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Effects of Social Media External Marketer Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions: Evidence from Vodacom Tanzania in Iringa Municipality

Patrick Alfred Makinda

PG Student, University of Iringa

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions in the telecommunication sector, using Vodacom Tanzania in Iringa Municipality as the study context. The study was guided by the objective of determining the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions. A mixed-methods approach and exploratory research design were employed. Data were collected through closed-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data through thematic analysis. The findings showed that external social media influencers influenced consumer purchasing decisions through credibility, trustworthiness, relatability, creativity, product demonstrations, recommendations and regular promotional content. The quantitative findings indicated that 84.3% of respondents strongly agreed that influencer advertising messages influenced their purchase of Vodacom products or services, while 88.8% strongly agreed that influencer promotional activities helped educate customers. In addition, 84.5% strongly agreed that influencer posts affected their trust in Vodacom products and services and 89.3% strongly agreed that external influencers frequently shared promotional content. Interview findings further showed that consumers were more responsive to influencers who provided clear explanations, honest opinions, personal experiences and practical demonstrations. The study concludes that external social media marketer influencers positively influence consumer purchasing decisions by improving product awareness, trust, understanding and social proof. The study recommends that telecommunication organizations strategically engage credible, authentic and relatable external influencers to communicate product information and promote services through creative and informative social media content.

Keywords: Social media, external marketer influencers, consumer purchasing decisions, influencer marketing, telecommunication, Vodacom Tanzania.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an important channel for communication and marketing because it enables organizations and consumers to exchange information, opinions and experiences about products and services. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube allow organizations to communicate with consumers while consumers can search for information, compare alternatives and share their experiences with others. The interactive nature of social media has changed the way consumers obtain and evaluate market information, making social media an important part of the consumer purchasing process (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Through these platforms, consumers can access information about products and services from companies as well as from other social media users.

The increasing use of social media has also changed the way organizations promote their products and services. Consumers can receive product information through advertisements, reviews, recommendations, demonstrations and personal experiences shared online. Such information can affect how consumers evaluate products before making purchasing decisions. Majeed et al. (2021) found that social media can influence purchase intention through mechanisms such as brand-related information and consumer engagement. Similarly, Mwakyusa and Nderumaki (2024) found that digital platforms can influence consumers' purchase decisions in Tanzania. These developments have increased the importance of individuals who use social media to communicate information about products and services to their followers.

One important development in social media marketing is the increasing use of social media influencers. Social media influencers are individuals who have established audiences on social media and can affect the attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of their followers through the content they share. Influencers may promote products through reviews, recommendations, demonstrations, personal experiences and other forms of content. Their influence may depend on factors such as credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and the relationship they develop with their followers. Joshi et al. (2023) explain that influencer marketing has become an important area of digital marketing because influencers can provide organizations with access to established online communities and communicate promotional messages in ways that may be perceived as more personal than conventional advertising.

Among different forms of influencer marketing, external marketer influencers are particularly relevant because they operate outside the organization whose products or services they promote. They may include celebrities, bloggers, content creators and other social media personalities who use their own platforms to communicate promotional information to their followers. External influencers can provide organizations with access to wider audiences and can present products through their own communication styles and experiences. Their influence may be strengthened when followers perceive them as credible, knowledgeable and relatable. Laohasukkasem et al. (2021) found that credibility, attractiveness and trust were important factors associated with consumers' purchase intentions in relation to online influencers. These findings suggest that the characteristics of an external influencer can affect how consumers respond to products and services promoted through social media.

The relationship between influencer characteristics and consumer purchasing decisions is also supported by broader empirical evidence. Ao et al. (2023), in a meta-analysis of social media influencer research, found an association between social media influencer activities and consumer engagement and purchase intention. Ilieva et al. (2024) similarly reported that social media influencers can affect consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour. Lee et al. (2024), in a meta-analytic comparison of celebrity and social media influencer effects, further demonstrated the relevance of influencers in shaping consumer responses to marketing communication. These studies indicate that influencer marketing can contribute to consumer decision-making, although the strength of the influence may differ according to the characteristics of the influencer, the type of product and the context in which the promotion takes place.

