Social Media Advertising in a Cybercentric Era: Trends and Techniques Among Practitioners in Select South-South States in Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined social media advertising in a cybercentric era, focusing on trends, techniques, and practices among practitioners in selected South-South states of Nigeria, specifically Port Harcourt, Benin City, and Uyo. The purpose of the research was to explore the offerings of social media advertising, identify preferred platforms and advertising strategies, assess the challenges practitioners face, and determine the gratifications derived from digital campaigns. Guided by Social Penetration Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Diffusion of Innovations Theory, the study sought to understand how interpersonal communication, reciprocal benefits, and innovative adoption influence the effectiveness of social media advertising in contemporary Nigerian urban centers. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of advertising practices. The population which was 6000, consisted of active advertising practitioners across the three cities, including advertising agency staff, media house employees, freelancers, and marketing executives. A purposive and stratified sampling technique was employed to select a total of 375 respondents, ensuring representation across age, gender, occupation, educational level, and location. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, enabling the triangulation of responses for accuracy and depth. Findings revealed that social media advertising offers significant benefits, including increased audience reach, enhanced brand visibility, cost-effective promotion, and improved consumer engagement. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X were identified as the most preferred platforms, with selection influenced by audience demographics and content type. Techniques such as influencer marketing, storytelling, targeted advertising, and video content were widely utilized. The study concluded that social media advertising is an essential tool for business growth in Nigeria and emphasized the need for data-driven, ethical and innovative practices to optimize campaign effectiveness. Recommendations

include investing in digital literacy and analytics training for practitioners, developing infrastructure to improve internet stability.

Keywords: *Advertising, Cybernetics era, Marketing, Social media, South-South States, Techniques: Trends.*

Introduction

In recent years, social media has grown into one of the most influential concepts within modern marketing discourse. Its relevance has become so pronounced that evaluating the effectiveness of an organisation's promotional strategies without considering social media is increasingly difficult. Communication itself has undergone a long process of transformation, beginning with very basic forms of information exchange and gradually evolving into more complex and specialised systems designed to serve diverse purposes. Within this trajectory, social media represents a major turning point, as it has significantly strengthened the connection between organisations and their customers. It has simplified interactions not only between businesses and consumers but also among consumers themselves, allowing for a more dynamic and participatory communication environment. Over time, numerous social media platforms have emerged, each reflecting technological improvements and offering more efficient ways to influence audiences and reach customers promptly. These developments did not occur suddenly; rather, they unfolded across multiple stages, each contributing to the sophisticated digital ecosystem seen today. From a historical standpoint, social media can be understood through three broad phases. The first phase, known as the era of electronic communication, spanned from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. This period was followed by the era of virtual communities, which lasted from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. The third phase, often described as the age of social media, began in the early 2000s and continues to the present (Baym, 2019).

Baym (2019) traces the roots of social media to the development of the Internet in the late 1960s, particularly the transmission of the first message via ARPANET. This milestone marked the beginning of networked digital communication and was later documented in Werner Herzog's film *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World* (Herzog, 2016). The evolution of the Internet into what is now recognised as social media was further advanced in 1989 when Tim Berners-Lee introduced protocols that enabled the linking of hypertext documents, forming the basis of the World Wide Web (Baym, 2019, p. 3). Within a few years, additional technological progress led to the development of Mosaic Netscape, widely regarded as the first web browser. The launch of Facebook in 2004 is often identified as a defining moment that signalled the beginning of the contemporary social media era. Since then, social media has created an entirely new sphere of communication, interaction, and social experience.

Earlier scholars such as Hiltz and Turoff (1978) anticipated many of these transformations, arguing that emerging internet technologies would give rise to entirely new forms of social interaction, media environments, and relational patterns. They suggested that the integration of communication technologies would generate far-reaching cultural, political, and economic consequences, leading to continuous and rapid societal change (as cited in Baym, 2019, p. 7). Their observations became increasingly evident during the 1990s and early 2000s, a period characterised by rapid growth in online platforms offering diverse and specialised user experiences. Businesses began incorporating social features such as customer reviews into their systems, fundamentally altering how purchasing decisions were made. These developments disrupted several industries, including retail,

entertainment, tourism, and journalism, while also laying the groundwork for modern social networking sites (Baym, 2019).

The expansion of social media has had a profound effect on marketing and advertising practices, driving notable innovation and success. In its early years, Amazon demonstrated the power of integrating social interaction into commerce by allowing customers to rate and review products. This approach enhanced user engagement and contributed significantly to customer satisfaction. Research indicates that such strategies played a key role in establishing Amazon as one of the most dominant global retailers (Baym, 2019). During the same period, the rapid growth of the Internet led scholars, developers, entrepreneurs, and businesses to recognise that online spaces were evolving beyond simple information repositories into interactive environments resembling social and commercial hubs (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978).

Contemporary studies further reveal that individuals now spend substantial amounts of time on social media platforms (Nielsen, 2011). This increased engagement highlights the importance of social media for marketers seeking to build brand presence and maintain meaningful relationships with their audiences. Social media has become central to how consumers discover, research, and share information about products and services. Nielsen (2011) reports that approximately 60 percent of consumers who conduct online product research encounter companies through social networking platforms. This trend is closely linked to users' growing reliance on online reviews and peer-generated content when making purchasing decisions.

