



Towards the Effective Utilisation of Influencer Marketing in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Advances in technology and the increased use of social media have made brands' usage of influencer marketing more widespread. Social media users no longer want to hear only from brands; they also want to listen to what others say about the brands and what their favourite influencers say. However, if brands do not understand how to utilise influencer marketing effectively, they cannot harness its benefits and minimise its drawbacks. Therefore, this position paper explored how organisations can gain desired results from well-planned influencer marketing efforts. It used the desk research methodology to gather secondary data on this subject matter. It discovered that organisations stand to benefit significantly from intentional and strategic influencer marketing campaigns if they consider several crucial factors such as the loyalty the influencer garners, how the influencer can persuade their audience, source credibility, content congruence, trustworthiness, values alignment, content informative value, content entertainment value, and the like. It was recommended that before working with influencers, organisations should be clear on their brand values and objectives to derive desired results. They should also develop influencer marketing guides, be more strategic and intentional when selecting influencers, and develop systems to monitor influencer marketing efforts effectively.

KEYWORDS

brand communications, influencer marketing, marketing communication, message acceptability, social media marketing

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is rapidly increasing in the marketing landscape as brands look for more authentic ways to connect with their target audience. Brands have found that more efforts must be made when promoting their products or services to gain the attention of their target audience. In the opinion of Ormond (2023), influencers help global businesses humanise their messaging and build more intimate communities. Influencer marketing is now a prominent form of marketing that has recently been gaining popularity, significantly enhancing companies' reach and performance (O'Toole, 2023). According to Pinkerton (2022), influencer marketing works because people want to buy from those they trust. This paper argues that influencer marketing

can effectively help organisations connect with their target audience if done effectively.

The marketing landscape is saturated yet result-oriented for brands that understand how to maximise it effectively. One of the ways to achieve this is by understanding the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Research has shown that people like to hear what others say about a brand rather than what the brand says about itself. A GeoPoll Survey in 2020 revealed that 53% of Kenyan and Nigerian consumers would believe an influencer's word above a brand's advertisement. The same survey showed that almost all respondents (96%) said 'yes' or 'sometimes' to whether they trust product reviews or recommendations from influencers (Kibuacha, 2020).

When marketing, brands try to influence the opinions of their ideal audience to accept their messages; influencer marketing is one such way to achieve that. According to Olajojo (2020), the media is important in developing and shaping public opinion. However, today, anyone can do this on social media. Fakeye and Ayoola (2022) observed that influencer marketing is becoming popular among advertisers due to its ability to set trends and boost product sales.

It is not enough to understand the importance of influencer marketing; organisations need to find ways to gain the proper Return On Investment in their influencer marketing spend. Jarrar, Awobamise, and Aderibigbe (2020) revealed that as the internet's popularity grows, a new class of "celebrities" or influencers emerges, and marketers must seize the chance or adapt to the new reality. Consumers today are significantly impacted by reviews and recommendations from trusted friends, family, peers, and influencers (Patni, 2024). Research has shown that some social media users are willing to purchase goods and services after an influential person or group of people they follow provides positive recommendations, reviews, or feedback regarding those products and services. Contrary to popular belief regarding marketing communication messages, brand messages seem readily acceptable when they come from certain quarters and are done in a certain way.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Effective influencer marketing will either result in success or otherwise; however, organisations must understand the factors that contribute to the success of influencer marketing campaigns to harness the benefits fully. A lack of understanding in this area can result in the wastage of the brand's resources, time, and efforts. According to Barker (2023), while it has many advantages, influencer marketing also has some risks and pitfalls that might affect one's reputation and financial standing.

Several studies focus on the importance of influencer marketing in today's marketing landscape. Pinkerton (2022) opined that today's organisations can leverage social media influencers into their PR and communications initiatives to fully leverage the current media landscape and efficiently reach target audiences. In addition, Cohen (2023) mentioned that influencer marketing allows one to reach potential customers at every stage of the decision-making process, from the moment they become aware of a brand until when they are considering making a purchase. However, this paper opines that it is essential to focus not only on the benefits of influencer marketing but also on how to get it done effectively to derive value from it.

