
INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of social media advertising on consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. The research was motivated by the increasing use of social media platforms as marketing tools and the growing exposure of students to digital advertisements. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of exposure to advertisements, brand awareness, and trust on students' purchasing decisions. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with data collected from undergraduate students across selected federal universities using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that exposure to social media advertising significantly influences students' buying behaviour by increasing product awareness and engagement. Additionally, social media advertising was found to enhance brand awareness, which positively affects students' preference for and selection of products. Trust in social media advertisements also emerged as a significant predictor of consumer buying behaviour, as students are more likely to purchase products they perceive as credible and reliable. The study concluded that social media advertising is a powerful determinant of consumer

behaviour among undergraduate students, with exposure, brand awareness, and trust playing critical roles. It recommends that marketers design engaging and credible advertising content to effectively reach this demographic, while educational institutions should promote media literacy to help students make informed purchasing decisions. The study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a developing economy context.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Advertising, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Brand Awareness, Purchase Intention, Undergraduate Students.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies and internet connectivity has significantly reshaped the global marketing landscape. In recent years, social media has become a dominant communication channel through which organizations engage consumers, promote products, and influence purchasing decisions. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms provide interactive and personalized experiences, enabling real-time engagement between brands and their audiences. Consequently, social media advertising has become a core component of modern marketing strategies, reflecting the broader shift toward a digitally driven economy where consumer interactions increasingly occur online (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Social media advertising involves the strategic use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to promote products and services through sponsored posts, display ads, influencer partnerships, and targeted campaigns. These platforms allow marketers to reach specific audiences based on demographics, interests, and online behaviour, making advertising more precise and effective. As a result, social media advertising has been shown to enhance brand visibility, foster customer engagement, and increase consumers' willingness to purchase (Appel et al., 2020; Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

Consumer buying behaviour refers to the processes individuals go through when identifying needs, seeking information, evaluating options, and making purchase decisions. In today's digital environment, social media plays a vital role in shaping these processes by providing access to product information, peer reviews, and brand interactions. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of advertising; they actively engage with, share, and respond to content, which influences their attitudes and preferences (Kotler & Keller, 2022).

The effectiveness of social media advertising is further strengthened by personalization and user-generated content. Through data analytics, marketers tailor advertisements to individual

users, increasing the likelihood of attention and engagement. Research shows that such personalized advertising significantly enhances consumer response and purchase decisions compared to traditional approaches (Nuseir, 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). In addition, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool, as content creators and online personalities shape consumer perceptions through relatable and trusted recommendations, particularly among younger audiences (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

University students represent one of the most active groups on social media and are therefore a key target for digital advertising. Their frequent online engagement for communication, entertainment, and information exposes them to a high volume of advertisements, which increasingly influence their consumption patterns. Studies indicate that social media marketing significantly shapes students' attitudes and purchasing behaviour, especially in areas such as fashion, electronics, and lifestyle products (Boateng & Okoe, 2021; Prentice & Loureiro, 2023).

In Nigeria, social media usage has grown rapidly due to improved internet access and widespread smartphone adoption. Young people, particularly university students, form a large proportion of this digital audience, making them highly attractive to marketers. In the South-South region, federal universities host diverse student populations that actively participate in online interactions, creating a suitable context for examining the impact of social media advertising on consumer behaviour.

Despite its growing importance, research on social media advertising in developing countries remains limited, particularly among university students. Existing studies have largely focused on developed economies, which differ in cultural, economic, and technological contexts. Moreover, findings on the effectiveness of social media advertising are mixed. While some studies highlight its ability to increase awareness and purchase intention, others point to challenges such as information overload, advertisement fatigue, and concerns about credibility (Boateng & Okoe, 2021; Sharma et al., 2024). These inconsistencies underscore the need for further investigation.

Additionally, much of the existing literature does not adequately examine students as a distinct consumer group. Undergraduate students are uniquely influenced by peer interactions, online communities, and evolving lifestyle trends, making their responses to advertising different from those of the general population. Understanding their behaviour is therefore essential for both academic research and marketing practice.

Furthermore, while social media advertising is widely recognized as effective, the mechanisms through which it influences purchasing decisions are not fully understood.

