IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON SOCIAL BRAND COMMUNICATION FOR KENYAN TECH BRANDS ON INSTAGRAM

By

LINDA NGWONO OTIENDE

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Communication, Cinematic and Creative Arts in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Communication Studies

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA

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Student’s Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented by any other person in any other institute of learning other than the United States International University – Africa in Nairobi for academic credit.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

LINDA NGWONO OTIENDE (ID No. 649149)
Approval Page

In accordance with United States International University – Africa policies, this thesis is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Communication Studies.

Sign Date:

_____________________________  ______________________
Lucy W. Gichaga, Ph.D.
Supervisor

_____________________________  ______________________
Kioko Ireri, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Journalism and Corporate Communication

_____________________________  ______________________
Valerie P. Adema, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Communication, Cinematics & Creative Arts
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By

Linda Ngwono Otiende
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to God for this far. Without Him, this research project would not be a success.

I would like to express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Lucy Wanjiku Gichaga for her guidance, constructive suggestions and encouragement throughout this research project. Her willingness to devote her time to this project is very much appreciated. God bless.

Special thanks to all the Professors in the USIU-Africa Communication Department for their constructive criticism throughout the research project that has helped make this project a success.

I would also like to thank everyone who participated in the data collection process. Special thanks to William Odhiambo, Calvin Otieno, Leah Amayo, Leah Okumu, Wangui Ngunjiri and Stanley Muturi who greatly assisted me in the data collection process.

Finally, I wish to thank my family once again, friends and close relatives for their continued support, encouragement and prayers throughout the project.
Dedication

I dedicate this project most specifically to my late mother, Mrs. Anna Otiende who passed on a day after my final thesis draft submission. Her continued prayers even when her health was deteriorating motivated me to complete this project. May God rest her soul in eternal peace. A special dedication to my father as well, Prof William Ogara who has stood by me every step of the way and whose financial support and prayers have enabled me to make this project a success. Many thanks as well to my siblings: David Ogara, Noah Otiende and Josephine Otiende who have been my support system and have encouraged me through all times and whose prayers have enabled me see this project come to a completion.
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List of Abbreviations

BAKE Bloggers Association of Kenya

BC Brand Communication

IRB Institutional Review Board

SBC Social Brand Communication

SBU Social Brand User

SMIs Social Media Influencers

SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Operational Definition of Terms

**Brand**: An image that people have in mind when thinking about a specific product or company and is based on a unique identity possessed by that company’s or seller’s product/service (Cotillard, 2015).

**Brand communication (BC)**: Communication activities that influence a customer’s opinion of a company’s product or services. Brand communication occurs each time a customer interacts with your brand and this is effected whenever a customer sees your logo, views your product and views the content of the brand (Edmonds, 2013).

**Instagram**: Online social network platform whose main service is sharing of pictures (Christensson, 2018)

**Network**: A system of interconnected people or things (Stone, 2017).

**Social Brand Communication (SBC)**: Brand communication on social media platforms generated by a user and is a fundamental source of information to target consumers (Bernoff, 2011).

**Social Media**: Activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinion using conversational media (Safko & Brake, 2009).

**Social Media Influencers (SMIs)**: People on social media with a sizeable network of followers (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Also identified as ‘social media celebrities’, SMIs play a key role to brands who wish to tell their story on social media (Forbes, 2016). They have the capacity to shape the attitude of their followers (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).
Abstract

Kenya has recently witnessed a thriving digital culture with social media emerging as a destination for brands to leverage engagement with consumers through the use of social media influencers (SMIs). This study which focused on Instagram as the main platform aimed at investigating the role of SMIs, the attributes that make SMIs increasingly influential thus assumed to have an impact on brand communication and whether there exists a relationship between SMIs and brand communication. The study was guided by the social network theory to explain the concept behind social media as a network backed up by the attribution theory to understand how social brand users attribute their behaviors to influencers view. Data was collected from 304 respondents by use of an online questionnaire designed using Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Findings of this study revealed that 81% of the respondents’ decision to interact or engage with the brands under study was not only affected by SMIs and their attributes but their follower count. The main attributes of SMIs that were found to have contributed to the influential potential of SMIs thus affecting the decisions of brand users were; trust (47%), authenticity (52%), persuasive power (45%), expertise (38%), and knowledge (45%). A one way ANOVA test conducted shows that there was a statistically significant relationship between the independent variables (trust and persuasion) and the dependent variable (brand communication). The Pearson correlation model adopted revealed a statistically significant correlation between follower count and knowledge capacity of an SMI hence an increase or decrease in either follower count or knowledge capacity significantly related to an increase or decrease in a brand user’s decision to recognize, interact and engage with a brand. Safaricom was identified as the most followed brand with 183, 000 followers which supports statistics from Social Baker that rank it as the most influential brand and confirms literature as well from the study that revealed it as the brand that has used SMIs the most in 2017 and 2018. A mean comparison revealed that all attributes were equally important and in the quest to create content that will at the end of the day engage social brand users, Kenyan brands should consider all of the above attributes when looking for suitable influencers to interpret brand messages to brand users. However, policies that address oversight of influencer posts need to be set up to curb issues of fictitious influencer posts that may defame organizations. This study therefore presented
the potential for help to other corporate brands hoping to use SMI s for brand communication in the future. One limitation of this study, however, was the high number of ‘I don’t know’ responses that were recorded when analyzing data thus presenting the use of SMI s by brands for brand communication as a possible area for future research.

*Key Words:* social media influencer, brand communication, brand user
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

More than half of the world’s population now uses the Internet, making it an integral part of our everyday life. For this reason, Internet growth continues to accelerate around the world with user numbers increasing by the day. A 2017 study by ‘We are Social’ and ‘Hootsuite’ on the use of the Internet, social media and mobile throughout Africa reveals that visiting social network sites remains the most performed online activity on the Internet all over the world (Kemp, 2017). According to Kemp (2017), up to 2.8 billion people worldwide are now using social media at least once every month with more than 91% accessing social media via their mobile devices.

There is no doubt therefore that social media use has become a big part of our everyday life and for this reason, it emerges as a destination for brands to bring not only their products closer to their potential online customers but also leverage engagement with these consumers. Companies have as a result become more interested in engaging consumers in spreading information about their products through the use of SMIs, an emerging community of heavy social media users with a large following and persuasive power to influence masses online. Social media influencers have gained so much attention and brands have discovered their impact and growth potential and are increasingly forging alliances with them to not only promote their products but also to communicate brand messages as well (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the impact that these SMIs have on brand communication for Kenyan brands on the Instagram platform.
1.2 Background of the Problem

Brand communication in the 21st century has evolved primarily as a result of the rise in the use of SMIs for brand communication made possible through the increased use of social media. As of 2016, it was estimated that there were 10 million social media users in Kenya with majority accessing social media via their smartphones (Dotsavvy, 2016). Safaricom further confirmed the presence of 7.8 million smartphones on their mobile network thus converging the benefits of always-on high-speed Internet, user-generated content and digital conversations (Dotsavvy, 2016). Easy accessibility to the Internet and the use of smartphones to access social media has therefore emerged as a contributing factor to the rise in SMIs.

The use of SMIs has surpassed the traditional word of mouth marketing which was very prominent and all it took for a brand to be successful was to create a quality product, market it to audiences within physical circles and people would buy it. In fact, as long as a brand’s product was of superior quality as compared to their competitors, a successful brand was guaranteed. However, times have changed and the increased use of social media has changed the game. Brands are slowly abandoning the traditional word of mouth advertising and efforts are now shifting towards SMIs interpreted as a highly credible electronic word of mouth, an improvement of the traditional word of mouth advertising which extends to the online social media world and not just the physical space (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). A famous quote by Zuckerberg (2007) that emphasizes the importance of influence and how nothing influences people more than a recommendation from a trusted friend best explains this prevalent rise in the use of SMIs by Kenyan brands for brand communication (Schonfeld, 2007). This is because SMIs have the persuasive
power to influence the decisions of their networks. According to an article that speaks about the art and science of digital influencer marketing in Kenya, SMIs, also referred to as digital influencers, have become an essential avenue for brand promotion in Kenya and one of the reasons they thrive is that consumers have become unresponsive to paid media (Dotsavvy, 2016). Social media influencers in Kenya use diverse platforms depending on expertise and preference and their popularity is as a result of the content they create which comes out as ‘real’ and ‘honest’ based on their contact with the product as opposed to just having an agenda of ‘selling’ a product for a brand (Dotsavvy, 2016). More and more brands are therefore turning to SMIs with the promise of delivering better and improved results (Dotsavvy, 2016). Brands are striving to not only be heard but to remain relevant by using SMIs to communicate to their potential online consumers.

No doubt the 21st century has been characterized by not just seeing but believing as well; believing from an influencer’s perspective. Hence the assertion that people influence people is correct because to make a brand believable, another party needs to prove that the brand is worth paying attention to and this is where influencers come in.

The most popular influencers globally possess audiences of millions of people on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Kenya’s most popular influencers have large audiences mostly on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with YouTube following closely. One example of an SMI in Kenya is Xtian Ndela who has more than a million followers on Twitter. Companies like Safaricom, Tecno Kenya and Airtel recognize this potential and therefore increasingly use influencers for brand communication. These influencers are paid by companies to push their brands online through creating content that seeks to amplify a brand’s product or service in a way that will influence the decision of their target
audience. According to Grave (2017), companies pay these influencers to promote their brands by integrating their products and services into their social media posts. Tecno Kenya for example, in 2017 maximized on the use of SMIs in a number of their campaigns. One such campaign was the #GloUpWithCX 2017 campaign that saw Tecno brand users on Instagram share their glow up journey based on a #GloUp hashtag. Through this hashtag, a winner would be chosen by the specific influencers for this campaign based on a challenge that would be judged by the influencers. The campaign, an Instagram campaign hired Instagram influencers with a large following who were paid to endorse the brand and increase its visibility based on the new product that was being launched. These influencers included Lucia Musau, a fashion blogger with 85,000 plus followers; Talia Oyando, a media personality with over 280,000 followers amongst others. Another example is the Safaricom blaze campaign which recently launched a TV show and incorporated a number of SMIs who were paid to create content on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to popularize the show. Safaricom has in the recent past used influencers like Joy Kendi; a fashion blogger with 122,000 plus followers; Patricia Kihoro, a radio personality with 110,000 followers plus and Anita Nderu, a media personality as well with 234,000 plus followers amongst others. Airtel Kenya has also emerged as another brand that has recently incorporated the use of SMIs in its recent AirtelTubonge #WachaNikupigie 2017 campaign. This campaign used Shix Kapienga, a radio personality and actress with over 350,000 plus followers as its main influencer.

