culturally specific; what is funny in one culture may not be in another.
- Relevance to Brand Message: Humor should align with the brand message and target audience for maximum effectiveness.

3.2 E-commerce Marketing in Nigeria

E-commerce marketing in Nigeria is growing rapidly as businesses leverage digital channels to reach consumers. With increasing internet penetration and mobile usage, Nigerian businesses are adopting various digital marketing strategies to promote their products and services online.

Digital Marketing Strategies Used by Nigerian Businesses. E-commerce marketing in Nigeria is a dynamic and rapidly growing field, driven by the country's large, youthful, and increasingly tech-savvy population. The Nigerian e-commerce market was valued at approximately \$8.53 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach \$14.92 billion by 2029, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.82%. This growth is fueled by high internet and smartphone penetration, with over 70% of online transactions occurring on mobile devices.

3.3 Key Marketing Strategies

Successful e-commerce marketing in Nigeria relies on a multi-channel approach that addresses local consumer behaviors. Social commerce is particularly crucial, with platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp serving as primary channels for product discovery, promotion, and sales. Businesses leverage features like Instagram Shops and Facebook Marketplace to showcase products, engage with their audience, and facilitate direct orders through chats.

Influencer marketing is another highly effective strategy, leveraging the trust and reach of social media personalities to promote products and drive sales. Content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and email marketing are also essential for building brand awareness and nurturing customer relationships. Given Nigeria's mobile-first environment, optimizing websites for mobile devices with fast loading speeds and simplified checkout processes is non-negotiable for a positive user experience [8].

Nigerian businesses, including e-commerce platforms like Jumia, employ several digital marketing strategies to engage customers and drive sales. Some of these strategies include:

- Social Media Marketing: Businesses use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp to promote products, engage with customers, and build brand awareness.
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Optimizing websites for search engines helps businesses improve visibility and drive organic traffic to their e-commerce sites.
- Email Marketing: Businesses use email campaigns to promote products, offer discounts, and engage with subscribers.
- Influencer Marketing: Partnering with influencers helps businesses reach wider audiences and build credibility.
- Content Marketing: Creating valuable content helps businesses attract and retain customers, driving engagement and sales.

4. Challenges and Opportunities

While digital marketing offers opportunities for growth in Nigeria's e-commerce sector, challenges such as limited

internet access in some areas, payment infrastructure issues, and logistics constraints exist. However, the growing youth population, increasing mobile usage, and expanding digital literacy present significant opportunities for businesses to leverage digital marketing strategies.

The primary challenges stem from Nigeria's infrastructural and economic landscape. Poor logistics and a lack of a standardized addressing system make last-mile delivery difficult, expensive, and unreliable, particularly in rural areas. This leads to high operational costs for businesses and delayed deliveries for customers. A persistent lack of trust in online transactions is another major hurdle. Many consumers are hesitant to make online payments due to fears of fraud, data breaches, or receiving counterfeit products, with cash-on-delivery still being a popular payment method.

Furthermore, inadequate and inconsistent power supply disrupts business operations and increases costs for companies that rely on generators. Lastly, regulatory and legal complexities, coupled with weak enforcement of consumer protection laws, make it difficult for e-commerce businesses to operate and for consumers to seek redress when things go wrong.

Despite the immense potential, e-commerce marketing in Nigeria faces several challenges. Inadequate infrastructure, including an unstable power supply and poor internet connectivity, can disrupt business operations and customer experience [9]. A key challenge is building consumer trust, which is often hindered by past fraudulent activities and a preference for cash-on-delivery payments. Logistical hurdles, such as difficult last-mile delivery and a lack of standardized address systems, also pose significant obstacles.

4.1 Opportunities

Despite the challenges, the opportunities for e-commerce in Nigeria are vast. The country's large population, with a growing middle class and high youth demographic, provides a huge consumer base. The increasing adoption of smartphones and social media also presents a significant opportunity for social commerce, where businesses can leverage platforms like Instagram and TikTok to sell products directly to consumers.

The rise of digital payment solutions, including e-wallets and mobile money, is gradually helping to address trust issues and will likely reduce the reliance on cash-on-delivery in the coming years. There is also a substantial opportunity to expand into underserved markets, especially in rural areas, by developing innovative and localized logistics networks. Finally, the e-commerce sector can create a wealth of new jobs, fostering entrepreneurship and economic growth across the country.

