

Influence of Social Media Influencers on Youth Culture and Identity

Ayodeji Kayode AYODELE

Lead City University Press,
Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Ibadan, Oyo State
ayodejiayodele51@gmail.com

&

Uthman Olakorede ISAMEEL

Lead City University Press,
Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Ibadan, Oyo State
uthmanolakorede@gmail.com

Abstract

The emergence of social media influencers has transformed the way youths engage with culture, identity, and self-expression in the digital age. In Nigeria, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have become dominant spaces where influencers actively shape youth fashion, values, aspirations, and behaviour. Despite the increasing visibility and authority of influencers in everyday youth life, scholarly attention to their impact on identity development within the Nigerian context remains limited. This study investigates the influence of social media influencers on youth culture and identity among students of Lead City University, Ibadan. Grounded in theories of social comparison and identity construction, the research explores the positive and negative psychological, cultural, and behavioural outcomes associated with influencer engagement. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 300 students selected through stratified random sampling across all faculties and academic levels. A structured questionnaire was used to capture students' experiences, preferences, and perceptions regarding influencer content. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests at a 0.05 significance level. Findings reveal that fashion, lifestyle, and comedy influencers are the most followed among Nigerian youths, and that influencers significantly

shape self-perception, lifestyle preferences, cultural orientation, and self-esteem. While many students report being inspired and informed by influencers, others noted feelings of pressure, self-comparison, and exposure to unrealistic standards. Hypothesis testing confirmed a statistically significant relationship between influencer engagement and youth identity, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concludes that social media influencers play a dual role as cultural educators and behavioural models, with the capacity to both enrich and distort youth identity. It recommends enhanced media literacy, responsible content creation, and further interdisciplinary research to guide healthier digital interactions among Nigerian youths.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Youth Culture, Identity Development, Nigerian Youths, Digital Media

Background to the Study

The rapid evolution of social media has profoundly transformed how individuals, particularly young people, communicate, construct meaning, and form identity. Platforms such as *TikTok*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *X* (formerly *Twitter*) have not only changed social interaction but also introduced a new digital class of personalities known as social media influencers (SMIs). These individuals, by curating content on fashion, beauty, lifestyle, health, comedy, and sociopolitical issues, have become pivotal figures in shaping youth culture and identity across the globe.

Social media influencers are viewed as more authentic, accessible, and relatable than traditional celebrities (Abidin, De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). They engage with followers in real time, often blurring the lines between private and public life. This continuous, parasocial interaction makes them highly influential in shaping not just consumption choices, but also personal values, body image, gender roles, and worldviews.

In the words of Giddens (1991), identity in late modernity is a reflexive project, a continuous process of self-construction based on social interactions. In today's digital era, these interactions are increasingly mediated through social media platforms, where influencers play an intermediary role. Youths model behaviour, speech, and appearance after these figures, leading to both aspirational mimicry and critical internal conflict (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2015).

In Nigeria, the influence of digital content creators has become multifaceted, shaping everything from language to lifestyle. Influencers like Enioluwa Adeoluwa, Sydney Talker, Papaya Ex, and Kiekie have become cultural arbiters among Nigerian youths. Their content, which often promotes trends in fashion, beauty standards, skits, and wellness, sets the tone for youth conversations and identity exploration on campus.

A recent study by Akintola (2024) found that consistent exposure to influencer content significantly affected undergraduates' body image and self-esteem. Among students in Osun State, 55.7% of high-exposure respondents reported increased dissatisfaction with their physical appearance and elevated levels of social comparison.

Furthermore, influencers are increasingly acting as informal educators and mental health advocates, often bridging the communication gap where institutional support may be lacking. Owolabi, Ogunlana, & Etim (2024) found that 62% of students in southwestern Nigerian universities considered influencer opinions on mental wellness "serious and useful." Influencers who shared personal stories of anxiety, stress, or depression were credited with reducing stigma and encouraging help-seeking behaviours among followers.

Similarly, Bibian and Ma'rof (2024), in a study of youths in Enugu East LGA, noted that social media use had a direct influence on self-concept

development. However, peer validation and online social support were even stronger predictors, suggesting that influencer impact is not unidirectional but shaped by social dynamics and interpersonal networks. The Social Comparison Theory by Festinger (1954) remains central to understanding influencer impact. In the social media age, youths often engage in upward comparisons, evaluating their worth against the often idealised lives of influencers. This can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Meier & Schäfer, 2018; Zhang, Li, & Zhao, 2021).

