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Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness in the Property Sector of Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract: **Rapid urban growth and a persistent housing shortage have drawn a large number of land-selling companies into Nairobi's property market, and the resulting competition has pushed many of them towards social media marketing. This study examined the effect of five social media marketing activities, namely customisation, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), interaction, trendiness and entertainment, on the brand awareness of property sector companies in Nairobi City County, drawing on uses and gratifications theory and the pleasure–arousal–dominance model. A descriptive design was adopted. An online questionnaire was sent to the marketing or sales lead of 83 member companies of the Association of Real Estate Stakeholders, and 24 usable responses were received (28.9 per cent). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. All responding firms marketed on social media, most frequently on Facebook and TikTok, but half had an annual social media budget below KES 100,000 or none at all. Brand awareness correlated positively with customisation ($r = .688$), e-WOM ($r = .641$), interaction ($r = .584$) and trendiness ($r = .527$), all significant at $p < .01$, while its correlation with entertainment was weaker and not significant ($r = .385$, $p = .063$). Together the five activities explained 57.0 per cent of the variance in brand awareness ($F(5, 18) = 4.77$, $p = .006$), but no single activity had a significant independent effect, which indicates that in this sector they operate as a bundle rather than as separable levers. Customisation carried the largest standardised effect, consistent with the informational needs of a high-value purchase, and respondents were markedly less confident that social media drives leads and sales than that it builds recognition. The study recommends that property firms prioritise searchable, platform-specific content, manage customer reviews actively to counter a sector-wide trust deficit, and track how social media engagement converts into enquiries and sales.**

Keywords: **social media marketing; brand awareness; customisation; electronic word of mouth; real estate; property sector; Kenya.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya's population grew from 10.9 million at the first census in 1969 to 47.6 million in 2019, and Nairobi City County alone was home to about 4.4 million people at the 2019 census (KNBS, 2019). Most urban households rent, and the gap between the demand for housing and the supply of new units has made land for residential development one of the most actively marketed products in the county. The property sector, which in this study means companies that buy, subdivide and sell land, has responded with a proliferation of firms competing for the same middle-income buyers, and the intensity of that competition has made marketing efficiency a practical concern for firms of every size.

Social media offers property firms an alternative to radio, television, print and outdoor advertising. It allows two-way engagement with prospective buyers, targeting by location and interest, and reach well beyond Nairobi, including to Kenyans in the diaspora, at a fraction of the cost of traditional media. Research on social media marketing has converged

on five activities through which firms create value on these platforms: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation and word of mouth (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016). Evidence that these activities build brand awareness, brand equity and purchase intention comes mainly from consumer goods and luxury fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016; Bilgin, 2018; Aji, Nadhila, & Sanny, 2020).

Land is a different kind of product. A plot is a high-value, infrequent and largely irreversible purchase, made in a market where buyers are wary of fraud and rely heavily on the experiences of others. Whether the activities that build awareness for fashion and beverages do the same for land, and which of them matters most, has not been established for Kenya's property sector.

The study's specific objectives were to determine the effect of interaction, trendiness, entertainment, customisation and electronic word of mouth on the brand awareness of property sector companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Uses and gratifications theory. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) argue that audiences are active rather than passive and select media according to the needs those media gratify, whether for information, social connection, identity or diversion. Applied to social media marketing, the theory predicts that brand content builds awareness when it gratifies what users came to the platform for. For a prospective land buyer, the dominant gratification is likely to be informational: finding plots that match a budget and location, verifying a seller and learning from other buyers' experiences. The theory therefore anticipates that activities serving information needs, such as customisation and word of mouth, will matter more in this sector than activities serving diversion.

Pleasure–arousal–dominance model. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) propose that people respond to environments along three emotional dimensions: pleasure, arousal and dominance, the last being the feeling of being in control. Bakker, van der Voordt, Vink and de Boon (2014) review the model's continued use in consumer and environmental research. In social media marketing, entertaining content operates mainly on pleasure, trendy and frequently updated content on arousal, and navigable, searchable pages on dominance, by giving users control over what they see. The model thus provides a way of distinguishing among the five activities by the kind of response they evoke, and it suggests that in a high-stakes purchase the sense of control may matter more than enjoyment.

