



Exploring the Use of Social Media Advertising by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to Promote Indigenous Handmade Products: A Case Study of Kumasi, Ghana

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Abstract

The indigenous handmade product businesses are turning to social media advertisements to break the structural barriers of the market, although there is limited empirical data on how these tools are adopted and utilized in the Global South creative economies. This paper examines the approaches of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that manufacture indigenous handmade products in Kumasi, Ghana to advertising via social media. Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, the Resource-Based View, and the Social Media Engagement Theory, the research has qualitative case studies based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and visual-content analyses of the chosen SMEs. Results show that social networking sites play both promotional and hybrid roles as a socio-commercial space within which culture, craftsmanship, and market share both similarities and differences. The main characteristics of SME implementation of social media advertising include the ability to see it as useful, economical, and convenient with ease of use and formalized digital marketing skills. The indigenous knowledge, artisanal prowess, and cultural narration become a valuable resource to be differentiated due to handmade products and increase customer confidence. The visitor participation tools like comments, one to one direct messaging, and customer feedback are critical as mediators to drive specified purchasing choices since in certain circumstances, this is enough to offset the under exploitation of formal analytic tools and performance indicators. Nevertheless, the issues with algorithmic visibility, unequal advertising results and the conflicts between commercialization and cultural authenticity remain. The research has implications on the theoretical landscape because it situates technology adoption and resources mobilization within indigenous creative business and provides the policymaking, practice, and development stakeholders with effective insights to facilitate inclusive digital entrepreneurship and cultural sustainability within the emerging economies.

Keywords: Social Media Advertising, Indigenous Handmade Products, Creative SMEs, Kumasi-Ghana

Introduction

Social media in the fast-growing digital economy is one of the most radical communication channels that the business possesses. The social communication platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube have ceased to be simply healthy social communications but strategic marketing tools with a tendency to shape consumer preferences, increase brand awareness, and find a way to make new customers (Meyers, 2017., 2024) ^[10, 14]. To small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developing economies, especially those with involvement in native handcrafted products, the social media provides an economical route of reaching broader target markets than in local economies.

The strategic use of social media advertising is still not well-researched and disproportional in several emergent situations, and Ghana is one of them (Meyers, 2017., 2024; Buchag *et al.*, 2022) ^[10, 14, 3].

Native hand-crafted products are not only economic products, but include traditional heritage, artisanal cultures, and village craft. The products include the work of shoemakers, basket weavers, kente weavers and wood workers in Ghana which have some role to play in creative industry as well as livelihoods in the country. However, their availability of extensive market exposure is limited by their low resources, geographical limits, and weakness in incorporating themselves into the formal marketing platforms. Through social media advertising, there is a chance of surmounting such obstacles in this landscape whereby the SMEs can market their products to both national and global markets. Potentially, artisans will be able to have brand recognition, triggering consumer demand through the use of targeted content and interaction and digital storytelling (Charchafa and Kimouche, 2025; Amegbe *et al.*, 2024) ^[5, 1]. The adoption of social media as a marketing strategy in business has been under research and has highlighted the optimistic side of digital platforms to the SME sector. The research that has been conducted in Africa and further shows that SMEs have been utilizing the social media more to promote their visibility and performance results (Kyalo, 2024; Gbandi and Iyamu, 2025) ^[9, 6]. To provide an example, in Kenya, it was revealed that the use of social media platforms has a significant positive impact on the performance of SMEs, as increased engagement with social media platforms leads to increased customer base and increased business (Kyalo, 2024) ^[9]. Likewise, research in Ghana has reported that the role of social media in influencing the results of marketing is becoming more and more significant, and SMEs rely on social media platforms to communicate with customers and build brand communities or enhance product recognition (Meyers, 2017., 2024; Timke, 2017) ^[10, 14].

Although the benefits are evident, the study on the specific mechanisms used by SMEs in Ghana to advertise on social media in promoting the indigenous handmade products is very minimal. Previous research in Kumasi studied how social media was being used in general among artisans but failed to fully investigate the results of such advertising in market performance or increased revenues (Buchag *et al.*, 2022) ^[3]. The insights show that there is a significant gap: the connection between the social media strategy, artisanal product identity and local marketing practices is not studied comprehensively. In addition, although studies in other contexts, including conventional handicraft companies in Algeria, propose that awareness and strategic implementation are the critical determinants of social media performance, the extent through which artisans in Ghana are aware and exploit such opportunities is not well studied (Charchafa and Kimouche, 2025) ^[5].

Along with marketing visibility, the social media advertising can also develop emotional affinity among consumers and handcrafted products through foregrounding narratives as well as cultural heritage and craftsmanship. These platforms give SMEs the ability to co-create meaning with viewers, which is consistent with more general debates in the digital marketing discourse on engagement and brand storytelling (Meyers, 2017., 2024) ^[10, 14]. In this perspective, social media advertising is not just another promotion tool but serves as a

channel through which indigenous identities get introduced and glorified over online marketplaces.

It is against this background that the current research attempts to investigate the nature of social media advertising as a marketing tool by SMEs to market local indigenous handmade products in Kumasi. This study will add the empirical data to the practice of digital marketing in the creative sector, and also underscores the possibilities and problems of using social media platforms to achieve the growth of the SMEs by concentrating on the artisans in the second largest metropolitan in Ghana.

