

Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, and the Formation of Trends

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Social media has, as discussed in prior research, significantly influenced modern lifestyle, communication forms, and consumer behaviour. Its business potential has transformed it into a new advertising platform, and social media is gradually becoming an alternative to conventional advertising, strongly impacting the relationship between brands and consumers. Directly targeting social media users through influencer marketing, a new form of advertising which identifies and utilises individuals with an influence over potential customers, brands orient their marketing and advertising activities around these influencers using social media. These brand advocates drive the brand message to the consumer market, impacting consumer behaviour. As traditional marketing strategies are becoming less effective, influencer marketing is proving more effective. This study aims to measure the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour and the reasons behind this impact, using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to conceptualise how consumers are persuaded by promotional messages which lead to attitude and behaviour change.

Keywords: *Advertising, Influencer Marketing, Formation of Trends, Consumer Behaviour, Social Media, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)*

Introduction

Social media and social media marketing trends have become one of the most discussed topics in the marketing field. With the rapid development of technology, the advent of Web 2.0, smartphones and small portable computers, internet access being available anywhere and anytime to those with who need to create, share, receive and process information, is the basis for the development of social media. With advantages that traditional mass media marketing lacks, the new concept of social media marketing has become popular worldwide, and the



explosive growth of digital media channels has forced businesses to adapt their approaches to informing customers and influencing their purchasing decisions (Wicks, 2015).

Influencer marketing previously known as word-of-mouth marketing is a process of activating individuals who have a command or an influence over a specified target audience, due to the individuals' expertise, popularity, or reputation. Influencer marketing primarily rests on two sub-practices. The first occurs when earned (i.e., unpaid) influencers, relying on preexisting relationships with brands, promote the brands' products to increase their own social growth; the second practice occurs with paid influencer marketing, which relies on sponsorship and testimonials.

One form of social media is a weblog or blog, a regular feature appearing as part of an online publication that typically relates to a particular topic and comprises articles and personal commentary by one or more author. Bloggers—who write for and maintain blogs, and may be paid or unpaid, represent one of the most popular forms of influencer marketing as they are perceived by their followers as authentic and loyal when they recommend a specific product or brand. Consumers perceive the blogger's recommendation as more trustworthy and credible than a message from a traditional advertising source. This builds a valuable relationship between brands and consumers, allowing brands to expand their target audience, increase brand public awareness, create social conversations, and establish credibility.

Social media influencers build their brand image by creating direct relationships with consumers through online two-way conversations, developing trust between consumers and the influencers and their brands. A range of measurable and non-measurable factors—such as quality and context of content, number of page views, search engine ranking, level of participation, frequency of activity, and fame or celebrity status—increase the popularity of the influencers. Thus influencers seek to enhance relationships with the target audience and prospects, driving consumers to their online activities, and requesting their feedback and comments.

Based on consumers' feedback, influencers develop certain hypotheses about the types of behaviour considered persuasive, which serve as a guide for their future actions. Following the concept of "leading by action," consumers are also likely to adopt and copy the behaviour shown by the influencer. This form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) inspires consumers to share their thoughts and experiences with other consumers on social media, who consider this a credible and trustworthy form of marketing. As influencers are masters of eWOM, they take the lead in shaping consumers' decision-making process and directing them towards certain brands and products. (Ahrens J, Coyle JR, Strahilevitz MA, 2013).

In this paper, we propose three main research questions:



RQ1: Who are the social media influencers?

RQ2: What forms of strategic communications do they use?

RQ3: How influential are these people in comparison to traditional forms of advertising?

Literature Review

Social Media

“Social media” is currently one of the most popular terms in the field of marketing and communications, as it is considered both a new direction for media worldwide and completely different from mass media. However, despite numerous attempts to define the concept, the literature does not provide a consistent, complete, and satisfactory definition acceptable to marketing experts.

According to marketing professor Andreas Kaplan from ESCP Europe University of Economics and his colleague Michael Haenlein in their book "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media" (2010), social media is a group of internet-based tools built from the idea and technology of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan 2010). Social media is defined as the online media in which there is a flexible movement between the author's role and the audience of participating individuals, utilising social software that allows both entities to post, comment, share, or change content, thus forming common interests' communities (Hudson 2018).

