

SOCIAL PLATFORMS INFLUENCERS AND CONSUMER PURCHASE PATTERNS IN FOOD AND BEVERAGE FIRMS, RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between social platforms influencers and consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms, according to Rivers State. The research adopted a descriptive survey design, and the population of the study comprised 25 food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, culled from www.directory.org.ng. Sequel to the population of the study, which is 25 food and beverage firms, the study adopted a census study with a focus on the staff. To generate data for the study, the questionnaire was distributed in batches of five (5) copies per firm. A total of one hundred and twenty-five (125) copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Copies of the questionnaire were administered and distributed to the management staff of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt. The study employed the Spearman Rank-Order Correlational Coefficient for testing the various hypotheses formulated for the study with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The findings revealed that social platforms influencer dimensions of source attractiveness and source trustworthiness showed a positive, strong, and significant relationship with consumer purchase patterns. It was concluded that food and beverage firms' managers should pay attention to social platforms influencers via attractiveness and trustworthiness, as it would lead to an increase in customer loyalty and referral. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the study recommends that food and beverage firms should advertise their products using only well-known social platforms influencers that are trustworthy, as it will lead to an increase in customers' loyalty, and also put into consideration the physical attractiveness of the influencer before engaging him or her.

Keywords: ***social platforms influencer, attractiveness, and trustworthiness.***

Introduction

Marketers claim that the twofold goal of marketing is to create value for customers and build strong customer relationships, which in turn the company will benefit from when capturing value in return (Kotler, Armstrong & Parment, 2011). An effective approach to building relationships between the company and its customers is through the use of social platforms influencers. Today, social platforms usage is one of the most prominent and popular online activities among individuals and organizations.

Social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. are potent tools in modern communication and marketing. They are media that are based on user participation and allow individuals or groups to generate content and engage in conversations and the exchange of contents. Social platforms are also online media that promote participation, openness, conversation, community, connectedness, interactivity, collaboration, and information sharing (Shepherd, 2009; Rodman, 2010; and Stagno, 2010).

On social platforms, there are lots of contents created in order to influence consumer patronage. The companies used what are called social platforms influencers to increase patronage of their brands. Social platforms influencers are individuals who have a big following on social platforms and blogs through "textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their

following in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blog or social platforms posts" (Abidin, 2015).

These 'social platforms influencers' are individuals who make an offer of an intriguing or important substance to the specialty crowds that tail them. They may be bloggers with a substantial readership or socially clever customers with faithful devotees on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Influencers are trusted by their audiences (David, 2015).

Studies have shown that social platforms influencers are used to influence consumer purchasing patterns (Jin et., al., 2019). Previous studies have revealed a positive association between influencer endorsement and the purchasing patterns of consumers (Wiedmann & Metternheim, 2019; Woodroof, 2019; Taillon et al., 2019). The results of a study by Jin et al. (2019) revealed that consumers perceived endorsements of products by celebrities on Instagram as more trustworthy, and they showed a positive attitude towards the brands that were endorsed by celebrities.

Statement of the Problem

Due to high demand and a growing population, the food and beverage industry has a great impact on consumers and leaves a lasting footprint. Current patterns of global consumption are unsustainable. Consumer lifestyles, including how consumers choose and use products and services, have changed as efficiency and technological advances have not been sufficient enough to bring global consumption to a sustainable level. (Sustainable consumption facts and trends: From a business perspective, 2008) Food and beverage firms have experienced low purchases as a result of a lack of loyalty and referrals from customers. Consumer purchase patterns in terms of loyalty and referral have dropped significantly. Extant literature revealed that customers' attitudes toward brands and products are positively influenced by social platforms influencers, but whether this results in patronage, loyalty, and referral is unclear (Byrne & Whitehead, 2017). To this end, this study examined the relationship between social platforms influencer and consumer purchase pattern in food and beverage firms, according to Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between social platforms influencer and consumer purchase pattern in food and beverage firms, Rivers State. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. ascertain the relationship between source attractiveness and consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.
- ii. find out the relationship between source trustworthiness and consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were postulated to address the objectives of the study:

- i. To what extent does source attractiveness relate to consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms, Rivers State?
- ii. To what extent does source trustworthiness relate to consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms, Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between source attractiveness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between source attractiveness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between source trustworthiness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between source trustworthiness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Clarification of Social platforms Influencers

