

## **SOCIAL MEDIA VIRALITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A STUDY OF PASS-ON ATTITUDES AMONG NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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**Abstract:** Viral advertising on social media are becoming increasingly important and crucial in determining the success or failure of online business. Students in Nigeria, like any other youth anywhere share a wide range of information on social media sites. Hence, this study focuses on viral advertising on social media and its influence on student attitude toward pass-on and online shopping behavior in Nigeria.

A survey research design was adopted and research was based on convenience sampling method of 635 Nigerian students located in Lagos state, and involved in social media network. 422 usable questionnaires were returned. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentage, and t- test. Validity and reliability test indicated that all variables were valid and reliable. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents scored the issues raised in the questionnaire positively, but at different varied levels. Results indicate that students' attitude towards advertising on social media positively and significantly affects their viral intention of pass-on and online shopping behavior in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Viral advertising, Social media, Students, Online shopping, Nigeria

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### **Introduction**

Students share and get more information on social media now than in the past. They choose private settings on social media for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Pinterest. They share with large network of friends. Extant literature posits that consumers are more comfortable with online viral advertising campaigns that encourage individuals to pass along a marketing message to others by Internet or e-mail. World-renowned companies have successfully used viral advertising in promoting business. Based on extant literature, from traditional platforms to Internet media, consumers value the non-commercial, nonimposed, personal sources of advertising information, peer-to-peer communication much better than the paid ads (Boroff 2000; Rechtin 2009; Steenburgh, et al. 2009; Thompson 2010, Godin 2000; Kirby and Marsden 2006 ).

Through viral advertising on social media, businesses of all sizes reach out to their target market, either as prospects or customers. However, despite this growing potential of viral advertising on social media, academic research regarding viral advertising on social media has been sparse in Nigeria. There is still limited understanding of the viral process and evidence to prove that viral advertising is one of the most efficient uses of communications among consumers as a means of multiplying a brand's popularity (Chiu et al.2007; Steyer et al. 2007).

University students being one of the greatest groups of social media users, hence, the present study examines viral advertising on social media: attitude toward pass – on and online shopping behavior among university students in Nigeria.

Viral advertising on social media increases company ability to reach users of social media, and ads placed on the social media could last for years, thus increase the likelihood of consumers to purchase products.

Social media is a promising platform for online marketers to develop viral-driven strategy for multidirectional communication with prospects and consumers. In most cases, companies advertise their products and brands in social media, hoping for prospects and consumers to exchange and spread out the advertised brand. This shows that attitude towards advertised brand is vital in determining students attitude towards viral advertising.

Extant literature also has it that advertising appeals, source of the message, peers influence, humour usage in advertising, ad source, tie strength, attitude toward ad, education, viral intentions, and emotional appeals, are all very significant factors in the context of viral advertising (Keller 2009; Kirby 2006; Chiu et al. 2007; Cruz and Fill 2008; Tellis 2004; Brown et al 2010).

Other authors even use the term viral marketing and viral advertising interchangeably (Anderson 2008). Bampo et al. (2008) consider viral marketing as a strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, creating the potential for exponential growth in its dispersion.

The paper starts with a critical look at the current literature on viral advertising on social media, and goes on to formulate hypotheses based on key constructs of finding the impact of viral advertising on social media, with special focus on students' attitude toward pass – on and online shopping in Nigeria. However effective viral advertising is, they are not always 100% effective, and for at times many consumers simply ignore online viral advertisements. Hence, the objective of this research is to find the attitude of students toward social media viral advertising in general, and its influence on student's attitude towards pass – on intention and online shopping in Nigeria. It also provides insightful idea on how student's attitude towards advertised brand affects viral advertising pass-on behavior and purchase.