The concept of social media generally includes the following: Firstly, social media is a form of communication based on the web, specifically Web 2.0, the second generation of development of the internet, with more dynamic advantages than Web 1.0 that uses internet tools to communicate information (Constantinides 2010). As the main difference between Web 1.0 and 2.0 is the rate of which information changes, with Web 1.0 the information displayed is mainly static, while in Web 2.0 the information is dynamic allowing users to interact more freely with each other. Secondly, social media is fundamentally different from traditional mass media, and this difference is reflected in the following:

- In mass media, information is provided in one direction from media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television channels to readers or audiences (i.e., a “one-to-many” process). Social media such as social networks, blogs, and forums allows information to be provided and shared in a multidimensional way between content producers and others (i.e., a "many-to-many" process).
- Most participants involved in the production and supply of information in mass media must be trained, and are often professional journalists and reporters. With social media, however, everyone with or without expertise can participate in producing and supplying

information; thus the phenomenon of the creation and exchange of user-generated content of Web 2.0.

- When publishing news, mass media usually follows certain periods (daily, weekly, or monthly), while releasing information on social media does not follow a pattern. For example, a blogger can post five to six posts a day, or every three to four days.
- When information in the mass media is erroneously published, it can only be corrected in the next edition. However, on social media, the problem can be quickly solved by posting comments or direct fixes; for example, the author may modify the content of the blog post on their forum.

Many experts now use terms for social media such as "post mass media" or "the democratisation of knowledge" to emphasise the empowerment of the production and dissemination of information to the individual.

Social Media Marketing

Businesses often utilise social media in marketing activities to reach their target customer, and a new concept has emerged alongside the idea of social media and social media marketing (Chaubey, Husain, and Ghufraan 2016).

In general, social media marketing concepts are defined based on the tools used. Thus it is necessary to note the following points:

- Because it uses websites and other social media applications on the internet as tools, social media marketing is now classified as one of several types of online or internet marketing activities. Compared with other online marketing activities such as mail marketing, web banners, and search engine marketing (SEM), social media marketing is still very new, but the effectiveness of sales confirms its advantages and it is used frequently in online and general business marketing activities worldwide.
- Social media marketing is often utilised to effectively spread companies' marketing campaigns, serving as a type word-of-mouth marketing on social media, and helping businesses build online dialogues and improve customer interaction.
- The goal of social media marketing, similar to that of all other types of marketing, is to achieve a companies' primary marketing goals: increasing profits, income, and market share; establishing relationships with customers; and strengthening and building brand image.
- It is necessary to clearly distinguish the concepts of "social media" and "social media marketing." While social media is a type of communication used to provide and share information to different audiences, social media marketing is a type of marketing used to serve the marketing activities of businesses and organisations.

Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Traditional 1.0 word-of-mouth marketing, or "rumor," is a spontaneous form of human communication. Due to rumors, various stories and life lessons have been handed down for generations. However, the veracity of rumors may become of concern. People may attempt to "shock" others to draw attention to themselves, or the stories spread are often exaggerated. With dissemination, rumors may become unrealistic or cause unforeseen, unintentional consequences (Chiosa 2014).

After the industrial revolution in the early nineteenth century, marketing science was born and became an indispensable business tool. Marketing science developed until the 1970s, and became a type of complete reasoning system in which word-of-mouth was used as both a "new" and an "old" tool. Thus word-of-mouth 2.0 evolved into a purposeful, organic word-of-mouth (WOM) method of spreading information to support other means of promoting products to consumers.

By the late 1990s, due to the internet revolution, the spread of information became increasingly convenient with the explosion of social networks, and tools such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and word-of-mouth marketing became even more effective, although word-of-mouth 3.0 required more professional information management. Compared with word-of-mouth 1.0 and 2.0, word-of-mouth 3.0 has the following advantages: messages spread quickly and widely; verifiable due to storage; and highly organised.