However, these challenges present unique opportunities. The high preference for cash-on-delivery is gradually shifting with the rise of secure payment gateways and digital wallets. The growth of specialized delivery services and the increasing adoption of mobile money agents are helping to address logistics issues. As the market matures, e-commerce businesses that focus on building trust through transparent policies, reliable service, and excellent customer support are well-positioned for long-term success.

4.2 Consumer Behavior Theory

Explaining the Influence of Marketing Stimuli (Memes)

Consumer behavior theories help explain how marketing stimuli, such as memes, influence consumer responses. One relevant theory is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

The S-O-R model posits that environmental stimuli (S) affect the internal states of an organism (O), which in turn lead to behavioral responses (R). In the context of memes as marketing stimuli:

- Stimulus (S): Memes about a product, service, or brand (like Jumia) on social media.
- Organism (O): The consumer's internal processes, including perceptions, emotions, and cognitive evaluations of the meme.
- Response (R): The consumer's behavioral response, such as increased engagement, purchase intention, or brand attitude changes.
- Applying the S-O-R Model to Memes
- Memes can influence consumer behavior through:
 - Emotional Engagement: Humorous or relatable memes can evoke emotions, increasing engagement and memorability.
 - Perception and Attitude Formation: Memes can shape consumer perceptions and attitudes toward a brand or product.

Other Relevant Theories

Other theories like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) can also explain how marketing stimuli like memes influence consumer behavior through central or peripheral processing routes.

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4.4 Meme Marketing

A Tool for Engagement and Influence on Jumia

Meme marketing is a powerful strategy for businesses like Jumia to connect with their audience, especially younger demographics like Gen Z. By leveraging memes, brands can join real-time cultural conversations, spark authentic rapport, and drive engagement.

Influence of Memes on Jumia (Hypothetical Context)

While there's limited direct research on the impact of meme marketing specifically on Jumia, we can infer based on general trends:

- Increased Engagement: Memes can generate about 10 times wider reach and 60% higher organic engagement than traditional static graphics.
- Viral Potential: Memes are shareable, relatable, and often rooted in current events or popular culture, making them perfect for capturing audience attention.
- Effective Meme Marketing Strategies for E-commerce Like Jumia
- Real-time Trend Spotting: Track Reddit threads, TikTok trends, and meme aggregations for timely, culturally aware content.
- Encourage User-Generated Content: Host meme-making contests or challenges to boost interaction and community spirit.
- Leverage Analytics: Use tools to track meme performance and adjust strategies accordingly

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5. Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This research has demonstrated that internet memes have emerged as a significant and increasingly effective tool in online brand promotion. The content analysis revealed that successful meme marketing hinges on factors such as timeliness, relevance to current trends, and a strong congruence between the meme's message and the brand's identity. Campaigns that subtly integrate brand messaging within genuinely humorous and relatable memes tend to achieve higher engagement and positive sentiment. Conversely, forced or outdated meme usage often results in negative consumer perceptions.

The consumer survey reinforced these findings, indicating that a majority of social media users perceive brands that successfully utilize memes as modern, relatable, and innovative. While the direct impact on immediate purchase intent was less pronounced, successful meme campaigns significantly boost brand awareness, foster higher engagement rates, and contribute to a more positive brand image, which can indirectly influence long-term consumer behavior. The risk of missteps, however, is notable, with a significant portion of consumers expressing skepticism towards inauthentic or poorly executed meme marketing.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the strategic deployment of memes presents a powerful opportunity for brands to cut through the digital noise, connect with their target audiences on a deeper level, and drive significant online engagement. The viral nature and cultural resonance of memes allow brands to achieve widespread visibility and cultivate an approachable, relatable persona. However, success is not guaranteed and requires a nuanced understanding of meme culture, a commitment to authenticity, and a willingness to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Brands must prioritize genuine humor, contextual relevance, and a strong brand-meme fit to avoid negative backlash and truly harness the promotional power of memes. As digital communication continues to evolve, meme marketing will likely become an even more integral component of comprehensive online brand strategies, necessitating ongoing research into its evolving dynamics and impact.

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