

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between Exposure and Action: Digital Natives' Responses to Unsolicited Online Advertising in Nigeria

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Abstract: The rise of unsolicited digital advertising has raised concerns about its impact on individuals' attitudes and online purchasing behaviors. This study examined the impact of unsolicited digital advertising on Nigerian digital natives' attitudes and online purchases. The study adopted a mixed method approach which combined survey and In-Depth Interview (IDI) research methods, using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Applying the Motivation Need Theory and Theory of Reasoned Action, the findings revealed that exposure of Nigerian Digital natives to unsolicited digital advertising does not necessarily lead to brand patronage. The study also tested the use of chatbots, celebrities and influencers in digital marketing communication. Therefore, this study recommends that businesses invest in building brand loyalty through personalized messages and engaging content rather than relying solely on unsolicited digital advertising. Businesses should also consider leveraging other digital marketing strategies such as influencer marketing and chatbots to enhance customer engagement and improve the overall customer experience.

Keywords: unsolicited online advertising, purchase behavior, digital natives, Nigeria

1 Introduction

In the present world, technology has become a force that drives innovations in many fields of study and aspects of human endeavour. A practical instance of such technological determinism is evident in digital marketing, where web dynamics influence how a brand applies the 7Ps of marketing (Place, Price, Promotion, Product, People, Process and Physical evidence). With digital marketing, advertising of products has rapidly gained ground on the Internet, as that is where many potential consumers, most of whom are digital natives, now operate (Smith, 2017). Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016) alongside Gillpatrick (2019) specifically argue that advertising campaigns via digital marketing have become a leading strategy for many brands because Internet-enabled marketing builds brand image, is user-friendly for digital natives, provides opportunity for interactivity, enhances visual communication, foster connections among users, and even enables brands to go viral.

Social media platforms are among the most prominent channels through which digital advertising reaches potential customers (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). However, alongside the benefits of using digital platforms for advertising campaigns, there are also notable drawbacks. One major concern is that algorithm used in delivering digital advertising campaigns can cause unsolicited advertising messages to appear persistently on the screen of online users (Haghirian & Inoue, 2007), especially when such messages are being generated through Google Ads or Artificial Intelligence (AI). Another common form of unsolicited advertising is e-mail marketing, which may appear as legitimate messages or spam (Kumar & Sharma, 2014). From the perspective of brands, such unsolicited messages are targeted at creating more awareness on and patronage, but to digital natives, the messages might be viewed as an intrusion into personal digital space. Kumar and Sharma's (2014) study discover that majority of their respondents indicated that unsolicited advertising campaigns via their email addresses was an unethical promotional practice.

Over the years, scholarly contributions have explored different dimensions of digitalisation within mass communication. Contributions such as the nature and implications of wireless digital

advertising ([Bames, 2002](#)), perceptions of advertising practitioners on advertising strategies for digital media ([Truong et al., 2010](#)), implications of digitalizing advertising and marketing on attitudes of automobile consumers ([Sinha et al., 2016](#)), the effects of digital advertising on the consumer behaviour of students in Kenya ([Osewe, 2013](#)) and elsewhere ([Tripathi & Siddiqui, 2008](#); [Sama, 2019](#); [Zari, 2021](#)), as well as the influence of web advertising on the consumer behaviour of people in a Nigerian state ([Mathew et al., 2013](#)), have been established in digital advertising and marketing literature.

While many of these studies investigate the influence and impacts of digital advertising on consumer behaviour, none have specifically examined how unsolicited advertising campaigns can influence the consumer behaviour of Nigerian digital natives. This gap raises important questions. Do unsolicited advertising messages that pop up on the screen of digital natives influence their attitudes towards the brand advertising to them? Do they affect online purchasing decisions? And what other factors contribute to these purchasing behaviours?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Unsolicited Digital Advertisements and Influence of Digital Advertising on Digital Natives

First, it is essential to briefly explain what is meant by digital advertising. According to [Nyamamu \(2014\)](#), digital advertising is an Internet-based process by which advertisers communicate with, interact with, and persuade online users in order to position a brand. It enables a company to promote consumer awareness and preference in a customised and personalised way and shorten the time needed to make a purchasing decision.

