

Social Media in Relation to Cooperate Social Responsibility in Fast Food Industry

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Abstract

This paper focuses on analyzing the role of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Youtube) with regards to corporate social responsibility (CSR), specifically in the fast food industry. The objectives are to identify the use of social media platforms by fast food restaurants, identify if social media integrate corporate social responsibility in their business thereby limiting marketing of unhealthy meals on their websites, and lastly, to find out if marketing of fast food products on social platforms affect users, especially the young people between the age of 15 to 25. The study analyzed and monitored 70 fast food restaurants and their social media activities. 63 Out of 70 were found to have at least three social media platforms where they promote their products to end users and none of the restaurants have any restriction in marketing any kind of product using social media. Results from questionnaire survey also found that many social media users get adverts from fast food restaurants with 13.85% being affected to buy the food most times and 47.69% sometimes. 81.54% of the participants also agreed that social media can do a great job in limiting the free marketing of unhealthy products by fast food restaurants.

Keywords: Social Media, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Stakeholders, fast food

1. Introduction

For years, companies got away with releasing only what were necessary, claiming to the society that they did the right thing. Today, however, customers, consumers, employees, and government officials' expectations have risen. There has been shift in values and preferences, thus, people are becoming more aware and concerned with corporate social responsibility (CSR). Societies are increasingly requesting for transparency and openness and as a result, CSR is becoming an increasingly essential activity in organizations. Companies are using various avenues to communicate CSR practices to the society, and CSR has become one of the top priorities of businesses over the last decade as it was ranked the number one focus of managers in the consumer goods sector in 2011 (The Consumer Goods Forum, 2011).

Social media plays an increasingly important role in many spheres of our daily and business activities. According to Gomez and Chalmeta (2013), social media is one of the main and most powerful communication channels that provide organizations with free and great opportunities to interact with stakeholders and maintain relationships because the sites have built-in interactivity. Bilic (2010) added that social media has changed the way companies carry out business and communicate with others, at the same time providing opportunities and challenges for the companies.

Different studies highlight the usage and benefits of social media. The importance of these platforms can be seen from FSB Associates where they refer to social media as a tool that provides organizations with a great way to share knowledge, as well as build and protect digital reputations (FSB Associates, n.d.). The use of social media can be very versatile because firms may use the same set of social media technologies very differently (Kurniawati, Bekmamedova, & Shanks, 2013). Initially, social media were used for leisure to allow people collaborate with friends (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Today, however, businesses have taken these media as a means for marketing and many companies can now reach a wider target without spending much using social media. According to Catalyst Consortium (2002), Firms should be more responsible environmentally and socially in conducting their business.

In the fast food sector for example, there are globally fresh concern over overweight and obese which is urging government to do more to influence diets. Hence, social media can be of great help to influence diet, but on other hand fast food restaurants also market their product through social media. In a research by Sharyn in Australia, three hundred and sixty four essays regarding student viewpoints on social responsibility in fast food marketing were content analysed (Sharyn, n.d). The topic was "Are marketers responsible for rising levels of obesity?" and the result found that three-quarter of students believed that marketers are either wholly or partially responsible for rising obesity levels in Australia. Even though other students argue that society, governments and individuals share responsibility, the general view of the students was that practices of social media marketing employed by fast food marketers are irresponsible (Sharyn, n.d)

Furthermore, In 7 days newspaper published on February, 6, 2014, UAE nutritionist Andrew Pickens said that greater care needs to be taken in UAE schools because the region is currently suffering one of the highest rates

of obesity and diabetes in the world. (O'Driscoll, 2014).

In addition, it is noted that if innovative CSR initiatives are undertaken in partnership with government and civil society, good health and well-being will be promoted tremendously with the help of business communities (The Catalyst Consortium, 2002). Hence, if firms refuse to undertake CSR efforts, and since many firms use social media to promote products and build reputation, what can social media sites do to promote these social and environmental concerns in other to be of help to its subscribers? The resulting argument has induced the researchers to examine the role of social media in relation to CSR, and if Social Media is or can be of any help to promote CSR, especially the global overweight issue.

