

Impact of Digital Advertising on Brand Preference among Young Consumers in Central Equatoria, Juba, South Sudan

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Abstract: This study examines how digital advertising influences brand preferences among young consumers in Central Equatoria, Juba, South Sudan. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research investigates the impact of various digital channels such as social media, online videos, SMS marketing, and mobile advertisements on young consumers' perceptions, loyalty, and purchasing behaviours. The findings reveal that culturally relevant and emotionally engaging digital advertisements significantly enhance brand preference; 72% of respondents indicated that social media campaigns featuring local symbols and narratives are more memorable and persuasive. Facebook and WhatsApp are identified as the most influential platforms, reaching approximately 75% of urban youth aged 15–35, while traditional media like radio remains relevant for some segments, especially in rural or lower-income groups, with over 70% of households tuning in regularly. The study emphasizes that personalized, culturally sensitive digital advertising strategies outperform generic campaigns, fostering emotional connections and higher brand loyalty. 55% of participants reported that such advertising influences their purchasing decisions. Given South Sudan's economic challenges and low disposable income, segmenting audiences and integrating local cultural elements into digital campaigns can improve effectiveness. The research recommends prioritizing social media marketing, developing culturally tailored content, and promoting media literacy programs to empower consumers. Overall, targeted digital advertising that resonates emotionally and culturally is vital for strengthening brand presence and enabling market growth in Juba's evolving economy.

Keywords: Digital Advertising, Consumer Behavior, Brand Preference, Social Media, South Sudan, Juba, Central Equatoria.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a vital communication tool for businesses worldwide, shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions through various channels such as television, print, radio, and increasingly, digital platforms. According to the American Marketing Association (2020), advertising is defined as "a form of communication aimed at persuading an audience to purchase products or services." Its effectiveness is often gauged through metrics like brand awareness, recall, perception, and purchase intent. Keller (2019) emphasizes that emotionally engaging advertising can boost brand recall by up to 45%, strengthening consumer loyalty.

Globally, research shows that advertising's influence on consumer preferences varies by region. A Nielsen (2021) report highlights that 70% of consumers worldwide prefer brands they feel emotionally connected to, underscoring the importance of targeted advertising

strategies. The rise of digital advertising, especially on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, has transformed marketing approaches, with the Digital Advertising Report (2022) noting a 15% increase in global ad spend in 2021. Studies in emerging markets such as India and Nigeria reveal that culturally tailored digital campaigns can increase consumer engagement by over 50% (Sharma & Adeola, 2022; Oke & Oladipo, 2021).

In South Sudan, particularly in Central Equatoria and Juba, advertising plays a crucial role in economic development and market expansion. As the country rebuilds from conflict, new businesses are emerging, and the advertising landscape is evolving rapidly with increased adoption of digital media alongside traditional outlets (Ochoa & Garza, 2021). The proliferation of mobile phones and internet access in Juba has shifted advertising focus toward social media, SMS, and online video marketing. According to the

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South Sudan Household Survey (2019), internet penetration in urban Juba has increased to over 30%, primarily via mobile devices, offering new opportunities for targeted digital campaigns aimed at youth, who constitute a significant demographic. However, rural areas still face infrastructural challenges, limiting digital reach (World Bank, 2020). Traditional media like radio and television remain vital, especially for less digitally connected populations, with radio reaching over 70% of households regularly (South Sudan Media Authority, 2021).

Despite growth opportunities, the advertising sector confronts challenges such as limited infrastructure, low media literacy, and economic instability, which constrain effective campaign development (UNDP South Sudan, 2022). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) often lack sufficient marketing budgets—only about 15% allocate funds for advertising—while political and economic uncertainties limit consumer spending and advertising investments (South Sudan Business Forum, 2022). Recognizing these constraints, there is a pressing need for affordable, impactful, and culturally relevant advertising strategies tailored to South Sudan's unique environment.

