Relationship Between Influencer Marketing and Brand Trust Among Generation Z Consumers in Awka Metropolis

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Abstract: *The rise of social media has elevated influencer marketing as a pivotal strategy for fostering brand trust, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers in emerging markets like Nigeria. This study aimed to examine the influence of influencer marketing and perceived influencer credibility on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study, and two null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. The target population was estimated to be 40, 000 Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis, who actively engage with social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube and make purchasing decisions influenced by these platforms. A sample size of 396 Gen Z consumers was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 95% confidence level, selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected using two structured questionnaires and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. The findings reveal that influencer marketing has a high positive influence on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. Additionally, finding revealed that very high positive relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. Findings further revealed that influencer marketing and perceived influencer credibility have significant positive influence on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. The study recommends, among others, that the Anambra State Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with relevant agencies, should initiate public campaigns to educate businesses on leveraging influencer marketing for brand trust. It is also recommended that businesses in Awka Metropolis conduct workshops and social media campaigns to promote credible influencer partnerships that resonate with Gen Z consumers.*
Keywords: influencer marketing, brand trust, generation z, perceived credibility, authenticity

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology, along with the growth of social media as a potent marketing channel, is rapidly changing how goods and services are made available to consumers. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok have become integral to digital marketing strategies. These social media platforms enable businesses to connect with their consumers in dynamic and engaging ways. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram have become central to digital marketing strategies because they enable brands to engage with audiences in innovative and interactive ways. Using social media to market goods and services have led to the emergence of influencer marketing as a dominant approach, particularly for reaching younger demographics like Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019).

Francis and Hoefel (2018) described them as practical consumers who value individuality and prefer brands that reflect ethical and social commitments. Priporas et al. (2019) observed that Generation Z appreciates transparency and makes extensive use of social media for both information and leisure. Fromm and Read (2018) described them as discerning individuals who seek authentic and relatable interactions with brands. Southgate and Finlay (2020) defined this generation as one with high expectations for brand engagement, influenced by their constant access to digital platforms. Su et al. (2020) observed that their purchasing decisions are often guided by peer recommendations and content from influencers, which sets them apart from previous generations. Gen Z represents a significant portion of the population who are highly active on social media platforms where influencers play important roles in shaping consumer preferences. Influencer marketing is characterized by authentic and engaging content, have become a strategic tool for brands to connect with this audience.

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing where brands collaborate with individuals who have a significant following and influence on social media platforms to promote products or services. De Veirman et al. (2017) defined influencer marketing as a modern evolution of celebrity endorsements, where influencers, often perceived as more relatable than traditional celebrities, act as opinion leaders. Lou and Yuan (2019) described influencer marketing as a strategy where brands partner with social media personalities to create authentic and relatable content that resonates with target audiences. Enke and Borchers (2019) stated that influencer marketing relies on the influencer's ability to foster parasocial relationships with followers, enhancing brand engagement. Campbell and Farrell (2020) defined influencer marketing as a collaborative process where influencers co-create content with brands to align with the values of their audience. Similarly, Schouten et al. (2020) viewed influencer marketing as a strategic communication tool that leverages the influencer's credibility to drive consumer trust and purchase intentions. Vrontis et al. (2021) further defined influencer marketing as a dynamic marketing approach that capitalises on influencers' social capital to shape consumer behaviour, particularly within digital ecosystems.

The potential of influencer marketing to enhance brand trust stems from its capacity to cultivate authentic and relatable connections with consumers. Influencers, often perceived as trusted peers, can bridge the divide between brands and audiences by delivering content that appears genuine and aligned with consumer values (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Their credibility, grounded in expertise or authenticity, can bolster consumer confidence in a brand's reliability and intentions, particularly among younger audiences such as Generation Z, who prioritise transparency (Enke & Borchers, 2019). By fostering parasocial relationships, wherein followers feel a personal connection with influencers, brands can build trust through endorsements that seem less commercial and more organic (Schouten et al., 2020). In contexts such as Awka Metropolis, where social media penetration is expanding, influencer marketing presents brands with a unique opportunity to foster trust by collaborating with local influencers who are attuned to the region's cultural and social nuances (Vrontis et al., 2021). This potential to enhance trust highlights the necessity of examining brand trust as a pivotal outcome of influencer marketing initiatives.

