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AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF THE CREDIBILITY OF FACEBOOK ADVERTISING

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Abstract: *Facebook, a social network website, has become very popular in recent times that it readily boasts of approximately 1.2 billion monthly active users and has become the medium of choice for advertisers seeking to reach a well-targeted worldwide audience at very cheap cost. The study examines how the young adults who form majority of the Facebook users perceive Facebook advertisements. A sample of 396 respondents was selected among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (Unizik) through a multi-stage procedure. Findings of the study show that the undergraduates perceive most of the advertisements on Facebook as credible and trustworthy. The study therefore recommends that social media advertisers particularly Facebook should maintain the favourable disposition undergraduates have towards Facebook advertising by packaging and disseminating only true and credible promotional messages to the users.*

Keywords: Facebook advertising, Audience perception, Credibility, Social network

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INTRODUCTION

The trend in the development of the Web 2.0 and the dynamic nature of social networking sites in the recent times is expanding the horizon of advertisement, featured before now, mainly in the mainline media. The popularity of Facebook sites has opened up lots of opportunities and changed how personal information is communicated to the audience whom greater percentage of the users constituting 30.9% of the entire 1.4 billion subscribers are young adults within the age range of 18 to 25 years and also form the average age range of undergraduate students in various universities in Nigeria (Facebook Reports, 2015). Apart from the research exploring the context of Facebook and advertisement in social networking sites,it also explores Facebook advertisements, its objective and subjective components that make the source credible to the audience. As a theoretical background, it equally critically examines how young adults view Facebook advertisements in relation to two theories- Attitude Change and Uses-and-Gratification theories.

This research therefore focuses on the perception of these Facebook users on the credibility of the advertisements they are exposed to on their Facebook pages particularly now that undergraduate students may have access to Facebook sites via a plethora of devices, whicg gives support to the ideas of a media–driven world and youth dependency on social media for information, education, and entertainment (Carlson, 2010).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The audience of several Facebook advertisements has been lead to make many uninformed decisions. Recently, four affiliated car dealerships in western Massachusetts in Boston agreed to pay a total $175, 000 to resolve allegations that they regularly lured consumers to their showrooms with misleading Facebook advertisements, and refused to make good on their promise as advertised (F&I and Showroom Report, 2014).

Being denied opportunity in mainstream media to propagate deceptive advertisements due to government legislations, advertisers now use the social media to spread false promotional messages. Since Facebook has been estimated to have over 1.11 billion users (Curtis, 2013), the possibility of exposure to true and false advertisements on Facebook is inevitable, and this has become a big concern to brand communicators and communication scholars all over the world.

Meanwhile, (Plous, 1993; Wildavsky, and Dake, 1990) argue that audience members interpret advertisements in a manner consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. So, there could never be a question of credible or non credible Facebook advertising since it is the individual's perceptions that determine what interpretation they make from a particular Facebook advertisement. Hence, the audience perception

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of Facebook advertisement remains a subjective matter. This raises the question: what is the audience perception of the credibility of Facebook advertisement?

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The basic objective for this study is to examine the perceptions of Facebook users of the various advertisements on their Facebook page. Consequent this study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To ascertain if the undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University make use of Facebook.
- To see if they are exposed to Facebook advertisements on their Facebook page.
- To examine how these undergraduate students perceive Facebook advertisements.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Against the backdrop of the research objectives, the study sought answers to the following questions

- Do undergraduate students of NnamdiAzikiwe University make use of Facebook?
- To what extent are these undergraduate students exposed to Facebook advertisements?
- How do these undergraduates perceive Facebook Advertisements?

FACEBOOK ADVERTISEMENTS: AN OVERVIEW

Facebook as a social networking service (SNS) was launched in February 2004 under the leadership of Mark Zuckerberg who was supported by his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students: Eduardo Saverin, Andrew Mccollum, Dustin Moskovits and Chris Hughes (Carlson, 2010). It appears a big surprise that about 10 years after the launch of Facebook, there is still a shaky grasp of the nature of Facebook advertising.

Facebook, a virtual meeting place for networking and socializing, is filled with advertisements that range from web banner displays to direct (word-of-mouth) promotional messages delivered to the audience as status updates and is referred to as Facebook advertising. Advertisements on Facebook are unique. Regular exposure to Facebook advertisements appears to progressively influence the audiences' hearts and minds, and also mould their opinion according to sponsors' wish(es) (Adobe, 2013). They are shown to specific groups of well-targeted and highly engaged people on desktop and mobile (Facebook Reports, 2015). Most Facebook advertisements could be classified as either true or deceptive. According to Facebook.com, (2009) in its compilation of rules Facebook advertisers should follow to avoid unethical advertising

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on the Internet suggests that false or misleading information should not be posted on the Internet.

