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Qualitative Analysis of Social Media Influencers Impact On Sustainable Brand Equity: A Case Study of Small Businesses in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on small business brand equity in Nigeria. With the country facing significant economic challenges and a growing unemployment rate, small businesses have become increasingly important for job creation and economic development. However, many small businesses struggle to establish their brand in a highly competitive market. The rise of social media influencers has opened new opportunities for small businesses to enhance their brand equity through innovative marketing strategies. The research employed an inductive approach, utilizing qualitative data collection methods through semi-structured interviews. A total of six small business owners who have engaged SMIs for promotional campaigns were interviewed. Findings from the study revealed that SMIs can have a significant positive impact on small business brand equity in Nigeria. They can increase brand awareness, improve brand associations, and foster brand loyalty. However, the study also identified challenges, such as influencer selection, budget constraints, and the authenticity of influencer endorsements. The research provides valuable insights for small businesses seeking to leverage SMIs in their marketing efforts, as well as recommendations for improving the effectiveness of such campaigns. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on influencer marketing and have practical implications for small business owners, marketers, and policymakers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Qualitative Analysis, Social Media, Influencers, Brand Equity, Businesses in Nigeria

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The global economy has been facing several challenges, including inflation, economic disparities, and high unemployment rates, which have hindered economic growth and development in various countries (Joseph, 2023). These challenges have significantly impacted Nigeria, a populous West African country that is already struggling with high unemployment rates. The unemployment rate in Nigeria has surged from 6.4% in 2020 to 33.33% in 2022, affecting the livelihoods of a significant proportion of its population, estimated at over 218 million (Obahiagbon et al., 2023). This situation has created considerable obstacles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly No poverty (SDG-1), Decent work and economic growth (SDG-8), and Industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG-9), as many individuals in the country live below the poverty line (Aluko, 2021).

In response to these economic challenges, many unemployed individuals in Nigeria, who may lack significant business knowledge, have turned to establishing small businesses to create a source of income. The number of small businesses has significantly increased from 60 percent of the total established businesses in Nigeria to 96.9 percent, providing 87.9 percent of employment and contributing 46.31% to the country's national GDP (Obahiagbon and Ogwu, 2023a). Small businesses are typically defined as independently owned and financed institutions with fewer than 100 employees, according to Hatten (2012). The Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Nigeria defines small-scale businesses as those with a capital investment of less than 750,000 naira (N750,000).

Furthermore, due to their limited financial resources, many small businesses in Nigeria heavily rely on social media as their main communication channel with customers (Ihemebiri et al., 2022). For some of these businesses, offline stores and other communication channels are not feasible due to the associated costs. Moreover, a significant portion of the Nigerian population regularly uses social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok on their smartphones, making it a norm in the digital age (Nwolu, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial for businesses of all sizes to take advantage of social media networks to enhance their brand equity and explore various digital marketing strategies.

In recent years, the use of social media influencer marketing has gained popularity in the field of digital marketing, thanks to the widespread use of social media platforms (Kiatkawsin and Lee, 2022). Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, social media influencers are ordinary individuals who have developed a large and loyal following online due to their knowledge, expertise, or personal brand. As such, they can be seen as more relatable to the public and can offer a more authentic representation of a product or service. In addition, social media influencer marketing is often less costly than traditional celebrity marketing, making it an attractive option for small businesses in Nigeria with limited resources (Lou & Yuan, 2019). By leveraging social media influencers, small businesses may potentially enhance their brand equity and reach a wider audience, which can ultimately lead to increased sales and business growth.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this research is the limited understanding of the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on the brand equity of small businesses in Nigeria. This issue arises in the context of the rapidly growing digital marketing landscape, where businesses are increasingly leveraging the influence of social media personalities to promote their brands (Obahiagbon et al., 2023). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of this marketing strategy for small businesses in Nigeria, who often face unique challenges and constraints in their marketing efforts.

This research problem matters because if it remains unaddressed, small business owners and marketers in Nigeria may continue to make uninformed decisions when selecting and collaborating with influencers, potentially leading to suboptimal results and inefficient allocation of resources. The consequences of not addressing the problem will be felt primarily by the small businesses themselves, who may struggle to compete effectively in the market due to insufficient knowledge about the true impact of influencer marketing on their brand equity. Besides that, due to the employment rate from small business, the Nigerian economy might be indirectly affected.