Literature Reviews

SME Performance and Social Media Marketing

The study of the nexus between social media marketing and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) performance has significantly expanded over the last decade, with the emergent economies being of special interest as the digital approaches are considered to be cost-efficient solutions relative to conventional advertising. The basic assumption to this literature is that social media provides SMEs with an opportunity to target larger audiences, connect with customers, and create brand awareness at comparatively smaller financial costs than traditional media. Several empirical studies prove that the use of social media has a positive impact on the visibility of the firm in the market, and its overall performance. Indicatively, Amegbe, Zungu, and Asamoah (2023) ^[1] discovered that the adoption of social media in Ghana by SMEs has a substantial and positive effect on the financial and non-financial marketing performance, which indicates that the digital use enhances awareness of customers and business development. Equally, research (in Africa) undertaken in Nigeria and Ghana has established that social media marketing plays a vital role in increasing sales, retaining customers and expanding market awareness of SMEs, and this is where digital platforms are strategic to performance improvement.

The findings are in line with other wider international studies that indicate that social media enables SMEs to directly interact with their consumers, online community formation, and real-time responses to consumer feedback, which have a collective effect of enhances competitive advantage. Furthermore, social media also provides analytics and targeting services that allow companies to deliver content to audience segments and increase the engagement and conversion rates. Nonetheless, literature also shows that the results of optimal performance are based on strategic implementation and digital capabilities in companies. As an example, the lack of digital competencies and awareness of the capabilities of social media advertising are often viewed as the obstacles among SMEs. On the whole, this literature makes social media not merely a source of information, but a vital element in SME marketing plans, which will determine the way companies engage with markets during the digital age.

Social Media Advertisement and Consumer Interaction

As much as the overall application of social media networks in marketing has been reported extensively, social media advertising, which entails paid promotion of services or goods on online networks, is a more specific field of digital marketing that has its own distinct set of consumer engagement consequences. Social media advertising integrates both classic and new advertising features that

include sponsored posts and paid search with the interactive digital characteristics of algorithmic audience targeting, real-time engagement analytics, and user feedback loops. Studies emphasize that these characteristics render social media advertisement quite impressive to create brand recognition and attract consumer attention. As an illustration, the literature covering the topic of advertising on such platforms as Instagram documents that social media advertising has the potential to create a beneficial impact on brand awareness and associations, yet the attitude of consumers towards such advertisements affects their performance.

In artistic markets like handcrafts and handmade goods, the activities of social media advertising tend to serve to tell the story of products and to prominently show craftsmanship, and to express cultural worth, aspects that transcend simple transactional communication. Even though there is a dearth of empirical studies regarding the social media advertising of artisans, corresponding research in the field of handicraft (e.g., in India) has shown that social media marketing can be effective in creating brand image and customer purchase intentions towards products of traditionalization. The studies support the fact that advertising is not just the aspect of being seen. There is also the evidence of the usefulness of social media advertising in the cultural and creative industries as in-depth interaction building using interactive forms of content like video reels, live shows, or customer-created content campaigns can create a community around niche products.

Regardless of the mentioned benefits, the literature also admits obstacles: SMEs that are bad digital citizens can make inefficient use of advertising options or cannot extract platform analytics to produce the best results. Digital inequalities, including uncertain internet access and insufficient training, continue to be a recurrent motif in the digital marketing research in developing settings. The lesson to SMEs, particularly those in the markets of artisanal or indigenous products is simple: it requires not only being creative but also possessing a tactical grasp of platform mechanisms and user behaviour to effectively advertise with the help of social media.

Adoption of Social Media in Traditional and Handicrafts

The studies that specifically address the implementation of the social media in the traditional and handicraft industries outline both possibilities and limitations regarding the use of online platforms by these companies to promote their services. Contrary to the fact that digital tools are being celebrated to reduce entry barriers to international markets, structural constraints to adoption and usage of social media marketing are in effect in most handicraft businesses. Surveys in North Africa and South Asia indicate that the level of awareness of platform benefits is an important predictor of social media usage in conventional companies. Charchafa and Kimouche (2025)^[5] discovered that awareness indirectly affected the degree to which handicraft firms embraced the social media as a channel to promote products in Algeria, which implied that the antecedents of integration are knowledge and perceived value.

Literature also states that producers of handicraft are usually behind in digital integration with the rest of the industries because of the constraints of resources, poor technical expertise, and absence of target training. A literature review on dissemination of artisanal products highlights the significance of digital marketing education among artisans with special reference to social networks as the key avenue

of reaching customers, especially Facebook and Instagram. In Ghanaian settings, there has been little scholarly coverage but as far as it has reached, research has indicated that social media can assist traditional artisans to access larger markets whilst maintaining cultural identity and authenticity as long as it is adopted effectively.

Although, the literature also pinpoints unique problems of indigenous artisans: unlike commercialized products the handmade products in general tend to need contextual narration and cultural framing to be able to communicate their value over the web. This subtlety puts more emphasis on the creative content strategy that can appeal to the local cultural sense as well as the general consumer anticipation. Moreover, the studies emphasize the multi-platform solutions to target a wide audience taking into account that dependence on only one platform may limit market penetration- another important factor to consider when SMEs in Kumasi are aiming at the regional, national, or international market.

Theoretical Interconnection and Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in making the methodological decisions of this study informed the incorporation of major concepts presented in Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM), Resource-Based View (RBV) and Social Media Engagement Theory to explain how SMEs used social media advertising to market indigenous handmade products. The framework theorized social media advertising as a strategic asset and communication activity that was influenced by technological perceptions as well as the contextual capacities.

