Instagram-Based Skin Care Influencers and the Development of Mutual Trust Among Followers in Lagos, Nigeria

Tolulope Kayode-Adedeji and Ifunanya Okechukwu

Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria

Department of Mass communication
Tolulope.kayode-adedeji@covenantuniversity.edu.ng; (+234) 7068298189

Abstract

Social Media Influencers usage in this current online age is becoming necessary and common in the communication-marketing environment. Over the years, they have shown their relevance and influence as impactful in the online space. In light of this, the study seeks to investigate and identify the various deceptive practices used by social media skincare influencers, through focus group discussion. The universities participants in Lagos state were selected using the cluster sampling method because major skin care brands in Nigeria have their head offices in Lagos state, also, considering the fact that universities are known to house Nigerians or categories of people who are social media savvy, fashion forward and particular about skin care, looks and appearances. Result shows skin care influencers are very useful in the online space, not just for brand promotion but also for helping skincare consumers in their skin care purchase decision-making. In addition, social media skin care influencers are not necessarily deceptive, however, they influence mainly for the money and publicity and leave out significant information when promoting a brand, the respondents agree that in this age, the use of social media influencer is significant for product promotion and consumer information. It is recommended that regulatory bodies in Nigeria should set up monitoring or control bodies who would carry out customer marketing research on brand and influencer activities to curb deception.

Key words: Consumer, Deceptive practices, Influencer, Instagram, Mutual trust, Skin care

1. Introduction

Online platforms are gradually growing and becoming 'real-life' marketplaces where marketing activities such as buying and selling take place. Many business owners are beginning to tap into the opportunities that social media platforms provide, such as reaching a larger portion of their brand audience, creating maximum visibility for their products, building a larger customer base for their organisations and ultimately building 'brand loyals'. Arumugan (2023) states that high rate of people using online platforms informs reason why organisations and business owners now switch to social media in order to showcase or promote their brands. This is because social media platforms provide brand owners and organisations with the reach of larger audience or customer prospects both locally and globally. Also, the reach of digital platforms increased visibility of brands, awareness of brands, as well as engaging with brand consumers in more interesting, interactive and meaningful ways. Pintu (2022) agrees with Arumugan by explaining that corporations have taken advantage of online marketing potentials as advantage for product influencing and have used it to drive their advertisement campaigns effectively.

In the highly competitive consumer market, brand owners are working tirelessly in creating sales and promotional messages that are capable of causing a 'brand switch' in the favour of their brands. They are not just working towards retaining their 'loyal' customers they also want to ensure that the consumers of other brands make a switch to

their own products. Hence, social media becomes a viable medium to pass these messages. The need to build a very striking brand identity that is possible to evoke brand-loyalty is imperative in attaining profitability and sustained competitive advantage in the market place as pointed out by Anyanwu and Oguibe (2022).

The engagement of well-known personalities in brand influencing is also one of the tools employed by brand owners to give maximum visibility to their products. Geyser (2023) explains that social media influencers are personalities that are well identified by the people and have some sort of connection with the people, as many of them are members of their fan base or followership.

In addition, Jin and Phua (2014) explain that social-media brand-influencers have good number of followers/fanbase both online and offline, and therefore have a perceived social impact. Their influence is made possible because most people tend to adopt these personalities as their role models, while many others idolize them because they are major celebrities, actors/actresses, musicians and stand-up comedians; hence, their promotion of brands and products are usually widely accepted by these groups of consumers.

Patmawati and Miswanto (2022) state that one of the effects of adopting brand-influencers on social media is drawing attention and creating awareness among the brand-influencer's fans/followers; this is done to maximise the possibility of increased purchase for the brand or product being advertised. Olenski (2016) believes that because influential people are used in advertising a product, there is likelihood that people will buy the product.

In recent times, there is increase in the use of deceptive practices in advertising in the form of brand influencing in the digital environment. Baltezarevie (2023) states that brand-influencers ride on the gullibility of consumers by indulging in deceptive advertising practices which involves promoting or advertising low-quality or defective skin care effects which in turn leaves the consumers feeling deceived and cheated

after they must have purchased the product because of the content created by the brand-influencer.

Fake and deceptive online product-reviews and unethical deceptive advertising practices are used to influence and advertise products online, such as skin care products in this context as pointed out by the Federal Trade Commission (2021). Campbell, Mohr and Yeleigh (2013) point out that the unethical use of deception in social media brand influencing is capable of causing consumers to purchase items they may never have a need for. This is because deception in advertising is the use of intentionally-designed unsubstantiated claims to deceive consumers into drawing mistaken inferences about the originality and potency of products or brands.

