

YouTube Influencer Marketing as a Predictor of Purchase Intention towards Cosmetic Products among Female Undergraduates of Babcock University, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study is an examination of YouTube influencer marketing as a predictor of the purchase intention towards cosmetic products among female undergraduates of Babcock University. This research was hinged on the source-credibility theory. Using a survey research method, a structured questionnaire was administered among 497 female undergraduates of Babcock University. The findings revealed that the female undergraduates have a positive perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products ($\bar{x} = 2.78$). However, respondents did not positively perceive the trustworthiness of YouTube influencers ($\bar{x} = 2.35$). Furthermore, the perception of YouTube influencer marketing significantly predicts the purchase intention towards cosmetic products among female undergraduates of Babcock University ($\beta = 0.849$, $t = 35.792$, $p < 0.05$). It was concluded that the positive perception of YouTube influencer marketing impacts customers' intention to purchase cosmetic products to a high extent. It was recommended that cosmetic brands should ascertain the trustworthiness of YouTube influencers whose services would be employed in order to enhance positive perception about product promotion among the YouTube audience.

Keywords: YouTube Influencer Marketing, Cosmetic Products, Purchase Intention, YouTube Cosmetic Content Creators, Audience Perception

Introduction

Demassification in the information age has necessitated more creative, digitised and niche marketing communication strategies. The evolving nature of social media, with the advantage of gaining access to a vast and dynamic audience pool, has made marketers to continually explore novel strategies such as social media influencer marketing to promote brands in order to reach and influence the audience effectively (Abraham, Floreto, Pagkalinawan & Etrata, 2022; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, marketers team up with content creators/creatives who overtime, have earned the attention and trust of the audience well enough to directly and/or indirectly influence their opinion, choices and behaviours (Abraham *et al* 2022; Lee & Lee, 2022; Takumi, 2020). Influencers have the powers to affect consumer behaviour because of their real or perceived authority, expertise,

knowledge, engagement or relationship with the audience (Abraham *et al* 2022; Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The community of beauty or cosmetics influencers on YouTube is one of the most popular and viable in social media influencer marketing (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Le, Alang & Tran, 2021). YouTube content creators present their experiences and share their opinions about products they have tested to a target audience who are inclined towards engaging with such contents (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The audience members are not passive receivers of the content as they indicate their cursory feedback through the like/dislike icon and express more elaborate thoughts in the comments section (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Le *et al* 2021). One ripple effect of this is that an individual's perception of a cosmetic brand may not only be shaped by the YouTube influencer's promotional content, but also by the direction of audience engagements on the content. Therefore, marketers leverage YouTube influencers' far-reaching presence and online audience community to promote their businesses.

Adopting a nonconventional approach to marketing, influencers improve the brand image of businesses, competitiveness, purchase-intention and patronage. However, this influence is reliant on several factors, such as content value, content quality, engagement on posts, quality of review, attractiveness, expertise, persuasiveness, credibility and trustworthiness (Abraham *et al* 2022; Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Isyanto, Sapitri & Sinaga, 2020). These factors are all hinged on the individual and communal judgements of the audience. Based on the foregoing, this study sought to examine the perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products and its influence on customers' purchase intention.

Statement of the Problem

Social media marketing is a growing field that has continually improved marketing communication and allowed for easier reach of target consumers through interactive platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube. YouTube is one of such platforms through which marketers leverage influencers to enhance the customers' brand awareness and encourage purchase intention (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Le *et al* 2021). This concept called YouTube influencer marketing involves the use of content creators or opinion leaders on YouTube to promote a brand. This strategy is increasingly popular among cosmetic brands who employ the services of influencers on YouTube to promote their brands through makeup and skin care related contents such as, cosmetics hauls, product reviews and do-it-yourself videos on how to use the cosmetic products (Le *et al* 2021; Marjerison, Huang & Chen, 2020). Meanwhile, the perception of YouTube influencer marketing among the audience is pertinent to the success of the promotion strategy. Marketers strive to ensure a positive audience perception and response through the selection of a suitable brand influencer, with particular attention to the influencer's trustworthiness, portrayal of brand image, promotional strategies employed, and perceived benefit/value of the promotion (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Isyanto *et al* 2020; Le *et al* 2021). Among its many predictors, perception toward influencer marketing has been established as a prominent factor responsible for customers' purchase intention, a stage that

precedes actual purchase, which remains the goal for every marketer (Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Isyanto *et al* 2020; Le *et al* 2021).

