

EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF UGANDAN SMES IN KABALE MUNICIPALITY REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BRAND BOOSTING

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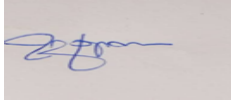
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DECLARATION

I, **Niwamanya Sophan** affirm to the best of my ability that this research report is my own work, created from the research I conducted examining the views and practices of Ugandan SMEs in Kabale municipality about using social media for enhancing brands. When information from others is utilized, their contributions are properly recognized through references and citations.

Signature



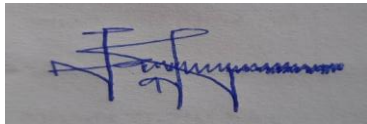
Date 20th /08/2025

Niwamanya Sophan.

APPROVAL

This is to confirm that the research report named "Exploring the perceptions and practices of Ugandan SMEs in Kabale municipality regarding social media for brand enhancement" authored and submitted by Niwamanya Sopha has been reviewed and accepted by the panel of supervisors as a partial fulfillment of the criteria for obtaining a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Mass Communication from Uganda Christian University

Signature



Date: .26th /08/2025

Mr. Morris Jatim

Supervisor:

DEDICATION

This piece is devoted to my cherished family and friends, particularly my beloved mother, Mrs. Kedress Turyagyenda, whose steadfast love and encouragement have been my cornerstone. I am profoundly thankful to my brother, Twesigye Gordon, who kindly covered my tuition from O level all the way to university. Heartfelt gratitude is also extended to Kiconco Patrick Katabaazi for his immense assistance and encouragement during my time at campus. Your support and sacrifices have enabled this accomplishment to happen

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
APPROVAL	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement	7
1.3 Purpose of the Study	8
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	8
1.5 Research Questions	9
1.6 Scope of the Study	9
1.6.1 Geographical Scope	9
1.6.2 Content Scope	10
1.6.3. Time Scope	10
1.7 Significance of the Study	10
1.8 Theoretical Framework	11
CHAPTER TWO.LITERETURE REVIEW	13
2.0 Introduction	13
2.1. Identifying the social media platforms most commonly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand building.	13
2.2 The strategies and practices employed by Ugandan SMEs to enhance their brand image and engagement on social media.....	16
2.3 The main challenges faced by Ugandan SMEs in utilizing social media for brand boosting	18
2.4 Understand how Ugandan SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts in terms of brand building.	20
CHAPTER THREE.....	23
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	23
3.0 Introduction	23
3.1 Research Design.....	23
3.2 Area of Study.....	24
3.3 Sources of Information	24
3.4 Study Population.....	25

3.5 Sampling Techniques	25
3.6 Variables Definition and Measurement	25
3.7 Procedure for Data Collection.....	26
3.8 Data Collection Instruments	26
3.9 Quality Control	27
3.10 Data Processing and Analysis	28
3.11 Ethical Considerations.....	28
3.12 Limitations of the Study.....	29
CHAPTER FOUR:.....	30
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION.....	30
4.1 Introduction	30
4.2 Biodata of Respondents.....	30
4.3 Social Media Platforms Commonly Used by Ugandan SMEs	33
4.4 Strategies and Practices Employed by SMEs to Enhance Brand Image	36
4.5 Challenges Faced by SMEs in Utilizing Social Media for Branding.....	39
4.6 Measuring the Effectiveness of Social Media Efforts	41
CHAPTER FIVE:.....	45
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	45
5.1 Discussion	45
5.2 Conclusion	49
5.3 Recommendations	51
REFERENCES	56
APPENDICES.....	58

ABSTRACT

The research is about exploring the perceptions and practices of Ugandan SMES in Kabale municipality regarding social media for brand boosting. The objectives of the study were identifying the social media platforms most commonly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand building, analyze the strategies and practices employed by Ugandan SMEs to enhance their brand image and engagement on social media, identify the main challenges faced by Ugandan SMEs in utilizing social media for brand boosting and understand how Ugandan SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts in terms of brand building.

The research employed a descriptive case study approach to qualitatively investigate how chosen SMEs in Kabale Municipality utilize social media for brand enhancement, incorporating both primary and secondary information sources. The target population included SME owners, social media managers, and customers in Kabale Municipality. Purposeful sampling was applied to select 20 SMEs that actively participate in social media branding. Interview guides facilitated the collection of qualitative data from SME managers and marketers, while focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with SME staff and social media followers to gain insights into their shared perceptions and experiences concerning SME branding strategies on social media.

During a focus group discussion with SME employees and social media followers in Kabale Municipality, they indicated that Facebook was the predominant platform for brand development

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The chapter provides the following subsections of information on the title, introduction, background, problem statement, research objectives and questions; scope, justification of the study, its significance as well as the theoretical framework.

1.1 Background to the Study

Most SMEs quantitatively tracked the effectiveness of social media by counting increases in followers, likes, comments, and shares. While those provided at least some level of brand attention and interaction insight, they were deficient in depicting additional audience action or sales impact. Customer ratings and testimonies generated qualitative information but were not formally summarized into performance analysis.

Physical signals such as sales leads that were linked with social media campaigns used to be the ultimate sign of brand success, and systematic monitoring systems were unheard of. The intermittent usage of licensed analytics software such as Facebook Insights was due to limited availability, expertise, and time. This didn't allow SMEs to think of optimization of campaigns or return on investment.

Despite these challenges, SMEs expressed interest in building more data literacy and analysis capability. Internal most critical monitoring practices were in the process of undergoing changes but were not quite there yet. This means an in-between state in which SMEs realize the importance of measurement but lack adequate capability for full implementation. Filling this gap is critical for future success in digital marketing.

Additionally, the entrepreneurial activities of young Africans are increasingly reliant on social media platforms, making digital branding a transformation for the generation. Young entrepreneurs are launching fashion, art, and food brands solely online through Instagram and TikTok (Ndyali, 2018). These platforms facilitate real-time storytelling, visual promotions, and customer testimonials—crucial for building brand trust. A study by Boateng (2019) showed that young African entrepreneurs view social media not just as a marketing tool but as an essential element of their business strategy. Even though large corporations dominate traditional media, small and medium-sized enterprises are finding a level playing field through social networks. The gradual democratization of marketing power is changing Africa's business landscape. Understanding these trends is essential for developing tailored strategies for small businesses in local environments.

In East Africa, social media has emerged as a transformative SME marketing and branding tool. The digital entrepreneurship sector in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda has grown remarkably, primarily due to youth and mobile access to the Internet (Mutuku & Odhiambo, 2020). More than 80% of small and medium-sized Kenyan enterprises utilize at least a single social media platform for marketing, as indicated by a report by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in 2019. WhatsApp and Facebook have emerged as favorites given the large network of users and the low cost. Small and medium-sized organisations in Tanzania use WhatsApp groups and Insta Stories for product promotion and receiving orders immediately (Ndiege, 2019). The use of these platforms is transforming conventional marketing practices and generating new brand development prospects. Nevertheless, numerous SME operators in the region still do not possess sophisticated technical expertise and digital policy.

In Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, there is increased use of social media for branding, albeit at a slow level due to infrastructure and education challenges. In Uganda, small and medium entities have taken to Facebook to market local crafts, fashion, and services more and more (Kalemera, 2018). A survey by Kira Digital Uganda in 2020 established that 60% of SMEs using social media recorded improved awareness of customers on products. Nevertheless, issues like absence of social media training, absence of brand management expertise, and irregular online participation were noted. In Rwanda, the government drives digital inclusion by ICT policies promoting SMEs (Rwabizambuga, 2018). Such community initiatives have a bright outlook for the use of social media, but issues arise hindering total success in enhancing brand visibility.

Furthermore, throughout East Africa, youth-run centers are rising to assist SMEs in digital branding expertise. The likes of Nairobi Garage, The Innovation Village in Uganda, and BongoHive in Zambia provide workshops on how to enhance a brand with digital means (Muchira, 2018). The centers have provided an environment from which even small undertakings are able to create professional brands and compete in the digital marketplace. Studies by Turyakira and Mbidde (2019) indicated that SMEs embracing digital models in East Africa showed improved access to markets and greater customer loyalty. Social media has connected the remotest regions, allowing undertakings in isolated regions to participate in urban and global markets. As the region adopts digital evolution, more SMEs are adjusting business models to incorporate online branding models. The trend presents a change in marketing momentum in the region due to digital connectivity

In Uganda, SME usage of social media has progressively risen in the last five years with rising mobile phone ownership and urbanization. In 2019, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) indicated that more than 18 million Ugandans utilized the internet, and Facebook and WhatsApp were the most utilized platforms. The platforms have emerged as indispensable for SMEs to market offers, interact with consumers, and enhance visibility. Nakirya and Lwanga (2020) state that social media enables Ugandan SMEs to create brand awareness without the expenditure of print and radio marketing. The majority of the companies use informal marketing, and utilizing social media is a hassle-free option. Not many SMEs have well-formed branding policies and continuous online interactions. The situation has generated a disconnect between digital branding's promise and its real impact in Uganda.

