

Utilisation of Digital Media for Marketing Communications by Businessmen in Owerri Metropolis

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determine the extent to which business men in Owerri use digital media for marketing communication. Survey research design was adopted, while questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection. The population comprised the 350 registered businessmen in Owerri metropolis, Imo State, Nigeria. The findings showed that the business community in Owerri metropolis is aware of digital marketing communication. The findings further showed that the businessmen use digital media for marketing communication. Furthermore, findings showed that the use of digital media for marketing communication by businessmen in Owerri metropolis has positive impact on their businesses. It was, however, discovered that the extent to which businessmen in Owerri use digital media for communicating their business activities was low; thus, it was recommended, among others, that businessmen in Owerri metropolis should increase the rate at which they use digital media for marketing communication purposes.

Keyword: Utilisation, Businessmen, Digital, Marketing Communication, Owerri Metropolis, Social Media

Introduction and Motivation for the Study

Digital communication technologies are part of peoples' daily lives today. Their acceptance in human activities, including business, has evolved new marketing conditions, part of which is digital marketing. The internet, social media, mobile apps and other digital communication technologies have become part of people's daily lives, the business persons inclusive. These new channels are presently evolving a new marketing condition giving rise to digital marketing which is the marketing of products or services using digital technologies.

Digital marketing is a broad marketing concept that explains the marketing of products or brands and services through one or more forms of electronic media which

differs from conventional marketing since it involves the use of channels and methods that allow a business person to analyse marketing campaigns and understand what is working and what is not in a quicker way. According to Ahmad (2017), digital marketing covers all the digital platforms and modern technologies in interaction use, execution and control of marketing strategies and plans for better customers' satisfaction that also help reach organisational goals.

Digital media are all-embracing and aim at consumers having access to needed information any time and any place they want it. In olden days, only specific information was available regarding business. Digital media are fast and widely growing sources of information, entertainment, news, shopping and social interaction. They help consumers to have access to wide range of information and the companies are also informed of what their customers say about them and indeed, the perception of the media, friends, relatives, peers, etc. It is a well-known fact that consumers trust the digital media more than companies which provide the goods and services. Most of the consumers use different and several digital channels and a variety of devices that use different diverse protocols, specifications and interfaces and they interact with those devices in different ways and for different purposes.

Digital media are relatively cheap compared with traditional media, affordable for most new and small scale businesses as well. Consumers leave behind a huge trail of data in digital channels (Ahmad, 2017). In this era of digital marketing communication, some business people in Owerri, Imo State travel to Germany, Turkey, Dubai, China, etc. to purchase goods. The question is, are they not aware that they can buy such goods while in Owerri, Imo state? Thus, this research aims at examining the use of digital marketing communication by business persons in Owerri metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

This study generally sought to find out how businessmen in Owerri metropolis utilise digital media for their marketing communication needs. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. find out the extent to which businessmen in Owerri metropolis have access to digital media;
2. determine the extent to which businessmen in Owerri metropolis use digital media for their marketing communication needs;
3. ascertain the digital media channels mostly used by the businessmen for marketing communication purposes; and
4. Find out the influence of the use of digital media on the business activities of the businessmen in Owerri metropolis.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Goldberg (2019) sees digital media as any data represented by a series of digits (1 and 0). Media, to him, refers to a method of broadcasting or communicating information. Thus, in layman's terms, digital media refers to any kind of information broadcast to us through a screen. This information might be found on websites or in applications, software packages, video games and more. Goldberg (2019) observes that digital media can be thought of in many different ways. We can think of it in terms of its purpose, the device we access it on, or which of our senses we use to perceive it. This implies that there is no one single way of classifying digital media. Thus, we can classify digital media according to formats, contents, purposes, etc.

Digital media are transmitted as digital data, which at its simplest involves digital cables or satellites sending binary signals — 0s and 1s — to devices that translate them into audio, video, graphics, text and more. Anytime you use your computer, tablet or cellphone, opening web-based systems and apps, you are consuming digital media. Digital media might come in the form of videos, articles, advertisements, music, podcasts, audiobooks, virtual reality or digital art (MaryVille University, 2019).

The Digital Age began to unfold in the second half of the 20th century, as computer technology slowly infiltrated different industries and then moved into the public sphere. Yet analogue technology remained dominant all through the 1990s. In the years that followed, newspapers, magazines, radio and broadcast television were still the primary means of communication, with fax machines and pagers becoming most people's first casual forays into the digital world (MaryVille University, 2019). When the internet went from a niche hobby to something common in most American homes, the Digital Age was fully underway. Now, most people walk around with at least one digital media device in their pocket, purse or backpack, using digital communication at work, on their commutes and even while out to dinner or shopping (MaryVille University, 2019). After that, they might come home and play a video game or stream a show, interacting with digital media yet again. Before they go to sleep, they might talk to their digital home assistant, finding out the weather forecast for the following day (MaryVille University, 2019).

Marketing is as old as man's existence on earth. Business owners spread information about their products or services through the newspaper, radio, television, magazines, arts, drama, personal contacts and even word of mouth. Digital marketing, at present, is becoming popular because, it utilises mass media devices like television, radio and the internet. The most common digital marketing tool used today is Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) which maximises the way search engines like Google find people and organisations' website. Ekeanyanwu, Batta and Oyokunyi (2017, p. 440) argue that

SEO is a key survival strategy for the news media industry. This strategy is put in place to make sure news aggregators, search engines, bloggers and anyone else who can redirect traffic to one's news website are able to scroll

the news headlines of these news organizations. In other words, the news firms package their news stories in a way the news aggregators/search engines could locate them and thus redirect traffic to the news firms. In the industry, traffic equals page views and the more page views the news site gets, the more advertisers are interested in advertising on such heavy traffic sites. This consequently leads to more revenue for the news media firms.

