

# Social Media, Advertising Messages and the Youth: Any Influence?

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## Abstract

Social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, twitter, and many others are popular internet sites where people especially youth interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, products or services, using multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio. Advertisers have always been fascinated by media and the youth because of their primacy to business. Social media are the latest platform that advertisers are spending huge part of their advertising budget on, yet there is little or no research on the influence these media have on the youth. The population of study is students of university of Lagos and Caleb University. The survey design was adopted with the use of questionnaire as data collection instrument. A sample of 300 respondents was randomly selected and test instrument administered on them. The findings showed that 93.5% of the respondents said they were exposed to advertisements on social media. 47% said social media advertisements had positive influence on them, 45.2% said they ignore advertisements on social media, while only 20% purchase products advertised on social media. The researchers concluded that social media may contribute to brand awareness, create interest in the prospect and may in conjunctions with other factors move prospect to take desired decision. However, social media should not be seen as the ultimate media to reach the elusive youth market.

**Keywords:** Social media, Advertising Messages, Youth, Influence

## Introduction

From time immemorial, advertisers have always seek for any media that will help them deliver their advertising message to their target prospects. As society and media use evolved, advertisers have always embraced changes in media landscape. From town criers to books, pamphlets, posters, radio, television, billboards and now social media, advertisers have always been at the forefront of experimenting with any media that can deliver their advertising messages.

Social media was created to facilitate the exchange of information via email, chat rooms, blogs, discussion forums, digital audio, images and movies among its users. It includes websites like face book, twitter, blogs and MySpace whose major users are youths and young adults who use it for diverse purposes. Many of these youths no longer depend on traditional media for their information and entertainment needs; rather, they are hooked to the social media for all these.

As more and more youth depend on social media for their needs, advertisers see it as an avenue to carry their advertising messages and to reach this important market segment. Manufacturers who produce goods and offer services that appeal to youths usually place their adverts on social media. Infact, social media sites are now overloaded with advertisements.

With the increasing move to social media as advertising hub, the issue is, does the youth respond to advertising messages on social media, if they do, do these advertising messages have any influence on them? These and other issues are address in this paper.

## ADVERTISING AND SOCIAL MEDIA: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

According to Belch and Belch (2009: v), the world is experiencing the most dynamic and revolutionary changes of any era in the history of marketing as well as advertising. They went on to say that these changes are being driven by advances in technology and developments that have led to the rapid growth of communication through interactive media, particularly the internet.

Advertising is one of the beneficiaries of this changing landscape in marketing as exemplified by internet technology. The main objective of advertising is to create awareness of the advertised product and provide information that will assist the consumer to make purchase decision. In the words of Kotler and Armstrong (2010:454) "advertising is a good way to persuade, whether the purpose is to sell coca-cola worldwide or to get consumers in a developing nation to use birth control". Consequently, many organizations expend a huge amount of money on advertising and brand management.

According to Perreault, Cannon and McCarthy (2009:436), advertising on the internet takes a variety of forms, but the purpose is usually to attract the interest of people in the advertiser's target market so they will click through to the firm's website. Kotler and Armstrong (2010:535), state that the major forms of online advertising include display ads, search-related ads, and online classifieds. The most common form is banners, banner-shaped ads found at the bottom, top, left, right or centre of a web page. Pop-ups are online ads that

appear suddenly in a new window in front of the window being viewed. Interstitials are online ads that appear between screen changes on a web-site, especially while a new screen is loading.

Many websites charge advertisers a fee based on how frequently or how long an ad is shown. They also use the pay per click advertising where advertisers only pay when a customer clicks on the ad and links to the advertiser's website (Perreaut, Cannon and McCarthy, 2009:437). According to Chaffey, Chadwick, Mayer and Johnston (2009:540), internet as an advertising media has the following advantages:

- Direct response: display ads can generate an immediate direct response via click through to a website enabling transaction for retail products.
- Enhancing brand awareness and reach: the visual imagery of a display ad can generate awareness about a brand, product or need.
- Achieving brand interactions: many modern display ads comprise two parts- an initial visual encouraging interaction through a rollover and then another visual or application encouraging interaction with a brand ad.
- Targeting: media buyers can select the right site or channel within a site to reach the audience. Advertisements can also be targeted via their profile through serving personalised ads or ads in e-mail.
- Dynamic updates to ad campaigns. In comparison with traditional media, where media placements have to be bought weeks or months in advance, internet ads are more flexible since it is possible to place an advert more rapidly and make changes during the campaign.
- Accountability: it is readily possible to measure reach, interaction and response to ads. However, it is more difficult to measure brand impact.