Most recently, Ugwu, Adeyemo, & Yusuf (2023) introduced the Social Media–Induced Depression Tendency (SMIDT) scale, validated among Nigerian university students. The study revealed that over 40% of respondents aged 16–26 exhibited signs of social media-induced low mood, particularly after prolonged exposure to curated and glamorous content from influencers. The influence of social media influencers in Nigeria is both pervasive and evolving. From reinforcing social values to challenging traditional norms, they are at the epicentre of youth culture and identity formation. As Nigerian youths increasingly look to online figures for direction, affirmation, and belonging, it becomes critical to examine the socio-psychological implications of this phenomenon, especially within university settings where identity is actively being constructed.

This study, therefore, seeks to interrogate the influence of social media influencers on youth culture and identity among students of Lead City University, with a view to understanding both its enabling and disruptive consequences.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the rapid expansion of influencer culture in Nigeria and its pervasiveness among young people, there is a glaring research gap

concerning its full impact on youth culture and identity development. While previous studies have explored social media's effects on self-esteem and mental health, few have specifically examined how influencer-generated content shapes youth values, self-perception, and social belonging in a localised African context.

Research by Akintola (2024) established that social media use predicts body image concerns and self-esteem issues among undergraduates in Osun State. However, the study did not focus on the specific role of influencers, figures who intentionally craft aspirational content for mass appeal. Similarly, while Owolabi et al. (2024) acknowledged the positive role of influencers in mental health sensitisation, they did not address the potentially negative outcomes of parasocial interaction, such as identity distortion or unrealistic lifestyle aspirations.

Moreover, many Nigerian youths develop parasocial relationships with influencers, one-sided emotional attachments that mimic real-life friendships (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). These relationships can blur the line between authentic self-expression and performative identity, especially when youths seek validation by mimicking influencer aesthetics and ideologies. This aligns with Giles' (2002) assertion that parasocial connections can become substitutes for real social bonds, possibly leading to social withdrawal or value disorientation.

Ugwu et al. (2023), through the SMIDT model, revealed growing signs of depression, escapism, and anxiety among Nigerian youths caused by constant exposure to idealised lifestyles promoted by influencers. However, their study was more clinical and did not examine how such exposure affects cultural values and identity formation.

Additionally, there is insufficient empirical data on how influencer content influences youth behaviour across cultural, ethical, and socio-economic lines. In a nation as diverse as Nigeria, this lack of nuanced

research limits our understanding of how influencers impact not just individual youth identity but broader youth culture, including fashion, language, attitudes toward relationships, politics, and even religion.

Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by exploring the positive and negative impacts of social media influencers on youth culture and identity. It will do so by contextualising the Nigerian experience within both national empirical data and global theoretical models.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives are to:

- i. To identify the types of social media influencer content most consumed by Nigerian youths,
- ii. assess how influencer content affects the cultural norms, values, and lifestyle preferences of Nigerian youths,
- iii. evaluate the extent to which social media influencers shape self-perception, self-esteem, and identity formation among youths,
- iv. examine both the positive and negative psychological and behavioural effects of influencer engagement on youth identity.

Research Questions

- i. What types of influencer content (e.g., fashion, lifestyle, activism, mental health) are most followed by Nigerian youths?
- ii. How do influencers influence the cultural expressions, value systems, and lifestyle choices of Nigerian youths?
- iii. In what ways do social media influencers affect youth self-image, self-esteem, and identity development?
- iv. What are the positive and negative impacts of social media influencer engagement on youth identity and behaviour?

Research Hypothesis

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Social media influencers have no significant influence on youth culture and identity in Nigeria.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Social media influencers significantly influence youth culture and identity in Nigeria.

Review of Literature

Social Media Influencers & Consumer Behaviour in Nigeria

The rapid growth of social media platforms such as *Instagram*, *TikTok*, *Twitter* (now *X*), and *YouTube* has significantly transformed consumer behaviour in Nigeria. Among the key drivers of this change is the rise of social media influencers, who play a pivotal role in shaping brand perception, purchase intention, and youth identity. Recent studies and industry reports highlight how these digital personalities have moved beyond simple product endorsement to become powerful cultural intermediaries who influence how Nigerians, especially young people, interact with brands, values, and one another.

A notable study by Adelabu et al. (2024) explored the impact of influencer marketing on brand acceptance among Nigerian youths. The research found that influencers significantly drive consumer engagement and loyalty to brands, particularly within the fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and entertainment sectors. These influencers help bridge the gap between brands and audiences by personalising brand messages and fostering a sense of trust. However, the study also flagged important concerns regarding the authenticity of influencer content, the need for clearer ethical guidelines, and the absence of transparent regulatory frameworks to govern paid partnerships. These issues, if left unaddressed, risk eroding consumer trust in the long term.

