Communication Clarity and Timeliness as Determinants of MTN Dealership Performance in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Downstream communication in telecommunications distribution determines whether independent dealers translate corporate promotions, tariffs, technical instructions and service procedures into accurate point-of-sale execution. This study examined communication clarity and timeliness as determinants of MTN dealership performance in Lagos State, Nigeria. It addressed two questions: how communication clarity relates to dealers' sales volume, and how communication timeliness influences dealers' product and service knowledge. Anchored in agency theory and participatory communication, the study adopted a descriptive correlational mixed-method design. Quantitative data were collected from 222 MTN dealership owners sampled equally from Lagos West, Lagos East and Lagos Central senatorial districts, while 12 dealership owners participated in in-depth interviews. A validated four-point questionnaire produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .768. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, simple linear regression and thematic analysis. Findings showed that clarity had a strong positive association with perceived sales volume (grand mean = 3.61; beta = .932; R2 = .868; $p < .001$). Dealers reported that clear information on promotions, prices, commissions and activation steps increases staff confidence, reduces point-of-sale errors and improves upselling. Timeliness also significantly predicted product/service knowledge (grand mean = 3.35; beta = .696; R2 = .484; $p < .001$). However, dealers distinguished between prompt reactive alerts and inadequate pre-launch lead time for training materials and tariff explanations. The study concludes that downstream communication is a strategic performance resource. It recommends a minimum 48-hour pre-launch information window, dealer-action templates, synchronised portal updates and periodic communication-effectiveness audits.

Keywords: communication clarity; communication timeliness; downstream channel communication; dealership performance; MTN Nigeria

Introduction

Telecommunications is a central infrastructure of Nigeria's digital transformation. Beyond voice connectivity, the sector supports mobile financial services, e-commerce, education, entertainment, security, and social interaction. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that Telecommunications and Information Services contributed 16.06% to Nigeria's real gross domestic product in the second quarter of 2023, confirming the sector's significance to national productivity (NBS, 2023). Because the sector is highly competitive, the communication processes supporting market execution deserve scholarly attention.

MTN Nigeria occupies a prominent position in this environment. Its competitiveness depends not only on network infrastructure and pricing but also on the performance of dealers who connect the company to subscribers. In Lagos State, these dealers operate in major clusters like Ikeja, Computer Village, Alaba, and Victoria Island. They offer essential services including SIM registration, data sales, and customer issue escalation. These activities make dealers strategic extensions of the organisation rather than ordinary retail outlets.

Downstream channel communication involves the flow of operational, promotional, and technical information from a producer to intermediaries (Rosenbloom, 2013). In telecommunications, this includes tariff updates and promotion mechanics. Message value depends on dealers understanding and acting on it promptly. Clarity ensures messages are unambiguous, actionable, and translatable to customer-friendly terms. Timeliness guarantees that information arrives early enough to support owner interpretation, staff briefing, product learning, sales-script updates and error-free execution. When clear and timely, this communication empowers dealers to brief staff, advise customers accurately, make persuasive sales recommendations and protect brand credibility. Conversely, ambiguous or late communication leads to lost revenue, misinformed customers, and poor execution.

Statement of the Problem

MTN's strong brand and technological investment do not automatically produce uniform dealership performance. Dealers are independent business actors requiring precise and timely information to translate corporate strategy into retail action. Often, promotional and operational messages are perceived as unclear or insufficiently actionable. Moreover, messages may transmit quickly but arrive too late for adequate staff training and customer-facing preparation.

The practical issue is whether MTN's communication attributes are strong enough to drive optimal retail execution. A dealer receiving unclear promotional rules may hesitate to sell, while one receiving launch-day product details remains practically unprepared. In highly competitive markets like Lagos State, such inefficiencies severely impact market share. While existing studies broadly cover channel management in related sectors (Adebayo & Oduwole, 2021; Ebitu et al., 2019), limited empirical attention has been given to how specific downstream communication attributes like clarity and timeliness influence critical dealer-level performance indicators such as sales volume and product knowledge. This study addresses that gap with targeted evidence from MTN dealers in Lagos State.

Literature Review

Downstream channel communication is a strategic mechanism that orchestrates the flow of operational, promotional, and technical directives from a parent company to intermediaries (Rosenbloom, 2013). In telecommunications, this communication aligns channel members to execute marketing strategies effectively (Stern, El-Ansary, & Coughlan, 2006). Its efficacy hinges heavily on message clarity, which minimises channel friction and errors (Okorie & Opeodu, 2018), and timeliness, which guarantees actionable information reaches partners promptly. Furthermore, Media Richness Theory highlights that the strategic selection of communication channels significantly shapes how messages are interpreted (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Dealership performance must transcend traditional sales metrics to encompass a multidimensional assessment of a partner's strategic value (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). For operators like MTN Nigeria, performance encompasses sales volume, product knowledge, strategic alignment, and customer satisfaction (Adebayo & Oduwole, 2021). Product knowledge empowers dealers to act as trusted end-user consultants (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995), while strategic alignment ensures congruence between dealer operations and corporate objectives (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In a tiered market like Lagos, delivering consistent customer satisfaction is essential for brand equity.

