The Impact of Social Media and Key Opinion Influencers on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Fashion Sector

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Abstract: In contemporary times, an extensive social network engulfs everyone in society due to the influence of the internet on our daily lives. These days, social media is not solely a platform for viewing and exchanging content, but it has also turned into a marketplace for purchasing and selling merchandise. Numerous customers explore, gain knowledge about, and make purchases of their preferred items on social media, while numerous brands and producers display, advertise, and sell their merchandise on these platforms. Online streaming purchases through social media platforms are gaining popularity among consumers worldwide. Social media is transforming how companies and brands engage with consumers, particularly millennials. In view of the escalating prevalence of this phenomenon, the present research seeks to explore the influence of content quality and brand interactions on consumer brand awareness and purchase intentions in social media. The research incorporates multiple theoretical and empirical sources from prior literatures on influencer marketing and demonstrates that consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions are positively influenced by their attitudes towards fashion influencers and comments on social media.

Keywords: fashion, social media, key opinion influencers, consumers, purchase intentions

1.   Introduction

The rapid development of diverse social media platforms and the rise of the internet celebrity economy have triggered a marketing revolution through the adoption of influencer marketing [1]. This new and efficient marketing strategy utilises individuals who have built a following, referred to in this article as influencers. These individuals, such as food bloggers, beauty bloggers and social media streamers, have become famous for self-promotion via social media platforms. Social media influencers cultivate a substantial following and consider their online activity a profession, resulting in significant sway. Their output is more accessible to their target audience and has the potential to spread virally. Additionally, it is often seen as authentic rather than purely commercial, hence fostering trust among fans [2]. This natural marketing edge provides them with a competitive advantage. In recent years, an increasing number of businesses have utilised influencers to endorse their products or services, with the aim of influencing consumer attitudes and decisions [3]. As a result, a new efficient marketing strategy, known as influencer marketing, has emerged. However, the study of influencer marketing in academia is still in its early stages, and there are various occurrences in the practice of influencer marketing, such as cognitive errors, neglect, blind obedience, and excessiveness, that require urgent scientific and professional guidance. The purpose of this article

is to review the literature on the subject of influencer marketing, to find what kinds of impacts do social media and key opinion influencers provide to consumers when they make purchasing decisions.

2. Theoretical Framework: Influencer Marketing

The concept of influencer marketing was initially introduced by Brown and Hayes, who defined it as "the creation and implementation of marketing tactics and campaigns using individuals who possess sway over customers and prospects", and highlighted social media as a newly emerged influencer catalyst [4]. In the current digital age, the dynamic nature of technology has transformed the world of influencers, demolishing the limitations once experienced in terms of reach and scope. Currently, research into influencer marketing is still in its early stages. This section is based on existing research and real-life applications, combined with the significant impact of social media, a novel influence promoter on influencer marketing.

The paper aims to elucidate the crucial role of social media as a carrier of influencer marketing, the unique characteristics of social media influencers, and the value generated by influencer marketing. The goal is to provide an enhanced understanding of the essence of influencer marketing.Social media has provided consumers with new ways to find, evaluate, and buy, and there has been a fundamental shift in the relationship between businesses and consumers [5]. Based on consumers' reliance on social media, marketing practices that use social media influencers to endorse products and brands are favoured by firms [6]. In social media contexts, 90% of influence comes from content creation, not distribution [5], and influencers who focus on content creation have significant influence. In addition, because influencer messages are often not perceived as being driven purely by commercial interests, consumers are more willing to trust influencers, and messages delivered by influencers tend to be more effective than business-generated content in influencing consumer decisions [7]. Influencers experience the product before the consumer does and communicate their feelings to the consumer, allowing the consumer to gain experience of the product prior to purchase, which is attractive and persuasive to the consumer and prone to stimulate identification and empathy.

The primary objective of influencer marketing is to impact the brand perceptions and purchase decisions of existing and potential customers by means of endorsements from influencers regarding services, brands, and products, these endorsements are usually based on the intellectual and entertaining content created by the influencers [8]. Word-of-mouth marketing is a practice where consumers share information about a product, service, brand or company with other consumers through online or offline means [9]. The purpose of this activity is to disseminate marketing information regarding products, services and brands through interpersonal networks. Unlike influencer marketing, word-of-mouth marketing is objective and free from subjective evaluations [10]. The language used is clear, concise, and value-neutral, avoiding biased and emotional expressions, ornamental language, and figurative speech. Clear structure and logical progression, with causal connections between statements, are evident. Technical term abbreviations are explained immediately when first used to ensure reader comprehension. The format is adherent to style guides, consistent citation, and consistent footnote style and formatting features. The language used is formal, precises, and grammatically correct, avoiding any spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors. Relationship marketing encompasses all marketing activities that seek to establish, develop, and maintain successful relational exchanges [11], with goals of acquiring new customers, retaining key customers and increasing customer loyalty. In comparison to word-of-mouth and relationship marketing, influencer marketing targets more focused audiences, with followers being individuals who have a keen interest in the product or brand [12]. Influencer marketing sieves out uninterested audiences, resulting in a more appealing return on investment ratio for the organisation.

