

Effect of Meme-Based Advertising on Brand Loyalty Among Instagram Users in Benin City

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have transformed contemporary advertising by enabling brands to use meme-based content to engage audiences through humour, relatability, and cultural relevance. Despite its growing adoption, there is limited empirical evidence on whether meme-based advertising translates into sustained brand loyalty, especially among users in specific local contexts such as Benin City. This study examined the effect of meme-based advertising on brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City, focusing on exposure level, user perception, and its influence on loyalty behaviour. It was anchored in the Uses and Gratification Theory. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with a sample size of 384 determined using Cochran's formula, of which 352 valid responses were returned and analysed. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed with descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that Instagram users in Benin City are highly exposed to meme-based advertising and perceive it as more engaging, relatable, and attention-grabbing than traditional advertising. However, while meme-based advertising positively influences emotional attachment, interaction, and brand preference, its effect on long-term brand loyalty is moderate and unstable. The study concludes that meme-based advertising is more effective as an engagement and brand visibility tool than as a standalone driver of sustained brand loyalty. It recommends that brands integrate meme strategies with consistent branding, informational content, and broader relationship-building approaches to achieve lasting consumer commitment.

Keywords: Meme advertising; Brand loyalty; Instagram; Benin City; Social media marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising practice has undergone significant transformation with the expansion of social media platforms and the increasing dominance of digital communication among younger audiences. Traditional advertising formats that relied heavily on direct promotional messages are gradually being replaced by more interactive and culturally driven strategies that encourage audience participation and emotional connection. Among these emerging strategies, meme-based advertising has gained remarkable attention due to its ability to combine humour, relatability, and viral appeal in promoting brands across social media platforms such as Instagram. Unlike conventional advertisements, memes are designed to blend entertainment with subtle marketing communication, making audiences more likely to engage with, share, and remember branded content. Malodia, Dhir, Bilgihan, Sinha, and Tikoo (2022) argue that meme marketing has become an effective tool for increasing audience engagement because viral memes stimulate emotional reactions and social interaction, thereby improving the visibility and relatability of brands within digital communities.

The growing popularity of Instagram has further strengthened the relevance of meme-based advertising in contemporary marketing communication. Instagram provides brands with a visually driven environment where memes can easily circulate among users through likes, comments, reposts, and stories. This has transformed memes from mere internet humour into strategic communication tools capable of influencing audience attitudes toward brands. Agrawal, Sharma, Mishra, Shah, Alam, and Khandelwal (2024) observe that both brand-

generated and user-generated memes on Instagram now function as important promotional mechanisms that shape audience perception and encourage consumer interaction with brands. Through meme-based advertising, brands attempt to appear more relatable, entertaining, and culturally aware, particularly among younger consumers who value authenticity and social relevance in online communication. In urban centres such as Benin City, where Instagram usage among youths and young adults continues to expand, meme advertising has become increasingly visible within the digital marketing activities of businesses and brands.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of meme-based advertising extends beyond temporary engagement to the development of deeper consumer-brand relationships. Social media users are more likely to develop attachment to brands that consistently provide entertaining and emotionally resonant content. Salqaura, Nasib, and Salqaura (2025) explain that brand engagement plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of meme marketing, as consumers who actively interact with meme content often develop stronger emotional connections with brands. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2025) emphasise that meme marketing strategies enhance brand engagement by encouraging virality, audience participation, and continuous interaction across social media networks. These interactions can gradually influence consumer loyalty by increasing familiarity, trust, and emotional attachment toward advertised brands. Within the Instagram environment, where user interaction forms the basis of content visibility and influence, meme-based advertising therefore has the potential to shape long-term consumer attitudes and loyalty behaviours.

However, despite the growing use of meme-based advertising, concerns remain regarding its actual influence on long-term consumer behaviour, particularly brand loyalty. While memes may successfully attract attention and generate short-term engagement, it is not always clear whether such engagement translates into sustained loyalty toward brands. Agrawal, Sharma, and Mishra (2025) argue that specific dimensions of meme content, such as humour, creativity, relatability, and relevance, significantly affect consumers' intention to continue engaging with brands. This suggests that not all meme-based advertisements produce the same outcomes, as audience reactions may depend on how effectively the meme aligns with consumer expectations and brand identity. Dhankhar (2026) also emphasises that customer perception of meme marketing shapes purchase intentions and brand attitudes, indicating that audience interpretation remains a critical factor in determining advertising effectiveness. In Benin City, where Instagram has become an important platform for digital interaction and commercial promotion, understanding how meme-based advertising influences brand loyalty is therefore essential for both marketers and communication researchers.

