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## New Media and the Cultural Identity of Young Adults in Nigeria

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### Abstract:

*This paper examined how new media affect the cultural identity of young adults in Nigeria. It explored the implications of the new media in the nation's cultural identity among young adults. A random representative sample of 500 young adults was done through the use of questionnaire items. This paper provided information as regards to the frequency of use and the trends in new media use, it focused on social network site which young adults are mostly associated with, and showed how an increased focus on social network (Facebook, twitter etc) by young Nigerian adults affect their worldview and lifestyle. The findings show that the social media generate both positive and negative change, and did not really promote the cultural values of Nigerians. It is in this perspective that the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) in collaboration with Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), should advertise Nigerians' cultural heritage of the social network sites to promote our rich cultural values*

**Key words:** New media, cultural identity and heritage, social media, Nigerian young adults

### 1.Introduction

The information and communication technology, mobile communication devices and the Internet are playing a definite and considerable role in people's social lives. The culture and lifestyle of individuals as well as their interpersonal relationships has been affected due to accessibility to various emerging communication media, as well as the speed of communication that the new media provide. These developing technology devices help to increase social interactions and new media awareness. For MacArthur Foundation (2008), "Social network sites, online games, video-sharing sites, and gadgets such as iPods and mobile phones are now fixtures of youth culture". They opine that, these new technologies have permeated young lives that one finds it hard to believe that less than a decade ago they had barely registered in the lives of youth. The youth spend more time on social media. They regard the web, cell phones, Blackberries, ipods, ipads and others as essential tools for living. This research explores that the new media might be one of the factors responsible for social changes in the area of Nigerian cultural values among Nigerian young adult and that social nuances, cultural values may not be taken into consideration in the pursuit of developing new technologies for social interaction. Because of this an empirical study is conducted to examine how the new media affects the cultural identity of young adults in Nigeria. In view of this, this study will look at the role of new media in fostering Nigerian culture.

### 2.The New Media

The new media play an important role in the relationship and socialisation. The new media induce change and might induce reactions from the users. Hence, the new media involves social media (Facebook, Twitter, Friendster, Myspace, etc.) where users/members use the internet to build their social network/relationship, sharing interests, and activities together. According to (Cardoso, 2006: 123-124; and Rice, 1999) in Jakubowicz, 2009:13, new media can be referred to, all those means of communication, representation and knowledge (i.e. media), in which we find the digitalisation of the signal and its content, that possess dimensions of multimodality and interactivity. This definition[is] comprehensive [and] inclusive of everything from the mobile phone to digital television and also embracing game consoles and the Internet ... The new media may be termed thus because they are mediators of communication, because they introduce the novelty of incorporating new technological dimensions, because they combine interpersonal communication and mass media dimensions on one and the same platform, because they induce organisational change and new forms of time management and because they seek the synthesis of the textual and visual rhetoric, thus promoting new audiences and social reconstruction tools.

Thus, it can be said that the new media enables interactivity among the users and also inform and induce change. Joseph Turow (2009:551), stated that the internet as a new mass medium is a "worldwide system of computer networks; a network of networks in which users at any one computer can, if they have permission, get information from any other computer (and sometimes talk directly

to users at other computers)". The internet performs many roles for the users. It can serve one individual or a group. The internet perform a lot of functions, such as, sending and receiving electronic mails, transferring files, chatting, surfing and remote access of computers to access files and programs.

### 3. Culture, Media And The People

Newhill and La Paglia (1986) say that culture "refers to a people's total way of life. It includes everything an individual has learned as a member of a society and will pass into future generations. It affects the system of government, economic system, art forms, music, literature, religion, customs and all material objects of a society's technology" Igwe and Adeyemi (2011) also defines culture as "truly the totality of a people's way of life at a given point in time. Culture involves the way people eat, worship, interact, perform socio-economic, political, educational and diverse activities within such a country or society " A culture is transmitted through observation, children learn their culture through their own observations and growing observations of what their culture considers right and wrong and it is also acquired through interaction with the environment (Kottak, 2004:86). In addition, cultures are learned and not biologically inherited, and humans learn through direct experience (situational learning), observation (social learning), and symbols (symbolic learning). For cultural anthropologists, cultural items ranging from dress to technology to sexual practices to dietary habits are enormously diverse, the culture of one group is distinct from another based on different values, beliefs, norms, and other characteristics (Igwe, et al, 2011; Scupin, 2006). Every human society has a culture; it plays a vital role for societal transformation and development. Kottak (2004:83) indicates that "societies are integrated and patterned through their dominant economic forces, social patterns, key symbols and core values."

