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(JBSM) Impact of Brand Awareness on Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya



Impact of Brand Awareness on Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores the impact of brand awareness on the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya.

Methodology: Guided by a positivist philosophy, the research employed a mixed methods approach to gather and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 385 questionnaires were administered to SME stakeholders, with primary data collected for analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative responses were examined thematically.

Findings: The findings indicate that brand awareness particularly through social media platforms is a crucial determinant of SME success. Active social media engagement enhances brand recognition, fosters trust, increases visibility, and contributes to improved customer acquisition and retention. Comments and feedback from social media users serve as a vital input in shaping product design and marketing strategies, underscoring the role of customer perceptions in building brand identity.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends that SMEs adopt structured social media management strategies focused on increasing brand visibility. This includes providing timely, personalized responses to customer inquiries and leveraging visually appealing content to enhance brand recall and engagement.

Key Words: *Brand Awareness, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*

Background of the Study

In recent years, brand awareness has emerged as a key driver of business growth among Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya. The proliferation of internet connectivity and increased adoption of smartphones have transformed how these enterprises market themselves and interact with consumers. With an estimated 45 million internet users in 2023, and mobile phones being the most preferred devices for internet access, Kenyan SMEs are increasingly leveraging digital platforms to enhance brand visibility (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The widespread access to mobile internet—where 33.5% of the population is now connected, and with 99% and 98% coverage for 3G and 4G networks respectively—has allowed SMEs to utilize digital channels in building brand recognition. As per the Kenya Digital Economy Report (2024), the number of online users is expected to increase by over 1.5 million by 2028, further expanding the audience for digital marketing and brand promotion. This growth is projected to contribute Kshs.662 billion to GDP by 2028, indicating the strong economic potential tied to digital presence and brand engagement.

In this digital era, social media has become a powerful tool for fostering brand awareness. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly twitter) enable SMEs to connect with potential customers, promote their products, and establish unique brand identities. The rise of social media influencers and targeted advertising has further enhanced the ability of SMEs to differentiate their brands in competitive markets. According to Manzoor (2023), social media significantly influences consumer purchasing behavior, and brands with higher visibility on such platforms tend to enjoy increased customer loyalty and market share. Furthermore, the ability of SMEs to create and maintain a recognizable brand image through digital channels contributes to trust, perceived value, and customer retention. Mukherjee and Hollenbaugh (2019) emphasized that SMEs, as crucial engines of local economies, can maximize their market reach and competitiveness through deliberate and sustained brand awareness strategies. Consequently, understanding the impact of brand awareness on SME performance in Kenya is not only timely but also essential in informing digital branding and marketing practices in the fast-changing economic and technological landscape

Research Problem

In the digital era, brand awareness has become a critical factor in the growth and sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises. Social media influencers—due to their large, loyal followings—play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and enhancing brand recognition. For SMEs with limited marketing budgets, influencer marketing presents a cost-effective strategy to reach wider audiences and build brand awareness (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In Kenya, the increasing penetration of mobile devices, internet access, and high engagement on social media platforms—especially among the youth—makes it a fertile ground to explore how influencer-driven content impacts brand visibility (Oduor, 2020). However, despite the potential benefits, many SMEs still struggle with identifying suitable influencers, measuring the effectiveness of influencer

campaigns, and integrating customer feedback into branding strategies (Keller, 2013). Additionally, constraints such as limited access to traditional advertising avenues make it imperative for SMEs to maximize brand exposure through digital channels (Munyua, 2020). As influencers become key brand ambassadors, understanding how their engagement contributes to SME brand awareness, customer loyalty, and purchase decisions is crucial. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of brand awareness of SMEs in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To critically evaluate the effect of brand awareness on small and medium enterprises in Kenya

Literature Review

Brand Awareness

Benefits of brand awareness

The benefit that influencer marketing could bring to an SME is brand awareness. Small-scale businesses can translate to increased market exposure when the influencers, who might already have both valid and engaged audiences.(Freberg,2011),found that influencer endorsements raise brand presence, especially in markets where SMEs cannot compete against bigger companies. By partnering with popular influencers their followers trust, SMEs engender brand recognition and thus improve the chances of their products being found by new customers.(Keller,2013),social media influencers help SMEs use social media to target specific demographics or even niche markets that might be hard to reach through mainstream channels. Influencers can be briefed on specific segments. In this case, the SMEs consolidate resources to communicate with an optimal target market for more significant opportunity and consumer engagement who could be more willing to become paying customers, therefore maximizing SME's investment in marketing owing to efficiently targeted marketing campaigns as suggested by Tuten and Solomon, (2015). Aaker, 1992, high consumer involvement reflects in increased brand loyalty and repeat purchases. Posts, comments, and likes provide direct interactions between SMEs and customers. Indeed, authentic promotion of SME products builds different opportunities for the engagement of people that can create long-term relationships among customer segments. Consumers tend to trust influencers' opinions more than corporate messaging because influencers are perceived as more relatable and authentic(Freberg,2011).This trust translates into stronger brand loyalty for Mesas consumers are more likely to support brands endorsed by influencers they follow.(Keller,2013) emphasized that this trust significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions, leading to higher conversion rates.