In addition, the increasing integration of memes into digital brand strategies raises important questions about how consumers interpret and respond to these forms of communication. Rolando (2025) explains that meme-based marketing creates stronger consumer connections by encouraging viral engagement and emotional resonance between brands and audiences. Similarly, Abbas and Rehman (2025) observe that brands increasingly utilise multimodal meme strategies on Instagram to combine humour, visuals, and cultural references in shaping consumer perception. While these strategies may enhance audience interaction, their long-term effect on consumer loyalty remains insufficiently explored, particularly within local contexts such as Benin City where cultural interpretation, social trends, and digital consumption patterns may differ from broader global environments. Against this background, this study examines the effect of meme-based advertising on brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing use of meme-based advertising on Instagram has transformed the way brands communicate with consumers, particularly among young social media users who are highly attracted to humorous, relatable, and visually engaging content. Brands now rely heavily on memes to capture audience attention, stimulate interaction, and create emotional connections that may influence consumer behaviour. However, while meme advertisements often generate high levels of engagement in the form of likes, comments, shares, and reposts, there is still uncertainty regarding whether such engagement translates into genuine and sustained brand loyalty among consumers. In addition, existing studies on meme marketing have focused largely on engagement, virality, and brand awareness rather than on how meme-based advertising affects long-term consumer loyalty within specific local contexts. For instance, Kim and Kim (2025) emphasise the role of meme marketing in

enhancing viral interaction and brand engagement, while Dharmawan and Linando (2025) focus primarily on customer perception and brand awareness. Similarly, Almaghlouth and Saleh (2024) examine behavioural motives influencing engagement with meme content but do not sufficiently explore how these interactions shape sustained loyalty toward brands. This leaves a gap in understanding the relationship between meme-based advertising and brand loyalty, especially among Instagram users in Benin City, where social media consumption patterns continue to evolve rapidly.

In Benin City, where Instagram usage among youths and young adults is increasingly shaping consumer culture and purchasing behaviour, understanding how meme-based advertising influences brand loyalty becomes essential for evaluating the long-term effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the effect of meme-based advertising on brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the level of exposure of Instagram users in Benin City to meme-based advertising.
2. Assess Instagram users' perception of meme-based advertising in promoting brands.
3. Determine the effect of meme-based advertising on brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City.

Conceptual Review

Meme-Based Advertising

Meme-based advertising refers to the strategic use of internet memes, humorous, relatable, and culturally grounded visual content, to promote brands, products, or services on social media platforms such as Instagram. It represents a shift from traditional persuasive advertising to a more interactive and participatory form of digital communication where entertainment and marketing are combined. Ezeani and Okafor (2026) define meme-based advertising as a contemporary digital marketing strategy that utilises viral humour, visual storytelling, and social media trends to enhance brand visibility and strengthen consumer engagement. They explain that unlike conventional advertisements that rely on direct promotional messages, meme-based advertising communicates indirectly by embedding brand meanings within humorous or relatable content, thereby reducing resistance from audiences who are often averse to overt advertising.

Building on this, Udoji and Bello (2025) describe meme-based advertising as a participatory communication model in which audiences are not only passive receivers of marketing messages but also active participants in their dissemination. According to them, memes thrive in digital environments because they are easily shared, adapted, and reinterpreted by users, allowing brands to benefit from organic virality. They further explain that the effectiveness of meme-based advertising depends largely on the ability of brands to align their content with prevailing social trends, cultural expressions, and the lived experiences of target audiences, particularly younger social media users who dominate platforms like Instagram. When properly executed, meme advertising creates a sense of familiarity and social connection between the brand and its audience.