The growth in popularity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) especially in the food sector presents opportunities to investigate different panoramas in the CSR area. Therefore, it is of great interest and motivation to research and find out how involved fast food restaurants are in social media marketing, how the marketing affects consumers and if social media is doing anything that restricts marketing of unhealthy products to consumers.

The scope of this paper is to investigate the role of Social Media in Fast Food Industry only. Therefore, the research presents a starting-point for further studies about the role of social media in CSR. The study is intended to help scholars and practitioners who are concerned with CSR, to realize the role that social media plays in CSR efforts, especially in the food sector. The paper continues with a literature review on social media and corporate social responsibility. It subsequently continues with the methodology, results and discussions and lastly, outlines the main conclusions.

2. Related Literature

2.1. Social Media

Traditionally, media refers to the way one communicates to another. Today, new forms of media have emerged known as social media which does not only allow one to communicate to others, but enables the recipient of the message to interact with the author of the message using highly accessible technologies (Williams, 2009).

Social media are web-based media and mobile technologies for social communication and interaction which can include social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+, micro-blogs like Tumblr and Twitter, video sharing sites like YouTube and Vimeo, social bookmarking like Delicious and Digg, and virtual worlds like Second Life (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2013) . It has an excellent mechanism that engages users in dialogue which allows for interaction and sharing of information and ideas in a way that was never achieved with the traditional media.

Social media sites are virtual communities for people with similar interest and there are numerous social media tools present today. The commonly used tools are summarised in Social Media Marketing Report by Stelzner (2013) in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Commonly used Social media
(www.socialmediaexperimenter.com 2014)

2.2 Social Media Usage

Recent statistics show that 93% of marketers use social media for business and social media is becoming part of an overall marketing budget or strategy of companies (Wolfe, 2013). Facebook has experienced amazing growth over past years, being the most powerful social media site with 56% leaving LinkedIn with 14%, while 11% and 9% for Twitter and Google+ respectively (Statistic Brain, 2014).

Wolfe (2013) stressed that using Facebook to promote product and engage customers is an inexpensive, yet powerful way to market business. Facebook announced that the company now has one million active advertisers (John, 2013) which also mean that 1million website has integrated with Facebook alone, and according to the Facebook's director Dan Levy, over 90% of advertisers are small business owners.

On the other hand, Twitter experienced user growth of 200 percent over 2008 statistical data (Wolfe, 2011). It is among the ten top most visited sites with Twitter account for over 645million registered users; 58 million of tweets per day and 60% of these tweets come from third party applications (Businesses). Twitter accounts for over \$405 million annual revenue from advertising in 2013 while \$259 million and \$139 million for 2012 and 2011 respectively (Statistic Brain, 2014).

YouTube has considered by many as a media sharing sites. Every day, over 4.2billion videos are viewed on YouTube and the site has an approximate unique visit of over 900 million monthly. Statistics shows that 65 hours of video is uploaded in every minute and 3.25 billion hours is watched every month (YouTube, 2013).

2.3 Benefits of Using Social Media

Social sites are important media channel for reaching diverse group of people. The use of social media provides companies with great benefits such as instantaneous communication, cheap collaboration, online archiving and public relations (Schneider, et al., 2007). It also improves productivity, fast performance and presents higher level of efficiency and trustworthy (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Furthermore, social media sites attract and enable millions of daily users to create a communal profile within a bounded system, where users can create and view connections within their individual networks, share ideas, information, interests, events and activities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). According to Manchester (2007), Social media platforms promote collaborative knowledge, exchange of ideas, learning, interactivity and engagement (Manchester, 2007). Companies and stakeholders can learn from one another by creating a strong platform through social media which can be used to engage and empower stakeholders to communicate with the organisation. The emergence of new media channels via the Internet has also led to a new way of marketing known as social media marketing.