Nobody is born knowing how to fit into a society or knowing the cultural values of his community. The learning process starts at home, with the parents, brothers, sisters and then moves to friends, relatives and the mass media. The youth today get absorbed with the media. Earlier, it was the television that occupies them but now, the internet is used almost every second. Phones, ipods, laptops etc are all connected to the internet and these have "displaced much of the socializing influence that once came from parents...stability of a society is ensured through the transmission of such values to the next generation" (Vivian, 2001: 368).

People have always yearned to belong to somewhere, to have that sense of who they are and where they are from. Often, people get confused about their social lives, if how they are living is how they ought to live. The youth is mostly affected by this, they are worried about who they are. Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney and Wise (2006:220) argue that "this identity crisis was often assumed to be linked to the growing power of the media (and media images) in the lives of these youths. In fact, there can be little doubt that the strength of the traditional sources of identity-religion, family, and work-has declined in proportion to the growing power of the mass media, leisure activities, and the consumer lifestyles in which media and leisure are bound up even as they define and promote such lifestyles". (Grossberg, et al, 2006).

Mass media inform, entertain, persuade and is pervasive in nature. "The mass media transmit cultural values through history. Past generations talk to us through mass media, mostly books, just as we, often not realizing it, talk to future generations. The media also diffuse values and ideas contemporaneously" (Vivian, 2001: 395).

Media impact lives and most times determine how people react to issues and situations. The media shape our attitude and values. It also shapes the perceptions of people, situations, places, and events. It is a significant influence on people and their cultural lives (Wood, 2009). Media provide surveillance for individuals who scan local and global environments for information that helps them make decisions to live better, even survive. It performs socialization function contributing to togetherness by creating commonality, helping individuals to maintain social relationships by giving them something in common. Hence the media are important in creating community, even nationhood and perhaps, with global communication, a fellowship of humankind (Vivian,2001:364)

People can immerse themselves in media thereby having stimulation, relaxation or emotional release, these feelings can be seen as diversion function of the media. Using the mass media as a stimulant, relaxant or release is quick, healthy escapism but when individuals perceive themselves for example as characters in a story and live their lives as those characters, it becomes a serious psychological disorder (Vivian, 2001:365).

Wood (2009:321) further says that, "Social media affect our lives in profound ways. According to prominent media scholars, they blur the traditional distinction between those who produce and those who consume media, alter our understanding of space, invite supersaturation, encourage multitasking, and promote visual activity and development. As social media become even more seamlessly woven into our lives, we may discover additional ways they influence our lives". With all these work of media, can one rightly say that new media/social media are transmitting cultural values? Or is there cultural intrusion? Is the western culture intruding into our African Nigerian culture? How do our young adults prefer dressing, talking and what kind of activities do they involve in?

### 4. Nigerian Cultural Values

African cultural values are those values that Africans including Nigerians are known for. "There must be values that are so dear to a people that any violation should be met with an instant sanction. When a nation has her value system in order, no obstacles are insurmountable and no problems are without solution" (Onu, 2005). Nigerians are known for their communal lives, a person is identified or known within his community. The community offers the individual or its members physical and ideological identity and security as well. There is a sense of community, communalism and the emphasis is on individualism. (Onu) 2005 emphasizes this and according to him, "we have been known for our love for the family. It is through the extended family system that we protect the young and look after the old. ...our strong attachment to our communities which has resulted in community development is a by-product of

strong family ties". Extended families are considered important and work as a unit, the individuals turn to members for help when in need and the family members rally round for them to ensure they solve them. There is mutual caring among the members.

