

**Exploring the Strategies that Self-Brand Instagram Users Adopt to Create
Business Awareness in Nigeria: Content Analysis**

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for MA in Journalism and
Media Communications**



GRIFFITH COLLEGE

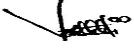
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Dedication

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, my family, and my friends who have helped me throughout this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my project supervisor, Dr. Alessandra Vecchi, for all of her assistance, advice, and feedback in ensuring the quality and appropriate structure for my research paper during this study program.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their support throughout this project. Finally, I would also like to thank all of my participants who have contributed massively to this project.

ABSTRACT

The research's main objective is to explore and determine the strategies essential for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to achieve profitability in their businesses. The literature review centers on the usefulness of the U&G-TAM model in Instagram marketing for business owners. Additionally, it examines the behavioral patterns of self-brand Instagram users and the strategies they have employed. Based on the literature review, the research identifies 12 successful Instagram marketing strategies that self-brand users can adopt.

A qualitative research approach was employed for the study, and five semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-brand Instagram users. The analysis of the findings revealed some correlations between the strategies discussed in the literature and their practical benefits for self-brand users. The study highlights three main elements that significantly contributed to the participants' business progress: partnering with influencers, optimizing a strong business profile, and utilizing hashtags and geotags effectively. These strategies have played a crucial role in the participants' success and profitability in their Instagram businesses.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Declaration.....	1
Dedication.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Abstract.....	4
1. Introduction.....	10
- 1.1 Overview.....	10
- 1.2 Research Purpose.....	10
- 1.3 Significance of the study.....	11
- 1.4 Research aims and objectives.....	11
- 1.5 Methodology.....	12
- 1.6 Structure of the study.....	13
2. Literature Review.....	14
- 2.1 Overview.....	14
- 2.2 The Framework of Self-brand Instagram.....	14
- 2.2.1 Motivators and Demotivators of Self-Brand Instagram Users.....	15
- 2.2.2 Value Creation of Self-Brand Instagram Users.....	16
- 2.2.3 Attitude of Self-Brand Instagram Users.....	17
- 2.2.4 Behavioural Intention of Self-Brand Instagram Users.....	17
- 2.3 Social Media Marketing.....	17
- 2.4 Instagram Business Strategies for Business Sustainability.....	18
- 2.5 Brand Awareness Strategies through Social Media.....	19
- 2.6 Growing Self-Brand Business through Instagram.....	19
- 2.7 Strategies for Instagram Marketing.....	20
- 2.8 Significance of Hashtags on Instagram.....	23
- 2.9 Challenges to Instagram Marketing.....	24
- 2.10 Benefits of Instagram Marketing.....	24
- 2.11 Conceptual Framework.....	25
- 2.12 Conclusion.....	26
3. Methodology and Research Design.....	27
- 3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach.....	27
- 3.2 Research Strategy.....	28
- 3.3 Collection of Primary Data.....	29
- 3.3.1 Sources.....	29
- 3.3.2 Access and Ethical Issues.....	31
- 3.4 Approach to Data Analysis.....	32
- 3.5 Conclusion.....	33
4. Presentation and Discussion of the Findings.....	34
- 4.1 Overview.....	34
- 4.1 Profile of Self-brand business owners who participated in the study.....	35
- 4.2 Findings.....	37
- 4.2.1 Participant Interview.....	37
- 4.2.2 Partnering with Influencers.....	37
- 4.2.3 Customer Incentives and Rewards.....	39
- 4.2.4 Developing a Strong Instagram Profile.....	40

- 4.2.5 Engaging the Target Audience.....41
- 4.2.6 Using Hashtags and Geotags.....43
- 4.2.7 Creating Engaging Contents for Your Products and Services.....44
- 4.3 Discussion.....46
- 4.3.1 Partnering with Influencers.....46
- 4.3.2 Customer Incentives and Rewards.....47
- 4.3.3 Developing a Strong Business Profile.....47
- 4.3.4 Engaging the Target Audience.....47
- 4.3.5 Using Hashtags and Geotags.....48
- 4.3.6 Creating Engaging Contents for Your Products and Services.....48
- 4.4 Conclusion.....48
- 5. Conclusion, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research.....49
- 5.1 Implications of Findings for the Research Questions.....49
- 5.2 Contributions and Limitations of Research.....50
- 5.2.1 Contributions of research.....50
- 5.2.2 Limitations of the Research.....52
- 5.3 Recommendations for Practice.....53
- 5.4 Recommendations for Future Research.....54
- 5.5 Final Conclusions and Reflections.....55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: U&G-TAM Model; Uses and Gratification (U&G) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Figure 2: Post Strategy for Self-Brand Instagram Users.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: 12 winning Instagram marketing strategies

Table 2: Paradigms of Research Methods

Table 3: Interview Questions

Table 4: Profile of Self-brand business owners who participated in the study.

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

B2B: Business-to-Business

B2C: Business-to-Customers

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

SMI: Social Media Influencers

U&G: Uses and Gratification

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

Small business owners in Nigeria find it difficult to sustain their businesses beyond five years due to the inability to create adequate awareness to target customers who may need their products or services (Jumelet et al., 2022). The general problem is that the baby boomers (ages 59-77) and Generation X (55-63) must be adequately equipped with the current social media methods, such as Instagram, to create awareness for their businesses. The specific business problem is that small business owners in Nigeria need more strategies for using Instagram to create awareness to improve their businesses, which has led to such businesses failing within two to three years of commencement.

1.1 Overview

This qualitative content analysis aims to explore the strategies Instagram business users in Nigeria use to create awareness for business expansion, which has guaranteed their business success for the past five years. Fin and Ryu (2019) analyzed brand awareness through Instagram by focusing on the effects of luxury brand post's Instagram source type as it affects brand versus fashionista, visual image type in terms of product focus or customer focus, and consumer characteristics which include vanity, opinion leadership, and fashion consciousness and how all these impact brand recognition and trust. Ibrahim and Aljarah (2022) studied the connection between social media marketing activities and customer loyalty, the rate of engagement among Instagram users, and the connection between the food business in Instagram. Although much research on the tourism industry has focused on social media marketing, including brand trust, satisfaction, and loyalty of customers, the strategies of self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria have been neglected (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2022).

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis study is to explore and identify the strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for at least five years and achieve profitability. The purpose for selecting self-brand users of Instagram is because of their exposure to challenges that affect their business sustainability. The target participants will be self-brand users of

Instagram in Nigeria that have sustained their businesses for at least five years and achieved profitability. Previous studies are on the attitude toward an ad, intrusiveness, and loyalty of consumers in the digital context (Belanche et al., 2019). None seems to have explored and identified strategies employed by self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to sustain their businesses for at least five years and achieve profitability.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study may be significant to Instagram users who would like to create self-brand for content, education, comedy, advertisement, and showcasing their products and services. The study findings may also be significant to the government which could engage its citizens creatively, using Instagram as means of job creation. The study may be significant to schools and places of learning that may use Instagram and develop it as a course for study. The study may be significant to social change through job creation, improvement in the standard of living, and community development through content creation and showcasing the strengths of the community and its reach culture. Ibrahim and Aljarah (2022) reported in April 2022, at least 1.145 billion Instagram users worldwide, representing 23.4% of the global population of age 13 and above. Instagram could be used as a means of virtual learning for several cultures to achieve inclusiveness and diversity in learning.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The proposed study's research aims to explore the strategies employed by self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to sustain their businesses for at least five years and achieve profitability. The purpose for selecting self-brand users of Instagram is because of their exposure to challenges that affect their business sustainability. Ibrahim and Aljarah (2022) examined the mediating role of user engagement between social media marketing activities and self-brand connections. The study revealed that user engagement acts as a mediator between social media marketing and self-brand connection. Tseng and Wang (2023) found out that to exert power and influence and gain more control, an increasing number of internet celebrities could create self-brand products rather than merely endorsing the products of other companies.

The objectives are as:

1. To identify how Instagram is used as a marketing tool for self-brand Instagram users to sell their own brands with the adoption of creating awareness for company expansion in Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the appropriate Instagram marketing strategies for self-brand Instagram users who want to successfully create long-term business sustainability.
3. To identify the challenges and benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users.
4. To develop a theoretical model that defines the key concepts related to self-brand businesses on Instagram, such as social media marketing, business strategies for sustainability, brand awareness strategies through social media, growing self-brand business through social media, strategies for Instagram marketing, etc.
5. To develop sets of recommendations for effective Instagram marketing strategies that self-brand Instagram users, and other small business owners would find useful, to avoid the challenge of maintaining their businesses in less than five years.

1.5 Methodology

The research methodology will be based on qualitative content analysis of messages from 200 self-brand owners on Instagram to understand strategies users adopted to create business awareness. Such self-brand owners will be drawn worldwide, and data will be analyzed to arrive at codes, categories, and themes that will be used to examine the strategies self-brand business owners use to create awareness through Instagram. Instagram will be the focus of the study to achieve qualitative content analysis and uniformity in the result findings. Because coding is significant in content analysis, the categories will be developed continually until saturation is reached. Saturation is reached when no new data or themes emerge from the content analysis process (Ness & Fusch, 2015). I will enhance the reliability and integrity of the interpretation by ensuring that all the Instagram accounts will be selected at arm's length, without any personal or official relationship with the Instagram handler. Also, peer review articles will be analyzed to identify common themes through a secondary data analysis through the review of peer-review articles on the subject matter. To identify how Instagram is used as a marketing tool for self-brand Instagram users to sell their own brands, I will recruit five Instagram users who have used Instagram as a marketing

tool for self-brand. The theoretical model that defines the key concepts would be analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated to create themes for further analysis.

1.6 Structure of the Study

Chapter One contains the introduction, an overview research purpose, the significance of the study, the research aim and objectives, and the methodology. Chapter Two will contain the literature review overview and the synthesis of the peer-reviewed articles relating to the subject matter. Chapter Two will end with the conceptual framework that underpins the topic. Chapter Three will contain the methodology, overview, research philosophy, and approach, research strategy, collection of primary data, and approach to data analysis. Chapter Four will contain a presentation and discussion of the findings, findings, discussion, and a conclusion. Chapter Five will contain the concluding thoughts and the contribution of this research, its limitations, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2. Literature Review

The research search engines would include emerald insight, Sage Journal, ScienceDirect, and ABI/INFORM collection. The keyword that would be used in the search engine would include social media marketing, business strategies for sustainability, brand awareness strategies through social media, growing self-brand business through social media, strategies for Instagram marketing, follow for follow on Instagram, challenges to Instagram marketing, and benefits of Instagram marketing.

2.1 Overview

In this section, emphasis will be placed on using higher critical order; analysis, synthesis, and evaluation to critically evaluate the strategies that self-brand Instagram users adopted to create business awareness as reported in previous articles that created a gap for this study. Such study findings have the potential to expose Nigeria's Instagram users to significant opportunities that may help improve the standard of living as well as provide a framework for the body of knowledge for practice and for teaching.

2.2 The Framework of Self-brand Instagram

The conceptual framework for this study is the uses and gratification (U&G) and technology acceptance model (TAM) as developed by Lim in 2015. The U&G-TAM framework is used in this study to understand what motivates and demotivates self-brand Instagram users to create business awareness through social media. The major tenets of the U&G-TAM model are motivation and demotivators, value, attitude, and behavioral intention (Figure 1). Florenthal (2019) identified the motivators and demotivators as entertainment, informativeness, irritation, creativity, and interpersonal utility. The values are social media engagement. The attitude toward brand content and engagement with social media sites (Florenthal, 2019). The behavioral intention includes co-creation, positive contribution, consumption, search, dormancy, detachment, negative contribution, and co-destructivity (Florenthal, 2019).

