

Do Influencers Influence? A Comparative Study of Celebrities and Social Media Influencers in Shaping Consumer Buying Behaviour in Port

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Abstract: *The research studied how celebrity endorsements and social media influencer advertisements impact consumer buying behaviour in Port Harcourt by using Infinix Nigeria as its research subject. The growth of digital marketing together with the rising use of endorsers has changed how young people see and buy products. Marketers face difficulties because traditional celebrities attract widespread attention while social media influencers create personal connections with their audience. The research examined consumer decision-making processes through three theories which included Source Credibility Theory and Social Influence Theory. The researchers used survey research design to obtain primary data from Port Harcourt youths through structured questionnaires which employed purposive accidental sampling method. The study found that celebrity endorsements increase brand awareness and brand prestige and brand recall while social media influencers drive greater consumer engagement and trust and niche market purchases through their authentic content and interactive communication. The research demonstrates that both endorsement types improve consumer behaviour but their effectiveness changes based on the particular product and advertising medium and target demographics. The research recommends that brands should implement hybrid endorsement methods which combine celebrity presence with influencer authenticity to achieve better marketing results in Port Harcourt's ever-changing consumer market.*

Keywords: Celebrities, Social media, Influencers, Consumer, Buying, Behaviour

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a dominant platform for communication, information dissemination, and marketing. With billions of users worldwide, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter (X) offer brands an unprecedented opportunity to engage with consumers directly. One of the most popular and effective strategies that brands have adopted to leverage this digital space is digital marketing through the use of endorsers, such as celebrities, influencers, and even micro-influencers, to shape and influence public perception of their products or services (Ekundayo, Olasehinde & Ibikunle, 2024). The rise of digital marketing has transformed how brands engage with consumers, with celebrities and social media influencers playing pivotal roles in shaping purchasing decisions. Both groups wield significant influence on consumer behaviour, albeit through different mechanisms. Moreover, consumer behaviour has evolved significantly, particularly in how people make purchasing decisions. Consumers no longer depend on corporate driven advertisements to form opinions about products. Instead, they seek recommendations from celebrities or personalities they admire or feel connected to through social media (Korell & Logan, 2022).

One of the most significant effects of celebrity endorsements is their ability to enhance brand awareness and prestige. Celebrities often have a broad, cross-demographic reach, making them ideal for mass-market campaigns. For example, Beyoncé's partnership with Pepsi or George Clooney's association with Nespresso elevates brand perception by aligning products with luxury and success. Additionally, celebrities can evoke emotional connections, as seen in Nike's campaigns featuring athletes like Serena Williams, which inspire loyalty and motivation among consumers (Jin & Ryu, 2020). On the other hand, social media influencers excel in driving engagement and fostering trust through personalized content. Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers often share their daily lives, making their endorsements feel more genuine. Consumers often perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy, leading to higher conversion rates in niche markets such as beauty, fitness, and tech (Mohan, 2024).

According to Schaffer (2020), traditional celebrities have long been used in advertising, but social media influencers, who often specialize in particular niches, are increasingly seen as more credible within their specific domains. For instance, a beauty influencer might be more trusted in recommending skincare products than a general celebrity. This shift toward influencers and niche endorsements raises important questions about what makes an endorser credible and how brands can leverage that credibility to boost their own reputations. Another key benefit of influencer marketing is its targeted reach and higher return on investment compared to traditional celebrity endorsements. Influencers, especially micro- and nano-influencers, cater to specific audiences, resulting in more meaningful interactions. For instance, a beauty influencer like Huda Kattan can sway makeup enthusiasts more effectively than a generic celebrity endorsement (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Moreover, influencer campaigns often generate higher engagement rates, with some studies showing up to 60% more interaction than celebrity led ads. This is because influencers engage in two-way communication responding to comments, hosting Q&A sessions, and providing honest reviews which strengthen

consumer trust. In contrast, celebrities may lack this level of interaction, making their endorsements feel more distant and transactional (Adeleke, 2023).