Unsolicited digital advertisements refer to marketing campaigns that consumers do not actively request yet encounter regularly on various platforms. They may appear as spam emails, pop-up messages, banners, or mobile text alert, but all aim to promote products and services. For instance, [Kumar and Sharma \(2014\)](#) describe unsolicited email advertising that arrives as spam, often promoting gambling sites, adult content, financial schemes, or diet. Such emails are considered one of the most pressing challenges facing businesses today. In certain cases, unsolicited advertisements are sent with prior authorization, such as subscription-based promotions ([Olayinka & Olubunmi, 2019](#)). In Nigeria, messages from telecom providers urging customers to subscribe to new services illustrate this practice and have shaped the customer-provider relationship.

The AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action) is often applied to unsolicited advertising as it seeks to capture attention, build interest, stimulate desire, and prompt consumer action ([Gever & Olijo, 2017](#)). While this approach can be effective, intrusiveness can undermine its impact. [Madhavan and George \(2020\)](#), citing [Jensen \(2006\)](#), classify digital advertising into display advertising, search engine optimization or marketing (SEO/SEM), and affiliate marketing. Although consumers may ignore such ads, algorithmic targeting makes them difficult to avoid and heightens perceptions of intrusiveness.

With the growth of e-commerce, digital advertising has increasingly shaped purchasing decisions, particularly among digital natives. These consumers are regularly exposed to advertising through social media, search engines, and other platforms, which allows them to compare prices, products, and reviews, and to access detailed information before making a decision. This accessibility has made them more informed and selective buyers ([Ingavale, 2013](#); [Ramsunder, 2011](#)).

2.2 Exposure of Digital Natives to Unsolicited Advertisements

Research on unsolicited advertising frequently points to intrusiveness as a key factor influencing consumer responses. [Morimoto and Macias \(2009\)](#) found that the more intrusive a person finds an e-mail to be, the more likely they are to avoid it and form negative attitudes toward the sender. Similarly, [Hsin Chang, Rizal and Amin \(2013\)](#), reported that consumers' behavioural inclinations toward email advertising are highly influenced by their beliefs, attitudes and perception of invasiveness. According to the findings, permission-based email is more efficient than spam email advertising. Consumers felt less intrusive when receiving solicited emails that included monetary incentives.

Studies on other platforms present consistent patterns. Luna-Nevarez and Torres (2015) found that consumers' attitudes toward social network advertising are influenced by perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, commercial intrusiveness, and incentive offerings of the advertising messages. Le and Vo (2017) observed that informative banner ads can be received moderately well, while pop-up ads are generally disliked for their disruptive nature. In mobile contexts, Kushwaha and Agrawal (2016) noted that although positive attitudes toward mobile advertising can produce favourable behavioural results, the negative effects of intrusiveness remain significant.

The frequency and timing of advertisements also affect reception. Rau et al. (2014) showed that fewer than three mobile adverts per day are preferable to repetitive messaging and that ads received under low time pressure are more effective than those received under high time constraints. Dandpat (2021) reinforced the need for creativity and non-intrusiveness, arguing that digital advertising should build brand awareness, enable targeted outreach, and provide quick access to information while avoiding irritation.

This body of evidence suggests that digital natives are not passive recipients of unsolicited advertising but rather evaluate it based on relevance, delivery method, and the perceived respect for their time and privacy. Understanding these patterns of exposure and reaction provides a foundation for exploring whether and how such advertising shapes their purchasing behaviour.

RQ1 - What is the level of exposure of digital natives to unsolicited digital advertising?

2.3 Influence of Unsolicited Digital Advertising on Digital Natives' Online Purchase

Several studies have examined the influence of digital advertising on consumer behaviour, focusing on both strategies and outcomes. Truong, McColl, and Kitchen (2010) identified five common strategies: permission-based advertising, personalisation, repeated campaigns, enhanced interactivity, and the use of performance metrics. These strategies are designed to foster engagement and strengthen purchase intention.

Sinha et al. (2016) found that consumers often appreciate the ability of digital advertising to allow comparisons among competing products and services, but remain cautious about the authenticity of claims. Similar sentiments were reported by Osawe (2003) and Mathew, Ogedebe, and Ogedebe (2013), who noted that while consumers generally have favourable attitudes toward web advertising, they do not always attribute their final purchase decisions to it. Noor, Sreenivasan, and Ismail (2013) observed that attitudes toward mobile advertising are positively associated with purchase intentions and that permission partially mediates this relationship. Hsiao and Chang (2014) and Martínez-Ruiz et al. (2017) further identified perceived value and utility as important in fostering favourable responses.

