

*The Perceived Effects of Social Media Brand-Building on Business Success in Malawi**Dr. Martin Sailesi Gulule**Exploits University, Malawi**Santosh Narayan Shriyan***Abstract**

This paper examines the perceived effects of social media brand building on business success in Malawi, drawing on Objective Three of the broader study on the efficacy of social media tactics in brand building. The study employed a mixed-methods research design. The quantitative target population comprised 135 marketing-related staff across 10 purposively selected companies, from which a required sample of approximately 101 respondents was determined using a finite-population sample-size formula. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using MS Excel and SPSS, while qualitative evidence from interviews, peer-reviewed literature and content analysis was used for contextual interpretation and triangulation. The findings show comparatively stronger mean assessments of overall marketing effectiveness for Facebook and WhatsApp, while the influence of the examined brand-building factors was generally moderate. Brand-building outcomes varied across sales, market share, customer loyalty and brand reputation. Click-through rate and brand awareness were among the strongest-rated KPIs, Facebook and Instagram were comparatively stronger for increasing brand awareness, and most platforms were regarded as important for building and maintaining brand image. The study concludes that respondents perceived social media brand building as relevant to business success, particularly through platform effectiveness, performance measurement, audience engagement and the strategic integration of social media activities. These findings are descriptive and should not be interpreted as proof of causal effects.

Keywords

brand building, business success, social media marketing, brand awareness, brand image, customer loyalty, key performance indicators, Malawi

1.0 Introduction

Brand building has become closely linked with the way businesses communicate, engage customers and develop long-term brand value in digital markets. Social media allows firms to create and reinforce brand awareness, image, trust and loyalty while also supporting marketing communication and customer interaction. However, the perceived business contribution of social media depends on how strategically platforms are selected and used, how performance is measured, and how effectively brand-building activities are connected to wider organizational objectives (Li et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2020). This paper focuses on Objective Three of the final thesis and examines respondents' perceptions of how social media brand building relates to business success in Malawi.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Although social media offers businesses substantial opportunities to strengthen brands, an online presence by itself does not guarantee improved business outcomes. Firms can experience differences in platform effectiveness, engagement, brand awareness and customer response, while limited resources and weak measurement may reduce the value generated from social media activities. The final thesis therefore identified the need for empirical evidence on the relationship between social media brand-building practices and outcomes such as customer loyalty, brand reputation, market share and sales. This paper addresses that need by examining respondents' assessments of overall social media marketing effectiveness, the perceived influence of brand-building factors, brand-building outcomes, KPI effectiveness, brand-awareness campaigns and the importance of social media for maintaining a strong brand image (Adeola et al., 2020; Annamalai et al., 2021).

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Main Objective

The main objective, as stated in the final thesis, is to evaluate the extent to which brand building affects the success of businesses. In this paper, that objective is examined through respondents' perceptions and descriptive assessments rather than as a direct causal estimate.

3.2 Specific Objectives

- a) To assess the overall effectiveness of the brand's social media marketing.*
- b) To examine the perceived influence of factors on social media brand-building tactics.*
- c) To assess the outcomes of brand-building efforts on social media.*
- d) To evaluate the effectiveness of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in achieving the brand's social media objectives.*
- e) To establish the effectiveness of social media campaigns in increasing brand awareness.*
- f) To evaluate the importance of social media in building and maintaining a strong brand image.*

4.0 Research Questions

- a) How effective is the brand's social media marketing overall?*
- b) What perceived influence do different factors have on social media brand-building tactics?*
- c) What outcomes are associated with brand-building efforts on social media?*
- d) How effective are the selected KPIs in achieving the brand's social media objectives?*
- e) How effective are social media campaigns in increasing brand awareness?*
- f) How important is social media in building and maintaining a strong brand image?*

5.0 Literature Review

The final thesis literature review links brand building with customer loyalty, brand equity and business performance. Aaker (1991) positions brand equity as a strategic asset capable of supporting differentiation and long-term value. In the social media environment, Li et al. (2021) emphasize that social media marketing strategy requires deliberate platform, content and engagement decisions, while Lim et al. (2020) show that social media activity outcomes can contribute to brand equity. These perspectives support the view that the effectiveness of social media should be evaluated not simply by platform presence but by its contribution to measurable brand outcomes.

Research reviewed in the thesis also highlights the role of customer engagement and organizational capability. Kamboj (2020) shows that participation in social media brand communities is influenced by the value users obtain from engagement, while Zollo et al. (2020) link social media marketing activities with brand equity through consumer benefits and experience. Dwivedi et al. (2021) further identify analytics adoption, trained digital teams and platform-specific strategies as important to digital marketing performance. These findings suggest that the business value of brand building is shaped by both customer-facing engagement and the resources available to manage social media effectively.