While it is a potentially effective medium, the internet according to Belch and Belch (2009:501) also has its weaknesses, including the following:

1. Measurement Problems: one of the greatest disadvantages of the internet is the lack of reliability of the research numbers generated.
2. Clutter: as the number of ad proliferates, the likelihood of one's ad being noticed drops accordingly. The result is that some ads may not get noticed, and some consumers may become irritated by the clutter.
3. Poor Reach: while internet numbers are growing by leaps and bounds, its reach still lags behind that of television.
4. Irritation: numerous studies have reported on the irritating aspects of some Web tactics. These studies have shown consumers' discontent with clutter, e-mail SPAM, and pop-ups and pop-unders. These irritating aspects can deter visitors from coming to or returning to the sites.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. They went on to say that it introduces significant and insidious changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals.

According to Morah (2012) "social media are media for social interaction and participation in public debates; Web platforms such as Wikipedia, MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Blogger, Wordpress, Netlog, Orkut etc, typical for this transformation of the internet". Ofoelue 92013:88) described social media as

internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio. On these websites, individuals and groups create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59) created a classification scheme, with six different types of social media: collaborative projects (Wikipedia), blogs and micro blogs (Twitter), content communities (YouTube and DailyMotion), social networking sites (Facebook), virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (Second Life). Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing.

According to Morah (2012), a common thread running through the definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value and communication development. The Web 2.0 platforms lead to the massive provision and storage of personal data that are systematically evaluated, marketed and used for targeting users with advertising.

Social networking sites are the most popularly used type of social media for advertising. It was in 2004 when teenagers began joining the MySpace site en masse that marketers started to consider the huge potential in

reaching this elusive market (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). They also define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”.

Social networking is one aspect of social media, where individuals are in communities that share ideas, interests, or are looking to meet people with similar ideas and interests (Reuben, 2008).

In the words of Sivanath, Karthick, Senthil and Vivek (2011:9), “the success of social networks marks a dynamic shift in how people are using the internet. We’ve evolved from just searching for information to creating and participating in social spaces with other individuals through the internet. The websites allow you to post what services you require done for you, like posting the adverts where the people whom you will find suitable will help you advertise on their Facebook and twitter accounts”.

Therefore according to Babu, Kumar, Siriam and Sivanath (2011, 7), Social networks can take advantage of demographic data on your profile and hence target the advertisement directly to you

There are several social media tools available for advertising; however, Stelzner (2012) listed the most frequently used social media tools. According to him, Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn, blogs and YouTube were the top five social media tools used by marketers, with Facebook leading the group.

Social networking is on the rise for business reasons and also for personal use. With its popularity increasing every day, the need for businesses and companies to go social is essential. Wind and Todi (2008: 6, 7) mentioned the reasons why social networks are being used as advertising tools.

1. **Cost Efficiency-** placing advertising messages on social networks is relatively cheap compared with other advertising media; it generally has a similar or expanded reach at much lower costs. Also, it is possible for companies to create free publicity through creative advertising techniques. There have been a number of successful advertising campaigns in YouTube and Facebook in recent years. Creating a page for a brand in Facebook is free which is cost efficient and also creates a large number of active followers and potential consumers.
2. **Large Reach-** Since social networking websites has millions of active users, it has become more popular and acts as an excellent medium for sharing their social experiences and helps in building relationships. The impact for a social network is the reach of an advertisement on a large scale. With its demand, advertisement is on the rise and displaying an advertisement on such networks is essential for the improvement in potential of businesses. The reach of a social network is greater than any other mass media of its kind. There are many active users on social media sites as it is now the most popular form of entertainment.
3. **Targeted advertising-** Advertisers have access to a great deal of information about users and their interests, allowing them to customize and target their advertisements to a degree not yet seen in any other advertising medium. For example, if a user lists shopping as an interest on their Facebook profile, the websites advertising system will generate advertisements based on shopping.
4. **Time spent online-** individuals are spending escalating amounts of time online, especially on social networking websites, at the expense of traditional advertising media such as television and newspapers. This could be as a result of many of the traditional functions like news, television shows of the old advertising media being shifted online to social networks such as DailyMotion and YouTube. As a result, Advertisers are constantly looking for ways to reach out to consumers who are spending more time on a particular media.