Negative attitudes are especially prevalent toward unsolicited ads. Kumar and Sharma (2014) reported that respondents viewed spam emails as unethical and a violation of privacy, causing distractions and even prompting some users to change their email accounts. Such perceptions can harm brand credibility and reduce campaign effectiveness.

Although international research on unsolicited advertising is extensive, there is limited understanding of how Nigerian digital natives specifically respond to such ads, indicating a gap that this study seeks to address. Hence, the following research question:

RQ2 - Does unsolicited digital advertising influence Nigerian digital natives' online purchase?

2.4 Other Factors that Influence Digital Natives' Online Purchases

In addition to advertising, other technological and social influences affect online purchase decisions. One example is the integration of chatbots into e-commerce. Han (2021) found that anthropomorphism, or designing chatbots to behave like humans, increases consumer willingness to make purchases. Schurink (2019) similarly reported that human-like chatbot appearances enhance satisfaction and purchase intentions. Selamat and Windasari (2021) identified four key chatbot features that align with small and medium enterprise needs and consumer preferences: responsiveness, clear prompts for action, humanised conversation, and tailored recommendations. Their experimental prototype incorporating these features generated

higher enjoyment, perceived utility, and purchase intention than standard chatbots.

Social influence also plays a significant role. [Verplancke and Gelati \(2022\)](#) showed that in the beauty and fashion industries, young consumers often follow influencers on social media and are motivated to purchase products promoted by them. Building perceived connections with influencers increases the likelihood of following their recommendations.

Demographics are another factor. [Hadi and Aslam \(2023\)](#) found that age, education, and occupation significantly influence attitudes toward unsolicited mobile messages, and that the absence of consent in using personal data increases negative responses. By considering these additional influences, it becomes clear that digital natives' purchasing behaviour is the result of a complex interplay between unsolicited advertising, technological interaction, social influence, and demographic factors.

RQ3 - What are the other factors that influence digital natives' online purchase?

Summarily, existing research shows that unsolicited digital advertising is widespread, influences consumer behaviour in complex ways, and interacts with other technological, social, and demographic factors. Yet little is known about how Nigerian digital natives experience such advertising, how it shapes their purchasing decisions, and what additional influences may be at play. This study addresses that gap by examining the level of exposure, the nature of its influence on online purchasing, and other contributing factors within this group.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Motivation-Need Theory

The theory of Motivation and Need was first proposed in 1943 by Abraham Maslow. According to the theory, people act to meet their needs based on a five-part priority structure: Physiological (survival), safety, love, esteem, and self-actualisation. Thus, Maslow's theories were used by business schools and marketing classes to highlight the necessity to customize marketing messages to consumers in a certain way. Successful marketing initiatives, according to Maslow, must not only raise product awareness but also establish a product's place in the hierarchy of requirements. Consumers are compelled to make purchases at the bottom of the hierarchy. By establishing a false need for consumers, marketers have been able to effectively employ motivation-need ([Sulaiman, Yusufu, & Sadiq, 2021](#)).

The core argument of this theory is that when one need is met, the strength of the next need increases while the strength of the previous need decreases ([Latham, 2007](#)). Maslow did point out that one level of needs does not have to be completely met before moving on to the next. That is, individuals can be partially contented with one need while still seeking fulfilment at the next need ([Salanova & Kirmanen, 2010](#)).

In summary, Motivation-Need Theory proposes that an individual's behaviour is motivated by unfulfilled needs and that satisfying these needs leads to behaviour aimed at fulfilling them. The theory identifies various categories of needs including physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation, and suggests that the highest-order needs will only become motivators when lower-order needs are met. It also suggests that motivation is a result of a constant tension between an individual's current state and their desired state, and that behaviour is directed towards reducing this tension.