Influencer Marketing

In an age in which trust has become key to brands, it is not enough for companies to introduce their product and services to the market in traditional ways. Influencer marketing thus becomes an important part of the marketing mix; according to Linqia's report, 94% of marketers rated influencer marketing "effective" in 2016, and accordingly, influencer marketing budgets doubled in 2017 (Linqia 2017). Influencer marketing partners social network influencers with brands to increase brand awareness; these influencers can be online celebrities or bloggers, reporters, industry experts, or even a brand customer with a large following on social networks.

As influential people on social networks and bloggers become popular and influential, they become advocates and promoters of the brand, and their shared word-of-mouth information about services and products of brands or businesses spreads quickly to consumers. This form of marketing strategy does not choose a specific advertising target, but companies pay for influencers to inspire and introduce their products to consumers (Onghai 2012). Critically, if the influencers sharing does not resonate with their followers, the influencers' sharing will make the followers feel uncomfortable. However, the most important thing about this form, according to Jay Baer, is to promote action, not just consumer awareness (Baer 2016).



Consumer Behaviour

According to Lamb, Hair and McDaniel, consumer behaviour is a process that describes how consumers decide to choose and remove a type of product or service (Lamb, Hair, and McDaniel 2000). Businesses traditionally researched consumer behaviour to understand consumers' needs, interests, and habits; to understand what they want to buy and why eventually they buy that product, service, or brand; and to understand how, where, and when they buy the product, service, or brand. They then developed marketing strategies motivating consumers to choose their products and services. However, researching consumer behaviour has moved beyond this scenario; now, consumers themselves discover if they are aware of the benefits of the products or services they have purchased, and evaluate how they feel after using these products or services, because this will impact their subsequent purchases and the product information they communicate to other consumers.

Methodology

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is often used to explain how consumers are convinced when receiving information. Under this model, the level of consumer conviction to make decisions will be influenced by two routes: the central route and the peripheral route (Geddes 2016). ELM is widely used in studies of the process of receiving information and knowledge in many different contexts, including receiving information technology, receiving word-of-mouth, and receiving reviews online. In these studies, the concept of information quality plays the role of a central line and the credibility of information resources acts as a peripheral road in the information assessment process. The quality of information and credibility of the information source has a positive impact on the attitude of the information recipient. Information quality is defined as the persuasive power of the points in the message. Credibility refers to the perception of the person receiving information about the reputation of the messenger. Credibility is also defined as the credibility of the source of information perceived by the recipient.

The central route has a strong impact on consumers when they evaluate the information received and argue about whether to collect information. However, this requires that consumers have the capacity and motivation to assess the data collected. Without the ability to carefully evaluate information, they will need other information relevant to the content of the data (meta information) to make decisions and will be influenced by the peripheral route. In other words, the lower the ability to assess consumer information, the stronger the impact of the peripheral route because the peripheral route is the decision-making shortcut without the effort to evaluate information.

Under ELM, the recipient of the data is strongly influenced by the quality of information when they are able to consider the information received or are motivated in analysing the information. Lacking this ability or motivation, they will use the credibility of the source to make decisions.

Our study uses ELM as the foundation theory for studying the impact of influencers of social media on consumer behaviour. ELM links influencing agents (information quality and credibility of the source) and the effect of these factors on consumer behaviour. Therefore, this model helps answer our study's questions.

