



INFLUENCER MARKETING AND CONSUMER'S LIFESTYLE BRANDING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF AUDIENCE PERCEPTION

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Abstract:

This study examines how influencer marketing affects consumer lifestyle branding in Tanzania, focusing on the role that audience perception plays. The research uses Source Credibility Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Perception Theory. It collects and analyses data from a group of Tanzanian urban young people, using a quantitative method with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model results showed that the constructs were reliable and valid. The structural model analysis showed that influencer marketing affects audience perception ($\beta = 0.686$, $p < 0.001$). Perception then affects lifestyle branding ($\beta = 0.564$, $p < 0.001$). The mediation analysis revealed that audience perception mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and lifestyle branding ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$). The model showed average explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.471$ for perception, $R^2 = 0.318$ for branding). It also showed good predictive relevance. The findings highlight the significance of genuine influencers and credibility in shaping brand identity adoption. Companies should invest in long-term influencer partnerships, create content that fits the culture, and manage perception with a plan. This study adds to the literature about digital branding in Sub-Saharan Africa and it shows that perception acts as a link between marketing influence and lifestyle alignment.

Keywords:

Influencer Marketing, Audience Perception, Lifestyle Branding

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing has become a prominent force in advertising, and it has changed how people see brands and how they buy things. Reports show that influencers play big roles in every stage of buying; they bring notice, make people curious, create desire, along with causing people to act. Influencers affect the way buyers go about their purchases by 42.2 % for global fashion brands (Mahmud & Tonima, 2024). In the increasingly digital settings across the globe, influencers act as current opinion leaders. They give realness and a sense of shared experience that old advertising often missed (Zak & Hasprova, 2021). Their visible presence on social media platforms let them shape not only what people buy, but also how people live and how loyal they become to a brand.

The rise of influencer marketing shows a bigger change in culture. It shows that people values endorsements that felt like they came from friends more than messages from companies. People trust influencers more than old famous people, especially younger groups, because influencers seem real (Haque et al., 2023). How social media platforms works, such as how people interact and the quality of the content, changes how well influencers shape what audiences thought (Vemuri et al., 2024). As brands around the world works to improve how they showed lifestyles, using influencers on purpose has grown to be important.

In Africa, influencer marketing also quickly has gained speed, it has changed to fit the continent's quick moving social and economic environment. With more smart phones also internet access, African buyers feel more and more affected by local and international social media figures. Research shows that influencers greatly affect consumer actions by giving messages that fit the culture and they also bridged the gap between brands as well as local audiences (Zak & Hasprova, 2020). African influencers often show ways of living that people wanted matched what modern buyers, while keeping cultural realness. This makes them more believable and effective.

How social media platforms works, like making content personal, talking back and forth, and telling stories with pictures, matters a lot in Africa's influencer system (Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022). These features make

influencers better able to shape what audiences perceives positively. The linking of local content and how social media platforms acted makes influencer marketing an important strategy for showing lifestyles all over the continent. It helps areas like fashion, makeup as well as technology reach different and young markets.

At the same time, influencer marketing in Tanzania shows a lot of growth, especially in city areas like Dar es Salaam. Tanzanian buyers, especially young people also young workers, more and more looks to influencers for ideas about how to live and what to buy. Influencers in Tanzania works on different platforms such as Instagram, YouTube in addition to TikTok. They not only influence people to buy products but also make lifestyle images that shows modern, desired ways of living (Dhingra, 2023). This move towards digital influencers greatly changes how brands in Tanzania talk to buyers; moving away from old advertising methods.

In addition, how well influencer marketing campaigns works in Tanzania greatly depends on social media platform features such as how easy it is to interact, how much content there is, as well as how believable the influencer is (Bentley et al., 2021). Tanzanian audiences like influencers who shares their values and ways of living and this make perception a main link between what influencers do and how lifestyle brands turn out. As more organizations in Dar es Salaam put money into campaigns led by influencers, understanding the mediating role social media platform is important to get the most out of marketing and make people loyal.

Dar es Salaam recently became a main spot for digital engagement in Tanzania; this came largely from the fast growth of social media use. As of January 2024, Tanzania had about 5.65 million active social media users. This counted for 8.3 % of the total population (Data Reportal, 2024). This sudden increase in digital connections greatly has changed the marketing setting. Influencer marketing became a very important strategy for brands looking to reach city buyers, especially the young.

Even with many people using influencer marketing, there is not much research checking its effectiveness in influencing consumer perception and lifestyle branding within the Tanzanian context. While global studies shows that influencers greatly shaped what people bought and how they chose to live (Mahmud & Tonima, 2024; Zak & Hasprova, 2021), these results may not fully apply to Tanzania because of differences in culture, economy and technological differences. There is a need for context specific studies to better understand what happens in Dar es Salaam's fast changing buyer market.

Recent studies in Tanzania shows that social media platforms affect what people decide to buy, especially among university students also young workers (Mashauri, 2023). There is still limited scholarly attention on how influencer marketing specifically causes changes in what buyers' perception and how lifestyle brands have developed. Without local insights, organizations risk putting in marketing plans that do not truly connect with what Tanzanian buyers want and how they live as these things are evolving.