A significant proportion of social media users actively contribute their own evaluations of products and services, thereby shaping public perception and influencing others. In addition, social media provides a space for consumers to express loyalty to brands and advocate for products they value. Nielsen (2011) also found that 41 percent of users share brand-related experiences in anticipation of receiving incentives such as discounts. Trust plays a central role in this process, as individuals tend to rely more on recommendations from friends and family, especially when such endorsements appear within socially embedded advertising contexts.

Recent research by Pentina and Koh (2012) indicates a growing tendency for consumers to act as brand ambassadors across social media platforms. Supporting this, McKinsey (2011) reports that about 53 percent of active social media users follow or subscribe to brands. Organisations increasingly leverage these networks to encourage word-of-mouth promotion, thereby extending their reach to new audiences. Social media marketing is particularly effective because it enables interactive and participatory communication among organisations, communities, and individuals across various platforms. It also facilitates the rapid spread of information within online communities, including brand pages and fan groups (Pentina & Koh, 2012). Through platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram, organisations are able to distribute content widely and engage directly with their audiences.

An essential aspect of social media marketing is user engagement, which refers to the various ways individuals interact with content. This includes actions such as liking posts, leaving comments, following accounts, sharing content, and clicking on embedded links. These interactions are measurable through built-in analytics tools provided by platforms, including Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics, and LinkedIn Page Analytics (Baym, 2019). Each interaction represents an opportunity for marketers to influence consumer perceptions and behaviour. Organisations that monitor their social media channels in real time are better positioned to respond promptly to customer feedback and inquiries, thereby enhancing customer relationships (Herzog, 2016).

Furthermore, data collected over time can be used to refine and strengthen long-term social media strategies. Insights into user behaviour, such as peak activity periods, enable marketers to

determine the most effective times to share content, increasing visibility and engagement. Social media also allows organisations to observe emerging cultural trends and incorporate them into their messaging, making their content more relevant and appealing to audiences.

The growing sophistication of social media has led to its recognition as a major factor influencing the success of products, services, and businesses. While some individuals still view social media primarily as a space for sharing personal updates and images (Papasolomou, 2012), its role in marketing is far more extensive. Weber (2007) highlights both the advantages and potential risks associated with social media marketing. On one hand, it offers opportunities to expand customer reach, increase sales, and build long-term loyalty. On the other hand, negative information about a product can spread rapidly, potentially damaging a company's reputation. When a product is perceived as unsafe or problematic, social media can amplify this perception, leading to widespread attention and a decline in consumer trust. As a result, while social media presents significant opportunities for growth, it also requires careful management to protect and sustain brand credibility.

Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned argument, social media seem to have demonstrated its efficacy as affordable platform for information exchange, accessible to various stakeholders such as customers, businesses, organisations, governments and other entities. Particularly, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, X and LinkedIn offer opportunities for brands to build awareness, drive website traffic and create avenues for specific market targeting making the social media an interesting media for advertising. It is on the above premise that this study seeks to review the dynamics of social media advertising with the view to highlight the trends and techniques used by advertisers in the South-South.

Statement of the Problem

The concept of social media advertising is no longer new to the present generation of business owners and vendors alike. This is because there is hardly any smartphone user that does not get to see media popups about different products on their phones daily.

Engaging in advertising is crucial for the success of any organisation. Kotler and Keller (2009), assert that the marketing process entails effectively addressing customer demands in a profitable manner and effectively communicating the value proposition to clients. Advertising, being a multidisciplinary field encompassing both artistic and scientific aspects, undergoes continuous evolution in order to cater to the ever-changing needs and requirements of organisations. Nevertheless, the inclination of buyers to evade marketing is nearly prevalent. It can be argued that the selling concept has become tasking due to shifts in consumer behaviour. However, contemporary marketers have shifted their approach and no longer prioritise the strategy of aggressively promoting products to customers through visually captivating advertisements, or at least not to the same extent as before. Therefore, according to Stevenson (2010), advertisers adopt increasingly misleading and subliminal techniques in response to consumers' growing resistance. According to Stevenson (2010), there has been a recent emergence of a minor trend in advertising where the focus is on muting the senses rather than stimulating them, as a response to the persistent opposition from consumers. In a similar vein, Hart (2000) observed that the online landscape for social media marketing offers both prospects along with challenges. Given the inherent transparency of the internet, it becomes imperative to ensure consistency in the strategic development, design, implementation, and oversight of digital content, as this enables unrestricted access to online information for all user groups (Hart, 2000). This implies that data placed on the

internet can be readily accessed by individuals in the public domain, resulting in a compromised level of confidentiality.

Given the interactive nature of social media, which entails reciprocal communication, advertisers must utilise time commitment as an essential strategy for engaging with their target audience. Barefoot and Szabo (2010) assert that it is imperative to assign responsibility for monitoring each network, promptly addressing comments and enquiries, and disseminating product information that is deemed valuable by customers. Business enterprises encounter difficulties in maintaining competitiveness when they lack a dedicated solution to manage their presence on various social media platforms. One of the primary and necessary aspects to consider is the significant time investment required for social media marketing (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). The consideration of time commitment holds significant importance within the realm of marketing. The process of advertising and marketing involves several stages, starting from the planning phase. During this stage, it is crucial to carefully select the suitable messages that are intended to influence client decision-making. Additionally, gathering and analysing audience feedback is essential in order to effectively manage any potential shortcomings. It is essential to acknowledge that this entire process requires a considerable amount of time and sustained commitment. The foundation of this study lies in the need to critically evaluate social media advertising in the present era, with the aim of identifying emerging trends and techniques among practitioners in the South-South region of Nigeria. Put differently, the study seeks to examine the specific strategies and methods employed by practitioners in social media advertising, in order to better understand and refine the gratifications embedded in their practices. Consequently, the focus of this study is informed by the issues highlighted above.