Unfortunately, most Facebook users who consume advertisements on the social network site appear not to be aware that some of the promotional messages they see on the website might be questionable. This suggests that the perceptive capacity of most Facebook users are not keen enough to identify and distinguish false or misleading promotional messages from true and credible ones projected on the SNS.

Facebook advertisements share similar features with advertisements on other social networking sites. For instance, both Facebook advertisements and Instagram advertisements bear "sponsored" label to let the audience know the promotional messages communicated as advertisements are sponsored. On the flipside, Facebook advertisements differ in form from advertisements some other social networks. A comparable look at Facebook advertisements and Twitter advertisements will yield a picture of Twitter advertisements sited within a community of vocal and motivated brand enthusiast who are also brand followers or already potential followers. While the targeting options available to advertisers when creating Facebook advertisements gives them the freedom to decide who exactly they would like to connect to, and how much they'd like to spend.

It is notable that report from Adobe shows that Facebook's advertisements clicks; advertisements impressions and advertiser's return on investment were all higher in 2013 than in 2012. Other advertising metrics like cost per click were lower (by 40%); meaning advertising on Facebook is becoming cheaper and effective (Carmichael, 2011). In other words, the advertisements on Facebook are growing effective over time and can show in the right column of Facebook or in the news feed on mobile or desktop devices (Facebook Reports, 2015).

On Facebook, a variety of advertisements options for advertisers to choose from exist, and they include; page promotion advertisements for increasing Facebook page fan base, post boosting advertisements for boosting the reach of Facebook posts, and Website promotion advertisements for driving traffic from the social network to an advertiser's website. Other types of Facebook advertisement are, sponsored stories, and Facebook offer options (Beese, 2012).

Social media networking has taken over the world. Facebook is at the fore front of the social media craze, with over 500 million active users on its website every month (Pew research, 2012). University students are one of the primary demographics actively using Facebook for connecting with friends, exchanging real-time information, and sharing links to relevant resources with others. Social networking site via the Internet has become an increasingly important part of these young adult's life and has allowed these individuals to present themselves to other users in a variety of formats such as texts, photos, audio and video (Gemmill and Peterson, 2006). These young adults equally expose themselves to several advertisements on their Facebook page making it necessary to examine their perception of the credibility of those advertisements on their Facebook page.

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FACEBOOK ADVERTISEMENTS AND CREDIBILITY

With the rapid development of social networks recently, advertisers make use of these social networking sites such as Facebook to advertise and promote their products and services. Advertising on Facebook is unique. They are created to drive sales and attract people to buy the products and services and this process is sometimes referred to as page engagement (Amy blog, 2014). This shows that a Facebook site has the power to engage the audience through advertisements on the Facebook pages. This advertisements are targeted at the users of Facebook site mainly the young adults that are highly engaged because of their access and use of the internet-enabled devices. Hence, the aim of this study is to fulfill the research gap by assessing the audience perception and the credibility of advertisement using the context of Facebook.

When advertisements contain great creative content, and are well targeted, they tend to engage consumers more through the accumulation of "likes, comments, and shares." As consumers on Facebook get engaged with any of the advertisements, the advertisements usually go viral, because friends of those who have taken an action of engagement are also shown the advertisements too even if they are not primarily in the target category of the advertisements.

The success of Facebook advertising therefore depends on what people perceive of the information they get through such advertisement. So, issues like advertising credibility becomes paramount as it relates the reliability of the product, its authenticity, privacy of trust, copyright law etc which must be observed in designing an advertisement whether on Facebook or any other sources., These issues when neglected may act as barriers to the success of an advertisement but when adhered to may promote the product or service to the target audience. Boyd and Ellison (2007) observe that more studies such as this should be done to contribute to research on social media advertising such as Facebook.

Credibility in this study refers to the objective and subjective components of the believability of a source or message, therefore audience belief of an advertisement shows the extent to which the consumer believes or trusts in the advertising claims particularly Facebook advertisement (Moore and Rodgers, 2005). Johnson and Kaye (2002) looked at the credibility of online media credibility and found that even though some college students believe that online sources were considered credible,that the internet was found to be the least credible medium to advertise in, with consumers regarding it with the highest level of skepticism. Moore and Rodgers (2005), in a similar view, found that some college students did not feel comfortable about surfing the online advertisements although they fell into the demographic group that shops online the most. They further note that the students investigated feel that internet advertising is credible and so, were hesitant when required to give credit card details

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or personal information and only purchased from sites that they knew and trusted (Moore & Rodgers, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as a survey in an attempt to assess how Facebook users perceive the credibility of advertisements on their Facebook pages. The survey questions concern how undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (Unizik) believe the information they get on Facebook advertisements. The population for this study comprises all undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, numbering about 35,000 according to data surveyed from the Registry department of the university.