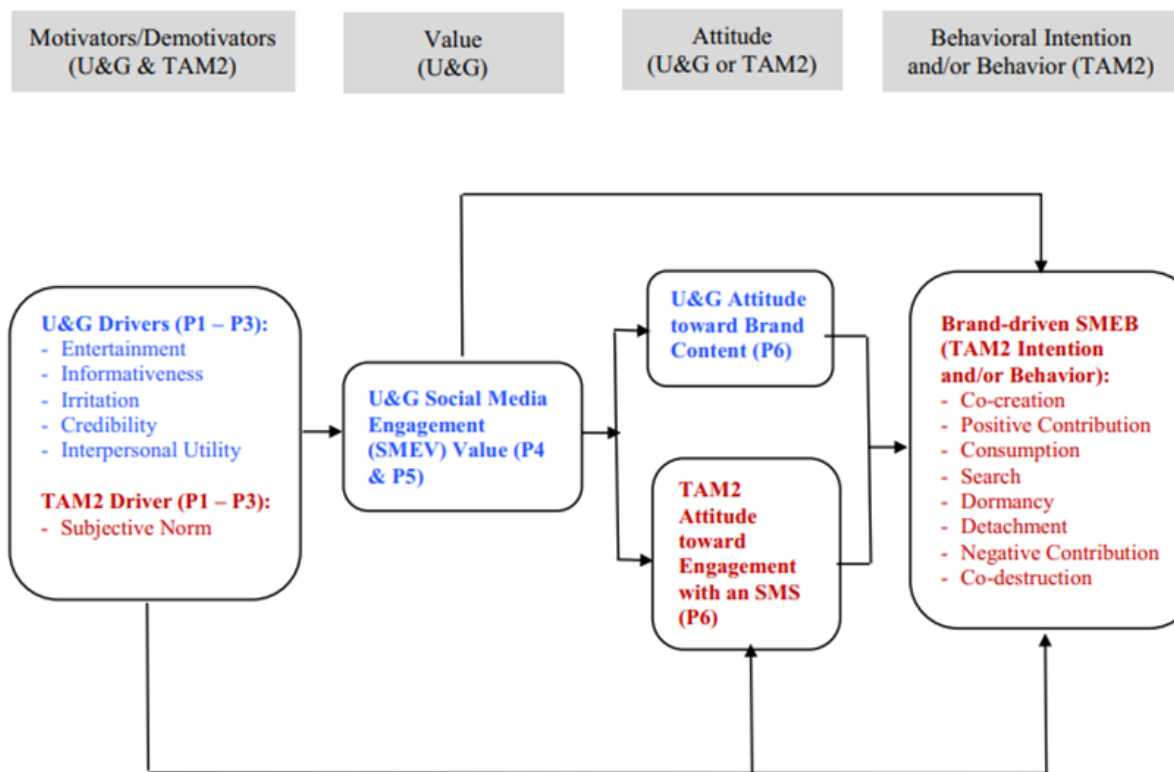


Figure 1: U&G-TAM Model

Florenthal et al. (2020) analyzed U&G theory to explain the intrinsic psychological and cognitive needs of entertainment, and information seeking. The U&G model has motivators as entertainment and informativeness, and demotivators as irritation to explain attitude toward online advertisement (Florenthal et al., 2020). The use of communication media is a goal-driven intentional and motivational act for self-brand Instagram users. The U&G-TAM will serve as a lens that will underpin the study; finding out from participants how motivated, demotivated, value, attitude, and behavioral intention influence their business to create awareness using self-brand Instagram.

2.2.1 Motivators and Demotivators of Self-Brand Instagram Users

Hussein and Hassan (2017) anticipated that sustained use of social media and a favorable attitude toward it would lead to increased customer engagement. They put forth a model based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and discovered that social connectivity and perceived enjoyment, in addition to commonly used TAM variables, had an impact on attitudes toward social media. Florenthal (2019) identified the motivators as entertainment, informativeness, credibility, and interpersonal utility, and the demotivators include irritation. Self-brand Instagram users employ the act of entertainment around their Instagram pages when projecting business awareness in the form of entertainment, which could generate

traction for the users or content creators. Guha et al. (2021) analyzed Instagram as a social media platform which is an internet-oriented community of software dependent on the technology of the web that facilitates the production and sharing of content created by the user. The self-brand Instagram user is motivated by the act of using Instagram to create entertainment, information, and for personal utility, but demotivated by the irritations that come with it. Irritation is activities such as critique comments, and the ability of others to use false language on Instagram users. The motivators are more of the strategies that self-brand Instagram users adopt to use Instagram to create business awareness.

2.2.2 Value Creation of Self-Brand Instagram Users

Value creation is the business practice judged by the customers or other stakeholders of the company to evaluate if the company is fulfilling the reason for its existence. Molina-Prados et al. (2021) evaluated the use of Instagram for self-brand users as a means of value creation in gaining recommendations, achieving a good digital reputation, and obtaining the maximum possible number of positive reviews. In terms of value creation, Instagram has provided new channels for communication between firms and customers by bringing the two parties an innovative approach to business practices. Molina-Prados et al. (2021) justified the need to take advantage of the Instagram shopping features to adapt the sales channels for the brand in question to enable the public to make purchase decisions online. In the fashion industry, for instance, a greater volume of shoppers has taken a greater interest in all things fashion related, with purchasing behaviour influenced by fashion trends as displayed on Instagram (Watkins, 2022). The activities on Instagram have also created jobs from 46-58% from 2017-2018 (Watkins, 2022). Brando et al. (2019) identified the value created through Instagram to include high status, exclusive and quality display of images and products. A new dimension of luxury has been described as all products and services that have a higher level of quality than other products in the same category without being more expensive or out of reach to a consumer. Value creation is identified by Brando et al. as a strategy that self-brand Instagram users adopt to create business awareness. The gap in the literature exists in that the participants may share a different light on what strategy they have used to create business awareness on Instagram.

2.2.3 Attitude of Self-Brand Instagram Users

The attitude of self-brand Instagram users influences the behaviour of business awareness created through Instagram. Tseng and Wang (2023) appraised the activities of influencers in product attitude. Influencer product affiliation can enhance product purchase behaviour and reduce the cost of advertisement through affective motive inference (Tseng & Wang, 2023). A brand effort on communication with the target market can determine how consumers behave towards the brand. Brand communication promotes brand authenticity which helps in brand attitudes and loyalty. Brand attitude can be described as the judgment of the quality of the brand's work as perceived by the consumer (Tseng & Wang, 2023).

2.2.4 Behavioural Intention of Self-Brand Instagram Users

The behavioural intention of self-brand Instagram users could be described as the character, habits, and intentions that emanated from behaviours of the users. These behaviours could be beneficial and same time detrimental to the success or failure of the Instagram user. In this study, it is assumed that such behavioural intentions are positive. The rise of digital media has given people new opportunities to express themselves, including through communication, shopping, dating, education, and gaming (Leckie et al., 2021). People show themselves more confidently to others in the virtual world because of the abundance of self-expression options available online, which influences their own self-image through their digital productions and activities. The participants would be asked to describe themselves in the first round of interviews, which will be followed by questions about the companies they follow on Instagram and why they like them. Later, the inquiries will become more in-depth inquiries regarding their online and offline purchasing habits (Leckie et al., 2021).

2.3 Social Media Marketing

Kaur and Kumar (2021) described social media as an extensive term that includes several platforms that encourage information sharing from one person to another. Such platforms include Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. Although the focus of this study is on self-brand users of Instagram, the term social media is used as a compound word to identify the behavior of Instagram. The primary purpose of social media is to create communication in the marketing world (Kaur & Kumar, 2021). Social media users could embrace business promotion, becoming influential, and eliciting purchase decisions using influential marketing strategies (Kaur & Kumar, 2021). The social media world has been significantly

impacted by internet technologies which have shifted the marketing practice from offline to online. Social media platforms have the potential to influence customers buying behaviour, reshape the self-brand, give options to customers to share their positive and negative experiences through comment, rating, and review sections (Kaur & Kumar, 2021).

Serbetcioglu and Gocer (2019) evaluated how the emergence of social networking sites such as Instagram has transformed the business world in communication and digital marketing. Social media activities have become a new business world where the organization operates online for business purposes (Serbetcioglu & Gocer, 2019). Before social media started to gain relevance, businesses operate only on a physical basis where clients are recruited and served through physical presence. The social media presence has helped expand the framework of service delivery to become possible across borders, at different time zones, and through an online real-time enabler of social media (Serbetciogly & Gocer, 2019).

2.4 Instagram Business Strategies for Business Sustainability

Singh et al. (2022) investigated the most suitable time to post and review on Instagram to maximize interactions and followership. As a result of the ease of access on Instagram, about 4.7 billion users are active on social media (Singh et al., 2022). Other mediums of communication and advertisement such as television and newspaper houses have experienced a decline in patronage because of the increase in activities on social media (Singh et al., 2022). Social media accounts such as Instagram technology programmers have explored strategies to increase outreach and followership on Instagram. In developing and creating attention for users on Instagram, such factors as age, and the appeal of messages to the intended audience must be of priority. In carrying out activities on post engagement, product advertisement, brand promotion, and consumer satisfaction, issues of appeal, location of users, and availability of internet access must be a major consideration.

Fissi et al. (2022) identified brand communication on social media as a sustainable strategy used by two and three-starred restaurant businesses. In the period of lockdown, for instance, many restaurants close down business due to the inability of customers to visit a physical eatery place. Also, the inability of motorbikes to deliver food to private homes was hampered at some point during the lockdown. However, what sustained most restaurant businesses was the active engagement through Instagram with their customers through followership on menu preparation and the cooking style of their favorite kitchen. The

ability to maintain such interaction enabled a smooth transition after the lockdown and maintained patronage after the lockdown.

The business of tourism involves the engagement with several stakeholders which a dynamic communication platform such Instagram account can provide gives rise to the study (del Vecchio et al., 2021). Family and businesses provide the need for annual meetings, social gatherings, and a bonding atmosphere in their annual budget and strategy at the beginning of every year. Such companies may not have the resources and time to visit all tourist centers before the actual event, however, the engagement through Instagram, and followership may give rise to an in-depth understanding of the tourist centers because of consistency in their posting, their appeal environment, price competitiveness, and ease of reach.

2.5 Brand Awareness Strategies through social media

Self-brand owners use Instagram to promote their products to attract patronage through followership (Kalra et al., 2023). Large businesses often provide adequate budgets for brand awareness annually to compete adequately in the market space. The self-brand is disadvantaged at the early stage of their businesses which could result in brand collapse and business discontinuity. Unemployment, poverty, and other social vices have been the result of such failed attempts to start and manage a business (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022). The large business use strategies such as building a recognizable brand, using story to tell their brand story, creating values beyond their brand, creating content that could be easily shared among friends and family, and running some social media context where gifts items could be should promote education or fight poverty so as to gain public recognition. While some of these strategies have worked in the past, they are also cost driven which self-brand owners may find difficult to execute effectively. Despite the fact that business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customers (B2C) have used strategies to create awareness for their branch, there remains a gap in knowledge for the strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for at least five years and achieve profitability.(Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022; Kalra et al., 2023).

2.6 Growing Self-Brand Businesses through Instagram

Growing businesses depend on several factors such as regulatory, political, environmental, and economic reasons and expansion. In growing businesses in the conventional business world, more employees would have to be employed and trained to operate the daily vision and mission of the organization. This idea of

business growth may have some unique perspectives when dealing with Instagram's medium for business growth. Grenman et al. (2019) mentioned that while businesses ensure the right people are employed in a brick-and-mortar business, in the case of using Instagram to promote business, followership, engagement, and patronage are more the focus than relying on employees. Although employment is handled at the backend of every business, Instagram serves as the front end where business promotion and customer acquisition take place. Businesses also establish different revenue sources as well as risk reduction. All these are common in all businesses in spite of the medium of reaching out to prospective clients. In the case of using the Instagram account, frequency of broadcasting and sharing messages among several audiences are strategies more effective to appeal to the target audience (Tayaa & Bouzaabia, 2022). In terms of risk reduction, ensuring message consistency and ensuring the activities of hackers are reduced is paramount. Competitors may use the messages created from the original messages and modify such messages to imply a misleading message could be a significant risk. Therefore, ensuring message integrity and consistency is a strategy major businesses have used over the years. Tayaa et al. (2022) found out that using influencers-momprenuers as strategies to create success in followership and business growth for Instagram account holders.

2.7 Strategies for Instagram Marketing

Virtanen et al. (2017) identified follow for following a marketing strategy as a unique feature of an Instagram account. The follow-for-follow practice enables intended buyers to indicate their interest in a product, video, or content through followership. The Instagram account handler could then be patronaged by a client after several times of followership. Co-creation marketing is a strategy that marketers have used over time where two or more brands come together to create a common presence for their products or services. The music industry, actors, and skit writers use this strategy often to reach a wider range of audiences (Tafesse & Wood, 2022). Promotion mixes such as advertisement, sales, relating with the public, or direct contact with potential customers have also proven to be adequate strategies among business owners. Advertisements can be from an individual or collection of companies to reach out to different or same audiences, sales could be framed to appeal to audiences, such as age, gender, tribe, or educational attainment (Tafesse & Wood, 2022). Other strategies used are business-to-business context, joint project sponsors, content community, and fundraising for social responsibility goals. Despite all these strategies mentioned in the reviewed articles, none seems to be directed as the

strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for at least five years and achieve profitability. Tafesse and Wood (2022) identified 12 winning Instagram marketing strategies:

Winning Instagram Marketing Strategies	Applications:
Set SMART social media goals	The social media goals must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. For instance, setting a goal to have one million followers in a space of one year could be measurable and same time realistic if the actions are in place to achieve the set goal.
Optimize your profile	The profile is a quick summary of who the self-brand Instagram user is. The profile should have all the details that a customer can use to contact the user without any ambiguity to contacts.
Optimize your graphic usage	The graphics used should be attractive and meaningful. The graphics should have unspoken words that contain details that could not be expressed using content.
Champion user-generated content	The contents must be of high quality and free from error and typographical errors. The content should speak volumes to make customers get attracted.

Develop a brand aesthetic	The brand should be stylish and unique to attract followers and easy to identify. Colours that are appealing should be used and not controversial colours.
Have a distinctive brand voice	The brand voice here could be referred to as a slogan or the unspoken word behind the brand. The brand voice should be distinctive.
Create useful story highlights	The stories behind the message should be memorable and deep to call for re-purchase or attractive to clients to want to read more. The story should be inspiring and educative, and also instructive.
Stay up to date on hashtags	Hashtags that relate to the content should be exhausted when using such hashtags. The hashtags should also align with positivity.
Reply to comments and DMs	Adequate time should be created for feedback to comments and DMs to create an impression that the responses are coming to a living being and not a machine.