This study aims to fill the knowledge gap and it looks at how influencer marketing affects what buyers perceive as well as how it helped lifestyle branding among selected organizations in Dar es Salaam. The results offer useful guidance for brands wanting to create more effective marketing approaches that fit the culture in Tanzania's digital economy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Literature Review

2.1.1. Source Credibility Theory

This study used the Source Credibility Theory because it provides a good base for understanding how influencer marketing affects what consumers do and how it relates to lifestyle branding. According to this theory, a message works well mostly because of how skilled, trustworthy in addition to appealing the person sending the message seems. In influencer marketing, influencers act as the "source," and how much they are trusted changes how audiences view brands and lifestyle suggestions. Research shows that how genuine, skilled next to trustworthy an influencer is greatly affecting how consumers see things and what they decide to buy (Baghel, 2024). Influencers who seem real and easy to relate to tend to affect consumer attitudes also brand loyalty in a good way, which proves the Source Credibility Theory works in online marketing situations (Agarwal, 2024).

Recent studies show that influencer marketing greatly changes not only what products people pick but also how consumers, especially younger people who see influencers as examples, fit into lifestyles (Nadanyiova et al., 2020). The personal bond and the desired value that people attach to influencers make them useful agents in promoting lifestyle branding. Their ability to tell lifestyle stories in a truthful and reliable way plays a main role in how

consumers take on certain behaviors, clothing styles, or buying habits. That confirms the ideas of the Source Credibility Theory within today's social media environment.

The Source Credibility Theory matters greatly to this study, especially when we think about Hypothesis 1 (H1): Influencer marketing positively affects audience perception. Since audience perception depends heavily on how reliable, trustworthy along with relatable the influencer is, the Source Credibility Theory directly supports the idea presented in H1. If influencers appear knowledgeable as well as genuine, they are more likely to shape how consumers think about brands and lifestyle choices in a good way; this proves the hypothesis within the urban area of Tanzania, where people use digital media more and more.

The theory supports Hypothesis 2 (H2): Audience perception positively affects lifestyle branding. Source Credibility Theory helps explain why good audience perceptions, which come from trusted influencers, lead to the adoption of specific branded lifestyles. As consumers identify more with the lifestyle shown by trusted influencers, their loyalty to linked brands grows, which strengthens lifestyle branding plans. By making consumer perceptions stronger through trustworthy influencer communication, brands can effectively place themselves into consumers' lifestyle choices, directly supporting H2.

2.2. Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing means a form of marketing that uses people with many social media followers, known as influencers, to sell products, services, or brands to their viewers. According to Gupta (2024), influencer marketing uses platforms like Instagram, TikTok along with YouTube. On these sites, influencers work with brands, post sponsored content, and review products to improve how people see brands and how much they trust them. The main idea behind influencer marketing rests on the honesty and reliability of influencers, because audiences tend to trust people, they feel connected to, which then leads to more brand preference and a greater wish to buy.

In addition, influencer marketing has changed into a plan that not only sells products but also shapes how people live. Vemuri et al. (2024) explain that influencer marketing serves as a useful way to promote good and desired ways of living. It uses influencer approvals also advice to change what consumers do. The success of influencer marketing relies on the influencer's reliability, honesty as well as genuineness, which directly change how the audience thinks and accepts messages about lifestyle. This method lets brands put their products into wider stories about how people live, which appeals to the chosen audiences.

2.2.2. Audience Perception

Audience perception refers to how consumers understand, judge in addition to feel about marketing messages, brands next to influencers and this comes from their own experiences, social situations along with mental patterns. Blažević and Babic (2023) state that audience perception changes based on the influencer's reliability, how much the message relates to the audience, as well as what the audience already thinks about the brand. Their study on Instagram influencer marketing showed that good audience perception connects closely to how much an influencer is trusted and how well the influencer's content fits with audience values. That then causes people to want to buy more.

Audience perception helps to change how consumers think and act toward lifestyle branding. Baghel (2024) points out that audience perception changes because of how honest and clear influencer communication is; this builds consumer trust and loyalty to a brand. Good perceptions can make the emotional bond between consumers and brands stronger, encouraging consumers to adopt lifestyles that brands support. Audience perception acts as a link between influencer marketing efforts also the lifestyle choices consumers make.

2.2.3. Lifestyle Branding

Lifestyle branding means a marketing method where brands sell not just products but a complete way of life; they place their identity into what consumers value, hope for as well as do every day. Nadanyiova et al. (2020) describe lifestyle branding as the making of a symbolic link between a brand and a desirable way of living. This encourages consumers to adopt products as ways to show who they are. This method places brands as parts of one's personal identity, aiming to create emotional loyalty beyond just product satisfaction.

Lifestyle branding also includes creating brand stories that fit with social trends and cultural values to build lasting consumer relationships. Jain and Abdille (2022) explain that lifestyle branding uses influencer marketing to spread brand stories through relatable people who show the brand's lifestyle image. Their study found that influencer partnerships help lifestyle branding by making brands seem like symbols of modern, desired living. Through this plan, brands place themselves into consumers' daily lives as well as cultural identities.