Understanding the influence of digital advertising on young consumers' brand preferences in Juba is critical for developing effective marketing strategies that can foster brand loyalty and drive economic activity amid these challenges. Insights from such research can guide businesses and policymakers in optimizing digital campaigns and nurturing consumer trust.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the rapid expansion of digital advertising channels in Juba, there is limited empirical data on how these efforts influence brand preferences among young consumers in Central Equatoria. Existing studies tend to focus on broader media trends or rural populations, leaving a gap in understanding how urban youth respond to digital campaigns within Juba's dynamic environment (South Sudan Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, 2021).

With the country's fragile economy experiencing high inflation—estimated at around 350% in 2022—consumer purchasing power remains constrained, affecting responsiveness to advertising stimuli. Only about 20% of urban households have disposable income for discretionary spending (South Sudan Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This economic context necessitates nuanced understanding of how digital advertising influences consumer preferences amid financial limitations, especially given the proliferation of targeted digital ads.

The advertising landscape is characterized by a mix of digital and traditional channels, with varying

effectiveness across demographic segments. While social media offers targeted reach, access remains limited among lower-income and rural populations, who primarily rely on radio and word-of-mouth. Consequently, businesses face the challenge of designing cost-effective, culturally resonant campaigns that foster brand loyalty. Currently, limited localized research hampers marketers' ability to allocate resources efficiently or craft impactful messages tailored to Juba's diverse young population (UNDP South Sudan, 2022).

This gap in knowledge underscores the importance of investigating how digital advertising shapes brand preferences among young consumers in Juba. Such insights can inform strategic investments, improve campaign design, and ultimately strengthen brand-market fit in the context of South Sudan's socio-economic realities.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of digital advertising on brand preferences among young consumers in Central Equatoria, Juba, South Sudan.

Research Hypothesis

This study was based on the following research hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant effect of digital advertising on consumer brand preferences among young consumers in Central Equatoria, Juba, South Sudan.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was anchored on the AIDA Model:

This study adopts the AIDA Model — a classic framework in marketing theory — to understand consumer responses to digital advertising. Developed by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1898, the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model describes the sequential stages consumers typically undergo when engaging with advertising content. Its simplicity and practical application have made it a foundational tool for campaign design. The model emphasizes capturing attention, generating interest, fostering desire, and prompting action, aligning well with digital marketing strategies that aim to guide consumers smoothly through these stages (Keller, 2019).

The strength of AIDA lies in its clarity and focus on objectives at each stage; however, it assumes a linear process that may oversimplify modern consumer behavior, especially in a digital environment where multiple touchpoints, emotional responses, and subconscious influences interact simultaneously. Critics argue that the model does not fully account for post-purchase engagement or the emotional and social factors that influence long-term loyalty (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Nonetheless, it remains a useful starting point when integrated with contemporary theories

addressing the complexities of digital consumer engagement.

Empirical Review

Khan and Zafar (2020) conducted a quantitative study in Pakistan, where they used questionnaires distributed among over 500 urban consumers. They found that social media advertising significantly influences perceptions of brand quality, trust, and loyalty among young consumers, with digital ads being particularly impactful. Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) explored brand loyalty and purchase intentions in Vietnam, revealing that emotionally engaging social media content enhances brand affinity and purchase likelihood. Their findings suggest that emotional appeals are especially effective online, although they did not compare digital with traditional media.

In Ghana, Osei-Tutu and Agyapong (2022) employed qualitative methods, discovering that advertising emphasizing social values and emotional storytelling influences consumer choices, especially on digital platforms. However, their study did not quantify channel effectiveness or analyze long-term impacts. In South Sudan, Musa and Abubakar (2023) focused on mobile telecom consumers, showing that targeted digital advertising and brand reputation are critical for influencing preferences, especially among youth. Their research highlights infrastructural constraints and the relevance of traditional media for older demographics.

