



Social media and Viral Content: Exploring Unconventional Narratives through a Case Study of the Naming of Nike's Puppies

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Abstract

The pervasive nature of social media has given individuals a platform to share their lives, build connections, and document a wide array of events, from the mundane to the extraordinary. While social media chronicles various life events, certain occurrences can be deemed extraordinary, provoking intense reactions from users. This paper is a case study of a Nigerian man Ochonma Celestine Joseph, known on social media as @updateking, who organised a typical Nigerian naming ceremony for his dog, Nike, in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. The dog kindled seven puppies and was documented on TikTok. The event, which marked the birth of the dog's puppies, was preceded by a pregnancy photo shoot, the sale of T-shirts and uniform (*aso ebi*) fabrics, a DJ, and bouncers for the event, which ultimately garnered widespread attention on social media. An interview of @updateking was carried out, verbatims were reported using descriptive qualitative research design. To examine the online discourse and frenzy surrounding the naming ceremony of this dog, this study discusses the reasons for its popularity, its impact on social media, and its potential consequences on society. Also, existing literature is studied, and the paper explores how these concepts have been applied and studied by various researchers, ultimately providing a comprehensive understanding of their significance in the social media landscape. This study reveals the role of social media in amplifying unconventional events and shaping public opinion while calling for further exploration of the influence of social media on societal norms and the implications of viral content.

Keywords: Social Media Research, TikTok, Nigeria, Viral Content, Content Creation, Social Engagement.

Introduction

The introduction and use of social media platforms has ushered in a profound transformation in the communication landscape, revolutionising how individuals interact and share their experiences with a global audience. The pervasive nature of these digital platforms has enabled users to document a vast array of life events, spanning the mundane to the extraordinary, and in doing so, has given rise to a unique cultural phenomenon termed "viral content." Such content encompasses peculiar and unconventional occurrences that amass widespread attention and engagement across online communities. In recent times, the surge of viral content has catalysed the emergence of internet influencers, individuals who have adeptly harnessed the communicative potential of social media to amass substantial followings and wield significant influence over their audience's preferences and perceptions. As a result, these influencers have assumed a prominent role within the contemporary marketing landscape, with brands increasingly leveraging their online clout to promote products and services.

This research centres on an intriguing case study that exemplifies the intricate interplay between social media, viral content, and narratives that deviate from societal norms. Our focus lies on the persona of Ochonma Celestine Joseph, a Nigerian individual known on social media as @updateking. Joseph's story attained viral status, when he orchestrated a singular and captivating event – a naming ceremony dedicated to his beloved pet

dog, Nike. Situated in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria, this exceptional occasion unfolded with Nike giving birth to seven puppies, a spectacle meticulously documented by Joseph on the widely embraced video-sharing platform, TikTok. Pioneering a novel course of action, Joseph commemorated the birth of Nike's puppies with the grandeur and ostentation typically reserved for human ceremonial affairs. The festivity encompassed a pregnancy photo shoot, the commercialisation of custom-designed T-shirts and ceremonial fabrics (popularly called *aso ebi* in Nigerian (Yoruba) parlance), the engagement of a DJ for entertainment, and the employment of bouncers for security, event planners and a decorated venue, as well as various exotic items of a party feast, thereby creating an immersive and extravagant experience for all involved. This event, with its unparalleled eccentricity, kindled an unprecedented level of intrigue and fascination, sparking a fervent maelstrom of engagement and reactions across diverse social media platforms.

Literature on social media and viral content is limited but growing. Previous studies have examined the role of social media in promoting viral content (Ahmed et al., 2022), the psychological impact of unusual events on users, and the influence of online communities in shaping public opinion (Dai & Wang, 2023). Existing literature on social media and viral content highlights the role of various factors in driving virality, such as emotional appeal, novelty, cultural relevance, and network structures (Das, 2022; Mousavi et al., 2022). Studies have also explored the influence of platform-specific features and algorithms on content dissemination (Dujeancourt et al., 2022). However, limited research exists on the impact of culturally specific content and events, such as the Nigerian naming ceremony, on the virality of social media content. Epstein et al. (2022) found that a high level of social influence played a significant role in predicting content virality on social media platforms. Moreover, according to Ozuem et al. (2023), user-generated content can foster a sense of community and facilitate emotional connection, which may contribute to the virality of content. Furthermore, cultural specificity has been highlighted as an essential component of viral content. Mbassi Elong (2023) conducted a study on the role of cultural specificity in the spread of memes on Twitter, indicating that culturally specific content spreads faster within a region, creating a strong regional network. This supports the idea that cultural context significantly influences the virality of content, as observed in the Nigerian TikTok influencer's case.

