

**A STUDY OF CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRAND
REPUTATIONS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN OREDO
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, BENIN CITY.**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

AUGUST, 2025

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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MASS
COMMUNICATION, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY, EDO STATE. IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELORS OF ART
DEGREE (BA) IN MASS COMMUNICATION.**

AUGUST, 2025
CERTIFICATION

I, the undersigned certify that this project work was carried out by me: **Dawn Omesham OGOANAH ART2100997** In the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Bachelors Of Art Degree In Mass Communication.

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DATE

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God almighty

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ABSTRACT

This study explored consumer attitudes toward the brand reputations of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City. This research aimed to identify the key factors influencing consumer perceptions, assess the impact of brand reputation on trust and loyalty, and examine the roles of social media and word-of-mouth in shaping attitudes toward SMEs. To guide this investigation, the study is rooted in the theories of "Brand Equity Theory " and " Theory of Planned Behaviour." Using a structured questionnaire distributed to 200 respondents, quantitative data were collected and analyzed using frequency distribution and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that factors such as product and service quality, customer service, and brand consistency significantly influence how consumers perceive SME brands. The results also show that a strong brand reputation enhances consumer trust, fosters loyalty, and positively influences purchasing decisions. Social media engagement and word-of-mouth were found to be powerful tools in shaping public perception, often amplifying both positive and negative brand experiences. The study concludes that SMEs in Oredo LGA must invest strategically in building and maintaining a reputable brand image through quality delivery, customer engagement, and digital presence. Therefore, it is recommended that conducting regular brand perception surveys can help SMEs understand how they are viewed by consumers thus feedback should inform strategy and identify areas for improvement.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's business landscape, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of many economies, as this is also a major drive of the Nigerian economy. They are the local boutiques, tech start-ups, neighbourhood restaurants, and growing enterprises. For SMEs, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria, building and maintaining a strong brand reputation is not merely desirable but essential for survival and growth. Etuk et al., (2025) aver that consumers are often exposed to a wide range of choices and sources of information especially through digital platforms and their perception of a brand's credibility, trustworthiness, and quality greatly influences their purchasing decisions.

According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), SMEs account for over 96% of businesses and approximately 84% of employment in Nigeria (SMEDAN & NBS, 2022). In areas like Oredo, a major local government area in

Edo State, SMEs span across diverse sectors including retail, fashion, hospitality, and services. However, Adebayo (2024) asserts that despite their numerical strength and contribution to economic development, many of these enterprises struggle with issues related to poor brand image, inconsistent customer experiences, lack of formal branding strategies, and negative word-of-mouth factors that cumulatively damage their public reputation.

Reputation, as a form of intangible capital, plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer attitudes, which include beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies toward a brand (Mutsikiwa & Eniola, 2024). For SMEs, establishing a positive brand reputation could mean increased consumer trust, repeat patronage, and favourable referrals (Adebayo, 2024). Conversely, a poor reputation often worsened by online reviews and social media backlash can lead to customer distrust, disengagement, and even business failure. The emergence of digital communication and online platforms has further elevated the importance of brand perception. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages; they actively evaluate, compare, and publicly express opinions about brands. Nwali and Ntegeeh (2022) aver that this behaviour has intensified the pressure on

SMEs to manage their reputation consistently across various consumer touch points because a single negative review on Facebook or Google My Business could significantly impact how prospective customers view a brand in Oredo's close-knit marketplace.

For SMEs, reputation can be a double-edged sword an excellent reputation can build loyalty and drive sales, while a negative one can push customers away, sometimes irreversibly. Unlike large corporations with deep pockets for damage, SMEs often rely on word-of-mouth, customer experiences, and digital footprints to establish credibility. In Oredo Local Government, where businesses thrive on relationships and community trust, consumer attitudes towards an SME's reputation can make or break its success. A customer's perception may be shaped by a variety of factors, including past experiences, online reviews, and social circles. With the increasing influence of digital platforms, people no longer rely solely on direct interactions to form opinions about a brand. Instead, a single bad review or a viral social media complaint can impact an SME's growth trajectory (Nwali and Ntegeeh, 2022).

Despite the importance of brand reputation, many SMEs in Oredo still struggle to manage and maintain a positive image. Some may not fully understand how consumer attitudes shape their business outcomes, while others may lack the resources to invest in proper reputation management strategies. This study, therefore, sought to explore how consumers in Oredo Local Government Area perceive SMEs, what factors influence their attitudes towards these businesses, and how brand reputation ultimately affects consumer behaviour.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria play a crucial role in employment generation, income distribution, and local economic development. In Oredo Local Government Area of Benin City a densely populated urban centre with a growing number of SMEs in sectors like fashion, food services, beauty, and retail the competition among businesses has intensified. Despite their economic relevance, many SMEs in Oredo still struggle to establish a strong brand reputation in the minds of consumers.

On the other hand, brand reputation is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in determining consumer preferences, trust, loyalty, and willingness to

recommend products or services. In today's digital age, a brand's reputation is not built solely through advertising but also through customer reviews, social media presence, word-of-mouth, and perceived product/service quality (Etuk et al., 2025; Mutsikiwa & Eniola, 2024). Unfortunately, many SMEs in Oredo lack structured branding strategies or underestimate the impact of consumer perception on their long-term sustainability. Anecdotal evidence suggests that consumers in Oredo, Benin City often distrust local SMEs due to issues such as poor customer service, inconsistent product quality, lack of after-sales support, and weak digital visibility. Many customers choose to patronize larger or more well-known brands even when local alternatives are more affordable due to perceptions that smaller businesses are unreliable or unprofessional. Yet, no empirical study has been conducted to understand what specifically drives consumer attitudes toward these SMEs in Oredo LGA.

Moreover, while some SMEs attempt to leverage social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok to build brand awareness, it remains unclear whether such efforts significantly affect consumer attitudes or lead to brand loyalty in the Oredo context. The lack of data makes it difficult for SME

owners to know which aspects of brand reputation matter most and which practices should be prioritized. This gap presents a significant challenge: without understanding how consumers in Oredo perceive and respond to brand reputations, SMEs cannot make informed decisions to improve their image or effectively compete in the local marketplace. Without insight into consumer psychology, many may continue to invest in ineffective strategies or miss out on opportunities to build lasting customer relationships. It is for these reasons that this study investigated consumer attitudes towards the brand reputations of SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area of Benin City.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the factors that influence consumer perceptions of brand reputation among SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area.
2. To show how brand reputation affects consumer trust and loyalty towards SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area.

3. To assess the role of social media and word-of-mouth in shaping consumer attitudes towards SME brands in Oredo Local Government Area..
4. To determine the extent to which brand reputation influence consumer purchasing decisions regarding SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area..