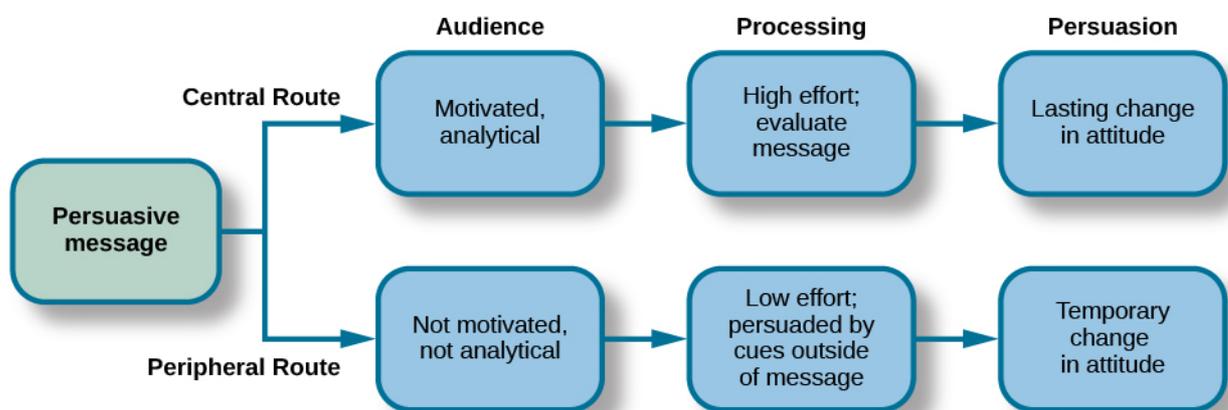


Chart 1. Elaboration Likelihood Model

Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is that “Influencer marketing in the digital age has resulted in making traditional media antiquated, which has been replaced by social media.”

Specific segments of the population strongly influence consumer behaviour. Reference groups are sections that directly or indirectly affect the views and actions of one or more people. Groups that directly affect consumers are called membership groups, in which consumers participate and interact with other members. In primary groups such as family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues members are intimate and have regular interaction. In secondary groups such as social organisations, industry associations, and unions members are more formal and have less interplay. People also want to be in aspirational reference groups, consisting of members with whom a person would like to be associated. For example, a young soccer player might hope to one day play for Manchester United, and he identifies himself with this group, even though there is no direct communication.

Marketers try to understand the groups of the target market with whom they want to trade. Reference groups affect a consumer at least in three ways: directing a person to follow new

behaviours and lifestyles; changing a person's views and consciousness because he or she often wants to be integrated into the group; and creating pressures to comply with common standards and thus affecting the choice of products and brands of that person (Fernandes and Panda 2018).

The effect of the reference group also changes according to the life cycle of the product. In the introduction phase of the new product, the customers' decisions for product selection are influenced by others, but they are less affected by others in the selection of the brand. In the development phase of the product, the influence of the reference group is quite strong for both product selection and buyer brand selection. At the end of the life cycle, there remains only the choice of brand, and during this recession, the influence of this group is quite weak in both product and brand selection.

Businesses whose brand and products are strongly influenced by reference groups must find ways to approach and influence those who guide public opinion in those groups. Further, an influencer who leads public opinion in the field of products can be persuaded by public opinion in another area. Research has shown that consumers' choice of products are strongly influenced by the reference group when buyers respect the opinion guide of that group. People who guide public opinion in groups have certain demographic and psychological characteristics; they understand the way to use the media to direct information and use their own influence, communication skills, and methods to change customer brand awareness. Therefore, they affect customers' purchase decisions and potentially increase profits for the brand (White, Habib, Hardisty, 2019).

This study used the ELM to consider hypotheses and to answer research questions. The next research hypothesis is "The way brands interact with their consumers has been effectively changed by Influencer marketing."

Findings

The Mechanism of Influencer Marketing Strategy

The postulations in the research will be helpful in delineating the mechanism of influencers on marketing strategy. The findings are based on the aforementioned ELM:

The Central Route

The central route is used when the recipient of the message has both the willingness and the capability to ascertain the technicalities of the message. Consequently, the cognitive responses displayed by the public will be more pertinent to the content of the message. The process is located at the high end of the ELM, indicating that individuals use reason to judge information. Moreover, objective information is used by the public to make informed decisions on the

central route. An advantage of this route is that the impressions that are eventually formed last longer. Furthermore, consumer decisions are more predictive of behaviour about such decisions, allowing brands to improve target-marketing initiatives. Overall, as the ability and motivation of the public to make informed decisions dwindles, the emphasis on the peripheral route begins to increase.