2.4 Social Media Marketing

The significant growth of social media has led many companies to engage in social media marketing which represents a marketing opportunity that transcends the traditional middleman and connects companies directly with customers (Stelzner, 2013). In addition, Owen and Humphrey (2009) describe it as the process in which real time communication with millions of people is been made easy due to emergence of social media sites like face book, twitter, YouTube, MySpace and other social media websites. It has been said that social media is seen by many marketers as the next gold rush' (Kaplan, 2010) and as a result, many companies are engaging in social media marketing today.

Social media marketing can be very important for organisations. If done correctly, according to Weston (2008) in Bolotaeva and Cata (2010), it can help find talent, build brand awareness, find new customers and conduct brand intelligence. The main reason why marketers engage in social media marketing according to a survey by Stelzner (2013) is that it generates exposure for business. Other findings for the benefits of social media marketing are summarised in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Benefits of Social Media Marketing
(socialmediaexaminer.com, 2014)

2.5 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

With globalisation comes fierce competition and strong ethical movement denouncing social inequalities, such as income disparity and escalating global environmental problems by demanding protection for all. Inevitably, companies are under immense pressure to take responsibility for their impacts on the society and environment as a whole. From early 1950s, corporate responsibility (CR) concerns have achieved eminence in the political and business arenas. This sparked a move towards the proactive role of governments, communities and organisations in developing processes in order to achieve the triple bottom line efficiency of economic, social, and environmental sustainability cohesively. Hence, the development of business philosophies of CSR, corporate sustainability (CS), corporate citizenship (CC), and corporate governance (CG), accompanied by stakeholder management theories, in ensuring the synergy between social and economic goals for organisational and societal gains.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be defined as a form of corporate self-regulation integrated into a business model whereby a business monitors and ensures its active compliance with the law, ethical standards, and international norms (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). It can be thought of as a responsible management of corporate impacts (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2013), in which organisations understand that they can create either positive or negative impact on the society, economy and environment, and they must strive hard to lessen the negative impacts. Furthermore, Holme and Watts (2000) describes CSR as the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while building for sustainable livelihoods as well as respecting cultural differences (Holme & Watts, 2000).

2.6 *CSR in the fast food Sector*

Companies of all sizes are integrating CSR into their business structure in response to high demand from the society for sustainable and ethically produced goods. This is especially prevalent and very important for the food companies as this sector has a strong impact on the society, economy and environment (Hartmann, 2011). The sector faces challenges in the context of CSR specifically for three main reasons. First, food is a basic need for survival; therefore, people maintain strong views on what they eat. This leads to a vast set of requirements in terms of animal welfare with regards to raw materials; waste disposal, energy and water use in terms of the environment; and labour conditions as well as safety, healthiness and quality of products (Maloni & Brown, 2006). Second, the food sector highly depends on human, natural and physical resources (Genier, et al., 2009). Third, food chain has a complicated and unique structure since organisations differ in CSR approach. Therefore, there are potential conflicts regarding CSR in the supply chain of the food sector (Hartmann, 2011).

Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity reported in 2010 that CSR is missing in the fast food sector because marketers target children as young as two years of age (Fast Food Facts, 2013). The report added that in 2013, despite the fact that many fast food chains like McDonald's added healthy kids' meal, healthy beverages and reduced fries quantity, there is less than 1% of all kids' meal combination that met the recommended nutrition standards. Furthermore, the number of menu items offered by chains like McDonald's, Subway, and Burger King increased by 35%, however, the choice of healthy items remained the same (Fast Food Facts, 2013)

2.7 *Social Media and CSR*

The expansion of Web 2.0 and the advancement of social media networks have given companies a diverse choice of media to communicate and market products to customers. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has also grown over the last decade due to the revolution and advancement of communication technologies which made it easy for users to spread information (Moon & Vogel, 2009).

