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Social media marketing and financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region of Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the effects of social media marketing on the financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region of Uganda, focusing on three specific objectives, which included: examining the effect of community engagement on the financial performance of tour firms; establishing the effect of branding on the financial performance of tour firms; and assessing the effect of positioning on the financial performance of tour firms. The study was anchored on the Destination Competitiveness Theory, and the cross-sectional research design was employed, targeting 173 employees among the 140 registered tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region of Uganda. Using the Morgan table, the study sampled 120 respondents, which included the tour managers, marketing managers and finance managers, employing the stratified random sampling technique. Structured questionnaires designed on a 5-point Likert scale were used to collect the primary data. Data was then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that community engagement, measured by information sharing, comments and feedback & user-generated content, significantly affected the financial performance of the tour firms ($R^2 = 0.126$, $p = 0.001 < .005$). Branding, which included visual identity and recognition, audience alignment and connection, had a positive and significant effect on the financial performance of the tour firms ($R^2 = 0.251$, $p = 0.001 < 0.005$). On the other hand, market positioning as measured by value proposition, target audience and content strategy was found to be the strongest predictor of financial performance among the tour firms ($R^2 = 0.270$, $p < 0.001 < 0.005$). The study concluded that social media marketing is a key driver of profitability, revenue growth and return on investment among the tour firms. The study recommended that tour firms leverage social media marketing as a strategic tool to improve financial performance.

Keywords: Branding, Community Engagement, Financial Performance, Market Positioning, Social Media Marketing, Tour Firms

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, social media marketing has become a vital and strategic tool for most tour firms leveraging platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube among others in order to build brand identity, engage customers and to strategically position themselves in the highly dynamic and competitive market place (Kayumovich & Kamalovna, 2019). As noted by Chu et al. (2020), these social media platforms offer interactive communication channels that enhance brand - customer relationships within the organisations, and on the other hand, Morrison (2022) underscores the participatory nature of these social media platforms where consumers co-create content which eventually influences brand perception and customer loyalty. According to Ndekwa (2025) aspects of social media marketing such as influencer marketing and user - generated content are very critical in amplifying brand visibility and customer reach and that social media marketing can best be assessed by looking at three key dimensions; customer engagement, brand identity and positioning. These three key dimensions interlink elements collectively leading to customer trust, enhanced customer loyalty and also contributing to the overall performance of most tour firms in a digital tourism economy.

As noted by Harrigan et al. (2017), social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Instagram came in to existence in the early 2000s marking the rise of revolution in the tourism marketing sector. Most tour have since embraced these platforms for their marketing activities such as; branding, customer engagement and service delivery consequently reporting higher visibility and market share growth which eventually leads to improved financial performance of the tour firms. Morrison (2022) further confirms that social media marketing improves revenue, reduces advertising costs and increases customer loyalty. Digital marketing strategies became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 to 2021 as lockdowns disrupted the operations of most businesses the world. Tour firms that adopted virtual tours, flexible online bookings and active social media communications experienced quick financial recovery which was echoed by the post-pandemic recovery in 2022 onwards further reaffirming that digital resilience and social media marketing were very key to financial recovery and sustained profitability for most of the tour firms.

Historically, the financial performance of tour firms has evolved alongside major developments in the transportation sector and technology advancements. According to Ranasinghe et al. (2021), in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome civilization, people traveled mainly for trade, religion or governance issues and while these societies had no formal tour firms, wealthy individuals would hire tour guides to move around. Financially, these services were exclusive, limited to the few elites and operated outside the commercial market which have actually laid the foundation for the recent paid travel services. Today, financial performance in tourism is increasingly tied to digital transformation particularly social media marketing, which supports customer engagement, brand visibility and market positioning. However, evidence from Uganda remains limited as few empirical studies have systematically examined how social media marketing strategies affect the financial performance of tour firms, especially in rural sub-regions like Kigezi.

In this study, financial performance served as the dependent variable reflecting the profitability, revenue growth and return on investment of the tour firms in the Kigezi region. Alatawi et al. (2023) affirms that, financial performance of tour firms can best be assessed through both quantitative measures such as; sales growth, bookings and revenue per client and qualitative measures such as; customer satisfaction and service delivery. Additionally, Mihalic (2002) and Dwyer et al. (2009) argue that financial performance must be considered alongside other measures such as operational sustainability, especially for small tour businesses operating in environmentally sensitive areas like Kigezi. This study specifically explored how social media marketing strategies such as branding, market positioning and community engagement translate into improved financial performance of the tour firms in Kigezi sub-region.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Tourism significantly contributes to Uganda's economy, accounting for approximately 7.7% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing over 667,000 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics UBOS, 2023). The attractive Kigezi sub-region is basically home to major tourist attraction sites such as Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Lake Bunyonyi and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, which possess immense tourism potential. Despite this, tour and travel firms in the region have reported low financial performance over the past five years (Tushabe et al., 2023). Since the year 2020, over 15% of registered tour operators in the region have stopped operations and others have resorted to staff layoffs and service downsizing to cut down on operational costs (Uganda Tourism Board, 2022). As much as these challenges can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and infrastructural challenges in the region, questions still arise regarding the strategic use of modern social media marketing tools by these local firms to improve visibility and client engagement and the overall performance of the firms. According to Minazzi (2015) social media marketing has become an increasingly important tool in global tourism for promoting destinations, enhancing brand awareness and increasing client bookings. In digitally evolving markets, tour firms that effectively utilize platforms like Facebook, Instagram and twitter among others often gain competitive advantage and financial sustainability. This study therefore sort to examine the relationship between social media marketing and financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region, addressing this knowledge gap and providing practical insights for marketing and policy improvement.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. To examine the effect of Community Engagement on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region
ii. To establish the effect of Branding on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region
iii. To assess the effect of Positioning on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant effect of community engagement on the financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region.