The following hypothesis slated in the null form were formulated and tested in order to achieve the objectives of the study:

**H10:** Viral advertising are not always effective, and many students simply ignore online viral advertisements.

**H20:** Students „attitude towards social media negatively influences attitude toward viral advertising.

**H30:** Student attitude towards humorous advertisement negatively affect viral intentions.

**H40:** Student attitude towards informative advertisements negatively affect viral intentions.

**H50:** Student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to a more negative attitude toward the ad than messages received from unknown sources.

**H60:** student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to lower viral intentions than messages received from unknown sources.

**H70:** There is a negative relationship between the frequencies of peer communication about advertisements and viral intentions.

**H80:** Highly educated consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement

**H90:** Student attitude towards brand does not influence students' viral intentions of pass - on behavior

**H100:** Attitude towards brand does not influence students' online shopping intentions

**H110:** Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media does not influence attitude toward pass – on behavior

**H120:** Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media does not influence attitude toward online shopping behavior

The hypotheses proposed in this paper integrate theories and constructs from extant literature on viral advertising and social media. This study will not only find out the impact of viral advertising on social media with special focus on students' attitude towards pass – on intentions ,and online shopping in Nigeria, but also will represent a beneficial opportunity to keep advertising research up to date with new technology and new online marketing platform of social media . It will also provide significant information to business practitioners as to the benefits of viral advertising. Practitioners will be able to see a clear picture regarding the viral tools at their disposal so that they can make informed decisions regarding their inclusion in the advertising strategy.

### **Literature Review**

According to Nurhidayah et al (2016), viral advertising is a type of advertising that infects customers having an advertising message which goes by from one customer to the next. It is regarded as unpaid peer to peer communication of attention seeking content to persuade or affect an audience to pass over the content to others. Viral advertising is unique in that it enables users to select the ads and pass them along to their social connections. Viral advertising pass-on behaviour is of important to marketers to develop a strong and favourable brand image among users or group members of social networking sites. Viral ads are online ads that become viral because of consumer action .Transmitting an ad online, either video, audio or print (picture) format, through social media, social networks, e-mail and other platforms is much faster and with a much wider reach. Viral advertising includes different forms, such as the link of a video ad form, for example, YouTube, transmitted to peers through e-mail or social media, and classical viral advertising like Whatsup (Reid 2005). As posit by Petresen (2012) viral advertising is controlled by consumers, if they do not like the ad, it not only affects the attitude toward the ad or brand, but also their intention to transmit the message. The consumer needs to like the ad enough not only for him/her to buy the product, but also to pass the message forward. Viral advertising is personal and even though it comes from an identified sponsor, it does not mean the companies pay for its distribution. Most of the classical viral ads circulating online are ads paid by the sponsor brand, launched either on their own platform (company webpage or social media profile) or on social media websites such as YouTube. Consumers get the page link from there or copy the entire ad and pass it along through e-mail or posting it on a blog, webpage and social media profile.

Petresen (2012) also posit viral advertising as unpaid electronic (e-mail, web or social media) distribution of business or user generated advertisements from consumer to consumer, based on ad content likeability, entertainment and controversial characteristics. Kirby and Marsden (2006). Also posit that viral ads can benefit products that do not have the “wow” factor, by generating buzz on the product, as long as marketers are able to come up with a viral ad.

Some studies use the term viral marketing and viral advertising interchangeably. Porter and Golan (2006) define viral advertising as “unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others. Kirby and Marsden (2006) write that viral advertising includes creating contagious advertising messages transmitted from peer to peer in order to increase brand awareness. The Internet offers a significantly increased potential of an ad becoming viral and having an exponentially growing diffusion rate.

Research has it that attitudes are significant predictors of consumer behavior in relation to a product or service (Mitchell and Olson 1981).

However, regarding attitude toward viral advertising, numerous studies have examined it as an important mediator of advertising response, in relation to consumer's reaction to advertisements and purchasing intentions, in experimental and survey settings (Batra and Ray 1986; Brown and Stayman 1992; Mitchell and Olson 1981). Attitude toward the ad is also seen as the key predictor of consumers' viral intentions, since individuals are willing to pass along ads that they like and appreciate.

