

Social Media Influencers and the Purchasing Decisions of Youth: With Special Emphasis on Emotional and Rational Aspects

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of social media influencers on the purchasing decisions of youth, focusing on emotional and rational aspects such as attractiveness, credibility, and message content. The main objectives are to examine how these aspects influence youth purchasing decisions and to determine the significance of emotional connections and trust in influencer marketing. Utilizing the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the research employs a cross-sectional design with a sample of 556 participants aged 15-24, collected via an online survey. Data analysis, including Chi-Square tests, revealed that social media influencer marketing significantly affects youth purchasing decisions. Emotional connections and trust in influencers emerged as crucial factors, with influencers' attractiveness and credibility significantly influencing purchase intentions. These findings underscore the importance of authenticity and trustworthiness in influencer marketing, suggesting that brands should focus on these elements to engage youth effectively. The study highlights the influential role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behavior and provides insights for marketers to develop strategies that resonate with young audiences.

Keywords: Social Media, Influencer Marketing, Emotional Decisions.

Introduction

During the past decade, social media platforms have become increasingly valuable, and the number of users continues to grow (Kemp, 2021). Social media is regarded as a mass phenomenon with a pervasive demographic appeal and is considered a more solid source of information among communication sources. As a result, with the continuous rise of social media, marketers have been efficient in seeking new techniques to promote their products and brands through these platforms, in a practice called social media marketing (Evans et al., 2021).

Simultaneously, a new group of opinion leaders arose, commonly named social media influencers (SMIs). An SMI is defined as an opinion leader who their network has authorized, is very active on social media (Li, 2016) and can utilize their online platforms to disseminate information and significantly influence the opinions and behaviors of their audiences due to their outstanding skills,

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knowledge, and attractive aspects (Moreno et al., 2015). Social media influencers consistently engage with their followers by often updating them with the latest information (Liu et al., 2012). Consumers generally regard digital celebrities, such as SMIs, as more trustworthy than traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This can be explained by the fact that consumers believe SMIs provide information more honestly and sincerely (Ge & Gretzel, 2018) and perceive SMIs as persons who are more comparable to ordinary consumers and hence more alike in comparison to other celebrities (Schouten et al., 2020). SMIs take benefit of this by often featuring and indicating direct experience with the products, showing on social media how they incorporate the products in their daily routines and real-life setups, and also sharing reviews and tutorials of the products they are endorsing (Rahmi et al., 2017). Finally, SMIs who are considered more knowledgeable and trustworthy have a more significant influence on their followers' behavior, resulting in more vital acceptance of the communicated message (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The attractiveness of the source (i.e. social media influencers) is another essential attribute that impacts young adults to a greater extent. The attractiveness of the source (i.e. social media influencers) is another critical attribute that impacts young adults to a greater extent. This way, attractiveness encompasses not only an endorser's physical characteristics but also other attributes that the followers may consider as righteous, such as creativity, personal qualities, and lifestyle (Conde, 2019).

The popularity level of Social media influencers is an essential factor, and it impacts youngsters. Ultimately, the greater the number of subscriptions, the greater the popularity level, and as a result, they will be considered more influential and credible among young adults.

The connection between FOMO and marketing communication has already become an area of scientific research. Due to fast advances in technology, FOMO has become more frequent, which can be explained by the extensive use of social media today. The content shared on social media platforms causes individuals to fear missing out. Accordingly, various efficient social media influencers' marketing is also based on FOMO appeals to stimulate demand for their endorsed products, which ultimately influence the purchasing decisions of their young followers.

Research Objectives

- To investigate how social media influencers influenced the buying decisions of youth.
- To examine how emotional and rational aspects of social media influencer marketing affect the purchasing decisions of youth.

Research Question

- How social media influencers influenced the buying decisions of youth?

Research Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant relationship between social media influencer marketing and purchasing decision of youth.

H2: There is a significant relationship between the emotional and rational aspects of social media influencer marketing and purchasing decisions of youth.

Significance of the Study

This research is of great importance in today's digital age. It addresses a vital trend where social media influencers exert considerable power in shaping consumer behavior among the youth demographic. By exploring this topic, the study can uncover insights into how influencers

influence youth's purchasing choices, the mechanisms through which they exert influence, and the broader implications for marketing strategies and consumer psychology. Understanding these dynamics is critical for businesses to effectively engage with young consumers and optimize their marketing efforts in the digital realm.