2.2.4 The influence of Influencer Marketing (IM) on Audience Perception

Gupta (2024) conducted a study, "Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Perception," to look at how influencer marketing changes brand perception and consumer actions. The main goal was to find out how influencers' trustworthiness, realness as well as connections with brands shape what consumers think. The study concluded that influencer marketing greatly increases brand awareness, liking in addition to desire to buy by using the trust consumers put in influencers and it used the Source Credibility Theory, which states that influencers' knowledge and honesty drive good audience perception and brand trust. The findings proved that trustworthiness and realness are central to changing consumer attitudes, supporting the theory's main point.

Blažević and Babic (2023) did research on "Students' Perception of Influencer Marketing on Instagram" in Croatia to learn how young consumers view influencer marketing on Instagram. The study's main purpose was to check if influencer marketing encourages students to buy advertised items. The findings showed that students generally saw influencer marketing positively, recognizing its role in guiding their buying choices. The researchers used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to explain how audiences process persuasive messages from influencers; they found that influencer marketing uses both the direct (message content) and indirect (source trustworthiness) paths of persuasion, confirming the model's use in social media situations.

Baghel (2024) looked into "Influencer Authenticity as a Catalyst for Brand Trust and Analysing Its Impact on Consumer Perception." The goal was to study how realness in influencers affects brand trust and what consumers think. The study concluded that real influencers build stronger consumer trust and lasting brand loyalty. Using the Source Credibility Theory, it showed that realness improves trustworthiness, directly improving audience perception of both the influencer and the promoted brand. The findings stressed realness as a critical element in how well influencers work, supporting the theory's claim that believable sources make messages more convincing.

Çelik et al. (2022) conducted a study titled "Perception of Influencers among Young Consumers" in Turkey, but it also had comparative details from other growing markets, including parts of North Africa. The goal was to analyze how young consumers view influencers and how these perception shape brand influencer collaborations. The study found that consumers had good feelings toward influencers they felt close to and trusted, but they showed bad reactions when influencers shared overly commercial content. Using Social Comparison Theory, the study explained how followers compare themselves to influencers, which affects their view of influencer trustworthiness and realness. The findings showed that looking up to influencers fostered admiration, making good perception better, while clear advertising could break trust.

Zhang et al. (2023) explored "Research on the Impact of Influencers on Audiences' Intention to Follow" in a Chinese-African fashion influencer situation. The study aimed to identify influencer traits that draw audiences. Findings showed that influencer knowledge and image consistency greatly affected audiences' desire to follow, with emotional and perceived value responses as a link and this research used the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, explaining that influencer traits (stimulus) influenced audience emotions and perception (organism), leading to following behavior (response). The study confirmed that good audience perception come from influencers who consistently match their image with what audiences expect.

2.2.5 The influence of Audience Perception on Lifestyle Branding

Agarwal (2024) conducted a study titled "The Power of Perception and how Branding Shapes Consumer Behaviour," aiming to examine how branding affects consumer behavior through perception. The main purpose was to find out how consumers' perception of branding signals, such as sensory experiences, emotional connections, and thinking processes, shape their buying actions and lifestyle adoption. The findings showed that good brand perception greatly impact consumers' alignment with brand values, leading them to add the brand into their personal lifestyle choices. The study used Perception Theory, stating that consumers' understanding of branding signals affects their attachment to the brand and their lifestyle decisions. The theory was supported by findings that good

perception strengthened emotional and behavioral alignment with brands, making perception a gateway to lifestyle branding.

Mulyati and Hariyanto (2021) explored "Perception of Students on the Apple Smartphone as a Lifestyle" with the goal of checking how students view the Apple brand as a lifestyle symbol. Done among university students, the study found that what audiences thought of Apple smartphones went beyond just how they worked and it showed social status and identity. The findings showed that a good view of Apple as a top tier, high status brand encouraged students to use the product as part of their lifestyle. That research used Jean Baudrillard's Theory of Symbolic Consumption, suggesting that products like smartphones are bought for what they mean, not just for their use. The theory was proven as students linked owning Apple products with confidence, prestige along with being part of a higher social group.

Jain and Abdille (2022) studied the connection between lifestyle branding and influencer marketing; they looked at how consumers in African markets saw lifestyle brands. The main goal was to find out how influencer marketing changed what people knew about brands and how it encouraged them to live by brand ideas. The study showed that when people thought well of influencers and their brands, they took those brands into their daily lives. The brands then became symbols of a way of life. The study used Social Learning Theory and it said that people learned and copied the ways of life shown by influencers by watching them. The results proved that how an audience saw influencers directly helped them accept brands as parts of their way of life.

Agha (2021), in "Media Promoting Brand Culture and Audience Preference besides Perception", wanted to see how what an audience thought affected whether they accepted brand culture in parts of Asia and North Africa. The study found that audiences viewed foreign brands as signs of being modern also important. They liked these brands more and made them part of who they were socially. The study used the Uses or Gratification Theory. It explained that audiences actively looked for brand information to meet their needs for social standing. The findings confirmed that when people thought well of global brands, they accepted them as part of their lives. This helped efforts to create lifestyle brands.

