

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Over the years, communication technology has significantly transformed every aspect of modern life, creating a shift from how we interact socially to how we conduct business and engage with academic content. It is no longer just about connecting people; it is about reshaping human behaviour, attitudes, and decision-making processes. Apuke and Iyendo (2017) argue that the development of social media and mobile technology has created a new space for communication that is instant, interactive, and far-reaching, effectively transforming the world into a ‘global village.’ With these advancements, people are not only kept updated of world developments, but they are also exposed to new ways of doing things that influence their daily lives, both personally and professionally. Meeker (1997) says “...the internet which is the new media is better than television and other media because it combines all their elements while adding the element of interactivity”.

One of the most widely used platforms to emerge from this digital revolution is WhatsApp. Originally launched in 2009, WhatsApp quickly became one of the most popular instant messaging applications in the world, with over 2 billion active users by 2021. The app’s ease of use, affordability, and accessibility have made it a go-to platform for communication, particularly among young people. In Nigeria, WhatsApp has grown beyond its initial purpose of simple messaging and now serves as a crucial platform for

business and marketing activities, especially among the student population. Kolan and Dzandza (2018) contend that the popularity of WhatsApp among university students is largely due to its ease of use, affordability, and the ability to form group discussions. For Nigerian students, WhatsApp has become a vital tool not only for social interaction but also for engaging in business activities, both as consumers and entrepreneurs.

As students and young adults increasingly turn to WhatsApp to meet their social and academic needs, it is not surprising that businesses have recognised the app's potential as a marketing platform. With WhatsApp Business accounts, Broadcast Lists, and Status updates, users are now able to promote products and services to their contacts and groups with minimal cost. Asemah and Edegoh (2013) highlight that the youth are the most active users of social media platforms, and their interaction often translates into economic behaviour. This trend has been particularly evident among university students, who are often the primary audience for digital marketing campaigns. They are more likely to act on recommendations from peers, making WhatsApp an effective platform for personalised, peer-driven marketing. The use of WhatsApp for marketing is closely linked to the emergence of digital entrepreneurship among students. With limited access to capital and formal employment, many students in Benin City have turned to digital platforms as low-cost, accessible alternatives for business. According to Nwagwu and Odetola (2015), digital tools have become essential for youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria, providing opportunities to reach customers, build brands, and generate income.

WhatsApp has evolved into a multifaceted platform, offering features that go beyond basic messaging. It allows users to send and receive text messages, images, videos, voice notes, and even conduct voice and video calls, all in real time. According to Olson (2014), WhatsApp's exponential growth was achieved without traditional advertising, highlighting its organic appeal and peer-driven expansion. This organic growth is due to the app's ability to provide users with a highly personalised communication experience. Unlike traditional advertising, WhatsApp marketing feels less intrusive and more like a conversation between friends, making it particularly effective in influencing students' buying behaviours. As users receive messages directly from their contacts or from brands they trust, they are more likely to act on these messages, whether it's purchasing a product, attending an event, or trying a service.

Many universities like uniben have been particularly receptive to WhatsApp's marketing capabilities. Students use the app to stay connected with friends, collaborate on academic projects, and also discover new products and services. It is noteworthy that WhatsApp groups have been specifically created to help students promote their small businesses and advertise their services. These groups have become common spaces for the exchange of information, where students share everything from academic resources to fashion trends, food, and entertainment. Obar and Wildman (2015) observe that social media platforms redefine influence by amplifying peer-to-peer communication, thereby affecting consumption behaviour in subtle but significant ways. For students, the informal and trusted nature of WhatsApp makes it a highly effective tool for both sharing

and receiving marketing messages. In fact, students are increasingly influenced by the buying behaviour of their peers, often making purchase decisions based on the products their friends recommend or share within group chats.

In addition to personal influence, the use of multimedia content on WhatsApp enhances the overall marketing experience. Users can share images, videos, and audio, providing a richer and more engaging experience than text-based messaging alone. This multimedia aspect has proven particularly effective in marketing, where the combination of visual, auditory, and text elements helps build emotional connections with consumers. As Dumpit and Fernandez (2017) pointed out, users tend to trust content from familiar contacts, which increases the likelihood of engagement and decision-making. By sharing content in the form of videos or images, marketers are able to showcase their products or services in a more compelling manner. This is particularly useful when marketing items like clothing, electronics, or food, where the visual appeal is a major selling point.

Another significant advantage of WhatsApp as a marketing platform is its cost-effectiveness. WhatsApp offers free communication, with users only needing an internet connection to send messages across borders. This has made it especially popular in regions like Benin City, where many students rely on affordable communication channels. Apuke and Iyendo (2017) stated that students are increasingly navigating both academic and economic life through social media. This emphasises the role that platforms like WhatsApp play in shaping their financial decisions. WhatsApp is not only used to communicate with friends but is also a platform for discovering new business

opportunities and making purchases. With its direct, non-intrusive model, WhatsApp allows students to explore and buy products without the pressure of traditional advertisements or sales tactics.

Despite the numerous benefits WhatsApp offers as a marketing platform, it is essential to recognise the influence it has on students' purchasing behaviour. As Tuckman's model suggests, academic performance is closely linked to factors that impact students' time management and focus. In the view of Lynn et al. (2015), as students rely more on digital platforms, their decision-making processes are shaped by the content they consume, whether consciously or subconsciously. This means that while WhatsApp provides students with a convenient means of making purchases, it may also affect their ability to manage time effectively, potentially detracting from their academic commitments. The ease of access to marketing messages could lead to impulse purchases, which, in turn, may influence students' financial decisions and spending habits.

For instance, in uniben and Benin city, where the student's population is large, WhatsApp's influence on consumer behaviour is particularly pronounced. WhatsApp groups and status updates provide a unique space for students to discover, evaluate, and purchase products. However, this ease of access to marketing messages also raises questions about the ethical implications of WhatsApp marketing. Are students being influenced by marketers to make purchases they would not have otherwise considered? Kolan and Dzandza (2018) argue that the use of digital platforms like WhatsApp creates a unique blend of communication and marketing, where the line between personal and

commercial communication is often blurred. This highlights the need to explore the extent to which WhatsApp marketing affects students' buying decisions and whether these behaviours have long-term implications on their financial habits and academic performance.

Additionally, there is a growing need to examine how student-led marketing strategies on WhatsApp influence broader consumer trends. In many cases, students not only consume marketing content but also act as content creators and micro-entrepreneurs. They promote their own goods and services, from clothing and cosmetics to event planning and tutoring, using the app as a low-cost yet far-reaching promotional tool. As noted by Osei-Owusu and Effah (2021), mobile-based platforms have become indispensable tools for young entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa, offering new avenues for income generation and self-sufficiency. WhatsApp, with its conversational and multimedia-friendly design, provides students with an entrepreneurial ecosystem where innovation and word-of-mouth marketing converge.

Moreover, the role of trust in digital marketing cannot be overstated. Trust, often built through repeated peer interaction, plays a significant role in shaping student responses to WhatsApp advertisements. When a product is endorsed by a classmate or friend, the perception of risk is reduced, and the likelihood of purchase increases. This is supported by Mpinganjira (2016), who posits that social trust significantly influences online consumer behaviour, especially among the youth demographic. Given the increasing role of WhatsApp in shaping students' buying behaviour, this study seeks to

explore how students in Benin City, Nigeria, use WhatsApp as a marketing platform and the influence it has on their purchasing decisions. By examining students' interactions with WhatsApp marketing, this study aims to shed light on the broader implications of mobile-based marketing in the lives of Nigerian students and its potential to shape future consumption patterns.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In current years, the advent of mobile communication and social networking platforms has significantly changed the way businesses interact with consumers. Among platforms, WhatsApp has gained tremendous popularity due to its simplicity, accessibility, and widespread use. Originally developed as a messaging application, WhatsApp has evolved into a versatile tool that supports not only social interaction but also commercial activities such as marketing, advertising, and customer engagement. In Nigeria, particularly among young people and students, WhatsApp has become a preferred medium for information sharing and peer-to-peer communication. This makes it a strategic platform for digital marketing, especially in university environments where students are often active users of social media.

Many universities, especially uniben has become a home to a diverse population of students who are exposed daily to various forms of WhatsApp marketing ranging from product promotions via broadcast messages and status updates to group sales and direct messaging from vendors. While WhatsApp offers convenience, cost-effectiveness, and a direct line of communication between marketers and potential buyers, it is still unclear

how students perceive the marketing messages they receive on the platform and to what extent these messages influence their buying behavior.

Furthermore, the effectiveness, reliability, and trustworthiness of WhatsApp as a marketing tool among students have not been adequately studied. Questions remain about whether students consider WhatsApp marketing credible, whether they frequently make purchases through the platform, and what factors such as peer influence, social proof, affordability, or convenience drive their purchasing decisions. In addition, issues such as fraud, misinformation, privacy concerns, and the lack of regulation within WhatsApp marketing spaces may also influence how students interact with sellers and respond to marketing content.

Despite its growing use, there is a noticeable gap in academic literature examining the relationship between WhatsApp marketing and consumer behavior within the Nigerian university context. While many businesses continue to invest time and resources into leveraging WhatsApp for marketing, little is known about its actual impact on students' purchase decisions. Without this knowledge, marketers, entrepreneurs, and even student vendors may be unable to effectively strategize or understand their audience's behavior. Therefore, this study seeks to critically assess how students of the University of Benin engage with WhatsApp marketing platforms and how this engagement influences their buying behaviour.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a marketing platform in UNIBEN.
2. Determine the level to which WhatsApp marketing influences students' buying decisions in UNIBEN.
3. Establish (if any) the challenges students face when using WhatsApp to satisfy their buying behavior.

1.4 Research Questions

The research is been guided by the following questions:

1. How do students perceive the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a marketing platform?
2. To what degree does WhatsApp marketing influence students' buying decisions and consumer behavior?
3. What challenges do students face when using WhatsApp for buying and selling transactions?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study is significant as it provides insights into the growing role of WhatsApp as a marketing platform in shaping the buying behavior of students at the University of Benin. The result of this study would provide empirical data that will benefit in understanding how students engage with WhatsApp for marketing and commercial purposes.

The study finding would give marketers and small business owners help to develop more effective marketing strategy by understanding students' perceptions, preferences, purchasing behaviors and engagement patterns on WhatsApp. It further serves as a reference material for research on digital consumer behaviour in Nigeria as it adds to the knowledge on social media marketing. Students are shown highlights on the impact that WhatsApp has on their consumption habits, encouraging informed and conscious purchasing decisions.

Ultimately, this study will add to that of the ongoing conversation on the evolving impact of mobile and social technologies in reshaping the traditional marketing practices and consumer engagement strategies, with a particular focus on young people in higher education institutions.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study focuses on assessing how students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) engage with WhatsApp as a marketing platform and the extent to which the platform influences their buying behavior. It specifically examines students within the university environment, as they are predominantly youths an age group that constitutes a major target for marketers and remains the most active demographic in terms of exposure to and interaction with advertising content. The research further narrows its focus to undergraduate students across various faculties and academic levels within UNIBEN, located in Benin City, Nigeria. By targeting this group, the study seeks to understand

usage patterns within a clearly defined and accessible population, which also represents a relevant segment in digital marketing trends.