Social media has become a great melting point for all kinds of people who go online for different things including business and marketing activities. Many Nigeria businesses both small and big are daily embracing social media push their goods and services to their customers and potential prospect.

## METHODOLOGY

For this work, the population chosen is students in two higher institutions (University of Lagos and Caleb University, Ikorodu) in Lagos state who use the social media. A sample size of 300 respondents was chosen for the study. The self administered questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

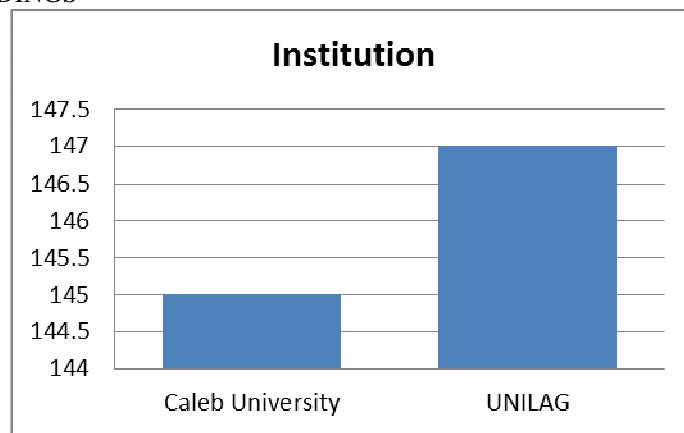


Fig.1: distribution of respondents across institutions they attended

Figure 1 above showed that 49.7% of the respondents are students of Caleb university while 50.3% are students of University of Lagos. This response showed that the universities are fairly represented.

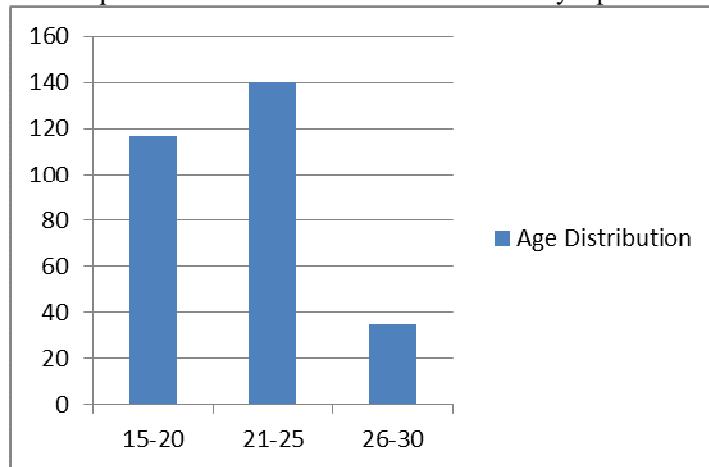


Fig.2: age distribution of respondents

Figure 2 above show respondents age distribution; 40.1% are between the ages of 15 and 20 years, 47.9% are between the ages of 21 and 25 years, 12.0% fall between the ages of 26 and 30 years. From the above table majority (47.9%) of the respondents are between the ages of 21 and 25 years, followed by those between the ages of 15 and 20 (40.1%). This shows that majority of respondents are in their 20s.

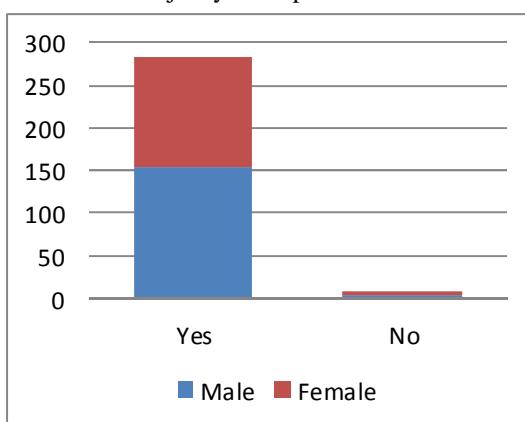
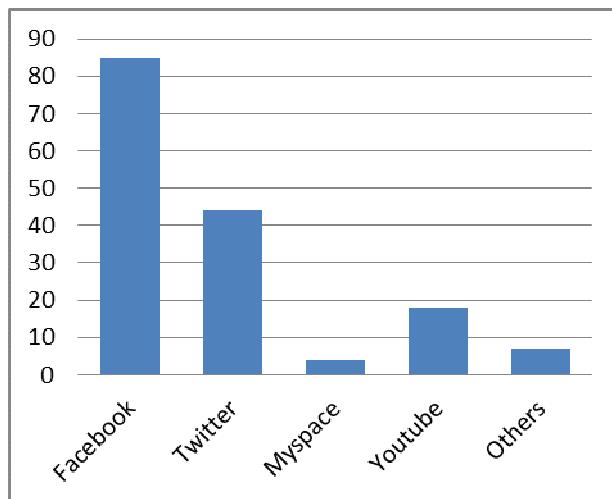