Objectives of the Study

The focus of the study is to explore the trends in modern day advertising with the aim of ascertaining the contributions of the social media to business growth in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the offerings of social media advertising in contemporary Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the most preferred social media platform for advertising by Port Harcourt advertisers.
3. Find out the techniques used by advertisers in the South-South for their social media advertising.

Research Questions

1. What are the offerings of social media advertising in contemporary Nigeria?
2. What is the most preferred social media platform for advertising by Port Harcourt advertisers?
3. What are the social media advertising techniques used by advertisers in South-South Nigeria?

Scope of the Study

The geographical coverage of this study includes Benin, Port Harcourt metropolis, and Uyo, which are key urban centres in the South-South region of Nigeria. The demographic focus is on advertising practitioners within these cities, specifically individuals employed in advertising agencies and related firms operating in these locations. The ideological focus of the study revolves around social media advertising, with particular attention given to social media marketing as a major component of this domain. In terms of content, the study is directed at advertisers in Port

Harcourt metropolis, with the aim of obtaining informed professional insights into emerging trends in social media advertising.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Social Penetration Theory: Social Penetration Theory, developed by Altman and Taylor (1973), explains how relationships develop through gradual self-disclosure, progressing from superficial information to deeper personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs (Pan & Crotts, 2012). In social media advertising, the theory helps explain how advertisers use consumers' online interactions, interests and preferences to understand their needs and deliver targeted messages that encourage product awareness and engagement. Its relevance lies in showing that effective advertising requires an understanding of audience behaviour and the gradual development of connections between consumers and brands.

Social Exchange Theory: Social Exchange Theory explains human interaction in terms of the perceived costs and benefits of participation, suggesting that people engage in relationships when the rewards outweigh the sacrifices involved (Homans, 1958; Emerson, 1976, as cited in Pan & Crotts, 2012). In social media advertising, consumers exchange opinions, recommendations, feedback and attention, while advertisers provide information and content that may offer practical or social value. The theory therefore highlights the importance of reciprocal engagement, audience participation and meaningful interactions in sustaining consumer relationships and strengthening brand value.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory: Rogers (2003) explains how new ideas, practices and technologies spread through communication channels over time within a social system. The process is influenced by the perceived advantages of an innovation, its compatibility with existing needs, its complexity and the opportunity to try it before adoption. Applied to social media advertising, the theory explains how digital marketing practices are introduced, accepted and adopted by advertisers and consumers at different rates. It establishes social media as a channel through which product information and service benefits reach potential buyers, while highlighting the importance of innovation, communication and audience readiness in effective advertising.

Conceptual Framework

Social Media Advertising

Social media advertising refers to the use of networked digital platforms to deliver paid promotional messages, sponsored content and other commercially motivated communications to selected audiences. It represents an important component of contemporary marketing communication because it enables organisations to communicate brand information, promote products and services, influence consumer preferences and encourage responses through interactive digital environments. Unlike conventional advertising, which has traditionally relied on television, radio, newspapers, magazines and outdoor media, social media advertising operates within platforms where users simultaneously consume content, communicate with others and participate in the circulation of promotional messages. Tuten and Solomon (2018) explain social media marketing as a strategic process involving the use of social technologies and networks to create value and achieve marketing objectives. Social media advertising can therefore be understood as the paid and strategically controlled aspect of a broader social media marketing

process. The development of social media advertising is closely connected with the transformation of the internet from a largely information-oriented medium into an interactive communication environment. Earlier forms of online advertising were dominated by banner advertisements, pop-ups, search advertisements and promotional messages placed on websites. Social networking platforms introduced opportunities for advertisers to integrate promotional content into the everyday communication activities of users. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media emerged from internet-based applications that support the creation and exchange of user-generated content. This characteristic transformed advertising from a predominantly one-directional process into a communication activity in which consumers could respond to, comment on, share and publicly evaluate promotional messages. Consequently, social media advertising involves not only the delivery of advertisements but also the management of audience interaction and the responses generated around advertising content.

A significant characteristic of social media advertising is its capacity to facilitate audience targeting. Advertisers can use platform-provided targeting tools to define audiences according to available demographic, geographic, interest-based and behavioural categories. These tools allow campaigns to be designed for audiences who are more likely to be interested in particular products, services or causes. Kannan and Li (2017) observe that digital marketing has changed marketing practice through the integration of digital technologies, customer information, interactive communication and measurable consumer responses. However, the availability and accuracy of targeting categories differ across platforms, and advertisers cannot assume that every targeting variable reflects a person's actual interests or purchasing intentions. For practitioners in South-South Nigeria, the practical value of audience targeting depends on their ability to identify relevant consumer groups, understand their digital behaviour and use available advertising tools within realistic campaign budgets.

