The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention

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Abstract

Social media influencers are those people who have developed credibility in a particular industry and gained a large number of followers or subscribers by posting content on social media. This study examines how influencers may impact consumers' intent to purchase, focusing on expertise, trustworthiness, similarity, and attractiveness of the source. Purposive sampling technique was used. A questionnaire was created online to collect data and the data set of 120 respondents was then analyzed using SPSS AMOS. The findings revealed that expertise and similarity of influencers have a positive effect on the consumers' intention to purchase whereas attractiveness and trustworthiness of influencers don't have a positive effect on it.

Keywords: Influencers, purchase intention, social media.

INTRODUCTION

In 1760 a potter called Josiah Wedgwood made a tea set for the Queen of England. Since the royal family was powerful and well known the potter marketed his tea sets as 'Royal Family approved'. This led to an enormous increase in sales and soon Wedgwood became a brand (McKendrick, 1960). That is the power of influencers.

Humans are those social beings which tend to form a connection with those who are similar to them (Forbes, 2017). Influencers post often on social media and interact with their followers which helps them form a connection or a bond with their followers. According to the Datareportal Global Overview Report, more than half of the world uses social media. (Simon Kemp, 2021). Social media influencers are those users of social media who have garnered a significant amount of following because of the kind

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of audio and visual content that they post online (De Veirman et al., 2017; Abidin, 2016). With the rise in social media users there has been a significant rise of what we call 'influencers'. Each and every user of social media tends to follow at least one of them. Influencers can be anyone - not just a celebrity, it can be any citizen who has garnered an audience because of their reputation for expertise or knowledge in a particular field. Influencers make use of various social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook etc. to share their views, suggestions, and to promote products (Varsamis, 2018).

Although influencer marketing has been studied in detail, insufficient attention has been paid to the Indian context. Most of the research has been done on influencers from countries like the US, France etc. As a significant rise in the number of internet users has been noticed in India, it's crucial to study the effect of influencers on the intention to purchase. The intention to purchase is simply the intent to buy an item or a commodity. All over the world, "authenticity" is a major reason why the respondents of the survey have faith in influencers. Furthermore, 66% of the respondents felt that the content of influencers needs to be related to their personal interests (Olapiac, 2017). This research aims to determine the effect of influencers on the consumers' intention to purchase. It would help in predicting the buying process and in designing effective marketing strategies to create brand awareness and in shaping the buying process of consumers.

This paper first discusses influencers and their ability to gain a large number of followers on social media platforms and then the earlier research studies conducted on the rise of influencer marketing and their effect on buyer's intent. This is followed by an empirical analysis focusing on the source's attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and similarity and a discussion of its results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Social media influencers represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media". They share events from their everyday life with their audience. They also share their views and suggestions about different products and services based on their own experience. (Freberg et al., 2011). Since endorsement has always played a pivotal role in attaining business ambitions of an organisation, taking advantage of the range of social media platforms, social media influencers are asked to create brand awareness and latest trends related to their field to their online followers and subscribers (Market hub, 2016). Individuals having a significant amount of following online on platforms like Instagram and YouTube are invited by companies to become their brand ambassador (Tapinfluence, 2017). According to a survey by Mediakix (2019), the top five social media platforms for influencer marketing are Instagram, Blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. As a marketing tool purchase intention can help us foretell the sales and market share (Morwitz, 2014).

Brands that tend to appear on the influencers' profile are considered to be more attractive as well as reliable by the customers and this was validated by a poll that 82% of consumers are more likely to follow the footsteps of their favourite influencers and would be interested in buying the products recommended by them (Talaverna, 2015). According to a study conducted by McKinsey & Company, 80% of consumers will consider a new brand if it is being recommended by a popular influencer (Agarwal A, Brar J, Elzinga D, & Tyagi A., 2019). Brand loyalty and brand image along with the knowledge about the brand tend to have a strong influence on the consumers' willingness or desire to buy (Tariq et al., 2013). Customers tend to have a more favourable intention towards a product or service if it is being promoted by an expert social media influencer and not a non-expert influencer (Rollins, B; Bhutada, N; Crawford, C; & Hvizdos, A, 2015). The non-