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What factors influence consumer perceptions of brand reputation among SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area.?
2. How does brand reputation affect consumer trust and loyalty towards SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area.?
3. What role do social media and word-of-mouth play in shaping consumer attitudes towards SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area.?
4. To what extent does brand reputation influence consumer purchasing decisions regarding SMEs Oredo Local Government Area.?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research offered valuable insights by examining how consumers perceive the brand reputations of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oredo Local Government. The results provided meaningful benefits to multiple groups, including business owners, customers, marketing professionals, and government officials. SME proprietors and managers will gain critical understanding about factors that shape their public image and how customer perceptions directly affect their business outcomes. These insights can inform more effective reputation management approaches that build stronger customer relationships. The research helped consumers recognize how company reputations develop and why it matters when making purchases. It also examined how digital platforms, customer interactions, and promotional activities influence their impressions of local businesses.

Also, marketing specialists discovered practical information about consumer psychology and reputation development. These findings enhanced branding and communication tactics specifically tailored for smaller enterprises in Benin City. Government representatives and regulatory bodies will gain substantive data

regarding the reputation challenges facing small businesses. This information supports the development of more effective business friendly policies that encourage SME growth and sustainability. Finally, the study provided a foundation for subsequent research in reputation management, consumer behaviour patterns, and small business development. It expanded the knowledge base in both business communication and entrepreneurial studies.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focused on examining consumer attitudes towards the brand reputations of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oredo Local Government. The study was limited to Oredo Local Government, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, as it seeks to understand how consumers within this location perceive and interact with SME brands. Also, the study explores key factors influencing brand reputation, including customer service quality, social media influence, word-of-mouth marketing, consumer trust, and purchasing decisions. It also examined the challenges SMEs face in maintaining a strong brand reputation. The research targeted consumers who engage with SMEs in various

industries, including retail, hospitality, fashion, and services. SME owners and brand managers may also be considered for additional insights.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study, while aimed at providing meaningful insights into consumer attitudes towards the brand reputations of SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area, was subject to several limitations that may affect the scope and generalisability of its findings. First, the research is geographically restricted to Oredo LGA, which means that the attitudes and behaviours identified may not represent those of consumers in other parts of Benin City or Nigeria as a whole. Additionally, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which may constrain the depth of data collection and analysis, particularly in terms of capturing longer-term consumer attitudes or observing seasonal variations in brand perception.

Another limitation was the nature of data collection, as the study relied on self-reported responses gathered through structured questionnaire. This method is

maybe prone to biases such as social desirability, recall inaccuracies, and limited emotional expression, which could affect the reliability of the responses. Moreover, the research may place emphasis on certain industries, such as retail, fashion, and food services, which are more visible to everyday consumers, potentially under representing less prominent sectors such as manufacturing or professional services. Also, the unavailability of data on the number of SMEs in Oredo Local Government from the Edo State Chamber of Commerce, Edo State Board of Internal Revenue, and Edo State Ministry of Information and Communication redirected the population focus of this research.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity and understanding, the following key terms used in this study are defined based on their specific meanings within this research context:

Brand Reputation: The overall perception and image that consumers have of a business based on its past actions, customer experiences, and public perception. It influences consumer trust and business success.

Consumer Attitudes: This refers to the perceptions, opinions, and behaviours of consumers toward brand reputation of SMEs in Benin City. It includes factors such as trust, loyalty, and purchasing decisions.

Customer Service Quality: the level of service provided by an SME to its customers, including responsiveness, professionalism, and problem resolution, which affects brand reputation and customer loyalty.

Purchasing Decisions: The process through which consumers decide to buy or reject a product or service based on their perceptions of the brand's reputation and credibility.

Small and Medium Enterprises: Businesses that operate on a relatively small scale in terms of workforce and financial capacity. In Nigeria, SMEs are generally defined by their annual turnover and number of employees.

Social Media Influence: The impact of online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter on consumer perceptions and brand reputation. It includes customer reviews, influencer marketing, and brand interactions.

Word-of-Mouth Marketing: A form of informal marketing where consumers share their opinions about a brand, product, or a service with others, influencing purchasing decisions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature on consumer attitudes towards brand reputation, particularly in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The literature examined included a range of sources such as online materials, journals, textbooks conference and seminar papers.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are broadly defined as businesses with limited scale in terms of workforce size, annual turnover, or asset base.

While different countries and organizations use varying criteria, SMEs are generally characterized by their relatively small number of employees and modest capital investment. In the Nigerian context, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) defines small enterprises as those employing between 10 to 49 people and medium enterprises as those with 50 to 199 employees. SMEs play a vital role in Nigeria's economy, forming about 96% of Nigerian businesses and contributing nearly 50% to the national GDP (SMEDAN, 2021).

SMEs are a driving force behind Nigeria's economic development. They are central to job creation, poverty alleviation, and economic diversification, particularly in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, trade, and services. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), SMEs in Nigeria account for over 80% of employment, especially within the informal sector. Their role is even more critical in rural and semi-urban communities where they serve as the primary economic actors. In addition to supporting local production and innovation, SMEs enhance social inclusion and grassroots empowerment, which are key to achieving national development goals.

Despite their importance, access to finance remains a significant bottleneck for Nigerian SMEs. Despite various interventions by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and other development finance institutions, many SMEs still face challenges in securing affordable credit. The World Bank (2025) reports that Nigerian SMEs experience similar financing gaps as their counterparts in other developing nations, owing to issues such as high interest rates, insufficient collateral, weak credit histories, and the lack of tailored financial products. Moreover, delays in government-backed loan disbursements and inconsistent policy implementation often exacerbate these constraints.

In Nigeria, SME performance has been shaped by both opportunities and structural constraints. On one hand, sectors such as tech start-ups, agro-processing, and creative industries have shown notable growth. On the other, many SMEs struggle with infrastructure deficits, inconsistent power supply, and market access barriers. While global statistics indicate that 65% of small businesses are profitable in 2025, Nigerian SMEs tend to operate under more volatile economic conditions marked by inflation, exchange rate fluctuations, and regulatory uncertainties (Adeyemi et.al, 2023). Nonetheless, resilient Nigerian

SMEs often adapt through innovation, local resource utilization, and informal networks.

2.1.1 Drivers of SME Success and Innovation

Key drivers of SME success in Nigeria include access to affordable finance, digital literacy, reliable infrastructure, and effective government support. Digital transformation is becoming increasingly relevant, especially with the rise of fintech, e-commerce platforms, and mobile-based solutions. However, digital adoption is uneven due to disparities in internet access, power supply, and education levels. Successful Nigerian SMEs typically leverage innovation in product development, engage in strategic networking, and adopt lean management practices to remain competitive and scalable (Innovation & Entrepreneurship Journal, 2024; Proietti & Magnani, 2025).