By using Infinix as a case study, the research seeks to empirically explore how consumers in Port Harcourt respond to the brand's mixed endorsement approach. Specifically, the study aims to assess the effectiveness of Davido's celebrity endorsement in enhancing brand prestige, recall, and purchase intention, while also evaluating the impact of influencer promotions on perceived authenticity, engagement, and trust. This case study provides a real-world context that allows the research to investigate which form of endorsement has greater influence on consumer behaviour and under what conditions each strategy is most effective. Drawing from the foregoing, this study seeks to examine celebrities and social media influencers' effects on consumer buying behaviour in Port Harcourt, using Infinix as a case study to compare the relative effectiveness of both advertising approaches.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the rise of influencer marketing has significantly reshaped the landscape of consumer engagement and advertising. Traditional celebrity endorsements, once the dominant model of brand promotion, now contend with a growing wave of social media influencers who, though often less globally known, command loyal followings and generate measurable impact within specific niches. In Nigeria, and particularly in urban centers like Port Harcourt, this shift is becoming increasingly visible. Consumers are bombarded with promotional content not just from movie stars, musicians, and athletes, but also from lifestyle bloggers, Instagram personalities, YouTubers, and TikTok creators. Despite the growing investment by brands into influencer marketing, there remains challenge that lies in the tension between the perceived authenticity of local influencers and the aspirational appeal of national celebrities within Port Harcourt's unique cultural context. While influencers are believed to foster stronger parasocial relationships through relatable content in Pidgin English and local references, celebrities maintain the advantage of broader recognition and higher production value in their endorsements. This dichotomy becomes particularly problematic for marketing practitioners who must decide where to allocate limited budgets, especially when targeting Port Harcourt's distinct consumer segments - from affluent oil workers to price-conscious students. Furthermore, the lack of localized data means that current marketing strategies may be based on assumptions drawn from other Nigerian cities that do not account for Port Harcourt's specific media landscape and consumer preferences.

More importantly, despite the fact that the rapid growth of influencer marketing in Nigeria has created a dynamic shift in how brands engage consumers, yet, there remains a significant knowledge gap regarding its comparative effectiveness against traditional celebrity endorsements, particularly in Port Harcourt. While previous studies have examined influencer marketing in Lagos and Abuja, Port Harcourt's unique socio-economic landscape - characterized by its oil industry wealth, vibrant youth culture, and distinct media consumption patterns - presents an under-researched context that may yield different consumer behaviour outcomes. The problem is compounded by marketers' increasing allocation of budgets to influencer campaigns without empirical evidence of their superior effectiveness over celebrity endorsements in this specific market. It is against the identified problem and gap in knowledge that this study seeks to investigate whether social media influencers indeed exert greater influence on consumer behaviour than traditional celebrities among Port Harcourt's diverse demographic groups, and under what specific conditions each endorser type proves more effective.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the celebrity endorsement strategies that affect consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt.
- ii. Analyze the platforms where social media influencer contents have the highest effect on consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt.
- iii. Determine the effect of celebrities endorsed advertisements on consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

To effectively carry out this study, the following research questions are raised and will be answered in this study:

- i. What are the celebrity endorsement strategies that affect consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt?
- ii. What are the platforms where social media influencer contents have the highest effect on consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt?
- iii. How do celebrities endorsed advertisements affect consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt?

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the effects of celebrities and social media influencers on consumer buying behaviour in Port Harcourt, using Infinix as the case study. Geographically, the study is delimited to Port Harcourt. Contently, the study examined the celebrity

endorsement strategies employed by Infinix particularly its collaboration with Davido and how these strategies affect consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility theory

Source Credibility theory was propounded by Hovland, Janis and Kelley in 1953. The theory states that people or receivers of information are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. In other words, Source Credibility theory posits that the effectiveness of a persuasive message depends on the perceived credibility of its source, which is determined by two key dimensions: expertise (the source's knowledge or skill in the relevant domain) and trustworthiness (the perceived honesty and objectivity of the source). The theory describes the influence of perceived expertise and trustworthiness on how people process information and creates attitudes. According to Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953), source expertise is "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions, while source trustworthiness is "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate assertions he considers most valid". Therefore, individuals are more likely to be swayed if the source is alleged to be credible (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). A communicator's expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and power represent the psychological construct associated with source credibility. In particular, the perception of a messenger will influence how a message is perceived and whether it will change attitudes and behaviour. Source credibility theory also examines the level to which people accept information from a person they perceive to have expert status, when compared to a person perceived as less qualified (Abidin, 2022). For example, information that is delivered from a person who is well known and considered to be an expert should have more influence. Therefore, a message delivered by an individual perceived as a credible source about a particular topic information authentication techniques and decision success, for example may have a more meaningful effect than the same message delivered by someone not seen as credible. According to Source Credibility theory, to maximize the potential value associated with messaging, it is important not only to focus on what information to communicate, but also to ensure the right source is delivering the information. The results of some research support these assertions, and confirm that source credibility is germane to information authentication (Korell & Logan, 2022).

Source Credibility Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how celebrities and social media influencers differentially impact consumer behaviour by emphasizing the role of perceived expertise and trustworthiness in persuasive communication. Celebrities typically derive their credibility from widespread fame and aspirational status, which enhances trustworthiness but may lack domain-specific expertise, making them more effective for prestige products or broad brand awareness campaigns. In contrast, social media influencers often cultivate credibility through niche expertise and relatable content, fostering higher perceptions of authenticity and specialized knowledge that resonates strongly with targeted audiences, particularly for specific product categories. The theory suggests that influencers may outperform celebrities in driving consumer decisions when their content aligns closely with their area of specialization, as audiences perceive them as more knowledgeable and genuine within their particular domains.

Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory was initially conceptualized by Herbert Kelman in 1958, with later expansions by other scholars such as Robert Cialdini in 1984 and Deutsch and Gerard in 1955. Kelman's foundational work identified three primary processes of social influence: compliance, identification, and internalization, which explain how individuals adopt attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours based on external pressures. Cialdini further refined the theory by introducing principles like reciprocity, commitment, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity, which detail the psychological mechanisms behind persuasion. These developments collectively form the basis of Social Influence Theory, which examines how social forces shape individual decision-making.

Social Influence Theory explains why celebrities and social media influencers impact consumers differently. Celebrities primarily leverage authority and identification consumers comply with their endorsements due to their high-status reputation (e.g., LeBron James promoting Nike). However, influencers rely more on internalization and social proof their relatable, niche expertise fosters trust, making followers internalize recommendations as genuine (e.g., a beauty influencer's skincare routine). In Port Harcourt, Nigeria, where peer recommendations are highly valued, influencers may drive stronger behavioural changes than celebrities, as their content aligns with local cultural norms and fosters perceived authenticity. Thus, Social Influence Theory helps marketers choose endorsers based on whether they seek mass appeal (celebrities) or targeted, trust-based persuasion (influencers).

Conceptual Review

Celebrities

Celebrities as individuals who enjoy public recognition and use this recognition to influence audiences beyond their primary field of achievement. This broad definition encompasses traditional stars from entertainment/sports and newer digital influencers (McCracken, 2018). Adegoju (2021) characterized celebrities as cultural icons whose mediated personas acquire symbolic value that can be transferred to products, services or causes through endorsement. Turner (2020) proposes that contemporary celebrities are "media constructs whose fame is deliberately developed across multiple platforms through strategic visibility management. Omojola (2019) defined Nigerian celebrities as "personalities whose fame derives from entertainment industries (Nollywood, music, sports) and who command commercial value through audience identification. Rojek (2016) distinguished between ascribed celebrities (born into fame), achieved celebrities (earned through talent), and attributed celebrities (media-created). Nigerian marketing scholar Adetunji (2022) operationalized celebrities in African contexts as personalities with cross-border appeal whose endorsement value stems from cultural resonance and aspirational identification. Driessens (2019) conceptualized celebrity as a social formation where media visibility transforms individuals into public commodities with exchange value. Balogun (2020) defined Nigerian celebrities as glocalised cultural intermediaries who negotiate Western fame models with local value systems. Marwick (2021) argued digital celebrities are "micro-fame practitioners who cultivate audiences through strategic self-branding and platform-specific content strategies. Adeleke (2023) defined social media celebrities as "content creators who attain influencer status through algorithmic visibility and participatory fan cultures.

Celebrities Endorsements

Celebrity endorsements have long been a cornerstone of marketing strategies, leveraging the fame and credibility of well-known personalities to promote products and services. This practice dates back to the early 20th century when companies first recognized the value of associating their brands with popular figures (McCracken, 2009). Today, in our digitally-driven world, celebrity endorsements have evolved beyond traditional media to dominate social media platforms, where stars can directly engage with millions of followers. The psychological foundation of celebrity endorsements lies in the "halo effect," where positive attributes of the celebrity transfer to the endorsed brand (Nisbett & Wilson, 2017). When consumers see a beloved actor, athlete, or musician promoting a product, they unconsciously associate the product with the celebrity's desirable qualities such as success, attractiveness, or trustworthiness. This phenomenon explains why brands are willing to invest millions in celebrity partnerships, with top athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo commanding endorsement fees exceeding \$40 million annually (Forbes, 2023). The effectiveness of celebrity endorsements stems from several key factors that influence consumer behaviour. Source credibility theory suggests that celebrities are particularly persuasive endorsers because they possess expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 2010). For example, when a renowned chef like Gordon Ramsay endorses kitchenware, his culinary expertise lends credibility to the products. Similarly, the match-up hypothesis posits that endorsements are most effective when there's a logical fit between the celebrity's image and the product (Kamins, 2010). This explains why athletic brands frequently partner with sports stars - LeBron James' partnership with Nike makes intuitive sense to consumers. Celebrity endorsements also tap into social identity theory, as consumers often purchase products endorsed by celebrities they admire to enhance their own self-image (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Research shows that celebrity endorsements can increase brand recall by up to 20% compared to non-celebrity ads (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008), demonstrating their powerful impact on consumer memory and recognition.

