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Examining Effects of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour on Fruiticana Soft Drinks in Central Business District of Lusaka, Zambia

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour for the Fruiticana soft drinks in the Central Business District of Lusaka, Zambia. Fruiticana is a product of Big Tree Company, a subsidiary of the Trade Kings group of companies. The fruiticana range of soft drinks was introduced to the market in 2019. The rapid proliferation of social media has significantly reshaped consumer decision making and transformed how firms engage with audiences. Within this evolving digital environment, influencer marketing has emerged as a prominent strategy for shaping consumer perceptions and stimulating purchase decisions. Despite its increasing adoption, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of influencer marketing in developing countries, particularly within Zambia's beverage sector remains limited. This study addresses this gap by analysing how exposure to influencer generated content affects consumer engagement, perceptions, and purchasing behaviour. Guided by three objectives assessing consumer engagement with social media, measuring exposure to influencer generated content, and evaluating the effect of influencer marketing on purchasing behaviour—the study employed a mixed methods approach using a convergent parallel design grounded in a pragmatic research paradigm. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 272 respondents selected using simple random sampling. Qualitative data were gathered through semi structured interviews with 27 purposively selected participants. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis, whereas qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo. The results show that consumers exhibit moderate levels of social media engagement, characterised by frequent platform use but limited active interaction with influencer content. Although exposure to influencer generated content was relatively high, it was primarily passive and algorithm driven. Regression analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between influencer exposure and purchasing behaviour ($R^2 = 0.176$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a moderate influence on purchase decisions. Qualitative findings further reveal that purchasing behaviour is often driven by curiosity and product trial rather than trust in influencers, with participants expressing skepticism toward influencer credibility. Trust was selective and more closely associated with perceived authenticity and relatability. Structural factors such as product availability and the limited visibility of local influencers also constrained purchasing behaviour. The study concludes that while influencer marketing significantly influences consumer purchasing behaviour, its effectiveness is conditional on engagement quality, credibility, authenticity, and contextual market factors.

1. Introduction

Social media refers to internet-based platforms that enable users to create, share, and exchange content while interacting within virtual communities and networks. These platforms facilitate communication, collaboration, and information dissemination among individuals and organizations, making them central to modern social interaction and marketing practices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Over time, the business environment has evolved significantly, prompting entrepreneurs and organizations to adopt diverse communication channels to reach their target audiences (Appel et al., 2020). Among these, social media has emerged as a dominant medium for conveying both profit and non-profit messages. The rapid expansion of internet technology has accelerated this shift, with global usage reaching approximately 5.4 billion people, about 67% of the world's population by 2023 (Kemp, n.d.). Consequently, social media has become deeply embedded in everyday life, significantly influencing consumer behavior and reshaping marketing dynamics (Yang, 2024)

In the digital era, social media plays a crucial role in the customer buying journey. It has transformed not only how individuals interact socially but also how businesses engage with consumers. Companies now have unprecedented access to both targeted and broad audiences, enabling real-time interaction and personalized communication (Sury et al., 2024). The dynamic and far-reaching nature of social media enhances its effectiveness as a marketing tool(Khanom, 2023). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram are widely used globally and have revolutionized the relationship between businesses and customers (Al Maalouf et al., 2024). They allow consumers to explore products conveniently while providing businesses with opportunities to influence perceptions and purchasing decisions. Understanding how social media marketing strategies shape consumer behavior is therefore essential, particularly in industries where trust and engagement are critical.

This study focuses on the influence of social media influencer marketing strategies on customer buying behavior, specifically examining Fruiticana soft drinks in Lusaka, Zambia. The research considers key behavioral outcomes such as brand awareness, customer loyalty, and purchase decisions, with particular attention to Facebook as a leading platform with billions of users worldwide (Khanom, 2023; Mukosa, 2022) Mukosa, 2022). Influencer marketing, which involves individuals with significant online followings promoting products or services, has gained prominence as an effective strategy for reaching and persuading consumers.

Zambia provides a relevant context for this study due to its ongoing digital transformation. With a population of over 19 million, the country's economy has traditionally relied on sectors such as mining, agriculture, and tourism (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2024). However, digital technologies are increasingly reshaping industries including retail, entertainment, and marketing. Social media usage is growing rapidly, creating new opportunities for businesses to engage consumers and implement innovative marketing strategies. Influencer marketing, in particular, is emerging as a powerful tool for connecting with target audiences in this evolving landscape.

Recent data highlights significant growth in internet and mobile connectivity in Zambia. As of 2024, the country had millions of internet and social media users, alongside widespread mobile phone adoption (ZICTA, 2023; Kemp, 2024). The expansion of mobile network providers has further enhanced access to social media platforms, enabling influencers to reach large and diverse audiences (Chisanga & Zulu-Mbata, 2018). Additionally, the rise of mobile banking, e-commerce, and digital transactions has created a supportive environment for digital marketing initiatives (ZICTA, 2018; ZICTA, 2023)

Facebook Social media platform is widely used in Zambia, (Mukosa, 2022). Influencers on this platform play an increasingly important role in shaping consumer preferences and promoting brands. Both profit and non-profit organizations utilize social media strategies to communicate with diverse audiences, often influencing purchasing patterns and decision-making processes.