Try Instagram live video	Instagram live video is another means to attract new and existing followers for an event. This is especially useful when new products are launched. Customers' experience could be enhanced through live videos to educate users on the new products or services.
Partner with social media influencers	The use of social media influencers can be effective with an influencer with large followers. The influencer may have the potential to bring traffic to Instagram, where a large percentage could take interest in your product after some of the strategies described here have been adopted.
Run promo contests and giveaways	Using promo and giveaways could be a brilliant strategy to gain followers on Instagram. The promo or giveaway could entice lots of followers to want to win that giveaway, and as such, have the opportunity to view the page.

2.8 Significance of Hashtags on Instagram

Schops et al. (2022) mentioned that hashtags are special features on Instagram that are built on algorithms that connect individuals and clusters to the meaning and content of the hashtag. Self-brand users of Instagram use hashtags to make their message gain spread among different audiences. It is also advisable to use three to five hashtags in content to expand the probability of reaching different audiences. Hashtag is not restricted to Instagram users, though it appears to be popularly used on

Instagram. Several hashtags that have been used are #Everyblacklivematters, and the #Endsars protest that took place in Nigeria in 2020. While hashtag with protest seems to be more popular in the past, there is no research on how a hashtag can be used as strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for at least five years and achieve profitability.

2.9 Challenges to Instagram Marketing

Davcik et al. (2021) inferred that common challenges such as not gaining sponsorship could affect Instagram users whose motive is to reach a wide range of audiences. Other challenges that are associated with Instagram users are the inability to properly know the best time to post content or information to Instagram accounts. Also, the inability to exhaust hashtags could pose a challenge, the inability to create a successful influencer strategy around communication and reaching the target market, and the inability to use appropriate content for the target audience could create a huge challenge for Instagram users. The challenges confronting Instagram users could also be around data availability, location, political instability, terrorism, and kidnapping threats. A user of Instagram could become popular and become a target for kidnapping in a volatile environment such as the Nigerian environment where Boko-Haram kidnaps and terrorizes citizens, making citizens leave in fear. Other challenges include acceptability and age bracket. Many baby boomers who have accepted Facebook and means of social media communication find Instagram more complicated especially uploading a setting size of video and pictures into the account as compared to Facebook. Politically exposed individuals may find using Instagram risky to post personal information.

2.10 Benefits of Instagram Marketing

Schorn et al. (2022) appraised the benefits of Instagram marketing to include advertisement, brand showcasing across a wide range of audiences, use of influencer marketing, and building of followership. The ever-increasing opportunities for using Instagram accounts cannot be described in a single word. Instagram has become a world of its own where several users meet on political, economic, social, and legal issues to create and access resources at different times. Instagram is not limited to culture or race or country. With the benefits such as free accessibility, one can access the world with a product or service and can be reached in return. Employment, contracts, marriages, and many other human benefits have been accessed through Instagram accounts. Instagram is also not limited to a particular language or

educational boundaries. Minimum language proficiency is needed to operate the business and creation of awareness through Instagram.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework will be visual imagery processing and customer-based brand equity. Brand awareness is a buyer's ability to recognize or recall that a specific brand name is a member of a certain product category. Brand awareness precedes building brand equity (Fin & Ryu, 2020) and increases the probability of inclusion of the brand in consumers' consideration set (Fin & Ryu, 2020). Consumer brand awareness captures the "top-of-mind" accessibility of the brand in memory and the potential retrievability of the brand in memory, which ultimately increases customer-based brand equity (Fin & Ryu, 2020). Brand awareness consists of two dimensions, namely, recognition and recall (Fin & Ryu, 2020). The theoretical framework will serve as a guide in identifying articles that would be analyzed and evaluated to achieve study findings which would be used to make a recommendation for practice, and for future research. Khan and Ahmad (2021) identified the post strategy for optimizing the use of Instagram for self-brand users. The posting strategy includes content strategies, media strategies, and schedule strategies (figure 2). Using the content strategies, the users would have to pay attention to the content type, hashtags, mentions, content-language, and content length to maximize the likelihood of attracting large followers. Media strategies described in previous studies suggested that the level of vividness and interactivity can affect online engagement significantly, but the results of these studies vary in terms of the nature of the relationship from the positive or negative application (Khan & Ahmad, 2021).

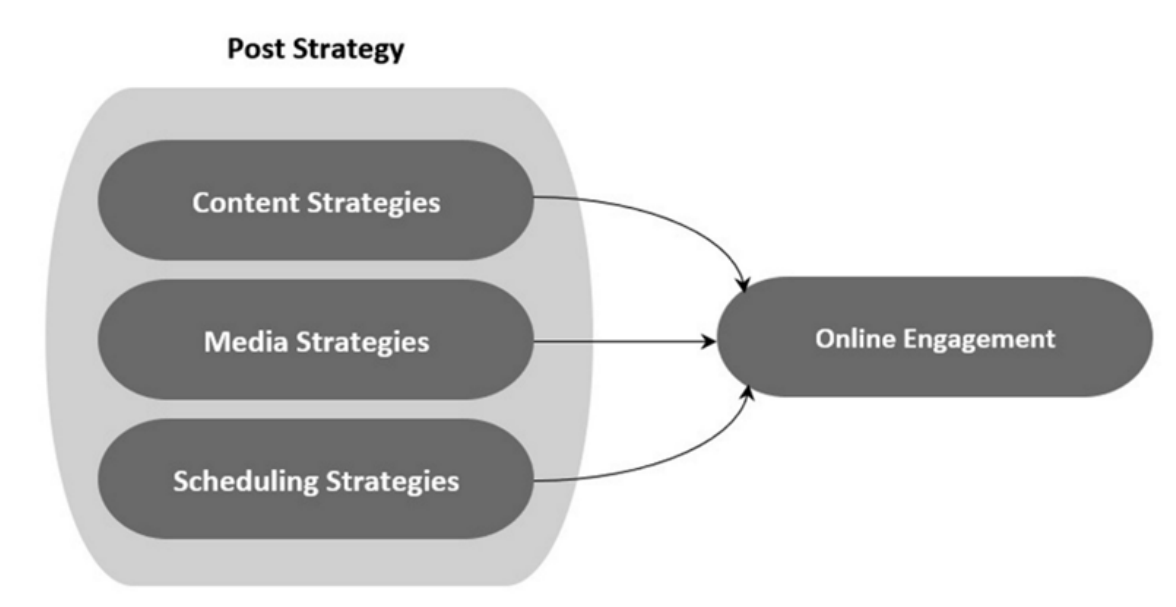


Figure 2 Post Strategy for Self-Brand Instagram Users.

Khan and Ahmad (2021) inferred that text and images are considered more vivid than links and videos, but that links and videos are considered to be more interactive than text and images. Previous literature on scheduling strategies suggested that scheduling on social media is categorized as an hour of the day and a day of the week. It is important to know the hour of the day and the day of the week to publish content that could reach greater fans and get higher engagement. Despite the analysis from the previous content, there exists a gap in the strategies self-brand Instagram users adopt in creating business awareness in Nigeria.

2.12 Conclusion

Several peer articles have been analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated on the challenges and benefits of using Instagram as a means of creating awareness for business owners. However, none of the articles contains strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for at least five years and achieve profitability. This has created a gap in the literature which is the focus of this study. Some of the topics discussed include social media marketing, Instagram business strategies for sustainability, brand awareness strategies, and the benefits of Instagram. Chapter three will include the methodology employed in data collection and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3. Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

A significant objective of this study is to explore the strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for 5 years and be profitable. The study would involve participants who have used Instagram to promote their self-brand to create business awareness. The interview questions (Appendix A) would be adopted for the data collection. Hence interpretivism philosophy is used as the primary influence in this study. Positivism is typically deductive, highly structured, and high sample measurement and quantitative in nature, hence would not be suitable for the study (Muhaise et al., 2020). Critical realism is reproductive, in-depth, and historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agencies, hence this is not suitable for this study (Muhaise et al., 2020). Postmodernism is deconstructive, reading text and realities against themselves, in-depth investigation of anomalies, hence not suitable for the study. Pragmatism uses mixed methods of both qualitative and quantitative, hence not suitable for the study as this study does not involve quantitative methodology. Interpretivism is an inductive and small sample, in-depth investigation, qualitative methods of analysis, and based on a case study, hence it is suitable for this study (Muhaise et al., 2020).

Paradigm	Research Methods
Positivism	Typically deductive, highly structured, large samples, measurement, typically, quantitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be analysed (Survey, experiment, quasi-experiment)
Interpretivism	Typically, inductive. Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted (Case studies, interviews, ethnography)
Critical realism	Retroductive, in-depth historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agency. Range of methods and data types to fit the subject matter.

Postmodernism	Typically, deconstructive –reading texts and realities against themselves In-depth investigations of anomalies, silences, and absences. Range of data types, typically qualitative methods of analysis.
Pragmatism	Following research problem and research question Range of methods: mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, action research Emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes

3.2 Research Strategy

The gap in literature can be traced back to the lack of studies to support the strategies used by self-brand Instagram users in creating awareness in their businesses in Nigeria. Despite the numerous studies on Instagram and self-brand Instagram users in the research reviewed in the previous chapter, none seems to narrow such strategies to how it applies in the Nigerian context. Therefore, an interpretive method is selected to narrow down the interviews into a robust structure of the actionable strategies that Instagram self-brand users have adopted in Nigeria in the past. The research strategy is a qualitative approach; where participants are identified to respond to the interview questions (Appendix A). The interview process will involve a virtual Zoom meeting with the five participants and each interview will be recorded for transcription. The ability to conduct a semi-structured interview will provide a deep understanding of the strategies used by the participants. The interview will be transcribed using codes and categorization to generate common themes. The themes would be further analyzed and synthesized to provide answers to the research question.

Qualitative research, a form of social action, centers on understanding how individuals perceive and navigate their experiences within society, aiming to comprehend the way people live. This approach involves utilizing open-ended questions, interviews, diaries, notebooks, classroom observations, and immersions to gather and interpret information from visual, written, and oral sources, as well as oral history (Mojajan, 2018). Its exploratory nature seeks to illuminate the "how" and "why" behind specific social phenomena or programs within certain contexts. By delving into individuals' beliefs, experiences, and meaning systems, qualitative researchers strive to gain insight into the social environment and the

underlying reasons behind observed behaviors. Unlike other methods, qualitative research does not employ statistical analysis or empirical computation. (Mojajan, 2018)

3.3 Collection of Primary Data

3.3.1 Sources

The study will include a primary data collection paradigm of a qualitative approach. The researcher will adopt a Zoom interview where each participant would be interviewed through a Zoom call. The participants will be Instagram users who are identified as self-brand users and who have remained in business for a period of more than one year with a followership of half a million and above. The inclusion criteria are (a) An Instagram self-brand user, (b) more than one year as an Instagram user, (c) a followership of half a million and above, and (d) A citizen of Nigeria living in Nigeria or outside Nigeria. The following interview questions will be used to ensure that saturation is achieved. Saunders et al. (2018) described saturation as the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data.

Interview Questions	Literature Review
What are the strategies you have employed as self-brand Instagram users to create business awareness?	Ilyas et al. (2020) identified cultural, social, personal, and psychological influences that determine brand selection. A brand is anything that can be used to distinguish one seller from another seller and to identify a product, product, or service. It could be a name, condition, design, or symbol (Ilyas et al., 2020).

<p>How has Instagram been useful as a tool for marketing for your self-brand, in selling your brand?</p>	<p>Huey and Yazdanifard (2014) described Instagram as a social media platform that is popular all over the world and has been utilized as a marketing tool by numerous multinational corporations. It is a crucial marketing tool that enables effective corporate communication. Marketers may communicate with their customers on Instagram by posting photographs and videos, leaving comments as a method to share information, and earning likes as a way to get customer feedback. This essay will examine how Instagram may be utilized as a tool for social network marketing (Huey & Yazdanifard, 2014).</p>
<p>What are some of the challenges that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users?</p>	<p>Agung et al. (2019) reflected that a lack of knowledge of the systematics of the algorithm behind Instagram is a major challenge for users.</p>
<p>What are some of the benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users?</p>	<p>Hanan and Putit (2013) identified some benefits of Instagram marketing as (a) an increase of contacts, (b) Easy to target your audience, and (c) an understanding of the interest of the demographics.</p>

<p>What are other strategies that you have experienced in using Instagram in promoting your self-brand that we have not already talked about?</p>	<p>Wally and Koshy (2014) described Instagram as a platform made specifically for visual content; its capacity to upload photographs on social media sites with ease has contributed to its phenomenal growth. Smartphone users spent more time on Instagram than Twitter in 2012 (Wally & Koshy, 2014).</p>
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3.3.2 Access and Ethical Issues

Participants are the subjects of the data being gathered and analyzed. Each social media user may have taken part in social media data collection and research (Chen et al., 2021). Social media platforms offer many opportunities for researchers to obtain data sets since they are rich sources of naturally occurring data on a variety of topics, including consumer habits, political opinions, and preferences (Chen et al., 2021). Research ethics should be based on the sensitivities of those being studied and everyday practice rather than bureaucratic or legal considerations in order to balance risk and interests in upholding the rights of individual participants (Chen et al., 2021). The ethical issues for this study would surround the recruitment of the participants, obtaining consent prior to data collection, the safety of the participants, issues of incentives, benefits of the study to the participants, the risk associated with taking part in the interview, confidentiality and anonymity, and access to patient data.