Digital marketing concept started from the internet and Search Engines' ranking of websites. The first search engine was started in 1991 with a network protocol referred to as Gopher for query and search. After the Launch of Yahoo in 1994, companies started to maximise their ranking on websites (Smyth, 2007). With the internet bubble burst of 2001, market was dominated by Google and Yahoo for search optimisation. Internet search traffic significantly grew in 2006 with the rise of Search Engine Optimisation for major companies like Google (Smyth, 2007). 2007 witnessed a measurable increase in the use of mobile devices which reflected in increased internet attraction and people all over the world started connecting with each other conveniently through the social media.

Companies in the developed world have realised the importance of digital marketing. Today, for businesses to excel, it is essential it merges online with traditional methods just to meet the needs of customers more precisely (Parsons, Zeisser & Waitman, 1996). The emergence of these new technologies has created new business opportunities for marketers to manage their websites and achieve their business goals (Kioni, 1998). With the presence of numerous choices for customers, the creation of brands and increase of traffic for products and services becomes difficult for marketers. Online advertising is still an influencing major marketing tool for building brands and increasing traffic for companies to achieve their goals (Song, 2001).

Today, boring (monotonous), commercial and traditional marketing techniques have given ways to digital marketing. In addition, it has shown great potentials that it can assist revive the economy and as well create tremendous opportunities for government to function in a more efficient manner (Munshi & Munshi, 20120). Instances of this abounds. Firms in Singapore have tested the success of digital marketing tools as being effective and useful for achieving results (Teo, 2008). More importantly, growth in digital marketing has been due to the rapid advances in technologies and changing market dynamics (Mort, Sullivan, Drennan & Judy, 2002).

In order for digital marketing to deliver result for businesses, digital content such as accessibility, navigation and speed are defined as the key characteristics for marketing (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). Another tried and tested tool for achieving success through digital marketing is the use of word-of-mouth (WoM) on social media and for making the site popular (Trusov, Randolph & Koen, 2009). In addition, WOM is linked with creating new members and increasing traffic on the website which in turn increases the visibility in terms of marketing.

Facebook as a major example of social media has opened the door for business to communicate with millions of people about their products and services and hence provided new marketing opportunities in the business world. This is possible only if the managers are fully aware of using the communication strategies to engage the customers and enhancing their experience (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Marketing professionals must truly understand online social marketing campaigns and programmes and understand how to do it effectively with performance measurement indicators. As the global market dynamics are changing in relation to the young audience accessibility to social media and usage, it is important that strategic integration approaches are adopted in organisations' marketing communication plan (Rohm & Hanna, 2011).

Helm, Moller, Mauroner & Conrad (2018) have found that online services tools are more influencing than traditional methods of communication. Today, it is known that social media users experience increase in self-esteem and enjoyment which put together is a motivating sign for business growth (Pai and Arnott, 2013). Web experiences positively affect the mental process of consumers of goods and services and enhance their buying decision online (Cetina, Cristiona & Radulescu, 2012). The internet is the most powerful tool for business (Yeannopoulo, 2011). Marketing Managers who fail to utilise the importance of the internet in their business marketing strategy will be at a disadvantage because the internet is changing the brand, pricing, distribution and promotion strategy.

Though the term digital marketing is comparatively new, its impact is huge, intimidating and complicated. Being one of the important tools in promotion mix, businesses are looking for a definite way to start and accommodate digital marketing but they have lack of understanding and muscle for implementing it. At present, social media such as Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter and other social media networks have effectively transformed the attitudes and perceptions of targeted consumers. This digital marketing was done through assessable wide network of customers via reliable data with real-time feedback of customers' experiences. Generally, digital marketing helps marketing activities to improve customers' knowledge by matching their needs and wants (Chaffey, 2013). Since the beginning of Yahoo in the internet industry in 1994, many companies have maximised their presence in online transactions with care (Smyth, 2007).

A survey conducted by Tiago & Verissimo (2014) shows that managers identify benefits of online marketing to include information gathering and feedback, increase in knowledge, increase in promotion of firms and expansion in internal and external relationships, and knowledge of consumers' consumption habits and preferences. Since marketing executives are confronted with rapidly changing markets which are beyond their control, Leeflong, Verhoef, Dahlstrom & Freundt (2014) identified four important challenges based on their survey for 777 marketing executives from the United States, Europe and Asia; these challenges are the ability to generate and leverage deep customer insights; managing brand health and reputation in a marketing environment where social

media play an important role; assessing the effectiveness of digital marketing and the increasing talent gap in analytical capabilities within firms.

Hui, Inmon, Huong & Suher (2013) studied how consumers respond to mobile coupons in physical stores and found that mobile offers make consumers to deviate from their planned shopping paths and also increase their planned spending. In an online shopping setting, Brase & Gips (2014) focused on shopping on mobile devices (for example, tablets) and specifically on how touching products (instead of clicking with a mouse) can increase feelings of psychological ownership and empowerment. They found that the use of mobile devices positively influences the customers' decision making. Unrelated to shopping is the work by Bart, Stephen & Sarvary (2014) that considered how mobile display ads- which are very small and very a little (if only) information-influence consumers' intentions. They found that in many product categories, mobile display ads have no effect, but that they do lift attitudes and intentions for high-involvement and utilitarian products; for example, financial services.

Other recent articles further considered additional online WOM-related issues. For instance, He & Bond (2013) considered when online reviews provide good versus bad forecasts of consumer brand enjoyment and found that the forecast error/discrepancy depends on the degree to which a reviewer's and consumer's preference are similar. Coscio, O'Donnell, Brook, Joseph, Francis & Falk (2015) identified neutral correlates of susceptibility to others' opinions in online WOM settings with susceptibility to social influence being related to brain region involved with shifting personal preferences and considering others. He & Bond (2015) focused on sets of online reviews and considered how consumers interpret opinion dispersion and whatever it is attributed to the product or to reviewer's tastes being heterogeneous.

