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## Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing vs Social Media Sponsored Advertising

Eficacia del marketing influyente Vs la publicidad patrocinada por medios sociales

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### ABSTRACT:

This study aims to assess the efficacy of social media advertising and influencer marketing, using sales, page engagement, brand perceptions and buying intentions as the dependent variables. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers ran six advertisements and opted to make use of the same adverts for both the influencer marketing and social media advertising campaigns. The findings of this study indicate that sponsored advertisements are more effective in generating post engagements than influencer marketing posts. Moreover, the study shows that social media users tend to save sponsored advertisements more than they save advertisements by influencers.

**KEYWORDS:** Brand loyalty, brand perception, buying intention, influencer marketing, sponsored ads..

### RESUMEN:

Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar la eficacia de la publicidad en redes sociales y el marketing influyente, utilizando las ventas, participación de la página, las percepciones de la marca y las intenciones de compra como variables dependientes. Para lograr los objetivos de este estudio, los investigadores ejecutaron 6 anuncios y optaron por hacer uso de los mismos anuncios tanto para el marketing influyente como para las campañas publicitarias en redes sociales. Los hallazgos de este estudio indican que los anuncios patrocinados son más efectivos para generar interacciones con publicaciones que las propias publicaciones de marketing influyente. Además, el estudio muestra que los usuarios de las redes sociales tienden a guardar más los anuncios patrocinados que los anuncios provenientes de influyentes.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Anuncios patrocinados, fidelidad de marca, intención de compra, marketing influyente, percepción de marca..

## INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing focuses on using social media influencers to drive a brand's message and reach a target market. Influencers are those individuals who have built a large social media following and who are perceived as trusted and influential in one or several niche markets (Sudha& Sheena: 2017, pp.14-30). The spread of the internet and the rise of social media users worldwide have made influencer marketing the logical next step of digital marketing. Approximately, a third of the world's population is connected to the internet and makes use of social media on a daily basis which has led to a change in consumer behaviour (Zahoor&Quereshi:

2017, pp.47-64; Awobamise: 2018, pp.40-55). These changes manifest in the way customers shop and seek out information on what to buy. As a result, there has been a growing consensus on the need to change the way marketing is carried out. More specifically, traditional media and even traditional digital marketing including sponsored posts, pop-up ads and so on need to be augmented with influencer marketing if they are to achieve their desired results in this significantly evolving digital marketplace (Khamis et al.: 2017, pp.191-208; Awobamise: 2018, pp.40-55).

Today, social media influencer marketing has become a major marketing tool for brands all over the world. This was enabled by the popularity and wide acceptance of platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, which enabled ordinary, everyday people to become social media influencers (Khamis et al.: 2017, pp.191- 208). As the internet becomes more ubiquitous, influencer marketing will not only survive but may become a very lucrative alternative to traditional advertisements and even traditional social media or internet advertising.

The endorsement has always been a formidable marketing tool used to sway public opinion; politicians make use of celebrities in political agenda-setting and advertisers use them to promote goods and services (Awobamise&Jarrar: 2018). The idea has always been that people tend to see these celebrities and public officials as role models and are more likely to believe them and support their agenda. Endorsements help companies develop and cultivate good reputations and are, in many cases, considered cost-efficient and effective (Taleverna: 2015; Harrison: 2017; Awobamise&Jarrar: 2018). Therefore, as the popularity of the internet has brought about a new class of ‘celebrities’ or influencers, marketers need to seize this new opportunity or adapt to this new reality.

Because of the reach and influence, these influencers wield when they review products, brands or just talk about a service or a product, and it is becoming increasingly clear that this new breed of ‘celebrities’ have the power to influence consumer opinion, hence the growth of influencer marketing (Booth & Matic: 2011, 99.184-191). Influencer marketing has become so pervasive that one can hardly scroll through an Instagram page without coming across some sort of such marketing. This is also the reality in even developing nations like Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya.