Social Media

The term 'Social Media' has been defined in different ways by its users, ICT experts, and authors. In 2019, Merriam-Webster defined social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as "group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". It includes web-based and mobile based technologies that are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Typical examples of social media platforms include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and the interactive options on these websites, such as the "re-tweeting" option on Twitter. These instruments are referred to as media because they are tools which can also be used for the storage and dissemination of information; unlike the traditional media like Television and Radio, most of the social media tools allow their users to interact as "re-tweeting" on Twitter and "comment" options on Facebook illustrate.

Social Media Influencers

An influencer is an active individual that has a reasonable influence on their network and surroundings because of their intellectual capacity. An Influencer is a third party who significantly influences the customer's purchasing decision but may never be held accountable for it. Influencers are those that have the ability to influence the purchasing decisions of others due to their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship (Dizon, 2015). Subsequently, Wong (2014) described social media influencers as influential people who have been perceived to be an expert in a chosen field, and as such, they attract many followers. Social media influencers are ordinary people who persuade consumers to make a purchase choice. Anyone can be a social influencer, influencing others' brand

affinity and purchasing decisions (Brown & Hayes, 2013). Social media influencers are online personalities with a big following on one or more social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs) who have an effect on their followers (Agrawal 2016; Varsamis 2018). In contrast to celebrities or public figures that are well-known through traditional media, social media influencers are "ordinary individuals" who have become "online celebrities" through generating and posting content on social media. Typically, they have knowledge in particular fields, such as healthy living, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty, and fashion. A recent Twitter survey indicated that customers may trust social media influencers as much as they trust their friends (Swant 2016).

Empirical Review

Mohan (2024) explored the influence of celebrity endorsements on the purchasing intentions of higher education students. Understanding this impact is crucial as the use of celebrity endorsements in marketing continues to rise. A quantitative approach is adopted, drawing on source credibility theory, social identity theory, elaboration model and theory of planned behaviour. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select participants from various colleges. Data were collected through surveys and analyzed using reliability tests, percentage analysis, chi-square tests and one-way ANOVA. The study found that significant associations were identified between exposure to celebrity endorsements, attitudes toward endorsements and purchasing intentions. Social media influencers emerged as the most influential, followed by sports figures and actors, highlighting the role of celebrity endorsements in shaping consumer behaviour among young adults. The findings are limited to a specific demographic group, which may affect generalizability. The study suggested that future research could expand to include diverse regions and educational levels. Marketers and advertisers can leverage these insights to create more effective celebrity endorsement strategies and enhanced marketing campaigns. The study highlighted the significant role of celebrity endorsements in influencing young adults' purchasing decisions, shaping consumer culture and social identity formation. This study provided insights into the dynamics of celebrity endorsements and their impact on purchasing intentions, offering valuable information for marketers, advertisers and policy makers to develop effective advertising strategies.

Ekundayo, Olasehinde, and Ibikunle (2024) investigated the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in influencing consumer's Choices in Southwest Nigeria's Food and Beverage Sector. This study employed a quantitative survey methodology to analyzed data from a sample of 300 Nigerian consumers, selected through random sampling within the South West sub region. Leveraging existing literature, the study explored key factors contributing to successful celebrity endorsements, including perceived authenticity, expertise, and brand-celebrity congruence. The analysis further examined the impact of consumer demographics and cultural influences on endorsement effectiveness. Findings indicate that celebrity endorsements have a minor influence on consumer perceptions of food and beverages in Southwest Nigeria. Nevertheless, while celebrity endorsements can play a minor role in influencing brand perceptions, their impact on long-term brand loyalty is not statistically significant in the Nigerian market. The study highlighted the need for a nuanced approach to celebrity endorsements, emphasizing the importance of authenticity, brand fit, and integration within a broader marketing strategy.

Onyeama and Kayaman (2024) explored the impact of celebrity endorsements and social media platforms on promoting sustainable consumer behaviour in Nigerian tourism industry. The study employed Mentionlytics software to analyze online documents and examined how political celebrities and social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook) influence consumer behaviour and decision-making processes within the tourism industry. The findings of the study suggested that celebrity endorsements and social media platforms have a positive impact on sustainable consumer behaviour. The results of the study suggested that political celebrities engaged followers on Facebook based on the 70% share. However, no engagement was found on Twitter based on the zero percent (0%) share, suggesting that Facebook enables political celebrities to promote sustainable tourism. The study contributed to the literature on sustainability and celebrity endorsements, offering insights for destination marketers and policymakers in the Nigerian tourism industry.