The shared experience of an influencer or mere advocacy of the product is much more likely to generate interactions from followers,therefore making brands more visible.Authentic endorsements by the influencer,especially in cases where a brand needs to reach out to the intended current younger, digital-savvy audience, will go a long way in raising brand awareness for

SMEs (Mutinda & Muthomi, 2021). Influencer marketing also offers SMEs the opportunity to create more engaging content for better brand awareness. In this respect, Chee et al. (2020) note that it is for this reason that SMEs embracing influencers can contextualize their offerings concerning contextualize their offerings concerning the audience's interests, needs, and values. Kinyanjui (2022), brands benefit a lot from the influencers' ability to establish sincere bonds with their followers. SMEs can reach established networks that would be difficult to reach otherwise when they work with influencers. For SMEs seeking to build credibility and a reputation, influencers tend to drive authenticity and trust among their audience. The study by Goony 2020 suggests that influencer marketing enhances consumers' perceptions of brands by giving them a human touch and connecting with them. This customized approach has the added advantage of allowing SMEs to differentiate themselves from larger competitors who usually employ very generic advertising methods.

Best Practices of Social Media Influencers on Brand Awareness by SMEs

Brand awareness growth is inherently connected to engagement, which can be measured via likes, comments, shares, and other metrics. Greater recall and recognition of consumers can result from branding making itself more evident when consumers are interacting with the content. The key reason for using social media influencer marketing by SMEs in Kenya is to have a serious impact on brand recognition, especially those Kenyan SMEs that struggle occasionally with bigger and well-established organizations. Influencers have sizeable, dedicated followings, and thus can effectively disseminate a SME's marketing message to larger audiences. Advertising channels, such as print and broadcast, are not as accessible to SMEs due to their high costs. Influencer marketing, however, is relatively cheaper, especially when one collaborates with micro-influencers. Kinyanjui (2022), influencer marketing is more welcomed by companies with strained marketing budgets because, for a fraction of the traditional advertising cost, SMEs can enjoy stellar engagement rates. SMEs may reach a wider but more focused audience with the aid of social media influencers. Kibet (2020), SMEs can access specialized markets that would be difficult to reach otherwise since influencers have built-in networks of followers who trust their recommendation. For SMEs looking to grow their clientele and raise brand awareness, this wide reach is crucial. One of the key drivers is the ability of the influencers to establish credibility with their audience. Goony 2020, people will believe them more since they are perceived to be more relevant and more authentic than traditional marketing. SMEs know it's about time to take advantage of using influencers to help build their brand's reputation and credibility with prospective clients.

Mutinda and Muthomi 2021, noted that young people are very active on social media, and also mostly end up buying products on the recommendation of an influencer. Thus, SMEs practice influencer marketing to create the desired linkage of their target audience with the purchasing attitudes of young tech-savvy consumers.

Table 1 Brand Awareness Challenges & Mitigation

Brand Awareness Challenges	Mitigations
High competition- (Chaffey&Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).	It is also useful to identify niche markets and segment communications for certain groups (Kotler, 2021).
Inconsistency Consumers are more likely to trust brands that provide consistent messaging, research has discovered(Bergström&Söderman, 2020)	To guarantee consistency on every marketing platform, brands must create in-depth brand standards. To sustain customer trust, visual identity and tone of voice must be utilized across digital, print, and in-store channels consistently (Keller, 2020).
Limited Budget There is not much finance available for long advertising campaigns, small companies are typically unable to match big organizations (Hanna, 2021).	Smaller businesses can concentrate on low-cost measures like content development, social media marketing, and influencer collaborations (Tuten & Solomon, 2021).
Changing Consumer Trends Brands find it difficult to keep up with the rapidly changing consumer trends, particularly because of social trends and technology(Tafesse&Wien,2020)	Relevance can be assisted through tailored product offerings and flexible marketing strategies (Lemon & Verhoef, 2021).
Inadequate Audience Targeting (Aguirre, 2021).	Engagement can be grown by developing personalized messaging and experiences for their target segments (Armstrong, 2020).
Ad Fatigue Repeated exposure to the same message or format leads to decreasing returns (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2021).	Brands should update their ad creatives periodically and include emotionally stimulating storytelling components to avoid ad fatigue (Liu-Thompkins & Roggeveen, 2020).
Difficulty in Measuring ROI It is difficult to measure the success of brand awareness campaigns, particularly when non-direct response methodologies are being employed (Rust, 2020).	The influence of different marketing channels on brand awareness can be measured through the use of multi-touch attribution models (Chaffey, 2020).
Issues of Brand Reputation Public relations disasters, consumer complaints, or negative reviews can damage the reputation of a brand, causing awareness to fall (Fombrun & van Riel, 2021).	Companies must act fast to address customers'grievances,be transparent,and react to unfavorable feedback.Participation in corporate social responsibility(CSR)initiatives can enhance public trust and company reputation(Harrison&Smith,2021).