The study accordingly modelled brand awareness as a function of five social media marketing activities. Customisation was measured through the ease with which customers can navigate and search social media pages and the relevance of content to the target audience. Electronic word of mouth was measured through customer referrals received via social media and the influence of users' comments and reviews on the brand. Interaction was measured through the ease of sharing feedback and the promptness of responses to customer queries. Trendiness was measured through the frequency of content updates and the sharing of captivating, current content. Entertainment was measured through the posting of interesting and entertaining content. Brand awareness was measured through the recognisability of the company's brand and products as a result of social media campaigns, growth in revenue attributed to those campaigns, and the extent to which leads and sales are driven by social media.

3. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media marketing activities. Kim and Ko (2012), surveying 362 consumers of luxury fashion brands, conceptualised social media marketing activities as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation and word of mouth, and found that they positively affected value equity, relationship equity and brand equity, and through them purchase intention. Godey et al. (2016) extended the framework to consumers of luxury brands in several countries and found that social media marketing efforts influenced brand equity, measured through brand awareness and brand image, and consumer responses including preference and loyalty. Bilgin (2018), using structural equation modelling on 547 followers of brands on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, found that social media marketing activities affected brand awareness, brand image and loyalty, with the clearest effect on awareness. Aji et al. (2020), surveying 114 Instagram users of ready-to-drink tea brands in Indonesia, found that social media marketing activity positively affected brand equity, e-WOM and purchase intention.

Interaction and trendiness. Wang (2018), drawing on a case study of Baidu, identifies interaction as the principal measure of social media marketing effectiveness and attributes weak interaction to uninteresting content, identical posting across platforms, delayed responses to customers and a shortage of skilled personnel. Ashley and Tuten (2015), in a content analysis of the social media content of leading brands, found that leading brands used a range of creative strategies to

encourage consumer engagement with their social content. Both studies treat interaction and the quality and currency of content as means of engagement rather than as ends in themselves.

Electronic word of mouth. Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) found that social e-WOM, in the form of brand-related posts shared among Facebook users, positively affected both brand attitude and purchase intention. For purchases where the buyer cannot easily inspect quality in advance, the experiences of other customers substitute for direct inspection, which is why e-WOM is expected to matter particularly in sectors exposed to fraud.

Across this literature, social media marketing activities are consistently associated with brand awareness and related outcomes, but the evidence comes from consumer goods, luxury fashion and technology brands, measured from the consumer side. None of the reviewed studies examines land and property, where the purchase is high in value and in perceived risk, and none examines Kenyan firms, so the relative weight of the five activities in that setting cannot be established from existing work.

4. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted. In the absence of a statutory register of land-selling companies, the population was drawn from the membership list of the Association of Real Estate Stakeholders, which comprised between 109 and 120 property sector companies operating in Nairobi City County at the time of the study. Contact details could be obtained for 83 of these companies, and the questionnaire was sent to all 83. The respondent in each firm was the marketing or sales manager or, where those roles were not defined, the person responsible for marketing.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire built in Google Forms and distributed by email and WhatsApp, with two weeks allowed for responses and follow-up by email, WhatsApp and telephone. The instrument comprised demographic and firm profile items, items on social media use, budget, personnel and challenges, and five-point Likert items, scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), measuring the five marketing activities and brand awareness. Customisation, e-WOM, interaction and trendiness were each measured by two items, entertainment by one, and brand awareness by three. Internal consistency for the full scale was assessed with Cronbach's (1951) alpha, which was 0.902.