Therefore, SMIs seem to have emerged as powerful tools for brand communication among Kenyan brands and their users (BusinessToday, 2018). This study, which will specifically focus on the Instagram platform, seeks to provide an insight as to why Kenyan
brands seem to be shifting towards the use of SMIs by investigating the effect they have when communicating brand messages to consumers.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Digitization, characterized by the increased use of the Internet and social media has disrupted traditional methods of brand communication such as traditional word of mouth advertising. Traditional word of mouth advertising was limited to audiences around us, but the increased use of social media and its connectivity has drastically extended this ability (TheFashionLaw, 2018). With traditional word of mouth advertising, typically defined as an unpaid form of promotion, a satisfied customer could talk to other people within their circle about how much they liked a brand product or service and it would stop at that. Electronic word of mouth advertising through the use of SMIs has extended the practice of word of mouth advertising beyond just an individual’s circle of friends to their social media circle (TheFashionLaw, 2018).

So as brands increasingly continue to let go of traditional word of mouth advertising, much effort is being put into SMIs who interpret brand messages amongst their followers and other potential online consumers (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). However, as literature continues to point out this shift from traditional word of mouth advertising to electronic word of mouth advertising by brands, none have explained the underlying reason for this shift. This study will fill this gap by seeking to investigate and understand the underlying reason for the death of traditional word of mouth advertising by examining the impact that SMIs have on brand communication for Kenyan Instagram brands thus causing this shift.
1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to understand why brands have abandoned traditional word of mouth advertising by investigating the impact that SMIs, a highly credible electronic word of mouth advertising, have on brand communication for Kenyan tech brands on Instagram. The study’s primary focus was the brand users of the Kenyan tech brands.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by general objectives and specific objectives as follows;

1.5.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the impact of SMIs on social brand communication for Kenyan tech brands on the Instagram platform.

1.5.2. Specific Objectives

i. To examine the role of SMIs in brand communication on Instagram

ii. To identify the attributes that portray SMIs as influential

iii. To determine whether there is a relationship that exists between SMIs and brand communication

1.6 Rationale of the Study

While a number of studies have been conducted in regards to the use of digital influencers and their effect on consumer decisions and brand perception, none have focused on the role of SMIs in brand communication (Booth & Matic, 2011; Uzunoğlu & Misci, 2014). For this reason, this study is a contribution to knowledge as it gives us an understanding of how SMIs affect the interpretation of brand messages to consumers thus contributing to their increased use by Kenyan brands.
Social media use remains a growing trend both globally and in Kenya. For this reason, new functionalities arise each day thus providing further opportunities for research on different social media platforms. While previous studies by scholars seem to focus a lot on Facebook and Twitter, this study will be a significant contribution to research and a future opportunity for future researchers looking to do more research on the use of Instagram by brands and how SMIs, on the other hand, maximize this platform to get endorsements from brands.

The following study used engagement of Instagram users as its research typology; a typology described as having the least amount of research done thus making this study a contribution to research (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2017, p. 581).

1.7 Justification of the Study

The current shift from traditional word of mouth advertising to electronic word of mouth advertising by Kenyan brands justified the reason for conducting this study (Njanja, 2015; BusinessToday, 2018).

Studies reveal that SMIs are increasingly being used to drive engagement with corporate brands (Linqia, 2017). Engagement is a critical component of brand communication and this highlights another justification for conducting this study. This study intended to test further the validity of this statement highlighted by Linqia (2017) by finding out the impact that SMIs have on brand communication hence their increased use to drive engagement within brands.

As of April 2018, Instagram emerged a clear choice and most requested platform of communication to consumers by brands thus justifying its use for this study (Ascierto, 2018).
1.8 Significance of the Study

Recent campaigns both globally and in Kenya that have used or continue to use SMIs reveal Instagram as the most used platform for brand engagement; a critical aspect of effective brand communication (DeMers, 2017). By finding out the effectiveness of this platform hence its use, this study hoped to present the potential for help to other corporate brands hoping to use SMIs for brand communication.

By investigating the impact that SMIs have on brand communication, this study was not only a benefit to the Kenyan brands under investigation, but it also seeks to provide useful information for social brand users as well who often engage and interact with the Kenyan brands.

The findings of this study aimed at providing a knowledge base for future scholars seeking to understand the role that SMIs play in brand communication and how Instagram as a platform is being maximized by brands to send out messages to the online target audience.

1.9 Scope of the Study

This research study focused on Kenyan tech brands and their users. This is because there exists a research void that seeks to give an understanding as to why Kenyan brands have abandoned traditional methods of advertising and shifted to the use of SMIs for brand communication yet many brands seem to be shifting (Njanja, 2015; BusinessToday, 2018).

The study limited the social media platforms used by focusing on Instagram because statistics present it as the most widely used by brands in reaching out to potential customers (Linqia, 2017). In addition, brands on Instagram have recorded a higher engagement ratio based on interactions per post as compared to Facebook, Twitter,
LinkedIn or Pinterest thus recording Instagram’s brand engagement ratio as eight times greater (Burney, 2016).

The study was conducted within a period of four months that is from March 2018 to June 2018.

1.10 Assumptions of the Study

This study assumed that all the Instagram followers of the Kenyan tech brands to be studied were users of the brand. Moreover, the SMIs to be examined would all have previously endorsed a brand on the Instagram platform alone as it was the main platform of study.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter mainly introduced us to the whole essence of conducting the research. It further introduced us to the main concepts of the study such as ‘SMIs’ and ‘brand communication’ which are the main variables of this research as discussed later in the study.

Moreover, this chapter provided a brief background on the research study to provide an understanding of where the research idea came from based on preliminary brand research on the current increased use of SMIs among Kenyan brands.

The next chapter provides a theoretical framework to the study and examines what other researchers have to say in regards to who SMIs are, their role and influential attributes on social media and a conceptual model to explain the relationship between SMIs and BC.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The following literature review compiles prior research on SMIs and social brand communication. Under SMIs, this literature review examined what other scholars say about SMIs and its relation to social brand communication. The chapter has further examined Instagram as it’s the main platform of study and compiles research on its use for brand communication through influencers.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research study was guided by the social network theory and the attribution theory.

2.2.1 Social network theory

The social network notion was first coined by Barnes (1954) in a community study he was conducting on a Norwegian island parish. In his article “Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish,” Barnes (1954) concentrates on face to face relationships through which class systems operate and how collective action is organized in a class system by studying an island parish dependent on industry. Barnes (1954) discovered that in as much as the individuals he worked with had cultural values of a community, their social world was filled with formal organizations and in fact, individuals made decisions based on personal contacts cutting across organizational boundaries. Personal contact in this context refers to the direct or indirect interaction between individuals or organizations. For this reason, these personal contacts cutting across organizational boundaries were configured as a network and further applied to the class system (Barnes, 1954).
In any network study, members of a given organization are presented with a list of other members of the same organization after which respondents are asked to put a mark next to every individual they have contact with, how often they have contact and the substance of the interactions (Sales, Estabrooks, & Valente, 2010).

The above two studies, therefore, bring out key aspects of a network and these are personal contact, interactions and relations. The main feature of the social network theory therefore is that it requires concepts, definitions and processes in which social units are linked to one another by various relations (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Relations defined by linkages are therefore a key component in this theory. Social network relations are said to be voluntary, informal and one that places an individual at the center of their social network. The main concept behind the social network theory is that social structures meant to quantify the interactions and relationships among individuals within a group matter (SihEmail, Hanser, & McHugh, 2009). These social structures of relationships and interactions within a group affect the beliefs and behaviors of individuals. In addition, the social network theory supposes that patterns and implications that are posed by relationships and interactions illustrate specific behavioral principles and properties in that “network theories require specification in regards to the patterns of relations, characterizing a group or social system as a whole” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

2.2.1.1. Social network theory’s key propositions

The social network theory in simple terms studies how people, groups or organizations interact with each other within their networks. This theory views these interactions based on nodes and ties. The social network theory involves four key aspects; the independence of actors, relations or ties in the flow, enabling and constraining of
individual actors within the network, generation of ties that last and networks by social structures (Claywell, 2017).

### 2.2.1.2. Nodes

Nodes are simply actors within a network. Nodes in a social network are not tied to just any other nodes within a network, but to nodes with similar characteristics hence a given network of nodes can possess particular features specific to that network alone. Nodes maintaining similar characteristics within a network form a cluster of nodes. A cluster of nodes therefore represent many actors or individual players tied to each other and these clusters are connected to other clusters of nodes via bridges (Williams & Durrance, 2008).

In relation to the study, nodes within a network will represent the various Instagram brand users tied to other Instagram brand users thus forming a cluster of nodes. Within the cluster of nodes is an influencer who is reached out for service by these other nodes, the Instagram brand users, within that network.

Figure 1 (a) represents cluster of nodes A, B, C, D linked together using bridges. Figure 1 (b) represents the cluster of nodes in (a) but as single nodes that represent an individual actor which can be an organization, individuals or companies.
2.2.1.3. Relationships

The importance of interactions is emphasized within any given network because at the end of the day, if networks were merely a list of close friends or colleagues in the office, then there would be nothing to study. This interaction between members of a given network is what is referred to as relationships or ties (Claywell, 2017). Within a network are clusters of nodes and each cluster is connected to another cluster of nodes through a bridge.

Relationships or ties connect different nodes within a network. The ties can either be strong ties or weak ties. Strong ties will therefore be much closer to a central node within a network whereas weak ties are farther away from a central node within a network. Granovetter (1983) introduces a weak tie theory that talks about the spread of information through social networks and posits that acquaintances, described as people with weak ties within a network, are likely to be more influential than close friends. Weak ties are people
you do not know; people within the network who you follow and are not close friends with within the social network contrary to a strong tie, say within a family network consisting of people you know and are close to. For this reason, weak ties tend to introduce new and valuable ideas to their networks because they are people you hardly interact with on a daily basis. Social media influencers are weak ties because the other Instagram brand users barely know them, but they follow them because of their influential power and their ability to provide valuable information regarding brands because of particular attributes such as their centrality and their ability to persuade their network of followers (Granovetter, 1983).