Sacksner, Kaundinya, Daftary, Jackson and Kundu (2022) describe social media skincare influencers as social media personalities who are able to create credible contents on beauty-related topics and are considered an expert in the beauty industry.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The incessant use of unsubstantiated claims about the potency of skin care products by brand influencers is unethical and also a concern to the general well-being of consumers of skin care products as there are reports of skin care products having adverse reaction on the skin of the users, resulting to serious health conditions like skin cancer, hives, hyper-pigmentation, etc. Skin care influencer exaggerate the potency or quality of the skin care product, posing a serious economic implication as it results to a total waste of money with consumers purchase intentions unmet.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To study consumers' perception of

deceptive practices by skin care influencers

on Instagram.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The social media platform investigated for the purpose of this work is the Instagram Platform. The Instagram platform is known to have the greatest level of users and brands engagement rating among other social media platforms as explained by McCormick (2022). The study is limited to skin care brand influencing and the activities of skin care brand influencers and skin care brands only. The respondents are social media users. primarily undergraduates in Nigeria, who actively engage with or patronise skin care influencers on Instagram. This study is limited to the universities within Lagos state, Nigeria which are scientifically selected.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Instagram Usage for Brand Influencing

Organisations are employing every opportunity at their arsenal to ensure that their brands are not relegated in terms of sales and loyalty. They engage in various activities like promotions, discounted sales, giveaways, referral discounts, loyalty discounts, influencer marketing and other forms of promotion and advertising. Salunke and Jain (2022) agree that social media has grown beyond adventures, he maintains that businesses and influencers now strategise using Instagram for building brand awareness.

The Instagram platform has proven to be the choice social media platform for maximum and result-driven brand awareness. Chen and Qasim (2020) explain that organisations' preference for Instagram is because high percentage of online users spend more time on the Instagram than on other platforms. This supports the stance of Zak and Hasprova (2020) who believe on the possibility that adverts and product promotions on Instagram can reach about 96.6% of Instagram active users on a monthly basis. They further explain that such high percentage could sum up to almost two billion potential customers.

Bojkov (2023a) establishes that a vital reason why organisations choose Instagram platform for brand awareness considering the unique configuration of the platforms that allows

activities on the platform to be measurable, hence, organisations will be able to measure the impact of their ad campaigns, which is very vital for an informed business decision. Bojkov (2023b) explains that the Instagram platform has features like followership count and interaction rating such as number of reactions such as likes, comments, views, saves and shares. All these configurations enable organisations determine the depth and reach of their advertising ads on the platform. Organisations therefore can optimise the Instagram platform for product marketing through creating a business account or profile, as it is dedicated to constant posting and updating information on the brand, through this account.

Bojkov (2023) further explains that Instagram's capabilities are no doubt, a great means to market grow brand's awareness and drive sales. Having online business representatives who will always be on ground to post useful tips on the products, highlighting the usefulness of the product and also responding to enquiries will also give the brand an edge in the market. These representatives work by ensuring marketing activity on their brand is not only timely but also trending.

Another way the use of Instagram can be optimised for brand awareness by organisations is by creating a viable brand community on the Instagram platform. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) also agree with this notion, explaining that organisations hoping to gain online visibility and brand awareness must consider creating a working online brand community where customers can meet, interact and share product-based experiences with ease.

Freedman (2023), explains that it is a great advantage working with brand influencers on Instagram because of their uniqueness in content creation.

1.5.2 Skin Care Influencing

Social media brand influencing has incredibly grown and gained prominence in various industries ranging from food, sports, fashion,

lifestyle, fitness, skincare and many more. Mwaisaka (2017) states that the advent and growth of internet platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, etc., has given room for influencing on social media.

It has always been the human desire to look beautiful and remain ageless and this desire cuts across all races, genders and age groups. Joshi, Karrapati and Krudamannil (2022) agree that physical appearance is an integral part of the human personal identity. They explain that it is natural and not abnormal that people search for products that could enhance their physical looks and delay aging. Thus, looking beautiful and appealing do not only consist of dieting, fitness and other healthy practices but also skin care.

The beauty industry just like many other industries has gained substantially from the rise of social media influencing, as Ridder (2020) mentions that beauty brands now turn to social media platforms to increase their visibility, credibility and to increase sales volume. The presence of beauty brands and skin care influencers online is more like a solution to the enormous beauty needs of many. Therefore, skin care influencers can do well in promoting a brand based on credible testimonial, following a customer's positive review of the product, explaining his/her skin care struggles in the past, to engaging the new product, revealing its pleasant results. Casalo, Flavian and Ibanez-Sanchez (2022) is of the opinion that credible and unbiased testimonials from skin care influencers could help organisations build communities of committed followers and customer base who also share same skin care struggle.

Skin care products are one of the many products with good sales; a product category that resonates well with people of all ages and circles. However, there are certain factors that determine what category of skincare sells more, such factors as, lifestyle, age, budget, skin type, skin conditions, environment and interest. Bouvier (2022) mentions that skin care could be age specific because while the older generation seeks for anti-aging beauty products, teenagers may tend to seek acne

remedies. It could also be gender specific as women are always fighting to defy aging.