The choice to focus solely on the University of Benin is justified by the need for a manageable and well-defined study population within the available timeframe and resources. As one of the largest federal universities in Nigeria, UNIBEN has a diverse and sizeable student population, making it an ideal setting for observing meaningful patterns in WhatsApp usage and its influence on students' buying behaviors. Limiting the scope to UNIBEN also allows for in-depth analysis within a specific context, which enhances the accuracy and reliability of the findings.

The areas covered include students' awareness and usage of WhatsApp for marketing purposes, their perception of its effectiveness, the role of peer interactions in shaping buying decisions, and the challenges encountered in using WhatsApp for commercial activities. The study is limited to WhatsApp as a marketing tool, intentionally excluding other social media platforms. This choice is justified by WhatsApp's widespread adoption and popularity among students, making it the most relevant platform for examining mobile-based marketing and peer-to-peer influence within these demographics.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

In studies like this, the utilization of various research instruments often enhances depth, accuracy, and the ability to generalize outcomes. However, due to time constraints, this study relied solely on the use of questionnaires as its research instrument. This

presented a limitation, as it restricted the researcher from effectively observing all UNIBEN students' interactions and usage patterns of WhatsApp. Instead, the study depended entirely on the data generated from the questionnaires.

Additionally, it was challenging to interpret respondents' expressions and attitudes. A more extensive study would have encompassed all students from both campuses of UNIBEN, unfortunately logistical challenges hindered the researcher's ability to access the entire student population across the university's locations. Nevertheless, efforts were made to select a sample that accurately represented the broader student body.

Another challenge was the attitude of some respondents. While a some were cooperative, others were reluctant, viewing the researcher either as a waste on their leisure time or as someone attempting to gather confidential information. Although the researcher encountered several challenges, consistent effort and respectful persuasion eventually secured the participants' cooperation. Nonetheless, the process proved to be demanding and placed significant strain on the researcher during data collection.”

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

To ensure an adequate understanding of the research, key terms are operationally defined to avoid misinterpretation.

Benin City, Nigeria: This is the capital of Edo state in Nigeria. This is the location of the sample.

Buying Behaviour: This refers to the process of making decisions and actions taken by consumers when selecting, purchasing, using, or disposing of products and services. It is

influenced by various factors such as individual preferences, social influences, marketing strategies, and economic conditions.

Communication: The process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, or feelings between individuals or groups through verbal, non-verbal, or digital means. It can occur face-to-face, through written text, visuals, or via digital platforms.

Influence: This is the ability to change or impact a person's decision and actions. In this context, it refers to the direct and indirect effect that WhatsApp as a marketing platform has on students' purchasing decisions, preferences and consumer behavior.

New Technologies: Refers to recent or emerging tools, devices, systems, or methods developed through scientific and technological advancements. In context, this includes innovations like social media i.e WhatsApp, smartphones, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and other digital platforms that transform how people interact and share information.

Student Assessment: In the context of this study, it refers to the evaluation of the University of Benin student's opinions, knowledge and experience on the use of WhatsApp marketing platforms and how these platforms influence their buying behavior. It involves analyzing their awareness, engagement, and responses to marketing activities conducted through WhatsApp.

Use: This is the process of employing or applying something for a particular purpose. In this context, "use" refers to how individuals or groups engage with tools, platforms, or systems to achieve specific goals.

WhatsApp Marketing Platforms: WhatsApp is a free social media platform that allows the exchange of text, images, documents, videos etc.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Preamble

This chapter presents the review of relevant literature. This is because every academic work to a large extent is a replacement of what is in existence. To this extent, the review covered the following sub topics:

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.2 WhatsApp as a Marketing Tool

2.3 Students Entrepreneurship and Digital Marketing

2.4 Peer Influence and Consumer Buying Behaviour on Students

2.5 Review of Empirical Studies

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Digital marketing, in its most comprehensive sense, refers to the use of internet-based platforms and digital technologies to promote and advertise products or services. This approach has been widely adopted due to the increasing presence of the internet and the growing reliance on digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops. Unlike that of traditional marketing, which usually involves physical media such as television, radio, and print ads, digital marketing allows for vibrant, interactive, and real-time communication between businesses and consumers. It utilises various online channels, including websites, social media platforms, email, search engines, and mobile applications to reach target audiences effectively.

One of the main benefits of digital marketing is the ability to collect and analyse vast amounts of consumer data. These realisation allow businesses to make informed

decisions about their marketing strategies and consumer engagement efforts. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing involves planning and implementing marketing activities through electronic channels such as websites, email, interactive television, and mobile media while utilising digital data that reflects customers' traits and behaviours. The core principle of digital marketing lies in its capacity to tailor content to each user's specific preferences and behavioural trends. This stands in stark contrast to the general, less focused approach typical of traditional marketing.

The real-time feedback loops provided by digital marketing platforms make them particularly powerful tools for businesses. For instance, when a consumer engages with an ad or promotional content, businesses can track their responses through clicks, likes, shares, comments, and purchase actions. This data is invaluable, as it helps marketers refine and optimise campaigns to better align with consumer needs and preferences. Ryan (2016) points out that digital marketing “provides marketers with an unprecedented level of precision in reaching consumers, allowing marketers to segment their audiences and personalise messages for increased effectiveness” (p. 47). This segmentation allows for highly targeted campaigns, with tailored messaging that speaks to specific interests, demographics, or behaviours of potential customers.

Furthermore, digital marketing facilitates a more inclusive and cost-effective approach to marketing, especially for small businesses and individuals. In traditional marketing, high costs are often associated with the creation and distribution of

advertising materials. However, digital platforms such as social media, blogs, and search engines allow businesses to promote their products or services at a fraction of the cost. This is particularly advantageous for student entrepreneurs who may have limited financial resources but possess creative skills and entrepreneurial drive. Students in institutions like the University of Benin (UNIBEN) often take advantage of these low-cost tools to launch their own ventures and market their offerings, ranging from clothing and accessories to food services and tech products.

Digital marketing also enables greater interaction between businesses and consumers. Instead of merely delivering a one-way message, digital platforms facilitate two-way communication. For example, businesses can engage with their customers through comments, direct messages, polls, and surveys, thereby creating an interactive environment where consumers feel involved in the brand's activities. This engagement not only helps in building brand loyalty but also enhances the overall customer experience. Furthermore, consumers are more likely to trust and engage with brands that interact with them on a personal level, which is one of the reasons why platforms like WhatsApp are so effective for student-run businesses. The informal, conversational nature of WhatsApp allows students to interact with their peers in a way that feels authentic and personalised, thus fostering a sense of trust and credibility.

The adoption of digital marketing strategies among students, particularly in university settings, has been significantly influenced by the growing prominence of social media. Students are highly active on platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and

Twitter, not only for socialising but also for discovering and purchasing products. The extensive reach of these platforms and the ability to target specific demographics based on their interests, online behaviour, and location makes them particularly effective marketing tools. As digital natives, students are adept at navigating online spaces and are accustomed to consuming information in digital formats. This fluency in digital media means they are more likely to trust and respond to online marketing efforts that speak their language and align with their lifestyle.

In Nigeria, the rising internet penetration and mobile phone usage have facilitated the growth of digital marketing, particularly among youth. According to Statista (2023), over 122 million Nigerians had internet access as of 2023, with a significant portion of this population consisting of students and young professionals. This demographic is not only consuming digital content but is also creating it whether through personal blogs, social media posts, or entrepreneurial ventures. The flexibility and cost-effectiveness of digital marketing allow these students to advertise their products without needing significant upfront investment in advertising campaigns or infrastructure. Digital tools like WhatsApp allow students to market their goods through informal channels such as group chats and status updates, which are both cost-effective and highly impactful within their peer groups.

Digital marketing also offers a range of opportunities for student entrepreneurs, enabling them to leverage digital platforms to establish brand presence and grow their businesses. For instance, through platforms like Instagram and Facebook, students can

build visually appealing profiles, showcase their products, and engage with potential customers. The use of WhatsApp for business is particularly prevalent, as it allows students to interact directly with customers through instant messaging, product showcases via photos or videos, and quick responses to inquiries. This direct interaction can increase conversion rates, as customers appreciate the immediate and personalised service they receive.

Moreover, digital marketing's impact on student buying behaviour is significant. Today's students are increasingly influenced by online recommendations, reviews, and advertisements, particularly through platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. Tiago and Veríssimo (2014) highlight that "digital marketing is most effective among younger demographics, whose consumer behaviour is heavily shaped by online interaction, peer influence, and mobile technology" (p. 706). The role of peer influence is crucial in shaping students' purchasing decisions, as they are more likely to trust product recommendations from their friends and social network than from traditional advertisements. This peer to peer marketing model is well suited to platforms like WhatsApp, where students can directly share product recommendations within their social circles. The importance of digital marketing for students also extends beyond consumer behaviour. It plays a crucial role in promoting entrepreneurship and economic independence among young people. As university students face challenges such as rising tuition fees and the high cost of living, digital marketing allows them to create new sources of income through small scale businesses. With low overhead costs and the

ability to market directly to their peers, students can build sustainable businesses that support their academic pursuits and provide valuable entrepreneurial experience.

However, despite the numerous advantages, the digital marketing landscape is not without its challenges. Digital literacy remains a significant barrier, especially in rural areas where students may have limited access to formal training in digital marketing tools and strategies. Moreover, unreliable internet connectivity and the risk of online scams or fraud can hinder the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts. Despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by digital marketing far outweigh the difficulties, particularly for students who are quick to adopt new technologies and trends.

Digital marketing represents a transformative force in the way businesses and consumers interact in today's digital era. For students, in Nigerian universities like UNIBEN, digital marketing offers a unique opportunity to engage in entrepreneurship, connect with peers, and influence their purchasing decisions. As such, understanding the fundamentals of digital marketing is essential for examining how platforms like WhatsApp shape student entrepreneurship and consumer behaviour in the university of Benin, Nigeria.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing refers to the use of social media platforms to promote products, services, and brands through user-generated content, engagement, and interactions. It is an integral component of digital marketing, with social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, and WhatsApp providing

businesses with the means to connect with their audience in ways that are both dynamic and personalised. Social media marketing leverages the collaborative and interactive nature of these platforms, turning consumers into active participants in marketing processes, unlike traditional marketing that relies primarily on one-way communication.

The rise of social media platforms has fundamentally altered how businesses approach marketing, enabling them to move beyond traditional methods such as print or television advertisements, to a more targeted, cost effective, and interactive approach. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is defined as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p. 61). This definition captures the essence of social media marketing its reliance on user generated content to build communities, foster relationships, and drive business success.

Social media marketing is characterised by its two-way communication flow. Unlike traditional forms of advertising, where businesses push messages to consumers, social media allows for the creation of content that invites feedback, comments, likes, shares, and other forms of interaction. This two way engagement creates opportunities for businesses to better understand their audience’s preferences, motivations, and concerns. As Mangold and Faulds (2009) explain, social media has “enabled consumers to become active participants in the communication process, rather than passive recipients” (p. 357). This active involvement helps businesses build stronger relationships with customers,

fostering a sense of loyalty and trust that often translates into increased sales and brand advocacy.

