

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND CORPORATE IMAGE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a critical tool for institutional branding and stakeholder engagement in higher education. Despite its growing use among public HEIs in Nigeria, empirical evidence quantifying its influence on corporate image remains limited. This study examined the relationship between social media marketing and corporate image of selected higher educational institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The research specifically investigated how three dimensions of social media marketing—content marketing, influencer engagement, and audience interaction—influence stakeholder perceptions and corporate reputation. The study was anchored on Relationship Marketing Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and Signalling Theory, which provided theoretical foundations for understanding how digital communication strategies shape institutional image. A quantitative survey research design was adopted for the study. Data was collected from 400 students across HEI in Lagos State using structured questionnaire and analysed via regression analysis at 0.05 significance level. Findings indicate that content-related social media activities is positively associated with stakeholder perceptions and institutional image formation, Influencer engagement positively associated with corporate reputation, and Audience interaction strongly predicted stakeholder perceptions. The study concluded that social media marketing is a multidimensional strategy that significantly enhances institutional image, with interactive engagement playing the most critical role. It recommended that institutions prioritize responsive two-way communication, leverage credible influencers aligned with institutional values, and develop strategic content that showcases academic excellence. It also recommends the adoption of strategically managed, data-driven social media practices to strengthen institutional reputation and stakeholder confidence.

Keywords: Social media marketing, corporate image, content marketing, influencer engagement, audience interaction

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a dominant force in shaping modern communication, transforming the way individuals, organisations, and institutions interact. The world is becoming a global village thus, these digital platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), LinkedIn, and YouTube enable users to create, share, and exchange information within virtual communities. With a world population of over 8.2 billion people, 5.6 billion are active users of one social media platform or another (Daniel S., 2025). As more individuals spend time online, organisations have identified social media as a critical space for engagement as against conventional and traditional communication and marketing tools used to build brand awareness and reach broad audiences. Key examples include print ads (newspapers, magazines), billboards, TV and radio spots, direct mail, brochures, and trade exhibitions. These one-way channels excel at mass reach but offer limited real-time interaction (Fleurent S., Laher K., 2025).

Social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a strategic approach through which institutions communicate their identity, promote services, and engage meaningfully with various stakeholders (Kaplan & Alalwan, 2018; Haenlein, 2019; Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2024). Within this digital landscape, higher educational institutions (HEIs) have increasingly adopted social media marketing practices to achieve communication and branding goals. Historically, HEIs relied on physical outreach, print advertising, and interpersonal channels to engage with prospective students and the public. However, the shift toward digital platforms has enabled these institutions to showcase their academic programmes, research activities, and student life more effectively. Through social media, HEIs can reach a broader audience, engage current and prospective students, and maintain ongoing relationships with alumni and industry partners (Mangold & Faulds, 2020; Boateng & Okoe, 2023; Ahmad, 2025).

The growing presence of HEIs on social media is closely tied to their efforts to shape and maintain a strong corporate image. Corporate image refers to the collective perception stakeholders hold about an organisation. It comprises functional elements such as academic performance and service delivery, emotional aspects such as trust and admiration, and symbolic dimensions such as prestige, tradition, and public relevance (Kennedy, 2022; Abratt,

2023; Nguyen, 2024). For educational institutions, a positive corporate image can influence student enrolment, institutional reputation, stakeholder confidence, and even government or donor support. Social media marketing plays a central role in image building by allowing institutions to shape public narratives about who they are and what they stand for. Key elements such as content marketing, influencer engagement, and audience interaction are particularly relevant in this regard. Content marketing involves the strategic creation and sharing of informative and engaging posts that align with institutional values and objectives. Influencer engagement refers to collaborations with credible individuals such as alumni, academic staff, or public figures to strengthen authenticity and reach. Audience interaction encompasses two-way communication through likes, comments, direct messages, and real-time feedback, which fosters transparency and trust (Ashley & Tuten, 2021; Ismail, 2022; Algharabat et al., 2020; Hajli, 2024).

