

The role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process

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Abstract. In the contemporary globalised markets opinion leaders play a vital role in the process of the purchasing decision-making of consumers. Thanks to their individual skills, specific knowledge or their personality, opinion leaders have a direct or indirect influence on the attitudes and decisions of consumers. In the contemporary globalised marketing using social media, this role is taken over by the influencers who affect consumers with their thoughts, attitudes and opinions and thus, significantly influence trends in demand for particular products. Over the recent years, influencer marketing has become increasingly popular, representing a specific type of social media marketing. The aim of this scientific contribution is the systematization of knowledge about the position and roles of influencers as opinion leaders in the social media environment in order to identify their typology, influence factors and the intensity of their impact on consumer decision making process, based on the comparison of knowledge from the results of global research studies and the quantitative online research study processed by authors. The findings of the survey showed that the promotion of some products through influencers may be more advantageous than others. Influencers will have the greatest impact when buying clothes, shoes, cosmetics and, surprisingly, services. Meanwhile, people rely heavily on other factors to buy food, jewellery and electronics, but it is not excluded that influencer marketing could affect them as well.

1 Introduction

Inevitable fact is, that during the last twenty to thirty years significant changes have occurred, caused by penetrating the internet or mobile technologies into human lives. The technological development brought own changes in terms of social and societal trends, technology such as the internet or mobile phones have had a huge impact on these trends. The changes also affect the preferences and behaviour of consumers. In spite of the significant technological changes there is an assumption, according to which the essence of consumer behaviour does not significantly change, however, resources used by people will change in a significant way. Technological progress, social trends even variety of choice and improving of economic situation of population are factors which change consumers'

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behaviour in the market. Marketing managers are forced to react on changes of lifestyle and consumer behaviour.

With technologies and especially the internet, consumers are becoming more and more informed and it is much more difficult to hit their traditional media. Segmentation can be identified as a key tool in responding to these changes. Today's era is characterized by the fact that for meeting the needs on the market consumers have an extremely large and varied range of different products. This fact encourages the perception of consumption as an important part of social life. The growth of social media has completely revamped the way people interact, communicate and engage [1]. Social media have become major media platforms to share personal information, news, photos, videos and are an essential communication platform facilitates the interactions of online users, which can influence or be affected by the opinions of others [2, 3]. Research and applied evidence suggest that online opinion leaders are important promoters of products and services in different areas of business and marketing tools [4, 5, 6, 7]. At present, influencer marketing is an important tool to influence buying behaviour and can be defined as the process of exploring, identifying, supporting and engaging people involved in high impact conversations. It is an important form of online marketing, in which the marketers target a sub-population of influential people, instead of the entire base of potential buyers [8].

The term influencer marketing is marketing products and services of those who take action to influence the purchasing behaviour of other people. Such buying influence is most often the result of popularity, reputation or even expertise of influencers. This type of marketing can be compared to word of mouth marketing. At strengthening its social media represent a crucial role and create appropriate conditions for the use of this instrument. Branding, that is to say the use of celebrities a few years ago, has become more popular with bloggers over the years, but today, branding is also about ordinary consumers who have a lot of influence on others. Influencer marketing can be said to be one of the fastest growing tools in reaching new consumers with the help of online media. [9]

Influencer marketing is based, in particular, on the confidence of consumers acquired by opinion leaders. Many of the influencers are also bloggers, that is, people who share their experiences, stories or interests with the broader internet public. They have their own circle of interests, they even have not been originally the influencers, and they just became ones. Many of them are sportsmen, actors, adventurers, or just ordinary mothers on maternity leave. Each of them can influence another group of people, and each of them is also able to promote a different product. The essence of the influencer marketing is the right product promotion. An essential factor of this form of marketing is that the influencer must be identified with the product, so he or she will not recommend a product without any experience with it, or even absence of any knowledge of it.

Many people believe that influencer marketing is a bubble that will not last long and burst. Customers, brands, as well as the numbers themselves talk about something else. However, we can expect changes in this trend. Companies will benefit from an even deeper collaboration with influencers, which presents new opportunities. Influencers and agencies will establish more transparent and intensified relationships with each other. World influencers prices are starting to grow enormously, so companies are increasingly using cooperation with microinfluencers. For businesses, the number of clicks, fans, or responses is often a misleading measure.

Influencer marketing is prevalent in firm strategies, yet little is known about the factors that drive success of online brand engagement at different stages of the consumer purchase funnel [10]. That's the way marketing practitioners may consider partnering with different influencer depending on their influencer marketing campaigns' specific goals and take advantage of different influencer depending on whether marketers want to create more buzz about corporate initiatives or publicize products just launched [11].

Influencer marketing has some limitations too, for example cooperating with influencers with high numbers of followers might not be the best marketing choice for promoting divergent products, as this decreases the brand's perceived uniqueness and consequently brand attitudes [12] or consumers could react negatively to influencers' posts when they do not appear with the products they endorse [13].