While Porter and Golan 2006; and Swanepoel et al. 2009 are of the opinion that viral advertising is an unconventional marketing technique that can help small businesses with low budget campaigns that have unique and compelling messages. They also posit that viral ads fit in the context of a pulling marketing strategy, when the advertiser wants consumers to associate the good feeling experienced from the provocative content of the ad with the brand. Likewise, previous studies also shows that viral advertising has the highest impact when the ads are "commercial-free" and focused on entertaining and engaging the customer, rather than presenting a call to action (Cruz and Fill 2008).

Research also has it that viral messages need to be funny or intriguing and appeal the imagination of consumers. Likewise, they are related to an easy to use or visible product, well targeted, come from a credible source, and is adapted to new technologies (Dobele et al. 2005).

Social media group as in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and among other groups constitute a new form of virtual community that provides enhanced relevance and credibility and allows marketers to engage consumers at a personal level. Facebook (2011) itself states, Facebook groups make it easier for members and friends of groups to communicate about shared interests more effectively. Marketers such as Target, Walmart, and Victoria's Secret thus actively use Facebook groups to facilitate message transmission and generate brand interests.

By joining a group on social media, the users interact with other group members and share information with ease and speed, and this offers a promising platform for marketers and advertisers to build viral-driven, multidirectional communication with consumers. Once consumers join a brand related group on social media, their brand perceptions and purchasing decisions could be influenced by mobilizing information they receive from other members. Likewise, they also may encounter more opportunities to pass along viral messages created by advertisers to their contacts through social networking sites.

Interactive Advertising Bureau (2009) posit that social media such as Facebook allow target consumers to become message senders by passing on ads to friends, connecting them to the advertisers explicitly, or commenting on the ad and having those comments passed along in viral channels

Porter and Golan (2006) recognize that, "viral advertising is typically seeded through existing email lists of loyal customers or through official company sites." For example, Facebook groups enable advertisers to send messages to members on Facebook inboxes, and thus providing further opportunities for implementing viral advertising campaigns. In most cases this viral advertising leads to an increase in ad recall, awareness, and purchase intentions when a user's news feeds indicate that friends have become fans of a particular brand's profile page (Neff 2010). Likewise, Fattah (2000) indicated that viral advertising needs to provide value to the sender, the receiver and the vendor in order to be effective.

Consumers' attitude towards online shopping is known as the main factor that affects online shopping potential. Attitudinal issues are also thought to play a significant role in social media adoption. Attitudes directly influence decision making. Attitudes serve as the bridge between consumers' background characteristics and the consumption that satisfies their needs (Shwu-Ing, 2003). Because attitudes are difficult to change, to understand consumers' attitudes toward online shopping, can help

marketing managers predict the online shopping intention and evaluate the future growth of online shopping.

However, Dobe et al. (2005) summarize a few key points for an ad to be engaging and become viral: “(1) capture the imagination by being fun or intriguing, (2) are attached to a product that is easy to use or highly visible, (3) are well targeted, (4) are associated with a credible source, and (5) combine technologies”.

Similarly, positive advertising responses indicate the power of using social media as a platform for viral advertising. When group members forward viral advertising to other friends, they become endorsers in that brand's. Social media ads in most cases increase friends' likelihood to pass along the ads.

Because advertisers value viral advertising, this study empirically examines whether joining social media will influence Nigerian university students engagement in online shopping and in viral advertising pass – on behavior.

### **Research methods**

The study is a survey that used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained with the aid of standardized instrument (questionnaires) online, and while the secondary data were obtained from extant literature.

The study was based on convenient sampling and the data was collected from students of Lagos state university and University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria. In order to assess the perception among students on the study, the data was collected from 635 students using social media. University students sample selection was made, with the recognition that social media sites users tend to be more of young, well – educated, and disproportionately composed of college students (Lenhart 2009; eMarketer 2009). College students are more likely than any other demographic to have social networking account and spend more time on the site daily (Pelling and White 2009). Hence, a university student sample, representing the largest segment of the social media user population, is appropriate for this study.

