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Awareness and Use of Social Media in Advertising: The Case of Facebook among Residents of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract

In recent times, advertisers are chasing their customers online to relate with them on a more personal basis, introducing new products to them and attending to their complaints online. The same way,

consumers are going online to make purchases. Social media collaborative, interactive and user-generated characteristics have endeared ordinary users, advertisers and consumers to communicate their shared interest with each other on social platforms. This study examined social media sites, particularly Facebook, to ascertain how users in Port Harcourt, Rivers State perceive their adoption as advertising media, if consumers patronise products advertised on them and how they make buying decisions on these social platforms. The survey research design was used to elicit information from a sample of 300 users in Port Harcourt Metropolis, which formed the study population. The findings showed that social media are good media for advertising, despite the challenges inherent in their use. It was also revealed that consumers patronise products/services advertised on social media predominantly based on recommendations/referrals from trusted sources - their friends, and that their need for such products necessitated their patronage. It is recommended that social media users should take advantage of the marketing opportunities present on social platforms and see them beyond mere social networking sites that help them stay in touch with friends and family members.

Key Words: Advertising, Awareness, Consumers, Facebook, Social media, Use

Introduction

The advertising landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, and nowhere is this more visible than online. The advertising medium is experiencing, perhaps, the most dynamic revolution and technological developments made possible by the growth of communication through interactive media. The advertising industry has long sought to go where consumers go. Indeed, the industry has followed consumers online, even developing new forms of advertising to relate to consumers in their virtual world. In fact, the very philosophy of advertising has changed, not wholly but in large part, as a result of the opportunities created online (Tuten, 2008).

In the present age of information superhighway, millions of people around the globe through social networking are building online local, regional and global communities to communicate their shared interests and activities, disseminate information and interact through a variety of web-based tools (Eid & Ward, 2009). Consequently, social media advertising is a recent addition to organisations' integrated marketing communications plans. Integrated marketing communications coordinates the elements of the promotional mix; advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion. In the traditional marketing communications model, the content, frequency, timing, and medium of communications by an organisation is in collaboration with an external agent, i.e. advertising agencies, marketing research firms, and public relations firms. However, the growth of social media has impacted the way organisations communicate. With the emergence of Web 2.0, the Internet provides a set of tools that allow people to build social and business connections, share information and collaborate on projects online (Corruthers, 2010). Furthermore, social media marketing programmes usually centre on efforts to create content that attracts attention and encourages readers to share it with their social networks. A corporate message spreads from user to user and presumably resonates because it is coming from a trusted source, as opposed to the brand or company itself. Social media have become a platform that is easily accessible to anyone with Internet access, opening doors for organisations to increase their brand awareness and facilitate conversations with the customer. Additionally, social media serve as a relatively inexpensive platform for organisations to implement marketing campaigns (Corruthers, 2010).

Sometimes, friends would have to draw the attention of their friends to some services or products they have seen or used on social platforms. The degree of trust a person has for his friend might determine if he would trust an advertisement referred to him by his friend or not. Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells (2009, p.343) put it succinctly when they said that "your relationships with friends will

affect how you respond to adverts in social media.” This scenario explains the genuine building of social authority which is a key component in successful social media advertising. Social authority implies that business organisations have to make people believe that they are credible, take good care of their reputation, and value their existing customers because these people are sources of information for their potential customers as they do not only use their products/services but interact with their friends about such products on social platforms.

The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) defines advertising as a form of communication through media about products, services or ideas paid for by an identified sponsor (Okoro, 1998). However, advertising, when conceived for an online environment and given contextual differences in its capabilities, functions, and the medium’s nuances, requires a new paradigm. The current definition of advertising states that advertising must be paid communications. Certainly, that is the model by which advertising has operated since its conception. But now, some of the most valuable advertising may be unpaid, or indirectly paid as in the case of CGM (consumer-generated media), some aspects of social media advertising, and the viral spread of brand messages (Tuten, 2008).