Furthermore, the problem has wider relevance beyond the Nigerian context, as similar issues may be faced by small businesses in other countries and regions (Obahiagbon & Ogwu, 2023a). Investigating the impact of SMIs on brand equity in Nigeria can potentially provide valuable insights and recommendations that can be applied to other contexts, contributing to the broader literature on influencer marketing and deepening the understanding of this increasingly important marketing phenomenon.

In summary, addressing the research problem is vital to help small businesses in Nigeria and beyond make better-informed decisions about influencer marketing, optimize their resources, and enhance their brand equity, ultimately contributing to their overall competitiveness and success in the marketplace. Therefore, this research is set to answer the following:

3. RESEARCH AIM and OBJECTIVES

To answer the set research question, this research aims to evaluate the impact of Social Media Influencers on the brand equity of Small Businesses in Nigeria. This will be guided by the following objectives:

- i. To explore how small businesses in Nigeria use social media influencers to promote their brand.
- ii. To critically analyse the factors that influence small businesses' selection of social media influencers.
- iii. To assess the effectiveness of social media influencer campaigns in increasing brand equity for small businesses in Nigeria.
- iv. To examine the potential risks and challenges associated with using social media influencers for small business branding in Nigeria.
- v. To evaluate the impact of Social Media Influencers on small businesses brand equity in Nigeria.



4. METHODOLOGY

This study methodology employed to evaluate the impact of social media influencers on Nigerian small businesses' brand. To achieve the objectives set in section 3 of this paper, the Saunders et al. (2019) research onion was used to guide the methodological choices in this study.

4.1. Research Design

This research purpose was exploratory as it aimed at evaluating a subject which had little or no information to analyze. Furthermore, the interpretivism research philosophy was used as this approach enabled the researcher to understand small business owners experience and interpret the use of social media influencers within their own context, how this shapes their decisions about using influencers to improve brand equity and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions of SMIs to facilitate social change.

In addition, this research followed the inductive approach as this allowed exploration of this understudied topic by gaining understanding through observations from experiences of participants to evaluate the impact of “SMIs on Brand equity of small businesses in Nigeria”. sides that, the research implored Qualitative collection of data which refers to collection of non-numeric date (Obahiagbon & Ogwu, 2023b). This is because of its interest in understanding the subjective experience and perception of the small business owners in relation to SMIs and their brand equity. In addition, this research used case study to capture the qualitative data because it aimed at providing an in dept look at one test subject “small businesses in Nigeria”.

4.2. Data Collection

The Primary Data collection was chosen, which refers to data collected directly from original sources for the first time by the researcher (Kothari, 2008). This w as chosen because there was no historical data relevant to this research. Using seven semi-structured interview questions, interviews were conducted to gain insights into small business owners' experiences and perceptions of social media influencer campaigns. Purposive sampling was used to select eight small business owners who had used social media influencers in Nigeria.

The researcher visited fifty known social media influencers on Instagram, twenty influencers on Facebook, fifteen twitter influencers, ten TikTok influencers and ten WhatsApp tv influencers to select brands who had appeared on those pages. Over 150 small businesses were approached via emails and direct messaging on the platforms. Six participants were selected from various industries who met the selection criteria and were willing to participate. The interviews were conducted via conferencing tools such as Zoom and Teams. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact of social media influencers on small business brand equity by exploring the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants.

However, one major limitation of using interviews was the limited number of interview participants, as it was relatively small, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences and perspectives of small business owners in Nigeria. This limitation may impact the generalizability of the study's findings. Besides that, the presence of the interviewer may have introduced biases in the data collection process.



Participants might have tailored their responses to please the interviewer or avoid sharing sensitive information, which could lead to biased results. Additionally, conducting interviews was time-consuming which may have limited the number of participants that would have been included in the study. This constraint affected the depth and breadth of the data collected.

Nonetheless, there were also alternative methods for collecting qualitative data, such as focus groups. Focus groups may have provided more varied perspectives on the research topic, but the small businesses perspectives could be influenced by the group choice. Thus, preventing the collection of the individual perspectives of the small businesses. Therefore, the use of interviews with purposive sampling was deemed the most appropriate method for this study.