Urbans SMEs in cities such as Kampala, Mbarara, and Gulu have more use of social media for branding than SMEs in rural locations. The disparity is explained by better access to the internet, improved digital literacy, and more access to smartphones (Kasozi & Lubega, 2019). In Kampala restaurants and fashion houses use Instagram to display product images and respond to customers' queries. WhatsApp status updates and Facebook pages provide platforms for collections of products, client ratings, and brand messages. A study by Mpiima (2018) indicated that SMEs using social media recorded a 20-30% increase in inquiries and interaction from customers. Though such interaction rose sharply, few SMEs have branding efforts or measure success using analytics. This makes the use of social media less effective in the long term for building brands.

Uganda's ministry of ICT started programs on digital skill training for small business enterprise leaders, but uptake remains low among SME establishments. The majority of

the training programs are donor-initiated and have weak linkage with local business-development plans (Wamala, 2019). Additionally, the costs of using the internet and cybersecurity challenges inhibit many small business establishments from complete use of online branding. Lack of understanding of branding basics contributes to inconsistent messages, uninspiring visual aspects, and limited customer interaction. As a result, although universal access exists for the use of social media, strategic use of such for enhancing brand visibility remains low among urban SME establishments such as those established in Kampala, Mbarara, and Gulu. The urban-rural disparity results from better access to the internet, improved digital literacy, and access to smartphones (Kasozzi & Lubega, 2019). In Kampala city, restaurants and fashion houses utilize Instagram for posting product photographs and customers' responses. WhatsApp's use of status and Facebook pages give avenues for products lists and customers and brand ratings and brand updates. Studies by Mpiima (2018) indicated SME establishments using social media achieving a 20-30% increase in questions and responses from customers. Despite such an increase, few SME establishments use branding methodologies or check performance using analytics. The latter makes the use of social media less effective as a sustainable brand-development tool.

Uganda's Ministry of ICT has started training small business operators on digital skills, but SME uptake is not significant. Training programs offered have mostly been influenced by donors and do not harmonize well with national plans of business development (Wamala, 2019). Besides, expenditure on use of the internet and cybersecurity issues deters many small operators from adopting fully online branding. Incorrect comprehension of branding basics takes the form of inconsistent communication, poor visual elements, and poor customer involvement. Hence,

strategic utilisation for improvement of brand visibility with high penetration of social media isn't fully realized. SME operators in Uganda need assistance on social media strategy, content, and brand position for more effectiveness. Such measures are critical in transforming awareness into loyalty and driving sustainable business expansion

In Kabale Municipality, SMEs have increasingly adopted use of social media but it is mostly informal and not well researched. Most business entities such as salons, tailoring shops, and mobile money agents utilize WhatsApp statuses and Facebook groups to advertise services (Turyatunga, 2020). Lack of well-developed branding and quality production of content however hampers effective brand positioning. The vast majority of SMEs rely on word of mouth or posters inside shops, occasionally using social media. Digital marketing is perceived more as an alternative resource rather than a genuine investment. The low usage of Instagram and Twitter implies local SMEs have not yet utilized the various outlets of social media at their disposal. The opportunity for further analysis of local tradition and challenges is made.

Young people in Kabale have been at the vanguard of innovative use of social media, specifically in business sectors like fashion, entertainment, and smallholder agriculture. The proprietors of small business use smartphones and low-cost plans for chat and negotiating with customers inside and outside the city (Byamukama, 2019). Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups are used extensively to market second-hand clothing, crafts, and phone accessories. However, the vast majority of business establishments suffer from the inability to have steady branding and working models of customer interaction. Surveys of business proprietors in Kabale reflect the desire to utilize social media more efficiently; however, a lack of skill, facilitation, and training impedes it.

Most business entities also lack logos, taglines, and histories of brand that would attract online visibility. Therefore, education on branding is appropriate for the local setting and critical.

Kabale's standing as a growing urban center and access to education services and potential for tourism offers SMEs an untapped market on social media. Firms with target groups of students at the university or tourist clientele have potential for successful digital brand campaigns (Tumwesigye, 2018). Infrastructure setbacks like slow network connectivity and inconsistent power supply remain hindrances. Partnerships among local government and SMEs for digital literacy and innovation hubs remain limited. Improving support systems may enable SMEs in Kabale to leverage more on social media for brand improvement. Research plays a crucial role in assessing current practices, attitudes, and potential responses. This study shall fill the knowledge gap and increase SME potential by harnessing platforms on social media effectively

1.2 Problem Statement

Over the past few years, social media has become a critical means of brand expansion for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) worldwide.

In Uganda, especially in urban centers like Kabale Municipality, increasing use of mobile phones and internet connectivity have created additional avenues for SMEs to utilize social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram to promote their businesses. Despite the convenience of access to these platforms, most SMEs in Kabale fail to leverage social media in a way that fosters sustainable brand growth. While some businesses post advertisements online from time to time, few businesses embark on sustained, strategic branding that builds customer loyalty, market visibility, or

competitiveness. Low digital capabilities, poor branding competency, low levels of access to affordable training, and inadequate infrastructure constrain SMEs' complete adoption of social media marketing. In addition, there is limited empirical work that examines the attitudes of SMEs in Kabale regarding the use of social media and how they incorporate it into their business models. With this information unavailable, SMEs might not understand the competitive strengths provided by digital branding. The absence of properly structured support mechanisms and policy guidelines holds SMEs back from realizing the full potentials of social media websites. It intends to explore the perspectives and behaviors of Ugandan SMEs operating in Kabale Municipality towards the use of social media for brand promotion. It will establish gaps in knowledge, skills, and practices and provide insights to be utilized in capacity building, policy development, and facilitation of local digital entrepreneurship. It is important to understand these dynamics to enable SMEs to enhance their brands, grow their customer base, and compete in the online market effectively

1.3 Purpose of the Study

To explore the perceptions of Ugandan SMEs regarding the role of social media in brand boosting in Kabale Municipality.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the social media platforms most commonly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand building in Kabale Municipality.
2. To analyze the strategies and practices employed by Ugandan SMEs to enhance their brand image and engagement on social media in Kabale Municipality.

3. To identify the main challenges faced by Ugandan SMEs in utilizing social media for brand boosting in Kabale Municipality.
4. To understand how Ugandan SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts in terms of brand building.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What social media platforms are most commonly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand building, and why?
2. What are the key strategies and practices employed by Ugandan SMEs to enhance their brand image and engagement on social media?
3. What are the main challenges faced by Ugandan SMEs in utilizing social media for brand boosting?
4. How do Ugandan SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts in terms of brand building?

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Geographical Scope

This research took place in Kabale Municipality, which is situated in Kabale District in the southwestern region of Uganda. The municipality consists of three primary divisions: Central, Northern, and Southern, each featuring an increasing number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) involved in various sectors including retail, hospitality, services, and small-scale manufacturing. Kabale Municipality has been chosen because of its rising urban development, increasing internet access, and the heightened use of smartphones by business operators. The results from this domain

will shed light on how SMEs in semi-urban areas of Uganda utilize social media for brand growth

1.6.2 Content Scope

The research was concentrated on recognizing the social media platforms predominantly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand development, examining the strategies and methods adopted by Ugandan SMEs to improve their brand image and interaction on social media, identifying the primary obstacles encountered by Ugandan SMEs in leveraging social media for brand enhancement, and understanding how Ugandan SMEs evaluate the success of their social media initiatives concerning brand development

1.6.3. Time Scope

The study examined the timeframe from 2017 to 2024, focusing on how SMEs have used social media for brand marketing throughout these years. This period is chosen as it encompasses important advancements like enhanced internet accessibility, greater smartphone adoption, and the transition to online business methods prompted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Data will be gathered, analyzed, and reported from March to July 2025, offering a prompt evaluation of existing trends and practices regarding social media use among SMEs

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study was significant to various stakeholders.

For business managers and marketing professionals, it may offer empirical evidence on how social media can be harnessed for brand promotion.

For academia, the study would contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital branding in developing countries.

Policymakers and communication strategists would also benefit from the findings as they design support systems for media development in rural areas.

Additionally, the study would serve as a reference for future researchers interested in media, marketing, and digital communication.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989). TAM is often used to explain how individuals and organizations embrace and implement new technologies. The model suggests that two important factors influence technology adoption: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

Perceived Usefulness reflects the extent to which SME owners and managers believe that using social media will enhance their brand visibility, customer engagement, and ultimately, overall business success. If they consider social media an effective tool for promotion and boosting their brand, they are more likely to adopt it.

Perceived Ease of Use refers to how straightforward SME owners view the utilization of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. When social media tools are easy to grasp and use, SMEs are more inclined to integrate them into their branding strategies.

