Followers' Perceptions of Influencer Authenticity and Their Influence on Purchase Decisions

Case Study: Orange Cameroon Influencer Marketing Strategy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores followers' perceptions of influencer authenticity and purchase decisions within Orange Cameroon's influencer marketing strategy. Drawing on an abductive, qualitative design, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews (seven consumers, one influencer, and one Orange Cameroon staff) and a netnographic analysis of comedian-turned-influencer Godisz Fungwa's Facebook posts. Data were analysed using thematic-narrative coding, grounded in Social Influence, Elaboration Likelihood, and Parasocial Interaction theories and content analysis.

My findings reveal that followers interpret authenticity through responsive two-way interactions (prompt comment replies), the use of local dialect (Pidgin and Cameroonian French), and candid discussions of service limitations. These cues significantly boost engagement; viewers report daily check-ins, active participation in polls, and frequent sharing of behind-the-scenes content. Authentic endorsements also translate into concrete behaviours: many participants switched to Orange Cameroon after watching influencer demonstrations, while trust buffered price sensitivity and fuelled peer-driven trials. Persuasive content strategies like humorous storytelling, cultural references, and clear calls to action further enhance the impact of promotional posts by making them feel like entertainment rather than hard sells.

This research contributes to theory by illustrating how authenticity cues activate parasocial closeness and influence processing routes and offers practical guidelines for brands: foster genuine dialogue, localize messaging, embed product mentions in narratives, and align content timing with audience routines. Overall, authenticity emerges as a critical driver of digital marketing success in emerging-market settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is a mainstream approach for most brands to reach consumers via trusted voices on social media (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). These trusted voices turn to command more influence and get a lot of "followership" and engagement on social media based on perceived authenticity from their diverse audience (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). Influencers then capitalize on the above social media facets to coerce and shape the purchasing decisions of their fans to be customers of the brands they are brand ambassadors for (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020).

Orange Cameroon, a leading telecom brand, actively leverages platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram for promotional campaigns, often collaborating with local influencers to engage audiences (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Understanding how the perceived authenticity of these influencers affects consumer trust and how some metrics on social media (likes, comments, shares) translate into purchasing decisions is crucial for optimizing such campaigns (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Perceived authenticity in influencer marketing can be defined as the extent consumers view an influencer as genuine, sincere, and true to themselves (as opposed to just "doing it for the money) (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020).

As social media influencers have emerged and grown in prominence, they have altered the way today's consumers view advertising and branded products, thereby steering their purchase decisions (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Influencers have introduced a fresh type of opinion leadership through their presence on social media platforms (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). According to Belanche et al. (2021), the extensive reach of influencers is amplified by the rapid nature of information sharing online.

Belanche et al. (2021) points out that because of their high social standing and non-social media employment, traditional (conventional) celebrities frequently distance themselves from the typical customer. Lim et al. (2017) asserts that influencer marketing is way more effective than traditional digital marketing strategies in fostering brand loyalty and driving consumer engagement, an intensified trend in the emergence of social media.

Influencers hold substantial influence over consumer decisions and perceptions due to their prominent online presence (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). Their endorsements significantly impact purchasing behaviours and alter consumer perceptions about specific products (Lou & Yuan, 2019). While the study will explore how influencer authenticity might affect purchasing decisions, it will also recognize that the relationship is not linear. Consumers today are discerning and critical; they do not automatically buy every product endorsed by an influencer. Instead, various factors such as personal relevance, perceived credibility, and contextual influences play significant roles in changing consumer behavior (Ilieva et al., 2024).

Influencer marketing is a potent instrument for firms to engage with customers (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). As conventional advertising becomes increasingly ineffective and digital content continues to rise in popularity, businesses must alter their marketing techniques to successfully captivate their target audience (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Going to the point, the reason for this is because influencers play a major role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviours through social media, one of the biggest advertising channels we have right now. This is a transition which has occurred in several countries, including Cameroon, where influencer marketing is now used by businesses, such as Orange Cameroon, to engage with their target audience (Boojihawon & Ngoasong, 2018).

The purpose of this thesis is prompted by the increasing importance of perceived authenticity, as consumers are becoming more sceptical of traditional advertising and rely on influencers who they perceive to be genuine and trustworthy (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020). In fact, many studies have found that authenticity affects audience engagement and purchase intent (Moreno et al., 2021). According to Casaló et al., (2018) social media influencers are often viewed as more personable and trustworthy than traditional celebrities, thereby enhancing their ability to influence consumer behaviours.

 The digital landscape in Cameroon has grown rapidly through internet and social media adoption in recent times. Reports today indicate a consistent increase in social media usage led by the younger generations, resulting in marketing opportunities via apps like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram (Statista, 2022). It is the youth demographic as a whole, representing a large part of

mobile and internet users, that are influenced primarily by social media, as evidenced by their use of social media to communicate (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, & Young, 2015).

Although researchers such as Yuan and Lou (2020) and Weismueller et al. (2020) have linked authenticity to engagement and purchase behaviour, very little of this scholars examines African markets, especially Cameroon. A handful of studies are beginning to close that gap: Eteki (2024), for instance, showed that genuine social media interactions in Cameroon build consumer trust and strengthen brand image. By concentrating on this under-explored context, the present investigation expands the influencer-marketing literature and offers practical guidance for brands like Orange Cameroon on using credible influencer partnerships to maximise consumer impact.

Problem Formulation

Influencer marketing via social media is a powerful marketing tool, serving a critical role in consumer perceptions and behaviours (Duffett, 2020). Influencer marketing on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are actively employed by organizations such as Orange Cameroon in Cameroon to increase consumer engagement and influence purchasing decisions. When perceived authenticity is effective, the success of utilizing influencers to engage consumers, they can significantly change chief components of consumer trust and accountability in their engagement with brand content (Lee & Eastin, 2021).

Although influencer marketing continues to grow in practice, an important gap exists regarding how perceived authenticity specifically impacts follower engagement and purchase   behaviours in the context of the Cameroonian market, especially with large brands such as Orange Cameroon. This gap is important because the Cameroonian environment is quite different from the environments in Western or Asian markets. For example, in Cameroon, social and economic factors, trust values, community interaction, and digital literacy determine how consumers interpret and comment or respond to content from influencers. Influencer marketing in countries that are more digitally developed and mature is often driven by trends, style aesthetics, and lifestyles. Cameroonians potentially place more importance on reference points such as social proof, local standards, and community engagement in their follower interpretation. A brand such as Orange Cameroon needs an understanding of unique Cameroonian perceptions to shape influencer strategies authentically and inspire consumer engagement.

This thesis resolves this gap by investigating follower perceptions of influencer authenticity and purchase decisions. Through this examination, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations to optimise influencer marketing effectiveness for brands operating within similar contexts.

Main Question

How do followers perceive influencer authenticity, and in what ways does it shape their engagement and intention to purchase endorsed products or services on social media?

Specific research questions include:

- How do followers perceive authenticity in social media influencers promoting Orange Cameroon?

- What are the effects of perceived authenticity on engagement levels (likes, comments, shares)?

- In what ways do followers' perceptions of influencer authenticity shape their attitudes and intentions toward purchasing the endorsed products or services?

- What can brands like Orange Cameroon do to optimise influencer marketing?

Background of the Study Area

Orange Cameroon is a well-known name in the Cameroon telecommunications industry and the company performed an important role in shaping the communication and connectivity landscape in the country. After the liberalisation of the telecommunications market in 1998, a licence was awarded to Société Camerounaise de Mobile in June 1999, and the company was one of the first two operators in the country. The company launched its service in February 2000 under the name of Mobilis (Orange Cameroon, 2025). In June 2002, it changed its name to Orange Cameroon, a division of the French telecom company that bought the brand. In 2006, the enterprise launched its multimedia services and made its online debut (internet). In 2011, with the advent of mobile banking, the company, in partnership with BICEC Bank, launched its mobile money, known as Orange Money, and in 2022, it obtained approval as a payment institution. As of 2025, the company has about 12 million subscribers, with its primary goal aimed at providing the best service

in all aspects of telecommunications (telephone network, mobile package, internet speed, money transfer on mobile, etc.) and customer relations (Orange Cameroon, 2025).

Orange S.A. has been operating in Cameroon since 1999, with its headquarters in Douala and multiple branches across the country. This study will focus specifically on Orange's head office in Molyko Buea, South West Region, Cameroon.

Orange Cameroun S.A. is a telecommunications provider offering mobile phone and internet services to the Cameroonian market. It holds a significant share of the country's mobile service industry but faces strong competition from investment-driven rival MTN Cameroon, as well as from the state-owned Camtel (which holds a monopoly on landline services) and Nexttel (https://lca.logcluster.org/34-cameroon-telecommunications).

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Figure 1: Orange Cameroon Head Office in Douala Cameroon

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will provide an overview of previous research that is related to this study's topic, and critiquing key findings and theoretical contexts that assist in this research. It will also help to put into context how I interprets and utilises these concepts when exploring the topic of influencer marketing.

The literature review will begin by discussing the theoretical basis of the study, specifically reviewing Social Influence Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Information Processing Theory, and Parasocial Interaction Theory, in the context of social media influencer marketing. It will then proceed to examine literature on previous research of digital marketing, especially that of the telecommunication industry. Next, a review of the academic journal articles on social media influencers will be looked at, discussing how they shape consumer engagement and brand perceptions. This will be followed by an in-depth examination of purchase intentions and how influencers impact consumer decision-making processes.

The literature review will also assess how previous studies have applied these concepts and how this research will extend their application within the specific context of Orange Cameroon's influencer marketing strategy. In doing so, it will pay particular attention to existing studies that examine influencer marketing within the African telecom sector, a critical and under-represented area of research that gives this study its unique relevance. By systematically reviewing and integrating these insights, this section will establish a strong foundation for the research framework, guiding the subsequent analysis of perceived authenticity's impact on social media engagement and purchasing decisions in the telecommunications sector.

Theoretical Literature

Nowadays, influencer marketing is a crucial strategy used by telecom companies to mould customer behaviour, engagement, and purchase intentions. Recent studies apply various communication and psychology theories to understand how influencers sway telecom consumers. Below I will highlight four relevant theories – Social Influence Theory, Information Processing Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and Parasocial Interaction Theory – and their

findings in the context of influencer marketing, with examples relevant to telecom brands like Orange Cameroon.

Social Influence Theory in Telecom Influencer Marketing

This theory explains how people's attitudes and behaviours are shaped by social pressures and norms (Moussaïd et al., 2013). In the context of influencer marketing, this theory suggests that consumers are persuaded by influencers via normative influence (the desire to blend in or follow others) and informational influence (accepting information from a reliable source) (Saritha et al, 2019). A recent study using a Social Influence Theory lens found that social media influencers greatly enhance brand perception by boosting their credibility and relatability, which directly increases consumers' purchase intentions (Saritha et al, 2019) . In practice, telecom brands leverage these dynamics by partnering with popular figures whose endorsements validate the brand. For example, in Cameroon, carriers like Orange have enlisted local celebrities as influencers to attract public attention and shape how consumers view their services. Such campaigns effectively *"position the brand in the minds of the target audience"* and *"attract new users"*, even helping to revive stagnant brands (Fuh, N. V. 2024). These findings underscore that leveraging social influence – via respected community figures or online personalities – can encourage consumers to trust a telecom brand and follow others in adopting its services.

