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**Impact of Social Media Influencers on How SMEs Incorporate Their  
Feedback into Their Product Development and Marketing Strategies**



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## Impact of Social Media Influencers on How SMEs Incorporate Their Feedback into Their Product Development and Marketing Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Influencers in social media have developed into a powerful marketing force, significantly impacting Kenyan small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). By leveraging the expansion of social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, influencers have transformed how businesses engage with clients. Through their large numbers of followers and credibility, influencers help SMEs increase brand visibility, gain new customers, and boost sales. This emerging form of marketing is particularly beneficial to Kenyan SMEs, in that it offers a low-cost alternative to traditional advertising and enables direct interaction with targeted groups. Consequently, social media influencers' power is reshaping the business landscape, opening up possibilities for expansion for SMEs in an increasingly digitalized economy. This study aims to critically evaluate the impact of social media influencers on how SMEs incorporate their feedback into their product development and marketing strategies.

**Methodology:** This study adopted positivism philosophy, which is based on data collection. The study used a mixed approach research design. The study collected 385 questionnaires. The study used primary data. Data was processed and analysed with the help of statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses. The application of both methods provides more validity and richness in research findings.

**Findings:** The study confirms that social media comments are a significant component of SME product design and marketing planning in Kenya. SMEs have customer-driven improvement, more sophisticated marketing tactics, and better customer interactions.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** SMEs must adopt specialized social media management strategies to increase engagement, ensuring frequent and effective online presence. Personalized responses to customers' inquiries can help to create stronger relationships and to build brand loyalty by making customers feel listened to and valued. In addition, companies must prioritize creating visually engaging content, as captivating visuals can significantly increase interactions and translate into higher sales conversions. By implementing these steps, SMEs can maximize the success of their social media efforts and improve overall brand performance.

**Key Words:** *Social Media Influencers, Feedback, Product Development Strategies, Marketing Strategies*

## 1. Background of the Study

The rapid growth of internet connectivity and smartphone adoption in Kenya has significantly transformed how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) interact with consumers and develop their products and marketing strategies. Over the last decade, Kenya has experienced substantial improvements in internet access, largely driven by the expansion of mobile broadband services. In 2023, the country had an estimated 45 million internet users, with mobile phones being the most common devices used to access the internet (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This digital expansion has enabled SMEs to engage with wider and more diverse audiences through online platforms, particularly social media. As internet access continues to grow, SMEs increasingly rely on digital channels not only for marketing but also for obtaining consumer feedback that can inform product development and marketing decisions.

Kenya has also made significant progress in expanding mobile network coverage, with approximately 33.5% of the population accessing mobile internet and nearly the entire population area covered by 3G and 4G networks. According to the Kenya Digital Economy Report (2024), this connectivity gap is projected to reduce significantly by 2028, bringing more than 1.5 million additional users online and contributing approximately Kshs. 662 billion to the country's GDP. This expanding digital environment has accelerated the role of social media platforms in shaping business strategies. Studies show that the growth of influencer marketing, smartphone usage, and internet accessibility has created a powerful ecosystem that allows SMEs to reach targeted audiences and obtain valuable consumer insights in a cost-effective manner (Gikunda, 2022; Manzoor, 2023). Social media platforms such as Instagram provide influencers with the ability to interact directly with followers, creating opportunities for SMEs to gather feedback, test product ideas, and adjust their marketing approaches to better align with consumer preferences (Mukherjee & Hollenbaugh, 2019).

Social media influencers have therefore emerged as important intermediaries between businesses and consumers in the digital marketplace. By collaborating with influencers who have established credibility and strong online followings, SMEs can enhance brand visibility, build consumer trust, and stimulate engagement that provides valuable feedback for product improvement and marketing strategies (Tuten & Solomon, 2015; Keller, 2013). Such interactions allow businesses to better understand consumer expectations, strengthen customer relationships, and encourage repeat purchases (Aaker, 1991). However, SMEs also face challenges when attempting to leverage influencer feedback effectively, including difficulties in selecting influencers whose values align with their brands, limited marketing budgets, and challenges in measuring the return on investment from influencer campaigns (Freberg, 2011; Tuten & Solomon, 2015; Keller, 2013). Despite these challenges, integrating social media influencer feedback into product development and marketing strategies has become an increasingly important approach for SMEs seeking to remain competitive in Kenya's evolving digital economy.