In Lagos State, Universities owned and operated by the government function within a dynamic and competitive educational environment. These institutions must continuously manage their public image amid infrastructural challenges, policy shifts, and the expectations of a digitally connected youth population. Social media offers a platform through which these institutions can not only disseminate information but also demonstrate accountability, engage constructively with stakeholders, and respond to public concerns. Effective use of social media marketing strategies has therefore become essential to institutional sustainability, especially in a state like Lagos where visibility and perception are closely tied to performance (Nwagwu & Famuyide, 2021; Omodafe, 2021; Yusuf & Onifade, 2023).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread adoption of social media platforms by higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria, many institutions face ongoing challenges in translating their digital presence into a coherent and compelling corporate image. Social media usage in these institutions often remains fragmented and reactive, lacking a strategic framework that aligns content with institutional values and stakeholder expectations (Obar & Wildman, 2015; Iroanya & Ndofirepi, 2021; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019). Consequently, universities frequently project inconsistent messages, which dilute their corporate identity and hinder the development of a recognisable and trusted institutional brand. This issue is further exacerbated by the tendency to use social media merely as a platform for announcements, with limited focus on brand storytelling, two-way audience engagement, or visual consistency (Alawode, 2019; Omodafe, 2021; Ajayi, 2023).

Another significant concern is the underutilisation of influencers and institutional ambassadors in shaping public perceptions. While leading global universities actively incorporate student voices, alumni testimonials, and academic experts to personalise and humanise their communications, many Nigerian public HEIs continue to rely on formal and hierarchical communication styles (Uche & Ngwube, 2019; Egbunike & Umezina, 2022; Olaleye et al., 2020). This bureaucratic approach limits opportunities to build emotional connections and authenticity, which are essential for cultivating stakeholder trust and loyalty. In a digital environment characterised by personality, relatability, and viral engagement, the absence of influencer-led strategies can significantly weaken institutional reputation (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2021).

Content strategy also presents a major challenge for Nigerian HEIs. Many institutions continue to produce text-heavy and formal posts that fail to engage digital-native audiences. Prospective students and applicants increasingly prefer content that is visual, dynamic, and emotionally engaging. However, institutional social media outputs often lack creativity, humour, and storytelling appeal (Ashley & Tuten, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Felix et al., 2017). This disconnect between audience preferences and institutional messaging undermines efforts to build positive perceptions and enhance reputational equity. Moreover, interactive engagement on social media remains limited among Nigerian HEIs. Whereas leading universities internationally use social media to foster dialogue, gather feedback, and encourage participation, many Nigerian institutions maintain a one-way, broadcast-style communication approach that restricts public interaction and erodes trust (Boateng & Okoe, 2023; Shareef et al., 2019; Yusuf & Onifade, 2023). This underutilisation of social media's participatory potential weakens transparency and responsiveness, both critical components of institutional credibility.

Existing research on social media use in Nigerian higher education predominantly focuses on student recruitment, engagement, or promotional reach (Omonijo et al., 2014; Eze et al., 2020; Falola et al., 2022). However, there is a notable gap in empirical studies that examine how specific social media marketing activities—such as content marketing, influencer engagement, and audience interaction—affect broader perceptions of corporate image within Nigerian HEIs. This gap limits understanding of how digital strategies influence institutional reputation and stakeholder relationships in the higher education sector. Addressing this gap is particularly important for Lagos State-owned Universities, which operate in a competitive and high-profile environment. Understanding the impact of social media marketing on their corporate image can guide these institutions in developing more effective communication strategies that strengthen stakeholder engagement and enhance institutional reputation. This study

seeks to examine the relationship between social media marketing and corporate image in selected higher educational institutions in Lagos state.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were postulated to guide the study

H₀₁: Content marketing has no significant influence on stakeholder perceptions of HEIs in Lagos State.

H₀₂: Influencer engagement has no significant effect on the corporate reputation of HEIs in Lagos State.