This theory is pertinent to this study as it elucidates the factors influencing SMEs in Kabale Municipality in their decision to adopt or forgo social media for brand enhancement. TAM will guide the investigation of how perceptions regarding the usefulness and user-friendliness of social media affect real usage behaviors. It also provides a framework for understanding the challenges SMEs face, such as lack of digital skills or limited internet access, which may affect their use of social media tools.

Utilizing TAM, the study will investigate the relationship between SME owners' views on social media and their adoption behaviors, providing insights for improving digital marketing engagement to foster brand growth in this area.

CHAPTER TWO.LITERETURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter offers a critical examination of current literature aimed at understanding Ugandan SMEs' views on the impact of social media in enhancing brand visibility. The assessment is structured according to the particular goals of the study. It starts by identifying the social media platforms predominantly utilized by Ugandan SMEs for brand development, examines the strategies and techniques adopted by Ugandan SMEs to improve their brand perception and interaction on social media, recognizes the primary difficulties encountered by Ugandan SMEs in leveraging social media for brand enhancement, and explores how Ugandan SMEs assess the impact of their social media initiatives in relation to brand development

2.1. Identifying the social media platforms most commonly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand building.

Nakirya and Lwanga (2020) assert that Facebook remains the primary platform for Ugandan SMEs in brand visibility and customer interaction. The ease of use, affordability, and entertaining functionalities make it ideal for promoting products and services. Ugandan SMEs commonly create Facebook pages to display products, place advertisements, and interact with customer responses. The site supports multimedia aspects such as pictures and videos and makes brand presentation easier. The boosted posts help business entities reach target groups at an affordable price. Facebook facilitates direct message, and interaction for clients and business entities increases. Therefore, it remains the best social network for SMEs in Uganda.

Boateng (2018) mentions that in Ghana, small and medium-sized enterprises across West Africa make widespread use of WhatsApp because of its ease of use and efficiency in providing direct communication. SMEs utilize WhatsApp statuses, broadcast lists, and groups for announcing product information and receiving immediate responses from customers. The informal but efficient marketing route keeps personal connections alive with customers for business houses. This is best suited to home-based and micro-businesses working on limited budgets. WhatsApp establishes brand faith and loyalty by providing steady and entertaining updates. This holds good in Uganda, where numerous SMEs depend on WhatsApp as a key branding device. It provides marketing and communication in a seamless package.

Kalemera (2018) found that urban SMEs in Uganda, particularly those involved in fashion, events, and beauty, use Instagram extensively. The platform supports customized visual branding, appealing more to those interested in trend-based content and younger demographics. Companies use Instagram stories, highlights, and reels to showcase products in an interactive manner and create curiosity. Regular uploaders of interesting visuals by entrepreneurs build stronger brand identities. The platform also supports cooperation with influencers, and small business establishments benefit from expanding the scope of audience reach. Though not popular in rural areas, Instagram has started to penetrate business minds equipped with technology. The platform is revolutionizing the branding landscape for business houses targeted at youth in Uganda.

Ndiege and Kimathi (2020) report that in Kenya, Instagram has become central to brand small and medium business formations in cities, particularly those targeting aspirational lifestyles. The visual-based concept of the platform fosters creativity and

narrative and allows SMEs to differentiate themselves from competitions. Most Kenyan SMEs utilize Instagram in building a harmonious and engaging brand story. The connection between Facebook and Instagram makes it easier for marketing efforts to utilize both platforms. The regional trend manifests in Uganda, wherein the use of Instagram has been more intentional. The platform allows small and medium business formations to emphasize style, distinctiveness, and identity. The platform plays a significant role in the visual brand evolution of East Africa.

Mutebi and Ssewanyana (2021) state that although not utilized extensively by SMEs in Uganda, YouTube offers an increasing opportunity for SMEs that have the potential of creating video content. On YouTube, agribusiness SMEs, trainees, and service providers upload tutorials, customers, and product offerings. The massive platform creates more engagement and building of credibility over time. Despite that, issues of high costs of data, inadequate video editing expertise, and poor equipment set limitations for wider acceptance. Businesses investing on YouTube aim at creating dedicated crowds. The value is in thorough branding and building.

Appel et al. (2020) indicated that SME branding across the globe has been transformed by TikTok by enabling quick, interactive, and occasionally viral content. In Nigeria, Indonesia, and India, small and medium business utilize TikTok to make their brands more personalized using music, comedy, and storytelling. The fact that its algorithm enables mass audiences to be reached by small business within a short period of time makes it feasible. Though relatively new in Uganda, numerous youth-oriented small and medium business in fashion, music, and entertainment have begun considering the platform. The platform provides room for raw expressions and casual

brand building. The platform provides great potential for small and medium business that have the potential of creating content innovatively. It is bound to grow in Uganda's digital landscape

2.2 The strategies and practices employed by Ugandan SMEs to enhance their brand image and engagement on social media

interaction on social media

Cite Qalati et al. (2022), SMEs in Pakistan enhance brand engagement by choosing platforms that fit business objectives and customer conduct. Ensuring platform compatibility ensures that content interacts with users without losing consistent branding. Companies adjust the type of content to fit the individual strength of each platform—images for Instagram, messages for WhatsApp, and Facebook stories. SMEs in Uganda choose platforms based on their industry and market. For instance, clothing business prefer Instagram, but shops use Facebook for promotions. This specific platform application ensures efficient brand communication. Additionally, it increases audience penetration and enhances customer loyalty.

Chukwudi et al. (2021) emphasize that in Nigeria, digital training supports SMEs in efficiently using social media for brand promotion. SMEs possessing knowledge of social media marketing produce better material, schedule better, and engage more meaningfully with followers. Customer engagement and brand confidence increase. Analogous patterns are shown by Ugandan SMEs, where training enhances brand uniformity and flexibility. Image editing, caption creation, and scheduling of posts operate as principal enablers. As SMEs improve digital skills, they graduate from

haphazard posting to systematic branding. Learning is a principal competence for digital brand expansion in numerous African contexts.

Bruce et al. (2023) in South Africa identified that applying user-generated content (UGC) and brand-generated content (BGC) establishes sustainable relationships with customers. UGC increases reliability, but BGC guarantees message consistency and control. SMEs showing customer images, ratings, and case histories increase social proof and believability. Ugandan SMEs have engaged similarly, especially in events and cosmetics. When customers see other people using a brand, influence and credibility increase. The application of UGC and planned content establishes a consistent brand image. The technique sustains attention among different customer groups.

Wang et al. (2025) in China explain how SMEs utilize multi-platform strategy to target particular demographics with particular content. Facebook creates awareness, for instance, visual appeal is used by Instagram, and viral engagement by TikTok. Such diversification establishes brand awareness at points of customer interaction. Ugandan SMEs exhibit such a trend in the deployment of direct communication on WhatsApp and broader advertising on Facebook. Multi-platform synchronization establishes brand familiarity and message reinforcement. It minimizes channel dependence.

It is proclaimed by Muwanguzi and Ngoma (2020) that SMEs from urban areas such as Kampala and Mbarara in Uganda reinforce brand image by regularly scheduling content and posting using specific themes. Companies having daily or weekly practices ensure brand consistency and stay remembered by customers. Calendars facilitate coherence of content with seasons, trends, or phases of advertising. The systematic nature facilitates memory recall and ensures brand loyalty. SMEs tend to utilize

Facebook's scheduling feature or software by various creators. Regular updation establishes trustworthiness, portraying the enterprise as well-organized and dependable. Therefore, planning is fundamental to SMEs' brand building in Uganda.

Nakitende (2023) also points out that SMEs from Uganda often use a community-based brand approach by using local connections and local identity to connect customers on the web. For instance, they use local words, regional aphorisms, or songs from the community in messages to make it more personalized. This builds emotional bonding and familiarity, especially in rural and sem urban areas. Ugandan SMEs use the brand approach on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to maintain a "local" brand identity. This forms loyalty and repeat interaction. Hence, cultural congruence is critical for branding. This enhances credibility and believability among target groups.

2.3 The main challenges faced by Ugandan SMEs in utilizing social media for brand boosting

Ugandan SMEs often suffer from limited digital literacy, hindering them from using social media efficiently for brand building. A study by Musiime and Mwaipopo (2019) indicated that most SMEs lacked the expertise to create engaging content and measure digital metrics. The limitation of such a constraint is brand inconsistency and the opportunity of engaging the audience lost. SMEs in Kenya suffer from hesitance in adopting digital marketing due to the lack of adequate training (Munyua & Wamukota, 2019). SMEs lack efficiency in the use of social media platforms due to limited digital expertise. Financing digital literacy programs is critical in helping SMEs enhance online brand awareness.