Information Processing Theory: Heuristics and Attention

Information Processing Theory relates to how consumers cognitively handle and interpret marketing messages (Sachdeva, 2020). Influencer content in telecom can be complex (e.g. explaining new plans or tech features), so consumers often use mental shortcuts (heuristics) to decide what to believe (Sachdeva, 2020). Research shows that repetition and message fatigue play a role: initially, repeated exposure to an influencer's post can improve consumer learning of the message, but over time too much repetition leads to boredom and diminished engagement (Geng, R et al., 2024). Moreover, certain influencer cues serve as heuristics that affect how deeply consumers process the content. For instance, an influencer's follower count can be a double-edged sword. One study noted that according to information processing theory, consumers devote *less* mental effort to scrutinising an advertisement when a highly popular influencer is involved (Gross, J et al., 2023). In other words, a massive follower count can act as a peripheral cue ("this person

must be credible if so many follow them"), reducing detailed evaluation of the message. On the other hand, a recent experiment in the tech industry (analogous to telecom tech products) found that more sceptical consumers responded better to micro-influencers with fewer followers and niche expertise than to mega-influencers with huge followings (Taeyeon Kim & Hye Jin Yoon, 2023) . This suggests that when consumers are inclined to process information carefully (low initial trust), they prefer influencers who provide substantive expertise over those who rely on broad popularity. For telecom marketers, the takeaway is that audience characteristics determine whether an influencer's popularity will boost persuasion or if a more expert, detail-orientated approach is needed to engage consumers' full attention.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Persuasion via Influencers

Elaboration Likelihood Model can be characterized as a dual-route theory of persuasion, which differentiates between the central route of persuasion (deep processing of content) and the peripheral route (surface processing of cues) (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986). Applied to influencer marketing, ELM predicts that consumers may be swayed through either route: by the quality of information an influencer provides or by attractive, easy-to-process cues like the influencer's charisma or style (Y.T. Erki, 2021) . Recent studies confirm both pathways are at work. In one analysis, researchers examined how social media opinion leaders impact consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions, explicitly focusing on ELM's two routes. They found that an influencer's argument strength (e.g. informative content about a telecom service) and source credibility (expertise and trustworthiness) drive persuasion through the central route, while traits like an influencer's attractiveness or fame act as peripheral cues that also significantly shape consumers' responses (Fuh, D. 2024). Essentially, a telecom brand's influencer campaign can appeal to a wider audience by appealing to the influencer's likeability and reputation (peripheral processing) and persuading tech-savvy consumers with convincing data and testimonies (central processing). For example, a 2021 study in the hospitality domain (analogous in using influencers for services) showed that consumers pay close attention to the source's quality and credibility when forming purchase intentions (Y.T. Erki (2021). Likewise, telecom consumers might scrutinize an influencer's knowledge about network services, but many will also be influenced by simpler clues like the influencer's positive tone or endorsement style. Overall, using ELM as a framework has helped validate that influencer marketing works on multiple cognitive levels – a critical insight for telecom brands crafting persuasive campaigns.

Parasocial Interaction Theory and Influencer-Follower Bonds

Parasocial Interaction Theory deals with the biased "relationships" that followers develop with media figures (Kowert & Daniel, 2021). With social media influencers, followers often feel a personal connection as if the influencer is a friend despite never meeting them. This sense of familiarity and trust can strongly impact consumer behavior (Andonopoulos et al., 2023). Josephine Yi, (2023) in a systematic literature review found that parasocial relationships between influencers and consumers have a positive outcome on consumer trust in the influencer, on their intentions to purchase recommended products, and on their evaluations of the brand being promoted (Josephine Yi, 2023). Key drivers of these bonds include the influencer's relatability and authenticity: factors like engaging interpersonal communication, intimate self-disclosure (sharing personal stories/experiences), and showing empathy toward followers all strengthen the parasocial connection (Josephine Yi, 2023). In a telecom context, brands like Orange have benefited from influencers who humanize the technology – for instance, a popular YouTuber or local celebrity who shares real-life stories about how Orange's services keep them connected. Such content cultivates pseudo-friendship feelings in the audience. Research indicates these feelings translate into higher engagement (followers actively liking, commenting, and sharing) and greater purchase intentions, because consumers trust recommendations from an influencer "friend" (Josephine Yi, 2023). In practice, this means a telecom influencer campaign that emphasizes personal storytelling and interaction (e.g. Q&A sessions about using a new 5G plan in daily life) can foster stronger loyalty than one with impersonal, purely informational ads.

Orange Cameroon, a leading telecom operator in Central Africa, provides a real-world example of how advertising strategies rooted in source credibility theory can shape consumer perception. Fuh (2024) analyzes how well-known Cameroonian celebrities particularly musicians, comedians, and footballers are used in billboard and televised advertisements to attract attention and enhance credibility. His research emphasises how emotional reactions (such as surprise, joy, and gestures of endorsement) and celebrity status help make brand messaging more memorable and compelling. However, Fuh's research focuses specifically on traditional celebrity endorsements, not digital influencer marketing. While his findings underline the power of celebrity in building brand appeal and shaping consumer impressions, this thesis aims to extend that understanding by looking at how social media influencers, who often build credibility through everyday relatability rather than fame, engage followers and influence purchase intentions in a digital, telecom-specific context.

By shifting the focus from billboard celebrities to digital influencers, this thesis addresses a distinct, underexplored dimension of brand communication within the Cameroonian market.

Review of Other Literature

Defining Perceived Authenticity

Perceived authenticity is defined by Lee & Eastin (2021) as a consumer's perception of social media influencers being genuine, sincere, and credible in endorsing brands (Lee & Eastin, 2021). Authenticity has dimensions of what constitutes authenticity, including trustworthiness, transparent, relatability, and expert, that make followers view influencer recommendations as trustworthy recommendations (Agnihotri, Bhattacharya, & Singh, 2023). Recent research suggests that authenticity influences influencer marketing effectiveness by influencing consumer engagement, trust, and ultimately purchasing (Duffett, 2020).

Lee and Eastin (2020) research highlighted the importance of influencer authenticity in consumer purchase decisions and suggest that sincerity towards a product can influence consumer perceptions. An additional example of a trusted review of a product form is electronic word-of-mouth authoring (EWOM) (Dwidienawati et al., 2020), Which has been demonstrated to be a successful driver of social commerce and influence amongst consumers. Investigating EWOM will further clarify the dynamic between influencers and consumer behaviour.

In practice, authenticity includes traits like trustworthiness, transparency, relatability and expertise (Lee & Eastin, 2021). For example, one model of authentic social media influencers (SMIs) includes (1) trustworthiness; (2) transparency - being honest about sponsored content or paid partnerships; (3) relatability - the influencer shares similar characteristics or experiences with the audience; and (4) expertise - the influencer has a knowledge about a product or topic (Lee & Eastin, 2021). These characteristics help followers believe the endorsements are genuine and sincere, which builds consumer trust; research finds that when an influencer is viewed as authentic, their audience is more likely to trust their recommendations, and view their content positively (Agnihotri, Chaturvedi, Kulshreshtha, K., & Tripathi, 2023).

Perceived Authenticity and Social Media Influencer Marketing

Perceived authenticity is multifaceted when it comes to influencer marketing:

- **Trustworthiness:** Followers perceive influencers as credible when they perceive the influencer to be authentic in recommending products that align with their values and experiences (Balaban et al., 2021).
- **Transparency**: When followers understand whether the post is sponsored in a clear and open way, followers perceive the influencer as being honest (Lee & Kim, 2021).
- **Relatability:** Influencers and followers may feel a stronger emotional connection when they have similar values or life experiences, which increases perceived authenticity (Ardley et al., 2022).
- **Expertise:** Followers deem influencers as more authentic and credible, therefore increasing trust, when they are perceived to have expertise when recommending products or services.

Social Media Engagement Metrics

Engagement metrics on social media (comments, likes, and shares), are the most notable metrics to describe the effectiveness of an influencer. Engagement metrics exhibit the audience's resonance and engagement, in addition to the potential effectiveness of a campaign led by an influencer (Yang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2024). Important factors in audience engagement are high levels of engagement which convey to audiences that content is relatable and trustworthy, which impacts audiences' perceptions of authenticity and their likelihood to think about product recommendations (Duffett, 2020).

While the term engagement is thrown around in marketing, it is imperative to make the distinction between evaluable engagement (the influencer's content closely relates to the product or service promoted) and in evaluable engagement (the influencer's content receives engagement but doesn't foster brand consideration or conversion). The effectiveness of engagement may entail more authentic conversations around the products or service the influencers are promoting - and influencing their audience's purchase intentions - and create consumer loyalty (Yang et al., 2024).

Impact of Engagement on Purchasing Decisions

Social media engagement serves as a pivotal mediator between perceived authenticity and consumer purchasing intentions. High-quality, product specific engagement increases both the

consumer's level of trust and likelihood of purchase manifold with increased levels of credibility, and social proof (Agnihotri, Bhattacharya, & Singh, 2023). Evidence suggests that, when engagement is driven by authenticity, parasocial relationships between influencers and their followers are significantly strengthened, which leads to increased purchase intentions (Lee & Kim, 2021). Therefore, successful influencer marketing involves an emphasis on authentic engagement, specifically in the service of promoting a product.

Optimising Influencer Marketing Strategy

In the case of brands like Orange Cameroon, optimizing their influencer marketing strategy starts with selecting influencers who authentically match and represent their brand identity and values. If influencers are transparently communicating that sponsorship is occurring and consumers perceive the influencer as more authentic, this will help to nurture consumer trust (Ardley et al., 2022). In addition, by proactively assessing engagement metrics to track the relevance and quality of engagement, brands can use this information to better identify influencers and improve their marketing campaigns, ensuring their marketing goals result in further consumer behaviour (Yang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2024).

Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers are digital content makers who develop significant audiences (Nashville Film Institute 2023). They routinely produce high-quality online content that aims to educate, entertain, or inspire their audiences to motivate and foster ongoing engagement with their followers. Whereas traditional celebrities chiefly use social media to share, promote, or discuss their work, influencers engage with their audiences through content creation, discussion starters, trend-setting, and developing interests within their communities; influencers engage with their followers through authentic connections. Influencers sometimes cooperate with brands to market products.

Social media influencers as a class have rapidly influenced marketing and media, and consumer behaviours, particularly as platforms like YouTube and TikTok have advanced the continued growth of online communities (Barta et al., 2023). By developing their audiences authentically, influencers have effectively built influence and thus become powerful actors in marketing and media.

Werner Geyser (2022) states that social influencers affect purchasing decisions based on their authority, expertise, position, or established relationships with their followers. Influencers usually pay attention on specific niches, and the scope of their following generally corresponds to the popularity of that niche. Influencers gain recognition for their expertise on particular subjects, regularly sharing content that attracts and retains enthusiastic followers.

In Cameroon, social media influencers (SMIs) have substantially contributed to promoting the country's cultural heritage, diversity, and tourism appeal, significantly benefiting the local tourism industry (Magno & Cassia, 2018). SMIs represent a modern category of third-party endorsers who use platforms such as blogs, tweets, and other social media forms to shape public opinions and attitudes (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). These individuals have credibility within specific domains, possess extensive follower bases, and effectively inspire their audiences to act based on their recommendations and viewpoints. Influencers have proven capable of attracting global interest and encouraging others to expand their digital reach (Gaines-Ross, 2003).

Identifying influential SMIs usually involves metrics such as daily blog traffic, the frequency of content sharing, and follower count. However, given that internet influence prioritises quality over quantity, such metrics should serve merely as preliminary evaluation criteria (Basille, 2009; Straley, 2010).

Influencers from Cameroon

According to data from 2022, there are 701 Cameroonian influencers with 1,000–10 million followers (Heepsy 2022). The top six influencers according to Heepsy (2022) include :

1. Mvemba Emilia (@biscuitdeme) – 2.6 million followers
2. Muriel Blanche (@muriel_blanche) – 1.6 million followers
3. Nathalie KOAH (@nathalie_koah) – 1.5 million followers
4. TENOR (@tenorofficiel) – 1.4 million followers
5. QUEEN MIMBA (@isblanchebailly) – 1.2 million followers
6. LOCKO (@lockofficial) – 1 million followers

Types of Influencers

Influencers can be grouped according to their audience size, the type of material they create, and the degree of their influence (Şenyapar, 2024). Another common method is by the industry they specialise in. This means that an Influencer may have lower credibility in one area, like having fewer followers, but have much higher authority in another (subject-matter expert or trust with their audience). For example, a popular artist or other mega-influencer may have millions of followers (high in follower count area) but not much credibility in marketing financial services. On the other hand, a micro-influencer who is a certified financial adviser with 10,000 followers may have much stronger influence in that niche based on their expert authority in that field and their relevancy to the audience. Micro- and nano-influencers can have very strong influence in their niche areas. They can be especially valuable to businesses that sell or advertise products to their specific audience.

Mega-Influencers

Mega-influencers are users of social media who have a large following. It is widely accepted that mega-influencers have at least one million followers on one platform, but this is not a hard line (Park, J. et al, 2021). Many mega-influencers are people who gained fame for some other reason (i.e., reality TV stars, musicians, athletes, actors); although, many other mega-influencers built their large audiences exclusively online and through the social media applications. Some, but not all, mega-influencers can collaborate with large brands in influencer marketing, given their reach.

Macro-Influencers

Macro-influencers are one level below mega-influencers and are generally more accessible for influencer marketing because of the presumption that they have many followers. Individuals with between forty and one million followers on a social media platform fall into this category (Park, J. et al., 2021). This group typically consists of two types of people: emerging celebrities who have yet to achieve widespread fame or successful online specialists with a larger audience than typical micro-influencers. Businesses engaging in influencer marketing often find greater value in the latter. Macro-influencers tend to have a strong presence and are effective at increasing brand awareness. Since they are more numerous than mega-influencers, brands may find it easier to collaborate with them (Brewster & Lyu, 2020).