The literature also provides evidence that social media marketing can influence customer behavior, brand awareness and business performance. Wibowo et al. (2020) connect social media marketing activity and customer experience with behavioral outcomes, while Tarsakoo and Charoensukmongkol (2020) examine the contribution of social media marketing capabilities to firm performance. Makrides et al. (2020) highlight the role of digital marketing in building brand awareness. Taken together, the literature supports examining platform effectiveness, business outcomes, performance indicators, brand-awareness campaigns and brand image as interconnected dimensions of social media brand building.

6.0 Methodology

This paper draws on Objective Three of a broader mixed-methods study conducted in Blantyre City, Malawi. The quantitative target population comprised 135 marketing-related staff across 10 selected companies. A required quantitative sample of approximately 101 respondents was calculated using the finite-population formula $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, with $N = 135$ and $e = 0.05$. The companies and participants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research objectives and their experience in branding, marketing and social media. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using MS Excel and SPSS. Qualitative evidence was obtained through interviews, peer-reviewed literature and content analysis and was used to provide contextual interpretation and triangulation alongside the quantitative findings. Accordingly, the Objective Three results presented in this paper are interpreted as respondents' perceptions and descriptive assessments; they do not constitute a direct causal estimate of the effect of brand building on business performance.

7.0 Findings

The findings for Objective Three are presented in six areas: overall social media marketing effectiveness, the perceived influence of factors on social media brand-building tactics, outcomes of brand-building efforts, KPI effectiveness, the effectiveness of campaigns in increasing brand awareness, and the importance of social media in building and maintaining a strong brand image.

7.1 Overall Effectiveness of the Brand's Social Media Marketing

The study evaluated how respondents perceived the overall effectiveness of the brand's marketing strategies across major social media platforms.

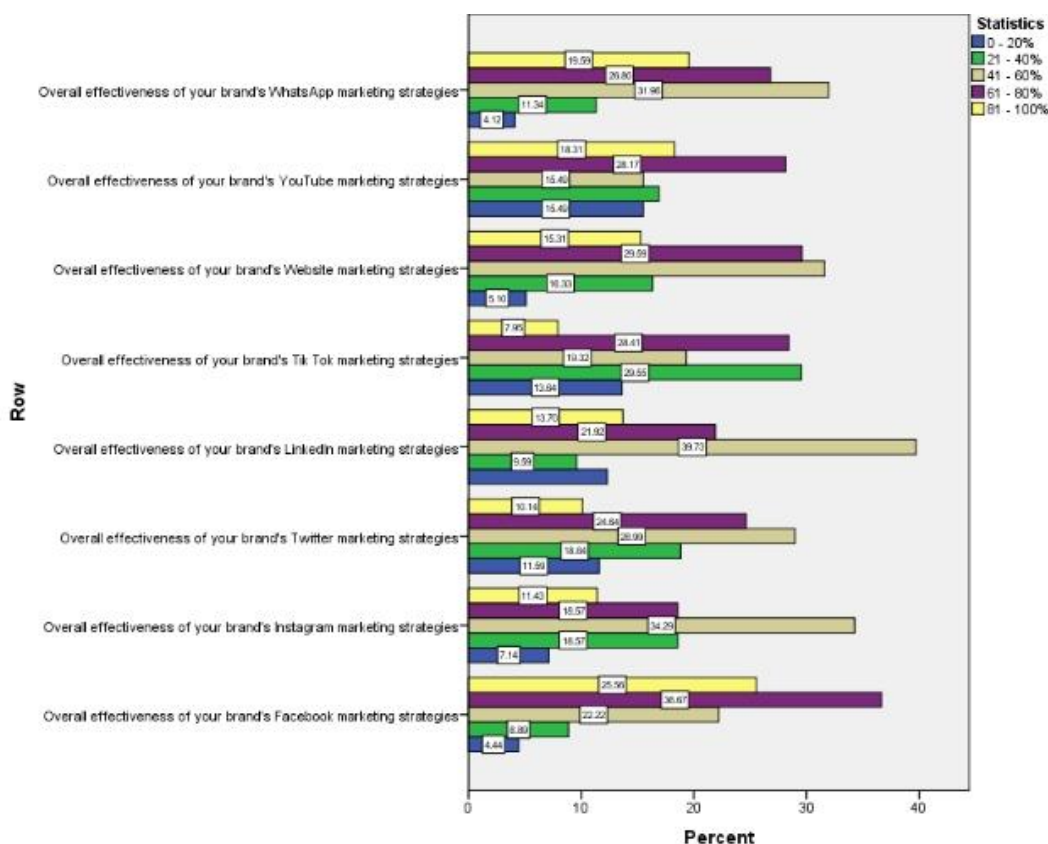


Figure 1. Overall effectiveness of the brand's social media marketing

Figure 1 shows that no social media platform was predominantly rated as 81-100% effective. Facebook (34.3%) and YouTube (28.2%) received the largest proportions of ratings in the 61-80% effectiveness category. Instagram (34.3%), Twitter (30.0%), LinkedIn (39.7%) and WhatsApp (32.0%) were most commonly rated in the 41-60% category, while TikTok (29.6%) had the largest proportion of responses in the 21-40% category.