Using social media as a tool for marketing research has been recognized recently by advertising and marketing scholars (Casteley et al. 2009; Cooke and Buckley 2008). Therefore, to gain a representative sample, this study employed a social network approach through Facebook to attract respondents.

E-mail invitation with a link to the online survey was sent first to students enrolled in marketing class called “Element of Marketing “ in the universities surveyed. Students with a Facebook account were asked to forward their e-mail to the department, and questionnaire will be sent to them. They were also asked to forward to the e-mail of their Facebook friends who also were their university friends of the same faculty. All participation was voluntary.

Confidentiality was assured and incentive for participating in the research by giving out pens to the respondents, and also making the report of the research available to them if they so desire was promised.

The time needed to complete the online survey was approximately 20 minutes. The data collection period spanned approximately one month, from June 2<sup>nd</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. The online data collection technique recruited 635 participants. The elimination of incomplete responses and response from people residing outside the two universities chosen for the survey, as well as the limitation to users between the ages of 18 and 25 years reduced the final sample to 422 respondents for the data analysis, resulting in an effective response rate of 66.46%. The variables measured were measured through a five point likert scale ranging from very high extent (5) to no extent at all (1).



Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentages and t-test analysis. The research instrument showed high reliability and validity. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the variables studied = (0.84) . This exceeds the value of 0.70 (suggesting adequate reliability (Cronbach (1947). The opinions of scholars of management and marketing confirmed the content validity of the measures used, while the pilot study result confirmed their predictive validity.

Finally, the questionnaire included demographic items, such as gender, age , and ethnicity, as well as their university and course of respondent . The findings from the research are presented below.

### **Results and Discussion**

In order to accomplish the purpose of the research study, the key to the research variables used in the study and the findings of the responses to the different issues are analysed in table 1.

#### **Key to Research Variables used in Table I**

##### **Viral Advertising on Social Media Measures**

**A1** = Students are committed to viral advertising on social media.

**A2** = viral advertising is one of the most efficient use of communications among students as a means of multiplying a brand's popularity

**A3** = Viral advertising on social media increases ability to reach users of social media,

**A4**= Social media is a promising platform for online marketers to develop viral-driven strategy for multidirectional communication with prospects and consumers **A5** = Attitude of students toward social media viral advertising in general.

**A6** = Viral advertising are always effective, and many students are attracted to online viral advertisements

**A7** = Students „positive attitude towards social media positively influences attitude toward viral advertising

**A8** = Students „positive attitude towards humorous advertisement positively affect viral intentions.

**A9**= Students „positive attitude towards informative advertisements, positively affect viral intentions.

**A10** = Student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to a more positive attitude toward the ad than messages received from unknown sources.

**A11** = student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to higher viral intentions than messages received from unknown sources.

**A12** = There is a positive relationship between the frequency of peer communications about advertisements and viral intentions.

**A13**= Less educated consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement.

**A14**= Student attitude toward the advertisement influences attitude toward the brand

**A15**= Student attitude toward advertisement influences viral intentions.

**A16** =. Student attitude toward the advertisement mediates the relationship between humour appeal and viral intentions.

**A17**= Student attitude toward the brand influence students“ viral intentions of pass – on behavior

**A18**= Attitude toward the brand influence students“ online shopping intentions.

**A19**= Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media influences attitude toward pass – on behavior

**A20** = Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media influences attitude toward online shopping behavior

In order to accomplish the purpose of the research study, the findings of the responses to the different issues are analyzed below.

Table I shows the descriptive statistics of the extent of student attitude toward viral advertising on social media, and the influence toward pass – on and online shopping behavior among university students in Nigeria .

