

# Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Marketing in Kenya: Might Word-of-Mouth Communication be the Critical Driver?

Fredrick Onyango Aila\* 

Department of Business Administration, Maseno University

## \*Corresponding Author

Fredrick Onyango Aila, Department of Business Administration, Maseno University, Kenya.

Submitted: 2026, Apr 10; Accepted: 2026, May 01; Published: 2026, May 22

**Citation:** Aila, F. O. (2026). Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Marketing in Kenya: Might Word-of-Mouth Communication be the Critical Driver?. *Curr Trends Business Mgmt*, 4(2), 01-08.

## Abstract

The Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BOP) market represents a substantial yet underserved segment of consumers in Kenya, characterized by low income, high price sensitivity, and reliance on informal networks. Traditional marketing approaches focusing on mass media and formal advertising often fail to generate sustained adoption and loyalty among these populations. This literature review synthesizes existing research on BOP marketing globally and within Kenya, with a particular focus on the role of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication as a potential primary driver of consumer behavior. The review identifies key mechanisms through which WOM influences adoption, including trust and credibility, social learning, network density, and emotional attachment. Additionally, it examines the interaction between WOM and formal marketing channels, and the emerging role of digital amplification through mobile platforms. Empirical evidence from Kenyan urban and rural BOP markets, including case studies such as M-Pesa, Kaskazi Network Ltd, and low-cost health interventions, demonstrates the centrality of WOM in driving product awareness, adoption, and loyalty. The review concludes by highlighting gaps in the literature, including the need for longitudinal, empirical, and cross-cultural studies, and offers implications for marketers and policymakers seeking to design effective, socially responsible strategies for engaging Kenya's BOP consumers. Overall, the findings suggest that leveraging WOM, integrated with affordability, accessibility, and appropriate digital tools, can significantly enhance marketing effectiveness in low-income contexts.

**Keywords:** Bottom-of-the-Pyramid, Word-of-Mouth, Marketing Strategy, Kenya, Consumer Behavior, Digital Amplification

## 1. Introduction

The Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) concept, first popularized by, identifies the largest socio-economic segment globally, consisting of low-income populations that together represent significant market potential [1]. While individuals in this segment may earn limited income per day, often below the international poverty line, the collective market size is substantial, offering opportunities for both social impact and profit. The BOP framework challenges conventional marketing assumptions by emphasizing affordability, accessibility, and social inclusivity rather than solely profit maximization. As asserts, businesses that successfully design products and services tailored to the needs of low-income

consumers can unlock previously untapped markets while contributing to social development goals [2]. Kenya exemplifies a context in which BOP marketing strategies can be particularly impactful. According to approximately 36% of the population lives below the national poverty line, with significant portions residing in urban informal settlements, such as Kibera and Mathare, and in rural areas with limited access to formal markets [3]. The BOP population in Kenya exhibits specific characteristics: limited disposable income, reliance on informal employment, strong community-based social structures, and high sensitivity to trust and recommendations from familiar sources. These characteristics imply that traditional mass-marketing strategies, heavy reliance

---

on formal advertising, large-scale retail distribution, or digital campaigns, may not be sufficient to stimulate adoption and brand loyalty among BOP consumers [4].

Traditional approaches to BOP marketing emphasize three main pillars: affordability, availability, and awareness. Affordability often involves product redesign, such as offering smaller package sizes (sachets) to reduce the upfront cost barrier, while availability addresses the logistical challenge of reaching dispersed populations through innovative distribution channels like micro-retailers, mobile vendors, or bicycle-based delivery networks. Awareness strategies typically include community outreach, local radio campaigns, and occasionally partnerships with governmental or non-governmental organizations to disseminate product information. However, despite these innovations, the unique socio-cultural dynamics of Kenyan BOP communities suggest that word-of-mouth (WOM) communication may serve as a critical, if underappreciated, driver of consumer adoption and brand loyalty. Word-of-mouth, defined as informal, interpersonal communication about products or services, has been widely recognized as a potent influence on consumer behavior. In contexts where formal advertising reach is limited or consumer trust in formal institutions is low, WOM can shape perceptions of product quality, credibility, and value [5,6]. In BOP markets, where consumers often rely on community networks and peer recommendations for decision-making, WOM may not simply complement traditional marketing but act as a primary mechanism through which brand awareness, trust, and loyalty are established [7]. WOM's effectiveness is reinforced by social identity and relational theories, which suggest that individuals are influenced strongly by people they perceive as similar, trustworthy, or part of their community [8].

