THE ROLE OF PUBLICITY IN PERSONAL BRAND CREATION AMONG WOMENPRENUERS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

In this research on "The role of publicity in personal brand creation among womenprenuers in Anambra State, the researcher sought to find out the various ways publicity has help womenprenuers in Anambra state to create a brand for themselves and the insights into branding practices and the perception of publicity influence.The researcher had three objectives :To find out the extent to which womenprenuers in Anambra state use publicity, To discover the various kinds of publicity used by womenprenuers in Anambra state and To establish how the use of publicity by womenprenuers promotes the creation of their personal brands. For these objectives to be achieved, the researcher adopted the survey design, determined the samples (399) she studied using Meyer's sample size determination formula and randomly selected them for this study from the 19 womenprenuers out of three local government that falls under the three senatorial zones in Anambra State. She used a reliable and valid questionnaire that was formed using 5-point Likert Scale to rightly measure the research variables of this study and answer her research questions. Frequencies, tables, simple percentages, pie charts and the arithmetic mean scores of the responses of the respondents, were used to analyze the findings of this study which are that strategic publicity positively shapes personal brands and empowers womenprenuers in Anambra state by expanding reach, improving credibility and spurring sales growth, critically supporting brand visibility, market penetration and commercialization. Based on the findings of the researcher, she recommended that womenprenuers should adopt integrated publicity strategies utilizing both online platforms like social Amelia as well as traditional offline platforms and the government should create specialized initiatives to build women entrepreneurs' publicity skills and brand awareness capabilities.

Keywords: Womenprenuers, personal brand, publicity

INTRODUCTION

The role of publicity in personal brand creation among womenprenuers in Anambra state has not been an area of focus in recent times and thus little or nothing has been done with regards this area of study. Past studies (Winchell 2010; Fahim and Reaz 2014) suggest that publicity being a major element of public relations implies communication about a product or organization by the placing of news about it in the media without paying for time and space directly. Thus publicity in its simplest form is the means of conveying information to the general public through the media. According to Mersham, Theunissen and Peart, (2009), it is the movement of information to the general public from the media. For the interest of this study, the focus on the role of publicity in personal brand creation among women entrepreneurs in Anambra state. These women have been identified as constituting a part of the business sphere (Tameryan *et al.,* 2020) in Anambra state.

Arising from these, this study interrogates the role of publicity in personal brand creation among womenprenuers in Anambra state. Personal branding is the conscious and intentional effort to create and influence public perception of an individual by positioning them as an authority in their industry. While research had consistently shown that media portrayal of women is predominantly negative, it is yet unclear how it relates to personal branding and the mechanisms upon which they internalize such portrayals (Singh *et al.,* 2018). This work with the use of survey design and in-depth interview design explores personal brand creation by women entrepreneurs and also interrogates the role publicity plays in personal brand creation among womenprenuers in Anambra state

The increasing prominence of womenpreneurs in the business landscape has brought attention to the critical role they play in economic development and empowerment. According to Britannica, (2023), Anambra State, located in south-easternNigeria, is witnessing a growing number of women who are taking charge of their entrepreneurial endeavours. As these womenpreneurs strive to establish successful businesses and build their personal brands, the role of publicity becomes a crucial factor in their journey towards recognition and success. The empowerment of women and their active participation in entrepreneurship are recognized as catalysts for economic growth and development. Womenpreneurs bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a diverse range of skills to the business landscape. Anambra State, like many other regions, is experiencing a surge in women's entrepreneurial activities, emphasizing the need to understand the factors that can facilitate their success (Metu & Nwogwugwu, 2022).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the role of publicity n personal brand creation among womenprenuers in Anambra State. The specific objectives include:

    i. To find out the extent to which womenpreneurs in Anambra state use publicity
    ii. To discover the various kinds of publicity used by womenpreneurs in Anambra state

iii. To establish how the use of publicity by the womenpreneurs promotes the creation of their personal brands

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

By conducting a comprehensive literature review,it is aimed to provide a deeper understanding on how publicity works with brand creation and awareness . This review will shed more light on the concept of publicity, pros and cons and the effect it has on brand creation

In marketing, publicity is the public visibility or awareness for any product, service, person or organization. According to Kent (2011), publicity can help attract attention whilst also supplying information regarding a specific organization or individual client and any event, activity or attribute associated with them. Thus publicity may also refer to the movement of information from its source to the general public, often but not always via the media.