H₀₃: Audience interaction does not significantly influence stakeholder perceptions in HEIs in Lagos State.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Social Media Marketing (SMM)*

Social Media Marketing has assumed a prominent role within the higher education sector. Universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education increasingly use social media to promote academic programmes, communicate achievements, and engage with stakeholders (Ismail, 2022; Algharabat et al., 2020; Olaleye, Adebayo & Oke, 2020). HEIs operate in a competitive environment where branding, visibility, and differentiation are crucial for attracting students, retaining staff, and securing international partnerships. Platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn allow institutions to showcase student experiences, research outputs, alumni success, and campus life, thereby shaping their corporate image. In Nigeria, where youth engagement with social media is high and internet usage among students continues to grow, the relevance of SMM in higher education is increasingly evident (Omodafe, 2021; Falola, Salau & Ogueyungbo, 2022).

Empirical studies continue to affirm the effectiveness of SMM in achieving marketing and image-building objectives. Felix et al. (2022) proposed a strategic framework for SMM that includes content creation, real-time interaction, and strategic alignment-elements critical to institutional branding. Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi and Kyriakou (2021) conducted a systematic review and found that SMM positively influences engagement, loyalty, and brand image across various sectors, including education. In Nigeria, Ojebuyi and Salawu (2019) examined how university communication departments use social media to manage reputation and reported a positive correlation between digital presence and institutional image.

2.2 *Content Marketing*

Content marketing in higher education involves the strategic creation and distribution of digital materials that are valuable, relevant and consistent. These materials may include videos, infographics, student narratives, research highlights and campus stories. The aim is to attract and engage stakeholders while reflecting the institution's values and identity (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2022; Ashley & Tuten, 2021; Godey et al., 2022). For higher educational institutions (HEIs), content marketing is not limited to promoting academic programmes. It serves as a vital tool for showcasing academic excellence, communicating institutional values and building emotional connections with various audiences (Melewar & Akel, 2022; Uche & Ngwube, 2019; Olaleye, Ukpabi & Mogaji, 2020). Key attributes of effective content marketing include originality, relevance, clarity and consistency in branding, each contributing to a coherent institutional narrative. Content marketing within social media marketing is a multifaceted practice rooted in originality, relevance, clarity, consistency and branding alignment. When strategically implemented, it enhances stakeholder engagement, builds trust and projects a coherent institutional identity. This makes content marketing a central variable in exploring the relationship between social media marketing and corporate image in Nigerian HEIs, particularly within the culturally diverse and digitally active Southwest region.

2.3 *Influencer Engagement*

Influencer engagement, as a component of social media marketing, refers to the strategic use of individuals who possess perceived authority, credibility or relatability to represent or advocate for an organisation's values, services or identity (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2021; De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2022; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2023). Within the context of higher educational institutions (HEIs), influencers may include student leaders, alumni, academic staff and institutional partners who share authentic experiences and affiliations with the institution on digital platforms. These individuals act as brand ambassadors whose communication helps shape the institution's image and attract new stakeholders (Ashley & Tuten, 2021; Ismail, 2022; Algharabat et al., 2020). Their perceived authenticity and trustworthiness make influencer engagement a powerful tool for cultivating emotional and symbolic connections with audiences.

Influencer engagement also aligns with principles of relationship marketing. By involving internal stakeholders such as students, staff and alumni in brand advocacy, institutions foster a culture of ownership and co-creation (Morgan & Hunt, 2023; Vivek, Beatty & Morgan, 2012; Hajli, 2024). This internal marketing dimension is particularly important in public institutions, where morale and identity may be affected by funding challenges and infrastructural limitations. Through influencer-led storytelling, institutions can shift public focus from constraints

to achievements, thereby redefining perception and enhancing institutional pride (Eze, Chinedu-Eze & Bello, 2020; Uche & Ngwube, 2019; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019). Influencer engagement is a vital element of social media marketing that enables higher education institutions to amplify brand messages through credible and relatable voices. Grounded in theories of source credibility, relationship marketing and engagement, influencer strategies offer HEIs an opportunity to strengthen emotional appeal, foster symbolic association and build trust. When aligned with institutional values and supported by strategic communication planning, influencer engagement becomes a cost-effective and impactful tool for shaping corporate image in the competitive landscape of higher education.