According to (Newhill and Paglia, 1986:176), "Africans are taught that people must fulfill their moral and legal responsibilities toward others, and the oral literature teaches that they must fulfill them. The oral literature teaches that those who do not will be punished. African poems and songs often contain a moral or rule for living". Africans are known for their good human relationship. According to (Anaedozie, 2007), Africans are known for their 'sense of good human relations which is seen on their interpersonal communication and there is also a 'sense of the sacredness of life', and in view of this, he argues that,

the African does not like violence per se this is because shedding of blood is abhorred. People who were killed were those whose continued existence was a threat to life of others and the peace of the community. In such cases, the principle that it is better for one man to die than for all the community to perish, applied. War was only taken to as a last resort, that is when all formal and normal courses of action to search for peace had failed. Murder was not encouraged, especially within the clan.

Nigeria is known for its rich cultural practices, which According to Yvonne Hawkins, "Entertainment and leisure activities in Nigeria are typically marked by traditional cultural practices; festivals, musical performances with singing and drums, dancing, and exhibitions are common forms of entertainment for many Nigerians. In urban areas, entertainment is mostly influenced by mass media and Western practices, like movies, technology and nightlife."

"Music in its various forms plays an important part in African life. When a team of men have to labour long and hard, they often sing to the rhythm of their work. It helps keep this going, lightens the burdens, and lifts their spirits. When an African woman works through the long day, she sings too. Music plays an important part in observances of births, deaths, marriages, religious ceremonies, holidays and other special days. It contributes to the personal, individual meaning of an event" (Newhill and Paglia, 1986:184)

Africans/Nigerians are known to be hospitable, friendly and live communal life instead of individual life, they are also known for their morality and respect for authority and elders but these fundamental features of our identity and culture are undergoing change. The question is what then is being passed to this generation? How is it being done? And is the new media a contributing factor to these changes?

### 5. Research Questions

- What is the level of exposure of young adults in Nigeria to new media
- What media activities/practices do young adults in Nigeria engage in?
- To what extent do social media project Nigeria cultural symbols?
- Do social media influence the cultural behavior of young adults in Nigeria?

### 6. Research Objectives

This study aims to find out if the media through the social media are performing the functions of transmitting cultural values from generation to generation, educating and entertaining the masses and to what extent? What role the new media are playing in fostering Nigerian culture since the young adult is mostly using the social media.

### 7. Methodology

This paper is an attempt to examine how new media affect the cultural identity of young adults (16 to 29 years) in Nigeria. Survey was conducted randomly in Babcock University Ogun State, Nigeria representing young adults in Nigeria. It used quantitative analysis which involved data collection through the administration of copies of questionnaires. Copies of questionnaires were administered to 500 young adults between the ages of 16 to 29. The age group was chosen because they are the heavy users of social networking sites. Out of the 500 questionnaires administered, 480 questionnaires were retrieved; only 470 were valid for analysis due to poor responses from some respondents.

### 8. Data Analysis And Results

This section presents the data collected from the field work of the study which aimed at establishing the new media and the cultural identity of young adults in Nigeria. The results are presented in frequencies and percentage tables with charts for easy understanding through analyzed data from Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	229	48.7
	Female	235	50.0
	Total	464	98.7
Marital status	Single	447	95.1
	Married	8	1.7
	Total	455	96.8

		Frequency	Percentage
Religion	Christian	411	87.4
	Muslim	35	7.4
	Others	5	1.1
	Total	451	96.0
Age	16-20	318	67.7
	21-24	91	19.4
	25-29	17	3.6
	Total	426	90.6

Table 1: Demographic Information

\*Mean Age Is 19.4965 With Standard Error Of Mean (SEM) =0.11640, Std. Deviation=2.40537

Table 1 reveals that the gender of the respondents falls within almost the same range with 48.7% males and 50% females. Majority of the respondents (95.1%) are single while the rest of 8 (1.7%) respondents are married and they are all above the age of 18 years with most of them females (see appendix). Majority of them are Christians (411; 87.4%) while 7.4 % (35) respondents are Muslim and 1.1% indicated other form of religion. Most of the respondents (68%) fall with the age group of 16- 20 years of age, followed by 19.4% respondents who are 21-24 years and 3.6% respondents are 25 years of age and above. This information is not strange considering that the study population was selected from academic environment having majority of young people within the age range of 16 and 22 years of age. Thus, the mean age of the respondents is 20 years.