Looking at the origin of the word itself, publicity originates from the French word "publicité" (advertisement). Hazel, (2009) opined that publicity as a practice originates in the core of Paris, where shopping, tourism and the entertainment industry met commercialised print media and an expanding publishing industry. Amid the municipal or urban society, scenes of consumption and new consumer identities were circulated through advertisement. La Maison Aubert shaped the emerging discipline of publicity. In early 19th century Paris, the advertisements and publicity campaigns for consumer items, such as cashmere shawls, and retailers such as perfumeries soon attracted regulation on flyposting (Hazel, 2009). The subjects of publicity is encompassing, it include people of public interest, goods and services, organizations, and works of art or entertainment. A publicist is someone that carries out publicity, while public relations is the strategic management function that helps an organization establish and maintain communication with the public. Publicity is often referred to as the result of public relations, in terms of providing favourable information to media and any third party outlets; these may include bloggers, mainstream media, as well as new media forms such as podcasts. This is done to provide a message to consumers without having to pay for direct time or space. This in return creates awareness and achieves greater credibility. After the message has been distributed, the publicist in charge of the information will lose control of how the message is used and interpreted, in contrast to the way it works in advertising (Mersham *et al.,* 2016). According to Grunig, public relations is often reduced to publicity. He also states how publicity is a form of activity in which should be associated with the sales promotion effort of a company, in order to help aid advertising and personal salesmanship as well (Grunig, 1992).

The use of publicity is an important and strategic element as well as a promotional tool due to its effect of intentional exposure on a consumer. This helps publicity gain an advantage over other forms of marketing, such as advertising, often in order to boost credibility. Favourable publicity is also created through reputation management, in which organizations try strive to control via the web (Aula, 2010). Ehrenberg *et al.,*(2002) noted that publicity could be either positive or negative. According to Ehrenberg *et al.,* despite the fact that publicity, both good and bad, can be beneficial for an organization, company or individual, much of it is paid for despite claims that publicity is often free (Ehrenberg *et al.,* 2002).

In social media, there are both popular platforms targeted at the masses and an enormous selection of communities and platforms that are for specialized use. Aalto & Uusisaari (2010) suggested that potential users can find the most suitable platforms to meet their needs by listening to other people's opinions and by trying the platforms themselves. All products and services have a limited life cycle and in these days, even the most popular ones can shrink next to nothing when newer ones are taking over the market. Choosing the most appropriate social media platform or platforms depends on the user's situation and goals. In order to attract attention and be found, it is wise to have a profile on all of the most significant social media platforms. Building a network is a long-term work so joining to a platform should not be left till last minute. It is important to reserve time to build a network of contacts as how well a user has managed to network impacts visibility. (Aalto & Uusisaari 2010).

Today's society has already become accustomed to the concept of one being a social media influencer. Influencers as described in Business-Dictionary (2017) are people who have the power to influence on other people's purchase decisions due to their authority, knowledge, status or relationship. Due to the direct link between a follower and an influencer, a completely new market has developed between brands and social media influencers who, for example, can help companies to promote their products or services through their social media channels.

According to Wissman, (2017), this new kind of marketing is called influencer marketing. Influencers have all the capabilities to become brands by themselves. Just as Oprah Winfrey and Martha Stewart became notable media moguls through broadcast and print in the 90s, social media influencers are nowadays able to do the same through social media. Over the upcoming years, influencers are most likely going to create massive brands. The first wave of digital brands resulted in creation of such household names as Google and Netflix. The second wave was dominated by social media giants, such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The third wave is yet to be seen, but it is predicted to be ruled by the social media influencers who opt to transform their enormous following base into lasting franchises. (Wissman 2017). Due to the rise of social media, nowadays one form of entrepreneurship is called being a social media influencer.

Today, Female Entrepreneurship impels toward getting fundamental to money related development. The money related and social positive states of women's endeavour make sure for the fiscal generality. Women authenticated affiliations and business visionaries is the speediest making division that unfathomably adds to the wealth creation and advancement of economies in both developed and developing nations (Verheul *et al.*, 2006).

Empirical Studies

Many scholars, practitioners, students and professional bodies in mass communication have at one time or the other launched investigation into perception of the role of publicity and the creation of personal brand or related area. However, not one among any of the examined studies have been able to exhaust the role of publicity in the creation of personal brand among womenpreneurs.