2.2.1.4. Centrality

In a given network is a certain degree of closeness to an actor which is referred to as centrality. Centrality refers to who the most important person within a network is; in other words, the person who is reached out to by other nodes within a network for a particular service. By providing a service for use by other nodes within the network, this most important person acts as an expert and an opinion leader. For this reason, opinion leadership is linked to the social network theory such that the SMIs, who serve as opinion leaders, are central to social networks (Merwe & Heerden, 2009). Centrality aims at identifying prominent actors within a network who are involved at large in relationships with other actors and are therefore more visible to others (Merwe & Heerden, 2009). Social media influencers have a vast number of followers and today, the number of followers which translates to the network size and indicates popularity, is often used to identify influential nodes (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). A central person within a network could also be referred to as a referent because they are referred to for information. Therefore, nodes within a network are not connected with the same degree of closeness.
These varying degrees of closeness therefore determine the value of a node to a network. If more people are close to you within the network then the more central and highly valued you are to them and vice versa. The aspect of centrality therefore examines an SMI as not only the most important person within a network, but also an expert assumed to be knowledgeable in the content they provide to their nodes; the social brand users hence their influential power. Because of this influential power, they have the ability to influence the decisions of their networks and are therefore also referred to as online opinion leaders (Merwe & Heerden, 2009).

From the above theoretical framework, it is succinct that the social network theory based on its key propositions best describes the concept of SMIs and their influential power within a network. This research study already recognizes the concept of SMIs yet the theory introduces influencers as a new concept which could as well be a significant contribution to the theory because the theory only recognizes the aspect of opinion leadership. However, social media is a network in itself and to be able to understand the flow of information within a network based on who the most influential person is and who can share information or a service, it is essential to understand the social network theory and how it works. This, therefore, presents the theory as a feasible theory for this study.

### 2.2.2 Attribution theory

This study was also guided by the attribution theory to explain how influential attributes of SMIs affect the decision of a consumer to interact or engage with a brand and how they’ll perceive a brand product as worth trusting based on an influencers’ review about the brand product.
The attribution theory is all about how meaning is attached in relation to another person’s behavior or an individual’s behavior (McLeod, 2012). In simpler terms, it’s basically why and how ordinary people explain events as they do. It is built on explanations that are made by individuals as a way of justifying their actions. The attribution theory, first proposed by Heider (1958) is built on the assumption that an individual will try to determine why people do what they do, that is, interpret causes to an event or behavior.

The use of SMIs, interpreted as a credible electronic word of mouth, all thanks to social media and its ability to extend beyond physical boundaries, has made it possible for consumer messages to appear more credible and trustworthy thanks to their influential attributes. The more a consumer attributes an influencer’s review about a brand product to the product’s actual performance then the more a consumer will perceive the communicator as highly credible and the more a given consumer will have confidence that the review is accurate. In the end, a consumer has a stronger belief that the brand product possesses characteristics mentioned in the review of the influencer.

This is therefore key for brands that are currently shifting towards the use of SMIs to engage and interact their consumers and to keep conversations positive and ongoing as a way of persuading the consumers to engage and buy their brand products frequently.

2.2.2.1. Propositions of the attribution theory

There are two attributions: internal and external.

2.2.2.2. Internal attribution

With internal attribution, the cause of behavior is assigned to an internal characteristic and not outside forces (Heider, 1958). The behavior of individuals, in this case, the consumers who consume content from SMIs is explained based on the attributes
possessed by the SMIs and this could include personality traits or things such as the persuasive power of SMIs thus presenting the theory as a feasible theory for this study.

2.2.2.3. External attribution

For external attribution, the cause for individual behavior is attributed to an event outside or some situation beyond a person’s control other than internal characteristic as the internal attribution (Heider, 1958).

2.3 General Literature Review

2.3.1 Brand communication studies

Brand communication refers to communication activities that serve to influence a customer’s opinion of a company’s product or services. Brand communication occurs each time a customer interacts with a brand and this is effected when a customer sees a brand logo, views a brand product and views the content of a brand (Edmonds, 2013). For this reason, brands should aim at ensuring that their products are well communicated on online platforms. According to Edmonds (2013), effective brand communication is achieved if the brand message is right and is delivered at the right time to the right people by the right person. A brand message is most likely to be well received if it is delivered by an expert who is likable, well known and shows the relevant expertise with relevant information (Edmonds, 2013). This is where SMIs come in because these people are assumed to portray expertise in whatever they do on social media sites and tend to be more likable hence the high following on their social media.

Web 2.0 technologies have made it possible for users on the Internet globally to access social networking sites and brands like Starbucks and Zara aim to connect with their consumers and enhance brand communication through social networking sites (Schivinski
& Dabrowski, 2015). This brings out the fact that companies are no longer the primary source of brand communication and instead, content that is created by Internet users all over the world which involves diverse topics on brands and their products emerges as a key source of brand communication. These Internet users who emerge as online opinion leaders have therefore played a crucial role in brand communication by influencing consumer decisions. Brands, therefore, aim at not only engaging their loyal consumers but also influencing their perceptions about their products (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013).

Moreover, an article published in the Daily Nation by Beatrice Obwocha states that companies and state departments have had to use social media immensely to not only improve their brands and customer service but also improve overall brand communication to the public. This succinctly highlights the fact that companies in Kenya have embraced social media as a way of enhancing their brand communication (Obwocha, 2015).

2.3.2 Social media and brand communication studies

Social media platforms have provided new means that brands are using to engage with consumers and companies hope to engage more with consumers by influencing their perceptions on products (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Social media has therefore emerged as an ideal tool with a broad demographic appeal and as a result, brands have retreated to social media to disseminate brand information and also communicate to target consumers about their products and services. In addition, the advent of social media has made it possible for individual users to create and share content online. No doubt brands need numbers and a reputable content creator and for this reason, users who generate online content most of the time and are interested in expanding their audience and reputation
emerge as the most suitable for brand communication. The material that is created by these online content creators is diverse and some of the topics covered by these creators include information about brands and products making companies no longer the primary source of brand communication (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008).

Established in 2011, the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE), is an example of an association of online content creators that promotes online creators and Kenyan brands target such associations to identify influencers in their niche that they can use to communicate their products and services to the online consumers through social media. Other brands such as Safaricom have immensely used social media in the past few years to advertise their brand and its services to their target audience. An article on Business Daily Africa confirms Safaricom again together with Airtel, GoTv and Kenya Power as the top brands that increasingly use social media to communicate messages about their brands to their customers (Njanja, 2015).

Studies further reveal that consumers do trust social media more as sources of information regarding brands as opposed to traditional tools of marketing communication otherwise still used by some brands (Karakaya & Barnes, 2010). For this reason, brand managers presume that brand communication may increase based on user-generated social media communication done by the ‘micro-celebrities’ of social media, the influencers (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012).

2.3.3 Social brand users

A social brand user in simple terms is a brand user confined to a social platform. These brand users focus on brand interaction and engagement just on social network sites and not through any offline strategies. Social brand users according to the social network
theory are nodes within a network assumed to reach out to an influencer for a service and this service could be in the form of brand messages that serve to influence their decisions to interact with a given brand. For this reason, SMIs play a key role because they influence the decisions of a social brand user and in fact make their work easier when it comes to deciding whether or not to interact or engage with a brand.

According to Merwe and Heerden (2009), social brand users will not decide on a product by evaluating every alternative and choosing the best but instead make a decision based on the very first alternative that arises because there is basically no time and money to spend evaluating alternatives (Merwe & Heerden, 2009). This is where SMIs come in because of their presumed ability to communicate brand messages in a way that satisfies a brand user. Social brand users within a network are therefore bound to trust the opinions of SMIs as opposed to the traditional methods of advertising.

2.3.4 Social media influencer studies

Safko and Brake (2009), who define social media as simply activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinion using conversational media, examine a new kind of paranoia that has come up as a result of social media use; the thought that someone is talking about your brand. This has led to a lot of keenness when talking about what your brand stands for and what you present on social media because you have virtually no control over what will be said about your brand on social media. Hence, brands have become extra careful about the messages they choose to communicate on social media. In as much as they may not have control over what is said, they can still have considerable influence and influence is what adds up to a successful relationship with your target audience (Safko & Brake, 2009). For
this reason, SMIs emerge as strategic tools upon which feasible relationships can be built. Ioanid, Militaru and Mihai (2015) posit that social media represents a great opportunity for brands to grow their customers’ numbers by using the influence power of online opinion leaders. These online opinion leaders are SMIs who use their persuasive power to influence the opinions and decisions of their followers.

The term SMI emerges as a new term that has recently dominated the marketing world. In the past, before even social media came into existence, organizations used word of mouth marketing to communicate with potential consumers. Word of mouth marketing was dispensed through opinion leaders described as “individuals who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others” (Rogers E. M., 1962, p. 435). The term opinion leader was also described as people “who were likely to influence other people in their immediate environment” (Lazarsfeld & Katz, 1957, p. 3). The information that is therefore provided by these opinion leaders is considered by audiences to be more trustworthy than any form of mass advertising thus making these opinion leaders more valuable to consumers when making decisions regarding purchasing (Gould & Stern, 1988). An online opinion leader will influence their circle of networks by acting as role models who inspire emulation, spreading brand information through word of mouth and giving direction for the search, purchase and use of a brand product. This phenomenon is what is being witnessed now through the use of SMIs.

