

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND BRAND IMAGE OF ENERGY DRINK PRODUCING FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study investigated social media influencer and brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.. The aim was to ascertain the effect of social media influencer on brand image of energy drinks in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. This study adopted quasi-experimental research design through cross-sectional survey research design. Based on the research objectives, hypotheses were formulated. The population comprised of customers 6 energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed. However, 367 were useful for the analysis. Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used in testing the hypotheses with the aid of SPSS version 23.0. The findings revealed that social media influencer has a strong positive association with brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that, social media influencer has positive impact on 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, Influencer's Authenticity, Influencer Attractiveness, Influencer Trustworthiness, Brand Image.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, media is one of the most vital factors in human existence, which has brought about lots of opportunities for advertisers. In this present digitization era, traditional advertising is gradually losing its relevancy and effectiveness, and online influencers have become a major aspect of marketing communication (Nirschl & Steinberg, 2018).

Social media influencers are individuals that have huge social media followers. These social media influencers are mostly celebrities in the entertainment industry, such as music, sports, movies or other genre of the industry. Social media influencers can also be seen in politics and other aspects of leadership of which they can have followers there as well. Using social media influencers in social media marketing activities is known as social media influencer. Social media influencers also act as the third party that recommends and describes a firm's products through use of social media contents, which could influence the consumers' opinions, behaviors, and attitudes towards patronizing a firm's product (Uzunoglu & Klip, 2014). Previous studies have been conducted regarding social media influencer and brand image. According to Halim & Karami, (2020) revealed in their study that social media influencers do not have a positive and significant influence on online customer purchase intention. Meanwhile, according to Isyanto et al., (2020) social media influencers positively and significantly influences online purchase intention. The inconsistency of the results from previous studies that resulted in differences Djafarova & Rushworth (2017); Liu et al. (2015); Linner, et al. (2018); Zhao, et al. (2016). To bridge the research gap, this study seeks to examine the effect of social media influencers on brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. Hence the aim of this study is to empirically examine the relationship between social media influencer and brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt.

Statement of the Problem

The use of technology is rapidly increasing, so are the marketing approaches that firms used to market their product or services. Energy drinks are becoming very popular among adults and growing youths and they are being consumed by these adults and youths. Despite how popular energy drinks are, fierce

competition in the industry has intensified in recent time, and most firms are encountering poor patronage and low sales.

Also, the medical sector advice that heavy intake of the energy drink which has a high level of caffeine increases the risk of adverse effects such as nervousness, anxiety, insomnia, heart palpitations, etc. This medical alertness has affected and is still affecting the brand image of this energy drink producers. However, due to these obvious challenges, most of these energy drink producers now employ the services of social media influencers in other to influence consumers positively and create loyalty to their brand. Social media influencing is a powerful tool in digital marketing campaigns which has a tendency of enhancing the firm's brand image. Therefore, the researcher embarks on this study to examine how social media influencing can impact on the brand image of energy drinks producers. Hence, the aim of the study is to examine the effect of social media influencer on brand image of energy drinks producers in Port Harcourt.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Social Influence Theory (SIT)

Using the social influence theory (SIT), the concept of social media influencer could be properly elaborated. The social influence hypothesis looks at how individuals in social settings relate to each other or how they behave in certain ways (Li, 2013).. Social influences are of two types, the Informational and normative influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). This implies that social media influencer communicate genuine and trustworthy information and messages about a firm's brands, which may alter an individual's perception of the brand which is as a result of social identification (Hsu & Lin, 2008). This also implies that source credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, familiarity, and objectivity are vital components to consider when evaluating the information that is showcased to the public (Ilicic & Webster, 2015; Munnukka et al., 2016).

Social Media Influencer

Social media influencers have gained popularity that enabled them to successfully become experts and create social media platforms for themselves (Thursday et al., 2017). These influencers zealously shares self-generated content on subjects that relates to beauty, fitness, food, and fashion. These influencers have gained large followers on the various social media space. Barker (2018), posits that "The easiest way to differentiate between influencers from celebrities is through the channels in which they build their influence". Conventional celebrities usually get their influencing job through television or radio (one-way communication media) While, influencers build their influence using non-traditional media channels, such as social media platforms (blogs, vlogs, you-tube, instagram, Facebook, tik-tok etc). According to Ki & Kim (2019), social media influencers are also people who have the expatriate to influence others through social media platforms.

Influencer Authenticity

Influencer authenticity refers to the sincere and transparent nature of an influencer's content and brand collaborations. Authentic influencers create content that considers their true personality, values, and experiences. Firms often seek influencers who are perceived to be authentic in other to maintain credibility and trustworthiness with their followers. Enli (2015), noted that authenticity is central to modern society and closely related to trustworthiness, which shows consistency, and not necessarily likability, Peterson (2005), sees the process of "authenticity work" as a deliberate effort that an individual makes to appear more transparent and authentic. For influencers, being authentic is a workable act of communicating that one is real (Duffy, 2017) and remaining consistent with one's brand. The credibility of the communicator or an influencer is crucial in persuading the audience (Hovland et al., 2015).