Nonetheless, In Nigeria, the engagement of SMEs with sustainable development goals (SDGs) is still emerging. Some businesses are beginning to adopt eco-friendly practices, promote gender equity, and support community initiatives. However, widespread integration of sustainability into SME operations remains limited due to funding constraints, lack of awareness, and minimal

regulatory enforcement. Governmental and non-governmental programs aimed at promoting green entrepreneurship and responsible business practices have begun to make inroads, but broader awareness and institutional backing are still needed (Adeyemi et al., 2023). To strengthen SME performance in Nigeria, policy interventions must address critical barriers such as financing, regulatory complexity, and skills shortages. Key recommendations include expanding credit guarantee schemes through institutions like the Bank of Industry (BOI), simplifying tax and registration procedures, and investing in SME-dedicated infrastructure such as industrial clusters and digital hubs. Enhanced collaboration between the government, private sector, and academic institutions can also drive innovation and capacity building. Programs that support youth entrepreneurship, women-led enterprises, and rural SMEs will be essential for inclusive growth and national development (SMEDAN, 2021; World Bank, 2025).

2.2 Brand Reputation

Brand reputation refers to how a brand is perceived by consumers based on past experiences, word-of-mouth, and marketing efforts (Kotler & Keller, 2019). It is widely acknowledged as a critical intangible asset that significantly

influences consumer behaviour and business performance (Novatia Consulting, 2024). It is the overall perception of a company's image as seen through the eyes of its consumers, stakeholders, and the public. It is shaped by how people view your products or services. It is what people think and feel when they hear your brand's name. A strong brand reputation enhances customer trust, increase loyalty, and differentiates businesses in competitive markets (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). For SMEs, brand reputation is crucial in influencing consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. In Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), where resources are limited, and market visibility is less robust than large corporations, managing brand reputation is particularly pivotal for survival and expansion (Olubunmi & Samour, 2025). Ikenna and Emeka (2024) aver that Nigerian SMEs frequently face challenges related to building and maintaining brand authenticity and trust due to limited resources, market exposure, and managerial expertise. Unlike large firms that can buffer reputation damage with financial capital, SMEs often depend heavily on *word-of-mouth*, consistent customer experiences, and digital presence to shape their brand reputation (Olubunmi & Samour, 2025).

2.2.1 Brand Reputation Management in SMEs

Addressing the challenges inherent in SME reputation management requires strategic efforts emphasizing transparency, relationship-building, and digital engagement. Social media marketing, in particular, offers SMEs a cost-effective way to enhance brand awareness, engage customers, and foster positive word-of-mouth (Olubunmi & Samour, 2025). Empirical evidence from Nigerian SMEs indicates that social media marketing positively influences reputation and purchasing intentions (Olubunmi & Samour, 2025). Additionally, establishing clear communication channels, responsive customer service, and consistent product quality are essential to maintain consumer trust and sustain positive reputations (Novatia Consulting, 2024).

Benin City's business environment is characterized by close-knit community relationships and a strong reliance on social trust, making brand reputation a critical success factor for SMEs (Olubunmi & Samour, 2025). SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area, like many other Nigerian local economies, often struggle with limited understanding and resources for systematic reputation management. The localized nature of these markets amplifies the impact of community attitudes and digital footprints on business success. Thus, research

focused on consumer attitudes in Oredo can provide insights on how reputation influences consumer behaviour and how SMEs can navigate reputation management effectively to enhance sustainability.

2.3 Consumer Attitudes

Brand reputation is the collective perception consumers hold about a brand's quality, reliability, and identity (Fombrun, 1996). Positive brand reputation fosters trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, conditions essential for SMEs whose resource constraints limit extensive marketing (Tsitsou, 2012). Studies in Nigeria reveal that consumer attitudes toward SME brand reputation are shaped by direct experiences, word-of-mouth, and digital interactions such as social media engagement (Okoro & Ibrahim, 2022; Olowo & Kolapo, 2025). For instance, Okoro and Ibrahim (2022) found a strong link between social media interactions and brand loyalty among SMEs in Southwest Nigeria, suggesting that positive consumer engagement online enhances attitudes, leading to repeat patronage. The study emphasized the role of responses to customer feedback and social interactions in building favourable brand perceptions (Okoro & Ibrahim, 2022).

Several factors influence consumer attitudes towards SMEs' brand reputations. These include:

- 1. Product and Service Quality:** High-quality products increase customer satisfaction and improve brand perception, thus positively influencing consumer attitudes (Adeyemi & Ojo, 2024). Product quality also mediates the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfaction, reinforcing positive attitudes (Etemad-Sajadi & Rizzuto, 2013; Adeyemi & Ojo, 2024).
- 2. Brand Personality Dimensions:** Characteristics such as competitiveness, prestige, morality, authenticity, and credibility significantly affect consumer satisfaction with SMEs, which shapes consumer attitudes (Zainuddin, Radzi, & Zahari, 2015; Tsitsou, 2012). Also, Adeyemi and Ojo (2024) opine that credible and authentic brand bolsters trust and consumer preference.
- 3. Social Media Presence and Interaction:** The adoption of social media marketing by SMEs has been shown to directly impact consumer attitudes positively by enabling meaningful interactions and customer engagement (Okoro & Ibrahim, 2022). Social media facilitates brand awareness,

information sharing, and complaint management, all pivotal to shaping consumer perceptions (Olowo & Kolapo, 2025).

- 4. Cultural and Community Trust:** In locations like Benin City, community relationships and cultural norms heavily influence consumer attitudes. SME brands that align with local values and foster trust within their communities tend to enjoy more positive reputations and consumer loyalty (Adegoke, 2023).

Consumer attitudes serve as a foundation for brand loyalty and subsequently impact SMEs' long-term sustainability. Studies in Nigeria confirm a positive correlation between favourable consumer attitudes toward SME brands and repeat purchase behaviour, which is essential for business growth amidst stiff competition and limited advertising resources (Bansah et al., 2015; Okoro & Ibrahim, 2022). Moreover, Olowo and Kolapo (2025) indicated that SMEs in Oyo and Ogun states reporting higher social media engagement levels also experienced increased customer satisfaction, suggesting consumer attitudes mediated by digital interactions can enhance SME reputation and profitability.

Despite the importance of maintaining a positive brand reputation, many SMEs in Nigeria, including those in Benin City, face challenges such as limited awareness of reputation management strategies, resource constraints, and inconsistent customer service delivery (Adegoke, 2023; Okoro & Ibrahim, 2022). These challenges can negatively affect consumer attitudes and hinder brand loyalty development.