Shepherd (2005) conducted a study on examining how young marketing professionals approach self-marketing and personal branding. The study utilized a mixed-methods research design consisting of interviews and surveys. The target population was recent marketing graduates from Middlesex University

Business School. A sample of 50 graduates participated in the research, providing both qualitative and quantitative data regarding their personal branding behaviors, attitudes and challenges faced in developing their personal brands. The results of the statistical analysis showed graduates had some understanding of personal branding but few had formally constructed personal brand statements. While participants engaged in various self-promotion activities, there was lack of strategic approach regarding personal branding. Based on the findings, Shepherd (2005) recommended marketing curricula should better support students in developing effective personal brands. Educational interventions could help graduates understand personal branding concepts and assist in systematically assessing their unique qualities to craft compelling personal brand narratives for career success.

Saunders (2011) examined the relevance of personal branding in her case study titled "A Case Study of Four Entrepreneurs on Their Quest to Achieve Professional Success in the Age of the Personal Brand". The study employed a qualitative research design utilizing in-depth interviews with four entrepreneurs: Jessica Styles, Tyshawna Spell, Shaunice Hawkins, and AshaniMfuko operating in various industries within the United States. The interviews aimed to evaluate how the entrepreneurs utilized personal branding to market their businesses and assess their personal brand image, identity, positioning and equity. The findings demonstrated personal branding was an essential marketing tool for the participants, with establishing authentic personal brands through understanding their strengths and differentiators being important. The entrepreneurs leveraged personal branding to build relationships, share expertise through traditional and social media, and realized impacts on their personal brand equity. Given the exploratory nature of the study as an emergent topic, Saunders (2011) recommended further research with a larger and more diverse sample to gain additional insights on personal branding use across different contexts, countries and demographic groups to advance the practical understanding of this concept.

Duffy and Hund (2015) explored how fashion bloggers represented their branded selves as entrepreneurial women. The study used a mixed-methods research design, qualitatively analyzing the textual content from 38 fashion bloggers' websites and 760 Instagram photos. In-depth interviews were also conducted with 8 full-time fashion/beauty bloggers. The target population was leading fashion bloggers. Data showed the bloggers depicted an ideal of "having it all" through tropes of passionate work, staging glamorous lives, and carefully curated social sharing. The findings demonstrated this articulated a form of entrepreneurial femininity drawing on post-feminist notions and self-branding logic. However, the researchers argued this obscured the labor, discipline and capital required while perpetuating myths women should work through consumption. Duffy and Hund (2015) concluded by addressing how the results reflected a digital economy still shaped by inequalities of gender, race and class. The researchers recommended further critical analysis of social media's role in (re)producing such inequities.

Duffy, Pruchniewska, and Scolere (2017) examined how creative workers presented themselves across different social media platforms. The study used qualitative in-depth interviews with a sample of 42 creative professionals including designers, bloggers, content creators and marketers/publicists. The population was independent creative workers using social media for self-promotion. The interviews aimed to understand

participants' platform-specific self-branding behaviors. The results showed creative workers negotiated their digital identities through "platform-specific self-branding" based on imagined affordances of each platform regarding features, audiences and their self-concept. The researchers concluded this intensified labor requirements as workers constantly adapted personas across social media to vie for attention in a precarious economy. They recommended further analysis of how platform-specific behaviors shape creative subjectivities and attention economies in the digital world.

Rosca, Agarwal, and Brem (2020) analyzed how women entrepreneurs engage in social entrepreneurship processes in emerging markets through a comparative case study. The study employed a multiple case study research design examining four social enterprises across India and Colombia. The population was women social entrepreneurs operating businesses in uncertain Base of the Pyramid environments. The researchers analyzed the entrepreneurial journeys and decision-making logics employed at different venture stages using an effectuation lens. The results showed women were highly motivated by social issues. A subtle transition between causation and effectuation approaches during venture creation was also found. The study highlighted specific challenges women entrepreneurs face and inclusive strategies employed to enhance socio-economic development. The researchers recommended framing the continued relevance of gender in the under-researched field of social entrepreneurship through further comparative analyses.