In a more critical perspective, Akinyemi, Osagie, and Danladi (2026) observe that meme-based advertising has become increasingly popular among Nigerian marketers due to its cost-effectiveness, high engagement potential, and ability to generate rapid online visibility. However, they caution that its effectiveness is not guaranteed, as poorly designed or inauthentic meme content may lead to negative audience reactions, including brand rejection or ridicule. They argue that the success of meme-based advertising depends on creative balance, where humour must be carefully integrated with brand identity without appearing forced or overly commercial. In this regard, meme advertising requires not only creativity but also a strong understanding of audience psychology and digital culture.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to the long-term commitment of consumers to consistently prefer, purchase, and support a particular brand despite the availability of competing alternatives. It is both behavioural and psychological, involving repeated patronage as well as emotional attachment to a brand. Olorunfemi and Chukwu (2025) define brand loyalty as a sustained consumer relationship characterised by trust, satisfaction, and positive brand experiences that influence repeat purchasing behaviour. They explain that in contemporary digital marketing environments, brand loyalty is no longer driven solely by product quality or price, but also by how brands communicate, engage, and emotionally connect with consumers through digital platforms.

Similarly, Adeyinka and Musa (2026) describe brand loyalty as the degree of commitment that consumers demonstrate toward a brand over time, even in the presence of competing products offering similar or better features. They emphasise that loyalty is strengthened when consumers perceive consistency in brand messaging, authenticity in communication, and value alignment between their personal identity and the brand's image. In social media environments such as Instagram, this loyalty is increasingly shaped by interactive content forms, including memes, which provide informal and relatable communication channels between brands and consumers.

In a more expansive view, Egbuna and Salami (2025) argue that brand loyalty in the digital age extends beyond repeat purchase behaviour to include brand advocacy and emotional attachment. They explain that loyal consumers often become brand ambassadors who voluntarily promote brands within their online communities through shares, comments, and recommendations. They further note that emotionally engaging digital content, particularly humorous and culturally relevant memes, can strengthen this advocacy by making brands more memorable, socially relevant, and emotionally appealing. However, they also stress that such loyalty is fragile and must be continuously reinforced through consistent and meaningful engagement strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Meme-Based Advertising, Digital Engagement, and Brand Loyalty

The increasing adoption of meme-based advertising within contemporary digital marketing reflects a major shift in how brands communicate with consumers in highly interactive social media environments. Rather than relying on traditional persuasive advertising techniques, brands now increasingly use humour, relatability, and cultural references embedded in memes to attract attention and encourage engagement. Kiljańczyk and Kacprzak (2024) describe internet memes in social media marketing as evolving strategic tools that transform informal humorous content into structured advertising mechanisms capable of shaping consumer perception and engagement behaviour. They explain that memes reduce consumer resistance to advertising messages by embedding promotional intent within entertaining and socially familiar content, making them particularly effective in digital platforms such as Instagram.

Similarly, Bowo, Anisah, and Marthalia (2024) examine meme marketing from a behavioural standpoint and argue that it significantly influences Generation Z consumer behaviour by affecting attention span, engagement level, and sharing tendencies. They explain that younger audiences are more likely to interact with brands that communicate through informal, humorous, and culturally relevant content because such content reflects their lived digital experiences. However, they also caution that when meme-based advertising is perceived as inauthentic, overly promotional, or poorly aligned with audience culture, it may result in reduced engagement or negative brand perception. This highlights the importance of creativity and authenticity in meme-based advertising effectiveness.

Tran, Vy, and Tam (2025) further emphasize the role of meme marketing in enhancing brand recall and engagement. They argue that meme-based content is more easily remembered than traditional advertising because it combines humour with visual storytelling, which strengthens cognitive processing and emotional association. According to them, memes increase brand visibility in highly competitive digital spaces by standing

out through entertainment value and cultural relevance. However, they also note that while memes are effective in generating immediate engagement, their ability to sustain long-term consumer loyalty remains uncertain and requires further empirical validation.

From a broader theoretical perspective, Murray, Manrai, and Manrai (2014) conceptualize memes as cultural units that evolve through a lifecycle consisting of creation, diffusion, adaptation, and decline. They argue that meme-based advertising must be carefully managed across this lifecycle to maintain relevance, as memes tend to lose effectiveness once they become overly commercialized or outdated. This perspective highlights the dynamic and time-sensitive nature of meme marketing, where success depends on timing, cultural alignment, and continuous adaptation to digital trends.

In a more technologically driven context, Nwagbara, Obidozie, Okon, and Ukeje (2026) observe that small businesses increasingly use generative artificial intelligence tools to create meme-based marketing content that is both cost-effective and adaptable to fast-changing online trends. They argue that artificial intelligence has democratized access to creative advertising strategies, allowing smaller firms to compete with larger brands in digital marketing spaces. However, they caution that overdependence on automated content generation may reduce authenticity, which is a key factor influencing audience trust and acceptance of meme-based advertising.

