Utilization of Whatsapp for Business Communication among Traders in Kano

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Abstract
WhatsApp, with its innovative offerings like WhatsApp Business, has the potential to revolutionize business communication on a global scale. This inclusive nature makes it particularly well-suited for businesses in Africa. This study investigates how traders in Kano, a prominent commercial centre in Nigeria, leverage WhatsApp for their business communication needs. It uses survey method to explore the factors influencing traders' preferences and usage of specific WhatsApp features, such as voice notes, audio calls, and video calls. The findings reveal that a significant portion of Kano traders utilize WhatsApp for business communication. Text messaging and voice notes emerged as the most preferred and frequently used features. Chi-square tests indicate no statistically significant relationship between the frequency of WhatsApp use and the type of business the traders operate. However, a significant relationship was observed between the usage of WhatsApp features and the educational level of the traders. The study concludes that WhatsApp, as a social media platform, possesses the potential to drive effective business communication and facilitate growth in the current digital age.

Keywords: ICT, WhatsApp, Business, Communication, Kano Traders

Introduction

In modern businesses, informational capital is as important as financial capital owing to the ineluctable relevance of effective business communication strategy to business growth. New information technologies have empowered contemporary businesses with a user-friendly, affordable and adaptable informational capital medium – social media (Georgescua & Popescul 2015) - which has changed the entire business communication landscape (Aral et al., 2013), causing unprecedented convergence, adoption and integration of its various applications into business communication strategy (William et al., 2016), relatively due to the availability and high frequency of using smartphones among potential customers (Mustapha et al., 2023).

While mainstream media remain important for delivering advertising messages, savvy marketers are now utilizing smartphones (such as Android and iPhone) to send direct messages. They leverage these devices to conduct transactions and promote various products and services to customers and business partners. Scott

(2013) argues that it is an exciting time to be a marketer, no matter what trade one engages in.

Marketers have a variety of web-based tools at their disposal to share thoughtful and informative content. This includes websites, blogs, e-books, white papers, images, videos, audio contents, and even product placements, games, and virtual reality experiences. Additionally, they can engage in conversations initiated by others on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Blogs, Chat Rooms, etc. All of these techniques are connected by the idea that organizations of various kinds operate like publishers, producing content that people are eager to engage with. By creating valuable content, organizations can build credibility and loyalty among their customers. Nowadays, savvy marketers adopt a publisher's mindset, focusing on creating and delivering content that is specifically tailored to their audience's interests (Scott, 2013).

Social media play a vital role in business-to-business (B2B) communication and small and medium enterprises – SMEs - (William et al., 2016, Dwivedi, et al., 2021). It was found helpful in image building, strengthening relationships, and networking among business entrepreneurs and customers (Kahar, et al., 2012), providing analytical support for sending tailored messages, reducing the cost of reaching out to non-targeted clients as in the case of using conventional media such as television and newspapers (Scott, 2013; Georgescua & Popescul, 2015; Mustapha et al., 2023; Jannah, 2023) thereby improving sales (Gbam, 2020).

Similarly, WhatsApp is one of the most popular chat platforms with over 2 billion users (Martin, 2024) found to be suitable for business communication (Jannah, 2023) due to its inclusive features such as text, voice notes, status, and audio and visual calls that break barriers to communication such as illiteracy and disabilities. The company specifically created the WhatsApp Business app with unique business features such as a business profile, catalogue and collections, automated messages, call-to-action buttons and payment integration to serve digital marketing platforms for small and big businesses.

WhatsApp and social media in general have some challenges such as technical hurdles, resource constraints, and regulatory issues such as privacy, and mistrust due to activities of hackers and scammers (Kahar, et al., 2012;Georgescua & Popescul, 2015; Mustapha et al., 2023; Jannah, 2023).

Kano is the most populous state in Nigeria with over 10 million people. It has

been the commercial centre for Trans-Saharan Trade between today's Northern Nigeria and the Arab world. It hosts one of the oldest markets in Africa — Kurmi, established in 1487 (Ibrahim, 2014), the largest textile market in Africa – the Kwari market (Mahmud, et al., 2022) and the largest foodstuff market in Africa – Dawanau market. Although there is no authoritative statistic about the current number of markets in Kano, Ibrahim (2014) identified 47 markets using satellite images. Therefore, this study aims to understand how Kano traders use WhatsApp and which of its features they prefer for interactions with clients and customers. This will help in determining the extent to which Kano traders leverage the values and opportunities presented by the online platform.