traditional celebrities are those citizens who are known to only a particular group of individuals, they are not movie stars or sports-persons (Abidin, 2016) but still they are considered as more influential because they seem to be reliable, accessible and trustworthy (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Companies believe that endorsers can vouch for the information about the product (Amoateng and Poku 2013; Sassenberg et al. 2012). Online marketers have access to the engagement on the influencers' posts related to their product or services in terms of likes, shares, comments etc. (De Veirman et al., 2017). This helps them in understanding the customers and further improving their service. There are certain factors which impact the purchase intention. Source trustworthiness and attractiveness don't significantly impact the intention to purchase but the expertise of the source does (Ohanian, 1990). The perceived impact of these influencers has a positive correlation with brand awareness, behavioural intention and brand expected value. Brand engagement leads to an increase in the expected value of the brand and helps in predicting the intention to purchase recommended brands (Jiménez-Castillo, D; Sánchez-Fernández, R. 2019). According to MediaKix, nearly 80% of digital marketers believe that influencer marketing has helped in raising their online businesses (Forbes, 2017). A survey by Neilson revealed that promotion by influencers gives 11 times the return on investment as compared to other marketing channels (Tapinfluence 2017). This is possible because influencers are considered to be

experts, and hence more reliable. They are also good at describing the functions of an item (Berger & The Keller Fay Group, 2016).

Problem Identification

Influencer has become a common buzzword.. With each passing day Indian influencers are gaining a huge number of followers and subscribers. Although research has been conducted in the past on influencer marketing, more research with respect to their impact on the consumers' intent to buy is required. Furthermore, the research on Indian context is scanty. It would be intriguing to find out how Indians respond to social media influencers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will examine various social media users and their attitude towards attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and the similarity of the source. The source here being a social media influencer.

For this purpose a quantitative study was conducted, because with the help of this type of research the opinion and perception of a larger number of people can be obtained, whereas in qualitative research the sample size is smaller as compared to quantitative research. It would help in obtaining more comprehensive results (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

1. THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1: Theoretical Model

This model is based on the Source Credibility model by Ohnanian(1990).

VARIABLES

- Dependent variable- Purchase intention,
- Independent variables- Source Attractiveness, Source Trustworthiness, Source Similarity, and Source Expertise.

Purchase Intention - It is the extent to which consumers are willing and inclined to buy a product or service desired by them.

Attractiveness - Physical appearance of the endorser, in this case an influencer, is considered to be having a positive influence on the acceptance of an advertisement (Erdogan, 1999). Endorsers who are good looking are more likely to gather a larger number of followers.

H1: Source attractiveness has a positive effect on the intent to purchase.

Trustworthiness - It's the confidence that consumers have in the source, in this case, a social media influencer. (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner and Ridder, 2011).

People tend to accept and act upon information which they think is coming from a trustworthy source.

H2: Source trustworthiness has a positive effect on the intent to purchase.

Expertise - It means having knowledge or experience. According to a study conducted by (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002) people are likely to believe the source that has more knowledge and experience than them.

H3: Source expertise has a positive effect on the intent to purchase.

Similarity - Similarity among two people leads to higher purchase intention of a product or service (

Jiang, L., Hoegg, J., Dahl, D., & Chattopadhyay, A, 2010).

H4: Source similarity has a positive effect on the intent to purchase.

2. Data Collection

To study the effect of influencers on the intent to purchase, primary data was collected. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), primary sources are those sources from which the researcher directly collects data that has not been collected before. Conducting a survey is considered as the best method of collecting data from a large number of people. (Hair et al., 2007). A survey was conducted online in order to obtain the data. The technique called purposive sampling was used to find out the impact of influencers. The questionnaire was shared with only those people who were social media users and followed influencers online. This study was carried out in India and the time period of the study was May, 2021- July, 2021.