Table 1. Overall effectiveness

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Overall effectiveness of your brand's Facebook marketing strategies	3.77	1.132	-.016	.503
Overall effectiveness of your brand's Instagram marketing strategies	3.39	1.376	-.515	.566
Overall effectiveness of your brand's Twitter marketing strategies	3.20	1.346	-.491	.570
Overall effectiveness of your brand's LinkedIn marketing strategies	3.23	1.253	-.310	.555
Overall effectiveness of your brand's TikTok marketing strategies	2.91	1.247	-.877	.508
Overall effectiveness of your brand's Website marketing strategies	3.40	1.146	-.419	.483
Overall effectiveness of your brand's YouTube marketing strategies	3.34	1.492	-1.027	.563
Overall effectiveness of your brand's WhatsApp marketing strategies	3.65	1.217	-.409	.485

Table 1 shows that Facebook (mean = 3.77) and WhatsApp (mean = 3.65) recorded the strongest mean assessments of overall effectiveness. The remaining platforms had mean scores between 2.5 and 3.49, indicating more neutral to moderate assessments. The standard deviations describe variability in respondents' ratings and should not be interpreted as tests of statistical significance. The kurtosis values describe distributional shape only and should not be interpreted as measures of financial risk or return.

7.2 Perceived Influence of Factors on Social Media Brand-Building Tactics

The study examined a range of platform, content, audience and interaction factors that may influence social media brand-building tactics.

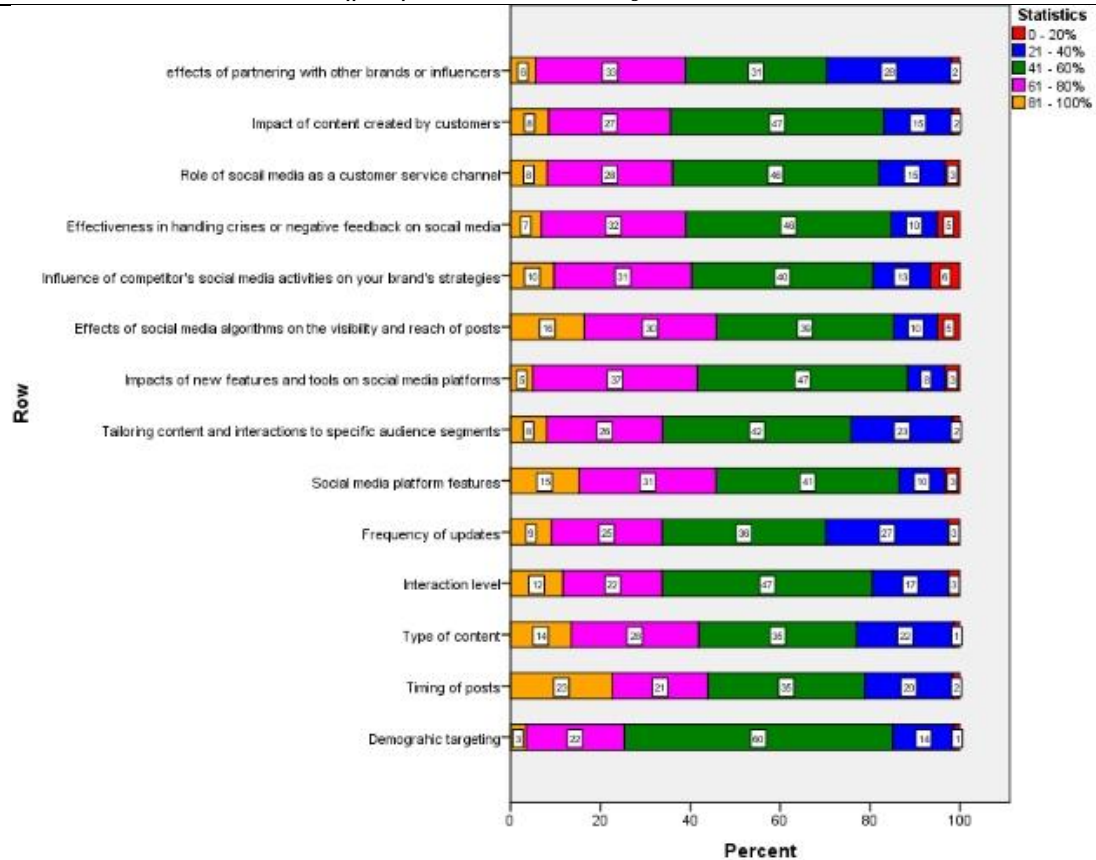


Figure 2. Perceived influence of factors on social media brand-building tactics

Figure 2 indicates that the largest response proportions for the examined factors generally fell within the 41-80% impact categories, showing that respondents perceived these factors as having varying but meaningful influence on social media brand-building tactics.