Dhingra (2023) looked into "The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour in Tanzania". This research focused on how social media affected people adopting lifestyles through what consumers thought. The study's purpose was to check if good thoughts formed through influencer marketing led people to match their lives with the brands promoted. The findings showed that consumers in Tanzania, especially young people in cities, saw influencers as real sources and this made them copy influencers' lives by using the products they supported. The study adopted Social Learning Theory and it showed that consumers copied the behavior and buying habits of influencers, directly linking good thoughts to lifestyle branding in Tanzania.

Mashauri (2023) did a study on "Social Media Marketing next to Consumer Behaviour among University Students in Tanzania". He wanted to find out how people's perception of marketing messages affected lifestyle branding. The findings showed that students who viewed brands well through social media more often accepted branded lifestyles. They saw those brands as central to who they were as well as how others saw them. The research used the Source Credibility Theory. It suggested that trusted marketing sources improved how audiences saw things, which led to brand loyalty and matching lifestyles. The study proved that believable messages made perception stronger, and that in turn helped lifestyle branding among young Tanzanians.

2.2.6 Audience Perception Mediates the Relationship Between Influencer Marketing and Lifestyle Branding

Gupta (2024) explored how influencer marketing affected what people thought of brands and how consumers behaved. The study focused on how much influencers could be believed and how real they seemed. The study, based on Source Credibility Theory, found that real, trustworthy influencers greatly improved how much people liked a brand also how much they wanted to buy it. For its method, it used surveys quantitatively. This study helps by taking this idea to Tanzania and it tests whether these global findings prove true in a specific culture and technology setting, where how influencers work and how much audiences trust them may be different.

Blažević and Babic (2023) looked at how Instagram influencer marketing affected what Croatian students intended to buy and they used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). It showed that both the quality of the message (the main path) and how much an influencer could be believed (the side path) shaped what people thought. The study

used both surveys and interviews. This study builds on this by specifically testing how these ways of seeing things turn into lifestyle branding results in Tanzania.

Baghel (2024) focused on how real and influencer was, as a reason for brand trust and good audience perception. The study, based on Source Credibility Theory, used surveys and structural equation modeling (SEM). It concluded that being real was very important for long term loyalty. This study moves this forward by looking at how perception, driven by being real, act as a mediator for lifestyle branding. That is especially true within Tanzanian city youth markets, where how real and influencer seems might cross with local values also who people think they are.

Çelik, Bakir along with Bazarci (2022) looked at how young consumers saw influencers. They used Social Comparison Theory; they found that comparing oneself to others who were better made people admire more, but being too openly about selling things made people trust less. Using surveys that compared things, it showed cultural differences in what people thought. This study helps by giving proof specific to Tanzania on how admiring or doubting influencers shapes lifestyle branding. It fills a geographical and cultural gap in the published works.

Zhang et al. (2023) researched Chinese-African fashion influencers. They used the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model; this showed that what influencers were like caused feelings that made people follow them. Using online surveys in addition to SEM, they confirmed that a steady image from an influencer led to good perception. This study takes these ideas further to directly test if those perceptions connect influencer marketing and lifestyle branding.

Jain and Abdille (2022) explored how good perception of influencers caused consumers to make brands part of their lives using Social Learning Theory. Through surveys in several African cities, it found that consumers copied the lifestyles supported by influencers. This study helps by narrowing the focus to Tanzania and it gives proof from Dar es Salaam on how perception acts as a go-between. It also tests whether the learning effects turn into lifestyle branding in this country's setting.

Agha (2021) looked at brand culture driven by media in Asia next to North Africa. He used the Uses as well as Gratifications Theory and he concluded that good audience perception of global brands encouraged people to accept branded lifestyles to improve their status. The study used surveys quantitatively. This research moves this forward by clearly showing perception as a mediator.

Dhingra (2023) checked social media's effect on Tanzanian consumer behavior. He found that young people in cities saw influencers as real and copied their lifestyles because of this. The study, put into the Social Learning Theory, used surveys. This study adds value by using a quantitative approach to show perception as a variable that acts as a mediator, rather than a direct effect. This offers more detailed ideas on how influencer marketing turns into lifestyle branding.

Mashauri (2023) explored how perception of social media marketing shapes lifestyle branding among Tanzanian university students, guided by Source Credibility Theory. Through surveys and regression analysis, it confirmed that positive perception fosters lifestyle alignment with brands. This study expands this by testing perception's mediating role using SEM and including broader influencer marketing dimensions, thus deepening the understanding of this dynamic.

2.3. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

The conceptual model for this study aims to examine the relationship among influencer marketing, audience perception as well as lifestyle branding within chosen organizations in Dar es Salaam. Based on the two hypotheses made, the model establishes a direct and linked relationship among these parts.

The first hypothesis (H1) proposes that influencer marketing positively influences audience perception. For this connection, influencer marketing, through real endorsements, relatable stories along with building trust, should shape how consumers view brands and the way of life connected to them. When influencers successfully share believable and appealing messages, the audience's perception of the brand gets better.