While the influence of YouTube influencer marketing has been highly researched, adequate study has not been conducted to address the perception of YouTube influencer marketing as a predictor of purchase intention towards cosmetic products in Nigeria. This study fills this gap by examining how Babcock University female undergraduates perceive YouTube influencer marketing and how that perception predicts their intention to purchase cosmetic products. Hence, providing a Nigerian context to YouTube influencer marketing in the cosmetic industry.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to:

1. Ascertain the perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products among female undergraduates of Babcock University.

Research Hypothesis

H₁: Perception of YouTube influencer marketing is a significant predictor of purchase intention towards cosmetic products among female undergraduates of Babcock University.

Review of Related Literature

Media convergence empowered by innovations in information and communication technology has brought about a paradigm shift in marketing communication. For one, there is now a demassification and defragmentation in the profile of contemporary media audience compared to that of the traditional media. This has made niche marketing a necessity, resulting in the prominence social media influencer marketing has gained in recent times. Social media influencer marketing is a promotional strategy which involves the use of individuals who have amassed a great followership, with engaging content and persuasiveness on social networking sites to promote a brand, with the goal of inducing customers' buying decisions (Abraham *et al* 2022; Isyanto *et al* 2020; Le *et al* 2021). Marketers collaborate with these individuals who are influential third-party endorsers, opinion leaders, tastemakers, to create content to promote their products or services, reach and crucially shape the opinions and buying decisions of consumers (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Marjerison *et al* 2020; Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang & Soutar, 2020). Influencers' communication strategy consists of textual and visual narration of product information, product reviews, product hauls and other beauty, makeup and skin care contents (Abraham *et al* 2022; Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Le *et al* 2021; Marjerison *et al* 2020). However, in the bid to persuade the audience at all cost, influencers sometimes produce contents that are perceived to be subjective and exaggerated (Chen & Dermawan, 2020).

Social media influencer marketing positions influencers as content creators and creatives for brand promotion. This is a strategy which transcends a narrow consideration of social media as mere advertising channels. Trends in social media influencer marketing show that Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are the top active content creation platforms

(Takumi, 2020). From the stance of the consumers and marketers, YouTube influencers have displayed an appreciable level of trustworthiness and engagement (Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Takumi, 2020). Chen & Dermawan (2020) argued that YouTubers show honesty in their product reviews and they likewise partner with trustworthy brands. Chen & Dermawan (2020) further revealed that in regards to cosmetic products, consumers perceive YouTube influencers to be more trustworthy than celebrities in the traditional media. Lee & Lee (2022) explained that audience engagements with beauty contents, vicarious experiences with the videos and the parasocial relationship that viewers develop with influencers, tend to enhance the perception of trust in YouTube influencer marketing.

It has also been established that consumers have come to find YouTube influencer marketing contents to be useful and helpful in improving their knowledge of products, product usage and in making purchase decisions. In a study by Chen & Dermawan (2020), consumers were reported to have perceived YouTube contents as informative and empowering as they learnt the application of makeup products, new beauty techniques and how to sell products within a short timeframe. Ananda & Wandebori (2016) also revealed that undergraduates perceive YouTube influencers' videos as being valuable for product information search and purchase decisions. According to Takumi (2020), the perceived information-based value attributable to YouTube influencer marketing can be connected to YouTube's inherent capacity to host detailed reviews and high-quality videos, leaving a lasting impression among the audience. However, critics are of the opinion that some influencers are overly focused on endorsing products even when they are to the detriment of the consumers. Reviews are sometimes not considered genuine as consumers do not enjoy the product experience and benefits as promoted by the influencers (Abraham *et al* 2022; Chen & Dermawan, 2020).

It is discernible from extant literature that social media influencer marketing through content creators tend to influence consumer purchasing behaviours positively. Studies have established that social media influencer marketing increases the willingness of consumers to purchase a product (Abraham *et al* 2022; Isyanto *et al* 2020; Le *et al* 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022; Marjerison *et al* 2020; Masuda, Han & Lee, 2022; Takumi, 2020). This impact is critical in assessing the effectiveness of influencer marketing as purchase intention is a prerequisite for actual patronage. Abraham *et al* (2022) reported that influencer marketing determined the purchase intention for beauty and cosmetic products among customers in the Philippines. In a study by Takumi (2020), consumers in the United Kingdom, United States of America and Germany were reported to have been influenced to patronise various brands as a result of their exposure to YouTube contents.