The purpose of this review is to synthesize extant literature on BOP marketing in Kenya, with a focus on the potential role of WOM communication as a critical driver. The review seeks to: (1) examine theoretical frameworks that explain WOM's influence on consumer behavior at the BOP; (2) explore empirical evidence of BOP marketing strategies in Kenya and comparable African markets; (3) analyze mechanisms through which WOM affects brand credibility, emotional attachment, and loyalty; and (4) identify research gaps for future investigation. By integrating insights from both global and Kenyan contexts, the review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how marketers and policymakers can leverage WOM to enhance engagement with BOP consumers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Marketing Theory

The BOP market challenges traditional assumptions of consumption and marketing by emphasizing the intersection of profitability and social development. Argue that companies focusing solely on middle- and high-income segments overlook the purchasing power of low-income populations [1]. Despite individual low purchasing power, the collective BOP market is substantial and can support profitable business models if firms adopt innovative strategies tailored to affordability, distribution, and product relevance.

## 3. Characteristics of BOP Consumers

BOP consumers exhibit several distinctive characteristics that shape their responses to marketing interventions. Firstly, price sensitivity is a defining feature: purchases are often highly deliberated, and incremental cost differences can significantly affect adoption decisions [2]. Secondly, BOP consumers frequently operate within informal economies, relying on daily cash income, local trade networks, and community-based micro-retailers. Thirdly, literacy and media access may be limited, restricting the effectiveness of mass media campaigns and requiring alternative communication channels for awareness and persuasion [9]. Fourthly, trust and social influence are paramount; community norms and peer recommendations heavily shape perceptions of product quality and brand credibility [7,10].

In the Kenyan context, these characteristics are particularly pronounced. Urban informal settlements like Kibera feature tightly-knit social networks in which micro-retailers (kiosk owners), community leaders, and local entrepreneurs act as key information nodes. In rural regions, social cohesion within villages and reliance on community-based lending and trading systems amplify the importance of relational and peer-based communication [4]. Consequently, marketing strategies that leverage social trust and interpersonal influence may outperform traditional media-centric campaigns in achieving adoption and loyalty.

### 3.1. Strategies for Reaching BOP Markets

Marketing to BOP consumers involves a combination of product innovation, distribution, and communication strategies. Affordability is often achieved through small packaging, low-cost materials, or flexible payment options. For instance, sachet marketing, selling single-use portions of products like shampoo, detergent, or beverages, is a widely adopted practice in Kenya and other African BOP markets [4]. Availability is addressed through innovative distribution channels, including bicycle-based delivery networks, door-to-door sales, and partnerships with local micro-retailers, which help circumvent the limitations of formal retail infrastructure [11]. Awareness campaigns may involve local radio, community events, word-of-mouth networks, and increasingly, mobile-based platforms like WhatsApp for information dissemination.

Several studies highlight that distribution and accessibility are interdependent with WOM effectiveness. For example, note that in rural BOP markets in India, WOM had a more substantial influence on consumer adoption when products were easily accessible through local retailers [7]. Similarly, in Kenya, informal social networks interact with local micro-retailers to reinforce peer-to-peer recommendations, suggesting that effective BOP marketing requires an integrated approach that combines product affordability, accessibility, and social communication channels.

### 3.2. Kenyan BOP Marketing Context

In Kenya, BOP marketing has evolved to address the twin challenges of income volatility and limited infrastructure. Companies like Kaskazi Network Ltd have implemented bicycle

---

sales representatives to reach dispersed communities, ensuring that products are not only known through WOM but physically available for purchase [11]. The widespread adoption of mobile money platforms, particularly M-Pesa, has further expanded market access, allowing low-income consumers to engage in cashless transactions, sometimes coordinated through community networks [12]. Despite these innovations, adoption and sustained loyalty often hinge on trust and interpersonal influence, underscoring the centrality of WOM in the Kenyan BOP context.