Social media plays an important role in how organisations report and communicate CSR practices because it provides the opportunities for interacting and maintaining relationships with stakeholders (Fieseler, et al., 2010). It is important for companies to communicate their CSR efforts through social media marketing since that is the major means by which businesses promote company's image (Hawthorne, 2012).

As food is essential in our lives, it is important for all sizes of fast food restaurants that engage in social media marketing to also engage in efforts with respect to CSR regarding nutrition and health. It has been claimed that fast food industry is more susceptible to social pressure because people care about what goes into their stomach, and societal concerns in this sector include healthy diet, nutritional value and halal food ingredients in some region (Soba & Aydin, 2011).

Researchers at Yale Rudd Centre for Food Policy and Obesity examined the nutritional value of fast food menus and the advertisement practices carried out on the internet by the restaurants. The research found that \$4.4 billion was spent on social media advert in 2010, and \$4.6 billion in 2012 in the food industry to encourage frequent visit and buying especially by young people (Fast Food Facts, 2013). In addition, the report mentioned that most fast food restaurants increased their advertisement to children, with three-quarters of adverts appearing on kids' website like Roblox.com, CartoonNetwork.com and Nick.com.

3. **Research method**

As stated above, the paper aims to: (1) identify social media usage by fast food restaurant, and (2) identify if social media integrate CSR in their business (3) identify if marketing fast food product on social media affect its users especially the young people between the age 15-25. Walsh (2012) highlighted that; "many 'qualitative' approaches use quantification and 'quantitative' studies make qualitative judgments (though often unacknowledged)". Since these approaches are used to find answers, quantitative research finds numbers and statistics, while qualitative research find qualities, analysing or evaluating words or things and drawing conclusions. However, many believe to disagree on which one is a better approach, but some utilize both (Brower, n.a). In other to conduct high quality research paper, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in this study.

Qualitative methods were use through investigation and evaluation of fast food restaurants websites and their corresponding pages or links on social media. The aim is to find out if fast food restaurant sites are integrated with social media site. In doing so; 70 fast food restaurants sites were randomly selected and visited. The focus

was only on the three social media namely: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Each and every one of the sites were observed to identify if they have a link for social media site or not. On the other hand, their corresponding pages were tracked on social media site to validate their activity and to know the number of consumers following them. Table was created to input the data as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Fast Food Restaurant with social media

S/N	Names	Facebook (likes)	Twitter (following)	YouTube V=Video	LinkedIn	Google+	Others
1	Mc. Donalds	Y (11,192)	Y (90,956)	Y	Y		Y
2	KFC	Y (7,015,140)	Y (431,299)	Y		Y	Y
3	Papa john's	Y (2,714,673)	Y (177,886)	Y			
4	Burger King	Y (6,744,600)	Y (6,884)			Y	Y
5	A & W	Y (429,457)	Y (5,239)	Y		Y	Y
6	Bonjangles	Y (325,726)	Y (8,801)	Y		Y	Y
7	Arbys	Y (2,549,327)	Y (218,595)	V		Y	Y
8	Brioche Doree	Y (808)	Y	V			
9	Wendy's	Y (4,648,692)	Y (524,658)	Y		Y	Y
10	Carls jr	Y (1,253,195)	Y (48,694)	Y		Y	Y

Quantitative method was used firstly through observation in other to measure the number of fast food restaurant site integrated directly or indirectly with social media site. As stated previously, 70 fast food restaurants were observed carefully taking into consideration the kind of food they market to consumers. Secondly questionnaires were used; this technique helps the researchers to target good number of participant and often increases the overall response of our audience (snapsurveys.com, 2014). Data was collected from 83 participants mostly student between the age of 15-25 who were randomly selected. The survey has 12 closed-ended questions and was distributed among the participants. In other to open-discussion with a participant, the aim of the survey was first introduced, and the participants were given choice of whether to continue or not. The questions are mostly concern with how marketing fast food product can influence consumption among participants. In Table 1, Y stands for yes, meaning those that have pages on social media. In the case of YouTube, some have only videos (V) uploaded without a page, while others have pages and videos.