The success of influencer marketing is contingent on a company's proficiency in recognising and exploiting the sway of influencers. Consequently, the customer's appraisal of influencer marketing hinges on the impact of the influencer's endorsement. Compared to the customer value of word-of-mouth and relationship marketing, influencer marketing offers a greater variety of benefits. When an influencer endorses a product or service, it produces engaging user-generated content that drives customer purchases and encourages additional endorsements from consumers. The assessment of customer value in word-of-mouth marketing relies heavily on the extent of customer involvement in the communication of said marketing, whereas the paramount measurement of customer value in relationship marketing is the customer lifetime value [13]. In addition to financial gains, the customer value proposition of influencer marketing encompasses the customers' contribution of their own resources towards participating in marketing promotions. Compared with word-of-mouth and relationship marketing, influencer marketing offers a more extensive viewpoint on customer value.

Influencer marketing represents a move from "corporate-directed customer learning" and "consumer-to-consumer information dissemination" towards "influencer-directed customer learning." The influencer is the primary source of information in influencer marketing who endorses products, services, and brands, ultimately impacting the purchasing decisions of their followers through the promotion of content creation [14]. Based on the characteristics of the material produced by influencers, both intellectual and entertaining, consumers engage and gain knowledge of the product or service offered as well as the purchasing process, among other aspects, by the influencer. Firms, in relationship marketing, inform customers of the specific norms involved in the exchange relationship. In word-of-mouth marketing, companies utilise varied efficacious techniques to stimulate customer discourse concerning the merchandise and the corporation's image, encouraging them to advocate it to other individuals in their vicinity. Influencer marketing emphasises the vital sway of influencers over customers' buying choices. When the sources of word-of-mouth marketing, including opinion leaders, become independent third-party endorsers that influence their followers' consumption decisions by creating content that endorses a product or service, the influential opinion leaders and transition into influencers. Influencers serve as the sources of influencer marketing.

The information flow and source-audience relationship in influencer marketing differs from word-of-mouth marketing and relationship marketing. Technical term abbreviations are explained upon first use. Passive tone and impersonal construction is employed, avoiding the first-person perspective except when necessary. Influencer marketing places the influencer at the center of the information flow, with communication between the followers and the influencer being the primary focus [15]. This is supplemented by multidirectional communication between the followers themselves, and an intimate relationship between the influencer and followers, fostering a sense of companionship akin to that of friends. Consistent language register is used throughout, with clear, objective, and value-neutral language avoiding biased, emotional, figurative, or ornamental language. Filler words are avoided, and common academic section headers are included. Citation is consistent throughout, with a clear footnote style and conforming to relevant style guides. Correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation has been ensured. In the context of word-of-mouth marketing, the flow of information is largely customer-to-customer based, with opinion leaders potentially disseminating information; however, no particularly intimate relationships are formed among customers themselves. In contrast, relationship marketing is based on a two-way exchange of information between the customer and the company, whereby the company focuses on establishing and maintaining a relationship with the customer. Compared to word-of-mouth and relationship marketing, influencer marketing emphasizes the central role of information exchange within networks. This relationship is portrayed as intimate between the source of information and the audience.

In influencer marketing, companies must delegate some of their authority to influencers while also utilising influencers to track the efficacy of their marketing. Influencers are responsible for crafting marketing content that influences effectiveness, while they can also rectify false information and misunderstandings to enhance word-of-mouth [12]. This approach differs significantly from word-of-mouth and relationship marketing. In the current media era, consumers can attain viral dissemination of information through social networks, thereby reducing companies' control over negative word of mouth. Relationship marketing involves negotiation on value between clients and firms, with customer power being limited to the customer-firm relationship.

In conclusion, there are disparities between influencer marketing and traditional marketing concerning objectives, customer value, information sources, customer learning orientation, information flow, and the extent of corporate control. Influencer marketing is distinct in that companies promote their products/brands through influential social media personalities and the like. Such endorsements are often based on influencer-created content, which is both entertaining and intellectual. Consequently, this method manifests as influencer-centric consumer education and impacts their followers through quasi-social exchanges and quasi-social relationships discussed between influencers and their followers. The latter are mainly customers or prospective customers with a more focused audience who are typically interested in the product/brand. Interactions and quasi-social relationships with followers, namely customers and prospects, are used to influence their purchasing decisions. Companies utilise influencers to assist consumers in locating and receiving information, fulfilling consumer demand, and achieving multi-principal value creation for companies, influencers, and consumers alike. Additionally, as with word-of-mouth marketing's influence on relationship marketing (e.g. bolstering customer loyalty through positive brand messaging), influencer marketing interacts with both word-of-mouth and relationship marketing. In particular, influencer marketing encourages positive word-of-mouth communication among followers [12], while word-of-mouth marketing garners more followers for the influencer or deepens followers' identification with the influencer. Relationship marketing improves the effectiveness of product or service endorsement by influencers, and enhances the customer-brand relationship by improving perceived ideal image congruence, leading to increased customer purchases.