Exorbitant costs for internet and data pose significant challenges for effective social media marketing for small and medium business organizations in Uganda. According to a report from the Uganda Evaluation Association (2024), inconsistent and expensive data affect SMEs from maintaining a steady online presence. The problem manifests in Nigeria among SMEs, which face similar challenges concerning access to the internet (Akinbode & Ajayi, 2019). The pricey data limits the quantity and quality of online content, which affects brand visibility. Affordable and reliable access to the internet helps small and mediumsized business entities optimize the use of social media platforms.

Financial constraints also limit Ugandan SMEs from using social media for marketing. Mwesigwa et al. (2019) found that many SMEs operate on limited funds, and this hampers their capability to perform paid advertising or engage digital marketing professionals. This limitation hampers their communication and interaction on various platforms of social media. In Indonesia, small and mediumsized enterprises face similar financial constraints in conducting digital marketing practices (Sari & Putri, 2021). Without adequate funds, SMEs face an inability to compete favorably in the digital space. Financial support and affordable digital marketing avenues provide critical intervention for SMEs to enhance online brand visibility.

One of the common problems faced by Ugandan SMEs is the absence of a clear digital marketing strategy. Nakibengo (2022) explained that many SMEs engage on social media without a clear strategic direction, leading to inconsistent information and failed branding. The problem is evident in South Africa, where SMEs have challenges making strategic digital marketing plans (Bruce et al., 2023). Lack of a clear strategic direction

results in missed opportunities for connecting with the audience and enhancing the brand. The development of in-depth digital marketing plans helps SMEs build a sound and consistent brand online presence.

Security fears halt Ugandan SMEs from fully embracing social media marketing. Babirye and Mukama (2022) explained that fears of data hacking and cyber fraud make SMEs hesitate in sharing sensitive information or fully participating on online platforms. The issue is global; in Europe, small and medium 企业 face similar challenges with regard to protecting data (Garcia et al., 2020). The issues limit the level of customer participation and building confidence on social media. Building effective cybersecurity measures and educating SMEs on the security of data can alleviate these fears and enable wider online engagement.

2.4 Understand how Ugandan SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts in terms of brand building.

Kato and Namukasa (2021) indicate that many Ugandan SMEs predominantly measure social media effectiveness through scrutinizing engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and number of followers.

Such quantitative measures provide insight into the audience engagement and help firms to decide on which content performs most effectively. While engagement figures can be accessed via such platform analytics platforms as Facebook Insights, SMEs struggle to convert engagement into measurable brand growth. This is also the case in Kenya, whereby SMEs rely highly on engagement to calculate brand awareness (Wachira & Were, 2020). Ugandan SMEs gauge effectiveness by tracking reach and impressions, showing how many users see their posts.

Mugisha (2023) confirms that measuring reach enables SMEs to know their existence of their brand outside their direct audience. This is especially applicable whenever firms spend money on paid advertisements. Firms in South Africa apply the reach statistics to measure brand visibility through social media, given that higher reach translates to greater raised brand awareness (Botha & Reyneke, 2019). Yet, SMEs tend to be unable to hit the balance between reach and substantial engagement. Customer feedback and social media ratings offer qualitative performance measures for Ugandan SMEs. Nakitende (2022) describes that SMEs closely listen to comments and interactions to determine customer opinion and brand image. Favorable comments and referrals are seen as proofs of trust and brand loyalty. SMEs utilize this strategy prevalent in Ghana, whereby social media discussions are employed to enhance branding strategies (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). SMEs are able to modify their communication strategies and enhance customer relations through active listening. In Europe, small and medium businesses frequently blend quantitative social media metrics with qualitative customer feedback to measure brand development.

Müller and Schmid (2021) of Germany indicate that companies monitor engagement rates, reach, and click-throughs while measuring customer sentiment through comments and direct messages.

This integrated method assists SMEs in evaluating brand visibility and audience impression. Likewise, UK SMEs utilize sentiment analysis tools to monitor brand performance and fine-tune campaigns in real-time (Smith & Johnson, 2020). European SMEs are more likely to incorporate such data into overall marketing strategies to provide a consistent brand experience throughout channels. SMEs in most African nations such as South Africa significantly utilize social media analytics tools to monitor

their brand performance. Botha and Reyneke (2019) established that South African SMEs prefer to make use of Facebook Insights and Google Analytics as social media platforms to track follower increase, engagement patterns, and conversion rates. Follower traffic from social media websites is utilized by them to measure campaign success. These metrics assist SMEs in optimizing content and posting times to enhance brand performance.

Most SMEs continue to struggle with comprehending data and translating it into effective branding. Small and medium business enterprises in Kenya in East Africa use both reach measures and customer interaction surveys to determine the effectiveness of social media. Wachira and Were (2020) point out that Kenyan SMEs track reach and impressions to measure brand visibility and also conduct periodic online questionnaires to collect information on customer satisfaction and awareness of the brand. The integration enables the companies to better tailor their communication and enhance community interaction. In Uganda, too, the same strategies are adopted where SMEs leverage a combination of data monitoring with customer direct feedback to build brand loyalty and customize content based on audience interest.

CHAPTER THREE.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the approach employed in the analysis of the knowledge and behavior of Ugandan SMEs in Kabale Municipality towards utilizing social media to boost their brands. It will describe the research design, location, population, sampling procedures, sources of data, variables, process, tools, evaluation of data, ethical issues, and limitations of the study. A mixed-method approach was employed to engage both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. This approach helped in systematic investigation of branding strategies. The selected methods helped effectively address the research goals. Academic and ethical standards were maintained throughout the entire process

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive case study method to qualitatively explore how specific SMEs in Kabale Municipality utilize social media to improve their branding efforts. This design enabled a deep understanding of social media branding methods in their true context by focusing on detailed descriptions and interpretations rather than numerical analysis. Data was collected exclusively using qualitative methods, especially through comprehensive interviews with managers and marketers of SMEs to gain in-depth understanding of their perspectives, strategies, and challenges, along with focus group discussions (FGDs) involving SME employees and followers to explore shared experiences and audience opinions about social media engagement. Utilizing open-ended questions in both methods encouraged comprehensive answers, providing an in-depth and authentic understanding of social media's impact on SME brand growth. This

purely qualitative approach offered depth and context, avoiding the intricacies and time demands of mixed methods, while enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings within the case study structure

3.2 Area of Study

The study took place in Kabale Municipality, located in Kabale District, in the southwestern region of Uganda. This region was chosen because of its increasing digital adoption and the variety of SMEs present. The municipality encompassed both urban and peripheral areas, making it ideal for analyzing different social media usage behaviors. Numerous companies in Kabale utilize platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram for marketing. The engagement of the local community with these platforms offered important perspectives. Kabale's commercial landscape provides a solid basis for investigating brand-oriented activities via social media platforms

3.3 Sources of Information

The research employed both primary and secondary data sources. Directly collected primary data came from SME owners, their marketing teams, and chosen social media followers. These individuals shared personal testimonials regarding their activities and experiences. Secondary data comprised scholarly literature, journals, governmental reports, and internet articles. These resources offered theoretical and contextual backing for the research. Utilizing various data sources will strengthen the reliability of the results. It enabled a comparison between recorded practices and actual conditions in the field

3.4 Study Population

The research population included SME proprietors, social media administrators, and clients in Kabale Municipality. The businesses chosen were those that utilize at least one social media platform for branding purposes. A total of 20 SMEs were selected for involvement. Moreover, 200 social media followers will constitute the larger population. These followers showcased the audience engaging with SMEs on the internet. Both SME operators and followers will provide valuable perspectives on branding strategies. Their perspectives aided in assessing the impact of social media on enhancing brand loyalty and visibility.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The research utilized purposive sampling to choose 20 SMEs that are actively involved in branding through social media. These companies were selected for their noticeable online visibility and regular posting activity. To choose 50 participants for social media followers, the study utilized simple random sampling. This method guaranteed variation in age, gender, and online habits. The integration of purposive and random sampling resulted in a well-rounded dataset. This approach will improve the significance and applicability of the results. It also guaranteed equity in the selection of participants.