Literature Review

The internet and online-based social media have changed consumer consumption habits by providing consumers with new ways of looking for, assessing, choosing, and buying goods and services (Albors et al., 2008). At present, new media forms have emerged as highly effective. These developments influence how marketers operate and affect marketing practices in terms of both strategy and tactics by presenting marketers with new challenges and difficult choices (Thomas, 2007). Social media's power is creditable as an individual gets to reach a massive audience within seconds of posting an advertisement, helping people lessen their costs and making people's ads reach out to their potential audience through social media advertisements.

Social media has also made advancements in the marketing system by introducing the concept of social media Influencers. Social media creates influencers who can benefit both the product owner and the consumer. Influencers are people who can create viral content or have a large number of followers and engagements on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The influencers receive numerous requests to review their products on online platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. Influencers can be found on almost every social media platform, but there are different influencers, such as fashion, beauty, books, food and others (Nandagiri & Philip, 2018).

In addition, in the form of influencers, marketing brands invest in strategies involving these key individuals and opinion leaders who have impact over their audience to help brands invest in strategies involving these key individuals and opinion leaders who influence their audiences to assist in their marketing activities by carrying and communicating the brand's message, with the motive of driving brand awareness and affect consumers' purchasing decisions (Sammis et al., 2015). Moreover, opinion leaders are perceived as credible sources of information and are recognized as experts in particular fields (Rahmi et al., 2017). Due to the growing habit of these practices, Internet users have been increasingly using social media to search and gather this type of information, with 72.10% using social media platforms to research brands (Kemp, 2021) resorting to the experiences of third-party sources, which they find more relatable and reliable than sources controlled by brands (Bahtar & Muda, 2016). At the same time, potentiated by social media, influential users have been affirming themselves as new opinion leaders online, capable of reaching large audiences (Grave, 2017). Opinion leaders refer to individuals who have the ability and motivation to share information and the power to influence the actions, thoughts and decisions of a considerable number of people (Zhao et al., 2018).

Due to this recent shift, more than ever, consumers are looking to other consumers for information about products and brands to enhance their purchasing process, taking into special consideration the opinion of these influential personalities, as is the case of SMIs (Talaverna, 2015).

SMIs are now becoming part of companies' social media strategies. Brands are approached by SMIs to promote their products on visually appealing social media platforms, relay information about the products, and update their audiences about the newest promotions (Liu et al. 2015) as a way to attract people who are more motivated to try the brand's products (Osayemi, 2019).

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way to attract people who are more motivated to try the brand's products (Osayemi, 2019). SMIs function as the fundamental connection between brands and consumers. By endorsing products through their personal lives, they make them relatable and relevant to the regular consumer (Li et al., 2012). Furthermore, a recent report on social media trends demonstrated that influencer marketing generated 11 times the return on investment of traditional marketing and that 94.0% of marketers found influencer marketing campaigns effective after implementing them (Lou & Yuan, 2019). SMIs often emphasize that they only promote products they would like to use themselves and that the endorsements are a genuine expression of their identity (Carter, 2016). Moreover, some consumers perceive sponsorship disclosures as transparency and honesty regarding the endorsement nature of the posts, which can increase source attractiveness (Evans et al., 2017). The brands need to find and select the SMIs who present a more significant impact on their target consumers and have a more substantial influence in getting their followers to try and adopt the endorsed products, thus resulting in greater endorsement effectiveness and leading to higher purchase intentions (Pophal, 2019). In turn, this endorsement effectiveness is highly influenced by the consumers' perceptions of the SMI and their endorsements, which are dependent on a set of characteristics held by the SMI (Conde, 2019). Based on the literature, to increase the impact of the message that SMIs share through their endorsements in social media, brands should look for the most credible, well-liked and well-known SMI who is regarded as a respected opinion leader (De Veirman et al., 2017).

When consumers follow or interact more regularly with the SMI, they usually perceive the SMI as more relatable and approachable and develop a certain closeness with them, feeling like they are a long-distance friend (Gannon & Prothero, 2018). As such, SMIs are likely to be more effective when the audience is very familiar with them because their followers intentionally choose to follow their activities and consider the SMI as part of their community (Grave, 2017). Many past researchers have found that attractive endorsers are more effective than less attractive sources at persuasiveness, influencing positive attitudes and stimulating purchase intentions (Li & Yin, 2018). Moreover, it was shown that products associated with physically attractive endorsers were better liked than those presented by those less attractive (Peng et al., 2020). However, according to Chapple and Cownie (2017), source attractiveness is mainly related to emotional and affective aspects instead of physical appearance, in the specific case of SMIs.

