

## **INFLUENCER TRUST AND BRAND SUCCESS OF COSMETICS FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE**

**DAVID** Confidence Onyinyechi

Department of Marketing, Faculty of Administration and Management  
Rivers State University Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

**NWOKAH** N. Gladson

Department of Marketing, Faculty of Administration and Management  
Rivers State University Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

### **Abstract**

The study investigated the relationship between influencer trust and brand success of cosmetic firms in Rivers State. Social identity theory was adopted as the theoretical foundation. The study adopted a positivist research paradigm and an explanatory research design. The population of the study comprised 19 cosmetic firms; and the entire population was surveyed. Purposive sampling method was used to select marketing, social media and brand managers of the 19 firms. Hence, a total 57 employees of the cosmetics firms provided primary data for the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. Out of 67 questionnaire distributed, 50 copies were found useful. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation served as test statistic. The statistical analyses was conducted with the help of Statistical Package of Social Sciences Software (SPSS). The results reveals that influencer trust has a very strong positive relationship with brand awareness; and a strong positive relationship with brand image. The relationships were found to be statistically significant. Therefore, the study concluded that influencer trust relates positively and significantly with brand success of cosmetic firms in Rivers State; and recommends that cosmetic firms in Rivers State should identify and engage influencers who are perceived as credible and authentic by consumers, to endorse or represent their products.

**Keywords:** Brand awareness, brand image, brand success, influencer trust, social identity theory

### **Introduction**

In recent years, the cosmetics industry has witnessed a paradigm shift in its marketing strategies, primarily driven by the emergence of social media influencers. This shift has been particularly prominent in regions like Rivers State, Nigeria, where the convergence of digital platforms and consumer behavior has reshaped the dynamics of brand success in the cosmetics sector (Okorie & Onyishi, 2019).

The rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok has democratized the creation and dissemination of content, giving rise to a new breed of influencers. These individuals, often with substantial followings and niche expertise in cosmetics, wield significant influence over consumer preferences and trends (Adjei et al., 2019). Jin and Phua (2014) highlights the pivotal role of trust in driving consumer attitude and purchase intentions in the context of social media marketing.

Brown and Hayes (2020) suggests that perceived credibility and reliability of influencer impact the extent to which their approvals, opinions, and confirmations are acknowledged and acted upon by their followers. In the context of influencer marketing, trust is a cornerstone for building long-term relationships with consumers and driving brand loyalty (De Veirman et al., 2017). In contexts where traditional advertising struggle to resonate with diverse consumer segments, influencers act

as trusted intermediaries, bridging the gap between brands and consumers through relatable, trustworthy content.

Wang and Kim (2023) opine that brand success occurs when a brand evokes strong emotional responses from target audience, leading to deeper engagement and brand affinity. Perez et al. (2019) emphasize the impact of influencer-generated content on brand image and identity formation, with consumers perceiving endorsed brands as more desirable and aspirational. Moreover, the interactive nature of social media platforms enables real-time engagement between influencers and their followers, facilitating product discovery, recommendations, and purchase decisions.

Influencer trust has emerged as a critical determinant of brand success for cosmetic firms. Nevertheless, deceptive advertising and undisclosed sponsorships have eroded trust between influencers, brands and consumers. Balancing global beauty trends and standards with local preferences and trust poses a challenge for both brands and influencers (Okazaki et al., 2015). Another major challenge is aligning influencer trust with the cultural variations of consumers. Many influencers do not resonate with local consumers (Ameerah & Abdulafis, 2024); and this impedes influencer effectiveness, as consumers response is often accentuated by cultural and socio-economic dynamics.

Okorie and Onyishi (2019) states Nigerian consumers exhibit a strong preference for personalized experiences that resonate with their cultural values and aspirations. By partnering with local influencers who embody these values and possess a deep understanding of cultural values, cosmetic firms can enhance their relevance and credibility among target audiences.