Several Instagram users would be approached with the intention to include them in the data collection process. To narrow down the participants, the inclusion criteria that would be adopted are (a) An Instagram self-brand user, (b) more than one year as an Instagram user, (c) a followership of half a million and above, and (d) A citizen of Nigeria living in Nigeria or outside Nigeria. The consent of the selected participants would be obtained through written consent that each participant would either consent or decline their consent. Each participant would return the consent form with the word "I consented" as signed before an interview will be carried out for the participant. The safety of the participant would be guaranteed by explaining to them their right to withdraw from the interview at any particular time, without prior notice, if they feel uncomfortable continuing with the interview process. The participants

would be informed that no incentives would be paid for participation, however, a copy of the final study would be made available to all the participants as appreciation for their time. The benefit of the study is the fact that the participants would be contributing their knowledge to close a gap in previous studies, while the risk is not noticed in this instance. Though the participants bear the risk of being vulnerable with their data or information, it will be clearly stated that all information as collected will be strictly for research purposes and that the names and identities of the researchers will not be disclosed to a third party. Pseudonyms such as PP1-PP5 (participants 1-5) will be used to represent participants. Only the researcher will have access to the data collected and this will be kept in a safe passworded file without any compromise of data.

The consistency of methods, techniques, and approaches used throughout a study is a requirement for qualitative research reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The goal is to ensure that, if a later researcher conducts the same study using the same methods as those previously disclosed by an earlier researcher, the results and conclusions will be the same. The ability to follow the data-collecting process from beginning to end exhibits incredible transparency and by extension dependability.

3.4 Approach to Data Analysis

Data collection, organizing the data into codes, developing themes, synthesizing, and generating conclusions are the four processes of data analysis in qualitative research (Yin, 2018). The replies from the participants will be arranged according to codes and themes based on how frequently certain words and phrases are used. Finding the meaning of the responses and the solution to the research question is the aim of the preparation, organization, analysis, and reporting of results in qualitative data (Lawrence & Tar, 2013).

Data analysis is the process of making sense of data by categorizing the data into themes based on coding, abridging the codes, and comprehending and representing the data by means of narratives and visuals (Yin, 2018). Data analysis involves connecting the findings to the literature with the purpose to validate the results (Yin, 2018). Using the five steps of Yin, I will (a) compile all data as collected, (b) data disassembly, (c) data reassembly, (d) data interpretation, and (e) data reporting and conclusion. Therefore, after collecting data using the Zoom link for a semi-structured interview, I will transcribe the interview into text and beginning the coding process to categorize common themes. The themes would be analyzed to provide meaning that may address the research question.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aims to explore the strategies employed by self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to sustain their businesses for at least five years and achieve profitability. The study adopts an interpretivism research philosophy due to its inductive, small sample, and qualitative nature, which aligns with the objectives of the research. Positivism, critical realism, postmodernism, and pragmatism were considered unsuitable for this study due to their focus on different methods and data types. The research strategy involves a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews conducted via virtual Zoom meetings with selected Instagram users who meet specific inclusion criteria. The data collected from these interviews will be transcribed and analyzed using coding and categorization to identify common themes. Through this process, the study seeks to uncover the strategies that successful self-brand Instagram users in Nigeria have employed to create business awareness. Ethical considerations have been taken into account throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and addressing any potential risks to the participants.

In summary, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on Instagram marketing and self-branding in the Nigerian context by exploring the specific strategies that have proven successful in sustaining businesses over time. The findings from this research can be valuable for self-brand Instagram users, marketers, and researchers seeking to understand and optimize social media marketing strategies in the Nigerian business landscape.

CHAPTER 4. Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter will contain the presentation, discussion, and conclusion of findings from the data analysis, and it will consist of four sections.

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis study is to explore and identify the strategies self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria used to remain profitable in business. The purpose for selecting self-brand users of Instagram is because of their exposure to challenges that affect their business sustainability. However, the main objective is to identify relevant ways in which Instagram is used as a marketing tool for self-brand Instagram users to sell their own brands successfully with the aid of adopting and creating awareness for company expansion in Nigeria.

For this purpose, to meet the research objectives and questions, the data analysis undertakes the thematic analysis to underline the relevant themes being used. A thematic approach was used to analyze the data collected from five participants. In its most basic form, thematic analysis is a method of research that creates concepts, meaning, and knowledge using coding techniques related to the data (Ozuem et al., 2020). Thematic analysis is a versatile method that identifies, investigates, and relates themes (Ozuem et al., 2020). However, complaints about the strategy include its shallow exploration of a tendency towards unsupported subjective prejudice about the subjects being studied detailed descriptions and in-depth interpretations are missing or not realized (Ozuem et al., 2020). The overarching research question is: What are the strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for 5 years and be profitable?

Demography of Respondents

These self-brand business users of Instagram were selected based on the fact that they have been running their business successfully for the past 5 years. Selecting self-brand business owners on Instagram who have at least 5 years of experience as respondents for the interview is very important as an essential step in qualitative research. Participants were also chosen based on helping to provide valuable insights and information related to the research objectives.

According to Harris and Sareeqa(2019), “The sample sizes should be at least five to twenty-five”. However, the specific sample size can vary depending on the research objectives, the complexity of the research

topic, and the depth of insights needed. Considering this, the sample size for my participants was five. Therefore, a total number of all five participants were interviewed. These five participants with their code names (PP1-PP5) are all self-brand individual business owners on Instagram and are all currently running their businesses in Nigeria. As well as specifically giving the age of the self-brand business owner, nationality of the self-brand business owner, gender of the self-brand business owner, and number of years in business. This is shown below in Table 4.1.

4.1 Profile of Self-brand business owners who Participated in the study.

No.	Code Name	Business Name	Age of Self-brand business owner	Nationality of Self-brand business owner	Gender of Self-brand business owner	Number of years in Business
1	PP1	Infinite Sports	29	Nigerian	Male	6
2	PP2	G.l.o.w.t.i.t.u.d.e	27	Nigerian	Female	5
3	PP3	CMT (Cut and Make Trends) Creations	30	Nigerian	Female	7
4	PP4	Max Entertainment	29	Nigerian	Male	6
5	PP5	Happy Kitchen	32	Nigerian	Female	5

Additionally, while carrying out the interview process, the questions formulated for the respondents were based on the research questions which helped in defining and collecting the relevant data from the respondents.

Interview questions:

1. What are the strategies you have employed as a self-brand Instagram user to create business awareness?
2. How has Instagram been useful as a tool for marketing your self-brand, in selling your brand?
3. What are some of the challenges that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users?
4. What are some of the benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users?
5. What are other strategies that you have experienced in using Instagram in promoting your self-brand that we have not already talked about?

However, before the interview questions were answered. Each of the five participants gave a brief introduction of themselves, their role in the business, and a brief background of the business. The participants were allowed to choose the venue in which they want to be interviewed. All participants chose to do the interview via a Zoom call. The interview for each participant took approximately 25-30 minutes. The participants were also given maximum assurance that the information collected from them, would not be disclosed as well as their identities.

Overall, it's essential to balance the selection criteria and not exclude other valuable perspectives. Different business owners at various stages of their journey can offer unique insights, and inclusivity in respondent selection which can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the broader entrepreneurial landscape. Therefore, the following sections describe, interpret, and discuss the findings from the participant's interviews. As it is an important process of examining and understanding the data gathered from the interviews.

Section 4.2 presents the main findings gathered during the interview process. This section will be divided into subsections that are very essential for conveying the main themes, codes, and relevant questions that align with the research objectives and questions. However, each of the subsections will consist of the main findings using quotations that are obtained from every participant's interviews. Section 4.3 will further explain the discussion of the findings from the results obtained from the main findings that are

analyzed, interpreted, and have a relation to the research objectives. This section will also further provide an in-depth explanation of the results and draw meaningful conclusions from them.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Participant Interview

In a qualitative research strategy, the main focus during the collection of data and the analysis is on words rather than quantification (Verma, 2017). Since the purpose of this paper is to understand and identify the strategies that self-brand business owners on Instagram use to create awareness for their businesses, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate for the participant interview.

In the interviews, the selected participants gave an insight into their own experiences, backgrounds, shared views, and opinions and this gave rise to the major selected themes. However, based on the answers received from the participants by following the thematic analysis, six themes emerged from the interview administered to the five participants. The themes are (a) partnership with influencers, (b) customer incentives and rewards (c) developing a strong business profile, (d) engaging the target audience, and (e) creating engaging content for your products and services. The participants are represented by a pseudonym of PP1-PP5 which represent participant 1 to participant 5.

4.2.2 Partnering with Influencers

This study included five participants with the data collection opening with each of them discussing the beginning of their journey to becoming a self-brand business owner on Instagram. Some of these selected participants for the interview either major in different business categories like sports, makeup, fashion, food, etc. For instance, a study conducted by Gupta and Dogra (2018) titled "The Power of Influencer Marketing on Instagram: A Comparative Analysis of User Engagement" analyzed the engagement rates of Instagram posts from businesses that partnered with influencers compared to those that didn't. The study found that posts featuring influencers received significantly higher engagement in terms of likes, comments, and shares. This research emphasizes the value of influencer partnerships in boosting user engagement and brand exposure.

Through the interview in this context, participants described how well partnering with influencers on Instagram has primarily been a beneficial factor for their business. Influencer marketing maximized by

brands is done in a positive word-of-mouth look to influencers to generate positive experiences that can spread across social media platforms to the brands existing and potential consumers(Kavanagh, 2020).

However, in this section, the first question was asked to *identify the strategies these self-brand Instagram users have employed to create a business*. According to the respondents, they all had about three to four strategies that they use individually but the major one said by all of them is having to partner with influencers. For instance,

PP1 *“Partnering with so many influencers in Nigeria, people who are into entertainment, brand influencers, etc. So, we partner with them to market our brand on their pages. Those influencers are people that will have from the number of 500K followers to maybe 2 million or 5 million followers because they have a broader range of audience, we believe that our clients might be amongst their audience”* .

PP2 *“when trying to partner with influencers we don't just jump into different makeup influencers. we always stick to one in line with our category of choice. Like, for example, if it's a bridal makeup artist we stick to a bridal makeup artist. If you're an editorial makeup artist, we stick to an editorial makeup artist. You always put into consideration the influencer's content category before choosing the one we want to partner with”*.

PP3*“A page exists that brings together business owners and influencers, aiming to assist them in growing their pages. To participate, you, as a business owner, would need to follow other businesses and influencers on this page. In return, they would follow your business account. When they post content, they would notify you about the right time to engage with other people's posts so that they reciprocate and engage with yours. This approach has been beneficial for me in gaining more clients. The influencer's role in this setup is to influence the group of business owners positively”*.

PP4*“ I leverage influencers to promote my brand and encourage people to refer it to others. When they do refer to my brand, it's not just through word of mouth. Instead, they highlight my page and share it with someone directly. That person can simply visit my page to see what I offer, and if they like what they see, they reach out to me through my call line without even needing to talk to me beforehand.”*

PP5*“I have built my network in the last five years by 100% percent by using social media influencers at least once a year to create new awareness to my audience”*

Each participant's opinions indicate that partnering with influencers on Instagram is a highly effective strategy for attracting potential customers and generating significant traffic for businesses. By collaborating with various influencers, companies can tap into their extensive follower bases and leverage their influence to create engaging and authentic promotional content. The power of influencer marketing lies in its ability to reach a wide and targeted audience, build brand credibility, and foster meaningful connections with customers. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, businesses should consider incorporating influencer partnerships into their marketing strategies to stay competitive and achieve substantial growth in the dynamic world of social media marketing.

4.2.3 Customer Incentives and Rewards

Following that when asked what other strategies have been employed as a self-brand Instagram users have employed to create a business not mentioned earlier. All participants indicated their other strategies. Amongst them is offering incentives and rewards to their clients. A research paper by Johnson and Smith (2017) titled "The Role of Customer Incentives in Influencing Purchase Behavior on Instagram" examined the influence of different types of incentives on customer purchase decisions. The research found that offering exclusive discounts or limited-time promotions to Instagram followers positively affected their purchase behavior, leading to an increase in sales and conversions. The participant pointed out this strategy as an essential catalyst that helped in their business growth.