Anderson & Simester (2014) documented the prevalence of deceptive reviews posted by people who have not purchased a product, suggesting that the price is not limited to competitors but include existing customers with no financial incentive to bias online ratings. Barasch & Berger (2014) examined social transmission behaviour when consumers broadcast (to many- through mass-audience posts on Facebook or Twitter) versus narrowcast, to a few-through messages to a few friends, finding that people share information that makes themselves not look bad when broadcasting (self-focus), but share information that will be helpful to receivers when narrowcasting (other focus).

Nefi (2011) studied social media and its role in marketing and indicated that marketers are taking note of many different social media opportunities and beginning to implement new social initiatives at a higher rate than ever before. According to him, social media marketing and the businesses that utilise it have become more sophisticated. Ahamd (2017) in his study on the impact of digital marketing as a tool of marketing communication: a behavioural perspective on consumers of Bangladesh, came up with the submission that modern day marketing has been going through a radical change. He also

opined that fast moving marketing trends based on the growth and innovation of new technologies as well as portable communication devices significantly influence the customers' behaviour. He recommended that a marketing plan with specific digital marketing tools would be integrated in marketing communication plan having observed that speed internet connectivity brings massive number of young crowd in the social media.

Si (2016) in his work on social media and its role in marketing, business and economics found that social media nowadays are among the best possibilities available to an item to get in touch with potential customers and community social networking websites are the method to interact socially. He emphasised that these new media easily win the attention of customers by linking with them at a deeper level. He also stated that community online marketing is presently a new mantra for several manufacturers. His findings further stated that promoters are considering many different social media possibilities and beginning to apply new social projects at higher rate than ever before, community online marketing and the companies that utilises it have become more sophisticated and one cannot afford to have no existence on the social programmes if the competitor is creating waves with its solution and items.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Interactive Global Media Theory. Interactive Global Media Theory centres on media globalisation based on an interactive platform and is sustainable for many reasons. First, there is global spread of the internet and the increasing trend of digital media convergence. Pavlik & McIntosh (2005) note that feedback in the converged world of digital communication is instantaneous in comparison with traditional analogue mass communication.

Second, television is becoming increasingly interactive as millions of viewers call in to vote, as in the case of the popular television programme - *American idol*. Cable television currently has interactive capabilities allowing viewers to order a pizza directly through the cable connection.

Third, there is an increasing competitive pressure between first-tier multinational media corporations to offer more locally produced content. Compaine (2005) noted that the key to success for star TV in India was the development of an Indian soap opera created by a local television executive. Benarjee (2002) argued that there is a significant trend in local and regional programming in developing nations and that much of this is in response to charges of cultural imperialism.

Fourth, the entire discussion of communication convergence in the digital realm which affects the internet, telecommunications, television, movies, radio and satellite distribution of contents is based on increasing interactivity. Consumers and media users increasingly seek interactive environments in which they can use these types of services in a seamless manner (Rushkoff, 2005). Consumers in Europe are already able to use cell

phones to make purchases from vending machines. The successful marketers of the future will be those who discover new interactive solutions for a public which seeks ubiquitous solutions from a variety of digital devices.

Fifth, interactive capabilities create new growth curve, which in turn will expand the customer base of mature media technologies. In essence, digital media technologies, as conceptualised in this theory, have the capacity to re-engineer growth of modern companies through such modern capabilities like the new interactive features in digital marketing tools.

Methodology

The researchers used survey research method, while questionnaire was adopted as the instrument of data collection. The population of the study comprised of registered businessmen in Owerri metropolis. The population of the officially registered businessmen in Owerri metropolis is three hundred and fifty (350). Since the population was not large, it was also used as the sample size.

The research design was descriptive-sectional survey because a segment of a large population was selected cutting across different demographics. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling technique. Purposively sampling technique was used to select the businessmen based on the fact that they were in a better position to give information on the subject matter. The researchers got the business addressees of the businessmen in the Owerri metropolis and dispatched various trained Research Assistants to the addresses to deliver the copies of the questionnaire. The business owners that were available at the time of arrival were pleaded to respond to the questions, which they did while a few others insisted the Assistants return back for the collection of the filled copies of the questionnaire.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 350 copies of the questionnaire distributed, only 329 copies were returned and found usable. Thus, the analysis was based on the 329 copies that were validly filled and returned.

To establish a connection between the subject of investigation, digital media, and the respondents or case study, businessmen in Owerri metropolis, it was important to find out their knowledge of digital media before proceeding further with the study. Data as presented in Table 1 below show that all the businessmen in Owerri metropolis have some kind of knowledge of digital media.

Table 1: Responses on the Knowledge of Digital Media

Variables	Freq	(%)
Yes	329	100
No	0	0
Total	329	100

The data in Table 2 were gathered to determine the extent to which the respondents have access to digital media. The data show that the extent to which the respondents have access to digital media is high. This is based on the fact that a majority of the respondents answered to that effect (77%). In essence, businessmen in Owerri metropolis have a very great access to digital media technologies.

Table 2: Responses on the Extent of Access to Digital Media

Variables	Freq	(%)
Very great	110	33
Great	143	44
Can't tell	4	1
Low	61	19
Very low	11	3
Total	329	100

One of the major objectives of this study was to determine if businessmen in Owerri metropolis use digital media for marketing. The information in Table 3 below shows that the businessmen Owerri metropolis use digital media for marketing communication. In the Table, 83% agreed that they use digital media for marketing communication.

Table 3: Responses on using Digital Media for Marketing Communication

Variables	Freq	(%)
Strongly Agree	120	36
Agree	155	47
Undecided	2	1
Disagree	29	9
Strongly Disagree	23	7
Total	329	100

Table 4 shows the information on the digital media mostly used by the respondents. In the Table, it is evident that social media are the popular media for digital marketing used by the businessmen in Owerri metropolis. This is attested to by the 94% of the respondents that identified social media as their major channels for digital marketing.

