



SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSaR)

**DEPLOYMENT AND USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN PUBLIC
RELATIONS: A STUDY OF GHANA'S FAST FOODS INDUSTRY**

BY

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FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
WITH MARKETING**

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I

further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication-Institute of Journalism, UniMAC.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God, whose grace and guidance have been my foundation throughout this journey. To my family, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my strength, this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to unravel the strategic processes behind the selection and deployment of social media influencers in Ghana's fast food industry. Anchored in the theoretical lenses of diffusion of innovations and social exchange theories, the research adopts a qualitative methodology, collecting data through interviews with Public Relations and Marketing Managers across five fast food companies (ChickenmanPizzaman, KFC Ghana, Mr. Wu's Chinese Fast Food, Papa's Pizza and Chicken n Wine) and analysing the findings through thematic analysis. The major findings highlight a calculated approach in influencer selection, where brand alignment and audience engagement are paramount, influenced heavily by the perceived benefits and innovative potential outlined in the chosen theories. The study recommends the importance of developing robust criteria for influencer partnerships, enhancing transparency in expectations, and establishing regular performance evaluations to ensure alignment with strategic marketing objectives. These steps are crucial for leveraging influencer relationships effectively within the fast food sector.

Keywords: Influencer Selection, Strategic Public Relations, Strategic Communication, Brand Alignment, Social Media.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DOI - Diffusion of Innovations

DRID - Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development

PR - Public Relations

Q&A - Questions & Answers

SET - Social Exchange Theory

SMIs - Social Media Influencers

UniMAC-GIJ - University of Media Arts and Communication

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

The strategic use of social media influencers in public relations has become a pivotal component in modern marketing strategies. Within the fast food industry in Ghana, this trend is increasingly prominent as companies seek innovative ways to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement. Social media platforms, with their expansive reach and interactive capabilities, provide a fertile ground for leveraging influencers to bridge the gap between brands and their target audiences. This study investigates the deployment of social media influencers within the public relations strategies of Ghana's fast food industry. It aims to explore how companies select and collaborate with influencers, focusing on the impact of these partnerships on consumer behaviour and business outcomes. By examining this dynamic, the research sheds light on the evolving landscape of public relations in the digital age and the critical role influencers play in shaping brand perception and loyalty.

1.2 Background of Study

In contemporary business practices, public relations (PR) plays a pivotal role in shaping brand image and influencing consumer behaviour (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Tandoh, 2020). The advent of social media has significantly transformed public relations strategies, offering new avenues for engagement and communication. Among the most prominent strategies in this digital age is the use of social media influencers. Social Media influencers are individuals who have garnered substantial online followings and possess the ability to sway the opinions and purchasing decisions of their audiences (Aprilia et al., 2023). Studies (Amoani-Yeboah, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Jun & Yi, 2020; Wang & Weng, 2024) have shown that influencers are capable of fostering trust and authenticity, bridging the gap between brands and consumers in a way that traditional marketing methods often fail to achieve. This shift highlights the evolving

landscape of public relations, where influencer marketing has emerged as a potent tool for businesses seeking to enhance their visibility and credibility.

The relevance of social media influencers within Ghana's fast food industry cannot be overstated. With the growing penetration of mobile devices and social media platforms, businesses in the sector are increasingly leveraging influencers to reach broader audiences, particularly among younger, and tech-savvy consumers (Bhalla et al., 2021). Fast food companies, which thrive on quick and direct customer engagement, have found influencer marketing to be an effective means of driving brand awareness and consumer loyalty (Rachmad, 2024). The fast-paced nature of this industry makes it imperative for brands to continually engage with their audiences in innovative ways. Influencers offer a unique channel through which these companies can communicate promotional messages that resonate with target consumers on a more personal level. Recent evidence suggests that consumers in Ghana are becoming more receptive to influencer-endorsed products, leading to an increase in the demand for influencers across various sectors, including fast food (Boateng & Okoe, 2019; Gbedawo, 2021).

Globally, Teixeira et al. (2023) and Guangul (2024) for instance intimate that influencer marketing has gained traction as a critical component of digital strategies, with brands allocating significant portions of their budgets to collaborations with influencers. A 2024 survey revealed that 22.4% of respondents invested between 10% and 20% of their marketing budgets into influencer marketing, while 26% dedicated more than 40% to this approach (Statista, 2024). Additionally, the influencer marketing industry is projected to grow to \$30 billion in 2024, reflecting a 28% year-over-year increase (Masterson, 2024). This significant investment underscores the growing importance of influencer partnerships in contemporary marketing strategies. Further, Stubb et al. (2019) intimates that the rise of social media has amplified the role of influencers (e.g Foodgod, Foodbeast, Alexis Frost,, Enioluwaofficial, Joshua Weissman etc) in shaping consumer behaviour across multiple industries. This global

trend is mirrored in Ghana, where the fast food sector is increasingly recognizing the importance of influencers (e.g Sdkdele, Wesley Kesse, SikaOfficial, Kalyjay, Chef Abbys etc) in its public relations efforts. However, while the global market has seen a more structured approach to influencer marketing, in the Ghanaian context, Febiri and Mireku (2023) accentuate that companies are still experimenting with different strategies to maximize returns. The adaptation of global influencer trends to local cultural and market dynamics makes Ghana an intriguing setting for studying the deployment of influencers in public relations.

This study seeks to explore the strategic processes behind the selection and deployment of social media influencers in Ghana's fast food industry. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors that guide the selection of influencers and the role they play in enhancing business outcomes within the fast food industry in Ghana.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite the growing influence of social media on consumer behaviour, the strategic use of social media influencers in public relations, particularly within specific industries, remains inadequately explored in many regions (Chan, 2022; Hasan & Sohail, 2021). This oversight underscores the necessity of investigating how these influencers can be effectively leveraged, highlighting a gap that this study seeks to address. In Ghana, the fast food industry is increasingly adopting influencer marketing, however, the availability of a structured approaches of selecting and deploying influencers is not clear. Studies (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Leung et al., 2022) have shown that while influencer marketing is a powerful tool, its effectiveness heavily depends on how well influencers align with brand values and audience expectations. However, there is a dearth of research examining the criteria used by businesses in the Ghanaian fast food sector to select influencers and the measurable impact these choices have on business performance. This gap in understanding creates a pressing need to investigate the strategies businesses employ and the potential returns on investment in this context.

One of the primary drivers for this research is the observed lack of empirical data regarding the outcomes of influencer marketing in Ghana. While global studies highlight the potential for brand visibility and engagement (De Veirman et al., 2017), Abrokwah-Larbi (2020) and, Awuah-Agyeman (2015) have explored the concrete effects on consumer behaviour and profitability in Ghana's fast food industry. Moreover, Pan et al. (2024) further iterate that businesses often face challenges in quantifying the business value of influencer collaborations, leading to ad-hoc decision-making processes. As a result, Sprout Social (2024) underscores that this creates uncertainty about the long-term benefits of influencer partnerships and raises concerns about their sustainability in the competitive fast food market.

Addressing these gaps is critical for the fast food industry in Ghana to fully harness the potential of influencer marketing. This study is, therefore, essential to developing a more effective, evidence-based approach to influencer marketing in Ghana.

1.4 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategic processes involved in the deployment of social media influencers within the fast food industry in Ghana. A qualitative approach is employed to gather insights from corporate entities, focusing on their decision-making frameworks and the business outcomes of influencer collaborations. The following research objectives are:

1. To understand how fast food companies in Ghana select social media influencers for their public relations campaigns.
2. To explore the role social media influencers play in influencing consumer behaviour in Ghana's fast food industry.
3. To assess how fast food companies in Ghana perceive the impact of social media influencers on their brand visibility and profitability.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do fast food companies in Ghana select social media influencers for their public relations campaigns?
2. What role do social media influencers play in influencing consumer behaviour in Ghana's fast food industry?
3. How do fast food companies in Ghana perceive the impact of social media influencers on their brand visibility and profitability?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to offer significant contributions to the understanding of social media influencer marketing within the context of Ghana's fast food industry. By exploring the strategic processes used to select and deploy influencers, the research adds valuable knowledge to the field of public relations and digital marketing in emerging markets. Currently, limited empirical data exists on how businesses in Ghana approach influencer marketing, and this study addresses that gap, providing a framework for analysing how effective influencer collaborations can be in driving consumer engagement and business outcomes. It therefore serves as a reference point for future academic inquiries into influencer marketing in similar industries and regions, broadening the scope of research in this growing field.

From a policy perspective, the findings from this study offers critical insights to policymakers and regulatory bodies responsible for overseeing marketing and advertising standards in Ghana. As social media continues to evolve as a powerful tool for marketing, it is essential that policies are developed to ensure ethical practices and protect consumer interests. This research contributes to shaping guidelines on influencer marketing, particularly in how companies disclose partnerships, the transparency of influencer recommendations, and the legal responsibilities of brands and influencers alike. These insights help create a balanced regulatory environment that promotes both business innovation and consumer trust.

Practically, businesses in Ghana's fast food industry stand to benefit directly from this study. The insights into the strategic decision-making processes behind influencer selection and deployment provides organisations with tools to make more informed, data-driven decisions when engaging influencers. Marketers and public relations practitioners can apply the study's findings to optimize their campaigns, improve brand-consumer relationships, and ultimately increase profitability. Influencers themselves, as key stakeholders, can gain a deeper understanding of their role within the fast food sector, aligning their collaborations with brands in ways that are mutually beneficial and sustainable over time.

Furthermore, this study serves as a foundation for future research in the domain of digital marketing and influencer strategies. As the fast food industry in Ghana continues to grow, it is likely that new challenges and opportunities will emerge, requiring ongoing exploration. Researchers can build on this study by examining other industries, consumer segments, or even longitudinal trends in influencer marketing, ensuring that the findings remain relevant and applicable in evolving market conditions.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in addressing the research objectives. Chapter One introduces the study by providing a comprehensive background, the research problem, and the objectives that guide the investigation. It also outlines the significance of the study, defines key terms, and offers a justification for the research. This chapter sets the foundation upon which the subsequent sections are built.

Chapter Two delves into the literature review, offering a critical examination of existing scholarly works related to social media influencers, public relations, and the fast food industry. The theoretical frameworks guiding the study are discussed in this chapter, helping to establish the academic context within which the research is positioned. This review identifies gaps in

the current literature, reinforcing the need for the present study and positioning it within the broader academic discourse.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology, detailing the qualitative approach adopted for the study. This includes the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, and data analysis techniques.

Chapter Four presents the study's results in relation to the research questions and discussing them in comparison with existing literature.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, concludes the study by summarizing the key findings, discussing their implications for theory, policy, and practice, and offering recommendations for future research. Each chapter is designed to progressively build the argument and contribute to the overall understanding of the study's objectives.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the study by outlining the research problem, objectives, and significance of investigating the use of social media influencers in Ghana's fast food industry. It established the background and context for the study, highlighting the increasing role of influencers in public relations and their potential business impacts. Key terms were operationally defined, and the relevance of the research was justified through theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the chapter offered a brief overview of the research methodology and a summary of the structure of the study, laying the groundwork for the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores relevant literature and theoretical foundations that guide this study. It examines the existing body of knowledge on public relations, social media influencers, and their roles within the fast food industry. By engaging with key scholarly works, the chapter identifies gaps and trends in research, laying a foundation for understanding how influencer marketing strategies are adopted and implemented. The chapter also introduces the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study, providing the academic context to analyse the role of influencers in public relations efforts. This exploration is critical to positioning the research within broader academic conversations and informing the study's approach to the subject matter.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Public Relations

Public relations involves managing communication between organizations and their publics to build, maintain, and protect reputations (Anani-Bossman et al., 2023). According to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of PR, organizations utilize different strategies, such as press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical communication, to achieve their goals. Public relations serves as a critical tool for shaping perceptions and controlling narratives (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). It focuses on fostering mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its stakeholders (Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani, 2023; Grunig, 2006). This discipline also involves crisis communication, where immediate strategies are employed to mitigate negative publicity

(Coombs, 2014). Overall, public relations relies heavily on planned, strategic communication efforts to manage reputations and create goodwill.