3.   Empirical Framework: Questionnaires

Chun et. al. [16] used quantitative methodology, whereby survey questionnaires were disseminated to gather data from Instagram users aged 15 and over. The collected data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS. The findings demonstrate that purchase intention is positively influenced by expertise, similarity, and familiarity. The research results will enhance the understanding of influencer marketing for future researchers and marketers. The study identifies three independent variables, specifically expertise, familiarity, and similarity, which have a significant impact on Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion items. However, trustworthiness and likability, the other two independent variables, do not have a positive impact. This research has practical applications for several stakeholders, particularly marketers and future researchers.

Based on the Social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Arora and et al. [17] investigated the factors that influence consumers' attitudes and intentions towards sustainable purchasing. Structural equation modelling was carried out using AMOS 22.0 on a dataset of 350 respondents. The results of the study indicate that social media use, social influence, environmental concern and perceived trust in social media are the main antecedents of consumers' sustainable purchasing attitudes, which in turn influence their sustainable purchasing intentions. Key stakeholders, including governments and regulators, should use the findings of this study when designing campaigns to encourage individuals to adopt sustainable purchasing behaviours. Promoting

sustainable purchasing behaviours can help mitigate the negative human and environmental impacts of impulse buying. Therefore, unravelling the role of social media in promoting sustainable purchasing behaviours makes the current study novel and valuable.

Abdullah et. al [18] seeks to identify the characteristics of social media influencers that contribute to purchase intention in the fashion industry. It adopts the Ohanian model of sources of credibility to examine the relationship between trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, similarity and familiarity on Instagram users' purchase intention of fashion products. A total of 148 sample students from Universiti Malaysia Kelantan responded to the questionnaire. The findings indicate that likability, trustworthiness and familiarity are key factors influencing Instagram users' purchase intention of fashion products. This study successfully investigated the factors that influence Instagram users' purchase intentions towards the fashion industry by social media influencers. The research tested the impact of various features and found that all five of the items tested had positive associations with Instagram users' purchase intention towards the fashion industry. The primary outcomes of this research indicate that likability, trustworthiness and familiarity have a profound impact on purchase intentions towards fashion goods. The study found that likability exhibits a stronger correlation with purchase intentions than other independent variables. This implies that the more affection conveyed through message delivery and information dissemination to Instagram users, the more persuasive it is in influencing purchase intentions among the Instagram community. Messages and marketing information shared on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook by social media influencers are deemed more dependable and trustworthy than paid advertising. The majority of consumers are more likely to purchase products recommended by their favourite influencer on Instagram. Regarding familiarity, consumers tend to buy products that they associate with their favourite and popular social media influencer on Instagram.

Chetioui et. al, investigates how attitudes towards fashion influencers impact brand attitude and consumer purchase intention [19]. It also aims to identify the factors that affect consumers' attitudes towards fashion influencers. To accomplish this goal, this study proposes a conceptual model that integrates the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) with theoretical insights from prior research on influencer marketing. Based on information gathered from 610 Moroccan participants, the authors conducted empirical investigations into the conceptual model, using partial least squares (PLS) estimation. The findings of this study demonstrate that individuals' attitudes towards fashion influencers have a favourable effect on brand attitudes and consumers' intentions to make a purchase. The authors show that attitudes towards fashion influencers are positively influenced by perceived credibility, trust, perceived behavioral control, perceived subjective norms, perceived expertise, and perceived congruence. These study findings assist fashion industry marketers and advertisers in comprehending the role of influencer marketing in consumer purchase intention. They also enable marketers to comprehend the factors that clarify attitudes towards fashion influencers, thereby aiding in the selection of influencers who can generate purchase intentions among current and prospective customers.

4.   Conclusion

Studies suggest that both blog content quality and para-social interaction have a positive impact on purchase intention in the fashion sector. Moreover, blog content quality plays a mediating role in the relationship between trustworthiness and purchase intention. Furthermore, the purchase intention is directly and positively influenced by consumers' perception of sponsored posts. Additionally, the attitude towards sponsored posts was identified as a mediator in the relationship between trustworthiness and purchase intention as well as between expertise and purchase intention. Additionally, the attitude towards sponsored posts was identified as a mediator in the relationship between trustworthiness and purchase intention as well as between expertise and purchase intention.

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This study showcases the marketing traits of digital influencers, which impact the purchase intention of fashion consumers. This enriches existing research and presents recommendations for future studies, emphasise the significance of synchronising fashion brand communication strategies with the influencers' way of life. The swift growth of diverse social media platforms and the impact of social media influencers offer prospects for marketing advancements in the new era of media. However, social media is characterised by a large number of people and spontaneous dissemination. This means that the information in social media is a mixture of good and bad, and the influence on people's consumer attitudes is both favourable and unfavourable, so it is all the more important for customers to be able to discern and deliberate on their own.

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