After the surveys were successfully finished, the data was analysed according to Tick-Box Data Analysis tools. Since data obtained from participants relates to yes/no or tick-box options from a precise list of alternatives, the usual practice of adding up the similar options and record each and every category was followed (UHBristol Clinical Audit Team, 2009). The recorded answer was then converted into percentages. If a particular question was not appropriately answered, the question was considered invalid while questions that involve opinion were recorded separately.

4. Result and Interpretation

4.1 Social Media Usage: Fast Food Restaurant

During the data collection, 70 fast food restaurants were visited with their corresponding links on three most popular social media sites: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Only 7 out 70 have less than three social media integrated with their websites, that is to say 63 have minimum of three social media site integrated with their websites. They have active pages on Facebook and twitter, and also uploaded videos on YouTube. Base on the finding, only 2 fast food restaurants were not integrated with either Facebook or Twitter but have other social media like flicker, tumblr, foursquare, instagram, pinterest etc. Facebook and Twitter are the most used social media by these Fast Food restaurant, they have active followers as can be seen from Figure 3a and Figure 3b respectively.

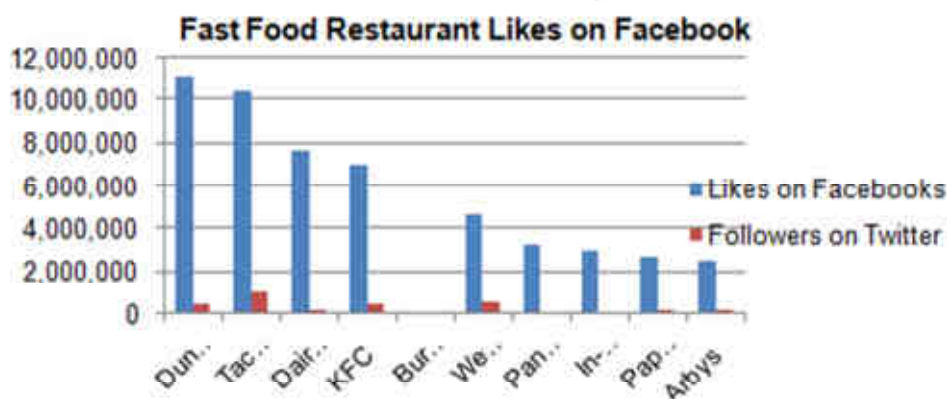


Figure 3a: Showing Fast Food restaurant with most likes on facebook

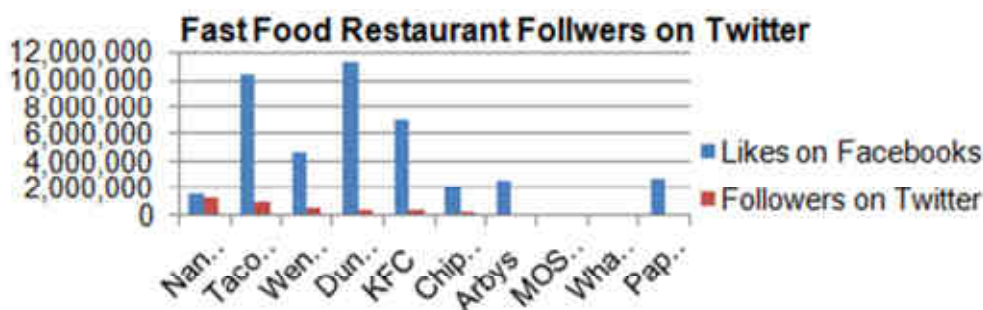


Figure 3b: Showing Fast Food Restaurant with most followers on

From Figure 3a and 3b; the top 10 Fast Food Restaurants are integrated with Facebook and twitter; they contributed over 52million followers on Facebook and approximately 5million on twitter. That is to say, in all the social media investigated, 10 have almost 73.76% followers on Facebook and 84.97% followers on twitter respectively.

