

An Investigation into Social Media Utilisation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and its Effect on Business Performance: A Case Study of Kabwata Township, Lusaka



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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the impact of social media on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Kabwata Township, focusing on the types of social media used, its impact on brand visibility, customer acquisition, and the influence of social media marketing strategies on sales revenue and profitability. A mixed methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of SMEs' social media practices. The study targeted SMEs actively using social media in Kabwata. 100% response rate was achieved from a sample of 133 SMEs for quantitative data and additional insights from 20 SMEs for qualitative data. The results indicated that platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and LinkedIn significantly enhanced brand visibility and customer engagement. However, the choice of platform alone did not predict success; strategic implementation was crucial. Significant correlations and regression coefficients demonstrated the positive impact of social media marketing on SME success, though with a modest effect on sales revenue. Recommendations emphasized aligning social media activities with business objectives to maximize benefits.

1. INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been pivotal drivers of economic development, playing a vital role in economies worldwide, particularly in developing and emerging nations (Obi et al., 2019; Ndiaye et al., 2018). In the European Union (EU), SMEs represented 99% of all businesses and were significant contributors to job creation, accounting for about 85% of new jobs in the last five years (European Commission, 2019). They also play a crucial role in private sector engagement, comprising two-thirds of the total sector in the region. For instance, in 2015, SMEs in Europe employed around 90 million people and generated an added value of 3.9 billion EUR (European Parliament, 2019). From the Zambian context, Simbyakula & Hapompwe (2024), observe that the informal sector has become the major employer in Zambia, stressing that SMEs play a vital role in the economic development of a country with studies indicating that SMEs contribute more than 50% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in many developing countries.

Unlike large corporations, SMEs demonstrated high flexibility, enabling them to swiftly adapt to market fluctuations, technological shifts, and evolving customer demands (Perez-Gomez et al., 2018). However, to fully realize their potential, SMEs required sustained funding to invest in growth opportunities (Dowling et al., 2019). In response to these needs, the European Commission implemented comprehensive measures and policies aimed at supporting SME growth and development, aligning closely with employment market dynamics (Gherghina et al., 2020).

SMEs were widely recognized as the backbone of economies due to their significant contributions to poverty reduction, employment generation, foreign trade promotion, and technological innovation, particularly in developing economies. The "Small Business Act," adopted in 2008, embodied Europe's commitment to SMEs by advocating policies that catered specifically to their needs. Furthermore, since 2010, the European Parliament endorsed various resolutions focused on stimulating innovation among European SMEs, enhancing industrial competitiveness within global markets, and promoting sustainable economic practices aligned with the European Strategy 2020 (OECD, 2005).

In recent years, the proliferation of social media platforms revolutionized business interactions and marketing strategies globally. SMEs, in particular, increasingly embraced social media as a cost-effective tool for expanding their reach, enhancing brand visibility, and driving business growth. According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC, 2013), approximately 65 million SMEs in developing countries actively utilized social media for networking, customer engagement, and marketing purposes.

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The adoption of social media by SMEs was driven by its potential to significantly enhance business performance. Research indicated that effective utilization of social media led to increased brand visibility, improved customer engagement, and higher sales revenue (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Chaffey et al., 2016). Despite the widespread recognition of these benefits, there remained a gap in understanding the specific impact of social media utilization on SMEs, particularly in contexts such as Zambia. This study aimed to address this gap by investigating the social media utilization practices of SMEs in Kabwata Township, Lusaka, and their effect on business performance. Kabwata Township was selected as the study location due to its vibrant SME presence and dynamic business environment. The research explored the types of social media platforms used by SMEs, frequency of posting, content strategies, engagement metrics, and the perceived benefits and challenges of social media marketing. Furthermore, it examined the relationship between social media use and key business performance indicators such as sales revenue, customer acquisition, and brand awareness.