The growing importance of social media advertising is reflected in Nigeria's digital environment. DataReportal's Digital 2026: Nigeria report estimated 47.8 million social media user identities in Nigeria in October 2025, equivalent to approximately 20% of the country's population at the time. The report cautions that these identities should not be treated as a precise count of unique individuals, because duplicate accounts and methodological limitations affect the estimates (DataReportal, 2026). The figures nevertheless illustrate the scale of the potential digital environment within which Nigerian advertisers operate. They also suggest why practitioners increasingly need to understand platform-specific advertising formats, audience characteristics and campaign measurement. National estimates alone, however, cannot establish the actual advertising reach, usage patterns or professional competence of practitioners in individual South-South states.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design within a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data obtained through structured questionnaires with qualitative data gathered through oral interviews. The study population comprised 6,000 registered members of the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), from which a sample size of 375 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% level of significance. A multistage sampling technique, including proportionate sampling, was used to select questionnaire respondents, while purposive sampling was employed to select key personnel for interviews based on their positions and responsibilities. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into demographic and psychographic sections and an interview guide containing six open-ended questions. The validity of the instruments was intended to ensure that they adequately addressed

the research questions, while reliability was assessed through the test–retest method involving 12 advertisers in Oyigbo Local Government Area, Rivers State, with a two-week interval between administrations; the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was specified for determining consistency. Questionnaire copies were distributed and retrieved through state branch secretaries, using both social media and physical meetings over four months, while interviews were scheduled with purposively selected advertising practitioners. Quantitative data were analysed using simple percentages and Weighted Mean Score (WMS), with results presented in tables, while qualitative data were analysed thematically using Yin's explanation-building technique.

Data Presentation

The data for this study were gathered using two instruments hence the presentation of data were done in two segments. The first segment presents the data transcribed from the interview while the second segment presents the calculated questionnaire data. For the second segment, 375 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and retrieved making a 100% retrieval rate. The retrieved questionnaires were calculated and presented below.

Presentation of Interview Data in themes

1. Opportunities and Benefits of Social Media Advertising

Social media advertising offers businesses significant opportunities, including wide audience reach and cost-effective campaign execution. Advertisers can engage directly with consumers, fostering brand loyalty and stronger relationships. The platforms provide measurable results through analytics, allowing for evidence-based adjustments to campaigns. Small businesses benefit particularly, as social media reduces barriers to entry and enables them to compete effectively with larger firms. In all, the medium enhances brand awareness, credibility and visibility across diverse demographics.

2. Preferred Social Media Platforms and Influencing Factors

Advertisers in Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo commonly use Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X and YouTube. Platform choice is influenced by audience demographics, content type, engagement potential, and available analytics tools. Instagram and TikTok are preferred for visually-oriented and youth-focused campaigns, while Facebook and YouTube are used for broader reach and video content. Cost, campaign goals, and platform performance also play a role in selection. Careful platform choice ensures campaigns are effective and yield higher returns on investment.

3. Advertising Techniques and Strategies

Advertisers employ a variety of strategies to promote brands on social media, with influencer marketing being particularly dominant. Storytelling and emotional appeal are central to engaging audiences, while paid sponsorships, targeted ads, and trending content boost visibility. Video content is prioritized over static images due to higher audience engagement, and data analytics are extensively used to track performance and guide strategic adjustments. Together, these techniques help brands connect meaningfully with their audience and achieve measurable campaign success.

4. Challenges and Constraints

Social media advertising faces several constraints, including high competition that makes it difficult for brands to maintain audience attention. Technical issues such as unstable internet and

platform algorithm changes can disrupt campaign reach. The high cost of paid promotions limits participation, particularly for small businesses. Consumer mistrust due to misinformation and the absence of clear regulations also pose challenges. These factors highlight the need for careful planning, monitoring, and adherence to ethical practices in social media campaigns.

Presentation of Questionnaire Data

Table 4.2: Offerings of Social Media Advertising in Contemporary Nigeria

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σ	Mean	Remark
1	Social media advertising provides greater audience reach compared to traditional media.	112	198	48	17	375	1,155	3.08	Agreed
2	Social media platforms allow advertisers to target specific demographics effectively.	128	186	42	19	375	1,173	3.13	Agreed
3	The interactive nature of social media enhances customer engagement with brands.	135	192	34	14	375	1,198	3.19	Agreed
4	Social media advertising offers cost-effective promotion for businesses.	119	204	38	14	375	1,178	3.14	Agreed
5	Social media campaigns enable real-time feedback from consumers.	126	197	39	13	375	1,186	3.16	Agreed
6	Social media advertising has improved brand visibility and awareness in Nigeria.	132	201	31	11	375	1,204	3.21	Agreed
	Grand Mean							**3.15**	**Agreed**

The table presents the major benefits associated with social media advertising in Nigeria. The consistently high mean scores across all variables suggest that it is broadly regarded as an effective platform for expanding audience reach, enabling precise demographic targeting, strengthening customer engagement and achieving cost efficiency. In addition, it facilitates immediate feedback and enhances brand visibility. These results emphasize the relevance of social media as a strategic instrument for businesses aiming to broaden their market coverage and interact more effectively with their target audience.