From the mean values in Table 1, it can be seen that all the variables (A1-A20) witnessed encouraging degree of influence of viral advertising on social media, with A3 and A4 having the highest extent with mean value of 4.92 respectively ( A3= Viral advertising on social media increases ability to reach users of social media, and A4= Social media is a promising platform for online marketers to develop viral-driven strategy for multidirectional communication with prospects and consumers ).

**Table I: Descriptive Statistics of Viral Advertising on Social Media Measures (N = 422)**

VARIABLE	MEAN	S.D	SKEWNESS	KUROSIS
A1	4.86	1.18	-0.65	-0.15
A2	4.88	0.99	-0.72	-0.24
A3	4.92	0.95	-0.88	-0.51
A4	4.92	0.95	-0.89	0.51
A5	4.86	1.15	-0.49	-0.47
A6	4.86	1.15	-0.48	-0.46
A7	4.85	1.26	-0.72	-0.24
A8	4.90	0.96	-0.74	-0.19
A9	4.89	0.97	-0.71	-0.24
A10	4.90	0.96	-0.74	-0.19
A11	4.90	0.96	-0.74	-0.19
A12	4.88	0.99	-0.70	-0.27
A13	4.85	1.26	-0.72	0.24
A14	4.21	1.60	-0.85	-0.34
A15	4.75	1.39	-0.71	-0.31
A16	4.88	1.38	-0.61	-0.21
A17	4.81	0.99	-0.70	-0.27
A18	4.81	1.33	-0.66	-0.18
A19	4.81	1.33	-0.66	-0.18
A20	4.81	1.33	-0.66	-0.18

**Source:** 2017 field survey.

Followed by A8 (A8 = Student positive attitude towards humorous advertisement positively affect viral intention; A10 = Student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to a more positive attitude toward the ad than messages received from unknown sources; and A11 = student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to higher viral intentions than messages received from unknown sources.) With mean value of 4.90 respectively received second highest emphasis.

There is a general consensus in extant literature that viral advertising is an “unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others (Porter and Golan (2006). Likewise, Research found that ads that create strong emotions, such as humour or inspiration, have a higher probability of being forwarded (Cruz and Fill 2008; Phelps et al. 2004). Research shows that emotions work in viral advertising because of the phenomenon of social sharing of emotions from individuals to their social networks (Dobele et al. 2005). Consumers are more willing to forward advertising that is engaging and entertaining, that creates a feeling of good and positive emotions (Chiu et al. 2007; Dobele et al. 2005; Phelps et al. 2004; Simmons 2007). Viral ads need to have a content that is emotional or funny enough to justify passing it along to other users (Porter and Golan 2006). . Some researchers and practitioners consider that humorous ads are best suited to a target audience composed of educated young ones (Weinberger and Gulas 1992).

While, the least received emphasis is A14 = Student attitude toward the advertisement influences attitude toward the brand, with mean value of 4.21.

This can also be explained because most youth in Nigeria do not attach high or optimal priority to brand. Students purchase to a high extent depend on the purchasing power, hence students did not find high support for attitude towards advertisement influencing attitude toward the brand. Unlike most studies, we also found that teenager peer groups are significant sources of influence, because young consumers learn from their peers, including different elements of consumption and use them as tools to express themselves and help them fit better within their social groups. In this context, we believe this can be one of the reasons we did not find significance for brands, since student consumers might not place such a high importance on brand, but more on purchasing power, peer influence and satisfaction.