3.6 Variables Definition and Measurement

The independent variable involved social media. It was assessed by analyzing posting frequency, content variety, and platform range. The frequency of posting will indicate how regularly companies share content on the internet. Content type will indicate if posts are promotional, informational, or interactive. The variety of platforms will evaluate the count of distinct platforms utilized. The variable that relied on others was brand strength. This was assessed through brand recognition, customer involvement,

and allegiance. Every indicator contributed to evaluating the effectiveness of social media in enhancing SME brands

3.7 Procedure for Data Collection

The process of collecting data started by securing approval from SME managers and pertinent authorities. Participants were made aware of the study's objectives, and their permission was secured. Surveys were given to chosen SME employees and supporters. Interviews with key informants were arranged with business proprietors and marketers to obtain more profound insights. Observations were carried out on the social media pages of SMEs. Data gathering occurred over a span of four weeks. The researcher retained adaptability to fit the schedules of participants

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

Interview Guides

Qualitative data was collected from SME managers and marketers using interview guides. These guides will include thoughtfully crafted open-ended questions that enable participants to articulate their opinions openly and thoroughly. The aim of utilizing interview guides was to investigate perceptions, branding tactics, difficulties, and evaluation practices concerning the use of social media by SMEs in Kabale Municipality. This approach allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive understanding of how decision-makers in SMEs perceive and utilize social media for enhancing their brands. Interviews took place in a one-on-one format, creating a relaxed atmosphere that promotes transparency and sincerity. The adaptability of semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewer to pose follow-up questions in response

to participant replies, which assisted in revealing deeper insights and hidden motivations. The gathered data was documented and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Discussions in focus groups (FGDs) took place with employees of SMEs and social media followers to understand their collective views and experiences related to SME branding tactics on social media. Each focus group had 6 to 10 respondents, and the interviews were managed through a series of open-ended structured questions. Important focal areas were respondents' perceptions of the social media presence of SMEs, popularity of content, their engagement behavior, and the impact of social media on purchasing decisions. FGDs allowed for interactive discussion, where respondents could elaborate on each other's points and bring out collective issues or recommendations. This method demonstrated success in collecting diverse viewpoints, comprehending group dynamics, and examining social factors that affect audience engagement with SME brands on the internet. The conversations were recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed for qualitative examination

3.9 Quality Control

The study employed several quality control measures to ensure reliable data collection. All instruments were pre-tested with a small sample of SMEs and followers to identify and correct unclear items. The researcher reviewed completed questionnaires daily for errors or inconsistencies. Data was cleaned and double-checked before entry into the analysis software. Triangulation was applied by using multiple data sources to cross-verify responses. These measures reduced bias and increase data accuracy. Every stage was closely monitored to maintain high-quality standards.

3.10 Data Processing and Analysis

Following data collection, quantitative information was coded and input into SPSS for analysis. Frequencies and percentages as descriptive statistics were utilized to encapsulate trends in social media usage and branding results. Cross-tabulations can also be used for comparisons. Interview qualitative data was transcribed and thematically analyzed. Emerging themes were utilized to capture views, approaches, and difficulties. The combined method will incorporate both kinds of data. This offered a comprehensive and in-depth perspective on branding practices on social media among SMEs.

After data collection, quantitative data was coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages was used to summarize patterns of social media use and branding outcomes. Cross-tabulations may also be employed for comparisons. Qualitative data from interviews was transcribed and analyzed thematically. Emerging themes was used to describe perceptions, strategies, and challenges. The mixed-method approach will integrate both types of data. This provided a rich and holistic view of social media branding practices among SMEs.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to all ethical standards for studies. All participants provided informed consent prior to the collection of any data. The aim of the study was clearly communicated to the participants. Confidentiality was preserved via coding and safe data storage. Participants could exit at any time without facing any repercussions. Approval for ethical clearance was requested from relevant authorities. The

investigator guaranteed that no damage—be it physical, emotional, or reputational—will take place. Participant dignity was upheld consistently during the entire process

3.12 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were expected in the study.

Some SME followers may lack digital literacy, which may affect their ability to respond clearly to questionnaires. Poor internet access in certain areas of Kabale will limit participation from some users.

Scheduling interviews with SME owners may be difficult due to their business commitments. These issues were addressed by simplifying data tools and offering flexible scheduling. Triangulation helped fill any data gaps caused by non-responses. Despite these constraints, the study will remain focused on delivering reliable and meaningful results.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kabale Municipality use social media for brand growth. The data collected from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations has been analyzed and interpreted in accordance with the study objectives. The findings are organized by theme, focusing on social media platforms commonly used by SMEs, brand development strategies and practices, challenges faced, and methods for assessing the impact of social media. The chapter begins by detailing the demographic characteristics of the participants to provide context for the analysis

4.2 Biodata of Respondents

This part outlines the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study, encompassing SME managers, employees, and social media followers

Table 4.1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	22 - 29	12	30
	30 - 39	18	45
	40 - 49	8	20
	50 and above	2	5
Total		40	100

Findings from Table 4.1 indicated that the majority of participants (45%) were in the 30 to 39 age categories. A significant portion (30%) was in the 22 to 29 age bracket, while 20% were between 40 and 49 years old

A mere 5% of respondents were 50 years or older, indicating that the primary contributors to SME social media branding were mainly young to middle-aged individuals

Table 4.2: Sex of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	24	60
	Female	16	40
Total		40	100

Results in Table 4.2 showed that 60% of participants were male, and 40% were female. This indicates a greater presence of males among the SME managers and personnel participating in the study, although females were significantly represented, particularly among social media followers

Table 4.3: Marital Status of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Marital Status	Married	22	55
	Single	14	35
	Divorced/Widowed	4	10
Total		40	100

Results from Table 4.3 revealed that more than half of the participants (55%) were wed. Singles represented 35%, whereas divorced or widowed people made up 10%. This indicates a diverse marital status among participants engaged in SME social media activities

Table 4.4: Work Experience of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Work Experience	Less than 3 years	8	20
	3 to 5 years	12	30
	More than 5 years	20	50
Total		40	100

Results from Table 4.4 showed that 50% of the participants had over five years of experience in SMEs. Thirty percent possessed between three and five years of experience, whereas 20% had under three years. This indicates that the majority of participants were well-acquainted with SME operations and the use of social media

Table 4.5: Education Level of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education Level	Secondary or below	4	10
	Certificate	6	15
	Diploma	16	40
	Bachelor's Degree	14	35
Total		40	100

Results from Table 4.5 showed that the majority of participants had completed post-secondary education. Forty percent possessed diploma qualifications, 35% had bachelor's degrees, 15% held certificates, and 10% had secondary education or less. This educational profile probably enhances the effective use of social media for branding of SMEs

4.3 Social Media Platforms Commonly Used by Ugandan SMEs

Results from Table 4.5 showed that the majority of participants had completed post-secondary education. Forty percent possessed diploma qualifications, 35% earned bachelor's degrees, 15% had certificates, and 10% completed secondary education or less. In a discussion with SME staff and social media users in Kabale Municipality, they *mentioned that Facebook was the most commonly utilized platform for brand development. They highlighted that Facebook's extensive user base and business tools such as pages and groups made it perfect for connecting with numerous customers. Facebook permitted SMEs to share varied content, including images and videos, which enhanced brand visibility. Facebook's advertising tools facilitated targeted marketing that was economical for small and medium-sized enterprises. It facilitated the creation of two-way communication pathways, enhancing customer confidence. The adaptability of Facebook has made it an essential platform for the majority of SMEs. Facebook formed the foundation of their social media approach.*

In discussions with managers of SMEs, they expressed that *WhatsApp was essential for direct and personal communication with customers. WhatsApp's messaging feature, group conversations, and broadcast capabilities enabled rapid dissemination of promotions and product details. Although WhatsApp was not ideal for public branding, it proved to be very effective in fostering intimate customer connections. A lot of*

customers favored WhatsApp for tailored assistance and quick replies. WhatsApp was simple to use and broadly accepted, becoming a favored option. It assisted in preserving customer loyalty via continuous engagement. WhatsApp enhanced Facebook by providing a more personal communication avenue. The professional profile probably enhances the successful utilization of social media for branding in SMEs

During a focus group discussion with younger social media users, they indicated that Instagram was becoming increasingly significant, particularly for SMEs in the fashion, hospitality, and food sectors. Instagram's emphasis on visuals through photos and videos made it ideal for creatively displaying products. Instagram stories and reels engaged younger viewers who appreciated interactive and fun content. Although Instagram has potential, restricted internet and smartphone access in rural regions limited its complete utilization. Instagram was emerging as the preferred platform for SMEs aiming at urban and youthful audiences. It worked well alongside Facebook and WhatsApp. The visual attractiveness of Instagram was a significant advantage.

In discussions with SME managers, they mentioned that Twitter and LinkedIn were not as commonly utilized for branding by SMEs. Twitter's local user base was limited, and LinkedIn primarily served as a platform for professional connections instead of direct advertising. These platforms fulfilled specialized functions, primarily for B2B interactions or supplier relationships. The majority of SMEs favored platforms that have extensive local user bases, which made Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram more suitable. Twitter and LinkedIn proved helpful solely in specific situations. SMEs experienced minimal benefits from allocating resources to these platforms. The emphasis stayed on platforms that attracted a large number of consumers.

During a focus group discussion with SME staff and followers, they expressed that the choice of platform was mainly influenced by customer presence. SMEs selected platforms where their intended audience engaged the most to enhance reach and interaction. Facebook and WhatsApp were prevalent because of their extensive utilization and business features. Instagram was chosen for targeted market segments focused on visual material. SMEs refrained from overextending themselves and concentrated on their customer locations instead. This approach focused on the customer aided in maximizing scarce resources. The selection of the platform was intentional and aimed at the audience.

