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SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND BRAND IMAGE OF ENERGY DRINK PRODUCERS IN PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates social media influencers and brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. The aim is to ascertain the relationship between social media influencers and brand image of energy drinks in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. Based on the research objectives, hypotheses were formulated and tested four hypotheses using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient and Partial Correlation. The population comprised of customers 6 energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. 226 copies of questionnaire were distributed. However, 210 were useful for the analysis. The findings revealed that social media influencers have a strong positive association with brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that, social media influencers have a strong positive and significant relationship with brand image of energy drink producers. The study therefore recommended that, energy drink producers should maintain the policy of aligning their brand position to reflect corporate image credibility strategies.

KEYWORDS

Social Media Influencer, Authenticity, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Reputation.



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Introduction

The media milieu of a given era has always been the determining factor when it comes to mass communication, group communication, organizational communication, and one-on-one communication. Before reaching the current pinnacle of internet-mediated communication, humanity have progressed through several levels of progressively more innovative media technologies. Media is one of the most pervasive aspects of modern life, resulting in a deluge of advertising opportunities and rising concerns about the need for efficient media-audience matching to minimize wasteful spend. According to Onwunali and Hussein (2017), media strategists have accepted the fact that, as a result of media fragmentation, groups of consumers and influencers on various social media platforms have usurped control from traditional media outlets such as television and radio. In the digital age of sensory excess, social skepticism, and increased individualism, the effectiveness of traditional advertising is declining, while online influencers have emerged as a potent commercial communication tool (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018). Their influence is due to the fact that their messages are actively solicited and ingested (unlike traditional advertising) (De Veirman et al., 2017). These influential individuals are distinguished by their ability to produce high-quality content, their prominence in their respective disciplines, and the size of their social media following.

Social media influencers are individuals who command a significant online following. They are frequently prominent members of the entertainment industry, such as musicians, sportsmen, performers, and directors. Followers may also find social media influencers to look up to in the domains of politics and other forms of leadership. Social media influencer marketing refers to the use of influential users in social media marketing campaigns. The researcher chose to model Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun (Wizkid), an African pop artist, as a social media influencer after observing his or her impact on African youth. His work has been so successful that Pepsi, Ciroc, and Nike have all become sponsors (Feshchuk, 2019). Wizkid also strolled the runway at a major Dolce & Gabbana fashion show in 2018 (Owoseje, 2019). Influencers' communications appear to originate from a "person like you or me" (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018), and are therefore more likely to be believed.

Energy drink producers often collaborate with social media influencers as a marketing strategy to promote their products and reach a wider audience. These partnerships can be mutually beneficial, as the influencers gain exposure and financial compensation, while the energy drink companies tap into the influencers' large and engaged follower bases.

Several studies have examined the correlation between social media influencers and brand perception. Social media influencers have little effect on customers' tendency to shop online, claim Halim and Karami (2020). The suggestions of individuals they follow on social media have a substantial impact on online buyers, according to study by Isyanto et al. (2020). According to studies conducted by Halim and Karami (2020), the impact of social media personalities on consumers' propensity to make purchases online is negative. According to research cited by Hermenda et al. (2019) and Nurhandayani et al. (2019), social media influencers' followers do not alter their plans to buy products online. In order to fill a vacuum in the literature, this study included gender as a moderating variable. In examining the impact that social media influencers in Port Harcourt have on the general public's opinion of energy drink producers, the researcher aim to embark on this study to ascertain how well social media influencer has impacted on brand image of energy drinks. In doing so, authenticity, attractiveness and trustworthiness were proxies of social media influencer employed to cushion the effect on reputation while gender moderate on both variables.

1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research aim was to ascertain the effect of social media influencer on brand image of energy drinks in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. While the specific objectives are to;

- 1) Examine the effect of influencer authenticity on brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State.
- 2) Ascertain the relationship between influencer attractiveness and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State.
- 3) Determine the effect of influencer trustworthiness on brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State.
- 4) Examine the moderating influence of gender on the relationship between social media influencer and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study extensively drew upon the theoretical frameworks of Status Conferral Theory and Social Influence Theory. The inclusion of the Status Conferral Theory serves as a significant framework within the context of this study. The first presentation of the concept occurred in 1948, as documented by Umeogu (2012). This phenomenon serves to enhance the social standing of individuals, cultures, and events that are prominently shown in media platforms. The fundamental concept of the theory is that the media serves to strengthen and promote certain cultural ideals, while simultaneously minimizing or eradicating variations or departures from those established norms.