H_{02}: There is no significant effect of branding on the financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub- region.

H_{03}: There is no significant effect of positioning on the financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Destination Competitiveness Theory

The destination competitiveness theory as developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), postulates that for any tour firm to be successful in the competitive market, is should have the ability to deliver its goods and services in a manner that they are more superior to those of competing firms, while at the same time sustaining economic use of resources and supporting the community well-being. According to Qu et al. (2011), the theory incorporates multiple dimensions including core resources such as natural and cultural attractions, supporting factors such as infrastructure, accessibility and service quality and also destination management which includes branding, marketing and information technology. The theory is anchored on the core proposition that a destination's competitiveness in the global tourism market is determined by effective branding and marketing strategies. This theory is very relevant in the context of social media marketing which has become a powerful tool for positioning destinations and influencing tourists' perceptions (Altinay & Kozak, 2021). The theory provides a foundational framework for assessing how social media branding and customer engagement can effectively contribute to the visibility and financial performance of tourism service providers. However, the theory has been criticized for being overly destination centered which often neglects the role of firm-level strategies and innovations such as the operational use of social media platforms by tour operators (Rheeders, 2022). Additionally, the theory also assumes a relatively uniform market response to competitive factors which may overlook diverse consumer behaviors influenced by digital trends.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Community Engagement and Financial Performance of Tour Firms

The intertwining of community engagement with social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a powerful lever influencing the financial viability of tour firms. Community engagement embodied in likes, shares, comments and user-generated content (UGC) serves as a tangible performance metric for SMM while actively shaping consumer behaviors that translate into financial outcomes (Alghamdi & Wahid, 2024). A growing body of literature supports a robust link: tour firms that cultivate vibrant online communities typically see a measurable boost in bookings, revenues and broader financial health (Amin et al., 2025; Chyrak et al., 2024). Early studies in adjacent sectors laid a theoretical groundwork affirming the positive correlation between online engagement and business performance (Toon, 2025). For instance, research into U.S. restaurant chains revealed a statistically significant relationship between social media content engagement likes, shares, positive comments and annual revenue increases, even after accounting for traditional advertising expenditures (Mansouri, 2024). The study posits that consumer engagement drives value co- creation between firms and users, translating into elevated sales, particularly when brands rely less on paid media. Etuk (2018) found that two-way social media communication strengthens customer relationships, increases satisfaction and boosts loyalty (Ghaderi et al., 2019). This customer bond is a critical step toward repeat booking and upselling, both crucial drivers of tour firm profitability. Social media's capacity to bolster tourist numbers is further substantiated by analytics-based research in destination marketing. An analysis of YouTube content across six Gulf destinations revealed that user engagement metrics e.g. Views, likes and comments were positively correlated with actual visitor numbers. This demonstrates that community engagement is not merely a proxy for interest, but a quantifiable driver of inbound tourism. The measurable effect of engagement on footfall provides strong evidence for its impact on financial metrics, as increased visitation directly correlates with revenue from tours, accommodations and related services.

2.2.2 Branding and Financial Performance of Tour firms

The growing reliance on digital technologies has transformed how tour firms build brand equity and drive financial performance, with social media branding emerging as a critical strategic lever (Lee & Park, 2022). Branding refers to the deliberate use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to construct and communicate a firm's identity, values, and promises in a way that resonates with targeted digital audiences (Braga, 2023). In the context of tour firms, where consumer decisions are highly influenced by visual content, peer opinions, and emotional appeal, branding on social media plays a central role in creating trust, influencing purchase decisions, and ultimately determining financial outcomes (Schniederjans et al., 2013). A fundamental premise in the literature is that strong branding creates psychological and emotional connections with customers, which in turn improves revenue-related performance. Selase Asamoah (2014) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model suggests that brand awareness, image, and associations influence consumer behavior and decision-making. In a tourism context, a well-crafted brand that resonates emotionally can lead to greater consideration, increased bookings, and loyalty especially when consistently projected through social media platforms (Munar, 2012). Unlike traditional advertising, social media allows two-way communication, enabling tour firms to dynamically engage users, adjust their message, and co-create brand meaning through user- generated content and community feedback. Empirical studies increasingly affirm that social media branding has a significant impact on financial performance, For example, Hutter et al. (2013) found that engagement with branded content on social platforms significantly influenced users' purchase intentions and brand attitudes, both of which correlate strongly with actual financial behavior. In tourism specifically, research by Mariani et al. (2016) showed that tour firms which effectively utilized branded hashtags, destination storytelling, and influencer partnerships reported higher revenue growth, customer acquisition, and retention. Beyond visibility and engagement, social media branding enhances trust a crucial precursor to financial performance. A study by Hudson et al. (2015) found that when tour firms consistently presented their brand voice, responded to user inquiries promptly, and maintained transparency through real-time updates, they cultivated higher trust levels among their social media followers.