Data were cleaned in Microsoft Excel and analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics summarised the firm profile and the Likert items, Pearson correlation established the strength and direction of bivariate relationships, and multiple linear regression was estimated in the form $BA = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CUST + \beta_2 EWOM + \beta_3 INT + \beta_4 TRD + \beta_5 ENT + \varepsilon$, where BA is brand awareness, CUST customisation, EWOM electronic word of mouth, INT interaction, TRD trendiness and ENT entertainment. Normality was assessed with the Shapiro–Wilk statistic and a Q–Q plot, multicollinearity with tolerance and variance inflation factors, and homoscedasticity with a plot of residuals. An introductory letter was obtained from Kenyatta University and a research licence from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation before data collection, and participation was voluntary and confidential.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Response rate and respondent profile

Of the 83 companies invited, 24 returned usable questionnaires, a response rate of 28.9 per cent, typical of unsolicited online business surveys but low enough to limit generalisation. Women made up 58.3 per cent of respondents, and the respondents were young: 70.9 per cent were under 36, and 29.2 per cent were between 18 and 24. All held at least a diploma. Forty-six per cent were marketing managers, sales managers or both, a further 13 per cent were marketing executives and 8 per cent were chief executives, and 71 per cent worked for firms that had been operating for more than three years.

Every responding firm marketed through social media and reported defined social media marketing goals. Activity was frequent: 91.7 per cent published marketing content regularly, with Facebook the most used platform (an average of 3.4 posts a week), followed by TikTok (2.9), WhatsApp and Instagram (2.6 each), X (2.1), LinkedIn (2.0) and YouTube (1.8). Resourcing was less consistent. Although 83.3 per cent reported a dedicated, trained social media team, 29.2 per cent had no annual social media budget, and half of all respondents either had no budget or one below KES 100,000 a year. The challenges respondents reported were consistent with that picture: insufficient budget, difficulty sustaining engagement across platforms, intense competition among firms marketing similar plots on the same platforms, pressure to produce fresh content, difficulty reaching the right audience, a trust deficit arising from past fraud in the sector, damaging reviews, and difficulty converting engagement into genuine leads.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the study variables (n = 24)

Statement	Mean	Std. dev.
Customisation		
Our pages allow customers to easily navigate and search for content	4.24	0.74
We offer relevant content suited to our target audience	4.33	0.70
Composite	**4.29**	—
Electronic word of mouth		
We receive customers referred by other customers on social media	4.13	0.80
Our brand is affected by comments and reviews shared on social media	4.13	0.80
Composite	**4.13**	—
Interaction		
Our pages allow customers to easily share feedback	4.25	0.68
We respond promptly to customer queries on our pages	4.17	0.76
Composite	**4.21**	—
Trendiness		
We frequently update the content on our pages	4.54	0.59
We share captivating and trendy content on our pages	4.21	0.66
Composite	**4.38**	—
Entertainment		
We post interesting and entertaining content on our pages	4.04	0.81
Brand awareness		
Our brand and products are easily recognisable because of social media campaigns	4.21	0.83
Our revenues have increased because of social media campaigns	4.13	0.99
Our leads and sales are mainly driven by social media marketing	3.79	1.06
Composite	**4.04**	—

Source: Survey data (2025). Items scored 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Composite values are the means of the item means.

Respondents rated all five activities highly, with composite means between 4.04 and 4.38 and item standard deviations below one. Trendiness was rated highest (M = 4.38), driven by frequent updating of content (M = 4.54, the highest item in the instrument), followed by customisation (M = 4.29), interaction (M = 4.21) and e-WOM (M = 4.13). Entertainment, measured by a single item, was rated lowest (M = 4.04). Firms therefore describe themselves as active, current and responsive on social media, and as less focused on entertaining their audiences.

The brand awareness items show the more informative pattern. Respondents were most confident that social media makes their brand and products recognisable (M = 4.21), less confident that it has increased revenue (M = 4.13), and least confident, with the widest spread of views, that it is the main driver of their leads and sales (M = 3.79, SD = 1.06). Recognition is attributed to social media more readily than commercial conversion, which matches the challenge respondents reported of turning engagement into genuine leads. It also suggests that many firms do not measure how social media activity converts into enquiries and sales, so that their judgement of its commercial value rests on impression rather than evidence.