4.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was carried out by using **Thematic analysis** which is the six-step process for recognizing, studying, and describing recurring patterns in data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It was useful for this research because it allowed the researcher to identify and analyse patterns in the data that answers the research question. These steps were carried out through the following steps:

Step 1: Familiarized with the Data
The first step was to familiarize oneself with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researchers ensured familiarization with data by reading through the data multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants information presented. Additionally, patterns, themes, and significance in the data were looked for.
Step 2: Generated Initial Codes
Once the data was reviewed and understood, the next step was to identify areas of interest within the data, such as, small Nigerian businesses use of social media influencers, factors they consider in selecting these influencers, the effectiveness of the campaigns and potential impacts.
Step 3: Searched for Common Themes and Connected Them
In this step, the researcher identified common themes across the data. These themes were linked to the relevant code.
Step 4: Reviewed Themes
The identified themes were reviewed to ensure they are comprehensive and relevant to the research objectives.
Step 5: Defined and Named Themes
In this step, the identified themes were defined and named in accordance with the research objectives.
Step 6: Produced the Report
A detailed report that described how the themes relate to, inform, and fulfil the research objectives was produced. The report was used to make inferences and make recommendations on the impact of social medial influencers on small businesses in Nigeria in the preceding chapter.

4.4 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations refer to the principles and standards that guide the conduct of research to ensure that it is conducted in a responsible and trustworthy manner (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To consider this, the researcher will ensure the following:

1. Voluntary Participation: Participants were provided with detailed information about the research in the form of an information sheet, which outlined the purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits of the research, as well as participants' rights.
2. Informed Consent: Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form, which served as a legal documentation of their agreement to participate in the research. They also received a verbal explanation of the research, to ensure they understand what they are agreeing to. The researchers kept records of these documents securely.
3. No Risk of Harm: To minimize the risk of harm, the research methods used were ethical and in compliance with professional guidelines.
4. Confidentiality and Anonymity: participants' personal information was protected by using pseudonyms or code numbers instead of participants' names, storing data in a secure location, and limiting access to the data to authorized personnel only. All the participants' personal information were anonymized before analysis and reporting.

4.5 Limitation

Limitations in research refer to the constraints or boundaries that may affect the results, generalizability, and conclusions of a study (Creswell, 2014). There are several limitations that were encountered in this research including:

1. Data availability and access: Data collection was hindered by the lack of availability of the necessary data and the difficulty of obtaining the data in certain instances.
2. Selection bias: The sample of small businesses used in this research were not fully representative of all small business' experiences in Nigeria.
3. Time constraints: The research was limited in time, and made it impossible to obtain data from all the geographic zone intended to be covered in Nigeria.

5. DATA PRESENTATION

This section presents the analysis and findings of this study conducted using the laid down methodology presented in chapter three to evaluate the impact of social media influencers on the brand equity of small businesses in Nigeria.

Table 4.1: Data Presentation of Response Rate

	Respondents	Percentage
Total targeted interviews	8	100
Total interviews conducted	6	75

A total of 8 respondents were targeted, 6 responded totalling 75% response rate. The response rate was deemed adequate and representative of the sample. The findings from the study are presented in the subsequent sections.

5.1 Profile of Interview Participants

This section presents the profile of the 6 participants who were interviewed for the case study on the impact of social media influencers on small businesses brand equity in Nigeria. The participants were owners of small businesses from various industries. They include:

1. Respondent 1 (Mobile accessories retailer): the first interview participant is an online mobile accessories vendor. The business has been in operation for two years and collaborated with Instagram and WhatsApp influencers for promotions.
2. Respondent 2 (Fashion Business Owner): The second interview participant is the owner of a fashion business that produces and sells African-inspired clothing and accessories. The business has been in operation for three years and has collaborated with Instagram and TikTok social media influencers to promote their products.
3. Respondent 3 (Logistics Business Owner): The third interview participant is the owner of a logistics business that provides despatch services all over Nigeria. They have been in operation for four years and have collaborated with Instagram and WhatsApp influencers.
4. Respondent 4 (Retail Beauty Business Owner): The fourth interview participant is the owner of a perfumery retail business. The business has been in operation for two years and has collaborated with beauty influencers to promote their products on Instagram and Facebook.
5. Respondent 5 (Catering Business owner): The fifth interview participant owns an event catering business. The business has been in operations for six years and has collaborated with Facebook and WhatsApp influencers for promotions.
6. Respondent 6 (Consulting Business owner): The third interview participant is a consulting business owner that provides business advisory and financial management services to small and medium-sized enterprises. The business has been in operation for one year and has collaborated with social media influencers on Instagram and Facebook to promote their services.

The interview participants represent a diverse range of industries and have varying levels of experience in using social media influencers to promote their brands. This diversity provides a good basis for analysing the impact of social media influencers on small businesses brand equity in Nigeria from different perspective and gives room for generalisation and reliability of data. It is therefore, important to analyse how these small businesses in Nigeria use social media influencers.