Brand trust is the confidence that consumers have in a brand's reliability, integrity and ability to deliver on its promises. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2015) defined brand trust as encompassing both cognitive evaluations of a brand's reliability and emotional bonds formed through consistent experiences. Erdem and Swait (2016) saw brand trust as a signal of quality and consistency, reducing perceived risk in consumer decision-making. Lou and Yuan (2019) viewed brand trust as the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand based on positive expectations of its performance, particularly in influencer-driven contexts. Haenlein et al. (2020) defined brand trust as a multidimensional construct involving reliability, competence and benevolence, critical for fostering consumer loyalty. Vrontis et al. (2021) stated that brand trust is an important outcome of effective influencer marketing which is driven by the authenticity of brand-influencer interactions. Furthermore, Jin and Ryu (2020) conceptualized brand trust as the consumer's belief in a brand's ability to deliver on promises, influenced by credible endorsements in social media settings. Trust is a critical factor in consumer decision-making, especially for Gen Z, who prioritize authenticity and transparency (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). However, the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns in promoting brand trust in Awka remains underexplored. It is against this background that the researcher examined the relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

Purpose of the Study
The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. Specifically, the study:

1. Examined the relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.
2. Investigate the relationship between perceived influencer credibility (and brand trust among Generation Z in Awka Metropolis.

Research Questions
1. What is the relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis?
2. What is the relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z in Awka Metropolis?

Null Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:
1. There is no significant relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.
2. Perceived credibility of influencers does not have a significant relationship with brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic review by Vrontis et al. (2021) analyzed 68 articles from 29 peer-reviewed journals, targeting general consumers, and found that social media influencer (SMI) characteristics—expertise ($\beta = 0.32$), trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.29$), and attractiveness ($\beta = 0.25$)—significantly predicted positive brand attitudes and trust, with authenticity amplifying these effects when influencers align with consumer values. Similarly, Dhanesh and Duthler (2021) surveyed 400 young consumers (aged 18–35, including Gen Z and Millennials) and found that engagement with influencers, measured by interaction metrics (e.g., likes, comments), explains 0.41 of the variance in brand trust, with perceived trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.48$) mediating this relationship. Building on these insights, Haenlein et al. (2020) used structural equation modeling with 481 social media users (aged 18–65) and found that influencers' expertise ($\beta = 0.42$) and kindness ($\beta = 0.35$) positively influence consumer well-being and brand trust, reducing skepticism by 0.40. Ki et al. (2020) surveyed 300 college students (mean age ~20) and found that influencers' perceived authenticity ($\beta = 0.38$) and expertise ($\beta = 0.31$) increase brand trust, explaining 0.45 of the variance in purchase intentions. In a similar vein, Campbell and Farrell (2020) conducted a qualitative study with general consumers and found that collaborative content creation between brands and influencers enhances perceived authenticity, leading to increased brand trust when content aligns with consumer values. Furthermore, Chekima et al. (2020) surveyed 250 young consumers (aged 18–30, including Gen Z and Millennials) and found that influencers' trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.45$) and expertise ($\beta = 0.29$) increase brand trust, explaining 0.39 of the variance in purchase intentions. Furthermore, Jin and Ryu (2020) surveyed 207 young consumers and found that influencer authenticity mediates the relationship between credibility and brand trust in the fashion industry, explaining 0.52 of the variance in trust ($\beta = 0.47$ for authenticity). Finally, Lou and Yuan (2019) surveyed 303 social media users (aged 18–55) and found that the informative value of influencer content ($\beta = 0.32$), trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.28$), and similarity ($\beta = 0.22$) explain 0.47 of the variance in trust in branded posts, significantly enhancing brand trust and purchase intentions.

METHODS

A correlational research design was employed for this study. The research was conducted in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. The target population was estimated to be 40, 000 Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis, defined as individuals aged 18 to 28 who actively engage with social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube and make purchasing decisions influenced by these platforms. A sample size of 396 Gen Z consumers was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 95% confidence level, selected through purposive sampling to ensure participants regularly interact with influencer content on social media, recruited from shopping centres, universities and online communities in Awka. Primary data were collected using two structured questionnaires. The first questionnaire is title Influencer Marketing Campaigns Questionnaire (IMCQ). It contains 20 items which are in two clusters, 1 and 2. Cluster 1 contains 10 items on influencer marketing while cluster 2 contains 10 items on perceived influencer credibility. The questionnaire was measured on a 5-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree and Strongly Disagree (SD). The second instrument is titled Questionnaire on Brand Trust (QBT). It contains 16 items on brand trust. The questionnaire was measured on a 5-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree and Strongly Disagree (SD). To ensure validity, the questionnaires were evaluated by experts in digital marketing and consumer behaviour and a pilot test with 30 respondents was conducted to refine the instrument. Reliability was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding values of 0.87 for exposure to influencer marketing, 0.82 for perceived influencer credibility and 0.90 for brand trust, all surpassing the 0.70 threshold, indicating high reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Out of 396 copies of the instrument administered, 289 copies were returned in good condition and used for the analysis of data. Data were analysed using Pearson correlation analysis in SPSS version 26 to examine the relationship between exposure to influencer marketing campaigns, perceived influencer credibility (independent variables) and brand trust (dependent variable) at a 0.05 level of significance. Correlation results were interpreted based on correlation coefficients (r), with p-values less than 0.05 indicating significant relationships.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis?