In the central route mechanism, consumers who receive information about the product introduced decide whether or not to receive it. If they already are familiar with a brand, they will accept the collection of information about the product and will think that it is a good product. As a result, when consumers identify the unique attributes of a brand, they will faithfully use its products. Certainly, customer awareness plays a critical role in deciding their shopping behaviour and creating loyal customers for that company. However, if there is no prior information available to the customer, the veracity of the evidence may be in question. If consumers can access product information themselves, they will decide their own behaviour; if consumers don't understand the product, they will look for information.

The Peripheral Route

As expected, the peripheral route is used when the consumer has little or no interest in the content of the message. At the low end of the ELM, the route entails consumers using emotional factors for making decisions related to brands. Moreover, these individuals will look for other peripheral factors, such their own moods, positive and negative cues of the message, and general impressions. As a result, companies utilise the customers' emotions to plan effective marketing campaigns using this route.

Credibility becomes a critical factor on the peripheral route, as marketers use the opinion of a famous person or influencer to convince the public to buy a product. In fact, while social media has emerged as a major tool for conducting marketing campaigns through influencers, the popularity of influencer marketing might suggest the decrease in society's overall awareness level as more people seem to base their judgments on the apparent credibility of celebrities.

Similarly, the peripheral route focuses on using the social impact of influential individuals. Indeed, websites such as Instagram and Facebook have become the leading marketing outlets in the digital age, as traditional media outlets—such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines—have shown declining effectiveness in terms of brand awareness and consumer purchasing decisions. Thus Influencer marketing focuses on impact from the peripheral route. A new product needs to be advertised because customers do not have sufficient information about it; thus, the marketing strategy must be appropriate to promote new products. Companies pay influencers to bring product information to customers; as they are trusted and loved by their followers, their customers will regularly monitor the influencer's activities on social networks. When Influencers talk about a product, consumers' brand awareness increases. And when choosing a product, consumers will rely on the information from Influencers in their

purchase decision. That means the above hypothesis is correct because Influencers have made customers both identify the brand and decide to buy the brand's product.

Influencer Marketing Agencies and Their impact on Customer Behaviour in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

Game Influencer

Game Influencer (Influencer Marketing Hub 2018) is a marketing agency in Germany, that utilises the peripheral route in influencer marketing, and specialises in conducting influencer marketing campaigns for electronic sports games. Game Influencer has more than 31 million Influencers in its database, and their influencers have 500 million views generated across all campaigns, with 7.5 million installs driven through their campaigns. The company connects Influencers with games to form brand awareness, prompting users to install game applications. This company is particularly influential in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Game Influencer pays Influencers based on viewers, and the app installs they drive. They also provide complete reports for both Influencers and customer companies.

Huda Kattan

Huda Kattan is an influencer who is successful due to her personal branding. Speaking about the success of peripheral route influencer marketing for Huda Beauty, Ms. Kattan has commented that Instagram has been critical in helping her reach customers and influence her brand worldwide. In 2010, Ms. Kattan established a makeup tutorial, beauty care, and beauty tips blog, which quickly attracted attention, helping her become a social network star; Huda Beauty's Instagram tutorial videos now have more than 33.8 million followers. This was also the foundation for her transition from professional makeup blogger to cosmetics production and trading (Sorvino 2018). Without Instagram, awareness and sales for Huda Beauty Cosmetics Company would have been much lower, as consumers buy products because of Huda Kattan's credibility, not because they already know it as an excellent cosmetics company.

Noon Al Niswa

Influencer marketing is becoming widespread in the MENA region, and includes Noon Al Niswa (Istizad, 2017), a famous influencer in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Middle East region. She uploads videos on YouTube to present her personal views on social issues, and particularly values the role of women. Noon Al Niswa has succeeded in developing a comedy show about women's roles and political influence in the country, which now has approximately 25 million views. Most of Noon Al Niswa's audience is female; therefore, brands that produce products for women often choose Noon Al Niswa to advertise their products.