PP1 *"Offering free delivery to clients helps to build a kind of trust environment between us and the client, because sometimes there are a lot of scammers online, and a customer might not want to spend a huge amount to someone that he doesn't know. We brought about the strategy of giving them payment on delivery and free delivery. When a customer tries to argue about not trusting or maybe doesn't know if we can be able to offer them those services. We'd be like, do you know what sir? Don't pay us. Don't give us anything. Just send us your delivery address and the available number. And within a certain period of time, the delivery agents are going to deliver to you. I can tell you that 95% of customers we approach this way, actually gained our trust and bought those items from us and they keep on coming back".*

PP2 *"Imagine saying, "Okay, let's just take 50% off on all charges, 50% off studio workings, 50% off home service, 50% off bridal, and all." Such a generous discount is sure to catch people's attention and pique their interest. It's a strategy that not only attracts customers but also creates*

a buzz around your brand. As word spreads like wildfire, your business could be on the receiving end of an influx of customers, turning them into enthusiastic brand advocates. This approach tried and tested, has the potential to make your business known to millions and zillions of people”.

PP3 *“Every time a customer makes a purchase and tags our page in their post, they earn loyalty points. After accumulating a certain number of points, they can redeem them for discounts, free shipping, or exclusive merchandise. This strategy not only encourages customers to keep coming back but also helps spread the word about the brand through user-generated content”.*

Based on the provided information, it is evident that certain Instagram users establishing their businesses are implementing tactics such as providing free delivery promotions to customers as a way to advertise their products or services. Their objective is to captivate their audience, enhance exposure, and foster loyalty among customers by offering free deliveries.

4.2.4 Developing a Strong Instagram Profile

The participants contributed their personal insights into engaging with their followers by improving their business-oriented Instagram profiles. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that a robust Instagram profile plays a significant role in promoting businesses, enabling them to distinguish themselves and attract a broader audience to their profile.

PP1 *“In my approach, I create a specific posting pattern for our Instagram account. I establish a weekly timetable to determine when and how often we'll be posting. The pattern we follow involves sharing a picture, a write-up, and a video. To maintain consistency and engagement, I ensure that every day, we share three different types of content: a write-up explaining the product's uses and benefits, a post featuring a product we sell, and a video demonstrating how to use the product. This strategy effectively captures the attention of our audience and encourages them to learn more about the products. In the picture tab, we showcase the equipment and its features, while the video provides a step-by-step guide on utilizing the product. This approach has proven to be successful, as it drives a significant number of people to our page, resulting in increased engagement and ultimately leading to more sales”.*

PP3 *“Regarding my bio, I've been crafting a concise introduction for my brand. This brief yet impactful description plays a crucial role in representing my brand effectively. I understand the*

significance of including relevant links in the bio to ensure that all essential information remains intact.”

PP4 *“It all began when I worked as an intern for nearly a year, where I became curious about how my mentor managed to captivate and retain his followers on social media. I soon realized that the key was in making his social media page vibrant and captivating, drawing immediate attention. Upon visiting the page, you could learn everything you needed to know about him in just a few lines, which left a lasting impression on me. I thought to myself, “Yes, I can definitely do this too. From that moment on, my primary social media strategy has centered around maintaining an active presence on Instagram. I believe that Instagram has been an incredibly valuable platform for young entrepreneurs like me over the years, and it has played a significant role in my business growth.”*

PP5 *“The strategy I have used is to ensure that I have a strong business profile that contains all details that the customer requires to make a quick contact”.*

In conclusion, the participants in the study shared their valuable personal insights on enhancing their business-oriented Instagram profiles to engage with their followers effectively. The findings reinforce the widely accepted notion that a strong and well-crafted Instagram profile plays a crucial role in promoting businesses, allowing them to stand out and attract a wider audience to their platform. By leveraging these insights, businesses can optimize their Instagram presence and harness its potential for growth and success in today's competitive digital landscape.

4.2.5 Engaging the Target Audience

Engaging the target audience on Instagram has become a crucial aspect of business success in the digital age. As a highly visual platform, Instagram offers an unparalleled opportunity for businesses to connect with potential customers and build meaningful relationships. However, in the fast-paced and competitive landscape of social media marketing, simply posting content is not enough. To effectively engage their target audience, savvy business owners must employ strategic techniques that resonate with their followers and foster authentic interactions.

PP1 *“Reaching and engaging my audience is crucial to target the specific people I want. By leveraging the analytic tool and combining it with reach and audience engagement data, I can*

optimize the display time of my posts for maximum impact. These tools help me save costs because instead of running sponsorships all week or during a certain period, I can focus on specific peak hours when customers actively engage with my posts. This way, I can increase the chances of potential customers seeing my content and taking action, like hopping into my DMs to make a purchase”.

PP2 *“I cannot stress enough the importance of using Instagram effectively. It's a highly popular social platform, and almost everyone is on it. When I post something, it reaches a wide audience, especially when I use tags and hashtags strategically. Instagram's ability to attract and engage audiences has proven invaluable to me over the years, and I've reaped the benefits of utilizing it to the fullest. However, there was a time when my posts were receiving little to no attention despite using hashtags. It made me feel discouraged, thinking no one was seeing my content. In reality, people were seeing it, but I wasn't attracting the right audience. Everything changed when I identified my target audience. Once I began catering my content to them, my follower count started growing exponentially. Instagram's power to connect with the right people has made a significant impact on my success with the platform”.*

PP3 *“For me, audience engagement is incredibly beneficial because it allows me to see what people are saying about my craft and everything related to it. It's valuable to know the thoughts and feedback of my audience as it helps me understand their perspectives and preferences.”*

PP4 *“Having a substantial audience reach on Instagram has connected me with people I wouldn't have naturally come across. The platform enables them to access and view my content, which they might not have encountered otherwise. Moreover, it allows them not only to see but also to reach out and contact me directly. Ultimately, Instagram has proven to be an invaluable resource in generating business opportunities and closing deals.”*

Instagram's significance in engaging the target audience cannot be overstated in today's digital era. Its visual appeal and vast user base present an exceptional chance for businesses to establish valuable connections with potential customers. However, to truly stand out in the competitive world of social media marketing, simply posting content is insufficient. Successful business owners must take a strategic approach, tailoring their content to resonate with their followers and foster genuine interactions.

By recognizing the power of audience engagement on Instagram, businesses can unlock new levels of brand visibility, loyalty, and growth. Through thoughtful content creation, leveraging Instagram's features,

and understanding the preferences of their audience, businesses can cultivate lasting relationships that translate into increased sales and success. Embracing these techniques will undoubtedly set businesses apart, allowing them to thrive in the dynamic landscape of social media marketing on Instagram.

4.2.6 Using Hashtags and Geotags

In the dynamic realm of social media marketing, hashtags and geotags have emerged as potent assets that assist business owners in strengthening their online presence and establishing deeper connections with their target audience. Hashtags act as virtual signposts, enabling businesses to organize and extend the reach of their content to a broader audience. Conversely, geotags add a location-based context, empowering businesses to target local customers and foster more personalized interactions.

A study by Mohammad and Thaheem (2019) titled "The Effect of Hashtags on Engagement: An Exploratory Study of Top Instagram Posts" examined the relationship between hashtags and user engagement on Instagram. The study found that posts with more hashtags tend to have higher levels of engagement, indicating the importance of using relevant hashtags to improve post visibility and interaction. Mastering the effective use of hashtags and geotags can have a profound impact on a business's visibility, brand recognition, and customer engagement while using Instagram.

PP2 *"I consistently incorporate hashtags and tag various brands, locations, and people to draw attention to my work. This approach has proven to be an effective way for me to gain visibility and attract interest in what I do"*

PP3 *"You need to put up hashtags that they are using at that point in time. Not the old hashtag, but the current ones. You need to put it out for your post to be on Instagram's top list. If you are putting a hashtag that is not working, your post will just be behind. It won't reach the kind of clients you want. When you talk about hashtags, talk about the hashtag you need to use must be within your niche. When you use a generalized hashtag, your post does not reach your desired prospective clients. It won't get there. It would just be floating."*

PP4 *"Over the years, Instagram has proven to be incredibly beneficial for a young business owner like me. By using hashtags and geotags effectively, I have been able to attract the right customers to my business. The platform's features have been a tremendous asset in growing my brand and connecting with my target audience".*

PP5 *“Using hashtags and geotags has been an incredible way for me to connect with the right audience. It's truly amazing how these simple tools have made a significant impact on my ability to reach and engage with the right people for my business.”*

The strategic utilization of hashtags and geotags is essential for maximizing visibility, increasing brand recognition, and fostering strong customer engagement on Instagram. However, hashtags and geotags have revolutionized the landscape of social media marketing, offering powerful tools for business owners to enhance their online presence and forge meaningful connections with their target audience.

4.2.7 Creating Engaging Contents for Your Products and Services

Also, the participants emphasized the significance of creating content tailored to their target audience, recognizing it as a fundamental factor for achieving a strong audience reach. Creating engaging content for your products and services is a fundamental strategy that every business owner should prioritize in today's competitive digital landscape. With an ever-expanding array of online platforms and social media channels, captivating content has become the cornerstone of attracting and retaining customers. By leveraging compelling visuals, persuasive storytelling, and interactive elements, business owners can not only showcase their offerings but also establish meaningful connections with their target audience.

PP1 *“The growth of our followership on Instagram has provided our audience with a trustworthy background to consider buying from us or utilizing our services. Our journey began with just 50 followers, but we steadily expanded to approximately 500 followers. Reaching this milestone, we initiated our marketing efforts. With a dedicated media team responsible for content creation and publicity, we launched our marketing campaigns through Facebook ads since Facebook owns Instagram. To effectively engage our audience, we adopted a consistent posting strategy on Instagram. Each day, we ensure we have three tiles in each row, featuring a write-up, a product we sell, and a video showcasing how to use the product. These content pieces effectively engage our customers and foster interest in our offerings. However, maintaining this regular content schedule can sometimes be challenging, as we may run out of content ideas. When this happens, it pushes us to constantly be creative and think outside the box. We understand that creativity isn't limited to just one person in the team, so we have expanded our media team to include more contributors to ensure a steady flow of fresh and engaging content. Through this strategic approach to content creation and marketing, we have seen significant growth and success on Instagram, establishing a strong and loyal customer base, and driving our business forward”.*

PP2 *“Currently, the situation isn't as favorable as it was a couple of years ago. Nowadays, to succeed, I have to put in a lot of effort and stay consistently active. If I decide to pursue something like makeup artistry, I must continuously share my content. I can't just post occasionally and then relax for months. It's essential to keep pushing and promoting my brand consistently to get noticed and gain customers' trust in my products or services”.*

PP3 *“For me, including a catchy caption after content creation is crucial since it helps drive significant traffic to my page from my followers. A compelling caption enhances the overall appeal of my content and encourages more engagement and interest from my audience”.*

PP4 *“On my Instagram page, I make it a priority to consistently post content that relates to my work, ensuring that my audience remains aware of my brand and what I am known for. Social media's power lies in delivering excellence not only in my field of expertise but also in curating content to share with my followers. This involves evaluating the photos and videos I capture, adding them to my social media collection, and posting them to regain awareness and attention. By maintaining a strong presence on social media and showcasing my expertise both on and off the field, I can effectively engage my audience and keep them informed about my brand and offerings.”*

In the fast-paced and competitive digital world, crafting engaging content for products and services is no longer an option but a necessity for every business owner. As online platforms and social media channels continue to proliferate, captivating content has emerged as the key driver for attracting and retaining customers. By harnessing the power of compelling visuals, persuasive storytelling, and interactive elements, business owners can not only showcase their offerings but also forge authentic connections with their target audience. Prioritizing the creation of engaging content is an indispensable strategy to thrive and stand out amidst the ever-evolving landscape of modern marketing. It is the pathway to building a strong brand presence, fostering customer loyalty, and driving sustainable business growth. Embrace the potential of captivating content and unlock the opportunities it presents in the dynamic digital landscape.

4.3 Discussion

The themes are (a) partnership with influencers, (b) Customer incentives and rewards, (c) developing a strong business profile, (d) engaging the target audience, (e) using hashtags and geotags, and (f) creating engaging contents for your products and services.

4.3.1 Partnering with Influencers

Sinha and Srivastava (2023) evaluated the activities of social media influencers to have some benefits to business owners who may want to leverage the existing followers of the influencer in the target market. Influencer marketing is used to convey legitimate messages through people who already have high trust in their followership. Using influencers is an efficient strategy if the new business is looking for brand imaging and marketing that will create an impact and brand value for the business (Sinha & Srivastava, 2023). Influencers have become an essential element in the Instagram ecosystem and their services have expanded to include shopping, buying, delivery, training, and other features to help in making the market succeed (Lee et al., 2022; Sinha & Srivastava, 2023). Influencers use pre-existing business relationships and trust they have built over time with followers to connect with other businesses (Lee et al., 2022). Shrivastava and Jain (2022) described social media influencer (SMI) as a new form of independent third-party endorse who uses blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms to influence audience buying opinion. Influencers could perform various functions which could include sharing user-specific product evaluations, suggestions of users' products to the world, and sharing personal experiences on their social media platforms about the positive effects of the products of a user (Shrivastava & Jain, 2022).

4.3.2 Customer Incentives and Rewards

The process of rewards and incentives for clients is the practice of enticing new customers for patronage and old customers for retainer ship. Such promo is advertised or showcased on the Instagram page to attract the target audience. Mascaraque-Ramirez and Para-Gonzalez (2022) outlined six promotions mixes which are personal sales, advertising, sales promotion, sponsorship, public relations, and direct marketing. Sales promotion as a focus of reference is the act of stimulating demand for a product over a certain period (Mascaraque-Ramirez & Para-Gonzalez, 2022). To effectively carry out promotion, incentives could be offered to new and existing buyers and sellers, discounts and discount vouchers could

be released to customers, and samples could be distributed for free (Mascaraque-Ramirez & Para-Gonzalez, 2022). In the case of Instagram self-brand users, delivery for free is an effective way to elicit new customer patronage.