Listiawati, Ahmad, Amelia, and Zaelani (2024) investigated the influence of endorsers on brand image formation within the realm of social media, focusing on the roles played by celebrities, influencers, experts, and everyday consumers. With the increasing integration of social media into marketing strategies, understanding how different types of endorsers impacted brand perception has become crucial. This study explored the effectiveness of various endorsers, evaluates their authenticity, and examined the implications of emerging trends such as the rise of virtual influencers and the use of data analytics. Key findings revealed that authenticity and relatability are paramount in modern endorsement strategies, with micro-influencers and everyday consumers providing significant value through their genuine connections with audiences. Celebrity endorsements continue to enhanced brand visibility but required careful management due to potential risks. Expert endorsements remained influential in credibility sensitive sectors, reinforcing the importance of authoritative voices. The study also highlighted the growing significance of virtual influencers and the integration of AI and data analytics in optimizing endorsement strategies. Additionally, the study underscored the rising importance of social responsibility in endorsement practices, reflecting consumers' increasing preference for brands that aligned with ethical values and societal causes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design. Survey research was a method of obtaining information from various groups or persons mainly through questionnaires or personal interviews in order to provide a relatively complete understanding of what was happening at a given period and time. In line with this definition, the population of this study comprised all youths who reside in Port Harcourt and who own and use Infinix mobile devices or intended to purchase one. According to the 2006 National Population Commission Census projected to 2024, the youth population in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area was 1,132,160 youths. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted a non-probability sampling method. Specifically, purposive sampling in combination with Accidental sampling, a subtype of purposive sampling, was used. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study focused on a specific group: Port Harcourt youths who currently used an Infinix phone or intended to buy one. Incident sampling allowed the researcher to collect data from eligible respondents encountered at various locations or online platforms, provided they met the inclusion criteria. Using this sampling technique the sample size was 156.

For this study, primary data were used, and these data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit standardized responses that could be easily quantified and analyzed. To establish validity for this study, content validity was employed. The questionnaire was reviewed by the project supervisor and other experts in marketing and consumer behaviour. Their suggestions, corrections, and adjustments were incorporated to strengthen its adequacy and relevance. Reliability was established using the test-retest method. Twenty (20) copies of the questionnaire were administered to 20 respondents who met the study criteria but were not part of the main sample. After a two-week interval, the same questionnaire was re-administered to the same group. The responses from both administrations were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the reliability index. Internal consistency was also assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, with reliability coefficients of 0.70 and above considered acceptable.

The data generated was arranged and coded using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 27 which facilitated the overall data analysis. The data analysis was undertaken in two phases beginning with the analysis of demographic data using tables, frequencies, simple percentages and charts. Secondly, frequencies, simple percentages, weighted means scores were used to answer the research questions. The mean was also calculated by assigning nominal value to the response categories: strongly agree (SA) 4, agree (A) 3, disagree (D) 2 and strongly disagree (SD) 1. The criterion mean is achieved thus;

$$\text{Criterion mean} = \frac{4 + 3 + 2 + 1}{4} = \frac{10}{4}$$

$$\text{Criterion mean} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$$

Decision rule for the research questions was based on a criterion mean of 2.50. Any mean response of 2.50 and above is regarded as agreed and was accepted mean while response rating less than 2.50 is regarded as disagree and was rejected.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Presents the Frequency Distribution of Exposure to Celebrity and Influencer Content

Category	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Celebrities	0	22	67	67
Influencers (SMIs)	22	0	89	45

Table 2 Presents the distribution for Intentional Product Search in the Last 6 Months

Category	Yes	No
Celebrities	89	67
Influencers (SMIs)	134	22

Table 3 shows the Mean Distribution of Responses on Celebrity Endorsement Strategies

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (\bar{X})	Decision
1	Celebrity advertisements attract my attention to Infinix phonest.	72	96	48	0	3.11	Accepted
2	I am more likely to complete a purchase of an Infinix phone after an influencer endorsement than after a celebrity endorsement.	48	24	120	24	2.44	Rejected
3	The credibility of a celebrity determines whether I trust the infinix phone model they endorse	72	96	48	0	3.11	Accepted
4	The lifestyle and success of a celebrity affect how I view the Infinix phones.	72	24	96	48	2.58	Accepted
5	A celebrity’s personality should match the type of Infinix phones they promote	24	96	96	0	2.66	Accepted

6	I believe that celebrities genuinely use the Infinix phones that they endorse (eg. Davido)	0	72	96	48	2.11	Rejected
7	Celebrities' social media posts about the Infinix phone they endorse increase my awareness of a brand.	48	168	0	0	3.22	Accepted
8	I am aware that Infinix uses celebrities to promote its products.	56	66	74	24	2.70	Accepted

Table 3 presents respondents' views on celebrity endorsement strategies for Infinix phones. The results show that celebrity ads effectively attract attention and increase brand awareness through social media posts. Respondents also agreed that a celebrity's credibility, lifestyle, and personality influence how they perceive the phone. However, they doubted that celebrities genuinely use the phones they endorse and rejected the idea that celebrity endorsements influence their purchase decisions more than influencer endorsements. Overall, the table indicates that celebrities help build awareness and perception but have limited impact on buying decisions.