The integration of social media into marketing strategies allows businesses to engage consumers throughout the entire buying process, from need recognition to post-purchase evaluation (Kikelomo et al., 2024). While traditional marketing channels such as television, radio, and print media remain relevant, they are now complemented by digital platforms. Among emerging strategies, influencer marketing has gained particular traction due to its ability to leverage trust and relatability.

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, especially beverages, is a key contributor to Zambia's economy and an important focus of this study. FMCGs are characterized by high turnover, low cost, and frequent consumer demand (Guo & Liu, 2023). This sector plays a vital role in employment, trade, and overall economic development, particularly in urban centers like Lusaka (Malhotra, 2014). Retail outlets, including large chain stores and smaller shops, serve as primary distribution channels for these products. The sector's growth supports broader economic activities such as logistics, advertising, and supply chain management. According to national statistics, the wholesale and retail sector has consistently contributed a significant share to Zambia's GDP(Zambia Statistics Agency, 2023;(ZamStats, 2025).

Given the competitive nature of the FMCG industry, companies must adopt effective marketing strategies to sustain sales and respond to changing consumer preferences(Olutimehin et al., 2024). Social media influencer marketing offers a promising approach to achieving these objectives. This study therefore examines how such strategies impact consumer buying behavior in Lusaka, contributing to a deeper understanding of digital marketing effectiveness in Zambia's evolving economic and technological landscape.

Social media has become a central marketing tool, enabling interaction, content sharing, and influencing consumer behavior globally (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) Its rapid growth, driven by widespread internet adoption, has transformed how businesses communicate with consumers (Appel et al., 2020) (Appel et al., 2019). In Zambia, increasing internet and mobile penetration has accelerated social media usage, creating new opportunities for influencer marketing (ZICTA, 2023) .While influencer marketing is widely adopted, its impact on brand awareness, customer loyalty, and purchase decisions in the FMCG sector remains unclear . How do social media influencer strategies shape consumer buying behavior in Lusaka? To what extent do they influence brand loyalty and purchase decisions in the competitive beverage market?

1.2 Problem Statement

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and specifically beverages have become a substantial driver of the Zambian economy. FMCGs are products that sell quickly and at relatively low cost, (Fareniuk, 2022). They include everyday items such as food, beverages, personal care products, cleaning supplies, and household essentials. They play a crucial role in both the economic landscape and the daily lives of consumers, (Malhotra, 2014). This sector has been identified as a vital part of Lusaka's economy, contributing significantly to employment and trade. According to Zambia Statistics Agency, (2023), the wholesale and retail sector (where the FMCG fall) reported the highest contribution to Zambia's GDP 2023 i.e out of K147.163.3 million, the sector contributed 19.5%, followed by Mining & quarrying (14.3%), Construction (12.2%) and Financial and insurance activities (11.5%), collectively accounting for more than 50 percent of national GDP. This revenue helps government to implement developmental projects such as building of schools, hospitals etc. It is the backbone of Lusaka's wholesale and retail industry, with supermarkets, hypermarkets, and smaller retail outlets relying heavily on the sales of these goods. Large retail chain stores such as Shoprite, Pick n Pay, Choppies and Kamwala shops are key distributors of FMCGs and serve as the main access points for consumers in Lusaka. The presence of FMCGs ensures the continuous flow of goods, maintaining the retail sector's profitability and providing a convenient shopping experience for consumers. The success of these businesses stimulates economic growth by increasing consumer spending, investment, and supply chain activities, supporting ancillary industries such as logistics and advertising. Characterized by intense competition, short product life cycles, and rapidly changing consumer preferences (Räisänen, 2024). Manufacturers and distributors have to make sure that sales are systematic and speedily done. According to (ZamStats, 2025) first quarter report, the wholesale and retail industry where the soft drink sector belongs, was Zambia's second highest contributor to the GDP at 16.3 percent.

In Lusaka, soft drink companies are increasingly relying on influencers to influence consumer preferences, particularly among young people. However, while the growth of social media influencer marketing has been widely acknowledged, its effect on consumer purchasing behavior remains a problem, which needs an examination. The problem lies in understanding the specific ways social media marketing influences consumer decision-making processes, brand perception, and ultimately, purchasing actions (Surjono, 2025). Understanding social media influencer marketing on consumer buying behaviour is important in order to harness a profitable return on investment by soft drink companies.