2.4 Audience Interaction

Audience interaction refers to the dynamic process of two-way communication between an institution and its stakeholders on social media platforms. Unlike traditional media, which typically supports one-directional message delivery, social media allows stakeholders to respond, comment, share and engage in real-time dialogue with organisations (Hajli, 2024; Pentina, Zhang & Basmanova, 2023; Shareef et al., 2019). Within higher educational institutions (HEIs), audience interaction is a vital component of social media marketing, as it reflects stakeholder engagement, institutional transparency and the quality of relationships. These interactions serve not only to disseminate information but also to establish emotional and symbolic connections between institutions and their audiences (Ashley & Tuten, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Algharabat et al., 2020). Audience interaction also plays a symbolic role in shaping institutional perception. When stakeholders observe that their contributions, questions or criticisms are acknowledged or acted upon, it reinforces the view of the institution as inclusive, transparent and people-oriented (Godey et al., 2022; Kennedy, 2022; Waeraas & Solbakk, 2019). This symbolic engagement fosters emotional appeal, which is essential for stakeholder loyalty and helps institutions stand out in competitive educational environments. In countries such as Nigeria, where public institutions often face reputational challenges due to strikes or funding constraints, effective audience interaction can help present a counter-narrative of openness and innovation (Yusoff & Onifade, 2023; Uche & Ngwube, 2019; Omodafe, 2021).

2.5 Corporate Image

Corporate image refers to the public's perception of an organisation, shaped by cumulative impressions formed through interactions, communications, experiences and symbolic representations (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2021; Kennedy, 2022; Melewar & Akel, 2022). It encompasses how internal and external stakeholders-including students, parents, alumni, staff, donors and regulatory bodies-interpret an institution's identity, values, capabilities and trustworthiness. Although traditionally associated with commercial enterprises, corporate image has become increasingly relevant to higher education institutions (HEIs) in response to globalisation, the expansion of access to education and growing competition for students, funding and partnerships (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2019; Gotsi & Wilson, 2021; Yeo & Youssef, 2021). Within HEIs, corporate image plays a central role in influencing stakeholder decisions related to enrolment, support, retention and alumni engagement.

2.6 Social Media Marketing and Corporate Image: Nexus in Higher Education

The relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and corporate image has emerged as a central theme in contemporary scholarship on marketing and institutional branding. Within higher education institutions (HEIs), this connection is particularly significant due to the competitive and perception-driven environment in which universities operate globally. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube serve not only as tools for marketing communication but also as instruments for shaping, projecting and managing institutional image (Ashley & Tuten, 2021; Hajli, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The multidimensional nature of corporate image-comprising functional perception, emotional appeal and symbolic representation-intersects with the strategic components of content marketing, influencer engagement and audience interaction, forming a complex interface that influences stakeholder attitudes, loyalty and advocacy.

At a foundational level, SMM enhances visibility and brand awareness, which are essential precursors to image formation. Godey et al. (2016) argue that increased online presence and interaction allow stakeholders to form initial impressions, access information and develop emotional connections with organisations. For HEIs, consistent, relevant and engaging content shared on digital platforms shapes how prospective students, parents, alumni and the general public perceive institutional values, capabilities and distinctiveness. In Nigeria, studies by Olaleye, Ukpabi and Mogaji (2020), and Omodafe (2021), confirm that institutions that actively use social media to showcase achievements, campus events, faculty activities and student experiences are often rated more favourably in terms of corporate image. The relationship between social media marketing and corporate image in higher education is both empirically validated and theoretically grounded. Through content marketing, influencer engagement and audience interaction, HEIs can shape stakeholder perceptions of their functionality, emotional resonance and symbolic value. In a competitive and digitally driven educational landscape-particularly in Nigeria and across Africa-effective use of social media is not merely supplementary but a strategic necessity for managing institutional identity and stakeholder relationships. As universities seek to build trust, loyalty and prestige, SMM continue to play a pivotal role in constructing and communicating a compelling corporate image.