The concept of a "social media influencer" may be elucidated by drawing upon the theoretical framework of Social Influence Theory (SIT). The primary concern of the social influence hypothesis, as proposed by Li (2013), is on the manner in which individuals within a social network are encouraged to engage in certain behaviours. Venkatesh and Brown (2001) suggest that social influence encompasses the deliberate endeavour to induce others to embrace certain actions via the transmission of persuasive messages and other means of persuasion.

Brand Image

As posited by Kotler and Keller (2012), an organization's identity refers to its outward portrayal to the public, whilst its image pertains to the perception held by the public towards the organisation. A brand encompasses several elements such as the company's name, logo, slogan, and other distinctive identifiers that are designed to leave a lasting impression on customers, hence fostering

Brand Reputation

Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) assert that an organization's reputation has significant value as an intangible asset. A person's reputation might be conceptualized as (1) the collective perception of the public towards them, (2) their current esteemed standing, or (3) a notable characteristic or trait for which they are recognized by others. According to Marken (2022), the recruitment, development, and retention of staff, utilization of corporate assets, and quality of management are key determinants that influence a company's total brand reputation.

Trustworthiness, favorability, and acknowledgement in relation to competitors are key components of a company's brand reputation.

2.3 Social Media Influencer

Following their successful establishment as credible figures in the realm of social media, individuals often referred to as "influencers" rapidly gained significant recognition and influence (Thursday et al., 2017). According to Lin et al. (2018), a significant number of social media users, mostly female, have gained a substantial following by establishing themselves as influencers who enthusiastically distribute user-generated content across many topics such as beauty, fitness, food, and fashion. Barker (2018) posits that the primary differentiating factor between influencers and celebrities is in the platforms they use to disseminate their message.

Relationship between Social Media Influencers and Brand Image

In the realm of influencer marketing, the use of both purchased and organic media sets it apart from conventional advertising and word-of-mouth practises (Hughes et al., 2019). Conventional advertising often encompasses many objectives, such as the establishment of brand equity, with the aim of increasing motivation. In contrast, influencers primarily prioritise strategies to augment the loyalty of their followers. Lou and Yuan (2019) conducted a study that revealed a positive impact of influencers' beauty, competence, and trustworthiness on consumers' brand awareness. A positive association was seen between a brand's credibility and its attractiveness, however no significant correlation was found with its competence, as perceived by its fan base. Sakib et al. (2020) shown that weight loss influencers' reputation, competence, and beauty had a positive impact on para-social engagement.

Influencer Authenticity and Brand Image

The concept of authenticity has been the subject of much contemplation and discourse among philosophers, ethicists, and critical academics. The concept of authenticity in relation to influencers pertains to the transparency and integrity of their material and brand collaborations. Authentic influencers priorities the inclusion of their own perspectives and experiences as the focal point of their content production.

According to Faleatua (2018), the Instagram branding process for young women may be characterized as a desire to project an image of authenticity, but not necessarily embodying it in a literal sense. This connection is fostered via the accumulation of shared experiences, emotions, personal narratives, and expectations. Consequently, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₁: There is no significant relationship between influencer authenticity and brand reputation of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Influencer Attractiveness and Brand Image

Limbu and Law (2020) assert that the term "attractiveness" pertains to the physical appearance and behavioural characteristics of an influencer. There is a higher likelihood that individuals will see an influencer as credible if they perceive them to possess physical attractiveness.

Erdogan (2009) provides a clear explanation for why consumers tend to have positive perceptions about influencers. The interpretation of the idea of beauty is often misconstrued. Nevertheless, this does not suggest a prioritization of physical attractiveness. Overall, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₂: There is no significant relationship between influencer attractiveness and brand reputation of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Influencer Trustworthiness and Brand Image

According to Erdogan et al. (2001), credibility encompasses the qualities of honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness that an influencer has. A correlation has been identified by researchers between the attainment of expert status and the level of credibility (Erdem&Swait, 2004). There exists a positive correlation between the perceived expertise of a celebrity influencer in a certain domain and the inclination of individuals to adhere to the influencer's recommendations. Trustworthiness is defined as the perception of honesty, reliability, and dependability in a source (Ohanian, 1990). The perceived legitimacy of a source also has a significant role in shaping individuals' reactions to it. As a result of this phenomenon, the prevalence of Instafamous individuals may create an impression among recipients that the originator has a greater capacity to substantiate and provide insights on the communicated material (Labrecque, 2014).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: There is no significant relationship between influencer Trustworthiness and brand reputation of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Gender as a Moderator

