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Impact of social media marketing on online consumer behavior

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ABSTRACT

Social media is on the rise and after the pandemic, social media has become the focus of the world. This paper aims to reveal the effect of social media marketing in general and influencer marketing in particular on the behaviour of online consumers. The answer to this research can help businesses assess the importance of social media marketing and other traditional forms of marketing and enable them to accordingly shape their marketing strategy.

Keywords: Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Consumer Behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

Customer and marketer communication has been drastically transformed by the Internet, particularly social media. One of the advantages of the internet is that it enables businesses to reach a worldwide customer population, and for the customers to survey, select, and purchase products and services from businesses around the world. The Internet offers a fresh avenue for customers and corporate managers to accomplish their objectives (al Kailani & Kumar, 2011). Peer communication on social media, a new way for consumers to socialise, has a significant impact on consumer decision-making and, consequently, marketing techniques (Vinerean et al., 2013).

Social technology is currently regarded as a given in every organisation due to the apparent impact of Web 2.0 in marketplaces across the globe. Many businesses now believe that social media and having a presence on the social web are necessary for any brand to interact with consumers (Evans et al., 2010). Social media has become more and more ingrained in internet users' daily life. According to the most recent statistics, there will be 3.96 billion social media users globally in 2022, a rise of 4.8% from the previous year (Gaubys, 2022). One of the most downloaded apps is Instagram. Over 28% of all internet users worldwide used Meta's Instagram, which had 1.21 billion active monthly users in 2021 (Statista, 2022). According to new research (*Engagement on Instagram - Everything You Need to Know*, 2021) Instagram is overtaking Facebook as the most popular social media network. Instagram engagement is the main factor driving marketers' enthusiasm for Instagram advertising. In a recent study, Socialbakers (2018) uncovered the precise factors that make Instagram so captivating - 1) Instagram's algorithm prioritises relevant material, 2) users spend a lot of time there, 3) it's a very visual platform, 4) it encourages creativity, and 5) it has a community of interesting content providers. In an effort to gain from high engagement rates among a sizable market of consumers, numerous brands create accounts on Instagram. According to The CMO Survey's Special Covid-19 Edition (The CMO Survey, 2021), social media has proven indispensable for marketing during epidemic. According to the poll, businesses are getting historically high returns on their social media spending. As a result, Influencer marketing is on the rise. We see almost all products being advertised by influencers on their respective Instagram handles. Taylor Lorenz, a technology reporter for The New York Times, has been writing for years about people who build an audience through their sewing or cooking channels on YouTube or Instagram and then use their notoriety to sell goods or advertise for businesses. She discusses how influencers are "influencing" not only buying trends but also our daily behaviours, preferences for certain products, eating and drinking patterns, productivity levels, and other things (Ovide, 2020). As a result, brands are investing more and more in influencer marketing. Its budget allocation is increasing, up to 7.5 percent from 6.5 percent a year ago and anticipated to reach 12.7 percent in the following three years (*CMOs: Adapt Your Social Media Strategy for a Post-Pandemic World*, 2021).

This paper offers a review of the relevant literature on 1) the evolution of social media marketing, 2) influencer marketing and SMIs, and 3) consumer-based marketing. The primary purpose of this study is to ascertain the effect of social media marketing in general and influencer marketing in particular on customer behaviour and what factors make the customers trust the (SMIs) social media

influencers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 The Evolution of Social Media Marketing

Social media, defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), has changed how the world works which include both individuals and businesses. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) observed, Social media is the focus of everything today - According to several business experts, if you do not use social networking sites, you are no longer a part of cyberspace. Social media enables businesses to communicate with customers directly and reasonably than they could with more conventional communication channels - like television, newspapers etc. These features of social media make it accessible to small enterprises, the public sector, and non-profit organisations and not just the multinational corporations. Social media sites not only help the business communicate with current customers but also help it engage with potential customers and build meaningful and long lasting relationships (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder 2010). Social media has also influenced consumer behaviour, from information seeking to post-purchase advertising channels over the course of the following year, which would result in a decrease in expenditure on traditional advertising. Social media marketing is here to stay and is growing every minute. Actions like expressing or demonstrating dissatisfaction with a company or a product (Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

According to Statista (2022), Facebook was founded in 2004 and currently boasts 1.9 billion daily and 2.9 billion monthly users, with India having the highest users with over 260 million, followed by the United States (180 million), YouTube has 2.3 billion users. Social media sites like Instagram and Snapchat, which substitute text with photos and videos, have grown in popularity more lately. The number of monthly active users of Instagram is predicted to reach 1.44 billion by 2025, representing 31.2% of all internet users worldwide (Statista, 2022). These numbers clearly tell us that social media is the need of the hour and not just something that is used by individuals to catch up with peers. Social Media has been widely used by corporations from small to large for promotion, advertising, marketing. During the pandemic, Social media became a necessity - both for individuals and corporations. According to a poll (The CMO Survey, 2021), social media expenditure rose by 74% from 13.3% of marketing budgets in February 2020 to 23.2 percent in June 2020. Meanwhile, CMOs anticipate a 5.3 percent decrease in traditional

