



SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND BRAND PERCEPTION OF ALCOHOL BEVERAGES IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media influencers on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State, Nigeria. Social media influencers are individuals who leverage their online credibility and engagement to shape consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward brands, making them an important component of contemporary digital marketing. The broad objective of the study was to assess the influence of social media influencers on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 250 respondents selected from Aba North, Aba South, and Umuahia North Local Government Areas of Abia State. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that perceived authenticity, quality of content, and consumer engagement each had a positive and significant influence on brand perception, with quality of content emerging as the strongest predictor. The study concluded that social media influencers significantly shape consumers' perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands. It was recommended that firms collaborate with credible influencers, develop high-quality content, and encourage consumer engagement to strengthen brand perception and improve marketing effectiveness.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Brand Perception, Perceived Authenticity Content Quality, Consumer Engagement.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies, coupled with the exponential growth of social media platforms, has fundamentally transformed the landscape of marketing and brand communication

globally. Social media influencers, defined as individuals who have cultivated a significant online presence and credibility, have emerged as pivotal actors in this new marketing ecosystem. They serve as intermediaries between brands and consumers, leveraging personal narratives,

authentic engagement, and targeted content to shape consumer attitudes and behaviors (Adelabu, Odion, Ewetan, & Ilesanmi, 2024; Sokolova & Kefi, 2019).

In Nigeria, the proliferation of affordable smartphones and improved internet accessibility has fueled a digital revolution, positioning the country as one of the largest and fastest-growing internet markets in Africa. According to Statistic Research Department (2025), internet penetration in Nigeria is projected to reach over 70% by 2027, supported by a population exceeding 220 million people, the largest in Africa. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter have become integral to everyday communication, entertainment, and commerce. Consequently, influencer marketing has evolved into a dominant strategy for brands aiming to connect with the Nigerian consumer in a more personalized and culturally resonant manner (Obembe, 2025).

Market analyses reveal that influencer marketing expenditure in Nigeria is expected to surpass US \$5.3 million in 2025, with anticipated compound annual growth rates of approximately 7.65% through 2029 (Statista Research Department, 2025). This surge reflects the increasing recognition by brands of the effectiveness of influencers in driving brand awareness, enhancing consumer trust, and fostering brand loyalty. Nigerian consumers tend to place significant trust in influencers' recommendations, with recent surveys indicating that more than 60% of social media users prefer influencer endorsements over conventional advertising formats (Obembe, 2025).

The unique cultural context in Nigeria further amplifies the power of influencers. By incorporating local dialects, slang, humor,

and shared societal experiences into their content, influencers create authentic connections that transcend conventional marketing boundaries (Christian, Bah, & Ohiolei, 2025). This cultural fluency enhances their capacity to shape brand narratives and influence consumer perceptions, particularly within dynamic markets such as fashion, beauty, technology, and lifestyle sectors (Osueke, Oyekola, Olatunde, Ibenyenwa, & Ogundoyin, 2024).

However, the growth of influencer marketing in Nigeria also presents challenges, including issues of authenticity, transparency, and ethical conduct. The lack of clear regulatory guidelines often results in concerns about undisclosed paid promotions and misleading claims, which may erode consumer trust and harm brand reputation (Obembe, 2025). Furthermore, the emergence of micro- and nano-influencers with smaller but highly engaged followings has shifted marketers' focus toward quality of engagement rather than sheer audience size (Adelabu *et al.*, 2024).

Given the increasing importance of influencer marketing within Nigeria's digital economy, it is imperative to critically examine how social media influencers impact consumer brand perception, particularly in localized contexts such as Abia State. This study aims to explore the multifaceted dimensions of this influence, including authenticity, trust, emotional resonance, and the overall relationship between influencers and consumer perception of brands.

Statement of the Problem

The rise of social media influencers in Nigeria has altered traditional marketing dynamics, offering brands new avenues to engage consumers. However, in regions such as Abia State, there remains a limited understanding of how influencer authenticity, trustworthiness, and emotional connection

affect consumer perceptions of brands. Despite the growing investment in influencer marketing, challenges such as consumer skepticism about influencer credibility, lack of transparency in paid endorsements, and inconsistent regulatory oversight undermine its effectiveness.