3. Questionnaire and Measurement

The questionnaire was created online. The first half of the survey consisted of standard demographics questions about age, gender, education etc. It also included a few introductory questions about various social media applications and influencers.

The second half of the survey consisted of statements regarding the independent and dependent variables of the study namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity. The statements were assessed on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1: "Strongly Disagree" to 5: "Strongly Agree". The Likert Scale makes sure that respondents have choices without becoming overwhelmed.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

1. Demographic Results

Out of the 120 people who responded to the survey 82(68.33%) were female and 38(31.66%) were male which shows that about two-third of the respondents were female and the rest of them were male. Most of the respondents were aged between 18-25 years(61.66%) while only 2.5% were above the age of 35. Sample of wide geographical coverage, 73.33% of

the respondents were from Delhi followed by Haryana from which 16.66% of responses were received. The respondents had diverse education qualifications, namely graduate (36.66%), post graduate (28.33%), Inter/12th (27.5%), matriculate/10th (5%) and others (1.66%).

Table 1 :Demographic Results

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	38	31.66
Female	82	68.33
Age		
Below 18	29	24.16
18-25	74	61.66
26-35	14	11.66
36-45	1	0.83
Above 45	2	1.66
State		
Delhi	88	73.33
Haryana	20	16.66
Gujarat	1	0.83
Andhra Pradesh	1	0.83
Manipur	1	0.83
Uttar Pradesh	8	6.66
Punjab	1	0.83
Education		
Graduate	44	36.66
Post graduate	34	28.33
Inter/12 th	33	27.5
Matriculate/10 th	6	5
others	2	1.66

2. Measurement Model

Prior to other analysis tests Common Method Variance was conducted. Harman's one factor technique was applied for this purpose. The constructs constituted of items, and these items were merged into a factor and the largest variance described by the first factor was 45.40% of the total variance. This implies, the Common Method bias was insignificant for the data set of this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003)

The value of model fit indicator PCMIN/DF was 1.500 which is below 2.0. Therefore, this model can be considered a good model. Other model fit indicators like IFI, CFI, GFI and TLI had values .952, .951, .894, and .933 respectively. Since these values were close to 9.0 this model can be considered as a strong model.

SPSS Amos was used for the purpose of SEM (Structural Equation Modelling). SEM provides the

modelling of relationships between several predictor and predicted variables (Gefen et al, 2000) The AVEs of expertise, similarity and attractiveness were greater than 0.5 which means that they met

convergent validity requirements. The loadings of the constructs are displayed in Table 2 along with the average variance extracted.

Figure2: Model fit

Table 2 : Measurement Model for Reflective Constructs

Construct	Indicator	Loading	AVE
Expertise	EXP1	.729	0.523
	EXP2	.665	
	EXP3	.773	
Similarity	SIMILARITY 1	.689	0.504
	SIMILARITY 2	.714	
	SIMILARITY 3	.727	
Attractiveness	A1	.716	0.614
	A2	.846	
Trustworthiness	T1	.624	0.420
	T2	.630	
	T3	.689	
Purchase intention	PC 1	.733	0.548
	PC2	.774	
	PC3	.713	

3. Structural Model

Before conducting the structural model evaluation, multicollinearity was checked to determine if the results are valid. The VIF factor below 5 indicated the absence of multicollinearity in the model (Hair et al, 2014) After that, the structural model was evaluated to check the significance of the hypotheses. Based on the results in the table given

Table 3 : Path-Coefficient Assessment

Hypotheses	Relationship	Std. Error	CR	p-value	Result
H1	SA-->PI	.164	.980	.327	Not Significant
H2	ST-->PI	.671	1.008	.314	Not Significant
H3	SE-->PI	.418	2.030	.042	Significant
H4	SS-->PI	.393	2.024	.043	Significant

Note: SA (Source Attractiveness), PI(Purchase Intention), SE(Source Expertise), ST(Source Trustworthiness), SS(Source Similarity)