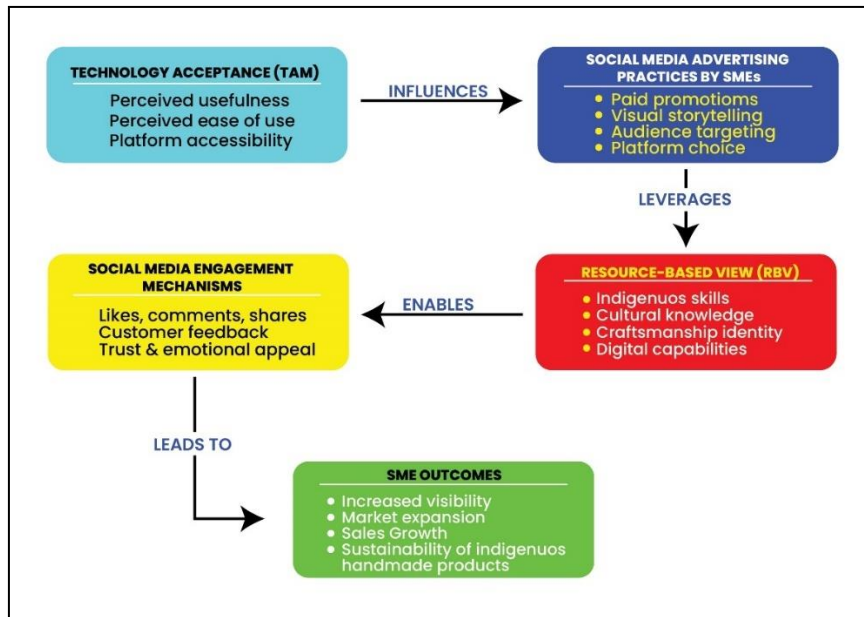
Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, the framework used the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of social media platforms as expected factors that determined the adoption and use of social media advertising by SMEs (Shahab *et al.*, 2024)^[13]. The theoretical lens applied to the qualitative approach provided a focus on how the artisans and SME owners narrated their experience, motivation, and constraints in the use of digital platforms. The semi structured interviews were hence suitable since the participants could express subjective perceptions that would not be captured by quantitative scales.

The Resource-Based View also put social media advertising in the context of an intangible organizational resource that would be able to create competitive advantage when well utilized (Nnindini *et al.*, 2024)^[11]. The concept of indigenous skills in this study, cultural knowledge, craftsmanship narratives, and digital skills were considered internal resources which SMEs utilized in the use of social media advertising. The case study design facilitated the in-depth analysis of how these resources were mobilized in particular business situations in Kumasi and this was in line with the focus of RBV on the capabilities of the firm and not industry-based generalization.

It further relied on the Social Media Engagement Theory when analyzing the idea of how SMEs communicated with consumers by promoting content, narratives, and feedback. The concept of engagement was not only perceived as the online presence but as the interaction based on trust, emotional bond, and cultural representation (Khan *et al.*, 2022)^[8]. This theoretical orientation supported the application of thematic analysis because it enabled the interaction patterns that were present in the engagement to be exposed naturally through the narrative of the participants (customer interaction, content strategies, and perceived audience responses).

In general, the conceptual framework connected theory, methodology, and empirical investigation since it placed social media advertising as a socially-embedded, resource-based, and perception-mediated practice. This congruence

not only made the qualitative case study method appropriate methodologically but also theoretically sound in order to make the findings relevant to qualitative research in digital marketing, SME, and creative industry.



Source: Researcher's Construct, 2026.

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Theory, Social Media Advertising, and SME Outcomes

Methodology

Research Approach

The research took a qualitative research design, since it aimed at producing a deep insight into the use of social media advertising by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to market native handmade products in Kumasi, Ghana. Qualitative approach was deemed as satisfactory since the study involved meanings, experiences, perceptions and practices and not quantifiable variables. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to attempt to understand complex social and business phenomena in the contexts of their real life, especially where little empirical evidence is available (Guo, 2024) [7]. Considering the indigenous handmade products that are culturally ingrained and the informal nature of many SMEs, this methodology allowed such a subtle approach to analyze the way advertising practices were undertaken within the context of normal business environments.

Research Design and Method

The research design used is the case study research design, whereby the research targeted SMEs that manufacture and sell indigenous handmade products in the Kumasi Metropolis. The use of a case study design was appropriate as it helped to explore the social media advertising practices in a highly intensive manner within a confined geographical and socio-economic setting. The design ensured that the researcher was able to elicit context specific realities, strategies and challenges of artisans and small business owners (Yin, 2021) [15]. The primary data collection method used was semi-structured interviews which allowed the participants greater flexibility to explain their experiences and also gave consistency in the interviews. This approach helped the researcher to delve into the motivation of the participants, their decision making and their perceptions towards social media advertising.

Population of the Study

The study population included owners and managers of the SMEs that produce and sell indigenous handmade products in Kumasi. These were the artisans who dealt with leatherworks, textiles, wood carving, bead making, metal crafts, or other traditional handicrafts that were actively using the social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to advertise their work. The city of Kumasi was chosen because it is an established cultural and artisanal center of Ghana, and a great concentration of local craft producers and unstructured creative industries are concentrated there.

Technique of Sampling and Sample Size

Participants were chosen in the study using a purposive method of sampling. The method suited well, as it allowed selecting cases containing information and having direct experience in social media advertising of handmade products. The participants were chosen according to the following criteria: they have to be active participants in the indigenous craft production, to possess or to run an SME, and to actively use social media in product promotion. The sample size of 20 SMEs was deemed to be adequate to reach the point of data saturation because common themes and patterns started to emerge towards the end of the process of data collection. Smaller sample sizes are backed by literature on qualitative research where the purpose is depth and not statistical generalisation (Guo, 2024) [7].