Influencer Attractiveness

Influencer's physical appearance and personality traits are components of attractiveness Limbu & Law (2020). When an influencer is perceived to be attractive, they are more likely to be credible. Attractiveness

is seen on the basis of how the influencer is familiar, liked, and close to his followers (Till & Busler, 2000). Physical attractiveness is the extent to which an individual's physical attributes appeals to the influencer's followers (Shimp, 2020). However, it does not just mean physical attractiveness, rather it involves the way of life of an influencer's personality and actions he or she exhibits. These further deals with the relationship between the positive behavior of a consumer and physical attractiveness of a social media influencer (Lim et al., 2017).

Influencer Trustworthiness

Erdem & Swait (2004) claim that trustworthiness is an individual's consistency in conveying what has been promised. Trustworthiness refers to how honest, trustworthy and the level of integrity an influencer possesses (Erdogan et al., 2001). Researchers have developed a connection linking perceived expertise and trustworthiness (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Therefore, it is believed that the more consumers perceive that celebrities and influencers has expertise in a specific field, the higher the level of trust the customer will have for the influencer. Trustworthiness is all about how honest, reliable and dependable a person is perceived to be (Ohanian, 1990). The extent to which consumers perceive an influencer or a celebrity to be dependable is also connected with trust.

Brand Image

The personality of a brand does not show up initially, but lots of identity development programs are needed in other to achieve a good brand image. The steps for building a good brand identity can be gotten through the name, logo, symbol, atmosphere, and events of that firm. Nevertheless, it is vital to differentiate between identity and image. Identity is an avenue that helps firms to present themselves to a community of consumers, while image is the perception a consumer has about the firm (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

The image of a brand is formed by the compilation of connections that consumers make with the brand in their memory (Keller et al., 2008). According to Kotler (2012) brand image is "the set of beliefs, ideas, and impression that a person holds regarding an object ". Kotler (2012) states that brand image is seen as how the consumers perceives and beliefs a thing in associations that occurs in consumer memory. To build a good brand image needs creativity and lots of efforts, because a sustainable brand image cannot be built in a day or through just one channel, but through all available media in a reliable manner and by using an appropriate requirements.

Relationship between Social Media Influencers and Brand Image

Hughes et al. (2019) pointed out that social media influencer is different from word-of-mouth and conventional advertising, since influencers use both elements of paid and earned media in their influencing activities. From the view of evoking motivation, conventional advertising is likely to have various objectives like building brand equity, while influencers focuses more on increasing the loyalty of their followers. Lou and Yuan (2019), in their study found that influencers' attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness has positive affect on consumers' brand awareness, trustworthiness and attractiveness enhances followers' trust in a firm's content. Sakib et al. (2020) study also exhibited that weight loss influencers' trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness has positive relationship on para-social interaction. In a study on the comparison of celebrities and influencers, Schouten et al. (2019) study, showed that influencer endorsement led to higher perceived trustworthiness than celebrity endorsements, but failed to exhibit such relationship in the area of expertise. However, a study conducted by Trivedi, (2018), indicates that attractive celebrity influencers are more likely to have positive impact on customers' responses than generalist influencers in the fashion and lifestyle sectors. The influence of a social media influencer so much to do in arousing the purchase intention of their followers from the content and advert they post, whether in the form of photos, videos, or Instagram stories, which has the tendency of influencing the purchase intention of their followers.

Influencer Authenticity and Brand Image

Godey et al. (2019), carried out a study on the engagement and credibility of social media influencers in the fashion and beauty industry. It data was gotten and analyzed from a survey of over 400 consumers in the fashion and beauty industry, the study found out that influencers' perceived expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness enhances their credibility and engagement with their followers and audience. They are of the opinion that understanding the different factors that improves an influencer's authenticity can help firms to discover the effectiveness of influencers, thereby and make use of more credible and effective social media influencers. Limbu and Law (2020) also noted that understanding the factors that helps an influencer's credibility can help marketers identify effective influencers that will help them build their brand image successfully. As competition increases, firms swiftly move away from traditional media marketing to using social media marketing sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and Tik-Tok to market their products and services. Influencers are seen as people who create valuable contents in other to trigger positive reactions from customers, they also have high reputations in specific fields (Cha et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017) and are usually followed by a large number of users in an online social networks (De Veirman et al., 2017). In this way, influencers can link firms with existing and potential customers (De Vries et al., 2012).

