

The Level of Trust Female University Students Place in Social Media Influencer-Endorsed Organic Creams in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media influencers as advertising agents in the beauty industry presents both significant opportunities and notable challenges in shaping consumer behaviour. This study examined the level of trust that female university students in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria place in influencer-generated content promoting organic skincare products, as well as the challenges associated with influencer advertising within the Nigerian beauty sector. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a descriptive survey of 380 female students drawn from Chrisland University and the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), with in-depth interviews conducted with five experts in the organic skincare industry. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 25), while qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings indicate that trust in social media influencers is primarily driven by factors such as transparency (mean = 4.15), detailed product demonstrations (mean = 4.02), and authentic engagement with followers (mean = 3.86). However, several challenges undermine this trust, including difficulties in verifying product authenticity (mean = 3.95), the over-saturation of influencer content (mean = 3.65), and exposure to conflicting product recommendations (mean = 3.55). The study concludes that although social media influencers play a significant role in shaping purchasing behaviour related to organic creams among female university students, their effectiveness is largely dependent on perceived authenticity, credibility, and relevance to consumer needs. It recommends the enforcement of ethical disclosure practices, the integration of credible product testimonials, and the development of regulatory frameworks and localised content strategies to enhance consumer trust and decision-making.

Keywords: Credibility; Organic creams; Social media; Influencers; Trust

ABSTRAK

Meningkatnya penggunaan influencer media sosial sebagai agen periklanan dalam industri kecantikan menghadirkan peluang yang besar sekaligus tantangan dalam membentuk perilaku konsumen. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tingkat kepercayaan mahasiswi di Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria, terhadap konten yang dibuat oleh influencer dalam mempromosikan produk perawatan kulit organik, serta mengidentifikasi tantangan yang terkait dengan penggunaan influencer dalam industri kecantikan di Nigeria. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan *mixed methods* dengan mengombinasikan survei deskriptif terhadap 380 mahasiswi dari Chrisland University dan Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), serta wawancara mendalam dengan lima pakar di industri perawatan kulit organik. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang disebar menggunakan Google Forms dan dianalisis menggunakan IBM SPSS Statistics versi 25, sedangkan data kualitatif hasil wawancara dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepercayaan terhadap influencer media sosial terutama dipengaruhi oleh transparansi (rata-rata = 4,15), demonstrasi

produk yang rinci (rata-rata = 4,02), serta interaksi yang autentik dengan pengikut (rata-rata = 3,86). Namun, kepercayaan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh beberapa tantangan, seperti kesulitan dalam memverifikasi keaslian produk (rata-rata = 3,95), tingginya intensitas konten influencer (rata-rata = 3,65), dan paparan terhadap rekomendasi produk yang saling bertentangan (rata-rata = 3,55). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa influencer media sosial memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk perilaku pembelian produk krim organik di kalangan mahasiswi, tetapi efektivitasnya sangat bergantung pada persepsi terhadap autentisitas, kredibilitas, dan relevansi influencer dengan kebutuhan konsumen. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan praktik pengungkapan yang etis, pemanfaatan testimoni produk yang kredibel, serta pengembangan kerangka regulasi dan strategi konten yang disesuaikan dengan konteks lokal untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan konsumen dan mendukung pengambilan keputusan pembelian.

Kata kunci: Influencer; Kepercayaan; Kredibilitas; Krim organik; Media sosial.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed contemporary advertising practices, particularly within the global beauty and skincare industry. In recent years, social media influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries between brands and consumers, leveraging their online visibility, perceived authenticity, and personal branding to shape audience attitudes and consumption patterns. Among the most active and impressionable segments of this digital audience are female university students, who routinely engage with influencer-generated content across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Olumuji, Olanrewaju & Salaudeen, 2026). This demographic is frequently exposed to curated narratives surrounding beauty standards and skincare routines, including the growing promotion of organic creams as healthier and more sustainable alternatives to conventional products.