By shedding light on current practices and challenges faced by SMEs in Kabwata Township regarding social media utilization, this study provided valuable insights for policymakers, business owners, and marketers on effectively leveraging social media to enhance business performance. Ultimately, the findings contributed to the growth and sustainability of SMEs in Zambia, thereby bolstering the country's overall competitiveness in the global market.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite SMEs being crucial for economic development in Zambia, they encounter significant challenges accessing resources and markets, limiting their competitiveness against larger firms (ZDA, 2020). Key obstacles include limited financing options, inadequate knowledge of effective marketing strategies, and difficulties in utilizing social media due to resource constraints and digital literacy issues (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A 2020 survey by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry revealed that only 30% of SMEs in Lusaka use social media for business purposes, with fewer than 15% reporting substantial business growth. On the other hand, a study by Chivwindi, Hapompwe, & Banda, (2023) focussing on modelling individual determinants of growth failure among SMEs in Lusaka Central and Mwembeshi business areas, established lamentable failure rates (70.4%) with a recommendation for the creation of an environment that allows SMEs to grow, because growth is evidence of sustainability. These factors underscore the need to understand how SMEs in Kabwata Township use social media, their challenges, and the impact on business performance, focusing on those in the retail food industry. According to Ndhlovu and Hapompwe, (2024), the demand for food is higher than ever as the region's population and urbanization rates rise quickly and hundreds of millions of people still experience food insecurity. Insights from this study can inform policymakers, business owners, and marketers on effectively leveraging social media to enhance SME growth and sustainability in Zambia (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; ZDA, 2020).

1.2. Specific objectives

- 1.2.1.** To find out the type of social media usage by SMEs in Kabwata township.
- 1.2.2.** To ascertain the impact of social media usage on brand visibility and customer acquisition in Kabwata township.
- 1.2.3.** To assess the influence of social media marketing strategies on sales revenue and profitability in Kabwata Township.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Media as a Communication Channel by SMEs.

The literature examining the use of social media by Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) reveals its role as a strategic tool for marketing and communication. Studies by Rootman (2019), Crammond et al. (2018), Ndiege (2019), Chatterjee & Kumar Kar (2020), and Lányi et al. (2021) highlight motivations such as networking, customer relationship building, business growth, and competitiveness. However, challenges such as limited resources, technical capabilities, and scepticism about effectiveness hinder widespread adoption (Michaelidou et al., 2021; Jagongo & Kinyua, 2019; Ainin et al., 2015; Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015; Grimmer et al., 2017; Tuten & Perotti, 2019). Despite these barriers, social media is seen as cost-effective and technically accessible, with platforms like Facebook being particularly popular for customer engagement in retail sectors (Odoom et al., 2019).

2.2. Impact of Social Media Presence on Brand Visibility and Customer Acquisition

Research underscores the critical role of social media in enhancing brand visibility and driving customer acquisition. Tufail and Abbas (2020) explored Starbucks as a case study, demonstrating how strategic social media marketing activities contribute to increased brand visibility through consistent branding and engaging content. Similarly, studies in the fast fashion sector by Jain and Sharma (2019) and in online retail by Mohanasundaram and Ojha (2018) reveal that active engagement on platforms like Instagram and X significantly influences consumer behavior, fostering brand loyalty and increasing sales.

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2.3. Influence of Social Media Marketing Strategies on Sales Revenue and Profitability

Studies such as Li and Zhang's meta-analysis (2021) highlight a positive correlation between effective social media marketing strategies and increased sales revenue. Retail-specific studies, such as those by Smith & Johnson (2020), emphasize the impact of social media engagement in driving consumer behaviour and boosting sales performance. By creating interactive content and leveraging influencer collaborations, businesses enhance their brand presence and appeal to target audiences effectively.

2.4. Literature Gap

Despite substantial research in developed countries, there remains a significant gap concerning social media utilization by SMEs in developing countries, particularly within the food retail sector. Existing studies primarily focus on motivations and challenges without adequately addressing specific contexts such as Kabwata Township in Lusaka, Zambia. Understanding how SMEs in these settings utilize social media and the impact on business performance is crucial for tailoring effective marketing strategies and supporting sustainable growth in local economies.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical review explored Social Capital Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as frameworks for understanding how SMEs in Kabwata Township can leverage social media to enhance networking, competitiveness, and operational efficiency. By applying these theories, the study aims to provide insights into the strategic use of social media platforms, offering practical implications for SMEs, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to support business growth and sustainability in the digital era.