2.2.3 Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers (SMIs) are individuals who have gained significant followings on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, and they wield considerable influence over their audience's purchasing decisions (Freberg et al., 2011; Sng et al., 2021). Unlike traditional media, SMIs engage with their followers through personal content and authenticity, which fosters trust and loyalty (Abidin, 2016). Influencers monetise this trust by collaborating with brands, creating sponsored content, and offering product endorsements (Amosah, 2021). They provide brands with direct access to niche markets, allowing for more targeted and personalized marketing strategies (Adıgüzel, 2020). SMIs have become essential in digital marketing due to their ability to create immediate, measurable impact on consumer behaviour (Tumsah, 2021). Their influence is primarily driven by social proof and the parasocial relationships they develop with their audiences.

2.2.4 Selecting Social Media Influencers in Public Relations

The process of selecting social media influencers for public relations campaigns necessitates a strategic and methodical approach, deeply rooted in an understanding of influencer impact and audience engagement. Freberg et al. (2011) emphasize that influencers hold substantial power to amplify public relations messages through targeted and authentic communication, a notion further supported by Chu et al. (2020), highlight the role of word-of-mouth and social influence in shaping consumer perceptions. Authenticity remains paramount, as it fosters trust and enhances the perceived credibility of both the influencer and the brand. Building on this, Davies and Hobbs (2020) argue that the relevance of an influencer to a brand's identity and public relations objectives is critical. Their research underscores that alignment with specific campaign goals ensures the influencer's message resonates effectively with the target audience, thereby maximizing the campaign's impact.

Moreover, Aziz et al. (2024) hint that evaluating an influencer's suitability for a public relations campaign requires a multifaceted analysis of metrics such as follower count, engagement rate, and content alignment. While follower count provides a measure of reach, engagement rates offer a more nuanced view of the interaction quality between the influencer and their audience. According to Glucksman (2017), high engagement rates indicate a loyal and interactive follower base, which is crucial for public relations success. Lou and Yuan (2019) further underscore the importance of credibility and perceived authenticity, noting that these traits are instrumental in cultivating long-term audience trust. The ability of an influencer to convey genuine, relatable content enhances the authenticity of the public relations message, thereby increasing its overall impact and resonance.

In addition to authenticity, the ability to foster meaningful interactions is critical. Van Driel and Dumitrica (2021) highlight that the effectiveness of public relations campaigns is closely tied to the influencer's capacity to engage their audience in alignment with the organization's communication goals. This sentiment is echoed by Audrezet et al. (2018), who emphasize that congruence between the influencer's content style and the brand's communication strategy ensures a cohesive and impactful campaign. The integration of public relations messages into an influencer's platform must feel organic and seamless, enhancing their reception and relatability among the audience.

Furthermore, the concept of social proof plays a significant role in magnifying the influence of an SMI's communication efforts. Singha (2024) elaborates on how repeated engagement with a dedicated audience builds trust and credibility, amplifying the public relations message's impact. This aligns with Schouten et al. (2021), who examine the power of parasocial relationships in influencer marketing. These one-sided relationships, where audiences feel a personal connection with influencers, significantly enhance the effectiveness of public relations campaigns by fostering a sense of intimacy and trust. This perceived closeness

encourages the audience to perceive the public relations message as more credible and personally relevant.

The dynamic nature of social media platforms also necessitates an evolving approach to influencer selection. Bansal et al. (2024) underscores the importance of adapting public relations strategies to platform-specific norms and audience dynamics. Selecting influencers who not only align with the brand's values but also possess a deep understanding of their audience ensures that public relations strategies remain relevant and impactful. This strategic selection process is thus a critical component in executing successful public relations campaigns, determining the extent to which public relations messages resonate and influence the target audience. Incorporating these elements ensures that the chosen influencer can effectively amplify the public relations message, fostering deeper connections with the audience and enhancing the campaign's overall impact. This strategic approach consequently not only maximizes immediate campaign outcomes but also lays the groundwork for sustained audience engagement and brand loyalty.

2.2.5 Role Social Media Influencers Play in Influencing Consumer Behaviour

The exploration of social media influencers (SMIs) and their role in shaping consumer behaviour has yielded a wealth of empirical insights. Beginning with Nafees et al. (2021), the study sought to understand how the perceived authority of influencers affects consumer attitudes towards brands. By examining the dimensions of expertise and trustworthiness, the research found that influencers perceived as credible significantly enhance consumer engagement and positively influence brand perception. This highlights the critical role of credibility in bridging the gap between consumers and brands, providing a foundation for deeper consumer trust.

Expanding on this notion, Labrecque (2014) delved into parasocial interactions (PSIs), aiming to unpack the psychological mechanisms that underpin one-sided relationships between

influencers and their audiences. The study revealed that these perceived intimate connections foster a unique sense of trust and loyalty, which traditional marketing often struggles to achieve. Notably, this trust, cultivated through PSIs, translates into stronger consumer-brand relationships, suggesting that the emotional bonds formed through influencers are instrumental in driving consumer loyalty and engagement. In a related vein, Pop et al. (2022) examined the impact of these parasocial bonds on brand credibility and purchase intentions. Their findings demonstrated that the emotional connection established through strong parasocial relationships enhances consumer perceptions of brand reliability, ultimately boosting purchase likelihood. This connection underscores the persuasive power of emotional resonance, as it allows consumers to feel more confident in their purchasing decisions.

Transitioning to the dynamics of transparency, Boerman et al. (2017) focused on the effectiveness of clear sponsorship disclosures within influencer marketing. The study sought to determine how transparency affects consumer trust and found that when influencers openly disclose sponsorships, consumer trust is significantly enhanced. This suggests that authenticity, coupled with transparent communication, is pivotal in cultivating a trustworthy relationship between influencers and their audiences. Additionally, the role of social media platforms themselves cannot be overlooked. Haenlein et al. (2020) investigated how platform algorithms shape the visibility and influence of SMIs. The study highlighted that algorithms on platforms like Instagram and TikTok not only amplify influencer reach but also seamlessly integrate their content into the daily lives of consumers. This continuous exposure fosters a more natural and frequent interaction with influencer content, reinforcing consumer engagement and trust.

Building on this, Abidin (2016) explored how influencers embed product endorsements into their personal content. By blurring the lines between personal and promotional material, influencers make endorsements appear more relatable and less intrusive, which significantly

enhances consumer engagement. This seamless integration, as the study found, is key to maintaining the authenticity and relatability that are central to the success of influencer marketing. Moreover, Hwang and Zhang (2018) examined how influencer endorsements impact consumer cognitive dissonance. The research concluded that endorsements from credible influencers reduce the psychological discomfort consumers often feel when making purchase decisions. This reduction in cognitive dissonance increases the likelihood of consumers following through with a purchase, highlighting the role of influencers in easing consumer decision-making processes.

On another note, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) as well explored the emotional impact of personal product experiences shared by influencers. The study found that these personal narratives create a strong emotional connection with consumers, significantly boosting their intention to purchase. By sharing authentic experiences, influencers not only promote products but also foster deeper emotional engagement, which is crucial in influencing consumer behaviour.

Essentially, from establishing credibility and emotional connections to fostering trust through transparency and seamless content integration, influencers operate as powerful agents in the contemporary digital marketing landscape. The studies collectively illustrate that the effectiveness of SMIs lies in their ability to blend personal authenticity with strategic marketing, ultimately driving consumer engagement and influencing purchasing decisions.

2.2.6 Impact of Social Media Influencers on Brand Visibility and Profitability

Social media influencers' impact in enhancing brand visibility and profitability has been a focal point of recent research. For instance, Chopra et al. (2021) sought to understand how influencer marketing affects brand reach compared to traditional advertising methods. From their study, it was revealed that influencer campaigns significantly enhance brand visibility, particularly through platforms like Instagram and TikTok. By leveraging the personal connection influencers have with their audience, Chopra et al. (2021) found that brands can achieve a more

organic and extensive reach, tapping into niche markets that conventional advertising often fails to penetrate. This finding underscores the unique capacity of influencers to act as intermediaries, translating personal relatability into broad brand exposure.

Kapitan et al. (2022) as well further explored the authenticity perceived in influencer marketing. Their research focused on how consumers respond to branded content delivered by influencers versus traditional advertisements. The study found that authenticity, fostered by the personal narratives of influencers, plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. This authenticity not only enhances brand visibility but also contributes to a more favourable brand perception, which is crucial in a crowded digital marketplace. Consequently, brands that collaborate with influencers benefit from higher engagement levels, as the personal endorsement by influencers resonates more deeply with consumers.

From a different viewpoint, Vrontis et al. (2021) examined the direct correlation between influencer marketing and brand profitability. This study sought to measure how influencer-driven campaigns translate into tangible financial outcomes. The findings indicated that collaborations with influencers lead to increased product sales and stronger customer loyalty. Importantly, Vrontis et al. (2021) highlighted that the profitability gains are not merely short-term; the trust and loyalty cultivated through influencer partnerships contribute to sustained revenue growth. This suggests that beyond immediate sales boosts, influencer marketing fosters long-term profitability by embedding brands within the daily lives of consumers.

In addition to these insights, Breves et al. (2019) analyzed the effectiveness of influencer marketing in expanding brand reach and engagement on social media platforms. Their research demonstrated that influencer campaigns drive higher engagement metrics—such as likes, shares, and comments—compared to traditional marketing efforts. This enhanced engagement not only increases brand visibility but also creates a feedback loop where consumer interactions further amplify the brand's presence. The study emphasized that real-time interactions

facilitated by influencers help brands build a more dynamic and responsive relationship with their audience, which is critical for maintaining relevance in the fast-paced digital landscape.

Turning to profitability, De Veirman et al. (2017) focused on the impact of influencer endorsements on sales performance and customer loyalty. The study found that well-aligned influencer-brand partnerships lead to substantial increases in product sales and reinforce customer loyalty. This alignment ensures that the influencer's message resonates with the intended audience, enhancing both short-term sales and long-term customer retention. Conversely, the research also warned of the risks associated with poor alignment. A mismatch between the influencer's image and the brand's values can result in negative brand perception, ultimately eroding profitability.

In addition, Kaur and Kathuria (2023) provided further evidence on the financial benefits of influencer marketing by examining engagement-driven revenue outcomes. The study highlighted how high engagement rates, facilitated by influencers, directly correlate with increased profitability. Metrics such as likes, shares, and comments serve as indicators of consumer interest and often translate into measurable sales growth. This underscores the importance of selecting influencers who can generate high engagement, as this not only boosts visibility but also drives financial performance.

Spiller and Tuten (2015) on the other hand investigated the broader implications of influencer marketing on brand strategy, emphasizing the importance of strategic alignment. Their findings reiterated that while influencers can significantly enhance brand visibility and profitability, careful selection is essential to avoid reputational risks. Poorly chosen partnerships can lead to consumer skepticism and diminished trust, which can have adverse effects on both brand perception and profitability.

The empirical evidence consistently highlights the pivotal role of social media influencers in enhancing brand visibility and profitability. Through authentic engagement, strategic

alignment, and real-time interactions, influencers offer brands a powerful avenue to not only expand their reach but also achieve sustainable financial success. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns hinges on the careful selection of influencers, ensuring that their image and message align with the brand's values and objectives.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, developed by Everett M. Rogers in 1962, is rooted in earlier sociological studies that examined the dissemination of agricultural technologies (Kaminski, 2011). Rogers (2003) synthesized this body of knowledge to formulate a comprehensive framework explaining how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread within societies. The theory assumes that innovations are adopted through a social process involving five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Key concepts within this theory include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, each representing different segments of society based on their propensity to embrace new ideas (Dearing & Cox, 2018). The purpose of DOI extends beyond merely explaining innovation diffusion; it also seeks to guide strategies for accelerating the adoption of beneficial innovations across various social and organizational contexts.

The DOI theory's scope encompasses multiple domains, from public health to marketing, with its application providing insights into how innovations can be introduced effectively (MacVaugh & Schiavone, 2010). One of the strengths of the theory lies in its ability to categorize individuals and predict adoption patterns, making it a valuable tool for practitioners aiming to promote new technologies or practices (Dearing & Cox, 2018). However, the theory also faces criticism, particularly for its limited consideration of cultural, economic, and structural barriers that may hinder innovation diffusion. Furthermore, its focus on individual decision-making may inadequately address the role of institutional and societal influences in

the adoption process, thus limiting its explanatory power in complex, real-world scenarios (Greenhalgh et al., 2004).