The second hypothesis (H2) suggests that how audiences think helps lifestyle branding, which means that when consumers hold good perception of a brand, often shaped by influencers, they are more likely to take on and add the brand's identity to their own personal way of life. A good audience view becomes an important link that leads to better lifestyle branding results for organizations.

The proposed model, as presented in figure 1 proposes that influencer marketing starts a chain of events and it makes audience perception better, which then strengthens lifestyle branding. This model aims to show how brands

can use influencers not just to sell products, but to build lasting lifestyle connections in the minds of Tanzanian consumers.

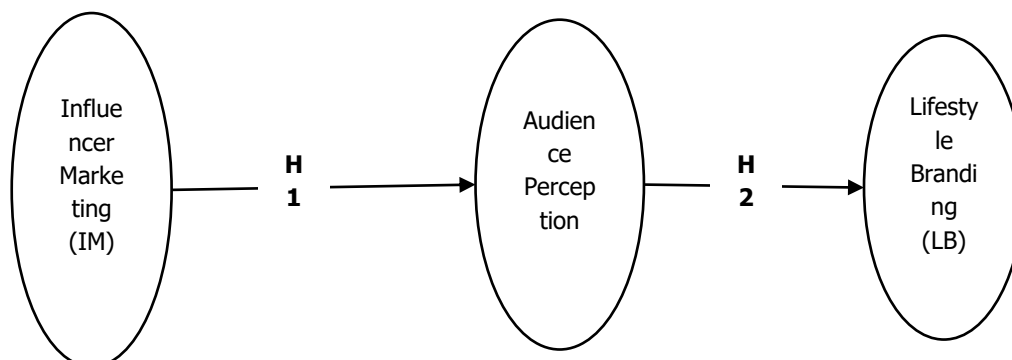


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using a survey design to empirically test the Theory of Source Credibility. The choice of this approach was grounded in its ability to facilitate the collection of numerical data and support the application of statistical techniques to evaluate hypothesized relationships among constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To collect the primary data, closed-ended questionnaires were employed. This format was selected to ensure consistency in responses and enhance the robustness of statistical analysis (Bryman, 2016).

A simple random sampling method was used to select respondents, ensuring that each participant had an equal chance of being included in the sample. Microsoft Excel's randomization function was used to facilitate the random selection process. This method was appropriate for minimizing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via Smart PLS 4 software. This analytical approach was chosen for its suitability in handling complex models and small-to-medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis was executed in two phases: Measurement Model Assessment: This stage involved testing reliability (via Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability) and validity (via Convergent and Discriminant Validity) to ensure the robustness of the measurement constructs. Structural Model Assessment: This stage involved testing the direct and indirect relationships between the constructs, including evaluating path coefficients, R^2 values, and mediation effects.

This study's target population consisted of users and marketing professionals from selected Tanzanian organizations that are known to use influencer marketing and lifestyle branding. The organizations were chosen from different sectors including telecom, FMCG, real estate, betting, and retail, that are as different from one another as possible to enable the generalizability of findings across multiple industry contexts. The research took place in six organizations with a population size of 335 personnel: Azania Group, GSM Group, Magic Builders Ltd, Vodacom Tanzania, Tigo Tanzania, and Wasafi Bet. These organizations were selected based on their direct participation in influencer marketing, a key research variable. The research was conducted in Tanzania.

The sample size was determined using the "10-times rule" suggested in PLS-SEM literature, which recommends a minimum sample size of 10 times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a construct (Hair et al., 2021). Since the highest number of indicators for any construct was four, the minimum required sample was 40 ($10 \times 4 = 40$). However, to increase the statistical power, reliability, and generalizability of the results, the sample size was expanded to 210 participants.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Measurement Assessment

The measurement model was tested using SmartPLS 4, following the steps recommended by Hair et al. (2022) and Sarstedt et al. (2022). Table 1 indicates that all the indicators are reliable, as their loadings exceed the suggested level

of 0.70. The loadings ranged from 0.751 to 0.884. This means that each item made a strong input to its construct. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test was used to assess convergent validity, and the results in Table 2 indicate that all variables scored above the 0.50 threshold. The AVE values were 0.701 for Audience Perception (AP), 0.619 for Influencer Marketing (IM), and 0.730 for Lifestyle Branding (LB). This shows that each hidden construct has good convergent validity.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Influencer Marketing (IM)	IM1	0.751	0.866	0.619
	IM2	0.820		
	IM3	0.736		
	IM4	0.835		
Audience Perception (AP)	AP1	0.769	0.903	0.701
	AP2	0.871		
	AP3	0.850		
	AP4	0.855		
Lifestyle Branding (LB)	LB1	0.846	0.915	0.730
	LB2	0.866		
	LB3	0.821		
	LB4	0.884		

Source: Research Findings (2025)

Composite reliability (rho_c), which is better than Cronbach's alpha in the case of PLS-SEM, was also checked. The results showed that all four constructs were highly reliable, with values of 0.866 for IM, 0.903 for AP and 0.915 for LB. These numbers are between 0.70 and 0.95, a good range for reasonable values. This means that the measurements of each construct are reliable and consistent.