As an influencer, there is need for authenticity and transparency to connect deeper with your audience and foster their trust. Al-Heali (2020) states that it is imperative that skin care influencers create content for the beauty brand, share their experience with the brand and maintain regular communication with their followers, this will generate awareness and visibility to the brand. Bojang (2017) maintains that trust is very significant to the success of a skin care influencer in promoting a beauty product bearing in mind that the influencer does not know his/her followers personally, therefore the skin care influencers would need to convince the buyers easily because of their trustworthiness, reliability, honesty and sincerity. Bruns (2018) maintains the view that if a skin care influencer lacks the afore-mentioned qualities, he/she will have no power to appeal to the followers.

As a skin care influencer, one is expected to carve a niche for one's brand in terms of quality assurance and customer relations. This is in line with the view of Strapagiel (2022) who believes that owning or influencing a skin care brand goes beyond a beautiful brand name and brand logo, rather it includes one's value proposition, being able to tell one's customers what advantage one's skin care product has over other competing brands.

An important aspect of skincare influencing and all forms of brand influencing in general is the issue of negativity. As a skin care influencer, it is important to be guided about what one says concerning other competing brands. It is advised to channel all energy towards promoting the brand than wasting time trying to bring other brands down, even if truly, you have used such brands and are not effective. Al-Heali (2020) mentions that it is negative, hateful and unnecessary to tarnish a competitor's brand reputation. He added that as an influencer your audience would assume you are doing that on purpose and you may lose credibility and their trust.

Another angle of credibility on the part of skincare influencing is becoming 'jack of all

4

trade', it would not sit well with your audience seeing you promote skin lightening beauty products when in actual sense you are a person of colour. This would not correlate. Your audience will probably take you for a joker and possibly see you as a mere marketer. Hafez (2021) states that beauty influencers are supposed to work in a specific niche as that will make their followers view them as being authentic and realistic.

Empirical Review

Smith (2021) in his research, content analysis of Instagram posts by skincare brands, did it to pinpoint the patterns of brand deception. He identified that there are many articles that are misleading in terms of highlighting the effectiveness of the product and that the posts do not declare paid partnerships with the influencer. Brownie's (2021) experimental study, sought to discover the impacts of influencer endorsements to the general belief of skincare brands. This study tested the effect of Instagram post containing influencer advertising of skincare products on attitude towards the advertised brands, and purchase intention. The evidence of the finding shows that endorsers' recommendations had a striking impact on purchase, despite having disclaimer statements. In addition, Ashley (2021) explains that sometimes, hiring and testing can help researchers determine the degrees of consumer trust, purchase intention, and perceived brand authenticity due to exposure to influencer content by employment of randomized controlled trials and behavioral experiments.

In addition, Sonntag (2016) used an online survey questionnaire that was administered to consumers with interest in skincare brands to assess their level of knowledge and experiences with brand deception on digital media. Therefore, the research has shown that participants had the knowledge that fake news can be spread, they face difficulty in identifying sponsored posts. This search for the truth or distinguishing between right and wrong information raises the challenges that people encounter on social media, particularly because advertisements can be laced with content in a way that it becomes difficult to distinguish them from actual content on the various social platforms.

Ayodele (2021) selected 21 Skincare influencers and conducted semi-structured interviews in order to elaborate participants' attitudes towards brand deception. Here most of the influencers and promoters confessed some of them felt pressured into providing some highly inflammable descriptions of products just for the purpose of attracting more sponsors and fans.

In their quantitative study, Semerádová and Weinlich (2022) analysed patterns of dishonesty within the context of marketing, using posts from skincare brands on different social media platforms as their data sample. Analysing the responses they provide; the authors of the study were able to identify a significant increase in deceptive practices. In this regard, they found alarming examples of exaggerated claim endorsements, wherein the brands would make more of the benefits or effectiveness of the particular products. Further, they discovered many instances in which brands faked endorsement and sponsored content by not disclosing those affiliations to consumers. Not only do such behaviours erode consumer trust, but they also emphasise the importance of increasing the legal requirements for promoting products and services through social media sites.

Following a cross-sectional survey design, Rossolatos (2018) sought to identify how cultural differences affect consumer responses regarding perceived deceptiveness from skincare brand advertising in the Western and Eastern regions. From the present study it was evident that the consumer in both markets was vulnerable to brand deception. But the study revealed that there were cultural concerns that affected the success of these under such deceptive marketing techniques. Thirdly, cultural factors defined how the consumers interacted with the deceptive appeals and demonstrated that what worked in one cultural environment may not be as effective in another one, or be interpreted in a different way. It is worthy of note that marketing communication strategy should be properly contextualized in culture.

In contrast, Godefroit-Winkel and Peñaloza (2023) synthesised data through an ethnographic survey of online skincare groups to evaluate the interactions between consumers with the organisaions' business information on digital media. As such, they engaged with the online forums, closely tracking user experiences and perceptions of skincare brands. In the process of the study, the collected data suggested the fact that the impact of peers and community engagement heavily influences the views of

consumers regarding brands and their genuineness. Their implications underlined the features of the social processes occurring within online communities and how the various opinions of the consumers influence the development of their personal attitude to the brands.