According to Wang et al. (2017), there is a suggestion that male and female internet users exhibit distinct communication and decision-making strategies. According to Chang (2016), empirical studies have shown that male users have a higher propensity for task-oriented behaviour compared to their female counterparts. The investigation of gender differences in decision-making processes among male and female internet users has been explored in previous studies (Chang, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). According to Eagly (1997), social role theory suggests that individuals tend to exhibit behaviours that align with the stereotypes associated with their gender. According to Chang (2016), males tend to use the internet more often for task-oriented purposes, while females exhibit a preference for engaging in social contact and maintaining relationships via online platforms. According to Lu et al. (2016), male internet users tend to have a greater inclination towards sharing job-related information as a means of showcasing their achievements in life.

Consequently, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₄: Gender does not moderate on the relationship between social media influencer and brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Empirical Review

Many empirical studies exist on Influencers in relation to brand Image and other related matters. Some of which have been considered in this study.

In their study, Klaus-Peter et al. (2021) raised the inquiry about the need of beauty, competence, and trustworthiness in influencers for the purpose of digital marketing endeavours. A comprehensive sample size of 288 individuals participated in an online survey with the purpose of evaluating the profiles of influencers who satisfied the specified criteria for the three aforementioned aspects. This study used structural equation modelling to investigate the impact of these factors on brand perception, brand loyalty, brand trust, and brand premium in relation to purchase intent and actual conduct. Based on the available data, it can be inferred that dependability emerges as the most crucial attribute, with physical attractiveness ranking second in importance. Curiously, technical expertise seems to have a very little impact.

Febby and Monika (2021) conducted a study examining the impact of online influencers and brand perception on customers' inclination to engage in online purchasing. The inclusion criteria for this study were adult females aged 18 and above who had knowledge of Maybelline products and were

followers of TasyaFarasya on the social media platform Instagram. Partial Least Squares (PLS) is used for the purpose of analysing the collected data from the participants. The present study uncovered no empirical support for the proposition that engaging with social media influencers would enhance the probability of a person engaging in online purchasing behaviour. Nevertheless, it is evident that customers are inclined towards engaging in online purchases when they possess a positive perception of the brand.

The study conducted by Santi et al. (2022) examined the impact of trustworthiness attributes shown by social media influencers on the purchase intentions of consumers belonging to Generation Z. The researchers' investigation was classified as an explanatory study. The present study used a purposive selection technique to choose a sample size of 210 participants. All participants were identified as members of Generation Z and were consumers of Korean cosmetic products in the country of Indonesia. The data is collected by the administration of questionnaires, and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is used for the subsequent analysis. Based on the results, it can be seen that the purchase intention of customers was notably influenced by the three distinct features of influencer credibility. The study conducted by Atika et al. (2019) examined the influence of brand perceptions on social media among cosmetics buyers, focusing on the effect on self-concept and purchase intentions. The research will use a cross-sectional methodology and gather data using online questionnaires distributed across various social media platforms. The method of convenience sampling would be used to gather the samples, with a potential sample size of up to 219 persons who would be approached to provide their thoughts. The approach of analysis utilised for this study was Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which was implemented using the SmartPLS software. The study revealed that both social media influencers and self-concept had a significant detrimental influence on purchase intent, whereas brand image exhibited a notable positive impact.

Arian et al. (2022) conducted a study to examine the variables of brand identification, brand perception, and trust in sponsored content. In order to conduct a statistical analysis on the effect of social media influencers, a set of hypotheses was formulated and a closed-ended questionnaire was given. A total of 327 responses were recorded for this investigation. Based on the research results, it can be seen that the level of brand awareness is favourably influenced by the perceived intrinsic characteristics of influencers. Additionally, the perceived extrinsic traits of influencers have a beneficial effect on both the brand image and the credibility of sponsored content.