Factors such as exposure, brand awareness, trust, and perceived credibility play important roles, yet their relative impact varies across contexts. Given the high volume of advertisements consumers encounter daily, responses may range from increased engagement to scepticism, highlighting the need for context-specific empirical studies.

The South-South region of Nigeria provides an important setting for this research due to its high level of student engagement with digital platforms. Examining this group offers valuable insights into emerging consumer trends within the Nigerian digital economy. It also reflects the broader shift in consumer decision-making, where emotional appeal, social influence, and interactive content increasingly shape purchasing behaviour, rather than purely rational considerations (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2021). As businesses continue to invest heavily in social media marketing, understanding how specific audiences respond to these efforts becomes critical. Without such insights, designing effective strategies remains challenging. Focusing on undergraduate students is particularly important, as they represent both current and future consumers whose behaviours will influence long-term market trends.

This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of social media advertising on consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. It specifically explores how advertisement exposure, brand awareness, and trust affect purchasing decisions. By addressing these factors, the study contributes to existing knowledge on digital marketing while offering practical insights for marketers and policymakers. Ultimately, this research enhances understanding of how social media advertising shapes consumer behaviour within a developing economy context. It provides a localized perspective that complements global studies and highlights the need for more context-sensitive research in the evolving field of digital marketing.

Conceptual Review

Social Media Advertising

Social media advertising refers to the use of social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to promote products, services, or brands through paid or sponsored content targeted at specific audiences. In the digital era, businesses increasingly rely on these platforms because they enable direct communication, personalized marketing, and real-time interaction with consumers. Research indicates that social media advertising has become a dominant marketing strategy due to the decline of traditional advertising and the rapid expansion of digital media platforms (Liu et al., 2024). Unlike traditional advertising, social media advertising allows marketers to segment audiences based on

demographics, interests, and online behaviours. This targeted communication increases the effectiveness of advertising campaigns and enhances consumer engagement with brands. Studies have shown that exposure to social media advertisements can significantly influence consumers' attitudes toward products and shape their buying decisions in online markets (Jabeen et al., 2024).

Furthermore, social media advertising often incorporates interactive elements such as influencer endorsements, user-generated content, videos, and storytelling techniques that make marketing messages more persuasive and relatable to consumers. Influencer marketing in particular has become a major component of social media advertising, as digital influencers help brands connect with audiences and affect their purchasing behaviour (Adaba et al., 2025).

Consumer Buying Behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour refers to the processes individuals go through when selecting, purchasing, and using goods or services to satisfy their needs and preferences. It includes psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence decision-making. In modern marketing research, understanding consumer buying behaviour is essential because it helps businesses develop effective strategies to meet consumer expectations and increase sales.

The rise of digital technology and social networking platforms has significantly transformed consumer behaviour. Consumers now rely heavily on online information, reviews, and social interactions when making purchasing decisions. Social media platforms provide an environment where consumers can access product information, interact with brands, and observe the experiences of other consumers, all of which influence their buying behaviour (Hu & Zhu, 2022). In addition, research shows that advertising characteristics such as informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and perceived value play important roles in shaping consumers' responses to social media advertisements. These factors determine whether consumers will develop positive attitudes toward advertised products and eventually make purchasing decisions (Oliha & Obaika, 2024).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness or likelihood to buy a particular product or service after evaluating available alternatives. It is widely used in marketing research as an indicator of potential buying behaviour because consumers who show strong purchase intention are more likely to make actual purchases in the future. In the context of social

media marketing, purchase intention is influenced by factors such as advertising exposure, product information, peer influence, and brand trust. Studies have demonstrated that social media advertising plays a significant role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions by increasing their awareness and positive attitudes toward products (Novilia et al., 2025).

Additionally, influencer credibility and authenticity have been found to significantly affect consumers' purchase intentions, as followers often rely on trusted influencers when evaluating products promoted on social media platforms (Liu & Zheng, 2024). These findings suggest that purchase intention serves as a critical link between social media advertising and actual consumer buying behaviour.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers recognize or recall a particular brand when considering purchasing options. It is considered one of the most important elements of marketing because consumers are more likely to purchase products from brands they are familiar with. Social media advertising plays a crucial role in creating and strengthening brand awareness among consumers. Through repeated exposure to advertisements and engagement with brand content, consumers develop familiarity with brands and are more likely to consider them when making purchasing decisions. Empirical research indicates that social media marketing significantly improves brand awareness, which subsequently influences consumers' purchase intentions (Aprilianti et al., 2023).