Micro-Influencers

Micro-influencers are regular people who earned credibility in a particular niche, attracting a devoted social-media community around that speciality. Their sway stems less from sheer follower numbers and more from the deep engagement and rapport they enjoy with their audience (Park et al., 2021).

Definitions differ, but creators with roughly 1 000 – 40 000 followers on one platform are usually classified as micro-influencers. One Cameroonian example is @bueamakeupartist0, a makeup artist located in Buea who shares tutorials, client makeovers, and beauty tips with audiences on TikTok and Instagram. She also encourages bookings and promotes confidence and self-love (Favikon, 2025). They may not always be aware of a company's existence before being approached for collaboration. In such cases, businesses must first demonstrate their value to gain the influencer's interest. Since micro-influencers have built strong relationships with their followers, they are cautious about endorsing brands that could harm their credibility.

Because collaborations have to resonate with their followers, micro-influencers typically choose brand partners very carefully. Some may be willing to promote a company for free, while others expect compensation. However, regardless of the terms, no influencer wants to be linked to a brand that does not resonate with their followers (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019).

Nano-Influencers

Nano-influencers are the newest category of influencers to gain recognition. They are frequently experts in a particular or highly listed field, despite having a limited following (Şenyapar, 2024). They can be likened to a big fish in a small pond; despite having fewer than 1,000 followers, their audience is highly engaged and values their opinions. For instance, in Cameroon, individuals like *@healthwithjules* (a wellness coach with fewer than 800 followers) or *@localtech_martin* (a tech repair specialist posting tips and reviews) serve as nano-influencers who shape behaviour within tight-knit digital communities. While some brands may overlook nano-influencers, they can be crucial for businesses targeting highly specific markets. However, their impact is generally limited for most companies. Although they are cost-effective and hold significant influence within their small communities, reaching a broad audience would require collaborating with numerous nano-influencers. Their strong connection with their audience allows them to enhance product awareness, shape purchasing decisions, and build brand loyalty (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Interestingly, when it comes to *negative* outcomes or over-saturation, nano-influencers may have limitations. The 2024 meta-analysis by Lee *et al.* noted that nano-influencers (<10k followers) were less persuasive than celebrity endorsers in their overall effect. This suggests that an influencer can be "too small" to meaningfully sway consumers on a broad scale – nano-influencers might lack the perceived authority or reach of larger figures, limiting their persuasive impact in certain contexts. In practice, nano-influencers might excel at driving word-of-mouth within a tight community or niche, but brands should not expect a single nano-influencer to trigger massive behaviour shifts across a wide audience. Rather, nanos are often used in micro-targeted campaigns or in aggregate (many nano-influencers at once) to seed grassroots buzz.

Influence on Consumer Behaviour

Influencer marketing strongly shapes consumer actions, influencing everything from how likely people are to buy to how they interact with advertisements. The effectiveness often varies by influencer tier:

Mega-Influencers: Mega-influencers' massive reach can translate into significant persuasion power in the marketplace. A recent meta-analysis (Lee *et al.*, 2024) compared traditional celebrities to social media influencers of different sizes. It found that *mega-influencers (with 1M+ followers)* are *significantly more persuasive than celebrity endorsers* in driving consumer outcomes. In other words, top social media personalities can shape consumers' opinions and buying intentions more powerfully than conventional celebrities, largely because they interact with followers in a conversational, peer-like way that builds trust (Dong et al., 2024). further showed that mega-influencer posts yielded *greater purchase intentions* among their followers (versus micro-influencer posts). They dubbed this the "mega-influencer follower effect" (Dong et al., 2024), wherein followers of a mega-influencer responded with higher willingness to buy the advertised product, partly driven by a heightened *sense of control* (the idea that following a major influencer empowers consumers with insider knowledge or status) (Dong et al., 2024). These findings illustrate how mega-influencers can directly shape consumer behaviour, moving the needle on purchase decisions and other responses.

Micro- and Nano-Influencers: Smaller-scale influencers exert their influence in different ways. Micro- and nano-influencers often develop close-knit, highly trusting relationships with their followers, which can strongly impact consumer behaviour through relatability and personal

recommendation power. Research consistently shows that these smaller influencers can drive *engagement and trust* to levels that larger influencers may not sustain. Park *et al.* (2021) demonstrated that micro-influencers, due to their perceived authenticity, can more effectively persuade consumers under certain conditions (e.g., when promoting fun, experiential products). The authenticity of the micro-influencer "rubs off" on the brand, leading followers to feel more genuinely positive about the endorsement and be more inclined to consider the product. This translates into a higher likelihood of *favourable consumer behaviour* (like exploring or purchasing the product) when the fit is right. However, this effect can be context-dependent – for utilitarian products or broad messaging, the sheer reach of a mega-influencer might outperform the micro-influencer's authenticity advantage.

Macro-Influencers: Falling between mega and micro, macro-influencers (often 100k–1M followers) can offer a blend of reach and resonance. The 2023 JBR study found that smaller influencers (which would include macro-level) showed *greater prowess in engaging customers* compared to celebrity mega-influencers (Borges-Tiago et al. 2023). This implies macro-influencers may hit a "sweet spot" – large enough audience to create substantial impact, yet still perceived as more approachable or credible than the absolute biggest stars. Other studies suggest that there is an optimal balance of reach and relatability; extremely large influencers risk seeming distant or purely commercial, whereas mid-tier influencers can come across as both popular *and* trustworthy (Sicilia & López, 2023). This balance can lead to effective persuasion and consumer action. In summary, macro-influencers often serve as effective brand ambassadors who can both *increase awareness* and *stimulate consumer interest* or behaviour, albeit typically at a higher cost than micro/nano but with more scale than the latter.

Impact on Brand Awareness and Perceptions

Larger influencers can rapidly spread messaging to a broad audience, making mega-influencers especially powerful for creating widespread brand exposure. Their huge follower base can translate into high *brand awareness*. In a 2024 study, Dong *et al.* found that posts by *mega-influencers* led their followers to hold *more positive brand attitudes* toward the advertised brands compared to posts by micro-influencers (Dong et al., 2024). This suggests that mega-influencer campaigns can strongly influence how a brand is perceived, potentially due to the prestige or popularity associated with these influencers. That said, bigger is not always better for brand perception. Other research

indicates smaller influencers can excel in conveying *authenticity* and trust, which also boosts brand perception. Park *et al.* (2021) showed that micro-influencer endorsements often appear more *authentic*, which can enhance how the audience perceives the authenticity of the brand. This "David vs. Goliath" finding highlights that a relatable micro-influencer can sometimes generate stronger brand affinity than a mega-celebrity, at least in certain contexts (e.g., promoting lifestyle or luxury items where personal touch matters). Credibility is a key factor in these outcomes. According to a 2023 study comparing mega and macro influencers in the Journal of Business Research, brand outcomes are highly impacted by an influencer's perceived trustworthiness (Borges-Tiago et al. 2023). In that study, both brand credibility and endorser credibility were crucial for driving *customer brand engagement and brand equity* (overall brand value). Notably, influencer credibility had a direct impact on brand equity only in the case of mega-influencers (Borges-Tiago et al. 2023). Meanwhile, smaller influencers (macro-level) demonstrated a higher ability to engage customers, supporting the idea that "*less is more*" in certain aspects of brand relationship-building. In essence, mega-influencers' endorsements can strongly lift brand perceptions if the influencer is seen as credible, whereas somewhat smaller influencers might naturally come off as more genuine and thus foster engagement and positive sentiment in different ways. (Borges-Tiago et al. 2023).

Impact of Influencers on Purchase Decisions

Lim et al. (2017), in their study, found that businesses can extend their reach to younger audiences through social media platforms. Limt al. (2017) contend that social media influencers are considered both cost-effective and efficient for marketing. Due to the widespread presence of the internet, they have become the preferred choice for brand endorsements (Harrison, 2017). Brands can enhance their credibility by incorporating social media influencers into their campaigns, as these influencers engage with consumers in an organic manner, unlike celebrity endorsements, which may appear less genuine (Patel, 2016; Talaverna, 2015).

Influencers can significantly impact consumer purchasing behaviour. According to social learning theory, individuals adopt behaviours from their surroundings (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers are more successful at increasing product engagement and cultivating brand loyalty within particular audiences than celebrities, even though celebrity endorsements typically increase brand exposure. Additionally, influencer marketing yields an elevenfold return on investment

(ROI) compared to traditional digital marketing, as reported by a Nielsen marketing survey (Tapinfluence, 2023). Carefully selecting the right influencer for a marketing campaign plays a vital role in increasing purchase intent, which is achieved by fostering positive consumer perceptions.

Understanding the importance of social media in consumerism requires analysing how branding influences purchasing decisions. Hermanda et al. (2019) examined how social media influencers shape brand image and consumer purchase intentions. A survey of 219 participants revealed that individuals who aligned with a particular influencer's views were more likely to follow their purchasing patterns. The study further highlighted that influencers act as third-party sources of product information, directly influencing consumer purchase behaviour.

Multiple investigations have examined how online influencers shape consumer choices. For example, Ambarwati and colleagues (2019) analysed the case of a prominent beauty vlogger who commands an audience exceeding one million subscribers on YouTube. They reported that beauty creators employ electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) to forge closer ties with viewers, thereby moulding brand perceptions and purchase behaviour through their product commentaries. Their findings showed that a substantial share of consumers opted to purchase Wardah cosmetics after exposure to e-WOM produced by the influencer Tasya Farasya, underscoring the considerable sway trusted content creators hold over followers' buying decisions.

Bagchi (2022) emphasised the crucial role influencers play in promoting content on their platforms. Their impact on consumerism is driven by strong communication, trust, and engagement with their audience. Influencers understand that fostering a sense of community and reliability helps maintain their online presence. By being relatable and actively engaging with their followers, they create a bond that makes their endorsements more credible. Influencers who spotlight items in their own speciality, such as beauty, music, or culinary content, earn greater trust from followers who share those passions. Because that credibility is firmly rooted in a specific field, these influencers are typically more effective at boosting product sales for the brands they endorse.

Ultimately, influencers are aware of their significant impact on consumer behaviour and recognise that their endorsements can determine a brand's success or failure (Bagchi, 2022).

Consumer's Perception of Influencers

Borchers (2019) explores the significance of social media influencers in communication, emphasising their role in engaging stakeholders. These influencers blend commercially driven content with broader narratives, navigating between personal connection and public exposure, as well as authenticity and commercialisation (Borchers, 2019). By leveraging their social presence and interactions, influencers establish extensive networks that influence stakeholders. The U.S. influencer marketing industry experienced substantial growth between 2016 and 2018, increasing in value from $1.7 billion to $4.6 billion (Geyser, 2019). However, challenges remain in using social media influencers, particularly the risk of a paracrisis. This occurs when an influencer's actions contradict the image of the brand they are associated with, leading to negative fallout—a phenomenon tied to image transfer. Authenticity is a key factor in how stakeholders engage with influencer content.

Borchers (2019) argues that influencers can maintain authenticity in their promotions if they are transparent while interacting with stakeholders. Similarly, Glucksman (2017) examined how brands incorporate social media influencers into their marketing strategies, finding that influencer-driven campaigns strengthen the relationship between customers and brands. The most successful brand promotions occur when influencers engage authentically, fostering interactive consumer participation.

Influencers often create the illusion of a personal relationship with their audience. According to Almahdi et al. (2022), audiences who view an influencer as trustworthy and feel personally connected to them are much more inclined to follow the influencer's lead, particularly when it comes to endorsed products. Taillon et al. (2020) placed emphasis on the importance of understanding how influencers manage brand relationships. A connection between influencers and their audience is often built on shared interests and perceived commonality, such as belonging to the same community or having similar tastes.

In their study, Taillon et al. (2020) conducted an online survey to assess variables including attractiveness, likability, similarity, and perceived closeness. Taillon et al. (2020) treated purchase intentions, willingness to offer word-of-mouth endorsements, and audience attitudes toward influencers as their outcome variables. The findings revealed that a sense of closeness significantly

impacts how viewers perceive influencers and make purchasing decisions. For influencers to effectively maintain their platforms, they must strike a balance between building connections with their audience while also preserving personal boundaries.

The frequency of interaction between an influencer and their audience also shapes the viewer's perception. Positive engagement increases the likelihood that followers will develop a favourable impression of an influencer. Croes & Bartels (2021) examined the relationship between consumer behaviour and interactions with influencers, highlighting the drives behind following social media figures. Croes and Bartels (2021) observed that the more time young adults spend tracking influencers on social media platforms, the more important it is to grasp the motives and rewards they pursue. Using an online questionnaire completed by 415 respondents, the researchers identified several core motivations for following influencers: exchanging information, staying abreast of emerging trends, seeking entertainment, finding a sense of companionship, browsing out of habit, and gathering information. Their analysis reveals that even casual scrolling and passive interaction can place users under an influencer's sway. By providing amusement, insights, and involvement in trending conversations, influencers cultivate loyal audiences and shape purchasing behaviour.