Advertising has traditionally been viewed as one-way communication, delivered from the advertiser through some media vehicle to a receiver, the target audience. Thinking of advertising as one-way communication limits what is possible, particularly online. In a world with Web 2.0 (social media), advertising encounters a new phase. Social media enable interactive capabilities in an environment characterized by user control, freedom, dialogue and bring a new degree of interactivity and consumer involvement to advertising applications. Social media truly enable a two-way (or multi-way) communication between brands and consumers. Online advertising becomes more about conversations, connections, and shared control and less about passive consumption of packaged content (Tuten, 2008). Dominick (2009) explains that advertising is not only paid for

in this era but word of mouth (viral advertising) is used to harness paid advertising.

Advertising through traditional media relied on a model of interrupting and disrupting consumers' life. "Interruption because the key to each and every ad is to interrupt what the viewers are doing in order to get them to think about something else" (Chaney, 2009, p.37). Consumers accepted these interruptions, served in the form of advertising, because they accepted that it was a necessary price to pay for what was otherwise free content broadcast on television, radio, and magazines. In that world, established content publishers controlled the distribution of content targeted at consumers. The interruption-disruption model is dying in the world of social media, where consumers control their media content and may even create the content.

According to Diamond (2010), the paradigm shift is a transfer of power. Not only do customers want to be asked permission by marketers, they want to actively engage in and participate in the product conversation. They want to tell a company what they think, how they view their brand, and how they can improve. Evans & Mckee (2010, p.11) explain that "engagement on the Social Web means that customers become participants rather than viewers." Social media have granted consumers the authority to speak up, and their voices are being heard loud and clear. While companies may want consumers to buy their products, these empowered consumers want those same companies to pay attention and give them a seat at the table. They no longer want to be merely passive consumers of products and services, but active participants helping to co-create them (Chaney, 2009; *The Economist* 2006). For social media advertising to thrive, Praise and Guinan (2008) explain that an organisation's marketing department should accept giving up some control and instead facilitate customers in driving the organisation's value proposition. Constantinidies (n.d) remarks that an organisation ought to define standards of conduct for its social marketing to thrive. Guidelines in social media do not only specify rules and permissions

but also responsibilities, tasks and time frames. This is because unattended social media lose audience (Barnes & Mattson, 2009).

Supporting the foregoing idea, Nwosu (2003, p.40) asserts that “social marketing is based on the new marketing concepts which insist that we must be customer-oriented and customer-driven in all that we do, for example, discussion, planning and execution in order to give maximum satisfaction to his needs and wants.” While the Internet is changing the ways companies design and implement their entire business and marketing communication programmes (Belch & Belch, 2009), “companies need to see potential and existing clients on social media as communities to be built and nurtured rather than just customers who are potential purchasers of goods and services” (Fyfe, 2009,p.181). While social media collectively can be considered interactive communication vehicles, corporate communicators must learn to distinguish the components of various social media, each of which has unique strengths.

Statement of the problem

There have been several debates by scholars on the future of social media advertising. Some are of the view that while too many advertisers are still focused on the business of shouting one message over and over, today, the most important communication is not the marketing monologue, but the dialogue that takes place among customers. Consumers are becoming insurgent, rising in revolt against slick, overly produced ads in favour of recommendations by fellow consumers and user-generated content such as that found in Facebook (Chaney 2009). In fact, the 9th Annual Edelman Trust Barometer Report revealed that people now say their most credible source of information about a company and its products is “a person like me” a trust level in peers that, in the United States, has skyrocketed from 22 percent a few years ago to 60 percent in 2009. More than 80 percent of people surveyed also said they would refuse to buy goods or services from a company they do not trust. The fact is that consumers

are demanding a decision-making voice in shaping the products, services, and media they consume (Chaney, 2009).

Others hold that consumers are not only suspicious of marketing, but do not like advertising and would not just trust at a glance. They want somebody they trust to tell them that a particular product is good. However, being that social media are new, are residents of Port Harcourt, Nigeria aware of them and adopting them as part of their advertising media? Do they patronize products advertised on social media based on recommendation/referrals from friends? Are there challenges hampering the effective use of social media in advertising? This study investigates awareness and use of social media as advertising vehicles with focus on the residents of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

- I. To ascertain the awareness of the use of social media in advertising by residents of Port Harcourt.
- II. To find out if users patronise goods and services advertised on social media.
- III. To determine whether consumers make buying decisions based on referrals made on social media.
- IV. To find out the factors that hamper effective application of social media in advertising.