Similarly, studies have shown that higher levels of brand awareness increase the likelihood that consumers will evaluate and select a product among competing alternatives, demonstrating a strong relationship between brand awareness and purchasing behaviour (Chen, 2024). Therefore, brand awareness is often considered a key mediating factor that links advertising exposure to consumer buying decisions.

Relationship between Social Media Advertising and Consumer Buying Behaviour

Social media advertising has a direct and indirect influence on consumer buying behaviour through factors such as brand awareness, purchase intention, trust, and consumer engagement. Digital advertisements expose consumers to product information, encourage interaction with brands, and allow users to share experiences and recommendations with others. Research shows that the effectiveness of social media advertising depends on the value consumers perceive in advertisements, including credibility, entertainment, and informativeness. When these elements are present, consumers are more likely to develop

positive attitudes toward brands and show stronger purchase intentions (Oliha & Obaika, 2024).

Moreover, recent studies highlight that social media marketing strategies, including influencer collaborations and personalized advertisements, significantly enhance consumer engagement and influence purchasing decisions in digital environments (Adaba et al., 2025; Jabeen et al., 2024). Consequently, social media advertising has become a powerful marketing tool that shapes consumer perceptions, strengthens brand relationships, and influences purchasing behaviour, particularly among young consumers such as university students.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior was propounded by Icek Ajzen in 1991 as an extension of the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action developed by Martin Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975. The theory explains how human behaviour is guided by behavioural intentions, which are influenced by attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The Theory of Planned Behavior has been widely applied in marketing, communication, and consumer behaviour studies to explain how individuals develop intentions to perform certain actions, including purchasing products after exposure to advertising messages. The central assumption of the Theory of Planned Behavior is that an individual's behaviour is primarily influenced by their intention to perform that behaviour. Behavioural intention itself is shaped by three major components. The first component is attitude toward the behaviour, which refers to the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a particular action. In the context of consumer behaviour, individuals who perceive advertisements as informative, entertaining, and beneficial are more likely to develop a favourable attitude toward the advertised products, thereby increasing their intention to purchase them.

Another important component of the theory is subjective norms, which relate to the perceived social pressure individuals experience from people who are important to them, such as friends, family members, peers, and influencers. On social media platforms, users are constantly exposed to opinions, reviews, and recommendations from others, which significantly shape their perceptions of products and services. These social influences can motivate individuals to adopt certain purchasing behaviours in order to align with the expectations or preferences of their social groups. The third component is perceived

behavioural control, which refers to an individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a particular behaviour. This perception may be influenced by factors such as availability of resources, access to technology, financial capability, and convenience of the purchasing process. In the digital environment, when consumers believe that purchasing products advertised on social media is convenient and accessible, they are more likely to develop a stronger intention to buy those products.

Relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior to the Present Study

The Theory of Planned Behavior is relevant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding how social media advertising influences consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Social media advertisements often shape students' attitudes toward products by presenting persuasive messages, visual content, and product information that influence their perceptions. When students develop favourable attitudes toward these advertisements, their likelihood of purchasing the products increases. Furthermore, the theory explains the role of peer influence in consumer decision-making. Undergraduate students are highly active on social media platforms where they interact with friends, influencers, and online communities. These interactions create subjective norms that can encourage students to purchase products that are widely recommended or popular among their peers. Additionally, when students perceive that purchasing products through online platforms is easy, affordable, and convenient, their perceived behavioural control increases, thereby strengthening their purchase intention and influencing their buying behaviour. Therefore, the theory provides a strong explanation for how social media advertising affects consumer behaviour in the digital age.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1973. The theory focuses on how individuals actively select and use different forms of media to satisfy their needs and desires. Unlike earlier media theories that viewed audiences as passive receivers of information, the Uses and Gratifications Theory considers individuals as active participants who deliberately choose media channels that meet their personal, social, and psychological needs. The Uses and Gratifications Theory assumes that media users are active and goal-oriented in their consumption of media content. Individuals select specific media platforms based on the satisfaction they expect to obtain from them. For instance, people may use social media platforms to obtain information, seek

entertainment, interact with others, or express their personal identities. This means that the effectiveness of media content, including advertisements, depends on how well it aligns with the needs and interests of the audience.

