

A REVIEW ON SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND INFLUENCING AND CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS

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Abstract: The purpose of this literature is to review the role of brand Influencers and their impact on social media, especially with regards to consumer purchase decisions. Based on the literature there are many ways to create brand exposure using social media platforms, but, brand influencing has been proven to a great extent to be one of the best social media marketing strategies which attract a wide coverage and it is widely used by a good percentage of marketers around the globe. Consumers found influencer's posts much more important than their number of followers. Besides that, customers consider social media influencers more credible and trustworthy than a traditional celebrity endorsement. It can be concluded that influencers' posts on social media such as Instagram have a great impact on the consumer's purchase intention as well as in their brand attitude. Therefore, some variables must be taken into account by marketing professionals, if they want to succeed in brand influencer marketing.

Keywords: Brand Influencer, Purchase Intention, Marketing, Brand Attitude.

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are over 3.7 billion Internet users in the modern-day digital era, which represents almost 50% of the entire world's population. Mass communication is not as predominant as it used to be because of the rise in internet and the marketing techniques that come with it, being that in today's era, a very large percentage of people communicate and share information via this medium. The Network and communication technology are now facilitated by social media via texts, videos, blogs, pictures and status updates on social networking sites (SNS) such as Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn (De Valck et al., 2009). As stated by Nedra et al. (2019) due to this new era, customers have greater opportunities to express their opinions and share their views immediately with their friends or followers via social media.

The use of brand influencers is one of the very many marketing strategies employed by marketers in today's business environment. They are said to enable or provide an image to the brands. Social media or organizational brand influencers were brought about mainly due to intense competition in the business environment among various products and services (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000). Brand influencers or are channels in brand communication through which a celebrity or known individual acts as the brand's spokesperson and certifies the brand's claim and position by extending his or her reputation, popularity and status in the online or on social media. In short, it is a tool of marked distinct products or services that creates a niche in the online market place and among equals in the industry, and amongst the firms sponsoring the brand endorsers (Sola, 2012).

A. The literature on Past Studies

Wang and Hariandja (2016) had researched brand ambassador entitled "The Influence of Brand Ambassadors on a Brands Image and Purchase Decision: A Case of Tous Les Jours in Indonesia". In this study, the author used the brand ambassadors, brand image, and purchase decision. Questionnaires were distributed to 139 respondents, and results from the study showed that brand ambassadors positively influenced the organisations' brand image and consumer purchasing

decision, this, the use of brand ambassadors or influencers as a marketing tool ought to be recommended. Yoo and Jin (2013) had completed a study on “Effects of celebrity organization congruence on audience attitudes, preferences, and credibility ratings for goodwill ambassadors”. In this study, 194 out of 304 respondents used in the study responded using the online survey. The variables used in this study are trustworthy, expertise, attractiveness, attitude toward the organization, goodwill ambassador, and congruence level. The results showed that Celebrity endorsement or influencer can be applied likewise to the relationship between a goodwill ambassador and the company to which they represent. Goutam (2013) researched about “The Influence of Branding Ambassadors on Buying Behavior of Soft Drinks in Belgium”. For conducting this study, the researcher used questionnaires which were distributed to 100 respondents with age ranging between 17-30 years old, where, 67 of them were males and the remaining 33 were female, which is including of the personal observer. There were two variables used in this study, namely brand ambassadors and buying behaviour. The result of this study showed that brand ambassadors or brand influencers had a great impact on the brand of soft drinks. Ogunsiji (2012) in his study “The Impact of Celebrity Endorsement on Strategic Brand Management” used celebrity credibility, celebrity personality, popularity and celebrity communication as the variables for the study. The samples used were randomly selected from the top ten marketing organizations and determined by 50 marketing specialists and key distributors. After analysing the data collected, the researcher found out that was about 98% correlation between success in the use of celebrity endorsement and the market brand strength.