Specifically, there is inadequate empirical evidence to determine the extent to which social media influencers influence consumer attitudes in Abia State, where cultural factors and digital adoption rates may differ from larger urban centers. This knowledge gap restricts marketers' ability to develop targeted influencer strategies and impedes regulatory bodies from implementing appropriate guidelines to ensure ethical marketing practices. Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by critically evaluating the relationship between social media influencers and consumer brand perception within Abia State.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to assess social media influencers and brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the influence of the perceived authenticity of social media influencers on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages.
2. Determine the effect of the quality of content shared by social media influencers on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages.
3. Determine the effect of consumer engagement with social media influencers on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

Statement of Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study were stated in a null form:

H₀₁: Perceived authenticity of social media influencers has no significant influence on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

H₀₂: Quality of content shared by social media influencers has no significant influence on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

H₀₃: Consumer engagement with social media influencers has no significant influence on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers operate at the intersection of digital culture and marketing strategy. They are individuals who have built a digital reputation based on their expertise, lifestyle, or personality, and are capable of swaying the opinions and decisions of others through their content (Abidin, 2018). Unlike conventional celebrities, influencers are often self-made and platform-specific, building their influence through consistent engagement with followers on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) (Freberg et al., 2011).

In the Nigerian context, influencers often reflect socio-cultural realities that traditional advertisements fail to capture. Obembe (2025) notes that many Nigerian influencers gain popularity through relatable storytelling, humor, local language use, and references to shared social challenges. These attributes make them effective ambassadors for both multinational and indigenous brands. For example, an influencer based in Abia State who speaks Igbo and references local events is more likely to capture and retain the attention of the region's youth and middle-class consumers.

Furthermore, the evolution of influencer categories—from mega- to nano-influencers—has broadened the influencer economy. Micro- and nano-influencers, though smaller in reach,

often boast stronger engagement and deeper trust within specific niches (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Their ability to foster a sense of community rather than celebrity status gives their endorsements a peer-like influence, which has proven more persuasive among younger demographics (Adelabu *et al.*, 2024). In markets like Abia State, where brand loyalty is often informal and influenced by peer approval, influencers bridge the gap between corporate messaging and real-life experiences, making them indispensable in shaping brand narratives.

Consumer Brand Perception

Brand perception, in its essence, refers to the cumulative image and meaning that consumers attach to a brand based on their interactions, experiences, and third-party influences. Keller (2001) describes it as the mental map that exists in a consumer's mind regarding a particular brand's value, trustworthiness, and identity. Factors influencing brand perception include direct product experience, packaging, advertisement, social conversations, and increasingly, influencer content.

In contemporary digital marketing, especially in emerging economies like Nigeria, consumer perception is no longer controlled solely by companies. Instead, it is shaped in real-time by influencer narratives, customer reviews, and peer discussions on social platforms (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). In this evolving ecosystem, influencers have become powerful agents of perception, capable of reinforcing or damaging a brand's reputation through a single post. Christian *et al.* (2025) argue that influencers often act as cultural coders, adapting brand language into more digestible, localized formats. For instance, an Abia State influencer promoting a beverage brand may link the product to

social occasions like traditional weddings, new yam festivals, or village gatherings, thus embedding the brand into cultural identity and usage patterns.

Moreover, perception is deeply emotional. A brand that is seen as trustworthy and endorsed by a favored influencer is likely to enjoy increased consumer preference, even in the presence of cheaper alternatives. Kayode-Adedeji *et al.* (2024) highlight that this emotional connection is particularly important in product categories such as skincare, food, or alcohol where trust and reliability significantly drive trial and loyalty.

Perceived Authenticity of Social Media Influencers

Perceived authenticity refers to the extent to which consumers regard social media influencers as genuine, sincere, transparent, and consistent in their communication and endorsement activities. In influencer marketing, authenticity reflects the belief that an influencer's recommendations are based on personal experience and genuine preferences rather than solely motivated by financial benefits. Unlike traditional advertising where consumers are aware that messages are created by firms to promote products, social media influencers often build relationships with followers by sharing personal experiences, opinions, and lifestyle content. According to Morhart *et al.* (2015), authenticity is associated with qualities such as continuity, credibility, integrity, and sincerity, which enable audiences to perceive a person or brand as genuine. Therefore, perceived authenticity becomes an important factor in determining whether consumers accept and value influencer-generated messages.