Brand Loyalty in Digital and Meme Marketing Context

Brand loyalty refers to the consistent preference, emotional attachment, and repeated engagement of consumers toward a specific brand over time. In the context of meme-based advertising, loyalty is increasingly influenced by how consumers interpret humorous and culturally relevant brand messages within digital platforms. Ali, Yawar, Ali, Saif, Goh, and Khan (2025) explain that social media influencers and viral content, including memes, play a significant role in shaping youth consumption behaviour by generating emotional motivation and strengthening brand attachment. They argue that repeated exposure to entertaining and relatable content increases the likelihood of long-term consumer loyalty toward brands.

Similarly, Henrie and Gilde (2026) examine meme-based persuasion among Generation Z consumers and explain that memes influence consumer engagement by activating both emotional responses and cognitive interpretation processes. They note that although memes are often perceived as informal and non-commercial, they still function as persuasive communication tools that shape consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions. However, they also emphasize that when consumers become aware of persuasive intent, it may reduce the effectiveness of meme advertising, thereby affecting long-term loyalty outcomes.

In a cognitive perspective, Brace (2026) explains that memes influence decision-making through simplified mental processing, where consumers rely on emotional cues and quick judgments rather than detailed evaluation of brand messages. He argues that meme-based advertising enhances memory retention and emotional association with brands, which can strengthen initial brand attraction. However, he cautions that such cognitive effects do not always translate into sustained loyalty unless reinforced by consistent positive brand experiences over time.

Okoronkwo (2025) further contributes by explaining that memes are increasingly used in communication strategies beyond marketing, including crisis and resilience communication. He argues that meme-based messaging can shape how audiences perceive organizational identity by presenting information in a relatable and less formal manner during sensitive or high-pressure situations. This reinforces the idea that memes contribute to emotional branding, which can indirectly influence consumer loyalty by shaping perceptions of brand personality, approachability, and trustworthiness.

Instagram Users and Digital Consumption Behaviour

Instagram users represent a digitally active audience that engages with visual, interactive, and rapidly circulating content within the social media environment. Their behaviour is shaped by continuous exposure to images, videos, reels, and memes that emphasize entertainment and social connectivity. Bowo, Anisah, and Marthalia (2024) explain that Generation Z Instagram users are particularly responsive to meme-based content because it

aligns with their communication style, humour preferences, and cultural experiences. They emphasize that these users actively participate in content circulation by liking, sharing, commenting, and reposting, thereby influencing the visibility and reach of branded content.

Kiljańczyk and Kacprzak (2024) also argue that Instagram users play a central role in determining the success of meme-based advertising because they actively contribute to content virality through engagement behaviours. They explain that Instagram functions as a participatory platform where users are not only consumers of content but also distributors who amplify brand messages across social networks. This participatory structure makes user engagement a critical factor in the effectiveness of meme-based advertising strategies.

Ali, Yawar, Ali, Saif, Goh, and Khan (2025) further explain that Instagram users, particularly younger demographics, are heavily influenced by influencer-driven and peer-shared content, including memes. They argue that user engagement is driven by emotional motivation, social identity, and perceived relatability of content. As a result, Instagram users are more likely to respond positively to brands that adopt entertaining, humorous, and culturally relevant communication styles. However, they also note that this responsiveness makes brand loyalty highly dynamic, as users can quickly shift attention to competing content if engagement strategies are not consistently maintained.

Empirical Review

Akinyemi, Osagie, and Danladi (2026) conducted a study aimed to examine how meme-based advertising influences consumer engagement and brand interaction on Instagram and Twitter. The researchers anchored the study on the Uses and Gratifications Theory to explain why users engage with meme content based on perceived entertainment and informational value. A survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 420 social media users using structured questionnaires. The findings revealed that meme-based advertising significantly enhances consumer engagement, especially when the content is humorous, relatable, and culturally relevant. The study concluded that memes are effective tools for attracting attention but warned that over-commercialisation reduces audience trust. It recommended that brands maintain creativity and authenticity in meme design to sustain engagement. The study aligns with the current research in terms of focusing on meme-based advertising and user response; however, it differs in scope as it emphasised general consumer engagement rather than brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City.