From the period advertising agencies discovered the value of using celebrities as part of their branding campaigns a large range of products and brands have been represented by celebrities and influencers. McCracken (1989) defined celebrity endorsement as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and also uses this on behalf of a product by appearing with it in an advertisement or social media post”. Hackley & Hackley’s (2015) definition of celebrity is widely accepted. It states that “individuals who have achieved public recognition among consumer’s non-consumers alike, leading them to develop a large fan base and a large community of followers”. The range of product categories ranges from cosmetics, textile, banking, phones, Jewries, groceries, and other consumer products. By using celebrities as part of their communication strategies, brands get the attention of consumers who want to look, smell or feel like their preferred celebrities and idols. According to Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta (2010), the traditional perspectives on celebrity endorsement are centered on communication theories. Celebrity endorsements or brand influencer are described by communication theories as one-way communication and persuading process where factors that exist within the endorser are thought to be important. The factors mentioned were: source, credibility, and attractiveness. Consumers develop a relationship with each celebrity and brand, having different possible perceptions towards one and another. Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta (2010) argued that a consumers’ attitudes towards a brand are most likely to be influenced by the pre-existing attitudes towards the brands, as a result of a partnership and the perceived usefulness of the products and brands, thereby, forming a possible circle which influences consumers’ perceptions of the partners, which in turn, leads to a positive evaluation of the relationship. Schema theory proves very useful when treating ads since according to Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta (2010), a buyer’s attitude towards a brand or celebrity will be determined by the preceding attitudes towards both, even past experiences with the brand or celebrity will be able to influence these attitudes.

B. The literature on Past Studies

The term influencer marketing is relatively recent, although there are already different classifications from dissimilar authors. According to Sudha & Sheena (2017), influencer marketing is the process of identifying people who influence a particular target audience or intermediate, so they can be part of a brand’s campaign, hence increasing reach, sales, or engagement through their visibility and personality. Agreeing with these authors, influencer marketing is an extension to the original idea of word-of-mouth marketing, focusing on a social context and generated more professionally. For the brands that look to broaden and increase their audience, influencer marketing is very useful in building a solid relationship with customers, through trustworthiness and realness. Influencer marketing can usually be accomplished in two ways: earned influencer marketing, which consists in any type of influence that’s unpaid for (genuine recommendations to catch brand’s attention, etc.) or paid influencer marketing, which consists in marketing ads that take the form of sponsorship, pre-roll advertising or testimonial messaging. This type of content creation can appear at any of the influencer’s posts and budgets vary widely, generally based on audience reach. As stated, influencers are content creators who grew by collecting a high number of followers. They give their followers an insight into their personal, everyday lives, their experiences and opinions through blogging or creating short-form content like Instagram or Snapchat. By involving

opinion leaders, (e.g. by offering to test a product, organizing an exclusive event, or simply paying them), brands aim to encourage them to endorse their products, thus building their image up among influencers' often huge base of followers, a practice called influencer marketing. The same marketers reported that influencer marketing consists of identifying and targeting influential users and stimulating them to support a brand or certain products over their social media activities. The main challenge of this marketing strategy is the identification of an appropriate opinion leader or influencer. The higher the number of followers an influencer has, the larger the reach of the brand message. Assessing the number of followers or one's audience size has frequently been put forward as a first step to see who the true opinion leaders are. A roadmap was elaborated to identify online opinion leaders in virtual communities in which the first phase is finding out who are active users with a large follower base. There are several sectors that influencers take interest in: health and fitness, fashion and beauty, food, high-tech, etc. YouTube, Instagram and Facebook influencers usually show the consumers the products they have experienced, providing their opinion or simply promoting them online. Typically, these posts are original images or videos with content related to the product/service of a definite brand (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer marketing has become an important medium for social media. The same writers claim that marketing on social media has changed from involving a stabilizing force (i.e. firms' integrated pattern of decisions concerning products and services) to implementing destabilizing forces. In other words, firms do not control marketing strategies anymore as consumers are increasingly responsible for making these marketing judgments. Due to this considerable change, the connections between establishments and their consumers go beyond the orthodoxly defined firm–customer dyad (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Therefore, digital influencers are increasingly valued by the world of marketing, being the gap between firms and consumers and contributing to its success. Influencer marketing can be practised taking into account 3 aspects: reach, relevance and resonance. Reach is related to the measure of the number of an audience since an influencer has a certain average of followers in an exact niche or market. This first aspect allows the digital influencers to reach masses of consumers through their social media channels. On the other hand, relevance concerns the degree of significance to the reader/consumer. The influencers must know the best and most imaginative way to promote a product/service to make it relevant for the audience. Finally, the resonance counts the amount of activity that an influencer yields by posting good content. This number can be higher if the influencer has strong relationships with their public, which are built with trust and transparency (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