Table 2: HTMT for Discriminant Validity

	Audience Perception (AP)	Influencer Marketing (IM)
Influencer Marketing (IM)	0.802	
Lifestyle Branding (LB)	0.643	0.586

Source: Research Findings (2025)

The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) was used to test discriminant validity, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). Table 2 indicates that all the HTMT numbers were below the threshold limit of 0.85, demonstrating sufficient discriminant validity.

4.2. Structural Model Assessment

4.2.1 Direct Relationship

The structural model was assessed by analyzing the amplitude and significance of the hypothesized direct paths using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. The findings suggest that all hypothesized direct relationships are statistically significant at the 5% level or higher.

Table 3 indicates that Influencer Marketing (IM) has a positive direct effect on Audience Perception ($\beta = 0.686$, $t = 17.146$, $p = 0.000$). Audience Perception (AP) had a substantial and positive effect on Lifestyle Branding (LB) ($\beta = 0.564$, $t = 9.797$, $p < 0.000$). This finding is supported by previous research on the importance of consumer attitude

in brand-related outcomes (Hair et al., 2022). These results suggest that H1 and H2 were supported, aligning with recent literature that highlights influencers' influence in shaping brand communication and perception (Richter & Tudoran, 2024).

Table 3: Direct Relationship

Hypothesis	β	T statistics	P values	Results
Influencer Marketing (IM) -> Audience Perception (AP)	0.686	17.146	0.000	Supported
Audience Perception (AP) -> Lifestyle Branding (LB)	0.564	9.797	0.000	Supported

Source: Research Findings (2025)

4.2.2 Indirect Relationship

The bootstrapping method was employed to evaluate specific indirect paths. The bootstrapping method was used in SmartPLS 4 software to assess the mediation effect. The results in Table 4 indicate that the mediation of AP between IM and LB was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.387$, $t = 7.828$, $p = 0.000$), which supports H3. This result indicates that primary influencer efforts impact branding by influencing audience perceptions. Hair et al. (2022) and Shmueli et al. (2019) have recommended evaluating complex indirect pathways in PLS-SEM. This finding is consistent with these recommendations.

Table 4: Indirect Relationships

Hypothesis	β	T statistics	P values	Results
Influencer Marketing (IM) -> Audience Perception (AP) -> Lifestyle Branding (LB)	0.387	7.828	0.000	Supported

Source: Research Findings (2025)

4.2.3 Direct and Indirect Relationship

The structural model figure in Figure 2 cements those significant direct and indirect relationships mentioned above. The structural model diagram visually illustrates the empirical interplay among Influencer Marketing (IM), Audience Perception (AP), and Lifestyle Branding (LB).

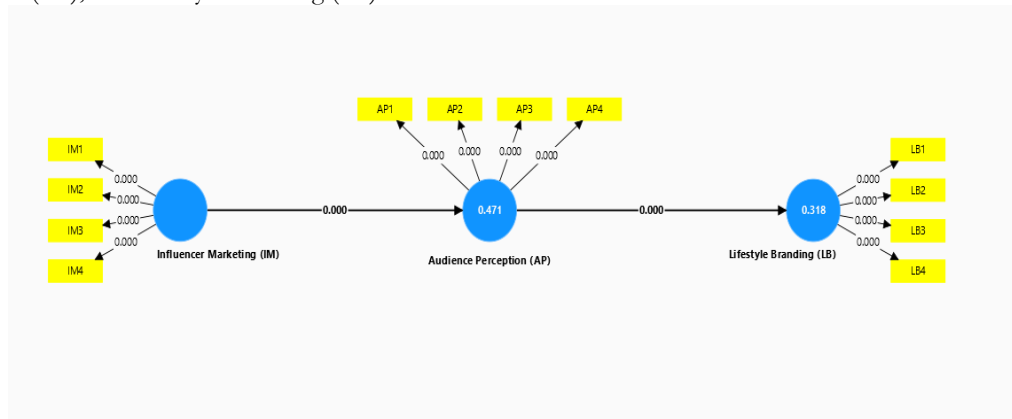


Figure 2: Direct and Indirect Relationship

These results confirm that AP substantially mediates the effects of both IM and LB, highlighting the significant role of user perception in determining branding outcomes. The R^2 values confirm these relationships, demonstrating that the model explains 47.1% of the variance in AP and 31.8% of the variance in LB, indicating moderate explanatory power.

4.2.4 Explanatory Power (R-square)

The model's explanatory power was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2). Table 5 indicates that for AP, the R^2 value was 0.471 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.468$), whereas for LB, it was 0.318 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.315$). Hair et al. (2022) suggest that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in both endogenous constructs, as these values indicate a moderate level of explanatory power.

Table 5: Explanatory power (R-square)

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Audience Perception (AP)	0.471	0.468
Lifestyle Branding (LB)	0.318	0.315

Source: Research Findings (2025)

4.2.5 Predictive Power (Q-Square)

Predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed through the blindfolding procedure. Table 6 indicates that all Q^2 values for the AP and LB indicators were significantly higher than zero, with values ranging from 0.178 to 0.390. This confirms that the model demonstrates satisfactory predictive relevance (Shmueli et al., 2019).