Several studies have adopted DOI theory to explore the adoption of innovations similar to the use of social media influencers in marketing. For instance, Delisle and Parmentier (2016) employed DOI to investigate how fashion brands utilize influencers to diffuse new trends, finding that early adopters play a crucial role in bridging the gap between innovators and the early majority. Similarly, Kavoura and Stavrianeas (2015) applied DOI to analyse the effectiveness of social media campaigns in the tourism industry, emphasizing the role of influencers in facilitating the adoption of new travel destinations among potential tourists. These studies underscore the relevance of DOI theory in understanding how innovations in marketing strategies, such as influencer collaborations, are adopted and diffused across consumer segments.

In the context of public relations, particularly within the fast food industry, DOI provides a robust framework for analysing how social media influencers contribute to the dissemination of brand messages and the adoption of new consumer behaviours. Studies such as those by Kapoor et al. (2018) demonstrate how DOI can elucidate the mechanisms through which influencer marketing campaigns spread innovative ideas, leading to increased consumer engagement and brand loyalty. By examining these dynamics, DOI theory offers valuable insights into the strategic deployment of influencers, highlighting its applicability in both academic research and practical marketing strategies.

2.3.2 Relevance of Theory to Study

The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory explains how new ideas and technologies spread within a social system over time as iterated. This theory aligns closely with the study objectives by offering a robust framework for understanding the adoption and implementation of social media influencer marketing strategies in Ghana's fast food industry. Specifically, the theory's

focus on the stages of innovation adoption—knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation—parallels the processes businesses undergo when integrating influencer collaborations into their public relations strategies.

Moreover, DOI Theory's categorization of adopters into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards provides critical insights into how various consumer segments respond to influencer-driven marketing efforts. This categorization is particularly useful for analysing how different demographics within the fast food sector engage with influencer content, thereby informing strategies to target early adopters and accelerate the diffusion of innovative marketing practices. By offering a structured lens to examine the adoption process, DOI Theory effectively supports the study's goal of exploring how social media influencers are strategically deployed to drive consumer behaviour and brand engagement.

Furthermore, the theory's applicability across diverse fields, including marketing and public relations, underscores its relevance for this study. DOI Theory not only facilitates the examination of how influencer marketing is adopted but also provides a theoretical basis for predicting its future trajectory within the fast food industry. Its ability to contextualize the spread of innovations in marketing practices makes it an indispensable framework for understanding the dynamics of influencer collaborations and their impact on consumer behaviour.

2.3.3 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) emerged in the late 1950s, primarily developed by sociologists George Homans and Peter Blau. Homans (1958) introduced the theory in his seminal work on social behaviour, emphasizing the exchange of resources as the fundamental basis of social interactions. Blau (1964) further expanded the theory by examining the complexities of power and dependence within social relationships. SET assumes that social behaviour is driven by a

rational calculation of rewards and costs, with individuals seeking to maximize their benefits while minimizing their losses. Key concepts include reciprocity, equity, and the balance of rewards and costs, which govern the dynamics of social exchanges (Cook et al., 2013). The theory's purpose is to explain interpersonal and organizational relationships by highlighting the transactional nature of social interactions and the motivations behind maintaining or dissolving these relationships (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

The SET's scope is broad, encompassing various contexts such as workplace dynamics, romantic partnerships, and consumer-brand interactions. One of its strengths according to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) lies in its clear framework, which allows for the analysis of diverse social relationships through the lens of resource exchange. However, SET has limitations, particularly its reductionist view of human behaviour, which tends to oversimplify complex social interactions into economic transactions (Homans, 1958). Critics argue that the theory underestimates the role of emotions, altruism, and social norms, which often drive behaviour beyond mere calculations of costs and benefits (Molm, 2006). Additionally, its emphasis on individual decision-making may overlook the influence of broader social structures and cultural contexts.

Studies leveraging SET to examine phenomena similar to the deployment of social media influencers provide valuable insights into the reciprocal nature of these relationships. For example, Zhang et al. (2017) applied SET to explore how influencer collaborations create value for both brands and consumers, highlighting the mutual exchange of credibility and exposure. Their findings demonstrated that influencers benefit from enhanced reputation and financial rewards, while brands gain increased visibility and consumer engagement. Similarly, a study by Abbas et al. (2023) utilized SET to analyse how the perceived fairness of influencer-brand relationships affects consumer trust and loyalty, emphasizing the importance of balanced exchanges in sustaining long-term partnerships.

When it comes to studies on the fast food industry, the SET offers a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of influencer collaborations. For instance, Alalwan et al. (2017) demonstrates how SET can be employed to investigate the mutual benefits of social media marketing strategies, where influencers provide authenticity and relatability, while brands offer financial and reputational rewards. These studies underscore the relevance of SET in elucidating the strategic interactions between influencers and companies, providing a nuanced understanding of how these partnerships can be optimized to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

2.3.4 Relevance of Theory to Study

Social Exchange Theory (SET) as explained examines social behaviour as an exchange of resources aimed at maximizing rewards and minimizing costs. This theory is particularly pertinent to the study's objectives as it offers a lens through which the reciprocal relationships between social media influencers and fast food companies can be analysed. SET emphasizes the mutual exchange of value—where influencers provide visibility and credibility while brands offer financial rewards and enhanced reputations—thereby aligning with the research objective of assessing the business outcomes of influencer partnerships.

In addition, SET's concepts of reciprocity, equity, and cost-benefit analysis provide a nuanced understanding of the strategic considerations involved in influencer collaborations. These concepts enable the investigation of how brands perceive the effectiveness of influencer engagements in achieving marketing goals such as increased brand visibility and consumer loyalty. SET's emphasis on balanced exchanges further supports the study's exploration of the sustainability and long-term impact of these partnerships, particularly in a competitive and rapidly evolving market like the fast food industry.

Ultimately, SET's comprehensive framework for analysing the dynamics of social relationships renders it highly suitable for examining the strategic use of influencers in public relations. Its ability to elucidate the intricate balance of costs and rewards in influencer-brand interactions enhances the understanding of how these collaborations can be optimized for mutual benefit. This relevance underscores the theory's critical role in providing actionable insights for both academic inquiry and practical application in the fast food industry.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the existing literature and theoretical models relevant to the research. It examined prior studies on public relations, social media influencers, and their impact on consumer behaviour, particularly within the fast food industry. The discussion also highlighted the diffusion of innovations and social exchange theories, both of which were critical in framing the analysis of influencer marketing strategies in Ghana. By assessing the theoretical and empirical research available, the chapter established a solid foundation for the study's objectives, shaping its approach to data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study, beginning with an overview of the chosen method. It then discusses the research population and other key topics essential for achieving the study's objectives.

3.2 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is pivotal for in-depth exploration of human experiences and the contexts in which they occur (Creswell et al., 2011). By emphasizing the subjective meaning of participants' experiences, qualitative research prioritizes understanding the nuanced perspectives of individuals involved in crisis communication and management (Hennink et al., 2020). This method is flexible and often employs an inductive approach, where patterns and theories emerge from the data rather than testing predefined hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2018) add that this approach is particularly suitable for capturing the complexity of crisis communication, as it focuses on the 'how' and 'why' rather than the 'how many' or 'how much'. By emphasising rich, descriptive insights, Taylor et al. (2015) assert that qualitative research captures the complexities of human behaviour and social interactions, making it particularly valuable in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and education.

3.3 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, using a case study design to closely examine the deployment of social media influencers in public relations within Ghana's fast food

industry. The case study method is ideal for investigating complex phenomena in their natural environments (Yin, 2018). By focusing on real-world examples, this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the decision-making frameworks and business impacts involved in influencer marketing. Case studies are valuable for capturing different perspectives and generating detailed insights (Maxwell, 2012). In this study, the design enables a thorough investigation into how fast food companies select and collaborate with influencers, considering the specific cultural, economic, and social contexts of Ghana. It provides an opportunity to assess the role of influencers in shaping consumer behaviour and increasing brand visibility, making it highly relevant for analysing the effectiveness of these strategies. By focusing on specific instances, the study highlights patterns and outcomes that are critical to improving the use of influencers in similar industries and regions. This method also allows for practical recommendations that can inform future marketing practices, ensuring the findings are not only theoretical but applicable in real-world settings.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Sampling Procedures and Rationale

Sampling is a cornerstone of robust research design, fundamentally influencing the extent to which findings can be generalised to a broader population (Boddy, 2016). This study adopts a non-probability sampling approach, specifically purposive sampling, to strategically select participants capable of providing the most pertinent insights. Purposive sampling is particularly effective when seeking individuals with specific expertise or experiences that directly align with the research objectives (Dworkin, 2012). By employing purposive sampling, the study targets five (5) marketing and public relations professionals actively engaged in managing influencer marketing campaigns for fast food brands. This deliberate selection was not merely a convenience but to ensure the inclusion of those whose experiences are most relevant as Campbell et al. (2020) highlight.

The choice of a sample size was warranted as Marshall et al. (2013) emphasise that in qualitative research, depth is often prioritised over breadth. Silverman et al. (2017) in a similar vein advocate for smaller sample sizes to enable profound engagement with participants' narratives. This sample size facilitated comprehensive interviews, allowing for an in-depth exploration of each participant's unique experiences. Additionally, this approach ensured that data collection and analysis remained manageable, allowing for a meticulous examination of emerging themes. The rationale for this sampling strategy lies in the understanding that profound insights are often gleaned through focused interaction with a carefully selected group of experts. Consequently, this methodological choice was not only pragmatic but also strategically aligned with the study's objectives.

3.4.2 Interview

In collecting data for the study, interviews served as the primary data collection method, chosen for their capacity to delve deeply into the research topic. This is because Silverman (2017) echoes that quality of research findings heavily relies on the effectiveness of this process. Justifying this choice, Brinkmann (2013) highlights the ability of interviews to facilitate in-depth, open-ended conversations that reveal the complexities of human behaviour and motivations. Interviews provided a platform for the participants to share personal experiences and insights that might not have surfaced through other data collection techniques.

During the interviews, a flexible and dynamic interaction was fostered, as noted by Aspers and Corte (2019). This adaptability proved essential when exploring the subject of the use of social media influencers. The interviews were conducted with a methodical yet adaptable approach to ensure both depth and flexibility. Prior to the interviews, a semi-structured guide (see Appendix) was meticulously prepared, incorporating open-ended questions designed to explore key themes such as influencer selection processes, campaign challenges, and outcomes as

advocated by Ames et al. (2019). This guide served as a roadmap, ensuring that all relevant areas were covered while allowing room for deeper exploration as needed.

On average, each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. This duration allowed for an in-depth exploration of the topics while maintaining participant engagement. Before conducting the main interviews, a pilot interview was carried out with a marketing professional from a similar industry. The purpose of this pilot was to test the clarity and relevance of the interview guide, ensuring that the questions elicited meaningful responses aligned with the research objectives. Feedback from the pilot interview led to minor adjustments in the phrasing of some questions and the overall flow of the interview process, enhancing its effectiveness. This preliminary step was crucial in ironing out any potential issues that could arise during the main interviews, thereby improving the quality and reliability of the data collection process.

Each interview commenced with a clear explanation of the study's objectives and assurances of confidentiality to create a safe and open environment for discussion. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement, with the option to withdraw at any time. The interviews were held either in person or via video conferencing platforms, depending on logistical considerations and participant preferences. To establish rapport, the conversations began with general inquiries about the participants' professional roles and their experience in marketing, gradually steering towards more specific topics related to influencer marketing strategies.

As the interviews progressed, probing questions were employed to delve deeper into complex issues. This enabled the participants to elaborate on their experiences and provide nuanced insights. This dynamic interaction not only enriched the data but also ensured that the discussions captured the intricacies of influencer marketing within the industry. The flexible nature of the interviews allowed for the exploration of emerging themes, ultimately

contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and successes associated with these marketing practices.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis as the primary method for analysing the interview data. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun et al. (2017), is particularly effective in qualitative research for its ability to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within the data. This method allowed the study to distil the detailed accounts of participants into coherent themes that directly aligned with the research objectives. The process began with familiarisation, where the researcher repeatedly reviewed the interview transcripts to gain an intimate understanding of the content. This initial phase was critical for immersing in the data and laying the groundwork for the subsequent steps.