C. The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intention

“Brands and businesses are increasingly interested in finding ways to leverage ‘popular figures’ as brand ambassadors on social media, and those are not necessarily famous singers, actors or athletes” (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). According to Sokolova & Kefi (2019), it became crucial for many brands to create and cultivate relationships with social media influencers, as reported by a recent study conducted by Business Insider. Concurring with the same study, investments in this area are poised to reach between \$5 billion and \$10 billion in 2022 (that is a five-year compound annual growth rate of 38%), particularly in the sectors of beauty, fashion, parenting and tourism. Consumers actively produce and publish multimedia content, also known as User Generated Content, about their opinions among different brands and other situations. Such content has demonstrated to be more popular and effective than professional advertisements. Nowadays, it's a fact that influencer marketing has a noteworthy impact on consumers' purchase intentions, through their products/services commendations, reviews, etc. Casaló et al. (2018), claims that among the several social networking sites (SNS) that is currently available, Instagram seems to be experiencing a rapid increase in the number of active users. Fashion brands have significantly more followers and interactions than other types of brands. Due to the feeling of immediacy that is created and because it created communities, Instagram is the most used platform by opinion leaders and this trend will continue soon. It has also been revealed that the engagement rate is higher on Instagram, as opposed to other SNS, and this percentage is even greater in the case of influencers (Casaló et al., 2018).

According to a Nielsen marketing analysis, influencer marketing yields returns on investments (ROI) 11 times higher as compared to digital marketing (Lim, et al., 2017). As reported by Media Kix marketing, approximately 80% of online marketers stated that social media influencers are potential endorsers who boost their online businesses to higher levels. These statistical data can effectively validate the usefulness of 11 social media influencers in motivating consumers' purchase intentions. Furthermore, recent influencer marketing reports also revealed that an estimated 50% of the brands earmarked an uptick fund allocation in contracting social media influencers to promote their brands (Lim et al., 2017). Furthermore, as stated by Singh & Banerjee (2018), previous studies have discovered that the presence of a celebrity in a commercial produces higher purchase intentions. Consumers sometimes purchase a product only because they appreciate

a specific celebrity supporting the product (Verma & Kapoor, 2004). Celebrities play a vital role in advertisements, constituting a deciding factor in the consumers' attitude formation and purchase intention. Moreover, it was noted that the partnerships between companies and celebrities have an advantageous effect on the expected future companies' profit. Celebrity endorsements impact the market in a way that the correlation between stock market value and celebrity endorsements has generated a reasonably persistent return (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). As stated by Casaló et al. (2018), opinion leadership impacts consumer's behavioural intentions in several ways. On one hand, it serves to increase the consumer's will to interact with the respective Instagram accounts and recommend them to others, in turn, benefiting the opinion leader. This means that followers are involved in a practice which is called the value-creation process – they can contribute with their knowledge if they interact with the account, and the number of followers may increase if they recommend it to others. Consequently, this buzz between the consumers may increase the value of the opinion leader, which is a central aspect of the new dominant logic for marketing. Also, according to Casaló et al. (2018), this whole process may have an impact on companies' sales; since consumers tend to follow the fashion advice posted on the account, and hence may trust the opinion leader's posts because of their product experience and perceived knowledge. This influence is even more effective when the consumer perceives that the content posted on the account matches his/her personality and interests, which conveys more credibility. According to Ge & Gretzel (2018), firms are, increasingly, accepting the fact that influencer marketing is a successful way to reach consumers and engage with them, influencing their purchase decisions. “The capabilities of social media influencers in effectively creating and transforming marketing messages underline their important role in understanding social media marketing pomposity.” (Ge & Gretzel, 2018: 1277) Digital Influencers, due to their proficient social media language skills, they are capable of using a very persuasive language since they deeply understand what followers want to read. A very good knowledge of customer's interests and values are needed to persuade the audience effectively using words. Also, social media Influencers understands consumer needs and wishes. They can create a special connection with their followers by speaking their language (emojis, etc.), and by presenting exciting contents and topics. Therefore, the tendency for a bigger consumer purchase intention is higher (Ge & Gretzel 2018).