2.2.3 Market Positioning and Financial Performance of Tour Firms

The digital era, where consumer choices are heavily shaped by online content and brand interactions, social media positioning has emerged as a strategic determinant of financial performance for tour firms (Kizildag et al., 2017). Positioning refers to how a firm differentiates and presents itself on digital platforms to occupy a distinct and valued place in the minds of target audiences. In tourism an industry deeply reliant on perception, trust and emotional resonance strategic positioning on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok enables tour firms to articulate a unique value proposition that influences customer attraction, conversion and loyalty, all of which are directly linked to financial performance (Rotondo & Fadda, 2019). Tourism services are inherently intangible and high-involvement purchases, making brand clarity and uniqueness essential. Kotler et al. (2016) define positioning as ―the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market. Empirical research by Mariani & Borghi (2020) found that tour operators with a well-defined and consistent social media positioning strategy achieved higher levels of consumer engagement, perceived brand authenticity, and ultimately, revenue growth. A study by Christodoulides et al. (2006) emphasizes that digital brand positioning creates psychological ownership among consumers, which is positively correlated with both booking intent and word-of-mouth promotion two key drivers of financial success. Furthermore, tour firms that position themselves clearly on social media often experience better alignment between their brand promises and audience expectations (Valeri & Baggio, 2021). This alignment leads to reduced customer dissatisfaction and enhances service satisfaction, which in turn improves financial metrics such as customer retention, repeat bookings, and lifetime customer value. In a survey of East African tour firms, Ndekwa (2016) found that businesses that adopted niche social media positioning such as promoting conservation-oriented safaris or local cultural experiences, experienced a 28% increase in bookings within 12 months compared to firms with generic or unfocused messaging. The study concluded that clear positioning not only attracts the right audience but also builds lasting customer relationships that contribute to steady revenue streams. Social media positioning also plays a role in increasing operational efficiency and marketing return on investment (ROI). When a firm knows exactly who it is speaking to and what it stands for, its marketing content becomes more targeted and effective. According to Hudson & Hudson (2023), digital positioning guides firms to tailor their tone, imagery, and content to their ideal customer profile, resulting in higher engagement and conversion rates.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework elucidates the existing relationship between social media marketing and financial performance of tour firms.

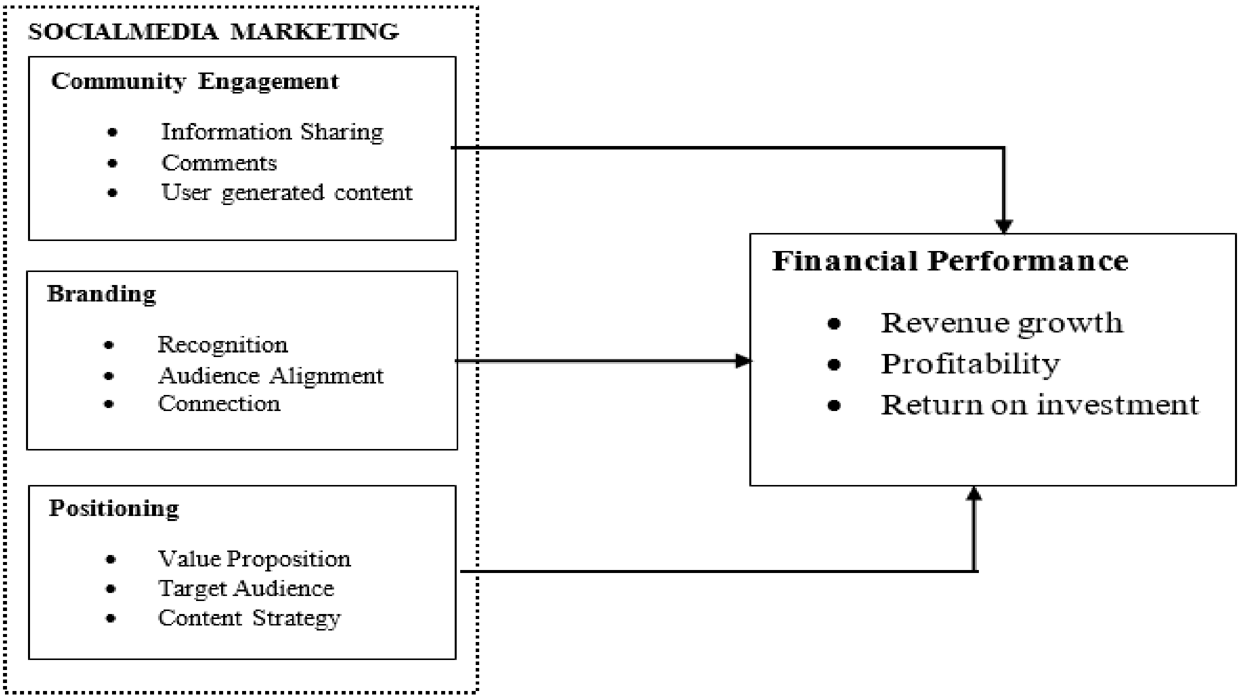

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework
Source: Adapted from Keller (2013)

As shown in Figure 1, social media marketing (the independent variable) was measured through three primary dimensions: community engagement, branding, and positioning, while financial performance (the response variable) was measured using revenue growth, profitability, and a return on investment. All these components interact to form a comprehensive digital marketing approach that influences how tour firms connect with potential and existing clients.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design with a focus on quantitative methods to examine the relationship between social media marketing and the financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi Sub-Region. The design was suitable for capturing data at a single point in time allowing the researcher to assess the existing patterns, practices and perceptions among the tour firms regarding their use of social media marketing strategies and their corresponding financial outcomes (Kothari and Nagrath, 2003).

3.2 Target Population

The population of this study comprised of 140 registered tourism firms in the Kigezi Sub-region, These firms include approximately 61 tour managers, 81marketing managers and 31 finance managers giving a study population of 173.

3.3 Sample Size

A sample of 120 respondents was selected to participate in the study using the Krejci and Morgan table.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure proportional and representative inclusion of tourism firms across the Kigezi Sub-region.

Table 1

Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Category	Target population	Sample size	Sampling Technique
Tour managers	61	45	Stratified Sampling
Marketing Managers	81	60	Stratified Sampling
Finance managers	31	15	Stratified Sampling
Total	**173**	**120**	

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from the selected respondents which was then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Out of these, 115 questionnaires were successfully returned, representing a high response rate of 96%.