Next, the study moved into the coding phase, where specific segments of the data were systematically labelled to highlight significant features related to influencer marketing strategies. Codes were carefully developed to capture the essence of participants' experiences, focusing on aspects such as influencer selection criteria, campaign challenges, and perceived effectiveness. This coding process was iterative, involving multiple rounds of refinement to ensure that the codes accurately represented the data. Through this process, patterns began to emerge, signalling the recurring ideas and concepts that would later form the basis of the themes.

Once the coding was complete, the study transitioned into theme development. Here, related codes were grouped into broader themes that encapsulated the core findings of the research. For example, themes such as "Strategic Selection of Influencers" and "Measuring Campaign Effectiveness" were identified, providing a structured framework for interpreting the data. Miles et al. (2014) emphasise that thematic analysis not only highlights key themes but also facilitates a deep exploration of the data, ensuring that nuanced insights are captured. This

phase involved a dynamic interplay between the data and the emerging themes, allowing the researcher to refine and adjust the themes as necessary.

Finally, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance to the research questions. Kalman (2019) underscores the importance of digging into the meanings behind the data, and this step was crucial for ensuring that the identified themes were not only descriptive but also interpretative, offering a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. The analysis culminated in the generation of a detailed thematic map, which provided a visual representation of the interconnections between themes. This analytical process ensured that the findings were well-grounded in empirical evidence. This offered rich insights into the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behaviour and brand success within Ghana's fast food industry.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical research practices formed the foundation of this study's design. This ensured that all procedures were conducted with the utmost respect for participant rights and well-being. From the outset, informed consent was obtained from all participants. This process involved providing comprehensive information about the study's purpose, the nature of their involvement, and any potential impacts. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, ensuring they fully understood their role and the broader context of the research. This thorough approach to informed consent underscored the study's commitment to transparency and ethical integrity.

Participant confidentiality and privacy were further safeguarded throughout the research. Personal information was handled with the highest degree of responsibility by employing secure storage methods and anonymising data to protect participant identities. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development (DRID) of the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC-GIJ) before data

collection commenced. This reflected the study's adherence to established ethical guidelines. This approval process not only validated the research design but also reinforced the commitment to ethical rigor, ensuring that all potential risks were thoroughly assessed and mitigated.

Participation was entirely voluntary, with clear communication that individuals could withdraw at any point without facing any repercussions. This respect for autonomy not only fostered a sense of trust between the researcher and participants but also ensured the integrity and reliability of the data collected. By upholding these ethical principles, the study aimed to produce credible and trustworthy findings while maintaining a strong, respectful relationship with all participants involved.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology for the study. It began by describing the qualitative research approach, explaining the use of a case study design to explore the deployment of social media influencers in public relations within Ghana's fast food industry. The chapter also detailed the research population and sampling strategy, focusing on purposive sampling to select relevant participants, such as marketing professionals and stakeholders from selected fast food companies. Data collection techniques, including semi-structured interviews, were discussed as the primary tools for gathering rich, detailed insights. The chapter concluded by addressing the ethical considerations for this research, emphasizing the importance of informed consent, participant confidentiality, and obtaining necessary approvals to ensure the study's credibility and integrity.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four provides a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the data collected for the study. It focuses on interpreting the responses from participants to address the research objectives. The chapter explores the key themes and sub-themes derived from the data, presenting insights into how social media influencers impact Ghana's fast food industry. Each section links the findings to the study's objectives, offering critical reflections and interpretations grounded in academic and practical contexts.

The pseudonyms used in this chapter are essential for maintaining participant confidentiality. To ensure anonymity, participants are identified using unique labels: P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. Each pseudonym represents an individual participant, allowing the study to present their perspectives clearly while safeguarding their identities. P1 through P5 correspond to the five participants who provided in-depth insights during the research process. By anonymizing their identities, the study adheres to ethical research standards, avoiding potential bias, harm, or undue attention that might arise from disclosure. This structured approach ensures the credibility and integrity of the research.

4.2 Influencer Selection Criteria

The selection of influencers for public relations campaigns emerged as a focal point in the field data. The participants articulated a range of perspectives that highlighted both shared and differing approaches, emphasizing critical factors like authenticity, relevance, and audience engagement. This section synthesizes these perspectives into three subthemes: authenticity and trustworthiness, audience relevance and alignment, and metrics and professionalism. These are analyzed in relation to theoretical discussions from the literature.

4.2.1 Authenticity and Trustworthiness

The emphasis on authenticity resonated strongly across the field data, with participants collectively underscoring its pivotal role in influencer selection. Authenticity was described as the cornerstone of audience trust, with genuine influencers fostering stronger consumer-brand connections. This perspective was supported by P5, who asserted that “authenticity is a crucial determinant in our choice of influencers because it directly impacts audience perception and trust in our brand. Without it, collaborations risk falling flat or even backfiring.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The significance of authenticity was further highlighted by P1, who remarked that “authenticity drives trust, which is the foundation of effective marketing. During a recent campaign, we partnered with an influencer known for their genuine content, resulting in a 15% increase in customer inquiries within a week.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This reflection aligns with Lou and Yuan (2019), who emphasized the importance of perceived authenticity in fostering long-term consumer trust. The literature reinforced the notion that authenticity not only enhances brand credibility but also improves message resonance among target audiences (Stubb et al., 2019). These observations also mirrored Social Exchange Theory (SET), which underlines the reciprocity inherent in trust-based relationships, where influencers provide genuine endorsements in exchange for tangible or reputational benefits.

However, the degree of emphasis on authenticity demonstrated variation among the responses. One perspective, shared by P3, highlighted the need for balance, stating that “an influencer’s authenticity must balance with their ability to align with the campaign’s goals. Authenticity without a clear alignment to the brand’s values can still undermine the effectiveness of a campaign.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This view reflects the findings of Audrezet et al. (2018), who argued that congruence between an influencer’s personal brand and the campaign’s objectives significantly enhances the impact of authenticity.

A similar emphasis on the relationship between relevance and authenticity was expressed by P2, who asserted:

Relevance and authenticity are inseparable. If an influencer's audience perceives their endorsement as forced, it erodes trust—not just in the influencer, but in our brand. Forced messaging stands out and can harm the campaign's success. (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

While the consensus leaned towards the primacy of authenticity, the findings demonstrated varying interpretations of how it should integrate into broader selection strategies.

4.2.2 Audience Relevance and Alignment

The significance of selecting influencers whose audience demographics align with brand objectives was a recurring theme among participants. According to P5, “The influence of a strong connection between an influencer and their demographic cannot be overstated. Influencers with a dedicated following in our target segment yield higher engagement and conversion rates.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective is echoed by Van Driel and Dumitrica (2021), who argued that the congruence between an influencer's audience and a brand's target demographic enhances campaign effectiveness by ensuring messages resonate with the intended audience. This alignment also mirrored the Social Exchange Theory (SET) framework, which emphasises mutual value exchange, suggesting that influencers' deep connection with their audience enhances message receptivity for brands. The discussion extended further with a focus on aesthetic and thematic compatibility, as highlighted by P2. It was asserted that “relevance ensures the message feels natural and not out of place. An influencer who aligns with our product category can integrate our message seamlessly into their content.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Similarly, Freberg et al. (2011) emphasized that audience compatibility

magnifies the persuasive impact of influencer campaigns, particularly in niches where consumer expectations are highly specific.

However, the challenges associated with ensuring audience alignment were acknowledged by some participants. One reflection from P3 highlighted that “despite careful evaluation, discrepancies can emerge. For instance, one influencer’s engagement metrics initially aligned well with our target market, but their content later deviated from our brand’s tone, impacting overall effectiveness.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This concern underscores the dynamic nature of influencer marketing and emphasises the necessity of continuous monitoring, as advocated by Kapitan et al. (2022). The adaptability of influencers was identified as a key criterion, with P4 noting:

We worked with an influencer who tailored their posts around a festive theme, driving significant traction during the holidays. Their ability to creatively adapt to different campaign themes was instrumental in achieving our objectives. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The discussions revealed broad agreement on the criticality of audience relevance, while also acknowledging the practical challenges of maintaining alignment throughout collaborations.

4.2.3 Metrics and Professionalism

Quantitative metrics and professionalism emerged as pivotal factors in the influencer selection process. The utilisation of analytics tools to evaluate influencers’ performance metrics, including engagement rates and audience interactions, was a key point raised by participants. The value of such tools was explained by P5, who stated, “Platforms like Influencity and Social Blade provide comprehensive analytics that enable us to assess an influencer’s growth, engagement, and authenticity. These metrics are invaluable in decision-making.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This reliance on analytics reflects broader

trends in influencer marketing, where data-driven insights are used to validate the credibility of potential collaborators (Haenlein et al., 2020).

A complementary perspective was offered, stressing the importance of manual observation in evaluating influencers. Furthering this, P1 remarked, “Beyond metrics, I personally review influencers’ comment sections to gauge genuine audience sentiment. For example, consistent follower inquiries about product recommendations indicate real trust in the influencer’s opinions.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This approach aligns with Lou (2022), who argued that qualitative assessments complement quantitative metrics to provide a holistic understanding of influencer impact.

Professionalism emerged as another critical theme, with participants underscoring the necessity of reliable and transparent collaborations. A negative experience recounted by P3 highlighted this point: “An influencer once failed to deliver content on time, impacting the campaign’s rollout. Since then, professionalism has become a non-negotiable criterion in our selection process.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This concern aligns with the findings of Bansal et al. (2024), who emphasised the role of professionalism in ensuring smooth campaign execution. Reflections on positive experiences also contributed to the discussion, with P1 sharing:

We partnered with an influencer who demonstrated exceptional professionalism and transparency. They proactively shared their metrics and proposed innovative ideas, making the collaboration highly effective and mutually rewarding. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The integration of professionalism and data-driven evaluation into the selection process reflects a strategic approach that balances quantitative and qualitative considerations, ensuring optimal outcomes for campaigns. Furthermore, these practices are consistent with SET’s principles,

highlighting the reciprocal nature of influencer-brand collaborations, where professionalism and reliability contribute to sustained mutual benefits.

4.3 Strategic Role of Social Media Influencers

The data revealed the multifaceted roles played by social media influencers in public relations campaigns. Participants consistently described these influencers as critical agents in bridging the gap between brands and audiences through emotional resonance, storytelling, and trust-building. These dimensions are explored under three sub-themes: storytelling and emotional connection, influencers as trust-builders, and influencers as amplifiers of brand visibility. These sub-themes are analyzed alongside relevant theoretical insights, which are integrated into the discussion to enhance coherence and depth.

4.3.1 Storytelling and Emotional Connection

The ability of influencers to craft compelling narratives was widely emphasized as a pivotal aspect of their role. The role of storytelling in enabling influencers to integrate brand messages seamlessly into their personal experiences was frequently emphasised by participants. This approach was described as a powerful means of fostering relatability and emotional engagement. An observation from P3 highlighted, “Social media influencers act as modern storytellers. When they weave our products into their daily lives, it feels organic, and audiences relate to it more strongly.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This mirrors Abidin’s (2016) findings that influencers’ personal content blurs the boundaries between endorsements and authentic experiences, enhancing emotional appeal. The interplay between storytelling and emotional resonance aligns with principles from Social Exchange Theory (SET), which highlights the reciprocal benefits of trust and engagement in influencer collaborations. The effectiveness of this approach was further illustrated by P1, who shared, “During a recent campaign, an influencer created a series of posts showcasing our festive menu in creative settings. These posts garnered over 50,000 likes and noticeably increased holiday orders.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This example aligns

with Labrecque (2014), who emphasized that parasocial interactions formed through storytelling foster deeper emotional connections between audiences and brands.

The challenges of maintaining authenticity in storytelling were also acknowledged. One observation from P4 highlighted, “There is a fine balance between genuine storytelling and overt marketing. If the narrative feels too commercialized, it risks alienating the audience.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective aligns with Audrezet et al. (2020), who warned against over-commercialisation and emphasised the importance of authenticity in sustaining audience trust and engagement. Further elaboration on this point was provided by P5, who noted:

An influencer once shared a personal story about our product’s impact on their fitness journey, creating significant buzz among health-conscious audiences. The engagement from this campaign surpassed our expectations, showing the power of a well-crafted narrative. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

These insights underscore the strategic importance of storytelling in leveraging influencers to humanize brands and deepen audience connections, a process further explained by SET’s focus on relational equity and mutual value creation.