The efficacy of influencer marketing efforts determines whether brand goals are met. However, this paper opines that questions arise about how effective this form of marketing is and how brands can do it better to produce desired results. Collaboration with influencers that do not share one's brand's values or target audience might have a negative impact. Their behaviours, controversies, or misaligned content can harm

one's brand's reputation and credibility (Barker, 2023). Fuller (2020) observed that influencers have built deep credibility with their followers by providing valuable and relevant content, significantly impacting their recommendations.

Do customers readily accept and act on influencer marketing messages? Do brands benefit from this endeavour, or is this just a moving train everyone is jumping on? What makes an influencer marketing effort succeed over the other? Influencer marketing has inherent risks owing to factors beyond one's control (Barker, 2023). Hence, this study contributed to the developing literature on fostering the effectiveness of influencer marketing and its significance to organisations in Nigeria. It also provided brands with an understanding of how to maximise influencer marketing activities. Rather than adding to the numerous literatures regarding the importance of influencer marketing, this study focused on how organisations can derive better value through influencer marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Source Credibility Model

Source Credibility helps to understand how messages are perceived through the lens of their source. According to Hovland and Weiss (1951), there is a higher level of agreement when statements are ascribed to high-prestige sources. Octaviani and Hartono (2023) opined that when it comes to celebrity endorsements, source credibility is a construct made up of three components: competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Likewise, in their research, Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that when a trustworthy source presented a material, opinions were largely more likely to change in the direction advocated by the communicator compared to untrustworthy sources. This model served as the basis for this work because it explains how the audience perceives, filters, and receives marketing messages from influencers. If the audience perceives the influencers as credible, there is a higher chance of them accepting and trusting their messages.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Evolution of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing may seem like a new term due to social media; however, it has existed in different ways over the years. According to Suciu (2020), influencer marketing can be traced back to ancient Rome when gladiators endorsed products. Brooks (2019) expressed that influencer marketing is not a new concept, and one has always gained knowledge from the experiences of their friends and family or sought inspiration from aspirational individuals when deciding what to purchase. Patni (2024) opined that due to the progression of influencer marketing from the days before the internet to the advent of social media, influence has been democratised, helping brands connect with their consumers on a more personal level and build meaning and long-term relationships.

Influencing others to take a desired action did not just start today; however, the dynamics and platforms for achieving such have been greatly altered over the years. According to Suciu (2020), the first well-recognised "influencer" partnership dates to 1760, when Wedgwood made a tea set for King George III's wife. Wedgwood swiftly promoted his brand as having "Royal" approval. Patni (2024) observed that before the internet, celebrities and other well-known personalities endorsed goods and services through print, radio, and television in the early days of influencer marketing. Leali

(2023) opined that influencer marketing reached a turning point in the early 2000s. MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram transformed things and influence, making them more accessible and less reliant on celebrity status.

Influencer Marketing in Nigeria

Influencer marketing has become widespread in Nigeria and other African countries. Statista Market Insights (2023) revealed that in Nigeria, influencer advertising market ad spending is projected to reach US\$4.8m in 2024. Likewise, a 2020 GeoPoll Survey discovered that, on average, 69% and 55% of Kenyans and Nigerians, respectively, said their purchasing decisions were directly influenced by influencer referrals (Kibuacha, 2020). It is evident that influencer marketing is on the rise and has enormous potential for the marketing communications industry. Jarrar et al. (2020) observed that influencer marketing has become so prevalent that it is difficult to scroll through an Instagram feed without encountering some form of such marketing. This is also obtainable in developing countries like Uganda, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Who Is an Influencer?

An influencer is an individual that persuades another to take an action. Peker (2020) mentioned that an influencer is someone who can influence prospective buyers' decisions. An influencer can be a fictional character, a public figure, a sportsperson, a celebrity, or a reliable friend. Huhn (2024) opined that influencers show how they use your product using their voice and on their own blogs or social media platforms. The concept of an influencer has evolved slightly in tandem with the growth of social media usage. A person might be considered an influencer if they have a considerable amount of followers on social media, friends, and the like (Peker, 2020).