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data obtained during the interviews. The thematic analysis was used due to flexibility and the ability to find patterns in qualitative data. The analysis was conducted in a systematic scope of familiarisation with the data, coding, theme development,

and interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2021) [2]. To make sure that the findings were based on lived experiences and not pre-conceived notions, themes were inductively derived out of the narratives of participants.

Validity, Trustworthiness and Ethical Concerns

The study has kept the quality criteria of credibility, dependability and reflexivity, which are some of the fundamental qualitative quality criteria, to gain credibility. The credibility was strengthened because of the long-term interaction with the participants and taking the verbatim quotes to corroborate readings. To be transparent in data collection and analysis procedures, an audit trail was followed. Ethical consent was gained before the collection of the data, and the study participants were made aware of the study purpose, their right to withdraw and confidentiality of their answers. All the participants provided informed consent, and the identity was safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms.

Results and Discussion

Advertisement in the social media as an efficient means of visibility of Indigenous handmade products.

The research found that social media advertisement was very instrumental in increasing the visibility of the indigenous handmade products among SMEs in Kumasi. It was evident that participants have continuously referred to products like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as cheaper alternatives

to conventional channels of advertising, such as radio, print media, or physical shows. To many of the artisans, the paid promotion of social media, especially, boosted posts and sponsored posts, were considered to be the adaptable means to attract more and more diverse audiences without a big financial burden. This is in line with the current literature that singles out social media advertising as a cost-effective advertising channel with a large reach and an effective method of marketing to SMEs that are under resource limitations (Amegbe *et al.*, 2023; Meyers, 2017) [1, 10].

According to the participants, visual-heavy platforms, in particular, Instagram and Facebook, proved useful when it came to displaying the aesthetic qualities of the handmade products, i.e., their texture, colour, and detail of craftsmanship. Artisans started to receive more enquiries, visit more pages, and gain more followers after the targeted advertising. Nevertheless, visibility was not understood as the simple reach in terms of numbers, but participants identified recognition, the presence in the wider markets, as an important result. This observation highlights the role played by visibility as a symbolic and a commercial advantage in indigenous craft economies.

"Before using Facebook and Instagram, most people only knew me from the local market. Now, even customers from Accra and abroad contact me after seeing my posts. It doesn't cost much, but it really puts my products in front of many people." — Participant, SME1



Fig 2: Screenshot examples of sponsored social media posts used by SMEs to promote handmade products.

Such an outcome aids the digital marketing literature that indicates that SMEs are the most beneficiaries when the advertising content is visually stimulating and culturally appealing (Khan *et al.*, 2022) [8]. It also shows that a social media advertising can make indigenous handmade products out of the local artefacts competitive market products.

Native Identity and Narration as the Major Advertising Techniques

A very clear finding was that SMEs had strategically incorporated indigenous identity and cultural narrative into their social media advertising content. The participants elaborated that consumers were not simply interested in the end product but also the narrative behind its development such as who made it, the materials, and the cultural significance the product had. Most SMEs thus prepared their advertisements to emphasise on traditional icons, local languages, artisanal processes, and ancestors' methods as a

form of the promotional storyline. This approach seemed to make the difference between self-produced products and mass-produced ones and create emotional connections in people.

Some of the participants reported that they utilize short videos, reels, and captions of the captured image in the account of making, which frequently featured unrefined materials and the workspace conditions. These practices are evocative of the engagement-based marketing theories, which focus on the emotional connection and authenticity in consumer-brand relationships (Khan *et al.*, 2022) [8]. Notably, artisans viewed telling of stories as a way of informing customers of the cultural value, not as a way of selling goods.

"I always show how I make the beads from scratch and explain their cultural meaning in my captions. People don't just buy a bead; they buy the story behind it. That's what makes my products special." — Participant, SME4

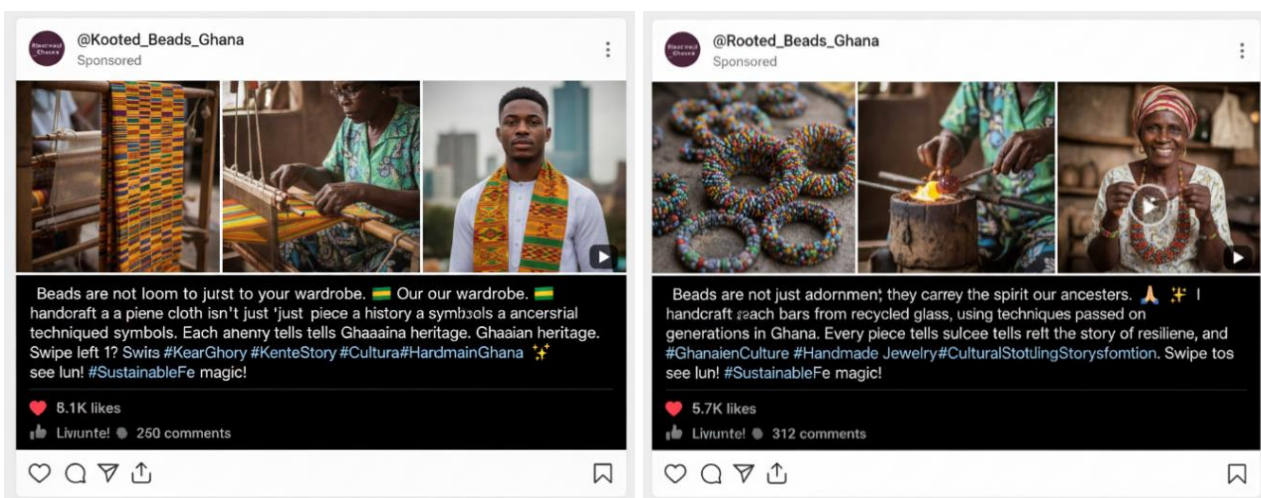


Fig 3: Sample social media post incorporating indigenous symbols and storytelling elements.