Suemo et al. (2024), in their study of beauty influencers on Twitter, emphasised that perceived attractiveness, credibility, and trustworthiness are major factors influencing product awareness and purchase intention among members of Gen Z. This demographic is particularly sensitive to how influencers present themselves, often aligning their buying decisions with influencers who reflect their values

and aspirations. For many young Nigerians, social media is not just a place for entertainment but a space for identity formation and self-expression. As a result, the influence of online personas often extends beyond product promotion to lifestyle inspiration and aspirational living. This links directly with the concept of identity signalling, where followers associate themselves with brands that reflect the values of their favourite influencers.

Supporting these academic findings are broader industry insights and market data. According to Statista, Nigeria's influencer advertising market is projected to reach over US \$5.3 million in 2025, with a steady annual growth rate. Social media advertising, in general, is expected to exceed US \$148 million in the same year. These figures reflect the increasing confidence that businesses place in influencer marketing as a key strategy for connecting with digitally-savvy consumers. Brands are now shifting focus from mega-influencers to micro- and nano-influencers, who often command higher engagement rates due to their niche audiences and perceived authenticity. As observed by Brand Communicator (2025), this trend is especially visible in Nigeria, where local influencers who use relatable content and native languages tend to resonate more deeply with their audience.

Trust remains a central component of successful influencer marketing. Novatia Consulting (2025) reports that over 70% of Nigerian consumers trust influencer recommendations more than traditional advertising. Influencer-generated content has been found to produce up to three times more engagement than brand-generated content, indicating that consumers value personal and relatable narratives over polished corporate messaging. These findings are consistent with the theoretical model of parasocial interaction, which explains how audiences develop emotional bonds with media figures. Such parasocial relationships can make consumers more receptive to the

messages and values communicated by influencers, further amplifying their impact on purchasing behaviour.

Nonetheless, the growing influence of social media personalities raises important ethical and regulatory questions. As influencer marketing becomes more commercialised, there is a pressing need for standardisation, particularly around disclosure of paid partnerships. While some influencers clearly state when content is sponsored, many still blur the lines between personal recommendation and advertisement, which can mislead followers. This is especially problematic in sectors like health, fashion, and cosmetics where uninformed choices can have harmful consequences.

In conclusion, social media influencers in Nigeria are undeniably reshaping consumer behaviour, particularly among youth. They act as powerful agents of brand communication, shaping preferences, trust, and even self-identity. While studies such as those by Adelabu et al. (2024) and Suemo et al. (2024) affirm their effectiveness in driving brand engagement and influencing purchase decisions, they also highlight the need for increased transparency, ethical guidelines, and media literacy among followers. For brands, the opportunity lies in collaborating with influencers who are not just popular, but authentic and aligned with the values of their target audience. For policymakers and marketers alike, balancing commercial potential with ethical responsibility will be essential to ensure that influencer marketing continues to thrive as a credible and sustainable form of digital engagement in Nigeria.

Influencer Effects on Self-Concept & Mental Health

The rise of social media influencers has significantly shaped how young people perceive themselves and approach mental health issues, particularly in Nigeria, where platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are highly popular among youths. Research by Bibian and

Ma'rof (2024) in Enugu East Local Government Council provides insight into the influence of social media on youth self-concept. Their study revealed that while social media does have an impact on how young people view themselves, social support and peer influence are stronger determinants of self-concept. Social identity also plays a major role, suggesting that youths navigate their self-image within a complex interplay of digital and real-life social forces. Notably, their research implies that influencer messages do not operate in isolation but rather interact with broader social dynamics such as cultural values and community norms.

In the realm of mental health, Owolabi et al. (2024) examined the role of social media influencers in sensitising Nigerian students to mental health issues. Their findings show that influencers can be powerful agents of awareness, helping to destigmatise conversations about mental health. However, many youths remain sceptical about the credibility of these influencers, especially when they lack professional qualifications or lived experiences. The study highlights a growing need for collaboration between influencers and certified mental health practitioners to ensure accurate messaging and build trust among followers.

Beyond individual studies, broader literature on this subject reinforces the complexity of the relationship between social media use and mental health. A scoping review by researchers published in *Behavioural Sciences* (2024) found that the effects of social media on youth mental health vary significantly depending on usage patterns. While passive use and social comparison tend to contribute to anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction, active and positive engagement, such as supportive communication, can enhance well-being by reducing loneliness and fostering a sense of connection.

The issue of social comparison is particularly salient in discussions of self-concept. According to social comparison theory, individuals evaluate their worth by comparing themselves to others. This phenomenon is amplified in digital spaces, where influencers often present idealised lifestyles and appearances. Young people, especially those with low self-esteem, are more vulnerable to internalising these unrealistic standards, which can lead to negative self-perception and mental distress. This is supported by findings from a 2024 study conducted at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which reported that social media use significantly predicts body image dissatisfaction among young adults, more so than general self-esteem. This aligns with global concerns about “Snapchat dysmorphia,” where individuals seek cosmetic changes to resemble their filtered online images.