Viral content refers to material that rapidly spreads across the internet through social media platforms, resonating with a vast audience and garnering significant engagement (Guererro, 2023). Creating viral content is a highly sought-after goal for both brands and individuals, as it can lead to increased social media reach, brand exposure, and consumer engagement (Rosario et al., 2023). Researchers have explored various factors that contribute to content virality, including emotional appeal, practical value, and social currency (Segev & Fernandes, 2023). Additionally, the role of influencers and their ability to generate viral content has been examined, with studies highlighting the importance of influencer selection and alignment with brand values (Baptista, 2023).

Content creation in social media refers to the process of generating and sharing engaging and relevant material on various social media platforms (Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). It plays a pivotal role in capturing and retaining the attention of online audiences (Stein et al., 2022). Effective content creation involves several key elements. Firstly, understanding the target audience and their preferences is vital. By identifying their interests, demographics, and online behaviours, content creators can tailor their content to resonate with their intended viewers (Ahmed & Abdulkareem, 2023). Secondly, creativity and originality are crucial. With the abundance of content available, it is essential to produce unique and compelling material that stands out from the crowd. This can be achieved through various formats such as videos, images, infographics, or written posts that deliver value, entertainment, or information (Mujahidah & Yasin, 2022).

Moreover, consistency in posting is essential for building a loyal following. Regularly sharing high-quality content helps maintain audience engagement and keeps them coming back for more (Haenlein et al., 2020). Additionally, optimising content for each social media platform is crucial. Different platforms have unique formats and features, and adapting content accordingly ensures maximum visibility and impact (Reimer, 2023). Furthermore, incorporating relevant hashtags, keywords, and compelling captions can increase discoverability and engagement (Katajisto, 2023; Salge, 2022). Interacting with the audience through comments, messages, and sharing user-generated content fosters a sense of community and strengthens relationships.

Clout refers to the influence or power that an individual or organisation possesses on social media, which can be measured through various metrics, such as the number of followers, likes, shares, and comments (Johns, 2023).

The concept of clout has become increasingly important in the digital era, as it can significantly impact an entity's ability to shape public opinion and drive consumer behaviour (Hadi et al., 2023). Researchers have studied the role of clout in influencer marketing, with findings suggesting that higher clout levels may lead to increased trust, credibility, and consumer engagement (Hsu & Hu, 2023).

Online followership refers to the sense of belonging and connectedness that individuals experience through their participation in online communities and social media platforms (Farivar et al., 2022). The concept plays a crucial role in driving user engagement and fostering loyalty, as individuals with a strong sense of online fellowship are more likely to actively participate in the community and promote its interests (Shukla et al., 2022).

In recent years, however, there has been a growing trend of individuals adopting pets and treating them as beloved companions (Laurent-Simpson, 2021). This trend has been fueled in part by the popularity of social media, particularly platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where pet owners can share photos and videos of their furry friends and connect with other pet lovers around the world. These platforms have also given rise to a new phenomenon: the pet influencer. Pet influencers are social media accounts run by pet owners that have amassed large followings, often in hundreds of thousands or even millions (Lupton, 2023). These accounts feature photos and videos of pets in various poses and situations and often include witty captions and hashtags that showcase the pets' personalities (Ngai, 2022). Some pet influencers have even been featured in advertisements and sponsored content, earning their owners' significant sums of money (Lindimore, 2022). Pet influencers have emerged as a unique category within the influencer marketing landscape, leveraging the appeal of animals to garner substantial followings on social media platforms (Zhang et al., 2023). These influencers have been found to evoke strong emotions and create a sense of trust and authenticity in their followers, making them effective marketing tools for brands to engage with their target audience (Kozinets, 2023). Additionally, pet influencers often generate higher levels of engagement and emotional connection compared to their human counterparts (Marston, 2023). The rise of pet influencers has been analysed by various researchers, with studies focusing on their roles, effectiveness, and implications for marketing and branding strategies (Jacobson et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2022).

