

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENT INFLUENCE ON CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR AND POTENTIAL ADDICTION TO ENERGY DRINK BEVERAGES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NSUKKA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social media advertising has altered the landscape of marketing globally impacting on products such as energy drinks whose appeal have become a global phenomenon. Today energy drinks are typically marketed as functional beverages that enhance alertness, improve concentration and increase physical stamina. It has also become a global youth culture phenomenon typically marketed with branding that emphasize improved vitality, high performance and adventure associating consumption with social status and modern lifestyle. Nigerian youths like their counterparts all over the world constitute a significant proportion of online users and have become prime targets for social media digital advertising. Companies increasingly leverage platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and WhatsApp to promote their products through viral campaigns, influencer endorsements and interactive content. The Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura served as the theoretical framework underpinning this research. The study assessed Nigerian youths aged 15–30 using 379 undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The survey research design was utilized and data was collected using the questionnaire. Findings of the study indicated high exposure to social media advertisements with significant awareness of their persuasive effects on consumption behaviour. Findings showed that influencer endorsements, viral trends and peer behaviour strongly shaped youths' energy drink intake, with many respondents reporting habitual consumption and mild withdrawal symptoms, indicating potential dependency. The study recommends that peer education and youth engagement should be strengthened through youth-centered programs to integrate discussions on the health effects of energy drinks with respondents emphasizing the need for stricter regulations, visible health warnings and responsible influencer marketing.

Introduction

The digital age has transformed organizational communication with consumers, positioning social media platforms as dominant channels for brand visibility, consumer engagement and sales promotion (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Social media advertising (SMA) builds on this capacity by delivering promotional

content in personalized, interactive and viral forms. Social media advertising thrives on personalization, peer recommendations and trends amplified by viral sharing making it highly persuasive in shaping consumption patterns (Godey, 2016). Today, aggressive traditional and digital marketing campaigns have entrenched energy drinks within youth social and recreational culture.

Energy drinks have become a global phenomenon in the last few decades and are typically marketed as functional beverages that enhance youth, alertness, improve concentration and increase physical stamina (Alissa, 2025). Originally introduced in Asia with the launch of Lipovitan in Japan in the 1960s, energy drinks rose to global prominence when Red Bull entered the Austrian market in 1987 and subsequently expanded internationally in the 1990s (Reissig, Strain and Griffiths, 2009). Their primary ingredients usually include caffeine, sugar, taurine, guarana, and various vitamins.

In Nigeria, energy drinks became popular in the early 2000s which coincided with the industrial growth period associated with urbanization, nightlife expansion and increasing exposure to Western lifestyle trends. Adeola, Adeniyi & Ajayi, (2022) agree noting that several factors account for the rising consumption of energy drinks among Nigerian youths. Lifestyle aspirations promoted by celebrities and influencers portray energy drinks as fashionable accessories of success, nightlife enjoyment and athleticism. Young Nigerians associate these beverages with modernity, success and social belonging. Ishak, Helmy & Yusoff, (2012) aver that academic and work-related pressures also encourage young people to seek quick sources of stamina to remain awake and productive. Thus, peer influence plays a large role, as many young people adopt energy drink consumption as part of social identity and group conformity.

Conversely, Seifert, Schaechter, Hershorin and Lipshultz, (2011) note that frequent consumption of energy drinks is linked to adverse effects such as insomnia, rapid heart rate, restlessness and dependency. Addiction may develop when individuals find it difficult to function without energy drinks or experience withdrawal symptoms such as fatigue, headaches and irritability (Reissig, Strain and Griffiths, 2009). Through visually appealing campaigns, influencer endorsements, and viral trends, energy drink brands create strong lifestyle associations with their products (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). These advertisements often downplay health risks while glamorizing connections to music, sports, nightlife and youthful vibrancy (Alabi, 2013). Some scholars emphasize that constant exposure to such advertising can normalize consumption and reinforce consumer bias, especially when advertisements feature celebrities or peer influencers, (Pecora, 2002).

