THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: AN INVESTIGATION OF THEIR IMPACT ON BRAND PERCEPTION AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS

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Abstract

In today's crowded market, companies and businesses are looking for different ways to introduce their products to consumers. One of them is by addressing social media influencers for advertisement. This paper examines how social media vlogs influence consumer behavior, including their brand perceptions and purchase decisions. The study is based on the analysis of contemporary academic literature from above 2015 years and the author's personal observations. The article also highlights the role of vloggers as opinion leaders, the importance of content authenticity, and the emotional involvement of the audience. The key mechanisms through which influencers build trust and influence consumer preferences are discussed. It concludes with recommendations for marketers and directions for future research.

Keywords: social media, influencers, consumer behavior, brand perception, purchase intentions.

Introduction

How much power does your favourite youtube vlogger have over your next purchase? The questions might seem vague, however, it is a growing trend in recent years for social media influencers to make money through promoting certain products to their audience. While advertising used to rely on TV, radio, and print media, today platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer new opportunities for promotion.

Influencers — people with large social media followings — have become key figures in marketing. They not only advertise products, but also shape brand perceptions, influencing consumer purchasing decisions. The question is how exactly influencers influence consumers and what factors make their influence effective.

The purpose of this article is to explore the impact of social media influencers on brand perception and purchase intentions. We will look at key mechanisms such as trust, authenticity, and emotional connection, as well as emerging trends including the role of micro-influencers and the impact of social media algorithms. The article is based on an analysis of the literature since 2015 and includes original opinions to offer a fresh perspective on the issue.

Theoretical Framework

Social media have changed the approach to marketing, making it more interactive and personalized. According to Lou and Yuan (2019), social media allows brands to interact directly with consumers, which enhances emotional connections. Influencers, as intermediaries between brands and audiences, enhance this effect by creating content that is perceived as more personal and believable than traditional advertising.

Who are influencers? Influencers are individuals who have significant influence on social media due to their popularity, expertise, or charisma. They are divided into macro-influencers (over 100,000 followers), micro-influencers (10,000–100,000 followers), and nano-influencers (less than 10,000 followers). Consumer behavior, in its turn, is defined as the process of making purchase decisions based on psychological, social, and cultural factors. Persuasion theory (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, updated in Kim et al., 2018) suggests that persuasion occurs through central (information analysis) and peripheral (emotion, trust) pathways. Influencers often use the peripheral route, relying on trust and emotional appeal.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative analysis of the impact of social media influencers on consumer behavior. To collect data, academic articles published between 2015 and

2025 were sourced through reputable databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus. The search keywords included "social media influencers", "consumer behavior", "brand perception", "purchase intention", and "influencer marketing". From the results, 12 articles were selected, with a primary focus on research that examined how social media influencers affect consumer trust, emotional appeal, and brand loyalty. These articles were carefully analyzed to extract key insights into the mechanisms by which influencers shape consumer attitudes and behavior.

In addition to the academic literature, a content analysis was conducted on the Instagram profiles of 5 popular influencers from different niches (e.g., lifestyle, fashion, and technology). The aim was to evaluate the types of product endorsements they make and analyze the level of audience engagement, such as comments, likes, and shares, to determine how this engagement correlates with their influence on brand perception and purchasing decisions. The study aims to synthesize findings from these sources to explore the influence of social media influencers in shaping consumer attitudes towards brands and to assess the effectiveness of influencer marketing in driving purchase intentions.

Results and Discussions

From the analyzed researches and original findings, it has been identified that social media influencers apply different mechanisms, through which they have a significant impact on consumer behaviour of the products, which they promote. Here they are:

1. Trust and Authenticity

Trust is a key factor in determining the effectiveness of influencers. A study by Jin et al. (2019) found that consumers trust influencers who appear genuine and share personal experiences of using a product. For example, when an influencer tells a story about how a product helped them personally, it is perceived as more credible than direct advertising. Authenticity also plays an important role. According to Kim and Kim (2021), influencers who create content that is consistent with their personal brand are

more trustworthy. For example, a fitness influencer promoting sports nutrition is perceived as more trustworthy than one promoting unrelated products.