- **Research Questions 1:** What is the level of exposure of young adults in Nigeria to new media? Figure1: Respondents indication on the new media mostly used

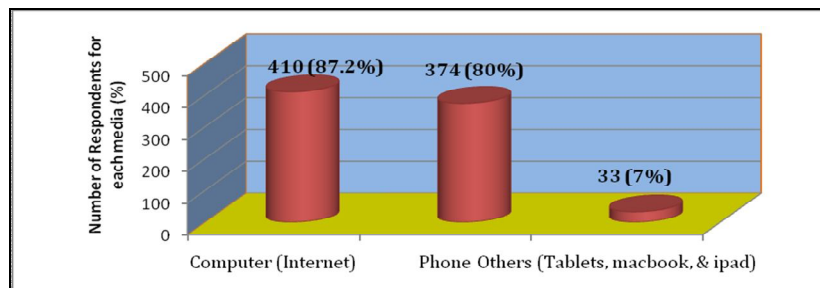


Figure 1

Figure 1 brings to knowledge the new media such as computer (internet), phone, tablets, macbook, ipad, e.t.c. use by respondents. Eight seven point two percent (87.2%) of the respondents used internet via computer and 80% respondents also indicated phone as the new media used while few respondents (7%) indicated other new media such as tablets, macbook, i-pad/ i-phone, playbook,MP3, and ipod.

Level of exposure to media		Frequency	Percentage
The number of media used at a time	1	139	29.6
	2	244	51.9
	3	36	7.7
	4	15	3.2
	Total	434	92.3
Those who own a laptop	Yes	397	84.5
	No	59	12.6
	Total	456	97.0
Those who browse on the Internet	Yes	432	91.9
	No	13	2.8
	Total	445	94.7

Table 2: Respondents Indication On Level Of Exposure To Media

Table 2 reveals the level of exposure of respondents to new media as indicated by respondents. It is vivid that majority of respondents (51.9%) used two media at a time, followed by 29.6% respondents who used just a single media at a time while 7.7% and 3.2% respondents used 3 and 4 media at a time respectively. In other words about 63% of the respondents used no less than 2 media at a time. While 85% respondents own a laptop, majority of the respondents (92%) browse on the internet which further reflects that the level of exposure to new media is high.

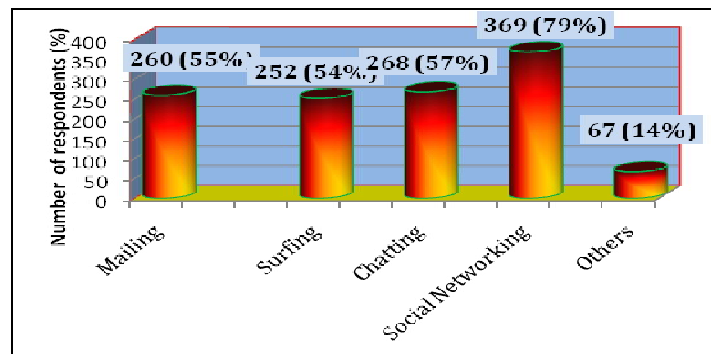


Figure 2: Respondents Reasons For Using Internet

According to figure 2, 79% of the total respondents use internet for social networking, another reason for using internet among young adults is to chat with their friends or people as affirmed by 57% of the total respondents and 55% of the total respondents use internet for mailing. Some of the respondents also indicated that they use internet for surfing and 14% (that is, those who indicated others) employed internet for research, assignment (academic activities), news update, sporting events, facts finding, latest technology, reading, games and checking of items.

- **Research Question 2:** What media activities/practices do young adults in Nigeria engage in?