Influencer Impact on Advertising Strategy

Schouten and colleagues (2017) explored the impact of endorsements on ad performance by running two experiments that spotlighted the roles of perceived credibility and audience identification. The first experiment centered on beauty and fitness goods, while the second tested endorsements for food and fashion items. Across both studies, participants felt closer to social media influencers than to traditional celebrities, viewing influencers as more authentic and dependable. This stronger sense of identification translated into higher advertising effectiveness when influencers fronted the campaigns.

Complementing these insights, Meredith (2020) underscored social media's growing weight in modern marketing, noting its power to nurture consumer relationships and reinforce brand loyalty. A pivotal driver of return on investment, Meredith argued, is the deployment of eye-catching visuals that inspire audiences to act. Her research reported that nearly half (44 %) of shoppers aged 18–34 have bought products because an influencer recommended them. She further stressed that

using clear key performance indicators (KPIs) enables brands to pinpoint the visual styles that spark the greatest engagement and, ultimately, drive results.

Kowalewicz (2022) explored how social media influences consumer purchasing behaviour. The study noted that in 2014, Facebook introduced the "buy" button, integrating social media platforms into direct sales strategies. A strong advertising approach on social media requires a well-managed budget, incorporating both promoted posts and organic methods such as trending hashtags. Collaborations with well-known influencers are a great method to draw attention within a particular niche since consumers are more likely to trust influencers they believe to be genuine.

Naderer et al. (2021) compared Instagram posts that openly declared a paid partnership with those that did not, analysing whether shared interests between influencers and their audiences shaped followers' responses and buying intentions. Participants were exposed to influencers with specific interests, and their responses were analysed. The results indicated that disclosure of sponsorships increased recognition of advertisements while also enhancing perceptions of influencer trustworthiness. This, in turn, positively affected purchasing decisions for both the influencer and the brands they promoted.

As technology continues to evolve, Generation Z has become more aware of digital advertising techniques. This shift requires brands to rethink their promotional strategies. Wolf (2020) stressed the importance of understanding how influencer marketing impacts this generation, particularly by analysing their preferences and attitudes toward influencers. The research contrasted micro-influencers with better-known figures by evaluating perceived authenticity, relatability, and trustworthiness, as well as followers' purchase intentions and overlapping interests. Survey findings confirmed the rising clout of influencer marketing and underscored the necessity of crafting content that targets specific audience niches. On this basis, Wolf (2020) argued that the evolving bond between influencers and their followers is reshaping contemporary marketing tactics. To effectively engage younger consumers, brands must prioritise authenticity and transparency, regardless of whether they collaborate with micro- or mega-influencers.

Engagement Levels and Audience Interaction

One of the starkest differences among mega, macro, micro, and nano influencers lies in their *engagement rates* – the frequency of comments, likes, shares, and interactions their content generates relative to their audience size. Smaller influencers tend to have higher engagement rates, indicating a more actively involved follower base. Empirical research backs this common industry observation: a study analysing over 1,400 influencers found that the group with the *fewest followers (nano-influencers)* achieved the *highest organic engagement levels* on their posts (Himelboim, I. & Golan, G. 2023). Conversely, as follower count increased, engagement rate decreased – especially for sponsored (paid) posts (Himelboim, I. & Golan, G. 2023). In other words, nano-influencers often punch above their weight in terms of engagement, while mega-influencers, despite huge reach, see a smaller percentage of their audience actively interacting. This may be due to closer relationships and a community feel in smaller followings, where followers are more likely to notice and respond to each post.

Other studies reinforce that micro and nano influencers cultivate more interaction per follower. Borges-Tiago *et al.* (2023) noted that smaller influencers exhibit a strong ability to *engage customers*, more so than big-name celebrities, supporting the idea that highly popular influencers can sometimes be "too big to sell" when it comes to deep engagement. Micro-influencers often engage in more personal communication with followers (replying to comments, direct messages, etc.), which fosters a sense of community and loyalty. This higher engagement can be invaluable for brands aiming to stimulate word-of-mouth and active discussion around products. Indeed, influencer marketing research frequently highlights engagement as a key metric of success, sometimes even more telling than raw reach. High engagement indicates that an influencer's audience is not just passively viewing content but is *involved* and potentially more influenced by the content.

It's also worth noting that different influencer tiers may use different content strategies that impact engagement. A recent study of Instagram content found that micro-influencers tend to produce a higher number and variety of sponsored posts compared to larger influencers, possibly because they are actively monetising their growing niche (Hogsnes et al., 2024). However, *nano-influencers are rarely involved in paid collaborations* in some markets (Hogsnes et al., 2024) – their content is often more organic and passion-driven. This can make nano-influencer posts feel more genuine, further encouraging follower interaction. Meanwhile, mega-influencers, who often

deal with many sponsorships, may see some engagement drop-off due to perceived commercialisation of their feed. Nonetheless, the *absolute volume* of engagement on a mega-influencer's post can be huge (given their million-plus following), which still offers brands a broad canvas of impressions and interactions, albeit with a lower engagement *rate* percentage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section explains the research methodology I used to examine how perceived authenticity and social media engagement influence purchase intentions in Orange Cameroon's influencer campaigns. Consistent with Kothari's (2004) view that systematic procedures are crucial for meeting research aims, it spells out the guiding paradigm, chosen approach and design, techniques for gathering and analysing data, measures to secure trustworthiness, and the ethical safeguards adopted, all to deliver a clear, transparent research process.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a fundamental framework comprising theories and beliefs that shape research assumptions about reality, knowledge, and methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which is appropriate for understanding how individuals perceive and interpret influencer authenticity in their social and commercial interactions with brands (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism suggests that knowledge is socially constructed and subjective, meaning that reality is shaped by individuals' lived experiences and perceptions (Rehman & Alharth, 2016). Looking at influencer marketing, customers assign personal meaning to influencers' content based on their own experiences, beliefs, and interactions with brands such as Orange Cameroon. Since this study seeks to explore consumer engagement and purchase intentions through influencers, understanding consumer perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness is crucial.

Ontologically, this study aligns with relativism, which posits that reality is not fixed but is shaped by social meanings and personal experiences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Consumers' perceptions of authenticity in influencer marketing vary depending on their previous interactions, brand loyalty, and personal values. Epistemologically, this study is aligned with interpretivism, which states that knowledge is subjective and context-dependent, and therefore my study seeks to understand how

individuals interpret and assign meaning to influencer authenticity within their lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Research Approach: Abductive Method

I will adopt an abductive research approach to explore the relationship between follower perceptions of influencer authenticity and their influence on followers' purchase decisions within Orange Cameroon's influencer marketing strategy. The abductive approach is particularly suitable as it bridges theoretical insights and empirical observations, fostering a dynamic interplay between existing frameworks and emergent findings rather than just concentrating on one aspect that is inductive or deductive. (Bryman & Bell)

This method will include findings from one influencer actively collaborating with Orange Cameroon as well as seven followers of these influencers. I did not succeed in interviewing the second influencer, Godizs Fungwa, alias Richard. However, this did not affect the research outcome, as my supervisor suggested that I should do a content analysis of Godizs Fungwa's posts about Orange Cameroon. This method enables me to capture rich insights that reflect the lived experiences of those involved in the influencer marketing process.

Research Design

A research design is the overarching framework that knits a study's elements into a coherent whole, guiding orderly data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). In this inquiry, a qualitative case study design is chosen to examine how perceived authenticity affects social media engagement and purchase intentions within Orange Cameroon's influencer marketing initiatives. A qualitative research design is very useful when we want to understand complex phenomena in their natural context (Yin, 2018). I chose this approach because it yields deep, nuanced insights into how participants experience and perceive the topic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Data Collection

To gain a well-rounded view of influencer authenticity, social media interaction, and purchasing behaviour within Orange Cameroon's marketing framework, the study draws on both first-hand data and existing secondary sources. Secondary data was gathered through analysis of an

influencer's promotion post for Orange Cameroon (Godizs Fungwa). Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. In the context of this study, data collection was conducted using a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews (Kallio et al., 2016) to gather in-depth insights into how influencer authenticity is perceived and integrated within Orange Cameroon's marketing strategy.

I employed a random sampling strategy to select a total of nine participants who could offer valuable perspectives on the research topic. Specifically, the sample consisted of two influencers, who were mentioned during interviews with followers. All of them are currently collaborating with Orange Cameroon. Seven loyal followers of these influencers who are also customers of Orange Cameroon were randomly selected among those who responded to my post on my WhatsApp status and those that I sent WhatsApp text messages to directly asking them if they were willing to participate in the interview. I then select participants based on criteria such as level of education, number of social media subscribers, influence within their networks, and professional position within Orange Cameroon. I also reached out to my elder brother, who is a sports football TV analyst and has worked in close collaboration with the orange staff and their influencers. He was able to connect me to Orange Cameroon Marketing Director and the influencers.

Interviews were conducted via WhatsApp Call, depending on participant availability and preference. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide, blending prepared questions with the freedom to ask impromptu probes arising from each participant's replies. This flexible structure was essential for exploring the complex and subjective nature of authenticity in influencer marketing. The interviews were audio-recorded with respondents' consent, ensuring that the data captured was accurate and could be transcribed for detailed analysis

Reflection on AI Use

I used chat GPT during my research to get idea on literature review and also how to structure my work. See scree short of the text in appendix

Data Analysis

In this section, I will explain how the data analysis was carried out. The nine interviews conducted with 7 followers, one Orange Cameroon staff member and one influencer were analysed using thematic analysis. To ensure thorough analysis, I apply Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach (Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006)) to examine my data.
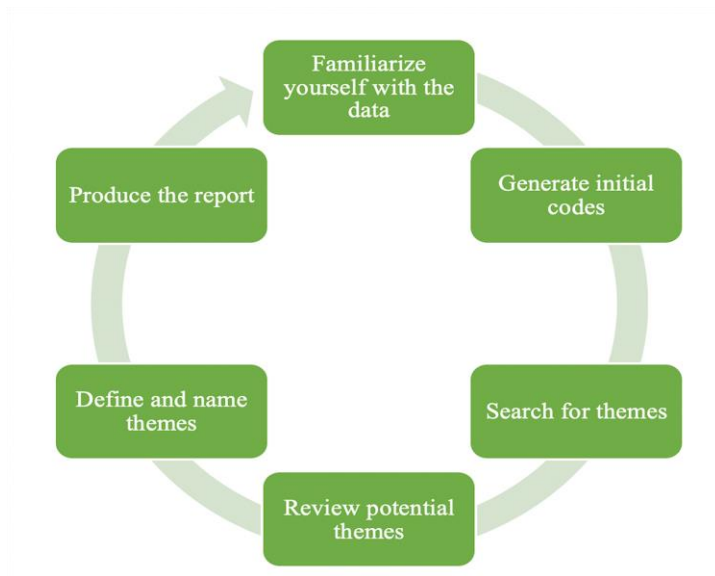
Figure 1: Thematic Analysis Process Based on Braun and Clarke's Six Phases (2006)

Phase one: Data Familiarisation

In the initial step of my analysis as a qualitative researcher using thematic analysis, I examined my transcripts and focused on rereading them to understand their content. Reading over the transcripts ensured thoroughness in mapping out themes and patterns. By applying phase one to the dataset, I was able to establish a firm data foundation which is useful for the other phases to come (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 5).

After conducting the interviews and correcting the transcripts, I went ahead to print them all and read through, since it is easier for me to read many pages on paper than on the computer. I also went through the different transcripts with the research question in mind.

Phase two: Generating codes

My focus here was to bring together ideas from the transcript that have and transcend the same meaning. These codes summarised the data and also provided an interpretivist lens for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With guidance from the research questions, I selected ideas with the same meaning and marked them with the same colour pens on the transcript. For example, ideas on platform preference were marked with the blue pen, while those for content type preference were marked with the red pen.

After this, I went ahead to create a table where I grouped all of them together, as you will find in tables 2 and 3. The table had three columns: one for the statements made by the interviewee, another for the group name and the last for the description of what the interviewee was talking about. This made it easy for me to come up with my analysis, as these were just extracted from the table during the analysis proper.

Phase three: Searching for themes

The purpose of generating themes is to find patterns that are coherent and are meaningful in the data that can be used for further description (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 7).