One of the primary advantages of social media marketing is its ability to create highly engaging, relatable content. Content marketing on social media often involves the creation of visually compelling posts, stories, videos, and infographics that catch the attention of consumers. The focus on visual content is particularly important when targeting younger audiences, such as university students, who are attracted to aesthetic content that resonates with their experiences and interests. On platforms like Instagram, the use of photos and videos is central to engagement, while Twitter and LinkedIn focus on concise, text-based communication and thought leadership. As students engage with content that aligns with their values and lifestyles, they are more likely to share it within their networks, amplifying the marketing message and increasing its reach.

Social media platforms also allow businesses to target specific audience segments with precision. This is done through advanced targeting options available on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, where marketers can define their audience based on factors like age, location, interests, online behaviours, and even past interactions with the brand. For instance, businesses can target ads to individuals who have interacted with similar products or brands, or those who have visited their website in the past. This level of precision targeting is a significant advantage over traditional advertising methods, which often cast a much broader net. As Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) observe, “Social media marketing offers the opportunity to engage with highly targeted segments

of consumers, increasing the likelihood that marketing messages will resonate with the right people” (p. 32). This targeting capability makes social media marketing especially beneficial for businesses that aim to reach niche markets, such as student entrepreneurs seeking to sell to their peers. For students at universities like the University of Benin, social media marketing presents an excellent opportunity to promote their products, services, and ideas within a highly interactive and digitally connected environment. Social media platforms are not just for socialising; they are powerful tools for student-run businesses to reach their target audience other students who are also highly active on these platforms. According to the Pew Research Center (2021), “social media usage is ubiquitous among younger demographics, with nearly 90% of adults aged 18-29 reporting that they use social media regularly.” This makes platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram essential for student entrepreneurs who wish to engage with their peers.

WhatsApp, in particular, has emerged as a key platform for student businesses. Known for its private, instant messaging feature, WhatsApp allows students to create groups, share content, and directly interact with customers. The personal nature of communication on WhatsApp helps foster trust, which is crucial in peer to peer marketing. Students are more likely to trust product recommendations from their friends and peers, and WhatsApp’s direct messaging allows for authentic conversations that are more likely to convert into sales. WhatsApp status updates also serve as a powerful

marketing tool, as businesses can use this feature to share real-time updates, promotions, and product launches with their audience in a non-intrusive manner.

A key feature of social media marketing is its ability to create viral content. Virality refers to the rapid and widespread sharing of content, often resulting in a significant increase in brand exposure. Social media platforms facilitate viral campaigns through sharing mechanisms, where users can re post, like, comment on, and share content with their networks. This creates a snowball effect, exponentially increasing the visibility of the brand and its products. For student-run businesses with limited budgets, the potential for a viral marketing campaign can be a game changer. A well-executed campaign can generate massive exposure and sales with little financial investment. As Kietzmann et al. (2011) state, “the viral nature of social media makes it possible for content to spread exponentially, resulting in tremendous visibility with minimal cost” (p. 246). This viral potential is especially appealing for students who may have limited resources for traditional advertising.

Moreover, social media marketing provides businesses with access to comprehensive analytics tools that allow for the tracking of key performance indicators (KPIs), such as engagement rates, reach, impressions, and conversion rates. These analytics are invaluable for businesses looking to measure the success of their campaigns, optimise their content, and refine their marketing strategies. On platforms like Facebook and Instagram, marketers can see which types of content resonate most with their audience, when their audience is most active, and the demographics of those engaging

with their posts. This data enables student entrepreneurs to make data driven decisions and continuously improve the effectiveness of their marketing efforts.

The influence of peer groups on student buying behaviour is another important consideration in social media marketing. Students are highly influenced by their peers, both online and offline, when making purchasing decisions. Social media platforms facilitate peer to peer interactions, where students can share product recommendations, reviews, and experiences with one another. According to Goh et al. (2013), “word of mouth marketing on social media is a powerful force, as consumers tend to trust recommendations from their peers more than traditional advertising” (p. 118). This peer influence is especially evident in platforms like WhatsApp, where students often share deals, product recommendations, and promotional offers with their friends and family members. While social media marketing offers numerous advantages, it is not without its challenges. The algorithms of social media platforms are constantly changing, and this can affect the visibility of posts and advertisements. As social media platforms evolve, businesses must adapt their strategies to ensure their content is seen by their target audience. Additionally, the sheer volume of content shared on social media means that businesses must consistently produce high quality, engaging content to stand out. For student run businesses, this can be a time consuming task, especially when balancing academic responsibilities with entrepreneurial efforts.

Social media marketing is a powerful tool that offers students in universities like UNIBEN an excellent opportunity to promote their businesses, engage with their peers,

and influence purchasing decisions. By utilising the unique features of social media platforms such as real time communication, viral content, and data analytics student entrepreneurs can build strong brand identities, increase engagement, and drive sales.

2.2 WhatsApp as a Marketing Tool

WhatsApp, a globally popular instant messaging platform, has increasingly become a vital tool for businesses, especially small scale enterprises and startups, to connect with their customers and promote their products. Initially developed as a private messaging app, WhatsApp now boasts over two billion active users worldwide (Statista, 2021), making it one of the most ubiquitous social platforms across the globe. While WhatsApp's primary purpose was to enable quick and easy personal communication, its rapid adoption by businesses has transformed it into a robust marketing tool. Particularly in contexts where budget constraints limit the use of more traditional advertising channels, WhatsApp presents a powerful opportunity for direct, personalised communication, making it especially advantageous for students running entrepreneurial ventures in university environments.

WhatsApp's Role in Digital Marketing

WhatsApp's integration into digital marketing strategies has been facilitated by its broad user base, simplicity, and multifaceted capabilities, including text, voice, image, and video messaging. Unlike other social media platforms, WhatsApp offers a more

intimate, personal interaction between businesses and customers, thus fostering trust and building stronger customer relationships. According to Wessel (2016), WhatsApp enables businesses to engage with consumers in a way that feels less intrusive and more conversational, leading to higher levels of engagement and conversion.

The shift towards mobile-first communication, with an increasing number of users engaging with brands via their smartphones, has enhanced WhatsApp's relevance as a marketing tool. As a highly popular mobile app, WhatsApp reaches users where they spend a significant portion of their time: on their phones. This immediate access facilitates prompt responses, which is essential for businesses looking to offer high levels of customer service and engagement. WhatsApp enables real time communication, which not only helps businesses maintain a consistent and accessible presence but also cultivates an interactive environment where customers feel heard and valued.

Core Features of WhatsApp that make it Effective for Marketing

WhatsApp provides a variety of features that are conducive to digital marketing strategies. Among the key features that make WhatsApp a valuable tool for marketing are:

1. WhatsApp Business is a specialised application created for small enterprises. It includes features that cater to business operations, such as a customised profile containing vital information like location, company description, email address, and website. The app also supports automated messaging, including welcome and away messages, and allows users to organise conversations using labels. These

automated functions are particularly beneficial for keeping communication active with customers during non-working hours or when staffs are not present.

2. **Broadcast Lists and Groups:** WhatsApp allows businesses to create broadcast lists, which enable messages to be sent to multiple contacts simultaneously. Unlike groups, broadcast lists ensure that each recipient receives the message as a one-on-one interaction, preserving the personal nature of the communication. This feature allows businesses to reach a large audience without spamming or diluting the quality of interaction. Moreover, WhatsApp groups can be used for building communities around a business, where customers can share experiences, give feedback, and promote word of mouth marketing (Ramirez, 2020).
3. **WhatsApp Status:** The Status feature, similar to Instagram or Facebook stories, allows businesses to post multimedia content (images, videos, or text) that disappear after 24 hours. Status updates are an effective way for businesses to stay top of mind with their audience and share time sensitive promotions, product updates, and behind the scenes glimpses. The ability to post ephemeral content allows businesses to create a sense of urgency and excitement, which can drive customers to take immediate actions.
4. **Direct Communication (Text, Voice, and Video Messages):** WhatsApp's core functionality allows businesses to engage in real time, two way communication with their customers. Whether through simple text, voice messages, or video calls, this direct communication builds rapport and enhances the customer experience.

WhatsApp's focus on personal messaging makes it an ideal platform for customer service, allowing businesses to address issues, answer questions, and resolve problems more efficiently than through traditional customer support channels.

5. **Rich Media Sharing:** WhatsApp supports the sharing of a wide variety of media formats, including text, images, video, documents, and even location data. For marketing purposes, businesses can leverage these media options to showcase their products, share promotional videos, send catalogues or brochures, and even provide location-based services, all of which enhance the customer experience and increase engagement.

WhatsApp's Effectiveness for Student Entrepreneurs

For student entrepreneurs in universities like UNIBEN, WhatsApp offers a unique platform for reaching peers in a familiar and engaging environment. As students themselves are the primary users of WhatsApp, leveraging this tool to market products and services among their immediate network is both cost effective and efficient. With a user base that consists largely of their peers, student entrepreneurs are positioned to use WhatsApp for highly personalised, peer to peer marketing, a strategy that is often more effective than traditional advertising methods.

Student entrepreneurs can use WhatsApp for several business activities, such as product promotion, customer service, and direct sales. Since students typically operate on smaller budgets and limited resources, WhatsApp offers an affordable solution that does not require expensive advertisements or physical stores. By leveraging their personal

contacts and creating word of mouth networks, student entrepreneurs can build a loyal customer base quickly and effectively. WhatsApp's direct communication channels also allow students to receive feedback instantly, enabling them to refine their products, improve their customer service, and develop stronger relationships with their target audience.

WhatsApp groups, in particular, can play a critical role in student entrepreneurship. Students often form social or interest based groups on WhatsApp, and businesses can tap into these groups to promote their products, share promotions, and encourage peer reviews. Furthermore, WhatsApp status updates offer a low cost, high engagement way to advertise to students who are likely to be online frequently. This combination of direct interaction and community driven engagement creates a fertile ground for student businesses to thrive.

WhatsApp's Impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour

The integration of WhatsApp as a marketing tool has had a profound effect on consumer buying behaviour. In the context of student entrepreneurs, the use of WhatsApp facilitates a shift in how students perceive and engage with brands. Consumers are more likely to trust personal recommendations from friends, family, and peers, and WhatsApp's direct communication capabilities enable businesses to create authentic, personal relationships with their customers. With the growing trend of online shopping, particularly among younger individuals, WhatsApp has become a practical platform for students to influence their buying choices. Smith and Murphy (2020) found that the ease

and speed of communication on WhatsApp increase the chances of impulsive purchases, as users receive quick replies to their questions or requests for product details. This tendency is even more pronounced in university settings, where students typically prioritise convenience and cost-effectiveness. WhatsApp also fosters a sense of exclusivity, as businesses can create closed groups or use broadcast lists to share promotions and limited-time offers with a select group of customers. This feeling of being part of a special community or receiving VIP treatment encourages students to act quickly on promotions, thus driving sales and conversions.

WhatsApp Marketing Strategies for Student Businesses

For student entrepreneurs, utilising WhatsApp effectively requires a strategic approach that incorporates both personal engagement and professional marketing practices. Several key strategies can be employed to maximise WhatsApp's marketing potential:

1. **Personalisation:** One of the key factors that set WhatsApp apart from other platforms is the ability to engage in personalised conversations. Businesses can use customers' names, past interactions, and purchase histories to create customised messages that resonate with individual preferences. Personalised communication builds trust and loyalty, making customers feel valued.
2. **Customer Service and Support:** WhatsApp allows businesses to provide instant customer support, responding to queries and addressing concerns in real time.

This proactive approach to customer service helps enhance customer satisfaction, which is essential for fostering long-term relationships.