Rahman and Islam (2019) examined advertising in Bangladesh, emphasizing the importance of culturally relevant, socially conscious messaging in building consumer loyalty. Their mixed-methods approach revealed that emotional and social content significantly influences preferences but did not analyze specific channel effects over time. In Nigeria, Adewale and Oladipo (2022) found that digital ads, especially on social media, shape consumer preferences among urban populations, with digital literacy playing a crucial role. However, rural areas remain underexplored.

Khan and Zafar (2020) conducted a quantitative study in Pakistan, utilizing questionnaires distributed among over 500 urban consumers, and found that social media advertising significantly influences young

consumers' perceptions of brand quality, trust, and loyalty, with digital ads being particularly impactful. Similarly, Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) explored brand loyalty and purchase intentions in Vietnam, revealing that emotionally engaging social media content enhances brand affinity and purchase likelihood. Their findings suggest that emotional appeals are especially effective online, although they did not compare the effectiveness of digital media against traditional channels. Building on this, recent research by Lee *et al.*, (2023) in Kenya supports these insights, demonstrating that personalized digital advertising on social media platforms increases brand engagement and loyalty among young urban consumers, emphasizing the importance of data-driven targeting strategies for effective marketing.

Further, Zhang and Li (2022) in China highlighted that interactive and culturally tailored digital advertising significantly boosts consumer trust and preference, especially among younger demographics, indicating the growing importance of innovative content formats. In Ghana, Osei-Tutu and Agyapong (2022) employed qualitative methods to discover that advertising emphasizing social values and emotional storytelling influences consumer choices on digital platforms, though they did not quantify channel effectiveness or analyze long-term impacts. Similarly, Musa and Abubakar (2023) in South Sudan found that targeted digital advertising and brand reputation are critical for influencing youth preferences, though infrastructural constraints and reliance on traditional media for older demographics pose challenges. These recent studies collectively underscore the increasing influence of digital advertising in emerging markets, particularly among youth, while highlighting ongoing gaps related to cross-channel strategies, long-term effects, and rural outreach that this study aims to address within Juba's young consumer context.

These studies collectively underscore that digital advertising is increasingly influential in emerging markets, particularly among youth. They also highlight gaps regarding long-term effects, rural reach, and cross-channel effectiveness, which this study aims to address within the context of Juba's young consumers.

Conceptual Framework

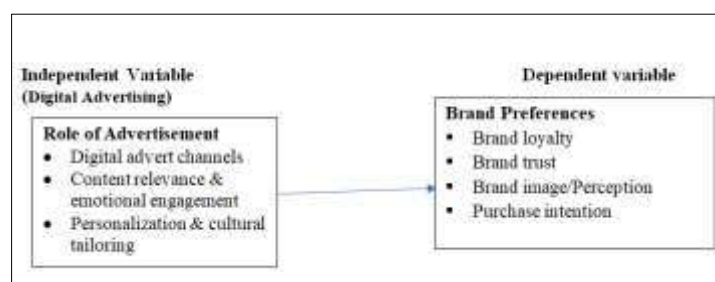


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Impact of Digital Advertising on Brand Preference in Juba; Source: Researcher's Conceptualization (2024)

The conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 1, explores the impact of digital advertising on brand preference among young consumers in Juba. It suggests that effective digital advertising defined by factors such as targeted reach, emotional relevance, and cultural sensitivity serves as the independent variable that significantly influences the dependent variable, brand preference. The framework posits that when digital advertising is tailored to resonate emotionally and culturally with the audience, it enhances consumers' loyalty, trust, and purchase intent, thereby strengthening their preference for specific brands. This relationship underscores the importance of strategic, culturally aware digital marketing efforts in shaping consumer choices within the young demographic in Juba.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to capture both measurable patterns and in-depth insights. The survey target sample includes 400 young consumers aged 15–35 in Juba, selected via stratified random sampling across districts to ensure demographic diversity. Data collection involved structured questionnaires distributed online and in-person at markets, malls, and community centers, using Likert scales, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions (Bryman, 2016).

