

# Short-term Impact of Instagram on Livelihoods of Artisans at Accra Arts Centre

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**Abstract:** The Accra Arts Centre in Ghana is a physical commercial hub for over eight hundred artisans. However, due to an ongoing construction project, the Marine Drive Project, the artisans' livelihoods are threatened. The Marine Drive Project aims to transform parts of the Accra coastline into a residential business district; hence will demolish the current Accra Arts Centre. Therefore, there is a need to explore sustainable livelihoods – ones that withstand stresses and shocks, such as the Marine Drive Project. Within the sustainable livelihoods framework, socially sustainable livelihoods encompass the economic gain that persons can derive from meeting their needs and affording them a decent living – such as the economic gain the artisans get from selling. To promote this social livelihood and withstand the stress of the project, artisans can use Instagram for commerce due to its visual emphasis, social features and embedded e-commerce platform. The Digital Business Transformation Initiative has taught about 120 artisans how to use Instagram for trade, and this research investigates its impact on the artisans' livelihood. Through the literature reviewed, brand awareness is a step towards increasing the sales volume on social commerce. Therefore, the impact on brand awareness was studied to investigate the short-term effect of Instagram on the artisans' business. The independent variable is the number of followers the artisan has, and the dependent variables are the frequency of posts by the artisan and the number of persons they follow. The findings gained external validity through a comparative analysis against selected African artisans to confirm patterns in the initial data set. Both datasets revealed that artisans could gain brand awareness through Instagram commerce and build their network through literature in the short term. However, other factors, such as the quality of posts and the quality of the artisans' network, play a role in achieving brand awareness. From the literature, the increasing brand awareness due to frequent posting and the quality of the artisans' following can lead to sales and improve the artisans' social livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Instagram, e-commerce, artisans, livelihoods, followers, brand awareness

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## 1. Introduction

Instagram commerce is a sub-set of e-commerce (Javida, et al., 2019) known as social commerce (Wang, et al., 2020). Social media commerce is a viable alternative to investigate for artisans because the Internet has become widespread (Jashari & Rrustemi, 2017), and people are transitioning from traditional media to social media (Oh, et al., 2017). Social media adoption rates among businesses are increasing because it allows cross-border direct two-way communication between a company or seller and the buyer (Khobzi, et al., 2018). Moreover, with social media updates and tools, sellers can customise their advertising to suit a person's online interests and profiles (Youn & Shin, 2019). Instagram, a social media platform, is chosen for this research because it encompasses an e-commerce feature within it, making it both a social and an e-commerce platform.

However, the impact of the use of Instagram among artisans will depend on certain variables. This research's independent variables are the frequency of posts and the number of people an artisan follows. The dependent variable will be the number of followers the artisan has. To determine how these response variables react, it is key to understand the kind of independent variables that will interact with them. For example, the individual-level factors of the artisans can impact the dependent variables. These individual-level factors include but are not limited to the artisans' education level, age, experience using Instagram, reputation as an artisan outside Instagram, and gender. For example, a study conducted by Albaity and Rahman (2019) showed that reputation positively affects attitudes regarding Islamic banking services. Similarly, an independent variable, such as an artisan's reputation outside social media, may influence Instagram commerce.

While understanding the interacting variables, it is key to understand what factors moderate and mediate (Fiedler and Sivo, 2015) this research and will feed into the study's scope, context and limitations. These moderating factors include the intermediaries of Instagram commerce, the organisation of a particular sector at the Arts Centre and certain individual-level factors. The mediating factors will be the Design Lab project that trains the artisans on Instagram commerce and the quality of the training.

These variables are essential background information, focusing the research and clearly defining the scope.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The Accra Arts Centre nurtures artisans' crafts through programmes and exhibitions. However, the Arts Centre demolition due to the Marine Drive project means artisans at the Centre need to look at alternative ways of selling their crafts. With the increasing adoption of social commerce and the absence of investigating specific social media platforms on artisans' livelihoods in literature, studying Instagram as a viable tool for artisans' trade emerges. Moreover, establishing the short-term impact of Instagram commerce on livelihoods can be a source of economic benefit to the artisans.

### 1.2 Research Question

1. How does Instagram commerce affect brand awareness of the artisans' products?
2. What is the likelihood of increased sales and a positive impact on livelihoods when using Instagram tools?