Although social media usage in Zambia continues to grow, with approximately 3.70 million users in early 2025, it remains unclear whether social media influencer marketing significantly affects consumers' actual purchasing behaviour toward Fruiticana soft drinks in Lusaka Central Business District (CBD). Existing studies on influencer marketing are largely general in nature and are not specifically focused on the Zambian context or on soft drink products, thereby creating both a contextual and empirical gap. This lack of context-specific scholarly evidence makes it difficult for soft drink companies and marketers to understand how consumer purchasing behaviour changes in response to social media influencer marketing. While influencer endorsements may strongly affect some consumers, they may not have the same effect on others, and measuring or predicting these outcomes remains challenging due to the diversity of social media platforms, rapidly changing consumer preferences, and the influence of other internal and external factors that interact with influencer marketing to shape buying decisions (Bhardwaj et al., 2024). Furthermore, despite the rapid growth in social media adoption, research specifically examining influencer marketing in Zambia—particularly in relation to a product such as Fruiticana soft drinks—remains limited. Additionally, most reviewed studies (e.g., Xiao, Rashidin, & Javed, 2021; Sraddhaa & Rubaid, 2023; Bansal & Khaskheli, 2023; Freberg (2011); De Veirman et al. (2017) have relied on a single methodological approach, either qualitative or quantitative and other analytics, which restricts a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effects of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour of Fruiticana soft drinks in Lusaka CBD, Zambia, in order to address the existing knowledge gap and provide evidence relevant to both academic research and marketing practice.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine the level of engagement of consumers with social media.
- To measure the level of consumers' exposure to social media influencer-generated content.
- To determine whether social media influencer marketing has an effect on customer purchasing behaviour.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

- How often do customers access social media.
- To what extent are consumers exposed to influencer-generated content related to fruiticana soft drinks?
- What is the effect of social media influencer marketing on consumer buying behaviour of fruiticana soft drinks.

2 Literature Review

Social media influencer marketing is a digital strategy in which brands collaborate with individuals who have strong online visibility and audience engagement to promote products, services, or brands. Its effectiveness is often linked to perceived credibility, authenticity, and reach, which can enhance consumer attention, engagement, and sales outcomes (Bakker, 2018). Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing is typically experienced as more personal and relatable because influencers cultivate ongoing interactions and para-social relationships with followers through routine content and dialogue (Evans et al., 2017;). Influencer content is delivered across multiple formats (e.g., short videos, live streams, posts, blogs), allowing promotional messages to be embedded in everyday narratives that audiences may perceive as organic (Evans et al., 2017).

A social media influencer is commonly defined as an individual who builds credibility and authority in a niche and can shape followers' opinions, behaviours, and purchasing decisions through expertise or relatability (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencers are often categorized by follower scale: nano (1,000–10,000), micro (10,001–100,000), macro (100,001–1,000,000), and mega (over 1,000,000) (Dangi, 2017). This typology is relevant to brand strategy because firms may select influencer tiers based on campaign goals, expected engagement, and audience fit (Dangi, 2017)

Consumer purchasing behaviour refers to the processes and actions through which individuals select, buy, use, and dispose of products or services. Contemporary marketing increasingly relies on digital channels and data-driven insights, reflecting a shift away from traditional approaches such as print advertising and word-of-mouth toward platform-enabled targeting and interaction (Khanom, 2023;). Social media platforms further shape purchasing pathways through algorithmic curation, content personalization and measurable engagement metrics, enabling brands to optimize message delivery and evaluate performance (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

2.1 Global evidence on influencer marketing effects

Globally, research on influencer marketing has expanded, though findings remain mixed regarding the magnitude of effects and which influencer attributes most strongly predict purchase-related outcomes (Ao et al., 2023; (Jans et al., 2020). Many studies point to the credibility-related characteristics as critical predictors of purchase intention and attitudes toward advertising and products (Pick, 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, systematic reviews note that much of the literature focuses on influencers as commercial tools, with comparatively fewer studies examining behavioural change mechanisms or public opinion effects (Jans et al., 2020; Xue & Musa, 2024). Scholars have therefore called for more studies across varied product categories, including fast-moving consumer goods and food/beverages, using mixed-methods designs to strengthen explanatory power and contextual validity (Vrontis et al., 2021; Mahmud H. B. & Tonima, 2024). Evidence also suggests that distrust can emerge from scandals or perceptions of overt commercial motivation, potentially undermining brand loyalty and reputation (Berry, 2024)(Berry, 2024). Importantly, influencers can also affect non-commercial outcomes. One case in point relates to the alignment between influencer communication style and audience norms has been shown to shift health-related perceptions and behaviours (Bonnevie et al., 2020)

2.2 African experiences

In Africa, influencer marketing has grown alongside increasing mobile and internet penetration and expanding social media use (Galal, 2024). Empirical studies in Egypt and South Africa show that influencer attributes, particularly attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, can significantly shape purchase intentions, with results varying by context and attribute strength (El-Kady & Tarek, 2024; Ramela et al., 2022). Related work emphasizes that trust, likability, informative quality and perceived expertise are frequently associated with higher purchase intention and engagement (Mmolotsane, 2022; Ramela et al., 2022). Research also suggests that user-generated or peer-like content may exert stronger behavioural influence than firm-generated content in some sectors, underscoring the importance of message source and authenticity (Makudza et al., 2020).