According to De Veirman, et al. (De Veirman et al.: 2017, pp.798-828), the general goal of any form of marketing is to increase sales, build brand awareness, grow market share, launch a new product/service, target new customers, improve stakeholder relations, enhance customer relations, and increase profit amongst others. If examined critically, one can categorize the goals of marketing into two broad categories:

1) Increasing market share (which involves increasing sales and breaking into new markets) 2) Improving stakeholder relations (which includes improving brand awareness, creating a positive perception about the brand, customer relations, and targeting new customers amongst others). Therefore, it is reasonable to measure the effectiveness of influencer marketing based on these two goals.

Nigeria has fully embraced social media influencers and celebrity endorsement (two terms that will be used interchangeably in the course of this study). Some of the top influencers in Nigeria are Ebuka Obi- Uchendu, OloriSupergirl, Noble Igwe, TundeEdnut, KayodeAbass, Omojuwa, just to name a few. These influencers have built a large and loyal following on social media and are now leveraging on their platforms to promote brands, causes and ideologies to their thousands of loyal and dedicated followers.

Sponsored posts or social media advertising allow advertisers to make promotional messages that are shown on the target customers’ or audiences’ timelines. Social media advertising has been proven effective in improving sales and creating awareness. However, there is a steady increase in the use of social media influencer marketing which begs the question of which is the most effective of the two. This study, therefore, seeks to compare the effectiveness of social media advertising and social media influencers’ posts on two of the most popular social media platforms in Nigeria- Instagram and Facebook.

### **Conceptual perspective**

In the course of this study, the sponsored post shall be used interchangeably with social media marketing where a marketer makes use of advertising tools on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. These tools usually allow the marketer to select a specific audience based on age, gender, hobbies, location and so on, and ensure that only the selected demographics get to see the marketing or advertising messages.

Influencer marketing, on the other hand, refers to marketing that involves leveraging on the popularity of social media influence of an individual to market products or services or advance a cause. This involves contacting a social media personality or a page that advertisers think is relevant to their products or services and negotiate a term that allows influencers to promote products or services to their thousands or millions of followers (Bolarinwa: 2015, pp.195-201).

This study posits that there is a significant difference in post engagement, sales, and buying intentions between consumers exposed to social media advertising and those exposed to influencers' promotional messages as shown in Figure (1) below:

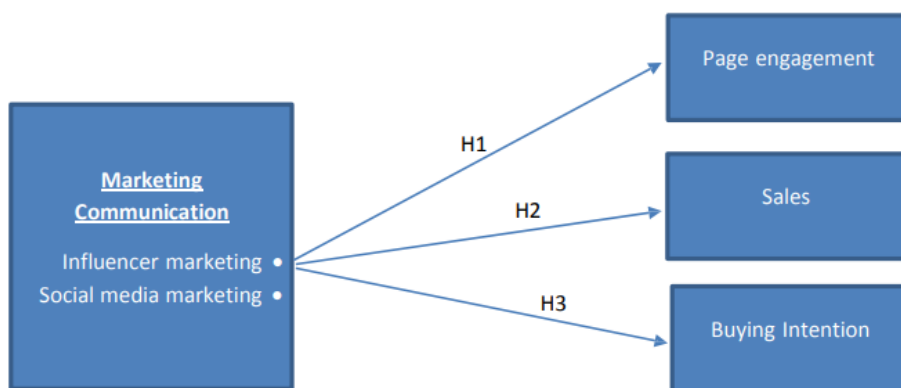


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

**Theoretical perspective**

This study made use of two theories; the technological determinism theory and social learning theory.

Technological determinism is a reductionist theory which at its core posits that the development of any society and its cultural values are driven by that society's technological development and progression. Technological determinists believe that particular communication technologies, media or even technology, in general, are the sole causes of change in society (Ray: 2013).

This theory is particularly important to this study because it helps understand how technology –in this case, social media (which influencer marketing is a result of) – is changing consumer buying behaviour.