Table 2

Response Rate

Questionnaires	Number	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires distributed	120	100
Questionnaires returned	115	96
Questionnaire not returned	5	4

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Community Engagement and Financial Performance of Tourism Firms

The first objective of the study sort to examine the effect of ´community engagement on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region. The opinions of the respondents were sort covering the various measures of community engagement (information sharing, Comments and feedback and User generated content) and the results are presented in tables 3, 4 and 5 below.

Table 3

Information Sharing on Social Media by Tourism Firms

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev
Our firm regularly shares timely and relevant information on social media platforms.	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	109 (94.8%)	4.89	0.54
We use social media to educate our audience about destinations and travel packages.	0	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.6%)	83 (72.2%)	28 (24.3%)	4.20	0.52
Our posts often include travel tips, safety guidelines and destination insights.	0	2 (1.7%)	31 (27%)	29 (25.2%)	53 (46.1%)	4.16	0.88
We customize our shared content based on audience interests and feedback.	1 (0.9%)	8 (7%)	15 (13%)	38 (33%)	53 (46.1%)	4.17	0.96
Our firm actively shares behind-the-scenes experiences or operations on social media.	0	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.7%)	21 (18.3%)	91 (79.1%)	4.76	0.52

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, **D**=Disagree**, N**=Neutral**, A**=Agree**, SA**=Strongly Agree**, SDev.** = Standard Deviation

The results in Table 2 above showed that tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region strongly engage in sharing timely and relevant information on social media platforms, with a high agreement (*M* = 4.89, *SD* = 0.54). Most firms actively post behind-the-scenes content (*M* = 4.76, *SD* = 0.52) and educate their audience about destinations and travel packages (*M* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.52). Other practices such as customizing content based on audience interests (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.96) and sharing travel tips and safety guidelines (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = 0.88) were also rated highly, suggesting that firms prioritize providing relevant, engaging and audience-focused content through social media.

Table 4

Social Media Comments and Feedback on Social Media by Tourism Firms

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev.
Our firm frequently receives comments and feedback on our social media posts.	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	7 (6.1%)	63 (54.8%)	43 (37.4%)	4.27	0.69
We respond to comments and inquiries from followers in a timely manner.	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.3%)	14 (12.2%)	40 (34.8%)	55 (47.8%)	4.24	0.89
Comments from users help us improve our services or travel packages.	1 (0.9%)	4 (3.5%)	23 (20%)	50 (43.5%)	37 (32.2%)	4.03	0.86
We actively encourage users to comment on our posts and engage in discussions.	1 (0.9%)	4 (3.5%)	23 (20%)	36 (31.3%)	51 (44.3%)	4.15	0.92
Comments and feedback are taken seriously and acted upon by management.	4(3.5%)	5(4.3%)	27(23.5%)	46(40%)	33(28.7%)	3.86	1.00

The results in Table 3 above showed that Tour firms receive frequent comments and feedback on their social media posts (*M* = 4.27, *SD* = 0.69) and responding to these comments in a timely manner (*M* = 4.24, *SD* = 0.89). Respondents also indicated that comments from users help improve services (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 0.86) and that their firms actively encourage discussion and user engagement (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 0.92). This means that the tour firms use these social media channels to actively engage with their customers. However, slightly lower agreement was noted regarding the extent to which management takes feedback seriously and acts upon it (M = 3.86, SD = 1.00), which may indicate room for enhancing responsiveness and incorporating audience input into decision-making.

Table 5

Use of User-Generated Content on Social Media by Tourism Firms

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev
We encourage customers to share their travel experiences on our social media pages.	3 (2.6%)	8 (7%)	30 (26.1%)	33 (28.7%)	41 (35.7%)	3.88	1.06
Our firm often shares or reposts content created by satisfied customers.	1 (0.9%)	8 (7%)	13 (11.3%)	52 (45.2%)	41 (35.7%)	4.08	0.91
We organize contests or campaigns that promote customer content sharing.	0 (0%)	11 (9.6%)	35 (30.4%)	46 (40%)	23 (20%)	3.70	0.90
Customer testimonials or stories are regularly featured in our content.	4 (3.5%)	7 (6.1%)	25 (21.7%)	44 (38.3%)	35 (30.4%)	3.86	1.03
We analyze user-generated content to improve our marketing strategies.	3 (2.6%)	8 (7%)	27 (23.5%)	30 (26.1%)	47 (40.9%)	3.96	1.08

User-generated content practices among tour firms in Table 4 above showed moderate to high levels of engagement, with firms encouraging customers to share travel experiences (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = 1.06) and frequently reposting content created by satisfied customers (*M* = 4.08, *SD* = 0.91). The use of customer testimonials (*M* = 3.86, *SD* = 1.03) and analysis of user-generated content for marketing improvement (*M* = 3.96, SD = 1.08) were also common. However, there was lower agreement on organizing contests to promote content sharing (*M* = 3.70, *SD* = 0.90) indicating these are potential areas for further development in social media strategy.

4.2.2 Branding and Financial Performance of Tourism Firms

The second objective of the study sort to establish the effect of branding on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region. The opinions of the respondents were sort covering the various measures of branding which included; information sharing, recognition and visual Identity, audience alignment and connections. The results are presented in tables 6, 7 and 8 below.