2.7 *Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)*

Higher education is a vital foundation for national development, serving as a key driver for social, economic, and technological progress. In well-organized societies, universities and other higher education institutions function as central hubs for research, teaching, and learning, creating an environment that fosters intellectual growth and innovation. The role of higher education in Nigeria has evolved in response to several challenges and trends, including increased student enrolment, reduced public funding, the emergence of private institutions, and growing internationalisation of education (Hayward, 2006). In response, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has intensified efforts to accredit and regulate academic programs, with particular focus on maintaining high standards for faculty qualifications and student admissions to ensure that Nigerian universities produce graduates who contribute meaningfully to the country's development.

2.8 *Theoretical Review: Signalling Theory*

Signalling Theory (ST) originated in economics through the seminal work of Michael Spence (1973), who developed the concept to explain how individuals convey information about their abilities in situations of information asymmetry, such as the job market. Signalling involves deliberate actions taken by informed parties, referred to as senders, to communicate quality or intent to less-informed parties, known as receivers. Over time, the theory has been extended to organisational studies, marketing and communication, where it is used to analyse how firms and institutions signal value, credibility and competence to stakeholders (Connelly et al., 2011).

In marketing, ST helps explain how organisations reduce uncertainty for consumers through observable cues and behaviours. These signals may include pricing, packaging, customer reviews or brand reputation. For higher education institutions (HEIs), signalling is reflected in how institutions use digital channels, particularly social media, to project values, reliability and performance to stakeholders who may not have direct access to internal processes (Bergh et al., 2014; Saxton & Guo, 2020). Given that HEIs are experience-based and intangibly branded, clear and credible signals are essential for shaping stakeholder perceptions. Empirical research supports the role of ST in institutional branding and marketing. Connelly et al. (2011) found that signals are particularly effective in sectors characterised by information asymmetry, such as education. In Nigeria, Mogaji (2020) reported that HEIs using consistent and credible digital signals, including student testimonials and research showcases, were more likely to influence positive stakeholder perceptions.

In a comparative study, Okorie et al. (2021) observed that both Ghanaian and Nigerian HEIs employed digital storytelling and alumni testimonials as key signalling strategies. These narratives functioned as reputation-building signals that influenced prospective students' enrolment decisions. Baek et al. (2018) similarly found that multimedia signals, including YouTube videos, significantly affected student engagement, trust and decision-making. These findings confirm the practical relevance of ST in social media contexts. Institutions that understand the mechanics of signalling, including visibility, credibility and interpretability, are better equipped to manage their corporate image in the digital age. Signalling Theory remains a valuable framework for understanding how institutions use digital tools to shape perception, attract stakeholders and reinforce reputation. When combined with Relationship Marketing Theory and Source Credibility Theory, it provides a comprehensive conceptual foundation for analysing how social media marketing influences corporate image in HEIs.

2.9 *Source Credibility Theory*

Source Credibility Theory (SCT) was originally developed by Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1954) to explain how the perceived credibility of a communication source influences persuasion and attitude change. The theory posits that the effectiveness of a message is significantly shaped by the audience's perception of the source's credibility. The foundational dimensions of credibility in SCT are expertise, which refers to the perceived knowledge or competence of the source, and trustworthiness, which relates to perceived honesty and integrity. Later adaptations introduced additional dimensions such as attractiveness (Ohanian, 2023) and goodwill, defined as the perceived intention of the source to benefit the audience (McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

For example, when a prominent alumnus shares a success story or interacts with the institution online, prospective students and other stakeholders are more likely to view the institution positively, provided the alumnus is seen as credible. Similarly, staff-led campaigns or faculty participation in webinars and thought leadership content can enhance institutional visibility and trust. These engagements serve as signals (Spence, 2023), but their effectiveness is moderated by the perceived credibility of the source. SCT thus offers a robust framework for understanding how different categories of institutional influencers-internal (such as faculty and students) and external (such as alumni and public figures)-shape audience reception. In terms of emotional appeal, SCT explains how messages from trustworthy sources foster emotional connections with audiences. For instance, when a student ambassador consistently shares engaging and authentic content about campus life, followers may develop a sense of pride and attachment to the institution. These affective bonds contribute to stakeholder loyalty and advocacy. Regarding symbolic representation, credible influencers help shape narratives about institutional values, heritage and prestige. When an influential alumnus shares how the institution contributed to their leadership journey, it