For Nigerian youths, who are among the most active social media users in Africa, these marketing strategies are especially powerful. Okorie and Oyedepo (2011) observe that young Nigerians often emulate lifestyles portrayed on social media, thereby reinforcing consumption behaviours that may result in habitual or

addictive use of energy drinks. Social media's interactive features, such as likes, comments, shares and viral challenges, further embed consumption within social networks, creating pressure for conformity and sustained demand. The addictive potential of energy drinks is largely attributed to their high caffeine content which is a central nervous system stimulant that can lead to tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms (Bakare and Okeke, 2021). Over time, larger quantities would be demanded by regular consumers in order to achieve the same effect, which may lead to compulsive/addictive consumption. Reported withdrawal symptoms include headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, irritability, and difficulty concentrating (Seifert et al, 2011).

In Nigeria, the risks are exacerbated by weak regulatory enforcement. Although the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC, 2022) has guidelines on labelling and permissible levels of caffeine, enforcement is inconsistent. Many youths are thus exposed to aggressive marketing campaigns without adequate information on the associated health risks. Bakare and Okeke (2021) argue that insufficient regulation of both advertising and product formulation heightens the risks of dependency and addiction among vulnerable populations.

Beyond direct advertising, social media platforms influence social norms and peer behaviours and their algorithms prioritize content that generates high engagement, which includes energy drink promotions, influencer content and user-generated posts about consumption. Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche and Young (2015) states that this creates a feedback loop where increased exposure leads to higher acceptance and normalization of frequent consumption despite its drawbacks. Social media therefore functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a cultural space where energy drink use is legitimized, glamorized and integrated into youth identity.

Nigeria provides a particularly significant context. With over 70% of its citizens under the age of 30 (National Board of Statistics, NBS, 2023) and internet penetration exceeding 152 million active users (National Communications Commission, NCC, 2023), youths represent the largest demographic of online consumers. Energy drink companies such as Fearless, Power Horse, Monster, Bullet etc, increasingly rely on digital marketing strategies that appeal directly to young consumers. Influencer partnerships, music and dance collaborations, comedy skits, and meme culture have made SMA the most effective tool for reaching Nigerian youths (Nzeakor, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and WhatsApp, are major channels for communication, marketing and consumer

engagement with energy drink manufacturers capitalizing on platforms to promote products through targeted advertisements, celebrity endorsements and viral trends which leave out the detrimental side effects. Also, the growing exposure trend and role of peer pressure influencing increased consumption of energy drinks among youths raises health and psychological concerns which may be as a result of poor awareness. Importantly, the excessive intake of energy drinks which have been linked to insomnia, anxiety, cardiovascular stress and psychological dependence may be as a result of inadequate knowledge with these issues being exacerbated by weak regulatory oversight highlighting poor consumer education.

Consequently, this study assesses the influence of SMA on consumption behaviour and addiction to energy drinks among Nigerian youths, aiming to provide empirical insights for policymakers, educators and health practitioners on factors influencing them.

Research Objectives

The following research question will guide this study:

1. Ascertain the extent youths exposed to social media advertisements on energy drinks in Nigeria.
2. Examine how social media advertisements influence consumption behaviour and potential addiction to energy drinks among Nigerian youths.
3. Find out factors that contribute to peer endorsement and peer influence in encouraging consumption behaviour and potential addiction to energy drinks among Nigerian youths

Literature Review

Social Media Advertising and Consumption Behaviour

Social media advertising has become a dominant force in shaping consumer behaviour, especially among young people who constitute the largest demographic of online users. Instructively, Mangold and Faulds (2009) described social media as a “hybrid promotional tool” that not only delivers marketing messages but also fosters consumer-to-consumer dialogue, thereby amplifying the reach and credibility of advertisements. This dual function may explain why consumption patterns among youths are increasingly shaped by social media campaigns, online reviews and viral trends. For instance, Statista (2023) reports that young people globally spend an average of three to four hours daily on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where they are continually exposed to targeted advertisements, influencer endorsements and interactive brand campaigns. The participatory nature of social platforms has also made advertising more persuasive, as young audiences tend to

place greater trust in messages shared by peers, influencers and celebrities within their networks.