Table 6

Brand Recognition and Visual Identity

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev.
Our brand is easily recognized on social media platforms.	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	12 (10.4%)	101 (87.8%)	4.85	0.44
Our firm's logo and brand colors are consistently applied across all social media content.	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.3%)	70 (60.9%)	38 (33%)	4.24	0.66
Followers can immediately identify our posts without reading the full content.	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.7%)	36 (31.3%)	34 (29.6%)	42 (36.5%)	3.99	0.91
Our brand name is frequently mentioned or tagged by users on social media.	3 (2.6%)	9 (7.8%)	28 (24.3%)	50 (43.5%)	25 (21.7%)	3.74	0.97
We use unique hashtags that are associated with our brand identity.	3 (2.6%)	18 (15.7%)	30 (26.1%)	26 (22.6%)	38 (33%)	3.68	1.17
Social media marketing has increased awareness of our brand in the tourism market.	0 (0%)	14 (12.2%)	2 (1.7%)	19 (16.5%)	80 (69.6%)	4.43	1.01
Our social media visuals reflect the personality of our brand.	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)	17 (14.8%)	62 (53.9%)	34 (29.6%)	4.11	0.71

The results in Table 5 above reveal strong brand recognition among tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region, with respondents overwhelmingly agreeing that their brands are easily recognized on social media platforms (*M* = 4.85, *SD* = 0.44). Consistency in logo and brand colors was also highly rated (*M* = 4.24, *SD* = 0.66), indicating a deliberate effort to maintain visual identity. While followers generally could identify posts without reading full content (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = 0.91), fewer respondents agreed that the brand name was frequently mentioned or tagged by users (*M* = 3.74, *SD* = 0.97). The use of unique brand-associated hashtags received moderate agreement (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = 1.17). Social media marketing was perceived to have increased brand awareness significantly (*M* = 4.43, *SD* = 1.01), and brand visuals were considered reflective of brand personality (*M* = 4.11, *SD* = 0.71). This suggests that tour firms actively work on visual consistency and recognition to strengthen their branding efforts via social media.

Table 7

Audience Alignment with Brand Messaging

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev
Our brand messaging aligns well with our target audience's interests and values.	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.6%)	7 (6.1%)	37 (32.2%)	67 (58.3%)	4.44	0.80
We understand our audience's preferences and create tailored social media content.	1 (0.9%)	13 (11.3%)	10 (8.7%)	45 (39.1%)	46 (40%)	4.06	1.01
We frequently analyze engagement metrics to improve content alignment.	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.6%)	19 (16.5%)	45 (39.1%)	47 (40.9%)	4.17	0.86
Our social media followers represent our ideal customer segments.	0 (0%)	4 (3.5%)	11 (9.6%)	42 (36.5%)	58 (50.4%)	4.34	0.79
We receive positive feedback from users who feel understood by our content.	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.6%)	24 (20.9%)	42 (36.5%)	45 (39.1%)	4.10	0.88
Our promotions and campaigns are relevant to the needs of our audience.	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.3%)	28 (24.3%)	54 (47%)	27 (23.5%)	3.88	0.85
We adapt our tone and messaging to suit different audience demographics on various platforms.	1 (0.9%)	6 (5.2%)	15 (13%)	40 (34.8%)	53 (46.1%)	4.20	0.92

Tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region generally perceive their brand messaging as well-aligned with their target audience's interests and values (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.80). Respondents reported understanding their audience's preferences and tailoring social media content accordingly (*M* = 4.06, *SD* = 1.01). Frequent analysis of engagement metrics to enhance content alignment was noted (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.86), and most respondents agreed that their social media followers represented ideal customer segments (*M* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.79). Positive feedback from users who felt understood was also common (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 0.88). Although promotion relevance scored slightly lower (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = 0.85), firms showed a tendency to adapt tone and messaging to suit different demographics on various platforms (*M* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.92) as shown in 7 above. Overall, the data indicate effective audience alignment practices to enhance branding success.

Table 8

Building Customer Connection through Social Media

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev
Our brand fosters emotional connections with our followers through storytelling.	1 (0.9%)	7 (6.1%)	17 (14.8%)	33 (28.7%)	57 (49.6%)	4.20	0.97
Our social media content builds trust and loyalty among customers.	1 (0.9%)	8 (7%)	18 (15.7%)	50 (43.5%)	38 (33%)	4.01	0.92
We receive regular direct messages from users expressing appreciation or asking for advice.	0 (0%)	8 (7%)	12 (10.4%)	41 (35.7%)	54 (47%)	4.23	0.90
Our audience engages with us during and after travel experiences.	2 (1.7%)	7 (6.1%)	20 (17.4%)	54 (47%)	32 (27.8%)	3.93	0.92
Social media helps us build long-term relationships with clients.	1 (0.9%)	9 (7.8%)	17 (14.8%)	43 (37.4%)	45 (39.1%)	4.06	0.97
We humanize our brand through personalized responses and behind-the scenes content.	1 (0.9%)	10 (8.7%)	14 (12.2%)	43 (37.4%)	47 (40.9%)	4.09	0.98
Our customers often return or refer others because of the connection they feel with our brand online.	4 (3.5%)	9 (7.8%)	10 (8.7%)	9 (25.2%)	63 (54.8%)	4.20	1.11

The data in Table 8 above indicate that tour firms actively foster emotional connections with followers through storytelling (*M* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.97) and build trust and loyalty via social media content (*M* = 4.01, *SD* = 0.92). Respondents frequently received direct messages expressing appreciation or requests for advice (*M* = 4.23, *SD* = 0.90), and reported active audience engagement during and after travel experiences (*M* = 3.93, *SD* = 0.92). Social media was also seen as a tool to build long-term client relationships (*M* = 4.06, *SD* = 0.97). Personalization efforts such as behind-the-scenes content were positively rated (*M* = 4.09, *SD* = 0.98). Finally, many firms noted that customers often returned or referred others due to the online brand connection (*M* = 4.20, *SD* = 1.11). This demonstrates that social media facilitates strong relational bonds between tour firms and their clientele.

4.2.3 Market Positioning and Financial Performance of Tourism Firms

The third objective of the study sort to assess the effect of positioning on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region. The opinions of the respondents were sort covering the various measures of positioning which included; Value proposition, target audience and content strategy. The results are presented in tables 9, 10 and 11 below.