Table 4: Responses on the Digital Media Channels the Respondents use for Marketing Communication

Variables	Freq	(%)
Hologram	0	0
Social media	310	94
Virtual reality	0	0
Digital arts	19	6
Augmented reality	0	0
Total	329	100

The data presented in Table 5 below were gathered to determine the extent to which the respondents use digital media for marketing communication. The data showed that the extent to which the business men use digital media for marketing communication was low (74%).

Table 5: Responses on the Extent the Respondents use Digital Media for Marketing Communication

Variables	Freq	(%)
Very high	52	16
High	33	10
Can't tell	0	0
Low	166	50
Very low	78	24
Total	329	100

The data in the Table 6 below show the perception of the businessmen in Owerri metropolis that the use of digital media for marketing communication has a positive influence on their businesses. This conclusion is supported by the 74% of the respondents who agreed to a positive influence using digital media marketing tools.

Table 6: Responses on the Influence of the Usage on Businesses

Variables	Freq	(%)
Positive	244	74
Negative	35	11
Can't tell	50	15
Total	350	100

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that all the respondents have knowledge of digital media. This implies that they know what digital media are all about and what they could be used for. In essence, we could argue that business persons in Owerri metropolis are aware of digital media and engage in digital marketing communication.

The findings further show that the respondents don't just know about digital media, they also have access to digital media. Data presented in Table 2 help clarify this. Part of the findings of the study also show that the businessmen use digital media for marketing communication as well as other marketing activities and that the most common digital media deployed for marketing amongst the business persons in Owerri metropolis is social media networks.

The use of social media for digital marketing activities of the business persons in Owerri metropolis could be adduced to so many reasons. The first obvious reason is that social media networks, according to Ekeanyanwu & Kalyango (2013, p.150), “are becoming increasingly connected, interactive, participatory, integrative, community based, ubiquitous, and digital!” The second reason for this could be that social media platforms, like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. are more readily accessible and also easily win the trust of the people.

These arguments are in agreement with Neti (2011) who found that the new media win the trust of consumers by connecting with them at a deeper level. According to Neti (2011), “social media are the new mantra for several brands since early last year, marketers are taking note of many different social media opportunities and are beginning to implement new social initiatives at a higher rate than ever”.

These conclusions are also in line with Si (2016) who stated that the social media nowadays are among the best possibilities available for an item to get in touch with potential customers and community and that social networking websites are the method to interact socially. Continuing, Si (2016), argues that social media help win the attention of customers by linking with them at deeper levels and that community online marketing is presently the new mantra for several manufacturers.

This again is in line with the Interactive Global Media Theory which states that people can interact through communication technologies globally and that social media channels are interactive, thus, businessmen can use the channels to exchange information with customers easily because of the social presence capability of these digital media technologies. Interestingly, most business persons in Owerri metropolis are literates who know how to use handsets and other digital media tools. Ownership of handsets was like compulsory for all of them. They listen to radio and television constantly on their handsets; they see or hear TV or Radio stations play commercials in their stations; they

also belong to social groups where they interact, making digital marketing easy.

However, we also observed that the extent of deployment of digital marketing tools was rather low amongst the businessmen in the Owerri metropolis. In essence, businessmen in the Owerri metropolis have not maximised the benefits of full deployment of digital media technologies. They still play digital marketing at a primary level and were found to constantly return to traditional and conventional advertising to promote their goods and services. If they actually value the use of digital media, the rate at which it is used would have been higher than the current rate. As noted by Si (2016), social media nowadays are among the best possibilities available for an organisation to get in touch with potential customers. One cannot afford to have poor existence or visibility on the social media programmes if the competitor is creating waves with its solutions and items (Si, 2016).

The data gathered and analysed further showed that the use of digital media for marketing by the businessmen in Owerri metropolis had some positive impact on the businesses and their profitability. This means that the businesses that have deployed digital marketing tools reported some positives especially in the area of profitability and the attraction of new customers. This is another encouraging point that should help the businessmen move towards full deployment of digital marketing technologies to upgrade their businesses.

This result is in line with Ahmad (2017), which shows the impact of digital marketing on behavioural prospects of consumers of Bangladesh. According to the study, modern day marketing has been going through a radical change and fast moving market trends based on the growth and innovation of new technologies as well as portable communication devices are constantly influencing the customer behaviour significantly.

In conclusion, Si (2016) notes that international companies have identified social media promotion as a potential promotion system, used them with enhancements to power their marketing with social media promotion. The reduction in the travelling expenses increases the income of businessmen and women, helps to offer better services to consumers, as well as helped them to post new profit margins. The use of digital marketing tools is also very significant because it increases organisational profit margins and showcase the company as a unique modern brand.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the use of digital media technologies for marketing communication by business persons in Owerri metropolis, Imo State, Nigeria. The findings showed that the respondents have knowledge of digital media and that they use digital media for marketing communication. The digital media mostly used for marketing communication

is social media. It was also observed that the extent the respondents use digital media for marketing communication was low.

However, despite the fact that the extent of usage was low, it observed that the usage has positive impact on the business enterprise of residents of Owerri Metropolis. Since the extent of usage was low, the researchers conclude that the businessmen in Owerri gave little attention to the use of digital media for marketing communication purposes.

Based on the findings and conclusion, it is recommended that businessmen in Owerri metropolis should use different types of digital media platforms to carry out their marketing activities. This is based on the understanding that the advantages of digital marketing communication cannot be overemphasised.

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Perception of Young People in Uyo Metropolis on Social Media Health-Related Information

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Abstract

Social media possess enormous potentials as tools for public health communication. While several studies have reported a growing interest of young people in sourcing information for their health and wellbeing from the social media, little is, however, known regarding young people's perception of health-related information sourced from the social media. This research helps to address this gap by exploring how young people in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, perceive health information accessed on social media. The study, which is anchored on perception theory, draws on a survey of 120 young people (aged 18-35) in Uyo metropolis selected via stratified and purposive sampling procedures. The findings reveal that young people in Uyo generally source health-related information from social media. While some young people perceive health-related information accessed on social media as credible and authentic, others perceive such information as false and misleading. The study, however, concludes that while people can become more knowledgeable about their medical conditions through health-related information accessed on the social media; healthcare professionals remain the most credible sources of health information.