Involvement in media activities	Frequency	Percentage	
Members of any social network site (facebook, twitter, etc)	Yes	445	94.7
	No	19	4.0
	Total	464	98.7
How long respondents have been on social network	Less than a year	29	6.2
	2-5 years	309	65.7
	6-9 years	97	20.6
	more than 10 years	28	6.0
	Total	463	98.5
How often they use the internet	Thrice daily	127	27.0
	once daily	184	39.1
	Rarely	78	16.6
	Others	63	13.4
	Total	452	96.2
Length of time spent on the web	1-3hrs	262	55.7
	4-6hrs	139	29.6
	7-9hrs	37	7.9
	10-13hrs	14	3.0
	Total	452	96.2

Table 3: Media Activities/ Practices By Respondents

Table 3 shows the media activities and practices of respondents. Also it reveals the extent of their involvement with new media in their vicinity. Four hundred and forty five 445 (95%) of respondents are members of social network site such as facebook, twitter,

yahoo messenger, etc. furthermore, majority of the respondents (66%) have been on social network for over 2 – 5 years while 21% of the respondents have been on the social network for over 6-9years. 6.2% and 6% of the respondents have been on their social network for more than 10 years and less than a year respectively. It was also observed that most respondents (39%) used the internet once daily, 27% and 17% of the other respondents used the internet thrice daily and rarely respectively. Another practice of young adults is the length of time spent on the web in which majority of the respondents about 56%, indicated that they spent between 1-3 hours at a stretch. It was also revealed that 30% of the respondents used the web for 4-6 hours while 8% of the respondents accepted that they stay about 7-9 hours and only few 3% respondents stayed up to 10-13 hours on the web.

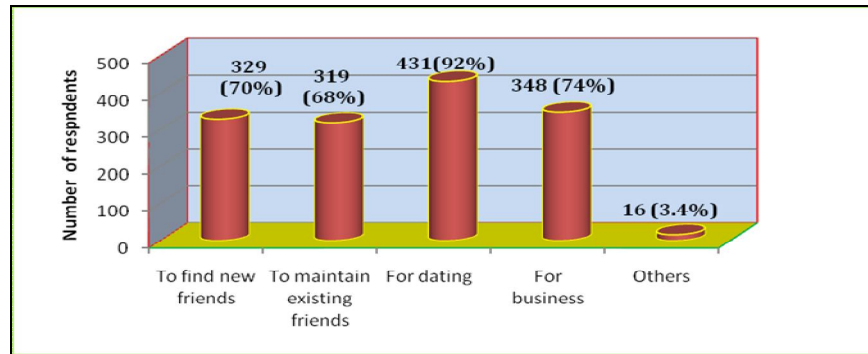


Figure 3: Respondents Reasons For Being Member Of Social Network Site

Figure 3 reveals respondents reasons for being members of social network site. 92% of the respondents are members of a social network site because of dating, while 74% of the respondents belong to social networking site because of business issues while 70% respondents are members for the sake of finding new friends. In addition, some respondents (68%) belong to social networking sites so as to maintain existing friends and only few respondents (3.4%) are members of such sites because of research, programming, Job and project activities.

• **Research Questions 3:** To what extent do social media project Nigeria cultural symbols?

Cultural Symbol	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total	
			count	%
Food	300 (63.8)	111(23.6)	411	87.4
Dress	375 (79.8)	64 (13.6)	439	93.4
Music/Art	421 (89.6)	15 (3.2)	436	92.8
Values/Norms	228 (48.5)	187 (39.8)	415	88.3
Beliefs	246 (52.3)	163 (34.7)	409	87.0
Other	14 (3.0)	-	14	3

Table 4: Respondents Indication On Social Media Feature On The Following Nigerian Cultural Symbols

As shown on table 4, prominent among the Nigeria cultural symbols feature on social media is Music/ art as indicated by 90% of the respondents. Three hundred and seventy five (375 (80%)) of the respondents affirmed that dress is one of the Nigeria cultural symbols feature on social media, next to this Nigeria food (64%), beliefs (52%), values/ norms (49%) and others (3%).