Table 2. Perceived influence of the factors

Factor	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Demographic targeting	3.13	.728	.785	.511
Timing of posts	3.44	1.097	-1.020	.582
Type of content	3.31	1.006	-.771	.552
Interaction level	3.23	.958	-.193	.541
Frequency of updates	3.10	.995	-.603	.541
Social media platform features	3.44	.987	-.090	.613
Tailoring content and interactions to specific audience segments	3.16	.927	-.398	.599
Impacts of new features and tools on social media platforms	3.32	.833	.800	.608
Effects of social media algorithms on the visibility and reach of posts	3.43	1.040	-.121	.604
Influence of competitors' social media activities on your brand's strategies	3.24	1.019	-.073	.599
Effectiveness in handling crises or negative feedback on social media	3.25	.921	.440	.613
Role of social media as a customer service channel	3.23	.920	.062	.604

Factor	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Impact of content created by customers	3.25	.883	-.024	.613
Effects of partnering with other brands or influencers	3.13	.953	-.816	.639

The mean scores in Table 2 were all between 2.5 and 3.49. Timing of posts and social media platform features recorded the highest means (3.44), closely followed by the effects of social media algorithms on visibility and reach (3.43). The results therefore indicate moderate perceived influence rather than a single dominant factor. Standard deviation measures dispersion around the mean and does not determine statistical significance. Kurtosis describes the shape of the response distribution and does not measure financial risk or return.

7.3 Outcomes of Brand-Building Efforts on Social Media

The study assessed perceived outcomes of social media brand-building efforts in relation to sales, market share, customer loyalty and brand reputation.

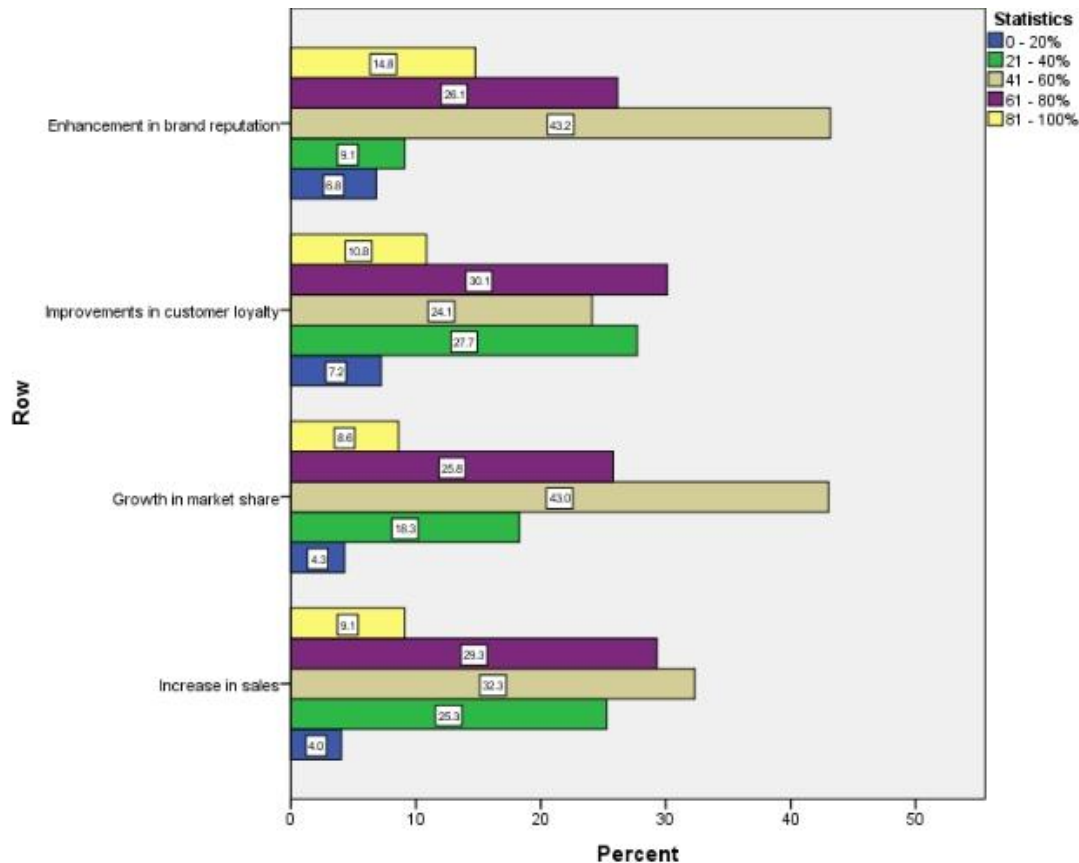


Figure 3. Outcomes of brand-building efforts on social media

Figure 3 shows that improvements in customer loyalty had the largest proportion of responses in the 61-80% outcome category. For the other outcomes, the largest response groups were generally in the 41-60% category, indicating more moderate reported improvements.