A sample of 396 was derived from the study population of 35,000. This sample had been arrived at using Taro Yamane's Formula:
n= N/1+N (e^)
Where n= sample size
N= study population
I= constant variable
e= error margin
Thus: n= 35,000/ 1+ 35,000 (0.05)2
= 35,000/ 1+ 35,000 (0.0025)
=35,000/1+87.5
= 35,000/88.5
= 396

Based on the computation using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 396 was adjudged adequate for the purpose of this study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 396 respondents from the study population of 35,000.

The first stage involved the selection of faculties from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Among the 14 faculties in the University, four faculties were randomly selected and they are; the faculties of Arts, Law, Management Science, and Social Science.

The second stage involved the selection of Departments; four Departments were randomly selected from the four faculties. They are as follows: Faculty of Arts; the Departments of African and Asian studies, English Language and Literature, Philosophy and Music were randomly selected. Faculty of Law; the departments of Civil Law and Property Law were randomly selected. Faculty of Management Sciences; the departments of Business Administration and Marketing were randomly selected. And for the Faculty of Social sciences; the departments of Mass Communication and Sociology were randomly selected.

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At the third stage, the levels were selected. For the faculty of Arts, levels 100 and 300 were randomly selected from the departments of African and Asian studies and Music respectively, while 200 level was randomly selected from the department of English Language and Literature studies. For the faculty of Law, 200level was randomly selected fromthe department of Civil Law. For the faculty of Management sciences; 400 levels were randomly selected from both the departments of Marketing and Business Administration. Finally, for the faculty of Social Sciences, 300 and 100 levels were randomly selected from the departments of Mass Communication and Psychology respectively.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses and analyzes the data and findings from 356 valid copies of the questionnaire out of a total of 396 completed by students of Unizik. Forty copies of the questionnaire were rejected after further analysis because the respondents were not undergraduates students of the selected faculties and departments used in the study.

The data from the questionnaire were statistically analysed using the SPSS version 16.0 program. The findings are discussed according to the segments of the questionnaire and then with reference to the research questions.

All the 356 valid respondents were undergraduates of NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka. Figure 1 above depicts the respondents' program of study.

Table 1: *Respondents' faculty*

Faculties	Response	Percentage
Faculty of Arts	149	42
Faculty of Law	44	13
Faculty of Management Sciences	87	24
Faculty of Social Sciences	76	21
Total	356	100

One of the questions that were asked the respondents seeks to know if the respondents actually are from the selected faculties and the data presented above shows that out of 356 respondents surveyed, (42%) were from the faculty of Arts, (13%) were from the faculty of Law, (24%) were from the faculty of Management Sciences, while (21%) were from the faculty of Social Sciences. These findings correlate with the fact that all valid respondents' were undergraduate students of the selected faculties used in the study.

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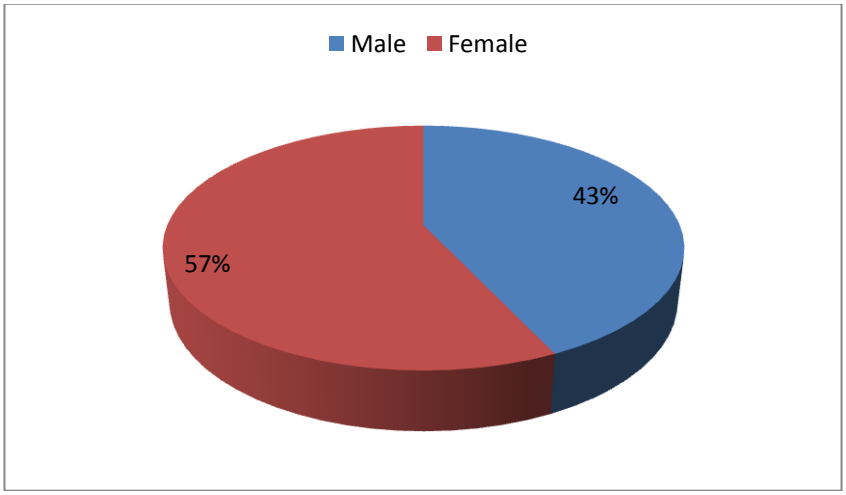

Figure 2: Respondents' Sex

Figure 2 above represents the sex of the respondents. Male respondents were (43%) while female respondents were (57%) confirming research findings that more females are enrolled in the universities in South-East, Nigeria than the males who go out early in life to trade or learn as apprentices.