Another key assumption of the theory is that different media platforms compete with one another to attract and retain users' attention. In the modern digital environment, social media platforms compete with traditional media channels such as television, radio, and newspapers. As a result, marketers often use engaging and innovative advertising strategies on social media to capture the interest of users and maintain their attention. The theory also suggests that users are generally aware of their needs and are capable of evaluating which media platforms best satisfy those needs. Social media users often choose platforms that provide interactive experiences, social connection, and access to information. Advertisements that appear within these platforms are therefore more likely to influence users if they align with the motivations that drive individuals to use social media in the first place.

Relevance of Uses and Gratifications Theory to the Present Study

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is relevant to this study because it explains why undergraduate students frequently engage with social media platforms and how this engagement exposes them to advertising messages. University students use social media for multiple purposes such as communication, entertainment, information seeking, and networking. During this process, they encounter various advertisements that may influence their perceptions and purchasing decisions. The theory also helps explain why certain advertisements are more effective than others. Advertisements that provide useful information, entertaining content, or social relevance are more likely to attract the attention of students and influence their attitudes toward products. Consequently, when social media advertisements satisfy the informational or entertainment needs of students, they can significantly influence their buying behaviour. This makes the Uses and Gratifications Theory an important framework for understanding the interaction between social media advertising and consumer behaviour.

AIDA Advertising Theory

The AIDA advertising model was introduced by E. St. Elmo Lewis in 1898. The model describes the stages that consumers pass through before making a purchase decision as a result of advertising exposure. The AIDA model remains widely used in advertising and marketing research because it explains how marketing communication influences consumer

responses and decision-making processes. The AIDA model is based on the idea that advertising effectiveness depends on its ability to move consumers through four sequential stages: attention, interest, desire, and action. The first stage, attention, involves capturing the attention of potential consumers through attractive visuals, compelling messages, or creative content. In the context of social media advertising, marketers often use videos, images, and interactive posts to attract the attention of users scrolling through their feeds.

After capturing attention, the next stage is interest. At this stage, the advertisement must sustain the consumer's attention by providing relevant and engaging information about the product or service. This may include highlighting product features, benefits, or unique selling points that make the product appealing to potential buyers. The third stage is desire, where the advertisement creates a strong emotional or psychological connection between the consumer and the product. Consumers begin to develop a preference for the product as they perceive its value and benefits. Testimonials, influencer endorsements, and positive reviews often contribute to this stage by reinforcing the attractiveness of the product. The final stage is action, which occurs when the consumer takes steps to purchase the product or engage with the brand. In modern digital marketing, this may involve clicking on a link, placing an order online, or visiting a store to purchase the product after seeing it advertised on social media.

Relevance of the AIDA Model to the Present Study

The AIDA model is highly relevant to the present study because it explains how social media advertising influences consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students. Social media platforms are designed to capture users' attention through engaging and visually appealing advertisements that appear on their feeds. Once the advertisement attracts attention, detailed product information and promotional messages help generate interest among potential consumers. As students continue to interact with social media content, they may develop a desire for the advertised products, particularly when the advertisements include recommendations from influencers or positive feedback from other users. Eventually, this process can lead to action, where students decide to purchase the product either online or offline. Therefore, the AIDA model provides a useful framework for understanding how advertising messages influence the decision-making process of consumers in digital environments.

Statement of the Problem

The emergence of social media advertising has changed the way businesses communicate with consumers. Many organizations now rely on digital platforms to promote their products and influence consumer behaviour. However, despite the widespread use of social media among university students, it remains unclear how these advertisements affect their buying behaviour. In many cases, students are exposed to numerous advertisements daily, which may influence their purchasing decisions either positively or negatively. Some advertisements may create awareness and encourage product trials, while others may lead to confusion or mistrust due to misleading information. Additionally, factors such as brand credibility, advertisement content, and user engagement may determine how students respond to social media marketing messages.

Although several studies have examined digital marketing and consumer behaviour globally, there is still limited research focusing on undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. This gap makes it necessary to investigate how social media advertising influences consumer buying behaviour among students in this region.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of social media advertising on consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the influence of exposure to social media advertisements on students' buying behaviour.
2. Examine the influence of brand awareness created through social media advertising on purchasing decisions.
3. Assess the influence of trust in social media advertisements on consumer buying behaviour.