5.2 The Use of Social Media Influencers by Small Businesses in Nigeria for Brand Promotion

The Interview respondents were asked to describe their usage for social media influencers. The responses were analysed, and the following common themes emerged:

Table 5.2.1: Social media influencer usage

Social Media Platform	Frequency	Respondents	Usage Patterns
Instagram	5	Respondents 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	Instagram influencers
WhatsApp	4	Respondents 1, 3, 4, and 5	WhatsApp influencers
TikTok	1	Respondent 2	TikTok influencers
Facebook	1	Respondent 6	Collaboration with Instagram influencers, promotion on Facebook

This table provides an overview of the social media platforms used by the small businesses interviewed. Instagram is the most frequently mentioned social media platform, followed by WhatsApp, with TikTok and Facebook mentioned less frequently. Instagram influencers are commonly mentioned in the usage patterns, with collaborations and promotional activities appearing as well.

5.3 Factors Influencing Small Businesses' Selection of Social Media Influencers

The data obtained from interviewing 6 of the businesses who participated in this survey with the interview question: “How do you select social media influencers to work with in promoting your brand?” The results have been transcribed, analysed using thematic analysis and presented in the table below:

Table 5.3: small businesses selection of social media influencers

Theme	Frequency	Respondents	Description
Word of Mouth	4	Respondents 1, 2, 3, and 5	Recommendations or references from others in selecting social media influencers
Follower engagement metrics	4	Respondents 1, 2, 3, and 4	Quantitative measures, such as engagement rate with the followers, used in influencer selection.
Niche and Lifestyle	2	Respondents 4 and 6	The relevance of an influencer's specific niche and lifestyle to the brand or product being promoted.
Trust and Credibility	1	Respondent 6	The perceived trustworthiness and credibility of the influencer.
Location	1	Respondent 5	Geographical considerations in selecting social media influencers.

This table provides an overview of the themes, their frequency, the respondents who mentioned each theme, and a brief description of each theme. Word-of-Mouth and Follower engagement metrics are the most frequently mentioned themes, followed by Niche and Lifestyle. Trust, credibility, and location are the least considered metrics. Respondent 6 when asked said “I will always choose influencers who tell their followers to jump and they jump, like and they like, and not have a large following. When they post I always watch out for how fast their audience engage in the posts”.

5.4. Analysis of The Effectiveness of Social Media Influencers Campaigns to Small Businesses In Nigeria

To analyse the effectiveness of social media influencers' campaign on small businesses in Nigeria. Data was obtained from the six business participants as they were further asked in their interview: “How do you measure the success of a campaign or promotion run through social media influencers?”. The results of the thematic analysis are presented in the table 4.4.1 below:

Table 5.4.1: Measurement of SMIs effectiveness

Theme	Frequency	Respondents	Description
Sales	2	Respondents 1 and 6	Direct revenue generated from the campaign as a measure of success.
Visibility and Awareness	4	Respondents 2, 3, 4, and 6	The extent to which the campaign increases brand exposure and recognition among potential customers as a measure of success
Traction and Performance	1	Respondent 4	The impact of the campaign on the performance of specific products, especially non-performing goods, as a measure of success
Leads and Referrals	2	Respondents 5 and 6	The number of potential customers and referrals generated by the campaign as a measure of success.
Following	1	Respondents 6	The growth in the number of followers or subscribers because of the campaign as a measure of success

This table provides an overview of the themes, their frequency, the respondents who mentioned each theme, and a brief description of each theme. Visibility and Awareness is the most frequently mentioned theme, followed by Sales and Leads and Referrals. Traction and Performance and Following are observed less frequently in the responses. Furthermore, to evaluate the effectiveness the interview participants were further asked: “Have you noticed any changes in consumer behaviour since you started using social media influencers for your brand?”. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 5.4.2: SMIs effect on small business consumer behaviour

Theme	Frequency	Respondents	Description
Trust and Credibility	4	Respondents 1, 3, 5, and 6	Degree of trust and credibility gained through influencer collaborations, impacting customer behaviour.
Awareness	4	Respondents 1, 2, 4, and 6	Increased brand exposure and recognition among potential customers because of using social media influencers.
Sales	3	Respondents 3, 4, and 6	Impact of social media influencers on generating sales, affecting customer behaviour.
Efforts and Work Quality	2	Respondents 2 and 6	Role of brands' efforts and the quality of their work in influencing customer behaviour.
Following	2	Respondent 4 and 5	Changes in the number of followers or subscribers because of influencer collaborations