Social platforms influencers have been defined differently by scholars and researchers (Enke & Borchers, 2019). One of the complete definitions is by Enke and Borchers (2019), who refer to social platforms influencers as third-party individuals who have accumulated a substantial number of followers or relationships with a specific quality to influence others that includes consumers through content production, distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social platforms. Similarly, Freberg et al. (2011, p. 90) defined social platforms influencers as a new category of "independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social platforms." Abidin (2015) further added the status group of social platforms influencers, the specific areas of their postings or endorsements, the need for a following and engagement with their audiences, and their eagerness to monetize their activities as further criteria. Again, Abidin (2015) defined influencers as individuals who have a big following on social platforms and blogs through "textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blog or social platforms posts." Thus, all three definitions refer to social platforms influencers as third parties with a large number of followers on social platforms and blogs who can create valuable content and influence their audiences' attitudes and reactions.

Dimensions of social platforms influencers

Source Attractiveness

According to Patzer (2013), physical attractiveness is an informational cue that involves effects that are subtle, pervasive, and inescapable; produces a definite pattern of verifiable differences; and transcends culture in its effects. According to Ohanian (1991), beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction. Celebrity endorsers' physical attractiveness gets great social appraisal and acceptability. It is a source to capture the attention of audiences both in print and electronic media. Physical attractiveness has a positive effect on the consumer's behavior toward the product and service while making comparisons between the product and the person (Ohanian, 1991).

As explained by Ohanian (1990), source attractiveness, sometimes referred to as likeability, is the physical attractiveness of the influencer (Ohanian, 1990). Ohanian (1990) further explained that source attractiveness encompasses classy, attractive, handsome, beautiful, elegant, and sexy characteristics.

Several past studies have revealed that source attractiveness is a positive and significant predictor of purchase intention by consumers (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Wiedmann and Mettenheim, 2019; Chekima et al., 2020). An influencer who is endowed with a high level of attractiveness is expected to influence their followers' purchasing intentions. The study by Chekima et al. (2020) found that source attractiveness was a positive and significant predictor of purchase intention among Malaysian consumers.

Source Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the honesty, integrity, and believability of an endorser (Erdogan et al., 2018). According to Ohanian (1990), trustworthiness is the degree of confidence consumers place in a communicator's intent to convey the assertions he considers most valid. Favorable dispositions, acceptance, psychological safety, and a perceived supportive climate are favorable consequences of trust.

When a celebrity is perceived as more trustworthy, the message will be more effective, and the consumer will feel more integrated. Consumers generally consider celebrities trustworthy sources of communicating information (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2016). It is a general principle that a

person you trust can easily convince you to believe in an unseen thing. Thus, that individual tends to be more trusted than any other in the community.

Several past studies have shown that source trustworthiness affects consumers' attitudes and purchasing intentions (Weismueller et al., 2020; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018; Wiedmann and Mettenheim, 2019). The results of a study by Weismueller et al. (2020) involving 306 Instagram users from Germany who were between 18 and 34 years old showed that source trustworthiness was a positive and significant predictor of purchase intention by consumers. Similarly, another study by Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2019) involving 288 participants found that trustworthiness was the strongest predictor of intention to purchase products and services.

Social platforms influencers and consumer purchase patterns

Studies have shown that social platforms influencers are used to influence customers' purchasing behaviors (Jin et al., 2019). Previous studies have revealed a positive association between influencer endorsement and the purchasing behavior of consumers (Wiedmann & Metternheim, 2019; Woodroof, 2019; Taillon et al., 2019). The results of a study by Jin et al. (2019) revealed that consumers perceived endorsements of products by celebrities on Instagram as more trustworthy, and they showed a positive attitude towards the brands that were endorsed by celebrities. Similarly, another study by Pick (2020) revealed that social platforms influencers had a favorable impact on the buying behavior of consumers. Another study by Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2019) examined the relevance of influencers' attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness in online campaigns and found that trustworthiness, followed by attractiveness, were the strongest components of brand loyalty and trust that led to purchasing intention. However, the relevance of expertise was insignificant. However, the results of another study by AlFarraj et al. (2021) revealed that influencer attractiveness and expertise had a significant impact on customers' engagement. The study found that the influencers' attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise were not significant predictors of purchase intention. This shows that the results from past studies are not consistent.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is the tendency of a customer to choose one business or product over another for a particular need (Udegbe et al., 2010). Similarly, Patrick et al. (2014) defined customer loyalty as the likelihood of a customer returning, making business referrals, providing strong word-of-mouth, as well as providing references and publicity. Hasan et al. (2014) defined customer loyalty as the behavior where consumers have it in mind to repurchase or re-patronize favorite products or services continuously. The composite definition of loyalty considers that loyalty should always comprise favorable attitudes, intentions, and repeat purchases (Patrick et al., 2014).