2.5 Relationship between Consumer Attitudes and Brand Reputation

The relationship between consumer attitudes and brand reputation has been extensively studied as a vital component of marketing and brand management. Brand reputation represents the collective perceptions and evaluations consumers hold about a company or product, which significantly influences their attitude toward the brand and subsequent purchase behaviour (Athanasopoulou, 2009). Consumer attitudes, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements, mediate how the brand is perceived and whether it sustains trust and loyalty over time.

Brand reputation is a dynamic construct shaped by both direct consumer experiences and indirect signals such as word-of-mouth, online reviews, and

media coverage (Sangadji, 2025). Positive brand reputation generates favourable consumer attitudes by fostering trust, perceived quality, and emotional attachment, which, in turn, enhances brand loyalty and willingness to pay premium prices (Athanasopoulou, 2009; Thaichon & Quach, 2015). Conversely, negative reputation stemming from service failures, unethical behaviour, or adverse publicity can deteriorate consumer attitudes, causing diminished confidence and shifting consumer preference toward competitors (Malque, 2025).

Empirical evidence shows that digital customer feedback, particularly online reviews and ratings, plays a critical role in shaping brand reputation and consumer attitudes, especially in the current digital marketplace where user-generated content is pervasive (Sangadji, 2025). Positive customer reviews enhance perceived authenticity and reliability of brands, leading to improved consumer trust and purchase intentions, whereas unchecked negative reviews or fake reviews can erode trust and damage reputation (World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025).

2.5.1 Consumer Attitudes as Drivers of Brand Reputation

The reciprocity between consumer attitudes and brand reputation is noteworthy. Strong, favourable consumer attitudinal responses stimulate positive brand reputation by promoting advocacy, repeat business, and resilience against negative publicity (Dwivedi et al., 2016). Relationship marketing insights emphasize how brands that engage consumers through consistent, ethical, and personalized interactions nurture lasting consumer-brand partnerships, thus reinforcing positive reputations (Athanasopoulou, 2009; Dwivedi et al., 2016). Social media and consumer boycotts illustrate the social dimension of this relationship. Boycotts triggered by ethical concerns or perceived corporate irresponsibility can quickly tarnish reputations, reflecting the potency of collective consumer attitudes in the digital age (Malque, 2025). Brands that align communications with consumer values and adopt proactive corporate social responsibility strategies can safeguard and even rebuild their reputations (Malque, 2025).

However, additional factors influencing the consumer attitudes–brand reputation nexus include brand visual identity and ethical marketing. Visual elements such as logos, colour schemes, and packaging create initial impressions

that shape cognitive attitudes toward the brand, which are pivotal in competitive markets (Thaichon & Quach, 2015). Ethical marketing issues, including transparency and fairness, deepen emotional and conative attitudes, fostering sustainable brand-customer relationships essential for positive reputation management (Thaichon & Quach, 2015). Summarily, brand reputation and consumer attitudes maintain a bidirectional, reinforcing relationship. A positive reputation cultivates favourable consumer attitudes, while these attitudes help build and sustain brand reputation. Digital platforms amplify the speed and scale of this interaction, making proactive reputation management and consumer engagement imperative for brand success. Understanding this interrelationship aids firms in crafting strategies that align brand values with consumer expectations in increasingly socially and digitally aware markets.

2.5 Empirical Study

This section is examined the reputation of how brand significantly affects how consumers perceive and relate with businesses, especially SMEs that often operate within limited marketing and reputational budgets. This empirical review is essential to determine how the methodologies, goals, and outcomes employed

in earlier research either correspond to or diverge from the approaches taken in this study.

Mutskiwa and Eniola (2024), *"Small and Medium Enterprises' Brand Personality and Customer Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Product Quality"*

This study sought to investigate how various dimensions of brand personality competitiveness, prestige, morality, authenticity, and credibility influence customer satisfaction among SMEs, and whether product quality mediates this relationship. The researchers employed a quantitative survey approach targeting customers of SMEs within a developing country context. Structured questionnaires were administered to gather data on perceptions of brand personality traits, product quality, and satisfaction. Statistical mediation analysis was conducted to analyze direct and indirect effects between variables. However, the study found that all five brand personality dimensions positively and significantly affected customer satisfaction. Notably, product quality partially mediated these relationships, meaning that the perceived quality of products strengthened the influence of brand personality on satisfaction. Competitiveness and credibility were among the strongest predictors. The study

also extended the applicability of Tsitsou's brand personality scale to the SME context in a developing world setting, which had previously been less explored.

This research closely aligns with this research as it examines how consumer perceptions (attitudes) toward brand traits influence satisfaction, an essential component of overall brand reputation in SMEs. Both focus on consumer attitudes shaping brand reputation in emerging markets. While this research addresses consumer attitudes towards overall brand reputation including cultural and community factors in Oredo Local Government, Benin City, Mutskiwa and Eniola emphasize specific brand personality traits and product quality as mediators, focusing on psychological constructs rather than broader sociocultural influences.

Lawal and Adejuwon (2022), *"Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty of Selected Small and Medium Enterprises in Southwest Nigeria"*

This Research focused on evaluating the impact of social media marketing, especially social interaction components, on brand loyalty among consumers of SMEs in Southwest Nigeria. Using a quantitative design, this study collected survey data from SME consumers. The analysis utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to assess how components of social

media marketing, including social interaction, branded entertainment, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), influence brand loyalty. Among the social media marketing components examined, social interaction was found to have a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty. This suggests that active engagement and interaction on social platforms foster closer consumer-brand relationships, leading to stronger loyalty and positive attitudes toward SME brands. Branded entertainment and e-WOM were less significant predictors in this context.

However, this study is highly relevant to this research as they both focused on consumer attitudes and brand reputation, especially given the rise of digital and social media influence in urban Nigerian areas such as Oredo. Both emphasize the crucial role of consumer engagement in shaping brand loyalty and reputation. Conversely, Lawal and Adejuwon's research centres specifically on digital marketing's impact on brand loyalty a subset of consumer attitudes while this research aimed for a broader exploration of consumer attitudes toward SME brand reputations, encompassing both online and offline factors.

Zakari and Ibrahim (2021), "Impact of Customer Satisfaction on Business Performance of SMEs in Nigeria"

This research focused on investigating the influence of customer satisfaction on the overall business performance of SMEs in Nigeria. The study used a descriptive survey design, collecting data from both SME customers and operators using questionnaires. Regression analyses were employed to establish the relationship between customer satisfaction and business performance indicators. Results showed a strong positive correlation between customer satisfaction and SME business performance. Businesses that nurtured positive consumer attitudes through satisfactory products and services reported better financial and operational outcomes, suggesting that consumer attitudes are critical drivers of SME success. This research reinforces the premise that favourable consumer attitudes (like satisfaction) influenced by brand reputation significantly affect SME sustainability and growth. Both researches acknowledge the central role of consumer perceptions in business success. Nonetheless, Zakari and Ibrahim's study focused primarily on downstream outcomes of consumer attitudes (business performance), whereas this research investigated the antecedents on how consumer attitudes toward brand reputation are formed and how they influence behaviour within a specific cultural context.