The importance of influencer authenticity has increased with the growth of social media marketing because consumers are becoming

more cautious about commercial content and paid endorsements. When influencers are perceived as authentic, followers are more likely to believe their recommendations, engage with their content, and develop favourable attitudes toward endorsed brands. Audiences often evaluate whether an influencer's lifestyle, values, and previous content align with the products they promote. Lou and Yuan (2019) noted that influencer credibility, including perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness, enhances the persuasive power of branded content and positively affects consumers' responses toward brands. Thus, an authentic influencer can serve as a credible bridge between the brand and consumers by reducing scepticism associated with promotional messages.

In relation to the present study, perceived authenticity of social media influencers is considered an important factor that may influence the brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State. Alcoholic beverage marketing often relies on lifestyle associations, social identity, and emotional appeal; therefore, consumers may pay attention not only to the product being promoted but also to the personality and credibility of the influencer promoting it. When consumers perceive influencers as genuine and honest in their recommendations, they may develop more favourable perceptions of the alcoholic beverage brands associated with them.

This study therefore examines perceived authenticity as an influencer attribute that can shape consumer evaluation, brand image, and overall perception of alcoholic beverage brands. This position is supported by Audrezet, de Kerviler, and Moulard (2020), who found that influencer authenticity plays a significant role

in building consumer trust and strengthening the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

Consumer Engagement with Social Media influencers

Consumer engagement refers to the level of consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement with a brand, product, or marketing communication beyond the simple act of purchase. In the context of social media influencers, consumer engagement represents the extent to which followers interact with, respond to, and develop relationships with influencers through activities such as liking, commenting, sharing content, participating in discussions, and seeking information from influencer platforms. Brodie et al. (2011) describe consumer engagement as a psychological state that occurs through interactive experiences with a focal object, such as a brand, which involves active participation and meaningful connections. Similarly, Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) explain that engagement involves consumers' cognitive processing, emotional attachment, and behavioural responses toward marketing-related activities. Therefore, consumer engagement with social media influencers reflects the degree to which audiences actively connect with influencers and participate in influencer-generated brand communication.

In social media marketing, consumer engagement with influencers is important because it strengthens the relationship between influencers and their followers, thereby increasing the persuasive impact of promotional messages. Unlike traditional advertising, social media platforms encourage two-way communication, allowing consumers to interact directly with influencers through comments, reactions, questions, and content sharing. These interactions can increase consumers' sense of involvement and trust, making influencer recommendations more influential in shaping

attitudes toward endorsed brands. According to Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015), engagement in online brand communities involves emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions, where consumers actively participate in conversations and develop stronger connections with brands and brand-related actors. For example, when followers of an alcoholic beverage influencer comment on product reviews, share promotional videos, or participate in discussions about beverage experiences, such activities demonstrate active engagement that may contribute to how they perceive the promoted brands.

In relation to this study, consumer engagement with social media influencers is considered an important factor that may influence the brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State. Alcoholic beverage brands often rely on lifestyle associations, social experiences, and influencer-created content to communicate brand identity and appeal to consumers. When consumers actively engage with influencers through interactions, feedback, and content sharing, they may develop stronger familiarity and emotional connections with the brands promoted by those influencers. This can influence consumers' evaluations of brand image, credibility, attractiveness, and overall perception of alcoholic beverage brands. Therefore, this study examines consumer engagement with social media influencers as a mechanism through which influencer activities may shape consumer perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands. This perspective is supported by Hollebeek *et al.* (2014), who established that consumer engagement enhances consumers' psychological connection and behavioural responses toward marketing entities.

Quality of Content shared by social Media Influencers

Content quality refers to the extent to which information, messages, and materials shared by social media influencers are perceived by consumers as useful, relevant, informative, credible, engaging, and professionally presented. In influencer marketing, the quality of content goes beyond the mere promotion of a product; it involves the ability of influencers to create meaningful messages that provide value to their audience while integrating brand information naturally into their communication. High-quality influencer content is usually characterized by clarity, accuracy, creativity, entertainment value, and relevance to followers' interests. According to De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017), influencer-generated content plays a significant role in shaping consumer responses because followers often evaluate not only the product being promoted but also the attractiveness and quality of the content through which the product is presented.

The quality of influencer content influences how consumers process marketing information and develop attitudes toward promoted brands. Well-designed and informative content can increase consumer attention, improve understanding of the product, and enhance confidence in the brand being promoted. Conversely, content that appears exaggerated, irrelevant, or overly commercial may reduce consumer trust and weaken brand perceptions. Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasized that the value of influencer-generated content, including its informativeness and entertainment qualities, contributes significantly to consumer trust in branded posts and influences consumers' attitudes toward endorsed products. Therefore, the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends not only on the popularity of the influencer but also on the ability of the influencer to deliver valuable and persuasive content.