## **Research Problem**

Small and medium-sized enterprises increasingly rely on digital platforms to promote their products and interact with customers. Social media influencers have emerged as important actors in this space because they possess large online followings and the ability to shape consumer opinions and purchasing decisions. Influencer marketing is also considered a relatively affordable marketing strategy for SMEs that often operate with limited advertising budgets, enabling them to reach a large audience at a lower cost (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Kenya presents an appropriate environment for examining this phenomenon due to the rapid growth of internet access, widespread mobile device usage, and high levels of social media engagement, particularly among young people (Oduor, 2020). As a result, social media influencers have become significant intermediaries through which SMEs can communicate with potential customers and obtain feedback that may inform their product development and marketing strategies.

Despite the growing use of influencer marketing, SMEs still face several challenges in effectively incorporating influencer feedback into their product development and marketing decisions. Many SMEs struggle to identify suitable influencers, measure the return on investment from influencer campaigns, and manage the financial costs associated with influencer partnerships (Keller, 2013). At the same time, social media influencers play a key role in disseminating brand messages to their followers, influencing consumer perceptions, engagement levels, and brand awareness (Freberg, 2011). However, limited empirical evidence exists on how SMEs translate influencer interactions and feedback into practical improvements in their products and marketing strategies, particularly in the Kenyan context where businesses also face restricted access to traditional advertising channels (Munyua, 2020). Therefore, this study sought to examine the impact of social media influencers on how SMEs incorporate influencer feedback into their product development and marketing strategies, focusing on aspects such as social media engagement, influencer marketing, and brand awareness.

## **Objective of the Study**

To critically evaluate the impact of social media influencers on how SMEs incorporate their feedback into their product development and marketing strategies

## **2. Literature Review**

### **The Rise of Social Media**

Social media use has been increasing over the years as a marketing channel among SMEs in Kenya. Kibet (2020), the integration of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter into the marketing strategies of SMEs at large helps them reach a diverse audience, thereby increasing visibility and improving consumer interaction. Social media is an inexpensive marketing strategy for small businesses since it enables them to advertise their goods

and services for a fraction of the price of conventional marketing techniques (Kanyegirire, 2019). In social media, it's not all about reaching the clients but it's about the a relationship that can be built between them. Mwangi and Gachanja (2021), social media provides a two-way flow of communication for SMEs in Kenya to effectively engage directly with their clientele. If companies respond to questions and comments on time consumers feel valued, and this enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty. The immediate nature of social media also helps SMEs address complaints and have conversations that build trust (Lupia, 2018). In January 2024, Kenya recorded 13.05 million social media users, which was equal to 23.5 per cent of the country's total population. In early 2024, Kenya recorded 66.04 million active cellular mobile connections, which was equal to 118.7 per cent of the country's total population (Datareportal, 2024).

Most SMEs in Kenya fail to maximally benefit from their interactions in social media spaces. Akinyi (2021), listed some major factors that hamper the use of social media by SME owners and their staff, especially insufficient digital literacy to produce good-quality content or otherwise engage clients online. Some parts of the country also suffer a lack of other resources, exacerbated by poor access to the internet (Njiru & Ngugi, 2019).

### **Growth of Social Media Use by SMEs**

Social media websites are useful tools for improving brand visibility. Chege (2020), SMEs with higher web visibility achieve more exposure, which may trigger business growth. Through the appropriate application of social media platforms and advertisements targeted at specific segments, SMEs can reach their intended customer base and thereby boost sales and market share. To effectively track the performance and engagement of an audience and improve their marketing strategies, SMEs should consider using social media analytics.

Another effective channel where SMEs interact with target customers is through influencer marketing. Kinyanjui (2022), collaborating with regional influencers has been a fruitful strategy in building up a reputation and increasing visibility among Kenyan SMEs. This partnership allows SMEs to tap into the influencer's established trust and audience, creating a mutually beneficial relationship that accelerates customer acquisition and brand awareness (Mutinda & Muthomi, 2021). Engagement through social media is increasingly linked to the improved performance of SME businesses. Social media, according to Ochieng & Kamau (2021), has contributed to enabling Kenyan SMEs to remain competitive by being abreast of innovations. In addition, as determined by Karanja (2019), social media visibility raises the levels of sales, customer retention, and profit for the overall business.

### SME Marketing Needs and Challenges

Kenyan SMEs' use of social media is influenced by several factors. Gikonyo (2020), one of the main motivators, is social media marketing's low cost. Social media offers SMEs an affordable platform that enables them to reach a large audience with little outlay of funds. For SMEs with tight marketing resources, this makes it especially alluring (Njoroge & Gachanja, 2019). Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. SMEs can connect with clients from both home and abroad (Mwangi & Wambui, 2021). SMEs are able to reach specific segments of clients, therefore enhancing the efficacy and impact of their marketing efforts. The communities around the brand are also built through social media platforms, improving client engagement and loyalty to the brand, as noted by Kibet (2020) in his study. Better consumer connections are also driving social media use. Social media enables two-way communication between companies and consumers, strengthening the relationship and increasing customer satisfaction (Muthomi & Gichuki, 2021). Businesses can interact with customers in real time and improve their experiences by using services like direct messaging, reviews, and comments.