To summarise, this empirical review reveals various approaches used to investigate the digital media influence and deceptive practices within the skincare industry. While moving from content analysis to neuroscientific research, scholars have looked into different approaches to uncover the intricate interplay of contemporary marketing practices and consumer conduct. Going forward, more cooperation across disciplines and the harnessing of new approaches and methodologies will be required in order to tackle the issues raised by brand deception on social media and encourage the online skincare industry to be more honest in future.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The Source Credibility Theory is one of the theoretical frameworks that supports this study.

The Source Credibility Theory

The Source Credibility Theory propounded by Hovland, Janis and Kelly in 1963 states that message recipients will be easily persuaded when the originator or the message source is trusted. The Source Credibility Theory postulates that brand consumers will be persuaded to buy a product if the message bearer (the brand influencer) is presented as truthful and not deceptive. This is the reason Griffin (2000) states that the credibility and transparency of brand endorsers or brand influencers could have an influence on the decision of consumers (brand consumers) towards the influenced products. Just as in the case of brand endorsers (influencers) and the brands they endorse. This is also in line with the view of Umeogu (2012) who explains the Source Credibility Theory as an instance where message acceptance depends on how credible the message sender is, as in the case of (brand influencer) as perceived by the receiver (consumers).

Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) are of the opinion that brand influencers have the ability to affect consumer trust and buying intention in the line of clothing, hair, and skin care, therefore selecting the right and credible source (brand influencer) to endorse your product or service will generate positive responses from the consumers. Cooley and Parks Yancy (2019) confirm that people will have faith in a product if they have faith in the brand influencer of the product.

Daneshvary and Schwer (2000) explain that a crucial determinant that may affect source credibility as relates to brand influencing is the "match-up" relationship that exists between the brand influencer and the brand. They maintain that the status of the influencer has no impact if an influencer who is known to be a vegetarian is used to promote meaty or beefy products just like using a dark-skinned brand influencer to sell a toning or skin-lightening cream.

1.7 Methodology

The qualitative research method that was adopted in the collection of data pertinent to this study is the Focus Group Discussion. This research approach was necessary to this study because it provides the researcher a first-hand information on not just the opinion of the participants but also on their non-verbal expression, which could also be necessary for further analysis.

Consumers of skin care products were selected using the purposive sampling technique as participants for a Focus Group Discussion. The criteria for selection are that they are social media users who follow at least one skin care influencer or have purchased and used a skin care product from a social media skincare influencer. In essence, the participants were asked verbally to ensure they meet the selection-criteria, also, their consent to participate was gotten through their signing of a consent form. The Focus Group Discussion was done in English language.

A total of 12 participants were purposively selected for the focus group discussion which was made up of 6 females and 6 males. This process was carried out in Lagos state and aims to gather information through the responses of the Focus Group participants on how social media skin care influencers use deceptive practices and how these affect skin care consumers, the influencer and the skin care brand; in terms of consumer-satisfaction, credibility on the part of the skin care influencers and loyalty to the skin care brand.

The process was made up of the 12 participants, a moderator and an observer. To document respondent's responses, the process was recorded

using a cam recorder. The recording was transcribed to text for further analysis.

1.8 Results

Consumers' perceptions of deceptive practices by skin care social media influencers Results derived from a 3-hour discussion represent the representative participants' perception of skincare influencing on social media. The major perceptions of consumers are that online skincare influencers are not necessarily deceptive, online skincare influencers influence mainly for the money and publicity, Social Media skincare influencers leave out significant information when promoting a brand and in this new age, the use of social media influencer is significant for product promotion in this age.

A) Online skincare influencers are not necessarily deceptive

Perception of online skincare influencers according to participants first suggests that most participants believe that online skincare Influencers are not deceptive in carrying out their duties. According to **Participant 1, 2, 4, 5** and **6** online skincare influencers are not necessarily deceptive with the act of online influencing. **Participant 2,** '*No I won't say they are deceptive*'. **Participant 6,** '*they are not necessarily deceptive*' be blames it on the brand itself by saying that *'that does not mean the influencer is saying the wrong thing or is being deceptive, it just goes back to the producers and all the people that are behind the camera that are making the product. So, you cannot necessarily blame the influencer for those scenarios.'*

While **Participant 3** referred to the actions of online skincare influencers in the online space as '*just doing their job ...*' **Participant 1** stressed that '*there is a notable difference between and Ambassador and an influencer. According to him, 'influencers just do their job as demanded by the contract while Influencers are not necessarily obliged to be honest or not but just to promote the product by whatever means necessary'*

Exceptionally, **Participant 3** believes that *'there are some online skincare influencers that have actually been deceptive because sometimes, some influencers would say they have used a certain product when they have not'* In addition, he noted that *'online social media influencers can be very deceptive when it comes to promoting certain products but not all the time,'*

Conclusively the participants believe that though the online space is an easy platform that can be manipulated for the purpose of deceptive practices as highlighted by Participant 4 ('*… the world is digital, if you want to reach a large audience, go online, you're going to get the audience you want. If you want to manipulate people, go online, feel free, you'll get what you want.*').

b) Online skincare influencers influence mainly for the money and publicity (a symbiotic relationship).