This observation can be compared to the research on handicraft marketing, which states that cultural authenticity is a factor that improves the perceived value and consumer confidence (Charchafa and Kimouche, 2025) [5]. The outcome also points out how social media advertising allowed in the process of SMEs claiming cultural ownership and repelling the marginalisation of indigenous products in the globalised markets.

Uneven Digital Skills and Advertising Knowledge with SMEs

However, even though use of social media tools is common, the research established a high degree of disparity in the adoption and knowledge of social media advertising tools by SMEs. Whilst others used a mix of trial and error, some of the participants displayed strategic knowledge, including understanding the audience, analytics monitoring, and scheduling of the content. Some artisans confessed to increasing the number of posts without a clear understanding

of how the targeting options or advertising metrics were to be applied. This disproportional digital competence usually affected the success of advertising campaigns and, in an instance, wasted resources.

The respondents explained these problems by the fact that they had not received any formal training, had to learn on their own, and did not have any access to professional assistance in digital marketing. This finding is also consistent with other past studies that digital literacy disparity is one of the crucial obstacles to successful social media adoption by SMEs in developing economies (Timke, 2017) [14]. Other participants were frustrated by the inability to make sales based on increased engagement metrics, even though advertisements can be translated into sales.

"Sometimes I boost a post, but I don't know if it really reaches the right people. I just try and hope for the best. I wish there was someone to teach us how to use these tools properly." — Participant, SME7

Table 1: Summary of participants’ self-reported social media advertising skills, approach, competencies, and perceived effectiveness

SME ID	Self-Reported Skill Level	Advertising Approach	Specific Competencies / Limitations	Perceived Effectiveness
SME1	High	Strategic	Audience targeting, content scheduling, basic analytics monitoring	Effective, generates inquiries
SME2	Moderate	Mixed	Occasional boosting, limited scheduling, basic visuals	Partially effective
SME3	Low	Trial-and-error	Boosts posts without targeting, unsure of metrics	Limited effectiveness, some wasted resources
SME4	Moderate	Experimental	Visual content creation, minimal audience targeting	Moderately effective
SME5	Low	Reactive	Boosting posts randomly, no analytics use	Low, mostly based on engagement feedback
SME6	High	Strategic	Content planning, audience segmentation, analytics review	Highly effective, consistent engagement
SME7	Low	Trial-and-error	Boosts posts, unsure of targeting, limited scheduling	Low effectiveness, frustrated by outcomes
SME8	Moderate	Adaptive	Observes peer practices, applies partially, minimal analytics	Moderate effectiveness

This finding also indicates that mere access to platforms is not adequate and efficient social media advertisement needs knowledge, confidence, and strategic intent. It supports the literature that has urged specific digital capacity-building initiatives to be implemented on artisans and creative entrepreneurs.

4. Trust and Purchase-Based Decision as a Social Media Engagement

The research also established that the consumer trust and purchase behaviour were affected by the use of social media advertising whose response mechanism included comments, one on one messages, reviews and sharing. The participants said that the interaction with the customers, especially the positive comments and likes, were the social proof that motivated the new customers to believe in the product and the seller. In most of the situations, the SMEs identified engagement to be more powerful than the advertisement,

since prospective customers usually considered previous interactions to make a buying decision.

Artisans reported that real-time feedback on the messages and comments sent was very essential in maintaining interest created by advertising. Other respondents said that social media pages were considered a sort of online shop and the key to trust was having constant interaction instead of a promotion once. This result can be explained by social media engagement theory, which states that most relational interactions are more important than transactional communication (Khan *et al.*, 2022).

"I get many comments and messages asking about my products. When I reply quickly and explain everything, people feel they can trust me. Some even place orders after seeing how I interact with others." — Participant, SME3

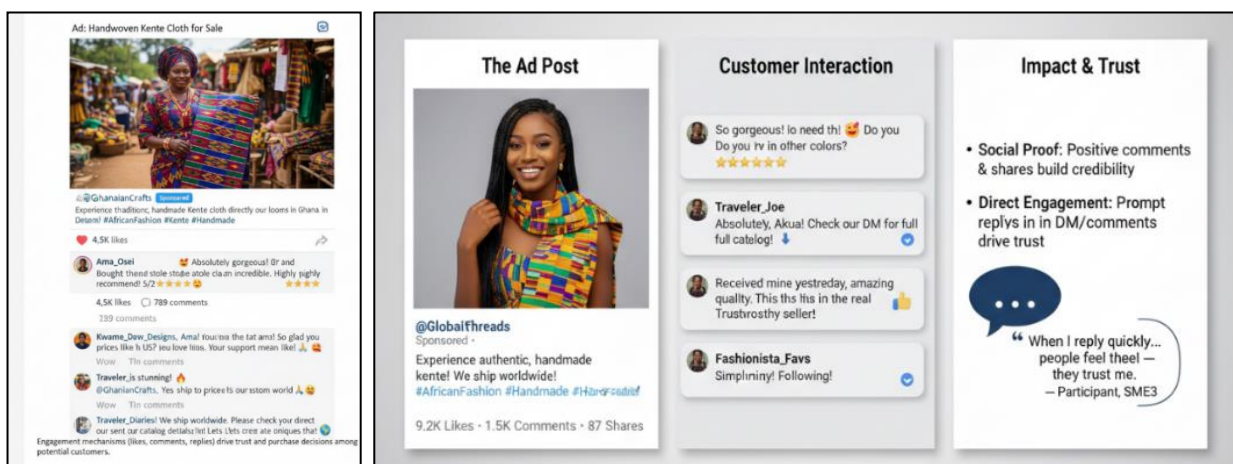


Fig 4: Example of customer engagement (comments and replies) on an advertised post.