The evolution of social media has since witnessed this new type of online opinion leaders who use existing platforms like Instagram to not only create and share content but also to influence the decisions of their followers. As a result, brands have strategically used SMIs to communicate their brand messages and products to online consumers because of
the level of influence they have on social media. SMIs will create and share posts with their followers about products and services that they have used or tried and this makes it easy for followers to relate to their content (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

Social media influencers, however, differ from brand ambassadors because first of all, they are content creators and second, as opposed to just being the focus of a brand, they advocate for a brand’s product or service out of support and belief (Sussman, 2015). The fact that they have used the product and can speak on it based on experience makes it relatable. When an SMI therefore posts information about a product, it means that they have used the product and they recommend it. This happens a lot with beauty bloggers who sometimes do not necessarily talk about products based on a sales pitch but because they loved the product and would love their followers to try it out. Authenticity is what attracts many a brand because they also want their products to be talked about and made relatable just as an SMI would do with their products. The audience trusts the opinion of the SMI and uses that information to make purchase decisions, just like the offline opinion leaders (Swant, 2016). Scholars further highlight that content provided by SMIs is personalized and created in such a manner that followers will want to engage with the product and with the SMI as well (Yadav, Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013; Song & Yoo, 2016).

Other researchers define an SMI as a third-party endorser who creates and shapes the attitudes of consumers through the use of blogs and social network sites. They can promote a brand because of their persuasive power (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Moreover, an SMI can be considered an expert who is knowledgeable about a particular topic (Merwe & Heerden, 2009). It could be sports, technology, fashion,
beauty, or health and for this reason, brands have been able to identify influencers in their niche as a result of this segmentation. Social media influencers are further defined as a kind of online ‘micro-celebrity’ who cultivate as much attention as possible and in turn craft a genuine personal brand via social networking sites that can be used by advertisers for consumer reach (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). According to Marwick (2015), being a micro-celebrity requires you to create a persona, produce content, and appeal to the online fans by demonstrating authenticity. This could well reveal to us some of the attributes of an SMI with authenticity being one of the reasons a given brand will choose a certain influencer for brand communication. These so-called ‘micro-celebrities’ appeal to corporate consumer brands as marketing tools who promote brands by associating various products with their social media sites.

Marketers now rate influencers as the fastest means of growing their customer base. These influencers know their fans, respond to these fans and feel obliged to continue interacting with their fans (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). The consistent conversation is what contributes to better engagement thus boosting their popularity. Forbes (2016) further highlights that SMIs gain fame as a result of their regular use and participation on social networking sites. These influencers who amass followers based on the content they come up with themselves are more relatable to the everyday social media user because they allow the online audience to step into their world (Forbes, 2016).

Social media influencers are also ‘tastemakers,’ meaning that what they say on social media holds a lot of weight and when they like something, then their followers also tend to follow suit (Ramaswamy, 2013). In addition, Ramaswamy (2013) further points out that celebrity endorsements are no longer the only means to get people listening on social
media; influencers are now changing the game and an influencer can be an ordinary person who can influence another person’s decision.

The convenience and affordability, therefore, which comes with social networking sites such as Instagram can be regarded as a suitable venue to influence the opinion of the online audience (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). Because social media targets a somewhat larger audience, it can strengthen the potential influence of individuals opinions’. The ability of an SMI to express their own opinion towards a topic publicly to their followers is interpreted as an attempt towards not only disseminating information but also convincing others (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). While research does not examine the exact roles of an SMI, a few characteristics of opinion leaders are highlighted by Winter and Neubaum (2016) which could as well be used to draw out the desired characteristics of an SMI. An opinion leader needs to be a person with a high personality strength characterized by charisma and the ability to persuade others (Winter & Neubaum, 2016).

The use of SMIs by brands emerges as 11 times more effective compared to a banner ad which means that at the end of the day, a social media account owned by an ‘SMI’ that has a large following could be the envy of many brands who are trying to reach out to their online consumers (Saiidi, 2016). For this reason, brands strive to engage in meaningful, lasting relationships with influencers to gain the attention of consumers.

A recent 2018 article published in the Business Today reveals that the role played and the influence exerted by Kenyan SMIs can’t be overestimated and that whatever they endorse could end up becoming a trend because as they lead, others follow (BusinessToday, 2018).
2.3.5 Instagram influencers

Instagram, the first social media platform designed specifically for sharing pictures was officially launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and by 2011, Instagram had over 10 million users and this success saw Facebook buy the platform in April 2012 (Desreumaux, 2014). Instagram has since emerged as an effective tool for brands to reach their target consumers through the use of influencers. Generally, individuals spend more time on Instagram as opposed to other sites thus making Instagram a much more efficient platform for SMIs to communicate marketing messages for brands to their followers (ElmiraDjafarovaa & ChloeRushworth, 2017). The video and photo sharing feature on Instagram has made it a suitable platform for electronic word-of-mouth because a brand and its products can be visually pictured and named just in the caption of the photo (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

The number of followers an Instagram influencer has represents the audience that the influencer shares their ideas to and a higher number of followers may end up translating to stronger brand effects (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). This notion is further confirmed after it was found out that positive tweets from celebrities with many followers’ resulted in a high product involvement and purchasing intentions as opposed to tweets from less popular celebrities (Jin & Phua, 2014). Brands have therefore turned to these Instagram influencers to get their messages and products succinctly communicated to the online audience (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). These influencers on Instagram are said to have prolific Instagram feeds that function as ‘real-time billboards to eager, watchful eyeballs’ (Crystal, 2014, p. 119). Crystal (2014) continues to observe that with up to
hundreds of thousands of followers, influencers consistently manage their posts on Instagram to curate displays, publish advertorials and grapple for viewership.

These Instagram influencers are not only identified based on their considerable number of followers, and instead, other factors are considered when choosing an ideal Instagram influencer to communicate a brand message to consumers. Brands can now identify the ideal influencer for their product using technology that helps you to track and identify relevant influencers for your brand (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). *Keyhole*, for example, is an automated social media analytics tool that accurately measures real-time and historical, social media data and in addition helps to identify the strongest influencers by ranking them based on follower engagement, the authority possessed based on a particular subject, and the exposure driven to any tracked hashtags (Keyhole, 2017). This works as a perfect tool that could enable a brand to identify Instagram influencers in their niche.

In Kenya for example, according to a recent 2018 article by Business Today, the social media space has seen the rise and fall of several influencers (BusinessToday, 2018). Some of the top-rated Instagram influencers include Sharon Mundia, a fashion and lifestyle blogger whose blog has opened doors of opportunity for her as an influencer. Mundia who currently has more than 230,000 followers on Instagram has scooped significant deals with brands like Samsung among other well-performing brands. Other Instagram influencers include the likes of Joy Kendi with 122,000 plus followers whose outgoing personality has scooped major deals for her with brands like Safaricom, Tecno, Colgate, Ciroc among other top performing Kenyan brands choosing her to endorse their products. Other Instagram influencers include Seth Gor, a digital content creator; Miss Mandi, a video blogger; Silvia
Njoki, a content creator among others. All these Instagram influencers are experts when it comes to creating content and as a result, need to be knowledgeable as well in whatever they endorse for them to create convincing content that will influence a social brand user. Judging from the aforementioned Instagram influencers, there’s no doubt personality among other key attributes is essential for any SMI.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Focusing on the above literature review, a few similarities arise in regards to who an SMI is and some scholars have gone ahead to highlight some of the characteristics that portray an SMI as a suitable opinion leader. Social media influencers have been described as content creators who provide personalized content created in a manner that followers will want to engage with the brand product and with the SMI as well (Yadav, Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013; Song & Yoo, 2016). Other scholars also posit that SMIs create and share posts with their followers about products and services that they have used before and this makes it easy for their followers to relate to their content (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Social media influencers have also been described as knowledgeable people who are experts in what they do (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). Lastly, they are described as opinion leaders who have the persuasive power to influence the decisions of their followers (Ioanid, Militaru, & Mihai, 2015).

The key points emerging from the above definitions of an SMI are content creation, expertise and opinion leadership. Centrality to a network also emerges as a key concept drawn out from the theoretical framework whereby opinion leadership is linked to the social network theory and the SMIs, who serve as opinion leaders, are central to social networks (Merwe & Heerden, 2009).
Previous literature may not be distinct in revealing the characteristics of an SMI, but a few scholars go ahead to outline the basics that a brand may consider when choosing the right influencer for their brand; persuasive power, authenticity and trustworthiness (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017; Winter & Neubaum, 2016).

The two main variables of this research study therefore are SMIs and brand communication. Social media influencers is the independent variable whereas brand communication is the dependent variable. Effective brand communication is assumed to depend on the impact of SMIs on social brand users.

Clusters of nodes within a network present a new concept of segmentation examined by Claywell (2017) where he states that nodes in a network are not tied to just any other nodes within a network, but to nodes with similar characteristics thus a given network of nodes can possess particular features specific to that network alone. A given cluster of nodes can therefore possess different characteristics depending on how each social brand user makes use of their social media.
Figure 2 Conceptual Model

Key

DV- Dependent Variable

IV- Independent Variable

SBU- Represents the social brand users
Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual model and highlights the key concepts that exist within a network: a central person, the SMI, and nodes, the social brand users (SBU). These nodes possess characteristics specific to a cluster. The nodes, who are social brand users within the context of the study, all reach out to the SMI, the most important person within the network, for a service; whether it’s just consuming content, commenting, spectating or connecting. The arrows represent the connection between the SMI and the brand users. The brand users reach out to the SMI because of a certain attribute that the SMI has that convinces them to interact or engage with a given brand. This study based on the literature review sought to examine whether trust, authenticity, persuasive power, expertise and knowledge affected the decisions of the social brand users to engage or interact with the brands under study.

2.5 Research Questions

RQ1: What role do social media influencers play in social brand communication on Instagram?

RQ2: What attributes of a social media influencer contribute to their influential potential in interpreting brand messages on Instagram for Kenyan tech brands?

RQ3: What relationship exists between social media influencers and brand communication?

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter examined the main theory, the social network theory, and the attribution theory which reinforced the main theory to explain the process of attribution and how it affects the decisions of brand users. The chapter further examined past literature on SMIs. It also looked at a conceptual model developed to guide the study in
understanding who SMIs are and the attributes that brands are assumed to look for when identifying specific influencers suitable for effective brand communication.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology systematically solves a research problem based on a series of steps adopted by a researcher along with the logic behind them. This chapter therefore outlines these series of steps based on the approach, design, population and sampling design, the data collection instrument, the validity of the instrument for collection and the method of analysis.