During the discussion session, most of the participant emphasised that the generation of online influencers are present online to promote brands mainly because of the monetary benefits as explained by the 'Attention Economy Theory' and popularity it gives. Considering that these influencers have built their pages to gain significant followership, they see themselves as an opportunity for the brand that decides to use them as influencers of the brand because they have gained the popularity that is good enough to put the product or services of the brand in the public sphere. In essence, their role is to create awareness which ever strategy or method they wish is most suitable to use.

With respect to this **participant 2** *'... I think personally, it's for the money ...,'*

Participant 1 added that *'Our generation now, most girls they want to be influencers not because they want to be loyal, it's because they want to be popular and be earning money'.* **Participant 5** added that in most case *'All influencers, they* (influencers) *want views and the engagements they* (influencers) *get through their post, it still brings money to them'.*

Participant 4: '*I think they do that for the money and two, for views*'

Participants 1: '*For the views. Because like TikTok in some countries, pay content creators a dollar per thousand views. So, imagine getting up to a million views, that's one thousand dollars.*'

Participant 2: '*I have a friend … the deal between them (Influencer and brand) was that, the views she had will determine her pay*'

However, **Participant 5** warns that *Most of these influencers and ambassadors, they do not use most of these products frequently. They just use the product because they just decided to sign the document with the brand because of the financial stakes that come with the contract being signed.*'

… they are in between because I feel it's purely business **Participant 1**

Opinion is not fact and influencers are also consumers. We're seeing them as if maybe they're one special group of people, they're just like you and I. That is just their job and they are not deceptive because they are using the product based on how they react to the product. **Participant 6**

C) Social media skincare influencers leave out significant information when promoting a brand

It is believed that the act of leaving out important information such as the skin type for the particular product, when and how to use a skincare product could be misleading for the prospective buyers of the skincare product. This in itself is deception and participants believe this is a common practice amongst social media influencers.

'*Influencers … they hardly use to talk about the skin type the product is used for. … I see that as very bad. You should tell me that this is for this skin type if you truly use it. You should tell me "I have this skin and it works for me" don't tell me it works for all skin type*'. **Participant 4.**

Participant 6, *stressed that Influencers should try not to exaggerate*. She claims that Influencers *'just highlight the positives of using that product and neglect the negative …'*

D) In this age, the use of social media influencer is significant for product promotion.

All participants seem to agree that the relevance of social media influencers in the promotion of products is inevitable as their actions facilitates product awareness, availability and presence in the market space. Different participants argue for or against influencer's deceptiveness on social media space. Either way, participants believe the use of social media influencers is necessary. According to **Participant 5**, *'the GenZ's they are the ones that mostly use social media, so it depends on the platform use'*

In addition, **Participant 4** says *'I feel everybody is digital now. … If you want to find a larger amount of people, go online.'*

For the few participants who believe that social media skincare Influencers could be deceptive a times stressed that the major deceptive practices they employ in relation to skincare brands advertising online is 'deceptive advertising' – claiming that the product they used in the video is the actual product they have been using for their glowing skin shown in the video advert'. This denotes that participants believe most social media skincare influencers do not actually use the social media skincare brands they claim to promote online. Some participants however argue that the concept of an Influencer does not oblige the Influencer to use the product as compared to an ambassador who they expected to promote the product or service by the brand and in turn use the product. The argument by participants on the concept of an influencer which contradicts Duffy's (2020) conceptual analysis leaves us questioning if there is a need or there could be a need for the development of a uniform 'Influencing mode of operations' to further protect the credibility of the brand and image of the influencer as emphasised by the Source Credibility theory. These results surround the responsibilities and obligations of an influencer,

Consequent to the above observation by participants from the Focused Group Discussion, this study, using graphical presentation, shows a Symbiotic Model of

relationship that should playout between the influencer and Brand for long lasting credibility especially as it relates to skincare brands and social media influencing. It is worth mentioning that the aim of the authors is to see to it that this model is adopted not just by skincare brands but all product brands who actively engage the use of Social Media influencers. This is why Tidgewell (2024) also argues that 'the accountability of the influencer is called into question as it is the role of the company who pays the influencer to promote their product. The authors also stressed that traditional legal remedies exist to ensure fair competition and truth in advertising, but the law needs to catch up with the rapidly evolving social media culture; hence the need for the 'symbiotic Model of Influencing process.