Referral

A referral occurs when one person recommends a product, brand, service, or organization to another person (Biyalogorsky et al., 2001). Kornish et al. (2010) defined a referral as a customer who shares and recommends a company's product or service to their friends, relatives, and colleagues at work. Usually, when a person is in need of a product or service to satisfy a particular need, he or she is likely to ask a friend, colleague, or family member for a recommendation. Nielsen (2020) reported that 84% of consumers trust referrals from their friends, colleagues, or family members more than any other source of information about a brand. Kumar et al. (2010) noted that referrals help companies grow their customer base, increase sales, and expand their market share by bringing new customers to them. With referrals, companies are able to attract new customers at no or lower cost by avoiding the costs of advertising on radio and television.

Empirical Review

Frah and Siew (2021) assess the effectiveness of social platforms influencers in terms of advertising. The research methodology used in this research is quantitative and involves a survey questionnaire.

A non-probability sampling—virtual snowball sampling—method was applied in the survey with 200 respondents. Consumers' see social platforms as an important tool in purchasing decisions, and social platforms influencers play an important role in that decision.

Liew et al. (2021) carried out a study to explore the relationship between social platforms influencers and the intention to purchase by Malaysian females. This was a quantitative study that used a self-administered questionnaire. Based on convenience sampling, primary data was collected from 202 respondents. The results revealed that only source attractiveness and source similarity were positive and significant predictors of intention to purchase. Source similarity had the highest impact on intention to purchase. However, source trustworthiness, source expertise, and source respect showed an insignificant impact on intention to purchase.

Curtis and Abratt (2011) the article investigated the relationship between customer loyalty, repurchase intent, and satisfaction in order to attempt to resolve the mixed views on these concepts. A quantitative review of loyalty-repurchase-satisfaction constructs was conducted to identify the strength and direction of the researched relationships and the influence of possible moderating factors affecting those relationships. The results demonstrate that loyalty and satisfaction indicate strong positive relationships (0.54). Repurchase and satisfaction display a complicated relationship, which confirmed the view that satisfaction does not explain repurchase behavior. Repurchase intent and satisfaction display strong positive relationships in the meta-analysis (0.63), as do the moderator analyses. Loyalty and repurchase/repurchase intent indicate the strongest positive relationship (0.71 among all conducted analyses).

Methodology

The research adopted a descriptive survey design, and the population of the study comprised 25 food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, culled from www.directory.org.ng. Sequel to the population of the study, which is 25 food and beverage firms, the study adopted a census study with a focus on the staff. To generate data for the study, the questionnaire was distributed in batches of five (5) copies per firm. A total of one hundred and twenty-five (125) copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Copies of the questionnaire were administered and distributed to the management staff of food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt. The study employed the Spearman Rank-Order Correlational Coefficient for testing the various hypotheses formulated for the study with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23.0.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

No. of Questionnaire Issued	No. of Questionnaire Returned	Useful Questionnaire	Not Useful	%
125	110	110	-	88

Source; survey Data, 2021.

The table above shows the questionnaire distribution and retrieval. The researcher issued 125 copies of questionnaire and from consistent visit, retrieved 110, 110 copies were useful. This represent 88% response rate and it was considered significant for the study.

GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

	Frequenc y	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Valid	MALE	50	41.7	41.7
	FEMALE	60	58.3	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0

Source; survey Data, 2021.

The table above shows the gender distribution of the respondents used for this study. 50 respondents which represent 41.7 percent of the population were males while the remaining 60 respondents which represent 58.3 percent of the population were females.