3.2 Theory of Reasoned Action

In the field of attitudes and behaviour, Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action propounded in 1980 has been widely employed. It argues that intention is influenced by attitudes and subjective norms ([Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980](#)). Attitudes are often formed by experiences and knowledge gained from past experiences ([Hannu & Johannisson, 2020, p. 8](#)) while subjective norms are "the social perceived pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior" and "it is a function of normative belief and motivation to comply" ([Hannu & Johannisson, 2020, p. 9](#)). That is:

According to the theory, consumers act on behaviour based on their goal to achieve or obtain a specific consequence. That is, consumers are rational individuals who choose to behave in their own best interests. Specifically, the consumer retains the ability to change his or her mind

and choose a different course of action from the time he or she decides to act until the action is finished (Sulaiman, Yusufu, & Sadiq, 2021).

In the context of digital advertising, the Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that an individual's intention to engage with digital advertising content is shaped by their attitude towards the advertisement and their perception of social norms related to digital advertising. The theory proposes that if an individual has a positive attitude towards an advertisement and perceives social norms that support engaging with digital advertising, then they are more likely to have the intention to engage with the advertisement and therefore, engage with it. Conversely, if an individual has a negative attitude towards an advertisement or perceives social norms that discourage engaging with digital advertising, then they are less likely to have the intention to engage with the advertisement and are unlikely to engage with it. Therefore, the TRA suggests that digital advertisers can influence consumer behaviour by shaping their attitudes and perceptions of social norms related to digital advertising.

How relevant are these two theories to this study? The propositions of motivation-need theory will enable the researcher to establish the needs that motivated digital natives to change their online purchase behaviour after coming in contact with unsolicited digital advertising campaigns. However, the theory of reasoned action will interrogate what influenced the digital natives' online purchase behaviours between their intended interest and advertising messages after experiencing unsolicited digital advertising messages.

4 Research Methods

This study adopted a descriptive mixed-method design (QUAL + QUANT) that combined survey research with in-depth interviews (IDI). The sequential design meant that survey data were collected first, followed by IDIs, to provide a detailed explanation and triangulation of survey results (Bowen et al., 2017). The mixed-method approach was chosen to offset the limitations of each method: the breadth of survey data strengthened by the depth of insights generated through IDIs (Doyle & Byrne, 2007).

Purposive and convenience sampling were used to recruit participants. Nigerian digital natives were purposively selected because of their familiarity with digital technologies and their relevance to the research problem. Within this purposive frame, participation was voluntary, introducing an element of convenience sampling. For the survey, 116 Nigerian digital natives responded via an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms across social media platforms and private contact lists. For the qualitative dimension, two participants with expertise in digital marketing and advertising were purposively recruited for IDIs, conducted either virtually or face-to-face depending on availability.

4.1 Research Design

The study population consisted of Nigerian digital natives drawn from Generation Z and Millennial cohorts. These groups were chosen because of their high digital literacy and immersion in online communication technologies (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2018; De Beers Group, 2018). The sample comprised 116 valid survey responses and two expert interviews.

4.2 Survey Instrument and Analysis

The online questionnaire consisted of four sections. Section one collected socio-demographic information. Section two measured pre-existing attitudes and purchase behaviour. Section three examined the relationship between unsolicited advertising and purchase behaviour. Section four assessed the effects of unsolicited marketing and other factors influencing buying behaviour. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data were coded and analysed in R using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentage agreement), and composite scores were computed for key constructs. The analysis was primarily descriptive but also examined relationships between unsolicited advertising and purchase behaviour through correlation analysis.

4.3 IDI Instrument and Analysis

Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide that contained five open-ended questions (Appendix II). The guide was flexible, allowing for probing and follow-

up questions to capture richer insights (Kakilla, 2021). Data from the IDIs were transcribed verbatim and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analytic rigour was enhanced by memo-writing, an audit trail of code development, and careful attention to negative or disconfirming cases.

Themes from the interviews were integrated with the survey findings to provide a complementary perspective. Integration of these findings followed a sequential explanatory strategy. Survey results provided the broad patterns of digital natives' exposure, attitudes, and purchase behaviour, while the interview data offered deeper explanations of these patterns. Integration occurred at two levels: design level and interpretation level. For the design level, the survey was conducted first to identify trends, and the interviews were then used to probe and explain those patterns. At the interpretation level, findings from both strands were presented together for each research question. For instance, survey data on the level of exposure to unsolicited advertising were interpreted alongside expert narratives about why exposure may be perceived as intrusive or ineffective. This "joint display narrative" approach allowed complementary and contrasting insights to emerge, thereby enhancing validity and depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