This finding demonstrates the synergy between advertising and engagement in that on the one hand, paid promotions draw attention, and on the other hand, interest transforms into trust and sales with the involvement of engagement.

5. Perceived Business Growth and Market Expansion Results

Lastly, the respondents tended to view the role of social media advertisement as a positive factor to business

development, especially when it comes to market expansion outside of Kumasi. Some of the SMEs had reported advertisement campaigns that resulted in people in other parts of Ghana and international customers (in the diaspora) contacting them with enquiries and orders. Even though the majority of the respondents did not keep formal records of sales, they reported a higher frequency of orders and a variety of customers as the signs of expansion.

Nonetheless, the respondents also mentioned that growth

results were not instant and they were based on consistency, content quality, and management of engagement. This impression-related evidence validates the Resource-Based View, which is a perception of digital capabilities and cultural assets as strategic resources that can provide a competitive advantage in the long run (Nnindini *et al.*, 2024).

"Since I started posting regularly online, I have received orders from Kumasi, Accra, and even Ghanaians living abroad. It has definitely helped my business grow and reach people I could never meet in person." — Participant, SME2

This finding supports the purpose of social media advertising as a slow yet significant growth engine of indigenous SMEs, especially in case of cultural identity and engagement approaches.

6. Platform Preference and Algorithm Awareness Shaping Advertising Choices

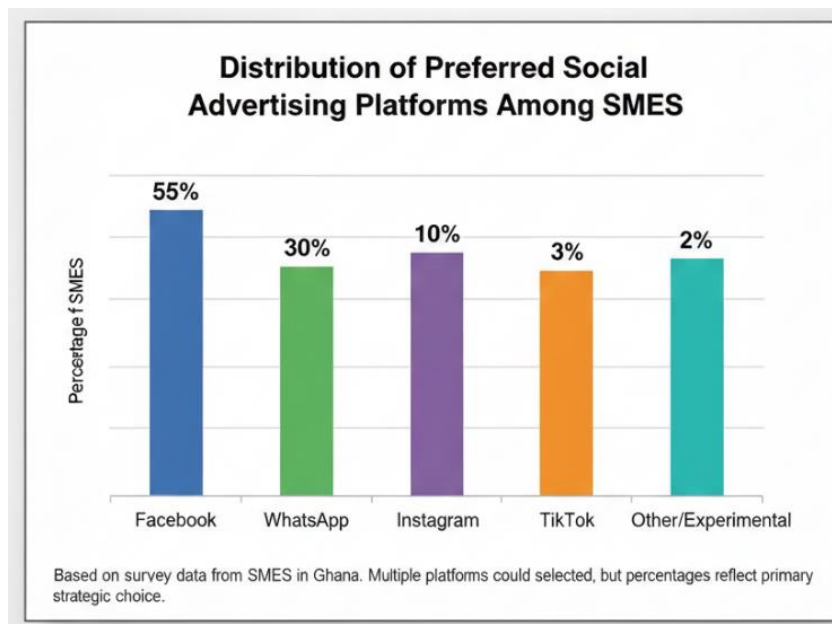
Another revelation that was made in the course of conducting the study was the strategic choice that SMEs made over particular social media platforms, which was largely influenced by the perceived presence in the audience and the platform algorithms. Facebook and WhatsApp were the biggest sources of advertising platforms identified as most of the participants because they are used extensively in Ghana and are well known by the customers in the country.

Instagram was quite frequently mentioned to be sexually appealing and seen to be more effective among rather young or global markets. Tik Tok was also a name that was mentioned less and when it was mentioned it was mostly experimental as opposed to strategic.

The platform preferences of the participants were also not just determined by the user demographics, but the perceived algorithm behaviour. Certain SMEs noted that a paid post in Facebook generated more reliable reach than organic posts, which were assumed to be suppressed by the platform algorithms unless boosted. This impression is consistent with the digital marketing scholarly literature that emphasizes the core determinant of advertising success in the social media platform algorithmic visibility (Meyers, 2017., 2024; (Cao & Weerawardena, 2023).

Nonetheless, there was not an equal awareness of algorithm functioning. Although some participants had strategized on timing their posts, changed formats, and used hashtags, others said that they were not sure why certain advertisements worked better than others. This kind of algorithmic illiteracy affected the level of confidence in advertising and investment choices.

"I mostly use Facebook because most of my customers are there, and the ads seem to show up more. Instagram looks nice, but I'm not sure if it really helps me reach buyers. These platforms have their own rules, and sometimes I don't understand them." — Participant, SME6



Source: Field Data, 2026.

Fig 5: Distribution of preferred social media advertising platforms among SMEs.

This finding indicates that the selection of which platform was not arbitrary but determined by perceived technological affordances and limitations which support claims that algorithm awareness is emerging as a key digital competency to SMEs (Cao & Weerawardena, 2023) ^[4]. It also shows the necessity of contextualized digital education that does not baffle the mechanics of platforms among indigenous entrepreneurs.

Financial Limitations and Unofficial budgeting of Social Media Advertising

The research also found out that financial factors had a major influence in the way SMEs embraced social media advertisement. Participants were working on very tight and informal budgets although advertising was usually viewed as being cheap. The majority of SMEs did not plan ahead on the monthly budgets to be spent on advertisements; rather, their

expenditure was usually reactive based on the need of the moment like new product launch, festive season, or a low sale or need period. The trend replicates the informal financial set ups that are prevalent within SMEs in developing economies (Gbandi & Iyamu, 2025) [6].