Consequently, when MTN conveys operational guidelines clearly and promptly, dealers can optimise their product knowledge and drive robust sales volumes.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is anchored in Agency Theory and the Participatory Communication perspective. Agency Theory explains the relationship between MTN as principal and dealers as agents executing market-facing activities (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Information asymmetry frequently arises when dealers lack accurate, timely information. Clear communication aligns expectations and minimises residual loss caused by uninformed agent decisions.

The Participatory Communication perspective complements this by emphasising dialogue, shared understanding, and active learning over one-way instruction transmission (Mefalopulos, 2008; Servaes, 1999). For dealers, communication is only completed when it facilitates clarification and strategic preparation before customer interaction. Together, these frameworks comprehensively explain why communication clarity and timeliness significantly influence sales execution and product knowledge.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are:

1. determine the relationship between the clarity of MTN's downstream communication and the sales volume of its dealers in Lagos State; and

2. evaluate the influence of the timeliness of MTN's downstream communication on the product and service knowledge of its dealers in Lagos State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between the clarity of MTN's downstream communication and the sales volume of its dealers in Lagos State?

2. To what extent does the timeliness of MTN's downstream communication affect the product and service knowledge of its dealers in Lagos State?

Method

A descriptive correlational mixed-method design was utilised to examine the relationships between communication attributes and dealership performance without manipulating study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The population comprised registered MTN dealerships actively operating in Lagos State. A quantitative sample of 222 owners was selected via stratified sampling, ensuring equal representation (74 each) from Lagos West, East, and Central districts. Additionally, 12 owners (four per district) were purposively selected for in-depth qualitative interviews based on their extensive operational experience.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, Dealers' Perception of MTN Downstream Channel Communication, featuring a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4 to Strongly Disagree = 1). An interview guide elicited qualitative insights on staff preparedness, sales conversion, and error management. Content validity was established via expert reviews, and pilot testing yielded a reliable Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .768. Ethical standards, including anonymity and voluntary participation, were strictly maintained. Quantitative data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, means (utilising a 2.50 benchmark), and simple linear regression to explicitly assess predictive associations. Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed thematically to provide deep contextual explanations.

Results and Discussion

Respondent Profile

All 222 respondents were dealership owners, a vital characteristic because owners make key operational decisions, guide staff briefing, and handle customer-issue escalation. The sample was highly experienced: 38.8% had operated for over 10 years, 30.6% for 7–10 years, and 20.7% for 4–6 years. Regarding staff strength, 59.0% employed 10-19 personnel, 31.1% had 5-9, and 9.9% employed 1-4 staff. All outlets provided mixed-service telecommunications solutions.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 222)

Variable	Category	n	%
Respondent role	Owner	222	100.0
Senatorial district	Lagos West	74	33.3
Senatorial district	Lagos East	74	33.3
Senatorial district	Lagos Central	74	33.3
Years as MTN dealer	4-6 years	46	20.7
Years as MTN dealer	7-10 years	68	30.6

Years as MTN dealer	Above 10 years	86	38.8
Years as MTN dealer	No response	22	9.9
Full-time employees	1-4	22	9.9
Full-time employees	5-9	69	31.1
Full-time employees	10-19	131	59.0
Primary business focus	Mixed-service dealership	222	100.0

Research Question One: Communication Clarity and Sales Volume

The descriptive results indicated strong agreement that communication clarity supports sales execution, yielding a grand mean of 3.61, substantially above the 2.50 benchmark. Key indicators showed that unclear messages directly cause missed opportunities (mean = 3.95), while clear instructions boost staff confidence to upsell (mean = 3.94). However, the specific item regarding the immediate obviousness of required dealer actions scored the lowest (mean = 2.80), highlighting a practical operational gap where messages lack specific directives on which portal to use.

Table 2: Descriptive indicators for communication clarity and sales volume

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Promotional communications are clear enough to execute quickly	3.60	Agreed
Clear messages are linked with higher sales during promotions	3.40	Agreed

Product details are presented in simple customer-friendly language	3.38	Agreed
Unclear or contradictory messages cause missed sales opportunities	3.95	Strongly agreed
Price and commission changes are easy to understand	3.88	Strongly agreed
Step-by-step instructions reduce point-of-sale errors	3.69	Agreed
Visuals and templates aid quick understanding	3.48	Agreed
Required dealer action is immediately obvious	2.80	Agreed, but weak
Clear messages increase staff confidence to upsell or cross-sell	3.94	Strongly agreed
Jargon and ambiguity make selling difficult	3.94	Strongly agreed
Grand mean	3.61	Strongly agreed

Note. Benchmark mean = 2.50. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

Regression analysis solidly supported these findings, revealing a strong positive association between communication clarity and perceived sales volume ($R = .932$; $R2 = .868$; $F = 1452.54$; $p < .001$). The standardised beta (.932) confirms that higher clarity significantly predicts better sales performance. Interview data powerfully aligned with this, as dealers noted that ambiguity inherently breeds hesitation, whereas clear mechanics definitively enable active cross-selling, explicitly validating the agency argument that minimised information asymmetry directly optimises agent performance. One interviewee aptly summarised the issue by saying, 'Clarity is money'.

