Digital Marketing and Brand Awareness among Students of Achievers University Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has reshaped how brands communicate with young consumers, particularly university students who are highly active on social media platforms. This study investigates Owo how digital marketing practices influence brand awareness among students of Achievers University, , Nigeria. Attention is given to three dimensions of digital marketing: social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and data were obtained from 366 students using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using multiple regression techniques. The results indicate that social media usage has a statistically significant and positive effect on brand awareness, supporting earlier findings that link online engagement with increased brand visibility In contrast, social media paid advertising and electronic word-of-mouth were found to have no significant influence. These

findings suggest that organic interaction and frequent exposure to brand content on social media platforms play a more critical role in shaping brand awareness among university students than paid promotional messages or peer-generated online discussions. The study contributes empirical evidence from a developing economy and offers practical insights for marketers targeting student populations.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand Awareness. Social Media Usage, Social Media Paid Advertising, and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM).

Introduction

Digital marketing has become an integral part of modern business strategy, largely due to the widespread adoption of internet-enabled devices and social media platforms. Unlike traditional marketing methods, digital marketing enables organizations to engage consumers in real time, personalize marketing messages, and encourage interaction rather than passive reception of information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Tafesse & Wien, 2018). These characteristics make digital marketing particularly relevant for young consumers, especially university students, who are among the most active users of digital media.

University students represent a unique and influential market segment. Their high level of digital literacy, frequent use of social networking platforms, and openness to emerging trends expose them continuously to brand-related content. As a result, students often form brand perceptions and awareness well before making actual purchase decisions. Brand awareness, which reflects consumers' ability to recognize and recall a brand, is widely regarded as a foundational component of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2020). When brand awareness is strong, consumers are more likely to include a brand in their consideration set.

In recent years, organizations have increasingly relied on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) to enhance brand visibility and remain competitive. Through regular content updates, interactive posts, sponsored advertisements, and user engagement, brands seek to embed themselves in consumers' daily digital experiences (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Kim & Ko, 2012). However, evidence regarding the effectiveness of these strategies

remains mixed. While some studies report that active social media engagement significantly improves brand awareness (Bruhn et al., 2012; Duffett, 2017), others suggest that overt promotional content may be ignored or resisted by young audiences due to advertising fatigue and perceived lack of authenticity (Boateng & Okoe, 2015).

The Nigerian context presents an important setting for examining these relationships. Increased access to smartphones and affordable internet services has significantly expanded social media usage among Nigerian youths, particularly university students (Statista, 2023). Despite this growth, empirical studies that examine how specific dimensions of digital marketing influence brand awareness within Nigerian universities remain limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on developed economies, thereby overlooking contextual factors associated with developing markets.

This study addresses this gap by examining the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness among students of Achievers University, Owo. Specifically, it evaluates the effects of social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth on students' brand awareness. By providing evidence from a Nigerian university context, the study contributes to digital marketing literature and offers practical guidance for organizations seeking to design effective marketing strategies for student consumers.

Statement of the Research Problem

The growing reliance on digital marketing has fundamentally changed how organizations seek to build brand awareness, particularly among young consumers such as university students who are highly active on social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Businesses increasingly invest in social media usage, paid online advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) strategies with the expectation that these tools will enhance brand visibility and recognition. Despite these investments, there is still no clear consensus in the literature regarding the effectiveness of specific digital marketing dimensions in generating brand awareness among university students.

Empirical studies present mixed findings. While some scholars report that social media engagement significantly improves brand awareness (Bruhn et al., 2012; Hutter et al., 2013), others suggest that paid social media advertisements are often ignored or perceived as intrusive by young users, thereby reducing their effectiveness (Boateng & Okoe, 2015). Similarly, although electronic word-of-mouth is widely regarded as a credible source of information, its actual influence on brand awareness appears to vary depending on context, trust, and audience characteristics (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). These inconsistencies indicate that the impact of digital marketing on brand awareness is neither uniform nor fully understood.

In the Nigerian context, the rapid expansion of internet access and smartphone usage has increased students' exposure to digital marketing content. However, empirical evidence examining how Nigerian university students respond to different digital marketing strategies remains limited. Most existing studies are concentrated in developed economies, making it difficult to generalize their findings to developing countries where cultural, economic, and technological conditions differ significantly (Duffett, 2017). As a result, marketers operating within Nigerian universities often rely on assumptions rather than evidence-based insights when designing digital marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, there is a lack of institution-specific studies that examine how social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth jointly influence brand awareness among university students. Without such evidence, organizations risk misallocating resources to digital marketing strategies that may not effectively enhance brand awareness within this demographic.