2.2 The new form of social media marketing - Influencer Marketing

The rise of social media has given way for a new form of social media marketing known as influencer marketing. This form of marketing utilises social personalities or “influencers” for promotion. According to (Freberg et al., 2011), SMIs (Social Media Influencers) are third party endorsers for brands/companies that shape consumer behaviour and habits through blogs, tweets and use of other social media. Connolly (2017) has noted that a SMI is a specialist in their area who collaborates with brands to help them sell their products, has more than 10,000 followers, and actively provides information about their products. The content these influencers share helps them build a connection with the customers. Influencers can create social dialogues, encourage interaction and also establish trends among the audience thanks to this direct line of communication. Consumer socialisation theory predicts that communication among consumers affects their cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes (Ward, 1974). According to research from Nielsen, Carat, and YouTube, working with a YouTube influencer can increase brand recognition four times more than working with a celebrity (Newberry, 2018).

Influencers are like “microcelebrities” who made it on their own (Evans et al., 2017). Celebrities have been used in marketing campaigns for a long time. These campaigns try to transfer the celebrity's image or value to the brands they endorse (Cheah et al., 2019). Social media influencers are a unique and more recent version of this marketing strategy (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Conceptually, celebrities and influencers are different in the following ways: Celebrities are known for things they do outside of social media, like sports and music. Influencers, on the other hand, are “born” on social media, where they develop the main thing they are known for (Schouten et al., 2019; Tafesse & Wood, 2021). So, an influencer's reputation comes only from the content they post and the things they do on social media, usually with the help of their followers (Hu et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). Most of the time, they focus on a smaller group of people who share similar interests and act as a kind of virtual friend. Influencers tend to seem more trustworthy (Lou & Yuan, 2019) or credible than traditional celebrities because they seem to be closer to the people who follow them (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As these influencers become opinion leaders or experts in their fields among their followers (Rahman et al., 2014), their followers look up to them for guidance on a certain topic and rely on them while purchasing certain products. This shows how important social media influencers are and what they can do.

One can encounter multiple famous influencers on YouTube and Instagram. Despite receiving a constant onslaught of advertisements, the majority of customers claim (*Influencer Marketing* ^ 520075, 2020) that their purchases are primarily influenced by the opinions, suggestions, and experiences of others rather than by marketers. Consumer interpersonal communication serves as a powerful avenue for influence. Marketing managers anticipate spending \$15 billion on influencer marketing by 2022. The value of the global Instagram influencer industry alone increased from US \$1.3 billion in 2018 to about US \$2 billion by 2020 (Statista, 2021). Almost all sectors, from apparel to technology to skincare, have influencers. In research from Driesch (2019), we can know that over 500,000 active influencers on Instagram alone, representing 39% of all Instagram accounts, have more than 15,000 followers. 81% of these influencers who are still active have followers with between 15,000 and 100,000 people. Online activity has significantly increased, and information is being transferred more quickly than before. It's a chance, and many influencers are taking advantage of it to increase their fan bases in the hopes that money will follow as noted by Taylor Lorenz in New York Times. Influencers quite literally influence everything and as a result brands/companies are increasingly using them for promotion. According to a Harvard Business article (*CMOs: Adapt Your Social Media Strategy for a Post-Pandemic World*, 2021), As online traffic increases, it will be crucial for organisations to discover the proper influencers in order to attract target customers and identify growth categories. Influencers are a wonderful approach to establish trust and real relationships with followers.

2.3 Consumer- based Marketing

Juan Sebastian Caicedo (Caicedo, n.d.), a portfolio marketing leader at Adobe, discusses consumer marketing. He defines consumer marketing as, “ A consumer is someone who buys things for a non-commercial purpose, either for themselves or for others. Companies use consumer marketing campaigns to sell to consumers. Campaign messaging focuses on both acquiring potential customers and retaining current customers. Marketers need to bring in new customers and increase customer loyalty. They can do this in a variety of ways, including using first- and third-party consumer data — typically captured through cookies — to “personalise” brand experiences for current and potential customers.” Personalization involves assessing and offering the next best experience based on what we know about a person and their digital behaviour at a specific time in order to potentially impact business objectives (Burns , n.d.) Customer relationship management, or CRM, is a data-driven tool that was used in the conventional sales cycle where insights were provided about what a customer might need in the future or if that person was prepared to upgrade his existing purchase based on the customer's previous transactions. These insights were then used to generate offers and attract the customer. CRM is being modified in the social media era to meet the new role of the customer who participates actively in the sales process. Behavioural information about the customer is gathered. This is possible through social media posts that are gathered by social media analysis tools. These can reveal information about past behaviour or current location, making marketing "personalised" for each customer (Evans et al., 2010). Juan says that the more you know about your customers, the better able you are to connect with them emotionally and to produce content that resonates with them and one can know their customers through collection of data.