### 3.3. Word-of-Mouth Communication: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has been extensively studied in consumer behavior literature. Originally defined WOM as informal, person-to-person communication about products or services, noting its potential to influence purchasing decisions, brand perceptions, and loyalty [5]. WOM can be classified as organic or amplified, and positive or negative, each affecting consumer behavior differently. Organic WOM emerges spontaneously from consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, whereas amplified WOM is intentionally facilitated by marketers through referral programs, community events, or influencer campaigns [6].

### 4. Theoretical Underpinnings

Several theoretical frameworks explain why WOM exerts a powerful influence, particularly in low-income contexts:

- **Social Influence Theory:** Suggests that individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are shaped by observing or interacting with others, especially those perceived as credible or similar [13]. In BOP markets, peer recommendations often carry more weight than formal advertising due to social validation and perceived authenticity.
- **Social Identity Theory:** Posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group memberships [8]. Products endorsed by in-group members (e.g., neighbors, friends, community leaders) are more likely to be adopted because they signal conformity with social norms and strengthen group identity.
- **Commitment–Trust Theory in Marketing:** Emphasizes that trust and commitment between consumers and brands facilitate relational exchanges, increasing loyalty and repeat purchasing [14]. WOM fosters trust by transmitting personal experiences and credible information, thus enhancing both perceived brand credibility and emotional attachment. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): Suggests that in contexts with limited exposure to formal advertising or low literacy, consumers may rely on peripheral cues, such as peer endorsements, to make purchasing decisions [15]. WOM provides such cues through interpersonal persuasion and testimonial evidence.

In the Kenyan BOP context, these theories converge to suggest that WOM may serve as a primary mechanism for brand adoption. Given the high reliance on community networks and informal social structures, information shared through trusted peers may be more persuasive than conventional advertising.

### 4.1 Word-of-Mouth in BOP Markets Globally

Word-of-mouth communication is widely recognized as a critical driver of consumer behavior in low-income markets, especially in regions where formal advertising penetration is limited and trust in institutions may be variable. Research across emerging markets demonstrates that WOM influences not only initial product adoption but also ongoing brand loyalty and community-level dissemination of information [5,7].

### 4.2 WOM and Adoption in Low-Income Markets

In India, studies on microfinance products and affordable consumer goods show that WOM is a primary mechanism through which BOP consumers evaluate new offerings. Report that in rural Indian villages, consumers rely heavily on peer recommendations to assess the credibility, utility, and quality of products [7]. Similarly, in Nigeria, research indicates that informal networks, often mediated by market associations and community leaders, amplify WOM, thereby enhancing trust and reducing perceived risk associated with adopting new products. These studies suggest that WOM is particularly effective when:

- **Formal Advertising is Limited:** In regions with low literacy or low access to mass media, interpersonal communication becomes the main source of product information.
- **Products Carry High Perceived Risk:** BOP consumers often make high-stakes decisions relative to their income, so they rely on trusted recommendations to minimize uncertainty.
- **Social Networks are Dense:** Tight-knit communities, often observed in rural or informal urban settings, facilitate rapid information diffusion through WOM.

### 4.3 Amplification of WOM

Marketers in BOP contexts have begun intentionally amplifying WOM through structured programs, such as referral incentives, community demonstrations, or the use of local influencers. For example, Coca-Cola's distribution strategy in Africa relies on local micro-distributors who serve both as sellers and as WOM conduits, providing firsthand recommendations about product quality and use [9]. In India, Hindustan Unilever successfully employed "Shakti Ammas," local women entrepreneurs, who directly sell products in their villages and simultaneously generate WOM among community members, resulting in substantial increases in adoption and retention [16].