Md Saad and Yaacob (2021) examined how Malaysian fashion icon and businesswoman Vivy Yusof used Instagram to build her personal brand as the CEO of multiple companies. The study employed a case study research design to analyze the content of Vivy Yusof's Instagram posts, which had over 1 million followers at the time. The population was Vivy Yusof's Instagram audience. The researchers categorized her posts using the Honeycomb framework to identify the key messages and functional blocks emphasized. The results showed Yusof focused on blocks like presence, relationships and identity to communicate about both her business and personal life. Her followers highly engaged with posts through likes and comments. The researchers concluded Yusof exemplified the importance of CEO personal branding on social media given her influence. They recommended the study contributed to understanding the association between social media content strategies and audience engagement.

Literature Gap
The reviewed literature highlights the importance of personal branding for entrepreneurs, with studies showing publicity plays a central role in reinforcing personal brands. However, several gaps exist in understanding how women entrepreneurs leverage publicity for brand creation. Specifically, most studies do not examine this topic directly and instead adopt a broader focus on related areas like personal branding and entrepreneurship, without analyzing publicity's contribution to brand building. There is also limited qualitative research exploring women entrepreneurs' own experiences and perspectives regarding publicity usage for personal branding purposes. Additionally, existing research predominantly covers Western contexts rather than developing regions such as Nigeria. Studies also tend not to consider impacts of rising digitalization and evolving media landscapes.

Gaps further include insufficient conceptual frameworks linking key constructs and lack of mixed-methods or quantitative research designs. Comparative analyses based on demographic factors are also limited. While studies acknowledge women entrepreneurs' significant economic contributions, many note gender inequalities remaining deeply embedded in several societies. Two theoretical viewpoints partly addressing these gaps are Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory and Symbolic interactionism Theory. They provide lenses for analyzing how entrepreneurs leverage impression management and purposefully select media to fulfill needs via publicity, also shaping encountered perceptions. However, more localized, nuanced, methodologically rigorous research directly exploring women entrepreneurs' publicity-driven brand building processes are still needed to comprehensively address gaps and advance understandings in this underexplored domain. This current research aims to fill some of these identified gaps.

Theoretical Framework
Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory
Erving Goffman, a Canadian born in 1922, is credited as the originator of Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory. According to Branaman (2001), Goffman formulated this theory during his research for his doctoral thesis in the Shetland Isles. In 1956, Goffman published his seminal work titled "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," which he later revised in 1959 (Branaman, 2001). This influential book played a crucial role in introducing the concept of self-presentation to a broad audience.
Goffman's theory of self-presentation was influenced by George Herbert Mead's idea that the self is shaped through interactions with others (Branaman, 2001). However, Goffman's perspective is more radical and concrete compared to Mead's. While Mead believed that the self emerges from social experiences, Goffman takes it a step further by proposing that the self not only arises from social experiences but is also constructed within the social context itself, resembling a theatrical performance (Branaman, 2001). As a result, Goffman developed the dramaturgical model, which uses theatrical metaphors to explain how individuals present themselves in various ways during communication.

Using Goffman's Self-Presentation Theory to examine the role of publicity in the creation of personal brand among womenprenuer, Goffman viewed impression management not only as a means of influencing how one is treated by other people but also as an essential part of social interaction. Erving Goffman's self-presentation theory explores the way people want to be seen and how people are perceived by their peers.

Self-presentation theory and personal branding go hand in hand, for example, we see celebrities and athletes building a particular brand, or persona over with the use of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Building a personal brand is a big part of a celebrity's life, and it can help them spread awareness and also provide an outlet to connect with their fans/supporters. This is made possible through the use of social media and the ability of the person looking to build a personal brand to make their messages heard. The theory of self-presentation looks at how people look to create an identity for themselves that they would like to be seen as by their peers or in the public eye. This is what Goffman calls the front stage.

The front stage is a key component of this theory and it is a way a person acts when in public or around other people to build a certain persona for how they would like others to view them. The front stage is where

celebrities and athletes tend to build their own brand and show many positive, deliberate messages that will try to portray them in a certain light in which the person would like to be seen. As opposed to what Goffman refers to as the back stage, which is a particular way a person acts when they are not in public or not posting on social media, trying to build a particular persona or brand they would like others to see.