D. Factors that Influence Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention on Instagram

Several factors bring about the consumer's purchase intention, as well to its change or making of an opinion towards a brand, product or service. Usually, these aspects are characteristics of an influencer but can also apply to customers. The explanation of the fundamental ones is exposed below:

- **Credibility & Creativity:** Credibility could be defined as the degree of the dependability and trustworthiness of the source (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970; Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). The credibility concept is related to the perception of communication quality by each member of the audience. Digital influencers have a positive impact on their audience through the internalization process. Individuals share similar values and attitudes with the speaker. One of the main factors of credibility, besides trustworthiness and goodwill, is expertise, which represents the experience and knowledge the person has in a certain field. While trustworthiness concerns the perceived honesty of the speaker, the goodwill suggests his/her perceived caring about his/her audience. Therefore, if the spokesperson is considered trustworthy, attractive and seen as an expert by their audience, it can certainly influence the attitude and behaviour of individuals, including purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). According to Lim et al. (2017), “Trustworthiness and expertise are two elements that are discussed within source credibility. Information presented by a credible source (e.g. social media influencers) can affect consumers' beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviours (Wang et al. 2017). Also, research by Haron et al. (2016) has provided evidence that, despite having unique content, the quality and reliability of the message is also very important and can significantly increase the consumer's purchases. That is, trustworthiness and the information quality shared by the opinion leaders/influencers do have a positive influence on purchase intention. As stated by Singh & Banerjee (2018), the level of consumers' purchase intention is better when the influencer's credibility is very high. The advertisements that are based on credible sources are more likely to influence convictions, assessments, attitudes and/or behaviours of a consumer, making him/her motivated to accept the information as truthful and in turn, use it. Furthermore, it has been considered that a positive brand personality, guarantees an increase in purchase intent and later, the products gain the value of differentiation. The endorsement featuring an influencer/celebrity with higher credibility leads to a positive impact on the consumers' attitude towards the advertisement (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). Hence, this situation will positively influence the attitude towards the brand (brand attitude) since consumers will have a better opinion about the company. Casaló et al. (2018) confirm that the main factors that lead a poster to be perceived as an opinion leader on

Instagram are originality and uniqueness instead of quality or quantity. Thus, aspects such as creativity, or being one of a kind, seem to also be fundamental in becoming a digital influencer.

- Image Congruence:** Image Congruence is yet another essential factor that is directly and significantly related to credibility, brand attitude and purchase intention growth. According to Paul & Bhakar (2018), Image congruence (IC) is defined as “*similarity between the image of a celebrity, public figure, sports personality, or other endorsers, and the image of the brand being endorsed*” (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Usually, advertising agencies elect a celebrity endorser or influencer according to certain elements such as the celebrity’s credibility, the match between the influencer and the brand, the image of the celebrity among the multitudes, etc. IC between the celebrity and the brand being publicized is one of the most important criteria that increase the celebrities’ trustworthiness, product evaluations by customers, and other aspects of advertisement and communication success (Paul & Bhakar, 2018).
- Para-Social Interaction:** According to Sokolova & Kefi (2019), the theory of Para-social interaction (PSI) defines the relationship between a spectator and a performer with an illusion of intimacy as for the ‘real’ interpersonal relationships (Dibble et al., 2015). Currently, it is very common for young women to follow various celebrities on Instagram and be influenced by them. Despite this, digital personalities seem to have more persuasiveness and credibility than traditional celebrities since followers are more capable of relating to them. Typically, the accounts that give the most support to their followers, by encouraging them to do worthy things for themselves and providing them with positive reviews, are the most appreciated ones. A study conducted in China revealed that Para-social interaction is influenced by empathy and the low self-esteem of the follower, also being positively related to purchase intention. PSI is directly related to the concept of similarity, which was found to be a persuading accelerating factor, especially if the similarity is significant to the message conveyed. People who have similarities generate a higher level of trust among each other, in this case, similarities between the speaker and the audience. Therefore, the social cognitive theory proposes that people are easily influenced by celebrities/digital influencers with whom they can relate to. Concurring with Sokolova & Kefi (2019), the younger generations are more likely to buy a product endorsed by someone with a similar self-image to them. The similarity between interacting individuals in terms of beliefs, education and social status is called attitude homophily (Prisbell and Andersen, 1980); (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019: 3). This idea is related to the similarities the individuals have with each other and the number of interactions that result from it. The higher the number of interactions, the bigger the number of relationships that are developed and, in the case of influencers, it’s called a Para-social relationship, which is strongly connected to the identification process. However, an opposite effect can also happen if the public perceives a person as a non-expert, especially regarding factual matters (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019; Knoll et al. 2015).
- Extrovert/Introvert Types of Personalities:** According to Dhar & Jha (2014), the costumer’s personality can be divided into two types: introverted and extroverted, being that these two types can effectively influence the user’s behaviours concerning their engagement and involvement on social media sites. The same authors stated that human personality plays a significant role in online purchasing decisions. It was perceived that people with an extrovert personality are more social and more involved in social media activities, while introvert personality people are less involved in social media activities. Therefore, targeting the extrovert population will increase brand attitude and, hence, the chances of product purchasing trends.
- Followers and Followed Ratio:** A high number of followers merged with a low number of followers can be an indicator of a false account created for advertising intents. These profiles might cause perceptions that the influencer is mainly aiming at commercial collaborations, thus being less authentic, whereas authenticity should be precisely the strength of collaborating with influencers (De Veirman, et al., 2017: 813). Also, according to the same study, when a product with an opposite design is recommended by an influencer with a high number of followers, perceptions of uniqueness and attitudes towards the brand are lower compared to when it is endorsed by an influencer with a moderate number of followers. A high number of followers generated the idea that the product is not that exclusive after all, as many others are interested in it. Thus, the influencer’s number of followers can effectively change consumer’s perceptions and, hence, affect their brand attitude and purchase intentions (De Veirman et al. 2017; Cresci, et al. 2015).