Chikere (2025), "Entrepreneurial Branding and Business Success of SMEs in Port Harcourt"

This study aimed at exploring how entrepreneurial branding elements, including brand image and brand name strength, impact the success of SMEs, particularly through customer loyalty and repeat patronage. Just like this research, the study adopted a quantitative survey design targeting SMEs in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to determine how branding factors relate to customer behaviour and business success. The study found that a credible and well-recognized brand image significantly enhances customer loyalty and encourages repeat patronage both indicators of positive consumer attitudes toward SME brands. Entrepreneurial branding efforts were shown to contribute directly to reputational capital and business sustainability. The focus on brand image's role in shaping consumer loyalty relates closely to this research with emphasis on brand reputation influencing consumer attitudes and behaviours. Both underscore branding's strategic importance for SME growth in Nigerian localities. However, Chikere focused specifically on entrepreneurial branding concepts, while this research took a broader approach to brand reputation.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two theories, namely: Brand Equity Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Brand Equity Theory

This theory offers a foundational lens through which researchers and marketers can examine the perceived value that a brand adds to a product or service. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity refers to “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers.” These assets typically include brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and proprietary brand assets.

In the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oredo Local Government Area of Benin City, consumer attitudes toward brand reputation are significantly influenced by the dimensions of brand equity. SMEs often lack the robust marketing budgets of larger firms and must rely more heavily on customer perceptions, word-of-mouth, and community-based reputation to build their brand value. Keller’s (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model further

elucidates this relationship by emphasizing the role of consumer perceptions in building strong brands. Keller posits that brand equity is built from the bottom up, beginning with brand awareness and culminating in brand resonance, which includes customer loyalty and advocacy. For SMEs in Oredo LGA, creating positive brand associations through trustworthiness, product quality, and community engagement can foster favourable consumer attitudes that enhance brand reputation.

Empirical studies have shown that positive brand equity can influence consumer buying behaviour, especially in developing economies where trust plays a critical role in purchase decisions (Agyapong, 2011). In a locality like Oredo, where SMEs compete for attention within niche markets, strong brand equity can serve as a strategic advantage, allowing businesses to differentiate themselves and build customer loyalty despite limited resources. Furthermore, consumer attitudes shaped by experiences, perceptions, and word-of-mouth are essential indicators of a brand's reputation. When consumers perceive an SME's brand as reputable and consistent, their attitudes become more favourable, which in turn increases the firm's brand equity. This cyclical relationship underscores the importance of

managing brand equity as a key strategic asset for SMEs seeking sustainability and growth in competitive local markets. Thus, Brand Equity Theory provides a robust conceptual framework for analyzing how consumer attitudes are formed and how they impact the reputation and success of SMEs in Oredo LGA. Understanding these dynamics can help local businesses tailor their branding efforts to align more closely with consumer expectations and foster long-term brand loyalty.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen (1991), provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals' intentions and behaviours are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The theory postulates that an individual's intention to perform behaviour is the most immediate predictor of that behaviour, and that this intention is influenced by three key components: Attitude toward the behaviour – the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour in question; Subjective norms – the perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the behaviour; Perceived behavioural control – the

perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour, which is assumed to reflect past experience and anticipated obstacles.

1. Attitude toward SMEs' Brand Reputation:

Consumers form attitudes about SME brands based on their perceived quality, trustworthiness, visibility, and past experiences. A positive brand reputation enhances consumer attitudes and increases the likelihood of engagement and loyalty (Gao et al., 2020). Therefore, a favourable attitude toward an SME's brand can lead to a stronger intention to patronize or recommend it.

2. Subjective Norms in Local Consumer Behaviour:

Consumers in Oredo LGA may be influenced by their peers, family, and community expectations when choosing whether to support a local SME. Social endorsement or rejection of a particular brand affects consumer willingness to associate with it (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, community sentiment and word-of-mouth about a brand's reputation play significant roles.

3. Perceived Behavioural Control:

Factors such as accessibility, affordability, and convenience of SME products or services influence consumer perceived control over the buying decision. If consumers feel it is within their control to access reputable SME brands in Oredo, their intentions to engage will likely be stronger.

By applying the TPB, the study seeks to uncover how these psychological and social constructs shape consumer behaviour towards SME brands. Understanding these dynamics is critical for SMEs aiming to improve their brand positioning and build sustainable consumer trust and loyalty in a competitive local market.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a large population in a systematic manner and facilitates the examination of relationships and patterns among variables without manipulating the environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey method also enabled the researcher to gather opinions, perceptions, and attitudes of consumers regarding SME brand reputations in Oredo LGA.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population for this study comprised consumers within Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City, Edo State who engage with SMEs in various sectors, including retail, hospitality, and services. These consumers represent a diverse demographic with different socioeconomic backgrounds, experiences, and perceptions regarding SME brand reputations. The target population includes both frequent and occasional patrons of SMEs, as well as individuals who may

have interacted with SME brands but formed distinct opinions about their reliability and trustworthiness. Understanding the perceptions of this varied population is crucial to identifying patterns and commonalities in consumer attitudes, which may ultimately influence brand positioning and customer engagement strategies for SMEs in Oredo.

Since precise population data on SME consumers and SMEs in Oredo were unavailable, this research targets consumers within commercial districts, markets, and shopping areas where SMEs operate extensively. It is on this note that the population of this study is derived from the population of SMEs in Edo State which is 2,995 according to a publication by Izuagie and Mohammad in 2025.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size pertains to the number of individuals or elements within a sample, which is a subset derived from a larger population. In this study, given the impracticality of studying the entire population the sample size was 200, determined using a straightforward percentage-based formula for sample size determination. According to Taro Yamane formula the sample size (n) for a given

population (N) at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error can be determined using the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = margin of error (0.05)

3.4 Sampling Technique

The stratified random sampling technique is chosen to ensure that every individual within the target population has an equal chance of being selected, reducing bias and improving the reliability of the results. The sample was drawn from different locations, including shopping centres, markets, business districts, and online consumer forums, ensuring a balanced representation of consumers across various engagement levels with SMEs.

3.5 Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was the primary instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and Likert scale-

based questions designed to elicit measurable responses. It was divided into two sections: Section A aimed to collect demographic details from the participants, including gender, age, marital status, and other relevant information while section B of the questionnaire addressed queries related to the research study.

3.6 Validity of Research Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire underwent expert review by professionals in marketing, and public relations. These experts evaluated the questions for clarity, relevance, and ability to effectively measure consumer attitudes towards SME brand reputation.