Theoretical framework

The diffusion of innovation theory and the uses and gratification theory formed the theoretical anchor for this study. The diffusion of innovation theory explains how information or idea can spread overtime through some channels and social structures in the society (Katz et al, 1963 cited in Ojobor, 2002). The idea behind the theory is that for a new idea to spread there must be awareness stage, interest stage, evaluation stage and trial and adoption stages. Rogers (1962) and Rogers and Shoemaker's (1973) model of information diffusion

envisaged four stages: information, persuasion, decision or adoption and confirmation (McQuail, 2011). The relevance of this theory to this work stems from the fact that social media are at the evolving stage and as such, different users will adopt them in varying degrees. While some users have passed awareness, interest and trial stages, adopting social media for advertising and some patronizing products advertised on them, others are yet to embrace this new media even though they are aware of them.

The *uses and gratification theory* explains the use to which different individuals put the media and the gratifications they derive from the media. Folarin (2005) observes that the theory perceives the recipient of media messages as actively influencing the effect process; he selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of his needs and beliefs. This implies that “members of the public will actively select and use specific forms of media content to fulfill their needs and to provide gratifications for their interests and motives” (DeFleur & Dennis, 1994, p.559). The implication is that business organisations or entrepreneurs who use social media are active as they willingly create their social media page. The users choose social media as a means to fulfil their wants and goals over other sources. Basically, the business organisation/entrepreneur signs up an account on Facebook or Twitter, for example, for a particular purpose. That is, the need to connect with customers to promote a product/service. For other users, it could be the need to connect interpersonally with friends or the need to patronise a product/service advertised on those social platforms or just to know an organisation they are interested in the better. The assumption is that those who decide to patronise products/services on social media may be doing so because of the gratification they hope to derive from those products/services. While those who do not patronize the products, may not have seen any gratification in the messages. Therefore, the theory is relevant to this study because it deals with how people use social media.

Brief review of literature

Social media and advertising: the case of Facebook

Facebook is a social network for connecting people with those around them - friends, family, co-workers, or simply others with similar interests. Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 alongside his roommates and fellow computer science classmates Eduardo Saverin, Austin Maskovitz and Chris Hughes at Harvard University in the U.S (Locke cited in Nnaane, 2011). Initially, Facebook membership was restricted to Harvard students but later extended to other colleges in Boston and Stanford University all in the U.S. “Since 2006, Facebook has expanded beyond Harvard to other schools, corporations, businesses and any user across the world” (Dunay & Krueger 2010, p.27).

Zuckerberg, cited in Nweze (2009), explains that advertising on Facebook is an opportunity for companies to reach their exact audience and connect real customers to their business. Facebook allows users to connect and share information in a variety of ways. Facebook allows users to post photos, videos and customize their profile content. Facebook has added a number of features over the past few years, including instant messaging/chat and apps (and their developer platform). Users communicate with one another through different methods, for instance, private messaging as well as writing on another user’s wall. Wall posts are visible to a user’s friends, but usually not to the general public. Users can also change their privacy settings to allow different users to see different parts of their profile, based on any existing relationships (the basic privacy settings are “only friends”, “friends of friends”, and “everyone”). Users can post notes that are visible to all of their friends. Users can also comment on or, more recently, “like” the posts of their friends, and conversations often occur within the comment sections among multiple people (Dunay & Krueger, 2010).

Facebook pages are online location for businesses, organisations, public figures, entertainers, professionals of all types and individuals

with the intention of marketing themselves to the Facebook community. Facebook pages provide a powerful set of online tools for engaging with customers (or, as they are called in Facebook, fans). Every day, 3.5 million people become fans of a facebook page. According to eMetric's February 2009 Facebook Usage Metrics Worldwide Study, although popular consumer brands enjoy large installed fan bases, smaller brands, business-to-business (B2B) companies, consultants, and personalities can also build a loyal following by using facebook page (Dunay & Krueger, 2010). If facebook were a country, it would be the sixth most populated nation in the world. This is because the site has grown to be perhaps the most popular all over the world with a user base of over 660 million (Amaefule 2011). The number of users continues to grow steadily.