Frequency of social media feature of Nigerian cultural symbols	Frequency (%)			
	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Food	131 (27.9)	164 (34.9)	132 (28.1)	18 (3.8)
Dress	213 (45.3)	164 (34.9)	60 (12.8)	6 (1.3)
Music/Dance	267 (56.8)	139 (29.6)	41 (8.7)	4 (0.9)

Values/Norms	59 (12.6)	150 (31.9)	184 (39.1)	43 (9.1)
Beliefs	93 (19.8)	109 (23.2)	185 (39.4)	48 (10.2)
Other (please specify)	7 (1.5)	13 (2.8)	8 (1.7)	2 (0.4)
How often do you check the following Nigerian cultural symbols on social media				
Food	117 (24.9)	83 (17.7)	159 (33.8)	85 (18.1)
Dress	143 (30.4)	155 (33.0)	108 (23.0)	39 (8.3)
Music/Dance	196 (41.7)	148 (31.5)	74 (15.7)	29 (6.2)
Values/Norms	61 (13.0)	105 (22.3)	195 (41.5)	77 (16.4)
Beliefs	57 (12.1)	105 (22.3)	192 (40.9)	87 (18.5)
Other (please specify)	5 (1.1)	11 (2.3)	6 (1.3)	4 (0.9)

Table 5: Respondents Indication On Nigeria Cultural Symbols

As shown above, the respondents were able to identify those Nigerian cultural symbols that are often featured in social media. Music/dance recorded the highest among other cultural symbols as indicated by 57% of the total respondents as the most featured Nigerian cultural symbols. This was followed by 45% of the respondents who affirmed dress as the most featured Nigerian cultural symbols on the social media and the same respondents (28%) also identified Nigerian food as a cultural symbol that is always featured on social media. 20% and 13% of the respondents indicated beliefs and values or norms respectively as cultural symbols that appear in the social media always. Furthermore, the most sorted Nigeria cultural symbols on social media is Music/dance (42%), Dress (30%), and Food (25%), while values/norms(13%), and beliefs (12%) are the least sorted on the social media.

Cultural Symbol	Frequency (%)			
	Intensely	Moderately	Scarcely	Undecided
Dressing	257 (54.7)	115 (24.5)	62 (13.2)	7 (1.5)
Communal Living	172 (36.6)	171 (36.4)	83 (17.7)	10 (2.1)
Music/Dance	286 (60.9)	106 (22.6)	36 (7.7)	4 (0.9)
Respect for Elders	85 (18.1)	115 (24.5)	182 (38.7)	56 (11.9)
Language	158 (33.6)	119 (25.3)	129 (27.4)	29 (6.2)
Other (please specify)	12 (2.6)	12 (2.6)	4 (0.9)	3 (0.6)

Table 6: Extent Of Social Media (Facebook, Twitter Etc) Influence On Nigerian Cultural Behaviour

According to table 6, the Nigeria cultural symbols that is intensely influenced by social media is music/dance as indicated by 61% of the respondents while 23% respondents accepted that music/dance is being influenced moderately by social media. Concerning influence of social media on Nigerian cultural dressing, 55% respondents are of the view that it is being influenced intensely while 25% indicated moderate influence. On influence of social media on Nigerian cultural communal living, 37% respondents are of the view that it is been influence intensely while 36% indicated moderate influence. Similarly, our cultural Language was viewed as being influenced intensely by social media by 34% respondents and moderately influenced by 25% respondents. The least identified cultural symbols intensely influence by social media is respect for Elders which was affirmed by 18% of the total respondents.

- **Research Question 4:** Do social media influence the cultural behaviour of young adults in Nigeria?