Social learning theory was propounded by Bandura in 1963 (Bandura & Walters: 1963) and has been widely used in the field of communication and advertising (Bush et al.: 1999, pp.13-24). The theory posits that people learn by observing others. It promotes the idea that individuals are motivated to behave in a certain way based on direct or indirect social interactions (Moschis & Churchill: 1978, pp.599-609; Subramanian & Subramanian: 1995, pp.14-18). Previous studies in marketing have made use of this theory to understand how consumer consumption behaviour is influenced by socialization agents like family, peers and celebrities (Martin & Bush: 2000, pp.441-453). Social learning theory is proposed in this study as a contextual foundation in understanding how social media influencers shape buyers' behaviour and perception, and how this influence impacts sales.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media influencers (SMIs) according to Freberg et al. (Freberg et al.: 2010) “represent a new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media”. As mentioned before, influencer marketing is gaining momentum and popularity in developing countries and is fast becoming an alternative to traditional forms of marketing communication (Booth & Matic: 2011, pp.184-191, Chan et al.: 2013, pp.167-179).

De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (De Veirman et al.: 2017, pp.798-828) pointed out that influencer marketing is very effective in ensuring a positive eWOM (electronic word of mouth). The effectiveness of influencer marketing was further supported by studies by Sudha and Sheena (Sudha & Sheena: 2017, pp.14-30) who found out that influencer marketing promotes a level of credibility that traditional marketing communication usually finds difficult to achieve.

According to Influicity- a tech company that develops applications and solutions to help marketers, agencies and publishers to manage their influencer operations- influencer marketing is effective in creating awareness for a brand or a product. They argued that 93% of marketers state that influencer endorsements increase their brand awareness and help them attract new customers. They also explained that consumers place a lot of trust in influencers and 82% of consumers are likely to purchase a product that is endorsed by an influencer while 31% of consumers in North America make a purchase based on the recommendations of an influencer. Furthermore, they claimed that social media influencers help in ensuring brand loyalty by consumers. While the previous studies showed that social media influencer marketing is effective in improving brand awareness, sales and retention, the fact remains that the majority of these studies were conducted in North America and Europe. There is, therefore, a need to find out if this remains true in an African context. Are influencers relevant enough in Nigeria to influence consumer buying decisions?

This study, therefore, seeks to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Influencer marketing posts generate more post engagements than sponsored posts.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Influencer marketing posts generate more sales than sponsored posts.

There is, however, evidence that sponsored posts or social media advertising are effective in getting people to purchase a product or make use of a service. Dahlen, Lange and Rosengren (Dahlen et al.: 2009) argued that no matter how limited the exposure is on social media, it usually has a strong impact on users' purchase behaviour. Bang and Lee (Bang & Lee: 2016, pp.1-14) in their study on the effectiveness of paid or sponsored posts proved that social media users generally do not trust this type of advertising. This position is supported by studies by Van Reijmersdal et al. (Van Reijmersdal et al.: 2016, pp.1458-1474) who stated that consumers who discover that a post is sponsored or is an advertisement usually react with a decreased buying intention. Evans et al. (Evans et al.: 2017, pp.138-149) also supported this position as they concluded that posts with the term “paid ad” or “sponsored” have fewer engagements than those without.

A study conducted by Putter (Putter: 2017, pp.7-13) on the impact of social media on consumer buying intention stated that when used properly, social media can be a great tool to develop and maintain a competitive advantage. He found out that companies that make use of social media in their marketing efforts tend to have a more significant advantage over those that do not. He implied that there is a direct relationship between increased buying intention and social media advertising, a relationship this study hopes to explore.

One of the earliest studies on social media advertising and brand perception was conducted by Rahman and Rashid (Rahman and Rashid: 2018). They posited that social media advertising has become more popular because of the array of options the internet and social media have made available to the general public. People now have options to choose from. Therefore, the simple act of choosing has become quite laborious. Similarly, according to Khalid (Khalid: 2016), there is a significant positive relationship between social media advertising and brand trust, brand equity and brand loyalty. A study by Ali et al. (Ali et al.: 2016, pp.69-77) on the impact of social media marketing on consumers' perception of brands found out that

social media marketing has a significant impact on brand perception. In their study, they compared social media marketing, promotional marketing and door-to-door marketing, and the findings showed that social media marketing has a significant advantage over the other forms of marketing when it comes to influencing consumer perception. One obvious limitation of most of the studies conducted to ascertain the relationship between social media marketing and brand perception is the fact that they lumped all forms of social media marketing into one, which muddies the waters and makes it difficult to understand how different forms of social media marketing might influence brand perception by consumers (Gorry& Westbrook: 2009, pp.195-203).