Despite the growing body of research on influencer marketing (Kapoor & Lamba, 2020; Saura & Bennett, 2020; Qualman, 2019), there remains a gap in understanding the specific factors that contribute to trust of influencers and its subsequent relationship with brand success in Rivers state, Nigeria. To close this gap, this study examined influencer trust and brand success to provide valuable insights that will enable cosmetic firms in Rivers State to develop more effective influencer marketing strategies and strengthen their competitive position in the market.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Theoretical framework provides the foundation upon which research is built. This study relied on Social identity theory (SIT) to provide the lens through which the research phenomena can be understood and interpreted. SIT is a classic social psychological framework established by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s. SIT seeks to understand and explain how people perceive themselves and others within social clusters. The theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, and their identity and behavior are influenced by these group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT emphasizes the importance of social categorization, social comparison, and social identity in shaping intergroup behavior. Brown (2000) indicate that SIT proposes that people originate their self-concept from membership in social groups, which shape their attitudes, behaviors and perceptions. Several studies have applied SIT to understand consumer behavior in the context of influencer marketing (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; De Veirman et al., 2017).

This study adopted SIT as a theoretical foundation because of its suggestion that consumers follow influencers who they perceive as representing certain social groups or identities that they align or agree with. These influencers act as “prototype” members of these groups, embodying the values, norms and behaviors associated with them. Consumers are motivated to associate themselves with these influencers because it reinforces their own social identity.

Also, when consumers engage with a brands endorsed by an influencer who shares their social identity, they experience a sense of belonging and connection with both the influencer and the brand. This connection strengthens their loyalty to the brand and enhances brand success.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Influencer trust**

Influencer trust is a multifaceted phenomenon impacted by expertise, consistency and engagement. By understanding the dynamics of influencer trust and addressing ethical considerations, brands, can cultivate meaningful relationships with their target market and drive positive outcomes. Brown and Hayes (2020) define Influencer trust as the perceived credibility and reliability, of an influencer, which determine the extent to which their approvals, opinions, and confirmations are acknowledged and acted upon by their followers.

Influencer trust is also the degree to which supporters depend on the credibility of an influencer's content (Brown, 2020). Smith et al. (2019) observed that influencer trust is the perceived level of expertise and knowledge that followers attribute to an influencer in a niche, environment, product, service or industry. Trust in influencers often originate from their perceived expertise or knowledge in specific areas (fashion, technology, health, fitness, business ownership, hospitality).

Competence and credibility are crucial to establishing influencer trust. Trustworthy influencers have the power to influence purchase decisions and consumer behavior. When they recommend a product or brand, their audience is more likely to take action, whether it is making a purchase, signing up for a service, or participating in a campaign. This influence can lead to tangible results for businesses, such as increased sales and brand awareness (Brown & Hayes, 2020).

Influencer trust also results to relational aspect of engagement between influencers and followers, characterized by mutual respect, communication and interaction, leading to loyalty (Wu & Chen, 2022). Influencers typically have niche audiences that share common interests and demographics. When influencers endorse products relevant to their audience's interests, it feels more personalized and tailored, and increases the likelihood of followers engaging with the endorsed content (Kim & Park, 2017).

### **Brand success**

Brand success entails achieving sustainable growth through continuous innovation, customer engagement and ethical business practices (Aaker, 2021). Kapferer and Bastien (2020) observe that brand success is achieved when customers consistently choose a brand over competing brands, due to deep-seated loyalty and emotional connection; this however, requires a brand's message, visual identity and overall experience to remain consistent across touchpoints.

Brand success is also achieved through authentic brand storytelling, transparent communication and genuine connections with customers (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2020). Consistency across touchpoints, including advertising, packaging, customer service and online presence, helps to

reinforce brand identity and build trust consumers. A cohesive brand message enhances brand recall and strengthens brand perception over time (Ateke & Nwulu, 2017); and confers market leadership (Keller & Lehmann, 2019).

Brand success effectively differentiate a firm from competitors by offering unique value and experiences to consumers (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2022). It creates a distinct perception of the brand in the minds of consumers. In addition, brand success evoke strong emotional response, and forge deep connection with consumers (Loureiro & Rita, 2020).

According to Miller and Smith, (2023), brand success extends beyond consumer perceptions to encompass internal stakeholders, and drives positive brand experiences and outcomes. Successful brands leverage their equity to expand into new product categories through brand extensions (Chang & Li, 2024); mitigate the risk associated with new product launch and facilitate consumer acceptance of brand extensions (Tauber, 1988).