In the Nigerian context, social media use among youth is intense and growing. The AXA Mind Health Report (2025) notes that nearly 44% of Nigerian youths aged 18–24 report experiencing mental health challenges, with social media addiction identified as a major contributor. Nigerian youths now spend an average of 3 hours and 42 minutes daily on social platforms, among the highest rates in Africa. This prolonged exposure, coupled with limited access to professional mental health support, makes many youths susceptible to anxiety, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy.

Public commentary in local Nigerian media supports these academic findings. Reports from platforms such as National Economy and Noah News emphasise that many Nigerian youths feel overwhelmed by the pressure to meet unrealistic standards portrayed by influencers. These platforms also underscore the need for mental health infrastructure and educational campaigns that promote critical engagement with social media content.

In conclusion, while social media influencers play a significant role in shaping youth self-concept and promoting mental health awareness, their impact is nuanced and deeply context-dependent. In Nigeria, influencer content often intersects with cultural, social, and infrastructural realities. The evidence suggests that interventions should not solely focus on digital strategies but also strengthen social support systems, promote digital literacy, and encourage collaboration between influencers and mental health professionals. This multi-level approach can help mitigate the negative effects of social media while amplifying its potential to positively influence the mental well-being and self-perception of Nigerian youths.

Sociocultural Pressures & Cultural Authenticity

The advent of social media has dramatically influenced cultural expression and identity formation, particularly within the Nigerian context. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have transformed not only individual behaviours but also collective cultural practices. Among the most striking shifts is the reconfiguration of traditional ceremonies, such as Igbo weddings, where digital aesthetics and influencer trends are increasingly shaping how these rites are perceived and performed. While this exposure can promote cultural visibility, it also introduces pressures that may dilute authenticity.

Nwagbara (2025) offers an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon by examining the impact of social media on traditional Igbo wedding culture. His study, grounded in ethnographic interviews with couples, event vendors, and social media influencers, reveals a dual reality. On one hand, digital platforms enable the widespread showcasing of cultural rituals like the “IgbaNkwu” (wine-carrying ceremony), making these traditions more accessible to the diaspora and global audiences. On the other hand, the visual-centric nature of social media drives many couples to prioritise spectacle over substance. The desire for an

“Instagram-worthy” wedding often leads to the adoption of globalised aesthetics, such as Western-style dresses, luxurious décor, and exotic locations, thereby reducing traditional customs to stylised backdrops rather than meaningful cultural expressions. This results in a form of cultural hybridisation where the appearance of tradition is preserved, but its deeper essence is overshadowed by performance for the digital gaze (Nwagbara, 2025).

This trend is not limited to wedding ceremonies alone. Ibrahim and Adetayo (2023), as referenced by Nazidi (2024), explore how social media shapes consumer behaviours among Nigerian youth. Their findings indicate that influencer-driven content fosters a culture of consumerism and materialism. Young people increasingly derive identity from what they wear, how they celebrate milestones, and what lifestyle they portray online. This shift marks a significant departure from traditional Nigerian values, which emphasise community, modesty, and purpose-driven living. Instead, social media encourages identity construction through conspicuous consumption, turning personal milestones into public performances meant to signal status and relevance. As a result, cultural authenticity becomes subordinate to the desire for digital validation.

Further compounding this issue is the commodification of tradition. Nigerian weddings, especially in urban centres, have become commercial events influenced by trends rather than rituals. Social media influencers now dictate popular colour palettes, decoration themes, and even types of dances to perform, often sidelining the elders and cultural custodians who once directed these affairs. This transformation is evident in the growing popularity of wedding blogs and “event planners” whose services cater not to tradition, but to a curated social media narrative. A report by 9JahotNews (2025) echoes this, noting that many Nigerian couples now face societal pressure to

conform to influencer-inspired templates, even when such choices conflict with family expectations or financial realities.

Despite these concerns, social media can also play a constructive role. It offers an opportunity for cultural revitalisation when used responsibly. For instance, when traditional storytellers, artisans, and community elders are given digital platforms, they can reclaim narratives and educate younger generations. There is also a growing call for culturally informed influencer marketing, where popular figures actively promote authentic practices rather than diluted, westernised versions.

To mitigate the adverse effects of social media on cultural authenticity, several interventions are recommended. First, media literacy programs can help youth critically evaluate the content they consume and share. Second, cultural institutions should engage with digital spaces to promote more grounded representations of Nigerian traditions. Third, collaborations between influencers and cultural custodians could foster content that balances aesthetics with authenticity. Finally, policy frameworks can be developed to guide the representation of cultural practices in digital media, ensuring that modernisation does not equate to erasure.

