Factors affecting marketing by social media influencer: A discussion on extensive literature.

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ABSTRACT

The digital space is growing ever than before. The recent covid 19 pandemic has just added fuel to fire. The new internet celebrities i.e. social media influencers has become more prevalent in the marketing arena owing to the growth of digital space. The social media influencers are replacing traditional word of mouth marketing and are sufficient to create necessary buzz around the brands, as they are considered to be the opinion leaders on the digital space. Most of the brand are now collaborating with these influencers and not hesitating to invest their money on them. However selecting the right influencer for the brand is a difficult task. It is more difficult now because a lot of new influencers are emerging. The marketer should select those influencers who can create value for the brand which is possible through establishment of brand credibility. The study aims to explore the variables that can add to brand credibility from influencer marketing perspective.

Keywords: Digital space, Social media influencers, Brand credibility

INTRODUCTION

Celebrity endorsement is one of the most commonly used marketing tools of organisations all around the world. Use of celebrities from different fields be it cinema, sports to promote products or services has always proved to be effective. But in the recent years with the advent of **new internet celebrity called social media influencers** and with their growing popularity, companies can be seen abandoning traditional celebrities and are preferring to market their product through these influencers (Veriman *et al*., 2017).

Social media influencers are the people who have built a sizeable amount of follower on social media platforms by proving themselves as a trusted tastemaker in one or several niche (Veirman *et al*., 2017).They are regular people like us who have expertise in a specific area and have become popular by posting content regarding that particular area (Lou and Yuan., 2019). As they are regular people representing common masses, social media influencers enjoy a similar level of trust as people have on their friends (Swant, 2016). When businesses sell their product or services by means of promotion through these popular people on internet, it can be termed as influencer marketing (Ahmad,2018).Influencer Marketing can further be defined as a strategy whereby the opinion leaders on internet is used to promote brands (Noyan, 2017; Varamis, 2018; Tanwar *et al*; 2022). Influencer marketing is now being considered as "the next big thing" by most of the researchers (Agrawal,2016).From a survey

conducted by Linqia in 2018across a variety of industries, including CPG, Food & Beverage, Media, and Retail, it was found that 92% of the marketers found influencer marketing to be effective and it is growing to be an integral part of the marketing mix. Influencer marketing can drive actual incremental sales at a rate 11X traditional digital advertising. The impact of influencer marketing is more prominent in fashion and beauty industry. A study conducted by Vettese among 520 women on Facebook reveals that influencer marketing sways their purchase decision the most (Forbes, 2019). Consumers pay more attention to the photos and videos posted by the influencers than the TV commercial Ads as they are considered less credible.Thus, in order to establish connections with the customers, fashion and beauty brands are collaborating with social media influencers.

We could see researches being done on this subject "influencer marketing " in recent years. But most of these researches focuses on the impact of influencer marketing on the purchase intention taking credibility as a mediating factor (Lim *et al*.,2017;Sokolva *et al*., 2019;Müller *et al*.,2018;Veirman *et al*., 2017;Casaló *et al*., 2018). But how influencer marketing can add to **brand credibility** has not been fully explored yet. Brand credibility can help in building brand equity by indirectly addingconsumer value to the brand (Erdem and Swait,1998; Spry *et al*; 2011). The emergence of brand credibility concept can be attributed to brand Signalling theory according to which marketers use brands as signals (Erdem and Swait, 2002; ErdemansSwait, 2004).**Expertise and trustworthiness** are two important elements of brand credibility. A brand is considered credible if the brand have the ability (i.e. expertise) and willingness (i.e. trustworthiness)to consistently deliver what has been promoted (Erdem and Swait, 1998).This paper proposes to make study on extensive literatures to bring into focus various factors researchers have identified affecting the marketing by social media influencers.

Objectives: The objective of this paper is to review the literatures so as to find out factors premising research on social media influencers marketing. It is expected that the findings will help the scholars in design their researchin the field of influences marketing.

METHODOLOGY

As this paper is conceptual and intension is to highlight the various factors researchers have identified as crucial to influencers marketing, the scholar has undertaken extensive review of extant literatures. So, only secondary sourcesof information have been used.

Discussion: Extensive extant literature has been consulted to get insights into various factors that affect the markets. The common factors researchers have explored are discussed below.

(1) Source credibility-

Communicator's characteristics have a significant effect on the persuasiveness of the message. Credibility is a positive characteristic of a communicator that affects the receiver's acceptance of the message (Ohanian, 1990). According to Giffin (1967) credibility is a part of ethos of communicator and it can impact the effectiveness of message. The study conducted by Hovland (1953) is one of the earliest and pioneer researches to be conducted with an emphasis on source credibility in a communication process. Hovland (1953) defined source credibility as the sum total of two factors namely source trustworthiness and source expertise. However, in the landmark study conducted by Ohanian (1990), in order to develop a credibility scale, both the source credibility model provided by Hovland (1953) and source valence model provided by McGuire (1985) was merged.

In recent years' numerous studies (Teng *et al*., 2014; Fanoberova *et al*.,2016; Munnukka *et al*.,2014;Roy *et al*.,2013; Lou and Yuan, 2013; Reinkainen et al., 2020; Bhatt *et al*.,2020) have investigated the role of endorser's credibility in the persuasion process and its impact on consumer behavior. All these studies have adopted the Ohanian

(1990) scale of source credibility.There are three dimensions of source credibility- **trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness**Ohanian (1990).