Theoretical Framework

One of the theories of persuasion linked with this field of study is the elaboration likelihood model. The central assumption of this model states that individuals assess persuasive information via two routes: the central route and the peripheral route.

Central Route

When young consumers are highly motivated and able to process information deeply, they are more likely to take the central route to persuasion. This means they engage in careful and considerate processing of the information provided by social media influencers. In this route, the content of the influencer's message, such as detailed product information, features, and benefits, plays a significant role in shaping the buying decisions of youngsters.

Peripheral Route

On the other hand, when young consumers have limited cognitive resources, they are more likely to take the peripheral route to persuasion. In this case, they rely on peripheral cues, such as the

influencer's popularity, attractiveness, or likeability, rather than the actual content of the message. The pure association of a social media influencer with a product or brand can create a positive attitude and influence their buying decisions. The focus shifts from the substance of the message to the characteristics of the influencer promoting the product.

In the context of social media influencer marketing, the Elaboration Likelihood Model highlights the following points:

Message Content

For the central route to be effective, influencers need to provide relevant and persuasive information about the products they endorse. The more imperative the content, the more likely it is to influence the attitudes and buying decisions of young consumers who are actively engaged in the central route processing.

Credibility and Informative Value

In the central route, the credibility and informative value of the influencer play a key role. Young consumers are more likely to trust and be persuaded by influencers who are perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable in a particular niche or domain.

Attractiveness and Likeability

For the peripheral route to be effective, influencers need to create a positive image and strong rapport with their followers. The likability and attractiveness of the influencer can impact the attitudes and buying decisions of young consumers who are more influenced by peripheral cues.

Research Methodology

The research methodology includes a discussion of the research design, target population, sample size and method of choosing the respondents, instrument used, procedure implemented in gathering the data, and, lastly, the statistical analysis used in this study.

A quantitative approach was used for the research study. Because this approach has the potential to provide accurate and measurable insights into the relationship between variables. Quantitative methods, such as surveys and structured questionnaires, are designed to systematically collect quantitative data that can be analyzed statistically to uncover patterns and correlations (Bryman, 2016). This study adopts a cross-sectional research design. Cross-sectional studies involve data collection from a sample of participants at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of a population's characteristics and behaviors (Babbie, 2016). In this study, cross-sectional allows for the analysis of correlations between influencer engagement and consumer behavior among youth. Cross-sectional design has been used to analyze the impact of social media influencer marketing on youth purchasing decisions.

The target population for the study was the youth who consume social media influencer marketing content. Purposive sampling was employed, with samples being selected based on which was considered suitable for the research, as well as ease of access and willingness to participate. Only those samples have been considered and selected for filling up the questionnaire and participating in the survey who are 15 to 24 years old, which was also the criteria for the participants to be included in the study.

Data was collected through a well-structured online survey questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions to ensure uniformity and facilitate statistical analysis. Survey methodology facilitates the systematic collection of quantitative data through structured tools such as questionnaires or interviews, ensuring that insights are gathered from a representative sample (Fowler, 2008).

The questionnaire was designed on Google Forms to capture essential information related to social media influencer marketing and its influence on youth purchasing behavior. It included Likert scale (strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, neutral=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5) questions, multiple-choice questions, and demographic inquiries. The questionnaire was distributed to the target audience via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. The questionnaire was distributed electronically, and 556 questionnaires were returned completed in all aspects, which are utilized for data analysis.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using the statistical software Statistical Package for Social Sciences [SPSS] to examine the relationships between social media influencer marketing and youth purchasing decisions.

This methodological framework is ideal for investigating contemporary phenomena such as social media influence. It offers a clear depiction of current attitudes and behaviors toward influencer endorsements.

Results

Table 1: Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|---|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 8.720 ^a | 1 | .003 |
| Continuity Correction | 6.589 | 1 | .010 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 6.841 | 1 | .009 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 8.689 | 1 | .003 |
| N of Valid Cases | 556 | | |
| A. 1 cell (25.0%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.18. | | | |
| B. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | |

- Pearson Chi-Square: 8.720 ($p = 0.003$)
- Continuity Correction: 6.589 ($p = 0.010$)
- Likelihood Ratio: 6.841 ($p = 0.009$)
- Linear-by-Linear Association: 8.689 ($p = 0.003$)
- Valid cases: 556

These results suggest a statistically significant relationship between using social media regularly and the influence of influencer endorsements on purchasing decisions among your survey participants. The p -values ($p < 0.05$) in the Chi-Square tests indicate that the relationship is unlikely to be due to random chance.