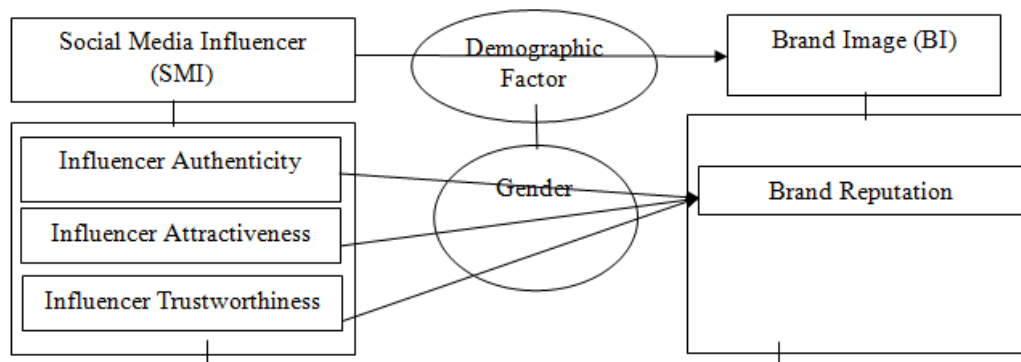


Fig 1: Operational Framework on social media influencer and brand image in Port Harcourt

Source: Research Desk; as adapted from Santi et al. (2022), Fombrum and Van Riel (2004)

Materials and Method

The present study used a cross-sectional survey technique, which is a quasi-experimental research strategy, to investigate the behaviour, opinions, or other observable manifestations within a selected sample group. The questionnaire methodology was used for this study. The population of this study includes all the players in energy drink production in Port Harcourt; however, our target population will be customers of these energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, who have been transacting with their carriers. See population table below:

Table 1: Table of Population

S/N	Name of Companies	Address
1.	Pabod Breweries Ltd	186/187 Trans Amadi Ind., Layout, Port Harcourt,
2.	Nigeria Bottling Co. Plc	Plot 126 Trans Amadi Layout, Port Harcourt
3.	Imco Int. Manufacuring Co. Ltd	Blk C3, Rumogba Obio Layout, Port Harcourt
4.	AC Commercial Agencies Nigeria Ltd	No 130, Aba Road, Port Harcourt
5.	Pinkyberry Frozen Yoghurt	44 Olu Obasanjo Rd, Iwoji, Port Harcourt
6.	Cold Stone Creamery Port Harcourt	44 Olu Obasanjo Rd, Elechi, Port Harcourt

Source: <https://www.Finelib.com-Nigeria Directory and Search Engine>.

The study adopts a non-probabilistic sampling to arrive at the sample size and a purposive sampling will be used in reaching out to the respondents. In order to establish the actual sample size of this study, the study adopted Freneund and William (2009) formula for determining infinite population. Based on this knowledge, two hundred and twenty-six (226) became our sample size in this study. The questionnaire was structured using a Five-Point Likert scale from SA=Strongly Agree (5), A=Agree (4), U=Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient and partial correlation was used to test if the independent variables are associated with the dependent variables alongside the moderating variable.

Results and Discussion

Two hundred and twenty-six (226) copies of questionnaire were distributed amongst the six drink producers in Port Harcourt. 210(93%) copies were accurately filled while the remaining 16(7%) contained certain inconsistencies, and thus not valid for analysis. Therefore, the analysis was based on 210 copies accurately filled.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 2: Influencer Authenticity and Brand Reputation

		Influencer Authenticity	Brand Reputation
Spearman's rho	Influencer Authenticity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	210
	Brand Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.898**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	210

The result shows that influencer authenticity has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with brand reputation at a rho = 0.898 and Pv = 0.000. The result presents influencer authenticity to have significant and positive impact on brand reputation. Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis one relating to influencer authenticity with brand reputation, because the Pv (0.000) <0.05 level of significance.

Table 3: Influencer Attractiveness and Brand Reputation

			Influencer Attractiveness	Brand Reputation
Spearman's rho	Influencer Attractiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.821**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	210	210
	Brand Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.821**	1.000**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	210	210

Evidenced from the result table shows influencer attractiveness to has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with brand reputation at a rho = 0.821 and Pv = 0.000. The result presents influencer attractiveness to have significant and positive impact on brand reputation. Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis two relating to influencer attractiveness with brand reputation, because the Pv (0.000) <0.05 level of significance.

Table 4: Influencer Trustworthiness and Brand Reputation

			Influencer Trustworthiness	Brand Reputation
Spearman's rho	Influencer Trustworthiness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.874**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	210	210
	Brand Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.874**	1.000**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	210	210

Evidenced from the result table shows influencer trustworthiness to has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with brand reputation at a rho = 0.874 and Pv = 0.000. The result presents influencer trustworthiness to have significant and positive impact on brand reputation.

Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis two relating to influencer trustworthiness with brand reputation, because the $P_v(0.000) < 0.05$ level of significance.

Table 5: Partial Correlation Analysis showing the Influence of Gender on the relationship between Social Media Influencer and Brand Image

Partial Corr.

Correlations			Social Media Influencer	Brand Image
Gender	Social Media Influencer	Correlation	1.000	.577
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000
		Df	0	208
	Brand Image	Correlation	.577	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.
		Df	208	0

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Decision: This table explained the moderating influence of gender on the relationship between social media influencer and brand image. Gender had a moderate but positive relationship with social media influencer and brand image at 0.577. Therefore, we accept the assertion that there is a moderating influence of gender on the significant relationship between social media influencer and brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Influencer Authenticity significantly and positively correlates with Brand Image

The results obtained from the analysis test revealed that the authenticity of influencers has a noteworthy effect on brand image and as such enhancing outcomes such as brand reputation. On this basis, the null hypothetical statements were rejected as the result revealed that there was a significant relationship between influencer authenticity and brand reputation. The result showed that social media influencer which involves influencer authenticity contributed towards the degree to which energy drink producers is able to adopt better competitive advantage to help in delivering of service and as well create good identity and positioning. This findings is in line with the work of Khamis et al. (2017), Djafarova& Rushworth, (2017).

The Effect of Influencer Attractiveness as a Social Media Influencer on Brand Image

This study demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between the attractiveness of social media influencers and the brand image of energy drink producers, as shown by a p-value of 0.000 and a direct effect coefficient of 0.821. These results provide support for the findings of Saeed and Bhatia (2014), which indicated that a majority of customers (55%) expressed agreement with the notion that endorsers representing certain brands should possess physical attractiveness. In a similar vein, the study conducted by Shimp and Andrews (2013) provides evidence to support the notion that the use of influencers with celebrity status enhances the overall value of a business. According to the study

conducted by Wang and Scheinbaum (2017), the presence of endorsers with a worldwide appeal and a high level of trustworthiness has a positive impact on consumers' views of the endorsed products. Based on a study conducted by Eren-Erdogm et al. (2016), it has been shown that the impact of attractive influencers, including both celebrities and individuals from the general population, on customers' evaluations and purchase intentions towards a particular brand is positive. Individuals that possess physical attractiveness are more likely to exert influence on others, so garnering heightened attention towards the endorsed product and ultimately driving sales.

The Effect of Influencer Trustworthiness as a Social Media Influencer on Brand Image

There is a strong and considerable association between the credibility of an influencer and the brand image of energy drink makers ($p=0.000$, direct effect coefficient=0.874). The study's results reveal that consumers' impressions of energy drink brands are impacted by the credibility of the influencers who support them; the higher the degree of trust in an influencer, the more positive the brand perception of the endorsed product. Consistent with earlier studies, Wang et al. (2017) revealed that only trustworthy celebrity personalities impact customers' inclination to make a purchase. Consistent with a follow-up study by Wang et al. (2017), we find that the legitimacy of celebrity endorsement has a beneficial influence on the likelihood to purchase cosmetics. Wei and Wu's (2013) study reveals that consumers' motivation to act is connected with the believability of an endorsement.

Gender significantly and positively moderates with social media influencer and brand image

Premised on table 5, it shows the moderating influence of gender on social media influencer and brand image. This means that energy drink producers should create a balance of cognition on customer's acceptance of their offerings.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, the study concludes that social media influencer is strongly and positively relates with brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, as social media influencer creates a means of attachment with management which leads to brand image that most times leads to brand reputation. Social Media Influencers have positive impact on the brand image of Energy drinks sold in Port Harcourt city

Recommendations

- 1) The producers of such drinks as Odogwu bitters, Red Bull and other energy drink producers, should continue to engage social media influencers like, Davido, Nyemar Jnr; Flavour (Musician), Obi Cubana etc.
- 2) Social media influencers with any kind of negative publicity should not endorse products.
- 3) Social media influencers, who possess expertise in the field of energy drinks, should influence energy drinks' as customers get influenced by such expertise level.

In order to mitigate negative publicity, it is essential for energy drink producers to closely monitor the online and offline activities as well as the reputation of influencers.

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