The increasing visibility of organic skincare products within influencer content reflects broader shifts in consumer preferences toward natural and environmentally friendly products. Influencers often position organic creams as safer, more effective, and aligned with holistic wellness lifestyles, thereby appealing to young consumers seeking both aesthetic and health-related benefits. However, while such promotional strategies may enhance product awareness, the extent to which they translate into actual purchasing behaviour remains a subject of scholarly debate. Keelson and Johnson (2021) argue that consumer familiarity with a product is a critical determinant of purchase intention, suggesting that repeated exposure through influencer marketing may play a significant role in shaping consumer choices. Similarly, Razak et al. (2019) contend that increased product knowledge fosters trust and preference, thereby reinforcing the persuasive potential of influencer-driven communication.

Despite these advantages, concerns persist regarding the credibility and authenticity of influencer endorsements. The commercialisation of influencer culture has blurred the line between genuine product advocacy and paid promotion, leading to scepticism among consumers. Many influencers engage in brand partnerships that prioritise financial incentives over personal experience with the products they endorse. Consequently, audiences may find it difficult to distinguish between honest

recommendations and strategically crafted advertisements. This issue is particularly salient in the beauty industry, where product effectiveness is often subjective and varies across individuals. As Pandey (2021) observes, uncertainty surrounding product performance and brand reliability can discourage consumers from experimenting with new or unfamiliar skincare products, even when they are heavily promoted online.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of influencer marketing is complicated by the potential mismatch between promoted products and the diverse needs of consumers. While influencers frequently present organic creams as universally beneficial solutions, individual factors such as skin type, sensitivity, affordability, and product accessibility significantly influence purchasing decisions. For many female university students, especially within the Nigerian context, economic considerations and availability may outweigh the persuasive appeal of influencer endorsements (Olumuji, Olanrewaju & Salaudeen, 2026). This raises important questions about the extent to which influencer-driven marketing aligns with the practical realities of consumers' lives. Without a clear understanding of these contextual factors, it is difficult to ascertain whether influencer promotions merely generate interest or lead to sustained consumer adoption.

In addition, the Nigerian beauty market presents a unique socio-cultural and economic environment that shapes consumer behaviour in distinct ways. The growing popularity of organic skincare products in Nigeria is influenced not only by global beauty trends but also by local perceptions of health, natural remedies, and self-care practices. However, the regulatory environment surrounding digital advertising in Nigeria remains relatively underdeveloped, which may contribute to the proliferation of misleading or unverified product claims. This further complicates consumer decision-making processes and underscores the need for critical evaluation of influencer credibility.

Given these dynamics, there is a need for empirical investigation into how social media influencer marketing affects consumer behaviour within specific demographic and geographic contexts. In particular, understanding the role of trust in mediating the relationship between influencer endorsements and purchasing decisions is essential. Additionally, identifying the challenges associated with influencer advertising can provide valuable insights for both marketers and policymakers.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the level of trust that female university students in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria, place in social media influencer-endorsed organic creams. It also explores the challenges associated with influencer advertising in shaping consumer choices within the Nigerian beauty industry. By integrating quantitative and qualitative perspectives, the study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital marketing, consumer behaviour, and the evolving role of social media influencers in emerging markets.

The primary objective of this study is to determine the level of trust female university students have in social media influencers on the usage of organic creams in Abeokuta, Ogun State. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. determine the level of trust female university students place in social media influencer-endorsed organic creams;

- ii. identify the challenges associated with social media influencer advertising in influencing consumer's choice in the Nigerian beauty industry.

To address these objectives, this study reviews previous literature on trust in social media influencers, the challenges associated with influencer marketing, and the theoretical perspectives underpinning this research.

Trust in Social Media Influencers

Trust in social media influencers is the confidence followers place in the recommendations, expertise and integrity of influencers' that extends to the products they promote (Alkan & Ulas, 2023). Brands usually seek out those influencers whose image agrees partner with their target audiences. They sign a contract with these influencers to leverage on the already established trust and gain acceptance among those targeted (Azeta, Drita & Brunela, 2024).

Ao, Bansal, Pruthi and Khaskheli (2023) proved that the trustworthiness of an influencer has a strong and positive effect on the level of engagement and purchase intention of the consumer. And influencer credibility stood out as the single most powerful factor behind these behavioral outcomes (Ao, Bansal, Pruthi & Khaskheli, 2023). Another survey indicated that close to 50% of social media users place as much faith in an influencer's recommendations as in those from their personal acquaintances (Alkan & Ulas, 2023). Kim and Kim (2021) also discovered that 63% of consumers now find the endorsements of influencers more persuasive than those of television or print advertising.