2.5.1. Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of social relationships and networks in providing resources that benefit individuals or organizations. In the context of SMEs in Kabwata Township, Lusaka, this theory underscores how social media platforms can facilitate networking, information exchange, and support among stakeholders. By leveraging social capital, SMEs can enhance their competitive advantage, foster collaboration, and improve business performance through effective social media strategies (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Lin, 2001).

2.5.2. Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory focuses on a firm's internal resources and capabilities as sources of competitive and comparative advantage. For SMEs in Kabwata Township utilizing social media, RBV highlights how platforms like Facebook and Instagram can provide access to a broader audience, customer feedback, and market insights. By effectively leveraging social media resources and capabilities, SMEs can develop unique competencies in customer engagement and brand visibility, enhancing their competitiveness in the digital marketplace (Barney, 1991; Sheth, 2016; Peteraf, 1993).

2.5.3. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains individuals' adoption of new technologies based on perceived usefulness and ease of use. Applied to SMEs in Kabwata Township using social media, TAM elucidates how business owners perceive the benefits and challenges of social media adoption. Understanding these perceptions can reveal barriers like concerns about usefulness and complexities in platform navigation, as well as drivers such as perceived benefits in customer outreach and brand enhancement. TAM offers a structured framework to analyze technology adoption behaviours and inform strategies to effectively integrate social media into SME operations (Davis, 1980).