4.2 Social media Usage: Participants

The use of social media cannot be over emphasized but for the purpose of this study, the survey finds out the numbers of social media users. 78.31% of the participants are students between the ages of 15 to 25 years. The finding shows Facebook as the most used social media with 63.86%, followed by YouTube with 59.03% and twitter with 45.78%. In addition, some participants indicate using other social media like Instagram, LikedIn, Google+, etc. But 39.76% indicated using only one social media while 60.24% cited more than two and above. Most of the participants use social media daily, only few indicated using weekly with low percentage of 6.02%. Since it is understood that social media were initially for leisure which allows people to initiate networking and collaborate with friends. However, businesses have taken social media as a means for marketing and now with the help of social media companies can reach wider target with minimum resources. One of the survey questions signify the purpose of using social media. Among the participants, only 16.25% cited using social media for business and half of them are between the ages of 26 to 35 years. But 83.75% specify using social media to keep in touch with friends or entertainments.

4.3 Impact of Fast Food Advert on Social media

Several questions were raised in other to help identify if marketing of fast food product on social media can have negative effect on consumers. All the participant answers all the questions presented to them, as was noted- 83 participants were selected randomly but the focus is on the age group 15 - 25. Table 2 and Table 3 display data obtained for the effect of fast food adverts on consumers' purchase, while figure 4 and figure 5 shows how these adverts influence eating habits.

Table 2: Fast Food Advert and factor that may influence purchasing

	Yes	No	Sometimes
How often people get hungry when they are socializing	33.76%	6.02%	54.22%
Fast food adverts when consumers are socializing	40.96%	7.23%	51.81%

Table 2 shows statistics of how many people see Fast Food Restaurants adverts and the factor (hunger) that may influence whether to purchase or not. In other to understand how regularly social media users see fast food

adverts, a question was asked related to that and it was found that 40.96% of users indicated frequently, while 51.81% cited occasionally. Only 7.23% indicated never to have seen them at all (Refer to table 2). The result of the targeted age group that was said to be 65 participants were compared with the result of all the 83 participants to see if there is any change in the findings. The question is concerned with how fast food advert influence users' purchasing habits and the result shows only slight difference which can be seen in Figure 4.

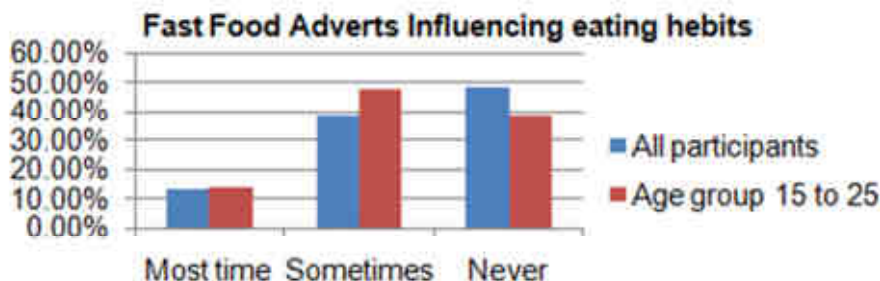


Figure 4: How fast food adverts can influence eating habits

As can be seen in figure 4, the targeted age group of 15-25 that are most time influenced is higher than other age groups, even though the difference is very little. Those that get affected sometime are more and the difference is reasonably higher. With never option, other age groups have a higher percentage. This explains that younger people get affected more.

In another question, a question was asked to rate how fast food advert influence purchasing. The result of the question is summarised in figure 5.