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND OTHER OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this research is to study the effect of social media marketing and influencer marketing on the behaviour of online consumers. After the review of relevant literature from prominent papers , a hypotheses along with some other objectives has been generated which is as follows :-

- a) Hypotheses-Social Media Marketing and Influencer Marketing impacts the consumer behaviour of individuals.
- b) The other aspects that this paper aims to explore are :-
 - The various factors that make a customer follow/trust a SMI (Social Media Influencer)
 - Relevance of celebrities in marketing
 - The relevance of traditional forms of marketing [i.e print (magazines,newspaper), radio, direct mail, telephone] in a digital age.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through an online survey. The questionnaire was distributed using various social media networking sites ,mainly Whatsapp and Instagram. The distribution of the survey was limited to the people living in North India and targeted all genders. It was a gender inclusive and sensitive survey. It targeted people of all age groups. A short description of the survey was provided to the respondents along with a guarantee of maintaining their anonymity as they were not asked to mention their names. They were also informed that the collected data will be used for independent academic research.

The questionnaire included 26 close ended questions which also included certain standard demographic specific questions. The rest of the questions were asked in order to collect insights on the effect of social media marketing on the purchasing behaviour of customers. The questions that were included in the survey aimed to analyse the social media usage of different networking sites, the occurrence of advertisements on social media, the effect of ads, communication fostered on social media regarding products , effect and trend of “influencers” and ‘influencer marketing’ and finally the status of traditional methods of marketing in today’s age. Out of the 26 questions , only 20 questions were analysed.

After the collection of data, statistical analysis was done in order to make sense of the data collected. When it comes to consumer decisions , behaviour , purchasing habits , performing objective analysis can be tough. Hence the approach taken to analyse the statistical data was subjective. Subjective analysis depends on the researcher. A total of 143 people participated in the survey. The analysis was done of specific ages but rather various age groups were analysed. Most of the participants were in the age group of 45-54 , followed by 18 to 24. The least targeted age group was that of 55 and older. Most of the respondents recognized themselves to be men. Most of the respondents were either employed or they were students.

5. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions	Percentage	frequency	
Age Groups	>18	9.79%	14
	18-24	25.87%	37
	25-34	16.78%	24
	34-44	11.19%	16
	45-54	32.8%	47
	55 or older	3.50%	05

gender	Woman	38.46%	55
	Man	53.85%	77
	Trangender	3.50%	05
	non-binary/ conforming	4.20% non-	06
q) how many social media accounts do you have?	None	0.70%	1
	One	14.69%	21
	Two	44.06%	63
	Three	20.28%	29
	More than three	20.28%	29
q) you are the most active on which social media sites?	Facebook	21.68%	31
	Instagram	32.87%	47
	Snapchat	12.59%	18
	Youtube	19.58%	28
	Other	13.29%	19
q) how much time do you spend on social media?	30 mins - 1 hr	30.77%	44
	1-3 hrs	45.45%	65
	4-6 hrs	19.58%	28
	More than 6 hours	4.20%	6
q) Do you visit the social media handle/site of a business after coming across its ad in a social media site?	Yes	59.44%	85
	No	40.56%	58
q) Do you come across ads on social media?	Yes	75.52%	108
	No	24.48%	35
q) Do you ever buy a product from a social media site?	Yes	53.85%	77
	No	46.15%	66
q) Do you keep up with the ongoing trends (fashion etc.) on social media?	Yes	59%	85
	No	41%	58
q) do you buy products recommended by people over social media	Yes	63%	90
	No	37%	53
q) do you follow the social media accounts of the businesses that interest you?	Yes	66%	95
	No	34%	48
q) does social media influence the purchases you make?	Yes	69%	98
	No	31%	45
q) are you aware of the term "influencers"?	Yes	85%	121
	No	15%	22
q) how many influencers do you follow?	>5	56%	80
	5-10	23%	33
	10-15	12%	17
	>15	9%	13
q) Do you visit the page/site of a business or a product recommended by an influencer?	Yes	66%	95
	No	34%	48
q) do you buy products that are recommended by an influencer	Yes	55%	78
	No	45%	65
q) What are your reasons for following a certain influencer?	High number of followers	20%	29
	Aesthetic social page	30%	43
	Expertise in a field	43%	62
	Interesting content	54%	77
q) would you say that your lifestyle is affected by an influencer?	Yes	54%	77
	No	46%	66
q) are you more likely to buy a product recommended by an influencer or celebrity?	Influencers	52%	74
	Celebrity	48%	69

q) are your purchases influenced by ads on any of the following? Select as many as applicable	Newspapers	58%	83
	Magazines	43%	61
	Radio	17%	25
	Television	62%	88
	Phone calls	13%	19