Some of the respondents indicated that they have begun with small investments in advertising, in some cases, with as little as a few Ghana cedis per campaign and increased their spending as they see returns. Nevertheless, the inadequate financial record-keeping complicated the ability of most SMEs to assess the advertising return on investment (ROI).

Consequently, explaining advertising success became largely subjective by evaluating it using metrics like more enquiries or social media interactions instead of objective sales information.

"I don't have a fixed budget for ads. Sometimes I spend a few cedis when I need more customers, other times nothing at all. I just watch if the posts get likes or messages and then decide if it was worth it." — Participant, SME5

Table 2: Advertising budget practices among participating SMEs showing expenditure ranges, planning style, and evaluation methods

SME ID	Advertising Budget Approach	Typical Monthly Spend (GHS)	Budget Planning Style	Evaluation Method
SME1	Reactive / occasional	5–20	Informal / ad-hoc	Likes, comments, inquiries
SME2	Seasonal / festival-driven	10–50	Informal / ad-hoc	Subjective observation of customer response
SME3	Gradual / incremental	2–15	Informal / adaptive	Increase in inquiries or orders
SME4	Minimal / trial-based	1–10	Informal / ad-hoc	Engagement metrics (likes/messages)
SME5	Sporadic / need-based	0–10	Informal / reactive	Post engagement and direct messages
SME6	Cautious / experimental	5–25	Informal / incremental	Anecdotal sales outcomes
SME7	Opportunistic / campaign-driven	5–30	Informal / reactive	Customer enquiries and repeat interest
SME8	Mixed / product-launch focus	10–40	Informal / event-driven	Social media feedback and sales inquiries

This finding coincides with the research that shows that SMEs tend to use intuitive instead of analytical decision-making when it comes to the use of marketing expenditure because of the minimal accounting infrastructure and data literacy (Timke, 2017) [14]. Even though social media advertising lowered the barriers to entry, financial uncertainty denied means to invest long-term and long-term strategic planning. The observation supports the relevance of incorporating fundamental financial tracking into digital marketing activities to promote sustainability and growth performance.

Commercialization and Cultural Authenticity: Tension as Perceived

Another subtle observation was the perceived conflict between business success and cultural authenticity in social media advertising. Other participants were worried that too much promotion, bargaining of prices on the internet, or customization of products to consumer preferences would erode the cultural significance of indigenous handmade products. Such participants saw social media advertising as a two-sided stick because, on the one hand, it has increased the market, and, on the other hand, has forced artisans to adjust their designs, simplify, or even focus on proven aesthetics instead of vintage design.

Other people though did not see any contradiction between commercialization and preservation of the culture. Rather, they claimed that social media advertising was an avenue to inform consumers on cultural value, and so enhance appreciation of indigenous craftsmanship. This deviation is a manifestation of larger discourses around cultural and creative industries on the topic of authenticity, commodification, and integration into the market (Owolabi *et al.*, 2024) [12].

"I sometimes feel I have to change my designs to make them more popular online. I don't want to lose the cultural meaning of my work, but I also need to sell. It's a difficult balance." — Participant, SME8

This finding is in line with the literature on cultural economy that states that digital platforms help both preserve and put cultural traditions at risk of the market (Owolabi *et al.*, 2024; Charchafa and Kimouche, 2025) [12, 5]. It also provides a significant socio-cultural layer of the study since it depicts that the SME advertising choices were not economic, but also moral and identity-focused.

Discussion

This paper discussed the practices by SMEs in Kumasi using social media advertising as a tool to market the local handmade products, and the results all shed light on the relationship existing among perceptions of technology, firm specific resources, and engagement. When the eight results are placed in the context of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Resource-Based View (RBV), and the Social Media Engagement Theory, the discussion facilitates theoretical and contextual insights into the digital marketing activities within indigenous creative industries.

In TAM terms, results 1 and 6 are very strong in arguing that perceived usefulness influenced the adoption and further use of social media advertising by SMEs. The high degree of perceived usefulness is evident by the popularity of social media advertising as a low-priced visibility tool (Result 1) relative to the conventional advertising media. The use of these platforms is also propelled by the choice of Facebook and WhatsApp by SMEs (Result 6), which further confirms the assumptions of TAM according to which technology adoption depends on its accessibility, familiarity, and perceived performance outcomes (Shahab *et al.*, 2024) [13]. Nonetheless, disproportional knowledge in algorithms and advertising tools (Result 3) indicated that there is a constraint on the perceived ease of use, and that adoption is not synonymous with making good use of it. This result generalizes TAM as it demonstrates that technical uncertainty can be parallel to partial acceptance in informal SME setting. Resource-Based View proves to be a great explanation of Results 2, 5, and 8, where it is stated that the indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, and craftsmanship narratives play a strategic role. The application of storytelling and

native symbolism in advertising used by the SMEs (Result 2) indicates the mobilization of rare and inimitable cultural resources that make a distinction between the handmade and the mass-produced products. Such intangible resources as cultural authenticity, artisanal expertise and a local identity are consistent with the statement of RBV that long-term competitive advantage is based on unique internal resources and not position, alone, in the market (Nnindini *et al.*, 2024)^[11]. In the same way, perceived business development and market expansion (Result 5) related to the effective integration of these cultural resources and digital capabilities by SMEs. The conflict between the commodification of culture and cultural authenticity (Result 8) further highlights the relevance of RBV, showing that all the valuable resources are not so easily scalable without risk to the symbolic value of such resources. This aspect is a contribution to the RBV literature in that it reveals ethical and identity-based limitations in the allocation of resources in creative economies.