Measuring brand success requires a multifaceted approach encompassing quantitative and qualitative metrics. Świtła et al. (2018) used brand awareness, brand image, and brand equity to measure brand success. This study adopted only brand awareness and brand image.

### **Brand awareness**

Brand awareness reflects consumer's ability to recognize or recall a brand and its associations (Pappu et al., 2005). It is the extent to which consumers are familiar with a brand and its products, and encompasses brand recognition and brand recall. Keller, (2008) define brand awareness as the level of familiarity consumers have with a particular brand, usually measured by their ability to recognize or recall the brand name, logo, or other brand elements.

Brand recognition occurs when consumers can identify a brand among alternatives when prompted. Brand recall, on the other hand, happens when consumers can retrieve a brand from memory without any external cues. Aaker et al. (2006) provides that brand awareness is crucial to building brand equity. High brand awareness serve as a barrier to entry for competitors (Kapferer, 2012), as established brands enjoy competitive advantage in capturing market share and sustaining customer loyalty (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

### **Brand image**

Brand image refers to consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand, including its personality, values and positioning in the market. Brand image is the perception of the brand in the minds of consumers, encompassing their associations, feelings, and attitudes towards the brand (Keller, 1993). It encompass tangible (product quality and features) and intangible (brand reputation and emotional connections) attributes. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), brand image is a set of associations that consumers make with a brand; or unique set of associations a brand evoke in consumers' minds, distinguishing it from competitors (Keller, 1993).

Like individuals, brands have values and beliefs that guide their actions and decision-making processes. These values are communicated through brand messaging, actions and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Brand image is therefore, a product of the promise a brand makes to customers, encompassing both tangible attributes and intangible benefits (Kotler & Keller,

2016). This buttress the idea that brand image essentially develops from a brand's pledge to consumers; and this pledge may consists what the brand stands for, its values, the quality of its products, its customer service, and the overall experience it delivers (Keller, 1993).

### **Influencer Trust and Brand Success**

Anecdotal statements of scholars convey the belief that influencer trust affect brand success. This can be inferred from the view that influencer trust drive consumers' to act on approvals, opinions and confirmations of influencers (Brown & Hayes, 2020); and that influencer trust influence purchase decisions and consumer behaviour (Kim & Park, 2017).

Also, influencer trust has been considered a potent influencer of consumers' decision to make a purchase, sign up for a service, or participate in a campaign (Brown & Hayes, 2020). In addition, Wu and Chen (2022) contends that influencer trust results in relational aspect of engagement between influencers and followers, and lead to loyalty, especially the influencer and the consumers share common interests.

There have also been empirical studies that link influencer trust to brand success. Smith and Johnson (2024) studied the impact of influencer trust on brand success; and reveal that a significant positive correlation exists between influencer trust and brand success; and trust in influencers mediate the relationship between influencer marketing content and consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

Similarly, Chen and Patel (2024) performed a longitudinal analysis of influencer trust and brand success in social media marketing campaigns. The results indicate that initial trust in influencers predicts subsequent brand engagement and advocacy, leading to long-term improvements in brand loyalty and market share. The study identified influencer authenticity and message congruence as key factors that moderate the relationship between trust and brand success.

In another study, Wang and Garcia (2024) established that consumers exposed to high-trust influencers exhibit significantly higher levels of brand credibility, brand attachment, and purchase intention compared to those exposed to low-trust influencers. Furthermore, trust in the influencer positively moderates the relationship between influencer-generated content and brand engagement metrics.

Based on the above, the study hypothesizes that:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: Influencer trust has no significant relationship with brand awareness of cosmetics firms in Rivers State.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: Influencer trust has no significant relationship with brand awareness of cosmetics firms in Rivers State.