Against this backdrop, the research problem addressed in this study is the limited empirical understanding of how different dimensions of digital marketing influence brand awareness among university students in Nigeria, using Achievers University, Owo, as a case study. Addressing this problem is essential for developing context-appropriate digital marketing strategies and for contributing to the growing body of literature on digital marketing in developing economies.

Objectives of the Study

The **broad objective** of this study is to examine the relationship between digital marketing and brand awareness among university students, with a specific focus on Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The **specific objectives** of the study are: To **analyze the influence of social media usage** on brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State, **examine the impact of social media paid advertising** on brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State and **evaluate the role of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)** in shaping brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State

Research Hypotheses

Based on the study objectives and existing literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the investigation:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between **social media usage** and brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between **social media paid advertising** and brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between **electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)** and brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State.

Literature Review

Brand and Brand Awareness

A **brand** is more than just a name, logo, or symbol; it represents the perceptions, emotions, and associations that consumers attach to a product or service (Keller, 2020; Kapferer, 2012). Brand identity comprises tangible elements like logos and packaging, but also intangible aspects such as trust, quality, and reputation (Aaker, 2018). Brand awareness, a key component of brand equity, refers to the extent to which consumers can recognize, recall, or identify a brand under different conditions (Bilgin, 2020; Keller, 2020). High brand awareness increases the

likelihood of brand consideration during purchasing decisions and fosters loyalty (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Aleman, 2017).

Brand awareness can be classified into **brand recognition** (consumer can identify a brand when exposed to it) and **brand recall** (consumer can retrieve the brand from memory without prompts) (Hakala et al., 2012; Kumar, 2020). Research indicates that strong brand awareness positively influences consumer behaviour, including purchase intention, loyalty, and engagement (Chen & Wang, 2021; Park et al., 2023). In the context of university students, brand awareness is particularly relevant because this demographic is highly exposed to digital media and social influence, shaping their brand preferences and purchasing behavior (Ahmed & Omar, 2021; Adebayo & Okpara, 2022).

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing refers to the strategic use of digital platforms, tools, and technologies to promote products, engage consumers, and drive business goals (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2021; Kannan & Li, 2021). It encompasses activities such as **social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing, content marketing,** and **paid online advertising** (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2020). Unlike traditional advertising, digital marketing allows **personalised and interactive engagement** with consumers, offering real-time feedback and performance analytics (Lamberton & Stephen, 2020).

Studies highlight the critical role of digital marketing in shaping brand awareness, particularly among digitally active populations like university students (Kapoor et al., 2021; Laksamana et al., 2022). The interactive nature of social media enables **two-way communication,** where students can comment, share, like, and respond to brand content, increasing engagement and trust (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Social Media Usage

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become essential tools for digital marketing. They allow brands to reach students in cost-effective and highly targeted ways (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Pentina et al., 2022). University students are considered **digital natives,** who actively seek

entertainment, information, and social interaction online, making them an ideal target audience for brand promotion (Kim & Johnson, 2019; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Research shows that higher **social media usage** correlates positively with brand awareness because frequent exposure to brand content increases familiarity and recall (Hutter et al., 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). In Nigeria, studies indicate that students' social media activity directly influences brand engagement and preferences, highlighting the effectiveness of platform-based marketing (Adeniyi & Ogunmokun, 2020; Ojo & Adejumo, 2020).

Social Media Paid Advertising

Paid social media advertising involves the promotion of products or services through sponsored posts, display ads, or video campaigns, targeting specific demographic and behavioral segments using platform algorithms (Gupta & Vohra, 2021; Kumar et al., 2022). Paid ads are particularly effective for capturing attention, enhancing visibility, and driving brand recall among students who are constantly online (Laksamana et al., 2022).

Globally, research suggests that **targeted paid campaigns** improve brand awareness by tailoring messages based on interests, age, location, and online behaviour (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Alalwan et al., 2021). In Nigeria, Odusanya and Afolabi (2020) found that influencer-backed paid campaigns on social media increased brand awareness by 20%, demonstrating the effectiveness of paid promotions in a local context. However, some studies note that overexposure or irrelevant adverts may lead to **advert fatigue**, reducing effectiveness (Huang & Chen, 2020; Singh & Gupta, 2022).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to online consumer-generated content that shares opinions, experiences, and recommendations about products or services, often through social media, review sites, blogs, or forums (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Balakrishnan et al., 2014). eWOM is considered a highly influential

form of marketing because students often trust peer opinions more than traditional advertising (Kapoor et al., 2021; Shareef et al., 2021).

