



INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUTH IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Social media influencer marketing has become a dominant digital strategy shaping consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour, particularly among youth who rely heavily on social platforms for product discovery and recommendations. Despite increasing investment in influencer-based campaigns by SMEs and other businesses in Nairobi County, empirical evidence establishing the key influencer-related factors that determine purchase behaviour remains limited in the Kenyan context. This study examines the influence of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County, Kenya. Specifically, the study assesses the effect of influencer credibility, influencer–brand congruence, content quality, and engagement intensity on consumer purchase behaviour. The study is anchored on Source Credibility Theory which posits that persuasion is enhanced when message sources are perceived as trustworthy, expert, and credible. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design is proposed, targeting youth social media users aged 18–35 years in Nairobi County. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression modelling. Hypothetical results indicate that influencer credibility and engagement intensity significantly predict purchase behaviour, while content quality and influencer–brand congruence show moderate positive effects. The study concludes that influencer marketing effectiveness is driven more by credibility and interactive engagement than by entertainment value alone. The study recommends that SMEs prioritize credible influencers and engagement-focused influencer strategies to achieve conversion-oriented campaign outcomes.

Keywords: influencer marketing, credibility, engagement, brand congruence, content quality, purchase behaviour, Nairobi County.

1.0 Introduction

Marketing communication has undergone significant transformation due to digitalization, shifting consumer attention from traditional media platforms toward social networks that enable real-time interaction, peer influence, and personalized content delivery. Social media platforms have become critical spaces where consumers discover products, evaluate brands, compare alternatives, and form purchase decisions. Youth consumers, in particular, increasingly rely on influencer-generated content, reviews, lifestyle demonstrations, and product endorsements in making consumption choices (Lou & Yuan, 2019; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). As a result, social media influencer marketing has become an important strategy for firms seeking to access and influence youth markets.

Influencer marketing can be understood as the strategic use of social media personalities who possess audience reach and perceived credibility to promote brands and products through content creation. Unlike conventional advertising, influencer marketing often appears more authentic, socially embedded, and relatable because the influencer has built ongoing relationships with followers and is perceived as a peer-like communicator (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). This creates persuasive advantage because followers may interpret influencer endorsements as genuine recommendations rather than purely commercial promotion. As influencer marketing expands, businesses allocate increasing budgets to influencer partnerships due to the expectation that influencer credibility and audience trust translate into conversions and brand loyalty (Geyser, 2021).

In Kenya, Nairobi County represents a rapidly digitizing market characterized by intense competition among SMEs and increasing reliance on online advertising. Nairobi hosts a high concentration of digitally active youth and widespread usage of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. Businesses have increasingly adopted influencer marketing to enhance brand visibility, stimulate product awareness, and increase consumer purchases. However, despite this growth, influencer marketing effectiveness remains uncertain due to the inconsistent translation of high engagement into actual sales. Many campaigns generate likes, comments, and views yet fail to result in conversion. This suggests the need to identify the specific influencer marketing elements that actually influence purchase behaviour.

This study examines the influence of influencer marketing on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County. The study focuses on four dimensions that are widely emphasized in influencer marketing research: influencer credibility, influencer-brand congruence, content quality, and engagement intensity. These dimensions reflect the core mechanisms through which influencer marketing exerts influence on consumer decision-making processes. By generating empirical evidence in the Nairobi context, the study provides practical insights for SMEs seeking cost-effective marketing approaches and contributes to knowledge on influencer-driven persuasion in emerging markets.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Businesses and SMEs in Nairobi County have increasingly adopted social media influencer marketing to promote their products and services, driven by the rapid growth of youth social media usage and the perceived persuasive power of influencers. Despite heavy reliance on influencers, the effectiveness of influencer marketing remains inconsistent because some campaigns generate high engagement without corresponding increases in consumer purchases. The inconsistency raises concerns about whether influencer marketing investments are strategically targeted or merely driven by trends. Moreover, the Kenyan market has witnessed emerging concerns related to influencer authenticity, inflated follower metrics, and