### **Test of Research Hypotheses**

#### **Research Hypothesis One - H<sub>0</sub>: Viral advertising are not always effective, and many students simply ignore online viral advertisements**

With the generation from the mean value in table 1 which shows the full result of the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study, the first hypothesis in the study was put to test, and from the mean column in Table I, it can be seen that A6 = Viral advertising are always effective, and many students are attracted to online viral advertisements witnessed encouraging degree of 4.86, thus, experiencing support for the research question. This suggested that most of the students believe that viral advertising are effective, and many students attached importance to online viral advertisement. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “Viral advertising are always effective, and many students are attracted to online viral advertisements” is hereby accepted. Likewise, in the *t*-test analysis (not recorded here), tested at 5 percent level of significance, the *t*-score value of A6 = 2.88, exceeds the *t* – table value of 1.96. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. This is not surprising because extant literature has it that online marketing and advertising represent the business trend of contemporary times (Datta et al. 2005; Porter and Golan 2006; Steyer et al. 2007).

#### **Research Hypothesis Two - H<sub>0</sub>: Students „attitude towards social media negatively influences attitude toward viral advertising.**

From the mean column in table 1 it can be seen that A5 and A7 (A5 = Attitude of students toward social media viral advertising in general. A7 = Students positive attitude towards social media positively influences attitude toward viral advertising) witnessed encouraging degree of 4.86 and 4.85 respectively, thus, experiencing good support for the research questions. This suggests that there is



relationship between student attitude towards social media and its influence towards viral advertising. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “: Students „attitude towards social media positively influences attitude toward viral advertising” is accepted. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here) when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$ - score values was 4.173. Since the  $t$  score value exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Extant literature has it that youth like students share a wide range of information about themselves on social media sites. Social media sites are designed to encourage the sharing of information and the expansion of networks (Chu, ShuChuan. 2011; Cox, Shirley A. 2010; Kelly et al. 2010)

**Research Hypothesis III - H<sub>0</sub>: Student attitude towards humorous advertisement negatively affect viral intentions.**

From the mean column in table I it can be seen that A8 “\Student positive attitude towards humorous advertisement positively affect viral intentions” witnessed encouraging degree of 4.90, thus, experiencing good support for the research question. This suggests that there is a positive relationship between student attitude towards humorous advertisement and viral intentions. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “Student positive attitude towards humorous advertisement positively affect viral intentions” is hereby accepted. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values was 4.326. Since the  $t$  score value exceed the  $t$  – table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The findings are in accordance with extant literature of past years which shows that most of the successful viral ads have some form of humour. Porter and Golan (2006) even say that humour is “the universal appeal for making content viral” employed almost unanimously in viral ads. Consumers are more willing to forward advertising that is engaging and entertaining, that creates a feeling of good and positive emotions (Chiu et al. 2007; Dobelet et al. 2005; Phelps et al. 2004; Simmons 2007). Viral ads need to have a content that is emotional or funny enough to justify passing it along to other users (Porter and Golan 2006).

**Research Hypothesis IV - H<sub>0</sub>: Student attitude towards informative advertisements negatively affect viral intentions.**

From the mean column in table I it can be seen that A9 “Student positive attitude towards informative advertisements, positively affect viral intentions” witnessed encouraging degree of 4.89, thus, experiencing good support for the research question. This suggests that there is relationship between student attitude towards informative advertisements and viral intentions. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “Student attitude towards informative advertisements positively affect viral intentions “is accepted. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values was 4.193. Since the  $t$  score value exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

**Research Hypothesis V - H<sub>0</sub>: Student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to a more negative attitude toward the ad than messages received from unknown sources.**

From the mean column in table I it can be seen that A10 “Student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to a more positive attitude toward the ad than messages received from unknown sources” witnessed encouraging degree of 4.90, thus, experiencing good support for the research question. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis

that “Student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to a more positive attitude toward the ad than messages received from unknown sources” is hereby accepted. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values was 4.175. Since the  $t$  - score value exceeds the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Researchers also concluded that usually, interpersonal sources have a higher influence on consumer behavior because they are perceived as having no personal intentions, or nothing to gain, from the consumption recommendations they make. Hence, this is why messages coming from known persons or friends are perceived as more credible (Chiu et al. 2007; Phelps et al. 2004).