Facebook Pages are used by brands and are equivalents to user profiles. A page is the location on the site where entrepreneurs/companies write all about themselves. Some of the most powerful social targeting features, as noted by Zarrella and Zarrella (2011), are useful when such companies have a large number of Page members or users. Zarrella and Zarrella notes further that although some brands attract millions of fans to their facebook pages through paid advertisement, there are also some brands that their marketing strategies take advantage of the viral power of Facebook, relying on fan participation to generate a stream of news feed stories, which in turn create word-of-mouth awareness and attract new fans to the page.

Special events such as symposium, trade fare, seminar etc. can be created by a company on their page and "invites" sent to their network of friends (fans). While commercial messages posted on a company's Facebook page and their events are restricted to their fans, the paid advertisement appears on the right hand side of a Facebook page whose owner falls within the target market of the advertiser as indicated during the creation of the advertisement. Pages can help a company promote their business on Facebook through the following:

Wall: The Wall tab serves as the central component of a Facebook page and is similar to a personal profile. The Wall allows organisation and their fans to upload content, such as photos, videos, and notes. These actions generate updates (called stories on Facebook) and often display as stories on a fans' News Feed.

News Feed: News Feed displays these stories and publishes any new social action that takes place on an organisation's page to their fans. For example, an addition of a new photo to an organisation's page is reported as a story on their News Feed.

Status Updates: If a company wants to push out a message, the addition of status updates is a welcome tool in the facebook marketer's toolbox. Like in personal profiles where users update their status by typing any kind of message, pages allow a page administrator of an organisation to send a limitless stream of updates (short messages up to 160 characters in length), which, in turn, appear in their fans' News Feeds. These messages can be information about their products/services or their recent activities.

Discussions: Discussions are another standard feature that allows anyone to create a new topic of conversation and permit follow-up comments. Members can add to any discussion by typing their comments in the appropriate box and clicking the Post Reply button. Facebook helps build relationships regardless of whether an organisation is selling to businesses or individuals.

A study jointly conducted and released by Nielsen and Facebook took a good look at Facebook and the value of ads campaigns. The study entitled, "Advertising Effectiveness: Understanding the Value of a Social Media Impression," analysed data from over 800,000 Facebook users and more than 125 Facebook ad campaigns across 70 different brands. The study showed some great insights regarding how peer-to-peer advocacy and recommendations affect social media ad campaigns. The findings revealed that people who viewed ads with social contexts had higher response rates than people who viewed the same ads without social context. Ad recall grew from 10% to 16%,

awareness doubled from 4% to 8%, purchase intent jumped from 2% to 8%. The result suggested that social media users had a direct impact on other users when it comes to ads, and that social media are fast and an effective way to advertise products or services (Brook, 2010).

In a 2010 survey by Marketing Profs and Junta42 that asked marketers which social networks they are currently using, 55% said they are using Twitter, 54% said they are using Facebook and 51% said they are using LinkedIn. The study found that social media marketing is dominated by the “big three” networks: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Being that the network that will be most effective for a brand depends on the audience and the strength of the brand’s efforts on each site, Facebook has been the most effective site for B2C (Business to Consumers) marketers according to HubSpot’s State of Inbound Marketing 2011 Report, which notes that: 67% of B2C marketers reported acquiring at least one customer from Facebook, compared with 41% of B2B (Business to Business) marketers.

In another study, Triumvirate, an environmental services company attributes \$1.2 million in revenue to search engine optimization, blogs, and social media. They used Facebook and Twitter to share industry news and drive more visitors back to their content, leveraged interns and employees outside of marketing to participate in social media. The company has seen some great results from integrating content creation and social media into their marketing mix. According to Mark Campanale, marketing manager and new media trainer at Triumvirate, consistency is key - dedicate the time to social media and the rewards will make the investment worth it (The Definitive Guide to Integrating Social Media and Email Marketing: 17).