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Usage of social media is sky high in recent times. Almost 90% of the people have two or more social media accounts. 79.03% of the people have 1-3 social media accounts whereas 20.28% have more than three. 45.45% spend an average of 1-3 hours on social media whereas 14.58% spend more between 4-6 hours. Social media penetration in our daily lives has increased manifold and will continue to do so. It is no surprise that businesses and brands invest billions on social media marketing as it has evolved as a platform where consumers spend a significant amount of their time. Instagram is the most used social application followed by Facebook and YouTube. 59% of the respondents agree that they feel a need to keep up with the ongoing trends on social media. This tells us that social media to a certain extent influences our behaviours, purchasing habits etc. This is where social media ads come in place. As discussed earlier, under consumer based marketing businesses utilise our social media habits to tailor custom advertisements. 75.52% of the population agrees that they do come across various advertisements on their social media handles. These ads do affect the consumer behaviour as more than half of the respondents visit the social media handles of a particular product/business after coming across its ads on social media. Social media has been growing as an alternative buyers market for a very long time. From large business to thrift stores, all provide the facility to buy a product directly from social media. More than half the respondents buy products over social media. 66% of the respondents follow the social media accounts of the businesses that interest them and a whopping 69% accept that their purchases are influenced by social media. Hence it is safe to conclude that social media marketing does impact consumer behaviour. Social media at least initiates conversations between people. 63% of the respondents state that they do buy products that are recommended by other people over social media. Particularly, peer interaction on social media, a new method of consumer socialisation, has a significant influence on consumer choices and, consequently, marketing tactics (Vinerean et al., 2013).

In recent times, a particular type of social media marketing which is known as influencer marketing is gaining ground. 85% of the respondents are aware of the term influencers and 35% of them follow between 5-15 influencers and some even follow more than 15 influencers. 66% of the respondents visit the site/page of a business or product recommended by an influencer which is still less as compared to the people affected by social media advertisements. More than half the respondents buy products that are recommended by an influencer. There are various reasons as to why one follows or trusts a certain influencer. The number one reason is interesting content followed by expertise in a field. The other reasons include aesthetic social media pages and high number of followers. Surprisingly, only 20% of the respondents care about the number of followers. More than half of the respondents even admit to the fact that even their day to day lifestyle, routine and habits are affected by “influencers”. Influencer marketing is growing rapidly and certainly influences the online consumer behaviour of individuals. An article on Harvard Business Review states that brands will need to find the right influencers to attract target clients and pinpoint growth groups as online traffic increases. Social media managers should spend on influencer training and relationship building. Setting up one-on-one and group meetings with influencers to talk about new products and get their thoughts on trends they're seeing will help to create a successful working relationship (CMOs: *Adapt Your Social Media Strategy for a Post-Pandemic World*, 2021). 52% of the respondents are more likely to buy a product recommended by an influencer rather than a celebrity. This disparity is not much which somewhat contradicts certain above mentioned research. One of the plausible reasons can be the fact that Indians still put celebrities at a very high pedestal. According to the collected data, one can easily deduce that certain traditional marketing platforms still hold certain relevance. Television, newspapers, magazines in the respective order influence the purchasing habits of consumers. As compared to these platforms, radios and phone calls hold less relevance in today's digital world. This suggests that these platforms should still be incorporated in the marketing strategies of various brands. Television seems to influence the most, hence, commercials can be another great way to engage with the customers.

7. CONCLUSION

This report cannot present everything as the ultimate truth as the sample size is small and not so diverse but it is safe to conclude that social media marketing and influencer marketing impacts the purchasing habits of online consumers. Recognition of this fact can be beneficial to businesses as they can integrate a strong social media strategy into their broader marketing strategy. Businesses should keep up with the new innovations and trends in social media. One of the rising trends in social media marketing is influencer marketing. Brands should invest to form meaningful relationships with the correct influencers so as to build a beneficial and long lasting relationship. Social media Marketing can influence varied groups and a significant portion of the population. We cause this fact to bring in social reforms by making marketing campaigns more inclusive and sensitive which put forward socially meaningful messages.

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