Base on influence from internet usage	Frequency (%)			
	Agree		Disagree	
It is good if ladies/girls initiate love relationship online?	169	(36.0)	276	(58.7)
Images I see on social media influence the way I dress?	254	(54.0)	189	(40.2)
Social media influences our cultural heritage positively?	185	(39.4)	252	(53.6)
Social media has helped in eroding traditional African values like, morality, respect for elders, communality etc?	241	(51.3)	202	(43.0)
Social media affect the way others dress?	375	(79.8)	61	(13.0)
Social media encourages me to involve my family in decision making?	188	(40.0)	249	(53.0)
My visit to social media helps me to value my local language as a means of communication?	146	(31.1)	293	(62.3)

Table 7: The Extent At Which Respondents Agree Or Disagree With The Following Social Behaviour On Social Media

Table 7 brings to light the extent of acceptance of some social behaviour influenced by social media (internet). 59% of the respondents disagreed to the social behaviour that affirms that it is good if ladies/girls initiate love relationship online while 36% respondents agreed to this social behaviour. Majority of the respondents (54%) agreed that the images they see on social media influence the way they dress while 40% respondents disagreed. Less than the average number of respondents (39%) agreed that Social media influence our cultural heritage positively while 54% believes that social media influence our cultural heritage negatively. In a similar view 51% believe that social media has helped in eroding traditional African values like, morality, respect for elders, communality, among others.

Majority of the respondents (80%) also agreed that Social media affects the way others dress and only few respondents (40%) agreed that Social media encourages them to involve their family in decision making. While few respondents affirmed that their visit to social media helped them to value their local language as a means of communication.

Lastly, as indicated in figure 4 below, most of the respondents (55%) disagreed that social media promote Nigeria cultural identity

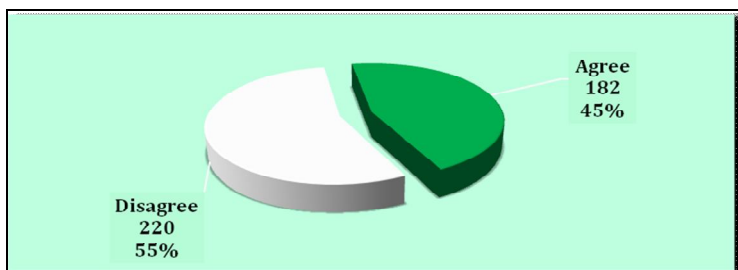


Figure 4: Responses On 'If Social Media Promotes Nigerian Cultural Identity'.

## 9. Discussions and Conclusions

This study found that the young adult in Nigeria are aware of the new media, use them frequently and most times more than one at a time. The internet especially for social use (dating, business, finding new friends and maintaining existing ones) has the highest level of usage among them. Nigerian cultural values are exposed in social network sites but the young adults are not highly influenced by those values. They believe that their moral behavior has not been totally destroyed and that social media affect their dressing negatively. Generally, the young adults in Nigeria believe that social media have helped in eroding traditional African values like, morality, respect for elders, and communality among others. From the findings, the social media generate both positive and negative change, and did not really promote the cultural values of Nigerians. The young adults sometimes get carried away with what they observe and view in facebook, twitter sites etc. They are mostly using these sites and what they view does not encourage them to have more interest in Nigerian's cultural values. They tend to fall towards western style of dressing, their food and even the way they reason. The findings also indicate that these social networks were developed mainly for social interaction and not to promote cultural values of a nation.



## 10.Recommendations

This study has shown that new media have both positive and negative effect on the young adult but more of negative effect. To preserve the cultural values of Nigerians in the lives of young adults, efforts should be made in the absorption of media and in accessing, analysing, and evaluating the media. Media scholars have agreed that media permeate our lives and because of this individuals ought to be responsible and thoughtful about how they use media, and how media use them. Communities have different and unique cultural values and identities and as such should be sustained. The National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) in collaboration with Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), should advertise our cultural heritage on the social network sites to promote our rich cultural values. Our beliefs, norms, food, dressing and others should be showcased, thereby discouraging those activities that encourage foreign cultures. Our cultural values should be made to remain indelible in the minds of the young adults who will pass it on to the next generation. More exposure to cultural values of western countries will lead to the admiration and copying of their cultures. There should be effort to strengthen the cultural values of Nigeria. The media educate and inculcate knowledge, therefore, the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) should use the social media as one of the avenues of preserving Nigerian cultural values.

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