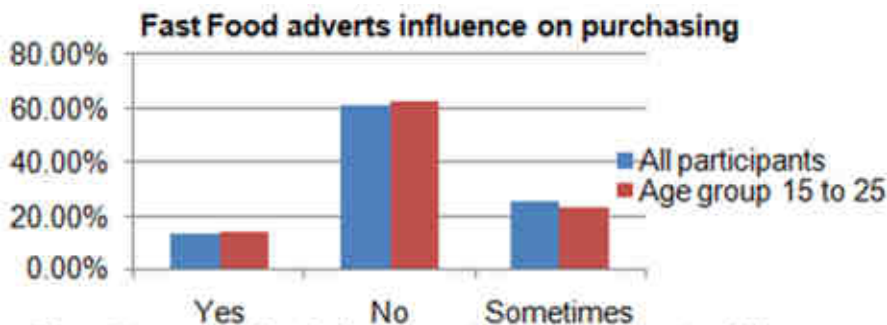


Figure 5: How fast food adverts can influence purchasing of the

From Figure 5; only few were affected mostly with these adverts. However, the figures changes with the data collected from main targeted audiences. Figuring out if these adverts influence users to buy any of the Fast Food products or not, only 27.72% cited never to have bought any of these products in the case of all participants, while 26.16% in the targeted age group. The result of this is tabulated in table 3. As can be noted, there is only a slight change in the data as well.

Table 3: Buying Fast Food products based on the adverts

Categories	Most time	Sometimes	Never
All participant	16.86%	55.42%	27.72%
Age group 15-25 years	16.92%	56.92%	26.16%

In addition, a question was asked to get participants view on if social media should limit marketing of fatty and sugary food in order to influence healthy diet. The results show that 80.72% agree while 14.46% disagree. Detailed statistics on this result can be seen in figure 4. Even the young people express their concern with most of them agreeing. One participant was quoted saying “depends whether people have been affected by other information on media, but social media could be a good solution for diets”.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Social media is described as a series of online tools that promote social participation and communication between users and it has a powerful advantage in engaging stakeholders and customers to interact and share information (Sweetser, 2010). It includes social networking sites, micro blogs, video sharing sites and social bookmarking among others. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices provide companies with opportunities to rethink and understand how day to day management decisions can affect society.

The objectives of this study are to identify the use of social media platforms by fast food restaurants, identify if social media integrate corporate social responsibility in their business thereby limiting marketing of unhealthy meals on their websites, and lastly, to find out if marketing of fast food products on social platforms affect users, especially the young people between the age of 15 to 25. Based on the findings, all the objectives have been achieved.

Furthermore, all the Fast Food restaurant investigated are active subscribers of social media, 63 have at least 3 social media site, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube which are integrated with their websites. Second, based on evaluation of each and every fast food websites and their corresponding pages/links at social media sites, it is clearly understood that there is absolutely no mechanism that lessen or harness, or in any way limit Fast Food presence or adverts on social media. And lastly, in doing so, the adverts influence age group 15 to 25 eating habits with 13.85% affected most times while 47.69% been affected sometimes. It can therefore be concluded that only 26.15% of 15-25 age group never opted to buy any of the products based on the advert they received and interestingly about 81.54% think that social media can do a great job by limiting Fast Food Restaurants presence in other to influence healthy diet.

According to this study, all the randomly selected restaurants use social media in advertisement. This finding is supported by Wolfe (2013) where the author's statistics found that 93% of marketers use social media for business. In addition, social media is understood by many as initiated for leisure and this study found that 83.75% use social media to keep in touch with friends or entertainments. Furthermore, the study found that Facebook is the most used social media site and this is also supported by Stelzner (2013) who indicated that Facebook as the most used social media.

Therefore, it is of great interest and motivation to say that; Fast Food sector are active social media subscribers, they have no limitation for marketing unhealthy foods, and marketing such product affects consumers tremendously. It is also agreed by majority of the respondent that social media can play an important role in restricting the marketing of fatty food.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings; the researchers recommend the following:

- Social media should limit unhealthy food adverts especially to young people
- Social media should be engaged in promoting healthy diet instead of otherwise.
- Social media should be concerned in what they are intended initially (leisure) rather than allowing businesses to ruin their reputation.

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