Purchase intention is frequently linked to perceptions of influencers and influencer marketing as a whole (Abraham *et al* 2022; Le *et al* 2021; Masuda *et al* 2022; Takumi, 2020). Takumi (2020) argued that the perceived trustworthiness of the influencer increased the rate of the purchase intention towards brands among customers. According to Le *et al* (2021), the influence of YouTube influencers on the intention to purchase cosmetic products among consumers in Vietnam can be linked to the perception of the credibility of the information disseminated by the influencers. Masuda *et al* (2022) pointed to perception of influencers' attitude, physical and social attractiveness and parasocial relationship as factors that heighten the purchase intention for brands among the audience.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the source credibility theory. Hovland, Janis & Kelly proposed the source credibility theory in 1963 to explain that a communicator's message is convincing to the degree to which receivers consider the source to possess some credibility traits such as expertise and attractiveness and trustworthiness (Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Le *et al* 2021). The theory proposes that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. The perceived credibility of the source determines how the audience will react to the message. The view of the audience of a medium and how they receive the message of that medium to a large extent, is dependent on how they see the source (Asemah, 2011a; Asemah, 2011b). The theory is hinged on the perception of the credibility of the source as a determinant of the persuasiveness of the message among the audience. It can be deduced that the more an influencer has embodied the characteristics of source credibility, the more customers would accept the promotional messages from such influencer. Previous studies have connected audience perception of source credibility, particularly of influencers, to product preference, attitude to promotions, brand image, believability of information disseminated by the influencer and ultimately, purchase intention (Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Le *et al* 2021). Hence, people are more likely to be convinced to purchase a product when the source (influencer) appears reliable with expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In regards to YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products, the effectiveness of this promotional strategy is reliant on the positive perception of the audience.

The influencers are to be perceived to possess communication traits of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness for the promotional strategy to be persuasive. The perception of the influencer serves as a means for the receivers of the information to rate the message source, the message itself and the products being promoted. Viewers of cosmetic products contents on YouTube need to perceive influencers as credible as this is germane to the persuasiveness of the message and the purchase intention towards cosmetic products.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the survey research method among 5,451 female students of Babcock University registered in the 2020/2021 academic session (Babcock University, 2021). A sample size of 497 was derived using the Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009) formula. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents, with the inclusion criteria that they visit YouTube at least, three days in a week and have been exposed to cosmetic products (make-up and skin care) influencer marketing contents on YouTube. This was to ascertain the awareness of and exposure to YouTube influencer marketing content on cosmetic products which precedes perception. A structured and validated questionnaire was used to gather data for this study. The Cronbach's alpha reliability test was used to ensure the internal consistency of the research instrument and it yielded the following coefficients for the constructs: perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products = 0.910 and purchase intention towards cosmetic products = 0.859. The questionnaire was administered at the various female halls of residence in

Babcock University. The quantitative data gathered were analysed using descriptive and inferential (regression) statistics.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Perception of YouTube Influencer Marketing of Cosmetic Product

<i>Variables</i>	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	Mean \bar{x}	Standard Deviation (SD)
Perceived Effectiveness of YouTube Influencer Marketing (Mean = 3.09, SD = 0.79)						
I believe that YouTube cosmetic products influencers shape the brand's image and identity	173 (34.8)	264 (53.1)	22 (4.4)	38 (7.6)	3.15	0.82
I believe that YouTube cosmetic products influencers help brands to build a community for the audience	133 (26.8)	305 (61.4)	35 (7.0)	24 (4.8)	3.10	0.72
I believe that cosmetic brands that employ YouTube influencers yield better sales	137 (27.6)	270 (54.3)	52 (10.5)	38 (7.6)	3.02	0.83
Perceived Image of YouTube Influencers (Mean = 3.08, SD = 0.86)						
I think that the scandals of a YouTube influencer often affects the brand they are promoting	222 (44.7)	205 (41.2)	57 (11.5)	13 (2.6)	3.28	0.77
I think that the likeability of the YouTube influencer can affect the likeability of the brand	193 (38.8)	198 (39.8)	69 (13.9)	37 (7.4)	3.10	0.90
I feel like YouTube influencers do not always deliver to the level that they are paid for	148 (29.8)	163 (32.8)	157 (31.6)	29 (5.8)	2.87	0.91
Perceived YouTube Influencer Marketing Strategies (Mean = 3.00, SD = 0.97)						
I am impressed by YouTube cosmetic influencers use of product samples	195 (39.2)	213 (42.9)	45 (9.1)	44 (8.9)	3.12	0.91
I like the use of collaborations by YouTube cosmetic products influencers	190 (38.2)	162 (32.6)	82 (16.5)	63 (12.7)	2.96	1.03
I like the use of referrals by YouTube cosmetic products influencers	168 (33.8)	171 (34.4)	113 (22.7)	45 (9.1)	2.93	0.96
Perceived Image of Cosmetic Brands (Mean = 2.87, SD = 0.74)						