From the foregoing, it appears that the literature supports the fact that sponsored or paid advertisements are not very effective. However, a media user cannot usually go on any social media platform without stumbling upon a sponsored post. The signs point to the fact that marketers and advertisers still see ‘traditional social media advertisements’ as effective and spend a lot of money on such advertisements. There is also a distinct lack of literature comparing the effectiveness of sponsored posts vis-à-vis influencer marketing posts. It is based on this premise that the researchers seek to test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a significant difference in the buying intention of consumers exposed to sponsored advertisements and those exposed to marketing messages from social media influencers.

## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of social media advertising and influencer marketing using sales, page engagement, brand perceptions and buying intentions as the dependent variables. Due to the nature of the research, the entire process of data collection was carried out online.

To achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers ran six different advertisements. The table below shows the breakdown of the advertisements that were used in this study.

**Table 1.** Social and influencer marketing breakdown

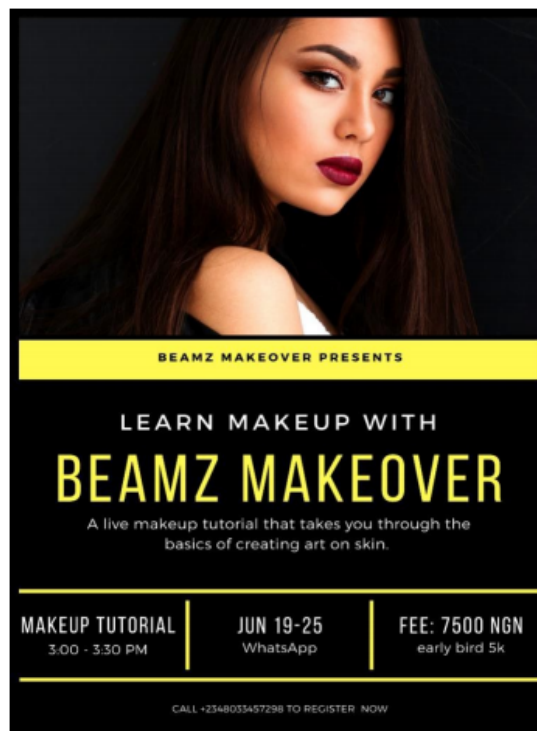
S/N	Product/Service	Types Of Advertisement	Value	Target Audience	Social Media	Potential Reach
1	Hair and Make-up products by Beamzmakeover	Influencer Marketing by Glowville	700 USD (one the page for a week)	Females between the ages of 18-35	Facebook and Instagram	20720 (combined followers)
2	Mobile phones by 1989 technologies					
3	Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020					
4	Hair and Make-up products by Beamzmakeover	Social media advertisement	100 USD (for one week)	Females between the ages of 18-35 and have shown an interest in Beauty products	Facebook and Instagram	35,000 potential reach (combined)
5	Electronics products by 1989 technologies					
6	Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020					

The three categories of products – Beauty and make-up, electronics and sexual enhancement - were selected because they are the most popular advertisements and paid posts on social media in Nigeria according to Glowville Communications- an online marketing company based in Lagos, Nigeria.

Due to funding limitations, the researchers opted to make use of OlumideGlowville, a social media influencer who is popular in Nigeria. MrOlumide of Glowville Communications agreed to give the researchers access to their social media analytics so we could confirm page and post engagements for free. All the posts were shared on social media within two months, with a week interval between each post. The researchers measured post engagement and sales for two weeks immediately after posting.

For social media advertisements, the researchers ran the adverts for the same products and made them as targeted as possible (see Table 1).

To ensure that there was no bias, the researchers opted to make use of the same adverts (image) for both the influencer marketing and social media advertising. The only difference was that the accompanying messages on both were different. Below is a sample of a make-up tutorial advert that was used for social media advertising and influencer marketing.