4.3.2 Influencers as Trust-Builders

Trust was consistently highlighted as a central theme in the discussions, with influencers portrayed as credible intermediaries between brands and consumers. This concept was emphasised by P5, who stated, “Trust is the currency of influencer marketing. When influencers genuinely endorse our products, their audiences are more likely to trust our brand.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation aligns with the findings of Nafees et al. (2021), who identified perceived authenticity and credibility as pivotal factors in fostering consumer trust in influencer-endorsed content. The role of

consistent and frequent endorsements was further highlighted by P2, who stated, “Frequent and consistent endorsements by trusted influencers reinforce our brand’s credibility over time. For instance, repeated collaborations with a lifestyle influencer increased customer retention by 15%.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Such findings resonate with SET, highlighting the reciprocal nature of trust-based relationships, where influencers’ credibility is exchanged for brand loyalty.

The data underscored the critical role of transparency in fostering trust. This was highlighted by P3, who noted, “Clear disclosures about sponsorships enhance the authenticity of influencer endorsements. Audiences value honesty, and this strengthens their trust in both the influencer and the brand.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation aligns with Boerman et al. (2017), who demonstrated that transparent sponsorship disclosures positively influence consumer trust while mitigating potential scepticism. Further elaboration on this was provided by P1, who shared:

We collaborated with an influencer known for their straightforward and genuine communication style. Their openness about using our products in their daily life not only increased sales but also positioned our brand as trustworthy and relatable. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The findings reinforced the view that influencers’ authenticity and transparency are instrumental in fostering trust, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of public relations campaigns. DOI Theory complements this discussion by illustrating how influencers, as opinion leaders, drive the early adoption of new ideas through trusted endorsements.

4.3.3 Influencers as Amplifiers of Brand Visibility

Influencers were consistently described by participants as amplifiers of brand messages, using their extensive reach and loyal followings to boost brand visibility. This point was articulated

by P4, who explained, “Influencers provide access to audiences we might struggle to reach through traditional advertising methods. Their platforms act as megaphones for our campaigns.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective echoes findings by Haenlein et al. (2020), who noted that social media algorithms amplify influencers’ content, increasing its visibility among target audiences. The amplification of brand messages aligns with the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, which underscores the role of opinion leaders in disseminating innovations and accelerating their adoption. The effectiveness of influencers in penetrating niche markets was highlighted by P5, who shared that “a campaign targeting the vegan community through a well-known food influencer increased our plant-based product sales by 20%. This level of reach and engagement would have been difficult to achieve through conventional channels.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The findings also acknowledged potential risks associated with over-reliance on influencers. The importance of aligning influencers’ audiences with the target demographic was emphasised, with P2 remarking, “While influencers amplify our brand’s reach, it’s crucial to ensure their audience aligns with our target demographic. A mismatch can dilute the campaign’s impact.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation aligns with findings by Kapitan et al. (2022), who cautioned that poor alignment between influencers and brand values can undermine campaign effectiveness. To this end, P3 elaborated:

In one campaign, an influencer’s viral video showcasing a creative use of our product drove a 30% increase in sales within a week. This demonstrated the exponential impact influencers can have when their content resonates with their audience. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

These discussions highlighted influencers' strategic role in enhancing brand visibility, particularly within niche markets, while underscoring the importance of careful selection to maximize campaign impact. The alignment of these findings with DOI Theory underscores the strategic positioning of influencers as pivotal actors in the diffusion process.

The data revealed the multifaceted roles played by social media influencers in public relations campaigns. Participants consistently described these influencers as critical agents in bridging the gap between brands and audiences through emotional resonance, storytelling, and trust-building. These dimensions are explored under three subthemes: storytelling and emotional connection, influencers as trust-builders, and influencers as amplifiers of brand visibility. These subthemes are analyzed alongside relevant theoretical insights.

4.3.4 Storytelling and Emotional Connection

The ability of influencers to craft compelling narratives was widely emphasized as a pivotal aspect of their role. The ability of storytelling to allow influencers to integrate brand messages seamlessly into their personal experiences was frequently highlighted by participants, fostering relatability and emotional engagement. As P3 stated, "Social media influencers act as modern storytellers. When they weave our products into their daily lives, it feels organic, and audiences relate to it more strongly." (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This mirrors Abidin's (2016) findings, which suggested that influencers' personal content blurs the boundaries between endorsements and authentic experiences, thereby enhancing emotional appeal. The impact of this approach was further reflected by P1, who shared, "During a recent campaign, an influencer created a series of posts showcasing our festive menu in creative settings. These posts garnered over 50,000 likes and noticeably increased holiday orders." (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This example aligns with Labrecque (2014), who emphasized that parasocial interactions formed through storytelling foster deeper emotional connections between audiences and brands.

The challenges of maintaining authenticity in storytelling were also acknowledged by participants. A point raised by P4 highlighted, “There is a fine balance between genuine storytelling and overt marketing. If the narrative feels too commercialized, it risks alienating the audience.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective aligns with the findings of Audrezet et al. (2020), who cautioned against over-commercialisation and advocated for authenticity to sustain audience trust and engagement. Further, P5 elaborated:

An influencer once shared a personal story about our product’s impact on their fitness journey, creating significant buzz among health-conscious audiences. The engagement from this campaign surpassed our expectations, showing the power of a well-crafted narrative. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

These insights underscore the strategic importance of storytelling in leveraging influencers to humanize brands and deepen audience connections.

4.3.4 Influencers as Trust-Builders

Trust emerged as a central theme in participants' discussions, with influencers viewed as credible intermediaries between brands and consumers. As P5 emphasized, “Trust is the currency of influencer marketing. When influencers genuinely endorse our products, their audiences are more likely to trust our brand.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation is consistent with the findings of Nafees et al. (2021), who identified perceived authenticity and credibility as key factors driving consumer trust in influencer-endorsed content. P2 further contributed to this discussion, stating, “Frequent and consistent endorsements by trusted influencers reinforce our brand’s credibility over time. For instance, repeated collaborations with a lifestyle influencer increased customer retention by 15%.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Such findings resonate

with Social Exchange Theory (SET), which highlights the reciprocal nature of trust-based relationships, where influencers' credibility is exchanged for brand loyalty.

Participants also highlighted the role of transparency in building trust. Highlighting this further, P3 remarked, "Clear disclosures about sponsorships enhance the authenticity of influencer endorsements. Audiences value honesty, and this strengthens their trust in both the influencer and the brand." (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This aligns with Boerman et al. (2017), who found that transparent sponsorship disclosures positively influence consumer trust, mitigating potential skepticism. Additionally, P1 shared:

We collaborated with an influencer known for their straightforward and genuine communication style. Their openness about using our products in their daily life not only increased sales but also positioned our brand as trustworthy and relatable. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The findings reinforced the view that influencers' authenticity and transparency are instrumental in fostering trust, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of public relations campaigns.

4.3.5 Influencers as Amplifiers of Brand Visibility

Influencers were consistently described by participants as amplifiers of brand messages, leveraging their extensive reach and loyal followings to increase brand visibility. It was noted by P4 that, "Influencers provide access to audiences we might struggle to reach through traditional advertising methods. Their platforms act as megaphones for our campaigns." (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective echoes the findings of Haenlein et al. (2020), who noted that social media algorithms amplify influencers' content, thereby increasing its visibility among target audiences. The role of influencers in niche market penetration was also highlighted, with P5 sharing, "A campaign targeting the

vegan community through a well-known food influencer increased our plant-based product sales by 20%. This level of reach and engagement would have been difficult to achieve through conventional channels.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Such examples align with Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, which emphasizes the role of opinion leaders in accelerating the adoption of new ideas within specific communities.

However, Potential risks associated with over-reliance on influencers were also noted by participants. It was remarked by P2, “While influencers amplify our brand’s reach, it’s crucial to ensure their audience aligns with our target demographic. A mismatch can dilute the campaign’s impact.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation aligns with findings by Kapitan et al. (2022), who cautioned that poor alignment between influencers and brand values can undermine campaign effectiveness. Further elaboration on this point was provided by P3:

In one campaign, an influencer’s viral video showcasing a creative use of our product drove a 30% increase in sales within a week. This demonstrated the exponential impact influencers can have when their content resonates with their audience. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

These discussions highlighted influencers’ strategic role in enhancing brand visibility, particularly within niche markets, while underscoring the importance of careful selection to maximize campaign impact.

The strategic roles of influencers identified in the findings reflected principles from both Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory. SET was evident in discussions about trust-building, where reciprocal exchanges between influencers and brands fostered credibility and loyalty. DOI Theory complemented this by elucidating influencers’ role as opinion leaders who drive the adoption of new ideas and products within targeted

communities. These theoretical frameworks provided a robust foundation for understanding the multifaceted contributions of influencers to public relations campaigns.

The findings underscored the strategic importance of social media influencers in public relations, emphasizing their roles as storytellers, trust-builders, and amplifiers of brand visibility. These insights, supported by theoretical perspectives, highlighted the transformative potential of influencers in shaping brand-consumer relationships and driving campaign success.

4.4 Influencer Impact on Consumer Behavior

The data underscored the substantial influence of social media influencers on consumer behavior, highlighting their role in shaping purchasing decisions, fostering loyalty, and driving engagement through innovative strategies. The participants' responses offered a detailed exploration of this impact, synthesized under three subthemes: influencers as decision catalysts, fostering customer loyalty, and strategies for effective consumer engagement. Theoretical insights were interwoven into the discussion to provide a comprehensive understanding.

4.4.1 Influencers as Decision Catalysts

The crucial role of influencers in shaping purchasing decisions was consistently emphasised by participants. It was noted by P1, "When an influencer shares a personal experience with our product, it feels authentic to their followers, leading to increased trust and, ultimately, purchases." (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation is consistent with Nafees et al. (2021), who highlighted the impact of influencers' credibility on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviors. The implication here is that influencers can effectively bridge the trust gap between consumers and brands, making products more relatable and accessible. Further elaboration on this point was provided by P3, who shared, "Influencers often act as trendsetters, making products feel both desirable and accessible. A campaign we ran with a popular influencer resulted in stock shortages due to demand spikes." (Participant 3,

Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This highlights how influencers, through their aspirational yet attainable endorsements, can influence consumer perceptions of value and urgency. This finding aligns with Haenlein et al. (2020), who emphasized that influencers shape desires by positioning brands within aspirational lifestyles. In addition, P2 intimated that:

Influencers bridge the gap between brands and consumers by making recommendations personal. For instance, a campaign we conducted during exam season with a university-focused influencer led to higher sales, as students trusted the recommendations tailored to their needs. (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The data revealed that influencers act as opinion leaders, capable of accelerating product adoption within specific consumer groups. Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory reinforces this role, explaining how influencers' relatability and credibility drive the dissemination of new ideas and products.

4.4.2 Fostering Customer Loyalty

The ability of influencers to cultivate long-term customer loyalty emerged as a significant theme in the findings. The link between authenticity, consistency, and stronger consumer-brand relationships was frequently highlighted by participants. As P5 emphasised, "Repeated collaborations with the same influencer create familiarity and trust, encouraging customers to return to our brand even when faced with competing options." (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). The implication here is that sustained partnerships with influencers can strengthen brand reliability in the eyes of consumers. Labrecque's (2014) research on parasocial relationships highlights the emotional bonds that consumers form with influencers as crucial to fostering loyalty. The value of genuine experiences shared by influencers was further emphasised by P4, who stated, "When influencers share genuine experiences with our products, it makes consumers feel more connected to our brand. This

emotional bond strengthens their loyalty.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Social Exchange Theory (SET) illustrates this dynamic by emphasising the reciprocal nature of trust-building, where emotional engagement ensures consumers’ continued preference for a brand. Further insights on this were offered by P1, who observed:

During a recent campaign, an influencer consistently promoted our products over several months, creating a sense of reliability among their followers. This consistency translated into a noticeable increase in repeat customers. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

This finding underscores the importance of continuity and authenticity in building consumer trust. By repeatedly endorsing products in a consistent manner, influencers enhance their reliability and, by extension, the perceived credibility of the brands they represent. Such long-term associations not only foster loyalty but also mitigate the impact of market competition.

