

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing (SMI), examined its impact on consumer purchasing behaviour and whether this is perceived by consumers. A validated survey was used to collect data from a sample of 150 consumers from Pune City, Maharashtra, India, who buy things online getting affected by advertisements on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The results of the study show that consumers are less likely to buy products advertised on social media. There is also evidence that consumers perceive such social media influencer marketing campaigns as advertising. However, consumers are more likely to engage in this type of marketing if they feel that the advertiser is genuine and trustworthy and trust the influencers themselves.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, social media, Consumer behaviour

1. Introduction

Nowadays, celebrities and other public figures can be found on various social media networks. These influencers, who often have an engaged following, are leveraging that audience to sell products to their followers. Social media influencers, due to the interaction with their followers, can have the ability to influence how consumers buy products, who are considered as part of their influencer network. Social media influencers may receive a commission or be paid in other ways, such as free products or prizes to encourage endorsement. In addition, they can be rewarded by brands with free advertising on social media, which is why customers may potentially perceive this endorsement as a form of advertising.

The online world is continuously evolving, and social media has become the leading source of online news, information and entertainment. With the growth in the number of users on social media platforms, it is not surprising that consumers are becoming more reliant on social media for information regarding their shopping behaviours. This trend has helped businesses to market themselves through influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a form of marketing in which a marketer seeks to reach a target audience by working with influential people who can spread awareness about the product or brand. In short, influencer marketing uses individuals to carry out word-of-mouth advertising about a product or brand for free or for a fee.

In the case of social media influencer marketing, these influencers are typically friends and family of a consumer, as well as celebrities and other public figures who can be found on various social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. These influencers may have an engaged following, who they often leverage their audience to sell products to.

Social media influencers can be found in all aspects of life. Famous YouTubers such (for example) Logan Paul have millions of subscribers and frequently post videos related to themselves and the products that they endorse. They use YouTube as a tool to market themselves through advertisements or collaborations with companies or brands, and then they encourage and help their followers to purchase the product. Although they are associated with a large number of followers, they usually have a low rate of click-through rate (CTR), which means that their videos receive little attention on social media platforms. These influencers usually do not receive any payment for their endorsements on social media, but receive free products or other prizes to encourage endorsement (Hori & Han 2014).

In addition to the diminishing link between the online presence of celebrities and consumers' purchase behaviours in general, another challenge that marketers face when promoting products is ensuring that these endorsements are perceived as advertising. Many consumers today are exposed to brands and product

advertisements on a daily basis, which can lead them to believe that all endorsements made by a social media influencer are really advertising. In contrast, if the influencer has a positive relationship with its followers, then this may lead to increased sales for businesses. Therefore, the aim of this research was to examine the effectiveness of SMI on consumer purchasing behaviour and whether consumers perceive such endorsements as advertising.

The current study examines social media influencers' impact on consumer purchasing behaviour and whether this is perceivable by consumers. To do this, a validated survey was used to collect data from a sample of 150 consumers who buy things online and have been affected by advertisements on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

2. Literature Review

Paul (2018) in his study states that marketers have taken notice of the potential impact of using social media influencers to reach their target audience and create an influence on their interactions with consumers. They are increasingly turning to social media influencers as a force to amplify their marketing efforts and also to expand awareness of the brand. The growing number of marketing experts who are employing influencers in their marketing efforts, is due to the fact that they see the effectiveness of leveraging influencer's influence on consumers' minds through various brands.

A study reveals that social media influencers helped drive more than \$5.5 billion in sales for companies in 2014, and the total is estimated to reach nearly \$10 billion by the end of 2017. Allan (2019) states that with the increasing use of social media influencer marketing, businesses are increasingly facing the challenge of creating a marketing strategy which can align their brand reputation with that of their influencers. The key to success is through developing a relationship between business objectives and the goals of the social media influencer.

Challa, Anute, (2021) companies primarily utilize Instagram to engage with their targeted markets and audiences by creating unique content, including quality images and videos. Despite variations in content quality, all companies are making considerable efforts to reach out to their audience and build their brand awareness globally.