Research Questions

1. How do Kano traders use WhatsApp for business communication?
2. Which WhatsApp features do Kano traders prefer for business communication?

Research Hypotheses

$H_0$1. There is no significant relationship between the frequency of using WhatsApp and Kano traders' type of business.

$H_0$2. There is no significant relationship between WhatsApp feature use and the education of Kano traders.

Literature Review

The collaborative technologies that now define present-day marketplaces—technologies commonly called "social media," the "Social Web," or "Web 2.0"—offer a viable approach to driving changes in deeper business processes across a wide range of applications (Dave & McKee, 2010). For most organizations, this offers something that extends far beyond marketing and communications.

Scott (2013) defines social media as the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differ from mainstream media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities.

The best way to think about social media is not in terms of the different technologies and tools but, rather, how those technologies and tools allow you to communicate directly with your buyers in places they are congregating. Dave and McKee (2010) argue that in today's socially connected marketplace, shared knowledge has become the most valuable resource. Information seeks to be free,

and in these new markets, it is: free from limitations on location, free from control over content, and free from restrictive access to consumption.

A study on social media and business transformation, which was designed to stimulate innovative investigations of the relationship between social media and business transformation, Aral et al. (2013) found that social media are fundamentally changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume and create. They represent one of the most transformative impacts of information technology on business, both within and outside firm boundaries.

The researchers argue that the social media landscape can be conceptualized as an intersection of activities that producers and users of social media can undertake and the level of analysis at which these activities can be investigated. Activities can be categorized into four broad areas (design & features, strategy & tactics, management & organization and measurement & value) that describe how producers and consumers create and use social media. Three self-explanatory levels of analysis (consumer & society, platforms & intermediaries and firms & industries) can then be used to characterize research from a particular perspective (Aral et al., 2013).

Rodriguez, Peterson and Vijayak, (2012) stated that the utilization of social media (e.g., LinkedIn and X) for reaching business-to-business clients is a relatively new phenomenon with performance outcomes essentially unknown. The 2012 study collected data from 1,699 business-to-business salespeople from different industries. The findings support that social media have a positive relationship with sales processes (creating opportunities and relationship management) and relationship sales performance.

In another similar study of the use of social media by B2B, Dwivedi et tal. (2021) found that social media play an important part in the digital transformation of businesses. The research provides a comprehensive analysis of the use of social media by B2B companies. The study focused on several aspects of social media such as the effect of social media, social media tools, social media use, adoption of social media use and its barriers, social media strategies, and measuring the effectiveness of the use of social media. The research also provided a valuable synthesis of the relevant literature on social media in the B2B context by analysing and discussing the key findings from existing research on social media.

In reviewing the publications gathered for the research, the following themes were

identified. Some studies investigated the effect of social media use by B2B companies. Using mostly surveys to collect the data from salespeople and managers, the studies found that social media have a positive effect on several outcomes important for business such as customer satisfaction, value creation, intention to buy and sell, customer relationships, brand awareness, knowledge creation, corporate credibility, acquiring new customers, salespersons performance, employee brand management, and sustainability (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

A study on internet's role in improving business transactions specifically, online business application (*Kudo*) to determine the role of internet in improving business transactions and the economy, found that the internet proved to increase the effectiveness of business transactions. The study concluded that the internet is becoming the dominating medium of sales compared to the traditional way as the *Kudo* provides various options to improving business operations online and the consumer is fascinated in its use (Soegoto & Rafi, 2018).

In a study examining the impact of social media platforms on phone sales within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Gbam (2020) investigated phone dealers to determine the effects of the platforms on their sales. The study reveals that WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are the most frequently utilized social media platforms by phone dealers in the FCT for sales purposes. Furthermore, the study identified several advantages associated with using social media platforms for phone marketing, including convenience, cost-effectiveness, access to customer feedback, enhanced safety and the ability to reach a larger customer base.

Building upon the existing studies, this study aims to further investigate the role of WhatsApp in business transactions conducted by traders in Kano. Specifically, this research will explore the usage patterns of various the WhatsApp features and the factors influencing traders' preferences for the platform.

Theoretical Framework

This study deploys a Transactional Model of Communication as a framework to explain the communication process taking place between traders and customers via the WhatsApp platform. The model views communication as a dynamic, ongoing process in which people are both senders and receivers of messages at the same time. Rather than seeing communication as a linear transfer of information, the model depicts communication as a two-way, interactive process

where participants are simultaneously both senders and receivers. It emphasizes that communication is simultaneous and involves constant adjustments based on feedback from all participants (Jain, 2024).