DISCUSSIONS

This study identified the impact of the influencers' expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity on purchase intention. The attractiveness and trustworthiness of social media influencers didn't impact the consumers' intent to buy.(H1 and H2 were rejected) but expertise had a significant impact on purchase intent (H3 was proved). The results of this study were in line with the results obtained by a study performed by Ohanian (1991), that showed source trustworthiness and attractiveness didn't impact the consumers' intention to buy that product. There is a weak logical link between influencers' attractiveness and trustworthiness with the purchase intention. Expertise of the influencer exhibits a significant relationship with the purchase intention. The results were similar to earlier research conducted by Kiecker& Cowles and Till and Busler (2000). The

below 2 out of 4 of the hypotheses were accepted. The results demonstrated that the expertise of source ($p < 0.05$) and its similarity($p < 0.05$) illustrate a significant positive correlation with the intent to buy, H3, H4 were accepted. On the other hand, there was not a significant positive correlation between the source attractiveness, source trustworthiness and the intent to buy, therefore H1, H2 were not supported.

perceived similarity of the source(influencer) and their followers on social media has a significant impact on the purchase intention (H4 was accepted). The result was in line with the results of earlier studies conducted by Wilson & Sherrell (1993) and Fu et al (2018). People tend to follow those influencers who share the same interests as them and who they can relate to.

Our study focuses on the youth of India since they use social media applications regularly and tend to follow a lot of influencers online. Earlier studies have predominantly focused on the source credibility whereas this study also focuses on the similarity of the sources.

IMPLICATIONS

Online content creators with a large amount of following tend to impact the consumers' purchase intent. They exhibit a positive correlation. According to Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1963) people learn through vicarious learning, hence it aptly supports the findings in this study. In this study, 4

variables were studied: SA(attractiveness of source), SE(expertise of source), ST(trustworthiness of source) and SS(similarity of source) which could lead to an increase in the intention to purchase. Purchase intention being the dependent variable in this study.

From a managerial perspective, this offers marketers an insight into the customers' views and perception about social media influencers. This would help them plan strategies, target audiences and work in collaboration with influencers to create worthy marketing campaigns.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- For this study the data was collected from 120 social media users. A study may be conducted with a larger sample size to delve deeper into this topic and produce comprehensive results.
- Most of the respondents in this study were young adults from Delhi, India. Future research may examine the impact of influencers on people across different age groups living in various parts of India to have an exhaustive view..
- Future studies may also explore the impact of various personality types on the consumers' intention to purchase.

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APPENDIX**Appendix 1**

VARIABLES	ITEMS	MEASUREMENT ITEMS	SOURCE
	Pc 1	I'm more likely to buy a product recommended by the accounts I follow on social media like Youtube, Instagram etc.	
Purchase intention	Pc2	I feel the urge to buy the products after watching a review or post about it	Model & Questions: Mahrous, & Abdelmaaboud, 2017
	Pc3	It is likely that I will purchase the products featured on an influencer's account.	
Trustworthiness	Trust 1	I trust influencers' reviews and recommendations more than traditional ads.	Ohanian,1990 Questions: Pedersen, & Stritch, 2018
	Trust 2	I'm more inclined to buy products that are promoted by my favourite influencer.	
	Trust 3	I think the promises made by an influencer are likely to be reliable.	
Similarity	Similarity 1	My favourite influencer shares the same interests as me.	Model: Reichelt, Sievert & Jacob, 2014 Questions: Casaló, Flavián, & C.Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018
	Similarity 2	My favorite influencer's personality is similar to mine	
	Similarity 3	Influencers post relatable content from their everyday life.	
	A1	Influencers are stylish.	
Attractiveness	A2	I think my favourite influencer is good looking	Model: Ohanian,1990 Questions: Dwivedi, Johnson, & Mcdonald, 2015
Expertise	Exp 1	Influencers have extensive knowledge about their field.	Model: Ohanian,1990 Questions: Spake, & Megehee, 2010
	Exp 2	I think influencers have experience in their area of interest	
	Exp3	I think influencers have specialized knowledge about their field	