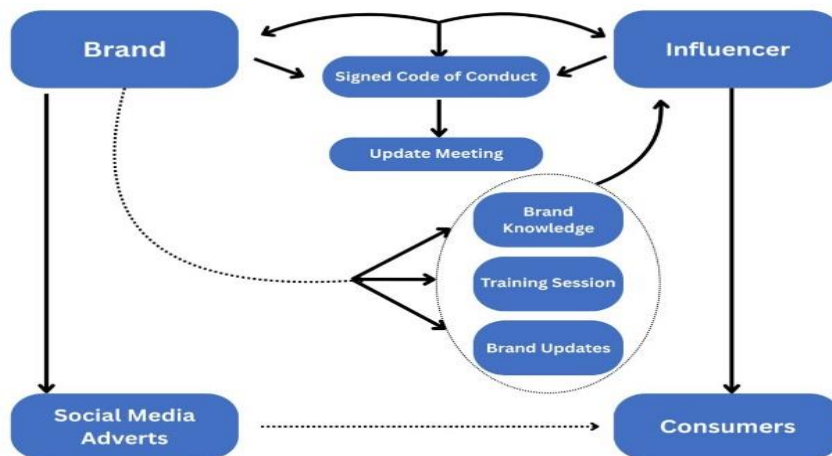**Symbiotic Model of Social Media Influencing Process**

One of the significant assumptions posed by the Source Credibility Theory propounded by Hovland, Janis and Kelly in 1963 which states that message recipients trust the originator or source of the message when persuaded. In essence, it is paramount to note that there is a necessitated relationship between the brand and the Influencers, that requires trust. For such trust to exist, a symbiotic relationship is pertinent between the Influencer and the brand to promote trust in the heart of customer or consumers of the product.

The diagram below proposes a model that explains how such symbiotic relationship should exist for a better and more effective act of brand influencing to build trust in consumers. As the empirical study by Liu and Zheng (2024) admits that informative value of an influencer's content and authenticity affects brand credibility. Also, Credibility brings loyalty which in turn increases repeated purchase and sales.

Figure 1: Symbiotic Model of Influencing Process

The Symbiotic Model of Influencing Process on social media is a "proposed model" which states that in ensuring lasting consumer trust in a brand, the marketing strategy, which specifically entails the engagement of an influencer must create, sustain and maintain a circular operation that allows for a continuous symbiotic relationship (communication) between the influencer and the brand. The problem of consumer trust in the influencer marketing activities of a brand necessitates the creation of this model. These respondents believe

that influencers mode of operations, as one who mediates between the consumers and brand could impede on consumer trust for the brand. Meaning the credibility of the source (the Brand), could be questionable since majority of the respondents believe the main purpose of social media influencers these days is primarily to make money.

'I will say it's for the money because most times ... So, I think personally, it's for the money ...,' **(participants 2)**

'Our generation now, most girls they want to be influencers not because they want to be loyal, it's because they want to be popular and be earning money'. (**Participant 1**)

It is important to note that as people are paying more attention to their online safety and protection against deceptive practices, participants reiterate that they are at any point ready to call-out any skincare brand and influencer who is dishonest about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a skincare product they advertise on social media.

Participant 4 says *'… if I heard about the product from an influencer, I'll call out the influencer and the brand. If I get the information from the brand itself, I'll call out the brand.'*

Consequently, while suggesting that consumers need to know and understand their skin type before purchasing any skincare products advertised by any social media influencers, should be more specific when influencing about a product to avoid being perceived as being deceptive. As noted by **Participant 4** *'… if you do not want to be deceptive, you should always state the skin type for the product. State your skin type and state the skin types that works with the product, always be specific.'*

Furthermore, **participant 2** claims that for a skincare brand the influencer is supposed to use the product consistently for at least 3 months before making the decision to serve as an influencer for the brand. According to him, that should be the only thing that should determine your willingness to influence for the skincare brand.

"Before you come out to advertise that brand, you're to use it for about maybe a month or two. It's in the contract whenever you're signing for a skincare brand. So, if you use it for that month or two and it does not work for you and you're seeing that it's not making any difference to your skin or it's not doing what it's supposed to do anyways, you cannot come out to advertise that brand. That is the policy, that is how it goes. So, for me I think yes! There's a limitation when you're advertising for a skincare brand."

Subsequently, **Participant 3** suggest *that there is need for influencers to 'have operations that guides them'*

Participant 4 *'I feel yes, they should have ethics to follow … I feel like yeah you (influencer should have code of conduct, you should have ethics, its important).'*

In addition, **Participant 1** *believes that every 'every business should have its policy and … yes I believe they should have that.'*

The above discussions emanating from the Focused Group Discussion Participants facilitates the need for the concept of the Symbiotic Model of Influencing Process to ensure consumers satisfaction, credibility of the brand, trust in the brand, awareness of the brand and more publicity for the influencers.

Assumptions of the model

1. Symbiotic and consistent circular relationship between the brand and influencer foster trust in the mind of consumers' overtime.
2. Social media influencers are only capable of a sustained relationship and relevance as online influencers when they are consistent with brand relationships and interactions.
3. Social media influencers will primarily build trust in the brand they influence for on social media when they have a general abiding law or policy of operations.

2.0 Discussion of Findings

Generally, respondents believe in the active use and engagement of social media influencers by various brands will promote their businesses online in the views of Edim, Pepple and Jerome (2024). Furthermore, Fakeye and Ayoola (2023) opine that influencers are veritable for brand visibility and awareness to most online shoppers, majorly comprising the GenZ, who make buying decisions based on believable product specifications and peer influences. This also aligns with the perception of one of the participants (5) who believes that brand influencing is a booming business.