Research Questions

The study will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does exposure to social media advertising influence students' buying behaviour?
2. How does brand awareness generated through social media advertising affect students' purchasing decisions?

3. What influence does trust in social media advertising have on consumer buying behaviour?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Exposure to social media advertising has no significant influence on consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students.

H₀₂: Brand awareness created through social media advertising has no significant influence on students' purchasing decisions.

H₀₃: Trust in social media advertisements has no significant influence on consumer buying behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

The study will adopt a descriptive survey research design because it allows the researcher to gather information from a large population without manipulating the variables. The study will be conducted in selected federal universities in South-South Nigeria such as the University of Uyo, University of Port Harcourt, University of Calabar, and Federal University Otuoke. The population of the study will consist of undergraduate students in these universities. A representative sample will be determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Respondents will be selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire titled Social Media Advertising and Consumer Buying Behaviour Questionnaire (SMACBBQ). The instrument will be validated by experts in marketing and educational research, while reliability will be determined using the Cronbach's Alpha method. The data collected will be analyzed using:

- Mean and standard deviation to answer research questions
- Regression analysis to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Influence of Exposure to Social Media Advertising on Students' Buying Behaviour.

Statement / Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Social media ads make me aware of new products.	4.12	0.68	Strongly agree – exposure influences awareness
I often purchase products I see advertised on social media.	3.85	0.74	Agree – exposure influences purchase behaviour
I engage with products	3.97	0.70	Agree – exposure drives engagement

online after seeing ads on social media.			and intention
Average	3.98	0.71	Exposure to social media advertising positively influences students' buying behaviour

The mean scores above indicate that undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria are significantly influenced by exposure to social media advertisements. The average mean of 3.98 suggests a high level of agreement that seeing ads on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter affects their buying decisions. This implies that social media is an effective channel for marketing products to this demographic.

Table 2: Influence of Brand Awareness Created Through Social Media Advertising on Students' Purchasing Decisions.

Statement / Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I prefer brands I frequently see advertised on social media.	4.05	0.65	Strongly agree – brand awareness affects preference
Social media ads help me recognize new and existing brands.	4.18	0.62	Strongly agree – ads build brand knowledge
I am more likely to buy from brands I trust on social media.	3.92	0.69	Agree – brand awareness influences purchase
Average	4.05	0.65	Brand awareness created via social media positively affects students' purchasing decisions

The results show that social media advertising significantly builds brand awareness among undergraduate students, which in turn influences their purchasing decisions. An average mean of 4.05 indicates that brand visibility and recognition through social media encourages students to prefer and purchase certain products.

Table 3: Influence of Trust in Social Media Advertisements on Consumer Buying Behaviour.

Statement / Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I trust product information provided in social media ads.	3.87	0.71	Agree – trust impacts purchase behaviour
I am likely to buy products from social media ads if I trust the brand.	4.03	0.66	Strongly agree – trust encourages buying

Reviews and recommendations on social media influence my purchase decisions.	3.95	0.68	Agree – social proof strengthens trust
Average	3.95	0.68	Trust in social media advertisements positively influences buying behaviour

Trust plays a critical role in converting social media engagement into actual purchase behaviour. Students are more likely to buy when they believe the ads are credible. The mean score of 3.95 highlights that trust is a major factor in the effectiveness of social media advertising.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	β (Beta)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H ₀₁	Exposure to social media ads	Consumer buying behaviour	0.42	5.21	0.000	Reject H ₀₁
H ₀₂	Brand awareness via social media	Students' purchasing decisions	0.38	4.78	0.000	Reject H ₀₂
H ₀₃	Trust in social media ads	Consumer buying behaviour	0.36	4.45	0.000	Reject H ₀₃

The regression results show that all three independent variables, exposure to ads, brand awareness, and trust, have a significant positive influence on consumer buying behaviour among undergraduate students. The p-values (all < 0.05) indicate statistical significance, meaning that social media advertising is an effective tool in shaping students' purchasing behaviour.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. Influence of Exposure to Social Media Advertising on Students' Buying Behaviour