The issue is particularly relevant in the telecommunication sector, where companies provide services such as voice communication, mobile internet, data bundles and mobile financial services. Telecommunication companies use social media to communicate information about products, introduce new services, announce promotional offers and interact with customers. External influencers can complement these activities by presenting telecommunication products to their own followers, explaining product benefits, demonstrating how services are used and providing recommendations. The use of external influencers may therefore provide telecommunication organizations with an additional means of reaching consumers and influencing their evaluation of products and services.

In Tanzania, the growth of digital platforms has created greater opportunities for organizations to communicate with consumers through social media. Tanzanian consumers increasingly encounter information about products and services through digital platforms, while businesses use these platforms to promote their products and communicate with customers. Existing Tanzanian studies provide evidence that social media and digital platforms can influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Lyimo and Sapi (2022) found an influence of social media advertising on consumer purchase behaviour in Tanzania, while Mwakyusa and Nderumaki (2024) examined the influence of digital platforms on purchase decisions among university students in Tanzania. Charles and Kanani (2025) also found that information and recommendation-related factors within social commerce environments were associated with purchase intention among Tanzanian social media users. However, these studies do not specifically explain the role of external marketer influencers in the purchasing decisions of consumers in the telecommunication sector.

The existing literature therefore leaves an important gap. Much of the available research treats social media influencers as a general category or examines social media marketing more broadly, without distinguishing external marketer influencers from other sources of social media influence. In addition, much of the empirical evidence has been generated in contexts such as food, retail, online shopping and general social commerce rather than telecommunications. Laohasukkasem et al. (2021), for example, examined online influencers in relation to Japanese food consumers in Bangkok, while Charles and Kanani (2025) examined social commerce purchase intention among Tanzanian social media users. Although these studies provide useful evidence about influencer and social media effects on purchasing intentions, they do not establish how external marketer influencers affect purchasing decisions for telecommunication products and services in Tanzania.

This gap is relevant to Vodacom Tanzania in Iringa Municipality, where consumers encounter information about products and services through both official company communication and independent social media personalities. External influencers may recommend Vodacom products, explain data bundles, demonstrate services, share personal experiences and encourage their followers to try particular products. However, the extent to which such activities influence consumers' purchasing decisions in the local context of Iringa Municipality remains insufficiently established. Examining this relationship can provide evidence on whether external influencer marketing contributes to consumer awareness, trust, product evaluation and purchasing decisions within the telecommunication sector.

Therefore, this study focuses on the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions in telecommunication organizations in Tanzania, using Vodacom Tanzania in Iringa Municipality as the study context. Specifically, the study seeks to determine how external marketer influencers affect consumers' purchasing decisions through their credibility, recommendations, information provision, product demonstrations and social media promotional content.

2. Theoretical Literature Review

2.1 Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), explains that organizations depend on resources that are controlled or provided by actors outside the organization. Organizations therefore establish relationships with external actors when such relationships provide resources that are important for achieving organizational objectives. In social media marketing, external influencers can be viewed as external resources because they provide organizations with access to established audiences, content creation skills, social connections, credibility and communication networks. For telecommunication organizations, working with external social media influencers can therefore extend the organization's ability to communicate product

information to potential customers through trusted and widely followed social media accounts. The theory is directly relevant to this study because it explains how a telecommunication organization can use the capabilities and audience networks of external influencers to promote its products and services and potentially influence consumer purchasing decisions.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Laohasukkasem et al. (2021) examined the impact of online influencers on consumers' purchase intention of Japanese food in Bangkok using quantitative data collected from 407 consumers through an online questionnaire. The study examined the influence of credibility, attractiveness, trust and expertise of online influencers on consumers' purchase intention. The findings showed that influencer credibility had the strongest influence on purchase intention, followed by attractiveness and trust, while influencer expertise did not have a significant influence. The findings indicate that consumers' responses to influencer marketing are strongly associated with how credible and trustworthy they perceive the influencer to be. This study is relevant to the current study because it demonstrates that characteristics of external influencers can affect consumers' intention to purchase promoted products. However, the study was conducted in Bangkok and focused on Japanese food, leaving a contextual gap regarding the influence of external social media influencers on purchasing decisions in the Tanzanian telecommunication sector.