The Transactional model recognizes that communication involves multiple layers of feedback, context, and non-verbal communication. Each person involved in the communication process plays an active role, constantly encoding and decoding messages in real time. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram are modern forms of transactional communication. For instance, when a businessman posts a promotional message, customers respond by liking, commenting, or sharing the post. The sender can then respond to individual comments, continuing the conversation in real-time and in the process a transaction can take place. The context in which communication takes place—social media in this case or WhatsApp in particular—shapes how communication or business messages are framed and understood (Jain, 2024).

Method:
This study employedthe survey research method and investigated how traders use WhatsApp for business communication in Kano markets. There are general markets (engaging in trading general products and services) and exclusive ones (trading a particular product exclusively) in the state. This study selected two big markets with a high number of traders, Sabon Gari and Dawanau International markets, to represent both the general and exclusive markets, respectively. A questionnaire containing both open and closed-ended questions was used as an instrument for data collection.

Based on the number of stalls, Sabon Gari market has approximately 150,000 traders who are formally registered with the management of the market. Dawanau International Market, though there was no official figure from its management, the number of traders in the market was approximately 150,000. The research sample size is 380 active WhatsApp users based on Krejcie and Morgan sampling tables, and 356 questionnaires were returned and found useful for analysis.

Findings:
The data presented here was collected through survey (n-356) and presented using descriptive statistics. Most of the respondents are male (66%) and were between the ages of 18-35 (79.5%). A simple majority had secondary certificates (56.5%) while the remaining attended tertiary institutions. The study categorised the

traders into four: retailers, dealers, online traders and those who practiced all the three business types. All the four categories were proportionately represented (all are 20% plus). The bio-data are essential to the discussion of the study's findings as we can see under cross-tabulation and Chi-square test (Tables 1, 2 and 5).

Table 1: Kano traders' frequency of using WhatsApp by type of business

Frequency		Type of business				
		Retailers	Dealers	Online	All	Total
	Very frequently	37	31	44	38	150
	Frequently	39	38	20	36	133
	Fairly frequently	11	9	11	6	37
	Not frequently	5	0	0	5	10
	Not very frequently	1	2	3	1	7
Total		93	80	78	86	337

The data reveal a high-frequency use of WhatsApp applications among Kano traders (78% between very frequently and frequently) indicating how they accept and integrate the new technology into their daily business communication. Chi-square statistical measure was used to measure the association between the frequency of WhatsApp use by Kano traders and their types of business. The results show an insignificant level of relationship between the two variables ($X2 = 21.850$, $df = 15$, $p = .112$). Hence, the null hypothesis ($H_0 1$) was accepted. The p-value (.112) is greater than the standard significance level of .005.

Table 2: Types of WhatsApp apps used by educational level of the traders

WhatsApp apps used by traders		The educational level of the traders					
		Islamic School	O level	NCE/ Diploma	Degree	PG	Total
	Normal WhatsApp	37	55	40	31	8	171
	Business WhatsApp	33	37	26	26	2	124
	GB WhatsApp	8	12	9	3	1	33
	Official WhatsApp	8	1	2	2	1	14
Total		86	105	77	62	12	342

WhatsApp has three types of apps: normal, business and official. Each has its special features and functions. However, there is GB WhatsApp, which is an unofficial app with some unique features such as the ability to view deleted messages and save status. However, it has numerous privacy risks, and WhatsApp has banned its users from using unofficial apps. The majority of Kano traders used normal WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business, as shown in Table 2. However, some traders are still using GB WhatsApp despite the risk associated with using it. The Chi-square results show a significant level of relationship between the type of WhatsApp used and the educational level of the traders (X2 = 57.350, df = 20, p = <.001). Hence, the second null hypothesis ($H_0$2) was rejected. This indicates that the co-occurrence of the two variables, types of WhatsApp app used and education is not by chance, rather it shows a significant relationship.

Table 3
Kano traders' opinions about WhatsApp usage

	SA %	A %	N %	DA %	SDA %
I use WhatsApp for business communication more than any other form of communication.	38.6	46.0	8.3	5.2	2
WhatsApp is the most suitable business communication application for Kano traders.	36.2	48.7	8.1	4.6	2.3
Traders who couldn't read and write prefer using voice notes.	38.7	51.2	4.9	4.3	0.9
Customers who cannot read and write prefer using voice notes	38.5	46.5	7.7	5.1	2.3

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, DA = Disagree, SDA = Strongly Disagree.

The respondents opined that majority of the traders they know are using WhatsApp for business. They also believed WhatsApp is the most suitable application for business communication among Kano traders as shown in Table 3.