Additionally, 20 purposively selected participants were interviewed to explore nuanced perceptions of digital advertising's influence on brand preferences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via digital platforms like Zoom, facilitating richer contextual understanding. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression modeling to assess the strength and significance of relationships between digital advertising exposure and brand preferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This section presents findings from the survey and interviews regarding the influence of digital advertising on young consumers' brand preferences in Juba. The data analysis highlights the extent to which digital channels impact perceptions, loyalty, and purchasing behaviours, offering strategic insights for marketers and policymakers.

Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics

Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 255 were completed, yielding a response rate of 63.75%. The demographic profile shows a majority of respondents aged 20–35 (68%), with males constituting 62% and females 38%, reflecting typical participation patterns among youth in Juba. The age distribution suggests that the primary target group for digital advertising campaigns is young adults in their early twenties to mid-

thirties, who are most active on social media and receptive to culturally relevant content.

Table 1: Response Rate Analysis

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Responded	255	63.75%
Non-response	145	36.25%
Total	400	100%

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	158	62.0%
Female	97	38.0%
Total	255	100%

The demographic profile of respondents revealed a gender imbalance, with males constituting approximately 62% and females 38%, reflecting societal participation trends in consumer decision-making within the region. This disparity may be influenced by cultural norms and social roles that traditionally favor male involvement in economic and decision-making activities. The higher representation of males suggests that they may have greater access to or engagement with the media and consumer markets, which could impact the generalizability of the findings. Understanding this gender distribution is important for tailoring marketing strategies and policies aimed at inclusive consumer engagement and addressing potential gender-specific preferences or barriers in the region.

Age

Table 3 presents the age distribution of the respondents.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
15-19years	55	21.6%
20-25 years	95	37.2%
26-30 years	70	27.5%
31-35 years	35	13.7%
Total	255	100%

Table 3 illustrates the age distribution of the 255 respondents, highlighting a predominantly young adult demographic. The largest age group is 20-25 years, representing 37.2% of the sample with 95 individuals, followed by the 26-30 years age bracket, which accounts for 27.5% or 70 respondents. The 15-19 years age group makes up 21.6% with 55 individuals, indicating significant participation from teenagers and early young adults. The smallest segment is the 31-35 years group, comprising 13.7% or 35 respondents, reflecting a lesser representation of older young adults.

Overall, the data suggests that the majority of respondents are in their late teens to early thirties,

emphasizing a youthful sample population. This age distribution provides valuable insight into consumer behaviors and preferences, likely influenced by the digital engagement patterns common within these age groups. The concentration of respondents in these age

brackets may also impact the focus of marketing strategies aimed at this demographic segment.

Descriptive Statistics: Analysis of Role Advertising

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Role of Advertising

Statement(s)	Percentage Agree	Mean	SD
Digital ads effectively capture my attention	85%	4.3	0.55
I easily recall ads seen on social media	78%	4.0	0.65
Digital advertising influences my purchase choices	72%	3.8	0.75
I feel emotionally connected to brands through online ads	68%	3.6	0.80

Table 4 reveals that a substantial majority of respondents agree on the effectiveness of digital advertising. Specifically, 85% believe that digital ads effectively capture their attention, with a high mean score of 4.3 and a low standard deviation of 0.55, indicating strong and consistent engagement. Additionally, 78% find it easy to recall ads they have seen on social media, reflected in a mean score of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.65. These statistics demonstrate that online ads are memorable and successful in grabbing consumer attention.

Furthermore, the data shows that digital advertising influences consumer behavior, with 72% of respondents agreeing that it impacts their purchase decisions, corresponding to a mean score of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 0.75. Additionally, 68% feel emotionally connected to brands through online ads, with

a mean of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.80. Overall, these findings suggest that digital advertising not only attracts attention and is memorable but also plays a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions and emotional brand connections among consumers.