Kotler and Keller (2016) noted that consumer behaviour is driven by cultural, social and psychological factors, which are constantly reinforced through social media platforms. Consumption behaviour refers to the habitual ways individuals acquire, use and dispose of products. Among young people, these patterns are deeply intertwined with peer influence, lifestyle aspirations and the desire for social visibility. Duffett (2015) agrees that social media advertising strongly influences brand loyalty and purchase intentions among Millennials and Generation Z consumers, particularly in fast-moving consumer goods. Thus, constant exposure creates familiarity and desirability, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase and repeat consumption.

In addition, De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) note that this form of advertising blurs the line between personal expression and commercial promotion making it difficult for young consumers to critically evaluate the persuasive intent of such messages. This points to the growing impact of social media influencers, who use subtle advertising techniques that mimic peer recommendations. Consequently, products such as energy drinks, fashion items and lifestyle brands are normalized as everyday essentials rather than occasional indulgences.

Chester and Montgomery (2011), caution that the immersive and persuasive nature of digital advertising often leads to impulsive, compulsive and repetitive consumption behaviours. The constant bombardment of advertising messages fosters a "culture of immediacy," where young people feel compelled to try new products to maintain social relevance. In the specific case of energy drive beverages, social media advertisements typically emphasize themes of vitality, enhanced performance and social fun. These themes resonate strongly with youths, who are often motivated by the desire for increased energy during academic, social and recreational activities. Over time, repeated exposure to such messages not only shapes consumption patterns but may also encourage overreliance and potential addiction.

For Nigeria where social media usage continues to expand rapidly, media literacy has become a vital skill for promoting responsible decision-making in the digital environment. Potter (2016); Buckingham (2003) all note that media literacy enables individuals to critically analyze and interpret persuasive messages, helping them distinguish between entertainment and marketing intent. In Nigeria, exposure to global advertising trends, coupled with limited regulation of digital marketing, makes young consumers increasingly vulnerable to persuasive and manipulative advertising strategies. Hobbs (2010) states that without adequate media literacy,

young audiences are more likely to internalize commercial messages and adopt risky consumption patterns. Strengthening media literacy among Nigerian youths therefore provides them with the analytical capacity to recognize the commercial motives behind such portrayals and to make health-conscious choices that align with their long-term well-being.

One of the most visible strategies in energy drink marketing is the sponsorship of events strongly associated with youth culture. Major brands such as Red Bull and Monster have invested heavily in extreme sports, gaming competitions, and music concerts. According to Miller (2008), such sponsorships serve as indirect advertising by embedding energy drinks within exciting and adventurous contexts. This not only enhances brand visibility but also reinforces the association between energy drinks and risk-taking behaviours that appeal to young people. In Nigeria and other developing contexts, energy drink companies have also been known to sponsor sporting activities, local music shows, reality TV programs and nightlife events. These sponsorships increase accessibility and normalize the presence of energy drinks in social spaces frequently visited by youth. The alignment of products with leisure and entertainment further reinforces the idea that energy drinks are integral to youthful enjoyment and social participation.

Addiction, Regulatory and Ethical Concerns

One of the most debated issues surrounding the consumption of energy drinks is the potential for addiction and dependency among young people. Addiction in this context is often linked to the high levels of caffeine, sugar, and other stimulants contained in these products. Alissa (2024) notes that caffeine is the most widely consumed psychoactive substance in the world, and regular intake can lead to tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, irritability, and fatigue. Energy drinks contain caffeine levels much higher than soft drinks present a significant risk of fostering dependence when consumed habitually.