Table 3. Brand-building efforts on social media

Outcome	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Increase in sales	3.14	1.030	-.690	.481
Growth in market share	3.16	.970	-.198	.495
Improvements in customer loyalty	3.10	1.144	-.934	.523
Enhancement in brand reputation	3.33	1.058	-.083	.508

Table 3 shows mean scores between 2.5 and 3.49 for all four outcomes, indicating neutral to moderate assessments overall. Enhancement in brand reputation recorded the highest mean (3.33), followed by growth in market share (3.16), increase in sales (3.14) and improvements in customer loyalty (3.10). The categorical pattern in Figure 3 and the mean scores in Table 3 should be interpreted together. Standard deviations indicate variability in respondents' ratings, while kurtosis provides descriptive information on distributional shape; neither measure establishes statistical significance by itself.

7.4 Effectiveness of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in Achieving the Brand's Social Media Objectives

The study examined how respondents perceived the effectiveness of commonly used KPIs for assessing progress toward social media objectives.

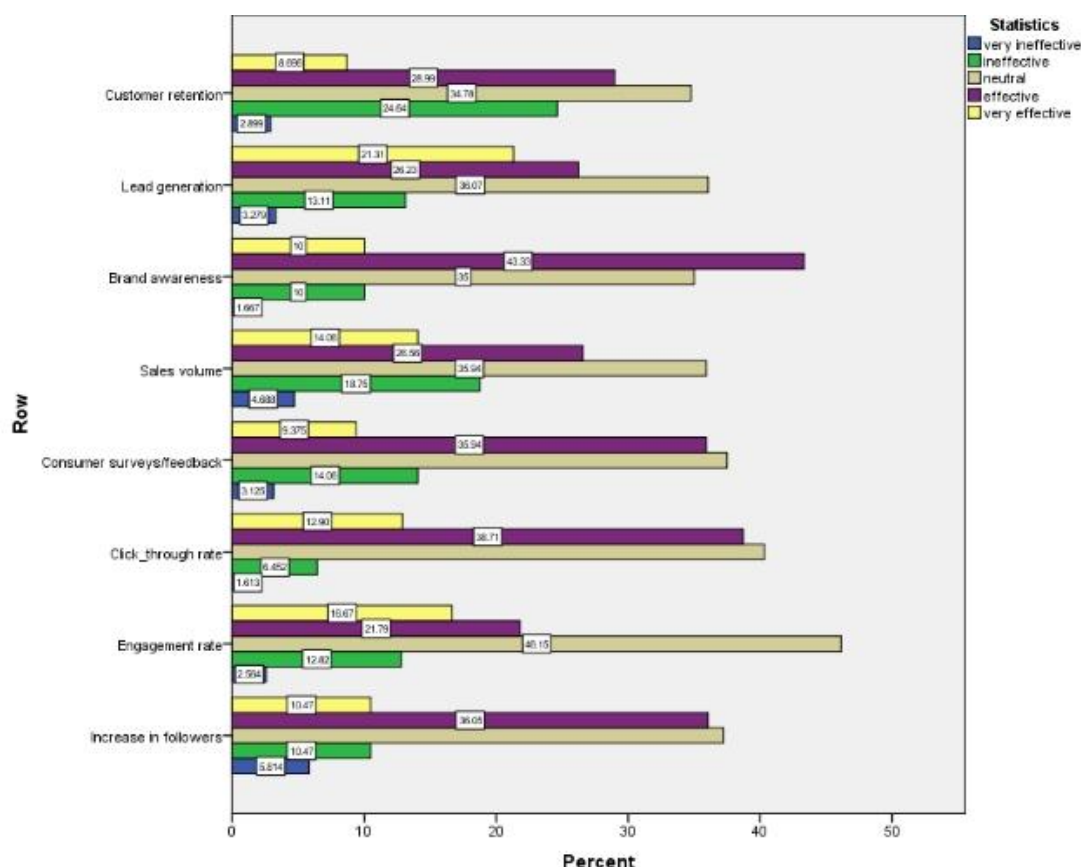


Figure 4. Effectiveness of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Figure 4 shows that brand awareness/recognition was a particularly prominent KPI, with 43.3% of respondents identifying it as effective. Responses for several other KPIs were more neutral, indicating differences in how businesses assess social media performance.

Table 4. Effectiveness of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increase in followers	3.35	1.003
Engagement rate	3.37	.995
Click-through rate	3.55	.862
Consumer surveys/feedback	3.34	.946
Sales volume	3.27	1.073
Brand awareness	3.50	.873
Lead generation	3.49	1.074
Customer retention	3.16	.994

The findings in Table 4 show that Click-Through Rate (mean = 3.55) and Brand Awareness (mean = 3.50) received the strongest mean assessments. The other KPIs had mean scores between 2.5 and 3.49. These results suggest that respondents placed comparatively greater emphasis on measures that capture audience response and brand recognition, while the standard deviations indicate variability in how the KPIs were assessed.

7.5 Effectiveness of Social Media Campaigns in Increasing Brand Awareness

The study assessed the perceived effectiveness of campaigns on individual social media platforms in increasing brand awareness.