3.7 Reliability of Research Instrument

Creswell and Creswell (2018) elaborate on reliability as the consistency and stability of individual scores when the same instrument is applied repeatedly. It ensures that these scores are minimally affected by measurement errors and remain consistent across administrations. Reliability testing evaluates how well the outcomes of a study align with one another. In this research, the reliability of the instrument was determined by distributing questionnaires across 20

respondents from a neighbouring LGA (Egor) who share similar socio-economic characteristics with the target population. The instrument was administered once, and the resulting scores were analyzed to calculate the reliability coefficient using the pre-test and post-test method.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of information. To gather primary data, the researcher distributed copies of the questionnaire online and personally delivered them to the respondents in strategic SME-heavy areas such as Ring Road, Airport Road, Sapele Road and Ekehuan axis. The questionnaire was designed to elicit detailed and relevant responses from participants while ensuring ease of completion. It consisted of both close-ended and Likert-scale questions, which will facilitate the quantification of consumer perceptions. The questionnaire covered various dimensions of brand reputation, including trust, quality, customer service, and reliability. Concurrently, secondary data was obtained through research in general textbooks, pertinent works by previous researchers, articles, and information sourced from the internet and the library.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis involves organizing and processing the gathered information to enable meaningful interpretation by the researcher, making it a vital step in the research process. For this study, the analysis predominantly utilized statistical techniques, including frequency distributions and percentage calculations. Frequency distributions helped to examine how the questionnaires were distributed among participants, while percentages transformed raw data into clear, easily interpretable results, facilitating straightforward evaluation and understanding. Also, the findings were presented in tabular and graphical format to enhance clarity and comprehension. By applying these statistical analyses, the study drew meaningful conclusions regarding how consumers perceive SME brands and the key factors that influence their reputation in Oredo Local Government.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of valid data collected from 195 respondents out of 200 questionnaires distributed regarding consumer attitudes toward brand reputations of SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City. This positions the total response rate of collected data at 97.5%. Data were presented in frequency tables, each accompanied by interpretation. The chapter also responds to the research questions guiding the study.

Section A: Demographic Data

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Male	100	51.3
2	Female	95	48.7
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The data reveals that out of the total participants, 100 were male, representing 51.3%, whereas 95 were female, accounting for 48.7%. This demonstrates that male respondents slightly outnumbered female respondents in the sample.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	18–25	52	26.7
2	26–35	74	37.9
3	36–45	43	22.1
4	46 and above	26	13.3
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The table illustrates the age breakdown of the survey participants. Among the respondents, 52 individuals, accounting for 26.7% of the sample, are aged between 18 and 25 years. The largest group consists of 74 participants (37.9%) who are between 26 and 35 years old. Furthermore, 43 respondents (22.1%) fall within the 36 to 45-year age bracket, while 26 participants (13.3%) are aged 46 years and above.

Table 3: Academic Qualification of Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	SSCE	30	15.4
2	OND/NCE	46	23.6
3	HND/BSc	84	43.1
4	MSc/PhD	35	17.9
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The tables show that among the total sample of respondents, 30 individuals (15.4%) have obtained SSCE qualifications, while 46 respondents (23.6%) hold OND/NCE certificates. The largest group consists of 84 respondents, representing 43.1% of the sample, who possess HND or BSc degrees. Furthermore, 35 respondents (approximately 17.9%) have advanced qualifications such as M.Sc. and PhD degrees. These statistics reveal that most respondents are holders of HND/BSc degrees, followed in descending order by OND/NCE holders, those with M.Sc./PhD qualifications, and lastly, SSCE holders.

Table 4: Employment Status of Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Student	50	25.6
2	Self-employed	62	31.8
3	Employed	68	34.9
4	Unemployed	15	7.7
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Among the respondents surveyed, 50 individuals, accounting for 25.6% of the total sample, identified as students. Those who are self-employed made up 62 respondents, representing 31.8%, while 68 respondents, or 34.9%, reported being employed. Additionally, 15 participants, corresponding to 7.7%, indicated that they were unemployed.

Table 5: Frequency of Patronage of Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Daily	40	20.5
2	Weekly	67	34.4
3	Monthly	52	26.7
4	Occasionally	36	18.5
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The data in the table indicate that 40 respondents, accounting for 20.5% of the total sample, engage with SMEs on a daily basis. Additionally, 67 respondents (34.4%) reported patronizing SMEs weekly. Monthly patronage was noted by 52 respondents, representing 26.7%, while 36 respondents (18.5%) stated they purchase from SMEs occasionally. This distribution suggests that a significant portion of the sample regularly frequents SMEs.

Section B: Attitudinal Statements on Brand Reputation

Table 6: Product/service quality strongly affects my perception of an SME's reputation

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	110	56.4
2	Agree	55	28.2
3	Neutral	15	7.7
4	Disagree	10	5.1
5	Strongly Disagree	5	2.6
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The data in the table reveal that a large portion of respondents 165 out of 195, accounting for 84.6% either agreed or strongly agreed that the quality of a product or service significantly influences their perception of an SME's reputation. Conversely, 15 respondents (7.7%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with this view, while another 15 individuals (7.7%) remained neutral. These findings suggest that consumers hold a predominantly strong attitude regarding the impact of product or service quality on SME brand reputation.

Table 7: Good customer service improves how I view a small business brand

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	100	51.3
2	Agree	60	30.8
3	Neutral	20	10.3
4	Disagree	10	5.1
5	Strongly Disagree	5	2.6
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

A significant majority of the respondents, totalling 160 out of 195 (82.1%), either agreed or strongly agreed that quality customer service enhances their perception of a small business brand. In contrast, 15 respondents (7.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, while 20 individuals (10.3%) remained neutral. These results reflect a notably strong consumer attitude regarding the importance of customer service in shaping brand perception.

Table 8: I trust SMEs more when they have a positive brand reputation

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	105	53.8
2	Agree	58	29.7
3	Neutral	18	9.2
4	Disagree	10	5.1
5	Strongly Disagree	4	2.1
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most respondents, totalling 163 out of 195 or 83.6%, either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they place greater trust in SMEs that possess a positive brand reputation. In contrast, 14 respondents (7.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 18 individuals (9.2%) remained neutral. These results demonstrate a generally strong consumer attitude toward the importance of brand reputation in fostering trust in SMEs.

Table 9: I am more loyal to SMEs that are known for reliability and good reputation.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	102	52.3
2	Agree	60	30.8
3	Neutral	16	8.2
4	Disagree	12	6.2
5	Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most respondents (162 out of 195, equivalent to 83.1%) indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement, "I am more loyal to SMEs that are known for reliability and good reputation." In contrast, 17 participants (8.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 16 respondents (8.2%) remained neutral. This reflects a generally strong consumer sentiment regarding loyalty towards reputable and reliable SMEs.