Against this backdrop, we can say that social media influencer offers great opportunity for firms to gain influencers' followers in other to maximize their reach (Childers et al., 2019). Overall, social media influencer can increase the visibility of a company and lead to greater reach of customers and followers of this influencers. Consequently, the following hypotheses were formulated:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between influencer authenticity and Brand Image of energy drinks firms in Port-Harcourt.

Influencer Attractiveness and Brand Image

Attractiveness most times is misunderstood. However, it does not just apply to physical attractiveness. Rather, it refers to the lifestyle of social media influencer's personality and actions. In regard to the study of Munnukka et al. (2016), the findings in their study are in line with the findings of other researchers, such as Lim et al (2017), their study showed the relationship between the positive behavior of a consumer and physical attractiveness of a social media influencers. Some selected findings from the attractiveness researches may likely be vital for social media influencer. For luxury fashion brands, In the context of beauty-related influencer videos on YouTube, Behm-Morawitz (2017), exhibited that the attractiveness of the influencer motivated viewers to create their own videos and as well follow the influencer. The study research conducted by Breves et al. (2021) concluded that an influencer's physical attractiveness and compatibility with the firm and its product had a significant influence on consumer behavior and attitudes. They found that these factors have the tendency of impacting positively on consumers' attitudes towards the endorsed brand, and ultimately, enhance their purchase intentions. Overall, the study formulated this hypothesis:

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between influencer attractiveness and Brand Image of energy drinks firms in Port-Harcourt.

Influencer Trustworthiness and Brand Image

A firm can engage the use of digital influencers in its marketing efforts for several reasons and this has been giving them lots of benefits. In today's market settings, relationships with customers can be created and trust can be instilled in them, all thanks to the influencer's honest message to their followers (Zak and Hasprova, 2020). Trustworthiness is usually measured based on three aspects. Firstly, Trustworthiness is seen as the influence a communicator has on the genuiness of a message (McGuire, 2019). The trustworthiness of a communicator or its message source is crucial to its persuasiveness (Hovland et al., 2013). Ohanian (1990), described trustworthiness as a three-dimensional construct, from previous literature that which include, dependability, knowledge, and attractiveness. Previous study on credibility of the source examined whether endorsers trustworthiness positively impacts on customers (e.g., Cunningham and Bright 2012; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015; Guido and Peluso 2009;

Lee and Koo 2015). Lou and Yuan (2019) highlight the relevance of message content and source credibility bonding in social media influencer and their followers. Wu et al. (2016) investigate a study on the importance of source credibility and how it's impacts on the perception of consumers of advertisement. In the context of sex education videos on you-tube, Ferchaud et al. (2018) showed that the power or influence of You-tube stars is mostly dependent on viewers' trust. It is against this that the hypothesis below was formulated the following hypothesis is proposed:

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between influencer trustworthiness and brands image of energy drinks firms in Port-Harcourt.

Empirical Review

Previous empirical studies have been carried on social media influencers and how it's relates to brand image as well as how it relates to other marketing activities, of which some have been considered in this study. Klaus-Peter et al. (2021) examined in their study how the requirements of influencers' attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness can be needed for online influencer's campaigns. A total of 288 respondents completed an online survey, examining the profiles of these social media influencers who varied in terms of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness expertise was found to be virtually null. Feby & Monika (2021) carried a study in other to analyze the impact of social media influencers and brand image on online consumer purchase intentions. The Partial Least Square (PLS) was used to analyze the data that was collected from the respondents. The result of this study revealed that social media influencers have no positive and significant effect on online purchase intentions. However, brand image has a positive and significant effect on online purchase intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprises of customers of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. Our target population was the customers of these energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. The population of Port Harcourt was used as the accessible population and there are 5,000,000 estimated (National Population Commission, NPC, 2025).

Table 1.1: 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. Manufacruring 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.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study is 400 customers in Port Harcourt and the sampling technique used was convenience sampling technique, this is due the readiness, availability and accessibility of the sample units. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamen sample size determination techniques at 0.05 level of significance which us a total sample of 400 respondents.

Reliability test was conducted in the study using the Cronbach's Alpha to measure how reliable the tools were, while the validity of the study instruments was also measured using face validity test which is proper in identifying the variables used, whether it could measure what is intended to be measured by experts.

The data was analyzed using spearman's rank order correlation statistical tool with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 21.0. The choice of using this statistical technique was based on its standard with the research design of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were sent out to the target units, which covered a specified target audience of lounge/bar/club within a month. A time frame of one (1) week was allowed in order to retrieve the distributed copies. From the total number of 400 copies distributed, three hundred and seventy-eight (371) retrieval success rate was recorded at a 92.8% statistical model presentation.

Table 1.2: Showing the Questionnaire Distribution Results

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Distributed	400	100
Retrieved	371	92.8
Not retrieved	29	7.2
Retrieved usable	367	98.9
Retrieved not usable	4	1.1

Source: Researcher's Field Desk, 2025.