**Research Hypothesis Six -  $H_0$ : student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to lower viral intentions than messages received from unknown sources.**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A11 “student attitude towards messages received from known interpersonal sources will lead to higher viral intentions than messages received from unknown sources” witnessed encouraging degree of 4.90, thus, experiencing encouraging support for the research question. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here) when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score value for A11 = 4.027. Since the  $t$  score value exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “student attitude towards message received from known interpersonal sources will lead to higher viral intentions than messages received from unknown sources” is hereby accepted. Researchers have it that an advertisement received from a known interpersonal source, such as a family member, friend or Facebook contact, will lead to a more positive attitude toward the ad and to a higher chance of forwarding the message, than an advertisement from an unknown source (Lueg and Finney 2007 ; Chiu et al.

2007; Phelps et al. 2004 ).

**Research Hypothesis Seven -  $H_0$ : There is a negative relationship between the frequency of peer communications about advertisements and viral intentions.**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A12 “There is a positive relationship between the frequency of peer communications about advertisements and viral intentions” witnessed encouraging degree of mean value 4.88, thus, experiencing encouraging support for the research question. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values for A12 = 4.521. Since the  $t$  score value exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “there is a positive relationship between the frequency of peer communications about advertisements and viral intentions” is hereby accepted.

Extant literature has it that the more consumers communicate with their peers about advertising, the more likely they will be to participate in the viral process and forward ads to other members of their social group ( de Gregorio and Sung 2010; Lueg and Finney 2007). Hence it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the frequency of peer communications about advertisements and viral intentions.

**Research Hypothesis Eight -  $H_0$ : Highly educated consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement.**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A13 “Less **educated** consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement” witnessed encouraging degree of mean value 4.85, thus, experiencing encouraging support for the research question. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values for A13 = 4.170. Since the  $t$  score value

exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “less educated consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement” is hereby accepted. Regarding education, research on advertising has it that, there is an inverse relationship between individuals’ education level and attitude toward the ad, with better-educated consumer’s usually liking advertising less (de Gregorio and Sung 2010.). Hence it can be concluded that less educated consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement.

**Research Hypothesis Nine -  $H_0$ : Student attitude toward the brand does not influence students’ viral intentions of pass - on behaviour**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A17 “Student attitude toward the brand influence students’ viral intentions of pass - on behaviour” witnessed encouraging degree of mean value 4.81, thus, experiencing encouraging support for the research question. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values for A17= 4. 427. Since the  $t$  score values exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “Student attitude toward the brand does influence students’ viral intentions of pass - on behavior ” is hereby accepted . Past researchers and practitioners have noted that consumers seem increasingly comfortable with online viral advertising campaigns that encourage individuals to pass along a marketing message to others , and that there is significant effect of attitude toward the brand on viral intentions ( Morrissey 2008; Rehtin 2009; Solman 2008a, 2008b; Steenburgh et al. 2009; Thompson 2010 ; Datta et al. 2005 ).

**Research Hypothesis Ten -  $H_0$ : Attitude toward the brand does not influence students’ online shopping intentions**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A18 “ Attitude toward the brand influence students’ online shopping intentions” witnessed encouraging degree of mean value 4.81, thus, experiencing encouraging support for the research question. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$  score values for A18 = 3.080. Since the  $t$ - score values exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “ Attitude toward the brand does influence students’ online shopping intentions ” is hereby accepted . Extant literature has it that attitude toward the brand has a positive effect on purchase intentions ( Rehtin 2009; Steenburgh, Avery et al. 2009; Datta et al. 2005 ). Hence it can be concluded that student attitude toward the brand does influence students’ online shopping intentions.