### 4.4 WOM and Brand Loyalty

Beyond adoption, WOM also fosters emotional attachment and loyalty. In low-income contexts, where repeat purchasing requires significant allocation of scarce resources, trust in product performance and in the brand is critical. WOM contributes to loyalty by:

- Reinforcing satisfaction through social validation
- Creating peer accountability for brand choice
- Facilitating shared narratives around product use, which can enhance perceived value

In Uganda, a study on low-cost water purification solutions demonstrated that households were more likely to continue

---

purchasing and using products when positive WOM from neighbors emphasized reliability, health benefits, and affordability [17]. This underscores WOM's dual role in adoption and retention, making it an essential tool for marketers targeting the BOP segment.

## 4.5 Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Marketing in Kenya

### 4.5.1 Overview of the Kenyan BOP Market

Kenya's BOP market exhibits both opportunities and constraints that influence marketing effectiveness. The country has a substantial low-income population, with high reliance on informal employment, micro-enterprise activity, and community-based networks [3]. Urban informal settlements such as Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru house thousands of low-income households that face limited access to formal retail, irregular income, and constrained mobility. Rural populations, particularly in arid and semi-arid lands, contend with seasonal income variability and challenges in infrastructure and distribution. These conditions highlight the critical importance of trust, social influence, and peer communication in marketing to BOP consumers.

### 4.5.2 Empirical Evidence of BOP Marketing Strategies in Kenya

Several Kenyan companies have implemented innovative strategies to reach BOP consumers:

- **Kaskazi Network Ltd** – This company uses bicycle-based sales representatives to distribute consumer goods across urban informal settlements. Representatives act as both product suppliers and sources of WOM, explaining product benefits and building trust with households [11].
- **Safaricom's M-Pesa platform** – M-Pesa's adoption illustrates the power of social influence and WOM in low-income markets. Initial uptake in rural areas was slow until influential community members began demonstrating the platform's utility, encouraging adoption within their networks [18].
- **Unilever and Procter & Gamble** – Both companies utilize sachet packaging and micro-retail distribution channels to make products affordable and accessible. Sales agents often rely on personal interaction and peer recommendations to encourage trial, illustrating the integration of WOM into broader BOP strategies [9,16].

These examples highlight a recurring theme: distribution channels and WOM are intertwined, with informal vendors, community leaders, and micro-retailers serving as both points of sale and conduits of interpersonal communication.

## 5. Case Studies Demonstrating WOM in Kenya

### 5.1 M-Pesa Adoption

M-Pesa, Kenya's mobile money platform, revolutionized financial inclusion in the country. Studies indicate that WOM was a primary factor driving adoption, especially in rural regions. Early adopters influenced peers by demonstrating transaction ease, security, and convenience. Social learning reinforced adoption, as trusted individuals in each community acted as role models for others [12,18]. While marketing campaigns provided awareness, adoption in the BOP segment relied heavily on community-level

WOM networks.

### 5.2 Kaskazi Network Ltd

The company's success in distributing consumer goods to urban slums demonstrates how micro-retailers amplify WOM. Bicycle-based representatives engage with customers directly, explaining product use, collecting feedback, and encouraging repeat purchases. WOM spreads rapidly in these dense social networks, reinforcing product credibility and trust [11]. Kaskazi's model illustrates how interpersonal communication can overcome barriers related to literacy, media access, and skepticism toward formal marketing.

## 6. Low-Cost Health Products

Kenyan non-profits and social enterprises distributing low-cost health interventions, such as water purification kits or insecticide-treated bed nets, report similar findings. Adoption increases dramatically when trusted community members endorse the products, provide demonstrations, and address concerns. WOM is particularly influential in health-related purchases, where perceived risk is high and trust is paramount [17].

### 6.1 Integration of WOM into Kenyan BOP Marketing Strategies

Empirical evidence suggests that successful BOP marketing in Kenya requires strategically embedding WOM into overall marketing design. Mechanisms include:

- **Micro-Retailer Networks:** Small-scale vendors often serve as the initial point of interaction for consumers, generating WOM through product explanations, demonstrations, and follow-up interactions.
- **Community Leaders and Influencers:** Chiefs, religious leaders, and local elders can endorse products, lending credibility to brands and encouraging adoption through their networks.
- **Peer-to-Peer Demonstrations:** In contexts like health products or mobile services, direct demonstrations by early adopters generate organic WOM that is more persuasive than formal advertising.
- **Digital Amplification:** Mobile platforms, particularly WhatsApp, SMS, and social media, are increasingly leveraged to extend WOM beyond immediate physical networks, allowing low-income consumers to share recommendations and product experiences virtually.