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In discussions with SME managers, they indicated that Twitter and LinkedIn were not commonly utilized for branding by SMEs. Twitter had a limited local audience, while LinkedIn was primarily utilized for professional networking instead of direct marketing. These platforms fulfilled specific functions, primarily for B2B interactions or supplier relationships. The majority of SMEs favored platforms that had extensive

local user bases, rendering Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram more viable. Twitter and LinkedIn proved to be beneficial solely in specific situations. SMEs experienced minimal benefits from allocating resources to these platforms. The emphasis continued to be on platforms attractive to a wide consumer base.

In a discussion with SME staff and followers in a focus group, they indicated that the choice of platform was mainly influenced by customer presence. SMEs selected platforms where their intended audience was most engaged to enhance reach and interaction. Facebook and WhatsApp thrived because of their extensive popularity and business features. Instagram was chosen for particular market segments that are focused on visual content. SMEs concentrated on their customer base rather than overextending themselves. This approach focused on the customer aided in maximizing constrained resources. The selection of the platform was deliberate and centered on the audience.

4.4 Strategies and Practices Employed by SMEs to Enhance Brand Image

During a focus group discussion with younger social media users, they mentioned that Instagram was becoming increasingly significant, particularly for small and medium enterprises in the fashion, hospitality, and food sectors. Instagram's emphasis on images and videos made it ideal for creatively presenting products. Instagram stories and reels attracted younger viewers who appreciated interactive and entertaining material. Although Instagram has significant potential, restricted internet and smartphone availability in rural regions limited its complete utilization. Instagram was emerging as the preferred platform for small and medium enterprises aiming at urban and young consumers. It matched Facebook and WhatsApp perfectly. The visual attractiveness of Instagram was a significant advantage.

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In the interviews of SME managers, they stated that multimedia elements such as videos, live streams, and Instagram stories enhanced interactions. Product videos or behind-the-scenes were more attention-grabbing than images or text. Live sessions enabled real-time customer engagement, creating emotional connections. Multimedia made their brands more human. Such interactive content was more memorable and

impactful. Videos enhanced message recall. Multimedia was turning into an even more vital tactic.

In discussions with SME workers and followers, they mentioned that visual branding consistency was crucial. Small and medium enterprises employed the same logos, colors, and messages on various media. Consistency in branding increased professionalism and credibility. Some SMEs employed designers, while others acquired graphic knowledge on their own. Visual identity consistency helped brands identify more easily. Inconsistency might lead to customers getting confused. Uniformity in branding needed constant attention. It formed a significant aspect of marketing.

When speaking with SME managers, they mentioned that storytelling was a good brand-building strategy. SMEs told true stories about their beginnings, values, and impact on society. Narrative building created emotional bonds with fans. Brands became personal by telling their struggles and successes. Stories established them differently from competitors and built allegiance. Narratives gave meaning beyond being just products. Many SMEs used storytelling as part of their content. Narratives played an essential role for engagement.

During a focus group with social media followers and SME employees, they emphasized that being on trend was important. SMEs monitored hashtags, trending challenges, and seasonal topics to keep content updated. Trend relevance boosted follower engagement and interest. Trends helped brands look relevant and alive with culture. SMEs manage trend uptake with brand consistency. Occasional uptake of trends resulted in viral content. Trend tracking was included in ongoing social media activity. It brought more visibility.

4.5 Challenges Faced by SMEs in Utilizing Social Media for Branding

During interviews with SME managers, they described how multimedia elements like videos, live streams, and Instagram stories added to engagement. Videos featuring products or providing backstories were more attention-grabbing than text or images. Live sessions enabled real-time customer interaction, establishing emotional connections. Multimedia engaged their brands. This interactive content was more memorable and effective. Videos helped to recall messages. Multimedia was becoming an increasingly strategic approach.

In conversations with SME employees and their advocates, they highlighted that consistency in visual branding mattered. Small and medium businesses all employed identical logos, color, and message on multiple platforms. Constant branding made them appear more professional and credible. A few SMEs hired designers, while others purchased graphic expertise in-house. Having a single visual identity reinforced brand recognition. Being consistent may cause confusion for customers. Continuous monitoring was required to have consistent branding. It was one of the major aspects of marketing.

In conversations with SME managers, they mentioned that storytelling proved to be a powerful strategy for building the brand. SMEs shared authentic stories about their beginnings, values, and impact on the community. Storytelling created emotional bonds with supporters. Brands became approachable by revealing their struggles and successes. Stories distinguished them from competitors and encouraged dedication. Narratives offered meaning that went beyond simple items. Many small and medium-sized companies included storytelling in their content strategies. Stories were important for engagement.

When interviewed, SME managers indicated that privacy and security issues discouraged them from participating fully in social media. Fears of losing data, fraud, or abuse of brand identities deterred them. These constraints limited new platform or feature exploration. SMEs wanted clearer advice on how to guard themselves on the net. The members felt that there was a requirement for increased understanding of data protection. Ambiguity reduced the belief in online marketing campaigns. To establish permission, these challenges had to be overcome. Managers and employees of SMEs, through interviewation, stated that internal resistance to embracing digital marketing was a hurdle.

More experienced employees or employees with less technology background would sometimes find it difficult to use the social media effectively.

Such friction led to inconsistent branding and low utilization of sites. Changes in perceptions and employee training were key to progress. Buy-in from the leadership was essential.

Organizational and cultural issues impacted overall marketing effectiveness. Overcoming such organizational and cultural hurdles was crucial. During focus group discussions with SME staff and their followers, they highlighted that cultural preferences for in-person engagements and traditional marketing hindered their dependence on social media. Certain customers favored face-to-face meetings, leading SMEs to find a balance between online and offline interactions. This combined method required significant resources, yet it was essential. Combining the two approaches facilitated engagement with various audiences. Social media enhanced rather than

substituted traditional marketing. This mirrored the actual conditions of local businesses. Adapting to cultural preferences was essential for achievement.

4.6 Measuring the Effectiveness of Social Media Efforts

In a focus group discussion with SME staff and social media followers, they had to say *that follower growth was the most commonly used informal indicator of social media success. SMEs tracked increases in likes, followers, and group members as signs of growing brand awareness. While follower numbers were helpful, they did not guarantee active engagement or sales. Follower quantity was a limited metric. More meaningful measurements were needed. Participants expressed interest in tools to better assess success. Follower count was only a starting point.*

In interviews with SME managers, they had to say *that engagement metrics like likes, comments, shares, and direct messages were better indicators of audience interest. High interaction levels showed posts resonated with followers and encouraged communication. Engagement was a valuable proxy for brand health. Meaningful interactions mattered more than passive follower counts. Monitoring engagement helped refine content strategies. Engagement was a priority for ongoing evaluation. Interaction indicated customer connection.*

In a focus group discussion with SME staff and followers, they had to say *that customer feedback on social media was an important qualitative measure. Positive reviews, testimonials, and recommendations boosted brand reputation. Managing negative feedback professionally was critical to maintaining trust. Feedback helped SMEs improve products and services. Participants viewed feedback as a vital communication and learning tool. Responsiveness to customer opinions strengthened*

loyalty. Active feedback channels were essential for brand stewardship. Feedback influenced future marketing content.

In interviews with SME managers, they had to say that practical results such as sales inquiries and orders linked to social media platforms were the most concrete evidence of branding effectiveness. SMEs often connected specific campaigns or promotions to increased sales interest. Formal tracking systems were rare but growing in awareness. These tangible outcomes helped justify further investment in social media. Sales impact was a key motivator. Linking marketing to business results was important. Participants desired better conversion tracking methods.

In interviews with SME managers, they had to say that most SMEs admitted limited use of formal analytics tools like Facebook Insights or Instagram Analytics. This was due to lack of time, expertise, and sometimes access. This gap made it hard to analyze audience behavior or return on investment. Without data, optimizing social media efforts was challenging. Participants wanted more training to improve analytics skills. Data literacy was essential for future success. Better analytics would enhance decision-making.

In interviews with SME managers and employees, they had to say that some SMEs developed basic internal monitoring methods such as manually tracking daily engagement or noting inquiries linked to social media activity. These simple practices provided helpful, though limited, insights. Informal tracking was better than no measurement. Such methods helped identify effective content types. Participants believed more robust systems could improve evaluation. Data collection was an evolving practice. There was willingness to adopt better tools.