In relation to this study, the quality of content shared by social media influencers is considered an important factor that may influence consumers' perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands in Abia State. Alcoholic beverage brands often compete through lifestyle messaging, storytelling, visual appeal, and social experiences; therefore, the way influencers present these brands may determine how consumers interpret and evaluate them. Influencer content that is informative, creative, relatable, and professionally presented may enhance positive brand perceptions, while poor-quality content may create negative impressions. Thus, this study examines content quality as a dimension of social media influencer effectiveness and seeks to determine its effect on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages among consumers in Abia State.

Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory was introduced by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) to explain how the characteristics of a communicator influence the acceptance and effectiveness of persuasive messages. The theory emerged from communication and persuasion research, which sought to understand why some sources are more effective than others in changing audience attitudes and opinions. The central argument of the theory is that the effectiveness of a message depends not only on the content of the message but also on the perceived credibility of the source delivering it. According to the theory, individuals are more likely to accept information and develop favourable attitudes when they perceive the source as credible, reliable, and competent.

The theory identifies source credibility as being primarily influenced by two major dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise.

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the audience perceives the communicator as honest, sincere, and dependable, while expertise relates to the perceived knowledge, experience, and competence of the communicator regarding the subject being discussed. A source considered trustworthy and knowledgeable is more likely to influence audience beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural intentions because consumers tend to rely on credible sources when evaluating information and making decisions. Over time, the theory has been applied extensively in advertising, celebrity endorsement, electronic word-of-mouth, and digital marketing studies to explain how communicators influence consumer responses.

With the development of social media platforms, the application of Source Credibility Theory has expanded to include social media influencers as persuasive sources of brand information. Influencers are not merely advertisers; they function as opinion leaders whose personal characteristics, communication style, and relationship with followers affect how audiences interpret promotional messages. The theory suggests that consumers are more likely to respond positively to influencer-generated content when the influencer is perceived as genuine, knowledgeable, and capable of providing valuable information. Thus, the credibility of influencers becomes an important factor in determining whether their recommendations can shape consumers' perceptions of products and brands.

This theory is relevant to the present study because social media influencers represent the primary communication source through which consumers encounter information about alcoholic beverage brands. The study examines how perceived authenticity, quality of influencer content, and consumer engagement with influencers affect brand perception. These variables reflect key elements of source

credibility because consumers' evaluation of influencer-generated content is influenced by whether they perceive the influencer as genuine, reliable, and capable of creating meaningful brand-related communication.

The study is therefore anchored on Source Credibility Theory because it provides a suitable explanation of the process through which social media influencers can influence consumer perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands. The theory establishes the link between influencer characteristics, consumer evaluation of marketing messages, and resulting brand perceptions. By applying this theory, the study assumes that the extent to which consumers perceive social media influencers as credible and valuable sources of information will determine the extent to which influencer activities contribute to favourable or unfavourable perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands in Abia State.

Empirical Review

A growing number of empirical studies across marketing and communication disciplines have explored the impact of social media influencers on consumer attitudes, purchasing behaviors, and brand perception. These studies form a strong foundation for understanding how influencers shape public opinion and how their effectiveness varies across contexts and demographics.

Adelabu *et al.* (2024) conducted a study on the influence of social media influencers on brand acceptability in Nigeria. Their findings revealed that authenticity was one of the most critical variables determining the success of influencer marketing. Consumers were more likely to trust and accept a brand if the influencer appeared genuine and relatable. In particular, audiences responded negatively when influencers promoted products they clearly

did not use. This finding has direct implications for Abia State, where local consumers often value sincerity and community representation in advertising.

Similarly, Rezki (2023) emphasized that influencer authenticity directly impacts emotional engagement and long-term brand loyalty. Brands promoted by influencers who shared personal stories, demonstrated real product use, or responded to followers' questions were perceived as more credible and trustworthy.

The role of trust has also been examined in several studies. Osueke *et al.* (2024), in their research on TikTok advertising among Nigerian university students, found a strong correlation between influencer trustworthiness and positive brand image. They concluded that students were more inclined to try new products if promoted by influencers they believed had genuine intentions or transparent communication styles.

