The Significance of Influencers and the Power of Marketing in Social Media

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**Introduction**

An Influencer is defined as a person who exerts influence or inspires the actions of others (“Influencer,” 2019). It is further defined as a person whom “is able to generate interest in something, such as a consumer product, by posting about it on social media (“Influencer,” 2019). As the online sphere grows, and more consumers go to their peers to provide guidance related to purchasing decisions, the more it is important for brands to build an online presence that allows them to interact with the consumer. This may include paying influencers to influence the public li the company’s favor. More specifically, according to Forbes magazine, influencers focus on key members of the target market, rather than the market as a whole, and provide the brand with social influence, through celebrity appeal, by showcasing that consumers have something in common with the influencer, thereby increasing their desire to try the related product (Parekh & Forbes, 2018)

The current research paper will draw on previous studies of social media and the work of influencers to determine the power of marketing in social media. More specifically, it will collect Likert-Based quantitative data from among the target demographics for social media influence using influencers to gauge their actual impact on consumers, and their effectiveness at determining the decision making process.

**Theoretical Background**

This chapter will provide an annotated review of the literature, as it relates to the hypothesis and primary direction for the research as a whole. The study will be organized according to the primary objectives that come out in the review of the existing literature. The literature review continues findings related to the texts, academic publications, books, news articles, internet articles and other suitable examples of related text..

2.1 Motivation

 Motivation is defined as the base reason that individuals behave the way that they do (Scnepenger et al., 2006). Thus, it could be argued that motivation is fundamental to the decision making process, as it relates to consumer goods When considering consumer behaviors, and what drives them to make purchasing decisions, motivation can be considered the process, or the factors that make people believe that the need to , or want to, make a specific purchase (Solomon & Bamossy, 2015).

 Consumers are typically motivated to satisfy their personal wants and needs during the pre-purchase stage of the consumer cycle (Solomon & Bamossy, 2015). Thus, influencers, by socially engaging the target audience at the pre-purchase stage, is able to help consumers interact with brands, and this increases their purchasing motivation (Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014).

 Given that research indicates that consumers who are exhibiting seeking behaviors are more motivated to purchase than those who are not (Kahn, 1995). Given how many people seek answers, or community and community response online, it is therefore not surprising that influencers, as members of the social group, can have a normative influence on the group as a whole, which in turn impacts consumption decisions. Thus the overall findings suggest that influencers alter motivation, and that this, in turn, alters decision making and purchasing decision making.

2.2 Social Influence

 The idea of social influence is highly related to the idea of motivation. Social influence is defined as the process by which an individual, and in this case a consumer, adapts their personal opinions and beliefs, as a direct result of social action with other people. (Moussaid, 2013). Society as a whole is strongly connected, and so social influence plays a direct role on market influence, and the eventual decision to make, or not make, a purchase (Moussaid, 2013). Correspondingly, social identity theory states that individuals will be more likely to make a specific decision, if it is the decision that the social majority is making (Thomson etal., 2014). This is impotent as it relates to the way that social media is used to promote goods, because it shows how influencers, by building personal relationships through social media, are able to influence the decision making nd purchasing behaviors of consumers. Essentially the influence becomes a leader, who establishes a social group, with shared norms and guidelines, which include social behaviors or the perception of purchasing decisions. As such, it is important to consider how, or in what ways, the influences are alternating the purchase behavior or their target audience, including what types of action are taken as a result of the influence.

2.3 Social Media

Social Media can be defined as an interactive computer mediated communication platform, which facilitates the creation and sharing of data or information, across multiple members of the same group (“Social Media”, 2019). It is a means of creating and sharing content, within a social network. As such, it is an important vehicle for the opinions of influencers to reach the public that they target.

When considering the importance of social media, as it relates to the actions of individual, it is important to consider the degree to which further exposure influences decision making and ultimately the decision to purchase.

2.4 Perceived Value

 The perceived value is the relative benefit as it is related to the relative cos for the consumer (Sanchez eta l., 2004). Perceived value, rom the viewpoint of the consumer, is based on the attributes of the thing that is for sale, but also how those attributes are presents (Sheth et al., 1991). Sheth et al., (1991) specifically developed the theory of perceived value, which states that the way that consumers perceive the value of an ite3m can be defined by five key factors: functional value, social value, emotional value, conditional value, and Epistemic value, or perceived novelty. The role of influencers is to alter the perception of consumers of each of these factors, or levels of perceived value, so that the customer perceives an item as more valuable, and is thereby encouraged to make a purchase of the item (Beneke, Flynn, Greig, & Mukaiwa, 2013). Bemeke et al., specifically demonstrated that perceived product quality, as it relates to price, are key areas influenced by influencers, as well as the risk perceived by the client, as it relates to willingness to buy.

2.5 Hypotheses

H1: Consumers are more influenced by social media, when encountering messages from influencers

H2: Influencers increase the likelihood that consumers will purchase sometime.

H3: Influencers alter the perception of value of a good, making the good more attractive to the target market

H4: influencers motivate buying behavior of consumers, through social engagement, and social contract, or the constructs of social influence.

2.6 Main Objectives

The primary goals of the current study are to explore the perceived impact of influencers, engaging with the public through social media, on consumer behavior and purchase decision making. Specific objectives include:

* To explore whether there is a correlation between influencers and motivation to buy
* To explore whether there is a correlation between influencers’ stance and perceived value
* To explore how influencers use social conventions, through social media, to influence purchasing decisions.
* To explore whether social media itself, of the influencers have the greatest effect on consumer intent.