Fig.3: respondents presence on social media

Figure 3 showed the percentage of respondents who are registered on a social media site. Of the male respondents 52.7% said Yes that they are registered on a social media site, while 1.4% of them said No, they are not registered on a social media site. Likewise, 44.5% of the female respondents answered in the affirmative while 1.4% of them answered negatively. In total, 97.3% f them responded positively while 2.7% of them responded in the negative that they are not registered on any social media site.

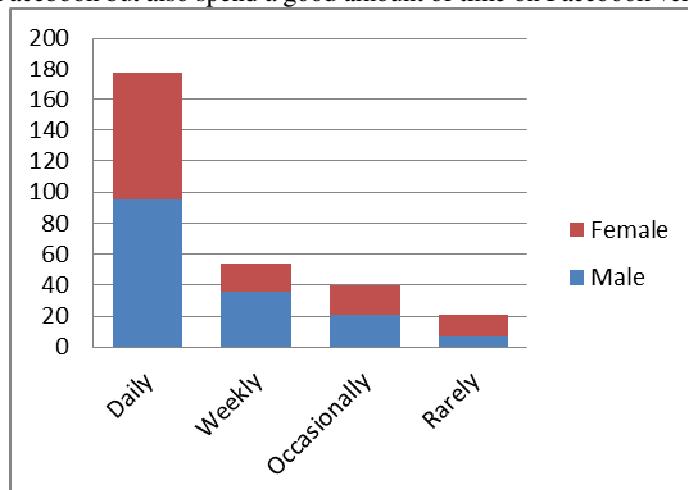
Therefore, from the data above majority of the respondents are registered on one form of social media site or the

other. This is in line with the finding of EDUCAUSE study cited in Lewis (2010), which revealed that the percentage of students who said they never use social networks has fallen from 25 percent in 2006 to 11 percent.



**Fig.: 4 respondents' choice of social media**

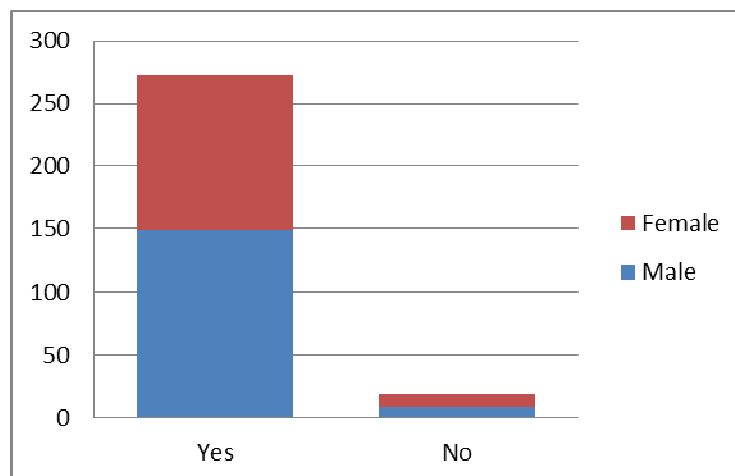
Figure 4 above show respondents' choice of social media sites. 54.4% of the respondents use Facebook, 29.8% use Twitter, 3.1% use MySpace, 9.3% use YouTube, while 3.4% said they use other social media sites. From the above, majority 54.4% are Facebook users. This finding supports D'Silva, Bhuptani and Menon's (2011) discovery that the most popular social media site is Facebook, which attracted many young adults not only to open their accounts on Facebook but also spend a good amount of time on Facebook very frequently.