This table provides an overview of the themes, their frequency, the respondents who mentioned each theme, and a brief description of each theme. Trust and Credibility and Awareness are the most frequently mentioned themes, followed by Sales. Efforts and Work Quality is mentioned by two respondents, while following is observed less frequently in the responses. Specifically, Respondent 4 said “I get 20 people following me daily, when I paid an influencer, I had to 1000 followers in a day. I also gave them products not selling at all, those products eventually became our most sold” while respondent 2 highlighted that “while the influencer gives me awareness, I have to put efforts to make the prospects buy from me”.

5.5 Risk And Challenges Associated With Small Businesses’ Usage Of Social Media Influencers

To access the risk and challenges associated with small business usage of social media influencers interview respondents were asked: “What challenges have you faced when working with social media influencers?”. The results of the thematic analysis are presented in the table below:

TABLE 5.5.1: Challenges Associated with The Use of Social Media Influencers

Theme	Frequency	Respondents	Description
Inconsistency	2	Respondents 1 and 4	Challenge of influencers not consistently posting as agreed upon, affecting the effectiveness of collaboration
Transparency	1	Respondent 4	Difficulty in maintaining clear communication and openness with influencers, hindering successful collaborations.
Audience and Traction	1	Respondent 5	Challenges related to influencer's audience not being the ideal target market, leading to reduced traction and unwillingness to purchase.
Budget	1	Respondent 6	Issue of influencers constantly raising their prices, making it difficult to afford them and maintain a budget.
No Challenge	2	Respondent 2 and 3	Some respondents did not face any challenges when using social media influencers.

This table provides an overview of the themes, their frequency, the respondents who mentioned each theme, and a brief description of each theme. Inconsistency is the most frequently mentioned challenge, followed by Transparency, Audience and Traction, and Budget Challenge, while some respondents did not report any challenges when working with social media influencers.

5.6. Evaluation of The Impact of Social Media Influencers On Small Businesses Brand Equity

The business interview respondents were asked: “How have social media influencers impacted your brand equity?”. The result is presented in the table below:

Table 4.5.1: social media impact on small business brand equity

Theme	Frequency	Respondents	Description
Brand Awareness	4	Respondents 1, 2, 3, and 4	The impact of social media influencers on enhancing brand exposure and recognition.
Sales	5	Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5	The role of social media influencers in generating sales, either directly or through the business owner's efforts.
Trust	2	Respondents 4 and 6	The influence of social media influencers on building trust and credibility for the business.
Visibility	3	Respondents 2, 4, and 6	The extent to which social media influencers increase the visibility of the business or its products.
Referrals	1	Respondent 5	The impact of social media influencers on generating referrals.
Influence Frequency	1	Respondent 3	The importance of using the influencer multiple times to achieve desired results.

This table provides an overview of the themes, their frequency, the respondents who mentioned each theme, and a brief description of each theme. Sales and Brand Awareness are the most frequently mentioned themes, followed by Visibility and Trust. Referrals and Influence Frequency are observed less frequently in the responses.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to delve into the nuanced interface of small enterprises and their reliance on social media influencers in Nigeria, a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The findings gleaned provide a comprehensive outlook on the efficacy, selection criteria, and challenges associated with influencer-led branding endeavours.

6.1. Platform Preferences in Influencer Engagement:

The exploration into the platforms of choice (detailed in Section 5.2) for influencer engagements ascertains Instagram's dominant role in influencer collaborations among Nigerian small businesses. Interestingly, WhatsApp's growing traction underscores its emerging importance, while platforms such as TikTok and Facebook trail behind. Such platform-specific patterns shed light on the evolving consumption behaviours and content preferences in the regional audience.

6.2. Criteria for Influencer Onboarding:

The selection parameters delineated in Section 5.3 draw attention to the balanced approach adopted by businesses. Not only do quantitative metrics, such as 'Follower Engagement Rates', play a pivotal role, but qualitative facets rooted in trust and authentic partnerships are being increasingly valorised. This interplay between data-driven decisions and interpersonal trust provides a refreshing perspective into the realm of influencer partnerships in Nigeria.