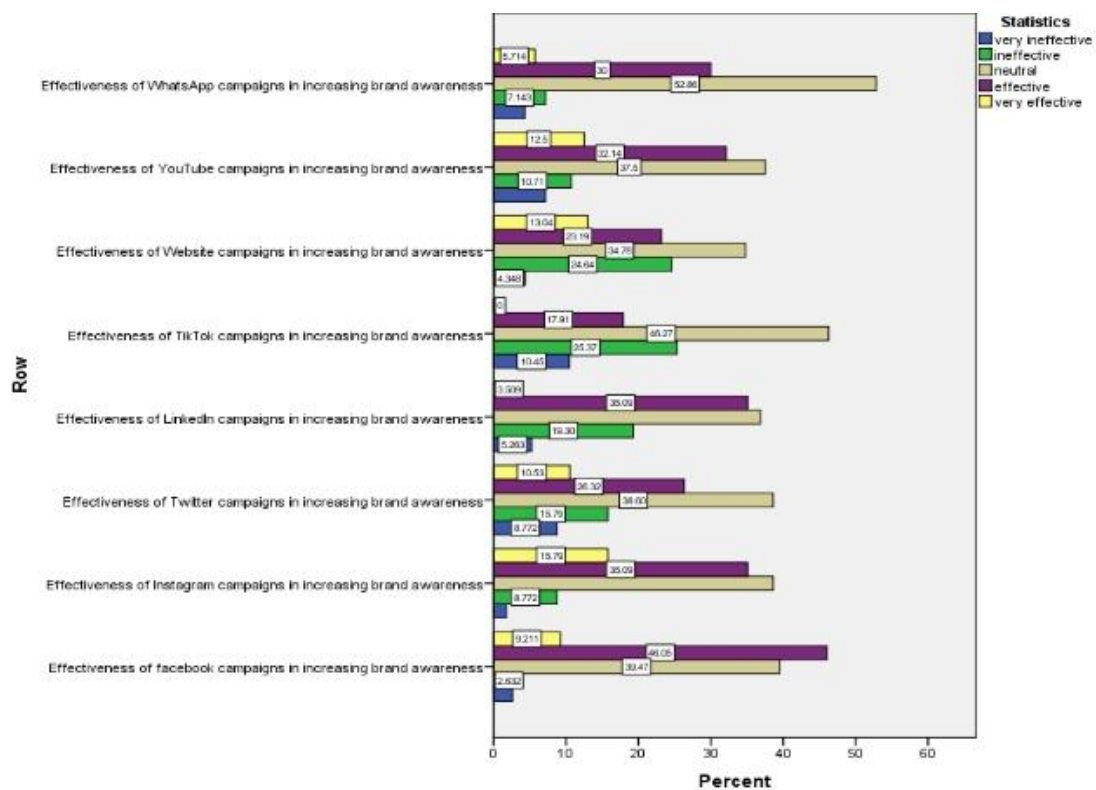

Figure 5. Social media campaigns in increasing brand awareness

Figure 5 shows that approximately 48.0% of respondents considered Facebook effective for campaigns aimed at increasing brand awareness. For the remaining platforms, the largest groups of respondents generally reported neutral assessments.

Table 5. Social media campaigns in increasing brand awareness

Platform campaign	Mean	Std. Deviation
Effectiveness of Facebook campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.57	.806
Effectiveness of Instagram campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.54	.927
Effectiveness of Twitter campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.14	1.093
Effectiveness of LinkedIn campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.12	.946
Effectiveness of TikTok campaigns in increasing brand awareness	2.72	.884
Effectiveness of Website campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.16	1.080
Effectiveness of YouTube campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.32	1.064
Effectiveness of WhatsApp campaigns in increasing brand awareness	3.26	.846

Table 5 shows that Facebook (mean = 3.57) and Instagram (mean = 3.54) had comparatively stronger assessments of effectiveness in increasing brand awareness. The remaining platforms had mean scores between 2.5 and 3.49. The standard deviations show variability in respondents' assessments and should not be interpreted as tests of statistical significance.

7.6 Importance of Social Media in Building and Maintaining a Strong Brand Image

The study examined the perceived importance of individual social media platforms for creating and maintaining a strong brand image.