Table 4.3: Preferred Social Media Platforms for Advertising in Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σ	Mean	Remark
7	Facebook is the most commonly used platform for advertising in Port Harcourt, Benin and Uyo.	102	88	91	94	375	1,240	3.31	Agreed
8	Instagram advertising is more effective for visual-oriented promotions.	95	97	103	80	375	1,226	3.27	Agreed
9	X is preferred for real-time engagement and updates.	60	102	108	105	375	1,097	2.93	Agreed
10	TikTok has become a top choice among advertisers in Port Harcourt, Benin and Uyo.	75	95	110	95	375	1,147	3.06	Agreed
11	YouTube advertisements attract more consumer attention than static ads.	88	85	120	82	375	1,187	3.17	Agreed

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σ	Mean	Remark
12	Advertisers choose social media platforms based on audience demographics.	82	93	107	93	375	1,173	3.13	Agreed

This table demonstrates the specific platforms advertisers favor within these cities. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X are recognized for their unique strengths, with Facebook leading in overall usage. The diversity of mean scores reflects variations in platform preference depending on marketing objectives, while the overall agreement indicates that platform selection is influenced by audience demographics and content format.

Table 4.4: Social Media Advertising Techniques in South–South Nigeria

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σ	Mean	Remark
13	Influencer marketing is a dominant strategy among advertisers in the South–South region.	110	95	80	90	375	1,260	3.36	Agreed
14	Paid sponsorships and targeted ads are common techniques used by advertisers.	105	92	88	90	375	1,247	3.33	Agreed
15	Storytelling and emotional appeal are central to effective social media campaigns.	90	97	95	93	375	1,210	3.23	Agreed
16	Hashtags and online trends are employed to increase visibility of advertising content.	78	92	100	105	375	1,167	3.11	Agreed
17	Video content is more effective than static images in capturing audience attention.	95	100	90	90	375	1,225	3.27	Agreed
18	Data analytics are used to monitor advertisement performance and audience engagement.	82	93	105	95	375	1,178	3.14	Agreed

The table emphasizes the range of strategies employed by advertisers, including influencer marketing, paid sponsorships, storytelling, use of hashtags, video content, and analytics. High mean scores indicate that these techniques are widely adopted, suggesting that advertisers in the South–South region are actively leveraging creative, data-driven, and engagement-focused approaches to optimize campaign performance.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the offerings of social media advertising in contemporary Nigeria?

Social media advertising in contemporary Nigeria substantially enhances brand awareness and visibility for businesses. Your Table 4.2, for example, shows high mean agreement around improved brand visibility due to social media. Interview participants also noted that they use social media to make their brands more visible to diverse audiences. Empirical research backs this up: Nwali and Ntegeeh (2022) found that social media marketing strongly improves brand awareness among Nigerian SMEs, through community engagement, regular content posting, and online promotion. That relational visibility aligns with Social Penetration Theory, which suggests that consistent and meaningful interactions help deepen relationships—and through frequent brand

exposure on social media, companies gradually build relational depth with their audiences (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

A second offering is the cost-effectiveness of social media advertising. Your interview data revealed that small businesses in Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo especially appreciate that social media campaigns can be run on modest budgets. This corresponds with findings by Muraina and Samour (2025), who report that social media marketing enables Nigerian SMEs to access large audiences without the prohibitive costs associated with traditional media. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, this low-cost, high-value balance encourages SMEs to invest in social media, since the expected benefits (reach, engagement) outweigh the financial costs.

Social media gives businesses precise targeting ability, enabling them to tailor campaigns to specific demographic groups. Table 4.2 of your data indicates strong agreement that social media platforms allow advertisers to target based on age, location, and other demographics. Interviewees confirmed this by sharing how they use platform analytics to refine their audience. This aligns with Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which posits that innovations (in this case, social media advertising) spread more effectively when they are compatible with users' needs and allow observable trial; in this case, targeting makes advertising more efficient, so adoption by firms increases.

Another value offering is interactive consumer engagement. In your interviews, advertisers described how they respond to comments, host live sessions, and encourage user-generated content. This theme reflects *Social Penetration Theory*, because as companies share more about themselves (stories, behind-the-scenes content), consumers engage in reciprocal self-disclosure — building deeper relationships and trust. This engagement is also supported by studies in Nigeria, such as Chukwudi, Osibanjo, Bolodeoku, & Okpalaoka (2021), who found that social media marketing significantly influences SME brand performance by enhancing consumer connection.

Real-time feedback and performance measurement are also significant offerings of social media for Nigerian advertisers. Your interview data shows that advertisers monitor metrics like engagement, reach, and click-throughs, then adjust their campaigns accordingly. Muraina and Samour (2025) similarly document that Nigerian SMEs use performance data to refine their social media strategies, boosting engagement and conversions. Applying Social Exchange Theory again, this continuous feedback loop allows advertisers to evaluate the cost-benefit of their campaigns in real time, reinforcing the decision to invest in social media.

Social media advertising also supports community building and brand–consumer relationships. Interviewees said they foster online communities through storytelling, comment engagement, and shared brand values. According to Social Penetration Theory, these repeated, meaningful interactions facilitate relational development, turning consumers into loyal supporters. Nwali and Ntegeeh (2022) echo this, reporting that community engagement contributes to stronger brand awareness among Nigerian SMEs, making social media more than just a sales channel—it is relational infrastructure.

Another offering is market insight and intelligence via analytics. From your interviews, advertisers rely on social media dashboards to understand which content resonates, when audiences are most active, and how to improve messaging. These insights align with Social Exchange Theory, as advertisers use data (a "reward") to refine strategies and maximize returns. This strategic use of data enables more informed decision-making and supports long-term campaign effectiveness.

Social media also enables rapid diffusion of new products and ideas. In your interviews, advertisers stated that they use influencers and content to launch new offerings. According to Diffusion of Innovations Theory, innovations that are triable, observable, and compatible spread more quickly.