Influencers must also meet certain criteria to be deemed as one. According to Mathew (2022), influencers must maintain a loyal following and be credible personalities in their niche. They also usually have knowledge or experience with what they are advertising. Influencers are content creators with a strong reputation and a large social media or blog following who promote a business (Huhn, 2024). According to Duran (2022), an influencer is someone who has developed a social media following based on a specific niche interest.

Types of Influencers

Influencers fall into different categories based on their number of followers. Olagboye (2023) highlighted four types: nano-influencers with 1,000 to 10,000 followers, micro-influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, macro-influencers with 100,000 to 1,000,000 followers, and mega-influencers with at least 1,000,000 followers. Fuller (2020) stated that nano-influencers are great for highly targeted, community-oriented campaigns, and they are reasonably priced; micro-influencers are suitable for generating high engagement rate conversions; macro-influencers are great for expanding visibility and trust in particular industries; mega-influencers or celebrities for large-scale, well-publicised brand awareness initiatives.

Influencer Marketing Vs Brand Ambassador

Some people often confuse influencer marketing with brand ambassadorship, so it is crucial to distinguish between both terms clearly. According to Huhn (2024), brand ambassadors and influencers help a brand share its product with their audience, thereby growing the brand's customer base. Duran (2022) noted that brand ambassadors and influencers have many similarities in that they all strive toward the same goal: to generate excitement for your brand. Their main differences are a brand's

goals and approach. However, Huhn (2024) observed that brand ambassadors are loyal customers who have a long history with a company and serve as its long-term representatives. Meanwhile, influencers work with a brand for a brief period and may not have used the brand's products prior to becoming an influencer for the brand.

Message Acceptability

Influencers leverage their large following to build community, garner loyalty, and increase engagement. Influencers who can generate authentic and genuine engagement through their content will likely produce the desired brand results. According to a 2020 GeoPoll Survey earlier mentioned in this study, influencers who provide relevant content continue to have a strong following as they gain and maintain consumer trust, eventually influencing purchasing decisions. Social media influencers, who are trusted and have a significant following, continue to have a key impact on customers' purchase choices (Kibuacha, 2020).

As such, the degree to which marketing or brand messages from influencer marketers are acceptable is crucial to the success of influencer marketing. Furthermore, a study by Olajojo (2020) found that the informativeness of the influencer's post, the facilitative nature of the content, and the persuasive strategies used impact how followers receive the message passed across to them. According to Fuller (2020), follower count and engagement rates may provide some insights but do not ensure success.

This paper posits that employing influencer marketing is not enough; organisations must carefully select influencers in line with the brand's values, personality, goals and objectives to achieve desired results. When influencers build loyalty, their messages are readily accepted by their audience. Thus, the key to influencer marketing success is the degree to which the audience accepts and engages with their messages. Fuller (2020) opined that engaging with the proper influencer can boost one's brand's trustworthiness and attract new clients. Mgiba and Nyamande (2020) also noted that an influencer must be able to convince people to take a desired action to be useful in a marketing program. It is essential to carefully select influencers to maintain brand integrity and trust with consumers because bad publicity about an influencer can directly impact the brand they represent (Fuller, 2020).

Influencer Marketing as an Effective Tool for Organisations

This paper opines that organisations stand to benefit from influencer marketing if done well adequately. Fuller (2020) emphasised that carefully choosing influencers consistent with one's brand can help leverage their influence to meet substantial marketing objectives. Palmer (2023) noted that one of the benefits of influencer marketing is that one can see results quickly because influencers are prepared to get started immediately, distributing a brand's message to its target market instantly and generating excitement about the brand's goods. Lammertink (2024) mentioned that beyond the numerical gain, influencers gain an inherently trustworthy following. They are viewed as familiar peers rather than far-off stars, providing insightful opinions and authentic viewpoints.