Table 4: Presents the Mean Responses on Platforms With the Highest Influencer Impact

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (\bar{X})	Decision
1	I often see influencer promotions of Infinix phones on Instagram	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.33	Accepted
2	TikTok influencers make Infinix phones look exciting and trendy.	22.2%	55.6%	22.2%	0.0%	3.00	Accepted
3	Reviews by influencers on YouTube help me understand Infinix phone's features better.	33.3%	22.3%	44.4%	0.0%	2.89	Accepted
4	Facebook exposes me to new Infinix phone models through influencer content.	22.2%	44.5%	33.3%	0.0%	2.89	Accepted
5	I only trust influencer content about Infinix phones more on platforms that allow real-time interaction (e.g., live streams).	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	2.67	Accepted
6	TikTok influencer content is more persuasive than content on other social media platforms when it concerns my choice for Infinix phones.	11.1%	55.4%	33.5%	0.0%	2.78	Accepted

Table 4 shows respondents' opinions on the social media platforms where influencer content has the strongest effect on their behaviour toward Infinix phones. All items were accepted, with Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube emerging as the most influential platforms, while Facebook and interactive platforms also showed moderate influence.

Table 5: shows the Mean Responses on the Effects of Celebrity-Endorsed Digital Marketing Content

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (\bar{X})	Decision
1	Celebrity advertisements attract my attention to Infinix phones.	33.3%	11.1%	44.5%	11.1%	2.66	Accepted
2	I admire and follow celebrity trends, including the phone brands they use.	0.0%	44.5%	33.3%	22.2%	2.22	Rejected
3	Celebrity endorsements like Davido make me trust the quality of Infinix phones.	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%	11.1%	2.89	Accepted
4	I am more likely to buy an Infinix phone if endorsed by a top celebrity	0.0%	33.3%	44.5%	22.2%	2.11	Rejected
5	Celebrities influence me more when buying expensive Infinix phone models.	22.2%	44.5%	22.2%	11.1%	2.78	Accepted

Table 5 presents respondents' views on the effects of celebrity-endorsed digital marketing content. The results show that celebrity ads attract attention and can enhance trust in product quality, but do not strongly influence trend-following or purchase decisions.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One

What are the celebrity endorsement strategies that affect consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt?

The results from Table 4.4 show that celebrity endorsement strategies in Port Harcourt primarily influence consumer **awareness, attention, and perception**, rather than actual purchase behaviour. Respondents agreed that celebrity advertisements strongly attract their attention ($\bar{X} = 3.11$) and that celebrities' social media posts significantly increase their awareness of Infinix phones ($\bar{X} = 3.22$). This reinforces the idea that celebrities play an important role in creating visibility and driving initial consumer engagement with the brand. The findings also show that the credibility and reputation of celebrity's shape consumer perceptions of the product ($\bar{X} = 3.11$), while the lifestyle and success of the celebrity influence how the product is viewed ($\bar{X} = 2.58$). Additionally, participants agreed that there should be a good match between a celebrity and the Infinix phone they endorse ($\bar{X} = 2.66$), supporting the match-up hypothesis that endorsement effectiveness improves when the celebrity's image aligns with the product.

However, despite these positive perceptual effects, respondents expressed significant scepticism regarding authenticity. Many disagreed that celebrities genuinely use the Infinix phones they promote ($\bar{X} = 2.11$), indicating a lack of trust in celebrity endorsements. Respondents also rejected the idea that celebrity endorsements lead them to complete a purchase ($\bar{X} = 2.44$), showing that while celebrities may influence awareness, they exert weak influence on actual buying decisions. Overall, the findings reveal that celebrity endorsement strategies in Port Harcourt function effectively as visibility and image-building tools, but they have limited power in shifting consumer trust or purchase behaviour.

When compared with previous studies, these findings align with the work of Belch and Belch (2021) and Kamins (2010), which emphasise that celebrities are most effective at attracting attention and enhancing message recall. The results also support Ekundayo, Olasehinde, and Ibikunle (2024), who similarly found that celebrity advertising rarely translates into strong purchase intention. Respondents' scepticism regarding whether celebrities use the products they endorse echoes the concerns raised by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) about declining consumer trust in celebrity promotions. However, the moderate awareness of Infinix's use of local celebrities ($\bar{X} = 2.70$) contrasts with earlier Nigerian studies such as Adegoju (2021), which reported stronger consumer preference for local celebrity endorsers. The weaker purchase influence observed in this study also contradicts older endorsement research that suggested celebrities strongly drive consumer decisions. A likely explanation is the growing dominance of digital influencers who consumers perceive as more relatable and authentic than celebrities.