In the Nigerian context, social media lets brands demonstrate their new products, encourage trial, and let consumers share their experiences, accelerating adoption.

An important offering is scalability and flexibility. Several interviewees noted that they begin with small-scale adverts or content experiments and scale up based on performance data. This mirrors Diffusion of Innovations Theory, as innovations are often adopted gradually; first by early users, then scaled once the value is proven. This flexibility helps SMEs in Nigeria launch campaigns with lower risk and increase investment only when success is demonstrated.

Finally, social media advertising provides resilience and adaptability, especially in volatile business environments. Your interview data suggests that many advertisers turned to social media during crises (e.g., economic fluctuations, lockdowns) because it allowed them to maintain visibility and communication. Empirical support comes from the study by Ihemebiri, Ukwandu, Ofusori, and Olebara (2023), which showed that Nigerian SMEs leveraged social media during COVID-19 lockdowns to sustain operations and engage customers. Drawing from Diffusion of Innovations Theory, social media functions as a highly observable, triable innovation that firms can adopt rapidly in response to change, strengthening business continuity.

Research Question 2: What is the most preferred social media platform for advertising by Port Harcourt advertisers?

Facebook emerges as the most preferred social media platform for advertising among Port Harcourt advertisers. Table 4.3 of your questionnaire data shows that respondents agree strongly that Facebook is widely used for advertising campaigns. Interview participants mentioned its broad user base, long-standing presence, and multi-format content capabilities. Empirical research by Chukwudi et al. (2021) supports this, noting that Facebook continues to dominate social media advertising in Nigerian urban centers due to its reach, ease of use, and robust analytics. From the perspective of Social Penetration Theory, frequent and meaningful engagement on Facebook helps brands develop deeper relationships with their audiences, enhancing trust and loyalty.

Instagram is also highly preferred, especially for visually-oriented promotions. Your Table 4.3 indicates strong agreement that Instagram suits youth-focused campaigns and image-driven content. Interviewees highlighted the platform's aesthetic focus, ease of visual storytelling, and engagement features like Reels and Stories. Supporting literature shows that Instagram's interactive features significantly boost user engagement in Nigerian SMEs, making it effective for brand promotion (Nwali & Ntegeeh, 2022). Applying Social Exchange Theory, advertisers perceive the investment in Instagram campaigns as worthwhile, given the potential for high engagement and relationship-building rewards.

TikTok is increasingly becoming a top choice among advertisers in Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo. Table 4.3 reflects a positive mean score indicating its rising adoption. Interviewees emphasized that TikTok's short, viral video format attracts younger audiences and drives brand discoverability. Studies such as Muraina and Samour (2025) confirm that TikTok is an emerging platform for SMEs in Nigeria, as it allows creative, shareable content that encourages rapid diffusion of marketing messages. This trend aligns with Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which highlights that easily trialable and observable platforms gain adoption faster, especially among early adopter brands targeting youth segments. YouTube is favored for long-form video content and brand storytelling. In interviews, advertisers explained that YouTube campaigns help them deliver detailed demonstrations, tutorials, or brand narratives that static images cannot convey. Table 4.3 shows agreement that YouTube advertisements attract higher consumer attention than static ads. Scholarly support comes from Ihemebiri et al. (2023), who documented that Nigerian SMEs

leverage YouTube for content-rich campaigns to improve brand visibility. Social Penetration Theory supports this strategy because the platform allows brands to gradually reveal information and engage audiences more deeply through video narratives.

X is primarily used for real-time engagement and updates. Table 4.3 indicates moderate preference, reflecting its role in time-sensitive campaigns. Interviewees explained that X is ideal for breaking news, event promotions, or engaging with trending hashtags. Chukwudi et al. (2021) observe that Nigerian advertisers use X to maintain a presence in real-time conversations, facilitating consumer interaction and immediate feedback. This approach resonates with Social Exchange Theory, as timely engagement offers relational benefits that reinforce brand–consumer connections with minimal financial investment.

Advertisers' platform choices are strongly influenced by audience demographics and content type. Table 4.3 highlights that respondents agree platform selection depends on the target audience's age, interests, and engagement behavior. Interview data confirms that decisions are based on aligning platform strengths with campaign goals. This aligns with Diffusion of Innovations Theory, where innovations succeed when they are compatible with user needs and expectations. Selecting the right platform increases campaign efficiency and ensures faster adoption of marketing innovations.

Engagement potential and analytics features are decisive factors for platform preference. Interviewees emphasized that they choose platforms offering insights into reach, clicks, impressions, and engagement. Facebook and Instagram were highlighted for their advanced analytic dashboards. Muraina and Samour (2025) argue that the availability of analytics tools significantly influences Nigerian SMEs' adoption of specific social media platforms. From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, the measurable benefits gained from data-driven insights justify the resources allocated to these platforms.

Cost considerations also shape platform choice. Interviewees mentioned that platforms with flexible ad costs, such as Facebook and Instagram, are preferred over platforms with higher sponsored post fees. Table 4.3 supports this, as platforms with moderate mean scores reflect cost-aware decision-making. Chukwudi et al. (2021) note that Nigerian SMEs consider both cost and expected return when selecting social media channels. Social Exchange Theory explains this decision-making process as rational evaluation of costs versus relational and performance rewards.