Research Question Two: Communication Timeliness and Product/Service Knowledge

The grand mean of 3.35 demonstrated agreement that timeliness is vital. However, the pattern of responses highlighted a sharp contrast between reactive and proactive timeliness. While prompt clarification responses scored highly (3.88), advance information for new products (2.24) and training materials (2.16) consistently scored poorly. This reveals that dealers often lack a sufficient preparation window before an official launch, leaving them practically unprepared despite receiving rapid notifications.

Table 3: Descriptive indicators for communication timeliness and product/service knowledge

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Information about new products arrives early enough for staff training	2.24	Disagreed
Timely updates improve team accuracy when advising customers	3.95	Strongly agreed
Training materials arrive with sufficient lead time	2.16	Disagreed
Last-minute communication leaves staff unprepared	3.89	Strongly agreed
Tariff and promotion changes arrive quickly enough for script updates	2.08	Disagreed
MTN responds promptly to clarification requests	3.88	Strongly agreed
Real-time alerts keep product knowledge current	3.89	Strongly agreed

There is little delay between approval of a new offer and dealer notification	3.86	Strongly agreed
Slow portal or FAQ updates cause confusion	3.68	Strongly agreed
Timely refresher communication helps knowledge retention	3.90	Strongly agreed
Grand mean	3.35	Agreed

Note. Benchmark mean = 2.50. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement.

Regression analysis emphatically confirmed a significant positive relationship between timeliness and product knowledge (R = .696; R2 = .484; F = 206.70; $p < .001$). The beta coefficient (.696) indicates that improved timeliness demonstrably strengthens knowledge, though the lower R2 suggests other key factors like training culture and experience also play a role. Interviewees expressed an unfortunate embarrassment factor, noting that customers sometimes accurately learn of new promotions via social media before dealers securely receive internal briefs. Dealers strongly emphasised that launch-day communications arrive too late to functionally facilitate adequate internal education.

Table 4: Regression summary for the research questions

Relationship	**B**	**beta**	**R2**	**Model statistics**
Clarity of communication -> sales volume	.580	.932	.868	R = .932; t = 38.112; F = 1452.54; $p < .001$
Timeliness of communication -> product/service knowledge	.445	.696	.484	R = .696; t = 14.377; F = 206.70; $p < .001$

Note. Regression coefficients are based on aggregated scale scores.

Discussion of Findings

Taken together, the findings systematically establish downstream communication as a vital performance resource for MTN's Lagos network. Clarity is fundamentally a primary predictor of sales performance, directly reducing execution errors and effectively empowering persuasive selling. When directives are unambiguous and simple, dealers efficiently convert market opportunities into tangible revenue (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Stern et al., 2006). Timeliness significantly impacts knowledge readiness. While reactive alerts are undeniably fast, they absolutely do not substitute for the proactive lead time essential for thorough staff training. A lack of advance knowledge can drastically damage dealer credibility in a highly informed consumer market. Theoretically, these crucial results validate Agency Theory, practically showing that actively minimising information asymmetry enables retail agents to execute seamlessly. Furthermore, the undeniable necessity for structured interpretation and preparation time fully supports the Participatory Communication perspective.

Conclusion

MTN's downstream channel communication significantly and directly determines dealership performance in Lagos State. Specifically, clarity has a remarkably strong positive influence on perceived sales volume by consistently boosting staff confidence and eliminating operational errors. Timeliness significantly affects critical product knowledge, yet the empirical data shows MTN relies more on reactive alerts rather than proactive preparation lead time. To optimally maximise dealer execution, securely protect brand trust, and sustainably drive revenue, downstream communication must be intelligently managed as a strategic organisational function. Ambiguity and insufficient preparation windows collectively create informational friction that ultimately compromises both customer experience and broader market competitiveness.

Recommendations

1. MTN must carefully institutionalise a strict 48-hour pre-launch communication policy for all new products and promotions to comprehensively allow dealers adequate preparation time.
2. Every major dealer communication should successfully incorporate a specific 'Dealer

Action Required' section, clearly detailing expected actions, responsible staff, deadlines, and relevant platform codes.

3. Strategically align message complexity with appropriate communication channels, seamlessly using SMS for routine alerts and interactive webinars or forums for complex policy changes.

4. Effectively maintain the official dealer portal as a centralised, perfectly synchronised single source of truth to permanently prevent informal channels from unfortunately dominating operational knowledge.

5. Continuously conduct regular communication-effectiveness audits explicitly tracking clarity, lead times, comprehension levels, and their direct measurable impact on ultimate sales outcomes.

6. Systematically integrate dealer feedback securely into the pre-launch planning phase, utilising select representatives from across Lagos to accurately identify operational gaps and potential customer inquiries beforehand.

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