2.   Emotional   Connection

Influencers often create an emotional connection with their audience, which increases their influence. A study by Lee and Watkins (2016) found that emotionally charged content, such as personal stories or inspirational posts increased brand perception and purchase intentions. For example, a TikTok video in which a popular beautiful influencer shares their experience using a cosmetic product may make female audience want to try the product.

3.   Impact   on   brand   perception

Brand perception is how consumers view and evaluate a brand based on their experiences and associations. Influencers can improve brand perception by presenting it in a positive light. For example, a study by Hudders et al. (2021) found that influencers who use visually appealing content strengthened brand associations with quality and prestige. However, there are risks. If an influencer promotes too many brands, it can undermine trust. A study by Childers et al. (2019) found that excessive commercialization reduces the influencer's perceived authenticity, which negatively impacts the brand.

4.   The   Role   of   Micro-Influencers

Micro-influencers are becoming increasingly popular due to their ability to create close relationships with their audience. According to the study by Kay et al. (2020), micro-influencers are more effective than macro-influencers in shaping positive brand perceptions, as their followers perceive them as "one of their own". For example, a local blogger promoting a cafe in their city may be more trustworthy than a celebrity.

5.   Always-On   Influence

Unlike traditional forms of advertising, which are typically scheduled or limited by

time zones, influencers are constantly posting content whether it's in the middle of the night or early in the morning. This constant stream of content means that influencers can reach their audience at any time, triggering immediate emotional responses and impulse buying. For example, a consumer, scrolling through Instagram at midnight comes across a story from their favorite influencer, showing them enjoying a delicious dessert from a local bakery. The visual appeal of the dessert, coupled with the influencer's enthusiastic promotion, might spark an immediate desire to try it, leading to an impulse decision to buy the same dessert or visit the bakery. These findings highlight the multifaceted impact of social media influencers on consumer behavior. Using mechanisms such as trust, emotional appeal and with spontaneous aids, influencers can effectively enhance brand perception and motivate consumers to purchase. The combination of these factors suggests that authenticity and the emotional connection between influencers and their followers are key to the success of influencer marketing strategies. Moreover, micro-influencers, with their niche audiences and higher levels of engagement, often have a greater impact on consumer behavior than their macro-influencers, who are more suitable for massive reach. However, there are a number of risks associated with influencer marketing, especially when over-commercialization or excessive product promotion occurs. They might break trust between influencers and their followers, leading to poor connection and undermined company brand. Therefore, brands and influencers must carefully balance product promotion with maintaining authenticity to avoid damaging their relationships with consumers.

New Trends and Suggestions

One of the new trends is the impact of social media algorithms on the visibility of influencer content. Instagram and TikTok algorithms determine which posts will be seen by the audience based on engagement (likes, comments, views). This means that even quality content may not reach the audience if it does not fit the algorithm. In my opinion, brands should take this into account and partner with influencers who are good at creating viral content to maximize their reach.

Another important topic is the ethics of influencer marketing. Consumers are increasingly demanding transparency, such as indicating sponsored content. Boerman's (2020) study found that adding "#ad" or "#sponsored" reduces perceived authenticity but increases brand trust when the influencer is sincere. I believe that brands should encourage influencers to be honest to maintain audience trust.

Cultural factors also influence the effectiveness of influencers. For example, in collectivistic cultures like in Asia, consumers trust community recommendations more, while in individualistic cultures like in the United States, they trust influencers' personal stories more. Lim et al.'s (2017) study highlights the importance of taking cultural factors into account when selecting influencers depending on the region, where they are promoting a brand. In my opinion, brands should adapt their influencer marketing strategies to local cultural norms.

Conclusion

Social media influencers have become an integral part of modern marketing. Their ability to shape brand perception and drive purchase intent is based on trust, authenticity, and emotional connection. Micro-influencers, visual content, and choosing the right platform amplify their influence. However, brands need to consider new challenges such as social media algorithms, ethical issues, and cultural differences.This article highlights that influencer marketing will continue to evolve, and brands need to adapt to new technologies and consumer expectations. Future research could focus on the impact of AI and virtual influencers, as well as the long-term effects of influencer marketing on brand loyalty.

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