**Table 1: Risks of Social Media and Mitigations**

Risks	Mitigations
Data security and privacy issue, Karanja (2020)	Training and capacity building are some of the important tactics, Kinyanjui (2022)
SMEs to public criticism, while on the other hand, it provides a platform for marketing Lupia, 2018)	Small business firms should have policies and procedures spelled out to address criticism or some form of crisis on social media, Muthomi and Gichuki (2021)
Chege (2020), SMEs in Kenya lack either the infrastructure, expertise, or human resources to manage social media accounts.	SMEs can protect client information and prevent security breaches by implementing secure payment systems, using encryption tools, and training employees on the best practices of data protection (Kibet, 2020).
Social media campaigns can be poorly executed and yield less-than-ideal results if the required staff or expertise is not available to do so (Njiru & Ngugi, 2019).	SMEs, whether outsourcing to social media managers or investing in tools to manage scheduling, have to allocate ample resources and time toward social media management (Gikonyo, 2020).

**Source: Author 2025**

### **Mitigation of Social Media Engagements**

Suitable mitigation measures should be put in place by Kenyan SMEs. Training and capacity building are some of the important tactics. Kinyanjui(2022), increasing SME owners' and staff members' digital literacy reduces the dangers connected to inadequate social media management. SMEs can enhance their capacity to produce high-quality content, interact with clients, and safeguard private information by receiving focused training. Another mitigant is managing one's reputation well. Small business firms should have policies and procedures spelled out to address criticism or some form of crisis on social media.

Muthomi & Gichuki (2021), SMEs could minimize the probable negative impacts brought about by the use of social media through proper reputation management characterized by prompt attention to consumer complaints and inquiries.

Cybersecurity measures are also very important in reducing the risks related to data security. SMEs can protect client information and prevent security breaches by implementing secure payment systems, using encryption tools, and training employees on the best practices of data protection (Kibet, 2020). It is also helpful for SMEs to work with cybersecurity experts in cases where internal resources are not available. Resource allocation is one of the key mitigants. SMEs, whether outsourcing to social media managers or investing in tools to manage scheduling, have to allocate ample resources and time towards social media management (Gikonyo, 2020). The process could be less cumbersome for SMEs, hence, ensuring effective usage of the platforms by engaging with the services of a digital marketing specialist or having a dedicated social media team.

### **SME Marketing Needs and Challenges**

For SMEs in Kenya and elsewhere, effective marketing techniques are vital in spurring expansion and maintaining their operations. One of the key concerns for SMEs is increasing brand visibility and awareness. In Kenya, SMEs often fail to reach their target market due to a lack of funds and resources (Waweru & Gichuki, 2020). All this can be addressed at reasonable costs with tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, all of which are social media forums that permit the SME to publicize its products and services to massive target markets without needing to bear exorbitant media prices. As shown by Chege (2020), Kenyan SMEs do appreciate how fundamental it is to implement solid customer relationship building and sustainability.

Social media makes two-way communication easier, allowing companies to interact with clients directly, answer questions, resolve issues, and get feedback instantly. This increases client trust and loyalty, both of which are critical to SMEs' long-term viability. Another marketing need that SMEs face pertains to focused marketing.

Njoroge & Gachanja, 2019, social media allows SMEs to reach out to specific demographics and amplifies their marketing effort. Guided by highly targeted features on various social media platforms, SMEs might focus on the right audience and increase their chances of closing a sale. Limited financial resources are one of the biggest problems facing SMEs. Due to their limited resources, the majority of SMEs in Kenya find it challenging to pay for conventional marketing avenues like print or television media (Gikonyo, 2020). Even though social media marketing is inexpensive, many SMEs still find it difficult to set aside enough money for paid advertising campaigns or the production of high-quality content. Other challenges include a lack of digital skills. According to Lupia (2018), many Kenyan owners and employees of SMEs are not conversant with the skills required to utilize social media in marketing.