**Fig.5: frequency of respondents visit to social media sites**

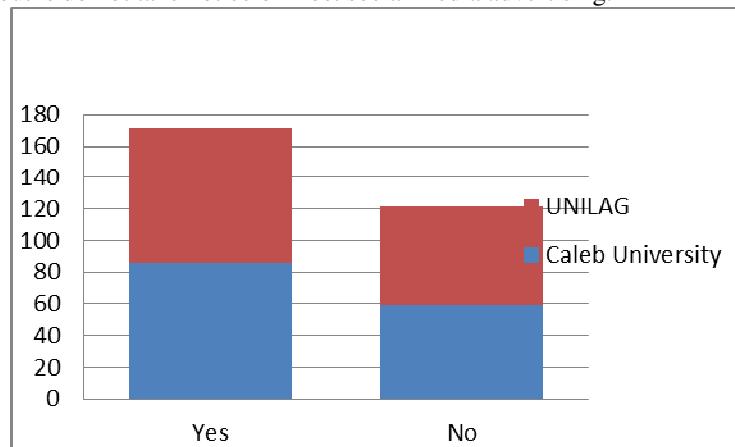
Figure 5 above show the frequency of respondents' visit to social media sites. Of the total respondents, 60.6% visit social media sites daily, 18.5% said Weekly, 13.7% said occasionally while 7.2% claimed that they rarely visit social media sites.

This shows that majority of the respondents 60.6% visit social media sites daily with majority of them being male. . This supports Wright et al (2010) finding which says that the use of smart phones like Iphones and Blackberries allows consumers to be connected to their favourite social media outlets 24 hours a day.



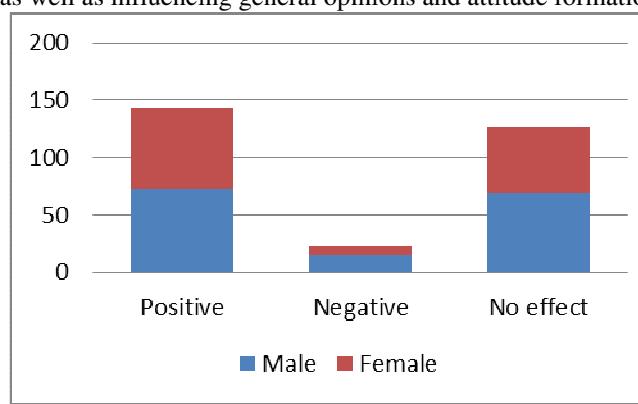
**Fig.6: respondents' exposure to advertisement on social media**

Figure 6 above show respondents who have seen advertisement on social media. Of all the respondents, 93.5% have noticed advertisements on social media while 6.5% claimed they have not noticed any. This findings show that majority 93.5% have noticed advertisements on social media. This finding contradicts Kelly (2008) finding where she said that youths do not take notice of most social media advertising.



**Fig.7: effect of social media advertisement on respondents**

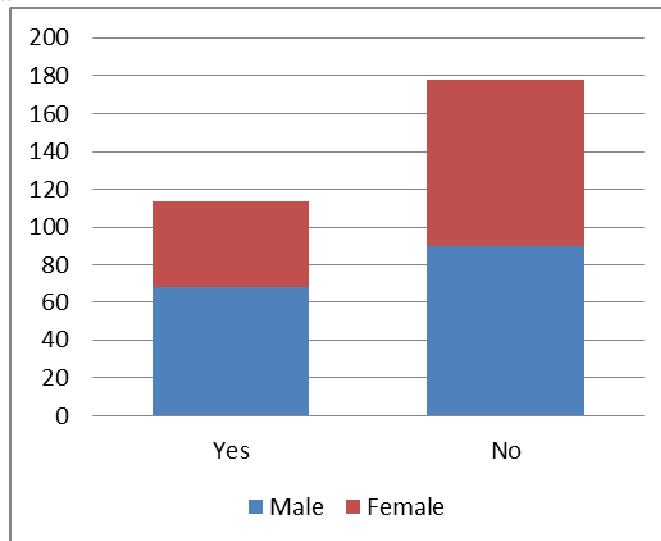
Figure 7 above show respondents who are affected by social media advertising. A total of 58.6 % said yes that they are affected by social media advertising, while 41.4% said no they are not affected by advertisements on social media. Of the respondents in Caleb University; 29.5% answered affirmatively, while 20.2 % answered negatively. Similarly, of the respondents in UNILAG; 29.1 % answered in the affirmative while 21.2% answered negatively. Therefore, this finding supports Mangold and Faulds' result cited in Bond, et al (2010) which states that social media have been acclaimed for having remarkable influences on every stage of the consumer decision-making process as well as influencing general opinions and attitude formation.