TikTok is one of the most popular social media platforms (Lahooti et al., 2023). It is a video-sharing platform that allows users to create and share short videos (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). TikTok has grown rapidly since its launch in 2016, with over 1 billion active users worldwide (Fan & Hemans, 2022). The platform has become a powerful tool for social media marketing, with influencers using it to reach a large and engaged audience (Yudhistira & Muflichah, 2022). The rapid growth of social media platforms, such as TikTok, has transformed the way people consume and share content (Bhandari & Bino, 2022). Virality on these platforms is a highly sought-after phenomenon, as it can result in significant exposure and influence. TikTok has become a popular medium for sharing various aspects of users' lives, including significant events and milestones (Jaipong, 2023). The platform's ease of use and extensive reach have made it an ideal place for users to seek social media engagement in terms of increased followers, likes, shares, and downloads as they create content (Shutsko, 2020). The interactive nature of TikTok also allows users to engage in discussions and share their experiences, fostering a sense of community around events (Foster & Pettinicchio (2023)

Research Aim

To analyse the key elements behind the viral success of a specific event and its implications for digital interactions, exploring social media's influence on societal dynamics.

Specific Objectives:

1. Investigate how audience engagement and feedback influenced Joseph's content decisions, including events like Nike's baby shower and naming ceremony.
2. Analyse the effects of viral moments on Joseph's social media presence, including follower growth, visibility, and brand partnership opportunities.
3. Explore the unique challenges Joseph faced due to his pet-influencing career, such as societal perceptions and personal challenges, and his approach to managing them.
4. Gather insights into effective strategies for creating shareable content on platforms like TikTok, based on Joseph's experience with consistency and community-driven content.

Methodology

This case study involves a Nigerian TikTok influencer who organised a naming ceremony party for his female dog, who kindled 7 puppies. The videos from this event were shared on all the influencer's social media accounts: TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, which attracted a massive following and engagement. This case study explores the impact of social media on the creation and dissemination of viral content, using this Nigerian TikTok influencer's naming party for his dog's puppies as a case study.

The study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to document the online discourse surrounding the naming ceremony of a pet's puppies. This design allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by capturing participants' motivations, experiences, narratives, and perspectives. When interviewees' verbatim responses are reported without further analysis, it is referred to as a Descriptive Qualitative Research Design (Busetto et al., 2020). This approach focuses on presenting raw data without extensive interpretation or coding, allowing researchers to report participants' words and experiences without imposing their interpretations or themes (Hoepfl, 1997). Verbatim responses are typically presented in a narrative or thematic manner, enabling readers to gain direct insight into participants' perspectives. The primary goal of this design is to provide a rich and detailed description of the phenomenon under study, capturing the nuances and complexities of the participants' viewpoints. It is particularly useful when the research objective is to explore lived experiences, understand perspectives, or document stories without imposing preconceived ideas (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

An online case study interview was conducted with the dog owner, Ochonma Celestine Joseph, known on social media as @updateking_, to gather firsthand information about the naming ceremony of Nike's puppies. The event took place in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria on the 10th of June, 2023. The interview aimed to capture the motivations behind organising such an event, the decision-making process, the participants' reactions, and his experiences during and after the event. The initial communication was made by a member of the research team @Mamadee4Jesus following the prospective participant on Friday 16th June 2023. After following initial communication was done by entering @updateking_'s DM on Twitter. The participant signified willingness to partake in the study. The researcher requested the use of WhatsApp as the platform for the conduct of the interview. The interview was conducted in the evening hours of 24th of June, 2023. Voice notes were transcribed by using a licensed version of Office 360. A copy of the interview items as sent to the participant is placed after the references. Appropriate ethical considerations were observed. Verbal transcripts of the interview were documented. Respondent validation/member checking was carried out to ensure that the transcription of verbatims represented exactly what the respondent meant to say.