**Figure 2.** Sample advert used for the study. Created using Canva free software

For the social media influencer marketing, Glowville developed a sales copy that accompanied the advert. The sales copy used as the accompanying text to the advertisement above. The text is shown below:

How have you been spending your Coronavirus lockdown? Have you learnt a new skill, or improved on an existing skill? Acquiring new knowledge and skills might be just what you need to survive post- COVID 19. So yesterday, I was chatting with a good friend of mine, and she told me how she graduated with a first-class but looked for a job for years without any. She then decided to put into use the skill she learnt while in NYSC. Today she makes an average of 150,000 a week and employs three full-time staff. She is a make-up artist. Because she's my padi, I asked her to teach some of my Facebook family some makeup skills, and she agreed. For a paltry 7500 Naira, you can finally learn how to make-up like a pro. I have enrolled Damilola for the class and thought to extend this opportunity to my followers. Please do not miss out as slots are very limited. Do not worry, and the class is going to be completely online, so you can still learn while keeping your social distance. Call Bimbo on +2348033457298 to register, and if you mention my name, you get a 25% discount!!

All the advertisements used in this study made use of a ‘Call-to-Action’ – in this case, it was ‘call +2348033457298, +2348038380552’ for the sponsored posts and +2348089194939, +2348023173982 for the influencer marketing- that required potential customers to call a particular number. The number was used exclusively for this campaign, so any call that came through must have come from someone who had seen the campaign. This ensured that we could confirm the effectiveness of both the social media influencers’ messages and social media advertisements as well as to measure and confirm buyers’ intention.

An online questionnaire was developed and distributed through Facebook, and the post was sponsored to boost the reach of the post linking to the online questionnaire. This was to ensure the maximum and most targeted reach possible for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was targeted (using the Facebook audience insight application) to the same demographic of customers the social media advertisements were targeted at, thereby ensuring that the majority of the respondents who filled the questionnaire were exposed to either the sponsored posts or the influencer’s posts. To encourage people to fill the questionnaire, a reward system was introduced, promising a chance for respondents to win a prize if they fill and submit the online questionnaire. By the end of the campaign period, 1272 people completed the online questionnaire, but only 1136 were used for the study.

### Experimental Conditions

Because this study was conducted exclusively online, a controlled environment was not possible. However, two broad groups of respondents were identified, those who were exposed exclusively to the influencer marketing (influencer’s followers) and those who were exposed to the paid social media advertising (targeted audience).

The social media influencer had 20,720 followers as at the time of this writing, while Facebook and Instagram gave a combined possible reach of 35,000. The table below shows the actual number of users who interacted with, saw or engaged with the posts during the campaign period.

Table 2.Total number of engagements

S/N	Advertising method/platform	Product/brand promoted	Total number of engagements
1	OlumideGlowville Facebook page (social media influencer)	Hair and Make-up products (training) by Beamzmakeover	21,235
		Sexual enhancement products by Purixxx2020	17,525
		Mobile phone shop (1989 technologies)	15,668
2	OlumideGlowvilleInstagram Page	Mobile phones by 1989 technologies	2346
		Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020	4532
		Hair and Make-up products (training) by Beamzmakeover	1750
3	Sponsored Post from official pages of brands and products advertised (Facebook)	Electronics products by 1989 technologies	17500
		Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020	25248
		Hair and Make-up products (training) by Beamzmakeover	18858
4	Sponsored Post from official pages of brands and products advertised (Instagram)	Electronics products by 1989 technologies	25023
		Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020	21214
		Hair and Make-up products by Beamzmakeover	22048



## RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 (H1): influencer marketing posts generate more post engagements than sponsored posts.

To test this hypothesis, the data analytics on Facebook and Instagram for both the influencer marketing and sponsored posts were collected and presented in the table below:

**Table 3.**Data analytics on Facebook and Instagram for both the influencer marketing and the sponsoredposts

Product/Brand	Influencer marketing (Facebook and Instagram post engagements)	Sponsored advertisement (Facebook and Instagram post engagements)
Hair and Make-up products (training) by Beamzmakeover	22985	40906
Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020	18014	42523
Electronics products by 1989 technologies	22057	46462
Total	63056	129891

The table above shows that sponsored advertisements provided over 100% more engagements than influencer marketing. It should be noted that engagements here include: post likes, comments, and shares.