Downsides of Influencer Marketing

The benefits of influencer marketing are numerous; however, it also has its downsides, some of which were reviewed in this section. Likewise, this paper provided suggestions to combat such challenges. According to Pfund (2019), one rarely mentioned challenge of influencer marketing is the saturation of the influencer space on social media. This paper opines that one way to address this issue is to take

time to ensure no compromises are made with the influencer selection. This will enable brands to choose the right fit and get their messages out there, even in the crowded influencer marketing space.

Another downside to influencer marketing is that organisations may find it challenging to determine how influencers create content around their brand messages. According to Mathew (2022), influencers work autonomously, creating their content while incorporating a company's advertising demands into it. The influencer has authority over the brand's message and can choose how to convey it. Palmer (2023) also expressed that collaborating with influencers means losing some brand control; this can only be avoided if everything is very scripted, in which case some authenticity is lost. On the other hand, this paper states that organisations must balance their brand values with influencers' creativity to maintain some form of control over what is being portrayed about their brand while incorporating the influencer's creativity.

There is also the challenge of authenticating the real impact of influencers. Pfund (2019) emphasised that instead of building real audiences, some social media accounts have become influencers by purchasing fake followers. These accounts have no influence over their followers, so unintentionally partnering with one would not help a brand get results. This paper notes that although this may happen in some cases, it differs for some influencers. In addition, a way to avoid falling prey to such is for a brand to thoroughly research an influencer and their platforms before engaging them.

It is also impossible to neglect the brand reputational risks that may be obtainable in influencer marketing. Fuller (2020) observed that there are inherent risks to a brand's reputation when working with influencers. Thus, alignment between an organisation's values and an influencer's public image is key. This paper agrees with the position of Fuller (2020); however, it is essential to note that when organisations select the right influencer who is consistent with their brand values and brand personality, they are likely to avoid such risks.

This paper posits that organisations must constantly analyse their market efforts to ensure they are updated with the best practices in the industry. This does not mean organisations must change the influencers they use every time, but they must be strategic with their choice, even if they have to repeat or change the influencers used at different points. Lammertink (2024) noted that trends drastically change the most popular influencers of the day, making it a perpetual challenge for brands to stay current and adapt their influencer campaigns accordingly.

Influencer Marketing Done Right

To ensure organisations get the best from their influencer marketing efforts, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. **Plan:** Effective planning is the first step in any influencer marketing efforts. Brands must ensure they have a plan for how they want to engage influencers and their goals and objectives. Kuzminov (2023) explained that before one can begin the search for the right influencers, one must first understand the core principles representing their company.
2. **Selection:** The selection of influencers is critical to ensuring that an organisation works with the right person. According to Kuzminov (2023), one must determine which influencers are genuine and credible with their target audience and focus on how many people engage with their content and how good it is. Mathew (2022) opined that a brand must ensure that the influencer's content is in line with its overall image, as unpleasant content can negatively impact the brand's reputation. Fuller (2020) observed that it is vital to partner with influencers who are already engaging with brands similar to

one's brand to ensure that influencer marketing efforts resonate with the ideal audience.

3. **Agreement:** Every detail must be written and agreed upon before embarking on any influencer marketing efforts. According to Lammertink (2024), once an influencer has been selected, a clear and detailed contract is essential.
4. **Guidance:** A brand must establish an influencer marketing guide to guide the actions of the influencer working on the brand's campaign. According to Fuller (2020), strategic planning, genuine collaborations, and consistent evaluations help ensure that influencer marketing campaigns bring the expected results.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Influencer marketing does not stop when a brand commissions an influencer to work on a project. A brand must put monitoring and evaluation systems in place to ensure that the influencer's activities are monitored and course-corrected if need be. Also, to ensure that each influencer marketing effort is analysed and measured through evaluation.