**Research Hypothesis Eleven -  $H_0$ : Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media does not influence attitude toward pass – on behavior.**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A19 “Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media influences attitude toward pass – on behavior” witnessed encouraging degree of mean value 4.81, thus, experiencing reasonable support for the research question. Likewise, in the  $t$  - test analysis (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the  $t$ - score values for A14 = 4.261. Since the  $t$ - score value exceed the  $t$  - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media does influence attitude toward pass – on behaviour” is hereby accepted. Research on advertising studies shows that there is a relationship between student attitude toward viral advertising on social media and attitude toward pass – on behavior. , and that ad appeals influence attitude toward the ad and viral intentions, with humour being the most significant appeal in the context of viral advertising (( Rehtin 2009; Steenburgh et al.2009; Datta et al. 2005 ; Dobelet al. 2007 ). Hence it can be concluded that student attitude toward viral advertising on social

media does influence attitude toward pass – on behavior.

**Research Hypothesis Twelve - Ho: Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media does not influence attitude toward online shopping behavior.**

From the mean column in table I, it can be seen that A20 “Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media influences attitude toward online shopping behavior” witnessed encouraging degree of mean value 4.81, thus, experiencing encouraging support for the research question. Likewise, in the *t* - test **analysis** (not recorded here), when tested at 5 percent level of significance, the *t* - score values for A16 = 4.101 Since the *t* - score values exceed the *t* - table value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that “Student attitude toward viral advertising on social media influences attitude toward online shopping behavior” is hereby accepted. This is in accordance with extant literature ( Chiu et al. 2007; Dobeles et al. 2005; Phelps et al. 2004; Simmons 2007 ; Limbu, et al . 2012; Weinberger and Gulas 1992 : Porter and Golan (2006) ). Hence it can be concluded that student attitude toward viral advertising on social media does influence attitude toward online shopping behavior

From the demographic statistics (table not shown) the students are between the age gap of 18 to 25 years. It was observed that they all have significant interest in the study, thus providing their personal contact such as email, address, and phone numbers among many others.

**Conclusion and Suggestion for Further Research**

The research has empirically investigated viral advertising on social media, with special focus on attitude toward pass – on and online shopping behavior among university students in Nigeria. It has been found that viral advertising on social media influences student attitude towards pass – on and online shopping behavior in Nigeria.

The results show that ad appeals influence attitude toward the ad and viral intentions, and significantly attitude toward the brand on viral intentions, influences attitude toward pass – on and online shopping behavior among university students in Nigeria.

The study also shows the importance of viral advertising on social media for consumers’ viral intentions, showing that reference groups or peer groups are important for viral advertising. We also found that attitude toward the brand positively influences purchase intention, as previous studies noted ( Chiu et al. 2007; Mangleburg. and Bristol 1998 ; Thompson. 2012; Shukla 2010; Dobeles et al. 2005; Phelps et al. 2004; Simmons 2007; Anderson 2008;

Weinberger and Gulas 1992 ; Borroff 2000 ; Cha, Jiyoung. 2009.; Porter and Golan 2006; Pookulangara et al. 2011; Limbu, et al. (2012). In this context, it establishes a relationship between viral advertising and its potential to lead to increased sales, showing that viral advertisements are at least as efficient in influencing consumers’ buying intentions.

The results also show that less educated consumers are more likely to forward a viral advertisement, thus being in accordance with extant literature that education plays a role in the viral process, by negatively impacting consumers’ intention to forward an advertisement (de Gregorio and Sung 2010). Overall, this study represents a significant contribution to the modern advertising research and practice, and a key step forward in the focus of viral advertising research. It establishes the role of viral intentions and purchase behavior, and provides a steady base for future research.

**Limitations**

The study confined itself to only marketing students from Lagos State University and University of Lagos, both universities in Lagos State, Nigeria. For effective generalization, this research therefore should be replicated in other universities in Nigeria. And the results are compared so as to establish



whether there is consistency in the results, bearing in mind the difference in location, environment, social and culture. Thus the findings may not be a thorough reflection of Nigeria as a whole.

It is proposed that future research on viral advertising should focus on differences based on ethnicity, by studying more geographical locations for future advertising research. These results may be useful to both academics and business practitioners.

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