The codes I had generated in phase two now formed the basis for my themes. The codes were collapsed to 7 themes. Themes like Authenticity Signal, Persuasive Content Strategies and Platform Genesis and Discovery constitute some of the themes that were generated from the data. The themes focused on answering the research questions which are tied to followers' perceptions of the authenticity of social media influencers, effects of perceived authenticity on engagement levels, and how these shape their attitudes towards purchasing products.

For the sake of clarity, I will talk more about this in the Analysis proper section.

Phase four: Reviewing potential themes

Here, I took a second look at the themes to see if they were generated based on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8). In order to determine whether the themes accurately represent the data, I created a particular degree of coherence and compatibility between the codes and the themes. I

took care to ensure that some themes didn't overlap with one another or be overly general. Additionally, I made sure they related to my research questions. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9).

To make sure my themes were connected to the study, I reviewed my themes again to find out if they were related to the codes, and this exercise still left me with seven themes.

Phase five: Defining and naming the themes

This step involved clearly defining each theme's uniqueness and significance by summarising its essence in a few sentences. It also included selecting relevant themes that effectively represent the research's objectives. To ensure comprehensive coverage here, the analysis should reference themes from the entire dataset, demonstrating that key points are addressed broadly and meaningfully (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). Below is an explanation of the themes.

Authenticity signal: I developed this theme to understand how followers understand the genuine behaviours of influencers.

Authenticity effect on engagement: This theme was developed to understand how influencers' authenticity can translate to measurable engagements.

Authenticity and purchase intentions: This theme was developed to perceive authenticity, shape attitudes and purchase intentions.

Persuasive content strategies: This theme explains the type of content that captivates followers' attention. Collaboration and campaign dynamics: I developed this theme to understand the criteria Orange Cameroon uses to choose influencers to work with and also balance influencers' creative and brand talking points.

Unique Cameroonian influencer practice: This theme explains the unique features of most Cameroonian influencers. Platform Genesis and Discovery: This explains how followers started using social media and influencers they followed.

Phase six: Producing the Report

In this last step of the analysis, I worked on seamlessly combining analysis and writing.

According to Braun and Clarke, the writing should effectively reference and elaborate on analytical elements in a convincing manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). For clarity, I decided to present the themes here instead of doing so under phase three. I will call it the analysis section.

This study also employed a systematic content analysis of Godisz Fungwa's Facebook posts promoting Orange Cameroon. All relevant static images, video excerpts, and giveaway/event announcements were collected from the start of his ambassadorship through May 2025. This complementary content analysis allowed me to triangulate participants' perceptions with real-world influencer practices, deepening my understanding of how authenticity signals and persuasive strategies manifest in actual social media campaigns.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring credibility, reliability, and validity is fundamental to maintaining methodological rigour in this study (Guba, 1981). In this qualitative inquiry, credibility is achieved through triangulation, where insights from semi-structured interviews are cross-verified with secondary data sources such as industry reports and analysis of influencer social media posts. This method enhances the authenticity and robustness of the results by providing multiple perspectives on influencer authenticity and its impact on social media engagement and purchase intentions. Additionally, the interview responses will be carefully compared against existing theoretical frameworks, ensuring that the insights are consistent and grounded in established research.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in the context of the telecommunications sector in emerging economies, transferability is defined as "the degree to which other researchers or users of the research can ascertain the applicability of the study findings to other participants, places, or times." Although this study focuses on Orange Cameroon, the insights gained regarding influencer authenticity may be relevant to other telecom brands operating in similar digital and economic environments.

Using a methodical approach to data collection and analysis preserves reliability. The research approach is consistent and repeatable because of the use of semi-structured interviews and thorough thematic analysis. Detailed documentation of all data collection procedures further supports the study's reliability (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025).

Finally, confirmability ensures that the study's findings are gotten from the data rather than the researcher's bias. To achieve this, transparent and replicable coding techniques will be employed during the analysis, and direct quotations from interviewees will be included to support the interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of paramount importance in this study, ensuring that all participants are treated with respect and that their rights and data are rigorously safeguarded. In line with academic guidelines (Saunders et al., 2019), the research adheres to several key ethical principles throughout the study.

Firstly, informed consent is obtained from every participant. Secondly, confidentiality is maintained by anonymising all participant responses. This measure ensures that any identifying information is removed or coded, thereby protecting the privacy of the participants. The collected data will be stored in a secured location and will only be accessible to the student researcher, which fosters trust and encourages honest and open communication during the interviews.

Thirdly, participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Participants were made to understand that they can decide to withdraw from the research at any stage without any negative repercussions. This principle reinforces the autonomy of the participants and ensures that their involvement is based solely on their willingness to contribute.

Lastly, data security is a critical component of the ethical framework for this study. All data collected will be stored securely in password-protected digital files and locked storage facilities when applicable. I also used a reliable transcription service. The data will be used exclusively for academic purposes and will be disposed of in a secure manner upon the completion of the research.

Ethics and Reflexivity

Because my study involved both personal interviews and analysis of publicly available social-media posts, I took care at every step to respect participants' rights and to reflect critically on my own position as a researcher. Before each semi-structured interview, I shared a plain-language information explaining the study's aims, how I would use the data, where it would be stored, and how anonymity would be preserved. All seven consumer participants and the influencer gave

written consent. I assigned pseudonyms and removed any identifying details, place names beyond the city level, exact ages, or workplace identifiers so that no one could be traced from quotes.

When reviewing Richard's Instagram and Facebook posts about Orange Cameroon, I worked only with material he has posted publicly; still, I treated his content with the same respect, focusing on engagement metrics and message framing rather than personal background.

Triangulation

There are four triangulation methods that are normally used to validate research. It helps us have a better understanding of the research problem and eliminate bias in the research at all levels (Bhandari, 2022).

Method triangulation: this involves using a variety of methods to collect data. The set of data is

compared to ensure similarity. In this study, three methods of data collection have been used, namely, semi-structured interviews, systematic content analysis of influencers' social media posts and participant observation.

Data source Triangulation: This involves collecting data from different types of people. This method enables us to identify different perspectives about the subject so that a more representative conclusion may be reached. As far as this research is concerned, data was collected from a diverse group of people, including single adults and couples with and without children.

FINDINGS

Profile Analysis of Godisz Fungwa's Orange Cameroon Promotions (Dec 2024–May 2025)

Godisz Fungwa, fondly known by his comic persona "Richard", emerged as a key influencer for Orange Cameroon in late 2024. A popular Cameroonian comedian and content creator, Godisz uses humour, local language (Pidgin English and French), and relatable storytelling to engage his Facebook audience. From the moment he began advertising for Orange Cameroon, his posts have combined comedic skits, promotional announcements, and giveaway campaigns. These field notes chronicle his Orange-sponsored Facebook content from its inception to present (May 2025),

highlighting each post's content, tone, engagement, hashtags, calls to action, and the broader influencer marketing patterns at play.

Table 2: Netnographic Summary of Key Facebook Posts by Godisz Fungwa (Richard) Promoting Orange Cameroon

S N	Links	Post Description
1	https://www.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/videos/1218263519277558/?app=fbl	"Country Too Sweet for Leavam" Comedic reel launching the #FêtesEnFeu holiday campaign; uses Pidgin slogan to tie Orange to festive local pride
2	https://www.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/videos/603294845511708/?app=fbl	"This Christmas is hard" Humorous skit lamenting holiday expenses, tagged #OrangeCameroun #FêtesEnFeu #LaDinguerie to blend empathy with brand visibility
3	https://www.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/videos/dirty-december-with-orange-cameroon-nafire-f%C3%AAteenfeu-ladinguerie-orangecameroun/1235881141044353/	"Dirty December with Orange Cameroon" High-energy video celebrating end-of-year fun, embedding Orange branding in comedic narrative
4	https://www.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/posts/dirty-december-with-orange-cameroon-nafire-f%C3%AAteenfeu-ladinguerie-orangecameroun/1108275717971948/	Static post "Dirty December with Orange Cameroon…" Bold image post with campaign hashtags, generating strong reactions without a hard sell
5	https://www.facebook.com/100063685892831/posts/pfbid02bJVjmJ5Vm8anmTmUeMtXZnUWSjoA8Xsw78b6VWKpMJ9VzM9TY8PdtttvxQSaE3Vrl/?app=fbl	"Bafoussam père…" Event-hype post for Orange's Feu sur Scène concert in Bafoussam; uses local greeting and FOMO call ("let's turn up")

6	https://m.facebook.com/story.php?id=10006368 5892831&story_fbid=1129267835872736	"An Orange Cameroon customer in Nkongsamba won 5 million…" Prize-winner announcement with on-site photo, reinforcing campaign credibility
7	https://m.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/photos/ orange-cameroon-has-a-question-for-its-clientsquestion-how-healthy-is-your-walle/1125871496212370/	"How healthy is your wallet?" Interactive poll framed as Orange's question, driving high comment rates through relatable humor
8	https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=112 3855773080609&set=a.328693505930177&typ e=3	"Why is Orange Cameroon reminding…January has 5 Fridays?" – Meme post poking fun at a long month, tagged #NaFiire #FêtesEnFeu #LaDinguerie for ongoing campaign cohesion
9	https://www.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/vide os/best-marital-advice/2285727921828929	"Best Marital Advice" – Video promo urging fans to use the Orange Max It app for surprise giveaways; ties in brand's 25th anniversary messaging
10	https://m.facebook.com/GodiszFungwa/photos/c ongratulations-to-the-lucky-winnersorange-cameroon-gifting-seasonsnafiire-f%C3%AAtes/1112017397597780/	"Congratulations to the lucky winners" – Photo post celebrating Orange Cameroon's gifting season winners, boosting social proof and FOMO

**January 2025: Relatable Post-Holiday Humour and Calls to Action**

After the holidays, Godisz seamlessly shifted his content to address the *post-festive blues* and New Year offers. January is typically a tough month financially for many, a fact he leveraged both for comedy and for promoting Orange's solutions. His posts in this period combined interactive humour with informative deals, maintaining audience interest while subtly directing them to Orange products.

Interactive Poll "How Healthy is Your Wallet?" (Early Jan 2025)

Right as the New Year set in, Godisz engaged fans with a playful question on behalf of Orange: *"Orange Cameroon has a question for its clients! Question: How healthy is your wallet/purse right now?"* He offered multiple-choice answers:

A. In consultation;

B. In the emergency room;

C. In … (likely "intensive care" or a similarly witty option).

This post's tone was humorous and highly relatable, essentially poking fun at how broke people feel after December. The use of a medical metaphor for one's wallet ("emergency room") is a local joke format that fans found hilarious. Importantly, this was content explicitly prompted by Orange (he introduced it as Orange's question), yet it didn't read like an ad; it read like a meme. Engagement was strong: followers flooded the comments with their votes (many humorously admitting their wallet was "critical" or "dead on arrival"), turning the post into a communal laugh. By stirring this conversation, Godisz achieved Orange's likely aim: identify a consumer pain point (money woes) in a light-hearted way *before* presenting a solution. There wasn't an immediate call-to-action to buy in the post itself; rather, it primed users for upcoming Orange promotions (e.g., special January data offers or bonus programmes to "revive" their wallets). This mirrors a broader influencer tactic of audience participation – using polls and jokes to drive engagement and subtly lead followers to consider their needs (here, affordable service in a lean month).
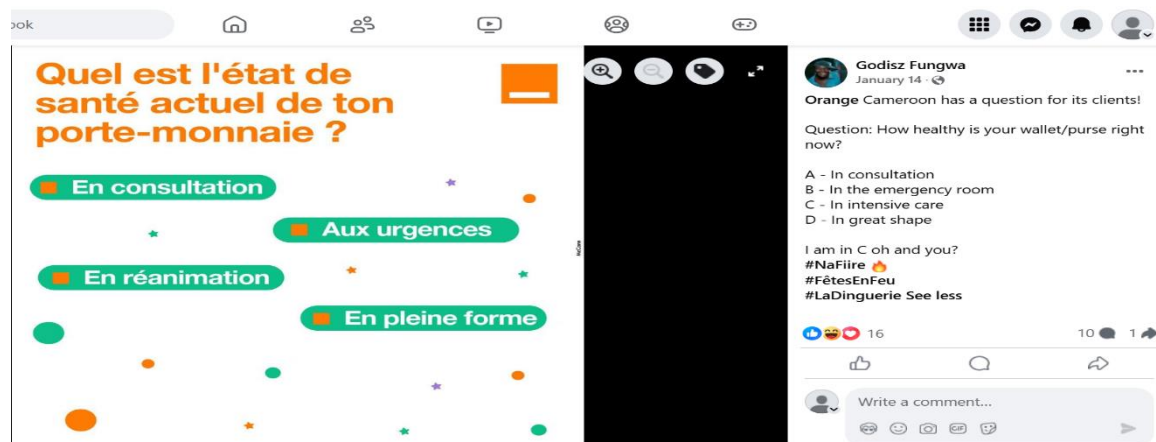
Picture 1: Promoting Orange Cameroon through a poll that triggers engagement