2.6. Conceptual framework

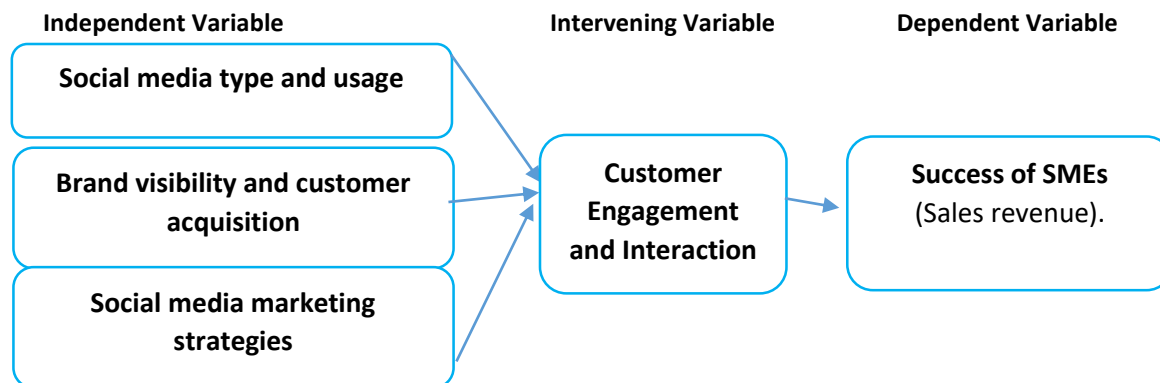


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

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The figure shows the operationalization of variables in the context of social media utilization by SMEs in Kabwata Township is structured around three independent variables and one dependent variable. Firstly, social media type and usage are defined by the variety and frequency of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram used for business purposes. This involves quantitative metrics like platform diversity and engagement levels. Secondly, brand visibility and customer acquisition assess how SMEs leverage social media to enhance their brand reach and attract new customers, measured through metrics like follower counts and conversion rates. Thirdly, social media marketing strategies encompass the specific tactics SMEs employ on these platforms, including content types, posting frequency, and engagement strategies. The intervening variable which is customer engagement and interaction entails the need to ensure customercentric approaches and policies by SMEs which keep the customers / clients abreast with activities of the firm and their benefits to them. This enhances loyalty and consistent purchases. The dependent variable, success of SMEs, is operationalized through financial metrics such as sales revenue growth and profitability margins.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for investigating social media utilization in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within Kabwata Township, Lusaka, was grounded in pragmatism and utilized a sequential mixed methods design integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The population consisted of approximately 200 registered SMEs in Kabwata Township, with data collected primarily from Kabwata market, chosen for its concentration of SMEs. Sampling techniques included non-probabilistic (purposive sampling) for qualitative data and probabilistic (stratified random sampling) for quantitative data, aiming for comprehensive insights. The quantitative sample size of 133 SMEs was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, while qualitative sampling approximated 20 SMEs, guided by theoretical saturation. Research instruments included structured questionnaires for quantitative data and semi-structured interviews alongside content analysis for qualitative insights. Data analysis involved regression analysis for quantitative data using SPSS and thematic analysis for qualitative data using Microsoft Word and Excel. Primary data sources included interviews, surveys, and content analysis, complemented by secondary sources such as previous research, industry reports, and SMEs' financial reports, providing a robust foundation for examining the impact of social media on SME business performance in Kabwata Township.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1. Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.076	.011		-6.703	.000
Social Media Type and Usage	-.001	.011	-.001	-.074	.941
Brand Visibility and Customer Acquisition	1.002	.018	.980	55.527	.000
Social Media Marketing Strategies	.022	.024	.020	.908	.365

a. Dependent Variable: SMEs success

4.2. Social Media Type and Usage

Results from a one-sample t-test assessing various statements related to social media usage for business promotion among SMEs in Kabwata. Each statement represents a belief or practice related to social media, with the test value set at 3. The negative t-values for most statements indicate that respondents significantly agree more than the neutral point (3) with statements about their social media activities. For instance, participants strongly endorse using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn for business promotion, with mean differences indicating substantial agreement (ranging from -0.53 to -1.44). They also emphasize the importance of maintaining a social media presence, investing in content creation, and exploring new channels. Additionally, they find social media advertising effective but tend to closely monitor performance metrics. Overall, these results underscore the critical role of social media in business strategy among SMEs in Kabwata, reflecting a proactive approach to leveraging digital platforms for growth and engagement.

Qualitatively, SMEs would recount:

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"We primarily use Facebook and Instagram for our business. Facebook helps us reach a broader local audience in Kabwata, while Instagram is great for showcasing our products visually. Our SME focuses on Twitter and LinkedIn. Twitter allows us to engage in real-time conversations with customers, while LinkedIn helps us network with other professionals and potential business partners."

The t-tests reveal that SMEs in Kabwata strongly agree with statements indicating active use and belief in the effectiveness of social media for business promotion. For instance, they actively use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, believing these platforms are crucial for business success. The negative mean differences with highly significant t-values indicate strong agreement that these platforms are effective tools for reaching and engaging customers.

The correlation matrix shows a strong positive relationship (Pearson correlation = 0.901) between social media type and usage and both brand visibility and customer acquisition. This indicates that SMEs that use social media extensively tend to have higher levels of brand visibility and are more successful in acquiring new customers. This finding aligns with previous research conducted by scholars such as Rosário (2023), who has emphasized the pivotal role of social media in modern marketing strategies. Their studies have shown that effective use of social media not only boosts brand visibility but also cultivates deeper customer engagement, ultimately contributing to enhanced brand loyalty and increased sales opportunities for SMEs.

Moreover, the correlation coefficient of 0.901 signifies a strong statistical association, implying that variations in social media usage patterns among SMEs in Kabwata Township are closely linked to corresponding variations in both brand visibility and customer acquisition outcomes. This statistical significance reinforces the strategic imperative for SMEs to allocate resources toward developing and executing comprehensive social media strategies that align with their business goals and target audience preferences.

In essence, the correlation underscores that social media platforms represent pivotal channels through which SMEs can effectively elevate their visibility and engagement levels in competitive markets like Kabwata Township. As digital landscapes continue to evolve, leveraging social media remains a cornerstone for SMEs aiming to expand their market reach, enhance brand perception, and ultimately achieve sustainable growth and profitability in today's interconnected business environment.