4.4.3 Strategies for Effective Consumer Engagement

Several strategies were detailed by participants as effective in shaping consumer behavior, with a focus on storytelling, interactivity, and promotional incentives. The effectiveness of interactive campaigns was highlighted, with P3 noting, “Interactive campaigns, such as Questions & Answers (Q&A) sessions or challenges, boost consumer interest and engagement. For example, an influencer-led Q&A about our product ingredients significantly increased transparency and trust.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). These approaches foster a sense of involvement among consumers, creating deeper connections with the brand. Boerman et al. (2017) emphasised that such interactive content strengthens audience engagement by encouraging active participation.

The role of promotional tactics was further highlighted by P2, who stated, “Giveaways and discount codes create urgency and excitement among consumers. A recent collaboration with a fitness influencer offering discount codes led to a 40% increase in sales of our healthy meal

line.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This suggests that promotional strategies not only drive immediate sales but also generate buzz, attracting new customers while retaining existing ones. The effectiveness of these tactics in stimulating consumer action was further supported by Haenlein et al. (2020). Additional insights were provided by P4, who elaborated:

Influencers who integrate our products into relatable content, such as a ‘day-in-the-life’ video, resonate strongly with audiences. These campaigns often lead to higher engagement and repeat purchases, demonstrating the power of relatability in marketing. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The data highlighted the need for alignment between influencer strategies and audience preferences. DOI Theory supports this finding by framing influencers as facilitators of tailored content dissemination, ensuring that marketing messages align closely with consumer expectations. Additionally, the creative integration of brand messaging within influencers’ daily narratives makes campaigns feel organic, which enhances audience receptiveness. The analysis revealed that social media influencers significantly impact consumer behavior by serving as decision catalysts, fostering loyalty, and employing innovative engagement strategies. These findings, supported by theoretical insights, underscore the strategic value of influencers in shaping purchasing behaviors and building lasting brand relationships.

4.5 Challenges in Influencer Collaborations

The field data revealed significant challenges associated with influencer collaborations, which participants articulated with varying perspectives and examples. These challenges often influenced the effectiveness of campaigns, necessitating strategic interventions. Two dominant subthemes emerged from the data: authenticity and trust issues and misalignment and resource constraints. Theoretical insights are integrated into the discussion to provide context and depth.

4.5.1 Authenticity and Trust Issues

Participants frequently cited authenticity and trust as critical challenges in influencer collaborations. Despite the importance of authenticity in fostering consumer trust, its absence was a recurring concern. As noted by P5, “Some influencers exaggerate their affinity for a brand, which can make their endorsements feel insincere. Consumers quickly pick up on this, and it damages both the influencer’s and the brand’s credibility.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This aligns with findings by Boerman et al. (2017), who highlighted that insincere endorsements undermine consumer trust and diminish campaign impact.

The data also indicated that inflated metrics, such as fake followers and artificial engagement, further complicate trust-building efforts. Once again, P3 remarked, “We discovered an influencer we worked with had purchased followers, which distorted their reach and engagement metrics. This not only wasted resources but also negatively affected our campaign outcomes.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Such incidents reflect broader concerns discussed by Haenlein et al. (2020), who noted that fraudulent metrics are prevalent in influencer marketing and pose significant risks to campaign credibility. This issue often forces brands to invest additional resources into verifying influencer analytics, thereby increasing both costs and operational complexity. Further elaboration on this issue was provided by P2, who stated:

When influencers are not transparent about their relationship with a brand, it creates skepticism among consumers. Clear disclosures are essential, but not all influencers adhere to this, which hurts both their reputation and ours. (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

Furthermore, P4 provided further insights, stating, “Authenticity issues often arise when influencers promote multiple competing brands. Audiences see through these inconsistencies,

which can result in disengagement or distrust.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This concern echoes findings by Lou and Yuan (2019), who argued that conflicting endorsements erode the credibility of both the influencer and the brand they represent. This highlights the need for exclusivity agreements and stringent guidelines to ensure consistency in influencer messaging. On another scale, P5 noted:

We once experienced a situation where an influencer’s lack of preparation resulted in poorly executed content. This reflected badly on our brand and led to decreased campaign engagement. Selecting influencers who are not only authentic but also professional is vital to avoiding these setbacks.

(Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

Theoretical insights from Social Exchange Theory (SET) reinforce these findings, emphasizing the importance of reciprocity and trust in influencer-brand collaborations. When authenticity and transparency are compromised, the reciprocal value exchange deteriorates, resulting in diminished consumer loyalty and brand credibility. To counteract this, participants suggested that comprehensive training sessions and continuous monitoring are necessary to maintain authentic and credible collaborations.

4.5.2 Misalignment and Resource Constraints

Misalignment between influencer personas and brand values emerged as another significant challenge. Selecting the wrong influencer was highlighted by participants as a potential source of ineffective messaging and reputational risks. As noted by P4, “In one campaign, the influencer’s content style clashed with our brand’s image, confusing our audience and diluting the campaign’s message.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This reflects Kapitan et al.’s (2022) assertion that a lack of alignment between influencers and brands can undermine campaign effectiveness by creating inconsistent messaging.

The importance of audience alignment was also underscored by P1, who stated, “It’s not just about reach; it’s about fit. An influencer may have millions of followers, but if their audience doesn’t align with our target demographic, the impact is negligible.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This highlights the significance of thorough vetting processes to ensure alignment, a sentiment echoed by Lou and Yuan (2019), who emphasised that audience compatibility enhances the relevance and resonance of influencer campaigns. Further reflections on this were shared by P3, who stated:

Budget constraints also limit our ability to collaborate with top-tier influencers who align perfectly with our brand. As a result, we often have to compromise and work with micro-influencers, which comes with its own set of challenges, such as limited reach. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

Resource constraints, including limited budgets and time, were frequently identified as barriers to optimal collaborations. Participants acknowledged that smaller budgets often restricted access to high-profile influencers, necessitating reliance on less experienced individuals. While micro-influencers offer cost advantages and niche engagement, their limited reach can hinder broader campaign objectives. Also, P5 observed:

Working with micro-influencers allows for deeper community engagement, but scaling such campaigns is challenging. When targeting broader markets, this lack of scalability often diminishes the overall effectiveness of our campaigns. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory underscores this challenge, as influencers with limited networks may struggle to effectively disseminate innovative brand messages to wider audiences. This often leads to a fragmented marketing impact, where niche success does not

translate into broader visibility. To address this, participants advocated for hybrid strategies combining high-reach influencers with micro-influencers to balance cost-efficiency and scalability. Again, P2 explained:

We've started incorporating hybrid campaigns, where we combine the reach of macro-influencers with the engagement of micro-influencers. This strategy helps us maximize impact while staying within budget constraints. (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

Additionally, participants highlighted the challenge of managing expectations when collaborating with influencers. Likewise, P4 noted, "Misalignment in campaign goals often results in confusion. Clear communication from the outset about deliverables, timelines, and expected outcomes is essential to avoid setbacks." (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This reflects findings by Lou (2022), who argued that detailed agreements and regular feedback loops are critical for successful collaborations.

The challenges associated with influencer collaborations—ranging from authenticity and trust issues to misalignment and resource constraints—underscore the complexity of navigating this marketing strategy. Addressing these challenges requires rigorous vetting processes, transparent communication, and strategic resource allocation. Participants recommended innovative approaches, such as hybrid campaigns and enhanced training programs, to mitigate these obstacles and ensure the effectiveness of influencer partnerships. These findings, grounded in theoretical insights, highlight the importance of adaptability and strategic planning in maximizing the effectiveness of influencer campaigns.

4.6 Influencer-Brand Relationship Management

The effective governance of influencer-brand relationships constitutes a critical determinant of success in collaborative marketing efforts. Insights from field data reveal the multifaceted nature of this engagement, highlighting pre-campaign alignment, continuous communication,

and contractual frameworks as pivotal components. These aspects are examined in depth, emphasizing their strategic implications for marketing within Ghanaian contexts, where cultural and market-specific nuances shape these interactions significantly. The strategic importance of managing these relationships lies in their capacity to balance creative autonomy and brand consistency while navigating the complexities of an evolving digital landscape.

4.6.1 Pre-Campaign Alignment and Goal Setting

Achieving alignment between influencer and brand objectives before campaign initiation emerged as an indispensable strategy. The importance of alignment was emphasised by P1, who stated, “We ensure alignment by discussing shared values and campaign goals with influencers in advance. Without this clarity, the campaign risks losing its focus.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This sentiment aligns with Lou and Yuan’s (2019) assertion that congruence between brand identity and influencer persona amplifies campaign impact by ensuring resonance with target audiences.

Further elaboration on the importance of preparation was provided by P4, who explained, “Pre-campaign briefings are central to ensuring influencers understand our brand ethos and objectives comprehensively. This preparation allows them to craft content that integrates seamlessly with our messaging.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This approach aligns with Social Exchange Theory (SET), which underscores that clear initial expectations foster reciprocal benefits and enhance trust. Reflections on this were also shared by P3, who recounted:

In one campaign, the absence of detailed pre-campaign discussions resulted in content that failed to align with our messaging, causing confusion among our audience. Since then, setting detailed goals has been non-negotiable. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The prominence of this strategy in Ghana is heightened by the need to address cultural authenticity, as local audiences place high value on relatable and culturally consistent marketing efforts. The emphasis on shared values is particularly relevant in Ghanaian markets, where societal cohesion and respect for tradition influence consumer perceptions.

Data suggest that establishing a shared vision mitigates potential missteps and ensures coherence across campaigns. In the Ghanaian context, where community-focused values prevail, this alignment becomes essential for establishing credibility and achieving marketing efficacy. Furthermore, the need to align global brand objectives with local sensibilities amplifies the complexity of this process, requiring brands to adopt tailored briefing strategies that incorporate both cultural relevance and marketing precision.

4.6.2 Communication Strategies and Ongoing Feedback

Effective and iterative communication was highlighted as a cornerstone of managing influencer relationships. As emphasised by P5, “Maintaining open channels for frequent dialogue allows us to address challenges in real time, adapt strategies as necessary, and keep campaigns aligned with evolving goals.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This iterative approach reflects Kapitan et al.’s (2022) advocacy for feedback loops as a means to enhance mutual understanding and elevate campaign outcomes.

The strategic role of constructive feedback was further highlighted by P2, who stated, “Timely feedback helps influencers adjust their content without compromising their creative vision, ensuring that our standards are met without stifling innovation.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective underscores the balance between adherence to brand guidelines and respecting influencers’ autonomy to maintain authenticity. Feedback sessions also provide an opportunity for influencers to share insights from their audience’s engagement metrics, fostering collaborative decision-making. Further reflections on this approach were shared by P4, who explained:

Our campaigns with weekly review meetings have demonstrated significantly better outcomes. These sessions allow for real-time performance analysis, fostering a collaborative atmosphere where influencers feel valued, and adjustments can be made promptly. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

This practice is particularly relevant in Ghanaian markets, where personalized interactions and consistent communication contribute to trust-building and long-term partnerships. Regular check-ins create an environment of mutual accountability, ensuring influencers remain aligned with campaign objectives while feeling empowered to express their creative identities.

The findings reveal that dynamic two-way communication empowers influencers to contribute meaningfully while ensuring campaign objectives are met. In Ghana, the emphasis on relationship-building magnifies the importance of such strategies, making frequent engagement critical for maintaining synergy. Furthermore, the cultural emphasis on interpersonal trust necessitates a communication style that prioritizes transparency, empathy, and adaptability.

4.6.3 The Role of Contracts and Formal Agreements

Contracts were identified as vital instruments for formalising expectations and ensuring accountability in influencer collaborations. As noted by P1, “Contracts provide clarity on deliverables, timelines, and compensation, eliminating ambiguity and creating a foundation of trust between parties.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation resonates with Boerman et al. (2017), who identified contracts as integral to mitigating conflicts and maintaining adherence to campaign guidelines.