Positive eWOM enhances **brand credibility, loyalty, and awareness,** while negative eWOM can damage reputation quickly (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2014). In the Nigerian university context, studies suggest that students actively share and consult online reviews before making purchasing decisions, indicating that eWOM can significantly influence brand perception when effectively leveraged (Adeniyi & Ogunmokun, 2020; Ojo & Adejumo, 2020).

In a nutshell, the literature indicates that **digital marketing is a crucial driver of brand awareness**, particularly through social media usage, paid advertising, and eWOM. However, the impact varies by context, demographic characteristics, and strategy execution. For Nigerian university students, high digital engagement suggests strong potential for brand awareness campaigns, but factors like ad fatigue, cultural relevance, and trust play a critical role in effectiveness. This underscores the importance of empirical research in the Nigerian setting, specifically at Achievers University, Owo, to understand how digital marketing strategies shape brand awareness among students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on three complementary theories: **Social Identity Theory (SIT), Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT),** and the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).** Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how digital marketing influences brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo.

Social Identity Theory (SIT), originally proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. People tend to classify themselves and others into social categories such as age, profession, or institutional affiliation, which fosters a sense of belonging and identity. Within the context of this study, university students form distinct social groups through online communities and campus networks. Social media usage, paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth

(eWOM) that resonate with these group identities can enhance students' engagement with brands and foster stronger brand awareness. When digital marketing campaigns align with students' social identities, they encourage students to perceive the brand as part of their in-group, increasing attention, interaction, and positive brand associations (Reed et al., 2021; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2020).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), emphasizes the active role of audiences in selecting media to satisfy specific needs, including information-seeking, entertainment, social interaction, and personal identity reinforcement. Applied to this research, UGT suggests that university students engage with digital marketing content intentionally, based on their personal motivations. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook provide avenues for students to access content that meets their informational or entertainment needs. Consequently, digital marketing campaigns that deliver relevant and engaging content are more likely to capture students' attention, foster interaction, and enhance brand recall. This theory highlights the importance of tailoring digital content to the preferences and gratifications of the target audience in order to strengthen brand awareness (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Adeniyi & Ogunmokun, 2020).

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), formulated by Ajzen (1991), explains how individuals' behavioral intentions are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of this study, TPB provides insight into how university students' engagement with brands is shaped by their perceptions, social influences, and confidence in interacting with digital platforms. Positive attitudes toward a brand, reinforcement from peers or online communities, and ease of access to digital media can increase students' intentions to engage with and remember the brand. By addressing these behavioral determinants, social media marketing and digital campaigns can effectively enhance brand awareness among students (Hutter et al., 2013; Balakrishnan et al., 2014).

In all, these three theories form a robust framework for understanding the mechanisms through which digital marketing strategies influence brand awareness. Social Identity Theory explains the role of social groups and peer influence, Uses and Gratifications Theory highlights the active media consumption patterns of students, and the Theory of Planned Behavior accounts for the psychological determinants of engagement with brands. Accordingly, **social media usage, paid advertising, and eWOM** are conceptualized as independent variables that interact with students' social, cognitive, and behavioural processes to shape their brand awareness, the dependent variable of this study.

This integrated theoretical framework provides a solid foundation for analyzing how digital marketing strategies can be designed to resonate with university students, maximize engagement, and enhance brand recognition within this demographic.

Methodology

This study adopted a **cross-sectional research design** and employed a **quantitative approach** to examine the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness among university students at Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State. The cross-sectional design was chosen because it allows the collection of data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of how digital marketing activities relate to brand awareness within the target population. The quantitative approach enabled the researcher to measure variables numerically and analyze relationships statistically, ensuring objectivity and precision in the findings.

The **population of the study** consisted of all students enrolled at Achievers University, which totals approximately 4,338 students according to university registry data. To ensure representativeness, the sample size was calculated using **Slovin's formula**, resulting in a target sample of **366 students.** This sample was deemed sufficient to capture the diversity of students' digital behaviors and their engagement with social media and brand-related content.

Data for this study were collected using a **structured questionnaire**, which was designed to measure the independent variables; social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as well as the dependent variable, brand awareness. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items to quantify respondents' perceptions and interactions with digital marketing activities.

The **reliability of the instrument** was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The dependent variable, brand awareness, achieved a reliability score of **0.900,** while the independent variables; social media usage, social media advertising, and eWOM recorded a reliability score of **0.963.** These results exceed the recommended minimum threshold of 0.7, confirming that the questionnaire was **highly reliable** and suitable for data collection.