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|----------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 143.483 ^a | 16 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 119.043 | 16 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 50.483 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 556 | | |

a. 14 cells (56.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .08.

- Pearson Chi-Square: 143.483 ($p = 0.000$)
- Likelihood Ratio: 119.043 ($p = 0.000$)
- Linear-by-Linear Association: 50.483 ($p = 0.000$)
- Valid cases: 556

These results indicate a statistically significant relationship between finding social media influencers friendly with their followers and finding brand/product endorsements by influencers trustworthy, as well as how these influence on purchasing decisions among your survey participants. The p-values ($p < 0.05$) in the Chi-Square tests suggest that the relationship is highly unlikely to be due to random chance.

Discussion

Research Question: How social media influencers influenced the buying decisions of youth?

The research question, "How do social media influencers influenced the buying decisions of youth?" is answered by the data analysis, which shows a significant influence of social media influencers on youth purchasing decisions. The Chi-Square tests revealed that emotional connections and trust established with influencers play a pivotal role. Influencers' attractiveness, credibility, and the perceived authenticity of their endorsements strongly influence youth's purchase intentions. These findings highlight the effectiveness of influencer marketing in engaging young consumers and shaping their buying behaviors, emphasizing the importance of building trust and emotional bonds in influencer partnerships.

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between Social Media Influencer Marketing and Purchasing Decision of Youth

The first hypothesis aimed to examine the existence of a substantial relationship between social media influencer marketing and the purchasing decisions of youth. The results of our analysis demonstrated a statistically significant association between these two variables. Specifically, respondents who reported using social media regularly were more likely to be influenced by influencer endorsements when making purchasing decisions. This finding underscores the pivotal role of social media platforms as channels for influencer marketing to reach and impact the youth demographic.

The statistical significance of this relationship aligns with prior research highlighting the effectiveness of influencer marketing in reaching and persuading younger audiences. The ability of influencers to engage and resonate with their followers has made them influential drivers of consumer behavior in the digital age. Our results underscore the importance for brands and marketers to consider the role of social media influencer marketing when targeting the youth segment.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional and Rational Aspects of Influencer Marketing

The second hypothesis delved deeper into the emotional and rational aspects of influencer marketing. Specifically, we examined the relationships between perceiving influencers as friendly with their followers, finding their endorsements trustworthy, and the impact of these endorsements on purchasing decisions. Our analysis revealed strong and statistically significant associations between these variables.

Participants who perceived social media influencers as friendly with their followers were more likely to find their brand endorsements trustworthy. Furthermore, those who found these endorsements trustworthy were more inclined to be influenced by influencers when making purchasing decisions. These findings emphasize the significance of the emotional connection that influencers establish with their audience. The trust and rapport influencers build play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions.

From a likelihood model perspective, the data strongly support the hypothesis that individuals who perceive influencers as friendly find their endorsements reliable. Furthermore, this perceived credibility of friendly influencers' endorsements significantly influences the purchase decisions of survey participants. This reinforces the idea that perceived reciprocity with influencers plays an important role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward endorsed products or brands. Therefore, businesses and marketers can leverage these insights to develop effective strategies that emphasize authenticity and reliability to effectively engage with their target audience. The study contributes to the likelihood model by providing empirical support for the relationships between social media influencer activities and youth consumer decisions.

Conclusion

The aim of the study is to know the influence of social media influencers on the purchasing decisions among youth supported by the evidence gathered from the respondents. Based on the above findings, the researchers arrived at the following conclusions. With the results presented in the study, it is easily concluded that, first of all, young customers' purchasing decisions are generally significantly influenced by social media influencer marketing. Second, the emotional bonds and trust that are developed with influencers are crucial. Therefore, every finding is consistent with the study's hypothesis. The findings highlight the importance of authenticity and reliability in influencer partnerships, guiding marketers toward effective strategies for engaging youth audiences in the digital age.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on influencer marketing by highlighting the significance of social media influencer marketing in shaping the purchasing decisions of youth. The emotional connection and trust established by influencers emerge as key drivers of consumer behavior in the digital age, reinforcing the vital role of influencers in contemporary m Future research in this domain may explore the nuanced aspects of influencer marketing, such as the types of products or services for which influencers are most influential and the potential differences in influencer effectiveness across various social media platforms. Additionally, longitudinal studies could shed light on the evolving nature of influencer marketing and its sustained impact on consumer behavior over time.

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