E. Social Media Influencer’s Vs. Traditional Celebrities Endorsement

As stated by Lim et al. (2017), social media influencers play a highly crucial role in creating product engagement and brand loyalty as they are efficient in interacting to a niche segment, even though celebrity endorsements are more useful

in raising brand awareness among consumers. Social media influencers as brand endorsers have grown especially among new and small online businesses. According to the same authors, based on the principles of influencer marketing, companies generally invite social media influencers such as bloggers with thousands of followers in their social media accounts as their brand ambassadors. The content announced by social media influencers is usually seen as more reliable and attracting to consumers, and have been validated by 82% of followers' polls, in which consumers are reported to be more likely to follow what their favourite influencers' put forward. In comparison to the celebrity endorsement marketing strategy, the use of social media influencers is seen as more credible, trustworthy and knowledgeable due to their empathy in building connections with consumers, especially for businesses that target the younger consumers (Lim et al., 2017). Distinctly different than orthodox celebrities, social media influencers are considered to be accessible, believable, intimate and hence easy to relate to, as they share the personal, usually inaccessible aspects of their life with their followers and connect with them directly. This may produce Para-social interaction, which has been defined as the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with an influencer and makes consumers more vulnerable to their opinions and behaviour (De Veirman et al. 2017; Abidin, 2016; Schau & Gilly 2003).

II. FUTURE DIRECTION PATH

From the above literature, we can categorically state that the endorsement of celebrities, is a great way to create brand awareness, as customers are more likely to use a product that their favourite "idol" is using. Future researchers could focus on the post-purchase behaviour of consumers when buying due to a social media post. The aim is to check if the product or service consumed meets or exceeds their expectations. More so, marketers should target audience with extrovert personalities as they have been proven to be more involved in social media activities than introverted ones. Lastly, to achieve more consistent and reliable information, the future review could cover international influencers, since the job of digital influencers is taken more seriously.

III. CONCLUSION

There are various procedures to create brand exposure using social media platforms, but, brand influencers have proven to a great extent to be one of the best social media marketing strategies which attracts a huge number of consumers, and it is one of the most used strategies by a good percentage of marketers around the globe.

Based on the literature, it can be concluded that influencers' posts on social media such as Instagram have a remarkable impact on the consumer's purchase intention as well as brand attitude. Therefore, some variables must be taken into account by marketing professionals, if they want to succeed in influencer marketing for their brands or companies. Finally, it was seen that consumers find the influencer's posts to be much more important than their number of followers. Besides that, in general, customers consider social media (Instagram) more credible and trustworthy than traditional celebrities (actors and singers). Thus, marketing specialists should invest more in micro-influencers, who are people that do not necessarily have a high number of followers but have a considerable impact on their online communities, using the Instagram platform.

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