Keywords: Health Promotion, Education, Social Media, Perception, Young People, Health Communication

Introduction

Social media, also known by some scholars as “participative Internet” (Jones & Fox, 2009), are becoming important platforms for the sharing of health information, in health

and wellbeing (Gabarron & Wynn, 2016; George *et al.*, 2016; Abedin *et al.*, 2017), opening new vistas for public health communication, especially as global Internet penetration deepens (Jane *et al.*, 2018). The second phase web in the web evolution known as Web 2.0 enhanced interactivity and collaborative content sharing, producing “Internet-based social networking services such as Facebook and Myspace, Twitter, Wikis for collaborative content development, blogs, and two-way mobile messaging platforms that connect people through cell phones and personal digital assistants” (Korda & Itani, 2013, p.15). These networking sites are available to anyone with an Internet connection (Oke, 2013), and are used daily by millions of people around the world. This may have prompted Ekeanyanwu & Kalyango's (2013, p.150) conclusion that “Social Media Networks could be classified as the ninth Wonder of the world because such media platforms are becoming increasingly connected, interactive, participatory, integrative, community based, ubiquitous, and digital!”

Social media's easy and low-cost access to large, widely scattered people (Korda and Itani 2013, p.15), precise evaluations of campaign success, and increased sustainability have made it powerful outlets for public health communication (Lister *et al.*, 2015). A Pew Research survey of American respondents, for instance, found that eight in 10 Internet users look online for health information, the third most common use of the Internet (Fox, 2011). There are currently over two billion monthly active Facebook users globally (Statista, 2019), with 1.59 billion people on average logging onto the platform daily (Noyes, 2019). YouTube has over 1 billion users and more than 30 million people who visit YouTube daily to watch and upload videos (Cook, 2019). Twitter has about 126 million daily active users (Shaban, 2019). As at 2016, there were 2.34 billion social media users across the world, and it is estimated that there will be three billion users by 2020.

Of these figures, the younger people broadly distributed across race, gender, income, and education form a greater percentage of social media users (Duggan & Brenner, 2012). According to Facebook (2009), the early adopters of social media innovations were predominantly teenagers; however, social networking sites have strategically targeted other age cohorts, as this innovation has diffused through the population.

Nigerians are also on the social media bandwagon. About 21 million Nigerians use smart phones, 17 million are on Facebook, and over 123 million use the Internet, placing the country as the largest in Africa (Internet World Stats, 2019). Across the globe, nearly one in four persons connects to social networks on a monthly basis. More than one billion accounts are registered on Facebook. These numbers continue to go up every quarter as the populations grow.

According to Levac and O'Sullivan (2011), the impressive growth in social media has been fascinating to watch, but intriguing as well, when you consider the multitude of applications these tools have unleashed, and their potentials to influence population health. In high-connected countries, social media are becoming increasingly important to seek out

and share health information (Tennant *et al.*, 2015). It is stated in the literature that today's patients could be seeking and sharing health information on social media (Park *et al.*, 2016; Cole, Watkins & Kleine, 2016; Gabaronn, Bradway & Arsand, 2018) as an additional resource to the consultations with their clinicians (Koch-Weser *et al.*, 2010; Lie *et al.*, 2017).

It is empirically evident that nowadays more and more people are receiving health-related messages from within social networks, which include friends, family members, co-workers, or other social contacts instead of from health experts (Neuhauser & Kreps, 2003; Kreps & Neuhauser, 2010). Messages from close contacts, 'trusted voices' of friends, neighbours, family, colleagues and other influencers, may seem more positive, and thus be more effective (Burke-Garcial & Scally, 2014).

Social media address some of the limitations in traditional health communication by increasing accessibility, interaction, engagement, empowerment and customisation (Levac & O'Sullivan, 2011). Burke-Garcial and Scally (2014) observe that social media have revolutionised the way in which health information is shared and gathered. Social media have fundamentally altered the nature of the interactions around health issues, thus offering an alternative to traditional methods of mass communication. A study conducted by Coyle and Vaughn (2008) revealed that the average college student visits their social networking account three times per day, while it is estimated that most of the students had never visited health organisation's website. The active participation of young people on social media platforms indicates that these networking sites can play a valuable and important source of information on illness prevention, treatment and counselling messages. This study therefore investigates how young people in Uyo, perceive health-related information sourced from the social media.

Statement of the Problem

Health information is an essential public good which should not only be readily available but accessible to the public. The use of social media is helping to make health information readily available and accessible to people, providing public access to a wide range of health promotion programmes and opportunities for people to communicate with others, and with health professionals (Cassell, Jackson & Chevront, 1998).

Several studies have shown moderate legitimacy of information on general health topics, even on websites identified as being 'credible' (Kunst *et al.*, 2002; Neuhauser & Kreps, 2003). However, in sourcing for health information from social networking sites, Manhanthan Research (2009) advises that vigilance must be applied because some information exchange should not be managed online as social media would be inappropriate and not feasible for more demanding requests such as diagnostics and treatments, where face-to-face contact with a physician is required.

Although much of the health information available on social media seems to be of reasonably good quality (Cole, Watkins & Kleine, 2016), some studies have also indicated that social media users are subject to risks associated with misleading or inadequate health information (Oyeyemi, Gabarron & Wynn, 2014; Cole, Watkins & Kleine, 2016; Lie *et al*, 2017).

Another basic limiting factor of health information sourced from social media relates to the authenticity of the information posted on social media sites. Users are advised to be wary of health information shared on social media, because the users are in control, as there is no filter for screening information sharing (Levac & O'Sullivan, 2011).

While several studies have reported a growing interest of young people in sourcing information for their health and wellbeing from the social media, little is, however, known regarding young people's perception of health-related information sourced from social media networks.