6.3. Evaluating Campaign Efficacy:

Assessing the real-world effectiveness of influencer-led campaigns reveals a complex picture. While Section 4.4's findings suggest that direct sales conversion remains a sought-after outcome, the overarching aspiration for enhanced brand visibility and resonance cannot be overlooked. The implication here emphasizes the necessity for adopting a multifaceted evaluation framework, catering to both immediate and long-term branding objectives.

6.4. Potential Pitfalls in Influencer Collaborations:

The inherent challenges associated with influencer collaborations are manifold, as reflected in Section 4.5. From inconsistency in content delivery to financial challenges and potential audience misalignment, these facets underline the importance of due diligence and strategic foresight. It's evident that for brands to maximize returns, a strategic, well-defined approach to influencer partnerships is indispensable.

6.5. Influencers and Brand Equity Augmentation:

The overarching influence of influencer engagements on brand equity, explored in Section 4.6, is a testament to the immense potential of this branding avenue. The observed positive correlation between influencer initiatives and enhanced brand awareness, coupled with tangible sales growth, ratifies the significant potential of influencer strategies in driving business growth.

In encapsulating the findings, the role of social media influencers in Nigeria's small enterprise landscape is undisputedly pivotal. However, as with any strategic endeavour, the challenges are pronounced. Hence, to optimize outcomes, businesses are urged to adopt a methodical approach, emphasizing both data-driven insights and the human element inherent in influencer partnerships. Future research could expand upon these findings, potentially investigating platform-specific nuances or diving deeper into the fiscal dimensions of such collaborations.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The intricate dynamics between social media influencers and small businesses in Nigeria provide compelling insights into the ever-evolving digital marketing landscape. The findings of this study emphasize the central role influencers play in shaping brand narratives, influencing consumer decisions, and, by extension, impacting brand equity. The results delineate that while there are tangible benefits of leveraging influencer engagements, the associated challenges necessitate a judicious approach. As digital platforms continue to proliferate, with audience preferences in constant flux, small businesses must be agile in their strategies. Emphasizing genuine partnerships, grounded in trust and shared values, can optimize returns, and mitigate potential pitfalls.

Furthermore, the balance between quantitative metrics and qualitative attributes remains a crucial consideration in influencer onboarding processes. While this research provides a comprehensive examination of the current scenario, the dynamic nature of social media suggests that these findings represent a snapshot of an ever-evolving landscape. It is the hope that these insights act as a foundation for further exploration, fostering more effective, strategic, and ethical collaborations between businesses and influencers in Nigeria and beyond.



Future endeavours might consider investigating longitudinal changes in influencer impact or exploring regional variations within Nigeria to provide an even more nuanced understanding.

8. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The present qualitative inquiry offers several pivotal additions to the academic corpus in the realm of brand equity, influencer marketing, sustainability, and their nexus within the specific purview of Nigerian small businesses. Here are the distinct avenues through which this study augments extant scholarship:

- **Contextual Depth:** Whereas previous research has largely been rooted in a generic, often Western-centric examination of influencer marketing, this inquiry ventures deep into the Nigerian landscape. It uncovers cultural, economic, and societal nuances that shape the dynamics between influencers and small businesses, highlighting the importance of context in marketing strategies.
- **Sustainable Brand Equity:** The focus on sustainability is crucial, especially in today's rapidly changing digital landscape. This research sheds light on how influencers, if chosen and collaborated with judiciously, can ensure prolonged brand equity, moving beyond short-term gains.
- **Qualitative Nuances:** While many studies often rely on quantitative metrics to gauge brand success, this study's qualitative approach captures the intricate narratives, perceptions, and experiences of stakeholders. This provides a richer, more textured understanding of the true essence of brand-influencer interactions.
- **Risk and Reward Dynamics:** This research not only delves into the advantages of leveraging influencers but also underscores the potential pitfalls. In doing so, it paints a balanced picture, encouraging businesses to approach influencer partnerships with both optimism and caution.
- **Groundwork for Sustainable Strategies:** By emphasizing sustainable brand equity, this study nudges businesses towards long-term vision and strategy. The findings here can be instrumental for businesses to weave sustainability into their core brand narrative and ethos, especially when working with influencers.
- **Priming Further Investigation:** As a qualitative exploration, this study raises as many questions as it answers, serving as a springboard for future academic pursuits. Scholars can further delve into specific themes, explore other regions, or perhaps embark on comparative studies between Nigeria and other economies.

In essence, this inquiry, by focusing on the qualitative facets of social media influencer impact on sustainable brand equity in Nigerian small businesses, enriches the dialogue both in theoretical contours and in pragmatic insights for industry stakeholders.



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