Ethics in Influencer Marketing

1. **Transparency:** Influencers need to be truthful in disclosing that they are being paid to promote a product or a service. Some social media platforms now ensure that partnership posts accurately reflect that they are sponsored. Leali (2023) recommended that influencers explicitly state any sponsored partnerships or collaborations in their content.
2. **Social Responsibility:** Influencers also need to be socially responsible to ensure that the product or service they are promoting is not harmful to the public or will harm anyone in any way.
3. **Integrity:** Influencers need to promote products or services with the utmost integrity, ensuring that what they promote does exactly what it says it does without exaggerating the facts. In addition, influencers must ensure they do what they have been commissioned to do and not fail to fulfil their agreement.
4. **Honesty:** If an influencer is not honest, the audience may not trust their reviews or recommendations. According to Kuzminov (2023), honesty is one of the most important qualities to have as an influencer. Influencers' marketing strategy is based on authenticity and sharing personal stories and ideas with their target audience.
5. **Stereotypes:** It is vital that influencer marketing messages do not contain any form of stereotype. Kuzminov (2023) observed that when conducting influencer marketing, it is critical to consider gender stereotypes and how people often expect men and women to act in particular scenarios.

Influencer Marketing Case Studies

Jumia

A study by Fakeye and Ayoola (2022) investigated the role of influencer marketing in promoting organisations, using Jumia Nigeria as a case study. They used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. Jumia Nigeria's marketing team and major influencers were interviewed, while consumers were surveyed. Interviewee responses confirmed that Jumia Nigeria extensively markets with influencers. They concluded that influencer marketing is crucial for lead generation due to social media's role as a nexus between brands and potential customers/clients. Interviewees agreed that social media makes it easy for brands to reach consumers, generate leads, and improve their social media presence. Interviewees said Jumia Nigeria's use of social media influencers has increased brand recognition and visibility. However, the

survey found a major determinant in respondents' goods purchases to be online product specifications/details (on Jumia or blogs).

Pepsi

Chain Reactions (2023) observed that a successful Nigerian influencer marketing campaign was Pepsi's "No Shakin' Carry Go". It targeted Nigerian millennials to raise brand recognition and engagement. Pepsi worked with six well-known Nigerian influencers, such as musicians and comedians, to make a set of fun and engaging videos. These videos showed influencers drinking Pepsi while cooking or shopping. For a chance to win rewards, fans were asked to make their own "No Shakin' Carry Go" videos on social media. More than 22 million views and 76,000 user-generated films made the campaign a success. The campaign raised brand awareness and interaction among Nigerian millennials, helping Pepsi stand out.

Cake App

According to Dogtiev (2024), the free Cake app helps non-English and non-Korean speakers learn English or Korean globally. The Cake app team had been utilising YouTube to introduce the app with short films outlining its benefits before approaching an influencer marketing agency. Help was needed to reach South American English-learning app seekers. They contacted five Latin American personalities for a two-week ad campaign to promote the app's educational and enjoyable features. On YouTube, the influencers creatively demonstrated the app's functions and benefits. The campaign was successful since all influencers introduced the software from an educational perspective, explaining how it may help people learn English. App viewers totalled 1.2 million.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used for this study was desk research, which explored secondary data to gain a broader and better understanding of the industry and the subject matter. This method was used because it was easily accessible, the researcher also wanted to discover what had been done in this area, and it was time- and cost-efficient. The research examined and synthesised different research, studies, and content to come up with the findings.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Majidian, Mahmoudzadeh Vashan, and Hakimpour (2021) studied the effective factors and consequences of influencers' behaviour in social media marketing. They utilised a qualitative sample size based on theoretical saturation (20 people), while the quantitative sample size was based on Cochran's formula (384 people). The study found 10 components and 63 indicators influencing influencer behaviour in social media marketing, including influencer attitude, influencer identity, personal branding, and important social events. Additionally, 6 components that affect the consequences of influencer behaviour in marketing: influencer loyalty, follower persuasion, lifestyle, advertising effectiveness, follower awareness, and entrepreneurship were among the topics covered on social media. The study also identified seven criteria influencing influencer behaviour on Instagram: attractiveness, reliability, content, reputation, expertise, credibility, and nationality of the influencer. Their study showed the importance of some subject areas that this paper discussed, such as the influencer's credibility, reliability, and reputation.