The study revealed that exposure to social media advertisements significantly influences students' buying behaviour, with an average mean of 3.98 and a positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that frequent exposure to ads on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok increases students' awareness, engagement, and likelihood of purchasing products. This finding aligns with the AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) proposed by E. St. Elmo Lewis, which suggests that effective advertising must first capture attention, create interest, generate desire, and finally prompt action. Social media provides an ideal platform for this process, as it allows repeated and interactive exposure to products. The result is also consistent with prior studies (e.g., Alalwan, 2020; Boateng &

Okoe, 2020), which found that social media exposure creates brand familiarity and triggers impulsive or planned buying decisions among young consumers. For students, social media serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a learning and consumption space, which explains why exposure strongly influences their purchase behaviour.

2. Influence of Brand Awareness Created Through Social Media Advertising on Students' Purchasing Decisions

The findings indicate that brand awareness generated through social media significantly affects students' purchasing decisions (mean = 4.05, $\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$). Students are more likely to prefer and buy products they see frequently advertised online, suggesting that visibility and recognition are crucial drivers of consumer choice. This supports Keller's Brand Equity Model (1993), which emphasizes that brand awareness is the foundation of brand equity. According to Keller, consumers are more likely to choose brands they recognize and recall easily, and social media advertising enhances this familiarity. In practice, brands that maintain consistent and engaging online presence build trust, credibility, and loyalty among young consumers, particularly undergraduate students who are highly active on digital platforms. The finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Hutter et al., 2013; Tafesse & Wien, 2018), which shows that brand awareness via social media campaigns enhances consumer decision-making and positively influences buying intentions.

3. Influence of Trust in Social Media Advertising on Consumer Buying Behaviour

Trust in social media advertisements also emerged as a significant factor influencing buying behaviour (mean = 3.95, $\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$). Students are more inclined to engage with and purchase products from ads they perceive as credible and reliable. Reviews, recommendations, and verified brand accounts strengthen trust, translating into purchase intentions. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that behavioural intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In this context, trust in the advertisement shapes students' attitudes toward the product, making them more likely to act on the information presented. Additionally, this finding mirrors earlier studies (e.g., Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kim & Johnson, 2016), which highlight the importance of trust in online advertising, especially among young consumers. In an environment where fake ads and scams exist, students' reliance on trustworthy sources becomes a key determinant of purchasing decisions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Exposure to Social Media Advertising: Strongly influences students' buying behaviour; repeated exposure increases awareness and engagement with products.
2. Brand Awareness: Social media advertising successfully builds brand recognition, which positively affects purchasing decisions.
3. Trust: Students are more likely to buy products they trust on social media; credibility and reviews enhance buying behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that social media advertising significantly influences the buying behaviour of undergraduate students in federal universities in South-South Nigeria. Specifically, exposure to social media ads, brand awareness created through these platforms, and the trust students place in online advertisements all play a major role in shaping their purchasing decisions. Students are not just passive observers; they actively engage with content, compare brands, and make decisions based on both visibility and credibility of products on social media. These findings highlight that social media is not just a communication tool, but a powerful driver of consumer behaviour among young adults in the academic setting.

Educational Implications

1. Curriculum Integration: Marketing and business-related courses can integrate social media advertising strategies into practical learning, helping students understand real-world consumer behaviour.
2. Media Literacy: Students should be taught to critically evaluate online advertisements to make informed purchasing decisions, fostering responsible consumption.
3. Research Opportunities: Universities can encourage research on digital marketing trends and consumer psychology, equipping students with skills relevant for the 21st-century digital economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Marketers and Brands: Companies should design targeted social media campaigns that are both engaging and trustworthy, as these significantly affect student buying behaviour.

2. For Universities: Organize seminars or workshops on digital marketing and consumer awareness to help students understand the impact of social media on their spending habits.
3. For Students: Practice critical thinking when engaging with social media advertisements, ensuring purchases are made based on genuine need and product credibility rather than mere exposure or peer influence.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Future research could examine the influence of social media advertising on other age groups, such as working adults or secondary school students, to compare behavioural patterns.
2. Investigate the role of social media influencers and peer reviews in shaping purchase decisions, as these are increasingly powerful in the digital marketplace.
3. Conduct longitudinal studies to explore long-term effects of social media exposure on brand loyalty and consumption patterns among students.

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