The regression analysis suggests that while there is a significant relationship between social media usage and brand visibility/customer acquisition, the specific ways SMEs use different platforms (Social Media Type and Usage1) do not significantly predict SME success. This aligns with broader research suggesting that the intensity of social media usage may matter more than the specific platforms used (Ngai et al., 2015).

Interview responses further explain how SMEs in Kabwata strategically choose social media platforms based on market research and competitor analysis. They emphasize the frequency and consistency of posting to maintain audience engagement and discuss specific engagement strategies like contests, collaborations with influencers, and interactive content. These strategies are supported by research indicating that active engagement and interactive content can significantly enhance engagement and customer loyalty (Asperen et al., 2017).

4.3. Brand Visibility and Customer Acquisition

Results from a one-sample t-test examining perceptions of the impact of social media on brand visibility and customer engagement among SMEs in Kabwata were obtained. The test value was set at 3, representing a neutral stance. The positive t-values indicate that respondents generally perceive social media as having a significantly positive impact on their businesses. They report that social media has increased awareness about their brands among Kabwata residents, with mean differences ranging from 0.49 to 0.64, suggesting strong agreement. This visibility is reinforced by observed rises in customer inquiries and positive feedback, contributing to an enhanced brand image. Although the metric regarding followers and likes did not show statistical significance ($t = 1.407$, $p = 0.162$), it still indicates a positive mean difference (0.13), suggesting a trend towards acknowledging social media popularity. Respondents also use targeted advertising effectively to attract potential customers and find that social media interactions lead to direct sales or inquiries. They perceive their social media presence as distinguishing them from competitors. Moreover, they actively monitor analytics, respond to customer queries and feedback, and believe that social media plays a crucial role in driving customer engagement and loyalty. Overall, these findings underscore the perceived importance and effectiveness of social media in enhancing brand visibility and customer relations among SMEs in Kabwata.

Qualitatively, SMEs would recount:

"Social media has been instrumental in boosting our brands' visibility in Kabwata. Through consistent posting and engaging content, we've been able to reach a wider audience beyond our physical location. Our posts often get shared, which helps in expanding our brand's reach organically. Social media allows us to showcase our products and services creatively. We use platforms like Instagram and Facebook to highlight customer testimonials, behind-the-scenes footage, and product launches. This approach has significantly increased awareness about our brand among local residents in Kabwata."

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The findings from the t-tests conducted among SMEs in Kabwata Township underscore a strong consensus regarding the positive impact of social media on both brand visibility and customer acquisition. The significant negative mean differences and robust t-values indicate that SMEs firmly believe in the effectiveness of social media as a tool for increasing their brand's visibility and attracting new customers. This alignment of perceptions suggests that SMEs recognize the strategic importance of maintaining active social media presences to enhance their market presence and reach a broader audience effectively.

Furthermore, the correlation matrix reveals exceptionally high correlations, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.999, between brand visibility/customer acquisition and SME success. This high correlation emphasizes the critical connection between effective brand management, customer engagement through social media platforms, and overall business success among SMEs in Kabwata. The nearly perfect correlation indicates that SMEs achieving greater brand visibility and successfully acquiring customers through social media tend to experience higher levels of overall success in terms of profitability, growth, and market competitiveness.

These findings are consistent with existing research literature that has also highlighted the pivotal role of social media engagement in driving brand outcomes. Studies by scholars such as Tuten and Solomon (2018) and Duffett (2015) have demonstrated how active and strategic use of social media can significantly enhance brand visibility, customer engagement, and ultimately contribute to business success. Such studies provide theoretical grounding and empirical evidence supporting the idea that SMEs can leverage social media not only as a marketing tool but also as a catalyst for achieving broader business objectives.