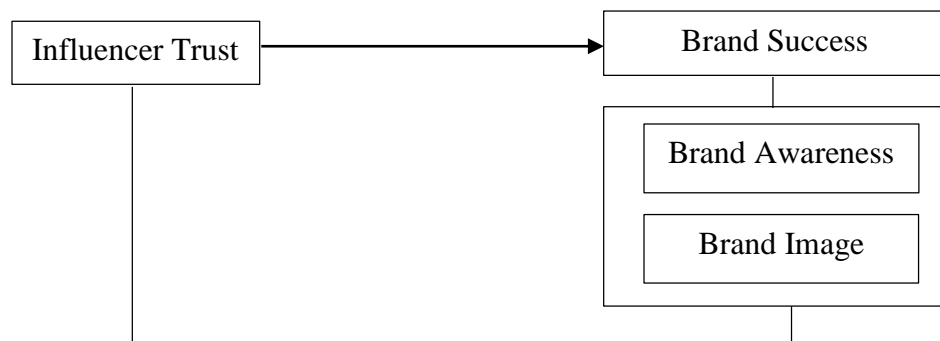


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of relationship between influencer trust and brand success of cosmetic firms in Rivers State.

### Methodology

This study was designed to determine the direction and magnitude of correlation between influencer trust and brand success of cosmetic firms in Rivers State. The study adopted a positivist research paradigm and an explanatory research design. The population of the study consisted 19 cosmetics firms in Rivers State. The entire population was adopted as the sample. The purposive sampling method was used to select the marketing manager, social media manager and brand manager of firms. Hence, a total of 57 respondents took part in the study. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect primary data. Out of 57 questionnaire distributed and retrieved, only 50 copies were found useful. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to establish the degree of relationship between the variables with the aid of Statistical Package of Social Sciences Software (SPSS). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the constructs is represented below:

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

S/N	Dimension	Item	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Influencer Trust	3	.910
2	Brand Awareness	3	.915
3	Brand Image	3	.904

SPSS Output (2024)

The result of the Reliability test in Table 1 indicates a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.910, 0.915, 0.904 respectively, for influencer trust, brand awareness and brand image. This suggests that all the variables in the study achieved high level of internal consistency.

**Table 2: Correlation between influencer trust and brand awareness**

			Influencer Trust	Brand Awareness
Pearson	Influencer Trust	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.820**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	50	50
	Brand Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	.820**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	50	50

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: (SPSS Output 2024)

Table 2 shows that the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.820^{**}$ ), this value is high, implying that a very strong relationship exists between influencer trust and brand awareness. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient indicates a positive relationship. As shown in Table 2, the probability value is  $(0.000) < (0.01)$  level of significance; hence the null hypothesis was rejected.

**Table 3: Correlation between influencer trust and brand image**

			Influencer Trust	Brand Image
Pearson	Influencer Trust	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.720 <sup>**</sup>
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	50	50
	Brand Image	Correlation Coefficient	.720 <sup>**</sup>	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	50	50

<sup>\*\*</sup>. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: (SPSS Output 2024)

Table 3 shows that the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.720^{**}$ ), this value is high, implying that a strong relationship exists between influencer trust and brand success. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient indicates a positive relationship. As shown in Table 3, the probability value is  $(0.000) < (0.01)$  level of significance; hence the researchers rejected the null hypothesis.

### Discussion of Findings

This study was designed to determine the direction and magnitude of correlation between influencer trust and brand success of cosmetic firms in Rivers State. The results of the statistical analyses conducted, showed that influencer trust has a very strong positive relationship with brand awareness; and a strong positive relationship with brand image. The analyses also indicates that the relationship between influencer trust and the metrics of brand success is statistically significant.

These findings corroborate the report of Smith and Johnson (2024) that influencer trust strongly impact brand success; and that trust in influencers mediates the relationship between influencer marketing content and consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The finding also agrees with report of Chen and Patel (2024) that consumers exposed to high-trust influencers exhibit significantly higher levels of brand credibility, brand attachment, and purchase intention compared to those exposed to low-trust influencers.

In addition, the findings support the position that trust in influencer positively moderates the relationship between influencer-generated content and brand engagement metrics (Wang & Garcia, 2024). Further, the findings complement the argument of Ateke and Nwulu (2017) that effective brand communication results in increased brand awareness in terms of brand recognition and brand recall.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the relationship between influencer trust and brand success is positive and important for cosmetic firms in Rivers State. By encouraging influencers to engage with their followers in meaningful ways to build rapport and credibility, cosmetic firms in Rivers State can effectively engage with consumers, build trust, and ultimately drive sales and brand loyalty in the region. Therefore, the study recommends that cosmetic firms in Rivers State

should identify influencers who are perceived as credible and authentic representatives of target social groups or communities.