In the beauty and skincare market where the efficacy of a product has direct effects the health and physical appearance, followers expect trustworthiness and evidence-based guidance from influencers in order to make their decisions on the products for them, amidst the numerous incredible product claims and, at times, allergic reactions to poor products on social media space (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Research within beauty and personal care specifically confirms that the influencers who are perceived to be highly informed and authentic in their social media contents, are considered credible. And this, in turn, results in trust and purchase intentions (Ünalmiş, Dirsehan, & Erdoğan, 2024).

Parasocial interaction (PSI) is the one-sided emotional bond that followers form towards influencers which further strengthens their trust by simulating a personal relationship. Maharani and Suprayogo (2024) posit that stronger PSI is associated with a high opinion of an influencer's expertise and, consequently, it results in more purchase intentions.

Meanwhile, the distinction between micro- and nano-influencers has introduced more nuance to this practice. Smaller or nano influencers usually enjoy higher engagements and are considered to be more relatable, thereby they command greater trust than distant celebrity endorsers (Breves, Liebers, Abt, & Kunze, 2021). On the flip side, virtual influencers, computer-generated personas, can achieve high trust when expertly designed, but they may also cause feeling of discomfort experienced with artificial representations known as uncanny valleys that hampers PSI and authenticity perceptions (Liu & Wang, 2024).

There are also special platform differences that influence the trust dynamics. On Instagram, the beautiful aesthetics of influencer content on the platform appeals to aspirational consumption but it can appear staged if it is overproduced. Whereas, raw and ephemeral format of contents on TikTok has a sense of immediacy and relatability to it that makes it seem even more authentic (Alkan & Ulas, 2023). Ranking by algorithms when platforms themselves project certain influencers' content can as well affect perceptions of legitimacy, though it may also provoke skepticism if audiences suspect paid placement within "recommended" feeds (Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

Challenges Associated with Social Media Influencer Advertising

Social media influencers have, since their emergence, facilitated niche-based digital marketing to the benefit of brands. Yet, the practice of influencing is not without challenges. Influencing works differently from what traditional endorsements on the traditional media do, which means the challenges and solutions are available if addressed effectively (Fatima & Oakley, 2025).

An influencers' credibility is heavily dependent on their perceived authenticity, whether followers believe their endorsements come from genuine usage rather than paid promotions. When influencers are seen to be authentic, both engagement and purchase intentions increase, and vice versa. Modepalli (2023) however averred that many influencers exaggerate the benefits their products offer, and may not have actually used the items they. As a consequence, consumers get more skeptical. A recent study on how consumers engage these promotional messages shows that some are able to look out for cues on sponsored content like scripted language or flashy images that tend towards persuasion knowledge with marketing intent, rather than truth, and this erodes audiences' trust (Pan et al., 2025).

Non-disclosure of paid partnerships is also an endemic issue. Although regulatory bodies, like Nigeria's Advertising Regulatory Council, direct that all sponsored contents need to be clearly labelled, not many influencers comply with the rule (Ekinci, Dam, & Buckle, 2025). Under-disclosure or total non-disclosure not only breaches the set legal standards but also affects the public reputation of the brand when audiences begin to feel misled by influencers and rather choose to scroll further to other contents.

A study among Dutch influencers even found that accounts of well-known and professional influencers, usually, do not fully disclose details of their paid partnerships, and this undermines consumers' confidence and invites regulatory penalties (Gui et al., 2024). As more brands engage the services of social media influencers, social feeds are also becoming inundated with an influx of contents with promotional intents. Reports confirm that brands experience diminishing returns when influencers over-promote products, as follower engagement declines sharply if more than two sponsored posts appear per week (Pan et al., 2024).

Another challenge is how and with what metrics influencer activities can be quantified. Traditional channels already have clear metrics (e.g., Nielsen ratings), but influencer campaigns rely on intangible engagement indicators (likes, comments, shares) that do not directly correlate with sales. Meanwhile, the unpredictable nature of

algorithms is a challenge. The reach of influencers depends on unclear and ever-changing social media algorithms. Feng and Xie (2023) demonstrated that since algorithms determine which contents to prioritise on social platforms, it significantly influences consumer purchase intentions by perceived influencer norms and gratification. Influencers and brands face a challenge, in the face of specific platform algorithm rules, to constantly adapt their content to enable them to maintain their visibility. This makes reach unpredictable and heavily reliant on platform rules (Feng & Xie, 2023).