communicates not only success but also a symbolic association with excellence and legacy (Balmer & Gray, 2023; Ajayi, 2023). In this way, credibility enhances the emotional and symbolic potency of institutional narratives. While a credible source can enhance message reception, poorly constructed or irrelevant content may still result in negative outcomes. Therefore, SCT is best applied in conjunction with complementary theories such as Signalling Theory, which focuses on message content, and Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasises long-term engagement. Despite these limitations, Source Credibility Theory remains a valuable framework for understanding how perceived trust in institutional representatives and influencers shapes stakeholder perceptions and emotional affinity with HEIs. Its relevance to social media marketing makes it a key theoretical lens for examining how digital communication strategies influence corporate image in contemporary higher education.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopts a quantitative survey research design to examine the relationship between social media marketing and corporate image among selected Lagos State-owned higher education institutions, namely Lagos State University (LASU), Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), and Lagos State University of Science and Technology (LASUSTECH), with a combined population of approximately 53,000 students and staff. Using Cochran's formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined and proportionately distributed across the institutions through a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale, with items adapted from established literature to measure social media marketing and corporate image. The instrument was validated through expert review and tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.82. Data collection was conducted through physical administration of questionnaires while adhering to ethical standards such as informed consent and confidentiality. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing both descriptive statistics and inferential techniques, including regression analysis, with all hypotheses tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

4.0 STATISTICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : Content marketing has no significant influence on stakeholder perceptions of HEIs in Lagos State.

Table 1. Model Summary for Hypothesis 1

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .286 ^a | .082 | .079 | .51202 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), CM

ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|--------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 8.983 | 1 | 8.983 | 34.266 | <.001 ^b |
| | Residual | 101.196 | 396 | .262 | | |
| | Total | 110.179 | 397 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: SP

b. Predictors: (Constant), CM

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 3.410 | .133 | | 25.664 | <.001 |
| | CM | .174 | .030 | .286 | 5.854 | <.001 |

a. Dependent Variable: SP

The study indicates that content marketing significantly impacts stakeholder perceptions of higher educational institutions in Lagos State, with an R value of 0.286 reflecting a weak yet notable positive relationship. Content marketing accounts for 8.2% of the variation in these perceptions. The ANOVA results confirm the model's significance, with an F-value of 34.266 ($p < .001$). A one-unit increase in content marketing correlates with a 0.174 increase in perception scores, reinforcing that the relationship is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Influencer engagement has no significant effect on the corporate reputation of HEIs in Lagos State.

Table 2. Model Summary for Hypothesis 2

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .321 ^a | .103 | .101 | .46230 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), IE

ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|--------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 9.506 | 1 | 9.506 | 44.479 | <.001 ^b |
| | Residual | 82.496 | 396 | .214 | | |
| | Total | 92.002 | 397 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: CRR

b. Predictors: (Constant), IE

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.831 | .203 | | 13.957 | <.001 |
| | IE | .322 | .048 | .321 | 6.669 | <.001 |

a. Dependent Variable: CRR

The study finds that influencer engagement significantly enhances the corporate reputation of higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Lagos State, evidenced by a moderate positive relationship ($R = 0.321$) and an R Square value indicating it explains 10.3% of the variation in corporate reputation. The ANOVA confirms statistical significance ($F = 44.479$, $p < .001$), and the coefficient table reveals that an increase in influencer engagement corresponds to a 0.322 rise in corporate reputation scores, reinforcing the rejection of the null hypothesis and affirming the meaningful impact of influencer-driven communication.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: Audience interaction does not significantly influence stakeholder perceptions in HEIs in Lagos State.