2.3 Zambian perspective and knowledge gap

In Zambia, influencer marketing is expanding due to rising connectivity and social media adoption, with emerging platforms and initiatives aimed at connecting brands to verified influencers (ZICTA, 2023; trends tech, 2023).

Although local studies document broader digital marketing effects, evidence remains inconclusive and limited in scope. Some studies report increased online engagement during the COVID-19 period, yet others find weak or non-significant links between online exposure and purchasing behaviour in specific student populations (Katongo & Musawa, 2022; Kamangala & Kayombo, 2024). Qualitative work also indicates that businesses increasingly recognize social media as central to marketing, but influencer-specific mechanisms remain underexplored (Imasiku, 2016). Consequently, a clear gap persists regarding how influencer marketing affects purchasing behaviour in Zambia's beverage/FMCG sector and how platform dynamics, credibility perceptions and local influencer visibility shape outcomes (Zulu, 2024; Mpuku, 2024).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Social Identity Theory (SIT), Source Credibility Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to provide a conceptual framework for understanding how social media influencer marketing shapes consumer purchasing behaviour in the soft drink sector. Social Identity Theory explains how individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups and are motivated to act in ways that reinforce a positive group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tajfel, 1978). Through processes of social categorisation, identification and comparison, individuals adopt the norms, values, and behaviours associated with groups they affiliate with (Turner, 1987). In social media environments, influencers often function as symbolic group leaders, fostering online communities with shared lifestyles, tastes, and consumption patterns. When consumers perceive themselves as part of an influencer's "in group," they are more likely to align their purchasing behaviour with the influencer's endorsements to affirm group belonging and social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Terry & Hogg, 1996). This mechanism is particularly salient among young, urban consumers who use consumption choices such as beverage brands to signal lifestyle and identity.

Even if SIT explains why consumers may be motivated to follow influencer recommendations, Source Credibility Theory explains when such recommendations are persuasive. Source Credibility Theory posits that message effectiveness depends on the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill of the communicator (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCroskey & Teven, 1999). In influencer marketing, consumers actively evaluate whether influencers possess relevant product knowledge and whether endorsements are authentic or commercially driven (Umeogu, 2012). Influencers perceived as credible are more effective in building trust, shaping favourable brand attitudes, and enhancing persuasive impact, thereby strengthening the likelihood that identity driven motivations translate into actual purchase intentions (Herdiani et al., 2025)

The Theory of Planned Behavior integrates these social and credibility processes by explaining how they ultimately lead to purchasing decisions. TPB posits that behaviour is driven by behavioural intentions, which are shaped by attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Buess, 2012; Ajzen, 1991). In influencer contexts, credible endorsers contribute to favourable attitudes toward the product, while influencer popularity and peer imitation reinforce subjective norms that normalise consumption (Chetioui et al., 2020; Shah Alom et al., 2023). Perceived behavioural control reflects consumers' assessment of their ability to purchase, influenced by factors such as availability, affordability and accessibility, critical considerations in emerging market contexts (Syafiq et al., 2024)

This integrated framework suggests that social media influencer marketing influences consumer purchasing behaviour through a sequential and interactive process: influencers foster social identification (SIT), credibility determines persuasive strength, and attitudes, norms and control perceptions mediate the translation of influence into purchase behaviour (TPB). This framework provides a robust foundation for examining influencer driven consumption in Lusaka's urban soft drink market.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

In this study, the Independent Variables are Social Media Influencer Marketing, Influencer trustworthiness, Consumer social media exposure. These form the social media influencer marketing index. They represent how influencers affect consumer behaviour through Facebook media platform. The index looks at parameters such as social media influencer marketing, Influencer trustworthiness, consumer social media exposure and consumer social media engagement. The following factors: purchase intention, actual purchase and brand loyalty constitute consumer purchasing behaviour index. This has been assessed in terms of how it is influenced by Social Media Influencer Marketing.The research logic is that the consumer purchasing behaviour is dependent upon or can be explained in terms of Social Media Influencer Marketing. In other words, the consumer purchasing behaviour is a function of Social Media Influencer Marketing, Influencer trustworthiness, Consumer social media exposure and Consumer social media engagement. Conceptually, this is presented in the diagram below;