Interpreted through the theoretical framework, the results partly support the Source Credibility Theory. The high scores for attention, awareness, and credibility demonstrate that celebrity attractiveness and perceived expertise shape perceptions. Yet low authenticity and limited purchase impact challenge the theory's expectation that credible sources directly persuade consumers. Social Influence Theory is reflected in the way respondents associate celebrity lifestyles and personality traits with the endorsement message, but the minimal behavioural effect suggests weak internalisation of celebrity influence. Social Identity Theory also appears in the agreed importance of celebrity product match and moderate preference for local celebrities, indicating some level of identity alignment. Nonetheless, the fact that these dynamics do not translate into meaningful purchase behaviour shows that identity alignment alone is insufficient for persuasion among consumers in Port Harcourt. Overall, the findings demonstrate that celebrity endorsement strategies are effective for enhancing brand visibility, shaping perceptions, and strengthening brand image, but they fall short in driving trust-based decisions or actual purchasing behaviour in the contemporary digital environment.

Research Question Two

What are the platforms where social media influencer contents have the highest effect on consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt?

The results (Table 4.5) show that Instagram and TikTok are the most influential platforms for social media influencer content among consumers in Port Harcourt, with Instagram emerging as the leading source of exposure. Respondents unanimously indicated that they frequently encounter influencer promotions on Instagram ($\bar{X} = 3.33$), underscoring its strong visual orientation, high engagement levels, and efficient content distribution algorithms that make influencer messages highly noticeable. TikTok also demonstrated substantial influence, with respondents agreeing that TikTok influencer videos make Infinix phones appear exciting and trendy ($\bar{X} = 3.00$), and many noting that TikTok content is more persuasive than content on other platforms ($\bar{X} = 2.78$). This reflects TikTok's ability to deliver short, dynamic videos that strongly appeal to younger audiences.

YouTube recorded a moderate influence level ($\bar{X} = 2.89$), indicating that while some consumers rely on detailed reviews to understand product features, others are more responsive to faster and more entertaining formats. Facebook showed similar moderate influence ($\bar{X} = 2.89$), suggesting that while it still exposes users to new phone models, its impact is less pronounced due to its slower engagement patterns and older user base. Respondents also expressed confidence in platforms that allow real-time interaction ($\bar{X} = 2.67$), suggesting that live streams and interactive sessions help strengthen perceived authenticity and trust in influencer content. Overall, the findings confirm that Instagram and TikTok exert the strongest effect on consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt, while YouTube and Facebook play supplementary but less dominant roles.

When compared with previous studies, these findings align with Nwokah and Eze (2020), who identified Instagram and TikTok as the most persuasive platforms among Nigerian youths, consistent with the high visibility and engagement reflected in this study. The strong influence of TikTok also supports Balogun (2023), who emphasized its viral, trend-driven nature and its ability to shape impulse-driven consumer responses. The results further correspond with Djafarova and Rushworth (2022), who highlighted Instagram's visual appeal and high interaction rates as key drivers of influencer marketing effectiveness. Meanwhile, the mixed responses regarding YouTube mirror Lou and Yuan's (2019) observation that long-form reviews are more appealing to consumers who prefer detailed product information. However, this study differs from earlier Nigerian findings that positioned Facebook as a

leading persuasive platform; here, Facebook's influence is only moderate, suggesting that consumers in Port Harcourt are shifting toward more visually immersive and fast-paced social media environments. Additionally, the importance placed on real-time engagement represents an emerging trend not emphasized in older studies.

The findings also reflect the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Social Influence Theory is evident in how Instagram and TikTok shape consumer attitudes through trends, viral content, and peer-driven norms that determine what is seen as modern or desirable. Source Credibility Theory helps explain why interactive and visually engaging platforms foster greater trust, as real-time engagement increases perceptions of honesty and transparency. Social Identity Theory is also exemplified, as consumers connect more deeply with influencers who use relatable cultural expressions, humor, and lifestyle portrayals typical of TikTok and Instagram. Collectively, the results show that visually appealing, interactive, and culturally relevant content on Instagram and TikTok exerts the strongest influence on consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt, highlighting a broader shift toward short-form video platforms and socially vibrant digital spaces.

Research Question Three

How does celebrity endorsed advertisements affect consumer behaviour in Port Harcourt?

The findings (Table 4.6) show that celebrity-endorsed digital marketing content in Port Harcourt has a mixed but noticeable effect on consumer behaviour. Respondents indicated that celebrity advertisements successfully attract their attention ($\bar{X} = 2.66$) and enhance their perception of product quality, as seen in the relatively high agreement that endorsements from celebrities like Davido increase trust in Infinix phones ($\bar{X} = 2.89$). These results show that celebrities are still effective in generating initial brand interest and creating positive product impressions. However, despite this influence on attention and perception, respondents expressed low admiration for celebrity trends ($\bar{X} = 2.22$) and made it clear that celebrity endorsements do not motivate them to buy Infinix phones ($\bar{X} = 2.11$). This demonstrates a significant gap between awareness-building and actual behavioural change. Even though celebrity content moderately influences consideration of expensive models ($\bar{X} = 2.78$), this influence stops short of inspiring real purchasing action, suggesting that consumers admire celebrities but remain sceptical of their promotional messages.