In addition, influencing works well only when there is a match between an influencer's persona and a brand. A mismatch between both can damage credibility and render a campaign ineffective. Psychological studies show that a strong congruence between influencer and brand makes a message persuasive and builds the trust of the consumer. Incongruent partnerships, on the other hand, lead to scepticism (Breves et al., 2021; Park & Lin, 2020).

Theoretical Framework - Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), originally proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), is a valuable theory for understanding why individuals actively seek out and engage with specific media content. Unlike passive models of media consumption, UGT positions audiences as active participants who use media to fulfill psychological and social needs (Ruggiero, 2000). Within the scope of this study, UGT aptly explains the relationship between female university students and their engagement with social media influencers promoting organic skincare products.

A primary gratification identified by UGT is the information-seeking motive. Female students may follow beauty influencers to learn about skincare routines, organic ingredients, and the perceived benefits of chemical-free creams. Influencers frequently position themselves as informal experts, offering product tutorials, honest reviews, and skincare advice, thus satisfying the audience's need for reliable beauty-related knowledge.

Personal identity and self-expression are additional key gratifications (Katz et al., 1973). Social media allows users to project and refine their self-image by following influencers whose beauty standards, skincare concerns, or cultural backgrounds resonate with their own (Teng, Khong, & Goh, 2014). Through adopting recommended skincare habits, female students not only enhance their appearance but also reinforce their personal and social identities, boosting self-esteem and confidence.

Social interaction and community belonging also feature prominently in UGT (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Beauty influencers often foster interactive communities where followers discuss products, share testimonials, and seek advice. This sense of connection strengthens loyalty to both the influencer and the endorsed products. Simultaneously, the entertainment gratification should not be overlooked. Influencers craft visually compelling, engaging, and sometimes humorous content, offering escapism while subtly embedding product promotions (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Trust and credibility have been identified as critical factors that mediate media engagement. Followers perceive influencers who consistently offer genuine content and

engage sincerely with their audience as more trustworthy (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Consequently, female students may be more likely to purchase organic creams promoted by influencers they trust, as this study seeks to uncover.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed methods research design, integrating a descriptive survey with in-depth expert interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media influencers shape the purchase of organic creams among female university students. The choice of this design was informed by the need to generate both quantitative data, capturing students' perceptions, trust levels, and purchasing behaviours, and qualitative insights from industry experts, thereby enabling triangulation and enhancing the robustness of findings.

The study population comprised 9,338 female undergraduates drawn from two universities in Ogun State, Nigeria: Chrisland University (N = 604) and the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) (N = 8,734), based on official institutional records (2025). In addition, professionals within the organic skincare industry constituted the qualitative component of the population. The sample size for the survey was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 5% margin of error, yielding a sample size of approximately 384 respondents. Furthermore, five key informants with demonstrable expertise in the organic skincare sector were purposively selected for interviews to provide contextual and experiential insights.

A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across academic levels (100 to 600). Lists of female students were obtained from the registries of both institutions, and proportional allocation was used to determine the number of respondents required from each level. Subsequently, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select participants. This approach minimised sampling bias and ensured adequate representation of the study population. For the qualitative component, snowball sampling was utilised to identify and recruit relevant industry experts based on referrals within professional networks.

Data collection was conducted using two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information on respondents' exposure to social media influencers, levels of trust, and factors influencing their purchasing decisions regarding organic creams. The interview guide facilitated in-depth discussions with industry experts on emerging trends, marketing strategies, and consumer behaviour within the organic skincare market.

To ensure the validity of the instruments, content validity was established through expert evaluation by two scholars in advertising and media studies, who assessed the adequacy and relevance of the items. Face validity was further confirmed through a pilot test involving 20 female students from another university, which enabled refinement of the instrument for clarity and comprehensibility.

Data collection for the survey was conducted using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms through university WhatsApp groups and official social media platforms. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and contingent upon

informed consent obtained electronically. Qualitative data were collected through in-person and virtual (video/voice call) interviews with selected experts, allowing for flexibility and depth of engagement.