Barriers to WOM effectiveness include product availability, cost constraints, and fragmented social networks. However, when affordability, accessibility, and trust are aligned, WOM emerges as a primary driver of adoption and brand loyalty among BOP consumers.

### 6.2 Mechanisms of Word-of-Mouth Influence in Kenyan BOP Markets

In Kenya's BOP markets, WOM functions through multiple mechanisms that shape consumer perceptions, adoption decisions, and loyalty. These mechanisms are closely intertwined with cultural norms, community structures, and economic realities.

---

## 7. Trust and Credibility

Trust is arguably the most critical factor driving WOM influence among low-income consumers. In informal settlements and rural areas, consumers often have limited experience with formal brands and may be skeptical of advertising claims. WOM mitigates this risk by providing credible, firsthand information from trusted sources. Studies in Kenyan informal settlements indicate that micro-retailers, family members, and neighbors are often perceived as highly reliable sources of product information because they have demonstrated authenticity and shared experience with the consumer [4].

Trust-based WOM facilitates several outcomes:

- **Risk Reduction:** Consumers are more willing to try products when a trusted peer endorses them.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Information about usage, maintenance, and potential issues is disseminated through interpersonal networks.
- **Brand Credibility:** Repeated positive recommendations reinforce perceptions of quality and reliability.

For example, in low-cost water purification programs, households adopted purification kits only after observing their neighbors successfully using them. WOM not only informed potential users but also reinforced trust in product effectiveness, resulting in higher uptake and continued usage [17].

## 8. Social Learning and Peer Modeling

Social learning theory posits that individuals learn from observing others' behaviors and their outcomes [19]. In BOP contexts, where formal education and advertising exposure may be limited, peer modeling becomes an important avenue for knowledge acquisition. Kenyan BOP consumers frequently rely on community demonstrations, household observations, and informal product trials to evaluate new offerings.

For instance, M-Pesa adoption studies highlight that early adopters functioned as peer models, showing neighbors how to conduct mobile transactions safely. Observers were more likely to adopt the service when they perceived positive outcomes for early users, illustrating that WOM operates not only as communication but also as a form of behavioral learning [18].

## 9. Network Density and Information Diffusion

WOM effectiveness is amplified in densely connected social networks, where information spreads rapidly and peer recommendations are reinforced through multiple sources. In Kenyan urban slums, tightly-knit community structures allow quick diffusion of both product knowledge and reputational signals. Network density is particularly important in informal markets, where micro-retailers, community-based organizations, and local associations serve as information hubs [11].

In rural regions, social cohesion, through extended family systems, village committees, or faith-based groups, creates natural pathways for WOM dissemination. Products endorsed by respected community members can rapidly gain acceptance, whereas those

lacking visible peer support may struggle to penetrate the market. These dynamics demonstrate that social network characteristics significantly moderate the effectiveness of WOM.

## 10. Emotional Attachment and Social Identity

Beyond functional information, WOM fosters emotional attachment and identity alignment with brands. Social identity theory suggests that consumers derive part of their self-concept from group membership [8]. Products associated with in-group approval signal conformity with social norms and enhance self-esteem. In Kenya, this mechanism is particularly relevant for aspirational BOP products, such as mobile phones, solar lighting solutions, and health-related goods. Positive WOM from peers validates consumer choices, reinforcing emotional satisfaction and increasing loyalty and repeat purchasing [7].

### 10.1 Interaction of WOM with Formal Marketing Channels

While WOM is critical in BOP markets, its effectiveness is enhanced when combined with formal marketing channels. Studies suggest that integration creates synergy between interpersonal and mediated communication.