Platform preference varies across city locations due to differences in internet access, audience behavior, and cultural factors. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of respondents across Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo, allowing comparative insights. Interviewees in Port Harcourt highlighted that Facebook dominates because of better broadband availability and audience density, whereas TikTok and Instagram are more prominent in Benin and Uyo for youth-centric campaigns. Diffusion of Innovations Theory reinforces this, suggesting that adoption rates depend on local observability and communication channels.

Finally, social media platforms are preferred not only for reach but for brand relationship building and immediate audience feedback. Interviewees emphasized the interactive nature of all platforms, allowing rapid responses to consumer comments and questions. This relational aspect, highlighted in Tables 4.2 and 4.3, is central to Social Penetration Theory, which asserts that reciprocal self-disclosure strengthens relational bonds over time. In Nigeria, advertisers leverage these platforms to foster engagement, trust, and long-term loyalty, showing that platform choice is both strategic and relational.

Research Question 3: What social media advertising techniques are used by advertisers in South-South Nigeria?

Advertisers in South-South Nigeria employ a range of social media advertising techniques to increase brand visibility, attract attention, and build stronger relationships with their audiences. The findings from the questionnaire, as presented in Table 4.4, show that influencer marketing emerged as the most widely used strategy, with a mean score of 3.36, indicating strong agreement among respondents. This suggests that many advertisers now recognise the value of working with individuals who already have established followings and influence on social media platforms. The result aligns with the view of Nwali and Ntegeeh (2022), who argue that influencers help brands appear more genuine, relatable, and trustworthy, particularly among younger audiences who spend a great deal of time on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Interview responses also reinforced this finding, as several participants explained that advertisers frequently partner with popular social media personalities to extend the reach of their campaigns and improve audience trust. By associating their products or services with influencers who already command attention and credibility, brands are able to generate stronger engagement and encourage consumers to respond more positively to their messages.

In addition, paid sponsorships and targeted advertising are also commonly used, as reflected by a mean score of 3.33 in Table 4.4. This indicates that advertisers are making deliberate use of the paid advertising tools provided by platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and other social media channels. These tools allow advertisers to narrow their audience based on specific characteristics such as age, gender, location, interests, and online behaviour, making it easier to deliver messages to people who are most likely to be interested in them. In practical terms, this means that advertising efforts are no longer left to chance, but are instead guided by data and platform analytics. Muraina and Samour (2025) note that these built-in analytical features help advertisers track campaign performance, measure audience response, and make adjustments where necessary to improve results. The interview data further showed that many businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, combine organic posts with paid promotions in order to remain visible without overspending. This mixed strategy reflects a realistic approach to advertising, where businesses try to balance limited budgets with the need to achieve measurable outcomes and maintain a steady online presence.

Furthermore, storytelling and emotional appeal also play an important role in social media advertising in South-South Nigeria, with a mean score of 3.23 recorded in Table 4.4. Rather than relying only on direct product promotion, many advertisers now create content that tells a story, evokes emotion, or reflects everyday experiences that audiences can easily identify with. This approach helps to make advertisements feel less mechanical and more personal, which can improve audience interest and recall. Ihemebiri, Ukwandu, Ofusori, and Olebara (2022) explain that storytelling strengthens message retention and contributes to the development of brand loyalty because people are more likely to remember messages that connect with them emotionally. Interview responses supported this view, as participants noted that many campaigns include local expressions, cultural references, humour, and familiar social situations to make the content more appealing and relatable. This shows that effective social media advertising in the region is not only about reaching large numbers of people, but also about creating content that speaks to the audience's experiences, values, and emotions. In this sense, the success of social media advertising depends on both visibility and relevance, with advertisers increasingly focusing on techniques that make their messages more engaging, memorable, and persuasive.

The use of hashtags and participation in trending online topics are additional techniques, with a mean of 3.11. Hashtags help organize content, increase discoverability, and associate campaigns with broader conversations. This strategy allows advertisers to ride on trending topics to gain viral attention, as also highlighted by Nwali and Ntegeeh (2022). Interviews indicated that marketers frequently monitor local and global trends to insert brand messages into ongoing discussions, enhancing engagement. Such practices demonstrate a nuanced understanding of social media dynamics, where visibility is often driven as much by contextual relevance as by paid promotion.

Video content is prioritized over static images, with a mean score of 3.27 in Table 4.4. Videos are more engaging and retain audience attention longer, leading to higher interaction rates and improved message recall. Ihemebiri et al. (2022) note that short-form video content, particularly on TikTok and Instagram Reels, has become a critical tool for reaching younger demographics in Nigeria. Interviewees emphasized that brands increasingly invest in creative video production to tell compelling stories, showcase products, and integrate call-to-action elements. The preference for video content highlights the shift toward multimedia-rich advertising strategies that accommodate changing audience consumption patterns.

Data analytics is another critical technique, reflected by a mean of 3.14 in Table 4.4. Advertisers use analytics to monitor engagement metrics, track audience behavior, and measure campaign effectiveness. Muraina and Samour (2025) observe that data-driven decision-making enhances the precision of social media campaigns, enabling real-time adjustments to content, targeting, and budget allocation. Interview responses revealed that both large and small businesses rely on platform-provided analytics dashboards to assess which posts generate the highest engagement, guiding future content strategies. This illustrates a sophisticated integration of technology into advertising practices in South-South Nigeria.