The regression coefficients obtained further bolster the correlations observed, particularly emphasizing the substantial predictive influence of brand visibility and customer acquisition through social media (Brand_Visibility_and_Customer_Acquisition1) on SME success in Kabwata. The coefficient of 1.002 for Brand Visibility and Customer Acquisition indicates that for every unit increase in brand visibility and customer acquisition through social media, SME success is predicted to increase by approximately 1.002 units. This strong relationship underscores the pivotal role of effectively managing and leveraging social media platforms to enhance a business's visibility and attract new customers, thereby driving overall business success.

These findings are consistent with established research emphasizing the strategic significance of social media in influencing brand outcomes. Studies such as those by Farook et al. (2016) have highlighted how active engagement on social media can substantially enhance brand visibility, facilitate customer acquisition, and ultimately contribute to organizational success. Cheung et al. (2020) argue that social media enables businesses to interact with customers in meaningful ways, fostering brand awareness and loyalty. Rijitha (2021) emphasizes that social media platforms provide unique opportunities for businesses to engage directly with consumers, thereby influencing their perceptions and purchase decisions positively.

4.4. Social Media Marketing Strategies

Findings from a one-sample t-test analyzing various social media marketing strategies employed by SMEs in Kabwata, with a test value set at 3 indicated a neutral stance. The results show strong agreement among respondents on several strategies. They highly prioritize posting engaging content to maintain audience interest (mean difference -1.46), indicating a proactive approach in content creation. While paid advertising on social media is not significantly different from the neutral value ($t = -1.689$, $p = 0.094$), there is a notable focus on using storytelling techniques ($t = 2.482$, $p = 0.014$) and leveraging customer testimonials ($t = 1.998$, $p = 0.048$) to build brand affinity and credibility, respectively. Respondents also actively analyze campaign performance ($t = 7.320$, $p < 0.001$) and find social media contests and giveaways effective for customer engagement ($t = 5.876$, $p < 0.001$). Although conducting polls and surveys did not significantly deviate from neutral perception, overall, these findings highlight a strategic and analytical approach to social media marketing in Kabwata, emphasizing content quality, performance tracking, and customer engagement through varied interactive strategies. These efforts aim to optimize visibility, engagement, and ultimately, business outcomes through digital platforms.

On the other hand, results from a one-sample t-test assessing perceptions and practices related to SME success and profitability in Kabwata. The findings highlight a positive outlook among respondents across various dimensions: SMEs report steady growth in sales revenue (mean difference 0.50) and consistent improvement in profitability margins (mean difference 0.64). They actively monitor sales performance to identify growth opportunities (mean difference 0.49) and implement proactive measures to enhance profitability (mean difference 0.13). Adjusting pricing strategies for profitability while maintaining customer satisfaction is a common practice (mean difference 0.60), and tracking ROI from marketing and operational initiatives is seen as crucial (mean difference 0.19). Cost-saving measures positively impact profitability (mean difference 0.39), and there is active pursuit of new revenue streams for sustainability (mean difference 0.30). Despite market challenges, SMEs feel they maintain healthy profitability levels (mean difference 0.30) and express confidence in future growth through strategic planning and effective management

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(mean difference 0.44). These results underscore a proactive approach to business management in Kabwata, emphasizing adaptability and continuous improvement as key drivers of sustainable success amidst economic challenges.

Interview responses highlighted the challenges SMEs face, such as adapting to platform algorithm changes and managing customer interactions, underscoring the importance of agility and responsiveness in maintaining effective social media strategies. Many recounted as follows:

"We employ a mix of content marketing and community engagement strategies. This includes sharing informative blog posts related to our industry, hosting live Q&A sessions to interact directly with our audience, and running contests to increase engagement and follower count. Influencer collaborations are a significant part of our strategy. We partner with local influencers whose audience aligns with our target market. They create authentic content featuring our products, which helps us reach a wider and more engaged audience. We utilize paid advertising on Facebook and Instagram to amplify our reach. By targeting specific demographics and interests, we ensure our ads are seen by potential customers who are likely to be interested in our products."