The findings showed that the sponsored posts on Facebook and Instagram provided 129891 engagements representing 67.3% of total engagements, while influencer marketing provided 63056 total engagements representing 32.7% of total engagements.

It should be noted that the cost of a post on Olumide (Glowville) page is usually between 200 dollars for a single image post and 500 dollars for a post accompanied by a story/write-up (the one used in this study). In contrast, the cost of the sponsored post used in this study was 100 USD per post, bringing the total cost for sponsored posts to 300 USD and the influencer marketing to 1500USD. At just 1/5 of the total cost, a sponsored post was still more effective in improving engagement than influencer marketing. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is rejected.

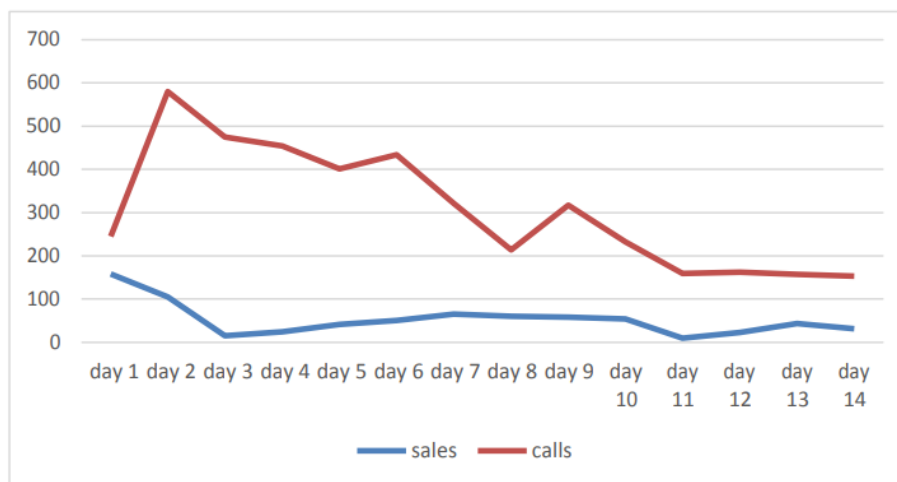
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Influencer marketing posts generate more sales than sponsored posts To measure the sales of the products, two approaches were used, namely; 1) The researchers measured how many phone calls were made daily for a period of two weeks from the day the post was shared on social media. Each social media post (for both influencer marketing and sponsored posts) had a unique phone number that all potential customers were required to call. 2) The total number of people who actually paid for the service within two weeks of when the post was shared was also collected. The table below details the number of sales and calls for each product category used in this study.

**Table 4.** The number of sales and calls for each product category

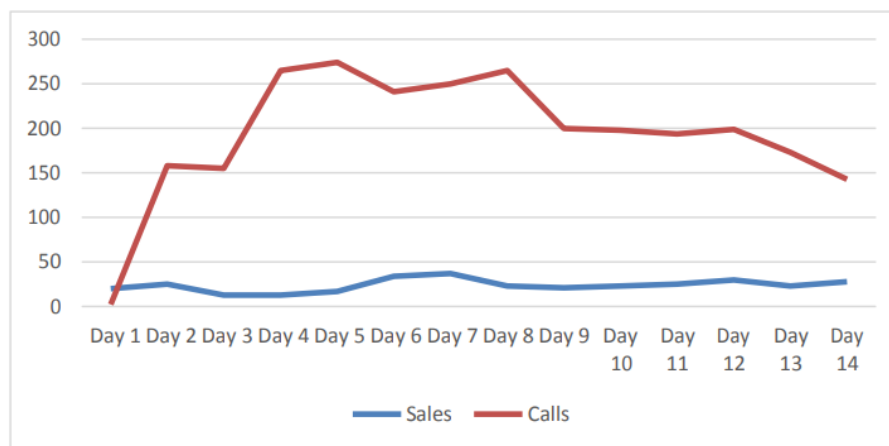
Marketing type	Product/brand	Calls/WhatsApp messages	Total sales
Influencer marketing	Hair and Make-up products (training) by Beamzmakeover	1523	301
	Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020	1891	378
	Electronics products by 1989 technologies	890	57
Sponsored posts	Hair and Make-up products (training) by Beamzmakeover	1200	98
	Sexual Enhancement products by Purixxx2020	766	211
	Electronic products by 1989 technologies	1200	23