3. Referral Programs: WhatsApp's peer-to-peer nature makes it ideal for referral programs. Businesses can incentivise existing customers to refer their friends and peers by offering discounts or rewards for successful referrals. This word-of-mouth marketing strategy is particularly effective in university settings, where students tend to trust recommendations from friends and classmates.
4. Creating Urgency: Using WhatsApp's Status feature to highlight flash sales, time-limited promotions, or exclusive deals creates a sense of urgency, encouraging customers to make quick decisions and complete their purchases. The ephemeral nature of status updates content that disappears after 24 hours heightens the feeling of urgency, motivating students to act quickly to take advantage of limited time offers.
5. Engaging Content: WhatsApp's multimedia capabilities allow businesses to share engaging content such as product demos, tutorials, and behind-the-scenes videos. This type of content creates a deeper connection with customers, as they feel more involved with the brand and its offerings.

Challenges of Using WhatsApp for Marketing

While WhatsApp offers many benefits for student entrepreneurs, it is not without its challenges. One major limitation is the potential for spam. Students may become overwhelmed with unsolicited messages, which can lead to customers opting out or

blocking the business number. Therefore, businesses must be careful to ensure that their communication is relevant, non-intrusive, and personalised. Additionally, businesses may face privacy concerns when using WhatsApp as a marketing tool. As a messaging platform, WhatsApp is inherently private, and users may be hesitant to share personal information or engage with businesses via this channel. Therefore, businesses must respect customer privacy and build trust through transparent and ethical marketing practices. Businesses must stay aware of WhatsApp's policies and regulations regarding marketing practices. WhatsApp has strict guidelines for business communication to prevent abuse, and businesses must adhere to these rules to avoid being flagged or banned from the platform.

WhatsApp has transformed from a simple messaging app to a powerful marketing tool that enables businesses especially student entrepreneurs to connect directly with customers, provide personalised experiences, and drive sales. Its interactive features, such as broadcast lists, groups, status updates, and multimedia sharing, offer a diverse range of marketing opportunities. For students running businesses, WhatsApp provides an affordable, convenient, and effective platform to engage with peers and expand their customer base. However, to succeed in using WhatsApp for marketing, student entrepreneurs must ensure they are using the platform ethically, personalising their communication, and staying mindful of privacy concerns. With the right strategies, WhatsApp can be a cornerstone of student entrepreneurship and a catalyst for business growth in the university setting.

2.3 Student Entrepreneurship and Digital Marketing

In recent years, student entrepreneurship has gained significant traction, particularly within university environments, where young individuals are increasingly embracing the potential of starting their own businesses. The rise of digital technologies has provided students with new opportunities to enter the business world with lower barriers to entry. Among the tools that have revolutionised student entrepreneurship is digital marketing, which has enabled student entrepreneurs to access a wider audience, market their products or services cost-effectively, and build brands with minimal capital investment. Student entrepreneurship refers to the process through which students engage in entrepreneurial activities while they are still enrolled in educational institutions, typically at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. These activities could range from starting a small online business to developing innovative products or services that address specific needs within their campus or community. As noted by Kolvereid (2018), “student entrepreneurship is a vital expression of the entrepreneurial spirit that fuels innovation, economic growth, and individual empowerment among youth.”

This phenomenon has been largely influenced by a variety of factors, including the increasing desire among young people to break free from traditional career paths, the accessibility of digital tools and platforms, and the educational system’s growing emphasis on entrepreneurial skills. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media network have become integral to student-led businesses,

offering low-cost marketing solutions, particularly for those operating with limited resources.

The Rise of Digital Marketing in Student Entrepreneurship

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital channels and technologies to promote and sell products or services to a targeted audience. It encompasses a wide array of techniques, including search engine optimisation (SEO), content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, pay per click (PPC) advertising, and more. For student entrepreneurs, digital marketing has become indispensable in reaching potential customers, particularly given the platform's ability to engage audiences without the need for large-scale, expensive marketing campaigns. One of the key advantages of digital marketing for students is its accessibility and scalability. Traditional marketing methods, such as TV or print ads, require substantial financial investment, which most student entrepreneurs simply cannot afford. In contrast, digital marketing provides students with a platform to create content, reach their target audiences, and drive sales without incurring high upfront costs. According to Kumar and Joshi (2019), "digital marketing levels the playing field, allowing small businesses and startups, including student ventures, to compete with established players on a more equal footing."

Additionally, the ability to measure the performance of digital marketing campaigns in real time allows student entrepreneurs to optimise their strategies and ensure they are reaching their desired audience. Unlike traditional marketing channels, where the success of a campaign may only be visible after a long period, digital

marketing provides instant feedback on engagement rates, clicks, impressions, and conversions, thus allowing for rapid adjustments.

Social Media and its Role in Student Entrepreneurship

The role of social media in student entrepreneurship cannot be overstated. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn are some of the most effective tools for students looking to launch their entrepreneurial ventures. These platforms offer a range of features that enable student entrepreneurs to connect with potential customers, build brand awareness, and develop a loyal following. Social media is particularly appealing to students because it provides an interactive environment where businesses can engage with their audience in a manner that feels more authentic and personal. Social media marketing techniques such as content creation, influencer partnerships, and customer interaction allow businesses to foster relationships with their target market. Studies show that students are more likely to purchase from businesses that they feel have a genuine connection with them, which is often facilitated by social media interactions (Smith & Martin, 2020).

For student entrepreneurs, social media also presents an opportunity for low cost advertising. While paid advertising on platforms like Facebook and Instagram can drive significant traffic to a student's business page, organic methods such as creating engaging posts, sharing customer testimonials, and running promotions can yield strong results without requiring an advertising budget. This is particularly important for students, who typically operate with limited financial resources.

The Role of WhatsApp in Student Entrepreneurship

WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most significant digital marketing tools for student entrepreneurs. As highlighted earlier in the context of WhatsApp as a marketing tool, its easy-to-use interface and direct communication channels make it a highly effective platform for student businesses. WhatsApp enables students to engage with customers in real-time, respond to inquiries, and even conduct transactions directly on the app. The ability to create broadcast lists, maintain personal relationships, and send multimedia content allows businesses to cultivate a more personal connection with their customers, which is essential for building trust and long-term loyalty. For student entrepreneurs, WhatsApp offers an instant feedback loop, enabling them to learn more about their customers' needs, concerns, and preferences, thus allowing them to tailor their products or services accordingly. According to Ramanathan (2018), "WhatsApp has empowered student entrepreneurs to create a virtual storefront that enables them to sell their products without the need for a physical location, making it an ideal platform for small businesses."

Furthermore, WhatsApp's group feature facilitates peer to peer marketing, which is particularly effective in university environments. Students often trust recommendations from their peers, and WhatsApp groups provide an ideal space for businesses to promote their products or services and encourage word of mouth advertising. These groups create a sense of community, where customers can share experiences, offer feedback, and recommend the business to their friends.

Digital Marketing Strategies for Student Entrepreneurs

To successfully utilise digital marketing, student entrepreneurs must adopt effective strategies that align with their goals and target audience. Some of the most effective digital marketing strategies include:

1. **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO):** Although this may seem like an advanced strategy, students can use SEO to optimise their website or blog content so that it ranks higher in search engine results. This is particularly useful for businesses offering products or services that can be searched online. SEO tactics include using the right keywords, creating high quality content, and acquiring backlinks from authoritative sources. While this can take time to yield results, it is a cost-effective way to increase visibility over time.
2. **Content Marketing:** Content marketing is an effective strategy for building a brand's authority and fostering a loyal customer base. Students can create blog posts, videos, tutorials, infographics, and other forms of content to educate their audience and offer value. This content can be shared on social media platforms and optimised for search engines to attract organic traffic. According to Patel (2019), "content marketing provides businesses with the opportunity to engage customers in meaningful ways while simultaneously driving traffic and improving SEO."
3. **Email Marketing:** For students looking to build a direct relationship with their customers, email marketing remains a powerful tool. By collecting email

addresses through sign-ups or promotions, student entrepreneurs can send targeted messages, product updates, and special offers directly to their customers' inboxes. Email marketing is highly personalised, which helps build trust and increase engagement.

4. **Influencer Marketing:** In the context of university students, influencer marketing can be highly effective. Student entrepreneurs can partner with micro influencers within their university or local community to promote their products. These influencers often have high engagement rates with their followers, which makes them valuable partners for student businesses.
5. **Retargeting Campaigns:** Using Facebook Pixel, Google Ads, or other tools, student entrepreneurs can set up retargeting campaigns to reach customers who have previously visited their website but did not make a purchase. This technique allows businesses to re-engage potential customers and increase conversion rates.

Challenges in Student Entrepreneurship and Digital Marketing

Despite the many advantages, there are also several challenges that student entrepreneurs face when using digital marketing. One of the most significant obstacles is a lack of expertise in digital marketing strategies. Many students are still learning about marketing, and without formal training, it can be difficult for them to effectively implement digital marketing campaigns.

Additionally, time management is a critical challenge. Balancing academics, extracurricular activities, and a business can be overwhelming for students. This often results in marketing efforts being inconsistently executed or abandoned altogether. A lack of financial resources is also a common challenge, as paid advertisements and sophisticated tools may not be affordable for students. Competition from more established brands is another issue that student entrepreneurs face. While digital marketing offers the opportunity to compete with larger businesses, it also means that student-led ventures must find creative ways to stand out in an oversaturated market.

The intersection of student entrepreneurship and digital marketing has created new opportunities for young entrepreneurs to establish businesses while still in school. Digital marketing tools such as WhatsApp, social media, and SEO have provided students with the means to reach customers, build brand awareness, and promote their products effectively, often at little or no cost. Although student entrepreneurs face challenges, particularly related to expertise, time management, and financial constraints, digital marketing remains a powerful and accessible tool that can help students succeed in the competitive business landscape. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, student entrepreneurs will increasingly rely on digital marketing to navigate the business world and achieve long-term success.

2.4 Peer Influence and Consumer Buying Behaviour Among Students

In the landscape of online consumer behaviour, peer influence has become a critical variable, especially among university students. It refers to the degree to which

individuals are affected by the behaviours, opinions, preferences, and choices of those within their social group. This influence becomes more pronounced in the online space, where product visibility, peer interaction, and shopping decisions are increasingly mediated by digital communication tools. In university settings, where peer groups often represent the primary source of socialisation and identity formation, their role in shaping online shopping behaviours cannot be underestimated.

Understanding Peer Influence in Online Consumer Behaviour

Peer influence refers to the effect that individuals within one's social circle exert on their attitudes, preferences, and behaviours. Among university students, this influence becomes particularly potent due to their social environment, marked by frequent interaction and shared experiences. Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989) categorise peer influence into three forms, informational, utilitarian and value expressive. Informational influence stems from peers providing credible product information; utilitarian influence is based on conformity to others' expectations; while value expressive influence involves adopting peer approved behaviours to affirm group membership.

On university campuses, peers serve not only as friends but as key informants in the decision-making process. Through both direct means (recommendations, co-shopping, product discussions) and indirect means (e.g., observing peers' purchases and preferences), students develop a framework for evaluating products. This is especially relevant in Benin City, where online trust mechanisms are still evolving, making peer testimony more reliable than brand advertising.