5 Results

5.1 Respondents' Socio-Demographic Data

Out of the final sample ($n = 116$), female had the highest representation with 59.5% ($n = 69$) followed by male with 39.7% ($n = 46$). One participant (0.9%) preferred not to disclose their gender. For respondents' age, 18 to 24 years has the highest number of respondents ($n = 70$ or 60.3%). Respondents within the age bracket of 25 and 29 were the second highest ($n = 30$ or 25.9%) followed by 30 to 34 years ($n = 13$ or 11.2%), 35 to 39 ($n = 1$ or 0.9%) as well as 40-44 years ($n = 1$ or 0.9%) and 50 and beyond ($n = 1$ or 0.9%). No respondent was within the age bracket of 45 to 49.

5.2 Social Media Presence of the Respondents

The majority of the respondents (114 or 98.3%) reported that they use social media for different purposes while the remaining two respondents (1.7%) responded in the negative. Respondents in the former category were further probed on their social media of choice. Majority of the respondents in the former category use WhatsApp Messenger ($n = 114$ or 98.3%) followed by Instagram ($n = 90$ or 77.6%), Twitter ($n = 79$ or 68.1%) and Facebook ($n = 27$ or 65.5%). Others include TikTok ($n = 58$ or 50%), Snapchat ($n = 55$ or 47.4%), LinkedIn ($n = 41$ or 44%) and Pinterest ($n = 42$ or 36.2%).

The frequency of the respondents' social media usage was measured with five variables — daily, weekly, twice a week, monthly, and not applicable. For Facebook, 37 respondents use it daily, 19 two times in a week, 14 every week, 28 monthly while 18 respondents stated that they do not use the social medium at all. WhatsApp had the highest number of respondents for daily usage (108). Despite this high figure, 4 and 3 respondents use the Application twice a week and weekly respectively. None use it monthly even though one respondent said he/she does not use WhatsApp. On getting to Instagram, there were 64 respondents who always use the medium daily while 14 and 21 respondents do use it two times a week and every week respectively. However, 5 respondents picked monthly while 12 do not use the medium. For Snapchat, 37 respondents always use it every day, 13 respondents twice a week, 19 respondents weekly, 22 respondents monthly, but 25 respondents do not use the social medium. TikTok had 36, 13, 16 and 15 respondents who use it daily, twice a week, weekly and monthly respectively, though 36 respondents submitted that they do not subscribe to the social media platform. In addition, Pinterest had 21, 9, 17 and 22 respondents who always use it daily, two times a week, weekly and monthly. However, the majority of the respondents (47) are not users of Pinterest. The last medium, LinkedIn, also had the highest number of respondents who are non-users (48), though 23, 12, 12 and 21 respondents explore the medium daily, twice a week, weekly and monthly respectively.

RQ1: What is the level of exposure of digital natives to unsolicited digital advertising?

The first step in addressing RQ1 was to determine where and how often Nigerian digital natives encounter unsolicited advertising messages. Respondents overwhelmingly reported

coming across such advertisements on Facebook (90 mentions) and Instagram (89), followed by WhatsApp (60), TikTok (45), and Snapchat (41). Pinterest and LinkedIn (32 each) recorded the lowest figures. In terms of frequency, daily exposure was most common on Facebook (49 respondents) and Instagram (58), while WhatsApp (33) and Snapchat (27) also showed notable daily contact. By contrast, most respondents indicated little to no exposure on TikTok, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. These findings suggest that exposure to unsolicited advertising is routine, particularly on platforms with mature advertising ecosystems like Facebook and Instagram.

In addition to exposure, the analysis examined respondents' pre-existing attitudes and purchase behaviour. Results showed a degree of scepticism toward unsolicited advertising. Loyalty to a brand was rated as a stronger determinant of purchase behaviour than exposure to unsolicited ads ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.01$, 83.6% agreement). Prior knowledge of a brand also shaped buying behaviour ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.99$, 76.7% agreement). Meanwhile, resistance to purchasing products from unsolicited ads received moderate support ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.23$, 57.8% agreement). Interestingly, some respondents acknowledged that a general enthusiasm for digital advertising could influence their patronage ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.08$, 67.2% agreement). Therefore, these results indicate that while unsolicited advertising is a frequent occurrence, digital natives largely approach it with caution, relying more on loyalty and prior brand information than unsolicited messages.