Taim Al Falasi

Taim Al Falasi has approximately 2.3 million followers on Instagram; she often writes about food, travel and lifestyle and advertises many types of products, including Downy Unstoppable. Her success is a testament to the efficacy of the peripheral route in influencer marketing in the contemporary scenario.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Reconsidered

There are numerous famous local and foreign influencers in the MENA region, with social backgrounds. Central to their success, however, is their dependence on the lower-end sections of the ELM elaboration continuum. Our research supports our hypotheses, as the evidence of presented in this section demonstrates that traditional media outlets have been supplanted by the shift to social media which is dominating marketing activities. Consumers seek the credibility of the informer, which is provided by the influencers in the MENA region. In the future, social media is likely to further increase its impact on digital marketing, resulting in an even bigger role of influencers. Although the characteristics of influencers might change, we propose that the fundamentals followed in the peripheral route will remain the same.

Top Middle East Influencers (istizada, 2018)

@wedy_m (Business/Fashion/Blogger) –233K followers

@laila_nabd (Business/Lifestyle/Blogger/Beauty Blogger) –5.4K followers

@sheetag (Ecommerce/OnlineShopping) –127K followers

@azadeh_akba (Lifestyle/Music/Woman's Rights/Fashion and Beauty) –27.3K followers

@tamerhosny – 2.9M followers

Strategic Communication

Popular Tools in the Digital Age

Social media has thrived with the sustained popularity of sharing and connecting platforms. While issues related to false identities and privacy have caused public concern, overall the use of social media for accessing information is increasing daily (Maitland and Lynch, 2020). The impact of the influencers discussed in this research study is changing the marketing world. With the increased emphasis on marketing maneuvers corresponding to the low-end stages of the ELM, influencers clearly indicate a preference for the peripheral route as it appears the greater proportion of the public lacks the ability and willingness to make informed decisions about their choices pertaining to brands.

Importantly, social networks are websites that are built on account registrations by individuals to become members and thereby create an online community of people with similar

backgrounds, concerns, or prior acquaintance who interact and communicate with each other (Alves, Fernandes, and Raposo 2016). The most popular social networks are Facebook, Twitter (also known as Microblog), LinkedIn, Friendster, hi5, and MySpace, and their members represent a part of society in the Web 2.0 environment, and these networks are an important tool as businesses build dialogues with customers—a key element in social media marketing. Shared networks are websites that allow participants to share with others on these websites; content can exist in the form of pictures, videos, presentations, etc. There are many different sharing networks such as the world's largest video sharing network, YouTube; photo sharing networks such as Instagram, Snapchat, Photobucket, and Picasa; and network sharing presentations such as SlideShare and Scribd. Although the shared networks online community is similar to social networks, the purpose of individuals utilising sharing network differs from social networks, as most sharing network members do not know each other in real life but share a common interest and interest—for example, people who go to Instagram sites often have a desire to share and find beautiful photos.

Strategy

Companies choose the Influencers suitable for their brand. There are three basic criteria for brands selection of influencers: popularity, relevance, and efficiency. Quantitative elements are observable through followers. To assess relevance, businesses rely on quantitative factors such as fans and followers (female or male, average age, location) and qualitative factors, including the number of followers or fans who care and interact well with the topics that the influencers mention.

Businesses also convey messages through influencers by their language and their perspectives on social networks. Companies focus on motivating influencers to share useful information with others, rather than just advertising messages. Creating the motivation for influencers to share will ensure the content they share is communicated naturally and is readily received by customers.

Influencers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, using various tools to communicate with customers; however, communication content is usually planned by the brand. Customers agree to receive information and recognise brands due to their trust in Influencers, and rely on the information received from influencers in their purchasing decisions.

The methods that Influencers often use to influence customer awareness and behaviours include:

- Influencers often notify customers about coupon codes with quality discounts available only via influencers for consumers. They send these codes to buyers to stimulate attention and influence purchases.

- Influencers periodically post content on their pages to talk about products; while not a new method, it reminds customers of the product's presence.
- Sharing experiences about products is also a way that Influencers attract customers' attention, as influencers are often invited by brands to use their products and services. For hotel services, brands will ask Influencer to use their room service, and then influencers will create content such as a blog post or YouTube video to introduce these services to their followers.
- "Giveaway" is one of the most popular ways to advertise products; influencers send a brand product as a gift to consumers who won a small competition.