The Digital Transmission of Peer Influence

Digital platforms have expanded the scope and speed of peer influence. Instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp have become core components of students' daily lives, serving as social arenas where vendor details, product pictures, pricing, and delivery experiences are shared. The immediacy and intimacy of WhatsApp groups allow opinions to travel rapidly, influencing purchase decisions in real time. Luo, Xia, and Yu (2013) note that group chats operate as filters, allowing students to assess products through collective vetting.

Moreover, peer endorsement carries emotional weight. Emotional expressions such as excitement, satisfaction, or regret are communicated alongside product posts, thereby emotionally priming other group members. This peer to peer marketing is often more persuasive than traditional marketing due to the authenticity and trust embedded in peer relationships. It also reflects a shift in power from marketers to consumers, as peer feedback becomes the primary determinant of brand credibility among students.

Conceptualising Consumer Buying Behaviour in the Student Context

Consumer buying behaviour encapsulates the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes that individuals undergo when making purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This behaviour is shaped by psychological, cultural, economic, and social variables. Among university students, these factors manifest uniquely. For instance, digital savviness, budget consciousness, peer validation, and convenience are

dominant influencers. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) assert that consumer behaviour extends beyond buying; it reflects deeper values and motivations.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a framework for understanding student purchases. While foundational needs like food and shelter are prioritised, many purchases are esteem-driven clothing, electronics, and accessories that align with social expectations and status. Here, perception becomes key: if a vendor is recommended by a respected peer or presents a professional image via WhatsApp, they are more likely to attract student buyers. Trust, built through peer networks and consistent vendor engagement, is the currency of student commerce.

The Role of Social Proof and Normative Pressures

Social proof, as described by Cialdini (2009), is the phenomenon where individuals look to the behaviour of others to guide their own choices, particularly in uncertain situations. In online shopping, where product inspection is limited, students rely heavily on peer actions. If several classmates endorse a vendor or product, others are likely to follow, not necessarily because of personal interest but due to perceived group validation. This also explains the bandwagon effect, where a single purchase shared in a WhatsApp group triggers a wave of inquiries and subsequent purchases.

Additionally, Moschis and Churchill (1978) note that adolescents and young adults place high value on social acceptance. Among university students, this often manifests as a desire to align with group norms. Purchasing behaviours may be motivated less by utility and more by the need to 'fit in' or avoid negative judgment. In this context,

emotional and normative dimensions of peer influence blend, fostering a culture of consumption that prioritises belonging over need.

WhatsApp as a Marketplace and Social Space

WhatsApp groups serve as dual purpose ecosystems facilitating both social interaction and commercial transactions. Each group (e.g., class, hostel, religious, business) has its influencers whose opinions shape group consensus. A positive product review or vendor referral from a respected peer can significantly influence purchasing trends. Likewise, a warning about poor service can discourage multiple potential buyers.

For student entrepreneurs, this dynamic offers both opportunity and risk. Positive experiences can turn customers into brand advocates, while negative experiences can quickly tarnish reputations. Many vendors leverage peer influence through referral bonuses, repost incentives, and loyalty programmes. When well-managed, these strategies transform WhatsApp into a robust, student-focused e-commerce platform.

Psychological and Cultural Dynamics

Psychological determinants such as motivation, perception, learning, and attitudes significantly influence student consumer behaviour. Students constantly weigh value for money, influenced by peer reviews and emotional reactions shared in WhatsApp groups. Frequent exposure to peer purchases builds familiarity, making new products seem less risky and more desirable.

Culturally, Nigeria's collectivist values amplify the role of peer influence. Consumption often signals social identity and status. Oyedele and Tella (2012) assert that young Nigerians frequently use consumer goods as a form of self-expression and social leverage. In Benin City, university students are particularly responsive to campus fashion trends and lifestyle shifts that reflect broader cultural values. This often results in impulsive purchases driven by social events, style conformity, and peer comparison.

Impulse Buying and Budgetary Concerns

The WhatsApp environment with its blend of status updates, promotions, peer testimonials, and vendor responsiveness encourages impulse buying. Students, often financially constrained, make quick decisions based on emotional or social triggers rather than deliberate evaluation. Countdown sales, scarcity cues, and endorsements from trusted peers heighten this behaviour.

Nonetheless, economic pragmatism still plays a role. Group purchases are common, allowing students to split delivery costs or qualify for discounts. The combination of economic necessity and social affiliation highlights the nuanced ways in which students navigate consumption.

Post Purchase Experiences and Consumer Loyalty

In student markets, loyalty is fragile and contingent on consistent vendor performance. While peer suggestions may influence first time purchases, sustained engagement depends on satisfaction, feedback responsiveness, and the building of trust. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) emphasise that digital reputation is key to retention,

especially in markets where feedback circulates rapidly via social channels. Post-purchase reviews in WhatsApp groups often determine vendor success or failure. As such, every transaction becomes a reputational moment. For vendors, this underscores the importance of managing not just sales but customer relationships.

Peer influence and consumer buying behaviour are deeply intertwined in the online shopping practices of university students. Platforms like WhatsApp serve as crucial intermediaries through which trust, emotional engagement, social proof, and vendor credibility are established and maintained. Peer recommendations, emotional resonance, cultural expectations, and economic pragmatism all converge to shape student purchasing patterns. For student entrepreneurs and digital marketers, understanding these dynamics is essential to crafting effective strategies that resonate with the values, motivations, and social realities of the student consumer in Benin City and beyond.

2.5 Review of Empirical Studies

A number of researchers have conducted empirical investigations into the use of social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, as tools for marketing and their influence on users' behaviour. This section presents a review of relevant empirical studies that inform and relate to the present research. The empirical works reviewed are: Ogunsola, K., & Mohammed, S.B. (2023), Uford, I. C., Charles, I. I. & Etuk, A. J. (2022) and Nwachukwu, K. C., & Onuoha, C. (2021).

Ogunsola et al (2023) study presented an extensive investigation into the factors that shape postgraduate students' purchase decisions with specific reference to products marketed through WhatsApp. The researchers recognised the increasing popularity of WhatsApp as a preferred digital marketplace, particularly among the youth and student populations, due to its convenience, informal tone, and multimedia capabilities. Grounded in the 'Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)', the study aimed to identify the psychological and contextual factors that most significantly influence students' likelihood of purchasing items promoted on WhatsApp. TPB was deemed appropriate due to its focus on the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping individual decision-making processes.

The researcher employed a quantitative survey design and relied on the administration of structured questionnaires to a sample of 314 postgraduate students selected from three tertiary institutions in Lagos State: University of Lagos (UNILAG), Lagos State University (LASU), and Pan-Atlantic University. The sampling strategy was multistage and purposive, beginning with institutional selection and concluding with random selection of respondents who actively engage in commercial activities or transactions via WhatsApp. The questionnaire captured data on participants' frequency of exposure to WhatsApp marketing messages, levels of trust in online vendors, nature of online relationships, perceived reliability of product information, and previous purchase experiences.

Findings from the study revealed a compelling pattern in consumer behaviour. The researchers observed that trust in the online seller and interpersonal communication via WhatsApp significantly increased the probability of a purchase. Many of the respondents reported that knowing or being familiar with the seller often times a fellow student, peer, or acquaintance helped reduce the perceived risk of fraud and boosted their confidence in completing a transaction. Other strong predictors identified included peer pressure, product visual appeal, testimonials shared in group chats, and the persuasiveness of sellers. On the contrary, concerns such as delayed delivery and lack of quality assurance were also noted, though they did not significantly hinder the overall use of WhatsApp for purchasing.

In terms of media usage patterns, the study highlighted that WhatsApp status updates and group broadcasts were among the most effective marketing features. These tools allowed vendors to share images, videos, and short captions which, according to the participants, offered a more engaging and immediate way to learn about new products. Some respondents described purchasing items “impulsively” after seeing them repeatedly featured on their contacts’ status. This supports the conclusion that consistent exposure to WhatsApp based advertisements can foster familiarity and eventually drive purchasing decisions, especially in closed communities like university settings.

The authors concluded that WhatsApp is not merely a tool for social communication but a strategic platform for interpersonal commerce. The strength of the medium lies in its peer-to-peer interaction model, which allows for a level of trust and

relatability that is often absent in more formal e-commerce platforms. Consequently, the study recommended that small-scale entrepreneurs, especially students, should be encouraged to explore WhatsApp as a viable marketing avenue. Additionally, it was suggested that training on digital marketing strategies be integrated into university entrepreneurship development programmes.

While this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing purchase decisions on WhatsApp, it focuses on postgraduate students in Lagos State. The current research differs by targeting undergraduate students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), thereby contributing to a more localized understanding of WhatsApp's marketing influence within Benin City's socio-economic context.

Uford, et al. (2022) carried out a significant study aimed at understanding the influence of e-marketing platforms on the buying behaviour of students at Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU). The research focused specifically on how Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as digital marketing channels affect the consumer decisions of undergraduates in relation to selected online products. The study was grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action, which posits that individual behaviour is driven by behavioural intentions influenced by attitudes and subjective norms. The researchers sought to explore not only the effectiveness of these platforms in disseminating marketing content but also the degree to which students interacted with advertisements and made purchasing decisions based on what they encountered online.

The study adopted a survey research design and utilised a quantitative approach for data gathering and analysis. A structured questionnaire was developed and distributed digitally to ensure wide reach. A sample size of 384 students was drawn from a total student population of 9,254 using stratified random sampling to reflect various faculties and departments. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential tools such as multiple regression analysis via SPSS Version 21. This analytical approach enabled the researchers to determine the strength of relationships between platform usage and actual buying decisions among the student population.

The findings revealed that all three platforms had a statistically significant relationship with students' buying behaviour, but the extent of influence varied. Facebook emerged as the most influential e-marketing platform, accounting for 76.9% of the variance in buying behaviour among the respondents. This was attributed to its community-building features, detailed advertisement formats, and ability to maintain continuous interaction with potential customers through pages, groups, and messenger. Instagram followed with 67.5% of the variance, indicating a strong correlation between visual appeal and purchasing motivation. The study suggested that students were more likely to purchase products showcased with attractive images, short videos, and influencer endorsements. Twitter, although less visual, also showed a positive correlation, accounting for 42.5% of the variance, and was found useful for brand updates, promotional tweets, and flash sales announcements.

Moreover, the study identified various factors that enhanced platform effectiveness, including user engagement, mobile accessibility, and frequency of interaction with marketing content. Students reported that they often made impulsive buying decisions after seeing a product repeatedly across platforms or after reading positive reviews and comments from peers. The role of peer influence and trust in online sellers also emerged as critical components of buying decisions, echoing the social influence aspect of the Theory of Reasoned Action.

In light of these findings, the researchers recommended that online vendors and marketers pay closer attention to the unique features and strengths of each platform. For example, marketers were advised to make use of Facebook's group features to build niche communities, use Instagram for aesthetically appealing product promotions, and maintain visibility on Twitter through engaging tweets and real-time interactions. The study concluded that a targeted and platform-specific strategy is more effective than a generic online marketing approach.

This empirical study is particularly relevant to the present research as it highlights the broader impact of social media on students' buying behaviour. However, while Uford et al. (2022) explored the role of multiple social media platforms, the current study narrows the scope to one specific platform WhatsApp. Unlike Facebook and Instagram, which are primarily public-facing platforms, WhatsApp functions within a more private, conversational context. This offers a different dynamic, as marketing through WhatsApp often relies on direct messaging, group broadcasts, peer-to-peer recommendations, and

status updates. The informal and intimate nature of WhatsApp marketing makes it particularly relevant for student to student commerce and digital entrepreneurship within university communities like UNIBEN. Therefore, while the context and platforms differ, the insights from Uford et al. provide a foundational understanding of how students interact with e-marketing content and translate such engagements into purchasing actions.