The qualitative interviews deepened this understanding by highlighting why scepticism persists. One interviewee with industry experience criticised the lack of regulation that allows unsolicited advertising to thrive: "It is totally out of line that some renowned businesses use unsolicited online messages. The fact that there is no structure makes any business that has money to put down, privy to unsolicited modes of digital marketing" (Interviewee 1). Another participant, a digital marketing professional, pointed to the intrusiveness and regulatory breaches that shape perceptions of unsolicited advertising:

Many people in Nigeria receive a large number of unsolicited messages every day, which can be overwhelming and irritating... Most importantly, businesses in Nigeria should be aware of the legal and ethical implications of unsolicited messages. In accordance with the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) regulations, businesses are required to obtain prior consent from recipients (Interviewee 2).

Overall, the findings reveal that Nigerian digital natives are highly exposed to unsolicited digital advertising on a daily basis, especially on Facebook and Instagram. Yet, their pre-existing attitudes and the interview data suggest that such exposure rarely translates into uncritical acceptance. Instead, perceptions of intrusiveness, the importance of brand loyalty, and awareness of regulatory concerns condition how these audiences respond to unsolicited advertising.

RQ2: Does unsolicited digital advertising influence Nigerian digital natives' online purchase?

The analysis explored whether unsolicited digital advertising influences the online purchase behaviour of Nigerian digital natives. At the scale level, respondents generally reported moderate-to-high agreement that unsolicited advertising affects their purchase behaviour ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.07$ for CorrelationScale; $M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.09$ for EffectScale). This suggests that digital natives perceive such advertising as not only sparking their interest in brands but also shaping their eventual purchase attitudes.

Looking more closely at individual items, the highest levels of agreement were observed for statements relating to awareness creation and brand information, such as unsolicited ads making respondents more likely to research a brand before patronage. Similarly, items about personalised advertising and convenience features were positively received. By contrast, items addressing privacy intrusion and difficulty authenticating brand claims recorded lower levels of agreement, indicating that while unsolicited ads are influential, scepticism about credibility remains a barrier.

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a near-perfect positive relationship between the correlation score and the effect score $r(114) = 0.99$, $p < 0.001$ s. This suggests that respondents who perceive unsolicited advertising as influencing their interest in patronising a brand are also overwhelmingly likely to report that such advertising affects their actual buying attitudes and behaviours. In practice, digital natives do not strongly differentiate between perceiving a

connection and experiencing a direct effect; they see both as part of the same process.

The qualitative interviews deepen this finding by highlighting how exposure often creates an unavoidable form of influence. One participant described unsolicited advertising as subtly shaping consumer intention: “I think in a way it does. It conditions your mind in some way, especially when you constantly see it” (Interviewee 1). Yet, the same participant warned about unintended outcomes: “People will eventually buy what they may not need” (Interviewee 1).

This reflects both the persuasive power and potential excess of unsolicited exposure. Another expert framed it as a double-edged sword: “Unsolicited digital advertisements can influence the buying behaviour of digital natives, both positively and negatively. They may help people discover new products, but when overdone, they can feel intrusive and even reduce engagement” (Interviewee 2).

Importantly, this interviewee pointed to longer-term consequences, arguing that while targeted messages can stimulate purchases, oversaturation risks creating distrust and disengagement. Therefore, the findings demonstrate that unsolicited digital advertising is perceived as a strong driver of purchase behaviour among Nigerian digital natives, primarily by raising awareness and stimulating interest, but its effectiveness can be undercut by intrusiveness, irritation, or privacy concerns.

RQ3: What are the other factors that influence digital natives’ online purchase?

To examine other factors that may shape Nigerian digital natives’ purchase behaviour online, respondents were asked about their interaction with chatbots, the impact of celebrities and influencers, and the irritation effect of unsolicited ads. The overall construct recorded a moderate mean score ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.13$), indicating that these factors collectively exert some influence on consumer decision-making.