In focus group discussions with SME staff and social media followers, they had to say *that there was a strong desire for training on social media analytics and data interpretation. SMEs wanted to make data-driven decisions to improve content, timing, and platform use. Enhanced skills would boost marketing outcomes and justify resource allocation. Capacity building was critical for sustained success. Participants expressed eagerness for practical, user-friendly training. Data empowerment would increase confidence. Analytics was the future of digital marketing.*

In summary, in focus group discussions and interviews with SME staff and managers, they had to say *that while follower growth and engagement gave useful feedback, lack of systematic, quantitative measurement limited SMEs' ability to fully leverage social media for brand building. Addressing these gaps through training and access to tools could significantly improve results. Measurement was vital for sustainable digital marketing success. Data was key to unlocking potential. Investments in analytics capacity would pay off. Measurement was a cornerstone of future strategies.*

Summary

Chapter Four presented the findings on how SMEs in Kabale Municipality use social media for brand building, starting with the demographic profile which showed most respondents were young to middle-aged, predominantly male, and largely educated beyond secondary level. The most prominent platforms that were noted were Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, which were appreciated for their extensive reach, messaging, and visual attraction. The SMEs used tactics of regular content updating, interacting, partnerships with influencers, and storytelling techniques in order to build

their brand reputation. Limitations comprised a deficiency of digital literacy, limited resources, inadequate internet connection, and the inability to measure efficacy as a consequence of insufficient analytical expertise. In spite of these issues, SMEs expressed readiness to enhance their digital marketing capability. The results call for infrastructural support and specialized training in order to fully leverage the role of social media in SME development and brand building in Kabale.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion

The social media platforms most commonly used by Ugandan SMEs for brand building

The research identified that SMEs in Kabale Municipality are primarily using Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram to build brands. Facebook's enormous user base, variety of content types, and cheap advertising capabilities made it the go-to platform. WhatsApp was favored for one-to-one, customizable communication, allowing SMEs to establish strong customer relations. Instagram, despite infrastructural constraints, drew young people and urban dwellers because of its visual nature of content. These results are consistent with international trends where SMEs employ platforms that provide extensive coverage and interactivity for promotion (Smith, 2022). The choice of platforms was greatly determined by the presence of customers as well as the nature of the business.

Agribusinesses preferred WhatsApp for the simplicity of direct communication, while retail and hospitality industries preferred Facebook and Instagram for their storytelling and pictorial potential.

SMEs chose platforms wisely in order to optimize the utilisation of resources by concentrating on where their audience communicated most.

The utilization of such a customer-centric platform demonstrates the pragmatic approach SMEs adopt in a scarce resource environment. Still, even newer platforms such as TikTok were met with caution due to the deficiency in digital competence and doubts regarding returns on investment. This reflects the tension between innovation

and the realist circumstances confronting SMEs. Digital literacy and access to assets play a role in platform adoption, with the implication being that greater diversity of platforms in the future will depend on conscious capacity development and infrastructure investment.

The strategies and practices employed by Ugandan SMEs to enhance their brand image and engagement on social media

The research found that frequent and regular posting of content was important for sustained visibility and customer interest. SMEs uploaded photos, videos, reviews, and updates regularly to engender familiarity and trust. Responding quickly to comments and messages ensured loyalty and community interaction important for sustained brand expansion. These behaviors reflect best practices in online marketing based on engagement and relevance (Jones, 2021).

Engagement with local influencers and business partners was a good approach to increasing brand visibility and credibility. Marketing through influencers enabled SMEs to enter new markets at affordable prices and create word-of-mouth for their brands. Live streams and Instagram stories as multimedia have personalizing brands and building emotional connections with the audience, thus improving message retention. Consistency in visual identity through color, logos, and messaging enhances professionalism and reinforces brand awareness. Storytelling was emphasized as a strong tool, with SMEs providing authentic stories about their origins, values, and contribution to society.

This approach differentiated brands and enhanced emotional bonds with followers. Additionally, monitoring social trends on social media and judicious

expenditure on paid promotion illustrated SMEs' efforts to stay relevant and maximize their limited marketing budgets. Overall, SMEs reflected growing understanding of adaptive digital marketing approaches appropriate to their means.

The main challenges faced by Ugandan SMEs in utilizing social media for brand boosting

Digital marketing skills inadequacy was a primary challenge, resulting in uneven posting and nonuse of platform functionalities. SMEs lacked formal training in content creation, social presence management, and analysis interpretation that limited their digital marketing scope. Limited resources such as no time and funds constrained regular and quality social media activity that needed tough priority decisions.

There were also technological barriers like poor internet connectivity and expensive data that impacted rural SMEs significantly, where it was hard to upload content as well as engage with customers in real time. Such infrastructural problems are prevalent in developing settings and restrict the full exploitation of social media benefits. Furthermore, challenge in quantifying social media success due to insufficient analytics competencies hampered evidence-based decision-making, making SMEs make decisions based on intuition as opposed to hard facts. Competition and content saturation that discouraged regular follower engagement were other issues. Issues of privacy and security limited experimentation with emerging sites and functionalities, while resistance from less technologically inclined employees delayed digital adoption. Offline individual preferences for face-to-face interaction required bridging the discontinuities between offline and online marketing. All the challenges mentioned

above pertain to the complexity that SMEs operate in when leveraging digital marketing.

How Ugandan SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media efforts in terms of brand building

Most of the SMEs quantitatively measured social media success by monitoring follower, like, comment, and share increases. Although those measures gave some degree of insight into brand awareness and interaction, they were weak in illustrating further audience behavior or effects on sales. Customer reviews and testimonials provided qualitative data but failed to be formally incorporated into performance analyses.

Physical indicators like sales leads linked with social media campaigns were considered the most obvious proof of the effectiveness of a brand, whereas official monitoring systems were uncommon. The partial application of official analytics tools like Facebook Insights was a result of insufficient expertise, time, and availability. This lack prevented SMEs from trusting optimization of campaigns or verification of investments.

In spite of these difficulties, SMEs demonstrated interest in enhancing their data literacy and analytical skills. Most significant internal monitoring practices were undergoing changes but were not up to the mark yet. This indicates an interim period where SMEs understand the significance of measurement but are short of proper capability for complete execution. Bridging this gap is important for continued success in digital marketing..

5.2 Conclusion

Common social media platforms used by SMEs in Kabale Municipality for brand building

SMEs in Kabale Municipality utilized primarily Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram to grow their brands. The extensive availability and vast user bases of such websites made them the most favored option for channels. SMEs targeted the popular websites to optimize their limited resources.

Despite the promise of newer social media platforms, they have failed to catch up with small and medium-sized enterprises. Use is still focused on established and proven platforms with good reach and interaction. This strategy allows for efficient utilization of time and resources in branding activities.

Prioritizing such front-line platforms enables SMEs to engage frequently with their target markets. Provided accessibility and company capabilities enable them to achieve their branding objectives within a cost-limited environment. This trend will persist in the reasonable future.

The strategies employed by SMEs to build their brand on social media

SMEs used various strategies such as posting content regularly and engaging regularly in an attempt to create their brand identity. They used influencers and narrative approaches in an attempt to create an emotional connection with customers. These are indications of increased awareness regarding online marketing from local contexts.

Multimedia materials such as photos and video were utilized with great effectiveness to engage and personalize the material. Trends on social media were also tracked by

The challenges faced by SMEs in using social media for brand building

SMEs so they remained competitive and forward-thinking. This indicates increased awareness of ways in which digital assets can be utilized to have the best effect.

Albeit the limitation of resources, SMEs were innovative in leveraging marketing to their context. Their practices reflect dedication to remaining relevant in an internet age. These new practices signal good progress in the development of SME branding.

How SMEs measure the effectiveness of their social media branding efforts

SMEs predominantly utilized random metrics such as growth in followers and engagement levels to gauge the performance of social media. Formal analytical metrics were never employed, which restricted their capacity to take data-driven decisions. Actionable feedback such as sales inquiries provided further insight but did not consist of systematic monitoring.

The restricted use of analytics diminishes the strategic potential of social media marketing to SMEs. Enhanced social media analytics capabilities are needed to measure and improve better. Enhanced capabilities will enable more efficient resource allocation and campaign performance.

Promoting evidence-based practices would enhance SMEs' comprehension of audience behavior as well as streamline branding methods. Without such enhancements, SMEs are likely to suffer from wastage of social media resources. Hence, investment in analytical abilities is greatly needed.

5.3 Recommendations

Small and Medium Enterprises owners and managers must make ongoing digital marketing skills training a priority. Most Small and Medium Enterprises operators do not possess requisite skills in content development, social media management, and data analysis, hence are unable to establish and maintain robust brands online. By funding ongoing training programs, Small and Medium Enterprises owners and managers will be more able to develop routine, interesting content that appeals to their target consumers. The capacity building will also make them more knowledgeable about the various social media platforms and how best to utilize them. Otherwise, Small and Medium Enterprises stand to lose important chances for growth and customer loyalty in a more digitalized economy.

Small and Medium Businesses must seriously create and execute structured social media plans that direct their branding activities in a systematic and deliberate way. These involve regular posting, proactive interaction with the followers, use of the narrative, and employment of multimedia like video and live streaming. Lacking a well-planned strategy, most Small and Medium Enterprises update erratically or create irrelevant content that fails to engage their audience and hence experiences low brand visibility. Systematic strategies will ensure Small and Medium Enterprises have brand visibility, build trust, and sustain customer relationships in the long run. The absence of these strategies is currently preventing most of the Small and Medium Enterprises from using social media to its full potential towards business development.