Table 10: I am more likely to buy from an SME with a strong brand image, even if prices are high.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	95	48.7
2	Agree	63	32.3
3	Neutral	20	10.3
4	Disagree	10	5.1
5	Strongly Disagree	7	3.6
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most respondents 158 out of 195, representing 81.0% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am more likely to purchase from an SME that has a strong brand image, even if their prices are higher." In contrast, 17 respondents (8.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 20 individuals (10.3%) held a neutral stance. These results demonstrate a generally positive consumer attitude concerning the influence of brand image on purchasing decisions despite price considerations.

Table 11: Negative customer experiences damage my perception of an SME's brand

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	98	50.3
2	Agree	62	31.8
3	Neutral	18	9.2
4	Disagree	12	6.2
5	Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

A significant majority of respondents 160 out of 195, equivalent to 82.1% agreed or strongly agreed that "Negative customer experiences negatively affect my perception of an SME's brand." However, 17 (8.7%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed to this notion, while 18 respondents representing 9.2% remained neutral. This reflects a strong consumer sentiment regarding this matter.

Table 12: Social media comments (positive or negative) affect my trust in an SME.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	90	46.2
2	Agree	65	33.3
3	Neutral	20	10.3
4	Disagree	12	6.2
5	Strongly Disagree	8	4.1
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

A significant proportion of respondents 155 out of 195, representing 79.5% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that social media comments, whether positive or negative, influence their trust in an SME. Meanwhile, 20 respondents (10.3%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, and another 20 (10.3%) remained neutral on this point. These results demonstrate a notably strong consumer attitude regarding the impact of social media feedback on trust in SMEs.

Table 13: I often form my opinion of an SME based on what others say (word-of-mouth).

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	85	43.6
2	Agree	67	34.4
3	Neutral	23	11.8
4	Disagree	15	7.7
5	Strongly Disagree	5	2.6
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

A significant portion of the respondents 152 out of 195, representing 77.9%—either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I frequently base my opinion of an SME on word-of-mouth from others." This reflects a notably strong consumer attitude toward the influence of word-of-mouth in shaping perceptions of SMEs.

Table 14: Influencer recommendations on social media shape my perception of SMEs.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	80	41.0
2	Agree	65	33.3
3	Neutral	25	12.8
4	Disagree	15	7.7
5	Strongly Disagree	10	5.1
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The findings show that most respondents 145 out of 195, representing 74.4% either agreed or strongly agreed that recommendations from influencers on social media influence their perception of SMEs. Meanwhile, 25 participants (12.8%) were neutral on this statement, and a smaller segment, comprising 15 (7.7%) and 10 (5.1%) respondents, disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This reflects a generally strong consumer attitude toward the impact of influencer endorsements on SME reputation.

Table 15: I am likely to recommend a well-reputed SME to family and friends.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	92	47.2
2	Agree	64	32.8
3	Neutral	20	10.3
4	Disagree	11	5.6
5	Strongly Disagree	8	4.1
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

A significant portion of the respondents, 156 out of 195 (representing 80.0%), indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement, "I am likely to recommend a well-reputed SME to family and friends." Meanwhile, 20 participants (10.3%) remained neutral, and 19 respondents (9.7%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement. This demonstrates a generally positive consumer attitude toward recommending SMEs with a good reputation.

Table 16: I avoid SMEs with poor reputations, even if they offer lower prices.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	88	45.1
2	Agree	68	34.9
3	Neutral	20	10.3
4	Disagree	10	5.1
5	Strongly Disagree	9	4.6
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most respondents, totalling 156 out of 195 (representing 80.0%), agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I avoid SMEs with poor reputations, even if they offer lower prices." In contrast, 20 participants (10.3%) were neutral on this matter, while 19 respondents (9.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results reflect a significant consumer preference related to this attitude.

Table 17: Brand reputation is one of the key factors I consider before making a purchase.

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	101	51.8
2	Agree	60	30.8
3	Neutral	18	9.2
4	Disagree	10	5.1
5	Strongly Disagree	6	3.1
	Total	195	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most participants, totalling 161 out of 195 (82.6%), either agreed or strongly agreed that brand reputation is an important factor they take into account before making a purchase. Meanwhile, 18 respondents (9.2%) expressed a neutral stance, and 16 individuals (8.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. These results reflect a robust consumer consensus on the significance of brand reputation in purchase decisions.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study will first be discussed through answering research questions and then a sum up of other findings.

Research Question 1: What factors influence consumer perceptions of brand reputation among SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area?

This question is addressed by responses to questions in table 6, table 7, table 10, and table 11. The data show that product/service quality (table 6) and customer service (table 7) are key determinants of how consumers perceive SME brands. A majority of respondents (84.6% for table 6 and 82.1% for table 7) either strongly agreed or agreed that these factors significantly shape their perception of a brand. Similarly, responses to table 10, which explored willingness to support SMEs with strong brand images despite higher pricing, and table 11, which examined the negative impact of poor customer experiences, further reinforce the importance of tangible brand encounters in shaping consumer opinions. These suggest that the most influential factors are operational excellence and consistent delivery of value, both of which directly affect reputation in the eyes of the consumer.

Research Question 2: How does brand reputation affect consumer trust and loyalty towards SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area?

This research question draws on insights from analysis from table 8, table 9, and table 16. The data show a clear relationship between positive brand reputation and consumer trust (table 8), with 83.6% affirming that they trust

SMEs more when their reputation is favorable. Likewise, table 9 reveals that brand reputation fosters customer loyalty, as 83.1% indicated they are more likely to remain loyal to reliable and reputable businesses. Furthermore, table 16 indicates that a poor brand reputation can discourage patronage regardless of lower prices, with 80.0% of respondents expressing such views. These findings confirm that brand reputation is not just a superficial marker but a foundational factor in cultivating enduring consumer trust and commitment.

Research Question 3: What role do social media and word-of-mouth play in shaping consumer attitudes towards SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area?

The influence of digital communication and interpersonal feedback is evident from response analysis on table12, table 13, and table 14. In table 12, 79.5% of respondents acknowledged that social media commentary influences their trust in SMEs. This highlights the power of online platforms in shaping perception. Additionally, table 13 indicates that 77.4% of respondents rely on what others say to form their opinion about SMEs, underscoring the significance of word-of-mouth in the local consumer environment. Table 14, which relates to influencer impact, shows that 74.4% of consumers are swayed by such figures on social media. These three analyses collectively emphasize that both informal peer

communication and digital endorsements are pivotal in developing or damaging brand attitudes.

Research Question 4: To what extent does brand reputation influence consumer purchasing decisions regarding SMEs in Oredo Local Government Area?