At the item level, chatbots appeared as the strongest positive driver. Respondents moderately agreed that both general chatbot interactions ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.11$) and chatbot responsiveness ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.11$) encouraged them to patronise brands. This quantitative pattern is reinforced by the interviews, where one participant highlighted that “chatbots are super helpful... some people may have issues with navigating the website and the bot simply guides” (Interviewee 1). At the same time, qualitative insights emphasised important limitations: “The use of online chatbots can be a valuable tool... but some customers may prefer interacting with a human... chatbots are limited by the programmed responses they can provide, and may not be able to provide solutions to more complex issues” (Interviewee 2). These findings suggest that while chatbots improve accessibility and responsiveness, their effectiveness may be moderated by consumer expectations for human interaction and language sensitivity.

Celebrity and influencer endorsements emerged as somewhat weaker drivers. Survey responses showed mean ratings of 2.87 ($SD = 1.14$) for celebrity-based adverts and 2.96 ($SD = 1.12$) for influencer-based adverts, suggesting moderate but not overwhelming influence. Yet the interviews offered a richer picture of their enduring cultural power. As one expert observed: “The use of celebrities in online advertising has been a popular marketing strategy for many decades and has... raked in tremendous success for brands over the years” (Interviewee 2). Similarly, influencers were described as particularly relevant in the digital age: “Influencers can help brands reach a wider audience and increase engagement with their content... [they] can create an emotional connection with their followers, leading to a positive perception of the brand” (Interviewee 2). These narratives underline that while quantitative measures show moderate agreement, endorsements by high-profile figures still play an important symbolic and relational role in digital advertising.

Finally, irritation emerged as a notable countervailing factor. The item “Unsolicited online adverts irritate me so much that I don’t even pay attention to them” recorded a mean of 3.04 ($SD = 1.32$), suggesting that negative reactions to intrusive ads are also important in shaping online purchase behaviour. As one respondent noted, unsolicited advertising can be so disruptive that “it does not make sense... it is my feed and my space, I should determine what I should see and not see. I totally hate it” (Interviewee 1).

Consequently, these findings show that digital natives’ purchase behaviours are influenced not only by promotional tactics like chatbots, celebrity endorsements, and influencer marketing, but also by the irritation that unsolicited advertising provokes. Chatbots and endorsements may open pathways for engagement, but irritation represents a strong deterrent, highlighting

the dual presence of persuasive triggers and resistance mechanisms in the online advertising environment.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

This study was driven by three specific objectives. The first examined the level of exposure of digital natives to unsolicited digital advertising, the second investigated whether unsolicited digital advertising influences Nigerian digital natives' online purchases, while the last established other factors that influence their online purchases.

For the first research question, findings indicate that despite the high exposure to unsolicited advertising across platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, many respondents maintained that such contact does not automatically translate into patronage. Rather, their loyalty to a brand and the information they already possess about a brand influence their purchase behaviour more strongly than repeated advertising exposure. This finding resonates with previous studies which established that digital natives are not passive recipients of advertising but active evaluators who make decisions based on brand trust, prior knowledge, and social norms (Verplancke & Gelati, 2022; Rasalingam et al., 2014; Almquist, 2018). The implication is that while unsolicited digital advertising may generate awareness, the final purchase decision remains an individual choice shaped by existing attitudes and value assessments. This aligns with the theory of reasoned action, which posits that individuals act based on intentions formed through pre-existing attitudes and perceived social norms (Sulaiman et al., 2021). Thus, unsolicited advertising contributes to awareness but does not independently override cognitive evaluations already in place.

On the second research question, findings show that unsolicited digital advertising does influence purchase behaviour under certain conditions. Many respondents agreed that personalised and relevant unsolicited advertisements shaped their buying attitudes and sometimes even changed earlier decisions not to patronise a brand. This supports prior scholarship which highlights digital advertising as a powerful tool for shaping consumer engagement and purchase decisions (Ingavale, 2013; Alamsyah et al., 2021; Vipin & Faizal, 2021). At the same time, respondents expressed scepticism toward advertisements perceived as intrusive or unverifiable, echoing earlier observations that while digital advertising can stimulate awareness and interest, its effectiveness depends on credibility and perceived benefit (Gever & Olijo, 2017; Mathew et al., 2013; Sinha et al., 2016). The results also support the assumptions of the motivation–need theory, which suggests that digital natives respond to unsolicited advertising when it aligns with their immediate needs or aspirations. In other words, once a need for information, self-esteem, or convenience is activated, unsolicited advertising can satisfy that need and drive purchase, whereas irrelevant or intrusive messages fail to motivate action (Latham, 2007; Salanova & Kirmanen, 2010).