This encompasses issues to do with handling social media management, content development, and assessment of campaign effectiveness and assessment of campaign effectiveness. SMEs will not be able to engage with their audience and measure the impact of their social media efforts without proper information. Another challenge is saturation on the social media platforms. As more and more businesses embrace social media marketing, the competition for consumer attention becomes very fierce. Muthomi & Gichuki (2021) stated that Kenyan SMEs face difficulties trying to gain a presence among numerous other brands and companies on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Competition would rise with diminished returns in such a case when businesses fail to stand out. Besides, there is the possibility of maintaining content consistency and quality information for the followers. This becomes tough for SMEs due to the limited availability of resources and manpower as stated by Karanja (2020). Photography, video creation, and graphic designs take Social media requires frequent updates with high-quality content to engage time and expertise, which SMEs lack in creating consistent content for their social media.

Some of the social media marketing practices that Kenyan SMEs can apply, in a bid to achieve this, include planning and scheduling content. In support, Kibet (2020) says that it is important for the business to prepare and plan the content, so that it remains steady online.

**Table 2: Best practices in SME usage of social media**

**Best practices in SME usage of social media: Continuous Branding**

For increased brand consciousness, make sure that the tone, language, and visual aspects are consistent in all media. (Keller, 2020)

**Interaction with Followers**

To create a good community base and generate loyalty, actively reply to messages, comments, and queries (2009), (Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

**Variety of Content**

To attract different people and engage a variety of audiences, use a variety of content types (images, videos, infographics, etc.). (Tuten & Solomon, 2021)

**Making Decisions Based on Data**

To obtain a greater understanding of audience behavior and create future advertisements, examine social media measurements (Ellis-Chadwick & Chaffey, 2019)

**Post Timing and Frequency**

To get the best audience engagement, post at the best times and have a regular posting schedule (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020)

**Influencer Collaborations**

Collaborations: Work with influencers who are relevant to your brand to create awareness and generate organic brand suggestions (Freberg, 2010; Solon, 2021).

**User-Generated Content (UGC)**

To create awareness and credibility, encourage users to create and post content about your brand. (Hennig-Thurau, 2020).

**Adapt Content to Each Platform**

Content should be well adapted to the peculiarity of each social media website

**Have a Consistent Brand Voice**

Create and have an identifiable, real voice that will connect with your audience. (Roggeveen & Liu-Thompkins, 2020)

**Track Your Brand Reputation**

Track what people are saying about your brand and react quickly to any bad words. (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2021).

**Source: Author, 2025**

## Channels to The Buying Journey and Models

The customer buying cycle stages are awareness, consideration, choice, and post-purchase; at every stage, social media is important to Kenyan SMEs. Waweru & Gichuki, 2020, social media is a very good avenue for the creation of awareness about a brand or product. SMEs can attract new customers by informing them about their products and services through organic content and targeted advertising. Social media also helps in the consideration stage by providing valuable content such as product demos, reviews, and testimonials that help consumers weigh their options (Kibet,2020). SMEs can directly impact purchasing decisions through social media channels. Studies by Lupia (2018) indicate that influencer endorsements, ratings, and customer reviews assist SMEs in gaining confidence from the audience. These elements are a form of social proof; therefore, customers are more confident when making their decisions. In the post-purchase stage, SMEs will be able to engage with customers through responding to reviews, distributing user-generated content, and calling for comments, thus nurturing repeat business and customer loyalty (Karanja,2020). Different social media platforms affect every step of the buying process in different ways. The most popular among these platforms is Facebook for SMEs in Kenya, and it most affects the awareness and consideration steps, according to Muthomi & Gichuki (2021). Instagram is visually appealing, and the strategy has really paid off for SMEs reaching younger consumers.

Chege (2020), Instagram is an ideal platform for companies in industries such as fashion, cosmetics, and hospitality, where the buying decision of customers is highly influenced by the look and appearance of the product. SMEs can move potential clients from the consideration stage to the decision stage using Instagram Stories and posts showcasing products in action or in real-life situations. Influencer collaborations and hashtags increase the reach and credibility, which leads to increased engagement and sales (Kinyanjui,2022). SMEs in Kenya rely heavily on Twitter to engage with customers and create brand awareness. Gikonyo (2020), Twitter is more effective at the decision-making and post-purchase stages because it is fast-paced and focuses on immediate communication. SMEs utilize Twitter to quickly make announcements of events or promotions, respond to customer complaints, and address client issues. Another important channel for Kenyan B2B SMEs is LinkedIn, which helps them get in contact with other decision-makers, industry leaders, and firms. As Njiru & Ngugi (2019) explain, LinkedIn fosters the thought of leadership and collaboration, as well as materials such as case studies, white papers, and webinars to support stages of awareness and consideration. This is how influencer marketing has. Kinyanjui (2022), for SMEs, working with local influencers on social media can help in reaching established audiences and making genuine connections with potential clients. Influencers can offer discounts or calls to action to increase conversions at the decision stage,

promote new items during the awareness stage, and offer testimonials during the consideration stage. Moving customers through the purchasing process depends heavily on the influencers' credibility and followers' confidence (Mutinda & Muthomi, 2021).