Table 4
Preference for WhatsApp features among the traders

	Text	Video Call	Voice Note	Audio Call	Status	Broadcast
Which WhatsApp feature do you use mostly?	52.3	12.9	15.5	3.9	12.8	3.4
Features used for quick communication	39.6	5.3	36.0	9.1	9.4	0.6
Features used for communicating with customers	36.8	8.1	39.3	6.4	8.6	0.8
Features used for communicating with friends	48.3	7.5	28.8	8.1	6.2	1.1
Features used for communicating with family	43.7	11.4	28.7	7.5	7.8	0.8

Table 4 illustrates that the WhatsApp text feature is the most used among Kano traders, followed by the voice note feature, with the broadcast feature as the least used. The preference varies depending on the purpose and the target receiver. Text and voice note features are used frequently (36.8% and 39.3% respectively) for quick communication and customer communication. Text is the most frequent for quick communication, and voice notes feature lead in customer communication.

Table 5: Most frequent WhatsApp feature used by Kano traders' Education

		The educational level of the traders					
WhatsApp feature frequently used		Islamic School	O-level	NCE/ Diploma	Degree	PG	Total
	Text	24	49	27	20	6	126
	Voice note	40	37	30	30	2	139
	Video call	13	5	1	7	2	28
	Status	10	7	7	3	1	28
	Audio call	9	7	2	2	1	21
	Broadcast	1	2	0	0	0	3
Total		97	107	67	62	12	345

Table 5 displays respondents' responses regarding WhatsApp feature use and educational level. It shows that the voice notes feature is the most frequently used feature for customer communication. Respondents who attended Islamic schools

and secondary schools used it more compared to other categories. Moreover, the Chi-square results show a significant level of relationship between the type of most frequent WhatsApp feature used by Kano traders for customer communication and the educational level of the traders ($X2 = 116.607$, $df = 30$, $p = <.001$). This is consistent with the respondents' belief that traders and customers who cannot read use voice notes more than the literate category, as shown in Table 3.

Discussion

The study reveals that Kano traders leveraged the opportunities provided by modern technology by adopting WhatsApp for business communication and marketing. They used WhatsApp frequently to communicate regardless of the type of business — retailers, dealers and online traders. The higher rate of use is an indication that WhatsApp proved to be productive and helped the traders in expanding their business (Sindani, 2017). Similarly, the traders believed WhatsApp is the most common and suitable application for business communication in Kano. This finding will not be unconnected with WhatsApp's simplicity and user-friendly features that deter other barriers such as conventional and digital illiteracy and disabilities (Jannah, 2023).

Findings also indicate that traders mostly use normal WhatsApp applications more than the WhatsApp Business application, which is more suitable for business communication and transactions. Their preference for the normal WhatsApp application is related to the traders' level of education as established by the Chi-square test. Additionally, Business WhatsApp has more advanced features, hence literacy can be a barrier to exploring its special features. The study also found that some traders still used GB WhatsApp despite the risk associated with it. They used the risky GB WhatsApp either due to ignorance of its potential risk or due to sensation-seeking traits (Zuckerman et tal, 1972), which means they intentionally take the risk because of the value they derive from it.

Text and voice note features are the most frequent features Kano traders used. Specifically, they used voice notes more for customer communication. Their choice of features is related to their education as established by the study and other factors that are not explored here and can be a subject for further studies. The statistical significance corresponds with the traders' belief that traders and customers who could not read used voice notes more compared to literate traders and customers. Generally, people tend to prefer spoken communication in an informal setting like traditional market because it is faster, spontaneous and more

natural compared to written communication which is, according Bhandari and Anburaj (2024) study, time- consuming and individuals have to spend significant time structuring their thoughts, organizing information, and ensuring that no critical details are omitted.

The study further reveals the power of spoken communication in informal settings like the market looking at how the traders prefer voice notes over the text feature. These findings will help Tech companies, policy makers and researchers to understand the patterns of social media use in informal settings like markets.

Conclusion and Recommendation

WhatsApp and other social media platforms are crucial for effective business communication and growth in today's digital landscape. Kano traders, encompassing retailers, dealers and online vendors, have become active members of the global WhatsApp user community. They primarily utilize standard WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business applications, with a smaller segment employing cloned applications like GB WhatsApp, despite the inherent security risks of the application.

Future research could delve deeper into the specific reasons behind traders' WhatsApp usage and feature preferences. This could be achieved by supplementing the current survey methodology with qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups discussion.

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