The importance of ethical clauses was underscored by P3, who stated, “Incorporating transparency requirements into agreements ensures influencers disclose sponsorships, safeguarding our brand’s credibility and meeting regulatory standards.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Ethical considerations are particularly significant in

Ghana, where heightened consumer scrutiny necessitates clear disclosure to maintain audience trust. Regulatory compliance also ensures alignment with global standards, positioning Ghanaian brands as credible players in international markets. Further insights on this were provided by P5, who described:

In an instance where timelines were disregarded, penalty clauses in our contracts ensured compliance in subsequent collaborations. This approach has become essential for managing projects efficiently. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

Contracts not only formalize timelines but also address content ownership, usage rights, and exclusivity agreements, which are particularly relevant in Ghana's interconnected markets, where overlapping brand engagements can occur. Such clauses provide legal recourse for brands while establishing clear boundaries for influencers. Additionally, formal agreements act as safeguards against unforeseen challenges, enabling dispute resolution through clearly defined terms. Also, P4 remarked, "Contracts tailored to the Ghanaian market must account for localized dynamics, ensuring that influencers adhere to culturally and ethically appropriate practices while aligning with brand expectations." (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This adaptability highlights the importance of comprehensive contractual frameworks in fostering sustainable collaborations. By addressing cultural sensitivities, contracts can preempt potential conflicts and reinforce trust between parties.

The strategic management of influencer-brand relationships is underpinned by rigorous pre-campaign alignment, robust communication practices, and legally sound contracts. These components, enriched by Ghanaian market-specific considerations, enable brands to navigate the complexities of influencer collaborations effectively. The findings from this analysis underscore the criticality of structured relationship management in driving long-term success in influencer marketing. By tailoring strategies to the cultural and regulatory nuances of the

Ghanaian context, brands can foster deeper connections with both influencers and their audiences, ensuring impactful and sustainable marketing outcomes.

4.7 Impact on Brand Visibility and Profitability

The strategic deployment of social media influencers as a mechanism for enhancing brand visibility and profitability has emerged as a cornerstone of contemporary marketing strategies. The data analyzed underscores the critical roles influencers play in amplifying brand awareness, fostering consumer engagement, and driving revenue growth. This discourse examines these dynamics through three interrelated subthemes: enhancing brand reach and recognition, driving consumer engagement and trust, and contributing to profitability through targeted strategies.

4.7.1 Enhancing Brand Reach and Recognition

Social media influencers function as powerful intermediaries in extending a brand's reach, leveraging their substantial digital networks to penetrate diverse and often untapped demographics. As remarked by P1, "Influencers enable us to connect with audiences that traditional marketing approaches often fail to engage. Their platforms exponentially increase our campaign reach." (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This perspective aligns with Haenlein et al. (2020), who highlighted the efficacy of influencer credibility in driving extensive brand visibility.

Further insights into cross-platform synergies were provided by P4, who stated, "Influencers sharing content across multiple social media channels provide our brand with exposure to distinct audience segments. This multi-channel strategy creates several points of interaction, significantly enhancing our reach." (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Such practices are supported by Lou and Yuan (2019), who emphasised the potency of diversified channel engagement in achieving comprehensive market penetration. Reflections on this were also shared by P3, who stated:

Collaborating with a globally recognized travel influencer not only elevated our brand visibility beyond local markets but also generated over 100,000 impressions in a single week, positioning us prominently among international consumers. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

These findings underscore the transcendent potential of influencer partnerships in bridging geographic and cultural divides. The strategic versatility of influencer campaigns also enables brands to engage niche markets effectively. Again, P2 observed, “Collaborating with micro-influencers embedded in specialized communities strengthens our connection with highly targeted demographics, fostering personalized engagement.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory supports this narrative, framing influencers as pivotal opinion leaders disseminating brand narratives across both mainstream and niche sectors. This dimension assumes even greater importance within Ghanaian markets, where culturally relevant storytelling amplifies resonance. Similarly, P5 added, “Leveraging influencers to embed culturally specific themes within our campaigns has significantly bolstered acceptance among local consumers, ensuring long-term brand visibility.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

4.7.2 Driving Consumer Engagement and Trust

The role of influencers in cultivating trust and enhancing consumer engagement emerged as a dominant theme in the data. As asserted by P5, “Influencers build authentic connections with their followers, and this authenticity translates into increased consumer trust and deeper engagement with our brand.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This observation mirrors Stubb et al. (2019), who argued that the authenticity of influencer interactions strengthens brand-consumer relationships.

The importance of interactive campaigns, a hallmark of influencer marketing, was also highlighted as key to fostering active consumer participation. P2 remarked, “Initiatives such as giveaways, live polls, and Q&A sessions hosted by influencers create excitement and invite active audience involvement. These formats make our brand relatable and accessible.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This view is supported by Kapitan et al. (2022), who emphasised the emotional connectivity engendered by interactive content. Further elaboration on this was provided by P4, who shared:

An Instagram Live session by a partnered influencer attracted thousands of real-time viewers who actively engaged with our product demonstration. This created a community-centric experience that aligned perfectly with our brand ethos. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

The capacity of live and interactive sessions to establish immediate and personal connections with audiences underscores their strategic importance. Consistency in influencer endorsements further reinforces brand messaging. Moreover, P3 noted, “When influencers repeatedly endorse our products, their sustained engagement embeds trust and ensures that our brand remains top-of-mind among their audiences.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Social Exchange Theory (SET) contextualizes this process, highlighting the mutual reinforcement of trust and loyalty in sustained brand-influencer relationships. In Ghanaian markets, where trust dynamics often hinge on community affiliations, influencers serve as vital connectors bridging brand identities and consumer expectations. In addition, P1 commented, “Our localized influencer strategies in Ghana are deeply rooted in fostering community trust, which has driven repeat engagements and cultivated brand loyalty.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

4.7.3 Contributing to Profitability Through Targeted Strategies

The financial implications of influencer collaborations were a recurring focal point, with participants underscoring their impact on revenue generation through precision-targeted strategies. As remarked by P1, “Influencers play a transformative role in converting awareness into sales by directing their efforts toward demographics closely aligned with our offerings. Their endorsements carry a unique persuasive weight.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Lou (2022) corroborates this, emphasising the effectiveness of personalised endorsements in shaping purchase behaviours.

The use of performance-based metrics as a cornerstone of evaluating campaign profitability was also discussed. Then again, P3 explained, “Our collaborations are structured with clear KPIs, such as click-through rates and conversions, to measure tangible returns. Influencers who consistently meet these targets deliver exceptional ROI.” This sentiment aligns with Haenlein et al. (2020), who argued that measurable outcomes underpin the financial viability of influencer marketing strategies. An example was provided by P5, who shared:

A fitness influencer’s targeted promotion of our health supplements resulted in a 40% surge in sales over four weeks. Their use of personalized discount codes proved instrumental in tracking and driving revenue. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

These insights highlight the criticality of aligning influencer strategies with explicit financial objectives. Scalability emerged as another pivotal attribute of influencer campaigns. Additionally, P2 observed, “The agility of influencer collaborations enables us to scale our marketing efforts seamlessly during product launches or peak seasons. This flexibility ensures both short-term profitability and sustained growth.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). The scalability of these campaigns underscores their relevance as adaptable and cost-efficient tools in competitive markets.

The discussion on localized profitability strategies was expanded by P4, who stated, “Collaborations timed with cultural festivals and regional events have delivered unprecedented sales spikes. By aligning our campaigns with moments of heightened consumer activity, we optimize impact and profitability.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). These insights underscore the necessity of cultural alignment in maximizing financial outcomes. Further emphasising the importance of data analytics, P5 added, “Leveraging data analytics to refine influencer selection ensures strategic alignment with profitability goals, enhancing the efficiency of each campaign.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

This analysis underscores the multifaceted impact of social media influencers on brand visibility and profitability. By expanding brand reach, fostering trust, and driving targeted revenue growth, influencers play a central role in contemporary marketing strategies. These findings, anchored in DOI and SET frameworks, elucidate the mechanisms by which influencers elevate brand messaging and consumer engagement. The Ghanaian context enriches this narrative, demonstrating the power of culturally resonant strategies to achieve sustainable market success. This exploration provides a rigorous understanding of influencers’ contributions to brand growth and profitability. By employing targeted, adaptive, and culturally aligned strategies, brands can leverage influencer partnerships to secure lasting visibility and financial resilience in competitive markets.

4.8 Consumer Trust and Credibility

The intricate dynamics of consumer trust and credibility are pivotal to the efficacy of influencer marketing strategies, shaping brand engagement, consumer loyalty, and purchasing decisions. This analysis examines how authenticity, transparency, consistency, and perceived expertise intersect to either build or erode trust and credibility in influencer campaigns.

4.8.1 Authenticity as the Foundation of Trust

Authenticity remains the cornerstone of trust in influencer marketing, as consumers increasingly demand genuine and relatable connections in brand communications. Influencers who are perceived as sincere in their endorsements generate greater engagement and foster robust brand affinity. As observed by P1, “Audiences discern when influencers genuinely use a product versus merely promoting it. Authenticity bridges this divide and builds lasting trust.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Stubb et al. (2019) corroborate this, identifying perceived authenticity as a key driver of consumer trust and long-term loyalty.

The perils of inauthenticity were highlighted by P4, who noted, “We once partnered with an influencer whose overly scripted content drew immediate backlash. The campaign’s credibility suffered significantly, reflecting poorly on our brand.” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Such instances underscore the detrimental effects of perceived insincerity. Lou and Yuan (2019) similarly argued that inauthentic influencer behaviour jeopardises not only their reputation but also the credibility of associated brands. Further emphasis on this point was provided by P5, who stated:

We collaborate with influencers whose values align with our brand ethos. Their enthusiasm creates a ripple effect of trust within their audience, amplifying engagement and loyalty. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

This approach is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that reciprocal, authentic exchanges foster trust between influencers and their audiences. In Ghanaian markets, where community-oriented values heighten the importance of authenticity, this alignment becomes indispensable.

Authenticity also extends to the congruence between an influencer’s persona and the tone of their content. Further, P3 observed, “Campaigns that grant influencers creative freedom

produce more impactful results. When influencers imbue promotions with their unique voice, the messaging resonates as genuine.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). These findings highlight the necessity of balancing brand oversight with influencer autonomy to maintain authenticity.

4.8.2 Transparency in Influencer Practices

Transparency is central to cultivating trust, particularly regarding sponsorship disclosures and promotional intent. As stated by P2, “Clear disclosures of paid partnerships are non-negotiable. Consumers value honesty, and transparent practices strengthen the trust bond between influencers and their audiences.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Boerman et al. (2017) validated this perspective, showing that transparency mitigates consumer skepticism and enhances credibility.

The ramifications of inconsistent disclosure practices were discussed by P3, who recounted, “Instances of inadequate sponsorship disclosures have led to consumer complaints and regulatory scrutiny, undermining both the influencer’s and our brand’s integrity.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Haenlein et al. (2020) also emphasised that adherence to transparency standards safeguards brands against reputational risks and reinforces consumer trust. Further insights were provided by P4, who shared:

We now embed explicit sponsorship disclosure clauses in our contracts to ensure compliance with advertising regulations. This approach reassures consumers of our ethical practices while fostering credibility. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

Codifying transparency into agreements mitigates ambiguity and fortifies consumer confidence in brand-influencer collaborations. Additionally, transparency enhances perceived authenticity. As remarked by P5, “When influencers candidly discuss both the benefits and limitations of a product, they humanize the promotion, deepening audience trust.” (Participant 5, Personal

Communication, November 22, 2024). This practice reflects an evolving paradigm in influencer marketing, where openness becomes a strategic differentiator.

4.8.3 Consistency in Messaging and Behavior

Consistency emerged as a critical factor in maintaining credibility across influencer campaigns. As asserted by P5, “Frequent endorsements of competing brands confuse audiences and erode trust in the influencer’s credibility. Consistency is essential to sustaining loyalty.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Kapitan et al. (2022) similarly identified consistent messaging as integral to strengthening brand affiliation and audience retention.

The value of enduring partnerships was emphasised by P1, who shared, “Our three-year collaboration with a lifestyle influencer has solidified trust among their followers. This continuity reinforces our brand’s reliability and deepens consumer loyalty.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Long-term collaborations align with Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, which posits that repeated exposure facilitates message adoption and reinforces trust. Further reflections on this were provided by P3, who recounted:

We engaged an influencer who endorsed multiple competing products within a short span. The resulting backlash diminished our campaign’s impact, highlighting the necessity of consistent endorsements. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024)

These cases underscore the criticality of cohesive messaging in preserving audience trust. Consistency also encompasses alignment between an influencer’s actions and their professed values. As noted by P2, “When influencers embody the principles they advocate, their credibility intensifies. Audiences reward this integrity with increased engagement and loyalty.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). This interplay between authenticity and consistency underscores their collective role in sustaining consumer trust.