Research methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. This method was considered appropriate because it is a method structured for collecting data for the purpose of describing a population too large to be observed directly (Babbie, 2007, p.75). Advertisers, entrepreneurs, individuals, students, applicants, and civil servants in Port Harcourt,

Rivers State capital, Nigeria formed the population of this study. Port Harcourt was chosen for this study because it is a highly commercial and industrialized city, with a lot of people literate and making use of social media platform including Facebook for interactions and other purposes. A sample of 300 was used for the study. The sample was drawn using a multi-sampling approach. First, the cluster sampling technique was used to delineate the study area (Port Harcourt) into 10 clusters as follows:

- (1) Trans-Amadi/ Ogbunabali /Elekahia/ Garrison,
- (2) Forces Avenue / Moscow Road/Aggrey Road/ New road,
- (3) Okporo Road/ Artillery/ Rumukrushu/Woji,
- (4) Diobu/ Old GRA/ D-line/ Nsimiro/Park,
- (5) Rumuola/ Rumuokwuta /Rumuigbo,
- (6) Rumuokoro/Nkpolu- Rumuigbo,
- (7) Ada George Road/ Mgbuoba/ Chioba,
- (8) GRA/ Waterlines/Oruworukwo/Garrison,
- (9) Mile 4 / Nkpo Village/ Aka Base/Iwofe,
- (10) Oyibo/Elemo Junction/ Oil mill.

Quota sampling technique was then used to decide the number of respondents drawn from each of the 10 clusters. This method was used to assign 30 respondents to each of the clusters, making a total of 300 respondents. The justification for assigning the same number of respondents in each of the clusters was for even distribution. The purposive sampling technique was then used in selecting the individual respondents, advertisers, ordinary users and other business organisations from the various clusters. “The purposive sampling is used when a researcher seeks certain characteristics in his sampling elements and he wants to ensure those chosen have those characteristics”(Ohaja 2003, p.82). The characteristics which the

researcher sought were respondents' social media (Facebook) knowledge. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. It is a vital instrument for gathering information from people about their opinions, attitudes, behaviour and perceptions on a given phenomenon (Ohaja, 2003), in the case of this study, awareness and use of facebook in advertising. All the 300 copies of the questionnaire administered were returned, but 10 copies were not properly filled, giving rise to 290 valid copies of the questionnaire for analysis.

Findings and discussion

Awareness of the use of social media in advertising

Table 1: Respondents' awareness of the use of Facebook in advertising

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	255	88
No	35	12
Total	290	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

From Table 1 above, 255 (88%) respondents are aware of advertisement by companies/brand on Fcebook while 35 respondents (12%) contend that they are not aware of advertisement by companies/brands on Facebook.

Patronage of goods/services advertised on social

Table 2: Respondents' patronage of goods/services advertised on Facebook

Patronage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	195	67.2
No	95	32.8
Total	290	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

Table 2 above shows that 195 (67.2%) respondents have bought/patronised products or services advertised on Facebook while 95 (32.7%) respondents have not bought or patronised any product or service advertised on Facebook. In a follow up question, respondents who said they had patronized goods or services advertised on facebook were asked how often they patronised products/services on Facebook. Their responses are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: How often respondents patronise products/services advertised on Facebook

Patronage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very often	40	20.5
Often	120	61.5
Occasionally	35	17.9
Total	195	99.9

Source: Field survey, 2012

Table 3 shows that a higher percentage of the respondents on this count (120 or 41.1%) said they patronised products/services often, 40 (20.5%) said they patronised very often, and 35 (17.9%) said they patronized occasionally. The implication of this finding is that the users studied patronized products/services advertised on Facebook, with a great majority of them (82%) doing so often.

Respondents' buying decision based on referrals and recommendations on social media

Table 4: Whether respondents' buying decision is based on referrals/recommendations on Facebook

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Referrals/Recommendations	145	50
On my accord	50	17.2
Don't patronize	95	32.8
Total	290	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

From Table 4 above, it is evident that 145 (50%) respondents made buying decisions based on referrals/recommendations on facebook while 50 (17.2 %) respondents made buying decisions on their own accord. A follow-up question was asked for respondents to give reasons for their answers presented in Table 4 above. Of the 50 respondents who said they bought or patronised products/services on their own accord gave the reason that their patronage of the products/services was necessitated by no other reason but need.