4.3.3 Developing a Strong Business Profile

A business profile introduces the business products and services, goals, vision, mission, values, and principles. The profile of a company is the first point of contact of the company to the external world. The profile speaks volumes that attract the customer or make the customers uninterested in the company at first sight into the profile. Diao et al. (2017) evaluated the pattern that companies use to profile their managing director, chief executive officer (CEO), and other top executive officers as a determinant of how the company is seen by the customers. Companies are advised to put forth their best front on their company's profile for marketing and investment decisions for prospective customers (Diao et al., 2017). As the CEO represents the organization within and outside the organization, the CEO must ensure that his or her duties are such that could be acceptable under private and public scrutiny (Diao et al., 2017).

4.3.4 Engaging the Target Audience

Target audiences are the clusters whose products or services appeal to their demand, taste, income, and desire. The target audience is the main beneficiary of a product or service that must be identified before the product or service is manufactured or produced. A market that failed to identify the target audience may not obtain the full benefit of the investment for the product or services. To identify the target audience, market research is required to be carried out internally or engage the service of an external consultant. The target audience could be defined by age, gender, inclusion credentials, geographical settings, educational backgrounds, or through snowballing (Devonshire et al., 2022). The said target audience once identified scientifically, could produce the optimal result envisaged for the audience.

4.3.5 Using Hashtags and Geotags

The hashtags and geotags are used to track both text and locations. The use of tags helps in expanding the visibility of the brand by context and by location of the business. Instagram users use tags to increase the possibility of being searched, discovered, or identified by the communities that associate with the text and locations. The ability to use the appropriate tags helps enhance the reachability and patronage of the

business. Hashtags enable individuals to join a virtual community on the social network that could be associated with a product, service, or event (Benevento, 2023).

4.3.6 Creating Engaging Contents for Your Products and Services

Content creation is one of the vital activities of an Instagram self-brand user as the content produces the image and mental picture on the customers to base their judgment of the company. The content is what describes the service or products; the product benefits and where it could be purchased. Once the content is distorted or with material error, it could be misleading for the company. Some organizations engage the services of content creators to remain relevant to the market. Several contents such as written content, visual content, interactive content, video content, audio content, blog post, stories, and case studies are some examples of the content available for users (Mehta & Kaye, 2019). The ability to consistently create appealing content for your target audience is the opportunity to remain relevant and profitable in the marketplace.

4.4 Conclusion

Chapter 4 contained the six findings of this study. The themes that emerged are (a) partnership with influencers, (b) giving clients free delivery promo, (c) developing a strong business profile, (d) engaging the target audience, (e) using hashtags and geotags, and (f) creating engaging contents for your products and services. The themes have been analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated with references to past peer-reviewed. The alignment with previous studies has been identified and the misalignment with past studies has also been identified. The study findings will be useful in making recommendations for further studies. Chapter 5 will contain concluding thoughts on the contribution of this research, its limitations, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 5. Conclusion, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

5.1 Implications of Findings for the Research Questions

This section marks the conclusion of the research study by summarizing the principal research findings concerning the research aims and questions. In this conclusion, we will provide a concise overview of the outcomes and their alignment with the original objectives and inquiries of the study. The findings from this research have several implications for self-brand business owners on Instagram. The identified themes and strategies shed light on effective methods for creating awareness and promoting businesses on the platform.

The research emphasizes the value of influencer marketing in reaching a wide and targeted audience. For self-brand business owners, collaborating with relevant influencers can lead to increased visibility, credibility, and customer trust. This strategy can be particularly beneficial for businesses looking to expand their reach and attract new customers. This research explores the perspectives of travel influencers on their experiences. The study used a phenomenological approach, conducting semi-structured online interviews with 12 influencers, along with reflective journals and document reviews. Thematic content analysis revealed three main themes defining influencers' experiences and perceptions. The findings highlight that being an influencer is a responsible and competent job, acting as a mediator between brands and consumers(Yılmaz et al., 2020).

Furthermore from the research conducted Offering incentives and rewards to customers can play a crucial role in influencing purchase behavior and fostering customer loyalty. Providing free delivery, exclusive discounts, loyalty points, or limited-time promotions can encourage customers to make purchases and share their experiences with others. This strategy not only attracts new customers but also creates a positive word-of-mouth effect, contributing to brand awareness and customer retention. A relevant research paper by Chen, Lee, and Wang (2018) titled "Customer Loyalty Programs on Social Media: The Impact of Rewards and Engagement on Instagram" explored the effects of loyalty programs and rewards on customer engagement and loyalty. The study revealed that Instagram users who participated in loyalty programs and received rewards were more likely to be loyal customers and exhibit higher levels of engagement with the brand. The findings of the research prove that by following a consistent posting schedule, sharing diverse content types, and creating a captivating bio, self-brand business owners can attract and retain their target audience. A strong profile not only showcases products and services but also builds trust and credibility among potential customers.

Also, a research paper by Chen, Yin, and Lee (2019) titled "Location-based Social Media Marketing: Analyzing the Effects of Geotagging on Customer Engagement" investigated the influence of geotagging on customer engagement. The study discovered that posts with geotags received significantly more likes, comments, and shares compared to posts without geotags. This suggests that incorporating geotags can boost user engagement and foster a sense of local community, making it an effective strategy for businesses targeting specific regions. Proper use of hashtags and geotags can significantly improve post visibility and attract the right audience. Hashtags help categorize content and increase the likelihood of discovery by users interested in specific topics. Geotags enable businesses to target local customers and create personalized connections. By leveraging these features strategically, self-brand business owners can enhance their online presence and widen their audience reach.

Overall, the implications of these findings suggest that self-brand business owners on Instagram need to focus on building authentic connections with their target audience. Utilizing influencer partnerships, customer incentives, a strong profile, audience engagement, hashtags, geotags, and engaging content can help businesses stand out in the competitive landscape of social media marketing. By implementing these strategies, self-brand business owners can create awareness, build a loyal customer base, and achieve sustainable growth on Instagram.

5.2 Contributions and Limitations of Research

5.2.1 Contributions of research

The research contributes to the understanding of the strategies that self-brand business owners on Instagram use to create awareness for their businesses. The study utilizes a qualitative research strategy, focusing on participant interviews to gather insights directly from the business owners themselves. The findings highlight six key themes that emerged from the interviews: (a) partnership with influencers, (b) customer incentives and rewards, (c) developing a strong business profile, (d) engaging the target audience, (e) using hashtags and geotags, and (f) creating engaging content for products and services.

The research provides valuable qualitative insights into the experiences, views, and strategies of self-brand business owners on Instagram. This in-depth understanding allows for a more nuanced exploration of their practices, motivations, and challenges. Qualitative insights refer to the rich and detailed information gathered through qualitative research methods, such as interviews, focus groups, or observations. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis,

qualitative research seeks to understand the deeper meanings, perceptions, and experiences of individuals or groups. In the context of the research provided, qualitative insights are obtained through participant interviews with self-brand business owners on Instagram. These insights are valuable because they offer a deeper understanding of the experiences, views, and strategies that these business owners employ to promote their brands on the platform.

The study aimed at pursuing the primary goals accomplished while gathering and analyzing data pertaining to self-branding business owners on the Instagram platform. First and foremost, it is crucial to emphasize the significance of summarizing the contributions made by these self-brand business owners to business strategies. The reason is that by summarizing these contributions, one can gain valuable insights into the impact and role of self-branding entrepreneurs in shaping and enhancing business strategies. The literature review suggested twelve main winning marketing strategies used by companies nowadays Tafesse and Wood (2022). However, the findings provided fresh perspectives on how these business owners maintain consistency in their industry and continue to attract followers to their pages. The study conducted focused on exploring various business strategies employed by entrepreneurs, with a specific emphasis on three key aspects: partnering with influencers, building a robust Instagram profile, and implementing customer incentives and rewards. These strategies were found to have a substantial impact on positively influencing the growth of the businesses and enhancing their overall branding.

In conclusion, by partnering with influencers, building a strong Instagram presence, and implementing customer incentives and rewards, businesses can effectively expand their reach, engage with their audience, and foster a loyal customer base. Understanding and incorporating these strategies can significantly contribute to a business's success in today's competitive market.

The study's second objective was to explore the utilization of hashtags as an effective marketing tool for business owners to capture the attention of customers. Hashtags have emerged as a prominent feature on social media platforms, particularly on platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Their primary function is to categorize content and make it easily discoverable by users with similar interests, thereby enhancing content visibility and engagement. The literature review provided by Schops et al. (2022) explains that hashtags are special features on Instagram as self-brand users of Instagram use hashtags to make their message gain spread among different audiences. From the discussion part, it is obvious that two of the five participants use the mention of hashtags. Moreover, the study helped to look into the deeper use of hashtags and it was specifically provided for businesses in the makeup and fashion field.

However, strategically employing hashtags for content categorization and brand awareness, can harness the power of social media to increase their visibility, reach, and ultimately, customer base. However,

another literature review study addressed the use of brand awareness for business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customers (B2C) that have used these strategies to create awareness for their businesses. (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2022; Kalra et al., 2023).

Next, the emphasis was laid on the benefits of marketing so as to identify it in relation to Instagram marketing. However, Instagram marketing offers a wide range of benefits for businesses and brands looking to establish a strong online presence and engage with their target audience effectively.

Schorn et al. (2022) appraised the benefits of Instagram marketing to include advertisement, brand showcasing across a wide range of audiences, use of influencer marketing, and building of followership. Instagram is a hub for influencer marketing, where businesses can collaborate with influencers to promote their products or services to a highly engaged audience. Influencers' credibility and rapport with their followers can lead to increased trust in the brand. Also for a wide range of audiences, Instagram offers various features such as likes, comments, and direct messages that encourage engagement and interaction between businesses and their followers. Engaging with customers fosters a sense of community and loyalty.

In conclusion, self-brand business owners on Instagram play a significant role in the platform's dynamic ecosystem and have the potential to make substantial contributions to their brand's success. By effectively leveraging Instagram as a marketing and branding tool, these entrepreneurs can achieve the following contributions and, consequently, receive relevant recommendations. These include influencer collaborations, authenticity, personalization, strategic use of hashtags, and consistent branding and approach.

5.2.2 Limitations of the Research

Sample Size: The research is based on interviews with only five participants. While qualitative research often involves small sample sizes, a larger and more diverse sample could provide a broader range of perspectives and insights.

Generalizability: Due to the small sample size and the specific focus on self-brand business owners on Instagram, the findings may not be easily generalizable to other types of businesses or social media platforms.

Subjectivity: Qualitative research relies on the interpretation of researchers and participants, which introduces subjectivity into the analysis. Efforts to mitigate bias and ensure rigor should be taken into account.

Time Sensitivity: The research may be time-sensitive, as social media trends and practices can change rapidly. Thus, the strategies identified may need to be continuously evaluated and updated to remain relevant.

Inherent Biases: Participants in the study might have inherent biases or specific experiences that may not fully represent the broader population of self-brand business owners on Instagram.

Overall, the research contributes valuable insights into the strategies used by self-brand business owners on Instagram to create awareness for their businesses. While the findings are context-specific and have certain limitations, they can serve as a foundation for further research and practical applications in the field of social media marketing and self-branding. Researchers and practitioners may use these insights to refine their strategies and navigate the dynamic landscape of digital marketing effectively.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice

To thrive on Instagram as a self-brand business owner, Partnering with influencers can be a highly effective strategy for attracting potential customers and generating significant traffic for your business. Identify influencers in your niche who have a broad and engaged follower base, and collaborate with them to create authentic and engaging promotional content. Also Providing incentives and rewards to your customers can foster loyalty and encourage repeat purchases. The approach involves offering exclusive discounts, free shipping, or loyalty points that customers can redeem for future purchases. This not only keeps customers coming back but also motivates them to share their experiences with the brand, resulting in amplified word-of-mouth marketing.

Another recommendation involves developing a strong business profile on Instagram, this is crucial for making a positive first impression on potential customers and effectively showcasing your brand and offerings, the Instagram profile should feature a clear and captivating bio that effectively communicates the essence of the business and what distinguishes it from others. Employ concise and impactful language to convey the brand's message, values, and mission. This can be thought of as the brand's elevator pitch, designed to capture the attention of visitors. Also, the "Highlights" feature is useful in terms of categorizing and displaying important information, announcements, or product/service highlights. These highlights allow you to organize your content and make it more accessible to your audience. Implementing these practical recommendations, self-brand business owners can effectively navigate the competitive landscape of Instagram and build a strong online presence that attracts and retains loyal customers. each

business is unique, so it's essential to experiment and find the strategies that work best for your specific brand and target audience.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research which are based on the findings from the participant's interview. However, when further emphasizing the recommendations for future research, conducting longitudinal studies is very inclusive as it helps to track the long-term effects of influencer partnerships on business growth. This would help understand how influencer collaborations impact brand loyalty, customer retention, and overall business success over an extended period.