In conclusion, the influence of social media on Nigerian culture is complex and multifaceted. While it provides visibility and innovation, it also introduces sociocultural pressures that can compromise authenticity. In the case of traditional Igbo weddings and youth consumption habits, it is evident that influencer culture plays a substantial role in shaping modern practices. The challenge lies in leveraging the benefits of digital exposure without losing the essence of cultural identity. A balanced, intentional approach can help ensure that Nigerian cultural practices not only survive but thrive in the digital age.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the conceptual lens through which a study is examined. This study adopts two interrelated theories: Social Comparison Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory. Both offer valuable insights into how and why social media influencers impact youth culture and identity in Nigeria.

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954, explains how individuals assess themselves by comparing their opinions, abilities, and lives with others. In today's digital environment, particularly on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, this comparison is amplified. Influencers often present idealised versions of themselves, highlighting beauty, success, luxury, or happiness, against which young people may measure their worth.

For Nigerian youths, who are navigating key stages of identity development, these comparisons can strongly shape their self-perception. Positive effects may include motivation to improve or the adoption of constructive habits. However, frequent exposure can also trigger negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and confusion about personal identity. According to Okonkwo and Eze (2024), many Nigerian university students report distress after comparing themselves to influencers online, particularly regarding appearance and lifestyle.

These comparisons are often based on unrealistic or filtered content, creating pressures that may distort real-life expectations. As noted in the AXA Mind Health Report (2025), a significant number of young Nigerians experience mental strain linked to social media use, with many citing influencer culture as a contributing factor.

While social comparison can drive ambition, it can also promote insecurity when individuals perceive themselves as lacking. Therefore, this theory remains crucial in understanding the influence of social media on youth identity, behaviour, and mental well-being.

Parasocial Interaction Theory

Parasocial Interaction Theory describes the one-sided emotional bonds that audiences form with media figures, feeling as though they know or relate to them personally, despite the absence of real interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In the age of social media, influencers embody this phenomenon. Their content, often personal, casual, and interactive, creates an illusion of intimacy, positioning them not just as public figures but as perceived friends or mentors.

For Nigerian youths, these parasocial relationships play a significant role in shaping identity and behaviour. Influencers frequently become models for lifestyle choices, fashion, speech patterns, and ethical viewpoints. As content is consumed repeatedly, these values are internalised, subtly influencing how young people perceive themselves and navigate the world.

Scholars such as Adeniran and Yusuf (2024) observe that many Nigerian adolescents mimic the language, aesthetics, and opinions of influencers they follow, often without critical evaluation. This emotional attachment may lead to a shift in cultural orientation, aspirations, and personal values, sometimes creating tension between traditional norms and digital influences.

In essence, Parasocial Interaction Theory highlights how emotional investment in influencers can deeply impact identity formation, especially in impressionable youth audiences.

Application of Both Theories

Together, these theories reveal how influencers exert both psychological and emotional pressure on young people's self-concept. For students at Lead City University, the dual processes of comparison and emotional attachment shape evolving notions of identity, often blending local cultural elements with globalised online trends. This fusion challenge the preservation of cultural authenticity while reinforcing the role of influencers as modern agents of socialisation.

Empirical Studies

Nasidi et al. (2024) demonstrated that *TikTok* use among Nigerian students significantly influences self-esteem, especially due to upward social comparison. Similarly, Fardouly et al. (2015) found that image-based social platforms can lead to body dissatisfaction through frequent comparisons with idealised figures.

Sokolova and Kefi (2019) demonstrated that followers of influencers often perceive them as trustworthy and relatable, leading to behaviour imitation. In Nigeria, Suemo et al. (2024) found that Gen Z consumers exhibit loyalty and behaviour change based on parasocial trust with beauty influencers on Twitter.

Akintola (2024) conducted a survey among 400 undergraduates in Osun State, revealing that social media use significantly predicts both body image ($\beta = 0.14, p < .01$) and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.13, p < .01$). Around 55% of respondents reported high self-esteem, with females exhibiting stronger positive self-perceptions.

Nnamchi, Ike, Okafor, and Ogba (2024) studied 542 young adults at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their analysis showed social media usage was a strong predictor of body image dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.56, p < .001$), while self-esteem did not significantly predict body dissatisfaction. These findings suggest that exposure, often to

influencer content, can harm body image, even when self-esteem remains unaffected.

Research in Enugu East (2024) explored how social media usage, social support, and peer influence combine to shape youth self-concept. While social media use impacted self-perception, social support and peer influence were even stronger determinants, illustrating a layered social system where influencers act as one of many influencing components.

Bibian and Ma'rof's (2024) quantitative study involving 404 youths in Enugu East, Nigeria, concluded that while social media usage does influence self-concept, social support emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by social identity, peer influence, and then social media usage. The research underscores that influencer impact is enmeshed within broader communal and peer networks.