Table 2: *Respondents' use of facebook*

Respondent's ownership of Facebook accounts		Respondent's access to Facebook accounts		Respondent's frequency access to Facebook	
Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Yes	82	Yes	75	Daily	72
No	18	No	25	Weekly	20
Total	100	Total	100	Monthly	8
				Total	100

A close look at the table above shows that majority of the respondents at 82% have ownership of Facebook accounts suggesting that mainly all the undergraduate students own Facebook accounts, majority of the respondents at 75% agree to access their Facebook accounts while majority of the respondents at 72% also agree that they access their Facebook accounts on a daily basis and these findings support the views of (Gemmill and Peterson, 2006) that young adults are likely to expose themselves to several advertisements on their Facebook page. These findings could mean equally that Facebook is the most popular site of all the social networking sites among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Table 3: *Respondents'exposure to facebook advertisements*

Respondents who have	Respondents were asked	Respondents were asked

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seen advertisements on their Facebook page		the position of advertisements on Facebook sites		to indicate if there any differences between Facebook advertisements and advertisements on traditional media	
Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Yes	93	Newsfeed	74	Yes	66
No	7	Inbox	26	No	34
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

The surveyed respondents from the data presented in Table 3 indicate that majority of the respondents at 93% agree to have seen advertisements on their Facebook pages suggesting that actually, advertisers promote their products and services through social networking sites such as Facebook. Also, majority of the respondents at 74% were of the view that advertisements on their Facebook pages appear in their regular Newsfeed, while 26% had seen them in their message inbox.The respondents were asked whether they perceive Facebook advertisements as different from other advertisements on radio, television, newspaper, and magazine etc and majority of the respondents at 66% were affirmative showing that there are some differences which might be a focus of another research to find out these differences.

Table 4: *Respondents' perception of facebook advertisements*

Respondent's perception of Facebook advertisements as credible		Respondent's believability of the information on Facebook advertisements		Respondent's who trust the information on Facebook advertisement	
Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Yes	62	Yes	73	Yes	65
No	38	No	27	No	35
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

One of the questions that were asked the respondents sought to find out whether they perceive Facebook advertisements as credible; majority of the respondents (73%) indicated that they perceive Facebook advertisements as credible, and (38%) think otherwise. It could be surmised that more undergraduate students perceive the information on Facebook advertisements as credible confirming the findings of (Johnson and Kaye, 2002; Moore and Rodgers, 2005) that online sources were considered credible among the undergraduate students they studied.

Table 4 above indicates that majority of the respondents at 73% believe the information they are exposed to on their Facebook advertisements and this further confirms the views of (Johnson and Kaye, 2002; Moore and Rodgers,2005) as stated earlier. Also, Majority of the respondents at 65% trust the information on Facebook advertisements they see on their Facebook suggesting that the undergraduate students may feel comfortable about surfing the Facebook advertisements seen on their Facebook pages.

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CONCLUSION

This section concludes the study; it discusses its limitations and makes recommendations for practice and further research.

The findings in this study indicate that undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka have a positive perception of Facebook advertisements in relation to Attitude Change Theory which according to (Baran, 2010), is anchored on the selective processes which provides a framework for understanding processes that help Facebook users "select" what advertisement content they are expose to, remember, interpret and then surf. This shows that the respondents might expose themselves to Facebook advertisements simply because the advertisements aligned with their pre-existing beliefs about the promotional messages making them to believe the advertisement as credible, and then they retained the advertisements messages leading to their acting on them since they assumed that the advertisements were consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. The study further show that since the respondents held favourable perceptions about Facebook advertisements, that they can absorb or assimilate the information they see on advertisements on their Facebook pages. This establishes that Facebook advertisements are credible and trustworthy in persuading audience members to action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings it is clear that Facebook is popular among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, and is also a reliable advertising platform to reach, persuade, and influence the demographic group to predetermined actions.

In order to maintain this position, it is recommended that social media advertisers should:

- Maintain the favourable disposition undergraduates have towards Facebook advertising by packaging and disseminating only true and credible promotional messages to the users.
- Sponsors of false and misleading Facebook advertisements should be prosecuted to contain them through the instrumentality of the law.
- More studies should be conducted to tackle some other issues in Facebook advertising not discussed in this work.

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