In the light of these observations and diverse opinions about health-related information from the social media, how do young people in Uyo perceive health-related information shared on social media platforms? This question and the underlying attempt to answer it forms the major problem that necessitates this investigation.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. To what extent do young people in Uyo metropolis source health-related information from the social media?
2. How do young people in Uyo metropolis perceive health-related information sourced from social media?
3. Are choices/decisions made by young people regarding their health influenced by health-related information obtained from the social media?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation upon which this study stands is the Perception theory introduced by Berelson and Steiner (1964). The theory holds that mass communicators want audiences to pay attention to their messages, and make appropriate changes in attitudes or beliefs, or produce the desired behavioural responses (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). The Perception theory suggests that the process of interpreting messages is complex and that the goal may be difficult to achieve.

Perception involves the complex process by which people select, organise, and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world (Berelson & Steiner, 1964). Benneth, Hoffman and Prakash (1989) describe perception as notably active which involves learning, updating and interacting with what is observed. They identified two types of influences on our perception: structural and functional.

Structural influences on perception come from the physical aspects of the stimuli to which people are being exposed. Functional influences are the psychological factors that influence perception, and therefore, introduce some subjectivity into the process.

This theory becomes relevant to this study because young people in Uyo who have access to social media messages on health may interpret the messages differently depending on the structural and functional influences that affect their perception as at the time of exposure to these messages.

Social Media and Health Information

Social media are changing the global communication culture. They are broadly understood as a set of online activities that facilitates interpersonal communication, information sharing, collaboration or crowd sourcing among online users. They have become a global phenomenon with over two thirds of worldwide adult Internet users being active on social networking sites (Mander, 2015). The users create a profile page where they can upload messages, videos and blogs and link their pages to their friends' pages, creating a social network. Users may also form groups based on common interests and ask their friends to join these groups. This process creates a haven for viral marketing (Freeman & Chapman, 2008), which can be leveraged to spread positive health behaviour messages.

Curtis (2011) cited in Ngonso, Okeke and Ugwonno (2017) describes the social media as Internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos, and audios. Social media audiences rely on the opinions of members of their social networks rather than solely or mainly on the mass media (Srampickal, 2007).

The propensity for ideas, information and comment to spread rapidly on social media provides opportunities for health professionals and leaders to communicate and educate in new ways and to reach communities of interest that form and reform as issues develop (Burke-Garcial & Scally, 2014). The speed with which messages on social media can be shared and discussed is exponential. Marketing Charts.com (2012) reports that Facebook posts get half of its reach in the first 30 minutes after it is published. If this is compared with the viral spread of an email 23.63 percent of all email opens occur within the first hour after delivery (Marketing Charts.com, 2012), it is glaring that social media possess a unique strength to reach and engage enormous numbers of people and disseminate rapidly important health information.

Social media are greatly expanding and changing the way we communicate daily. Health authorities across the world are now using social media platforms to inform and educate their constituents about diseases. Social media can increase access to health information and healthcare providers as well as drive measurable health behaviour change (Levac & O'Sullivan, 2011; Burke-Garcial & Scally, 2014). The easy access provided by social networking sites makes an ideal avenue for reaching the general population. By

involving in social networking, people get connected and experience a sense of support without necessarily meeting for face-to-face interaction. Information on social networking sites is available at all times of the day, making it extremely accessible. Hence, Farhi (2009) describes networking as an ideal way to communicate because busy people can trade information rapidly.

Social media amplify changes in the media landscape as an avenue for dissemination and engagement (Benkler, 2006; Loader & Mercea, 2012). Andres and Woodward (2012) describe the power of the social media – for those who love access – as truly remarkable. Social networking provides users the opportunity to connect to one another, which could thus prove favourable to positive health behaviour change. This is because social networking could result in social influence. Social influence plays a key role in behaviour change, since an individual's actions are affected by observing the behaviours of others.

Social Media and Healthcare

The dissemination of health information online has not only been adopted by public health specialists but also by medical doctors. Doctors have adopted social websites to share simple information with their patients, eliminating waiting time and a trip to the clinic. James Rohack of the American Medical Association once observed that communication with existing patients online could add value to the patient-physician relationship (Cohen, 2009). Health promotion mediated by the Internet has enhanced opportunities for patients to be more actively engaged in their care, because patients who use this form of communication are involved in coping with their problems and in communicating with their doctors, compared to those who did not use the Internet as a communication mediator (Korp, 2006).

Manhanthan Research (2009) found that about 60 percent of physicians were already using or were interested in using physician online communities, a type of social networking used only for medical purposes. By using this platform, healthcare providers update patients on relevant health news by directly delivering personalised messages, reminders, and alerts.

Perception

Perception is a complex process. Yet, it is an important aspect of human behaviour. Human perception, according to Hammons (2009), is related to a broad range of important endeavours in fields such as health, media, and national defence, among others. Hammons (2009) sees perception as being, “personal and social. It affects families, communities, countries, and the international community. Our perceptions and understanding of ourselves are key in the areas noted above and in many other ways” (p. 1).

Gamble and Gamble (2002) define perception as, “the process of selecting, organising, and subjectively interpreting sensory data in a way that enables us to make

sense of our world” (p.83). It is the process or product of organising and interpreting sensations (sensory data from external objects or events) into meaningful patterns (Chandler & Munday, 2011). Perception is an interpretive process – selective, constructive, and evaluative rather than a passive recording of external reality. According to Chandler and Munday (2011), perception is shaped by such factors as contextual and cultural frames of reference, as well as individual differences, purposes, and needs.

The frames of reference are a result of what we are aware; make sense of the stimuli received from our environment by the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch (Watson & Hill, 2006). Simply, perception involves deciding which information to notice, how to categorise that information and how to interpret it within the framework of our existing knowledge (McShane & Glinow, 2003).