4.8.4 Perceived Expertise and Authority

The perceived expertise of influencers significantly shapes their credibility and effectiveness in influencing consumer behavior. As remarked by P2, “Influencers with demonstrable expertise in their niche command greater respect. Their endorsements carry weight, driving heightened engagement and conversion rates.” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Freberg et al. (2011) similarly identified expertise as a cornerstone of influencer effectiveness, reinforcing trust through informed recommendations.

The value of domain-specific collaborations was further elaborated by P5, who stated, “Our partnerships with dermatologists for skincare campaigns bolster our credibility. Their professional authority assures consumers of our product’s efficacy.” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). Social Cognitive Theory complements this approach, emphasizing that perceived expertise fosters positive consumer attitudes and decision-making. Further insights on this were shared by P4, who observed:

When influencers integrate technical knowledge with relatable storytelling, they achieve a balance that strengthens trust and engagement. This combination is particularly effective in building credibility across diverse audiences. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024).

This synergy between expertise and relatability underscores the multifaceted nature of influencer credibility. Participants also acknowledged the potential pitfalls of overemphasizing expertise. As cautioned by P3, “While technical depth is valuable, overly formal presentations can alienate audiences, especially in lifestyle-oriented campaigns. Influencers must balance authority with approachability to maintain relatability.” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). These insights underscore the need for influencers to adapt their expertise to audience expectations. The intersection of authenticity and expertise

emerged as a critical determinant of trust. It was remarked by P1, “Influencers who demonstrate genuine knowledge and passion for their subject matter achieve unparalleled credibility, fostering deeper consumer interactions.” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, November 22, 2024). These findings illuminate the intricate interplay of authenticity, expertise, and relatability in influencer marketing strategies.

4.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter Four analyzed and elaborated on the key findings derived from the study. It underscored the significant role of social media influencers in influencing consumer behavior, elevating brand visibility, and driving profitability within Ghana’s fast food industry. The analysis provided a detailed examination of how influencers are selected based on specific criteria, including authenticity, audience alignment, and engagement metrics. It also explored the strategies employed by influencers to foster consumer engagement, such as interactive campaigns, storytelling, and personalized endorsements. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted the quantifiable outcomes of influencer collaborations, particularly in terms of increased sales, market penetration, and enhanced brand loyalty. Through an integration of findings with theoretical frameworks and existing literature, the discussion illuminated the mechanisms through which influencer marketing achieves its impact. It drew connections between the practical applications observed in the industry and broader marketing theories, offering a comprehensive understanding of how influencer-driven campaigns contribute to competitive advantage and sustainable growth in this context.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter consolidates the findings of the study and provides a detailed conclusion based on the analysis. It reflects on the research objectives, highlighting how they were addressed through the study's findings. This chapter also offers practical recommendations for stakeholders in Ghana's fast food industry and identifies areas for further research. The focus is on translating the insights from the study into actionable strategies while considering the broader implications for marketing and public relations practices.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

This study investigated the strategic employment of social media influencers within Ghana's fast food industry, focusing on the criteria for their selection, their roles in shaping consumer behavior, and their impact on brand visibility and profitability. The research was guided by three primary objectives: to ascertain the methodologies fast food companies in Ghana use to identify and select influencers for public relations campaigns, to explore the ways in which these influencers affect consumer behavior in the industry, and to evaluate the extent to which influencers enhance brand visibility and financial performance.

The findings highlighted several critical insights across these dimensions. The process of selecting social media influencers was shown to hinge on key factors such as authenticity, audience alignment, and the influencer's reach. Participants underscored the importance of congruence between the influencer's personal brand and the values of the company, emphasizing that alignment enhances the resonance and authenticity of promotional content. Companies demonstrated a dual approach to selection, employing both quantitative metrics—including follower counts and engagement rates—and qualitative considerations, such as the

influencer's tone, relatability, and ability to cultivate genuine connections with their audience. These criteria collectively ensure that influencers are not only credible but also effective in advancing the brand's objectives.

In examining the role of influencers in shaping consumer behavior, the study revealed that their impact is profound and multifaceted. Through compelling storytelling, product demonstrations, and authentic endorsements, influencers serve as trusted conduits between brands and their target audiences. Participants consistently emphasized the emotional resonance created by influencers, noting that trust and relatability were essential components of successful campaigns. Interactive strategies, such as live streaming and promotional giveaways, were highlighted as particularly effective in engaging audiences and fostering a sense of community around the brand. These approaches not only drive consumer interest but also deepen their emotional investment in the brand.

The research further demonstrated that social media influencers significantly enhance brand visibility and profitability. By leveraging their expansive digital networks, influencers extend the reach of marketing campaigns beyond traditional limitations, exposing fast food brands to diverse audience segments. Participants frequently attributed heightened brand recognition and elevated consumer engagement to well-executed influencer partnerships. Moreover, the financial benefits of these collaborations were evident. Many companies reported measurable increases in sales and improved returns on investment, with influencer-driven campaigns proving instrumental in expanding market penetration and retaining customers. These outcomes underscore the strategic value of influencers as cost-effective tools for achieving sustained growth.

The study illuminates the transformative role of social media influencers in Ghana's fast food industry. By skillfully bridging the gap between brands and consumers, influencers not only elevate brand visibility but also cultivate trust and deliver tangible financial benefits. While

their effectiveness hinges on strategic selection and collaborative execution, their contributions are firmly established as a cornerstone of modern public relations practices in this competitive sector.

5.3 Conclusion

Social media influencers play a vital role in the fast food industry in Ghana. Acting as intermediaries between brands and consumers, they create relatable content and share authentic experiences that resonate with their audiences. By leveraging digital platforms, influencers significantly enhance brand messaging and visibility. Their ability to engage diverse audience segments often surpasses the limitations of traditional advertising. Through targeted campaigns, storytelling, and endorsements, influencers drive consumer engagement and loyalty. These collaborations lead to measurable profitability, including increased sales and market penetration. Their strategic integration into marketing efforts highlights their importance in shaping perceptions, building trust, and promoting growth in a highly competitive sector.

The fast food industry in Ghana is expanding rapidly, influenced by global trends while retaining its local identity. This growth is driven by shifting consumer preferences, rising urbanization, and an increasing demand for convenient dining options. In this dynamic environment, social media influencers have become indispensable to modern marketing strategies. By forging connections, building trust, and amplifying brand narratives, they are central to contemporary public relations practices. Their role underscores the transformative potential of digital engagement and the adaptability of marketing practices to the evolving digital landscape.

This study provides critical insights into influencer marketing by examining selection methodologies, campaign execution, and the quantifiable impacts on brand visibility and profitability. It underscores the importance of selecting influencers whose values align with

brand objectives, ensuring promotional efforts resonate authentically with target audiences. The research highlights the value of combining qualitative factors such as relatability and tone with quantitative metrics like audience reach and engagement rates. These findings emphasize the necessity of culturally specific and strategically aligned approaches in addressing consumer behavior unique to Ghana's context.

The implications of this study extend beyond marketing strategies. It reveals how brands can navigate Ghana's socio-economic dynamics, characterized by community-oriented values and a strong emphasis on cultural authenticity. Social media influencers act as essential intermediaries, bridging the gap between corporate messaging and consumer realities. By fostering trust, cultivating loyalty, and engaging diverse demographic segments, influencers enable brands to adapt global marketing strategies to the intricate cultural fabric and economic realities of the Ghanaian market. This approach not only enhances local resonance but also ensures the effectiveness of universal digital engagement principles.

The study highlights the broader implications of integrating global innovations with localized strategies. It demonstrates how the strategic use of influencers allows brands to align with community values, strengthen consumer connections, and achieve differentiation in an increasingly competitive market. Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of cultural authenticity in driving engagement and profitability. By tailoring influencer strategies to local contexts, brands can foster deeper connections with their audiences and sustain growth over the long term.

This research contributes significantly to understanding the interplay between digital strategies and cultural specificity within Ghana's fast food sector. It provides actionable insights for practitioners by emphasizing the dual alignment of cultural relevance and digital efficacy. This approach not only builds trust and loyalty but also equips marketers with practical frameworks to thrive in diverse and vibrant economic environments. Ultimately, the study highlights how

culturally attuned marketing practices can shape the future of the fast food industry in Ghana and similar markets.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of social media influencers in Ghana's fast food industry. These recommendations are designed to address the objectives of the study while providing actionable steps for stakeholders to optimize influencer marketing strategies. Each recommendation aligns with the need for strategic selection, effective engagement, and measurable outcomes within this competitive industry.

Fast food companies should refine their influencer selection processes. Marketing teams must prioritize individuals whose personal values and audience profiles align closely with brand objectives. This approach ensures authenticity and fosters trust with target audiences. Detailed criteria, including both qualitative attributes like relatability and quantitative metrics such as engagement rates, should guide the vetting process. Public relations practitioners should conduct thorough background checks on influencers to verify credibility and maintain the brand's integrity.

To enhance consumer behavior, influencers should be trained to communicate brand messages effectively. Training programs facilitated by fast food companies would ensure that influencers understand product offerings and campaign goals. Brands must also encourage influencers to engage audiences using interactive methods, such as live sessions or giveaways. These strategies deepen consumer connections and build long-term loyalty. Collaborative efforts between influencers and marketing professionals will drive consistency and relevance in campaigns.

For sustained brand visibility and profitability, companies should adopt data-driven approaches to influencer marketing. Digital marketing teams should track key performance indicators, including reach, impressions, and conversions, to evaluate campaign success. Public relations

teams must also foster long-term partnerships with influencers to build credibility and ensure message consistency. By integrating these practices into their strategies, fast food companies can optimize resource allocation and enhance their competitive edge in the market.

5.5 Areas for Future Research

Future research should delve into the enduring effects of influencer marketing on consumer loyalty within Ghana's fast food industry. This study has illuminated aspects of visibility and profitability, yet the shifting dynamics of consumer-brand relationships merit deeper examination. Understanding how influencers contribute to long-term brand affinity and retention would provide actionable insights for marketing practitioners. Additionally, micro-influencers—with their smaller, yet highly engaged audiences—deserve focused exploration, particularly in their capacity to influence niche consumer segments effectively. Such inquiries would enrich understanding and offer practical guidance on optimizing influencer partnerships for sustained impact.

Another critical area for further investigation lies in the ethical considerations surrounding influencer marketing. Transparency in sponsorship disclosures and the accountability of influencers in maintaining brand trust remain pressing concerns. Research that examines the interplay between ethical practices and consumer perceptions could shed light on best practices for fostering trust and credibility in campaigns. Investigating these dimensions within Ghana's socio-cultural and regulatory contexts would not only advance academic discourse but also inform ethical standards tailored to the local market.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background

Tell me about yourself.

- *Follow-up: How did you get involved in your current role?*

Selection of Influencers

1. What is your understanding of the work of social media influencers?
2. What key attributes do you look for when selecting influencers for your brand?

- *Follow-up: Can you explain why these attributes are critical?*

3. How do you identify and evaluate potential social media influencers?

- *Follow-up: What specific criteria or tools do you rely on?*

4. How do you ensure an influencer aligns with your brand's values and goals?

Influence on Consumer Behaviour

1. How would you describe the impact of social media influencers on your audience's purchasing decisions?

2. What strategies make influencers effective in shaping consumer behaviour?

- *Follow-up: Can you share an example of a strategy that worked well?*

3. How do influencer endorsements affect customer loyalty?

Impact on Brand and Profitability

1. How do you monitor the effectiveness of the influencers you work with?

- *Follow-up: What metrics or feedback do you find most insightful?*

2. How do you evaluate the return on investment of using influencers compared to other marketing methods?

3. What challenges have you encountered in achieving profitability through influencer collaborations?

- *Follow-up: How have you adapted to these challenges?*

4. What opportunities have arisen from working with influencers in terms of profitability?

5. How do you address the challenges and opportunities associated with influencer marketing?

THANK YOU