5.1.4 "January Has 5 Fridays" Meme Post (Jan 2025)

In another witty update, Godisz shared a viral observation: *"Why is Orange Cameroon reminding its customers that January has 5 Fridays? Hahaha, January, go longgggg, ohhh!"* This caption references Orange's own social media messaging – apparently, Orange had pointed out the rare length of that January (5 Fridays, i.e., a protracted month). Godisz jumped on it, laughing *"January go long ohh"* in pidgin (meaning "this January will feel very long!"). The tone was comical and a bit cheeky, essentially laughing *with* Orange's social media team and the audience about a common sentiment. By reposting or referencing Orange's content, he acted as an *amplifier* for the brand's social campaign while adding his personal twist. Engagement level was high: fans reacted with 😂 and "so true!" comments, sharing the post because it reflected their own dread of a long, cash-strapped January. Hashtags like #NaFiire, #FêtesEnFeu, and #LaDinguerie remained in use, keeping the holiday campaign label alive into the new year. There was no direct call to action here except to share a laugh, but implicitly it kept Orange's name positively circulating on Facebook during a time people typically complain about telecom expenses. This fits an influencer pattern of humanising the brand – Godisz took a corporate social post and translated it into the informal, humorous register his followers love, making Orange appear more in tune with everyday jokes.
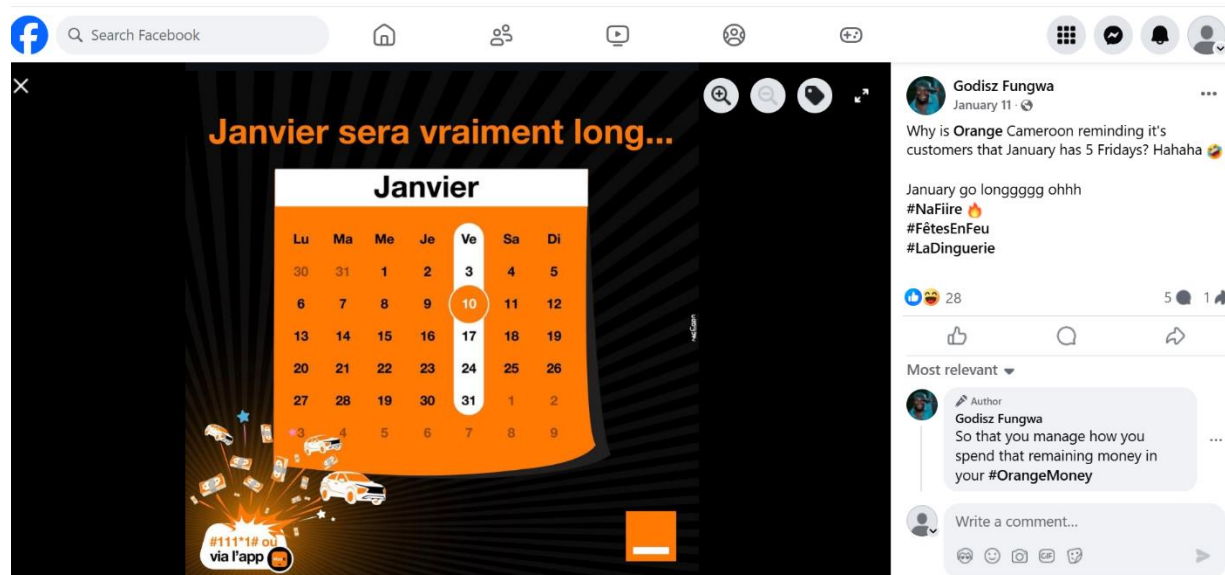
Picture 2: showing Richards Promotion strategy for Orange Cameroon

5.1.5 Promoting Orange's New Data Offer (Jan 2025)

Godisz also made straightforward promo posts in an informative yet colloquial tone. For instance, he highlighted a special data deal: *"Do you even know that in all the noise, Orange Cameroon is making data affordable for all? Imagine 2.2GB for just 1200* frs"." Here, he directly touts an Orange package, but notice the phrasing "in all the noise", which sounds like a friend giving you a tip amidst chaos. By positioning the offer as a cool secret fans might have missed, he maintains a peer-to-peer voice rather than a salesman's. The content is promotional (it clearly mentions the price and volume), with hashtags #NaFiire, #FêtesEnFeu, and #LaDinguerie appended to maintain campaign consistency. The call to action is implicit: he's nudging readers to take advantage of the deal (*Orange is "making data affordable",* so go get some). Engagement came in the form of enquiries and endorsements; followers tagged others like "see this offer!" or asked "is it valid for all customers?" which Godisz (or other Orange community managers) could answer. Such direct promo posts sprinkled among comedic ones ensured that the influencer campaign actually drove awareness of Orange's products. The key was the tone; by couching the ad in Godisz's casual delivery, it likely avoided the tune-out that blatant ads might trigger.
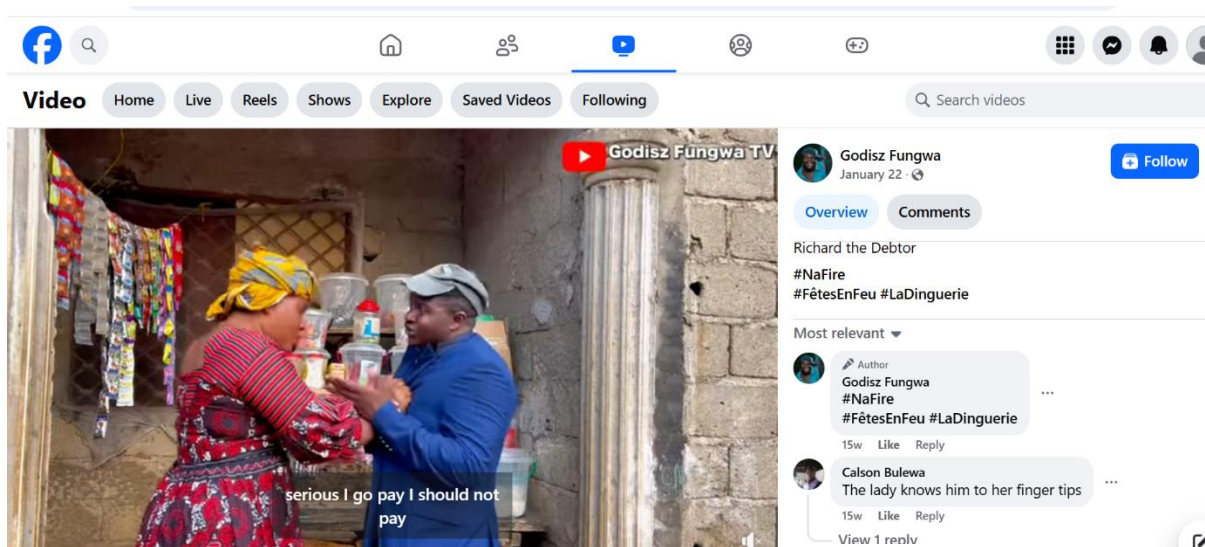
Godisz Fungwa
19 Feb · 🌐

Do you even know that in all the noise, **Orange** Cameroon is making data affordable for all? Imagine, 2.2GB for just 1200frs.
#NaFiire 🔥
#FêtesEnFeu
#LaDinguerie

Le forfait qui nous met bien

Pulse Kolo2Cent via Max it

1200U = 2,2Go

Pulse et les Jeunes

Picture 3: Promoting Orange Cameroon Data Bundles

5.1.6 Comedy Skit: "Richard the Debtor" (Video, Jan 2025)

Godisz's comedic storytelling continued into January, now touching on New Year themes. "Richard the Debtor" was a short film/skit he released around mid-to-late January. In this sketch, Richard (his character) humorously deals with mounting debts after the holiday spree – perhaps evading a creditor or concocting excuses, all played for laughs. The Facebook post introducing the video carried the campaign hashtags #NaFiire, #FêtesEnFeu, and #LaDinguerie, though the content of the video itself was more about the character's misadventures than Orange. The tone was pure comedy, a bit of farce mixed with relatable social commentary (many viewers likely saw themselves in *"January debtor"* mode). Godisz often posted a teaser caption and then directed fans, *"New Richard comedy just dropped – check the link in the comment section to watch,"* thereby driving traffic to his YouTube or Facebook Watch for the full video. Engagement was substantial: within hours, *"Richard the Debtor"* amassed ~10,000 views on Facebook, with hundreds of likes and amused comments ("Richard will kill me with laugh!", "This is my life this January □"). While Orange isn't overtly mentioned in the skit, the branding is indirectly present via hashtags and the context that this content is part of Orange's sponsored series. This follows a known influencer marketing pattern where the brand enables entertaining content that audiences would watch for its own sake; the

positive association with the brand is built by *osmosis*. By making people laugh during a typically dreary month, Godisz-as-Orange effectively nurtured goodwill; viewers subconsciously credit Orange for bringing them this comic relief (and thus feel more inclined to patronise the brand). It's a clever use of storytelling – solving no obvious problem, but delivering emotional value (humour) under Orange's banner, which in turn bolsters audience trust and affinity.

Picture 4: Harsh Taging Orange Cameroon #NaFiire, #FêtesEnFeu under his comedy skit

5.1.7 Sustaining the Momentum in 2025: "Everyone Wins" and New Campaigns

Even after the holiday campaign officially wound down, Godisz Fungwa continued to partner with Orange Cameroon into 2025, promoting new initiatives and keeping fans engaged with fresh content. The themes evolved to highlight Orange's "everyone wins" philosophy and milestone celebrations, with Godisz maintaining his mix of humour, authenticity, and clear calls to action.

 In early 2025, Orange launched an "Orange Bonus" programme via its Max It app, a gamified loyalty scheme where users could accumulate points (by buying offers) for chances to win big prizes (cash, trips, etc.). Godisz became a mouthpiece for this campaign. On Facebook and other platforms, he urged his followers to participate: *"Yes!!!! Everyone wins with Orange. Subscribe to your Orange Bonus plans via Max it, and enjoy all it has to offer…"*. This caption (from an Instagram cross-post on April 5, 2025) shows his enthusiastic call to action – he explicitly tells

people to subscribe using the app. The tone is upbeat and encouraging, reinforcing the idea that *"tout le monde va win"* (Orange's French-English catchphrase meaning "everyone will win"). In a TikTok video, he further exclaims*, "Join the fun and stand a chance to win prizes by using Orange's Max IT App!"*, showcasing the app interface and how to play. These posts were more directly promotional than the holiday skits – essentially digital "how-to" commercials – but Godisz kept them lively, often using phrases like "join the fun" rather than "participate in this promotion", maintaining a friendly vibe. Engagement came in the form of shares and comments from followers tagging others, e.g., "Let's try this and win something, bro!" The use of hashtags evolved; while #FêtesEnFeu gave way to new tags like #2025CestTop (Orange's New Year slogan) in official channels, Godisz's posts focused more on the core message (often foregoing many hashtags in favour of a direct tag to @OrangeCameroun). This suggests that as the partnership continued, his content became a bit more straightforward in branding. The influencer pattern here is clear: employing a trusted creator to drive app adoption and participation in a promotion. Godisz's stamp of approval ("I'm hyped about this, you should try it too!") likely lowered scepticism and got more fans to engage with Orange's campaign than traditional ads could.

Picture 5: Showing Everyone Wins Promotion strategy

Orange's 25th Anniversary Celebrations (April 2025)

Orange Cameroon marked 25 years of operations in 2025, rolling out special offers to thank customers. Godisz contributed by sharing and amplifying these milestone moments. For example, in April he posted a graphic from Orange with excitement: *"Orange is celebrating 25 years with you and giving you even more!"* He tagged Orange's official page and used campaign hashtags, indicating a sponsored post. The content typically highlighted extra bonuses or gifts Orange was offering as part of the anniversary. Godisz often expressed gratitude to the fans and excitement about Orange's longevity (aligning with Orange's own messaging of thanking customers). While these posts were less about comedy and more about brand goodwill, Godisz still injected a personal touch, perhaps sharing a nostalgic note or a local phrase of congratulations. Engagement on such posts was positive, if slightly more subdued than the humour skits; fans left congratulatory messages to Orange or asked, "What are the new surprises?" By involving Godisz in the anniversary communications, Orange leveraged his credibility: as someone who has "been on this journey" with the audience, he could authentically congratulate Orange and encourage fans to celebrate the brand's success as their own. This reflects an influencer marketing pattern of long-term brand ambassadorship beyond one-off ads. Godisz became identified with Orange's brand story over months, which can deepen audience trust. Followers see that he genuinely aligns with the company's values, implying Orange is worthy of loyalty.