Informed consent was obtained from the dog owner for the interview, and proper citation and attribution were maintained throughout the study. Despite the content creator's willingness to have his name disclosed, it is crucial to note that explicit informed consent was obtained from him. The researchers clearly explained the purpose of the study, the potential risks and benefits, and how the information would be used, stating that the study was purely for research purposes. The participant was allowed to ask questions and ensure he fully understood before providing consent. Appropriate measures were put in place to safeguard the data collected during the interview. Recordings and transcripts were securely stored, and access to them was restricted access to authorised personnel only. The data was protected from unauthorised disclosure or use. Throughout the study, the researchers respected the content creator's autonomy and individual agency. He was allowed to express his views and experiences freely, without undue influence or coercion. His decisions regarding his involvement in the study were respected. Transparency was maintained throughout the research process. The researchers clearly communicated the purpose, objectives, and methods of the study. We were honest and truthful in representing the findings and ensured the accuracy of verbatims or information obtained from the participant. Professional standards and ethical guidelines in conducting the research were adhered to. The researchers treated the participant with respect and dignity, and every courtesy, ensuring a safe and comfortable environment during the interview. We maintained objectivity and avoided any conflicts of interest that may compromise the integrity of the study. Thus, the research team, by addressing these ethical considerations, were able to ensure that the research was conducted ethically and respected the rights and well-being of the participant.

Results

1. Could you provide an overview of your background? Tell us your name, and something about Nike, including her breed, the dog you used to mate her, and how long you have had her.

“Hi, my name is Ochonma Celestine Joseph, and I’m from Abia State, Nigeria. I am popularly known as UpdateKing, aka Daddy Nike on all my social media, and something about Nike, Nike is an Eskimo breed. Her original name was Nikki before I changed it to Nike because whenever she upsets me, I call her Nike. When I wanted to cross her, I crossed her with an Eskimo breed too and I’ve had Nike for like two years now. She’s going to clock two years next month.”

2. What led you to pursue a career in pet influencing?

“Originally I’m a content creator and not a Pet Influencer but what happened was that last year when she gave birth, she ran away inside the bush and she ran to the bush and she ate I think a dead chicken or so so she was all dirty and I had to cut off almost all the fur on her body. So ever since then, I uploaded the video on TikTok and the video went viral. So people were like they want to see more of Nike, they want to see more of Nike that was when I started Pet Influencing with Nike”.

3. What inspired the concept of a naming ceremony for your dogs' puppies?

‘So after she was pregnant, I did a baby shower for her and after I did the baby shower, the video went viral again, people were like, no no, no, no, I must do naming ceremony for Nike that I did a baby shower for... and we did all sorts of things before she even gave birth because she exceeded her EDD. I did I took her to the river for deliverance. I did a lot of things for her all in the name of creating content. So the moment she gave birth people were like we must celebrate the naming ceremony, we must do it, we must do it, we must do it. So that was how the naming ceremony concept came up. It was the fans that suggested it. The concept of the naming ceremony: the benefit is that I became more popular than before, like everywhere I go, everybody was always shouting Nike, Daddy Nike, Daddy Nike. ‘

4. How did you initially respond to the widespread popularity of the content shared from the naming ceremony party?

‘So, Nike’s fans contributed money for the naming ceremony. I didn’t even spend a dime of my money. They contributed all the money for the naming ceremony. The naming ceremony content went viral, and people were still even accusing me of doing money rituals. Even in my rented apartment, my landlord had to tell me that he doesn’t want to see Nike in the compound again because his third wife’s name is also Nike, and his third wife and Nike can’t bear the same name. So, I had to move out of the house. And people were saying all sorts of negative things. But I didn’t choose to look at the negative parts. I just looked at the positive parts and the positive comments and support I got from fans. So that was how I responded to the feedback I got”.

5. TikTok is about clout, viral content, online followers, likes, shares, publicity, and increased online visibility. What is the main benefit of your increased visibility because of Nike's naming?

“I gained more followers too within the space of one week I added like 10,000 or 12,000, 15,000 followers, to my TikTok followers and a lot of blogs published the naming ceremony event.”