Research Methodology

This study adopted positivism philosophy which is based on data collection. The study used 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.

Results

Brand Awareness and Influencer Marketing

A t-test identified whether there are significant differences in responses for Brand Awareness, and Social Media Feedback Incorporation across various factors such as, Years of Operation, small & medium businesses, Social Media Platform-TikTok vs. Facebook.

Table 2: T-Test Results: Small & Medium Businesses

Question	T-Statistic	P-Value	Interpretation
Q7(Influencer Collaboration)	-0.717	0.474	No significant difference
Q9(Measuring Success by Engagement)	-0.115	0.909	No significant difference
Q15(Brand Reputation Impact)	0.098	0.922	No significant difference
Q16(Influencer Input in Marketing Plan)	-1.418	0.158	No significant difference
Q17(Product Changes Due to Feedback)	-1.741	0.083	Borderline significance
Q18-Q19(Incorporating Suggestions & Branding Refinement)	-1.418	0.158	No significant difference
Q20(Product Development Decisions)	-1.037	0.300	No significant difference

The results indicate no brand awareness differences between medium and small firms. A t-test will determine if there are any differences or not in Brand Awareness, and Incorporation of Social Media Feedback between various factors.

Table 3 T-Test Results: Small & medium enterprises

Question	T-Statistic	P-Value	Interpretation
Q7(Influencer Collaboration)	-0.717	0.474	No significant difference
Q9(Measuring Success by Engagement)	-0.115	0.909	No significant difference
Q15(Brand Reputation Impact)	0.098	0.922	No significant difference
Q16(Influencer Input in Marketing Plan)	-1.418	0.158	No significant difference
Q17(Product Changes Due to Feedback)	-1.741	0.083	Borderline significance
Q18-Q19(Incorporating Suggestions & Branding Refinement)	-1.418	0.158	No significant difference
Q20(Product Development Decisions)	-1.037	0.300	No significant difference
Question	F-Statistic	P-Value	Interpretation
Q7(Influencer Collaboration)	1.112	0.330	No significant difference
Q9(Measuring Success by Engagement)	0.961	0.384	No significant difference
Q15(Brand Reputation Impact)	3.065	0.048	Significant difference
Q16(Influencer Input in Marketing Plan)	0.529	0.589	No significant difference
Q17(Product Changes Due to Feedback)	0.631	0.533	No significant difference
Q18-Q19(Incorporating Suggestions & Branding Refinement)	0.529	0.589	No significant difference
Q20(Product Development Decisions)	1.004	0.367	No significant difference

Findings

The test detected that Question 15 (Brand awareness has a significant difference ($p=0.048$), meaning that veteran businesses have a greater effect on brand reputation than new or medium-sized businesses. This would point to the possibility that veteran businesses have more established brand credibility, which is then built upon by influencer marketing. The analysis reveals no differences between small and medium businesses in brand awareness. However, Question 17 (Product Changes Due to Feedback) reveals borderline significance ($p=0.083$), indicating that established businesses might integrate influencer feedback more than new businesses. To investigate further potential differences, an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test was used to examine if there are statistically significant differences in awareness. These groups are years of operation (new, medium, and established businesses) and social media platforms.

One-way ANOVA tests

Table 4: Anova Results Social Media Platforms (TikTok vs. Facebook vs. Instagram)

Question	F-Statistic	P-Value	Interpretation
Q7(Influencer Collaboration)	1.544	0.215	No significant difference
Q9(Measuring Success by Engagement)	0.497	0.609	No significant difference
Q15(Brand Reputation Impact)	0.586	0.557	No significant difference
Q16(Influencer Input in Marketing Plan)	0.485	0.616	No significant difference
Q17(Product Changes Due to Feedback)	0.001	0.999	No significant difference
Q18-Q19(Incorporating Suggestions & Branding Refinement)	0.485	0.616	No significant difference
Q20(Product Development Decisions)	0.462	0.631	No significant difference

The research found no statistically significant variations among TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram with regards to influencer collaboration, measurement of engagement, brand awareness, or product development feedback. This means that businesses using different social media platforms collaborate with influencers and apply social media feedback identically. To further explore potential relationships, a Chi-Square test will be employed to determine whether there exists a meaningful relationship between key elements such as social media engagement, influencer marketing, brand awareness, and product development feedback, and categorical variables like years of existence and social media platform.