Owolabi et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive survey among university students across multiple Nigerian institutions. They found that social media influencers significantly contribute to raising awareness and reducing mental health stigma, though concerns remain regarding their credibility and professional authority. This demonstrates both the potential and limitations of influencer-mediated health messaging.

Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted for the study on the influence of social media influencers on youth culture and identity in Nigeria. It provides detailed information on the research design, study population, sampling procedure, instrument design, data collection process, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations.

The study employs a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for obtaining quantifiable data from a large number of

individuals, to describe and analyse observable patterns and behaviours. This design enables the researcher to explore how social media influencers impact the cultural values, lifestyle preferences, self-image, and identity formation of Nigerian youths in a university setting.

The target population for this study consists of all undergraduate and postgraduate students of Lead City University, Ibadan, within the age bracket of 15 to 30 years. This demographic is chosen because it represents the most active age group on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), and YouTube, where influencer content is highly visible. The university's digitally literate student community makes it a suitable environment for this type of research.

A sample size of 300 students will be selected from across all faculties of Lead City University. These include the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Education, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Environmental Design and Management, Faculty of Communication and Information Sciences, and the Faculty of Basic Medical and Health Sciences. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for finite populations and adjusted for feasibility, while still maintaining statistical reliability and generalizability.

To ensure fair and representative coverage, the study will adopt a stratified random sampling technique. In the first stage, each faculty will be treated as a stratum. The number of students selected from each faculty will be proportionate to the size of its student population. In the second stage, within each faculty, departments will be randomly selected, followed by simple random sampling of students from those departments. This multi-layered approach reduces bias and enhances the accuracy of the findings by reflecting the diversity within the university population.

The primary data collection instrument will be a structured questionnaire titled "Influencer Engagement and Youth Identity Questionnaire (IEYIQ)." The questionnaire consists of five sections. Section A captures demographic data. Section B identifies the types of influencers students follow. Section C explores how influencer content shapes cultural expressions and lifestyle choices. Section D addresses the influence of influencers on self-esteem, self-image, and identity formation. Section E examines both the positive and negative behavioural effects of social media influencer engagement. The questionnaire includes a mix of closed-ended and Likert-scale items, which allows for both quantitative analysis and respondent clarity.

To ensure validity, the instrument will undergo a content validation process involving communication and psychology experts who will review the items for relevance and clarity. A pilot test will be conducted with 30 students outside the final sample to assess the instrument's reliability. The internal consistency of the questionnaire will be measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum coefficient of 0.70 considered acceptable.

Data will be collected using a hybrid method involving both physical and online distribution. Google Forms will be used to reach digitally active students, while printed questionnaires will be shared through class representatives and departmental contacts for on-campus respondents. This approach ensures wider participation and accommodates students with varying preferences and levels of access.

The data obtained will be analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores will be used to answer the research questions. Inferential statistical techniques such as Chi-square tests and Pearson correlation will be employed to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. This will allow the researcher to determine

the existence and strength of relationships between influencer engagement and youth culture and identity.

In conducting this study, strict ethical standards will be observed. All participants will be informed of the purpose of the research and their right to voluntary participation. Informed consent will be obtained, and respondents will be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No identifying information will be disclosed. Ethical approval will also be sought from the appropriate ethics committee at Lead City University to ensure compliance with academic and professional guidelines.

By employing this comprehensive and representative methodology, the study aims to generate meaningful insights into the influence of social media influencers on the values, identity, and behaviour of Nigerian youths within the context of a university environment.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected from 300 respondents at Lead City University, Ibadan, regarding the influence of social media influencers on youth culture and identity. The analysis addresses the research questions using descriptive statistics and tests the hypothesis using inferential statistics.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 300 students participated in the study. The demographic data is presented in the table below:

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	144	48.0%
	Female	156	52.0%
Age	15-18	52	17.3%
	19-22	138	46.0%

Academic Level	23-26	78	26.0%
	26-30	32	10.7%
	100	60	20.0%
	200	50	16.7%
	300	84	28.0%
	400	66	22.0%
	Postgraduate	40	13.3%
	Social and Management Sciences	72	24.0%
	Arts and Education	51	17.0%
	Basic Medical and Health Sciences	39	13.0%
Faculty	Engineering	30	10.0%
	Environmental Design and Management	27	9.0%
	Natural and Applied Sciences	33	11.0%
	Law	24	8.0%
	Communication and Information Sciences	24	8.0%
	Total	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation

This table shows a balanced and proportional representation of students from all eight academic faculties in Lead City University. Social and Management Sciences had the largest number of respondents, consistent with its larger student population, while smaller faculties like Law and Communication also had fair representation.