The table shows that influencer marketing is more effective at getting people to call and even buy a product or use a service than a sponsored post. The findings show that the three products categories got a total of 1, 068. Seven hundred thirty-six sales representing 68.9% of the total sales and sponsored posts could only generate 332 sales representing 31.1% of the total sales.

A daily chart below shows the daily sales and calls/WhatsApp for a period of two weeks of post-advert placement.



**Figure 3.** Sales vs. calls for influencer marketing



**Figure 4.** Sales vs. Calls for sponsored advertisements

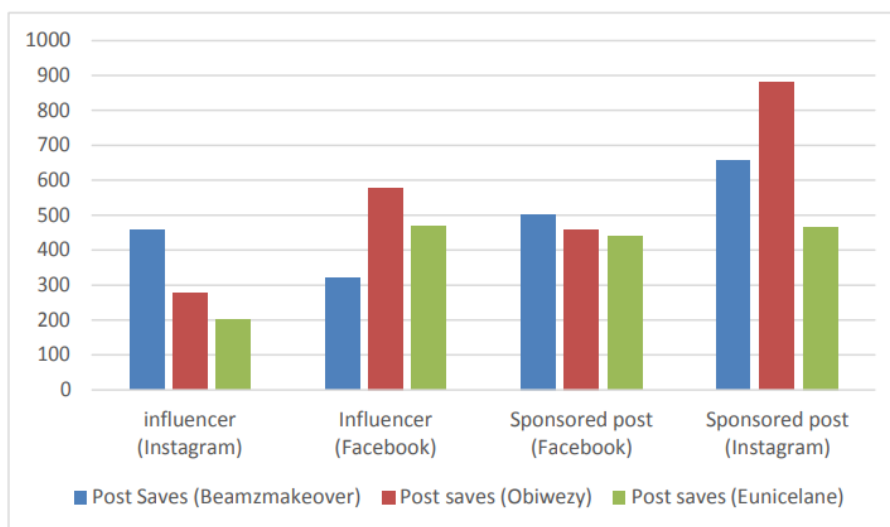
The charts above show that influencer marketing brought in more total sales than sponsored posts. Another observation is that sales appear to be almost constant throughout the period under review for sponsored posts. This can be explained in light of the fact that Facebook and Instagram show an advert to an almost equal number of people per day, therefore, making the exposure almost equal throughout the period set by the marketer. Influencer marketers mostly post the advert message once, so there is a lot of engagement on the first day, after which engagement and sales significantly drop for the product.

Based on the above findings, it is clear that influencer marketing is more effective in generating more calls and sales than the sponsored post. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): there is a significant difference in the buying intention of consumers exposed to sponsored advertisements and those exposed to marketing messages from social media influencers.

After the online campaign was carried out, and the responses/engagement data was collected over a period of two weeks after the campaign, a follow up questionnaire was also distributed online. The questionnaire sought to measure two things; the buying intention of users who saw the adverts (from either the social media influencer page or the sponsored posts) and the brand perception of the buyers.