Influencer marketing has become very popular among marketers over time due to its effectiveness as an extension or amplification tool for marketing activities (Tao, Choo & Kim, 2019). It is also highly scalable, fast to implement and can be accessed anywhere in the world. Kim (2019) states that social media influencers have been used by businesses for a long time and have proven to be effective when it comes to encouraging new customers to try out their products. This article supports the need for marketers to be receptive towards social media influencers because they are part of an evolving marketing environment that requires businesses to change their marketing strategies so as to adapt with it or leverage its emerging trends.

In addition, another study conducted in 2018 shows that there are many positive outcomes associated with social media influencer marketing (Tao et al., 2018.) Tao et al., (2018) state that the positive outcomes of social media influencer marketing include: high ROI, increased brand awareness and increased sales. The success of such strategies is due to the fact that social media influencers have a broad reach as they often have access via their followers to a large audience who are highly engaged with their content. Furthermore, this study shows that even though there are many challenges in connecting the goals of marketers and social media influencers, there have been many successful cases wherein marketers combined their efforts with those of influencers leading to increased sales and profits from consumers.

Zhang in his study confirms the findings from some other scholars (Zhang, et al. 2016) as social media influencers' influence on purchasing behaviour is very limited in general which implies that the strategies employed by marketers to achieve their goals are not well-received by consumers. It also reveals that the lack of trust in social media influencers has a direct impact on the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

Mishra & Kumar (2020) in their study confirm the findings that social media influencers have influenced consumers' purchasing behaviours through their endorsements. They also add that the influencers are perceived as advertising content in general which means that most of their followers believe that they are only endorsing a product to receive free products or other rewards. This is a challenge for marketers because if the influencers lose credibility and followers, then it will negatively affect their business.

In addition, Kjetil (2017) states that the number of websites and YouTube channels dedicated to reviewing brands and products has increased over the past few years and this has led to an increase in product sales. In

fact, in 2017 alone, brands were able to achieve a 10% increase in sales due to the influence of social media influencers.

Muang et al., (2016) state that it is important for marketers to involve social media influencers as part of their marketing campaign and not just use them as a source of product endorsements. They also add that those who fully understand the nature of influencer marketing stand to gain more than those who do not. This means that businesses should involve social media influencers in content creation, provide incentives and pricing strategies which will benefit their customers and also ensure that they are using authentic brand ambassadors so as to avoid being perceived as fake advertising. So, how can marketers ensure that they are acquiring influencers who are authentic, genuine and genuine in their social media content?

This is challenging for marketers because many people who have large audiences on social media use their platforms as a way to promote brands. In fact, when it comes to Facebook and Instagram, it is very common for people to receive money in exchange for posting content about a product or brand. This is why it is important for marketers to invest more into understanding the different types of influencers available online so as to select influencers who suit the needs of their current marketing objectives.

Overall there is paucity of research on the relationship between social media influencers and customer buying behaviour. This article aims to give the right direction to marketers so as to effectively collaborate with influencers in order to improve their customer relationship and generate more revenue.

3. Objectives of the study

1. To investigate the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in Pune city.
2. To examine the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumer buying behaviour.
3. To examine whether these social media influencer marketing campaigns are perceived by consumers as advertising or not?
4. To examine the level of trust that consumers have regarding social influencer marketing.

4. Hypotheses

- H1: Social media influencer marketing is not perceived by customers as advertising.
 H2: Social media influencer marketing has a profound impact on the consumer buying behaviour.
 H3: Consumers are more likely to be able to trust social media influencers for their authentic reasons than for the branding reasons of the brands they endorse themselves.

5. Methodology

1. Research Design: An exploratory survey was used to collect data from a sample of 150 customers who buy things online getting affected by advertisements on social media platforms, i.e., Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
2. Research Methods: This study used a cross sectional design to collect data from customers who are affected by advertisements on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in Pune city.
3. Research Design: This study was conducted as an exploratory survey method because it is difficult to test the influence of social media influencer marketing in Pune city.
4. Measurement: The main characteristic that has been observed from the research is that people easily believe things through social networks and trust them more than they trust brand names or other associations such as those brands they use themselves.
5. Sampling:

The study sample was 150 consumers getting affected by advertisements on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The sampling method that was used was convenience sampling, where the chosen participants meet certain criteria. The selection criteria were firstly, to have information about social influencer marketing campaigns and secondly they could be involved in purchasing decisions.