Udoji, Bello, and Eze (2025) carried out a study which investigated how exposure to meme-based advertising influences brand recall and purchase intention among young consumers. The study was guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which explains how individuals process persuasive messages either through central or peripheral routes. A descriptive survey design was used, and data were obtained from 350 undergraduate students selected through stratified sampling. The findings showed that meme marketing significantly improves brand recall, but its influence on purchase intention was moderate and dependent on content relevance and humour appeal. The study concluded that meme advertising is more effective for awareness creation than for direct behavioural change. It recommended that marketers combine meme content with other persuasive advertising strategies to strengthen consumer action. This study relates to the current research in its focus on meme advertising effectiveness, but it differs because it does not address brand loyalty or focus specifically on Instagram users in Benin City.

Ezeani, Okafor, and Nwachukwu (2026) understudied whether exposure to meme-based advertising contributes to long-term brand loyalty among social media users. The study was anchored on Social Identity Theory, which explains how individuals develop attachment to brands that reflect their social groups and identity. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining survey responses from 500 respondents with in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that meme-based advertising has a positive influence on brand loyalty when users perceive the content as authentic, entertaining, and socially relatable. However, excessive repetition of branded memes was found to reduce perceived originality and weaken loyalty intentions. The study concluded that meme marketing is effective in building emotional connection but must be carefully managed to avoid audience fatigue. It recommended that brands adopt balanced meme strategies that align with audience culture. The study is closely

related to the current research as both focus on meme-based advertising and brand loyalty, but it differs in location focus and does not specifically examine Instagram users in Benin City.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), originally propounded by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), which explains that media audiences are active users who deliberately choose media content and platforms to satisfy specific needs rather than passively consuming information. The theory assumes that individuals are goal-oriented in their media consumption behaviour and make choices based on expected gratifications such as entertainment, social interaction, information seeking, identity formation, and emotional satisfaction. In the context of digital marketing and social media advertising, this implies that Instagram users do not merely view content randomly; rather, they intentionally engage with content that provides humour, relatability, emotional connection, and social value. McQuail (2020) extends this perspective by explaining that in digital environments, media usage is strongly influenced by convenience, immediacy, personalization, and perceived relevance. This suggests that Instagram users are more likely to engage with meme-based advertising when it aligns with their entertainment needs and fits seamlessly into their everyday social media experience.

Applied to this study, Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a strong explanatory framework for understanding how Instagram users in Benin City perceive and respond to meme-based advertising in relation to brand loyalty. It suggests that users are not passive recipients of brand messages but active participants who decide whether or not to engage with meme content based on the gratification they expect to derive. In this case, meme-based advertising may satisfy users' need for entertainment, humour, and social connection, which encourages interaction such as likes, shares, comments, and reposts. However, this engagement is not automatic, as users evaluate meme content based on perceived authenticity, creativity, and cultural relevance. Ezeani (2026) explains that social media users are more likely to engage with branded content when it aligns with their personal experiences and digital culture, suggesting that gratification plays a key role in shaping consumer response to meme advertising.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of data on Instagram users' exposure to meme-based advertising and its influence on brand loyalty without manipulating any variables. The design is considered suitable for this study because it captures real-life perceptions and behavioural responses within a natural social media environment, particularly among users in Benin City where Instagram is widely used for entertainment, communication, and brand interaction.

The population of the study comprised all residents of Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, which is estimated at 2,568,755 people based on recent demographic projections. This figure reflects the urban population size of Benin City as a rapidly growing metropolitan area in southern Nigeria (World Population Review, 2026). The population was considered appropriate because Instagram usage and exposure to digital advertising cut across different demographic groups within the city, making it necessary to define the study within a broader population before narrowing down to relevant respondents.

From this population, the sample size was determined using the Cochran (1977) formula for large populations:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

- $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level)

- $p = 0.5$ (maximum variability)
- $q = 1 - p = 0.5$
- $e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

Substituting the values:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384$$

Therefore, the sample size was 384 respondents. However, since the study is specifically focused on Instagram users, a screening mechanism was applied to ensure relevance. A filter section was included at the beginning of the questionnaire to identify respondents who (1) actively use Instagram and (2) have been exposed to meme-based advertising on the platform. Only respondents who satisfied both conditions were retained for analysis, while others were excluded from the final dataset. This ensured that although the sampling frame was drawn from the general population of Benin City, the actual respondents reflected the target group relevant to the study.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. First, respondents were approached using convenience sampling across key locations in Benin City such as tertiary institutions, business districts, and residential areas. This allowed access to a diverse group of potential Instagram users. Second, the screening criteria were applied to isolate only eligible Instagram users from the broader sample. This approach was necessary due to the difficulty of obtaining a precise sampling frame of social media users within a defined geographic population.