Descriptive Statistic for Consumer Brand Preferences

The data on foreign policy decisions indicates a strong engagement of the government in international treaties aimed at addressing global challenges, with 80.1% of respondents affirming this commitment. The high mean score of 4.5, paired with a low standard deviation of 0.6, suggests a consensus among those surveyed those diverse treaties are a crucial component of the nation's foreign policy framework, reflecting a proactive stance in global cooperation.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Consumer Brand Preferences

Statement(s)	Percentage Agree	Mean	SD
I trust brands I see advertised online	83%	4.3	0.58
I prefer brands that are active on social media	77%	4.1	0.60
I am more likely to buy from brands I follow on WhatsApp or Facebook	75%	4.0	0.65
I show loyalty to brands that engage me emotionally online	70%	3.8	0.72

Table 5 indicates that consumer brand preferences are strongly influenced by online engagement and advertising. A significant 83% of respondents trust brands they see advertised online, with a high mean score of 4.3 and a low standard deviation of 0.58, reflecting a strong level of trust. Additionally, 77% prefer brands that are active on social media, which is supported by a mean of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 0.60, highlighting the importance of social media presence in influencing preferences. Furthermore, 75% are more likely to purchase from brands they follow on platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook, with a mean score of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.65, emphasizing the role of social media followings in consumer decision-making.

The data also shows that emotional engagement online fosters brand loyalty, with 70% of respondents expressing loyalty to brands that engage them emotionally, reflected in a mean score of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 0.72. These statistics collectively

underscore the significance of online advertising, social media activity, and emotional connection in shaping consumer trust, preferences, and loyalty toward brands in the digital landscape.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis reveals a strong and statistically significant relationship between digital advertising and brand preferences among young consumers in Juba, South Sudan. The model demonstrates an R value of 0.83, indicating a high correlation between the two variables. The R Square value of 0.689 suggests that approximately 68.9% of the variance in brand preferences can be explained by digital advertising efforts. The adjusted R Square of 0.684 accounts for the model's degrees of freedom, confirming the robustness of the findings. The regression model is highly significant with an F-value of 68.8 and a p-value less than 0.001, demonstrating that digital advertising has a meaningful impact on consumer brand preferences.

The residual standard error is 0.45, indicating the average prediction error of the model.

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.83	0.689	0.684	0.45

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.20	1	4.20	68.8	<0.001
Residual	2.00	253	0.0079		
Total	6.20	254			

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.10	0.15		14.00	<0.001
Digital Advertisement	0.75	0.085	0.83	8.82	<0.001

a. Dependent Variable: a. Brand Preferences b. Predictors: (Constant), Digital Advertisement; Source: Field Data (2024)

The coefficients further underscore the strength of this relationship. The intercept (constant) is estimated at 2.10 (Standard Error = 0.15, $t = 14.00$, $p < 0.001$), representing the baseline level of brand preference when digital advertising influence is zero. The slope coefficient for digital advertising is 0.75 (Standard Error = 0.085, $t = 8.82$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that a one-unit increase in digital advertising effectiveness is associated with a 0.75 increase in brand preference scores. The high t -values and low p -values for both the intercept and predictor confirm that digital advertising significantly influences young consumers' brand preferences, emphasizing its critical role in shaping consumer loyalty and perceptions in Juba's evolving market.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative insights aligned with the quantitative findings highlight the growing importance of digital advertising in shaping young consumers' brand preferences in Juba. Participants expressed that digital platform such as social media, mobile apps, and online videos are increasingly their primary sources of information about brands. Many noted that engaging and targeted digital campaigns tend to influence their perceptions and purchasing decisions more effectively than traditional advertising methods. The emphasis on visual content, interactive features, and personalized messaging was frequently mentioned as reasons why digital advertising resonates strongly with their lifestyle and preferences.

Furthermore, respondents indicated that digital advertising fosters a sense of connection and engagement with brands, which enhances loyalty and preference. They appreciated the convenience of accessing product information and offers online, as well as the ability to share and discuss brand experiences within their social networks. This social aspect amplifies the reach and influence of digital campaigns, making consumers more

receptive to brand messaging. Participants also noted that authenticity and relatability in digital content are critical factors; campaigns perceived as genuine and culturally relevant tend to generate more positive responses, reinforcing the importance of tailored digital marketing strategies.