Charles and Kanani (2025) examined the antecedents of social commerce purchase intention among Tanzanian social media users using online and offline surveys involving 155 respondents. Their regression analysis found that information richness, service quality, webpage attractiveness and offline word-of-mouth positively influenced consumers' purchase intention, with recommendation quality identified as the most important condition among the factors examined. Although the study did not focus specifically on external social media marketer influencers, its findings demonstrate the importance of information and recommendations within social media environments in shaping consumers' purchase intentions in Tanzania. This provides a relevant basis for examining external influencers because influencers commonly communicate product information and recommendations to their followers. However, the study did not specifically establish how the credibility, attractiveness, content and recommendations of external influencers affect purchasing decisions for telecommunication products and services, which leaves room for the present study.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach and an exploratory research design to examine the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions in telecommunication organizations in Tanzania. The study was conducted in Iringa Municipality, focusing on Vodacom Tanzania as the study context. The mixed-methods approach was used to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information on how external social media marketer influencers affect consumers' purchasing decisions. The study targeted 146 respondents who were relevant to the study context, and a sample of 96 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan approach. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents with relevant knowledge and experience of social media marketing, external influencers and consumer purchasing behaviour. Primary data were collected through closed-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaires generated quantitative data on respondents' views regarding the credibility, trustworthiness, recommendations, product information and promotional activities of external influencers, while the interviews provided detailed explanations of participants' experiences and perceptions. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 22 and presented using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analysed thematically by identifying, organizing and interpreting recurring ideas and patterns related to external influencer marketing and consumer purchasing decisions. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled the study to obtain numerical evidence as well as detailed explanations of how external social media marketer influencers influence consumer purchasing decisions in the telecommunication sector.

4. Findings

4.1 Effects of Social Media External Marketer Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

This section presents the findings concerning the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions in the telecommunication sector, with specific reference to Vodacom Tanzania in Iringa Municipality. The analysis focused specifically on how external influencers who promote Vodacom products and services through social media affect consumers' perceptions, trust, product knowledge and purchasing decisions. Data were obtained through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with respondents who actively used social media and were exposed to promotional content from external influencers. The quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics, while interview responses were organized thematically according to the recurring issues raised by participants. Five major themes emerged from the findings: credibility and trustworthiness of external influencers, influence on purchase decisions, the role of influencers in educating and informing customers, social proof and recommendations and effectiveness of influencer promotions. These themes were also reflected in the questionnaire responses, where respondents generally reported positive effects of external influencer promotions on their purchasing decisions.

Credibility and Trustworthiness of External Influencers

This subsection examines the credibility and trustworthiness of external social media influencers as factors affecting consumers' purchasing decisions. The findings indicate that consumers paid attention to the knowledge, honesty and consistency of influencers when evaluating promotional messages about Vodacom products and services. Respondents explained that influencers who demonstrated knowledge of telecommunications products and

provided information in a clear and honest manner were more likely to gain their confidence. The questionnaire findings also showed that 84.5% of respondents strongly agreed that external influencers' posts affected their trust in Vodacom's products or services.

One participant explained:

"I follow a tech influencer who explains data plans clearly. When they recommend Vodacom, I feel confident buying." (Respondent #16, 2026)

Another participant stated:

"Some influencers are just paid to promote, but when I see someone giving real pros and cons, I trust their word." (Respondent #17, 2026)

The findings indicate that credibility was closely associated with consumers' willingness to consider products promoted by external influencers. Participants trusted influencers who demonstrated knowledge of the products, presented information consistently and appeared honest in their recommendations. Respondents were also aware that some influencers receive payment for promotional activities, making authenticity an important consideration when evaluating their messages. Frequent and consistent communication was reported to strengthen familiarity and confidence in the influencer's recommendations. These findings suggest that external influencers are more likely to affect purchasing decisions when consumers perceive them as knowledgeable, honest and dependable. The findings are consistent with the study's existing literature, which identifies credibility and trustworthiness as important characteristics in influencer marketing.