Table 9

Value Proposition Communication

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev.
Our social media clearly communicates the unique benefits of our services.	2 (1.7%)	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.6%)	10 (8.7%)	99 (86.1%)	4.77	0.71
We emphasize what makes our tour firm different from competitors.	2, (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.5%)	77 (67%)	30 (26.1%)	4.14	0.71
Our followers understand why they should choose our services over others.	1 (0.9%)	4 (3.5%)	36 (31.3%)	33 (28.7%)	41 (35.7%)	3.95	0.94
We regularly highlight our value in terms of customer experience and quality.	0	9 (7.8%)	13 (11.3%)	49 (42.6%)	44 (38.3%)	4.11	0.90
Our posts consistently reinforce our core strengths and offerings.	2 (1.7%)	7 (6.1%)	31 (27%)	42 (36.5%)	33 (28.7%)	3.84	0.97
We use testimonials and success stories to reinforce our brand value.	5 (4.3%)	8 (7%)	27 (23.5%)	46 (40%)	29 (25.2%)	3.75	1.05
Our pricing, service packages, and delivery standards are well-positioned through our social media.	1 (0.9%)	9 (7.8%)	17 (14.8%)	52 (45.2%)	36 (31.3%)	3.98	0.93

The data in Table 8 above indicate that tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region strongly communicate their unique value propositions on social media. The majority of respondents agreed that their social media clearly conveys the unique benefits of their services (*M* = 4.77, *SD* = 0.71) and emphasizes what differentiates their firms from competitors (*M* = 4.14, *SD* = 0.71). Followers reportedly understand why they should choose their services over others (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = 0.94). Firms regularly highlight customer experience and quality (*M* = 4.11, *SD* = 0.90) and reinforce core strengths consistently (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = 0.97). Testimonials and success stories are used moderately to bolster brand value (*M* = 3.75, *SD* = 1.05), while pricing and service positioning through social media receive fairly positive ratings (*M* = 3.98, *SD* = 0.93). These results reflect an overall strong emphasis on articulating the firm's value to customers via social media platforms

Table 9

Target Audience Definition and Engagement

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev.
We clearly define and understand the audience we target on social media.	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.3%)	4 (3.5%)	19 (16.5%)	86 (74.8%)	4.60	0.83
Our content is created with the needs and preferences of our ideal customer in mind.	0	2 (1.7%)	6 (5.2%)	73 (63.5%)	34 (29.65)	4.21	0.61
We monitor the demographics and behaviors of our followers to tailor our messaging.	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	11 (9.6%)	40 (34.8%)	60 (52.2%)	4.34	0.86
Our marketing campaigns are specifically directed to a selected segment of the tourism market.	0	3 (2.6%)	17 (14.8%)	60 (52.2%)	35 (30.4%)	4.10	0.74
We adapt our messaging based on customer personas or travel interests.	0	10 (8.7%)	19 (16.5%)	34 (29.6%)	52 (45.2%)	4.11	0.98
We regularly assess whether our content resonates with the intended audience.	2 (1.7%)	6 (5.2%)	13 (11.3%)	52 (45.2%)	42 (36.5%)	4.10	0.92
Our social media followers align well with our intended market segment.	2 (1.7%)	7 (6.1%)	17 (14.8%)	43 (37.4%)	46 (40%)	4.08	0.97

Tour firms demonstrate clear understanding and targeting of their intended audience on social media. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that their firms clearly define and understand their social media audience (*M* = 4.60, *SD* = 0.83). Content creation is aligned with the preferences of ideal customers (*M* = 4.21, *SD* = 0.61), and follower demographics and behaviors are monitored to tailor messaging (*M* = 4.34, *SD* = 0.86). Marketing campaigns are directed at selected tourism segments (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 0.74), with messaging adapted based on customer personas and interests (*M* = 4.11, *SD* = 0.98). Regular assessment of content resonance with the target audience (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 0.92) and alignment of followers with intended market segments (*M* = 4.08, *SD* = 0.97) further suggest a strategic approach to audience targeting and engagement as shown in 9.

Table 10

Content Strategy and Consistency

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev.
We have a structured plan for the type and timing of content we post on social media.	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.5%)	23 (20%)	41 (35.7%)	45 (39.1%)	4.07	0.94
Our content themes (e.g., adventure, culture, relaxation) match our positioning goals.	1 (0.9%)	7 (6.1%)	11 (9.6%)	47 (40.9%)	49 (42.6%)	4.18	0.90
We maintain visual and messaging consistency in all social media posts.	4 (3.5%)	9 (7.8%)	17 (14.8%)	52 (45.2%)	33 (28.7%)	3.88	1.03
We use different content formats (images, videos, stories) to enhance engagement.	2 (1.7%)	9 (7.8%)	29 (25.2%)	45 (39.1%)	30 (26.1%)	3.80	0.98
Our content is scheduled and published based on audience engagement patterns.	2 (1.7%)	7 (6.1%)	28 (24.3%)	43 (37.4%)	35 (30.4%)	3.89	0.97
We track content performance and adjust our strategy accordingly.	5 (4.3%)	8 (7%)	19 (16.5%)	43 (37.4%)	40 (34.8%)	3.91	1.09
Our content supports our goal of maintaining a distinctive brand position in the tourism market.	6 (5.2%)	16 (13.9%)	10 (8.7%)	33 (28.7%)	50 (43.5%)	3.91	1.25

Table 10 above indicate that the tour firms generally maintain structured and purposeful content strategies on social media. Respondents reported having a planned schedule for the type and timing of posts (*M* = 4.07, *SD* = 0.94), and content themes generally match positioning goals (*M* = 4.18, *SD* = 0.90). Visual and messaging consistency scored moderately high (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = 1.03), while the use of diverse content formats such as images and videos was slightly less prominent (*M* = 3.80, *SD* = 0.98). Content scheduling is based on audience engagement patterns (*M* = 3.89, *SD* = 0.97), with performance tracking and strategy adjustments practiced to a reasonable extent (*M* = 3.91, *SD* = 1.09). Finally, the content supports the firms' goal to maintain a distinctive market position (*M* = 3.91, *SD* = 1.25). This indicates an overall deliberate content strategy aimed at enhancing positioning through social media.