### **Benefits of Using Social Media Influencers**

Influencers in Kenya have often showcased SMEs' products in a friendly and accessible way through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which has been proven to have a significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. (Kibet,2020). The involvement of influencers by SMEs improves brand awareness and helps to increase trust, especially when it comes to companies looking to target younger or first-time customers. Maintaining engagement post-purchase is crucial to ensure consumer loyalty and repeat business. After a purchase, SMEs can engage customers through social media channels by showing appreciation for the support, requesting feedback, and encouraging them to share their experiences online (Mwangi&Wambui,2021). A community around a brand can be established by an SME to enhance its relationship with clients and improve the chances of repeat business and long-term loyalty. The significance of individualized interaction in the post-purchase stage is emphasized by Lupia (2018). SMEs can produce customized content that appeals to consumers and makes them feel appreciated by taking into account their unique needs and preferences. Through this approach, SMEs guarantee that their social media presence becomes a continuous component of the consumer journey, thereby promoting sustained brand advocacy.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study adopted positivism philosophy, which is based on data collection. The study used a mixed approach research design. The study collected 385 questionnaires. The study used primary data. Data was processed and analyzed with the help of statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses. The application of both methods provides more validity and richness in research findings.

### **4. Findings**

#### **Social Media Customer Feedback Integration in Product Development and Marketing Strategies**

This objective was to assess whether social media feedback affects product development and marketing strategies for small and medium-sized firms (SMEs)in Kenya. Social media sites give enterprises direct access to customer views that allow them to develop products further, enhance services, and add value to advertising campaigns. The focus is on the discussion of t-tests and chi-square tests, which were employed to identify how SMEs apply social media feedback to support

strategic decision-making. A t-test was conducted to compare how much new and long-established SMEs utilize feedback on social media within their plans. There was no significant variation in the level of usage of feedback ( $p=0.221$ ), so that new and established SMEs are equally active users of social media feedback. However, established SMEs were better organized to implement ( $p=0.049$ , significant), and this can imply that longer-standing companies possess more effective means for integrating feedback into decision-making. The evidence agrees with Lim et al. (2024), who concluded that more mature companies' digital strategy allows them to better use customers' insights.

A chi-square test examined whether using feedback on the different social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook) resulted in variations in effect. There existed a statistically significant correlation ( $p=0.035$ ), with businesses that used Instagram and TikTok making more use of feedback in contrast to firms using Facebook. The real-time interactions of TikTok and Instagram provide for quicker adaptation of businesses, which aligns with Smith and Johnson (2025), who suggest the pace of interaction by customers is higher where a platform is well-suited to give actionable feedback. The study confirms that social media comments are a significant component of SME product design and marketing planning in Kenya. SMEs have customer-driven improvement, more sophisticated marketing tactics, and better customer interactions. Despite this, burdens such as finding valuable comments and inadequate resources still exist. Recommendations include constructing systematic comment analysis systems, emphasizing timely engagement on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, and investing in customer relationship management (CRM) technology to streamline the integration process.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

The study findings indicate that social media feedback and influencer engagement play a significant role in shaping how SMEs in Kenya develop their products and marketing strategies. The results showed that both new and established SMEs actively use social media feedback, although established firms are better organized in implementing such feedback into strategic decisions. The chi-square results further demonstrated that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok enable SMEs to utilize customer feedback more effectively than Facebook due to their interactive and real-time communication features. Overall, the findings confirm that social media engagement and influencer participation contribute to improved customer interaction, stronger brand visibility, and enhanced marketing strategies among SMEs, although challenges such as identifying relevant feedback, selecting suitable influencers, and measuring return on investment still persist.

## Recommendations

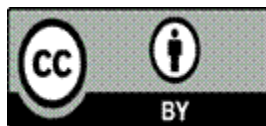
Based on the findings, SMEs should adopt structured social media management strategies that enable them to systematically analyze and integrate customer feedback into product development and marketing decisions. Businesses should focus on timely engagement with customers on highly interactive platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, while also investing in customer relationship management technologies to improve the organization and utilization of feedback. Additionally, SMEs should prioritize strategic influencer selection and develop performance-based partnerships to better measure the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Creating visually engaging content and providing personalized responses to customers' inquiries can further strengthen relationships, enhance brand loyalty, and improve overall brand performance.

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