Quantitative data were exported into IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25) for analysis, using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means to summarize responses. Qualitative data from expert interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and insights. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a more nuanced interpretation of the influence of social media on consumer behaviour in the context of organic skincare products.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, analyzes, and interpretes the data gathered from the respondents through the administration of questionnaires, and interviews with experts, regarding the influence of social media influencers on the purchase of organic cream among female university students in Abeokuta. The data obtained from the 380 valid questionnaire responses of the 384 administered, is presented using tables of frequencies, percentages, and mean values to present students' Interactions with influencer contents. Data from field interview with 5 organic skincare product experts are also presented in this section.

Trust Determinants

Research question 1: What determines the level of trust female university students place in social media influencer-endorsed organic creams?

Table 1. Level of Trust Female University Students Place in Social Media Influencer-Endorsed Organic Creams

Statements	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean (X)
I trust an influencer's organic-cream endorsement more when they clearly disclose sponsorship.	180 (47.4%)	124 (32.6%)	38 (10.0%)	28 (7.4%)	10 (2.6%)	4.15
I believe an influencer knows the product well if they share detailed usage tips.	142 (37.4%)	162 (42.6%)	28 (7.4%)	38 (10.0%)	10 (2.6%)	4.02
I feel more confident in buying when influencers show "before-and-after" results.	57 (15.0%)	190 (50.0%)	57 (15.0%)	57 (15.0%)	19 (5.0%)	3.55
I trust influencer recommendations when they respond honestly to followers' questions.	124 (32.6%)	152 (40.0%)	38 (10.0%)	57 (15.0%)	10 (2.6%)	3.86
I find an influencer more credible if they have professional or academic credentials in beauty/skincare.	104 (27.4%)	95 (25.0%)	66 (17.4%)	95 (25.0%)	19 (5.0%)	3.44

Source: Online Survey (2025)

From table 1, the findings on trust as a determinant to influencer marketing effectiveness, reveals unique findings among respondents. Notably, influencers are perceived as transparent, with 80.0% of respondents (47.4% strongly agreeing and 32.6% agreeing) indicating sponsored posts are clearly disclosed, supported by a high mean score of 4.15. Influencers also provide valuable practical and detailed guidance tips, with 80.0% agreement (37.4% strongly agreeing and 42.6% agreeing) and a mean score of approximately 4.0. Additionally, honest engagement is a strong trust builder of trust among female students, with 72.6% agreement (32.6% strongly agreeing and 40.0% agreeing) and a mean score of 3.86. However, the use of before/after visuals is only moderately persuasive, with a mean score around 3.6, and trust due to professional credentials is an area for improvement, with a mean score around 3.4.

Perceived Challenges

Research question 2: What are the challenges associated with social media influencer advertising in influencing consumer behaviour in the Nigerian beauty industry?

Table 2. Challenges Associated with Social Media Influencer Advertising

Statements	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean (X)
I find it difficult to verify the authenticity of influencer-endorsed organic creams.	114 (30%)	180 (47.4%)	38 (10.0%)	48 (12.6%)	0	3.95
Over-advertising by multiple influencers makes me skeptical of the product's efficacy.	76 (20.0%)	162 (42.6%)	76 (20.0%)	66 (17.4)	0	3.65
Conflicting recommendations from different influencers confuse my purchase choices.	95 (25%)	124 (32.6%)	76 (17.4%)	66 (17.4%)	19 (5%)	3.55
Limited regulation of influencer content makes me question the safety of promoted creams.	76 (20.0%)	180 (47.4%)	57 (15.0%)	57 (15.0%)	10 (2.6%)	3.67
Language or cultural differences between influencers and Nigerian consumers reduce the ad's impact.	76 (20.0%)	114 (30.0%)	57 (15.0%)	95 (25.0%)	38 (10.0%)	3.25

Source: Online Survey (2025)

The findings from the data presented above highlights major challenges respondents face in influencer marketing contents. Around 77.4% of respondents find it hard to verify the authenticity of an influencer's claims about endorsed creams, with a mean score of 3.95, indicating a strong need for credible proof. Many (62.6%) feel skeptical when Influencers over-advertise their promotional contents, with a mean score of 3.65, suggesting that saturation can be counterproductive. Conflicting messages and recommendations about organic goods from different influencers cause confusion for 57.6%, with a mean score of 3.6, highlighting the need for standardized talking points. Unregulated influencer content also raises safety concerns for 67.4%, with a mean score of 3.67, which underscores the need for clearer guidelines. Respondents (50%) also feel

that cultural differences can also reduce the impact of an ad, implying that language and cues can be tailored for better impact, as indicated by a mean score of 3.25.