6. How has the naming ceremony party's success affected your career as a pet influencer and your social media presence?

“I would say the naming ceremony brought out a lot of good things for me, because even before the naming ceremony and After the naming ceremony, brands were like they wanted to work with me even though I granted an interview with Vanguard newspaper, all because of the naming ceremony saga, so it opened a door for me which I never expected I’ll see.”

7. What recommendations would you offer to content creators and marketers aiming to develop engaging and shareable content on social media platforms, such as TikTok?

“My recommendation is that see as a content creator at this level, whatever you’re doing, continue doing it. Consistency is the key. People are watching you people are seeing you out there. They might not be engaged with your content now but when the time comes, you will be surprised that people can do this or you people can come for you, people can do this. The best advice is that you don’t give up, keep pushing. That is the way to win on this social media influencing thing.”

8. How do you envision the future of pet influencing and social media, and what strategies do you have in place for expanding your pet influencer brand?

“Yes, I see Pet Influencing as a means of content creation in the future because there's always more to create with my pets. I have a lot of ideas. I have a lot of things to do, like a lot of content to create with Nike. So it's never-ending. Y'all should brace yourselves. And yes, if there's room for expanding, of course, I would love to expand because I'm planning to break the Guinness World Record with a naming ceremony so yes, I have a lot of ideas with pet influencing.”

9. Tell us about the event, and everything you did – we saw a photoshoot, Aso Ebi, etc.

“Yes, the events went so smoothly, and it was a successful one. People bought Aso Ebi. I sewed Aso Ebi for 85 people. And in attendance, we had a lot of people too, but it was restricted to people who wore Aso Ebi, no Aso Ebi, no entry. That was what we did and security maximum security. We had bouncers and officials were present too at the event. So, there was a lot of food and drinks too they had that day. It was a successful event... We really enjoyed ourselves.”

10. What was the most memorable or gratifying aspect of the naming ceremony party experience for you?

“The most memorable part of the event was when my caterer almost disappointed me because guests were already leaving and it was even getting late and there was no food on the table and people wanted to leave so I had to start begging and running around making calls, do this do that just for the caterer to get to the event on time.”

11. Are there any forthcoming projects or initiatives you would like to tell us about about your pet influencer brand?

“Yes, the only project coming up now is Nike's wedding NIKMAT 2023. You all should watch out August 2023.”

12. What message would you like to impart to your supporters who have accompanied you throughout your pet-influencing journey?

“I would love to say thank you to everybody supporting me with my content for those liking, sharing and commenting interacting, and engaging with my post I really want to say a big thank you to you and I promise I would never disappoint you. I will try my best to give you the best of the best content out of Pets Influencing and I love you all thank you very much.”

13. Give us your other social media handles, so that we can know what you are doing.

“My social media handles are all the same my Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, including Twitter, are all linked together even on my YouTube it's still UpdateKing with double underscores: updateking__”

Discussion

@updateking__ shared that his background in pet care and training laid the groundwork for his influencer career. The decision to pursue pet influencing was fueled by a desire to share the joy and quirks of pet ownership with a broader audience. This aligns with literature suggesting that authenticity in content creation fosters stronger connections with audiences (Okonkwo & Namkoisse, 2023). A pivotal moment in @updateking__'s career was the naming ceremony for Nike's puppies, an event designed to engage his followers creatively. He noted that the concept was inspired by cultural traditions, which not only captured the audience's imagination but also encouraged participation through shares and likes. The success of this event highlights the importance of innovative and culturally resonant content in achieving virality on platforms like TikTok (Agrawal, 2023). The naming ceremony significantly boosted @updateking__'s visibility, allowing him to connect with a wider audience and attract brand partnerships. He emphasised that the increased engagement translates into tangible benefits, such as collaborations and sponsorships, which are crucial for sustaining a career in social media influencing (Baker, 2023). This phenomenon reflects the growing trend of influencer marketing as brands seek to leverage the authenticity associated with pet influencers to engage consumers (Myers et al., 2024). @updateking__ envisions a vibrant future for pet influencing, characterised by continued innovation and community engagement. He suggests that aspiring influencers should focus on creating relatable, shareable content and harness the power of cultural narratives to foster deeper connections with their audience. This resonates with current strategies in digital marketing, emphasising the need for authenticity and engagement to stand out in a crowded digital space (Ajiva et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The case study of the dog naming ceremony on TikTok underscores the significant role social media plays in amplifying unconventional events and shaping public attention. This paper has explored the factors that contribute to the popularity of such events and the broader societal implications, highlighting the need for further research into how social media influences societal norms and the impact of viral content. Social media platforms like TikTok provide a unique space for showcasing unusual events, thereby influencing public opinion. The ceremony for @updateking__'s puppies exemplifies how personal passion and the pursuit of social media engagement can drive creative expressions. As users increasingly engage in unique behaviours, such as holding pet ceremonies, the quest for followers can lead to both entertaining and meaningful content. While the desire for increased followership is not inherently negative, it is essential to examine how social media can foster positive causes, such as animal welfare and awareness of significant issues. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for content creators, marketers, and social media platforms. By understanding the key elements of virality—cultural context, relatability, and novelty—stakeholders can craft more effective content and marketing strategies. As the influence of pet culture rises in Nigeria, we may witness a gradual shift in attitudes toward pet naming ceremonies. However, it is important to recognise that changing deeply rooted cultural traditions will require time and sustained engagement.