Following that extending the research by conducting a comparative analysis of businesses that use customer incentives and rewards versus those that do not. This would shed light on the effectiveness of different incentive strategies and their impact on customer behavior. As well as audience segmentation which helps to explore how businesses can effectively segment their target audience on Instagram and tailor content accordingly. Understanding how different segments of the audience respond to specific content types and messaging can help optimize marketing efforts.

Further down to that, hashtag and geotag analysis is very important as it investigates the relationship between the number of hashtags used, the relevance of hashtags, and the level of user engagement on Instagram. Similarly, study the impact of geotagging on attracting local customers and driving in-person interactions. Also, the content strategy helps delve deeper into the content creation strategies of successful self-brand business owners on Instagram. Investigate the factors that contribute to content virality, user engagement, and how businesses adapt their content based on audience feedback.

The cross-platform analysis also helps the research to include a cross-platform analysis of self-brand business owners' marketing strategies. Understanding how these strategies differ across various social media platforms can provide valuable insights for businesses to optimize their digital marketing efforts. Moreover, brand perception as it investigates how consumers perceive and interact with self-brand business owners on Instagram. Understanding how these businesses build credibility and trust can help guide future marketing approaches.

Lastly, cultural context can also be considered with cultural differences and how they influence the effectiveness of various strategies. Cultural nuances may affect the way influencers are perceived, the

type of content that resonates with audiences, and the success of customer incentives. As well as the impact of algorithm changes in examining how algorithm changes on Instagram impact the visibility and engagement of self-brand business owners' content. Understanding these dynamics can help businesses adapt their strategies to stay relevant and maintain growth. Then having successful metrics which develops a comprehensive framework to measure the success of self-brand business owners on Instagram beyond follower count and engagement metrics. Identifying meaningful key performance indicators (KPIs) can help businesses track their progress more effectively.

5.5 Final Conclusions and Reflections

In conclusion, this study has undertaken a scholarly exploration to identify the strategies essential for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to sustain and thrive in their businesses. By adopting a qualitative research approach, the study delved into the experiences, perspectives, and insights of five self-brand business owners operating on Instagram.

The findings of this research shed light on several key strategies that have proven effective for these self-brand business owners. Firstly, partnering with influencers emerged as a prominent and successful tactic. Collaborating with influential individuals allowed businesses to tap into larger audiences, boost user engagement, and enhance brand exposure. The study highlights the significance of influencer marketing in generating positive word-of-mouth and establishing credibility within their respective industries also the provision of customer incentives and rewards was identified as a powerful catalyst for business growth. Offering free delivery, exclusive discounts, loyalty programs, and other rewards fostered customer trust and loyalty, encouraging repeat purchases and referrals. This approach not only attracted new customers but also contributed to building a loyal customer base, essential for sustained profitability. The study emphasized the importance of developing a strong Instagram profile. Consistent and strategic posting patterns, along with a well-crafted bio, helped these businesses establish a professional and appealing brand image. A strong profile contributed to differentiating themselves from competitors and making a positive impression on potential customers. Engaging the target audience effectively emerged as another critical strategy. By using analytics tools, identifying peak engagement times, and tailoring content to the preferences of their audience, self-brand business owners were able to maintain an active and vibrant presence on Instagram. Engaging content and interactions was pivotal in fostering connections and generating interest in their products or services.

Furthermore, leveraging hashtags and geotags emerged as practical tools to expand the reach of their content and connect with a broader audience. Relevant hashtags allowed businesses to target specific niche markets, while geotags facilitated personalized interactions with local customers. Creating engaging and compelling content was identified as a cornerstone of successful self-branding on Instagram. Utilizing captivating visuals, persuasive storytelling, and interactive elements helped these businesses attract and retain the attention of their audience. Consistent and creative content creation fostered a sense of connection and resonance with their brand.

In summary, this research provides valuable insights into the strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain competitive, profitable, and sustainable in their businesses. By understanding and implementing these strategies effectively, self-brand business owners can optimize their Instagram presence, build brand credibility, foster customer loyalty, and achieve long-term success in the dynamic and ever-evolving world of social media marketing. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, businesses must remain adaptable and open to embracing new approaches to ensure they remain relevant and successful on Instagram.

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Appendices

- Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1) Introduction

Opening Script:

Hello and good evening,

My name is Vera Chidinma Edih. I am a master's student currently studying for a master's degree in Journalism and media communications at Griffith College, Dublin Ireland. I am also currently writing my final project, and my topic is "Exploring the Strategies that Self-Brand Instagram Users Adopt to Create Business Awareness in Nigeria".

And by doing so, part of the requirements for my final project is that I conduct interviews with my desired interviewees. So that was why I reached out to you today knowing fully well of your own self-brand business on Instagram as it is used for creating business awareness for your customers.

And I am so happy to have you here today with me.

For the interview today, I would be recording here on Zoom, and at the end of the process, a transcription would be made after the discussion. Also, every information said here today, is very confidential. As I am the only one who would have access to this data until it is time to be erased.

If for any reason you would not like to participate anymore in this interview or stop me from recording please feel free to do so.

The interview would take approximately 30-35 minutes. If there are any questions you have please let me know. Should I start recording? Okay, I will start with the first question.

2) Research Aim

This proposed study aims at exploring and identifying the strategies required for self-brand users of Instagram in Nigeria to remain in business for 5 years and be profitable.

3) Opening Questions

Interviewee:

Brand Name:

The role and responsibilities of the brand:

4) Key Questions

1. What are the strategies you have employed as a self-brand Instagram user to create business awareness?
2. How has Instagram been useful as a tool for marketing for your self-brand, in selling your brand?
3. What are some of the challenges that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users?
4. What are some of the benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing amongst self-brand Instagram users?
5. What are other strategies that you have experienced in using Instagram in promoting your self-brand that we have not already talked about?

- **Appendix B (Interview Transcript 1)**

Interview number 1

Venue ZOOM

Interviewee Chibuzor Emmanuel

CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of Infinite Sports

Interviewer Vera Chidinma Edih

The interviewee introduces himself and was asked permission before recording.

Vera: Hello, thank you for meeting me here today. I am really happy to have you here with me and I appreciate your time. So, before we carry on with the main questions for the interview. Can you please introduce yourself, the role, and the description of your brand?

Chibuzor: My name is Chibuzor Emmanuel. I am the owner of Infinite Sports. Infinite Sports is located in Nigeria. We deal with sports and fitness equipment. Also, the importation of these types of equipment. As well as selling wholesale and retail to consumers in Nigeria.

Vera: That's great! So, my first question would be based on the strategies you have incorporated for your self-brand business over the years. What are the strategies that you have employed as a self-brand Instagram user to create business awareness?

Chibuzor: Great Question. First of all, the growth of followership on Instagram gives our audience, to build a trusted background to buy from us or maybe buy our services. We started from 50 to about 500 followers. When we reached a number of 500 followers, we started our marketing. But first of all, we have our media team that does content creation and publicity as well, so from there, we started doing our marketing via Facebook ads because Facebook was the owner of Instagram. Any sponsorship or any marketing we do, we have to go through Facebook. We're able to leverage their marketing tool to reach our audience.

Chibuzor: The second one is partnering with so many influencers in Nigeria, people who are into entertainment, brand influencers, etc. So, we partner with them to market our brand on their pages. Those influencers are people that will have from the number of 500K followers to maybe 2 million or 5

million followers, because they have a broader range of audience, we believe that our clients might be amongst their audience.

Chibuzor: Then optimizing our Instagram profile as this includes creating a certain pattern where we post. A timetable is done on how we're going to post for the week, and also how many times we are going to be posting for the week. And apart from that, the pattern we are engaged in posting on Instagram was posting a picture, posting a write-up, and posting a video.

Instagram has three tiles in each row. Every day, we make sure we post three pieces of content, which are a write-up, a product we sell, and a video on how to use the product with that, it can be able to engage the customer on how to know more about a particular product. In the write-up, we explain more about the uses of the product, how it can benefit you, and all of that.

Then in the picture tab, we are going to put a picture of the equipment and its features. Then in the video, we are going to put up how to use that particular equipment with that, it helps, that strategy drove a lot of audience to our page, and they engaged, and at the end of the day, we got sales.

Vera: Great thank you for that answer. The second question is How has Instagram been useful as a tool for marketing your self-brand in selling your brand?

Chibuzor: Okay so for this we first of all communicate directly with customers. When it comes to marketing or digital marketing, people do website marketing where you can see the products you want to buy on the website and you actually just go and buy but sometimes they need another level of clearance or another level of explanation on that particular product. This part of the tool of messaging the client directly actually helped us to explain certain products and also negotiate terms of payments with the client.

Chibuzor: Then working with Instagram analytics. The analytics tool helps us to know when to post, where to post, and the day and time to post. Instagram analytics can show you how users engage in your page, the period of time of the day, they engage in your page, and the day they engage in your page most.

For example, talking from my brand, the users engage on our page on days Monday, Sunday, Saturday, Wednesday, And Friday. Tuesdays and Thursdays aren't a good time for users to engage. We don't know why, but so with that tool and the analytics, Instagram showed us, we're able to strategize and put out posts during those peak hours.

Where the audience engaged in our page. For example, on Saturday, there is Instagram analytics showed us audience engaged on our page from that time. 3 p. m. to 11 a. m. So, within that time of 3 p. m. to 11 a. m. we can do some sponsorship.

Chibuzor: Also, reach and audience engagement is other vital tools. Reach and audience engagement can help you to target the audience you want. You can also target the time of the day you want those posts to be displayed to your audience.

So, leveraging the analytic tool and combining it with the reach and audience engagement, we can have a maximum reach to our audience so that these tools help us to cut costs because instead of just doing the sponsorship throughout the week, or maybe throughout the certain period, we can target specific times, which are the peak hours, the customers engage in our post, where the customers can't see the post and hop into our DM a buy.

Chibuzor: Also, when making good use of our Instagram stories. It is not everything we are meant to post on our page the stories have a maximum time of 24 hours for whatever you're posting to be displayed.

For example, when we do deliveries, we tell our delivery agents to make videos of the equipment, the customer bought, and instead of posting that on our page. We put it up on all the stories so that people can see it.

When we deliver this product and they'll see, how happy the customer is and they will see how the customer is using those products. We also deliver free for our loyal customers during a promo.

Vera: Amazing! Thank you for that answer once again. The next question What are some of the challenges that are associated with Instagram marketing among self-brand Instagram users?

Chibuzor: Wow! We have actually encountered a lot of challenges because as a business owner, that kind of thing would definitely come.

Chibuzor: The number one has to be competition. From the period of 2018 to date, Instagram has grown with so many users of almost a billion. We are not sole marketers or maybe sole product sellers of those products or services we offer. Some so many people sell those products and they don't sell them alone in the physical store because they saw what we are doing. Many of them hopped online to start selling. There was so much competition online in terms of prices and the services we offer and how we render those services.

It was quite competitive and it's a problem because a customer might reach out to you and say, this product is very expensive, and they saw it on another page for a lesser price. We now tend to explain further our price is different and why we have to buy those products at our price. Sometimes it gives a little issue and also because some might not patronize us anymore they will go patronize our competitors.

Chibuzor: The second one has to be constant content creation. We can run out of content at any time, where won't know what to post and we won't know when to post and all that because we mapped out to be posting four times a week and we might run out of content and we wouldn't know what to post for like maybe two days or three days. It just involves being constantly creative, as creativity is not only limited to one person in a team.

We now have to broaden our media team. There are going to be more contributions to the content we are creating. Most times the four people in the team might run out of content as well to post. But we're able to like to overcome that challenge and we are still in business.

Vera: This must have been really a tough thing to go through. But with every challenge which is the bad side, comes the benefits which is the good side. This would now lead us to the fourth question. What are some of the benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing among self-brand Instagram users?

Chibuzor: There are so many benefits in marketing on Instagram because there is a huge improvement when we start marketing on Instagram.

Chibuzor: Instagram Direct Messages is a huge benefit. Two years into the business, our revenue grew by 80%. That's a very huge margin. The revenue we are making from those sales, actually grew by 80% than the one we made when at our physical store. There are so many people that don't want to come to the physical store and might feel lazy to come to the physical store, they might just come to the page and see what they like and message you.

This messaging tool as well helps you to communicate directly with the customers. The benefit of having all those tools are reaching out to the audience, to a large audience within a short period, and just by a click of a button helps us to make direct sales and also have more visibility. Because of that, we're able to be visible and gain the trust of our target audience.

Vera: Amazing! Thank you for the answer. Finally, the last question of the interview. What other strategies does your business have that we've now talked about earlier?

Chibuzor: Well another strategy for me would be having a catchy Instagram bio. Talking about your bio, I've been writing out everything basically like a brief introduction of my brand on the bio. It goes a long way. Of course, in that bio, links will be important so just ensure that the information is intact.

Vera: Wow! This is really amazing hearing all of this today. Thank you, Chibuzor Emmanuel, for coming for my interview today. It was so great to have you here. Do you have any questions before I go?