Social Media has provided a simple way for celebrities to get their personal brand to reach a wider audience, and they utilize the 'front stage' to influence people in a particular way and to make themselves look good in the public eye. The 'back stage' is part of Goffman's theory of self-presentation theory, and it is happenings or beliefs people would not want their peers or public to necessarily see or hear. These are happenings that go on behind the scenes that can oftentimes hurt someone's reputation and are avoided when a celebrity is trying to build a personal brand. These are often personal happenings, or beliefs that will negatively affect how an audience will look at the brand you are building.

Symbolic interactionism theory
Symbolic interaction was conceived by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. Mead argued that people's selves are social products, but that these selves are also purposive and creative, and believed that the true test of any theory was that it was "useful in solving complex social problems" (Griffin *et al.,* 2015). Mead's influence was said to be so powerful that sociologists regard him as the one "true founder" of the symbolic interactionism tradition. Symbolic interaction theory, as described by Hewitt (2007), explains identity as the embodiment of roles, guiding behavior in specific situations. Identity can be categorized into three types: situated, personal, and social. Situated identity refers to perceiving oneself through the eyes of others, providing a brief but impactful perspective.
According to Link *et al.* (2015), this viewpoint of symbolic interactionism can be applied to the use of social networking sites and how one's identity is presented on those sites. With social networking sites, one can boast (or post) their identity through their newsfeed. The personal identity presents itself in the need for individuals to post milestones that one has achieved, in efforts to differentiate themselves. The social identity presents itself when individuals "tag" others in their posts, pictures, etc. Situated identities may be present in the need to defend something on social media or arguments that occur in comments, where one feels it necessary to "prove" themselves. It has amassed a number of criticisms. Critics of this theory claim that symbolic interactionism neglects the macro level of social interpretation. Symbolic interactionists are also often criticized for being overly impressionistic in their research methods and somewhat unsystematic in their theories. Many sociologists argue that the theory is too wide-ranging in what it tackles to give clear direction on understanding it.

This theory provides insights into how publicity plays a role in personal brand creation among womenpreneurs. Symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals shape their personal brands through the interactions and interpretations of others. Publicity serves as a means to communicate and establish symbols and meanings associated with personal brands. Womenpreneurs can use publicity to shape the perceptions of their target audience, establish positive associations with their brands, and influence how others interpret and interact with their entrepreneurial endeavours. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for understanding the social construction of personal brands and the role of publicity in shaping these symbolic interactions.

By integrating Symbolic Interactionism Theory, the theoretical framework for studying the role of publicity in personal brand creation among womenpreneurs in the field of mass communication offers a comprehensive understanding of how leadership and social interactions influence the effectiveness of publicity strategies. This framework allows for the examination of how womenpreneurs can leverage transformational leadership practices to inspire and empower others, while also using publicity as a symbolic tool to shape the perceptions and meanings associated with their personal brands.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the researcher employed a mixed method approach. The survey design and in-depth interview . She studied females in business in Anambra State and selected 399 samples using Meyer's (1973) sample size determination formula, with the females in Anambra projected population of 2,153,314 as at the 2006 Nigerian population census. The sample size were randomly selected from the 3 senatorial zones(Anambra North , Anambra South and Anambra Central) using the simple random sampling technique. Using this technique, the researcher randomly selected 19 women   from the villages from three randomly selected LGA under the three senatorial zones. To collect data from the selected samples, the researcher used a closed-ended, valid and reliable questionnaire which was formed using 5-point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and interview guide. For the analysis s of the findings of this study, frequencies, tables and simple percentages, were used by the researcher, while the qualitative data was thematically analyzed.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Theme 1: Extent of publicity usage

  The participants showed varying views on the extent to which women entrepreneurs utilize publicity. The majority of the participants affirmed the usage of publicity by women in business. For instance, Participants 1, 2 and 18 stated that women entrepreneurs use publicity "to a very large extent." According to Participant 5, "I will say they are using it well actually. Because people are struggling, women are hustlers so they're using it well." However, a different view came from Participant 4 who stated "Well for Anambra state. I don't think they depend on publicity; they feel they can do it by themselves" and Participant 6 who stated, "Here we have only a few people only just few brands I know of that make use of publicity in promoting of their business." A different response came from Participant 12, "I'm not sure I know a lot about that" and Participant 18, "I don't know."

Theme 2: Types of publicity methods

This theme was further subdivided into two themes; Online and Offline. This was done due to the varying patterns in the responses of the respondents as all the responses fall in either of the two categories.