5.3 Correlation and regression results

Table 2: Correlation with brand awareness and multiple regression estimates (n = 24)

Predictor	Pearson r	B	Std. error	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	—	-0.463	1.120	—	-0.41	.684
Customisation	.688	0.487	0.349	.406	1.40	.180
Interaction	.584	0.329	0.249	.268	1.32	.203
Electronic word of mouth	.641	0.274	0.320	.231	0.86	.403
Trendiness	.527	0.060	0.409	.041	0.15	.885
Entertainment	.385	-0.090	0.234	-.093	-0.38	.706

Source: Survey data (2025). Dependent variable: brand awareness. $R = .755$, $R^2 = .570$, adjusted $R^2 = .451$, standard error of the estimate = 0.584; $F(5, 18) = 4.77$, $p = .006$. Correlations with brand awareness significant at $p < .01$ except entertainment ($p = .063$). Variance inflation factors 1.72 to 3.55.

Four of the five activities correlate positively and significantly with brand awareness: customisation most strongly ($r = .688$, $p < .001$), followed by e-WOM ($r = .641$, $p = .001$), interaction ($r = .584$, $p = .003$) and trendiness ($r = .527$, $p = .008$). Entertainment correlates more weakly and not significantly ($r = .385$, $p = .063$). Together the five activities explain 57.0 per cent of the variance in brand awareness (adjusted $R^2 = .451$), and the model is significant ($F(5, 18) = 4.77$, $p = .006$). The estimates are internally consistent: the standardised coefficients, the coefficient of determination and the variance inflation factors can each be reproduced from the reported correlation matrix.

The central result is that, although the activities jointly explain a majority of the variance, none has a statistically significant independent effect. Customisation has the largest standardised coefficient ($\beta = .406$, $p = .180$), followed by interaction ($\beta = .268$, $p = .203$) and e-WOM ($\beta = .231$, $p = .403$), while trendiness contributes almost nothing once the others are held constant ($\beta = .041$) and entertainment has a small negative coefficient ($\beta = -.093$). Two features of the data explain this pattern. With 24 observations and five predictors, the model has little power to separate individual effects. More substantively, the activities are strongly intercorrelated, most notably customisation with trendiness ($r = .754$) and with e-WOM ($r = .685$). Firms that customise their content also update it frequently, engage with customers and attract referrals. In this sector the five activities behave as a bundle that firms adopt together, and the data cannot attribute brand awareness to any one of them separately.

Within that bundle, the ordering of the coefficients is consistent with the theoretical framework. Customisation, which concerns whether prospective buyers can find relevant plots and information easily, has both the strongest correlation and the largest standardised effect. Uses and gratifications theory predicts exactly this for a high-value, information-intensive purchase, in which the gratification sought is finding and assessing options rather than diversion (Katz et al., 1973). In terms of the pleasure–arousal–dominance model, customisation acts on dominance, giving the user control over what they see, and that sense of control appears to matter more for a land buyer than the pleasure that entertainment provides (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The result is consistent with Kim and Ko's (2012) and Godey et al.'s (2016) inclusion of customisation as a core activity.

Electronic word of mouth has the second-strongest correlation with brand awareness, which is consistent with Kudeshia and Kumar's (2017) finding that social e-WOM shapes brand attitude and with the trust deficit respondents described. In a market where buyers fear fraudulent sellers, referrals and reviews from other customers substitute for the inspection that a buyer cannot easily carry out in advance, and both positive and negative reviews travel quickly. Interaction, which correlates moderately with awareness, supports Wang's (2018) view that two-way engagement and prompt responses are the practical measure of social media effectiveness. Trendiness is the activity firms rate highest yet the one with the smallest independent contribution, which suggests that frequent posting is now common practice in the sector and no longer distinguishes one firm from another. Creative strategy, which Ashley and Tuten (2015) identify as the basis of engagement, may matter more than frequency.