### 11. Complementarity with Traditional Media

Even limited formal advertising can prime consumers for WOM interactions. Local radio programs, flyers, or mobile advertising can introduce a product, while WOM provides interpretation, validation, and contextualization. For example, FMCG companies in Kenya often broadcast product information via local radio stations but rely on micro-retailers to provide demonstrations and personalized recommendations, effectively bridging the gap between awareness and trial [4].

The combination of media and WOM addresses two key BOP constraints:

- **Awareness:** Media channels reach consumers who might not have direct exposure through peers.
- **Trust and persuasion:** WOM converts awareness into actionable adoption by leveraging credible social sources.

### 11.1 Feedback Loops and Product Refinement

WOM can also serve as a feedback mechanism for marketers, providing insights into consumer preferences, pain points, and product performance. Kenyan micro-retailers often share community feedback with distributors or manufacturers, enabling rapid adaptation to local needs. This creates a positive feedback loop in which WOM not only drives adoption but also informs ongoing product and marketing strategy [9].

### 11.2 Case Integration: M-Pesa and FMCG Products

- **M-Pesa:** Marketing campaigns raised initial awareness, but adoption relied heavily on peer demonstrations and household-level WOM. Digital promotions reinforced these behaviors, creating an integrated system of media and interpersonal communication [18].
- **FMCG Products:** Unilever and P&G's sachet-based products are distributed through micro-retailers who act as brand ambassadors, complementing limited radio or print

---

campaigns. WOM here translates awareness into tangible trial and repeat purchase [16].

## 12. Digital Amplification of WOM in Kenyan BOP Markets

The rise of mobile technology and social media presents new opportunities to amplify WOM among BOP consumers. Kenya has one of Africa's highest mobile penetration rates, and platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and SMS services facilitate rapid dissemination of peer recommendations.

### Mechanisms of Digital WOM

1. **Peer Sharing via Messaging Platforms:** Consumers share experiences, recommendations, and product usage tips through WhatsApp groups or SMS chains.
2. **Community Social Media Groups:** Platforms like Facebook groups for local communities serve as virtual extensions of dense social networks, allowing WOM to spread beyond immediate neighborhoods.
3. **User-Generated Content:** Low-cost smartphones enable consumers to create and share testimonials, photos, or videos demonstrating product benefits, reinforcing credibility through visual evidence.

Studies indicate that digital WOM retains key features of traditional WOM, credibility, trust, and social validation, while dramatically increasing reach and speed of diffusion [20]. In Kenya, fintech adoption (M-Pesa) and mobile health interventions have leveraged digital WOM successfully, particularly among youth and urban BOP consumers, who are both mobile-savvy and socially networked.

## 13. Implications for Marketers and Policymakers

Given the centrality of WOM in BOP marketing, several implications emerge:

- **Designing WOM-Integrated Marketing Strategies:** Marketers targeting BOP segments in Kenya should embed WOM into the core marketing design, not treat it as an ancillary activity. Strategies may include: training micro-retailers as brand ambassadors; engaging community leaders and early adopters as influencers; organizing product demonstrations and peer-led trial sessions; and encouraging digital WOM through incentivized sharing and community messaging platforms.
- **Leveraging Trust Networks:** Understanding local trust structures is essential. Companies must identify credible nodes, micro-retailers, respected elders, or community organizations, whose endorsement carries weight. Misalignment with these networks can result in ineffective messaging, low adoption, and even reputational damage.
- **Policy and Social Development Considerations:** Policymakers and development organizations can leverage WOM to advance social objectives such as financial inclusion, public health interventions, and energy adoption. By recognizing community trust networks and supporting peer-led dissemination, initiatives can achieve higher adoption rates and sustainability. For example: health campaigns for

immunization or sanitation may pair formal messaging with community peer educators. Additionally, microfinance or insurance adoption can rely on early adopters to demonstrate benefits, reducing perceived risk.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** To maximize impact, marketers and policymakers should track WOM flows, identify influential nodes, and measure adoption outcomes. Incorporating feedback mechanisms ensures continuous improvement and alignment with consumer needs [7].

### 13.1 Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Directions

Despite substantial progress in understanding BOP marketing and the role of WOM, several critical gaps remain, particularly in the Kenyan context. Addressing these gaps can guide both academic inquiry and practical marketing strategies.