Online Publicity

From Table 36 above, 94.74% of the participants highly utilized online platforms for publicity. Participants 1 and 2 directly stated "Social media mostly WhatsApp." Participant 4 stated, "For me personally, I make

use of WhatsApp Facebook and Instagram." Some popular responses resonate with Participant 9 who explained, "There are people that you pay for them to advertise your business on their platforms, maybe they have a very large audience on WhatsApp and Facebook." Participant 9 also gave a statement resonating with some other participants, "I also believe in this referral contest stuff, you give a gift to people that can get people to buy from you. The more they buy, the more the gift you give referrers

Offline Publicity
Based on the offline publicity utilization, 73.68% of participants utilized it. Participant 1 stated "Me mostly I make use of one-on-one discussion" which resonates with Participants 5, 6, 13 and 18. Participant 5 stated, "I have seen people using flyers." Which was also utilized by most participants. Participant 12 stated "I remember, two events to showcase skills and product that was held inside school" and referred to "entrepreneurship programs" Participant 16 stated to be "networking events." This was also supported by Participant 7 who stated "Also there are also trade fairs like sometimes they organized trade fairs in Anambra like trade fair that maybe they'll be like okay that ehm.. we might rent a hall, different entrepreneurs we stay in that hall and people will come and buy stuff from them buy their wears from them and also UNIZIK one time organized a trade fair where students brought out their wears to sell." However, Participant 13 stated "the banner with is very popular and very common for the most entrepreneur in Anambra state that I've observed and I've also used." Participant 7 stated, "also some people use the ehm.. radio stations to broadcast about your business."

Theme 3: Effectiveness of publicity strategies
The participants showed varying responses on how the publicity strategy has been effective. Participant 1 stated, "I have more sales every day on a regular, which shows that my publicity is working." Participant 5 stated, "I often get more customers via social media and they call offline often." According to Participant 6 "When I used content creation on TikTok, it went viral I started getting orders." Participant 12 stated, "I was able to generate leads in a few days just by using this WhatsApp." Participant 13 stated "The banner is outside your doorpost and anyone that passes something like this and there's an awareness for the passerby, anybody that is passing through that need to drop his or her child like, Oh, someone is here. Let me try and go there. And when they come in, your banner attracts that publicity of using banner, it attracts." Participant 14 stated, "I talk to few persons and before you know it other people started calling me."

Theme 4: Impact of publicity on personal branding
The responses also vary. Participant 2 stated, "The advantages it offers is that it helps increase your sales, your customer base and much more." Participant 4 stated "publicity has really helped my business so far at least to an extent now I can say my business has gone viral because of this publicity even people I don't know are patronizing me because of publicity that I do." Participant 6 stated "it brings more sales increase profit; you know it makes people know your brand more" and also stated "I do have constant orders now people do call me that they were referred to me by this so-so person." Participant 9 stated "if I'm to say I'm going to use a scale of 10, without publicity you just be like 4,3 but on a scale of 1 to 10 with publicity you have 9.5." Participant 10 delightfully stated "the fact that I get goods, like I keep restocking every week."

Participant 13 stated "it attracts customers, it attracts other persons that will need to come and ask for a job because it creates job opportunity for those around… publicity create awareness." Participant 15 stated "since I started posting my stuffs online and doing different publicity in different platforms, I noticed I had more customers." Participant 16 stated "publicity can help entrepreneurs build their reputation, increase their visibility and attract potential customers or investors", "it actually increases brand recognition", "increase in website traffic", "I had an access to new opportunities, such as partnership or investment, meeting new people and getting new business ideas which also allows my business to grow and scale up."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

For this study, the researcher found out what was the extent to which womenpreneurs in Anambra State use publicity which answered the first objective. The quantitative survey results (not Table 12) showed that 60.7% of respondents did not pay for business publicity, while 39.3% invested in publicity. This indicates that while a sizeable minority use paid publicity, the majority rely on unpaid methods.