3.2 Research Approach

The three main research approaches used in research studies are quantitative, qualitative and mixed approach. The main difference between these three approaches is framed based on words (qualitative) as opposed to numbers (quantitative) or using closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) as opposed to open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions) (Creswell, 2014). Mixed approach involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to give a more enhanced and better understanding of a research problem as opposed to either approach being conducted on their own (Creswell, 2014).

This study employed the quantitative research approach, an approach used to test objective theories by examining the relationship among the variables of a research study (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative approach was used to investigate the outcome of the relationship between the two main variables; SMIs, the independent variable and brand communication, the dependent variable. Contrary to qualitative researchers who collect data in the fields where participants are experiencing a problem under study, the use of
quantitative approach for this study involved sending out instruments for participants to complete (Creswell, 2014).

Quan-Haase and Sloan (2017) present four approaches for conducting Instagram research and they include big data, visibility of context, small samples and engaging with Instagram users. This study used ‘engaging with Instagram users’ as the main approach to not only understand the usage characteristics of the Instagram brand users but also why SMIs on the Instagram platform are increasingly being used by brands for communication to consumers (Dotsavvy, 2016).

3.3 Research Design

A research design is a plan and procedure used for research that spans the decisions from broad presumptions to specific methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 21). The decision on what design to use depends on the assumptions a researcher presents to their study, strategies and specific methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

This study used the descriptive research design; a scientific method that involves the observation and description of the behavior of a subject without affecting their behavior (Shuttleworth, 2008). The descriptive design is applied by market researchers when judging the habits, opinions and attitudes of consumers thus presenting it as a feasible design for this study.

3.4 Population and Sampling Design

A population is where the sample for research is drawn whereas a sample is the number of items to be selected from the population representative of the entire population. The population of the study were the total Instagram followers of the four brands under
investigation: Safaricom, Tecno, Airtel and Samsung arrived at based on a list by the researcher of the fastest growing brand pages in Kenya on Facebook compiled using Social Baker. Research on Instagram statistics in regards to the best performing brands has hardly been done and as a result, it was assumed that Facebook statistics would guide the researcher into getting an inkling of some of the biggest brands in terms of visibility on social media. To add on to the validity of this assumption, an article “A List of the 20 Biggest Brands in Kenya In 2017 Has Been Unveiled” which reveals some of the highlighted brands by Social Baker as among the 20 top biggest brands in Kenya was used (Etemesi, 2017). Based on the similarity in the two lists of the top 20 biggest brands on social media, the study settled on the above four mentioned Kenyan tech brands that have recently used SMIs quite often to endorse their brand products.

This study used stratified random sampling, a type of probability sampling used to get adequate representation of a subsample.

Our sample size, 400, was drawn from the total population arrived at using the Slovin (1960) formula;

\[ n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \]

Where \( n = \) Number of samples, \( N = \) Total population (262,300) and \( e = \) Error tolerance (0.05)

To get an approximate number of respondents per brand that would be required to fill out the questionnaires, stratified sampling based on the Glen (2013) formula was used whereby:
(Sample size of the strata = size of entire sample / population size * layer size (the number of followers per brand)) to calculate the proportion of people from each group.

e.g. for Safaricom (400/262, 300) * 183,000 = 279

Table 1 *Brand Preliminary Instagram Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Brand</th>
<th>Instagram Followers (No of people in Strata)</th>
<th>Sample size from each strata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safaricom</td>
<td>183,000</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tecno Kenya</td>
<td>45,700</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Kenya</td>
<td>22,300</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airtel Kenya</td>
<td>11,300</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Followers</strong></td>
<td><strong>262,300</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total = 400</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding up the approximate number of respondents per brand equated to the initial sample size of 400. Participants were randomly selected per brand based on the sample size per strata.

**3.5 Data Collection Method**

This study used surveys; a method of data collection that involves collecting information from a sample of individuals in a systematic way in the form of questionnaires (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 194). The survey was an online survey administered via a link that was provided to respondents, who in this case were the brand users of the chosen brands under study; Safaricom, Tecno, Airtel and Samsung. The use of a survey allowed for the use of a probability sample.

Instagram researchers present three primary options for data collection which include extracting data directly from the Instagram API, obtaining data from a third party
tool or service that connects the API for them and manually extracting data from the Instagram users (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2017). This study used the manual collection of data from every randomly chosen follower of each of the four brands by simply sending out a link that would direct respondents to the questionnaire. The link was sent either via the Instagram ‘direct message’ feature, Whatsapp or email.

Prior to sending the link to the questionnaire, a courtesy message was sent to each of the randomly chosen respondents requesting their participation and explaining why the study was being conducted. This was done to ensure credibility in answering the questionnaire.

The online questionnaire was developed and organized based on the three main research questions and the main objective of the study. It was fashioned into four sections; a ‘Demographics’ section to determine the characteristics of our target population; a ‘Platform Usage’ section to understand the Instagram usage characteristics of our target population; a ‘Brand Interaction’ section to examine the level of interaction between the brands under study and our target population and the last section; ‘Influencer Attributes’ to identify the influential attributes of SMIs that past literature present as having contributed to the abandonment of traditional word of mouth advertising.

Google Forms, an online survey software, was the main data collection instrument used for this study. Google Forms is not only free but does not limit the number of respondents in a study thus making it a feasible tool for this study seeing that the study’s sample size was 400. The process of data collection ran from March 2018 to June 2018.
3.6 Operationalization of Variables

Operationalizing variables served to define and measure the main variables of this study; SMIs, the independent variable and brand communication, the dependent variable. The main indicators of effective brand communication by an SMI were measure based on whether at the end of the day a social brand user recognized, interacted and engaged with any of the brands under study each endorsed by an SMI and whether the attributes of an SMI contributed to this.

3.7 Research Procedure

Before administering the survey, a pretest was conducted. The pretest which included 10 participants was conducted at the end of February before the main survey was issued out to participants to ensure that the questionnaire was adequately designed. The respondents involved in the pretest did not participate in the main survey. The online survey ran for a period of four months, from March 2018 to June 2018. Overall, out of the 400 potential respondents that were contacted, 304 respondents took part giving a response rate of 76 percent.

Out of the 304 respondents who took part, 51 percent were aged between 23 and 28, followed by age 17 to 22 (34 percent), then age 29 to 34 (12 percent), age 35 to 40 (2 percent) and 40+ years (1 percent). These findings confirm statistics presented by Statista (2018) which claim that a majority of Instagram users are aged between 18-34 years. Gender representation was not biased seeing that out of the 304 respondents, majority were female (56 percent) whereas the male accounted for the remaining 44 percent thus providing an almost balanced view. From this, it can be deduced that females spend most time on Instagram as opposed to males thus confirming information from global statistics.
about women spending more time on Instagram than men (Statista, 2018). Employment status arose as a significant factor when considering the use and access of the services of the Kenyan brands under study. At the end of the day, for a user to interact or engage with the brands under study, they had to have purchased or alternatively made a purchasing decision regarding any product from the brands under study. Out of the 304 respondents, majority of the respondents (57 percent) were either employed or had businesses of their own.

This study focused on Instagram as the main platform of study and as a result, it was important to first of all understand the characteristics of the Kenyan brand users of the brands under study based on how many times they logged in to Instagram to either interact or engage with a brand. It was found that majority of the respondents logged in to Instagram several times a day. This confirms previous literature presented by scholars that state that individuals spend more time on Instagram as opposed to other sites thus making Instagram a much more efficient platform for SMIs to communicate marketing messages for brands to their followers (ElmiraDjafarova & ChloeRushworth, 2017). A question was further asked to respondents to examine whether SMIs influenced their decision to interact and engage with a brand and it was found that the number of Kenyans one followed with 10,000+ followers affected the decision of the respondents to follow, interact and engage with a brand. Safaricom was identified as the most followed brand thus confirming statistics from Social Baker that present it as the top most influential brand.

3.8 Data Analysis

To draw conclusions from the data collected, this study used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 24) SPSS tool to analyze data in the form of both descriptive
and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics allows researchers to take random data and organizes them in some order by providing a summary of responses based on frequencies, percentages and means whereas inferential statistics establishes the relationship between the study variables (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The responses that were collected from Google Forms were first transferred to Microsoft Excel thereafter into SPSS where data cleaning was conducted. Descriptive statistics, as well as inferential statistics, was used. Inferential statistics was conducted to establish the relationship between the two main variables of the study; SMIs and brand communication. The analysis information presented as output on SPSS was interpreted and the findings presented in chapter four.

3.9 Validity

Prior to handing out the questionnaire, a research expert had to go through the questionnaire to ensure the content validity. Content validity was done to examine how well the questionnaire measured the theoretical constructs in question (Stephanie, 2017). Any questions that were not clear were reworked and the questionnaire was passed on to the researcher’s academic supervisor for further review and critique. A pretest was then conducted among 10 respondents to ensure that there would be ease and clarity while answering the questions.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The researcher anticipated that ethical issues would arise when conducting this study and it was therefore essential to protect participants and develop their trust. Participants are bound to remain reluctant in participating in such a research especially if it asks for personal information seeing that the Internet has lately become a hub for heinous
acts. Being an online research, the researcher ensured that issues of authenticity, credibility and personal disclosure were carefully considered.

Social media allows a user’s data to be easily accessible making it easy to get hold of respondents because they can be simply messaged. Therefore, ethical issues such as uninformed consent were anticipated because for such a study, the social brand users would be randomly chosen and messaged without their consent. As a result of this, some of the randomly chosen respondents did not want to take part in the survey and this emerged as a limitation not only for this study but remains a limitation for social media research as a whole. However, the only way this issue was dealt with was through asking for consent from the randomly chosen respondents as attached in the Appendix section.

Moreover, prior to conducting the study, approval was sought from the university to conduct the research. The survey was approved by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants, in turn, were not coerced to participate in the survey. For those willing to participate, anonymity was maintained and all information collected was used for academic purposes. The main incentive that was used for this study was an assurance that the results of the survey would be sent to the respondents’ email as a way of motivating them to fill the questionnaire.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the series of steps that were used by the researcher to conduct the research. The research used online surveys for data collection and a questionnaire as the main instrument for collecting data. A pretest was conducted among 10 respondents to ensure the questionnaire was adequately designed and that the questions were precise and easy to understand. The survey was administered to 400 respondents.
Data was then collected and the chapter further explained how analysis would be conducted.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the major findings of this study. Data was collected using online questionnaires.