The research instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire, divided into sections covering demographic characteristics, exposure to meme-based advertising on Instagram and perception of meme content. The questionnaire was designed using a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), with a decision mean score of 2.5 used as the benchmark for analysis. The questionnaire was distributed using google form via Instagram for a period of four days.

Out of the 384 copies of questionnaire distributed, 352 were properly completed and returned, while the remaining were either not retrieved or excluded due to incomplete responses or failure to meet the Instagram usage criteria. This response rate was considered adequate for statistical analysis and enhances the reliability of the findings. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequency distribution, percentages, and mean scores, which were used to summarise respondents' views in line with the research objectives. This approach provided a clear interpretation of how meme-based advertising influences brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Level of Exposure of Instagram Users in Benin City to Meme-Based Advertising (n = 352)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I frequently come across meme-based advertisements while scrolling through Instagram feeds and stories.	152 (43.2%)	120 (34.1%)	54 (15.3%)	26 (7.4%)	3.13	Accepted
Branded meme content appears regularly on my Instagram timeline through sponsored posts or influencer pages.	140 (39.8%)	118 (33.5%)	58 (16.5%)	36 (10.2%)	3.03	Accepted
I intentionally or unintentionally interact with meme-based advertisements (likes, shares, comments, or views) on Instagram.	128 (36.4%)	110 (31.3%)	72 (20.5%)	42 (11.9%)	2.92	Accepted

Aggregate Mean = 3.03 | Accepted

The data in Table 1 show that Instagram users in Benin City are consistently exposed to meme-based advertising across different forms of platform interaction. Respondents confirm that meme ads appear frequently in feeds, stories, and sponsored content streams, indicating that such advertising is embedded within everyday Instagram usage. The results also show that exposure is not only passive but also interactive, as users engage with meme-based content through likes, views, shares, and comments. This confirms that meme-based advertising is not incidental but a recurring feature of users' Instagram experience, making it a relevant advertising strategy within the digital environment.

Table 2: Instagram Users' Perception of Meme-Based Advertising in Promoting Brands (n = 352)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Meme-based advertisements attract my attention more than regular promotional ads on Instagram.	158 (44.9%)	126 (35.8%)	46 (13.1%)	22 (6.2%)	3.19	Accepted
Meme-based ads make brands appear more relatable, youthful, and culturally relevant.	146 (41.5%)	122 (34.7%)	54 (15.3%)	30 (8.5%)	3.09	Accepted
Meme-based advertising improves my understanding and awareness of brand products and services.	132 (37.5%)	118 (33.5%)	66 (18.8%)	36 (10.2%)	2.95	Accepted

Aggregate Mean = 3.08 | Accepted

Table 2 reveals that Instagram users in Benin City perceive meme-based advertising as a strong promotional communication tool. Respondents agree that meme ads are more attention-grabbing than conventional ads, largely because of their humour and cultural relevance. They also believe that meme-based content makes brands appear more relatable and aligned with youth culture, which enhances brand appeal. Importantly, respondents acknowledge that meme-based advertising contributes to improved awareness and understanding of products and services, suggesting that meme content is not only entertaining but also informative in shaping brand perception.

Table 3: Effect of Meme-Based Advertising on Brand Loyalty among Instagram Users in Benin City (n = 352)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Meme-based advertising increases my emotional attachment to brands I follow on Instagram.	140 (39.8%)	122 (34.7%)	54 (15.3%)	36 (10.2%)	3.04	Accepted
Meme-based ads influence my repeated interaction with brands (liking, commenting, sharing, or revisiting pages).	136 (38.6%)	118 (33.5%)	60 (17.0%)	38 (10.8%)	3.01	Accepted
Meme-based advertising encourages me to prefer certain brands over competing brands on Instagram.	130 (36.9%)	112 (31.8%)	66 (18.8%)	44 (12.5%)	2.93	Accepted
Meme-based advertising makes me more likely to recommend or share branded content with friends or followers.	128 (36.4%)	114 (32.4%)	64 (18.2%)	46 (13.0%)	2.91	Accepted