These definitions highlight three important elements in perception: noticing, organising, and interpreting (Akpan, 2011). Young people in Uyo may have perceptions of health-related information sourced from social media. They take cognizance of such information (noticing), put the information into a coherent and meaningful pattern (organising) and draw conclusions from the available information (interpreting). This implies that young people engage in social perception which is an attempt to explain, understand and make judgments about health information sourced from the social media.

Perception is simply a particular way of understanding a phenomenon. It is important to communication. The knowledge of perception helps us to understand and appreciate why people perceive a given idea, innovation or phenomenon differently. The perception of the social media influences responses to the health-related information received there from. Akpan (2011) describes perception as relative. Two persons may not perceive a given phenomenon or information the same way. Hence, perception is dependent on who is engaging in perception, when it is done or where it occurs. In the long run, it is subjective, therefore relative (Akpan, 2011).

Perceptions regulate behaviour. How young people perceive health-related information on social media, for example a campaign on quitting smoking, safe sex, sleeping under long lasting insecticide-treated nets regulates their behaviour either negatively or positively toward the information received. Perceptions affect the thoughts, feelings, and actions of people on a given situation.

Methodology

This study surveyed the perception of health-related information sourced from social media among young people in Uyo, capital city of Akwa Ibom State. From a projected population of 183,000 young people residents in Uyo (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017), using Comrey and Lee (1992) sampling guideline, a sample size of 120 young persons were chosen. The 120 subjects selected as sample size for the study were drawn using stratified and purposive sampling procedures. The inclusion criteria were: being within 18-

35 years' bracket, having a mobile phone with access to the Internet, being on a social networking site or platform such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, among others.

The 120 subjects selected as respondents were purposively drawn from Ibom Plaza, Ibom Tropicana, University of Uyo and Uyo City Polytechnic. The selected areas are the hub of young people in Uyo who fell within the criteria listed above. The research instrument was the structured questionnaire. The items on the questionnaire were structured using close-ended format. Items 1-3 contained the demographic data of respondents, 4-7 addressed research question one, 8-11 focused on research question two, while items 12-15 provided answers to research question three. One hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaire were administered on the 120 respondents selected as the sample size for the study. All the 120 copies of the questionnaire were returned and found useful for data analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The study focused on sampling the opinion of 120 young people in Uyo on their perceptions of health-related information sourced from the social media. The results and analysis of data are presented below.

Table 1: Sources of health-related information and frequency of sourcing the information

Sourcing for Health Information	Distribution / %	Frequency of Sourcing	Distribution /%
I source health-related information from the social media.	74 (62%)	Daily	6 (5%)
		Weekly	24 (20%)
I do not source health-related information from the social media.	40 (33%)	Twice a week	8 (6%)
		Twice a month	2 (2%)
		Monthly	48 (40%)
		Can't say	32 (27%)
Undecided	6 (5%)		
Total	120	Total	120

Table 1 above shows that 74 (62%) of the respondents sourced for health-related information on social media networks and 48 (40%) did so monthly.

Table 2: Extent of respondents' sourcing health-related information from the social media

Issues	Very great extent	Great extent	Some extent	A little extent	Can't say
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
I source health-related infor from the social media	14 (12)	62(51)	10(8)	20(17)	14(12)
I do not source health-related infor from the social media	14(11)	48(40)	15(13)	25(21)	18(15)

N= 120; n=number of individual responses

Table 2 shows that 62 (51%) respondents to a great extent sourced health-related information from the social media.

Table 3: Respondents' perception of health-related information sourced from the social media

Perceptions	Distribution	%
Credible	26	22
Authentic	24	20
Reliable	17	14
Satisfactory	7	5
False	23	19
Misleading	20	17
Can't say	3	3
Total	120	100

In Table 3, 26 (22%) and 24 (20%) respondents perceived health-related information sourced from the social media as credible and authentic; while 23 (19%) and 20 (17%) respondents perceived it as false and misleading.

Table 4: Extent of respondents' perceptions of health-related information sourced from the social media

Issues	Very great extent	Great extent	Some extent	A little extent	Can't say
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Credible	10 (8)	14(12)	59(49)	23(19)	14(12)
Authentic	12(10)	15(13)	52(43)	23(19)	18(15)
Reliable	10(8)	13(11)	50(41)	27(23)	20(17)
Satisfactory	8(6)	14(12)	43(36)	37(31)	18(15)
False	11(9)	16(13)	49(40)	24(20)	20(17)
Misleading	9(8)	17(14)	50(41)	26(22)	18(15)

N= 120; n=number of individual responses

Table 4 shows that respondents perceived to some extent health-related information source from the social media as credible (49%), authentic (43%), reliable (41%), satisfactory (36%), false (40%) and misleading (41%).

Table 5: Responses on whether health-related information sourced from the social media influenced health habits and actions of respondents

Responses	Distribution	%	Action	Distribution	%
Influences health habit	48	40	Influence action	50	42
Not sure	34	28	Not sure	36	30
Does not influence health habit	38	32	Does not influence action	34	28
Total	120	100	Total	120	100

Table 5 indicates that 48 (40%) of the respondents said that the health-related information sourced from the social media influenced their health habits and 50 (42%) of them acted upon such information with regard to diagnostics and treatments.

Table 6: Extent of influence on respondents' health habits and reliance on diagnostic and treatment information source from the social media

Issues	Very great extent	Great extent	Some extent	A little extent	Can't say
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n(%)
Extent of influence on health habit	8(6%)	14(12%)	48(40%)	14(12%)	36(30%)
Extent of reliance on diagnostic and treatment regimes	10(8%)	12(10%)	45(38%)	17(14%)	36(30%)

N=120; n= number of individual responses

Table 6 shows that 48 (40%) and 45 (38%) of respondents were those who said their health habits were to some extent influenced by the health-related information sourced from the social media and that they relied on the diagnostic and treatment regimes provided on the platforms.