Presentation of Thematically Analysed Interview with Organic Skincare Experts

Five experts in the organic skincare products industry were identified and interviewed in line with the objectives of this research to understand the phenomenon being investigated. Respondent 1 is used to represent Elegance Organic beauty store, Respondent 2 represents Hashani Oloshe, Respondent 3 represents Flawless Skincare n Spa, Respondent 4 represents Remonic Organic Skincare, Respondent 5 represents Deemakay skincare.

Table 3. Summary Table of Interview Findings

Research Objectives	Primary Themes	Sub-Themes
Trust in Influencers	Authenticity Imperatives	Consistency as credibility
		Demonstration-driven transparency
		Person reputations risks
Industry Challenges	Market Saturation and Credibility Gaps	Cost-driven pricing issues
		Oversupply erosion
		Verification limitations

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Trust in influencers

From the interview, it was deduced that trust is built through consistent, transparent content but easily undermined by influencers' personal conduct or market saturation. All respondents linked credibility to demonstrable authenticity.

Respondent 2 (Hashabi Oloshe) emphasized consistency: "A real and relatable brand influencer that is consistent because if they are not consistent... it's a waste of money." Respondent 4 (Remonic Organic Skin Care) tied trust to observable proof: "Demonstration on live videos boosts product credibility." Conversely, Respondent 1 revealed how influencers' side businesses damage trust: "Our brand influencers turn to cream mixers after influencing... which affects our product's credibility." This can be interpreted this: students view influencers as peer advisors rather than distant celebrities. Trust requires ongoing "proof of relationship" through regular engagement and visible product use. The finding that influencers' personal ventures harm credibility suggests students distrust commercial motives – a critical consideration for brand-influencer contracts.

Industry Challenges

Based on expert opinion, market oversaturation, influencer costs, and regulatory gaps create systemic barriers to effective influencer marketing.

Respondent 4 (Remonic Organic Skin Care) pinpointed cost issues: "Influencers are expensive to maintain, affecting product pricing." Respondent 1 also described market saturation: "We used to have enormous sales before, but now everyone is an organic cream maker." Respondent 3 (Flawless Skincare n Spa) noted verification limitations: "When consumers don't trust the influencer, they won't buy... product quality alone doesn't guarantee repeat sales." This means that the Nigerian organic cream market faces a "trust paradox" – while influencers are essential for visibility, their proliferation

and high costs dilute impact. Students' skepticism toward claims (without regulatory backing) suggests brands should invest in third-party certifications alongside influencer campaigns.

While the interview findings provide practical perspectives from industry practitioners, the following section discusses the quantitative findings in greater depth by relating them to existing literature and the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

Trust Determinants in Influencer Endorsements

Female students were also found to place a high trust in influencers who clearly disclosed sponsorship ($X = 4.15$) and provided detailed usage tips ($X = 4.02$). Industry experts reinforced this, with Respondent 4 (Remonic Organic Skin Care) stressing: "Demonstration on live videos boosts product credibility," while Respondent 1 emphasized consistency as critical: "A real, relatable influencer that is consistent... inconsistency wastes money." These results echo findings that transparency and informative content enhance perceived sincerity and credibility (Anam, 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024) and that detailed demonstrations reduce perceived risk (Coutinho et al., 2023).

Influencers who engage their followers honestly—such as responding promptly to follower questions—also proved influential ($X = 3.86$), reinforcing the role of two-way communication in building trust (Weismueller et al., 2020; Lee, Hwang, & Yoo, 2021). Conversely, hidden, undisclosed sponsorships or exaggerated claims eroded trust sharply. This aligns with expert concerns about credibility risks, exemplified by respondent's experience: "our brand influencers turn to cream mixers after influencing... which affects our product's credibility." This mirrors Kayode-Adedeji et al. (2024) submission on deceptive influencer tactics (overstated benefits or undisclosed incentives) lead to consumer frustration in skincare contexts. In our study, participants explicitly mentioned skepticism toward ads that felt "too good to be true," reflecting Okazaki et al. (2015)'s warning that undisclosed promotions undermine credibility.