Entertainment is the only activity not significantly correlated with brand awareness, and it is also the one firms prioritise least. The finding contrasts with the role of entertainment in consumer goods and fashion (Kim & Ko, 2012; Aji et al., 2020), and it is consistent with the informational logic of land purchase. It does not mean that engaging content is

unimportant, since entertaining content may still attract audiences to a page, but the evidence suggests that what builds awareness of a property firm is the usefulness and credibility of its content rather than its entertainment value.

5.4 A note on the analysis

The reported statistics are internally consistent, but five features of the analysis qualify their interpretation. First, the analysis in the source project describes the full five-predictor model as having $p = .06$ and therefore re-estimates it without entertainment. The reported ANOVA gives $F(5, 18) = 4.77$, which corresponds to $p = .006$, so the full model was already significant. Removing a predictor after inspecting the results is not justified, and the full model is reported here. Second, the model summary in the source labels the value .570 as R, whereas it is R^2, the multiple correlation being .755. Third, the regression equation in the source combines standardised coefficients with an unstandardised constant and treats the coefficients as established effects, although none is individually significant. Fourth, the two e-WOM items have identical means and standard deviations ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.797$), which is possible but unusual enough to warrant checking for a duplicated column in the data file. Fifth, two of the three brand awareness items concern revenue and leads rather than awareness, so the dependent variable combines awareness with perceived commercial outcomes, and reliability was reported only for the scale as a whole, with each activity measured by one or two items.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media marketing is universal among the property firms studied and strongly associated with the brand awareness they report. Customisation, electronic word of mouth, interaction and trendiness each correlate significantly with awareness, and together the five activities explain more than half of its variance. They do not, however, act as separable levers. Firms that do one of them well tend to do the others well, and with the evidence available no single activity can be shown to drive awareness on its own. Within that bundle, the activities that serve buyers' need for usable and credible information, namely customisation and word of mouth, carry more weight than those that serve diversion, and entertainment contributes least. This ordering is consistent with uses and gratifications theory and with the high-value, high-risk nature of land purchase.

The study's second conclusion concerns measurement. Firms are confident that social media makes their brands recognisable, but noticeably less confident that it generates leads and sales, and half of them invest less than KES 100,000 a year in it or nothing at all. A sector that cannot trace how engagement becomes enquiries and sales cannot judge what its social media spending achieves, and it is likely to under-invest in the activities that work.

6.1 Recommendations

Property firms should treat customisation as the core of their social media effort. Content should be tailored to each platform rather than posted identically across all of them, listings should be organised so that buyers can search by location, price and plot size, and pages should provide the documentation buyers need to assess a plot. These are the features that serve the informational needs most strongly associated with brand awareness in this study.

Firms should manage electronic word of mouth deliberately, given the trust deficit that past fraud has created in the sector. This means inviting verified buyers to share their experiences, responding openly and promptly to negative reviews, and using platform verification features to establish authenticity. In a market where buyers rely on the experiences of others, a firm's reputation on social media is part of its product.

Firms should measure how social media activity converts into enquiries, site visits and sales, using tracked links, dedicated contact channels and simple records of lead sources. Doing so would replace impression with evidence in judging the value of social media, and it would allow budgets to be set according to returns. Firms should also set aside a dedicated annual budget for social media, since content production, paid targeting and premium platform services cannot be sustained on the minimal budgets half of the respondents reported.

6.2 Limitations and further research

Several limitations bound these findings. The sample of 24 firms is small and was obtained through a 28.9 per cent response to an online invitation, so it may over-represent firms that are more active and confident on social media. With five predictors, the sample also lacks the power to estimate individual effects. Brand awareness was reported by the firms' own marketing staff rather than measured among consumers, and two of its three items concern revenue and leads, so the study measures firms' perceptions of their own effectiveness. Each activity was measured with one or two items, which limits reliability at construct level. The design was cross-sectional and confined to Nairobi. Further research should survey

prospective and recent land buyers directly, using established measures of brand recall and recognition, and should use a larger sample of firms with multi-item scales for each activity, so that structural equation modelling can test whether the activities act jointly or separately. Comparative studies in other counties and in other segments of the real estate market would establish whether the dominance of customisation and word of mouth is specific to land or common to high-value purchases generally.

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