Moreover, addiction to energy drinks is frequently associated with polysubstance use, especially alcohol. Ferreira, de Mello, and Pompéia (2004) noted that mixing alcohol with energy drinks is a rising trend among young adults, as the stimulant properties of caffeine mask the depressant effects of alcohol. The addictive nature of energy drinks carries several health and social implications. Seifert, et al (2011) note that these adverse effects like increased heart rate, hypertension, sleep disturbances, anxiety and in extreme cases, cardiovascular problems. The addictive cycle is thus reinforced by the dual appeal of energy drinks as both everyday stimulants and nightlife enhancers, placing youths at greater risk of long-term health complications leading to dependence similar to that observed in other psychoactive substances.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how individuals acquire new behaviours in social contexts. Unlike traditional behaviourist theories that emphasized learning only through direct reinforcement or punishment, Bandura argued that people can also learn indirectly by observing the actions of others and the consequences of those actions. This process, known as "observational learning", highlights the powerful role of modelling and imitation in shaping human behaviour.

Social Learning Theory explains how individuals acquire behaviours through observation, imitation and reinforcement. In social media contexts, influencers, celebrities, and peers function as models. Youths observing such figures consuming energy drinks perceive these behaviours as attractive and socially approved. Reinforcement occurs when peers validate consumption choices, embedding energy drinks within youth identity.

Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism interaction between behaviour, personal factors, and environment applies here. Youths' desire for energy drinks and social acceptance interacts with social media environments saturated with advertisements, creating feedback loops reinforcing consumption. They begin to imitate these behaviours by purchasing and consuming the same brands of energy drinks. The reinforcement process plays out when peers or online followers validate their choices with admiration or when the consumption aligns with aspirational lifestyles presented by influencers. Over time, this cycle of observation, imitation, and reinforcement may encourage habitual energy drink use. Once normalized, such behaviour can progress into excessive consumption, which carries the risk of addiction.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study will adopt the survey research design. The survey design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect quantitative data from a large number of respondents at a specific point in time. In the context of this study, it facilitates the examination of youths' opinions, attitudes and behaviours concerning the influence of social media advertisements on their consumption behaviour and potential addiction to energy drinks.

Population of the Study

The population of study of this work are the students of UNN, specifically, undergraduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka Campus. The population,

according to the academic planning unit UNN, was 22799 for undergraduate students.

Sample Size

Using Australian calculator, Hence, the sample size is 379

Source:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Sample+Size+Calculator>

Sampling Techniques

The research work employed multistage sampling technique utilizing cluster, simple random sampling by balloting and convenience sampling. The total number of shared questionnaires by the researcher is Three hundred and Seventy-nine (379) copies of questionnaire which were shared on social media groups within the University of Nigeria.

Method of Data Collection

The Likert scale online questionnaire was adopted as the main instrument for data collection of the study. The questionnaires were administered digitally for reach and response rate. The forms were produced through Google Forms to enhance quality and standard.

Reliability of Research Instruments

The reliability of the research instrument was tested using the test-retest method. 25 respondents participated in a pretest, after which the same questionnaire was administered to them again after a five-day interval. The Guttman Scale formula was used to calculate the reliability coefficient, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 90%, indicating high reliability.

= 90% (very high)

Method of Data Analysis and Presentation

Data gotten from the field work were analysed with the use of mean, likert scale, charts, percentages and frequency distributions to give accurate report of the findings.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research question 1: Ascertain the extent youths exposed to social media advertisements on energy drinks in Nigeria.