Result 4 and some Results 1 and 7 can be most effectively explained using the Social Media Engagement Theory. The fact that trust and purchase decisions were motivated by engagement mechanisms including comments, direct messages, and peer validation (Result 4) supports the idea of the theory that places more emphasis on relational interaction than one-way communication (Khan *et al.*, 2022)^[8]. Social media advertising served the initial role of creating an attention stimulus and continued interaction translated visibility into economic results. This is in line with the engagement theory that suggests that value is generated in a process of interaction and not in terms of promotional messages. Engagement theory is further contextualized by financial constraints and informal advertising budgeting (Result 7) because SMEs focused on campaigns that led to visible interaction as opposed to returns that could be measured analytically. Informally, engagement measures were therefore used as measures of success.

Result 3: unbalanced digital skills is an outcome that cuts across all three theoretical constructs, which points to a significant integrative point. The lack of ease of use was heightened by the lack of skills according to a TAM perspective; the lack of digital competence became a scarce organizational resource according to an RBV lens perspective; and the lack of meaningful online interaction according to an engagement perspective. This triangulated interpretation is also the contribution of this study because it shows that there is a need to integrate theories to gain a complete understanding of SME digital behaviour in developing settings.

In general, the discussion shows that advertising through social media within indigenous SMEs in Kumasi was not only a technological adoption problem but also a socio-technical process that was determined by the cultural resources, economic restraint, and relational practices. The explicit mapping of the eight results to TAM, RBV, and Engagement Theory allows the study to build upon the current literature and introduce the new narrative of functional adoption instead of strategic negotiation as indigenous SMEs navigate the technological, cultural, and market-based requirements. This combined theoretical framing makes the results more explanatory and the applicability of the context-dependent study of digital marketing in the Global South.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating the application of social media advertising by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kumasi, Ghana, in marketing indigenous handmade products. Through the qualitative case study methodology and basing the analysis on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Resource-Based View (RBV), and the Social Media Engagement Theory, the study presented a more contextualized interpretation of the digital advertising activities in the indigenous creative economies.

The results show that social media advertising has already emerged as a significant facilitator of market presence and business survival to indigenous SMEs. Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp were not just communication systems; they acted as informal marketplaces where craftsmen demonstrated products, cultural identities, and communicated with customers and generated trust. In line with TAM, the perceived usefulness and accessibility continued the use of social media advertising by SMEs despite technical knowledge that was still limited. It shows that this adoption was practical and not comprehensive as it was caused by direct business requirements and not official digital planning.

Through an RBV lens, the research revealed that indigenous knowledge, craftsmanship, and cultural story telling were highly sought assets and resources that were inimitable and strategically incorporated by SMEs in their advertisement contents. These cultural resources distinguishing between the products made by hand and the products created in large quantity helped in generating a sense of value and market growth. Nevertheless, it was also found that there were conflicts between commercial development and cultural authenticity which implies that there are limitations to the deployment of resources in creative industries due to issues of ethical and identity.

Engagement Theory also provided further light regarding the interaction of advertising results based on interaction and not exposure. The likes, comments, direct messages, and customer feedback were the primary factors in determining trust and buying choices, and in many cases, they replaced the lack of formal performance indicators. Combined, the research adds to the literature of digital marketing and SMEs by showing that advertising in the indigenous terms of social media application can be explained as more of a socio-technical and cultural process than a technological or economic one.

Policy and Practice Implications

SME Practice Implications

The results of the study strongly suggest to the owners of SMEs and artisans that it is highly necessary to shift away towards more deliberate and conscious social media advertising activities. Although it is possible to achieve visibility with a minimum amount of investment, the growth would be impossible without enhanced knowledge of the advertising instruments, targeting of audiences, and performance metrics of the content. Simple records keeping practices which involve tracking of advertising expenditure and results may be considered by SMEs in order to maintain a better evaluation of the return on investment. We should also maintain the strategic utilization of cultural story telling because it is one of the major competitive advantages and not an additional branding component.

Policy Implication and Institutional Support Implication

At the policy level, the study highlights the necessity of digital capacity-building programmes to indigenous artisans and creative SMEs that are specific. Training programs that will help demystify the social media algorithm, the paid advertising functionality, and simple analytics should be tailored in culturally informative ways by government agencies, the local authorities, and the entrepreneurship support institutions. These programmes must understand that many SMEs are informal and need practical learning, in a hands-on mode rather than theoretical digital marketing.

Besides, the innovative policy in the industry must clearly acknowledge the indigenous handmade products as cultural and economic resources. Subsidized advertising credits, collaborations with digital platforms, or community-based digital hubs are some of the methods that support SMEs and advance inclusion and lessen digital inequality. Those interventions would be in line with the wider national objectives connected to cultural conservation, youth employment, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Development Partner and Digital Platforms Implications

This study can also help develop lessons to the development organizations and social media companies who are working in Ghana. Simplified advertising interfaces and local-language capabilities to artisans who have low digital literacy could be considered by the platform designers. The development partners, in their turn, may complement digital marketing training with more extensive creative economy and livelihood programmes, with technological adoption promoting instead of destroying cultural identity.

Future Research Implication

Lastly, this research provides research opportunities in the future. The influence of context on digital advertising behaviours of indigenous SMEs in Ghana or any other African country could be studied comparatively in other regions of Ghana or other African nations. The connection between engagement measures and real sales performance might be extended by quantitative or mixed-method research. Longitudinal research can also inform about the effects of long-term social media advertising on business development, cultural continuity and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge over time.

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