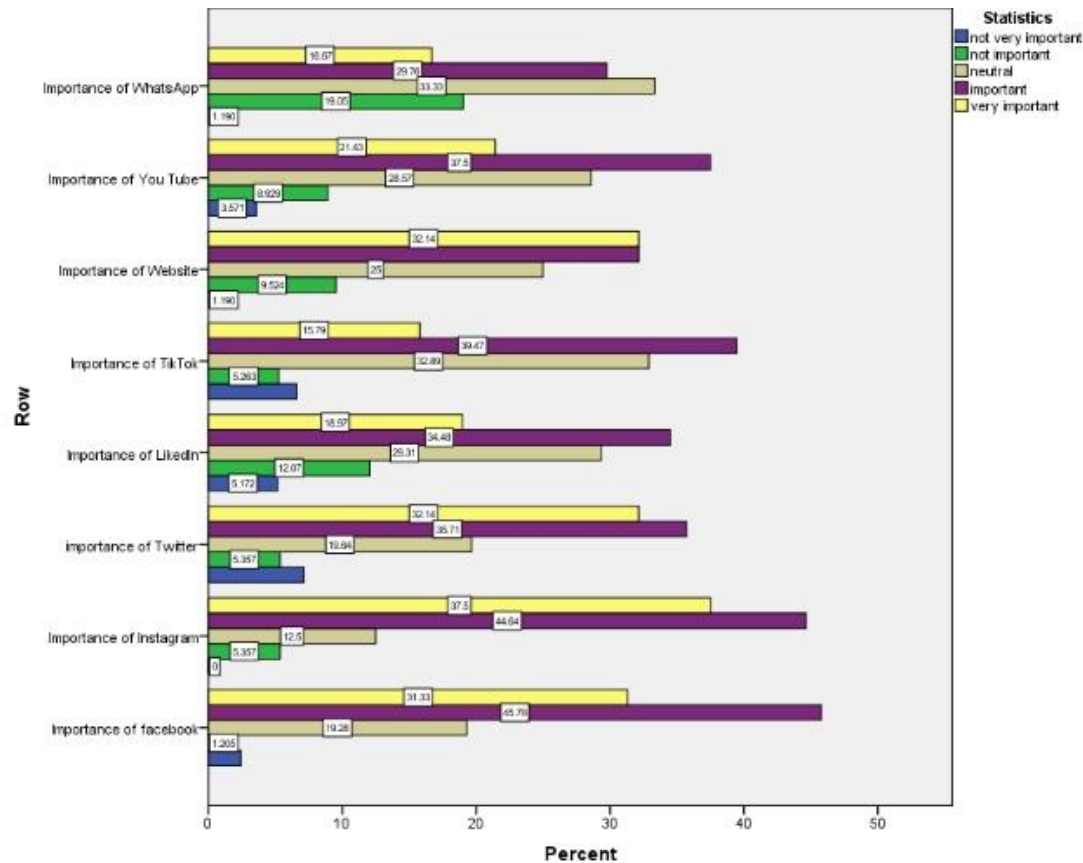


Figure 6. Importance of social media for building and maintaining a strong brand image

Figure 6 shows that Facebook (46.7%), Instagram (44.6%), Twitter (36.7%), LinkedIn (34.4%), TikTok (38.5%) and YouTube (37.5%) were commonly rated as important for building and maintaining a strong brand image. Respondents were more neutral regarding WhatsApp (31.1%) and websites (32.1%), although websites also received an equal 32.1% share in the important category.

Table 6. Importance of social media for building and maintaining a strong brand image

Platform	Mean	Std. Deviation
Importance of Facebook	4.02	.883
Importance of Instagram	4.14	.841
Importance of Twitter	3.80	1.166
Importance of LinkedIn	3.50	1.096
Importance of TikTok	3.53	1.039
Importance of Website	3.85	1.024
Importance of YouTube	3.64	1.034
Importance of WhatsApp	3.42	1.020

Table 6 shows that most platforms received mean scores of 3.50 or higher, indicating comparatively positive assessments of their importance for brand image. Instagram recorded the highest mean (4.14), followed by Facebook (4.02), websites (3.85), Twitter (3.80), YouTube (3.64),

TikTok (3.53) and LinkedIn (3.50). WhatsApp had a mean score of 3.42, indicating a more neutral assessment. Standard deviations show variability in respondents' ratings and should not be interpreted as tests of statistical significance.

8.0 Discussion

This section discusses the six dimensions examined under Objective Three and relates the findings to the broader literature used in the final thesis.

8.1 Overall Effectiveness of the Brand's Social Media Marketing

The findings show that platform effectiveness was not uniform. Facebook and WhatsApp recorded the strongest mean assessments, while Facebook and YouTube attracted the largest proportions of ratings in the 61-80% category. This difference between mean scores and response-category patterns reinforces the need to interpret platform performance using more than one indicator. Li et al. (2021) argue that effective social media marketing depends on strategic platform selection and alignment with organizational objectives, while Tarsakoo and Charoensukmongkol (2020) connect social media marketing capabilities with business performance. The present findings therefore support a platform-specific rather than one-size-fits-all approach.

8.2 Perceived Influence of Factors on Social Media Brand-Building Tactics

The factors examined in Table 2 were generally assessed at moderate levels, with timing of posts, platform features and social media algorithms recording the highest mean scores. These assessments suggest that the perceived effectiveness of brand-building tactics may be shaped by a combination of content timing, platform functionality, audience interaction and changes in the digital environment. Dwivedi et al. (2021) similarly highlight the role of platform-specific strategies and digital capabilities, while Cartwright et al. (2021) emphasize the strategic management of social media within organizational marketing. The results do not support treating standard deviation as a test of significance; instead, the variation shows that businesses experience these factors differently.