Audience Engagement and Influencer Marketing Patterns

Godisz Fungwa's Orange Cameroon campaign demonstrates how a skilled influencer can harmonise brand messaging with personal style to build engagement and trust:

Use of Humour and Cultural Language

Virtually all of Godisz's Orange-related posts employ humour, from slapstick video scenarios to witty one-liners. By speaking in Pidgin English ("January go long ohh", "e no easy ohhh"), local French slang, and popular catchphrases (*"na fire"*, *"la dinguerie"*), he resonates deeply with the Cameroonian youth and urban audience. This cultural relevance makes the promotional content feel organic. Instead of a telecom company telling people about data plans, it's "Richard" cracking

a joke about them which humanises Orange's image. This aligns with best practices in influencer marketing, where relatability and authenticity drive persuasion.

Storytelling and Character Persona

Godisz's character "Richard", a loveable everyman dealing with everyday problems, is central to the storytelling. Orange's services often appear implicitly as *solutions* or background enablers in these mini-stories (e.g., if Richard can celebrate a "dirty December", perhaps it's thanks to Orange's network; if he's stressed about money, Orange's bonuses might help). By weaving Orange into narrative content, he avoids direct advertising and instead uses storytelling to create positive associations. Viewers become invested in Richard's comedic saga and, by extension, appreciate Orange for "sponsoring" the entertainment or providing plot devices (like the giveaway that rescues someone with 5 million!). This method reflects a broader pattern where influencers act as *content creators* for brands, making ads that don't feel like ads.

High Engagement Through Interaction

The posts were crafted to spur engagement, not just passive likes, but active participation. We saw this with the wallet health poll (fans commenting on their state), the event invite (fans tagging friends to join), and contest posts (followers eagerly checking if they or someone they know won and sharing the news). Godisz often prompted viewers to "check out" something (his vlog, a link, or the MaxIt app) or answer a question, effectively creating *calls-to-action* that felt like friendly suggestions rather than corporate commands. The result was a lively comment section on many posts and extensive sharing of his content – exactly what Orange would hope for from a virally minded campaign. Metrics across platforms underscore this success: for example, his orange bonus TikTok garnered over 700 likes in short order, and a comedy reel amassed 600+ comments. On Facebook, while exact like/share counts aren't always visible without login, the available data (views, etc.) and anecdotal evidence show strong audience involvement. This indicates that the campaign did not just reach people; it engaged them, a key sign of influencer marketing effectiveness.

In summary, Richard's netnographic profile (Table 2) shows that by embedding Orange Cameroon promotions within comedic skits (SN 1–3), relatable memes and polls in Pidgin and French (SN

7–8), genuine giveaway announcements (SN 6, SN 10), and succinct data-bundle tips (SN 9), he consistently signals authenticity to followers answering our first research question. His use of humour and local language makes promos feel like peer-to-peer advice, which our interviewees describe as "real" and trustworthy, driving them to like, comment, share, and even switch providers on the spot (RQ2). In turn, this heightened engagement translates into stronger positive attitudes and concrete trial behaviours (RQ3), as followers report subscribing to bundles immediately after Richard's demos and tagging friends to join in giveaways. For Orange Cameroon, these findings imply that influencer campaigns should prioritise culturally resonant storytelling and interactive formats rather than overt sales pitches to optimise both engagement and purchase intent (RQ4).

Profile Analysis: Aunty Felicia (Macro-Influencer)

Background & Reach.

Dr Kwoh Elonge, known on social media as Aunty Felicia, is a 37-year-old comedian-turned-influencer with academic credentials in journalism, sociology, educational psychology, and governance. Her audience is 66% female, predominantly aged 25-44, and concentrated in Douala, Yaoundé, Buea, Limbe, and Kumba (F8, influencer).

Selection Criteria & Brand Fit.

He accepts partnerships only when there's a strong "brand-influencer" fit. For example, he will not promote betting platforms (due to her educator role and majority-female audience) or untested traditional medicines lacking scientific approval. Instead, she gravitates toward health (e.g., telemedicine) and education brands that align with her personal values. *(APP8) influencer*

Content Strategy & Authenticity.

Aunty Felicia weaves product messages into her comedy routines, maintaining credibility by personally testing each service beforehand. She explained,

"I first… make sure that what I'm saying is truthful… before putting it out. When the audience tries it and sees that what I said is true, trust is there." (F8, influencer).APP8 L00:22:29

Analysis of Interview with Orange Cameroon Staff

The marketing director, who oversees digital strategy for Orange Cameroon, frames influencer partnerships as an extension of their broader campaign activation:

"A whole lot of them are where we activate a commercial campaign or product campaign or a brand campaign based on the strategy of when we activate everything." (staff) APP9 L00:08:46

In her view, influencers uniquely carry Orange's message into communities that traditional media can miss:

"We cannot really say that everybody will sit in front of their TV ... but somebody will because he's following a specific influencer ... and he's anticipating their message" (staff).APP8 L00:09:36

On evaluating impact, the marketing director explains that influencer work is treated as a non-revenue-generating line item within the A&P budget.

"So the return on investment can only be if the media objective has a specific percentage when calculating the budget of the A&P advertisement and publicity ... If the objectives were made, then we assume that their contribution was made" (staff) APP9 L00:10:55.

In practice, this means Orange sets clear engagement or reach targets in advance and judges success by whether those targets are hit.

When asked about authenticity challenges, the marketing director is candid:

"Most influencers see themselves as doing the company a favour rather than a collaboration" (staff). APP9 L00:11:52

He stresses that true collaboration requires influencers to research Orange's values and services:

"Influencers have to also research ... and see where their pitch ... merges with Orange, with the company's way of working as well" (staff). APP9 L00:12:36

Without that deeper understanding, content often feels copied or disconnected.

On the wider Cameroonian influencer ecosystem, the marketing director notes both promise and pitfalls:

"Every little influencer in Cameroon is very toxic, and there is very little originality" (staff).

She laments that many have not embraced influencing as a business:

"Some of them feel that influencing is just … they don't treat it as a business construct … your name becomes the brand, and the lifestyle you lead becomes the brand" (staff).

Yet she also acknowledges the talent within this emerging field, noting that those few who do innovate grow "very, very fast".

Presentation of Findings from followers

Table 2: Open Codes and their explanation

Data Example & Source	Open Code	Data Description
"I started using social media, I think that was 2013. Yeah, that's when I started."	Social Media Initiation	When and why the participant first began engaging with social platforms.
"The first influencer I ever followed was Richard."	First Influencer Followed	The very first content creator the user chose to follow and their motivation.
"I now focus on TikTok as well as LinkedIn… for now I use mostly LinkedIn and Facebook."	Platform Preferences	Which social channels participants prioritize and why.
"It's almost like every day I go on the platform."	Engagement Frequency	How often users actively consume influencer posts.

"I just enjoy his comic nature… when I'm stressed… I laugh."	Content Enjoyment	Emotional appeal humor, suspense that keeps followers coming back.
"Their content aligns with my life interests… some are musicians, some comedians."	Influencer Characteristics	Creator traits (genre, style) that resonate with followers' personal interests.
"They create a comedy skit and then… bring in 'go subscribe to Orange Cameroon data bundle.'"	Promotion Strategy	Techniques for embedding brand messages seamlessly in regular content.
"I always get the Orange Cameroon daily bundle… I rely on Orange data bundles very often."	Purchase Behavior	Actual buying actions directly attributed to influencer prompts.
"I engage a lot with their… behind-the-scenes content… product review and lifestyle posts."	Content Type Preference	Formats (BTS, reviews, lifestyle) that attract the most engagement.
"When they interact by replying to comments… makes me feel they're real."	Relatability Through Interaction	Two-way dialogue as a key cue for judging influencer authenticity.
"He uses Pidgin in his posts it feels like he's talking to me."	Use of Local Dialect	Local language choices that enhance personal connection and credibility.
"I like behind-the-scenes clips of him choosing an outfit… appreciate the creativity."	Behind-the-Scenes Engagement	Fascination with content that reveals the influencer's creative process.
"I personally had engaged with one of the influencers. I've paid them to promote my services."	Entrepreneurial Engagement	Followers hiring influencers for their own marketing,

		illustrating trust in their persuasive power.
"I rely on Orange data bundles very often because I do not trust other providers like MTN…"	Brand Reliance	Deep loyalty to a brand cultivated by influencer endorsement.
"A few of them embed the advertisement in the comedy entrances… you barely recognise it was really about publicity."	Embedded Advertising Subtlety	Subtle weaving of ads into entertaining content.
"I started as a comedian then became an influencer… if you're successful as a comedian, you grow a loyal following."	Comedian-to-Influencer Trajectory	How personal brand evolution (from comedian to influencer) shapes credibility.
"Orange Cameroon always gives you key talking points… sometimes even detailed info about the product."	Brand Guidance & Orientation	The structured briefs and talking points provided by the brand to influencers.
"I found a way to integrate product placement into my comedy so it flows without stopping the viewer's experience."	Content Integration Technique	Creative methods for delivering sponsor messages without breaking narrative flow.
"We use custom promo codes… we gauge how many downloads they've had from the Aunty Felicia pages."	Performance Tracking Method	Use of unique codes or links to measure influencer-driven conversions.
"It's mixed… you have creative freedom, but you will stick to the message."	Creative Freedom Boundaries	Balancing brand requirements with personal style.

"People back home have network problems… it's tricky but I have to be authentic."	Authenticity vs. Reality Challenge	Navigating product limitations while maintaining honest endorsements.
"Influencing in Cameroon is not monetized… very rare to see monetization locally."	Market Monetization Constraints	Structural barriers affecting influencers' ability to earn at home.
"We select or influencers based on the following, we look at influencers that are void of any scalars and that their message is a message that is generally healthy."	Influencer Selection Criteria	Brand-side guidelines for choosing the right creators by values, audience, and message fit.
"we share information that have to do with the brand."	Brand Alignment Assurance	Ongoing coordination to keep influencers on-brand and accurate.
"Effectiveness is assessed through interactions and views."	Engagement Metric Use	Reliance on likes, shares, comments, and view counts to gauge campaign success.
"If community sentiment is largely negative, we rethink or discontinue the collaboration."	Sentiment Analysis	Monitoring follower feedback tone to adjust influencer strategy.
"Mostly on weekends."	Engagement Timing Specificity	Certain days or times when users preferentially engage with influencer content.
"They embed Cameroonian culture childhood memories, local jokes so I feel right at home."	Cultural Nostalgia Appeal	Use of shared cultural references to strengthen emotional bonds.

"Video demos by influencers made me switch my internet to Orange Cameroon right away."	Service Adoption Influence	How influencer explanations directly drive trial and switching behavior.

Table 3: Axial codes and their explanation

Themes	Constituent Open Codes	Description
Authenticity Signals (RQ1)	Relatability Through Interaction; Use of Local Dialect; Communication Credibility; Authenticity vs. Reality Challenge	How followers identify genuine behaviour-two-way replies, Pidgin usage, honest disclosures when network issues arise that signal an influencer is "for real."
Authenticity's Effect on Engagement (RQ2)	Engagement Frequency; Engagement Timing Specificity; Content Type Preference; Behind-the-Scenes Engagement; Story Reposting; Engagement Metric Use; Sentiment Analysis	The ways in which authentic cues translate into measurable engagement (likes, comments, shares) for example, higher daily interactions when influencers respond promptly.
Authenticity & Purchase Intentions (RQ3)	Purchase Behavior; Service Adoption Influence; Brand Reliance; Peer Recommendation; Price Sensitivity	How perceived authenticity shapes attitudes and intentions: e.g., "I switched to Orange Cameroon right after watching the demo," or "If it's too pricey, I'll skip it."
Persuasive Content Strategies (General)	Content Enjoyment; Influencer Characteristics; Persuasive Techniques; Promotion Strategy; Embedded Advertising Subtlety; Cultural Nostalgia Appeal; Visual Appeal; CTA Clarity	The narrative and design tactics (humour, local jokes, clear calls to action) that make promotional posts compelling without feeling like hard sells.