commercialization of endorsements, which may alter the influence of influencer promotions. While global studies have emphasized credibility and congruence as key determinants of influencer impact, there is limited empirical evidence establishing which influencer marketing factors significantly influence youth purchase behaviour in Nairobi County. This creates a knowledge gap that limits evidence-based digital marketing decision-making and undermines entrepreneurship performance in digitally competitive markets.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the influence of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County, Kenya. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the influence of influencer credibility on consumer purchase behaviour, to assess the influence of influencer–brand congruence on consumer purchase behaviour, to establish the influence of influencer content quality on consumer purchase behaviour, and to examine the influence of engagement intensity on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

H01: Influencer credibility has no significant influence on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County.

H02: Influencer–brand congruence has no significant influence on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County.

H03: Influencer content quality has no significant influence on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County.

H04: Engagement intensity has no significant influence on consumer purchase behaviour among youth in Nairobi County.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Source Credibility Theory explains how persuasion is influenced by perceptions of the source delivering the message. The theory posits that audiences are more likely to accept and act upon communications from sources perceived as trustworthy, expert, and credible. In advertising, credibility reduces perceived risk and uncertainty by increasing message believability and confidence in claims (Ohanian, 1990). In the context of influencer marketing, influencers act as social message sources whose persuasive power depends on credibility signals such as honesty, expertise in product categories, transparency, and consistency in messaging (Ki et al., 2020). Thus, Source Credibility Theory is relevant in explaining why influencer credibility influences consumer purchase behaviour.

2.2 Empirical Review

Influencer credibility has been widely emphasized as a fundamental determinant of follower persuasion and marketing success. Credibility influences purchase behaviour because consumers interpret credible influencers as reliable sources of product information and guidance. Empirical research indicates that influencer credibility is significantly associated with purchase intention and brand attitudes, especially in markets where consumers increasingly rely on online reviews and social recommendation mechanisms (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Credibility also strengthens consumers' confidence in quality claims, thereby reducing perceived risk.

Influencer-brand congruence refers to the perceived fit between the influencer's identity, lifestyle, and values and the promoted brand. Congruence increases persuasion by making endorsements appear natural and authentic rather than commercial. Studies show that congruent endorsements generate stronger brand attitudes and higher purchase intention because consumers view the message as consistent with influencer personality and therefore less deceptive (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). In contrast, poor congruence may trigger skepticism and resistance.

Content quality reflects the perceived creativity, clarity, informativeness, and aesthetic appeal of influencer content. High-quality content improves consumer engagement by enhancing storytelling and making product features easily understood. Empirical research shows that informative and entertaining influencer content strengthens consumer attitudes, enhances perceived value, and increases purchase likelihood (Ki et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). However, content quality may be insufficient for conversion if credibility and congruence are weak.

Engagement intensity refers to the extent of interaction between influencer and audience, including frequency of posts, responsiveness to comments, audience participation, and social proof signals such as likes, shares, and views. Engagement intensity matters because it enhances relational connection and signals influencer relevance within the consumer community. Studies show engagement strengthens emotional attachment and increases purchase behaviour through social validation mechanisms (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019; Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualizes social media influencer marketing through four independent variables: influencer credibility, influencer-brand congruence, content quality, and engagement intensity. Consumer purchase behaviour is the dependent variable.