Using the parasocial connection, credibility, and immersion theory, Liu (2021) studied how influencer marketing on social media impacts customer engagement. The author utilised an integrated model to demonstrate how influencer marketing

improves customer engagement on social media platforms in two directions. According to the model, the parasocial relationship between an audience and an influencer improves source credibility, and then source credibility improves brand credibility. The author concluded that Influencer marketing should be analysed through the lens of parasocial relationships and content absorption. The study examined source credibility in relation to influencer marketing and customer engagement, which are key aspects of this paper.

On the other hand, Ezenwafor, Olise, and Ebizie (2021) examined the effect of social media influencers on purchase intention among social media users. Their study population was active social media users in Anambra state, and they used a sample size of 220. Their findings show that trustworthiness, attractiveness, and influencer product fit all have a favourable and substantial effect on purchase intention. In addition, purchase intentions are not influenced by expertise. They concluded that when the need for social media influencers arises, organisations should look for those who have a high level of trust with their audience, are attractive, and align with the product being promoted. The position of this paper on how proper care must be taken when organisations are working with influencers aligns with the findings of Ezenwafor et al. (2021).

The study by Ao, Bansal, Pruthi, and Khaskheli (2023) on social media influencers' impact on customer engagement and purchase intention revealed that influencer marketing has increased in popularity in the era of social media, and marketers are widely using it to persuade potential customers. The research emphasised eight key characteristics of social media influencers, including homophily, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, credibility, informative value, entertainment value, and congruence with the product. Their study was based on 176 effect sizes generated from 62 separate investigations, with the aggregate sample consisting of 22,554 individuals. Findings revealed that social media influencers have moderate to high relationships with both purchase intent and customer engagement. As customers become active on social media platforms and follow influencers, the researchers advised practitioners to tap into these influencers to engage customers and generate buy intent. Their study emphasised the need for more intentional influencer marketing efforts, which aligns with this paper's position.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This paper discovered that several factors affect the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Some of these include the loyalty the influencer garners, how the influencer can persuade their audience, source credibility, content congruence, trustworthiness, values alignment, content informative value, content entertainment value, and the like. This finding aligns with the position of Olajo (2020) that the informativeness of the influencer's post, the facilitative nature of the content, and the persuasive strategies used to impact how followers receive the message passed across to them.

In addition, the findings align with the proposition of the source credibility model because it shows that the credibility of the source is a major factor in whether a brand message being conveyed by an influencer is accepted or not. Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that when a trustworthy source presented a material, opinions were largely more likely to change in the direction advocated by the communicator compared to untrustworthy sources.

CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing is effective for organisations, provided they develop strategic and intentional plans towards such campaigns while ensuring they select the right influencers. Organisations that want to effectively stand out online and connect better with their ideal audience need to consider strategic influencer marketing in their brand plan. If done well, influencer marketing can help organisations achieve their marketing goals. Some of the things brands must consider when embarking on influencer marketing include finding out if the influencer represents the brand's value, has an engaging and loyal audience, if the influencer's audience is similar to the brand's audience, if the influencer is authentic, and the like.

This paper also examined some downsides of influencer marketing and provided solutions to such challenges. It looked at influencer marketing through the lens of the source credibility model; it also highlighted the importance of message acceptability in influencer marketing, the downsides of influencer marketing, how to do influencer marketing right, and ethics in influencer marketing. Thus, brands that want to achieve their desired results online need to connect with influencers with high message acceptability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

1. Before working with influencers, organisations should be clear on their brand values and objectives to derive desired results. This helps them ensure that the influencers' marketing activities align with their organisation's values and goals.
2. Organisations should develop influencer marketing guides before embarking on influencer marketing campaigns to foster successful efforts. These guides aid in the smooth working relationships between influencers and organisations.
3. Organisations should be more strategic and intentional in selecting influencers while ensuring brand fit. This would ensure that the influencer marketer selected represents or aligns with the organisation's positioning in the market.
4. Organisations should develop systems to effectively monitor influencer marketing activities by the influencers they partner with. Without measuring the marketing efforts of influencers, organisations may not know if they are succeeding at their campaigns.

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