Others who were referred by friends were of the view that they patronised these products/services because they believed and trusted that their friends would not recommend something that would not give them the desired gratification. Of the 95 respondents who said they did not patronise any good/service, 25 of them explained that most of the products/services that they see on their Facebook pages are not things they need while 70 respondents explained that the difficulties experienced in online purchases are enormous and as such they avoid making purchases online.

This finding corroborates the findings of previous research that social media users had a direct impact on other users when it comes to advertisements (Brook 2010). Although 95 (32.8%) maintained they have not patronised products/services advertised on Facebook, the need/relevance of the product being advertised was also an important issue for respondents as they revealed that their need for the product necessitated their patronage of such products and often, viewing an advertisement that was not specifically relevant to them made them not to click on those ads.

Factors that hamper effective application of social media in advertising

The data revealed that 50 (17.2%) respondents were of the view that creating a Facebook advertising page is simple but that the idea of Facebook requesting their master card number where money will be deducted is a big challenge to them and that when they get to that stage they stop. Another 50 (17.2%) respondents were of the view that

some Facebook pages accounts are not interactive because they hardly see anyone online to interact with them and that some do not update their pages with current information about themselves. So, getting the latest information on what they do is always difficult. Thirty-five (12.1%) respondents said that those who are doing social media advertising are more interested in posting commercial messages and responding to inquiries about their products/services that they think might lead to an eventual sale but rarely respond to complaints raised about their organisation. Forty (13.8%) respondents were of similar view that the Internet is not regulated and that anybody can post anything whether real or false. Fifty (17.2%) respondents explained that buying airtime to visit Facebook costs money just as recharging a modem is also very expensive. Thus, sometimes they find it difficult to browse and even when they do, they spend limited time online and might not be able to click on any advertisement or negotiate for any product/service advertised there. Forty (13.7%) respondents said that fluctuations in network are a challenge when negotiating for a product/service online.

From the foregoing finding, one can deduce that consumers expect a dialogue in social media, in which brands listen to what they have to say rather than simply pushing promotional marketing messages to them without taking into account what they think, feel, and want. This is probably because one of the unique features of social media is their interactive capability which is manifested in constant engagement with customers and potential customers. It can also be inferred that if customers find it difficult to spend more time on the Internet as a result of the expensive nature of the technology, adequate access to the Internet and quality time spent on Facebook may determine the extent to which people can patronise products/services on those social platforms. The lack of regulation of the Internet which makes it very easy for false content to spread was also a factor that some respondents said hampers effective application of social media in advertising.

Conclusion

This study has established that Facebook, and by extension social media, fosters an open, transparent environment where discussion flows freely between the consumer and the advertiser. The study is also clear that a very thin line exists between consumers and advertisers on social media (Facebook) since the content of social media sites are user-generated. Thus, anyone with a computer and Internet service can create and publish content. Despite the challenges inherent in social media advertising, this study is an indication that people are gradually harnessing these new media as part of their marketing strategies and others making buying decisions on them either on their own accord or through recommendations by their trusted friends. These findings are indicators that advertising or doing business on social media will get better with time. As more people gravitate to the net, advertisers continue to chase them online to relate with them on a more personal basis.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is recommended that business organisations should not only register their presence on Facebook and depend on their updates, notes, and wall posts to keep their fans informed about what they do; they should actually place advertisements and pay the owners of the sites, bearing in mind that their ads would get to their target market based on their location, age, interest and activities online. Information posted on their wall is limited to only their network of friends (fans) unless it is so interesting that people will be willing to share it with others. The reason for this is to enable business organisations maximise both paid search and the viral spread of their message. Similarly, Nigerians on social media should see these platforms beyond social networking sites that help them stay in touch with friends and family, but should enjoy the marketing advantage these platforms present. This is because some of the advertisers deliver their goods/services within the shortest time frame at the buyer's doorstep without extra charges. Also, Consumers

should exercise some patience with advertisers on social media, being that it is a new form of advertising and some of them are trying to know how well to serve them better bearing in mind that they can become advertisers tomorrow since social media advertisements are created by their users.

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