Table 11

Financial Performance of the Tour Firms

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDev.
The firm has experienced consistent revenue growth over the past three years.	0	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.7%)	14 (12.2%)	98 (85.2%)	4.82	0.49
Promotional campaigns on social media have generated noticeable spikes in revenue.	2 (1.7%)	7 (6.1%)	8 (7%)	48 (41.7%)	50 (43.5%)	4.19	0.94
Revenue generated from returning customers has improved due to social media engagement.	1 (0.9%)	4 (3.5%)	12 (10.4%)	58 (50.4%)	40 (34.8%)	4.15	0.81
The firm consistently generates sufficient profits to cover operational costs and investments.	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.6%)	14 (12.2%)	46 (40%)	51 (44.3%)	4.24	0.83
Our profitability has improved due to increased customer retention driven by social media marketing.	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	11 (9.6%)	37 (32.2%)	63 (54.8%)	4.37	0.86
We track and analyze the profitability of services promoted online separately from other channels.	0	4 (3.5%)	6 (5.2%)	53 (46.1%)	52 (45.2%)	4.33	0.73
We realize a strong return on investment from our social media marketing efforts.	0	3 (2.6%)	9 (7.8%)	47 (40.9%)	56 (48.7%)	4.36	0.74
Our social media expenditures are justified by the financial returns we gain.	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.3%)	15 (13%)	40 (34.8%)	54 (47%)	4.23	0.90
We monitor ROI from individual social media campaigns.	3 (2.6%)	3 (2.6%)	15 (13%)	49 (42.6%)	45 (39.1%)	4.13	0.92

The results revealed that tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region generally experience strong revenue growth with most respondents agreeing that their firms have seen consistent revenue growth over the past three years (*M* = 4.82, *SD* = 0.49). Promotional campaigns on social media have generated noticeable revenue spikes (*M* = 4.19, *SD* = 0.94), and social media engagement has improved revenue from returning customers (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 0.81). Overall the results suggest that revenue growth is positively influenced by social media marketing and customer retention efforts.

Tour firms generally report positive profitability outcomes, with most agreeing that they consistently generate sufficient profits to cover operational costs and investments (M = 4.24, SD = 0.83). Notably, profitability improvements are linked to increased customer retention driven by social media content (M = 4.37, SD = 0.86) and firms actively tracking profitability from online promotions separately (M = 4.33, SD = 0.73). These results indicate that social media marketing plays an important role in enhancing profitability.

Respondents agree that tour firms realize strong returns on investment (ROI) from their social media marketing efforts (M = 4.36, SD = 0.74) and that social media expenditures are justified by financial returns (M = 4.23, SD = 0.90). Monitoring of ROI from individual campaigns is practiced (M = 4.13, SD = 0.92). This underscores the financial effectiveness of social media marketing in boosting ROI in the tourism sector.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

To determine the effect of the various constructs of social media marketing on financial performance of the tour firms, the study tested all the three hypothesis using regression analysis and the results are as presented below.

H_{01}: *Community engagement has no effect on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region*

Table 12

Regression Analysis showing the Effect of Community Engagement on Financial Performance of Tour Firms in the Kigezi Sub-Region

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	2.702	0.374	—	7.233	<.001	[1.962, 3.442]
Community Engagement	0.366	0.091	.354	4.028	<.001	[0.186, 0.545]

Note. *Model summary: R = .354, R² = .126, Adjusted R² = .118, F (1, 113) = 16.23, p < .001. DV = Financial Performance.*

The results in table 12 above indicate that community engagement positively and significantly affects financial performance of the tour firms in Kigezi sub-region as shown by $R = 0.354$, $R^2 = 0.126$, $F(1, 113) = 16.23$ and $p < 0.001$.

This means that the 12.6% variance in financial performance can be attributed to community engagement efforts by the tour firms. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B = 0.366 and $p < 0.001$) indicate that for every one unit increase in community engagement activities, financial performance of the tour firms increased by 0.366 units. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.354$) reveals a moderate positive relationship between community engagement and financial performance of the tour firms. The study therefore **rejected** the null hypothesis that community engagement has no effect on financial performance of the tour firms.

These result agree with the results of Morgan & Hunt (1994) who found out that the development of long-term trust interactions with customers was the basic foundation for success in business. Similar the findings by Mansouri (2024) demonstrated that active online engagement not only fosters trust and loyalty among the customers but also increased the customer's intention to purchase. However, it has also been noted by other scholars that while some firms excel at listening and engaging customers, they are less effective at translating insights into service improvements. This aligns with Etuk (2018) and Ghaderi et al. (2019) who argued that customer feedback is a critical resource for innovation and competitive advantage, but only when it is systematically acted upon and that strengthening this aspect would further solidify the role of community engagement as a financial performance driver.