Furthermore, Kayode-Adededeji *et al.* (2024) investigated consumer responses to skincare influencers. They found that when trust was compromised such as when influencers failed to disclose sponsorships or promoted unverified products, consumer backlash often followed. These patterns are especially important for consumer markets in Abia State, where word-of-mouth and personal networks still heavily influence trust in brands.

Samson *et al.* (2024) explored how emotional resonance affects consumer perception of sustainability-focused brands in Nigeria. Their study showed that followers were more responsive to influencers who aligned with their values and communicated emotional narratives—such as social impact, self-confidence, or cultural pride. Emotional resonance was found to deepen engagement and elevate brand perception beyond functional product attributes.

In line with this, Christian *et al.* (2025) examined how cultural alignment and emotional storytelling by Nigerian influencers shaped

sustainable branding efforts. Their research concluded that emotional resonance, when culturally grounded, could significantly amplify brand message reception, particularly in regional markets like Abia State.

Lou and Yuan (2019) conducted a quantitative analysis of engagement metrics and found that micro-influencers (those with smaller but highly engaged audiences) often outperform celebrities or mega-influencers in driving consumer action. Engagement quality—such as comment response rates, shares, and DMs—was shown to have a greater influence on brand perception than total follower count. This is especially relevant in regions like Abia State, where locally known influencers can generate stronger cultural resonance and trust despite having smaller online audiences.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The choice of this design was informed by its suitability for collecting data from a large number of respondents to examine existing phenomena without manipulating the study variables. The descriptive survey design enabled the researcher to obtain firsthand information on consumers' perceptions of social media influencers and their influence on brand perception of alcoholic beverages. It was considered appropriate because it facilitates the collection, description, and analysis of opinions, attitudes, and behavioural tendencies of respondents in their natural setting, thereby providing reliable data for addressing the study objectives.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Abia State, located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with Umuahia as the state

capital and Aba serving as its major commercial and industrial hub. Specifically, the study focused on Umuahia North, Aba North, and Aba South Local Government Areas (LGAs). These LGAs were purposively selected because of their relatively high population density, significant commercial activities, and widespread use of social media platforms. Furthermore, they represent both urban and semi-urban environments, thereby providing a diverse consumer population suitable for examining variations in brand perception. Aba North and Aba South are prominent commercial centres with active entertainment and hospitality industries where alcoholic beverages are extensively marketed and consumed, while Umuahia North offers a blend of administrative, residential, and commercial activities that contributes to a heterogeneous consumer base. The selection of these LGAs therefore provided an appropriate setting for investigating the influence of social media influencers on consumers' brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

Sources of Data

The study utilized primary data as the main source of information. Primary data were collected directly from consumers of alcoholic beverages through a structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' opinions, perceptions, and experiences regarding social media influencers and brand perception. The use of primary data was considered appropriate because it provided current, firsthand, and study-specific information that directly addressed the research objectives. Collecting data directly from the target respondents also enhanced the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of the findings by ensuring that the information reflected the actual views and behaviours of consumers within the selected study area.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of social media users aged 21 years and above residing in Abia State, particularly those who actively follow or engage with influencers on

platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). The age threshold of 21 was deliberately chosen to align with the legal drinking age in Nigeria, given that one of the focus sectors includes alcoholic beverages, such as stout and Hero Lager beer.

Sample Size

The Population of the study was an infinite population. Topman formula is used to determine the sample. A Pilot survey was carried out to determine a representative of the sample size. 40 copies of questionnaire were administered to a randomly selected people.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

n = Desired sample size

Z² = Standard deviation of desired confidence level which is 1.96 at 95% confidence level

P = Probability of positive response (75%)

q = Probability of negative response (25%)

e = Level of precision or error (5%)

Substitution:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.75 \cdot 0.25}{(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{0.7203}{0.0025} \\ &= 288.12 \\ n &= 288 \end{aligned}$$