Nwachukwu & Onuo (2021) study delved into the dynamics of digital marketing through WhatsApp and its influence on the consumer behaviour of undergraduate students in Southeastern Nigeria. Recognising the pervasive use of WhatsApp among youths, the researchers aimed to explore how this platform facilitates commerce and affects purchasing decisions within the undergraduate demographic. Anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the study posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use significantly influence users' acceptance of technology in this case, WhatsApp as a marketing tool. The study employed a quantitative survey design, distributing structured questionnaires to a sample of 400 undergraduate students across four universities in Southeastern Nigeria: University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Abia State University, Uturu; and Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The sampling technique was stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various faculties and departments.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis via SPSS version 25. The findings revealed that perceived trustworthiness of vendors, frequency of WhatsApp usage, peer influence, and visual appeal of product

advertisements were significant predictors of purchase decisions among undergraduates. Notably, the study found that students were more inclined to purchase products advertised by peers or acquaintances, highlighting the role of trust and social connections in WhatsApp commerce. Furthermore, the study observed that the interactive features of WhatsApp, such as status updates and group chats, served as effective channels for product promotion. Students reported that seeing products repeatedly on their contacts' statuses or receiving endorsements in group chats increased their likelihood of making a purchase. This underscores the importance of social proof and repetition in influencing consumer behaviour.

The study concluded that WhatsApp has created a hybrid space that merges social interaction with commercial engagement, especially among youth. While this study supports the present research in highlighting the commercial use of WhatsApp, the focus of this study is on general undergraduates across the Southeast. The current research distinguishes itself by targeting students within the University of Benin and investigating their perception and assessment of WhatsApp's marketing influence on their buying behaviour within Benin City's socio-economic environment.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on planned behaviour and uses and gratification theories.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

This is a communication theory that explains how individuals actively seek out media to fulfil specific personal and social needs. The theory emerged in the 1940s but

was later developed and popularised by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1970s. It marked a significant shift in media research by focusing not on what media do to people, but on what people do with media.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study as it considers media users as active participants in the communication process, making conscious decisions based on their individual needs and gratifications. As Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) assert, "the audience is conceived as active, and the use of the media is goal-directed". This assumption is central to understanding the behaviours of students who engage with WhatsApp marketing content. In this context, students are not passive recipients of advertising messages but are instead active consumers who interact with such messages based on their motivations, expectations, and satisfaction.

According to Katz, Gurevitch and Hass (1973) categorized the needs satisfied by the media into five:

1. Cognitive needs: A desire for acquiring information and knowledge.
2. Affective needs: The emotional or pleasurable experience gained from media.
3. Personal integrative needs: It is the reinforcement of personal credibility, confidence, or status.
4. Social integrative needs: The enhancement of interpersonal connections and relationships.
5. Tension release needs: It is the escape from daily pressures or entertainment.

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) cited by Asemah opines that the theory takes the view of a media consumer. Applying these categories to WhatsApp marketing, students may find gratification in various forms. For instance, they may seek out WhatsApp status updates to gather information about new products (cognitive needs), enjoy engaging visuals and humorous product captions (affective needs), support friends' businesses to maintain social relationships (social integrative needs), or make purchases as a means of identity reinforcement (personal integrative needs). Furthermore, group chats, broadcast messages, and WhatsApp stories serve as interactive features that allow marketers and buyers to communicate quickly and informally, further increasing user satisfaction.

In the context of the University of Benin, students operate within a digital environment where WhatsApp has become a popular tool not only for communication but also for marketing and commercial activities. The widespread adoption of smartphones and mobile data services has facilitated the platform's integration into everyday life. Thus, the Uses and gratification theory is a suitable lens through which to examine why students use WhatsApp for marketing, how they engage with marketing content, and what effects this has on their buying behaviour. Moreover, contemporary scholars have reinforced the relevance of this theory in digital media studies. This supports the idea that WhatsApp marketing appeals to students not just because of the products being advertised but also due to the platform's social and interactive nature.

In conclusion, the Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a robust foundation for understanding the behaviours and attitudes of student consumers on WhatsApp. It

allows this study to explore the underlying motivations that drive engagement with WhatsApp marketing and how such motivations translate into real consumer decisions within the student community in Benin City.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The theory was propounded by Icek Ajzen in 1985, it provides a valuable framework for understanding how individuals' intentions influence their behaviours, particularly in contexts involving decision-making, such as online purchasing through platforms like WhatsApp. The theory extends the earlier 'Theory of Reasoned Action' by adding a third determinant of intention perceived behavioural control, which accounts for factors outside an individual's control that may affect their intention and actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). TPB proposes that behavioural intentions are influenced by three primary factors: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These three constructs together shape an individual's intention to perform a behaviour, which is the immediate antecedent to actual performance.

In the context of WhatsApp marketing among students, the attitude refers to the student's evaluation of WhatsApp as a useful and effective platform for online purchases. If students perceive WhatsApp as convenient, reliable, and affordable, their attitude towards using it for buying decisions will be positively influenced. Subjective norms involve the perceived social pressure students may feel from peers, family, or influencers to engage or not engage in WhatsApp-based purchases. For instance, students may be more inclined to buy a product advertised via WhatsApp if it is endorsed or shared within

their social circle or group chats. Perceived behavioural control reflects students' beliefs about their capability to make purchases on WhatsApp, which may include factors such as ease of payment, accessibility, trust in vendors, or technical familiarity with the platform.

Ajzen (1991) posits that “intentions to perform behaviours of different kinds can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control; and these intentions, together with perceptions of behavioural control, account for considerable variance in actual behaviour.” This is highly applicable to the present study, which seeks to assess how the use of WhatsApp marketing influences students' buying behaviour in the University of Benin.

Various studies support the application of TPB in digital commerce. For example, Hansen, Moller Jensen & Solgaard (2004) employed TPB to explain online grocery shopping behaviour, finding that perceived control and subjective norms significantly influenced purchasing intention. Similarly, Shah Alam & Mohamed Sayuti (2011) used TPB to assess halal food purchasing behaviour and found the theory appropriate in predicting consumer intentions in online and offline contexts. These empirical validations indicate the theory's suitability in interpreting the purchasing dynamics of students using WhatsApp.

The application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour to this study provides a comprehensive lens through which student engagement with WhatsApp marketing can be evaluated. Students' decisions to engage with product promotions on WhatsApp are not

random; rather, they are based on a combination of attitudes, social influence, and the extent to which they feel empowered to act. This theoretical framework thus provides a structured basis for analysing how WhatsApp, as a social messaging app, facilitates consumer behaviour among undergraduates in Benin City.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEACH METHODOLOGY

Preamble

This chapter focuses on the research methodology of this study, therefore it explains the following:

3.1 Research Design

3.2 Population of Study

3.3 Sample Size

3.4 Sampling Technique

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

3.6 Validity of Research Instrument

3.7 Method of Data Collection

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted the survey research design, which is commonly used to obtain relevant information for academic investigations. Survey research is designed to assess the views and perceptions of a population by collecting data through instruments such as questionnaires or interview schedules. For this reason, the survey design was deemed appropriate for this study. It is especially useful when the researcher intends to gather data from a sample that accurately represents a larger population. Thus, the adoption of the survey design enabled the researcher to obtain data from a selected group of undergraduate students at the University of Benin, serving as a representative sample of the entire population under study.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study was 60,000. This comprised of all undergraduate students of the University of Benin, located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. According

to the university's official website, the estimated student population for the 2024/2025 academic session is approximately 60,000 students. This total includes full-time students pursuing undergraduate programmes across all disciplines. As one of the largest federal universities in Nigeria, UNIBEN has a diverse student body enrolled across various faculties and departments at both the Ugbowo and Ekehuan campuses. This study specifically targets this undergraduate population because they represent the primary users of WhatsApp for academic, social, and increasingly commercial purposes. As active digital natives, students at UNIBEN frequently engage with online platforms, making them ideal for assessing how WhatsApp functions as a marketing tool and its impact on their buying behaviour.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size for the study was 397. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

n= sample size

N = total population (60,000)

E = level of precision (0.05)

$$\text{Therefore, } n = \frac{60,000}{1 + 60,000(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \underline{397}$$

$$n = \frac{1 + 150}{151} \times 60,000$$

$$n = 397.35$$

n = 397 approximately.

3.4 Sampling Technique

The study employed the use of simple random sampling. This is the technique in which every individual or item in the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected. The sampling technique was chosen to ensure fairness and reduce bias in selecting participants for the study. For this research, the sampling was carried out by randomly selecting undergraduate students from different faculties in UNIBEN. This was done by first identifying the target population, after which participants were chosen at random without replacement, ensuring that each selected respondent truly represented the larger student body.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled “Student Assessment of WhatsApp Marketing and its Influence on Buying Behaviour in UNIBEN”. This questionnaire was carefully developed to gather relevant information from undergraduate students of the University of Benin regarding their perceptions, experiences, and behaviours related to WhatsApp marketing.

The questionnaire comprised 19 items divided into 4 distinct sections to capture different aspects of the research objectives. Section A contained 4 items and was used to

collect demographic information from respondents. Section B focused on the perception of WhatsApp as a marketing platform. It consisted of 5 items designed to assess how students perceive the effectiveness and reliability of using WhatsApp for marketing purposes. Section C addressed the influence of WhatsApp marketing on students' buying behaviour. This section also contained 5 items that explored how students' purchasing decisions are affected by exposure to WhatsApp advertisements, including impulse buying, product discovery, and trust in advertised goods or services. Section D examined the challenges students encounter in buying and selling transactions on WhatsApp. This final section included 5 items, which aimed to identify issues such as delivery delays, fraud/scam risks, and dissatisfaction with customer service.

The questionnaire was designed using a four point Likert scale to capture varying degrees of opinion and behaviour. Depending on the nature of the question, the response options were: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), Very Frequently (VF), Frequently (F), Infrequently (I), Very Infrequently (VI), Very Regularly (VR), Regularly, Occasionally (O), Rarely (RA). This allowed for detailed expression of respondent's opinion.

3.6 Validity of the Research Instrument

To ensure that the instrument for the study measures effectively. The questionnaire was developed carefully, the research supervisor examined and scrutinized

the instruments in line with the study objectives and determined how valid the instrument was in collecting data for the study. Identified corrections were implemented.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The method that was adopted for the collection of the copies of distributed questionnaire was the personal approach by the researcher. The researcher along with a research assistant administered 399 copies of the questionnaire on a person to person basis, which in turn aided the easy retrieval of the copies in order to avoid any loss. This approach was very helpful and useful to the respondents and the researcher as it provided an avenue for the classification of issues within the ambit of research ethics.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The data gathered for the study using questionnaire was analyzed using simple frequency and percentages representation. Frequency tables were used in order to ensure easy and comprehensive interpretation of data acquired and collated to show simplified manner findings. This is to allow for easy analysis and interpretation of data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Preamble

The chapter reflects on the data collected from the analysis questionnaire administered, as well as the discussion of the findings obtained.