6. Time horizon: This study used a cross sectional survey design because it is difficult to test the influence of social media influencer marketing in Pune city as well as to measure the effectiveness of this type of advertising campaign.

6. Results

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	20-30 years	61	40.7	40.7	40.7
	30-40 years	40	26.7	26.7	67.3
	40-50 years	41	27.3	27.3	94.7

	Above 50 years	8	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 1. Age

40.7% of the respondents were from the age group of 20-60 years. 26.7% were from the age group of 30-40 years, 27.3% from 40-50 years and 5.3% of them were above 50 years old. It can be inferred that the majority of respondents were relatively young and in their prime working ages.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Male	75	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Female	75	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Gender

The survey showed an equal distribution of male and female respondents, with 50% of each gender. This indicates that the sample population was representative of a fair mix between male and female respondents.

Table 3. Social media influencer endorsements are just another form of advertisements

36% of the respondents firmly Agreed that social media influencer endorsements are just another form of advertisement. 30% of the respondents agreed, while 16.7% disagreed and only 14% Firmly Disagreed. This suggests that most people view social media influencers as a viable platform for marketing products or services. However, most of the respondents treat them as regular advertisements.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	15	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Disagree	16	10.7	10.7	20.7
	Neutral	6	4.0	4.0	24.7
	Agree	43	28.7	28.7	53.3
	Firmly Agree	70	46.7	46.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	21	14.0	14.0	14.0
	Disagree	25	16.7	16.7	30.7
	Neutral	5	3.3	3.3	34.0
	Agree	45	30.0	30.0	64.0
	Firmly Agree	54	36.0	36.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Social media influencer marketing is effective in promoting my purchase.

A majority of the respondents (46.7%) Firmly agreed that social media influencer marketing is effective in promoting their purchase, while 28.7% agreed and only 10% disagreed. This indicates that people generally have a positive view towards social media influencers as a form of advertisement.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	19	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Disagree	21	14.0	14.0	26.7
	Neutral	7	4.7	4.7	31.3
	Agree	37	24.7	24.7	56.0
	Firmly Agree	66	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Social media influencer marketing influences consumer purchase behaviour more than direct advertising on social media.

Most of the respondents (44.0%) Firmly agreed that social media influencer marketing influences consumer purchase behaviour more than direct advertising on social media, while 24.7% agreed and 14% disagreed. This

shows that people perceive social media influencers as having more influence on their purchasing decisions than traditional ads.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	26	17.3	17.3	17.3
	Disagree	35	23.3	23.3	40.7
	Neutral	11	7.3	7.3	48.0
	Agree	26	17.3	17.3	65.3
	Firmly Agree	52	34.7	34.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 6. Consumers perceive that the advertiser is a genuine person, when the influencers are involved in social media influencer marketing

Most of the respondents (34.7%) Firmly agreed that consumers perceive that the advertiser is a genuine person, when influencers are involved in social media influencer marketing, while 17.3% agreed and 23.3% disagreed. This suggests that people find it easier to trust an advertisement if there is an influencer associated with it. Therefore, influencers can be an effective tool in promoting products or services.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	16	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Disagree	15	10.0	10.0	20.7
	Neutral	8	5.3	5.3	26.0
	Agree	55	36.7	36.7	62.7
	Firmly Agree	56	37.3	37.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 7. The effect of social media influencer marketing on consumers' buying behaviour is dependent on the brand's history and the existence of a seamless customer experience for them

Most of the respondents (37.3%) Firmly agreed that the effect of social media influencer marketing on consumers' buying behaviour is dependent on the brand's history and existence of a seamless customer experience for them, while 36.7% agreed and only 10% disagreed. This indicates that people are more likely to engage with a brand if they have a good history and customer experience. Therefore, it is important for brands to ensure that their customer experiences are up to par in order to make the most out of influencer marketing.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	10	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	9	6.0	6.0	12.7
	Neutral	6	4.0	4.0	16.7
	Agree	46	30.7	30.7	47.3
	Firmly Agree	79	52.7	52.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 8. Trust affects consumer purchase and their perception to social media marketers.