Table 3: Model Summary for Hypothesis 3

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .554 ^a | .307 | .305 | .44477 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), AI

ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|--------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 33.822 | 1 | 33.822 | 170.977 | <.001 ^b |
| | Residual | 76.357 | 396 | .198 | | |
| | Total | 110.179 | 397 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: SP

b. Predictors: (Constant), AI

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.504 | .205 | | 7.326 | <.001 |
| | AI | .632 | .048 | .554 | 13.076 | <.001 |

a. Dependent Variable: SP

The study reveals that audience interaction significantly enhances stakeholder perceptions of higher educational institutions in Lagos State, evidenced by an R value of 0.554 and an R Square of 0.307, indicating that audience interaction explains 30.7% of the variability in perceptions. The ANOVA results validate the model's significance (F -value = 170.977, $p < .001$), confirming that the correlation is not incidental. The unstandardized coefficient (B

= 0.632) indicates a notable increase in stakeholder perception scores with increased audience interaction, supported by a standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.554), reinforcing the strong positive impact. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, affirming that audience interaction positively influences stakeholder perceptions in the context of higher education in Lagos State.

Discussion of Findings

The study explores social media marketing's impact on corporate image and stakeholder perceptions in higher education institutions in Lagos State, focusing on content marketing, influencer engagement, and audience interaction. Findings demonstrate that audience interaction has the strongest positive effect on perceptions and reputation, explaining 30.7% of variance in stakeholder perceptions, aligning with Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes the importance of trust-based relationships through engagement. Influencer engagement shows a significant but moderate impact on reputation (10.3%), interpreted through Source Credibility Theory, while content marketing has the least influence (8.2%), as per Signaling Theory. The study suggests that institutions should prioritize interactive engagement and credible messaging to enhance their reputation, indicating that social media strategies must be comprehensive and reflect real performance to establish trust. Limitations include reliance on cross-sectional data, highlighting the need for future longitudinal studies to deepen understanding of these dynamics. Overall, the research confirms that effective social media marketing is crucial for positive institutional perception in Nigerian higher education.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the empirical findings, it can be concluded that social media marketing significantly influences the corporate image and stakeholder perceptions of higher educational institutions in Lagos State. Audience interaction emerged as the most influential dimension, reflecting the critical importance of two-way communication and stakeholder engagement in contemporary institutional branding. Content marketing and influencer engagement also contribute positively, albeit to a lesser extent, demonstrating that informational content and endorsements by credible sources are valuable but insufficient alone for reputation building. The findings support the theoretical underpinnings of Relationship Marketing Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and Signalling Theory, showing that social media marketing operates through multiple mechanisms to shape stakeholder perceptions. By combining interactive engagement, credible messaging, and strategic content dissemination, HEIs can foster trust, loyalty, and positive institutional identity among their stakeholders. The study concludes that while social media is an essential tool for institutional visibility, its impact on corporate image depends on strategic deployment that prioritizes engagement, authenticity, and alignment with institutional values. In the context of Lagos State, where higher educational institutions operate in competitive, high-profile environments, effective social media marketing can enhance stakeholder confidence, attract prospective students, and strengthen institutional reputation.

Recommendations

- 1) **Strategic Content Marketing:** Institutions should develop content marketing strategies that communicate achievements, academic programs, and institutional values. Content should be visually engaging, storytelling-focused, and tailored to the preferences of digital-native audiences.
- 2) **Leverage Credible Influencers:** Higher educational institutions should actively involve credible individuals such as faculty experts, alumni, and reputable public figures in social media campaigns to enhance authenticity and credibility.
- 3) **Enhance Audience Interaction:** Institutions should prioritize building relational engagement with stakeholders through responsive social media practices.

Contributions to Knowledge

The study provides quantitative evidence on the relationship between social media marketing and corporate image in Nigerian public higher educational institutions, addressing a gap in existing literature. Also, by examining content marketing, influencer engagement, and audience interaction separately, the study offers nuanced insights into how different social media strategies influence stakeholder perceptions and corporate reputation. The study also applied relationship marketing theory, source credibility theory, and signalling theory to the context of higher education, demonstrating how these theories explain the mechanisms through which social media affects corporate image. Finally, the findings provide a practical framework for Lagos State HEIs to design and implement effective social media marketing strategies that enhance institutional visibility, trust, and stakeholder engagement.

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