Sampling Technique

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select only those respondents who are aged 21 and above that reside in Umuahia North, Aba South, or Aba North and have also purchased or considered purchasing alcoholic products promoted by

influencers. This sample technique were chosen to ensure data relevance and alignment with the study's focus on influencer engagement and consumer brand perception in a digitally active context.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure content validity, the research instruments were reviewed by two academic experts in marketing and communications. A pilot test was conducted with 20 respondents from neighboring states to check for clarity, consistency, and comprehension. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency among survey items.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms and shared via WhatsApp broadcast groups, social media pages, and email. The questionnaire consisted of: demographic questions, likert-scale items on trust, authenticity, emotional resonance and behavioral indicators such as purchase intent and brand loyalty. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using the simple regression and correlation coefficient analysis. Hypotheses One, Two, and three were tested using simple linear regression because each hypothesis examines the predictive influence of a single independent variable which are perceived authenticity, quality of content, and consumer engagement on the dependent variable, brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

Model Specification

The study employed simple linear regression to test Hypotheses One, Two, and Three, while the general simple linear regression model is expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Brand Perception of Alcoholic Beverages

β₀ = Constant (intercept)

β₁ = Regression coefficient

X = Independent variable

ε = Error term

The specific regression models for the study are:

Hypothesis One

$$BP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PA + \varepsilon$$

Where:

BP = Brand Perception

PA = Perceived Authenticity

Hypothesis Two

$$BP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 BQC + \varepsilon$$

Where:

BP = Brand Perception

QC = Quality of Content

Hypothesis Three

$$BP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 BCE + \varepsilon$$

Where:

BP = Brand Perception

CE = Consumer Engagement

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents and analyzes the data collected from the administered questionnaires and interviews. The analysis is structured around three research objectives and hypotheses. The total number of valid responses was 250 completed and returned questionnaire.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Age distributions of the respondents

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
21–24	85	34.0%
25–34	80	32.0%
35–44	45	18.0%
45–54	25	10.0%
55+	15	6.0%
Total	250	100%

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1 presents the age distribution of the respondents who participated in the study. The findings reveal that respondents aged 21–24 years constituted the largest proportion of the sample, accounting for 85 respondents (34.0%), followed closely by those aged 25–34 years with 80 respondents (32.0%). Respondents within the 35–44 years age bracket comprised 45 respondents (18.0%), while those aged 45–54 years accounted for 25 respondents (10.0%). The least represented group was respondents aged 55 years and above, with 15 respondents (6.0%). This distribution indicates that the majority of the

respondents (66.0%) were between 21 and 34 years, suggesting that the study largely captured the opinions of younger adults, who are among the most active users of social media and are therefore more likely to engage with social media influencers and their promotional content. Nevertheless, the inclusion of older age groups ensures that the study reflects perspectives across different age categories, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample and providing a broader understanding of consumers' brand perception of alcoholic beverages.

Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	135	54.0%
Female	115	46.0%
Total	250	100%

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 2 presents the gender distribution of the respondents who participated in the study. The results indicate that 135 respondents (54.0%) were male, while 115 respondents (46.0%) were female. This distribution shows a relatively balanced representation of both genders, although males constituted a slightly higher proportion of the sample. The inclusion of respondents from both genders is important because it

provides diverse perspectives on the influence of social media influencers on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages. Consequently, the balanced gender composition enhances the representativeness of the sample and strengthens the credibility of the findings by ensuring that the views of both male and female consumers are adequately reflected in the study.

Table 3: Summary of Simple Regression Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta(B)	t-value	F-Value	Sig.	R ²	Decision
H ₀₁	Perceived Authenticity	Brand Perception	.624	14.47	209.38	.000	.389	Rejected
H ₀₂	Quality of Content	Brand Perception	.681	16.90	285.61	.000	.464	Rejected
H ₀₃	Consumer Engagement	Brand Perception	.593	13.35	178.22	.000	.352	Rejected

Source: Researcher's Computation using SPSS (2026)

Table 3 presents the simple regression results on the influence of perceived authenticity, quality of content, and consumer engagement on the brand perception of alcoholic beverages. The findings show that all three independent variables exerted positive and statistically significant effects on brand perception ($p < .001$). Consequently, all the null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that the variables significantly predict consumers' brand perception.

Interpretation of Hypothesis One (H₀₁)

The simple linear regression analysis revealed that perceived authenticity has a positive and statistically significant influence on brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State ($\beta = .624$, $t = 14.47$, $F = 209.38$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .389$) indicates that perceived authenticity accounts for 38.9% of the variation in consumers' brand perception. The positive beta coefficient

implies that as consumers perceive social media influencers to be more authentic, their perception of the promoted alcoholic beverage brands improves. Since the p-value (.000) is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore concluded that perceived authenticity significantly influences consumers' brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State.