Collaboration & Campaign Dynamics (General)	Influencer Selection Criteria; Brand Guidance & Orientation; Creative Freedom Boundaries; Content Integration Technique; Performance Tracking Method; Brand Alignment Assurance	How Orange Cameroon and its creators negotiate the partnership choosing the "right" influencer, balancing brand talking points with creative latitude, and measuring results.
Unique Cameroonian Influencer Practices (General)	Comedian-to-Influencer Trajectory; Entrepreneurial Engagement; Market Monetization Constraints; Cultural Nostalgia Appeal	What sets Cameroon apart: many influencers began as comedians, audiences even pay them for promotion, yet monetization remains rare—while tapping childhood memories cements bonds.
Platform Genesis & Discovery (General)	Social Media Initiation; First Influencer Followed; Platform Preferences; Hashtag Usage	The user journey onto social media where they started, whom they followed first, which apps they favor, and how they use hashtags to discover Orange Cameroon offers.

Theme 1: Authenticity Signals

For Orange Cameroon followers, authenticity is seen as relatable and trustworthy. Followers value transparency, such as disclosing sponsorship and using the products genuinely. All my interviewees spoke about influencers making use of the products they promote. This aligns with Hovland et al.'s (1953) Source Credibility Model, specifically the trustworthiness dimension. As **Follower 2 (F2)**

"If they show themselves using that product in real life, I will follow their recommendation" (App 2, *L00:11:09*).

A second core signal, mentioned by 5 followers, is the use of local dialect, particularly Pidgin English. Drawing on Tajfel & Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory, when influencers adopt the audience's vernacular, they trigger an immediate "ingroup" connection. **Follower (F1)** observed,

Also, the fact that they use the common parlance of Cameroon. Sometimes they use the lingua franca of Pidgin English, which is more relatable in the streets. That makes me think that they are more authentic in what they are doing (F1, follower).

Most followers agreed that dialect use deepens perceived credibility and emotional resonance.

Finally, candid messaging both affirming service strengths and admitting hiccups cements authenticity in followers' eyes. Here an influencer spoke up. **Influencer A** emphasised,

"For me, it's really about honesty… its credibility. I will not advertise anything misleading." (influencer A) APP 8 L 11:14

And when network outages strike, frank acknowledgements "preserve trust rather than erode it" (comment reported by 6 of 8 followers).

"Sometimes you actually market a product… People back home have network problems… It's tricky, but I have to be authentic." (influencerA) APP 8 L 31:05

By openly voicing limitations, influencers turn potential brand liabilities into moments of shared understanding, an effect almost unanimously praised.

Theme 2: Authenticity's Effect on Engagement

Perceived authenticity influences followers' engagement directly, which is always driven by the format of the content and the way the influencer interacts.

Content type preference: As mentioned by 3 of the interviewees, followers engage with content that is entertaining, for example, comedies. In contrast**, F7 (APP7 L** 09:12) mentioned that lifestyle posts are also engaging.

Video format and entertainment: Captivating videos that include a bit of fun, as mentioned by 3 followers, or videos which reflect our everyday life are highly preferred for engagement (F1

APP1 L 10:36). Specifically praised a vox pop video where influencers directly engaged with the public, which built trust. '*They were doing a Vox Pop. And to me, that was very interesting because somehow, they were asking the targeted customers in the streets where the African nation's cup was taking place.*''

Motivation for engagement: According to F6, F5 and F7, discounts are a strong motivator for engaging with Orange Cameroon content, as they lower the perceived risk of trying a new product. F3 APP 3 L 12:15 said that "*if an influencer comes with a new service that Orange is offering, that probably seems like it's a solution to the Internet issue, for example, that I've been having. I may want to pay attention and like it and then go ahead and try.*

Theme 3: Authenticity and Purchase Intentions

Followers who trust an influencer's sincerity are far more likely to move from mere interest to concrete buying decisions. Through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), perceived authenticity strengthens positive attitudes toward Orange Cameroon, boosts the subjective norm (social pressure to conform), and enhances perceived behavioural control (confidence in the purchase process), all of which drive purchase intentions and eventual behaviours.

Authentic Endorsements Drive Trial

Most followers reported that when influencers weave product use into their own narratives rather than delivering a detached sales pitch, the recommendation feels credible enough to prompt immediate trial. As Follower 1 (F6) described,

"Yeah, yeah. The first thing is that I am someone who is very sceptical. So if I don't have, if I don't have a justification beyond reasonable doubt, I will not engage and I will not even buy the service".

So only videos – convincing videos – because I don't just not, even if it's a flyer or ordinary post, I will not engage; I will not get it. But if there's a video that gives an explanation of why I should get that product and why it's important, I get to, you know, be more convinced that it's a good product. Yeah." (F6,) APP 6 L 17:43 - 18:57

Only two participants said they'd still want to compare options first, but the majority treated influencer demos as personal testimonials rather than abstract ads lowering barriers to service adoption.

Social Proof and Peer Influence

A strong ripple effect emerged when friends or family echoed an influencer's message. Many participants recounted that peer recommendations reinforced what they saw online. For example, **Follower 1 (F1)** said,

"It also gladdens their heart, and it goes a long way to make families and friends also want to align with these companies because they are not only bringing foreign influencers, but they are also bringing those influencers in the community that they know and they have grown up seeing." *(F1) 15:33, 17:51*

This is further supported by comments from influencer posts (Richards) on Orange Cameroon bundles.

A follower on Richard's promo post noted that:

"My sister told me to try the bundle, so I did, and I've never looked back"
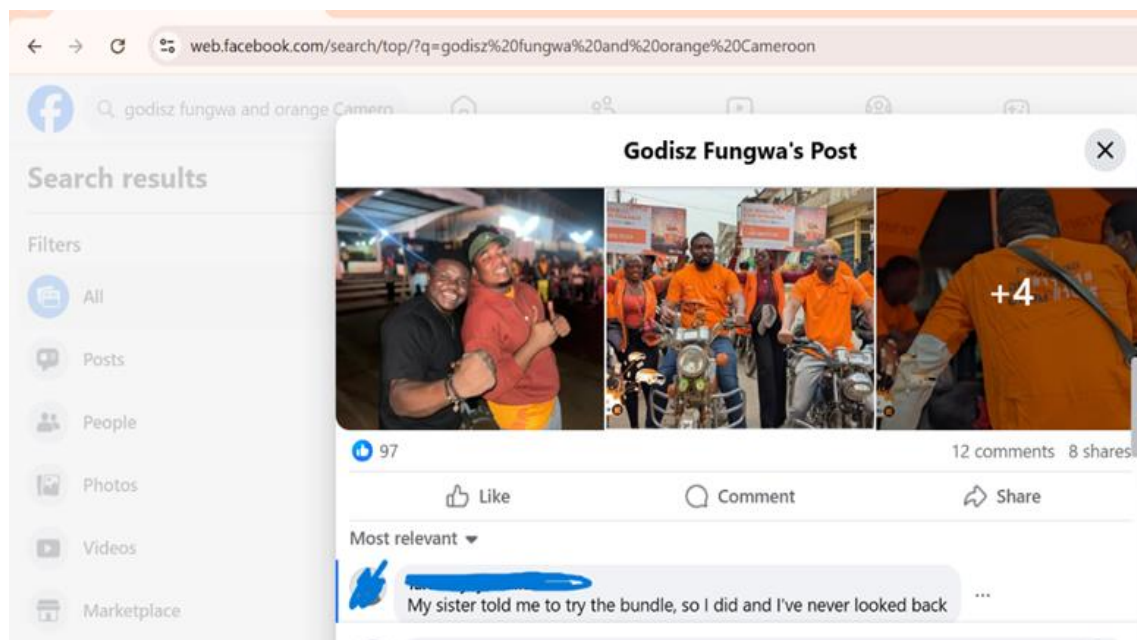
A couple of followers noted that they might wait for more reviews if their close contacts hadn't tried it yet, but the prevailing view was summed up as "If it worked for me."

Brand Reliance and Loyalty

Six of seven followers described a shift from trial to default preference. **Follower 6 (F6)** explained,

"I rely on Orange data bundles very often because I do not trust other providers like MTN…" (F6, follower).

Only one follower admitted occasionally checking competitors' offers, but the predominant pattern was clear: repeated authentic interactions anchored Orange Cameroon as the trusted, go-to provider.

Purchase history based on influencers' recommendations: F3 mentioned she has not purchased anything because of influencers' promotion. F1 and F7 stated that they, as F1 APP 1 L 08:32, said he switched to orange due to influencers' promotion. *"When I saw the promotion on this influencer's speeches about Orange Cameroon Internet services and how much better the services were, I switched, and I started using their Internet services on my mobile phone. And it helped a lot."*

DISCUSSION

This study's results provide a valuable understanding of how influencer authenticity drives followers' engagement and purchase intentions within Orange Cameroon's influencer marketing. Through a triangulation of interviews, a content analysis, and engagement metrics, the study makes clear how authenticity works as a driver of consumer behavior. The findings are discussed in terms of the research questions and theoretical frameworks used in this study.

Authenticity as a multi-dimensional construct

The study has verified authenticity as a multi-dimensional construct identified in prior literature to be comprised of trustworthiness, transparency, relatability, and expertise. Followers termed influencers as authentic when their content resonated with cultural normatives, personal principles, and collective experiences. For example, one follower argued that the use of Pidgin and an open exchange regarding Orange Cameroon's limitations in service was sincere and credible. The findings here support Lee and Eastin's (2021) conceptualization of perceived authenticity as a combination of sincerity, transparency, and expertise.

From the perspective of social influence theory, the authenticity reinforced both normative and informational influence. Followers bonded with influencers not only as brand ambassadors but credible peers who understood their context and needs. It points to the need for cultural localization and personal relevance to develop authenticity signals.

Impact on Engagement Metrics

The study revealed that authenticity played a big role in the levels of engagement, exemplified by the high level of interactions with Godisz Fungwa's Orange Cameroon posts. Engagement levels peaked with content involving humour, use of local dialects and interactive features including polls. These engagements increased parasocial bonds and provided followers with feelings of personal connection to the influencer.

This finding offers supporting evidence for the parasocial interaction theory which posits the audience establish quasi-friendships with media figures through consistent, relatable, and engaging interactions. The tendency to like, comment on and share posts was greatest with posts that most reflected the influencer's authentic personality whilst aligning to their own culture. This shows that an increase in parasocial closeness is likely to enhance the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

Authenticity and Purchase Intentions

Perceived authenticity and purchase intentions were described as a key theme. Followers indicated they trust endorsements more that seem authentic, feeling that trust even outweighed price sensitivity when they made purchase decisions. Many followers noted that they changed to Orange Cameroon services after seeing influencers demonstrating their products. This reinforces the clear link between authenticity and consumer decision-making.

When considering the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), two useful insights can be taken from this discussion. First, that authenticity is a central and peripheral cue of persuasion. Followers can actively process influencer content (central processing), while also needing leniency for the possible distraction of peripheral processing (use of humor and storytelling allowed them to perceive promotional posts as entertainment, not advertising). Second, both of these routes inform an understanding of the need to create content, not just to tap into cognitive dimensions but also emotional dimensions of consumer behavior.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are offered to practitioners:

Foster Genuine Dialogue

Brands should encourage influencers to engage in real-time conversations, responding promptly to comments and direct messages. Explicitly allocate campaign budgets for community management to sustain two-way interactions and cultivate trust.

Localize Content Strategy

Marketing teams must collaborate with influencers to embed culturally resonant language, humor, and local references. Workshops on regional dialects and consumer preferences can support influencers in delivering truly relatable messaging.

Embrace Transparent Imperfections

Campaign guidelines should permit influencers to acknowledge minor product or service shortcomings in a lighthearted manner. Training on constructive framing of candid disclosures will help transform weaknesses into authenticity-enhancing moments.

Optimize Posting Schedules

Utilize audience analytics to identify peak engagement windows aligned with target demographics' daily routines (e.g., lunch breaks, evening leisure). Synchronize content releases to maximize visibility and drive habitual check-ins.

Balance Metrics with Autonomy

Develop clear performance indicators (e.g., unique tracking codes, affiliate links) without stifling creative freedom. Periodic check-ins with influencers can ensure alignment with brand objectivesnm while preserving the originality of content.

Extend Platform Diversification

Encourage influencers to experiment across multiple social media channels (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels) to reach diverse audience segments, adapting authenticity cues to each platform's conventions.

Limitations and Future Research

The research contributes important insights; however, there are weaknesses. Although a sample size of 30 is acceptable for qualitative exploratory research, the sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could increase sample size that includes consumers from different demographic elements and countries across different African markets in order to validate or expand on these insights. Another aspect that could be explored is the use of quantitative data - for example: click-through scores, conversion data, etc., to better assess the use of authenticity as it relates to consumer behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The discussion outlined in this paper demonstrates the importance of authenticity in stimulating engagement and subsequent purchase intentions in influencer marketing. The research brings together theoretical frameworks with empirical data and highlights the importance of understanding the various dimensions of authenticity in emerging markets. In doing so, this paper provides both theoretical contributions and practical implications for best utilising influencers.

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