Small and Medium Enterprises must actively pursue partnerships and alliances with local influencers, complementary businesses, and community leaders due to a large demand. These alliances have been effective means of expanding brand awareness and building

credibility with target segments. Aligning with influencers or trusted community members can enable Small and Medium Enterprises to reach new customer segments and create buzz about their products or services. Most Small and Medium Enterprises lack these opportunities presently because of low awareness or capabilities. Facilitating collective marketing will allow Small and Medium Enterprises to enhance brand recognition and expand market coverage without bearing excessive advertisement expenses.

The research indicates that there is an urgent requirement for the government to invest in the development of digital infrastructure, especially internet connectivity and access to cheap data in Kabale Municipality and the surrounding districts. Most Small and Medium Enterprises are afflicted with slow and expensive internet and exorbitant data prices that hamper their efforts to have an active and useful social media presence. Small and Medium Enterprises are unable to fully utilize digital marketing platforms and are also not able to answer customers' inquiries on time due to a lack of reliable infrastructure, which affects their competitiveness. Empowering digital infrastructure is necessary to provide a supportive ecosystem for the expansion and digitalization of Small and Medium Enterprises.

Government departments should acknowledge the need for fostering capacity-building initiatives allowing Small and Medium Enterprises to attain core competencies in digital marketing and analytics. An overwhelming percentage of Small and Medium Enterprises lacks technical capability to optimize campaigns and make sense of social measures, and such makes informed judgments and resource allocation difficult. Government departments will incentivize more Small and Medium Enterprises to accept digital marketing by allowing enabling policy and access to training programs. The measures

will make Small and Medium Enterprises more competitive and boost regional economic growth and employment.

Regulatory and government departments have a pressing need to establish clear policies and education on data privacy, protection, and cybersecurity. Small and Medium Enterprises have common fears regarding cyber attack, data breach, and brand identity abuse, which prevent them from using social media portals and new digital technology actively. Without clear guidance and rules, Small and Medium Enterprises feel vulnerable and hesitate to implement innovative marketing campaigns. Enhancing cybersecurity education and providing protocols for online safety will provide Small and Medium Enterprises with confidence to adopt digital marketing more extensively and securely.

Development partners and NGOs should act on the overriding necessity for digital literacy expertise with regard to the unique challenges of the Small and Medium Enterprises. An overwhelming percentage of Small and Medium Enterprises do not have the expertise on how to use social media sites effectively, produce quality content, and have insight on engagement reports. Capacity-building training on such territories will facilitate the Small and Medium Enterprises in measuring and optimizing advertising campaigns effectively. Moreover, institutions that do not have government participation have a significant role to ensure they supply Small and Medium Enterprises with resources, guidance, and pilot projects demonstrating the value of digital marketing to help Small and Medium Enterprises overcome fears and technical hurdles.

Development institutions have to conceptualize and implement pilot projects using new digital marketing platforms and digital marketing instruments for Small and Medium Enterprises.

Demonstration projects give Small and Medium Enterprises frontline experience and real-life case studies of how new technology and new approaches to brand building and customer interaction can improve. Demonstration projects also give Small and Medium Enterprises operators confidence and facilitate broader use of digital approaches that would otherwise seem risky or complicated. By driving innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises marketing, the development partners can catalyze sustainable growth and competitiveness in the sector.

Schools should give utmost importance to the inclusion of digital marketing and analytics of social media modules in business and entrepreneurship studies. An overwhelming majority of today's and tomorrow's future and current managers of Small and Medium Enterprises have little access to practical, real-world digital marketing knowledge transferable to the workplace. Inclusion of such disciplines in formal education will enable graduates with expertise required to manage social media for brand building in an effective way. Besides, educational institutions and Small and Medium Enterprises collaboration will enable training to stay current and relevant to industry requirements and prevailing trends and thereby make training programs more effective.

There is a need for Small and Medium Enterprises staff and managers to participate in periodic professional development workshops specially created for them. Similarly, there is a need for cooperation in conducting research among Small and Medium

Enterprises and learning institutions. The latter ongoing learning endeavors will allow Small and Medium Enterprises to keep abreast of fast-changing technology and social media trends. Research cooperation will further set the foundation for the construction of tailored marketing models accounting for unique challenges Small and Medium Enterprises operating in Kabale Municipality and other similar contexts experience. The participatory nature of the training and research will witness Small and Medium Enterprises attain hands-on, practical experience enabling ongoing brand building and successful digital marketing.

Summary

This chapter provided a critical examination of how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kabale Municipality utilize social media for brand building. The most popular platforms Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram and SME approaches of frequent posting, story telling, and partnership with influencers were analyzed. Critical challenges like weak digital competency, weak infrastructure, and gaps in measurement were also examined. The study found that whilst SMEs show favorable efforts in digital advertising, potential is limited by systemic challenges and resource limitations. Recommendations were provided to small and medium business owners, government institutions, NGOs, and educational institutions to fill gaps in capacity building, infrastructure, and policy. Enhancement of these aspects will facilitate SMEs to utilize social media more efficiently for sustainable advances. In the long run, interdependent efforts by stakeholders hold the key for the achievement of the full potential of digital brand building for SMEs.

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APPENDICES

A. Interview guide for SME owners/managers

*“Good morning/afternoon. My name is **Niwamanya Sophan**, a student at Uganda Christian University pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism and Communication. I am conducting a research study titled ‘**Exploring the Perceptions and Practices of Ugandan SMEs in Kabale Municipality Regarding Social Media for Brand Boosting.**’*

The purpose of this interview is to understand how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) like yours perceive and use social media to build their brands, what challenges your face, and what strategies you apply. Your insights will be highly valuable to this study. Participation is voluntary and your responses will be treated with confidentiality.”

“With your permission, I would like to proceed with a few questions.”

Section 1: Perceptions of Social Media and Brand Building

1. How do you perceive the role of social media in promoting and building your business brand?
2. What do you think are the main benefits of using social media for your business?

Section 2: Social Media Platforms and Usage

3. Which social media platforms do you currently use for marketing your business?
Why do you prefer these platforms?
4. How often do you post or update content on these platforms? What type of content do you usually share?

Section 3: Strategies and Practices

5. Can you describe the strategies you employ to attract and engage customers via social media?
6. Do you have a specific plan or schedule for your social media activities? How do you create content that aligns with your brand?

Section 4: Challenges Faced

7. What challenges do you encounter when using social media for branding?
8. How do issues like limited digital skills, internet access, or costs affect your social media efforts?

Section 5: Measuring Effectiveness

9. How do you assess whether your social media activities are helping to boost your brand?
10. What indicators or feedback do you look for to know if your social media marketing is successful?

Section 6: Support and Training

11. Have you received any training or support on how to use social media for branding? How has it helped or hindered your efforts?
12. What additional support or resources would help you improve your social media branding practices?

Section 7: Future Plans

13. How do you plan to enhance your social media presence in the future?
14. What changes or improvements would you like to see in social media tools or policies to better support your branding?

“Thank you very much for sharing your valuable insights. Your input is greatly appreciated and will contribute meaningfully to the findings of this study. Should you wish to receive a summary of the research findings, I will be happy to provide it once the study is complete.”

B. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SME EMPLOYEES OR FOLLOWERS

*“Good morning/afternoon everyone. My name is **Niwamanya Sophan**, a student researcher from Uganda Christian University. Thank you for joining this discussion. I am carrying out a study entitled ‘**Exploring the Perceptions and Practices of Ugandan SMEs in Kabale Municipality Regarding Social Media for Brand Boosting.**’*

We are here to talk about how you, as customers or social media users, perceive SME branding on social media, your experiences, and how businesses could improve. This discussion is confidential and there are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share your honest thoughts.”

1. Perceptions of SME Social Media Presence

- How do you perceive the social media pages of local SMEs in Kabale?
- Do they influence your perception or trust in these businesses?
- What makes a social media page attractive or trustworthy in your opinion?

2. Content and Engagement

- What kind of content do you usually see from SMEs?
- Which types of posts do you find most appealing or convincing (e.g., photos, videos, promotions)?
- How do you usually interact with these SMEs online?

3. Impact on Buying Decisions

- Has social media content ever influenced your decision to buy or use a service from an SME? How?
- Do testimonials, customer reviews, or influencer endorsements impact your trust in an SME?

4. Challenges and Improvements

- What challenges do you face when engaging with SMEs online (e.g., fake information, poor content)?
- What suggestions would you give to SMEs to improve their social media use and interaction with customers?

5. Perceived Value of social media for SMEs

- In your opinion, how important is social media for SME growth and reputation?
- Would you recommend more SMEs to use social media for branding? Why or why not?

“Thank you for your participation and honest contributions. Your opinions are very important and SMEs in Kabale understand how to better communicate and grow their brands through social media. I sincerely appreciate your time.”