Interpretation of Hypothesis Two (H₀₂)

The regression result showed that quality of content exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on brand perception ($\beta = .681$, $t = 16.90$, $F = 285.61$, $p < .001$). The model explains 46.4% ($R^2 = .464$) of the variation in consumers' brand perception, making it the strongest predictor among the variables examined. The positive beta coefficient indicates that improvements in the quality, relevance, and attractiveness of social media content are associated with more

favourable consumer perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study therefore concludes that quality of content significantly influences consumers' brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State.

Interpretation of Hypothesis Three (H₀₃)

The findings further indicated that consumer engagement has a positive and statistically significant influence on brand perception ($\beta = .593$, $t = 13.35$, $F = 178.22$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .352$) shows that consumer engagement explains 35.2% of the variation in brand perception. The positive beta coefficient suggests that increased interaction between consumers and social media influencers, through activities such as liking, commenting, sharing, and participating in discussions, enhances favourable perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands. Given that the p-value (.000) is below the 0.05 significance threshold, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was therefore concluded that consumer engagement significantly influences brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that perceived authenticity has a positive and significant influence on consumers' brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State. This indicates that consumers tend to develop more favourable perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands when they perceive social media influencers as honest, credible, and trustworthy. The finding is consistent with Lou and Yuan (2019), who found that influencer credibility and authenticity significantly enhance consumer trust, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) reported that authentic influencers

foster stronger consumer-brand relationships through increased trust and emotional attachment. However, the finding contradicts Ejah (2024), who found that influencer authenticity had no significant effect on consumer perception, arguing that consumers have become increasingly sceptical of sponsored endorsements. The disparity may be attributed to differences in study context, product category, and consumer behaviour across geographical locations.

The study further established that quality of content significantly influences consumers' brand perception and emerged as the strongest predictor among the variables examined. This suggests that informative, entertaining, and visually appealing content shared by influencers enhances consumers' perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands. This finding agrees with De Veirman et al. (2017), who reported that high-quality influencer content positively shapes consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands. Likewise, Ki and Kim (2019) found that consumers respond more positively to brands promoted through valuable and engaging influencer-generated content. In contrast, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) argued that influencer popularity exerts a stronger influence on consumer evaluation than content quality, particularly among younger social media users. Such differences may be due to variations in consumer demographics, platform usage, and cultural settings.

Finally, the findings showed that consumer engagement has a positive and significant influence on brand perception of alcoholic beverages. This implies that consumers who actively interact with influencer content through likes, comments, shares, and discussions are more likely to develop favourable perceptions of promoted brands. The finding supports Hollebeek et al.

(2014), who concluded that consumer engagement strengthens cognitive and emotional connections with brands, thereby enhancing brand perception. It also aligns with Dessart et al. (2015), who found that engagement in online brand communities improves consumers' attitudes and attachment toward brands. However, the result differs from Boerman (2020), who reported that consumer engagement does not always translate into favourable brand perception, especially when promotional content is perceived as overly commercial or lacking transparency. These differences may be explained by variations in consumers' trust in influencers and the level of disclosure of sponsored content.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that social media influencers significantly influence consumers' brand perception of alcoholic beverages in Abia State. Specifically, perceived authenticity, quality of content, and consumer engagement were found to have positive and statistically significant effects on brand perception, with quality of content emerging as the strongest predictor. The study therefore concludes that consumers are more likely to develop favourable perceptions of alcoholic beverage brands when influencers are perceived as authentic, create high-quality content, and actively engage with their audiences. Consequently, marketers should collaborate with credible influencers and develop engaging, value-driven content to strengthen brand perception and improve marketing effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Alcoholic beverage companies should collaborate with social media influencers who are perceived as authentic, credible, and trustworthy to promote their brands. Marketers should prioritize influencers whose endorsements are genuine and consistent with their personal values, as this will enhance consumers' trust and foster more favourable brand perceptions.
2. Brand managers and social media influencers should focus on producing high-quality, informative, creative, and engaging content that effectively communicates the unique attributes and value of alcoholic beverage brands. Since quality of content emerged as the strongest predictor of brand perception, organizations should invest in professional content development to maximize the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns.
3. Organizations should encourage greater consumer engagement by designing interactive social media campaigns that motivate consumers to like, comment, share, participate in discussions, and provide feedback on brand-related content. Such engagement will strengthen consumers' emotional connection with the brand and improve overall brand perception.

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