As seen in table 1.2. Showed how the questionnaire distribution and retrieval process was carried out for this study. As a result of certain observed blank, omission, double entries and incomplete filling, some of the copies of questionnaires were not used in the study. A total of four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires were sent out, three hundred and seventy-one (371) copies exhibiting a percentage response rate of 92.8% were retrieved, while twenty nine (29) which represented 7.2% were not retrieved. From the three hundred and seventy-one (371) that were collected, three hundred and sixty-seven (367) which represent 98.9% were useful, and four (4) which represent 1.1% were not useful for the study.

Testing of Hypotheses

As specified in chapter three, the hypotheses were tested using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between influencer authenticity and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt.

Table 1.3: Influencer Authenticity and Brand Image

			Influencer Authenticity	Brand Image
Spearman's rho	Influencer Authenticity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.898**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	367	367
	Brand Image	Correlation Coefficient	.898**	1.000**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	367	367

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025 (SPSS output)

The result shows that influencer authenticity has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt at a $\rho = 0.898$ and $P_v = 0.000$. The result presents influencer authenticity to have significant and positive impact on brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt. Therefore, the null hypothesis one was rejected, because the $P_v (0.000) < 0.05$ level of significance.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between influencer attractiveness and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt.

Table 1. 4 : Influencer Attractiveness and Brand Image

			Influencer Attractiveness	Brand Image
Spearman's rho	Influencer Attractiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.821**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	367	367
	Brand Image	Correlation Coefficient	.821**	1.000**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	367	367

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025 (SPSS output)

Looking at the result shown on the table above, influencer's attractiveness has a significantly and positive relationship with brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt at a rho = 0.821 and $P_v = 0.000$. The result further displayed a significant and positive relationship between influencer attractiveness and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt. This then means that the null hypothesis three was rejected, because the $P_v (0.000) < 0.05$ level of significance.

Test of Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between influencer trustworthiness and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt.

Table 1.5 : Influencer Trustworthiness and Brand Image

			Influencer Trustworthiness	Brand Image
Spearman's rho	Influencer Trustworthiness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.874**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	367	367
	Brand Image	Correlation Coefficient	.874**	1.000**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	367	367

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025 (SPSS output)

From the table shown, the result shows a strong and positive significant relationship between influencer trustworthiness and brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt at a rho = 0.874 and $P_v = 0.000$. The result further presents that influencer trustworthiness significantly and positively impacts on brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis three relating to influencer trustworthiness with brand image of energy drink producers in Port-Harcourt, because the $P_v (0.000) < 0.05$ level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

Influencer Authenticity significantly and positively correlates with Brand image

The results gotten from the data analyzed revealed that the authenticity of influencers has a notable effect on brand image and as such it enhances the firm's brand reputation and improves customer engagement. It is on this note that the null hypothetical statements were rejected, due to the result revealed that influencer authenticity significantly relates with brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. This finding is in line with the work of previous studies such as; Khamis et al. (2017), Djafarova & Rushworth, (2017), Hashoff (2017), Sireni (2020).

The Effect of Influencer Attractiveness as a Social media influencer on Brand image

This study produced a statistically significant and positive relationship between the attractiveness of influencers on firm's brand image of energy drink firms in Port Harcourt. It is on the basis the research results, influencer's attractiveness which is a dimension of social media influencer have a positive and significant impact on the brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. This effect is seen through five indicators, namely attractiveness, classiness, beauty/handsomeness, elegance, and sexiness. These results provide support for the findings of the study carried out by Saeed and Bhatia (2014), which displayed that majority of customers (55%) are in agreement with the perception that endorsers that represent certain brands and firms should possess physical attractiveness as one of their attributes.

The Effect of Influencer Trustworthiness as a Social media influencer on Brand image

From the result revealed in the study, there is a strong and positive association between how credible an influencer is and the brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt. The result further revealed that consumers' perception of energy drinks brands are impacted by how credible the influencers who support them are. Furthermore, an influencer's level of trust has a way of enhancing a positive brand perception of the endorsed product. Previous studies such as; Wang et al. (2017), noted that the level of trust and personality a celebrity possesses impacts customers' conviction towards purchasing a firm's product.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results from the analysis, the study concludes that social media influencer has a strong and positive relationship with brand image of energy drink producers in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The result gotten from this study will be suitable for any kind of firm having challenges on how to boost their brand image. Based on the conclusion, recommendations are made as follows;

- 1) The producers of these energy drinks in Nigeria should endeavor to engage the services of these social media influencers in order to help them maximize their market share and further boost their brand image positively.
- 2) Energy drink producers should employ those influencers who have a reputation of being trustworthy, genuine, sincere and honest. And any Social media influencer with any kind of negative publicity should not endorse products.
- 3) Influencers, while transferring meaning to the brand they are influencing, should depict reality and passion while passing their messages to their followers and the firm's customers.

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