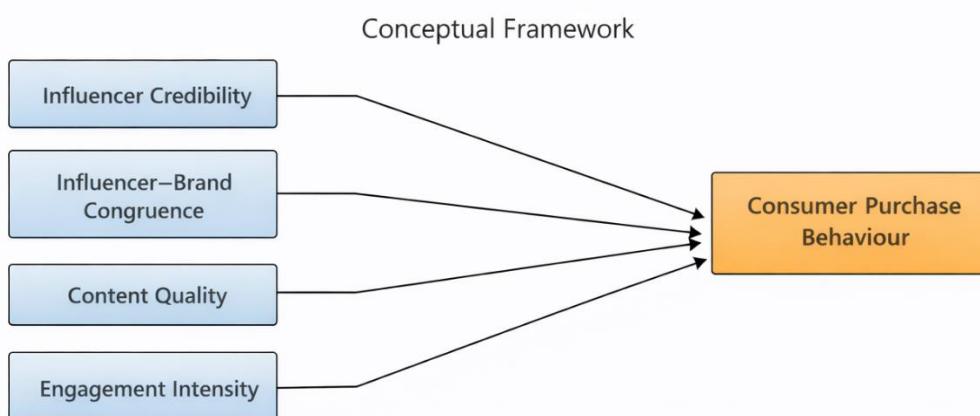


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The study targets youth aged 18–35 years residing in Nairobi County who actively use social media platforms and are exposed to influencer marketing content. This population is appropriate because youth represent the most active influencer marketing consumer segment and demonstrate high sensitivity to digital persuasion and social proof mechanisms (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Data was

collected using a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire will measure influencer credibility, congruence, content quality, engagement intensity, and purchase behaviour.

The sample size was determined using Cochran's sampling formula and a minimum sample of 384 respondents was targeted. Stratified sampling was applied based on sub-counties or major zones in Nairobi to enhance representativeness. Validity was ensured through expert review and pilot testing, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha with a threshold of 0.70. Data was analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics will describe the variables, Pearson correlation will assess associations, and multiple regression will determine the influence of influencer marketing dimensions on purchase behaviour.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 381 questionnaires were returned, of which 13 were incomplete and excluded, resulting in 368 usable questionnaires. This represented an 87.6% response rate, which was considered adequate for statistical inference.

Table 1: Reliability Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Credibility	0.88
Influencer–Brand Congruence	0.84
Content Quality	0.86
Engagement Intensity	0.82
Purchase Behaviour	0.87

The reliability results show that all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Influencer Credibility	1				
2. Influencer–Brand Congruence	0.53**	1			
3. Content Quality	0.46**	0.49**	1		
4. Engagement Intensity	0.55**	0.41**	0.52**	1	
5. Purchase Behaviour	0.62**	0.51**	0.47**	0.58**	1

Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$.

The correlation analysis reveals that influencer credibility had the strongest association with purchase behaviour, followed by engagement intensity. This indicates that youth consumers in Nairobi County are more likely to purchase endorsed products when influencers appear credible and when there is sustained interactive engagement.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value
Influencer Credibility	0.33	6.91	0.000
Influencer–Brand Congruence	0.18	3.52	0.001
Content Quality	0.12	2.41	0.016
Engagement Intensity	0.29	5.84	0.000

Model Fit: $R^2 = 0.49$, $F(4,363) = 87.32$, $p < 0.001$

The regression results show that influencer credibility and engagement intensity were the strongest predictors of purchase behaviour. Brand congruence and content quality also had statistically significant effects but with smaller magnitudes. These findings indicate that credibility and engagement are more conversion-oriented factors, while content quality mainly supports awareness and persuasion but does not drive purchase as strongly unless credibility is high.

5.0 Conclusions

The study concludes that influencer marketing significantly influences youth consumer purchase behaviour in Nairobi County. Influencer credibility and engagement intensity are the most critical drivers of purchase behaviour, suggesting that trustworthiness and interactive communication form the strongest persuasion mechanisms in influencer marketing. Brand congruence and content quality also influence purchase behaviour but play comparatively weaker roles. This implies that businesses should avoid selecting influencers solely based on popularity metrics and instead emphasize credibility and engagement strength.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that SMEs and businesses in Nairobi County adopt evidence-based influencer marketing strategies by partnering with influencers who demonstrate credibility, consistency, and authentic brand alignment. Marketers should prioritize engagement-focused strategies that encourage interactive participation rather than purely entertainment-driven promotion. Influencers should maintain transparency and ethical endorsement practices to strengthen credibility and enhance conversion rates. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and objective purchase measures to complement perception-based surveys.

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