I associate the image of a skincare brand to the reputation of the YouTube influencer	162 (32.6)	143 (28.8)	146 (29.4)	46 (9.3)	2.85	0.98
I feel more inclined to patronise a makeup brand if I like the YouTube influencer	122 (24.5)	222 (44.7)	90 (18.1)	63 (12.7)	2.81	0.95
I feel more inclined to patronise a skincare brand if I like the YouTube influencer	106 (21.3)	237 (47.7)	86 (17.3)	68 (13.7)	2.77	0.94
I associate the image of a makeup brand to the reputation of the YouTube influencer	116 (23.3)	149 (30)	155 (31.2)	77 (15.5)	2.61	1.01
I believe that makeup brands that employ YouTube influencers are better than cosmetic brands that do not	81 (16.3)	154 (31)	177 (35.6)	85 (17.1)	2.46	0.96
I believe that skincare brands that employ YouTube influencers are better than cosmetic brands that do not	94 (18.9)	133 (26.8)	148 (29.8)	122 (24.5)	2.40	1.05
Perceived Trustworthiness of YouTube Influencers (Mean = 2.35, SD = 1.00)						
I believe that I can rely on the reviews of YouTube influencers	64 (12.9)	166 (33.4)	194 (39)	73 (14.7)	2.44	0.89
I believe that all YouTube influencers are credible	84 (16.9)	157 (31.6)	142 (28.6)	114 (22.9)	2.42	1.02
I believe in the originality of YouTube influencers	101 (20.3)	138 (27.8)	125 (25.2)	133 (26.8)	2.42	1.09
I believe that all YouTube influencers are honest	57 (11.5)	99 (19.9)	179 (36)	162 (32.6)	2.10	0.99
Weighted Mean					2.78	0.93

Source: Field Survey 2022; Freq. = Frequency

KEY: If mean is 1 to 1.74 = Strongly Disagree; 1.75 to 2.49 =Disagree; 2.50 to 3.24 =Agree; 3.25 to 4= Strongly Agree

Decision rule: If mean is 1 to 2.49 = Negative Perception, 2.50 to 4 = Positive Perception.

Table 1 depicts that female undergraduates of Babcock University generally had a positive perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products ($\bar{x} = 2.78$). Particularly, the respondents positively perceived the benefits of YouTube influencer marketing, image of YouTube influencers, promotional strategies used in YouTube influencer marketing and the image of cosmetic brands. However, female undergraduates had a negative perception of the trustworthiness of YouTube influencer marketers of cosmetic products ($\bar{x} = 2.35$). This suggests that though Babcock University female undergraduates generally had positive perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products, they do not consider YouTube influencers trustworthy.

H₁: Perception of YouTube influencer marketing is a significant predictor of purchase intention towards cosmetic products among female undergraduates of Babcock University.

Table 2: Perception of YouTube Influencer Marketing as a Predictor of Purchase Intention towards Cosmetic Products

Variable	Coeff	Std. Error	B	t-stat.	Prob.	R ²
Constant	10.013	.728		13.751	.000	0.721
Perception of YouTube Influencer Marketing of Cosmetic Products	.482	.013	.849	35.792	.000	

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention towards Cosmetic Products
 Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 2 shows that perception of YouTube influencer marketing positively significantly influences purchase intention towards cosmetic products among Babcock University female undergraduates ($\beta = 0.849, t = 35.792, p < 0.05$). Consequently, the hypothesis was accepted. Perception of YouTube cosmetic product influencer marketing was also found to have a strong positive association with customers' purchase intention towards cosmetic products ($r(497) = 0.849, p < 0.05$). This implies that as the perception of YouTube influencer marketing improves among female undergraduates, their purchase intention towards cosmetic products will also increase. The regression model also indicates that perception of YouTube influencer marketing predicts 72.1 percent variance in customers' purchase intention of cosmetic products ($R^2 = 0.721$). This indicates that better perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products could be used to drive improved customers' purchase intention of cosmetic products among Babcock University female undergraduates.