**fig.8: the effect of social media advertising on respondents**

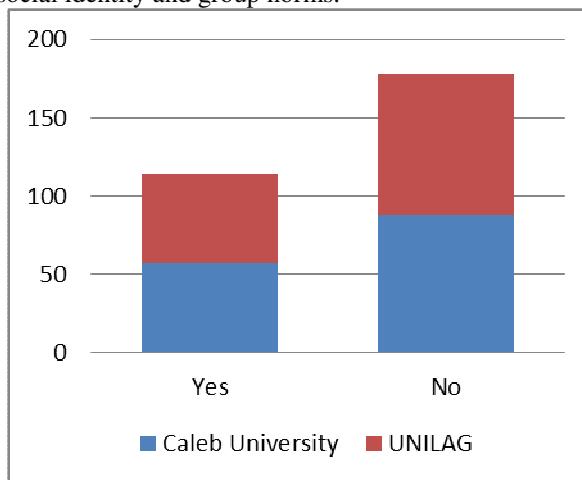
Figure 8 above show the effect social media advertising has on respondents. Out of the total respondents; 49% said they were positively affected by advertising messages on social media, 7.8% said they are negatively

affected, while 43.2% ( $n=126$ ) said social media advertisements has no effect on them. Therefore, this means that social media advertising has a positive effect on the respondents. Consequently this result supports Imran's (2011) finding where majority of the respondents considered social media advertising "a good thing" and responded positively to it.



**Fig.9: respondents' response to social media advertisements**

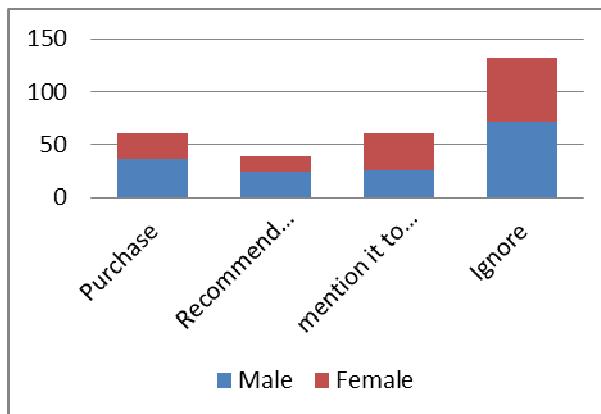
Figure 9 show response of respondents to social media advertisements. 39.1% of both male and female respondents said they respond to social media advertisements, 61% said no that they do not respond to advertising messages on social media. This finding shows that majority 61% of the respondents have never responded to advertising messages on social media. This findings support Zeng et al's finding cited in Bond et al (2010) that responses to advertising in this context depend on perceptions of advertising relevance and value, as well as being influenced by social identity and group norms.



**Fig.10: respondents' attitude to social media advertisements**

Figure 10 above show respondents' response to advertising messages on social media using institution of respondents. Among respondents in Caleb University; 19.5% said they respond to advertising messages on social media while 30.1% said they do not respond to advertising messages on social media. Likewise, for UNILAG, 19.5% said yes that they have responded to advertising messages on social media while 30.8% said no, they have never responded. In total, 39% answered positively while 61% answered negatively. Therefore, majority of the respondents 61% said they have never responded to advertising messages on social media.

This finding is in line with Kelly's (2008) discovery that showed that respondents have very high level of avoiding advertisements on social media sites because they see it as not being relevant to them.



**Fig.11: nature of respondents' response to social media advertisement**

Figure 11 above showed the nature of respondents' response to social media advertisements. Among the male and female respondents; 20.5% said they make purchases, 13.3% said they recommend the products to others, 21% said they mention it to others while 45% said they ignore them. This shows that majority 45.2% of the respondents ignore advertisements on social media. This supports Kelly, Kerr and Drennan's findings cited by Imran (2012) that young consumers are likely to avoid online social media advertising if they expect a negative experience, perceive the message irrelevant or are skeptical toward the advertising message or the advertising medium.

## CONCLUSION

The research shows that although students in higher institutions who are mostly youth are affected by advertisements on social media and have a positive attitude towards them, they do not automatically respond to the advertising messages the way the advertisers anticipate. Although, as observed in the study, other factors could contribute to lack of response, like distrust of advertisements on social media, irrelevance of the product or services being advertised, and fear of being victims of fraud. This reinforced other findings which say that advertising alone cannot induce purchase but rather, it works with other factors.

Therefore, it is recommended that social media should be seen as the oracle to media solution to marketing communications issues, but rather, the choice of social media should be made in realization of the fact that it is best used in conjunctions with other marketing communications tools.

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