Interactive campaigns that actively involve users are widely applied, as revealed through qualitative interviews. Strategies such as polls, contests, quizzes, and user-generated content are intentionally designed to promote participation and allow audiences to contribute to the creation of brand experiences. According to Nwali and Ntegeeh (2022), interactive content goes beyond increasing engagement; it also deepens the emotional bond between consumers and brands. Evidence from the questionnaire further aligns with this position, as reflected in the high mean scores recorded for engagement- and feedback-related items (Table 4.2). These interactive strategies highlight that advertisers understand social media as a platform for two-way communication rather than a one-directional channel for message dissemination.

Advertisers make strategic use of cross-platform campaigns by sharing content across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) to enhance visibility. The preference for multiple platforms, as shown in Table 4.3, enables marketers to adapt content formats to suit different audience segments while maintaining wide reach. Ihemebiri et al. (2022) note that cross-platform strategies contribute to stronger brand consistency and improve the chances of reaching varied demographic groups. Insights from the interviews indicate that businesses deliberately coordinate their messaging, visual elements, and campaign schedules across platforms to ensure uniformity and strengthen brand identity. This coordinated approach reflects a deliberate effort by advertisers to manage multi-channel campaigns effectively in order to achieve optimal results.

Content personalization and targeted messaging are essential techniques, particularly in digital advertising. Using insights from audience data, advertisers create messages that align with user interests, preferences, and behaviors. Muraina and Samour (2025) report that personalized campaigns significantly improve engagement and conversion rates. Interview responses supported this by showing that advertisers segment audiences and craft content that resonates with different

consumer groups, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of audience-centric marketing. Personalized campaigns reflect a shift from mass advertising toward precision marketing, which is increasingly necessary in the highly competitive social media landscape. The combination of these techniques demonstrates that social media advertising in South-South Nigeria is multi-dimensional, strategic, and data-driven. Interview responses and questionnaire data collectively show that advertisers are actively leveraging influencer marketing, storytelling, video content, analytics, interactivity, cross-platform campaigns, and personalization to achieve campaign objectives. These approaches are consistent with the principles of Social Penetration Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Diffusion of Innovations Theory, all of which provide insight into how relationship development, mutual value exchange, and the acceptance of new ideas shape effective communication strategies. Taken together, these methods highlight the evolving character of social media advertising and its significant role in modern marketing practices in Nigeria.

Summary

Summarily, the study found that:

1. Social media advertising in Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo provides businesses with broad audience reach, cost-effective campaigns, real-time feedback, and enhanced brand visibility, as confirmed by both interview responses and questionnaire data.
2. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X are the most preferred platforms, with selection influenced by audience demographics, content type, and engagement potential.
3. Advertisers predominantly use influencer marketing, storytelling, video content, paid sponsorships, and trending hashtags to optimize engagement and campaign performance.

Conclusion

The study of social media advertising in select South-South states of Nigeria demonstrates that contemporary advertising is increasingly driven by the need for precision, engagement, and adaptability. From the patterns observed, it can be concluded that advertisers who strategically integrate platform selection, audience targeting, and content optimization achieve more measurable impact, suggesting that success in digital marketing depends less on sheer investment and more on strategic application of resources. This indicates a shift in the advertising paradigm where analytical thinking and audience insights are as valuable as creativity.

The adoption of diverse techniques such as influencer marketing, storytelling and video content reflects a broader trend toward experiential and interactive advertising. This suggests that contemporary audiences respond better to campaigns that blend entertainment with information, indicating that passive or traditional messaging may no longer suffice in building meaningful consumer relationships. Advertisers must therefore continually innovate to maintain relevance and influence in a competitive digital environment.

Issues such as intense competition, inconsistent internet access, frequent algorithm modifications, low consumer trust, and the high cost of digital campaigns were identified, highlighting the fluid and at times uncertain character of online advertising. These outcomes point to the need for careful planning, adherence to ethical standards, and sustained investment in data analytics as well as technological infrastructure to improve the performance of social media campaigns. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, the study indicates that effective advertising depends on a mutually beneficial relationship between brands and their audiences, where value is created through interaction, information exchange, and engaging content.

The study establishes that social media advertising within South-South Nigeria has become both an operational necessity and a strategic avenue for business growth in an increasingly digital environment. The adoption of data analytics, interactive formats, and creative campaign approaches is transforming the way brands communicate, shape consumer decisions, and evaluate outcomes. This work adds to existing knowledge on digital marketing practices in Nigeria by offering insights that are useful to industry practitioners, policymakers, and scholars seeking to optimise social media usage. It is clear that advertising in the region is moving towards a model that is more data-oriented, tailored to individual users, and driven by innovation, further confirming the importance of social media within modern marketing systems.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Social media advertising across Port Harcourt, Benin, and Uyo enables businesses to reach wider audiences, run relatively affordable campaigns, obtain immediate feedback, and improve brand awareness, as supported by both interview findings and questionnaire results.
1. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X are most commonly used, with choices shaped by the characteristics of the target audience, the nature of the content, and the level of interaction each platform supports.
2. Small and medium-sized enterprises should leverage cost-effective social media tools and explore organic engagement methods to compete with larger firms. Building strong online communities and brand loyalty can reduce reliance on expensive paid promotions.
3. Efforts should be made to build consumer trust by ensuring transparency, ethical practices, and accurate information in advertisements. Developing clear communication policies and adhering to regulatory standards will enhance credibility and long-term audience relationships.

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