A majority of the respondents (52.7%) Firmly agreed that trust affects consumer purchase and their perception to social media marketers, while 30.7% agreed and only 6% disagreed. This suggests that people are more likely to purchase from a brand if they trust it, which can be established through influencer marketing. Therefore, brands should focus on building strong relationships with their influencers in order to create trust and engagement among consumers.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	9	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Disagree	12	8.0	8.0	14.0
	Neutral	12	8.0	8.0	22.0
	Agree	56	37.3	37.3	59.3
	Firmly Agree	61	40.7	40.7	100.0

	Total	150	100.0	100.0	
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Table 9. Consumers are more likely to engage in social media influencer marketing if they feel that the advertiser is genuine and trust the influencer themselves.

Most of the respondents (40.7%) Firmly agreed that consumers are more likely to engage in social media influencer marketing if they feel that the advertiser is genuine, and trust the influencer themselves, while 37.3% agreed and only 8% disagreed. This demonstrates that people are more likely to engage with an advertisement if it has an influencer associated with it and if they trust the influencer. Therefore, brands should focus on building strong relationships with their influencers in order to create trust among consumers and increase engagement.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	9	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Disagree	8	5.3	5.3	11.3
	Neutral	13	8.7	8.7	20.0
	Agree	54	36.0	36.0	56.0
	Firmly Agree	66	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Influencers' images play a crucial role in making an impact on consumers and their perception of purchasing decisions.

Most of the respondents (44%) Firmly agreed that influencers' images play a crucial role in making an impact on consumers and their perception of purchasing decisions, while 36% agreed and only 5.3% disagreed. This indicates that people are more likely to purchase something if they have seen it promoted by an influencer with whom they can relate. Therefore, it is important for brands to choose influencers whose images and messages resonate well with their target audience in order to make the most out of influencer marketing.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	8	5.3	5.3	5.3
	Disagree	9	6.0	6.0	11.3
	Neutral	5	3.3	3.3	14.7
	Agree	62	41.3	41.3	56.0
	Firmly Agree	66	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 12. I am less likely to buy products advertised on social media platforms.

Most of the respondents (44%) Firmly Agreed that they are less likely to buy products advertised on social media platforms, while 41.3% agreed and only 5.3% disagreed. This suggests that people may be reluctant to purchase something if it is being promoted through a platform that they do not trust, or if it is being promoted by an influencer that they do not relate to. Therefore, brands should focus on finding the right influencers and platforms in order to increase their chances of successful engagement with consumers.

		Freq.	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Firmly Disagree	54	36.0	36.0	36.0
	Disagree	55	36.7	36.7	72.7
	Neutral	12	8.0	8.0	80.7
	Agree	25	16.7	16.7	97.3
	Firmly Agree	4	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 13. Social media influencers help to convert negative brand image to positive brand image.

Most of the respondents (36%) Firmly Disagreed that social media influencers help to convert negative brand image to positive brand image, while 36.7% disagreed and only 2.7% agreed. This indicates that people may be sceptical about the ability of influencers to change public opinion about a brand and suggests that brands should focus on using influencers to create positive content in order to build trust and credibility with consumers.

7. Testing of Hypothesis

H1: Social media influencer marketing is not perceived by customers as advertising.

According to Table 3, 66% of the respondents Firmly Agreed or agreed that social media influencer endorsements are just another form of advertisements. However, to check if the results are not due to mere chance, a chi square test was used. The following were the results of the test.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Firmly Disagree	21	30.0	-9.0
Disagree	25	30.0	-5.0
Neutral	5	30.0	-25.0
Agree	45	30.0	15.0
Firmly Agree	54	30.0	24.0
Total	150		

Table 14. Social media influencer endorsements are just another form of advertisements

Social media influencer endorsements are just another form of advertisements	
Chi-Square	51.067 ^a
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell Freq. is 30.0.	