4.1 Data presentation and Analysis Based on Bio-Data

The data collected from the field survey are presented as follows:

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
16 – 20 years	101	25.44%
21 – 25 years	244	61.46%
26 – 30 years	46	11.59%
31 and above	6	1.51%
Total	397	100%

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

The highest number of respondents, 244 (61.46%), fall within the 21–25 years age bracket. This indicates that the majority of students who participated in the study are in their early to mid-twenties, reflecting the core demographic of UNIBEN students likely to engage with WhatsApp marketing and online transactions.

Table 2: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency of responses	Percentage of Responses
Male	166	41.81%
Female	215	54.16%
Prefer not to say	16	4.03%
Total	397	100%

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

The highest number of respondents were female, accounting for 215 individuals (54.16%). This shows that female students made up the majority of the sample, suggesting that their perspectives may have a greater influence on the overall findings of the study.

Table 3: Level of study

Level	Frequency of Responses	Percentage of Responses
100	22	5.54%
200	23	5.79%
300	45	11.33%
400	265	66.75%
500	21	5.29%
600	21	5.29%
Total	397	100%

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

The highest number of respondents, 265 (66.75%), were in their 400 level. This indicates that the majority of participants were final year undergraduate students, suggesting a more mature and experienced demographic in terms of academic exposure and online consumer behaviour.

Table 4: Faculty of Respondents

Faculty	Frequency of responses	Percentage of responses
Art	84	21.16%
Environmental sciences	67	16.87%
Physical Science	19	4.79%
Law	43	10.83%
Agriculture	40	10.08%
Medical Sciences	48	12.09%
Engineering	42	13.60%
Education	54	10.58%
Total	397	100%

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

The table shows that the study involved respondents from multiple faculties. However the largest number of respondents, 84 (21.16%) were from the faculty of Art due to accessibility.

4.2 Presentations and Analysis of Data Based on Other Items in Questionnaire

Table 5: Respondents perceptions of WhatsApp as a marketing platform

S/	Perceptions	Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly	Total
-----------	--------------------	-----------------	--------------	----------------	-----------------	-----------------	--------------

N		Agree				Disagree	
1	WhatsApp is an effective platform for marketing products/ services.	166 (41.81%)	195 (49.12%)	19 (4.79%)	12 (3.02%)	5 (1.26%)	397 (100%)
2	I find it easy to engage with businesses/marketers on WhatsApp.	152 (38.29%)	209 (52.65%)	19 (4.79%)	12 (3.02%)	5 (1.26%)	397 (100%)
3	Information shared through WhatsApp marketing is usually reliable.	166 (29.22%)	137 (34.51%)	116 (29.22%)	25 (6.30%)	3 (0.76%)	397 (100%)
4	WhatsApp marketing allows for faster communication with sellers.	166 (41.81%)	195 (49.12%)	19 (4.79%)	12 (3.02%)	5 (1.26%)	397 (100%)
5	I trust businesses that market products through WhatsApp.	77 (19.40%)	140 (35.24%)	164 (41.31%)	9 (2.27%)	7 (1.76%)	397 (100%)

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

From the responses presented in Table 5, it is evident that students generally have a positive perception of WhatsApp as a marketing platform. A majority of respondents agreed (49.12%) that WhatsApp is an effective medium for marketing products and services. A similar trend was observed in the perception that it is easy to engage with businesses or marketers on the platform, where 52.65% agreed. Furthermore, when asked about the reliability of information shared through WhatsApp marketing, the highest proportion of respondents agreed (34.51%), although a considerable number maintained a

neutral stance. In terms of communication, a majority once again agreed (49.12%) that WhatsApp marketing enables faster interaction with sellers, which also recorded the highest mean score of 4.27, underscoring its role as a convenient tool for business engagement. However, the perception of trust in businesses marketing through WhatsApp differed, as the highest response recorded was neutral (41.31%), suggesting that while students find the platform useful and interactive, their confidence in trusting businesses on WhatsApp remains cautious.

Table 6: Respondents' views on the influence of WhatsApp marketing on their buying decisions/consumer behaviour

S/N	Influences	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1	WhatsApp marketing influences what I choose to buy.	46 (11.59%)	193 (48.61%)	109 27.46%	39 (9.82%)	10 (2.52%)	397 (100%)
2	I have purchased products based on WhatsApp advertisements.	82 (20.65%)	230 (57.93%)	47 (11.84%)	26 (6.55%)	12 (3.02%)	397 (100%)
3	I prefer buying from student vendors advertising on WhatsApp.	68 (17.12%)	152 (38.29%)	152 (38.29%)	13 (3.27%)	12 (3.02%)	397 (100%)
4	Peer influence through WhatsApp statuses affects my buying decisions.	53 (13.35%)	165 (41.52%)	109 (27.46%)	60 (15.11%)	10 (2.52%)	397 (100%)
5	Promotional offers shared	125 (31.48%)	138 (34.76%)	96 (24.18%)	19 (4.79%)	19 (4.79%)	397 (100%)

	on WhatsApp motivates me to buy.						
--	----------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

Table 6 showed that WhatsApp marketing has a significant influence on students' buying behaviour. A majority of respondents agreed (48.61%) that WhatsApp marketing influences what they choose to buy. Similarly, 57.93% agreed that they have purchased products based on WhatsApp advertisements, which also recorded the highest mean score of 3.87, showing that advertisements on the platform play a strong role in shaping purchasing decisions. With respect to patronising student vendors, 38.29% of the respondents agreed, while an equal percentage remained neutral, suggesting a balanced view on this aspect. In addition, a substantial proportion agreed (41.52%) that peer influence through WhatsApp statuses affects their buying decisions, though a significant number were neutral. Finally, 34.76% of the respondents agreed that promotional offers on WhatsApp motivate them to make purchases, with 31.48% strongly agreeing, showing that discounts and offers are powerful tools for driving student purchases.

Table 7: Challenges faced by respondents when using WhatsApp for buying/selling transactions

S/N	Challenges	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
1	I experience delay in seller response.	33 (8.31%)	96 (24.18%)	216 (54.41%)	40 (10.08%)	12 (3.02%)	397 (100%)
2	I have encountered scams or fraudulent	25 (6.30%)	60 (15.11%)	143 (36.02%)	109 (27.46%)	60 (15.11%)	397 (100%)

	sellers on WhatsApp.						
3	Products quality often differs from what was advertised.	32 (8.06%)	95 (23.92%)	186 (46.85%)	60 (15.11%)	24 (6.04%)	397 (100%)
4	I face difficulties in returning items or getting refund.	67 (16.87%)	67 (16.87%)	179 (45.08%)	39 (9.82%)	45 (11.33%)	397 (100%)
5	Network or app-related issues interrupt my transactions.	39 (9.82%)	102 (25.70%)	130 (32.74%)	74 (18.64%)	52 (13.09%)	397 (100%)

Source: Online Survey, 2025.

Table 7 presented several challenges associated with WhatsApp marketing were identified. A majority of respondents sometimes (54.41%) experienced delays in seller responses, making this the most common challenge reported. This challenge also showed that communication delays are the most consistent issue faced by students when using WhatsApp for marketing. With respect to fraudulent practices, 36.02% stated that they had sometimes encountered scams or fraudulent sellers, while 27.46% noted that they had never faced such experiences, suggesting that scams, though present, do not affect all users. Concerning product quality, the highest proportion of respondents sometimes (46.85%) reported that the quality of products differed from what was advertised, reflecting an issue of trust and reliability. Similarly, 45.08% of respondents indicated that they sometimes faced difficulties in returning items or obtaining refunds, highlighting

weaknesses in customer protection and redress mechanisms. Finally, network or app-related interruptions were also identified, with 32.74% of respondents reporting that this challenge occurred sometimes, while 25.70% experienced it often. These findings suggest that while WhatsApp marketing is widely used, operational and trust-related challenges particularly delays in seller responses remain a significant concern.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

This section presents the discussion of findings which is based off the answers to the research questions administered in the questionnaire.

Research Question 1: How do students perceive the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a marketing platform?

Students perceive WhatsApp as an effective and convenient platform for marketing. Revealing appreciation to ease of engagement, communication speed, and general reliability of shared content. Further, Table 5 provides direct insight into how students perceive the overall effectiveness of WhatsApp as a marketing platform. A combined majority of 90.93% of the respondents expressed positive views, with 41.81% strongly agreeing and 49.12% agreeing that WhatsApp is an effective platform for marketing products. This means that a significant amount of the respondents hold a favourable perception of WhatsApp's role in product marketing, indicating widespread approval and recognition of its usefulness among students. Table 8 reinforces the app's strength in speed and accessibility, as 49.12% agreed that WhatsApp allows for faster communication with sellers, and 41.81% strongly agreed. These responses show that

students value the immediacy and responsiveness the platform provides, further affirming its effectiveness in marketing, as swift communication is a key aspect of successful marketing. However, trust in marketers remains a moderate concern, which suggests the need for improved transparency and brand credibility among businesses using the platform.

These results align with the findings of Ogunsola & Mohammed (2023), who reported that students in tertiary institutions increasingly rely on social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, due to its simplicity, low data usage, and accessibility. Their study concluded that WhatsApp serves as an effective medium for small scale entrepreneurs, especially students, to advertise and engage consumers with minimal cost. Thus, the current research confirms that WhatsApp is not only a preferred communication tool but is also perceived by UNIBEN students as a strategic and impactful platform for marketing consistent with earlier findings from the literature.

Research Question 2: To what degree does WhatsApp marketing influence students' buying decisions and consumer behaviour?

To a degree, WhatsApp marketing significantly impacts students' buying decisions and shapes their consumer behaviour in various ways. From Table 10, 193 respondents (48.61%) agreed and 46 (11.59%) strongly agreed that WhatsApp marketing influences what they choose to buy. This reflects a majority (over 60%) of students who

acknowledge the role of WhatsApp in their decision-making process, demonstrating the platform's effectiveness in shaping preferences and prompting consideration. In Table 11 supports this finding by revealing that 230 students (57.93%) agreed and 82 (20.65%) strongly agreed that they had purchased products based on WhatsApp advertisements. This confirms that WhatsApp marketing is not just persuasive but also effective in generating actual consumer action, leading to purchases amongst students.

Furthermore, Table 13, 165 respondents (41.52%) agreed that peer influence through WhatsApp statuses affects their buying behaviour, indicating that social dynamics within WhatsApp play a role in driving consumer interest. The presence of peer-generated content, especially through statuses, appears to function as informal endorsements that influence student choices. Table 14 reveals that 138 students (34.76%) agreed and 125 (31.48%) strongly agreed that promotional offers shared on WhatsApp motivate them to buy. This shows that price incentives and promotional strategies delivered through the platform have a powerful impact on purchase motivation, especially among price-sensitive student consumers.

Conclusively the data clearly show that WhatsApp marketing exhibit a strong and multi-dimensional influence on students' buying decisions and consumer behaviour. Through persuasive adverts, peer influence, and promotional messaging, the platform not only attracts attention but also stimulates action and shapes consumption patterns within the student demographic.

Uford, et al. (2022), which highlighted how social media platforms, including WhatsApp, do more than just inform buyers they actively shape consumer preferences and buying patterns. Their study found that peer influence, embedded advertising, and group promotions within private messaging apps play significant roles in fostering consumer engagement and eventual purchases. The current study supports this perspective by showing how WhatsApp functions not just as a tool for marketing communication, but also as a behavioural influence mechanism, particularly within peer dominated environments such as UNIBEN.