Arising from the foregoing, the t-tests conducted among SMEs in Kabwata underscore their proactive engagement with social media platforms, particularly in terms of their perceptions and practices regarding social media advertising and content creation. The findings reveal a strong agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of social media advertising, as indicated by significant negative mean differences and t-values. This suggests that SMEs recognize the value of investing in paid promotions on social media to reach and engage their target audience effectively. Moreover, their emphasis on creating content for these platforms indicates a commitment to maintaining a dynamic online presence that resonates with their customer base.

Furthermore, the correlation matrix demonstrates a robust positive relationship (Pearson correlation = 0.984) between the implementation of social media marketing strategies and SME success. This correlation indicates that SMEs that adopt comprehensive and strategic approaches to their social media marketing efforts tend to achieve higher levels of success in Kabwata. The coefficient of 0.984 underscores the strong predictive power of effective social media marketing tactics on business outcomes, suggesting that businesses that prioritize strategic planning and execution in their social media strategies are more likely to experience growth and profitability.

These findings align with existing research that emphasizes the critical role of social media marketing in driving business success. For instance, Jeswani (2023) discuss how leveraging social media for marketing purposes enables businesses to engage with customers in real-time, personalize interactions, and foster brand loyalty. Rosário (2023) highlight that effective social media marketing strategies not only enhance brand visibility but also contribute significantly to customer acquisition and retention.

The regression coefficients indicate that while social media marketing strategies (Social Media Marketing Strategies) have a small effect size, they do not significantly predict SME success in this model. This may suggest that other factors not captured in the model could influence the relationship between social media strategies and business success (Moghavvemi, 2015).

However, alongside these strategic benefits, interviewees also discussed challenges associated with managing social media marketing. Changes in algorithms on platforms like Facebook and Instagram were cited as significant hurdles. These algorithm updates can impact how content is prioritized and displayed to users, requiring businesses to adapt their strategies to maintain visibility and engagement. Moreover, managing negative feedback and addressing customer concerns publicly on social media platforms emerged as a sensitive issue. Interviewees emphasized the importance of handling such interactions with transparency and responsiveness to protect brand reputation and maintain customer trust.

These findings align with scholarly research advocating for a nuanced and adaptive approach to social media marketing strategy. Gligor (2021) argue that successful social media strategies require businesses to stay agile and responsive to changes in platform algorithms and user behavior. They emphasize the need for continuous monitoring and adjustment of strategies based on real-time data and feedback. Similarly, Silva et al. (2020) highlight the strategic use of metrics and analytics in evaluating social media ROI and optimizing marketing efforts for enhanced business outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the critical role of social media in enhancing business performance among SMEs in Kabwata Township. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were found effective for business promotion, supported by significant t-test results. A strong positive relationship between social media usage and brand visibility/customer acquisition was observed, emphasizing the need for robust social media strategies. SMEs strategically selected platforms based on market research, emphasizing frequent posting and engagement strategies to maintain customer loyalty.

Furthermore, the study emphasized the significant impact of social media on enhancing brand visibility and attracting customers among SMEs in Kabwata Township. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram were deemed effective, with clear statistical significance from t-tests. The correlation analysis showed a strong relationship between social media management, customer

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engagement, and business performance. Effective strategies in social media management predicted increased SME success, highlighting its role in achieving broader business objectives.

Finally, the study underscored the pivotal role of social media marketing strategies among SMEs in Kabwata Township. SMEs recognize the effectiveness of social media advertising and content creation in reaching target audiences and enhancing online presence. A robust positive correlation was found between the implementation of these strategies and SME success. While the direct impact on predicting SME success was moderate in regression analysis, effective social media strategies were crucial for enhancing market presence and customer engagement, potentially driving increased sales revenue.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Social Media Utilization: SMEs should align social media activities with specific business objectives, focusing on consistency and interactive engagement. **Adaptation to Platform Changes:** Agility in monitoring and adjusting strategies is essential amidst evolving social media landscapes.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1. Longitudinal Studies: Track the long-term impact of social media on SME performance.
- 7.2. Comparative Analysis across Industries: Conduct sector-specific analyses to identify tailored best practices.
- 7.3. Advanced Analytics and AI Integration: Explore AI-driven tools for optimizing social media strategies.

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