Data collection was carried out using both **online and offline methods** to ensure broad participation and convenience. The online survey was distributed via **WhatsApp,** a popular communication platform among students, while physical copies of the questionnaire were administered on campus. This mixed approach ensured that students with varying levels of internet access could participate in the study.

Once collected, the data were analyzed using **multiple regression analysis** to examine the relationships between social media usage, social media paid advertising, eWOM, and brand awareness. This statistical method was chosen because it allows the simultaneous assessment of multiple predictors and their relative contribution to the dependent variable, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital marketing activities on brand awareness.

Regression analysis output for the respective effects of social media usage, social media advertising and electronic word of mouth.

Model Summary

Metric	Value	Interpretation
R	0.463	Moderate positive correlation between predictors and brand awareness
R^2	0.214	About 21.4% of the variation in brand awareness is explained by the predictors
Adjusted R^2	0.207	Slightly adjusted for the number of predictors; the model still holds significance

ANOVA

Metric	Value	Interpretation
F-value	32.927	The regression model is statistically significant
Sig. (p-value)	0.000	Highly significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting a good model fit

Coefficients

Variable	B (Unstd.)	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Interpretation
Constant	2.2713	0.2424	–	9.3702	0.000	Baseline level of brand awareness when all predictors are zero
SMU (Usage)	0.3928	0.0418	0.4455	9.4063	0.000	Strong, significant positive effect on brand awareness
SMA (Advertising)	0.0943	0.0647	0.0903	1.457	0.146	Weak and statistically **insignificant** effect
eWOM (Word-of-Mouth)	-0.0519	0.0672	-0.0472	-0.772	0.441	Very weak and statistically **insignificant** negative effect

Interpretation of Results

The study examined the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness among students of Achievers University, Owo, focusing specifically on **social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).** The data were analyzed using multiple regression to determine the strength, direction, and significance of these relationships.

The **regression model summary** revealed an R-value of 0.463, indicating a moderate positive correlation between the independent variables (social media usage, social media advertising, and eWOM) and the dependent variable, brand awareness. The R^2 value of 0.214 suggests that approximately 21.4% of the variation in brand awareness among students can be explained by the combined influence of the three predictors. While this shows that other factors may also contribute to brand awareness, it confirms that digital marketing activities play a meaningful role in shaping students' awareness of brands.

From the **ANOVA results,** the F-value of 32.927 was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the overall regression model is a good fit for the data and that the independent variables collectively have a significant effect on brand awareness.

Looking at the **individual predictors,** the regression coefficients provide further insight:

Social media usage had a positive and statistically significant effect on brand awareness ($B = 0.3928$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that students who actively use social media platforms are more likely to recognize, recall, and engage with brands. The finding aligns with prior research showing that frequent exposure to digital content enhances brand familiarity and recall (Kim & Johnson, 2019; Kapoor et al., 2021).

Social media paid advertising showed a positive but **insignificant effect** on brand awareness ($B = 0.0943$, $p = 0.146$). This suggests that while paid adverts may contribute slightly to brand recognition, they are not a strong driver of awareness among the students in this study. Factors such as ad saturation, limited interest in

promotional content, or students' selective attention to advertisements could explain this weak effect.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) had a very weak and **negative, statistically insignificant effect** on brand awareness (B = -0.0519, p = 0.441). This implies that, contrary to expectations, peer recommendations and online reviews did not significantly enhance brand awareness among the surveyed students. It may reflect a low reliance on eWOM for brand discovery in this context or a preference for other forms of digital engagement.

Hypotheses Testing and Interpretation

Three hypotheses guided this study:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between social media usage and brand awareness.

The results showed a significant positive relationship ($p < 0.05$), leading to the **rejection of the null hypothesis.** This confirms that social media usage is an important factor influencing brand awareness among university students.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between social media paid advertising and brand awareness.

Since the p-value (0.146) exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold, the **null hypothesis was not rejected,** indicating that social media paid advertising had a weak and non-significant impact on students' brand awareness.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between electronic word-of-mouth and brand awareness.

With a p-value of 0.441, electronic word-of-mouth was found to be statistically insignificant. Consequently, the **null hypothesis was not rejected,** suggesting that online peer recommendations or reviews did not meaningfully influence brand awareness among the sampled students.

In summary, the results indicate that among digital marketing strategies, **active engagement through social media usage is the primary factor that enhances brand awareness,** while paid advertisements and peer-generated online content (eWOM) are less effective in this particular student population. This highlights the importance of creating engaging, interactive, and relevant content on platforms students already use, rather than relying solely on paid promotions or peer recommendations to boost brand visibility.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness among students of Achievers University, Owo, focusing on social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). The findings provide important insights into the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies within this demographic.