Table 1: Exposure Level

S/N	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	Mean	remark
1	I am aware of energy drink brands (Fearless, Monster, Power Horse, Bullet, etc.).	180	146	26	20	11	379	4.18	High
2	I frequently come across energy drink advertisements on social media platforms.	165	146	34	22	12	379	4.10	High
3	I follow social media influencers or celebrities who promote energy drinks.	138	150	47	30	14	379	3.91	High
4	Social media advertisements make me more aware of energy drink products and brands	154	155	38	21	11	379	4.05	High

Average Mean = 4.06 (High)

The analysis of data reveals a high level of exposure of Nigerian youths to social media advertisements promoting energy drinks. The computed grand mean score of 4.06 indicates that respondents are significantly exposed to various forms of online promotional messages. A majority of the participants strongly agreed that they are aware of popular energy drink brands such as Fearless, Monster, Power Horse and Bullet. Similarly, most respondents reported that they frequently come across advertisements for these products on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

Research Question 2: Examine how social media advertisements influence consumption behaviour and potential addiction to energy drinks among Nigerian youths.

Table 2: Extent of Influence.

S/N	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	Mean	remark
10	I feel the urge to take energy drinks regularly because of constant exposure to advertisements.	121	126	65	44	23	379	3.64	High
11	I experience cravings or find it difficult to reduce my energy drink intake.	112	123	74	47	23	379	3.56	High
	I have experienced withdrawal symptoms (e.g., headaches, fatigue, irritability) when I stop taking energy drinks.	94	107	78	64	36	379	3.27	High
13	Social media advertising encourages excessive or addictive consumption of energy drinks	138	142	52	32	15	379	3.93	High

Average Mean = 3.60 (High)

The analysis of data reveals that social media advertisements has high influence on both the consumption behaviour and potential addiction of Nigerian youths to energy drinks. The responses yielded a grand mean of 3.60, which signifies that most participants agreed that constant exposure to energy drink advertisements on social media affects their desire and consumption habits.

Research Question 3: Find out factors that contribute to peer endorsement and peer influence in encouraging consumption behaviour and potential addiction to energy drinks among Nigerian youths

Table 3: Peer Role, Consumption Behaviour and Potential Addiction.

S/N	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total	Mean	remark
14	I don't feel bad when i consume energy drinks because my friends or peers also consume them.	115	136	63	41	24	379	3.65	High
15	Influencer endorsements on social media strongly affect my choice of energy drinks.	128	147	52	36	16	379	3.86	High
16	Viral social media trends (e.g., TikTok challenges, skits) can influence my decision to try energy drinks.	120	138	64	40	17	379	3.73	High
17	I believe peer influence plays a bigger role than advertisements in my energy drink consumption.	99	121	79	52	28	379	3.46	High

Average Mean = 3.68 (High)

The analysis of data indicates that social media endorsements and peer influence play significant roles in shaping the consumption patterns of Nigerian youths toward energy drinks. The responses produced a grand mean of 3.68, suggesting that peer interactions, influencer endorsements and viral online trends strongly affect the attitudes and behaviours of youths regarding energy drink consumption.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that Nigerian youths are highly exposed to social media advertisements promoting energy drinks. Most respondents

indicated that they frequently encountered energy drink promotions across different platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, and that many of these advertisements are presented by popular influencers and online personalities. This high level of exposure suggests that energy drink companies have strategically utilized social media as a powerful tool to reach and persuade young audiences. This finding is consistent with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (2001), which emphasizes that individuals learn behaviours and develop preferences by observing others, particularly influential figures and media models. The result also aligns with the study by Manasa et al. (2025), who noted that social media has become one of the most effective channels for influencing the purchasing behaviours of young consumers.

This finding reinforces the argument of Baran and Davis (2015), who assert that repeated exposure to advertising messages not only informs consumers but also shapes their attitudes and behavioural patterns. Similarly, Adeniyi (2021) found that persuasive media messages can normalize potentially risky behaviours by associating them with modernity, success and social desirability. In this context, social media advertising appears to have contributed significantly to framing energy drinks as both functional and socially appealing, thereby enhancing their attractiveness to youths.