4.2 Response Rate

The study targeted adults aged 17 and above who were all Instagram users and followers of either of the four brands that were under study that is; Tecno, Safaricom, Samsung or Airtel. A total of 304 respondents took part out of the estimated sample size of 400 giving us a response rate of 76 percent.

4.3 Results of the Pretest

A pretest was conducted among 10 Instagrammers who were brand users/followers of the brands under study to ensure the questionnaire was adequately designed. The respondents who participated in the pretest were excluded from the main survey. As far as validity was concerned, expert input was sought from a research analyst who went through the questionnaire and raised an issue regarding the clarity of one of the questions. They felt that the question meant to test the attributes of an SMI needed to be broken down further and captured in the form of full statements as opposed to the previously stated one-word statements that assumed the respondents would be familiar with the topic of research. After correcting the issues that emerged from the pilot stage, the questionnaire was then ready for approval after which it was administered to potential respondents.
4.4 Findings on the Role of SMIs

The first research question of this study, RQ1, sought to find out the role of SMIs on Instagram for Kenyan tech brands. This research question was meant to confirm the influential role of SMIs and their ability to affect the decisions of brand users. To first of all understand the level of influence possessed by an SMI, a question was asked to respondents to identify whether they followed any Instagrammers with 10,000 plus followers because SMIs are primarily identified by their sizeable network of followers which is a major contribution to their influence. Based on the findings, 75 percent followed SMIs, identified below as Instagrammers with 10,000 plus followers. Eighty-one percent further agreed that an SMI would affect their decision to interact and engage with a brand thus confirming and supporting the influential role as the main role of SMIs when it comes to interpreting brand messages on the Instagram platform. The findings of this research question were, therefore, supported by the responses that were received from the brand interaction questions as presented on Table 2.

Table 2 Brand Interactions Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Interaction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With regards to people you follow on Instagram, are there Kenyan Instagrammers you follow who have 10,000+ followers?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would an Instagrammer with many followers chosen to endorse a brand influence your decision to interact or engage with a brand?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Findings on the SMI attributes

The second research question, RQ2, sought to identify the attributes that make SMIIs influential. The researcher therefore assessed the extent to which respondents would agree to a number of Likert statements that focused on the main attributes of SMIIs under study. The attributes that were being investigated by the researcher were broken down into technical attributes and social attributes. The technical attributes were expertise and knowledge whereas the social attributes investigated as to whether they’d have an impact on SMIIs were: trust, authenticity and persuasion. The end result was that the researcher was trying to investigate whether the following attributes played a role in affecting the decisions of brand users. Data was captured in a Likert scale of 1 to 5; (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-I don’t know, 4-Agree and 5-Strongly Agree). Below were the findings per attribute;

4.5.1 Technical characteristics

These mainly comprised the SMI’s technical expertise or knowledge in a specific area related to a brand.

4.5.1.1 Expertise/Knowledge.

Respondents were asked to indicate what suited them best in relation to whether or not expertise and knowledge of an SMI affected their overall decision to interact or engage with a brand with 1 as ‘strongly disagree’, 2 as ‘disagree’, 3 as ‘neutral’ 4 as ‘agree’ and 5 as ‘strongly agree’ and the findings were then tabulated and illustrated in form of percentages as shown in Table 3.
Table 3 *Technical Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Social media celebrities chosen for brand endorsements appear knowledgeable about the products they endorse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) I am more likely to follow a brand endorsed by a social media celebrity based on their large network of followers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3 which displays technical characteristics, majority of the respondents (45 percent) agreed that knowledge would affect their interaction or engagement with each of the brands under study. Thirty eight percent agreed that the number of followers would affect their decision to recognize, interact and engage with a brand.

4.5.2 Social characteristics

Based on the social attributes that were being investigated in this study, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not trust, authenticity and persuasive power of an SMI affected their overall decision to interact or engage with a brand with 1 as ‘strongly disagree’, 2 as ‘disagree’, 3 as ‘neutral’ 4 as ‘agree’ and 5 as ‘strongly agree’ and the findings were then tabulated and illustrated in form of percentages as shown.

4.5.2.1 Trust

In regards to the statements highlighted in Table 4 (displaying the ‘Impact of Trust findings), the number of respondents in terms of percentage who agreed that trust would affect their decision to interact or engage with a brand were more (47 percent) than those who disagreed (21 percent). These figures were arrived at by conducting a mean of the findings as displayed on Table 4.
Table 4 *Impact of Trust*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) A social media celebrity with many followers will not deliberately endorse a brand that may cause harm to their followers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Social media influencers portray credibility when endorsing a brand product</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) I am more likely to trust a review created by a social media celebrity as compared to a brand-created review</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) How true and honest a social media celebrity is when talking about a brand product affects my decision to interact with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.5.2.2 Authenticity**

This study also examined authenticity as an influential attribute and respondents were questioned as to whether authenticity of an SMI had an effect on their interaction with brands. Based on the findings given in Table 5, the total number of respondents in percentages who agreed were greater (52 percent) in number than those who disagreed (24 percent) thus confirming authenticity as another key attribute that affects how social brand users respond to messages by SMIs.
Table 5 Impact of Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) A social media influencer will only endorse a brand product that resonates with their audience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The personality of a social media influencer will affect my decision to engage with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2.3 Persuasion

The persuasive power of an SMI was also tested to examine whether it affected the decisions of brand users when choosing to recognize, interact or engage with a brand endorsed by an SMI. Findings revealed a higher percentage (45 percent) for those who believed in the persuasive power of an SMI than for those who did not (29 percent) as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6 Impact of Persuasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) It’s more convincing to try a product that has been recommended by a social media celebrity with many followers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) I am most likely to purchase a product reviewed by a social media celebrity with many followers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) I am most likely to take advice about a brand’s product from my favorite social media influencer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis was done to determine the mean comparisons of the attributes under investigation. From Table 7, the highest attribute of SMIs was trust at 3.76 and the lowest attribute was follower count at 3.0 based on a scale of 5. This meant that all the SMI attributes got average responses. These findings therefore meant that no attribute was more important than the other and no attribute was rejected by the respondents. These results confirm that all the SMI influential attributes under study affected the decisions of the social brand users in one way or another. At the end of the day, whether or not they disagreed or agreed, the attributes had an impact on their opinion towards messages interpreted by SMIs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Std. Error of Skewness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrities chosen to endorse brands portray credibility when endorsing a brand on their platforms</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.168</td>
<td>-0.623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality of a social media celebrity will most likely affect my decision to engage with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.346</td>
<td>-0.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrity with many followers will not deliberately endorse a brand product that may cause harm to their followers</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.388</td>
<td>-0.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How true and honest a social media celebrity is when talking about a brand product affects my decision to interact with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.287</td>
<td>-0.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrity will most likely choose to endorse a brand that can only resonate with their followers</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.378</td>
<td>-0.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrities chosen for brand endorsements appear knowledgeable about the products they endorse</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.262</td>
<td>-0.308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's more convincing to try a product that has been recommended by a social media user with many followers</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.375</td>
<td>-0.254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to purchase a product reviewed by a social media user with many followers</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.312</td>
<td>-0.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to take advice about a brand product from a social media celebrity</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.278</td>
<td>-0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to follow a brand endorsed by a social media celebrity based on their large network of followers</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.328</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to trust a review created by a social media user with many followers as compared to a brand-created review</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.352</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Findings on the Relationship between SMIs and Brand Communication

Based on research question three, RQ3, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether or not there exists a significant difference on the dependent variable by the independent variable (StatisticalSolutions, 2013). The test was conducted to compare the effects of the attributes of SMIs on a brand user’s decision to recognize, interact and engage with a brand.

On a scale of $p$ is equal or less than 0.05, a one-way analysis revealed a significant effect of trust on brand communication at $p=0.001$ and the effect of persuasion on brand communication at $p=0.003$. This means that there exists a significant difference between some of the attributes of an SMI and brand communication. Taken together, this suggests that trust and persuasion as attributes have an effect on a brand user’s decision to interact and engage with a brand.

A one-way analysis further revealed that there wasn’t a significant effect of the number of followers and how honest an SMI was when talking about a brand product on brand communication with the $p$ values at 0.503 and 0.474 based on a scale of $p$ is equal or less than 0.05. These findings revealed that the number of followers and how honest an SMI was did not have much of an effect on a brand user’s decision to interact and engage with a brand.
**Table 8 ANOVA Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrity with many followers will not deliberately endorse a brand product that may cause harm to their followers</td>
<td>Between groups 7.583</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.791</td>
<td>2.036</td>
<td>.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 465.445</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1.862</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 473.028</td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrities chosen to endorse brands portray credibility when endorsing a brand on their platforms</td>
<td>Between groups 10.375</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.187</td>
<td>3.859</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 337.452</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1.344</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 347.827</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrity will most likely choose to endorse a brand that can only resonate with their followers</td>
<td>Between groups 25.321</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.660</td>
<td>6.680</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 468.123</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>1.895</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 493.444</td>
<td>249</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How true and honest a social media celebrity is when talking about a brand product affects my decision to interact with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>Between groups 2.509</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.255</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 420.515</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1.675</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 423.024</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality of a social media celebrity will most likely affect my decision to engage with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>Between groups 14.433</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.217</td>
<td>4.089</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 442.984</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1.765</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 457.417</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to trust a review created by a social media user with many followers as compared to a brand-created review</td>
<td>Between groups 5.066</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.533</td>
<td>1.447</td>
<td>.237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 435.835</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1.750</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 440.901</td>
<td>251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s more convincing to try a product that has been recommended by a social media user with many followers</td>
<td>Between groups 18.815</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.408</td>
<td>5.316</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 444.197</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1.770</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 463.012</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to purchase a product reviewed by a social media user with many followers</td>
<td>Between groups 2.345</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.173</td>
<td>.688</td>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 427.769</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1.704</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 430.114</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to take advice about a brand product from a social media celebrity</td>
<td>Between groups 18.446</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.223</td>
<td>5.979</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 385.664</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1.543</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 404.111</td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to follow a brand endorsed by a social media celebrity based on their large network of followers</td>
<td>Between groups 12.839</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.419</td>
<td>3.802</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 422.062</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1.688</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 434.901</td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrities chosen for brand endorsements appear knowledgeable about the products they endorse</td>
<td>Between groups 12.573</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.287</td>
<td>4.006</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within groups 390.744</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1.569</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total 403.317</td>
<td>251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Pearson’s correlation was also conducted to identify the existence of any relationship between the main variables of this study that is brand communication and SMIs. This was examined based on how often a social brand user was likely to like, comment or repost posts by the brand(s) under study, which in essence was examining the engagement aspect that is an indicator of brand communication. This was compared with all the attributes of this study that were under investigation; trust, authenticity, persuasive power, expertise and knowledge.