The qualitative interviews provided more nuance, with mixed perspectives on women entrepreneurs' publicity usage. Several interviewees felt usage was extensive, with comments like "to a very large extent" (Participants 1, 2, 18). However, others saw more limited adoption, e.g. "Only a few brands I know of that make use of publicity" (Participant 6) or "I don't think they depend on publicity" (Participant 4). The variance in viewpoints may reflect differences across industries, business sizes, or geographic areas. However, the results align with Odoemene and Okafor's (2018) Nigerian study showing that 61% of women entrepreneurs use marketing including publicity to promote their businesses. However, they contrast with the Findings from Amaehule *et al*. (2018) suggesting very low adoption of promotional strategies among Nigerian female entrepreneurs.

The second objective was also in line with this analysis as the researcher also sought out to discover the types of publicity used by womenpreneurs. The survey (Table 22) showed a slight preference for online (57.9%) over offline (42.1%) publicity. Social media was the most popular channel at 49.9% (Table 23), followed by events/speaking (17.5%), then partnerships (8.3%), print media (4%), and radio/TV (4.3%).

The interview findings mirrored the dominance of online platforms, especially social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram (Participants 1, 2, 4, 9). This echoes Odoemene and Okafor's (2018) finding that Nigerian female entrepreneurs predominantly use social media for publicity. Social media allows engaging directly with the target audience while leveraging existing networks (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). However, interviewees also discussed significant usage of offline publicity like flyers, radio, banners, and trade fairs (Participants 5, 7, 12, 13), which can benefit less tech-savvy clients.

Publicity objectives (Table 23) were mostly increasing sales/growth (29.3%), building awareness (20.3%), and expanding reach (23.3%). These goals align with typical early-stage branding aims of establishing visibility and acquiring customers (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). However, a maturing brand may focus more on objectives like credibility or reputation. An interesting cross-theme finding was the positive correlation (0.242) between online and offline publicity usage (Figure 2). This suggests that for optimal impact, womenpreneurs should utilize integrated strategies spanning both online and offline channels rather than limiting themselves to one area

Furthermore, the researcher also found out how womenpreneurs' use of publicity promotes personal branding. Which in return is in line with the last objective. The surveys showed a strong belief in the impact of personal branding, with 100% agreeing it is very important for business success (Table 28). Most felt their brand impacts their business (Table 17) and that publicity boosts customers (Table 18). In interviews, participants highlighted branding benefits like increased sales, reach, and profit (Participants 2, 6, 9). Notably, offline publicity methods had the highest correlation with branding impact at 0.447 (Figure 2). This indicates traditional channels remain crucial for creating awareness and visibility. Odoemene and Okafor (2018) similarly found posters, radio, and TV more effective for Nigerian female entrepreneurs than social media. Offline publicity had a lower correlation (0.242) with online methods (Figure 2), suggesting integrated strategies are not the norm.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of publicity in personal brand creation among women entrepreneurs in Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that publicity, especially through integrated online and offline strategies, plays a vital role in enabling womenpreneurs to build awareness, acquire customers, expand their reach, and enhance their personal brands and legitimacy. While social media currently dominates publicity efforts, traditional offline platforms retain relevance and have the strongest correlations with branding impact. This highlights the need for holistic approaches spanning both digital and traditional channels. The research also found branding activities to be an ongoing investment focused on business growth objectives rather than reputation-building at this early stage. Participants unanimously agree on the importance of personal branding for women-owned businesses. Reported outcomes include increased sales, profit, recognition, and opportunities. This underscores the ability of strategic publicity to empower women entrepreneurs and counter gender-based limitations through brand-building.

The study demonstrates that Anambra women entrepreneurs are actively leveraging publicity, especially offline and social media platforms, to craft distinctive personal brands and drive the growth of their ventures. The findings provide valuable insights into contextual publicity practices and strategies for optimizing personal branding outcomes among womenpreneurs in the region. Further research can build on this study to enrich our understanding of this significant link.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study recommends that:

1. Adopt integrated publicity strategies utilizing both online platforms like social media as well as traditional offline platforms. An omnichannel approach can maximize reach and awareness.
2. Begin publicity and branding initiatives early when starting new ventures to capitalize on opportunities for visibility and customer acquisition.
3. Create specialized initiatives to build women entrepreneurs' publicity skills and brand awareness capabilities.

4.   Develop targeted grant and support programs to enable womenpreneurs to access paid publicity opportunities.

5.   Encourage women's business networks and associations to conduct integrated branding campaigns collectively.

6.   Sponsor trade fairs, events, conferences, and awards to facilitate offline publicity and networking opportunities.

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