The study also established that constant exposure to social media advertisements influences not only consumption but also tendencies toward addiction among Nigerian youths. A considerable number of respondents acknowledged experiencing cravings, difficulty reducing their intake and even mild withdrawal symptoms when they attempted to stop consuming energy drinks. This implies that continuous exposure to persuasive advertisements can foster habitual consumption that may develop into dependency. The finding supports the observation by Rembe (2017); Buchanan, Yeatman, Kelly & Kariippanon (2018) who all aver that repeated digital exposure to stimulant-based products can reinforce behavioural patterns and increase tolerance levels among young consumers. It further aligns with Bandura's assertion that individuals are likely to imitate behaviours portrayed positively in the media, particularly when such behaviour in this case, the constant depiction of energy drinks as symbols of vitality and success encourages excessive or addictive consumption among youths.

Another finding of this study is the significant role of peer influence and endorsements in shaping the consumption patterns of Nigerian youths. Many respondents admitted that they consume energy drinks because their friends or peers do so, while others indicated that influencer endorsements and viral social media trends motivate their decisions to try or continue consuming such drinks. It aligns with the report by Deloitte Digital (2025), which found that social media users,

especially younger audiences, are more likely to engage with products endorsed by peer influencers who are featured in viral online content. The implication of this finding is that social validation and the desire to belong to a social group contribute significantly to energy drink consumption among Nigerian youths, often amplifying the persuasive effects of direct advertisements.

Summary

In general, high exposure to influencer-driven content and viral campaigns promotes both curiosity and habitual consumption, while peer influence reinforces social acceptance of the behaviour. Although many respondents showed awareness of the associated health risks, the persuasive appeal of online advertisements and the pressure to conform to social trends continue to drive consumption. The study therefore underscores the urgent need for stricter regulatory frameworks, responsible marketing practices and targeted health education to mitigate the adverse effects of social media advertising on youth consumption behaviours.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media advertisements possess substantial influence on the consumption behaviour and potential addiction to energy drinks among Nigerian youths. Continuous exposure to persuasive advertising messages, especially through influencers and viral content, fosters both curiosity and habitual consumption. The glamorization of energy drinks as fashionable and performance-enhancing products has normalized their intake among young people.

It also found that peer influence, combined with the desire for social acceptance, contributes significantly to the growing culture of energy drink consumption. Moreover, while many youths recognize the health risks associated with overconsumption, the power of advertising appeal and social influence often outweighs rational health considerations. Therefore, the influence of social media advertising extends beyond mere awareness because it shapes perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, sometimes resulting in dependency-like tendencies. It is thus imperative for advertisers, regulators, and health agencies to take proactive steps toward ensuring that the marketing of energy drinks on social media prioritizes public health and ethical standards.

Recommendations

There is a need for stricter regulation of social media advertising. Government agencies such as the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) should implement and enforce more stringent guidelines governing the online promotion of energy drinks. Such regulations should ensure that advertisements include explicit health warnings and refrain from portraying energy drinks as symbols of strength, success, or glamour.

Secondly, the promotion of health education and awareness about the side effects should be intensified. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with educational institutions and media organizations, should launch public enlightenment campaigns to equip young people with accurate information, enabling them to make healthier choices.

In addition, peer education and youth engagement should be strengthened. Youth-centered programs should integrate discussions on the health effects of energy drinks, while youth-led organizations can play an active role in promoting awareness and encouraging healthier lifestyle habits.

Furthermore, influencers, celebrities and energy drink marketers should disclose brand sponsorships openly and avoid exaggerating the benefits of these drinks in ways that could mislead their audiences. Responsible advertising practices by influencers can help reduce the normalization of energy drink consumption among impressionable youths.

Moreover, self-regulation and moderation should be encouraged among Nigerian youths. Schools and universities can support this initiative by including topics on media literacy and health responsibility in their orientation or wellness programs.

There should be collaboration among key stakeholders, to ensure that advertising practices are balanced, ethically sound and designed to protect young audiences from manipulative marketing strategies. Through such collaboration, the harmful effects of unregulated energy drink promotions can be minimized and public health safeguarded.

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