Dauhan and Langi (2023) also share the same view as they believe that brand influencing is a decent source of livelihood. Though a few issues were identified by the respondents which includes the absolute inability of the brands and anyone to fully eradicate or control the act of deception which could be notable in some of these influencers. It is inevitable to completely curb some of the deceptive activities that transpire in the online space. These obvious reasons are inherent in the nature of the cyberspace, especially social media. The porous nature will always allow for some form of manipulation, which all brand will be ready to use to attract potential customers as expressed by Alqahtani and Bukhari (2021).

Respondents' continuous encouragement of social media influencers; despite the argument that they could be deceptive is evident in the statement of Kim and Kim (2022) which believes that social media users tend to feel connected with social media Influencers by interacting with them in the virtual world and perceive social media Influencers as more authentic'.

Whilst respondents believe in the engagement and benefits of social media influencers, they suggest that there is need for consistent monitoring of their activities in marketing the brand on social media, as this will minimise any form of deception, if it exists.

1.9 Conclusion

The deduction from the study takes us back to the need for skin care influencers, as well as skin care brands to exist for the sole aim of adding value and sustainable development as stressed in SDG 12, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. Particularly:

SDG 12.6: Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

SDG 12.8: Ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

SDG 12.10: Promote sustainable consumption behaviours by addressing unethical or deceptive marketing practices.

The above 3 sections of SDG 12 focus on ensuring consumers have access to accurate, transparent, and sustainable information to make informed choices.

2.1 Recommendations

In order to minimise and further protect online consumers where a lot of purchases now take place, it is necessary for concerned stakeholders to do the following:

1. Effective regulation: Regulatory bodies in Nigeria like the (ARCON) should set up monitoring bodies who will carry out consumer marketing research on brand activities (a performance survey) addressing different areas of consumers' experiences online with different skin care influencers. Such primary data can be used to monitor and further control.

References

Al-Heali (2020). The effect of marketing deception on consumer purchasing decision. An analytical study of the opinions of Baghdad University students. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change.13*(6), 575-595.

Alqihtani, S. and Bukhari, A. (2021) Online Deception in Social Media. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science. 4*(7), 88-91

Anaeto, S. G, Onabajo, O and Osifeso, J. (2010). Models and Theories of Mass Communication. Bowie, Maryland: African Renaissance Book Incorporated.

Anyanwu, C. & Oguibe, C. (2022). Evaluation of other critical variables in the sustenance of brand loyalty beyond the promotion mix. *African journal of social and behavioural sciences (AJSBS),* vol. 12, no. 2.

Arumugam, V. (2023). A study on the impact of social media on marketing a brand. *International journal of research and analytical review*. Vol. 10, issue 2.

Ashley, R. R. (2021). An examination of black women's health information understanding

and negotiation of engagement in skin whitening. https://doi.org/10.32469/10355/68883

Ayodele, D. (2021). Black Skin: The definitive skincare guide. HarperCollins.UK.

Baltezarevie, R, (2023). Deceptive advertising in the online environment: Conference paper. Researchgate.net/publication/369539091.

Bojang, I. 2017, Determinants of Trust in B2c E-Commerce and Their Relationship with Consumer Online Trust: A Case of Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation, *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce. 22* (1) 1-59.

Bojkov, K. (2023). 29 Instagram statistics for marketing in 2023. Retrieved from https://embedsocial.com

Bouvier D. (2022). 9 rules when advertising skincare. www.blogen.influence4you.com

Brownie, D. (2021). The authority of fashion: The impact of brand credibility and gender blurring on attitudes towards gendered fashion advertisements. https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.17065115

Bruns, I. (2018). Perceived authenticity and trust in social media-driven influencer marketing and their influence on intentions-to-buy of 18- 24-year-olds in Ireland. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). *Dublin Business School*, Ireland.

Campbell, M., Mohr, G. & Yeleigh P. (2013). Can disclosures lead consumers to resist covert persuasions? The important roles of disclosure, timing and types of response. *Journal of consumer psychology/23(4), 483-495.* *https://doi.org.10.1016/jcs.2012.1012*

Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021). Be creative, my friend! Engaging users on Instagram by promoting positive emotions. *Journal of Business Research, 130,* 416– 425. *https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020214.*

Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2016). Digital Marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice (6th ed.) Upper Saddle River: Pearson.

Chen, X., & Qasim, H. (2020). Does E-Brand experience matter in the consumer market? Explaining the impact of social media marketing activities on consumer-based brand equity and love. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour,* *20*(5). https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1915

Cooley, D., & Parks-Yancy, R. (2019). The Effect of Social Media on Perceived Information Credibility and Decision Making. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 18(3), 249–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2019.1595362

Daneshvary, R., & Schwer, R. K. (2000). The association endorsement and consumers' intention to purchase. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 17(3), 203–213.