8.3 Outcomes of Brand-Building Efforts on Social Media

The outcome findings show that respondents associated social media brand building with several dimensions of business performance, but the assessments were not uniformly strong. Customer loyalty had the largest proportion of responses in the 61-80% category, whereas brand reputation recorded the highest mean score. This indicates that categorical response patterns and average ratings capture different aspects of respondents' experiences. Lim et al. (2020) link social media activity outcomes with brand equity, while Zollo et al. (2020) and Wibowo et al. (2020) emphasize the role of consumer experience and engagement in shaping brand-related outcomes. The findings therefore suggest that the perceived business contribution of brand building should be evaluated across multiple outcomes rather than sales alone.

8.4 Effectiveness of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in Achieving the Brand's Social Media Objectives

Click-Through Rate and Brand Awareness received the strongest mean assessments among the KPIs. This suggests that respondents value indicators that show both immediate audience response and longer-term brand recognition. However, lead generation, engagement, sales volume, follower growth and customer retention also provide complementary information. The literature reviewed in the thesis emphasizes the importance of analytics and performance measurement in digital marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). A balanced KPI framework is therefore preferable to reliance on a single measure.

8.5 Effectiveness of Social Media Campaigns in Increasing Brand Awareness

Facebook and Instagram recorded the strongest mean assessments for campaigns aimed at increasing brand awareness, while Facebook also stood out in the response-category results. This pattern is consistent with the importance of selecting platforms according to audience behavior and campaign objectives. Makrides et al. (2020) identify digital marketing as an important avenue for building brand awareness, while Li et al.

(2021) emphasize the need for platform-specific strategy. The results suggest that brands should prioritize demonstrated strengths without assuming that the same platform mix will suit every audience or campaign.

8.6 Importance of Social Media in Building and Maintaining a Strong Brand Image

Most platforms were regarded as important for building and maintaining brand image, with Instagram and Facebook receiving the highest mean scores. WhatsApp was the only platform with a mean below 3.50, although it still formed part of respondents' broader social media environment. Liu et al. (2020) demonstrate the value of social media content for understanding and shaping brand image, while Zollo et al. (2020) connect social media marketing activity with brand equity through consumer experience. These findings support maintaining a consistent brand presence while adapting channel use to each platform's role and audience.

9.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that respondents perceived social media brand building as relevant to business success across several dimensions, including platform effectiveness, brand-building factors, sales, market share, customer loyalty, brand reputation, performance measurement, brand-awareness campaigns and brand image. The evidence does not indicate that one platform or one measure is sufficient on its own. Rather, the findings support a coordinated approach to platforms, content, engagement and measurement. Because the Objective Three evidence presented here is primarily descriptive and perception-based, these findings should not be interpreted as establishing a direct causal effect of social media brand building on business success.

9.1 Overall Effectiveness of the Brand's Social Media Marketing

Facebook and WhatsApp recorded comparatively stronger mean assessments of overall effectiveness, while no platform was predominantly rated in the 81-100% effectiveness category. Businesses should therefore evaluate platforms according to their target audience and objectives rather than assume equal effectiveness across channels.

9.2 Perceived Influence of Factors on Social Media Brand-Building Tactics

Timing of posts, platform features and social media algorithms were among the highest-rated factors, although all mean scores remained in the moderate range. Brands should monitor platform changes, tailor interactions to audiences and continually adjust tactics based on observed performance.

9.3 Outcomes of Brand-Building Efforts on Social Media

The findings show variation in respondents' assessments across sales, market share, customer loyalty and brand reputation. Customer loyalty was prominent in the response-category results, while brand reputation recorded the highest mean. This supports evaluating the perceived contribution of social media brand building through a broad set of business and brand outcomes.

9.4 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Click-Through Rate and Brand Awareness were the strongest-rated KPIs. Brands should prioritize these measures while also tracking engagement, lead generation, sales volume, follower growth, customer feedback and retention to obtain a more complete view of social media performance.

9.5 Brand Awareness Campaigns

Facebook and Instagram were comparatively stronger in increasing brand awareness. Brands should use these strengths where appropriate while continuing to assess other platforms in relation to audience characteristics, content format and campaign goals.

9.6 Building and Maintaining a Strong Brand Image

Most social media platforms were viewed as important for building and maintaining brand image, with Instagram and Facebook receiving the highest mean assessments. Brands should maintain consistency in brand identity across platforms while adapting communication to the strengths and audience of each channel.

9.7 Practical Recommendations

- a) Use an integrated social media strategy that combines the strengths of multiple platforms rather than relying on one channel.
- b) Give greater attention to platforms and activities that demonstrate stronger results while continuing to test and evaluate alternative channels.
- c) Use analytics and clearly defined KPIs, particularly brand awareness and click-through rate, to monitor performance and guide resource allocation.
- d) Adapt content, timing and interaction to the characteristics of each platform and the needs of the target audience.
- e) Review social media trends, algorithms and platform features regularly so that brand-building tactics remain relevant and effective.
- f) Evaluate brand-building success across customer loyalty, brand reputation, market share and sales rather than relying on a single business outcome.

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