Meme-based advertising contributes to my long-term loyalty and continued engagement with a brand.	120 (34.1%)	116 (33.0%)	70 (19.9%)	46 (13.0%)	2.86	Accepted
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Aggregate Mean = 2.95 | Accepted

Table 3 shows that meme-based advertising has a multi-dimensional effect on brand loyalty among Instagram users in Benin City. The findings indicate that meme advertising influences both emotional attachment and behavioural engagement, as users develop stronger affective connections with brands and interact more frequently with their content. It also shows that meme-based content affects brand preference and comparative choice behaviour, as users are more likely to choose brands that consistently use relatable and entertaining memes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study found that Instagram users in Benin City are highly exposed to meme-based advertising, with frequent encounters across feeds, stories, and sponsored content. However, this exposure is largely platform-driven rather than user-directed, meaning visibility is shaped more by Instagram's algorithmic distribution than deliberate audience interest. This supports Shifman (2014), who explains that memes circulate through rapid replication systems where virality often overrides intentional consumption. In the same vein, Jegede and Akinboboye (2026) argue that high exposure to meme marketing does not automatically translate into meaningful consumer attention or behavioural change, as users tend to engage with such content in a fleeting and entertainment-focused manner. Balami (2025) similarly notes that meme-based campaigns, while highly visible, often struggle to sustain attention due to the fast turnover of content on Instagram.

The study also revealed that Instagram users generally perceive meme-based advertising positively, especially in terms of attractiveness, relatability, and ability to capture attention compared to traditional advertisements. However, this perception is largely emotional and surface-level, rather than grounded in critical evaluation of brand value. Henrie and Gilde (2026) explain that such responses are influenced by persuasion knowledge gaps, where users engage with branded memes without fully recognising their commercial intent. Ali, Yawar, Ali, Saif, Goh, and Khan (2025) further argue that meme-driven consumption behaviour among youths is strongly shaped by emotional motivation and social identity rather than rational product assessment. Brace (2026) adds that memes simplify cognitive processing, encouraging quick emotional reactions rather than deeper brand evaluation. The implication is that while meme-based advertising is effective in attracting attention and shaping favourable impressions, it does not necessarily build strong cognitive trust or long-term brand evaluation structures among users.

Finally, the findings show that meme-based advertising has a positive but moderate effect on brand loyalty, influencing emotional attachment, repeated interaction, brand preference, and recommendation behaviour among Instagram users. However, this loyalty appears fragile and context-dependent rather than stable. Egbulefu and Nwaoboli (2023) argue that digital advertising effects in Nigeria are often strongest at the engagement level but weaken when sustained behavioural commitment is required. Nwagbara, Obidozie, Okon, and Ukeje (2026) further suggest that contemporary digital marketing strategies, including AI-supported content creation, are increasingly optimized for visibility and engagement rather than long-term loyalty formation. This explains why meme-based advertising may generate interaction and preference shifts but struggles to secure enduring brand commitment in highly competitive and fast-moving digital environments. The implication is that meme-based advertising should be viewed as a complementary strategy rather than a standalone tool for building brand loyalty, requiring integration with consistent branding and value-driven communication to achieve long-term impact.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is argued that meme-based advertising is highly visible and widely encountered among Instagram users in Benin City, and it is generally perceived as an engaging and relatable form of digital advertising. However, despite this positive reception, its impact remains largely limited to attracting attention and generating short-term interaction rather than producing strong, sustained brand loyalty. The study therefore concludes that while meme-based advertising is effective as an engagement and visibility tool, its influence on long-term brand loyalty is moderate and unstable, depending heavily on how well it is integrated with broader branding and communication strategies. Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Brands should go beyond mere frequent meme placement and ensure that meme-based advertisements are consistently tied to strong brand identity elements such as logos, slogans, and product cues to enhance memory retention and move users from passive exposure to meaningful brand recall.
2. Marketers should design meme content that balances humour with subtle informational value about products or services, so that audience engagement is not only emotional but also cognitively reinforces brand trust and credibility.
3. Brands should not rely solely on meme-based advertising for loyalty building but should integrate it with sustained engagement strategies such as influencer collaborations, customer reward systems, and consistent brand storytelling to convert short-term interaction into long-term consumer commitment.

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