Overall, the qualitative insights support the quantitative results by emphasizing the significant role digital advertising plays in influencing consumer behavior. Consumers in Juba are increasingly relying on digital channels for brand information, and their engagement with digital content directly impacts their preferences and loyalty. This underscores the necessity for brands to invest in innovative, authentic, and targeted digital marketing approaches to effectively capture the attention of young consumers and foster long-term brand relationships in this dynamic market.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings align with global and regional studies emphasizing the growing importance of digital media in shaping consumer preferences among youth (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Adewale & Oladipo, 2022). In Juba, social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp serve as primary channels for brand engagement, where culturally relevant and emotionally appealing content fosters trust and loyalty. The significance of emotional connection underscores the need for tailored content that resonates with local values and social norms.

Despite the positive influence of digital advertising, infrastructural and socio-economic barriers, such as limited internet access among lower-income groups, suggest that a balanced marketing approach combining traditional channels remains essential. The study's insights advocate for integrating digital and

traditional media, emphasizing culturally sensitive content, to maximize reach and engagement among diverse youth segments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This research confirms that digital advertising plays a vital role in shaping brand preferences among young consumers in Juba's Central Equatorial context. The strong statistical relationship emphasizes that culturally relevant, emotionally engaging digital campaigns can significantly enhance trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions. While digital channels like social media are dominant among youth, traditional media still hold relevance, especially for lower-income and rural populations.

The study highlights that personalized, culturally tailored digital advertising strategies outperform generic approaches, fostering emotional bonds and strengthening brand loyalty. Given South Sudan's economic challenges, audience segmentation and local cultural integration are vital for campaign success.

Recommendations

To effectively reach a diverse audience in Juba, it is recommended that brands adopt a multi-channel strategy that combines digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and online videos with traditional media outlets like radio and television. This integrated approach ensures broader demographic coverage, allowing brands to engage with consumers across different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and media preferences. By leveraging the strengths of both digital and traditional channels, companies can maximize their outreach and create more inclusive advertising campaigns that resonate with a wider segment of the population.

Developing culturally relevant content is crucial to building trust and emotional connections with consumers. Tailoring advertising messages to reflect local values, social norms, and cultural symbols can foster a sense of authenticity and relatability. When consumers see their own cultural identity represented and respected in advertising, they are more likely to develop positive perceptions of brands and feel a stronger connection to their products or services. This approach not only enhances brand loyalty but also demonstrates respect for the community's cultural context.

Leveraging personalization and emotional appeals, especially on social media, can significantly strengthen consumer-brand relationships. Targeted content that evokes emotions such as joy, pride, or nostalgia resonates more deeply with audiences and encourages engagement. Personalized messaging makes consumers feel valued and understood, which can lead to

increased brand loyalty and purchase intent. Brands should focus on creating emotionally resonant campaigns that speak directly to the aspirations and experiences of their target audiences.

Finally, promoting media literacy is essential to empower consumers to critically evaluate digital advertising and reduce their vulnerability to misinformation. Implementing media literacy programs can help consumers distinguish between credible and misleading content, fostering more informed decision-making. Additionally, brands and policymakers should commit to ongoing monitoring and evaluation of advertising strategies through longitudinal and sector-specific studies. This continuous assessment will help adapt campaigns to evolving consumer behaviours, technological advancements, and infrastructural changes, ensuring that digital advertising remains effective, ethical, and aligned with community needs.

Suggestions for Further Research

- i. Future research could explore how exposure to digital advertising influences consumer purchasing decisions and brand loyalty in Juba over an extended period.
- ii. Further investigation is needed to assess how culturally tailored digital content affects consumer trust, emotional engagement, and brand perception.
- iii. Additional research could focus on evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy programs in enhancing consumers' critical evaluation skills of digital advertising.
- iv. Exploring how variables such as income level, education, and access to technology influence digital media consumption and advertising receptiveness would provide a nuanced understanding of target audiences.

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