H_{02}: *Branding has no Effect on Financial Performance of Tour Firms in Kigezi Sub Region*

Table 13

Regression Analysis showing the Effect of Branding on Financial Performance of Tour Firms in the Kigezi Sub-Region

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	2.197	0.327	—	6.713	<.001	[1.549, 2.846]
Branding	0.483	0.079	.501	6.153	<.001	[0.328, 0.639]

Note. *Model summary: R = .501, R^2 = .251, Adjusted R^2 = .244, F (1, 113) = 37.86, p < .001. DV = Financial Performance.*

The results from 13 revealed that branding significantly predicted financial performance of the tour firms in Kigezi sub-region as indicated by $R = 0.501$, $R^2 = 0.251$, $F(1, 113) = 37.86$ and $p < .001$. The results indicate that 25.1% of the variance in financial performance of the tour firms is as a result of Branding efforts. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B = 0.483 and $p < .001$) suggest that for every one unit increase in branding, financial performance increased by 0.483 units. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.501$) indicates a strong positive relationship between branding and financial performance of tour firms. Consequently, the study **rejected** the null hypothesis that branding has no effect on financial performance of the tour firms**.**

Having a strong and distinct brand identity in today's highly competitive tourism industry is not an option but an essential requirement for a firm's success. As noted by Keller (2013), firms can build brand equity through leveraging brand awareness, associations and customer loyalty all of which were positively echoed in his findings. The findings also revealed that social media platforms allowed firms to continuously strengthen these brand elements consequently ensuring high brand visibility in the dynamic marketplace. The current study findings also identified emotional branding, particularly through storytelling and behind the scenes content as a strong marketing strategy. This also corresponds with the findings by Keller and Swaminathan (2020), who underscored the importance of emotional connections as a functional attribute in creating enduring and loyalty customers. Their findings also revealed that when customers connect emotionally with a brand, they are more likely to revisit, recommend and share their experiences with others consequently contributing to increased revenues and financial performance of the firms. Findings of Kim and Ko (2011) also support this by revealing that brand image formed as a result of social media marketing significantly influences consumer purchase intentions. Additionally, the finding that tour firms reported significant increases in brand awareness through social media ($M = 4.43$) confirms the transformative power of digital branding in influencing financial performance of the tour firms. In conclusion, firms that maintaining strong brand visibility stand a better chance of achieve both short-term gains in bookings and long-term sustainability through repeat customer purchases and referrals leading to improved financial performance.

H_{03}: *Positioning has no effect on financial performance of tour firms in Kigezi sub region*

Table 14

Regression Analysis showing for the Effect of Positioning on Financial Performance of Tour Firms in the Kigezi Sub-Region

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	2.117	0.324	—	6.539	<.001	[1.476, 2.759]
Positioning	0.510	0.079	.520	6.469	<.001	[0.354, 0.666]

Note: *Model summary: R = .520, R^2 = .270, Adjusted R^2 = .264, F (1, 113) = 41.85, p < .001. DV = Financial Performance.*

The simple linear regression results in table 14 above revealed that positioning significantly predicted financial performance of the tour firms in Kigezi sub-region as indicated by $R = 0.520$, $R^2 = 0.270$, $F(1, 113) = 41.85$ and $p < .001$. The results further revealed that Positioning accounted for 27.0% of the variance in financial performance of the tour firms. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B = 0.510 and $p < .001$) designates that for every one unit increase in positioning, financial performance increased by 0.510 units. Additionally, the standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.520$) reflects a strong and positive relationship positioning and financial performance of the tour firms. Hence the study **rejected** the null hypothesis that positioning has no effect on financial performance of the tour firms**.**

These findings corroborate with Porter's (2008) assertions that competitive advantage ascends from product differentiation and focus. This means that the tour firms can ensure that marketing investment generate maximum returns by tailoring their social media content to specific customer experiences. Moreover, monitoring of customer behavior and ensuring adjustment of messaging contents can demonstrate adaptive marketing practices. This reflects the principles of dynamic capability theory which affirms that firms can achieve superior performance when they rapidly sense, seize and reconfigure opportunities in response to the market changes (Teece et al., 1997).

The strong agreement on the value of ROI from social media marketing ($M = 4.36$) provides further evidence that strategic market positioning contributes directly to profitability and that by targeting the most profitable customer segments, tourism firms optimize their marketing resources ensuring efficiency and effectiveness.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that community engagement through social media marketing significantly improves the financial performance of tour firms in the Kigezi sub-region. Activities such as posting relevant content and responding to customer comments builds trust, strengthens customer relationships and increases purchase intentions among the customers. Although the use of customer feedback is still limited, community engagement remains a key driver of financial performance and firm's growth.

The study concludes that branding is a critical determinant of financial performance among the tour firms Kigezi sub-region accounting for 25.1% of the variance in financial performance. Brand recognition, visual consistency and emotional storytelling enables tour firms to strengthen customer loyalty and increase bookings and reservations. Additionally, social media platforms provide a cost effective avenue for continuous reinforcement of brand identity.

The study concludes that market positioning is the strongest predictor of financial performance among the tour firms in Kigezi sub-region accounting for 27% of the variance. Firms that clearly define their target customers, constantly communicate their unique value propositions and adjust strategies based on customer behavior are most likely to achieve superior returns on investment and better financial performance in general. This validates the role of strategic positioning in ensuring competitive advantage and improved firm performance.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that tour firms should strengthen customer feedback integration by establishing formal mechanisms to collect, analyze and act on customer feedback from the social media platforms. This will improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Firms should also encourage greater interaction with customers by running online polls, Question & Answer sessions and discussions to maintain active engagement with their customers. Additionally, tour firms should dedicate staff or create social media management teams to ensure timely responses and feedback to customer inquiries and comments.

The study recommends tour firms should invest in developing a consistent and recognizable brand identity across all social media platforms emphasizing on attractive logos, colors and messaging content. Emotional branding through storytelling and showcasing behind the scenes experiences should be enhanced to create deeper connections with customers. Additionally, managers should also actively promote user generated content (UGC) such as customer reviews, photos and videos to strengthen brand authenticity and visibility.

Finally, the study recommends that tour firms should adopt data driven marketing by using analytics to identify target market segments and adjusting their content accordingly. Firms should clearly define and communicate their unique value propositions on social media platforms to distinctively differentiate themselves from competitors. Regular evaluation of return on investment (ROI) for social media campaigns should be conducted to ensure that positioning strategies remain efficient and profitable.

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