Discussion of Findings

Sourcing Health-Related Information from the Social Media

The data in Tables 1 and 2 clearly indicate that apart from using social media for other information needs, young people also sourced health-related information on their various social networking sites. As indicated in Tables 1 and 2, out of the 120 respondents sampled, 62 percent of the respondents sourced health-related information on their

respective social media networking sites. The majority (40%) of those who sourced health-related information did that on a monthly basis and 51 percent did so to a “great extent.”

This finding supports the empirical evidence that younger people, broadly distributed across race, gender, income and education, form greater percentage of the over one billion social media users across the world (Duggan & Brenner, 2012). This finding also underscores Gabarron and Wynn (2016), George *et al.*, (2016) and Abedin *et al.*, (2017) that social media are becoming important platforms for the sharing of health information, in health and wellbeing.

Across the globe, nearly one in four persons connects to a social network on a monthly basis. Literature is replete with the fact that nowadays, more and more people are receiving health-related messages from within social networks, which include friends, family members, co-workers, or other social contacts instead of from health experts (Neuhauser & Kreps, 2003; Kreps & Neuhauser, 2010). The finding also aligns with Burke-Garcial and Scally's (2014) conclusion that messages from close contacts, trusted voices of friends, neighbours, family, colleagues and other influencers, may seem more positive, and more effective. The answer to research question one therefore is that to a 'great extent' young people in Uyo sourced for health-related information on social media platforms.

Perceptions of Health-Related Information sourced from Social Media

The available data from the study reveal that the respondents had different perceptions about the health-related information they sourced from the social media. As clearly shown in Table 3, 22 percent of the respondents perceived the health-related information from the social media to be credible. Twenty percent of the respondents said they believed in the authenticity of the health-related information received from the social media. Out of the 120 respondents sampled, 14 percent said the health-related information they sourced from the social media was reliable.

On the other hand, 19 percent of the respondents perceived the health-related information sourced from the social media to be false and 17 percent were of the opinion that health-related information received from the social media is misleading and therefore unbelievable. The extent of respondents' perceptions was also sought. It was evident from the study that respondents' perceptions of the health-related information sourced from the social media networking sites were to 'some extent' credible at 49 percent, authentic at 43 percent, reliable at 41 percent, satisfactory at 36 percent, false at 40 percent and misleading at 41 percent.

This finding aligns with some previous studies (Kunst *et al.*, 2002; Neuhauser & Kreps, 2003) which have shown moderate legitimacy of information on general health

topics, even on websites identified as being “credible”. The result suggests that respondents had different perceptions of the health-related information sourced from the social media. This is an indication that while some social media users viewed health-related information accessed on social media as credible, authentic and reliable; others perceived such information as false and misleading. Perception theory holds that two types of influences affected the perception of people: the structural and functional influences. The structural influences come from the physical aspects of the stimuli (health-related information from the social media) which people are being exposed. The functional influences are the psychological factors prevalent in the individual as at the time of exposure to the information (Benneth, Hoffman & Prakash, 1989). These influences affected the respondents' different perceptual interpretations of the health-related messages they were exposed to on the social media.

However, irrespective of the different perceptions the respondents had regarding health-related information they sourced from the social media, social networking provided users the opportunity to connect to one another, which could prove favourable for positive health behaviour change. The social influence prevalent in social networking could play a key role in behaviour change since an individual's actions are affected by observing the behaviours of others.

Influence of Health-Related Information Sourced from Social Media on Respondents' Health Choices

The data from Tables 5 and 6 show that out of the 120 respondents sampled, 40 percent said the health-related information sourced from their social networking sites influenced their health habits. Another 42% of the respondents also agreed that they acted upon the health-related information they received from the social media regarding their health.

Furthermore, the extent to which the respondents were influenced by the health-related information sourced from the social media indicates that a greater percentage (40%) of the respondents were to 'some extent' influenced by the health-related information received from the social media; while 38 percent of them relied 'to some extent' on the health-related information sourced from the social media. The influence and reliance are particularly with regard to diagnostic and treatment information available on the social networking sites.

This finding is contrary to Manhanthan Research (2009) warning that socio-media are inappropriate and not feasible for more demanding request such as diagnostics and treatments where face-to-face contact with a physician is required. Although health-related information sourced from the socio-media influenced the respondents' health choices, causing them to take action about their health; however, the fact that this influence was to 'some extent', implies that they were not totally influenced by the social media health messages.

This finding also has a relationship with Perception theory – the theoretical base of this study. What the finding here suggest is that the perception of uncertainty around the credibility, authenticity and reliability of the information posted on social media sites may account for some of the respondents' distrust of the health-related information sourced from the social media. Total dependence on health-related information from the social media poses some risks to users. As documented in the literature, users are subject to risks associated with misleading or inadequate health information (Koeh *et al.*, 2010; Oyeyemi, Gabawan & Wynn, 2014; Cole, Watkins & Kleine, 2016; Lie *et al.*, 2017).

To answer research question three, it is empirically revealed from this study that health-related information accessed on social media networking sites had some level of influence on the choices young people made regarding their health habits especially as it concerns diagnostics and treatments, but they did not totally depend on such information.

Conclusion/Recommendations

From the findings of this study, we note that young people in Uyo are well represented on social media platforms and they source health-related information from the social media networks. It is also evident from the study that while some respondents perceived the health-related information received from the social media as credible, authentic and reliable; others perceived such information as false and misleading. The study equally finds that health-related information sourced from the social media networks, to some extent, influence young people's health habits, particularly reliance on diagnostic and treatment regimes offered on the social media.

It is therefore, recommended that diagnostic and treatment regimes should not be sought online as they are more demanding and requires face-to-face contact with a physician. The diagnostic and treatment regimes offered on the social media may not come from medical personnel as the true identities of such persons are not often known. Health-related information received online should be subjected to further confirmation or verification with health experts. The conclusion is that while people can become more knowledgeable about their medical conditions through health-related information on social media, healthcare professionals remain the most credible sources of health information.

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