**Justification**

Influence marketing can be considered a fundamental advertising concept (Brown & Hayes, 2008). It is a more visible, or increased level of word of mouth, which focuses on putting both the star-appeal and the product itself equally on display (Korler & Armstrong, 2012). Evidence also consistently indicates that this kind of appeal can have significant impact on the purchasing behavior of consumers (Korler & Armstrong, 2012). Social media influencers interact with consumers primarily through social media, and use it as a location by which they can talk directly to the target market about a given product or service (Korler & Aremstrong, 2012; Jaakonmaki et al., 2017). It is a result of this that influencers receive sponsorships from companies who actively want influencers to market the product directly to the private consumer (Li et al., 2014).

 Social media influencers are new to the market of advertising, and essential endorse a product, creating media content that is distributed through social media, and designed to promote a product or shape a consumer’s response to certain goods (Fredberg, 2010). Thus, as the total number of users on social media grows so does the audience and reach of influencers who are directly working to influence the decisions that they make, in the market. According to Fredberg (2010), social media influencers have become a vital part of the marketing approach of brands, and generating buzz and recognizability for product lines. This is so much so an issues that businesses are increasingly tracking influencers, and their relevance to decide who to work with. This gives them a competitive advantage, in the form of the types of marketing that they gain from their partnership with influencers.

Given that recent research shows that as much as 50 percent of all consumer decisions, and as much as 50 percent of all consumers make purchases based on information they are exposed to through social media (Saiidi, 2016; Grimes, 2012), it is important to consider how many of those decisions are directly related to influencers. It is also important to consider how that relationship is managed, so as to ethically maintain transparency with the client. Thus, the current study will seek to quantify the degree to which influencers are well targeted and impact culture of spending related to influencers, related to their targeted consumer.

**Methodology**

 This chapter will present the proposed methodological approach, which will be used as the foundation for the collection and analysis of data in the original study. This will include an overview of the research approach, or method, the design, the ethical considerations and the resulting limitations.

4.1 Research Approach

The current paper will be conducted using a positivist approach. The positivist approach to research is useful for analyzing sociological phenomenon, which is based on quantitative evidence. Deductive reasoning can be used to determine how society operates and why (Larraine, 1979; Gartell, & Gartell, 1996). As such, a literature review, or what is already known about human behavior, will be used as the foundation of the study. The literature review will directly influence the questions posed in the collection of primary research. The goal will be to use surveys to collect quantitative date, so that the data can be correlated between the actions of influencers, and the decision making of their consumers. This would allows for the development of a new understanding of how this materially contributes to sales.

4.2 Research Design and Sample

The research design applied will be the distribution of an online survey, through a specialty app designed to deploy surveys and correlate the collected data, like Survey Monkey. A convenience sample will be used, both because of the time constraints and because of the ease of access to subjects that it allows. It is possible that a snowball effect could also be used, this would allow the researcher to identify the first few people in the target demographic, and then allow them to invite their friends. This would still provide a convenience sampling, but would increase the likelihood of getting a sampling of young people who meet the study’s target audience.

The questionnaire which will be used will be created by the researcher, and based on the existing body of literature and the identified gap in the existing literature. This will help to provide more targeted information about the effect of influencers on the perception and decision making of consumers. The survey will contain a total of five demographic questions, that simply collect demographic data, and ten Likert-scale questions that collect quantitative information regarding the impact of influencers on their decision making.

The survey for this research will being distribution around the 18th of January and continue through the 18th of February. This is after the first of the year, during a time when people are likely to respond, but is close enough to the holiday season to take advantage of asking people questions about their shopping behaviors very near the largest shopping season in the fiscal year. This will also ensure that the surveys are being collected after the holidays when people return to their normal school and work routine, and are more likely to completely finish the survey.

4.3 Ethical Consideration

In terms of ethical considerations, it is critical to consider the ethics of the given research and their possible impacts on the participants (Sanders et al., 2016). It is critical that the ethical-consent form, in a style that corresponds to the requirements of the university be used. The ethical -consent ensures informed consent for all participants. It also must be reviewed and signed by all participants before they begin taking part in the survey task. This provides the participant information about the goals and objectives of the study and the kind of data that will be collected, as well as their participation, or the expectations related to their participation, within the study. It also provides an explanation that the participant my quit, and request that their information be removed from the study, at any time.

 It is also important to protect the personal information of all clients and their privacy. As such, all results should be collected anonymously, such that there is not any identifying characteristics, there is not personal information to be violated, and there is not any risk of identification and resulting bias by the researcher. Thus, each participant will be assigned a case number, which will be used to identify them, instead personal information.

The study will also use a set of inclusion/exclusion criteria, in order to ensure that the information collected is valid, and that collecting their data is legal/ they have the legal right to give informed consent. This means that all participants must be over the age of 18, have at least one active social media account, and provide their signed consent.

4.4 Research Limitations

 There are two significant limitations to the study: sample size and diversity. It is important that the size of the sample collect be significant, so that the correlation can be drawn between the independent and dependent variables in the hypothesis. The sample size must therefore be statistically determined to be significant, as it relates to the target population, for this study.

Secondly, there is the risk of a sample population that is skewed because it is a samples of convenience. For example, it might contain more women than men, and more students than working consumers. This is the risk that is associated with using the convenience sampling, and so, must simply be explained as it relates to the findings, when the final sample’s demographics are known. In essence these limitations may limit the overall generalizability of the study’s findings, because it will be limited to a local subset of the larger population of interest as determined by the sample collected.

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