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Influencer Marketing and Brand Trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis

Variables	N	r	Remarks
Influencer marketing	289	0.713	High Positive
Brand trust			Relationship

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The result of the Pearson's correlation (r) presented in Table 1 shows that the correlation between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis was 0.713. This value indicates a high positive relationship. This implies that as influencer marketing increases, brand trust among Generation Z consumers also increases and at a high rate. This indicates that there is a high positive relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z in Awka Metropolis?

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Perceived Influencer Credibility and Brand Trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis

Variables	N	r	Remarks
Perceived Influencer Credibility Brand trust	289	0.782	Very High Positive Relationship

The result of the Pearson's correlation (r) presented in Table 2 shows that the correlation between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis was 0.782. This value indicates a very high positive relationship. This implies that as perceived influencer credibility increases, brand trust among Generation Z consumers also increases and at a very high rate. This indicates that there is a very high positive relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

Table 3: Test of Significance of Pearson's Correlation between Influencer Marketing and Brand Trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis

Variables	N	r	p-value	Remark
Influencer marketing Brand trust	289	0.713	0.00	Significant

The results in Table 3 show that there was a significant positive relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis, r = 0.713, p < 0.05. Since the p-value of 0.01 was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning that there was a significant relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

Hypothesis Two: Perceived credibility of influencers does not have a significant relationship with brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

Table 4: Test of Significance of Pearson's Correlation between Perceived Influencer Credibility and Brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis

Variables	N	r	p-value	Remark
Perceived Influencer Credibility Brand trust	289	0.782	0.00	Significant

The results in Table 4 show that there was a significant positive relationship between perceived credibility of influencers and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis, r = 0.782, p < 0.05. Since the p-value of 0.01 was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning that there was a significant relationship between perceived credibility of influencers and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis.

DISCUSSION

The finding of the study revealed a high positive relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. Two major factors may account for this outcome. First, influencer marketing capitalises on the authenticity and relatability of influencers, which strongly resonates with Gen Z consumers who prioritise genuine and transparent brand interactions. Second, the interactive nature of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, facilitates direct engagement between influencers and followers, strengthening parasocial relationships that enhance brand trust. This finding is in agreement with Vrontis et al. (2021) who found that influencer authenticity and credibility are critical drivers of brand trust, particularly among Gen Z, who value transparency and alignment with personal values. On the other hand, Campbell and Farrell (2020) reported that while collaborative content creation enhances authenticity and brand trust, its effectiveness depends on strategic brand-influencer alignments.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed a significant relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. This result corroborated the findings of Lou and Yuan (2019) who found that the informative value of influencer content, combined with trustworthiness, significantly enhances trust in branded posts, influencing brand trust among Gen Z. In the same vein, Campbell and Farrell (2020) affirmed that co-created, authentic content is necessary to foster trust, supporting the significant relationship observed in this study.

The findings of this study revealed a very high positive relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. Several factors may explain this outcome. Firstly, perceived influencer credibility, encompassing trustworthiness, expertise and authenticity, aligns closely with the values of Gen Z consumers, who prioritise genuine and transparent brand interactions. Credible influencers are perceived as

reliable sources, enhancing consumer confidence in the brands they endorse. Secondly, the cultural and social context of Awka Metropolis likely amplifies this relationship, as influencers who share local values or experiences foster stronger connections with Gen Z audiences. This finding is consistent with Vrontis et al. (2021) who revealed that influencer credibility and authenticity are pivotal in building brand trust, particularly among Gen Z consumers who value transparency. Similarly, Jin and Ryu (2020) found that authenticity, a component of credibility, mediates the relationship between influencer endorsements and brand trust in the fashion industry.

Furthermore, the findings revealed a significant relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. This finding is supported by Lou and Yuan (2019) who found that influencer trustworthiness and expertise significantly enhance trust in branded posts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that influencer marketing has a significant relationship with brand trust among Generation Z consumers in Awka Metropolis. The findings revealed a high positive relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust and a very high positive relationship between perceived influencer credibility and brand trust. Furthermore, both relationships were found to be statistically significant. These findings suggest that the extent to which influencers create authentic, relatable and credible content greatly contributes to fostering trust in brands among Gen Z consumers. Therefore, leveraging influencer marketing and ensuring high perceived influencer credibility are essential for brands aiming to build and sustain trust with this demographic in Awka Metropolis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Brands operating in Awka Metropolis should prioritise partnerships with influencers who exhibit high credibility, authenticity and cultural relevance to enhance brand trust among Generation Z consumers.
2. Marketing agencies and brand managers should invest in training programmes for influencers to improve their content creation skills, focusing on transparency, professionalism and engagement to strengthen consumer trust.
3. Businesses should leverage popular social media platforms to facilitate interactive influencer campaigns that promote parasocial relationships and build brand trust among Gen Z.
4. Experienced influencers with a proven track record of authenticity and credibility should mentor emerging influencers, helping them develop strategies to create relatable and trustworthy content for Gen Z audiences.

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