Research Question One

What types of influencer content (e.g., fashion, lifestyle, activism, mental health) are most followed by Nigerian youths?

Type of Influencer Content	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fashion	90	30.0%
Lifestyle	75	25.0%
Comedy/Skits	60	20.0%
Activism	30	10.0%
Mental Health	25	8.3%
Education	20	6.7%
Total	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation

The data reveals that fashion-related influencer content is the most followed among Nigerian youths at Lead City University, representing 30% of responses. Lifestyle content comes next with 25%, followed by comedy/skits at 20%. Educational content (10%), activism (8.3%), and mental health (6.7%) are less frequently followed. This suggests that entertainment and image-oriented content have a stronger appeal to the youth audience than advocacy or wellness-focused content.

Research Question Two

How do influencers influence the cultural expressions, value systems, and lifestyle choices of Nigerian youths?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Influencers shape how I dress or behave	105 (35%)	120 (40%)	35 (11.7%)	30 (10%)	10 (3.3%)	300
I've adopted habits based on influencer content	98 (32.7%)	110 (36.7%)	45 (15%)	35 (11.7%)	12 (4%)	300
Influencers reflect modern Nigerian youth culture	125 (41.7%)	95 (31.7%)	50 (16.7%)	20 (6.7%)	10 (3.3%)	300

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation: The data indicates that the majority of respondents either strongly agree or agree that social media influencers play a significant role in shaping their dressing, habits, and perception of youth culture in Nigeria. For instance, 75% of respondents believe that influencers shape how they dress or behave, while 69.4% admit to adopting habits from influencer content. This suggests a strong correlation between influencer activity and youth cultural expression.

Research Question Three

In what ways do social media influencers affect youth self-image, self-esteem, and identity development?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Influencers affect how I perceive myself	90 (30%)	115 (38.3%)	50 (16.7%)	30 (10%)	15(5%)	300
I feel pressured to look or behave a certain way	75 (25%)	105 (35%)	60 (20%)	45 (10%)	15(5%)	300
I admire influencers and wish to be like them	85 (28.3%)	100 (33.3%)	70 (23.3%)	30 (15%)	15(5%)	300

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation: The data reveal that a significant portion of respondents agree that influencers shape their self-image and identity. 68.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree that influencers affect how they perceive themselves. 60% report feeling pressured to look or behave a certain way due to influencer content. 61.6% admire influencers and aspire to emulate them. These findings suggest that social media influencers have a moderate to high influence on youth self-image, self-esteem, and identity development.

Research Question Four

What are the positive and negative impacts of social media influencer engagement on youth identity and behaviour?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Influencers inspire me to pursue my goals	130 (43.3%)	95 (31.7%)	40 (13.3%)	25 (8.3%)	10 (3.3%)	300
I learn useful things from influencers	115 (38.3%)	100 (33.3%)	50 (16.7%)	25 (8.3%)	10 (3.3%)	300
Influencer culture promotes unrealistic lifestyles	95 (31.7%)	105 (35.0%)	60 (20.0%)	25 (8.3%)	15 (5.0%)	300
Too much focus on influencers affects youth behaviour	110 (36.7%)	100 (33.3%)	50 (16.7%)	30 (10.0%)	10 (3.3%)	300

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation: The data indicates that social media influencers have both positive and negative effects on youth identity and behaviour. A majority of the respondents (43.3%) strongly agree and 31.7% agree that influencers inspire them to pursue their goals, while 38.3% strongly agree and 33.3% agree that they learn useful things from influencers. This suggests that influencers play a motivational and educational role for many youths.

However, the data also reveals growing concern about the adverse effects of influencer culture. Specifically, 35.0% agree and 31.7%

strongly agree that influencer culture promotes unrealistic lifestyles, while 36.7% strongly agree and 33.3% agree that too much focus on influencers negatively affects youth behaviour. This indicates that while influencers may be a source of inspiration, their impact on youth behaviour and perceptions of reality can also be problematic.

In summary, although social media influencers contribute positively to youth aspirations and learning, their influence must be approached with critical awareness due to the risks of unrealistic expectations and behavioural shifts.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis

H₀ (Null): Social media influencers have no significant influence on youth culture and identity in Nigeria.

H₁ (Alternative): Social media influencers significantly influence youth culture and identity in Nigeria.

To test the hypothesis, Pearson's Chi-Square Test was employed to assess the relationship between social media influencer engagement and variables such as identity and self-perception, cultural behaviour, and lifestyle choices.

Variable Relationship	Chi-Square Value (X²)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	P-value
Influencer Engagement x Identity and Self-perception	16.42	4	0.002
Influencer Engagement x Cultural Behaviour	18.03	4	0.001

Decision Rule

Since the p-values (0.002 and 0.001) are less than the significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis.