Table 6: Predictive Power (Q-Square)

Items	$Q^2_{predict}$
AP1	0.178
AP2	0.390
AP3	0.204
AP4	0.373
LB1	0.251
LB2	0.207
LB3	0.249
LB4	0.293

Source: Research Findings (2025)

Additional evaluation of the model's predictive capacity outside the sample was conducted using PLSpredict, and the results are presented in Table 8. Compared to a linear regression benchmark (LM), the PLS-SEM model demonstrated significantly lower prediction errors for almost all indicators (e.g., AP1: 1.049 vs. 1.065; LB2: 1.241 vs. 1.264) when the root mean squared error (RMSE) values were calculated. These findings suggest that the model has significant predictive power, as most PLS-SEM RMSE values surpass those of the LM model, a recommended criterion for strong predictive capability (Shmueli et al., 2019).

Table 7: PLS Predict

Items	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE
AP1	1.049	1.065
AP2	1.012	1.05
AP3	1.058	1.095
AP4	1.075	1.083

LB1	1.205	1.218
LB2	1.241	1.264
LB3	1.282	1.275
LB4	1.212	1.221

Source: Research Findings (2025)

4.3 Additional Analysis

In this study, further analysis was conducted using the Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) for the target construct of Lifestyle Branding (LB) to offer additional managerial insight as indicated in figure 2. The PLS-SEM results are further augmented by IPMA, which combines the average latent scores (performance) and the total effects of latent constructs (importance).

The findings indicated that audience perception (AP) was essential and exhibited relatively high performance in developing Lifestyle Branding. This finding corroborates previous research, suggesting that user perception is critical in determining brand positioning in digital environments (Becker et al., 2023; Sarstedt et al., 2022). In practical terms, the results indicate that the brand's outcomes could be considerably improved by enhancing the perceived trustworthiness of the influencer.

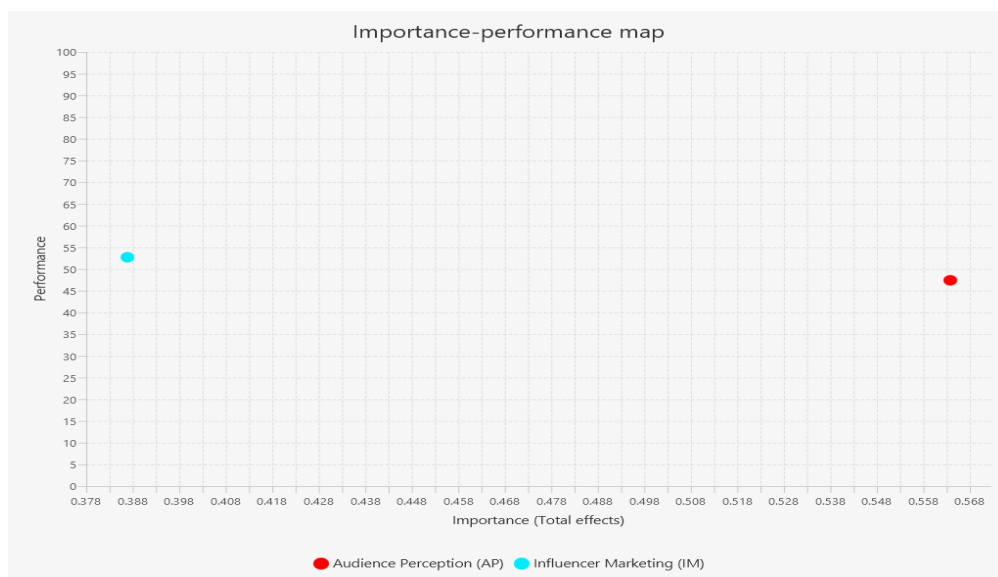


Figure 3: Importance of Performance Map

4.4 Discussion

A study set out to check how influencer marketing affected consumer lifestyle branding in Tanzania and it looked at audience perception as a mediator. The findings support all proposed connections and offer theoretical and practical help.

The results show that influencer marketing affects audience perception directly. This connection is clear and the numbers support it ($\beta = 0.686$, $p < 0.001$). This shows that influencers help shape how consumers understand branding messages, especially with traits like being believable, real along with steady and these findings match Gupta (2024), who said that believable influencers improve brand awareness and how people feel about a brand; they also match Baghel (2024), who found that real influencers directly improve audience perception and brand trust, which means that Tanzanian consumers, like others around the world, pay attention not only to what a message says but also to who says it also if that person seems trustworthy.

The study also found that audience perception affects lifestyle branding positively ($\beta = 0.564$, $p < 0.001$), which means that how consumers understand brand messages, especially when influencers deliver them, directly shapes their choices to use those brands as part of their personal identity and way of life and this finding matches Agarwal (2024), who showed that brand perception shapes buying behaviors and lifestyle match. It also matches Mulyati and Hariyanto (2021), whose work showed how students view brands like Apple as lifestyle symbols beyond their basic use. That highlights the emotional as well as symbolic sides of consumer brand connections and it also points to the importance of branding plans that connect not only with thoughts but also with culture and feelings.