Results of the Pearson correlation revealed negative values for the Pearson’s $r$ value for all the attributes tested except for one which revealed a (+1.02). Results further revealed a significant effect of follower count and how knowledgeable an SMI should be on brand communication at $p= -0.01$ and $p= -0.02$ for a scale of $p$ is less than or equal to 0.05. This means that there existed a statistically significant correlation between a few of the attributes under study; follower count and knowledge capacity hence an increase or decrease in any of the two variables significantly related to increase or decrease in brand communication.
Table 9 *Pearson’s Correlation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>How often are you likely to like, comment or repost posts by the above-ticked brand(s)? (engaging)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often are you likely to like, comment or repost posts by the above-ticked brand(s)? (engaging)</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrity with many followers will not deliberately endorse a brand product that may cause harm to their followers</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.001, Sig. (2-tailed): .993, N: 226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrities chosen to endorse brands portray credibility when endorsing a brand on their platforms</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: .102, Sig. (2-tailed): .126, N: 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrity will most likely choose to endorse a brand that can only resonate with their followers</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.162*, Sig. (2-tailed): .015, N: 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How true and honest a social media celebrity is when talking about a brand product affects my decision to interact with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.055, Sig. (2-tailed): .411, N: 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality of a social media celebrity will most likely affect my decision to engage with a brand they endorse</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.044, Sig. (2-tailed): .513, N: 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to trust a review created by a social media user with many followers as compared to a brand-created review</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.116, Sig. (2-tailed): .084, N: 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s more convincing to try a product that has been recommended by a social media user with many followers</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.048, Sig. (2-tailed): .475, N: 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to purchase a product reviewed by a social media user with many followers</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.071, Sig. (2-tailed): .290, N: 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to take advice about a brand product from a social media celebrity</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.087, Sig. (2-tailed): .190, N: 227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to follow a brand endorsed by a social media celebrity based on their large network of followers</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.056, Sig. (2-tailed): .399, N: 226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media celebrities chosen for brand endorsements appear knowledgeable about the products they endorse</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation: -0.022, Sig. (2-tailed): .748, N: 224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study purposed to investigate the impact that SMIs have on brand communication for Kenyan tech brands on Instagram. The study, a quantitative study, was conducted through the online survey method in the form of questionnaires that were sent out to potential respondents identified as followers of any of the four tech brands that were under study: Safaricom, Tecno, Airtel and Samsung and thus assumed to be brand users of the mentioned brands. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study and whether or not the research objectives of the study were achieved.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

This section focuses on the summary of the major findings of the study in line with the main objectives of the study

5.2.1 Role of SMIs

The first objective of this study was to find out the role of SMIs which was in line with the first research question. The survey conducted revealed that majority of the respondents (81 percent) agreed with the fact that an SMI would affect their decision to interact and engage with a brand. This goes ahead to confirm and support the influential role of SMIs as their main role when it comes to communicating brand messages to consumers thus affecting their overall decision to recognize, interact and engage with a brand. Saiidi (2016) confirms this influential role of SMIs by highlighting the fact that the use of SMIs by brands emerges as 11 times more effective meaning that an account owned
by SMIs is an envy of many brands trying to reach out to their online audience. Because of their level of influence administered through personalized content, the online audience will want to interact and engage with not only a brand product but the SMI as well (Yadav, Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013; Song & Yoo, 2016).

**5.2.2 Attributes that make SMIs influential**

Once the influential role of SMIs was confirmed, it was important to understand the attributes that contribute to this influential role of SMIs. Therefore, based on the SMI attributes of the study that were tested, findings revealed that both technical characteristics and social characteristics are key attributes that contribute to the influential role of SMIs.

In regards to the questions that investigated trustworthy as an attribute, a majority of the respondents confirmed that SMIs needed to portray trust when speaking about a given brand to consumers. This confirms Gould and Stern’s (1988) notion that information provided by opinion leaders is considered by audiences to be more trustworthy than any form of mass advertising thus making opinion leaders more valuable to consumers when making decisions about a brand. Social media influencers portray trust when they create and share posts with their followers about products and services that they have used or tried and this makes it easy for followers to not only have trust in the products they endorse but also make their content relatable (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

Persuasion as another attribute under investigation revealed a majority agreeing to the fact that SMIs play a significant role when it comes to convincing brand users to recognize, engage and interact with a brand. They have the ability to promote a brand because of their persuasive power (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).
The genuineness of an SMI affected the decision of a brand user when choosing to interact and engage with a brand thus highlighting the importance of authenticity as another key social attribute. Scholars highlight that content provided by SMIs is personalized and created in such a manner that followers will want to engage with the product and with the SMI as well (Yadav, Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013; Song & Yoo, 2016). This personalization is what contributes to the authenticity of an SMI because they will create content based on first-hand experience with the brand product.

In regards to technical characteristics, both expertise and how knowledgeable an SMI should be were also tested and it was found that they both affect the decisions of brand users when it comes to recognizing, interacting and engaging with a brand. Merwe and Heerden (2009) confirm expertise is a key characteristic of an SMI and in fact combine the two attributes (knowledge and expertise) by stating that an SMI can be considered as an expert who is knowledgeable in a particular topic.

5.2.3 Relationship between SMIs and brand communication

Based on research question three, the findings of this study revealed a positive correlation between the main variables of this study; SMIs and brand communication based on a Pearson’s correlation that was conducted. Findings from an ANOVA test conducted between the dependent variable (brand communication) and trust and persuasion further revealed a statistically significant relationship. This means that the attributes under investigation did affect the decisions of brand users to interact and engage with a brand. These findings confirm information presented by different scholars who posits that a brand’s message is most likely to be well received if it is delivered by an expert who is likable, well known, and shows the relevant expertise with relevant information (Edmonds,
2013). In addition, authenticity, persuasive power, and trust are also key attributes that affect the interpretation of brand messages to consumers thus supporting findings from various scholars (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations (Attributes)

The results of this study confirmed that trust, authenticity, persuasion, expertise and knowledge are all key influential attributes that affect the decisions of brand users to interact and engage with a brand. After a mean comparison was done, it was found that all attributes were equally important and in the quest to create content that will at the end of the day engage social brand users with brand products, Kenyan brands should consider all of the above attributes when looking for suitable influencers to interpret brand messages to brand users.

Seeing that trust was a key attribute that affects the decisions of social brand users, Kenyan tech brands need to work on creating more social proof by frequently involving SMIs when interpreting brand messages to consumers because in the end, a social brand user’s trust will only be won if SMIs are given a chance to story tell based on their own experiences with brand products.

Authenticity was also highlighted as a major influential attribute. For this reason, Kenyan brands should replicate what other influential brands such as Safaricom are currently doing in terms of frequently engaging SMIs in a number of their campaigns which has foreseen SMIs speak from their own experiences thus affecting the decisions of their followers.
Persuasive power is reflected in the number of followers an SMI has and seeing that this attribute was also a key attribute that affected the decisions of brand users, Kenyan brands need also to consider follower count when choosing an influencer to communicate a brand message to brand users best because a large following is assumed to mean that the SMI has been able to convince their followers based on their personalized content. This will help brand messages reach a sizeable network of people thus leading to effective brand communication in the long run.

Expertise and knowledge emerged as key attributes that affected the decision of social brand users to interact or engage with a given brand. Although the figures in percentages were less than 50 percent, the total number in terms of percentages for knowledge and expertise were 45 and 38 percent respectively which were more than those who disagreed and those who gave ‘I don’t know’ responses. This could therefore mean that SMIs who have been used by Kenyan brands before have not fully portrayed the technical know-how when it comes to platform use, content creation and communicating information about brands. Kenyan brands should therefore work at identifying the right influencers in their niche and carefully scrutinize influencers before settling on just any so they ensure that their brand messages are interpreted effectively.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Practice

This study presented the potential for help to other corporate brands hoping to use SMIs for brand communication. However, Kenyan corporate brands need to conduct more market research regarding the use of SMIs as a brand communication strategy to enable brand users to understand the concept behind their use thus making it easier for them to adopt it as a new strategy. This applies most specifically to brands such as Safaricom where
a number of brand users still do not understand why influencers are used and will for this reason choose to interact or engage with the given brand based on personal choice and not influence by SMIs.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Policy

The main task of an SMI is to create personalized content that will appeal to the brand users and affect their decision to interact and engage with the brand. However, Kenyan tech brands need to put in place clear guidelines when using SMIs such that when they are chosen to endorse brands, they should mention in their posts the brand they are endorsing to avoid situations where unknown social media users use fictitious names in the name of brand endorsement then end up negatively defaming the brand.

5.3.4 Recommendations for future research

One limitation of this study was the high number of ‘I don’t know’ responses that were recorded when collecting the findings thus highlighting the fact that the use of SMIs by brands requires extensive research as it is still a new area of research and yet a new brand communication strategy that brands are in the process of adapting.

Most studies as observed from the literature review as well focused much on Facebook and Twitter in regards to the use of SMIs thus presenting the use of SMIs on Instagram as a possible area of future research.

5.4 Conclusion

The main aim of this research was to find out the impact of SMIs on brand communication for Kenya tech brands. Based on each objective, the following conclusions were made.
Based on objective number one, which was to examine the role of SMIs in brand communication on Instagram, it can be confirmed that SMIs are in reality influential and are indeed the online micro-celebrities who cultivate as much brand attention as possible (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Their sizeable network of followers does indeed affect the decision of their followers and as a result, have played a big role in helping brands reach out to their online consumers.