Conclusion

There is a statistically significant relationship between social media influencer engagement and youth identity, behaviour, and cultural expression among students of Lead City University. This suggests that influencers play an active role in shaping how youths perceive themselves and engage with culture.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the role social media influencers play in shaping youth culture and identity among students of Lead City University, Ibadan. Data from 300 respondents across all faculties and academic levels indicate that social media influencers significantly impact the lives of Nigerian youths in multifaceted ways.

Firstly, the study confirmed that fashion, lifestyle, and comedy/skit influencers are the most followed categories among respondents. This aligns with Akintola (2024), who noted that youths are drawn to visually appealing and inspirational content. However, while Akintola focused primarily on body image and self-esteem concerns, this study expands on those findings by identifying comedy and lifestyle content as dominant forces in shaping youth preferences, particularly among students.

Secondly, respondents revealed that influencers affect their cultural expressions, values, and lifestyle choices, including how they dress, speak, behave, and respond to trends. This supports the findings of Ugwu et al. (2023), who found that constant exposure to idealised content fosters escapism and alters behavioural patterns. However,

unlike Ugwu et al.'s clinical focus on depression and anxiety, this study contextualises these changes within youth culture, showing how digital content now helps define everyday cultural norms.

Thirdly, the study found that influencers significantly shape students' self-image and identity development. Many respondents admitted to feeling pressured to match the standards set by online personalities. This corroborates the assertion by Giles (2002) that parasocial interactions can substitute real social bonds, leading to value disorientation and identity performance. Similarly, Sokolova & Kefi's (2019) insights into parasocial relationships were evident in this study, as students reported emotional attachment to influencers they had never met, often mimicking their behaviours.

Interestingly, while Owolabi et al. (2024) emphasised the positive role of influencers in mental health awareness, the current study reveals a more complex reality. Although respondents acknowledged the motivational and educational roles of some influencers, particularly those promoting personal development and entrepreneurship, they also expressed concern about the pressure to attain unrealistic lifestyles. Thus, this study extends Owolabi et al.'s findings by highlighting the dual nature of influencer impact.

Finally, Pearson's Chi-square analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between influencer engagement and youth identity and behaviour. This empirical evidence reinforces the need for localised research, as previously noted in the literature, especially given Nigeria's cultural diversity and the evolving digital landscape.

In conclusion, this study affirms that social media influencers are key cultural agents in Nigeria. Their content shapes youth identity, values, and behaviour, supporting global models such as the SMIDT model (Ugwu et al., 2023) and parasocial theory (Giles, 2002), while also

highlighting uniquely Nigerian dimensions of youth culture that require continuous, contextual exploration.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media influencers have a significant and measurable impact on the cultural expression, self-identity, lifestyle choices, and behaviour of Nigerian youths. Influencers, whether intentionally or not, have become role models whose online presence shapes how youths perceive beauty, success, morality, and self-worth. While many of these impacts are positive, encouraging ambition, creativity, and learning, there are also negative consequences such as pressure to conform, low self-esteem, and behavioural imitation that may not align with personal or cultural values.

The digital space, particularly influencer culture, has become a powerful force in redefining youth identity in Nigeria. As such, there is a growing need for education, self-awareness, and digital literacy to help young people engage with influencer content more critically.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Media Literacy Campaigns:** Schools, universities, and media bodies should promote media literacy to help youths analyse and interpret influencer content more critically, discerning between positive influence and harmful trends.
- 2. Balanced Influencer Content:** Influencers should be encouraged to portray more realistic and diverse representations of youth experiences, including failures, struggles, and self-growth, rather than promoting perfection and materialism.
- 3. Parental and Institutional Guidance:** Families and educational institutions should engage in open conversations with youths about

online content, helping them maintain a healthy balance between digital life and real-world values.

4. Further Research: Additional studies should be carried out across multiple universities and regions in Nigeria to validate these findings and examine evolving trends in influencer culture.

5. Policy Involvement: Stakeholders in digital policy and social media regulation should consider setting up guidelines or frameworks that promote responsible content creation by social media influencers.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study adds to existing literature on digital culture and youth development in Nigeria by empirically demonstrating that:

- Social media influencers are cultural actors, not just entertainers or marketers.
- Influencer content significantly contributes to youth identity construction and behavioural outcomes.
- Nigerian students are both active consumers and reactive subjects to digital culture, indicating the need for intentional content regulation and education.

Suggested Areas for Further Research

1. A comparative study of the influence of male vs. female influencers on youth identity.
2. The role of religious or value-driven influencers in shaping moral behaviour.
3. The psychological impact of influencer comparison and validation-seeking among adolescents.
4. Influence of micro-influencers vs. macro-influencers on decision-making and identity.

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