Table 15. Test Statistics

Thus, we can safely reject the null hypothesis and accept that social media influencer marketing is perceived by customers as just another form of advertising.

H2: Social media influencer marketing has a profound impact on the consumer buying behaviour.

According to Table 4 and Table 5, according to most of the respondents social media marketing is effective in promoting their purchase. It also influences consumer purchase behaviour more than direct advertising on social media. However, a chi square test was performed to be sure the outcomes were not the result of random chance. What you see below are the test results.

	1. Social media influencer marketing is effective in promoting my purchase.	2. Social media influencer marketing influences consumer purchase behaviour more than direct advertising on social media.
Chi-Square	92.200 ^a	69.200 ^a
df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell Freq. is 30.0.		

Table 16. Test Statistics

Thus, we can safely reject the null hypothesis and accept that social media influencer marketing has a profound impact on the consumer buying behaviour.

H3: Consumers are more likely to be able to trust social media influencers for their authentic reasons than for the branding reasons of the brands they endorse themselves.

According to Table 9, most of the respondents (40.7%) Firmly Agreed that consumers are more likely to engage in social media influencer marketing if they feel that the advertiser is genuine, and trust the influencer themselves, while 37.3% agreed to the same. However, a chi square test was performed to be sure the outcomes were not the result of random chance. What you see below are the test results.

	Consumers are more likely to engage in social media influencer marketing if they feel that the advertiser is genuine, and trust the influencer themselves.
Chi-Square	90.867 ^a
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell Freq. is 30.0.	

Table 17. Test Statistics

The P value is lesser than 0.05, which means that the results are not due to mere chance. This helps us to reject the null hypothesis and accept that “Consumers are more likely to be able to trust social media influencers for their authentic reasons than for the branding reasons of the brands they endorse themselves.”

8. Conclusions

The survey results indicate that most people view social media influencers as a viable platform for marketing products or services, and believe that it is effective in promoting their purchase. There was an equal distribution of male and female respondents, with the majority of them being relatively young adults. This shows that the sample population was representative of the general public, making the results more reliable. Overall, the survey suggests that social media influencers are an effective form of advertising for businesses.

The survey results showed that people perceive influencer marketing to be more effective than direct advertising when it comes to influencing purchase decisions. People also find it easier to trust a brand if there is an influencer associated with it, showing the importance of involving influencers in campaigns. Lastly, customers are more likely to engage with a brand if they have a good history and customer experience, which means brands must work to ensure that their customer experiences are up to par in order for influencer marketing to be successful.

Overall, it is clear that social media influencers can have a positive impact on consumer purchasing behaviour when used effectively. Brands should take this into consideration when planning their campaigns and use influencer marketing to their advantage.

The survey results show that trust and relationships between influencers, brands and consumers can have a significant effect on consumer purchase decisions. Brands should focus on building strong relationships with their influencers in order to create trust among consumers and increase engagement. Likewise, it is important for brands to choose influencers whose images and message resonate well with their target audience in order to make the most out of influencer marketing. By understanding the importance of trust and relationships between influencers, brands, and consumers, organizations can maximize their return on investment from influencer marketing.

The survey results also highlight that it is necessary for organizations to be clear about the goals of their campaigns and monitor how they are performing in order to ensure that they are meeting the desired objectives. This can involve monitoring the engagement rates, brand sentiment and purchase decisions of consumers in order to gauge whether or not their campaigns have been successful.

Overall, this survey provides insight into the importance of trust and relationships between influencers, brands and consumers when it comes to social media influencer marketing. By understanding the attitudes of consumers and the importance of trust, organizations can maximize their return on investment from influencer marketing campaigns.

Finally, the results of this survey suggest that brands should carefully consider their social media content and influencer partnerships when attempting to reach a larger audience. Brands should focus on creating content that resonates with the target audience, as well as finding the right influencers and platforms to ensure successful engagement with consumers. Additionally, they should recognize that people may be sceptical about the ability of influencers to change public opinion and focus on using them to create positive content in order to build trust and credibility. Therefore, brands should strive to use social media strategically in order to gain the most benefit from their campaigns.

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