Influence of External Influencers on Consumer Purchasing Decisions

This subsection examines how external social media influencers directly affect consumers' decisions to purchase Vodacom products and services. Participants reported that influencers affected their purchasing decisions by demonstrating products, explaining services and presenting Vodacom products in situations that consumers could relate to in their daily lives. The questionnaire results showed that 84.3% of respondents strongly agreed that advertisement messages from influencers' social media influenced their purchase of Vodacom products or services, while 83.7% agreed that current social media influencers who promote Vodacom products encouraged them to purchase Vodacom products.

One participant explained:

"I saw an influencer showing step-by-step how to subscribe to a data bundle. It was so simple and I immediately tried it myself." (Respondent #19, 2026)

Another participant stated:

"When I see an influencer using Vodacom to stream or do live sessions, I feel like I should use the same service to enjoy the same lifestyle." (Respondent #20, 2026)

The findings indicate that external influencers affected purchasing decisions by making products and services easier to understand and more relevant to consumers' everyday experiences. Demonstrations provided practical information about how particular services could be used, while lifestyle-related content made some products appear more desirable. Participants also indicated that the popularity of an influencer could create a sense of belonging and encourage them to try products promoted by people they followed. The results therefore suggest that external influencers can move consumers from awareness of a product towards consideration and purchase by presenting promotional information in a personal and relatable manner.

Role of External Influencers in Educating and Informing Customers

This subsection examines the role of external influencers in providing information and educating consumers about Vodacom products and services. Participants reported that influencers often explained product features, promotions and usage procedures in simpler language than formal company advertisements. The questionnaire results support this finding, with 88.8% of respondents strongly agreeing that Vodacom's promotional activities through influencers played an important role in educating customers.

One participant stated:

"Sometimes Vodacom adverts use technical words, but when an influencer explains them in simple terms, I understand better and can decide to buy." (Respondent #22, 2026)

Another participant explained:

"I usually get to know about new data offers from influencers before even seeing them on Vodacom's page." (Respondent #23, 2026)

The findings indicate that external influencers served not only as promotional agents but also as sources of product information. Participants valued explanations, demonstrations and practical guidance because these forms of content reduced difficulties in understanding telecommunications products and services. Some respondents reported that influencers introduced them to new bundles and promotions, while others explained that guidance on how to use services increased their confidence to purchase. The findings therefore show that the educational role of external influencers can contribute to purchasing decisions by reducing uncertainty and improving consumers' understanding of the products being promoted.

Social Proof and Recommendations from External Influencers

This subsection examines the influence of recommendations and social proof provided by external social media influencers. Participants reported that seeing an influencer they admired using or recommending Vodacom products increased their confidence in those products. Influencer recommendations

were sometimes perceived as similar to advice from a person known to the consumer, particularly when the influencer shared personal experiences rather than simply presenting a formal advertisement.

One participant explained:

“When I see an influencer I follow using Vodacom, I feel like it must be good. It pushes me to try it too.” (Respondent #25, 2026)

Another participant stated:

“An influencer talking about their own experience with Vodacom feels like advice from a friend, so I can trust it.” (Respondent #13, 2026)

The findings indicate that recommendations from external influencers created social proof that affected consumers' perceptions of Vodacom products and services. Participants associated products promoted by popular influencers with wider acceptance and popularity. Personal testimonials also made promotional messages appear more relatable than conventional advertisements. The findings suggest that consumers may use the behaviour and recommendations of influencers as additional information when evaluating whether a product is worth purchasing. This effect was particularly evident when the influencer was familiar to the respondent and when the recommendation appeared genuine and based on personal experience.

Effectiveness of External Influencer Promotions

This subsection examines factors that determine the effectiveness of promotional activities conducted by external social media influencers. Participants explained that the impact of influencer marketing depended not only on the popularity of an influencer but also on the manner in which promotional content was presented. Frequency of posting, creativity, storytelling, humour and relatability were identified as important features that attracted attention and maintained consumers' interest in Vodacom products. The questionnaire findings showed that 89.3% of respondents strongly agreed that external influencers frequently shared promotional content about Vodacom products on their social media platforms.