However, sharing before and after visuals and professional credentials were less persuasive ($X = 3.55$ and 3.44 respectively), suggesting that while visual proof can be compelling, its effectiveness may be contingent on perceived authenticity and viewers' ability to scrutinize image manipulation (Andonopoulos et al., 2023). Expert Respondent 3 noted this paradox: "when consumers don't trust the influencer, they won't buy... product quality alone doesn't guarantee repeat sales."

These findings align with earlier research on influencer credibility (e.g. expertise and honesty driving trust) while highlighting cultural factors specific to Nigeria. Theoretically, this reinforces Uses and Gratification Theory, students who are consumers will only use product they trust. Practically, organic skincare marketers should therefore vet influencers for genuine knowledge of their products, require transparent disclosures, and ideally choose personalities who reflect their audience's background. Emphasizing authenticity in influencer partnerships emerges as critical, since as Kayode-Adedeji et al.

(2024) caution, maintaining an objective, honest tone in reviews will go a long way in helping the influencer retain credibility and trust.

Perceived Challenges in Influencer Marketing

From the study conducted, students face difficulties in verifying the authenticity of products marketed by influencers ($X = 3.95$). They also express skepticism from over-advertising ($X = 3.65$), mirroring the documented concerns about exaggerated claims and audience persuasion knowledge (Pan et al., 2025; Modepalli, 2023). Experts identified market saturation as key, with Respondent 1 stating: “everyone now sells organic creams - sales dropped,” while Respondent 4 noted cost pressures: “influencers are expensive to maintain, affecting product pricing.” Al-Bayati & Al-Rabaiwi (2020) earlier warned that deceptive tactics, such as fabricating product features, can have harmful consequences.

When recommendations from influencers also contradict one another, female students claim the message confuses their decisions ($X = 3.55$). Lack of proper content regulation is also a challenge ($X = 3.67$) which further underscored the fragmentation and trust erosion described by Gui et al. (2024) and Ekinci, Dam, and Buckle (2025). Respondent 1 highlighted demonstration limitations: “influencers can’t show how products work on body parts considered not screen-worthy,” restricting proof of efficacy. The challenge of cultural and language differences ($X = 3.25$) also reduces the impacts of social media influencers. Onyinyichi and Nwokah (2024) noted that balancing global beauty trends with local expectations proved difficult, as some influencer content did not align with the cultural values of young Nigerian women, reducing its impact. This mismatch suggests the need for localized content strategies and focused messaging (Kayode-Adedeji, Okechukwu, & Oyedepo, 2024). Respondent 2 identified an unexpected cultural challenge: “customers put trust in the influencer rather than the product,” creating vulnerability to influencers' personal reputational issues.

Based on these findings, industry stakeholders should advocate for stricter disclosure guidelines and standardized messaging. Influencers should also look into co-creating of localized content that resonates culturally, while brands monitor the frequency of their posts to avoid saturation and skepticism.

CONCLUSION

Furthermore, students' trust is a fragile construct influenced by their ability to critically assess source credibility, the perceived authenticity of influencer content, and their existing biases or prior experiences. Purchase intention is strongly affected by demonstrable product benefits, access to the product, and social proof. However, these drivers are frequently undercut by the challenges of deceptive endorsements, poor regulatory oversight, and saturation of content.

Based on the areas addressed in this study, and the findings the following recommendations are offered:

Influencers should also adopt clear disclosure practices, openly stating sponsorships, and back their promotions with detailed, informative, and experience-based content. Brands should ensure that partnered influencers are not only aesthetically

aligned but product-knowledgeable. Furthermore, two-way interaction (e.g., comment replies and Question and Answer sessions) should be encouraged to simulate genuine relationship-building. These trust-building strategies must be maintained consistently to avoid skepticism.

To tackle authenticity concerns, brands must vet influencers carefully for credibility and require usage-based promotion. Regulatory bodies such as ARCON should enforce clear disclosure and ethical advertising standards across influencer content. In addition, brands should develop uniform messaging frameworks to minimize conflicting promotions and consumer confusion. Finally, incorporating culturally nuanced language, imagery, and experiences in ads will help bridge disconnects between global beauty norms and local realities.

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