Independent Variables Dependent Variables

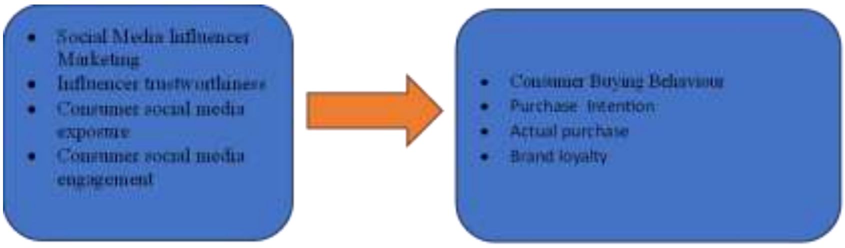

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

3 Research Methodology

This study adopted a convergent parallel research design, underpinned by a pragmatic research approach, to examine the effect of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour. The convergent parallel design enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, allowing the study to integrate numerical patterns with in depth explanatory insights and to provide an understanding of consumer responses to influencer marketing (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) This approach was particularly suitable for explaining not only whether influencer marketing affects consumer behaviour, but also why consumers behave in certain ways when interacting with fruiticana soft drinks promoted by influencers on social media.

A mixed methods approach was employed to enhance analytical rigor and triangulate findings in various data sources (Creswell, 2011). The target population comprised adults (18 years and above) soft drink consumers residing in Lusaka District who had access to the internet and social media platforms. As a sampling frame for this population was not available, the accessible population was estimated using official census demographics and national internet penetration data. Lusaka Province has a population of 3,093,617 residents (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022), of which adults aged 18 and above constitute approximately 50.6 percent. National internet penetration stood at 33.0 percent at the end of 2025 (Data Reportal, 2026). Based on these parameters, the accessible population was estimated at approximately 516,572 adults with internet access in Lusaka District.

Sample size determination: To determine an appropriate sample size for the quantitative survey, the study employed Cochran's (1977) formula, which is widely used for large or unknown populations in social science research. The formula is expressed as:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

n_0= initial sample size,

Z= Z value corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for 95% confidence),

p= estimated proportion of the population with the attribute of interest (assumed to be 0.5 for maximum variability),

q= 1 – p, and

e= margin of error (0.05).

The sample was therefore calculated as:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = 384.16$$

Taking a 95% confidence level (Z = 1.96), a margin of error of 5% (e = 0.05), and a proportion (p = 0.5), the calculated sample size was 384 respondents.

Quantitative data were collected using structured, closed ended questionnaires with Likert scale questions, administered to respondents selected through simple random sampling. Simple random sampling was adopted to reduce selection bias and ensure that each eligible participant had an equal chance of inclusion (Bryman, 2016). The survey measured exposure to influencer marketing, engagement levels and purchasing behaviour related to soft drink brands. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and regression analysis to examine relationships between influencer marketing variables and consumer purchasing behaviour.

Qualitative data were collected through semi structured interviews conducted in English. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' informed consent to ensure accuracy during transcription and analysis, consistent with best ethical practices in qualitative research (Brinkmann, S; Kvale, 2019).

Response rate and non-response bias assessment

A total of 272 usable questionnaires were obtained and included in the quantitative analysis, yielding a 71% response rate for survey-based research involving adult consumers. In social science studies, response rates of 30 percent or higher are generally considered sufficient, particularly for self-administered surveys conducted in urban settings (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). This indicates that the response rate achieved is adequate to support statistical analysis. (Cook et al., 2000) also argues that response representativeness is more important than response rate in survey research.

There were a number of strategies employed to encourage participation, including clear explanation of the study purpose, assurance of confidentiality and anonymity and a concise questionnaire design (Young, 2016). To assess potential non response bias, early and late respondents were compared on key variables following the extrapolation method (Wallace & Mellor, 1988) Late respondents were treated as proxies for non-respondents (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). Independent sample t tests revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that non response bias is unlikely to have influenced the results. This strengthens the internal validity and robustness of the findings (Lindner et al., 2001; Groves et al., 2009).

Ethical considerations

This study adhered to the highest standards of research ethics and was cleared by the University Ethics Committee (IORG No. 0005376, HSSREC IRB No. 00006464, REF NO. HSSREC- -2025-SEP-018). All participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits. They were required to give written consent before participating. Voluntary participation was emphasized and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All responses were treated as confidential. To ensure anonymity, no names or personal identifiers were attached to the data or presented in the findings. The study also promoted equal opportunity for participation across gender, age and jobs roles. All participants were treated with dignity, respect (Ngulube et al., 2024) and their input was valued equally, regardless of their position within the study area.

4 Findings

Findings of the study are presented in this section;

4.1 Level of consumer engagement with social media

Descriptive statistics were employed to assess respondents' levels of social media engagement, with the results presented in Table 1. The findings indicate that respondents spend a moderate amount of time on social media platforms, with an average daily usage of M = 2.60 (SD = 0.98). The median score of 3.00 suggests that most respondents spend approximately one to four hours per day on social media. This confirms that social media platforms remain integral to daily consumer activity and represent critical communication channels for marketers.