One participant stated:

“When influencers post often about Vodacom bundles, it reminds me to buy or recharge. If they stop posting, I also forget.” (Respondent #14, 2026)

Another participant explained:

“I like when influencers use funny skits or creative videos. It makes me enjoy the ad and even check the bundles.” (Respondent #15, 2026)

The findings indicate that frequent exposure to influencer content helped maintain awareness of Vodacom products and promotions. Creative formats such as short videos, humour and storytelling attracted respondents' attention and made promotional messages easier to remember. Participants also indicated that influencers who appeared similar to their lifestyles were more convincing than influencers who appeared distant from their everyday experiences. The findings therefore suggest that the effectiveness of external influencer marketing depends on the combination of regular communication, creative presentation and perceived relatability rather than on popularity alone.

Overall Interpretation of the Findings

The findings show that social media external marketer influencers affected consumer purchasing decisions through credibility and trustworthiness, direct product influence, customer education, recommendations and social proof and the effectiveness of promotional content. The quantitative results indicate generally positive perceptions of external influencer marketing, with high proportions of respondents reporting that influencer messages affected their purchasing decisions, trust and understanding of Vodacom products.

The qualitative findings provide further explanation of these results. Consumers were more responsive to influencers who were knowledgeable, honest, consistent and relatable. Product demonstrations and simplified explanations helped consumers understand Vodacom services, while recommendations and personal experiences provided additional confidence when making purchasing decisions. Frequent and creative promotional content also helped maintain consumers' awareness of Vodacom products. Overall, the findings indicate that external social media influencers can influence consumer purchasing decisions when their promotional messages are considered credible, informative, relevant and relatable. These findings directly address the study objective of determining the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions in the Tanzanian telecommunication sector.

5. Summary of Findings

The study examined the effects of social media external marketer influencers on consumer purchasing decisions in telecommunication organizations in Tanzania, with specific reference to Vodacom Tanzania in Iringa Municipality. The findings showed that external influencers affect consumers through their credibility, trustworthiness, relatability, creativity, product demonstrations, recommendations and regular promotional content. Respondents reported that influencers who provide clear explanations, honest opinions and personal experiences make it easier for consumers to understand and evaluate Vodacom products and services before purchasing. Influencers also contribute to consumer education by simplifying information about bundles, promotions and service use, while recommendations and personal experiences create social proof that encourages consumers to try promoted products. Frequent, creative and relatable promotional content further maintains consumers' awareness and interest in Vodacom products. The quantitative findings similarly showed positive responses, including 84.3% agreement that influencer advertising messages influence purchases, 88.8% agreement that

influencer promotions educate customers, 84.5% agreement that influencer posts affect trust and 89.3% agreement that influencers frequently share promotional content.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that social media external marketer influencers have a positive influence on consumer purchasing decisions for Vodacom products and services. Their influence is particularly associated with credibility, trust, informative content, product demonstrations, recommendations, social proof, creativity and relatability. External influencers provide consumers with information that complements official company communication and can reduce uncertainty when consumers are considering telecommunications products and services. The findings further indicate that consumers are more likely to respond to influencer promotions when the content is understandable, authentic, consistent and relevant to their everyday experiences. Therefore, external social media influencers represent an important promotional channel through which telecommunication organizations can reach consumers, strengthen product awareness and encourage purchasing decisions. This conclusion is consistent with the findings in the study, which show that external influencers affect trust, product understanding and consumers' willingness to purchase Vodacom products.

7. Recommendation

Telecommunication organizations should strategically use credible and relatable external social media influencers to promote their products and services. Organizations such as Vodacom should select influencers based not only on popularity but also on their knowledge, credibility, authenticity, relationship with their followers and ability to communicate product information clearly. Influencers should be encouraged to use product demonstrations, personal experiences, educational explanations, storytelling and other creative forms of content that help consumers understand the benefits and use of telecommunications services. Organizations should also maintain regular monitoring of influencer campaigns to assess consumer responses and ensure that promotional information is accurate and transparent. This would help strengthen consumer trust, improve product awareness and increase the likelihood of purchasing decisions. The recommendation is directly supported by the study findings, which show that credibility, education, social proof, creativity, frequency and relatability were important features of effective external influencer promotions.

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