Research Questions 3: What challenges do students face when using WhatsApp for buying and selling transactions?

The data reveals that students encounter a range of practical and consumer related challenges when engaging in buying and selling transactions on WhatsApp. A major issue is highlighted in Table 15, where 54.41% of respondents indicated that they sometimes experience delays in seller response. This suggests that a lack of timely communication is a common frustration for students, potentially affecting the pace and efficiency of their transactions. Table 16 further reveals the problem of fraudulent activities, with 143 students (36.02%) reporting that they have sometimes encountered scams or fraudulent sellers. This reflects a significant vulnerability within WhatsApp commerce, as the platform lacks standard buyer protections found in formal e-commerce settings.

Additional Table 17 product misrepresentation emerges as another major concern. 186 respondents (46.85%) stated that product quality often differs from what was

advertised, pointing to issues of honesty, credibility, and accurate product display factors that are central to trust in digital buying. Lastly, Table 18 shows that 179 respondents (45.08%) sometimes face difficulties in returning items or getting refunds. This highlights a lack of clear return policies and customer support structures, making it difficult for buyers to resolve complaints or seek redress after a purchase.

Apparently, it shows that most prominent challenges UNIBEN students face on WhatsApp include delayed seller responses, exposure to fraudulent sellers, inaccurate product representation, and difficulties with returns or refunds. These challenges reflect the informal and unregulated nature of WhatsApp based commerce.

Nwachukwu & Onuoha (2021), who found that while WhatsApp is a popular tool for youth led digital entrepreneurship, it is plagued by informal structures that expose both buyers and sellers to risks. Their research showed that inadequate regulation, poor customer protection policies, and unverifiable seller identities often lead to transaction disputes and dissatisfaction among student buyers. Therefore, the current research reinforces these empirical findings by demonstrating that although WhatsApp offers numerous marketing benefits, its informal nature introduces risks that can erode consumer trust and discourage consistent engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of this study, as well as suggestions for further studies.

5.1 Summary

The findings reveal that a significant majority of UNIBEN students perceive WhatsApp as an effective and accessible marketing platform, appreciating its fast communication features and ease of engagement. Many students confirmed that WhatsApp marketing messages influenced their purchasing decisions, particularly when products were endorsed by peers or promoted with attractive offers.

However, despite the platform's usefulness, the study also uncovered several challenges faced by students. These include delayed responses from sellers, fraudulent activities, misleading product representations, and difficulties in returning goods or securing refunds. These issues underscore the informal and largely unregulated nature of WhatsApp commerce.

These findings align with several empirical studies. Ogunsola and Mohammed (2023) also found that the convenience and direct messaging features of WhatsApp contribute positively to its perceived effectiveness in marketing. Similarly, Uford, Charles, and Erik (2022) concluded that peer influence through WhatsApp statuses significantly sways consumer choices, especially among youths. Additionally, Nwachukwu and Onuoha (2021) observed that while WhatsApp has transformed social commerce, it remains plagued by trust issues, weak return policies, and susceptibility to scams echoing the concerns raised by students in this study.

5.2 Conclusion

The research concludes that WhatsApp is a highly valued marketing platform among UNIBEN students, appreciated for its immediacy, peer interaction, and marketing

appeal. The platform effectively influences buying decisions and plays a key role in shaping consumer behaviour through peer driven engagement and promotional messaging.

However, the unregulated nature of WhatsApp marketing brings about significant challenges, especially regarding trust, product accuracy, and customer service. These issues threaten the long-term sustainability and credibility of WhatsApp based commerce unless properly addressed.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Training for Student Vendors:** Student marketers should be educated on customer service best practices, including timely response and product transparency, to improve buyer experience. UNIBEN student business groups or platforms could create informal verification badges or directories for trusted sellers to promote credibility and reduce fraudulent activity.
2. **Consumer Awareness Campaigns:** Awareness programmes should be launched within student communities to educate buyers on identifying scams, managing expectations, and seeking redress.
3. **Development of Return Policies:** Sellers should adopt simple, flexible return and refund policies to boost customer confidence and satisfaction.

5.4 Suggestions for further studies

The researcher suggests that further studies should expand the scope of this study by exploring different contexts, platforms, and timeframes. A broader and comparative focus will provide deeper insights into student buying behaviour and guide more effective digital marketing strategies.

1. A Comparative Analysis of WhatsApp Marketing and Its Influence on Student Buying Behaviour in Selected Nigerian Universities.
2. The Influence of Social Media Platforms on Student Buying Behaviour: A Focus on Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp.

REFERENCES

Apuke, O. D., & Iyendo, T. O. (2017). Two sides of a coin: Revisiting the impact of social networking sites on students' performance in selected higher educational settings in Nigeria*. ***Science International (Lahore)***, *29*(6), 1265-1275. ([ResearchGate][1])

Asemah, E. S., & Edegoh, L. O. N. (2013). Influence of social media on the academic performance of the undergraduate students of Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. **Research on Humanities and Social Sciences**, *3*(12). ([Nigerian Journal of Business Education][2]).

Asemah, E. S., Gujbawu, M., Ekhareafo, D. O., Okpanachi, R. A. (2022). *Reset methods and procedures in mass communication*. 3rd Edition.

Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1989). Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. **Journal of Consumer Research**, *15*(4), 473–481.

Bernard, K. J., & Dzandza, P. E. (2018). Effect of social media on academic performance of students in Ghanaian Universities: A case study of University of Ghana, Legon. **Library Philosophy and Practice**, 2018, Article 1637. ([University of Ghana][3])

Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). **Digital marketing** (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

Chu, S. C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. **International Journal of Advertising*, 30*(1), 47–75.

Cialdini, R. B. (2009). **Influence: Science and practice** (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Engel, J. F., Blackwell, R. D., & Miniard, P. W. (1995). **Consumer behavior** (8th ed.). Dryden Press.

Eze, S. C., Chinedu-Eze, V. C., & Bello, A. O. (2020). The utilisation of digital platforms by small and medium-sized enterprises during COVID-19: Implications for business sustainability. **Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 27*(7), 1169–1185.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. **Business Horizons*, 53*(1), 59–68.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. **Business Horizons*, 54*(3), 241–251.

Kolvereid, L. (2018). Entrepreneurship in higher education: Encouraging innovation and growth. **Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 21*(1), 134–147.

Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2018). **Principles of marketing** (17th ed.). Pearson Education.

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). **Marketing management** (15th ed.). Pearson Education.

Kumar, V., & Joshi, A. (2019). The role of digital marketing in modern entrepreneurship. **International Journal of Digital Marketing*, 17*(2), 58–68.

Luo, X., Xia, Y., & Yu, Y. (2013). Peer influence in online shopping contexts: A social comparison perspective. **Information & Management*, 50*(5), 89–108.

Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. **Business Horizons*, 52*(4), 357–365.

Moschis, G. P., & Churchill, G. A. (1978). Consumer socialization: A theoretical and empirical analysis. **Journal of Marketing Research*, 15*(4), 599–609.

Oyedele, A., & Tella, A. (2012). The symbolic consumption of fashion clothing among Nigerian youths. **Journal of Research in International Business and Management*, 2*(5), 130–138.

Patel, N. (2019). **The definitive guide to content marketing**. Neil Patel Blog.

Pew Research Center. (2021). **Social media use in 2021**. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org>

Ramirez, M. (2020). WhatsApp for business: A new frontier in marketing. **Digital Marketing Journal*, 13*(2), 102–115.

Ramanathan, R. (2018). Leveraging WhatsApp for business growth. **Digital Marketing Review*, 10*(2), 65–74.

Ryan, D. (2016). **Understanding digital marketing: Marketing strategies for engaging the digital generation** (4th ed.). Kogan Page Publishers.

Schiffman, L. G., & Wisenblit, J. (2019). **Consumer behavior** (12th ed.). Pearson Education.

Smith, K., & Murphy, L. (2020). The impact of instant messaging on impulse buying in e-commerce. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 44*(5), 516–524.

Smith, L., & Martin, R. (2020). Social media engagement and its impact on consumer European buying behaviour. *Journal of Marketing Research, 58*(4), 389–402.

Smith, T., & Murphy, K. (2020). Mobile messaging apps and the evolution of impulse buying behaviour in young adults. *Journal of Digital Consumer Research, 8*(2), 55–69.

Statista. (2021). *Number of WhatsApp users worldwide from 2013 to 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com>

Statista. (2023). *Number of internet users in Nigeria from 2010 to 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com>

Tiago, M. T. P. M. B., & Veríssimo, J. M. C. (2014). Digital marketing and social media: Why bother? *Business Horizons, 57*(6), 703–708.

Wessel, K. (2016). WhatsApp: The new wave of business communication. *Journal of Business Communication, 23*(4), 24–35.

APPENDIX

University of Benin,
Benin City,
Nigeria.

Dear Respondent,

APPEAL TO FILL ITEMS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

I, Olumese Victoria Oare, an undergraduate student in the department of Mass Communication University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria; conducting a research on the topic: **Student Assessment Of The Use Of Whatsapp Marketing Platform In UNIBEN And Its Influence On Their Buying Behaviour In Benin City, Nigeria.**

I humbly appeal to you to fill the items in the questionnaire. The study, represent my dissertation and it is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree in Mass Communication.

Hence, you have been carefully selected to provide information that would aid the successful completion of this study. Please note that the information you provide would be treated with utmost confidentiality in accordance with research ethics which respects

respondent's privacy. Thank you in anticipation of your time, understanding and cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Olumese Victoria Oare
Researcher

QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTION: Please, read and carefully tick (✓) the item beside the box that best explains your disposition.

Section A: Demographic Information

S/N	Item	Response Options
1	Age	☐ Under 18 ☐ 18–22 ☐ 23–27 ☐ 28 and above
2	Gender	☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say
3	Level of Study	☐ 100 ☐ 200 ☐ 300 ☐ 400 ☐ 500 ☐ 600
4	Faculty	_____

Section B: Perception of WhatsApp as a Marketing Platform

INSTRUCTION: Please, read and carefully tick (✓) the item beside the box that best explains your disposition.

S/N	Perceptions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6	WhatsApp is an effective platform for marketing products/services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I find it easy to engage with businesses/marketers on WhatsApp.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Information shared via WhatsApp marketing is	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	usually reliable.					
9	WhatsApp marketing allows for faster communication with sellers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	I trust businesses that market products through WhatsApp.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Influence of WhatsApp Marketing on Buying Behaviour

INSTRUCTION: Please, read and carefully tick (✓) the item beside the box that best explains your disposition.

S/N	Influences	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11	WhatsApp marketing influences what I choose to buy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	I have purchased products based on WhatsApp advertisements.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	I prefer buying from student vendors advertising on WhatsApp.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	Peer influence through WhatsApp statuses affects my buying decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	Promotional offers shared on WhatsApp motivate me to buy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section D: Challenges Faced When Using WhatsApp for Buying/Selling

INSTRUCTION: Please, read and carefully tick (✓) the item beside the box that best explains your disposition.

S/N	Challenges	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
16	I experience delay in seller response.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	I have encountered scams or fraudulent sellers on WhatsApp.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	Product quality often differs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	from what was advertised.					
19	I face difficulties in returning items or getting refunds.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	Network or app-related issues interrupt my transactions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