- **Limited Empirical Studies on Kenyan BOP Consumers:** While global research demonstrates the effectiveness of WOM in BOP markets, empirical studies focusing specifically on Kenya are relatively scarce. Most insights are drawn from case studies or anecdotal evidence [11,18]. There is a need for systematic empirical investigations exploring: the relative influence of WOM compared to traditional advertising; adoption rates and repeat purchase behavior among Kenyan BOP consumers; and variation across urban informal settlements versus rural communities. Such studies would strengthen the evidence base for designing effective marketing strategies.
- **Longitudinal and Causal Research:** Much of the existing literature relies on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between WOM, adoption, and loyalty. Longitudinal studies could track: how WOM influences adoption over time; the persistence of loyalty generated through WOM; and how network dynamics and social influence evolve as products diffuse. Understanding these dynamics would enable marketers to predict adoption patterns and optimize WOM interventions.
- **Digital WOM in Low-Income Contexts:** The increasing penetration of mobile phones in Kenya introduces the potential for digital WOM amplification, yet research on its effectiveness among BOP consumers remains limited. Key areas for future research include: comparative effectiveness of digital versus traditional WOM; Impact of social media, WhatsApp, and SMS on adoption; and Barriers to digital WOM, such as limited internet access or digital literacy. This knowledge is essential for integrating technology into BOP marketing strategies without excluding digitally marginalized populations.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Much of the current understanding of WOM in BOP markets is drawn from India, Nigeria, and other emerging markets [7]. Cross-cultural research in Africa, particularly comparing Kenya to neighboring countries like Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, could: reveal cultural and social variations in WOM effectiveness; identify best practices transferable across contexts; and Inform regional marketing and development strategies. Such comparative studies could improve

---

generalizability and context-specific insights.

- **Integration of WOM with Formal Marketing Channels:** Although existing studies highlight the synergy between WOM and formal marketing, there is limited research on optimal integration strategies in BOP contexts. Future research could explore: how to sequence formal campaigns and peer-led interventions; the impact of multi-channel WOM strategies on adoption and retention; and cost-effectiveness of combining WOM with radio, SMS, and mobile marketing. Answering these questions would help marketers maximize the impact of constrained resources in low-income markets.

#### 14. Synthesis and Conclusion

This review synthesized literature on BOP marketing in Kenya, with a focus on the role of WOM communication. Key findings include:

- **WOM as a primary driver:** In Kenyan BOP markets, WOM is not merely complementary but often central to adoption and brand loyalty. Trust, credibility, and social validation within dense community networks make peer recommendations highly persuasive.
- **Mechanisms of influence:** WOM operates through trust, social learning, network density, and emotional attachment, enabling consumers to navigate risk, evaluate product quality, and reinforce social identity.
- **Integration with formal channels:** WOM is most effective when integrated with formal marketing interventions, such as radio campaigns, flyers, or digital promotions. This synergy enhances awareness, reinforces trust, and accelerates adoption.
- **Digital amplification:** Mobile technologies, particularly WhatsApp and SMS, provide avenues to extend WOM reach and speed up product diffusion, while preserving the credibility and relational trust that underpin traditional WOM.
- **Practical implications:** Marketers should embed WOM strategies into the core marketing design, leveraging micro-retailers, community influencers, and peer networks. Policymakers and development organizations can also harness WOM to achieve social objectives, such as financial inclusion, health interventions, and energy adoption.
- **Research gaps:** There is a pressing need for empirical, longitudinal, and cross-cultural studies on WOM in Kenyan BOP markets, particularly exploring digital amplification, network dynamics, and integration with formal marketing channels.

#### 15. Conclusion

This review highlights the centrality of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BOP) marketing in Kenya. BOP consumers, characterized by low income, reliance on informal networks, and high sensitivity to trust, often make purchasing decisions based on peer recommendations rather than formal advertising. WOM operates through multiple mechanisms, including trust and credibility, social learning, network density, and emotional attachment, to influence product adoption, repeat purchase, and brand loyalty. Integration with formal marketing channels, such as local radio or mobile campaigns, enhances

WOM effectiveness, while digital platforms provide opportunities for rapid and extended dissemination. Empirical evidence from Kenyan BOP contexts, including M-Pesa, micro-retailer networks, and low-cost health products, demonstrates that leveraging community networks and interpersonal influence is critical to successful engagement.