The extent of brand reputation's influence on purchasing behaviour is most clearly reflected in analysis in table 15 and table 17. Table 15 reveals that 80.0% of respondents are willing to recommend SMEs with a positive reputation to others, suggesting that brand perception extends beyond individual decisions and influences social recommendations. Table 17 directly addresses purchasing decisions, with 82.6% agreeing that reputation is a key consideration before buying. This confirms that brand reputation plays a substantial role in shaping the consumer decision-making process and often serves as a deciding factor at the point of purchase.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to examine consumer attitudes toward the brand reputations of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City. The research was guided by four key questions focused on identifying the factors influencing consumer perception of brand reputation, examining the effects of brand reputation on trust and loyalty, analyzing the roles of social media and word-of-mouth in brand perception, and determining the extent to which brand reputation affects consumer purchasing behaviour. A structured questionnaire was administered to 195 respondents across various demographic groups to gather primary data.

The analysis revealed that consumers in Oredo LGA place a high value on the quality of products and services, as well as the standard of customer service

offered by SMEs. These were cited as the most influential factors shaping their perception of a brand.

1. The presence of a consistent and strong brand image helped enhance consumer trust and loyalty.
2. The study also found that brand reputation significantly determines the level of consumer trust in SMEs, often leading to repeat patronage and strong customer loyalty.
3. Consumers generally prefer SMEs with well-established reputations, even when faced with cheaper alternatives offering similar products or services.
4. Social media platforms and word-of-mouth communication emerged as critical tools in the branding ecosystem.
5. Consumers rely heavily on the opinions of others, especially on social platforms and in peer discussions, to form impressions and decide on whether to engage with an SME. This underscores the importance of maintaining a positive online presence and managing brand conversations actively.

Finally, the study confirmed that brand reputation plays a crucial role in consumer purchasing decisions. Consumers are not only more inclined to buy

from brands they perceive positively, but they are also more likely to recommend such brands to others, further boosting the growth potential of SMEs through referral and loyalty.

5.2 Conclusion

From the findings, it is evident that brand reputation is a pivotal factor in determining how consumers interact with SMEs in Oredo LGA. The perception of a brand goes beyond aesthetic appeal or marketing campaigns it is rooted in actual consumer experiences, service delivery, quality consistency, and public discourse. A good reputation not only boosts consumer trust but also fosters loyalty, increases the likelihood of word-of-mouth referrals, and contributes to long-term business success.

Furthermore, in a marketplace that is increasingly driven by digital impressions and customer reviews, SMEs must understand that every touch point with a customer contributes to their overall brand perception. A single negative experience, particularly when amplified on social media, can diminish consumer confidence. Conversely, positive engagements help create a favourable brand narrative, making it easier to retain customers and attract new ones. In conclusion,

brand reputation is not just a supplementary asset for SMEs but a core component of sustainable competitive advantage. SMEs in Oredo LGA and beyond must therefore prioritize brand-building initiatives, maintain service quality, and remain transparent and accountable in their business dealings to build lasting consumer relationships.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the results obtained from this study, the following recommendations are made to help SMEs strengthen their brand reputation and consumer engagement strategies:

1. SMEs should focus on maintaining consistent product and service quality. Quality assurance mechanisms should be integrated into daily operations to minimize variability and enhance consumer satisfaction.
2. Investing in customer service training is vital. Employees should be equipped with interpersonal and communication skills that help deliver exceptional customer experiences and foster positive brand associations.
3. SMEs must be proactive in managing their online presence. This includes regularly updating social media platforms, responding promptly

to customer inquiries and complaints, and engaging in reputation management strategies.

4. Word-of-mouth marketing should be nurtured by encouraging satisfied customers to leave reviews and testimonials. Referral incentives can also be introduced to stimulate customer-led brand promotion.
5. Conducting regular brand perception surveys can help SMEs understand how they are viewed by consumers. This feedback should inform strategy and identify areas for improvement.
6. SMEs should actively monitor competitors and industry benchmarks to stay informed about changing consumer expectations and evolving branding practices.

Furthermore, while this study has made significant contributions to the understanding of consumer attitudes toward SME brand reputation, there are opportunities for further research. Future studies could focus on comparative analyses across different local government areas or states in Nigeria to explore regional differences in consumer behaviour. Additionally, sector-specific studies, such as investigating branding in the hospitality, fashion, or fintech SMEs, could

provide more focused insights relevant to particular industries. Another area worth exploring is the influence of generational differences on brand perception, particularly how Gen Z and Millennials interact with SME brands compared to older age groups. Longitudinal studies assessing the impact of consistent branding efforts over time on consumer loyalty and financial performance would also be valuable. Lastly, further research could evaluate the return on investment (ROI) of social media branding initiatives among SMEs in developing economies.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

The researcher is a student in the department of Mass Communication of the University of Benin, writing a dissertation on, “a study of consumer attitudes toward brand reputations of small and medium enterprises in Oredo Local Government Area, Benin City.” in partial fulfilment for a Bachelors Degree in Mass Communication.

Please, your candid response is needed as part of the information for the study. Please know that your identity would be kept anonymous.

Yours sincerely,

Dawn Omesham OGOANAH

Instructions:

- Please tick (✓) the option that best represents your opinion.
- All responses are anonymous.
- This questionnaire is for research purposes only.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say
2. Age: ☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–45 ☐ 46 and above
3. Educational Qualification: ☐ SSCE ☐ OND/NCE ☐ HND/BSc ☐ MSc/PhD
4. Employment Status: ☐ Student ☐ Self-employed ☐ Employed ☐ Unemployed
5. How often do you patronize SMEs in Oredo? ☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Occasionally

Section B: Key Issues on Brand Reputation and Consumer Attitudes

Please indicate your level of agreement using this scale: **SA** – Strongly Agree | **A** – Agree | **N** – Neutral | **D** – Disagree | **SD** – Strongly Disagree

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Product/service quality strongly affects my perception of an SME's reputation.					
2. Good customer service					

improves how I view a small business brand.					
3. I trust SMEs more when they have a positive brand reputation.					
4. I am more loyal to SMEs that are known for reliability and good reputation.					
5. I am more likely to buy from an SME with a strong brand image, even if prices are high.					
6. Negative customer experiences damage my perception of an SME's brand.					
7. Social media comments (positive or negative) affect my trust in an SME.					
8. I often form my opinion of an SME based on what others say (word-of-mouth).					
9. Influencer recommendations on social media shape my perception					

of SMEs.					
10. I am likely to recommend a well-reputed SME to family and friends.					
11. I avoid SMEs with poor reputations, even if they offer lower prices.					
12. Brand reputation is one of the key factors I consider before making a purchase.					

Thank you for your participation!