The researchers also collected data on the number of people who saved the posts on Instagram and Facebook. It is the assumption of the researchers that the only reason why a post like the ones used in this study will be saved is if the user intends to revisit the post in the future in order to make a purchase. The findings of the study showed that a combined number of 2,304 people saved the post on both the Facebook and Instagram pages of the social media influencer's handle. While, 3401, people saved the page on the sponsored posts. The chart below depicts these findings:



**Figure 5.** Post saves on Facebook and Instagram (influencer marketing and sponsored post)

From the foregoing, social media users who were exposed to the sponsored posts tended to have a higher level of buying intention than those exposed to the social media influencer’s message. This may suggest that users will save a post from a page they do not follow if they find that post interesting. While they might not save a post from an influencer’s page, they already follow since they can always go back to the page and find the particular post. This, however, is worthy of a different and more elaborate study to find out what influences social media users to save posts and what kind of posts are most likely to be saved. From the findings of this study, we can conclude that there is a significant difference in the buying intentions of social media users exposed to advertising messages from a sponsored post and those exposed to advertising messages from a social media influencer. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Findings from the questionnaire also showed that of the 1,272 total respondents, 435 stated that they saw the influencer’s posts, 701 said that they saw the sponsored post and 136 said that they saw both adverts. Since the purpose of the questionnaire was to compare the buying intention of users exposed to influencer marketing messages and sponsored posts, only 1136 questionnaires were used in the study.

The findings showed that 422 respondents of the total respondents confirmed that they saved at least one of the advertising posts. When asked why they saved the posts, 82% of the respondents stated that they saved the post in order to be able to easily find it when they decide to purchase the product in the future.

The findings also show that 56% of those who were exposed to the social media influencer advertising message stated that they intend to purchase at least one of the products in the near future or as soon as they can afford it, while only 32% of those who saw the sponsored post stated that they would be purchasing at least one of the products they saw in the near future.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that sponsored advertisements are more effective in generating post engagements than influencer marketing posts. This can be explained by the fact that sponsored posts have a wider and more targeted reach than influencer marketing posts. It should be noted that influencers can only share a post with their already existing followers which limits their reach to the number of people who follow them. In contrast, sponsored posts can be configured to reach as many people as you want in any particular location, which makes a sponsored post unlimited in its reach. The reach alone can account for the reason why sponsored posts generate more engagements than influencer marketing. It should, however,

be noted that engagements do not necessarily translate to more sales. The findings of this study show that while sponsored posts generate more engagement, influencer marketing generates more sales. Sudha and Sheena (Sudha& Sheena: 2017, pp.14-30) assert that influencer marketing promotes a level of credibility that traditional marketing communication will find difficult to achieve.

It is also well established in the literature that people follow influencers because they have a genuine interest or trust in what they promote or represent. This probably explains why people are more likely to buy a product or pay for a service that is promoted by an influencer they follow than from a sponsored post. This also lends credence to the social learning theory as propounded by Bandura in 1963 (Bandura & Walters: 1963), which posits that people learn by observing others. In this case, people are not just learning the importance or credibility of a product, but because someone they trust (influencer) endorses or supports the brand, they tend to do likewise and support the same brands.

Buying intention was measured by the number of people who have indicated an interest in purchasing a product through calls or WhatsApp or by saving the advertising message. The findings show that social media users tend to save sponsored advertisements more than they save advertisements by influencers. The researchers posit that this happens because followers of influencers can always go back to the page and check for the advert, but since the majority of those exposed to sponsored posts do not follow the advertisers' pages, they tend to save the posts since they might never come across that particular post again. The positive brand perception was higher among users exposed to advertisements by social media influencers than those exposed to the sponsored posts on social media. The reason for this is because social media users tend to trust the influencers they follow. This trust often leads to followers supporting and trusting the brands their 'mentors' also trust and support.

## CONCLUSION

As social media and the internet become ubiquitous, the creation of social media celebrities (often referred to as influencers) become more commonplace. Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, is not so far behind in the development of new online 'celebrities. Brands and advertisers are increasingly making use of social media influencers as brand influencers, and it has, therefore become imperative to confirm the efficacy of influencer marketing as a means of brand and sales promotion. Findings from this study show that influencer marketing while very effective in promoting some immediate sales is not very effective in increasing post engagement which is helpful in ensuring consumers interaction with advertisers in order to get pertinent information that informs their decision to buy. The researchers, therefore, recommend further studies to consider looking into the effectiveness of social media influencers in encouraging brand loyalty and ensuring return purchase. Without brand loyalty and return purchase, the ability of brands to remain competitive and profitable is very slim.

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