With respect to paid content, respondents reported an average level of interest in clicking on social media advertisements and sponsored posts, with a mean score of M = 2.75 (SD = 1.05). The median value of 3.00 indicates that users are more likely to view advertisements that align with their personal interests. Given the persistent exposure to online advertising, users selectively engage with promotional materials rather than interacting with all sponsored content.

Active engagement with influencer generated soft drink content, however, was relatively low. The frequency of liking, following, or reacting to such content recorded a mean score of M = 2.51 (SD = 1.15), indicating that engagement ranged from rare to occasional. Reposting behaviour demonstrated the lowest level of interaction, with a mean score of M = 1.98 (SD = 1.18), suggesting limited willingness to share influencer created soft drink posts.

In contrast, passive engagement emerged as the dominant mode of interaction. Respondents reported frequently viewing influencer related soft drink content without actively engaging, as reflected by a mean score of M = 3.05 (SD = 1.21) and a median value of 3.00. The findings suggest that consumers in Lusaka are regularly exposed to influencer promoted Fruiticana soft drink content but engage primarily through passive consumption rather than interactive behaviours. This shows the role of influencer marketing in generating visibility and brand awareness, even in the absence of high levels of active engagement.

Table 1: Exposure to influencer-generated soft drink content

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
N	272	272	272
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	3.57	3.31	2.88
Median	4.00	3.00	2.90
Standard Deviation	1.01	0.990	0.760
Minimum	1	2	1.40
Maximum	5	5	5.00

Notes:
- Column 1: How often do you see posts from social media influencers promoting soft drink brands?
- Column 2: How often do you specifically target posts of your influencer on social media?
- Column 3: Influencer Exposure Index

4.2 Objective 2: Exposure to influencer-generated soft drink content

Descriptive statistics were employed to examine consumers' exposure to influencer generated content promoting soft drink products on social media, with results presented in Table 2. The findings provide support for Hypothesis 1, which posited that consumers in Lusaka's Central Business District are exposed to influencer generated promotional content. Respondents reported frequent encounters with sponsored posts featuring Fruiticana soft drinks (M = 3.57, SD = 1.01), while the median value of 4.00 indicates that at least half of participants were exposed to such content on a regular basis. The proximity of the mean and median values suggests that exposure is not sporadic but recurrent, reinforcing the view that influencer driven brand messaging forms a routine part of users' social media experiences.

Beyond passive exposure, respondents also reported actively seeking influencer generated content, although to a lesser extent. The mean score for intentional searching for influencer posts (M = 3.31, SD = 0.99; median = 3.00) reflects behaviour ranging from occasional to frequent engagement. However, when compared to passive exposure through newsfeeds, these findings support Hypothesis 2, which anticipated that consumers are more likely to encounter influencer content accidentally than through deliberate search. This pattern highlights the role of platform algorithms in shaping visibility, alongside individual user interest. Although some consumers actively follow influencers, many encounter promotional content incidentally during routine browsing, indicating that exposure is driven by both user agency and system generated recommendations.

To further contextualize these patterns, an Influencer Exposure Index was constructed by aggregating key visibility indicators. The index yielded a mean score of M = 2.88 (SD = 0.76) and a median of 2.90, indicating a moderate and relatively uniform level of exposure across respondents. The limited variability suggests that most consumers experience comparable levels of influencer led soft drink messaging. These results establish a foundational condition for subsequent hypothesis testing by demonstrating that influencer content is both pervasive and consistently encountered. This recurring exposure provides the necessary context for interrogating how influencer marketing may shape engagement levels, attitudes and purchasing behaviour in the following analyses.

4.3 Objective 3: To determine whether social media influencer marketing has an effect on customer purchasing behaviour of soft drinks

To determine whether social media influencer marketing has an effect on consumer purchasing behaviour of fruiticana soft drink, correlation and regression analyses were conducted. The results are presented in tables 2 below:

Table 2 Correlation matrix

		Influencer exposure index	Purchase Behaviour Index
Influencer Exposure Index	Pearson's r	-	-
	Df	-	-
	p-value	-	-
Purchase Behaviour Index	Pearson's r	0.420*	-
	Df	270	-
	p-value	<.001	-

Correlation analysis revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between exposure to influencer generated content and purchasing behaviour for Fruiticana soft drinks ($r = 0.420$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that as consumers' exposure to influencer posts increases, their likelihood of purchasing Fruiticana soft drinks also increases. The strength of the relationship suggests that influencer visibility plays a meaningful role in shaping consumer behaviour, although it does not operate in isolation.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of influencer exposure. The model accounted for 17.6 percent of the variance in consumer purchasing behaviour ($R^2 = 0.176$), demonstrating that influencer exposure has substantive explanatory value. The regression coefficient shows that a one unit increase in the Influencer Exposure Index is associated with a 0.226 unit increase in purchasing behaviour, holding all other factors constant ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that influencer exposure exerts a direct and positive effect on purchasing behaviour, thereby supporting Hypothesis H3.