## References

- Aaker, D. A. (1996). Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California Management Review*, 38(3), 102-120.
- Aaker, D. A. (2021). *Building Strong Brands*. Simon and Schuster.
- Aaker, D. A., & Joachimsthaler, E. (2022). *Brand leadership: Building assets in an information economy*. Simon and Schuster.
- Adjei, M. T., Noble, S. M., & Noble, C. H. (2019). The influence of social media marketing on consumer brand engagement: an empirical investigation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35(1-2), 27-59.
- Akintoye, A. (2021). *How Nigerian makeup brands are collaborating with influencers to boost sales*. Retrieved from <https://nairametrics.com/2021/01/17/how-nigerian-makeup-brands-are-collaborating-with-influencers-to-boost-sales>
- Ateke, B. W., & Nwulu, C. S. (2017). The brand communication-brand awareness nexus. *Business Master*, 5(1), 210-221.
- Brown, A., & Garcia, M. (2024). Redefining brand success: A holistic approach. *Journal of Marketing Strategy*, 15(2), 78-92.
- Brown, D., & Hayes, N. (2020). The role of trust in influencer marketing: a study of fashion micro-influencers. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/13527266.2020.1775002
- Brown, D., Fiorella, L., & Moskowitz, D. (2018). The power of being real: A case for authentic, emotion-driven content in social media marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 88, 138-150.
- Brown, J. (2020). The role of influencer trust in social media marketing. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 45(2), 215-230.
- Brown, J. D., & Hayes, R. A. (2008). Influences of product recommendations on credibility judgments: The role of source expertise. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(4), 454-462.
- Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems, and future challenges. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30(6), 745-778.
- Chen, Y., & Patel, R. (2024). Longitudinal analysis of influencer trust and brand success in social media marketing campaigns. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 64(2), 180-200.
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798-828.
- Garcia, M., & Martinez, L. (2018). The role of emotional connection in influencer marketing. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 26(3), 360-365.
- Hadjikhani, A., & LaPlaca, P. (2020). *Luxury brands in emerging markets. In handbook of research on global fashion management and merchandising*. IGI Global.
- 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.



- Kapferer, J. N. (2012). *The new strategic brand management: Advanced insights and strategic thinking*. Kogan Page.
- Kapferer, J. N., & Bastien, V. (2020). *The luxury strategy: Break the rules of marketing to build luxury brands*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Keller, K. L. (2008). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. Pearson Education.
- Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2006). Brands and branding: Research findings and future priorities. *Marketing Science*, 25(6), 740-759.
- Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2019). Brands and Branding: Research findings and future priorities. *Marketing Science*, 38(4), 629-641.
- Kim, H., & Park, S. (2017). The role of social influencers in brand communication. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(2), 1-12.
- Miller, K., & Smith, J. (2023). Employee advocacy: Driving brand success from within. *Journal of Human Resources Management*, 27(2), 167-182.
- Okazaki, S., Li, H., & Hirose, M. (2015). Beauty ideals and digital cosmetic surgery: Comparing the perceptions of Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean Consumers. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 55(3), 255-266.
- Okorie, N., & Onyishi, I. E. (2019). Influencer marketing: A route to building strong brand community in Nigeria. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25(7), 701-721.
- Pappu, R., Quester, P. G., & Cooksey, R. W. (2005). Consumer-based brand equity: Improving the measurement - empirical evidence. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 143-154.
- Perez, M., Castellanos, O. G., & Wu, L. (2019). How social media influencers impact customer brand loyalty: The moderating role of brand trust and product involvement. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25(1), 18-39.
- Smith, J., & Johnson, A. (2024). The impact of influencer trust on brand success: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(3), 301-320.
- Smith, J., Johnson, A., & Lee, K. (2020). The impact of influencer trust on brand success: a quantitative analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 45(2), 201-215.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.). *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Basil Blackwell.
- Wang, L., & Garcia, M. (2024). Understanding the dynamics of influencer trust and brand success: An experimental study. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 30(2), 210-230.
- Wang, Y., & Kim, M. (2023). Emotional engagement: A pathway to brand success. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 28(2), 201-215.
- Wu, T., & Chen, S. (2022). Examining the relational mechanisms of influencer trust on social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 125, 456-467.