Bivariate Analyses

Test of Hypothesis one (1)

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between source attractiveness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Correlations			
		source attractiveness	loyalty
Spearman's rho	source attractiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000 .905**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	110	110
	loyalty	Correlation Coefficient	.905**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.
		N	110

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

SPSS output, 2021

The output analyzed the extent to which source attractiveness relate with loyalty. Spearman's correlation co-efficient indicates a strong association between the two variables ($R_s=0.905$). The test of significance indicates that with $P.002 < 0.01$ we can reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between source attractiveness and loyalty. Thus, we can say that higher levels of source attractiveness were associated with higher levels of loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Test of Hypothesis two (2)

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between source attractiveness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Correlations			
		source attractiveness	referral
Spearman's rho	source attractiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000 .762*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.028
	N	110	110
	referral	Correlation Coefficient	.762*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.028	.
		N	110

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

SPSS output, 2021.

The output analyzed the extent to which source attractiveness relates with referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State. Spearman's correlation co-efficient indicates a strong association between the two variables ($R_s=0.762$). The test of significance indicates that with $P.028 < 0.05$ we can reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between source attractiveness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State. Thus, we can say that higher

levels of source attractiveness were associated with higher levels of referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Test of Hypothesis three (3)

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between source trustworthiness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

		Correlations	
		source trustworthiness	loyalty
Spearman's rho	source trustworthiness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.778*
	loyalty	N	110
		Correlation Coefficient	.778*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	110

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source, Survey Data 2021.

The table above presents the result of correlation analysis between source trustworthiness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State. The result indicates that there is a strong correlation between source trustworthiness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State ($\rho = .778^*$) and this correlation is significant at 0.05 level as indicated by the symbol *. Based on this result, the null hypothesis (Ho₃) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is significant relationship between source trustworthiness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Test of Hypothesis four (4)

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between source trustworthiness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

		Correlations	
		store cleanliness	referral
Spearman's rho	store cleanliness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.802*
	Referral	N	110
		Correlation Coefficient	.802*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000
		N	110

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source, Survey Data 2021.

The table above presents the result of correlation analysis between source trustworthiness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State. The result indicates that there is a very strong correlation between source trustworthiness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State ($\rho = .802^*$) and this correlation is significant at 0.05 level as indicated by the symbol *. Based on this result, the null hypothesis (Ho₄) is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is significant relationship between source trustworthiness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Summary of Findings

- i. There is significant relationship between source attractiveness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.
- ii. There is significant relationship between source attractiveness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.
- iii. There is significant relationship between source trustworthiness and loyalty in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.
- iv. There is significant relationship between source trustworthiness and referral in food and beverage firms, Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis, source attractiveness showed a strong, positive, and significant relationship with consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms in Rivers State, with a coefficient value of 0.905 and 0.762, respectively. Based on the result, when a consumer is attracted to a social platforms influencer, they are more likely to purchase the brand. The finding is supported by the study of Liew et al. (2021), who carried out a study to explore the relationship between social platforms influencers and the intention to purchase by Malaysian females. The results revealed that source attractiveness positively and significantly predicts intention to purchase.

Also, source trustworthiness showed a strong, positive, and significant relationship with consumer purchase patterns in food and beverage firms in Rivers State, with a coefficient value of 0.778 and 0.802, respectively. Based on the result, when a consumer trusts a social platforms influencer, the consumer will be more likely to purchase the brand. The finding is supported by the study of Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2019), who carried out a study involving 288 participants and found that trustworthiness was the strongest predictor of intention to purchase products and services.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between social platforms influencer and consumer purchase pattern in food and beverage firms, Rivers State. From the analysis carried out, it was observed that social platforms influencer dimensions of source attractiveness source trustworthiness showed positive, strong and significant relationship with consumer purchase pattern. The study concluded that food and beverage firms' managers should pay attention to social platforms influencers via attractiveness and trustworthiness as it would lead to an increase in customer loyalty and referral.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study; the study recommends that:

- i. Food and beverage firms should advertise their products using only well-known social platforms influencers that are trustworthy as it will lead to an increase in customers' loyalty.
- ii. Food and beverage firms should also put to consideration the physical attractiveness of the influencer before engaging him or her.

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