Objective number two sought to examine the attributes that make SMIs influential and based on the findings from this study supported by literature, it is succinct that trust, authenticity, persuasion, expertise, and knowledge are all key attributes that contribute to the influential role of SMIs (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Gould & Stern, 1988; Merwe & Heerden, 2009). Brands should therefore look for these attributes when trying to identify a suitable SMI to promote their brand products.

With regard to the third objective which was to determine whether a relationship exists between SMIs (the independent variable) and brand communication (the dependent variable), a Pearson’s correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the variables. Results revealed a positive correlation meaning that the variables were directly associated thus confirming the fact that SMIs have an effect on brand communication. As the use of SMIs rises, so does their effect on brand communication.

The results of this study indicate that SMIs are indeed online micro-celebrities and opinion leaders because of their influential power. It can therefore be concluded that SMIs have a positive impact on brand communication. By investigating the effectiveness of Instagram as a platform, this study has not only presented the potential of using SMIs for brand communication to other corporate brands, but has provided useful information for
social brand users who often engage and interact with the Kenyan brands that were under study.
References


Crystal, A. (2014). #In$tagLam: Instagram as a repository of taste, a brimming marketplace, a war of eyeballs. In M. Berry, & M. Schleser, Mobile media making in the age of smartphones (pp. 119-128). Newyork: Palgrave Pivot.


Appendices

Appendix 1 IRB Form

United States
International
University-Africa

USIU-A Institutional Review Board (IRB)

20th July, 2018

Linda Otiende
School of Communication, Cinematics & Creative Arts

Project Title: Branding in the Social Media Era: Investigating the Role of Social Media Influencers for Social Brand Communication

Dear Otiende,

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to the USIU-Africa Institutional Review Board (USIU-A IRB). The IRB appreciates your work in completing the proposal. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the policies that govern the protection of human subjects.

The IRB has determined that your proposed project employs surveys that pose no more than minimal risk to the participants. The information will be obtained in such a way that one’s responses will not be linked to one’s identity or identifying information. For these reasons, the USIU-A IRB has determined that your proposed study is exempt from further IRB review.

Even though your project is exempt from IRB review, the research must be conducted according to the proposal submitted to the USIU-A IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please be aware that changes to the research protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exempt review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the USIU-A IRB.

Should you or study participants have any queries regarding IRB’s consideration of this project, please contact irb@usu.ac.ke.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Damarly Sikalihe, Chair | IRB | USIU-Africa
dsiikalihe@usu.ac.ke
Office 0730 116 112

CC: Research Office
p.o.box 14634-00800 Nairobi, Kenya | tel:254-730-116-000 | info@usu.ac.ke
www.usu.ac.ke
Appendix 2 NACOSTI Form

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Telephone: +254-20-2213471, 2243149, 3310571, 2219430
Fax: +254-20-2213471, 3310571, 2219430
Email: dgo@nacosti.go.ke
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke
When replying please quote

Ref: No. NACOSTI/P/18/79777/24005 Date: 20th August, 2018

Linda Ngwono Otende
United States International University
P.O. Box 14634- 00800
NAIROBI.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on “Impact of social media influencers on social brand communication for Kenyan Tech Brands” I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in Nairobi County for the period ending 17th August, 2019.

You are advised to report to the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit a copy of the final research report to the Commission within one year of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

BONIFACE WANYAMA
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
Nairobi County.

The County Director of Education
Nairobi County.
Appendix 3 Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Otiende Linda, a Masters student at United States International University. The following survey is a part of my thesis requirements and it aims to investigate the impact of SMIs on brand communication for Kenyan tech brands.

I hereby request you to please assist me in filling out the following survey which will help me gather information based on my topic of research. The survey should take no more than 5 minutes.

Thank you for your participation in the survey.

Note that your participation is voluntary meaning that if at any given chance you are reluctant to participate, you are free to withdraw at any moment. Maintaining confidentiality is of uttermost importance and as a result, data collected will be handled confidentially and your participation will be kept anonymous. The information provided by you in this questionnaire will be used only for research purposes.

I agree to take part in this survey.

__________________  ________________  ________________
Name of participant  Date                                     Signature

__________________  ________________  ________________
Researcher          Date                                     Signature
Appendix 4 Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS
1. What is your age?
   - 17-22
   - 23-28
   - 29-34
   - 35-40
   - Above 40

2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

3. What is your level of education?
   - High school
   - Some college
   - Diploma
   - Undergraduate
   - Master’s Degree
   - PhD

5. What is your employment status?
   - Employed
   - Unemployed
   - Self-employed
   - Student
   - Other

6. How did you receive the questionnaire?
   - A link was sent to me via email
   - A link was sent via the Instagram ‘Direct Message’ feature
   - A link was sent via Whatsapp

PLATFORM USE
7. What do you use Instagram mainly for?
   - Create content (i.e. pictures, videos etc)
   - Connecting with friends
   - Consume and react to content (liking, reposting or commenting)
   - To just spectate (i.e. no interaction or participation in any way)

8. How often do you log in to your Instagram account?
9. How often do you post on Instagram?
   - Never (I only have an Instagram account and follow others but I have never posted)
   - Occasionally (on a need basis)
   - Once a month
   - Several times a month
   - 1-3 times a week
   - 4-6 times a week
   - Once everyday
   - Several times a day

10. How often do you react to posts on Instagram? (i.e. commenting or reviewing)
   - Never
   - Occasionally (on a need basis)
   - Once a month
   - Several times a month
   - 1-3 times a week
   - 4-6 times a week
   - Once everyday
   - Several times a day

BRAND INTERACTION

11. In regards to the people you follow on Instagram, are there Kenyan Instagrammers you follow with 10,000+ followers?
   - Yes
   - No
   (i) If yes, could you please mention their name(s)? ________________
      If no, skip to question (iii)

   (ii) Have they ever endorsed a Kenyan brand you know of?
      - Yes
      - No
      If yes, please provide the name of the brand ________________
   (iii) Would an Instagrammer with many followers chosen to endorse a brand affect your decision to follow or interact with a brand?
12. Based on the following 4 tech brands under study, kindly tick the one(s) you follow on Instagram

- [ ] Safaricom
- [ ] Tecno-Kenya
- [ ] Airtel
- [ ] Samsung

13. What made you follow the brand?
- [ ] Personal interest
- [ ] Because a social media celebrity influenced me to
- [ ] Admirable online presence
- [ ] Overall reputation as a brand

14. How often are you likely to like, comment or repost posts by the above-ticked brand(s)?
- [ ] Occasionally
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] 1-3 times a week
- [ ] 4-6 times a week
- [ ] Everyday

15. Do you think interacting with the brand(s) has affected your attitude towards the brand(s)?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

16. Have any of the people you follow on Instagram ever endorsed a product of any of the following brands; Safaricom, Airtel, Samsung, Tecno-Kenya?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
  (i) If yes, which one(s)?
  (ii) Could you please provide the name(s) of the individual chosen to endorse the brand?
  (iv) Did that affect your decision to follow or interact with the brand(s)?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

ATTRIBUTES

17. How would you define a social media celebrity? (You can tick more than one)
- [ ] A social media user with up to 10,000 plus followers on any social media platform (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc)
A social media user who endorses products for other brands on social media
A social media user who consistently posts content
A social media user who posts engaging content and gets a lot of likes
A social media user who portrays considerable influence from the content they post
An entertainer on social media whose content gets shared and reposted frequently
A social media user who can generate sales conversions from their audience based on honest display and experiences of their personal lives

18. A social media celebrity with many followers will not deliberately endorse a brand product that may cause harm to their followers
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

19. Social media celebrities chosen to endorse brands portray credibility when endorsing a brand on their platforms
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

20. A social media celebrity will most likely choose to endorse a brand that can only resonate with their followers
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

21. How true and honest a social media celebrity is when talking about a brand product affects my decision to interact with a brand they endorse
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

22. The personality of a social media celebrity will most likely affect my decision to engage with a brand they endorse
   - Strongly Disagree
23. I am more likely to trust a review created by a social media user with many followers as compared to a brand-created review
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

24. It’s more convincing to try a product that has been recommended by a social media user with many followers
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

25. I am most likely to purchase a product reviewed by a social media user with many followers
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

26. I am most likely to take advice about a brand product from a social media celebrity
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

27. I am more likely to follow a brand endorsed by a social media celebrity based on their large network of followers
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - I don’t know
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
28. Social media celebrities chosen for brand endorsements appear knowledgeable about the products they endorse

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- I don’t know
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Thank you so much for participating.
Appendix 5 Brand Preliminary Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facebook Pages Stats in Kenya</th>
<th>Total Fans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Safaricom Limited (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>1,659,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. StarTimes (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>1,184,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coop Bank Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>1,112,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. KCB Group (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>1,094,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Modern Coast Express Ltd (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>1,035,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kuza Bora (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>915,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Monte KENYA (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>831,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. DLK Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>821,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Coca-Cola Kenya</td>
<td>649,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jumia Kenya</td>
<td>634,993</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Equity Bank Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>623,332</td>
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<td>12. Killimall - Online Shopping in Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
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<td>13. Telkom Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
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<td>14. Samsung Mobile Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>561,392</td>
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<td>15. Kenya Power (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>547,456</td>
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<td>16. Kenya Weddings (Skyscaper)</td>
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<td>17. Jumia Mobile (Skyscaper)</td>
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<td>18. Cussons Body East Africa (Skyscaper)</td>
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<td>19. Tusker Lager Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>465,912</td>
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<td>20. TECNO Mobile Kenya (Skyscaper)</td>
<td>462,407</td>
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## Appendix 6 Research Budget

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Item Breakdown</th>
<th>Total item cost (KShs)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROPOSAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication costs (Internet use)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis proposal writing/printing drafts</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROJECT PHASE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
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<td>Final draft (printing and spiral binding)</td>
<td>3 copies</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final thesis copy (printing and spiral binding, proofreading)</td>
<td>3 copies</td>
<td>6,000</td>
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<td>NACOSTI</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<td>Final Hardcover Bound Copies</td>
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<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingency</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>30,500</strong></td>
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</table>
### Appendix 7 Work Plan and Time Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
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