The mediation analysis showed that audience perception acts as a link between influencer marketing and lifestyle branding ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that influencer marketing affects lifestyle branding not just directly but also through how audiences process and take in these marketing efforts; this supports ideas from both the Source Credibility Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), as Baghel (2024), Blažević and Babic (2023) discussed. In these theories, perception acts as a main way to turn marketing signals into actions. The study also builds on Social Learning Theory, as Jain and Abdille (2022) used it, by showing that Tanzanian consumers copy influencer backed lifestyles based on how they view those influencers. By showing perception as a mediator, this study adds detail to earlier research in the area, such as Dhingra (2023) also Mashauri (2023), who found perception to be a notable factor but did not test its mediating role quantitatively.

From a theory view, this study offers three main helps. It adds to the Source Credibility Theory by showing that how believable an influencer seems does not just affect brand perception directly. It also helps people take on a lifestyle through audience perception. The research adds detail to Social Learning Theory by showing that learning depends on perception. Only when people view influencers in a good way does their behavior led to copying a lifestyle. The study adds new regional insights by doing research in Tanzania. This area does not show up much in current books and it tests theories often made in Western or Asian settings within an African culture and technology background.

In a practical sense, the findings hold important meanings for marketing people in Tanzania and similar rising markets. Brands should choose to work with influencers who are popular as well as seem real and fit the culture. Audience perception is the main way influencer content leads to lifestyle branding. Marketing plans should also focus not only on what influencer promotions say but also on how target audiences understand those messages. Since perception changes outcomes, visual branding, storytelling as well as being steady should be managed carefully to improve believability and emotional connection. The IPMA analysis supports this insight, showing that audience perception is both a high importance and high-performance part of making lifestyle branding plans. Brands wanting a better lifestyle match with their consumers should put money into making their influencers seem more trustworthy and real.

The model's ability to explain further supports its strength. The R^2 values for audience perception (0.471) and lifestyle branding (0.318) show a moderate but helpful explanation of differences. Tests of prediction, including Q^2 also PLSpredict, showed that the model had better prediction truth than simpler comparisons and this supports its use in real branding situations. These findings confirm that the tested model not only explains but can also reliably predict consumer behavior results in influencer-based campaigns.

The study has good points but also limits. The sample mostly looked at young people in Tanzanian cities. That may limit how much the findings apply to people in the countryside or other age groups. Future research could do studies comparing groups of people to check perception patterns across different Tanzanian settings. The single time design limits conclusions about cause and effect. A study over time could better check how ongoing exposure to influencers affects long term brand adoption and lifestyle change. While the number-based approach offers clarity as well as broad use, future research using different methods could explore the detailed emotional and cultural ways people understand influencer content through talks or group discussions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

To sum up, this study confirms that influencer marketing clearly shapes lifestyle branding through the mediator role of audience perception in Tanzania. The findings offer both theory proof and practical advice by showing that perception is not just a passive reaction to marketing messages. It is an active idea that shapes how branding becomes part of consumers' identities and how they use it. By putting together structural equation modeling with ideas, this research adds a useful model for understanding how influencer marketing works in African consumer markets - it also highlights the strategic importance of perception on the path from influence to lifestyle.

From the study's results, several suggestions for strategy and policy are recommended and these ideas help practitioners, brand managers, influencers along with researchers who want to increase how influencer marketing affects lifestyle branding in Tanzania.

Businesses that operate in Tanzania should pick influencers because they are believable, real as well as share the same values as the people they want to reach. The study shows that influencer marketing changes how an audience sees things. This then decides if consumers will adopt a brand as part of their daily routine. Work with influencers to tell real stories, avoid too much advertising, and keep brand messages consistent and this helps to keep trust also influence.

Marketing campaigns need to do more than just get seen; they should focus on how people understand the messages. The study found that audience perception affects the link between influencer marketing and lifestyle branding. Businesses should spend money on tools to track perceptions, analyze opinions in addition to get consumer feedback. That helps to measure how people receive campaigns. Strategies such as influencers as well as brands working together to create content, showing what goes on behind the scenes, and talking with the community can help people see the brand in a better light.

The study looked at young city people in Tanzania. Brand managers should adapt influencer content to show local values, language next to how people identify themselves. Influencers who show cultural relevance, relate to others socially, and have admirable qualities are more likely to be trusted also copied. Localizing content, which includes using Swahili, talking about Tanzanian social problems, or referring to regional fashion and music, can make messages clearer as well as better connect with how people think.

Short-term influencer campaigns might create awareness. They probably will not lead to a deep connection with a lifestyle. To move from influence to adopting an identity, influencers and brands should build long term partnerships. Such collaborations allow for steady work, deeper trust from the audience, and the growth of a shared brand story; this has been shown to improve perception also lifestyle branding.

Social media figures influence how young people act and what consumers pick. Because of this growing influence, Tanzanian regulatory bodies, such as TCRA or consumer protection agencies, should think about making rules for open as well as ethical influencer marketing. Making paid partnerships public, setting standards for realness, and holding influencers responsible can build consumer trust and protect audiences from tricky methods.

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