Discussion

This research study is instrumental in explaining the changing trends in the marketing and communications business. It seems evident that marketing through the ELM central route is on the decline because of a change in preferences of the public. Both the willingness and capability of the public to judge the content of a message is waning. If the audience lacks the necessary ability to scrutinise the technicalities of an advertised message, it is wise for brands to use influencers as part of their marketing mix.

By utilising influencers, the public at least perceives that product-related information is accurate. Although the practice of following the peripheral route lies at the low-end of the elaboration continuum (ELM), it appears to be successful in digital media marketing. As the influence of traditional media declines, and marketers and consumers adapt to changing technology, ease of access and improvements in technologies are likely to increase the popularity of social media influencers.

Our research analysis clearly indicates that influencer marketing is on the rise in the MENA region, as the importance of the ELM peripheral route increases. Consumers tend to trust in suggestions from credible third parties rather than from brands or businesses, as consumers are likely to view self-promotion with suspicion. Thus Influencers play an essential role in connecting brands with target customers.

Even if traditional media outlets use influencers, the ease of access of social media will maintain the popularity of the latter in the MENA region, and the popularity of social media influencers is likely to rise even further. When a brand merges with influencers, brands not only benefit from the influencers' fans but also from customers coming from friends' networks, as influencers navigate traffic to the brand's website, increasing the level of brand recognition on social networks or selling products through information or their own stories. Therefore, this trend of marketing is forecasted by leading marketing experts to continue; with the decline of traditional marketing forms, influencer marketing is considered one of the most effective ways

to attract customers. Consumers tend to be indifferent to billboards or TV, but they do want to learn about a brand from people they trust. With the advantage of Influencers—who are able to produce content by sharing information, brand experience to loyal people—businesses can move ahead of competitors and solidify their brand position in the industry. Most influencers are content creators on social networking sites such as YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram. Among them, Facebook and Instagram are most widely used in influence marketing campaigns because of their vast reach and flexibility. Facebook is also useful for articles with natural interaction and advertising content.

Based on the level of influence on the public, it is possible to divide Influencers into the following three categories:

- **VIPs/Celebrities:** People with a reputation who can attract the attention of the public; actors, models, singers, MCs, and athletes are influencer groups with the highest level of awareness. However, in order to choose an effective influencer in this group, businesses must evaluate relevance in many ways, from fans to personal brands to information about topics and topics of interest.
- **Professional influencers (experts, highly-qualified, or influential people in the industry):** These people have a relatively high reach (lower than VIPs/Celebrities) and have the highest level of resonance or credibility with consumers.
- **Citizen influencers (People with 5K+ friends and followers who have shared information about the industry, and consumers who have shared information about the industry or their experiences or product reviews):** These people with have a relatively high resonance and relevance but have the lowest level among these three influencer groups.

Advertisers realise that the best way to deliver advertising information to potential customers is to deliver these messages through people they trust, as social users and potential customers of brands tend to be influenced by the introduction of the brand by relatives, friends, or influencers they follow on social networks. Therefore, 51% of advertisers believe that influencer marketing plays a more vital role in advertising campaigns than mass media or other forms of marketing. (Woods 2016). However, while statistics show that few website visitors are converted from Facebook, more than 2 million users spend most of their time exploring and interacting with content on Facebook (Johnson 2016). Therefore, advertisers cannot ignore this fertile land available to reach their potential customers, and one of the most natural, efficient, and innovative approaches is influencer marketing. The evidence presented in the study indicates that influencer marketing is becoming a rising trend in the MENA region.

The drivers in the marketing business continue to adapt to trends over time, and the current trend is that of social media influencer marketing. Social network users often feel uncomfortable when their newsfeed is full of banners, advertising posters of specific brands

and services. According to IAB statistics, 26% of PC users and 15% of mobile device users use ad blocking tools to block ads on websites or social network channels (<https://influencermarketinghub.com>). While this reduces the interaction effect of advertising campaigns, the content in Influence marketing campaigns is not advertising, and is considered information from a real person, and thus more interactive. Users view these contents voluntarily by following social networking sites, organisation websites, or personalities who interest them.