These findings align with previous studies showing that celebrities can increase brand appeal and strengthen perceived product credibility in the early stages of consumer decision-making, but rarely convert these impressions into purchases. They also support research highlighting growing consumer scepticism toward celebrity endorsements, reflecting a shift in trust toward influencers as more authentic communicators. However, the results differ from earlier Nigerian studies that reported stronger consumer trust and higher purchase influence from celebrity endorsements, suggesting that today's digital consumers in Port Harcourt are more critical and less dependent on celebrity advice. Interpreted within the theoretical framework, the results partially support Source Credibility Theory, as celebrity attractiveness and prestige enhance interest and perceived quality, yet the low scores for trust and purchase intention challenge the assumption that credibility always leads to persuasion. Social Influence Theory helps explain the rise in interest and consideration, showing that while celebrities can attract attention through admiration, this admiration does not translate into behavioural conformity. Social Identity Theory is also reflected in the modest product appeal created by aspirational associations with celebrities, but this identification remains too weak to drive consumers toward actual buying decisions.

Overall, the findings show that celebrity-endorsed advertisements in Port Harcourt strongly shape perception, interest, and initial brand engagement but have limited power to build trust or drive purchasing behaviour, highlighting their declining persuasive influence in the modern digital marketplace.

Conclusion

The study concludes that while both celebrities and social media influencers play important roles in digital marketing communication, influencers have a significantly stronger effect on consumer purchasing behaviour in Port Harcourt. Celebrities remain effective for generating attention, visibility, and brand prestige, but their influence rarely translates into actual buying decisions due to lower perceived authenticity and limited product familiarity. In contrast, influencers who communicate in relatable, credible, and experience-driven ways are more successful in shaping consumer attitudes, building trust, and motivating purchase intentions.

The findings show that authenticity, cultural alignment, and relatability are the most powerful drivers of persuasion for modern consumers, who increasingly value honest, practical, and transparent communication over polished celebrity endorsements. Therefore, brands seeking strong behavioural outcomes should prioritise influencer partnerships, while still using celebrities for complementary purposes such as visibility and aspirational appeal.

Overall, the study emphasizes that strategic integration of both celebrities and influencers can yield the most effective marketing results: celebrities for awareness and image-building, and influencers for trust, engagement, and conversion.

Recommendations

1. For Marketers and Brand Managers: Marketers should adopt a segmented, evidence-based approach when selecting endorsers. Celebrities should be reserved for campaigns aimed at visibility, brand prestige, and broad awareness, as their primary strength lies in capturing attention rather than driving actual purchases. For products that require trust, explanation, and credibility such as smartphones and other everyday consumer goods brands should prioritise social media influencers, who consumers perceive as more authentic, relatable, and knowledgeable. Influencers who provide practical demonstrations, honest reviews, and culturally aligned communication are more effective at reducing perceived purchase risk and encouraging product trial. Brands should also consider leveraging conversational content formats such as reviews, TikTok explainers, live sessions, and Q&A-

style videos, as these formats strengthen audience connection and enhance message credibility. Partnering with local creators who incorporate relatable cultural cues, humour, and Pidgin English can further increase engagement and resonance among Port Harcourt consumers.

2. For Advertising and Media Agencies: Agencies should refine their endorser selection criteria by emphasizing trustworthiness, authenticity, communication style, and perceived credibility rather than relying on follower count alone. Content should prioritize transparency through real-life product demonstrations, unscripted moments, honest explanations, and interactive formats that consumers perceive as genuine. A hybrid endorsement strategy is recommended, combining both celebrities and influencers within the same campaign. Celebrities can build visibility and aspirational appeal, while influencers provide the detailed, trustworthy messaging required to convert audiences into active buyers. This balanced approach maximizes both reach and persuasion.

3. For Policy Makers and Regulators: Policymakers should establish clear guidelines requiring transparent disclosure of paid partnerships and sponsored content, ensuring that consumers can distinguish authentic opinions from paid endorsements. Stronger ethical standards are needed to address misleading claims, undisclosed advertising, and deceptive influencer practices. Additionally, digital literacy initiatives should be expanded to help young consumers and frequent social media users critically evaluate online content, recognize persuasive intent, and make informed decisions. This will reduce vulnerability to manipulation and promote healthier digital consumption habits.

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