Discussion of Findings

The researchers sought to determine the perception of YouTube influencer marketing as a predictor of purchase intention towards cosmetic products among female undergraduates of Babcock University. Results revealed that female undergraduates of Babcock University generally had a positive perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products. This finding aligns with the trend reported by Takumi (2020) that consumers positively perceived influencer marketing efforts on YouTube above those on other social media platforms. Similarly, Lu *et al* (2014) revealed that consumers are favourably disposed to sponsored posts endorsed by bloggers. Findings of the study showed that the respondents perceived YouTube influencer marketing as an effective strategy to shape brand image and identity, build a community of audience and improve sales. According to Abraham *et al* (2022), cosmetic and beauty products consumers have come to terms with social media influencer marketing in the way influencers project brand image and how they engage with the influencers' posts as audience members. The findings of this study further substantiate

the result of Lee & Lee's (2022) research which demonstrated that audience brand engagement, community building and networking, as well as purchase intention towards promoted brands are facilitated by parasocial interaction of the audience with YouTube influencers.

Respondents assessed the cosmetics brands from the lens of their perception of the brand influencer. This suggests that the nature of the customers' perception of YouTube influencers can rub off on the brand being promoted. In other words, customers' attraction to YouTube influencers impact their likeness for brands. Several scholars corroborate this finding that attractiveness of social media influencers- particularly in the areas of physical appearance, delivery, social values and personality- makes it easier for the audience to receive the message and enhances efficacy to adopt the promoter's message (Abraham *et al* 2022; Chen & Dermawan, 2020; Le *et al* 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022; Weismueller *et al* 2020). This implies that the likeability/attractiveness of YouTube influencers would influence the audience members' affinity and fondness for brands. The findings also revealed that respondents had a positive perception of the image of cosmetic brands which they are exposed to through YouTube influencer marketing. This finding is validated by Abraham *et al* (2022) who acknowledged that influencer marketing remains an instrumental tool in enhancing the brand perception and recognition of businesses. This further supports previous studies which have revealed the power of social media influencers in shaping consumers' perception about products (Nowak & McGloin, 2014) and how specifically, influencer marketing tends to enhance perceived reputation of cosmetic brands (Le *et al* 2021).

Furthermore, it was shown that female undergraduates of Babcock University did not consider YouTube influencers of cosmetic products as being trustworthy. YouTube influencers were perceived to be lacking credibility, honesty, originality and reliability. Contrary to the findings of this study, Takumi (2020) reported that consumers consider YouTube influencers to be most trusted compared to those on Instagram and TikTok. The recurring knowledge in literature is that trustworthiness is crucial to the effectiveness of influencer marketing. According to the source credibility theory, trustworthiness of the source of a message increases believability and message adoption among the audience. In their study, Le *et al* (2021) for instance, established a correlation between trustworthiness of beauty influencers and information credibility among the audience. For Chen & Dermawan (2020), it was discovered that the more the audience members trust the influencer, the higher the chances of them purchasing products promoted by the influencer. The study also found that the perception of YouTube influencer marketing is a significant predictor of customers' purchase intention towards cosmetic products. This is in line with several studies that have established a relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention. In the study of Masuda *et al* (2022), it was reported that through the parasocial relationship between influencers and followers, social media influencer marketing significantly impacted customer purchase intention. According to Isyanto *et al* (2020), consumers' willingness to purchase products is connected to their perception of influencer marketing. Meanwhile, Ananda & Wandebori (2016) attributed that attractiveness of YouTube beauty influencers is a key factor in the purchase intention

towards products among undergraduates. In other similar studies, it has been reported that people tend to purchase numerous products because of social media influencers (Takumi, 2020) and more specifically, buy cosmetic products in response to promotions made by YouTube vloggers (Chen & Dermawan, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Audience perception of marketing efforts is germane to the success of such promotional activities and the sustainability of brands. The researchers concluded that female undergraduates generally have a positive perception of YouTube influencer marketing of cosmetic products. However, this positive perception does not extend to the trustworthiness of YouTube influencers. Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Cosmetic brands who want to employ YouTube influencer marketing should carefully select influencers with an established track record of trustworthiness. The influencers should also be such that would continue to build trust among the audience through honesty, particularly, in product reviews.
2. Brands should ensure that their YouTube influencer marketing efforts have a positive perception among the audience, especially in the areas of perceived benefits of promotional messages to the audience, perceived image of cosmetic brands, perceived appropriateness of promotional strategies adopted by the influencers, perceived image and trustworthiness of the influencers.
3. YouTube influencer marketing tactics, with positive perception among the audience, should be adopted by cosmetic brands to influence the customers' purchase intention that would lead to patronage among the female target market.

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