      (i) Trustworthiness: Trust is the element of degrees of confidence in the trusted person or his communication (Giffin, 1967). Hovland (1953) defined trustworthiness as the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the statements that he believes to be true. According to Erdogan (1999) trustworthiness refers to the honesty, integrity and believability of a person. Trustworthiness of an endorser in the communication process can influence the attitude of consumers (Bhatt *et at*., 2013)

      Trustworthiness has a positive effect on the credibility of the influencer and it enhances the belief of the followers on the content provided by social media influencer promoting a brand (Lou and Yuan, 2018; Saima and Khan, 2020). Trust in the branded content can add to brand awareness (Lou and Yuan, 2018). For developing a long lasting consumer brand relationship trust is must (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). If credibility and trustworthiness is compromised, it might create distrust in the brand recommended by the influencer (Reinikainen *et al*; 2020).

      (ii) Attractiveness: Attractiveness of a source is related to three factors- similarity, familiarity and likability. (McGuire,1985). **Similarity** is a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver with the communicator. **Familiarity** refers to the level of comfort that the receiver feels with the communicator and likability is the affection that is developed towards the communicator due to communicator's physical appearance and personal traits (Kiecker and Cowels, 2002). **Attractiveness** does not mean simply physical attractiveness, but includes any number of virtuous characteristics that consumers might perceive in a celebrity endorser. For example, intellectual skills, personality properties, lifestyles, or athletic prowess (Erdogan, 1999).

      Apart from trustworthiness, **attractiveness and perceived similarity** are found to be important in enhancing trust in the branded content**.**

People feel similar to influencers which ultimately leads to the success of influencer marketing, but this is more relevant in case of beauty products (Schouten *et al*.,2019).

      (iii) Expertise: Hovland (1953) states expertise as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be source of valid assertions. Expertise may be judged on the basis of quantity of pertinent information, degree of ability or skill, or validity of judgment (Giffin, 1967). A source having knowledge, intelligence, maturity, and professional or social status, can be termed as an expert. A source with expertise is more persuasive than a source with less expertise (Kiecker and Cowels , 2002) . In the Ohanian's (1990) scale of source credibility five dimensions of expertise was used, namely- expert, knowledgeable, experienced, qualified and skilled.

      However in most of the studies **expertise** is found to have no significant influence on the consumer purchase decisions (Ladhari *et al*., 2019, Lou and Yuan, 2018; Schouten et al; 2019).

(2) Para social relationship-
      Para social relationship can be termed as the illusionary face to face and direct relationship between a media persona and a media user (Hurton and Wohl,1956;Jin,2018). Para social relationship may range from merely liking and having trust on the media persona, feeling similarity with him/her, desiring to have communication to para social love including romantic desire with the media persona (Tukachinsky,2010). These relationships can lead to a positive bonding between media persona and the audience (Rubin and Perse,1987). Such positive bonds results in the transfer of positive traits of the media persona or celebrities to the endorsed brand (Chung and Cho,2017). Para social interaction and para social relationship can enhance the cognitive and emotional engagement with the media content provided by the media persona and shift in the attitude of media users towards the message conveyed by the content (Libers and Schramm,2019). It has many characteristics of the real social relationships. The

human need for social affiliation is now fulfilled by most of the people from young generation by developing proximity and connection with the media figures (Hoffiner,1996).Para social relationship with the influencer attracts the followers towards the brand related information provided by the influencer and followers can evaluate the brand in a more objective and fair manner.Thus para social relationship can be used by firms to disseminate product information and also it is crucial for consumer's brand evaluation including value equity, relationship equity and brand equity (Yuan *et al*., 2019).Para social relationship plays a significant role in transferring trust from the follower to the brandpromoted by a particular influencer by reducing any apprehensions that a follower might have regarding the brand (Reinikainen *et al*.,2020).

(3) Advertising value-

Advertising value is the subjective evaluation of the relative worth or utility of advertising to consumers (Ducoffe,1951). The factors affecting online advertising value are informativeness, Entertainment and irritation. The way a consumer perceives the advertisement, influences their attitude towards the advertisement. The ability of an advertisement to provide resourceful and helpful information regarding the product to cause the a consumer to act in as positive way implies its informativeness (Ducoffe,1996). Out of all three factors the informative value of influencer generated contents positively affects credibility of theinfluencer and inturn affects their purchase intentions. Social media influencers regularly share contents on the social media platforms on the topics of their interest or areas where they have expertise. They are viewed as quality information and followers take purchase decisions depending on that. Thus brands should rely on informative content creators as a part of their collaboration (Lou and Yuan, 2018).The advertisers or promoters on the web also should focus on delivering more precise, concrete facts related to the products that they are endorsing ,so that consumer can take rational decision by evaluating various product alternatives (Burner, 2006; Zha et al., 2014).

Conclusion and implications-

The paper is an attempt to identify the factors that contributed to brand credibility in influencer marketing. Influencer marketing can prove to be an effective marketing strategy to reach that segment which very young and hard to reach provided that all the factors that can lead to its success are given due consideration. Going through previous literature, it has been identified that thecredibility factors such as attractiveness including similarity and trustworthiness has a significant influence on brand credibility. Besides that para social relationship with the influencer and informativeness value of advertising message created by the content creator on the internet are two important variables in transferring from the influencer to the brand that they are recommending. The ultimate goal of the marketers is to develop brand equity which can be done by establishing brand credibility. Brand equity helps a company to competitive advantage over its competitors. There are plenty of social media influencers but marketers must select and invest on those influencers who help the brand to establish brand credibility and generate revenues. Even though the study tried to shed light on the factors required for strengthening brand credibility in the context of influencer marketing by exploring the findings of the previous literature, more detailed studies needs to be conducted in this regard. Thus,future research involving survey among consumers to investigate their perspective in this regard will enhance credential.

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