Dauhan, G., and Langi, E., (2024) Social Media Influencer: The Influence of Followers' Purchase Intention through Online Engagement and Attitude. *Bimun Business Review.* 15(1), 44-51

Edim, J. Pepple, J., Jerome, E. (2024). Influencer Marketing and the Adoption of Financial Technology Services by SMEs in Calabar. *Nigeria Journal of Management Science.* 61(7), 222-241

Fakeye, O. and Ayoola, M. (2023) Social Media Influencers in Retail Marketing in Nigeria. *International Journal of Women in Technical Education and Employment* 3(2)

Federal Trade Commission. (2021, October 13). FTC Puts Hundreds of Businesses on Notice about Fake Reviews and [Press release. https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2021/10/ftc-puts-hundreds-businesses-no%20tice-about-fake-reviews-other

Freedman, M. (2023). Instagram for business: Everything you need to know. Retrieved from https://businessnewsdaily.com

Geyser, W. (2023). 32 Facebook statistics-revenue, users (+ everything you need to know in 2023). https://influencermarketinghub.com

Godefroit-Winkel, D., & Peñaloza, L. (2023). The Ethics of Freedom in Consumption: An ethnographic account of the social dimensions of supermarket shopping for Moroccan women. *Journal of Business Ethics*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05376-2

Griffin, E. (2000). A first look at communication theory (4th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. p. 35-36, 279-280, 380-382.

Hafez, M.D. (2021). The impact of social media marketing activities on brand equity in the banking sector in Bangladesh: the mediating role of brand love and brand trust. *International Journal of Bank Marketing, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print).* https://doi.org/10.1108/ijbm-02-2021-0067

Hovland, C.I., Janis, I.L.; and Kelley, H.H. (1953). Communication and Persuasion. New Haven,Yale University Press.

Jin, S.-A. A., & Phua, J. (2014). Following Celebrities' Tweets about Brands: The Impact of Twitter-Based Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Source Credibility Perception, Buying Intention, and Social Identification with Celebrities. *Journal of Advertising*, *43*(2), 181–195. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2013.827 606

Joshi M., Korrapati N.W., Reji F., Krudamannil R. (2022). The impact of social media on skincare: A narrative review. www.researchgate.net. https://doi.org/10.25040/IKv20221-0285

Kim, J., and Kim, M. (2022) Rise of Social Media Influencers as a New Marketing Channel: Focusing on the Roles of Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Social Responsibility among Consumers.

McCormick, K. (2022). 6 most popular social media platforms. https://www.wordstream.com/gt; blog.

MCroskey, J. (1958). Scales for the Measurement of Ethos. Speech Monographs, 33, 67-72. McLachlan, S. Instagram demographics in 2022: Most important user stats for marketers. Retrieved from https://blog.hootsuite.com

Mwaisaka, F. (2017). The influence of social media on the consumer decision making process in the cosmetic industry in Nairobi County, Kenya. University of Nairobi Research Archive http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/han dle/11295/102510

Olenski, S. (2016). How brands use celebrities for endorsement. Retrieved from https//forbesmagazine.co

Patmawati, D., & Miswanto, M. (2022). The Effect of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention: The Role Brand Awareness as a Mediator. *International Journal of*

Entrepreneurship and Business Management, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.54099/ijebm.v1i2.374

Pimmer, C. Chipps, J. Brysiewicz, P. Walters, F. Linxen, S. and Grohbiel, U. (2016). Supervision and social media: Use and perception of Facebook as a Research Education Tool in Disadvantaged Areas. 17(5).

Pintu, D. (2022). A prospective venue for marketing is social media marketing. *International Journal of multidisciplinary. Doi:10.31305/rrijm.2022.* vo7.i1002

Ridder, M. (2020). Cosmetics Industry - Statistics & Facts. Statista.

Rossolatos, G. (2018). Impossibly good looks: A pragma-ontological approach to unearthing the latent rhetorical structure of anti-ageing advertising discourse. *Sign Systems Studies*, *46*(2/3), 216–254. https://doi.org/10.12697/sss.2018.46.2-32

Semerádová, T., & Weinlich, P. (2022). Achieving business competitiveness in a digital environment: Opportunities in E-commerce and Online Marketing. Springer Nature. https://www.statista.com/topics/3137/cosm etics-industry

Sacksner, J. P., Kaundinya, T., Daftary, K., Jackson, K. L., & Kundu, R. V. (2022). Skin tone preferences and their influence on skin care behaviors. Archives of Dermatological Research. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00403-021-02320-0

Salunke, P., & Jain, V. (2022). Instagram Marketing (2015–2021): A Review of Past Trends, Implications, and Future Research. Review of Management Literature, 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1108/s2754-586520220000001007

Smith, H. (2021). The hidden sell: subversive advertising of fashion products in social media. https://doi.org/10.51415/10321/3197

Sonntag, J. (2016). The impact of emotional branding on brand loyalty in the skin care market: Comparing the German and the UK market using the example of Nivea and Dove. GRIN Verlag.

Strapagiel L. (2 022). Beauty marketing: How to sell skincare products. www.shopify.com

Umeogu, B. (2012). Source Credibility: A Philosophical Analysis. Open Journal of Philosophy, 02(02), 112–115. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2012.22017

Zak, S., & Hasprova, M. (2020). The role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process. *SHS Web of Conferences*, *74*(03014), 03014. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20207403014