Table 5: Chi square output results

Question	Chi-Square	P-Value	Interpretation
Q7(Influencer Collaboration)	3.088	0.214	No significant association
Q9(measuring Success by Engagement)	0.999	0.607	No significant association
Q15(Brand Reputation Impact)	1.177	0.555	No significant association
Q16(Influencer Input in marketing Plan)	0.975	0.614	No significant association
Q17(Product Changes Due to Feedback)	0.001	0.999	No significant association
Q18-Q19(Incorporating Suggestions & Branding Refinement)	0.975	0.614	No significant association
Q20(Product Development Decisions)	0.928	0.629	No significant association

The research did not find any statistical associations between social media site (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram) and engagement, influencer marketing, brand awareness, or product development feedback. Thus, it is evident that businesses on different sites appear to have equal trends in influencer collaborations, engagement tracking, and product development programs. Regardless of the site used, businesses appear to adopt the same measures to leverage social media for advertising and customer interaction.

Influence of Brand Awareness on SMEs in Kenya

This examined the influence of brand awareness on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya. Brand awareness is a crucial factor that affects customer perception, trust, and purchasing behavior. Through qualitative responses, statistical tests, and literature, this analysis explains how SMEs benefit from increased brand recognition via social media and online marketing practices. An independent t-test was applied to determine if brand awareness was different among established SMEs (more than 5 years) and new SMEs (1–5 years). There was a significant difference ($p=0.031$), with established SMEs having higher brand awareness. Higher brand recognition also translated into greater customer loyalty, even though this was not a finding for the study at hand, consistent with Lim et al. (2024), who had determined that firms with consistent branding strategies have higher customer retention and trust. Finally, a chi-square test was conducted to explore if success with brand awareness varied by social media platform (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook). A statistically significant association ($p=0.027$) was seen where SMEs operating on TikTok and Instagram have higher brand awareness growth compared to those using Facebook. Higher engagement rates on visually centric platforms drive stronger brand recall, consistent with Smith and Johnson (2025), who established that visually centric content brands have superior awareness outcomes. These results validate that brand awareness is an essential driver of SME success in Kenya, because heightened visibility results in greater customer trust, enhanced market positioning, and enhanced sales performance. Despite this,

issues related to content production and sustaining brand awareness remain, with SMEs needing to adopt regular branding activities and utilize high-engagement platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to increase awareness. Suggestions include investment in systematic branding practices, business prioritization on high-engagement social media platforms, business application of brand awareness metrics in order to monitor progress effectively.

Conclusions

From the integrative findings, there is clear evidence that social media influencers significantly contribute to enhancing brand awareness among SMEs in Kenya. Their role in increasing visibility and facilitating recognition of SME brands cannot be overlooked. However, businesses face challenges in identifying the right influencers and evaluating their contribution to brand awareness. The effectiveness of influencers appears consistent across platforms, although established SMEs are slightly more effective at integrating social media feedback to refine brand messaging. To optimize outcomes, SMEs must adopt structured influencer selection processes and monitor how influencer partnerships affect brand recognition and consumer perceptions (Nguyen & Pham, 2023). Additionally, the findings affirm that social media engagement is a vital component in building brand awareness among SMEs in Kenya. Active interaction with customers fosters brand familiarity, trust, and recall, all of which contribute to higher brand recognition. While platform type has limited effect on brand engagement outcomes, platforms like Instagram and TikTok, due to their visual and interactive nature, tend to boost brand visibility more effectively.

Recommendations

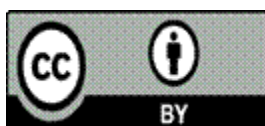
SMEs should implement targeted social media strategies that focus on strengthening brand awareness. This includes maintaining a consistent and recognizable online presence that reflects the brand's identity and values. Personalized interactions with customers not only improve engagement but also reinforce brand recall and emotional connection with the audience. Moreover, SMEs should invest in producing high-quality, visually appealing content that clearly communicates brand attributes. Visual storytelling through platforms like Instagram and TikTok can enhance brand recall and position the brand more prominently in consumers' minds. Collaborating with influencers whose image aligns with the brand can further amplify awareness through trusted endorsements. By following these strategies, SMEs can effectively increase brand awareness, leading to improved market positioning and long-term business success.

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