Chibuzor: Thank you too, Vera. No, I don't have any questions. All I have to say is you have done absolutely well with your interview questions. Great job!

Vera: Wow! Thank you. This means a lot. Thank you once again. Have a great day! Bye.

Chibuzor: Bye. Have a great day too.

- Appendix C (Interview Transcript 2)

Interview number 2

Venue ZOOM

Interviewee Charity Oyinyechi

CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of G.L.O.W.T.I.T.U.D.E

Interviewer Vera Chidinma Edih

The interviewee introduces himself and was asked permission before recording.

Vera: Hello, thank you for meeting me here today. I am really happy to have you here with me and I appreciate your time. So, before we carry on with the main questions for the interview. Can you please introduce yourself, the role, and the description of your brand?

Charity: Hello. My name is Charity Oyinyechi. I am the CEO of G.L.O.W.T.I.T.U.D.E. G.L.O.W.T.I.T.U.D.E a makeup company which is located here in Nigeria, which makes me a makeup artist. It is a self-brand business that deals with all kinds of events that needs the assistance of a makeup artist like the brides, models, etc.

Vera: Amazing! So, my first question would be based on the strategies you have incorporated for your self-brand business over the years. What are the strategies that you have employed as a self-brand Instagram user to create business awareness?

Charity: For me, it would be defining focus and having a niche. You don't just jump into different makeup. You always stick to one. Like, for example, if you're a bridal makeup artist, you stick to a bridal makeup artist. If you're an editorial makeup artist, you stick to an editorial makeup artist. If you're for beauty, you stick to party guests. You always stick to that before you combine everything and choose which one you want to go for.

Charity: Then working on models. I enjoy working on models. And lastly for me would be constant posting on Instagram. It has helped me a lot over the years. I started my business two, or three years now. I always post, I always use hashtags, I always tag different brands, different locations, and all, and tag different people so they can draw attention to my work.

Charity: Having to give an excellent delivery as well. Also, excellent delivery as well has been paramount for me. I mean delivering excellently on the field and also off the field because I need to get content that I need to still bring back to social media. I need to evaluate those contents, added pictures, and videos, bring them back to social media, post them and then get awareness again, get attention again. During the free delivery period, lots of customers take advantage of our products through Instagram.

Vera: Great thank you for that answer. The second question is How has Instagram been useful as a tool for marketing your self-brand in selling your brand?

Charity: The constant use of Instagram marketing. Never joke with the use of Instagram. Instagram is a very top social and almost everybody's on Instagram. When I post something, almost everybody sees it, and I tag people, don't joke with Instagram, the use of hashtags. Instagram can draw so many audiences to you, so many audiences to your posts, and this has helped me very well over the years, and I can say enjoy the benefits of using Instagram.

Charity: Then also the use of Instagram hashtags. There was a particular time, I had maybe less than 100 or so when I posted the work I did on Instagram because I always post, and I tag a whole lot of people using the hashtags, different hashtags, you can use like a lot of hashtags on Instagram, and it draws the audience to you. Like I tagged lots of people and helped my business that day. Like I got different messages, DMs, and people asking me how much my charges are, and how much my rates are, and it was very exciting because I never knew Instagram could draw that kind of attention and that kind of excitement to me.

Vera: Amazing! Thank you for that answer once again. The next question What are some of the challenges that are associated with Instagram marketing among self-brand Instagram users?

Charity: Yes, challenges do definitely come but there would always be a constant reminder in my head to have to overcome them.

Charity: The first for me would be not getting enough audience on Instagram. There was a particular time I was posting, and nothing was coming. I was using hashtags and still nothing at all. Like nobody's seeing my posts. You feel no one is seeing your posts because you're not getting the kind of audience you want to get but people are seeing it. But, you're not getting that kind of audience you feel you want to get.

Charity: Another is the Instagram algorithm. It's not as favorable as how it was in like two, or three years ago. With that right now you have to push and push and push and you have to be very consistent. if you say you want to do something, for example, to do this makeup thing, you have to put out your content back always. You don't just put context and just relax for months and all like you have to keep pushing for people to notice your brand and for people to patronize your brand too.

Vera: This must have been really a tough thing to go through. But with every challenge which is the bad side, comes the benefits which is the good side. This would now lead us to the fourth question. What are some of the benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing among self-brand Instagram users?

Charity: Ah Yes! That would be meeting different makeup artists. There, can be a makeup fair and you guys can get to meet at that makeup fair. Makeup brands can notice you and give you products. I mean, PR products, free products, who wouldn't love a free product? give you free products, and you use all those products on your models, and you give reviews on them, like, all those things are really exciting when it comes to, like, pushing out your brand on Instagram.

Charity: Another one is the profits gained from Instagram. Instagram is like another Facebook. It is a very huge benefit in making all of those profits from Instagram, because like I said earlier on, as long as you're pushing your brand, as long as you're working, as long as you're consistent, there is no way you won't flourish on Instagram.

I know with lots of DMs I've gotten on, what's your rate card? Can you send me your rate card, your studio working, your home services, and all as long as you're out there? Always and consistently pushing on your brand. There is no how you won't succeed.

Vera: Amazing! Thank you for the answer. Finally, the last question of the interview. What other strategies does your business have that we've now talked about earlier?

Charity: Another strategy is advertising. Advertising your brand with the use of flyers. It has helped me a lot while I still constantly push my brand out there.

Charity: Also doing promos. There are sometimes I can just say, okay, let's just take 50% off on all charges, 50% off studio workings, 50% off home service, 50% off bridal, and all. Then I would always like to advertise it and you will know people are rushing to you. People are coming to you. They are also advertising your brand to other people. That is what I do most times and gradually like that you can be referred to as millions and zillions of people possible.

Vera: Wow! This is really amazing hearing all of this today. Thank you, Charity Oyinyechi, for coming for my interview today. It was so great to have you here. Do you have any questions before I go?

Charity: Thank you too, Vera. No, I don't have any questions. Well done! Amazing interview. I look forward to hearing good news about your project.

Vera: Wow! Thank you. This means a lot. Thank you once again. Have a great day! Bye.

Charity: Bye. Have a great day too.

- Appendix D (Interview Transcript 3)

Interview 3

Venue ZOOM

Interviewee Blessing Abigail

CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of CMT (Cut make and trends) Creations

Interviewer Vera Chidinma Edih

The interviewee introduces himself and was asked permission before recording.

Vera: Hello, thank you for meeting me here today. I am really happy to have you here with me and I appreciate your time. So, before we carry on with the main questions for the interview. Can you please introduce yourself, the role, and the description of your brand?

Blessing: Hello. My name is Blessing Abigail. I am the owner of CMT (Cut Make and Trends) Creations. It is a fashion brand that is located here in Nigeria. I am basically a fashion designer. As I deal with making traditional fashionable clothes for my clients with the raw material yard I use which are lace and Ankara.

Vera: Amazing! So, my first question would be based on the strategies you have incorporated for your self-brand business over the years. What are the strategies that you have employed as a self-brand Instagram user to create business awareness?

Blessing: First of all, running ads and promotions. I was able to run ads and it was very effective. Ads were also used to get more visibility, and it worked for me.

Blessing: Also, the act of consistency. Being consistent is also a major strategy for me, as I try as much as possible often to post for people to see my story and be familiar with it. I also try to be familiar with Instagram's new upgrade to know what is trending and what to use when due.

Blessing: Then I would say usage of large features on Instagram. For all the features on Instagram, I try as much as possible to use it. By using these large features, it also helps in running ads, and with that, I get more visibility and more sales.

Blessing: Lastly for me would be follow-for-follow-up. It is a page that gathers all business owners together and tries to help them build their pages. This involves people having to follow each other's business accounts. For example, there's an account I'm following, they have business owners on them, like on their follower list. If you're a business owner and you follow, there are times they post, so they get to tell you, okay, this is the time to like other people's posts for them to like yours back. This has helped me to get more clients from that.

Vera: Great thank you for that answer. The second question is How has Instagram been useful as a tool for marketing your self-brand in selling your brand?

Blessing: This has helped me in the area of getting more visibility. This visibility involves when I get tagged by my previous clients or even present when they wear the clothing I sew for them to any event on Instagram. One time, one of my previous clients, tagged my handle on a post, and that person saw her post, fell in love with the service I rendered, and she just clicked on my handle and reached out to me. It was still the same Instagram platform, that my handle was shared by one of my previous clients, and it works just perfectly.

Blessing: Also, with the use of Instagram tags. I feel tag has worked for me to help to improve my business because let me say 70% of people that have reached out to me were based on tags on Instagram.

Vera: Amazing! Thank you for that answer once again. The next question What are some of the challenges that are associated with Instagram marketing among self-brand Instagram users?

Blessing: For me, it would be content creation. It's not easy to create content. There was this business-oriented person that reached out to me sometimes. But she was like, she wants to help me with my business, wants to help me with my followers. She was like, I need to do this, do that. As she was listing the all thing in my book, she said she does not mind that she was going to just orientate me for free. That she just like my page. She said I like something about myself and she would like to just orientate me for free.

I brought out a notebook and I had to jot a whole lot of things in that notebook. She talked about content and talked about a lot of things that would make me create content for her. It was quite a whole lot for me.

Blessing: Also, putting out a catchy caption. Captions are part of your content because after you have created content, you have to put out a catchy caption.

Blessing: Another one would be making use of current hashtags. You need to put up hashtags that they are using then. Not the old hashtag, but the current ones. You need to put it out for your post to be on Instagram's top list. If you are putting a hashtag that is not working, your post will just be behind. It won't reach the kind of clients you want.

When you talk about hashtags, talk about the hashtag you need to use must be within your niche. When you use a generalized hashtag, your post does not reach your desired prospective clients. It won't get there. It would just be floating. It won't be where it's meant to be. And sometimes I feel constrained when I'm on my business page because I don't just click on anything that pops up. After all, I wouldn't want that thing to come.

Blessing: Lastly, for me, I would say getting comments. Although I see some people's comments and everything it might be working for other people but for me, comment doesn't work at all. Although I have a few people like legit people that when you post them, they will still repost. They will like your comments and everything but other people don't want to relate to that post.

Vera: This must have been a tough thing to go through. But with every challenge which is the bad side, comes the benefits which is the good side. This would now lead us to the fourth question. What are some of the benefits that are associated with Instagram marketing among self-brand Instagram users?

Blessing: Well I would say Instagram archive. I see Instagram as an archive of my work. If I'm to start sending 1001 videos, or pictures of my work to my clients to view. My clients will get tired of looking at it. They might even get confused about what they want. But if you have an Instagram archive. The person that is a prospective client goes there, scrolls the one she doesn't want to click on and doesn't click on it. What you want to click on, you click on it and later check if this is what they are looking for. They'll reach out to you and make further inquiries about the clothing. If you have a place where you keep your portfolios, where your works are kept, that can give people easy access to reach them.

Blessing: Instagram Testimonials is another one. As the testimonials make people know if this business is legit. Your testimonials will make more clients satisfied and rest assured that you are legit.

Blessing: Also, easy access to your potential clients. It makes people assess your business page easily. Because sometimes some people are not on Instagram as they don't trust what can be there. Some people are not really into Instagram. But I feel heading over to Instagram to make further inquiries about something you want to buy is beneficial because it allows easy access and you can choose from what you want freely.

Blessing: Then I would also say audience engagement. Audience engagement is a benefit because people want to see what people are saying about your craft and everything.

Blessing: Consistency is also another beneficial factor for me. Consistency has made my brand a place in people's hearts.

Blessing: Then having to get feedback. Getting feedback also helps my business, which would make me grow. Some people don't just want to give that feedback. I don't know the reason. Some people, they don't want people to know that they are associating with an upcoming brand.

Vera: Amazing! Thank you for the answer. Finally, the last question of the interview. What other strategies does your business have that we've now talked about earlier?

Blessing: That would be giving clients free delivery. Although, there are limited to certain locations and those free delivery helps to build a kind of trust environment between us and the client, because sometimes there are a lot of scammers online, and a customer might not want to spend a huge amount on someone that he doesn't know.

We brought about the strategy of giving them payment on delivery and free delivery. When a customer tries to argue about not trusting or maybe he doesn't know we can able offer them those services. We'd be like, do you know what sir?

Don't pay us. Don't give us anything. Just send us your delivery address and the available number. And within so and so period, they're going to deliver to you. I can tell you that 95% of customers we approach this way, actually gained our trust and they keep on coming back.

Blessing: Then another strategy would be having a situated time to post on Instagram. Some content creators talk about having time to post. Time to post on Instagram is very important. I set a time for posting and days I post. I tried to check my insights, try to check the days my followers engage more. I post on those days and I ensure I post within that time.

So that Instagram is accustomed to the fact that, this is the time I post because my followers are always very active, more active within that period. My post gets to reach more people, more audience, and that's the goal.

Vera: Wow! This is really amazing hearing all of this today. Thank you, Blessing Abigail, for coming for my interview today. It was so great to have you here. Do you have any questions before I go?

Blessing: Thank you too, Vera. No, I am okay.

Vera: Wow! Thank you. This means a lot. Thank you once again. Have a great day! Bye.

Blessing: Bye. Have a great day too.