Users often spend less time watching ads while spending more time watching important information; this type of content remains in the user's mind longer. Users find that influencers share highly personal content based on their own experiences, make honest comments about the products and services they use, or give personal opinions about the brand. The information influencers convey encourages customers to consider, experiment and create interaction with influencers—something that traditional marketing cannot do. Moreover, consumers tend to refer to other users' opinions on social networks before making purchase decisions. Most of the consumers on social networks will consult reviews about products and services on online channels and will search for comments on social networks before deciding whether to buy a product. Consumers are also price sensitive, and often seek discounted orders and promotions; more than half use mobile applications to find the best discount orders whether they are planning to shop online or at a store. By understanding this psychology of consumers, brands increase their marketing efforts to transmit product information, promotions, and after-sales on social networks.

Recommendations and Implications

From its early days, social media marketing has attracted the attention and interest of marketing professionals. However, controversy still revolves around the expansion of this type of marketing; some marketing experts believe that influencer marketing is a temporary trend that is likely to die along with popular social networks or sharing networks. Some experts also state that social media marketing is not as efficient as believed; in fact, due to costly efforts to regularly update information, customer care on social networks has a high cost. However, many experts believe that social media marketing has opened a new chapter for the future of marketing, and consider it a trend that no business can ignore. This controversy will continue, until there is sufficient information to support the continued and expanding benefits of social media marketing.

As increasing numbers of businesses are considering influencers to promote their products, companies need to pay attention to the following issues:

- A good strategy, but choosing the wrong person will waste resources and potentially damage the brand. The criteria for finding the most influential people to promote a

brand includes not only the number of followers they have, but also the level of their relevance and interaction. To make a marketing strategy successful, businesses must ensure their goals—which typically include generating revenue, improving brand reputation, and crisis management—are in line with their choice of influencer.

- Any marketing influencer campaign is geared towards generating revenue; according to a consumer study conducted by Twitter and Annalect, nearly 40% of interviewees said that they bought products online after seeing the product used by influential people on Instagram, Twitter, Vine or YouTube.
- Partnering with influencers can elevate brand awareness, but at a high financial cost; therefore, this tactic cannot be applied to companies with modest budgets. These companies could consider building a long-term relationship through micro influence (micro-influencer), at a more financial outlay, but with the benefit of the ability to track in the niche market.
- Businesses must coordinate other marketing strategies such as affiliate marketing, special discount programs, advertising programs, flash sales and coupons (vouchers).
- Influence marketing allows companies to leverage the reputation of individuals on the Internet, increasing and improving their brand awareness by choosing influencers with a high number of online views, display frequencies, and interactivity. Furthermore, influential people often create new content for campaigns that play an essential role in increasing brand awareness.
- Businesses can use feedback from influential people to test consumer perceptions about the brand, making the necessary management strategy changes based on that feedback.
- Honesty and transparency are two vital factors that make people believe in the quality of products. Through influential people, businesses can build trust and increase reputation for the brand.

Conclusion

Marketing today plays a central role in translating customer information about new products and services into customers' locating these products on the market, and then influencing their purchasing decisions. New products and services are vital to addressing changing customer preferences and protecting against competitive threats; customers desire change, thus companies innovate to satisfy and meet customers' needs.

Brands commonly pay for influencers' presence in advertising or for appearances in posts on their social network. This potentially benefits brands that successfully cooperate with influencers. Brands should also create multi-channel campaigns, using Influencers simultaneously on multiple platforms, as customers utilise many social networking sites and search engines to access products. In addition, the brand also needs flexibility in selecting and combining strategies, as incorporating different campaign resources can bring new benefits. Importantly, sponsoring an influential person does not automatically make a brand successful



in business. When deciding on an influencer, the brand label needs to match the nature of the message they want to convey with the influencer. Post-campaign, brands must assess the effectiveness of their influencer marketing programs. In conclusion, influencer marketing has demonstrably changed the way brands interact with their consumers.



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