Despite these insights, significant gaps remain, particularly the need for longitudinal, empirical, and cross-cultural studies, as well as research on digital WOM in low-income contexts. Overall, the literature suggests that marketers and policymakers seeking to reach Kenyan BOP consumers must strategically embed WOM within their marketing designs, aligning affordability, accessibility, and trust-building mechanisms to maximize impact.

#### Take-Home Messages

- i. **WOM is central, not complementary:** In Kenyan BOP markets, word-of-mouth is often the primary driver of product adoption and brand loyalty.
- ii. **Trust and social networks matter:** Consumers rely heavily on recommendations from trusted peers, family, and community influencers.
- iii. **Integration enhances impact:** Combining WOM with formal media campaigns or mobile-based marketing amplifies awareness and adoption.
- iv. **Digital WOM is an emerging opportunity:** Mobile and social platforms can extend the reach and speed of WOM while retaining credibility.
- v. **Policy and social interventions benefit:** Health, financial, and energy programs targeting low-income populations can leverage WOM for higher uptake and sustained engagement.
- vi. **Research gaps exist:** Empirical, longitudinal, and cross-cultural studies are needed to optimize WOM strategies in BOP contexts.

#### References

1. Prahalad, C. K., & Hart, S. L. (2002). The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid. *Strategy and business*, 54-54.
2. Prahalad, C. K. (2005). The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid: Eradicating poverty through profits. *Wharton School Publishing*.
3. World Bank. (2023). Kenya poverty assessment 2023: Monitoring living standards and inequality. *World Bank Group*.
4. Gateru, J., Senaji, T. A., & Muturi, W. M. (2017). Relationship between affordability strategies and bottom of the pyramid market segment. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research*, 1(03).
5. Arndt, J. (1967). Role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *Journal of marketing Research*, 4(3), 291-295.
6. Brown, J., Broderick, A. J., & Lee, N. (2007). Word of mouth communication within online communities: Conceptualizing the online social network. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 21(3), 2-20.
7. Banerjee, S., & Sreejesh, S. (2022). Role of word-of-mouth communication in consumer brand relationship initiation

- 
- and maintenance: insights from the bottom of pyramid markets. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*.
8. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
  9. London, T., & Hart, S. L. (2004). Reinventing strategies for emerging markets: beyond the transnational model. *Journal of international business studies*, 35(5), 350-370.
  10. Tjizumaue, B. (2015). Buyer/Seller Relationship in the Services Sector at the Bottom of the Pyramid: A Commitment-Trust Theory Perspective. *International Journal of Innovation and Economic Development*, 9(5), 16-27.
  11. IMD Business School. (2020). Kaskazi Network Ltd – Distributing to the Bottom of the Pyramid (A). *Lausanne, Switzerland: IMD*.
  12. Nyimbiri, B. A. (2021). The impact of the mobile money on people’s use of financial services in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 9(1), 137-146.
  13. Kelman, H. C. (1961). Processes of opinion change. *Public opinion quarterly*, 25(1), 57-78.
  14. Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of marketing*, 58(3), 20-38.
  15. Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change. *Springer Science & Business Media*.
  16. Prahalad, C. K., & Hammond, A. (2002). Serving the world’s poor. *Harvard business review*, 80(9), 48-57.
  17. Gugerty, M. K., & Kremer, M. (2008). Outside funding and the dynamics of participation in community associations. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(3), 585-602.
  18. Jack, W., & Suri, T. (2011). *Mobile money: The economics of M-PESA* (No. w16721). National Bureau of Economic Research.
  19. Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1, pp. 33-52). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-hall.
  20. Cuesta-Valino, P., Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, P., & Garcia-Henche, B. (2022). Word of mouth and digitalization in small retailers: Tradition, authenticity, and change. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 175, 121382.

**Copyright:** ©2026 Fredrick Onyango Aila. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.