### 1.3 Research Objectives

This paper aims to understand if Instagram commerce is a viable alternative or supplement in creating sustainable livelihoods for local artisans. Specifically, this study will focus on:

1. Understanding the contextual factors that contribute to the success or failure of e-commerce among artisans in Ghana
2. Measure the effectiveness of Instagram commerce on brand awareness of artisans
3. Increase the economic benefit of Ghanaian artisans through Instagram commerce

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

Previous research has looked at the impact of social media on local artisans in different locations. However, the study looked at how this affected other marketing elements, such as brand equity and brand awareness but did not distinguish how these factors impacted artisans' livelihoods. Some research, which attempted to make this linkage, limited its scope to people who could potentially become teachers of their crafts. Moreover, there is little understanding of Instagram adoption in a country such as Ghana, with high mobile penetration but low internet connectivity (Meltwater, 2023). Moreover, there is a need to study individual social media platforms because although findings from other platforms can be generalised, the uniqueness of each service can impact the conclusions. Hence, the scope focuses on local artisans using Instagram to promote and sell their craft and understand how Instagram marketing may impact their businesses and can help other artisans.

## 2. Method

The Ashesi Design Lab (D:lab), in collaboration with Dr Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings, a member of parliament in Ghana for the Korle Klottey constituency, is training artisans at the Accra Arts Centre on Instagram commerce. The data for this research was obtained by studying this phenomenology. Within four months, over 40 artisans were sampled using stratified sampling. The artisans were from four sectors at the Accra Arts Centre: The Northern and Southern sectors, Textiles, and wood carvings. However, out of this sample, forty-two were chosen for the data analysis. The criterion used depended on whether the artisans had finished all the modules of the Instagram training and thus had a substantial knowledge of Instagram. Data was also obtained via interviews with the artisans and key stakeholders, including the Centre leaders and trainers of the D-lab project.

Additionally, observation of participants was used to monitor their receptiveness to the program. Furthermore, with the artisans' permission, their Instagram analytics were obtained and analysed to assess trends. Regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and the strength of these relationships.

A second data set was obtained 42 from artisans across Africa, that had used Instagram for more than a year, with a mean of four years, and had at least 500 followers. This was to gain external validity of insights gained from the first data set (Dion, 1998).

## 3. Results

For the Accra Arts Centre artisans, the multiple linear regression shows that the frequency of posts and the number of people an artisan follows have a statistically significant relationship with the number of followers. For the dependent variable 'frequency' ( $\beta = 33.67$ ,  $SD = 6.77$ ,  $P\text{-value} = 3.32e-06$ ), the results suggest that for every other post made, the number of followers increases by approximately 33.67 (holding other variables constant). Whereas for the dependent variable 'following', for every additional person the artisan follows, the number of followers decreases approximately by 1.09 (holding other variables constant). The p-value indicates the expected number of followers when the frequency of posts and the number of people followed are zero.

With the selected African artisans, the multiple linear regression also shows that the frequency of posts and the number of people an artisan follows have a statistically significant relationship with the number of followers. For the dependent variable 'frequency' ( $\beta = 16.74$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ ,  $P\text{-value} = 1.44e-09$ ), the results suggest that for every other post made, the number of followers increases by approximately 16.47 (holding other variables constant). Whereas for the dependent variable 'following', for every additional person the artisan follows, the number of followers increases approximately by 0.19 (holding other variables constant).

#### 4. Discussion

The results from the Art Centre artisans show that the frequency of posts can increase the number of followers; however, following too many people can affect the number of followers. Conversely, the external validity from the dataset of the selected artisans showed that the more persons an artisan follows, there is a positive effect, although this is marginal. This positive effect is not surprising as the selected African artisans had been using Instagram for a mean of four years and therefore aligns with the concept of network centrality in social analysis network theory (Breiger, 2014). This concept propounds that persons with high network centrality are more likely to have more influence and, thus, gain more traction on social media. Therefore, the artisans using Instagram have gained a higher level of centrality and thus can either gain followers once they follow another or, at the very least, not lose followers. However, the Art Centre Artisans have not gained much centrality due to their recent Instagram onboarding, and it is possible that following other accounts instead has the reverse effect. However, this variable's marginality shows that it may not be the most important for artisans in the short term. However, both datasets show a strong linkage between the frequency of posts and gaining followers. Therefore, if an artisan would like to transform their livelihoods by gaining sales on Instagram, they should first possibly aim to gain brand awareness through frequent posting. However, from observation, other variables can play a role, such as the quality of the posts. From observation, the quality of the posts of the selected African artisans varied vastly, whereas they used hashtags, descriptive captions, and a variety of Instagram tools. These could also be factors that influence the difference in traction gained by these artisans (Tafesse and Wien, 2016), as opposed to the Art Centre artisans.

#### 5. Further Research

Further research should examine other independent and dependent variables to understand better Instagram's role in affecting artisans' livelihoods and improve generalizability. Moreover, an intermediary present in this research was the Digital Business Transformation Initiative, which could have impacted the artisans' usage and receptiveness to Instagram. Therefore, further research can explore this topic further, without intermediaries or using a different means for artisans onboarded to Instagram, to determine if the conclusions differ.

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