The regression intercept was not statistically significant ($p = 0.290$), indicating that baseline purchasing behaviour is not strongly predicted in the absence of influencer exposure. This finding reinforces the role of influencer content as an important stimulus in activating purchase responses rather than merely reinforcing preexisting behaviour. While these findings affirm the influence of social media influencer marketing on purchasing behaviour, the proportion of explained variance indicates that influencer exposure is only one of several determinants of consumer decision making. Product attributes, brand familiarity, personal taste, price sensitivity, and availability are factors likely to shape purchasing outcomes. Consequently, influencer marketing should be understood as an important but complementary driver of consumer behaviour rather than a singular determinant.

The results demonstrate that influencer marketing significantly enhances purchasing behaviour for Fruiticana soft drinks among consumers in Lusaka's Central Business District, thereby confirming Hypothesis H3 and underscoring the strategic value of influencer visibility within broader marketing circle.

Table 3 Linear regression

MODEL FIT MEASURES

MODEL	R	R^2
1	0.420	0.176

MODEL COEFFICIENTS – PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR INDEX

			95% Confidence Interval			
PREDICTOR	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	T	p
INTERCEPT	-0.0940	0.0888	-0.269	0.0807	-1.06	.290
INFLUENCER EXPOSURE INDEX	0.2262	0.0298	0.168	0.2848	7.60	<.001

4.4 Qualitative findings - thematic analysis

This section presents insights derived from open-ended interviews. Through iterative review, recurring ideas were identified by closely interrogating participants' responses and coding salient excerpts. Patterns were established by comparing meaningful statements across discussions, with themes emerging where consistent expressions were observed. The resulting thematic categories are presented below and supported by participants' verbatim accounts.

Purpose-driven but non-commercial use of social media

Findings indicate that Facebook is primarily used for leisure, learning, communication and access to general information rather than for guiding purchasing decisions. R1 described their online activity as centered on entertainment and browsing. R2 highlighted education and spiritual purposes as a motive for accessing Facebook. R7 noted that engagement is used for communication mostly. Although advertisements are encountered during these activities, the platform is not perceived as marketplace by design; consequently, influencer-generated content may exert limited influence on product choice.

High but passive and platform-dependent exposure to influencer content

A second theme highlights that exposure to influencer content is high but largely passive. Participants reported frequent encounters with influencer posts, typically without actively seeking them, as such content is algorithmically delivered. R3 noted that influencer material "just pops up… everyone gets to see what is going on. On the other hand, R8 indicated that it appears "sometimes… not too often," . These findings suggest that, although influencer marketing is highly visible, it is not consistently driven by deliberate consumer engagement.

Low engagement and predominantly observational behaviour

Closely linked to exposure is the theme of low engagement. Although respondents reported frequent exposure to influencer content, active interaction remains limited. Engagement is largely observational rather than participatory. R12 reported that , "I rarely do that… I just come across them". Similarly, R19 described engagement as "very rare". R21 added that, "I usually just browse", indicating minimal actions such as liking, commenting, or searching for influencer content. This pattern suggests that most consumers are passive recipients of influencer marketing, potentially constraining its behavioural impact.

Purchasing behaviour driven by curiosity rather than influence

Findings indicate that curiosity, rather than influencer persuasion, is a primary driver of purchasing behaviour. Exposure to fruiticana soft drinks on facebook may prompt trial purchases, but not necessarily brand switching. Several respondents reported purchasing products out of curiosity rather than strong endorsement. R1 noted purchasing fruiticana "just to get to taste it", and R15 and R5 added that, "I will try… but not changing my brand". These responses suggest that influencer marketing may stimulate initial interest but has limited influence on altering established consumer preferences.

Skepticism toward influencer credibility

A recurring theme is skepticism regarding influencer credibility, where 20 out of 27 respondents questioned the authenticity of influencers, perceiving them as commercially motivated rather than genuine advocates. R4 , for example stated that influencers "do it for money… even if the drink is not good". R22reported dissatisfaction with promoted fruiticana drinks, noting that "when we try them, we are always disappointed". Such perceptions weaken the persuasive power of influencer marketing, given the central role of trust in shaping consumer decisions.

Selective trust based on authenticity and personal relevance

Despite general skepticism, trust in influencers is not absent but conditional. Respondents indicated that trust is selectively placed in individuals perceived as authentic and relatable. One participant stated that, "those I follow, yes, I trust them". Another respondent referenced specific figures saying, "Pompi and Trevor Noah… not everyone". Trust was also associated with perceived real-life credibility, as one respondent explained they trust influencers who "have something in their life… not just aesthetics". These findings suggest that influencer effectiveness depends on authenticity, relatability and perceived credibility.

Limited influence of local influencers

The findings further reveal the limited influence of local influencers relative to international or widely recognized figures. R19 indicated that locally relevant influencer content is less visible or impactful within their social media experience. R23 revealed that "locally it's rare… on my browser". This suggests constrained exposure to local influencer marketing and a potential preference for global content, with implications for marketing strategies in the Zambian context.