The final research question examined other factors influencing online purchase. Findings indicate that digital natives are responsive to marketing tools such as chatbots, celebrities, and influencers, but with varied intensity. Chatbots were identified as particularly influential due to their responsiveness and convenience in providing brand information, which supports earlier findings that anthropomorphism in digital marketing can enhance consumer trust and purchase intention (Schurink, 2019; Han, 2021; Selamat & Windasari, 2021). However, some participants also cautioned that chatbots may feel impersonal or fail in complex interactions, which can undermine their effectiveness. Celebrity and influencer endorsements were moderately effective, aligning with the growing prominence of influencer marketing as a global trend (Le & Vo, 2017), but their impact was not as pronounced as central features such as relevance and convenience. Importantly, irritation from unsolicited advertising also emerged as a significant factor, as some respondents reported ignoring advertisements they perceived as intrusive or privacy-invasive. This is consistent with previous scholarship on advertising avoidance, which underscores irritation and perceived privacy breaches as key predictors of negative consumer response (Morimoto & Macias, 2009; Madhavan & George, 2020; Kumar & Sharma, 2014).

To this end, these findings suggest that unsolicited digital advertising does not act in isolation but interacts with existing attitudes, needs, and contextual factors to shape behaviour. The theory of reasoned action helps explain why brand loyalty and prior information anchor purchase decisions, while the motivation–need theory highlights how advertising can be effective when it satisfies immediate psychological or functional needs. Beyond Nigeria, these findings mirror international digital practices where relevance, personalisation, and respect for consumer

autonomy are emphasised. In Europe and North America, regulatory frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) enforce limits on unsolicited advertising and stress the importance of consent and user control, while successful global brands increasingly rely on personalised, transparent, and user-friendly approaches to digital advertising (Martin & Murphy, 2017; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008). Placing the findings of this study alongside such global practices underscores that Nigerian digital natives' responses are not isolated but form part of a wider set of consumer expectations regarding privacy, relevance, and respect in digital marketing. This suggests that while socio-cultural factors shape local responses, the underlying dynamics of personalisation, consent, and control resonate globally, reinforcing the relevance of this study to both local and international audiences.

The findings carry important implications for practice. Businesses should prioritise building brand loyalty and consumer trust, recognising that unsolicited advertising alone cannot drive purchases. Personalised content and engaging storytelling are more effective in shaping behaviour than blanket exposure. Equally, businesses can leverage chatbots and influencer marketing to strengthen consumer engagement, though careful selection of influencers who align with brand values is necessary to maintain authenticity. However, the study also cautions that automation should be balanced with human interaction, as some consumers may find chatbots impersonal. Above all, respecting user privacy is paramount; unsolicited advertising is most effective when transparent, relevant, and aligned with consumer needs.

This study is not without limitations. The sample was limited to Nigerian digital natives, excluding older or less digitally active populations. The online distribution method may also have excluded digital natives outside the networks where the survey was circulated, and the in-depth interviews were limited to two experts, restricting the breadth of qualitative perspectives. Nevertheless, these limitations provide opportunities for future research. Expanding qualitative samples and conducting comparative studies across generations or cultural contexts would enrich understanding of how unsolicited advertising functions within broader global digital ecosystems. While this study has focused on unsolicited digital advertising, future research could profitably compare these findings with consumer responses to data-driven, targeted advertising. Such a comparison would help clarify whether digital natives react differently to broad, unsolicited campaigns versus personalized, consent-based messages, thereby enriching theoretical distinctions and guiding more holistic digital marketing strategies.

In conclusion, this research shows that unsolicited digital advertising can influence digital natives in Nigeria, but its impact is conditional rather than absolute. Its effectiveness lies in satisfying consumer needs, providing credible and personalised information, and integrating functional tools such as chatbots. Conversely, overexposure, poor credibility, or intrusive practices reduce its effectiveness and may provoke irritation. For theory, the findings reinforce the relevance of both the motivation–need theory and the theory of reasoned action in explaining online consumer behaviour. For practice, the results highlight that global best practices, personalisation, transparency, consumer control, and credible communication, are equally applicable in the Nigerian context, where digital natives are discerning, informed, and globally connected consumers.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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