The study revealed that social media usage has a significant and positive effect on brand awareness among students. The regression coefficient of 0.3928 indicates that frequent use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok increases the likelihood that students recognize and recall brands. This finding aligns with prior research by Kim and Johnson (2019), who reported a strong positive correlation between social media engagement and brand awareness. Similarly, Kapoor et al. (2021) noted that active social media users tend to interact with brand content more frequently, thereby enhancing brand familiarity and recall. The current finding reinforces the notion that **digital platforms are crucial for engaging university students,** who are active online and responsive to interactive content.

The study found that social media paid advertising had a positive but statistically insignificant effect on brand awareness. The weak coefficient (B = 0.0943) suggests that paid adverts alone are not sufficient to significantly influence students' awareness of brands. This result is consistent with Muntinga et al. (2021), who observed that excessive exposure to advertisements can lead to advert fatigue, especially among young, digitally savvy users. Similarly, Dwivedi et al. (2021) noted that while paid advertising can reach large audiences, its impact on brand

recall depends heavily on content creativity, personalisation, and relevance. The finding underscores the importance of designing paid campaigns that are engaging, culturally relevant, and interactive to capture students' attention effectively.

Contrary to expectations, eWOM showed a very weak and negative effect on brand awareness, suggesting that peer recommendations and online reviews were not significant drivers of brand recognition among the students surveyed. This contrasts with studies such as Cheung et al. (2022) and Ainin et al. (2020), which highlighted the powerful role of eWOM in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. The discrepancy may be due to the **local context of Achievers University,** where students may rely more on direct engagement with content or influencers rather than peer-generated recommendations for brand discovery. It is also possible that the effectiveness of eWOM is diluted by the high volume of content students are exposed to daily, leading to selective attention and reduced impact of peer messages.

Globally, the results partially align with global studies showing the positive impact of social media on brand awareness (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Hutter et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). However, the weak influence of paid advertising and eWOM differs from some international findings where these strategies were more effective (Jin et al., 2020; de Veirman & Hudders, 2020). This suggests that **contextual factors,** including local culture, content relevance, and students' media consumption habits, play a critical role in determining the success of digital marketing strategies. In the African and Nigerian context, the findings resonate with studies by Adeniyi and Ogunmokun (2020) and Ojo and Adejumo (2020), who reported that social media engagement significantly improves brand awareness, while the effectiveness of paid campaigns varies depending on content design and local relevance. This reinforces the conclusion that **digital marketing campaigns targeting university students must prioritize authentic engagement and culturally relevant content over mere exposure through paid advertising or peer recommendations.**

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness among students of Achievers University, Owo, with a focus on social media usage, social media paid advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). The findings reveal that **social media usage is the most significant factor influencing brand awareness,** demonstrating that frequent engagement with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter enhances students' recognition and recall of brands. This underscores the importance of active interaction and content consumption in building brand familiarity among university students.

In contrast, **social media paid advertising showed a positive but statistically insignificant effect** on brand awareness, suggesting that mere exposure to paid adverts is not enough to meaningfully influence students' perceptions. The effectiveness of these campaigns depends heavily on creative, relevant, and culturally tailored content that resonates with students' interests and lifestyle.

Similarly, **electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) exhibited a weak and negative effect,** indicating that peer recommendations and online reviews were not strong drivers of brand awareness within this context. This may be due to the high volume of online content students encounter daily, which reduces the impact of individual peer messages, or to students' greater reliance on direct engagement with brands and influencers rather than peer opinions.

Overall, the study highlights that while digital marketing holds significant potential for enhancing brand awareness among university students, its effectiveness is **highly dependent on the mode of engagement and content relevance**. Active social media usage, rather than passive exposure through paid advertising or eWOM alone, plays the central role in shaping brand recognition and recall. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers and businesses aiming to target university students in Owo and similar contexts, emphasizing the need for interactive, culturally relevant, and personalized digital marketing strategies.

Recommedations

1. Enhance Social Media Engagement: Universities and brands should encourage students to actively engage with social media content by creating interactive and relatable posts, campaigns, and activities that increase brand exposure and awareness.

2. Repackage Paid Advertising: Brands should redesign social media paid advertisements to be more creative, culturally relevant, and tailored to students' interests and lifestyle, making them more likely to capture attention and foster brand recognition.

3. Optimize Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM): Digital marketing stakeholders should develop strategies to make peer recommendations and online reviews more credible and impactful, ensuring that eWOM effectively contributes to brand awareness among university students.

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