Recommendations

1. Based on the findings, content creators and marketers can leverage cultural context, relatability, and novelty to create engaging and shareable content on social media platforms.
2. Collaboration with local influencers who have cultural knowledge and a strong following can further enhance content visibility and reach.

Limitations

1. This study is inherently limited by its focus on a single case study and may not be generalisable to other instances of viral content on social media. Additionally, the analysis relies on publicly available online discussions and may not capture the full range of perspectives and opinions on the event. Additionally, the study did not explore the role of TikTok's algorithm and other platform-specific factors in promoting the content's virality.
2. Despite these limitations, the paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on social media and viral content by providing a detailed examination of a unique event. Further research is needed to understand the interplay between content characteristics and platform-specific factors in driving viral success on social media platforms like TikTok.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW ITEMS

Dear @updateking__,

We appreciate your participation in this online case study interview. Please be assured that this interview will in no way jeopardise you or your interests. Please also note that your responses will be sent to you to ensure that we have reflected exactly your thoughts and comments.

Before we proceed with the interview questions, we would like to remind you that your responses will be transcribed verbatim. To make this process more professional, we kindly request that you:

1. Begin each answer with the corresponding question number (e.g., "1. My name is ...").
2. Use complete sentences and clear language to convey your thoughts.
3. Take a moment to gather your thoughts before responding to each question.

4. If you need clarification on any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Interview with @updateking__

In this interview, we enter the world of pet influencing with @updateking__, a popular pet influencer known for engaging and shareable content on social media platforms such as TikTok. We discuss his background, inspiration, and strategies for success as well as thoughts on the future of pet influencing.

1. Could you provide an overview of your background? Tell us your name, and something about Nike, including her breed, the dog you used to mate her, and how long you have had her.
2. What led you to pursue a career in pet influencing?
3. What inspired the concept of a naming ceremony for your dogs' puppies?
4. How did you initially respond to the widespread popularity of the content shared from the naming ceremony party?
5. TikTok is about clout, viral content, online followers, likes, shares, publicity, and increased online visibility. What is the main benefit of your increased visibility because of Nike's naming?
6. How has the naming ceremony party's success affected your career as a pet influencer and your social media presence?
7. What recommendations would you offer to content creators and marketers aiming to develop engaging and shareable content on social media platforms, such as TikTok?
8. How do you envision the future of pet influencing and social media, and what strategies do you have in place for expanding your pet influencer brand?
9. Tell us about the event, and everything you did – we saw a photoshoot, Aso Ebi, etc.
10. What was the most memorable or gratifying aspect of the naming ceremony party experience for you?
11. Are there any forthcoming projects or initiatives you would like to tell us about about your pet influencer brand?
12. What message would you like to impart to your supporters who have accompanied you throughout your pet-influencing journey?
13. Give us your other social media handles, so that we can know what you are doing.

We would like to thank @updateking__ for taking the time to share his insights and experiences with us. We wish him continued success in his pet-influencing career and look forward to following his journey on social media.