Access and availability constraints affect purchasing behaviour

Product availability emerged as a critical determinant of purchasing behaviour. Even where interest is generated through influencer content, limited access may prevent actual purchase. R3 revealed this constraint, stating, "when we don't see them, we can't buy". This indicates that external factors, particularly product availability, play a decisive role in translating exposure into consumption.

4.5 Discussion

This section is the discussion of findings of the study. These are presented in thematic strands and based on earlier set objectives.

Objective 1 – Consumer Engagement: Descriptive results show moderate daily social media use and low active engagement (e.g., limited sharing/liking), indicating that consumers primarily consume influencer content passively. These supports (Ao et al., 2023), who found that visibility and reach often matter more than interaction in shaping brand awareness. Within the conceptual framework, this suggests that engagement type conditions how exposure translates into purchasing behaviour.

Objective 2 – Influencer Exposure: The moderate-to-high exposure levels ($M = 2.88$) confirm that influencer-generated fruiticana soft drink content is highly visible on Facebook. This aligns with Macdonald et al., (2015), who posits that repeated exposure increases product familiarity and trial intentions, reinforcing the framework's assumption that exposure is a direct antecedent of purchase behaviour.

Objective 3 – Effect on Purchasing Behaviour: Correlation and regression results ($r = 0.42$; $\beta = 0.226$; $p < .001$) demonstrate a statistically significant effect of influencer marketing on purchasing decisions. This supports (Javed et al., 2022), who found influencer endorsements to positively influence consumer buying behaviour, though the effect size in this study suggests a moderate, not dominant, role.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Most respondents in Lusaka spend considerable time on facebook platform but engagement remains largely passive. While exposure to influencer-generated content is high, interaction is minimal, with users primarily observing rather than actively participating. Consequently, although content dissemination is rapid, meaningful engagement and interaction remain limited, constraining the depth of influencer–consumer relationships.

Exposure to influencer content is most prominent on Facebook and largely driven by algorithmic delivery rather than intentional search. Despite high visibility, exposure alone does not necessarily translate into behavioural change. Without active engagement, the influence of such content diminishes quickly and locally generated content often receives comparatively lower visibility.

The study finds that social media influencer marketing has a statistically significant but moderate effect on consumer purchasing behaviour on fruiticana soft drinks. Influencer exposure contributes to purchase decisions but explains only part of consumer behaviour. Purchasing is often driven by curiosity rather than trust, with influencer content encouraging product trial but rarely leading to sustained brand switching. skepticism regarding influencer credibility further limits impact; however, perceived authenticity and relatability can enhance influence. Additionally, contextual factors, particularly product availability and the limited visibility of local influencers play a critical role in shaping purchasing outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations

- Big Tree Company and other Soft drink companies should prioritize authenticity 'over reach' when selecting influencers. Aligning influencers with brand values and fostering genuine, transparent communication can strengthen consumer trust and engagement. This is premised on the fact that micro-influencers with highly engaged audiences may be more effective than those with large but less interactive followings. Thus, campaigns should also incorporate interactive and experiential elements to convert passive exposure into active participation.
- Social Media Influencers should develop value-driven content and emphasize authenticity and transparency to build and sustain audience trust.
- Big Tree Company and other soft drink companies must enhance marketing strategies that continue prioritising platforms such as Facebook, which has high visibility and engagement potential, recognizing that platform dynamics significantly influence content reach and user interaction. Integrated campaigns that combine digital promotion with in-store visibility and traditional media can enhance sales.
- The Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority, Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and other digital communication regulatory bodies and industry stakeholders should monitor social media influencer marketing content and enforce ethical standards within digital marketing practices. This shall help strengthen regulation and transparency in influencer marketing and improve consumer trust.

5.3 Areas for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the effect of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour, several areas warrant further investigation.

Future studies could explore the role of influencer characteristics, such as credibility, attractiveness, expertise, followership and content quality in shaping consumer trust and behaviour. Additionally, research could examine the comparative effectiveness of local versus international influencers, particularly within the Zambian context.

Further research may also investigate the long-term impact of influencer marketing on brand loyalty, as this study found that influencer marketing primarily drives trial rather than sustained behavioural change. Longitudinal studies would be particularly useful in understanding how consumer behaviour evolves over time.

Furthermore, future studies could focus on specific product categories or brands within the beverage industry to provide more targeted information. Expanding the scope to include other regions beyond Lusaka would also enhance the generalizability of findings. Other parameters such as respondents' income, locality, age and educational status could also be explored.

5.4 Limitation of the Study

This study was limited in scope of the study as only the Lusaka CBD was considered. It was further limited in that only one product line was examined. The sample size was not fully met due to limited timeframe of the research.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they not aware of any competing financial interests or personal relationships that may have influenced the work described in this document.

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Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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