2 Methodology

The aim of this paper is to find out how influencer marketing affects consumer purchasing decisions. In order to achieve that objective, we used the basic methods of scientific research - analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction and interrogation. In order to obtain theoretical background to the researched issue, it was based on information available in professional books, magazines and electronic sources from foreign and domestic authors. In this theoretical section we used mainly methods of synthesis and analysis. As part of the marketing research, we applied a quantitative method of inquiry - questioning using an online questionnaire. Another method, which belongs to inductive-deductive methods, is the method of cognition, which we used in the evaluation of the questionnaire and based on the results formulated suggestions and recommendations.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 The main results of the survey

Any business or brand that wants to promote their product most effectively is aware that influencer can have a very positive impact on their communication campaign. Especially in recent years, influencers have been given the opportunity to express themselves and influence potential consumers. Thanks to social networks, they can quickly build a network of fans and supporters and easily communicate their opinions, ideas and experiences with products.

The aim of our survey was to determine whether and how much influencers affect consumers in purchasing decisions. This survey has also identified products where consumers rely heavily on the opinion of influencers and areas where the opinions of influencers are considered the most credible, and whether the look and reputation of the influencers is important in purchasing decisions. We conducted a survey using a standardized questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both open and closed questions and was distributed via the Internet. The survey was attended by 430 respondents who were from different age groups and came from different regions. Answers were collected during the two-month period - from February to March 2019.

Formulation of hypotheses:

- **H1:** For the most trusted people influencer regarded personalities from the sports field.
- **H2:** More than 55% of respondents consider products that promote influencers to be better than others.
- **H3:** At least 30% of respondents would buy a product just because it was promoted by their favourite influencer.
- **H4:** Influencers have the greatest influence on consumer decision-making when buying clothes.

In the first hypothesis (H1) we expressed the assumption that the most trusted people considered influencers from the sports field. After evaluation, we can conclude that sportsmen are most trusted for up to 44.5% of respondents as shown on figure 1. This is the

possibility with the largest number of answers, and we accept the first hypothesis.

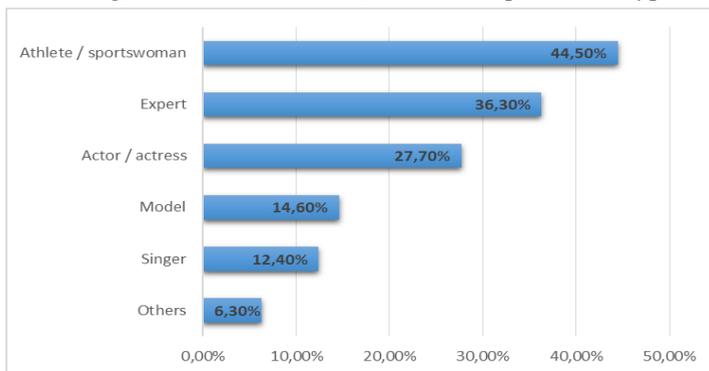


Fig. 1. The most trusted influencer types

The second hypothesis (H2) suggests that more than 55% of respondents consider products that promote influencers to be better than others. After evaluating the question that examined the perception of the quality of such products, we reject the hypothesis. Only 32.8% of respondents consider products promoted by influencers to be of high quality. We can say that most respondents consider product quality to be neutral.

In the third hypothesis (H3), we assumed that at least 30% of respondents would buy a particular product just because it was promoted by their favourite influencer. The analysis provided us with sufficient information to reject this hypothesis. There were only 21.9% of respondents who would be encouraged to buy.

The last hypothesis (H4) we expressed the assumption that the influencer major impact on consumers' decisions when purchasing clothes. We can accept this hypothesis after the evaluation of the survey. The data we processed show that 45% of the respondents would be influenced when buying clothes, of which 12% of respondents expressed strong agreement and the remaining 33% agreed.

The survey also showed that among all the areas in which influencers operate, respondents trust most to athletes and experts in the field. In today's consumer society, beauty and attractiveness might seem to be the most important factors, but our research has shown that consumers place more emphasis on the skills and expertise of the influencers as shown on figure 2. Companies considering influencing influencers should not forget this and reach for a professional or expert.

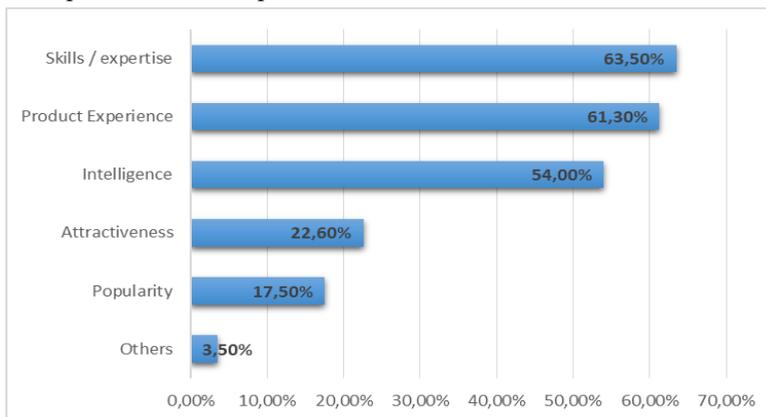


Fig. 2. Desired influencers characteristics

3.2 Discussion and recommendations

The aim of the survey was to find out how influencers influences celebrities in the process of consumer buying decisions. After processing the results, we can draw the following conclusions and recommendations.

Given how often consumers encounter influencer marketing in their area, we can call it a very successful and popular form of promotion. However, despite the widespread use of this method, it can still provide a competitive advantage. Different consumer segments will respond differently to the types of influencers the company chooses to engage. We can say that the success of influencer marketing is choosing the right personality according to whom they plan to target advertising. Large international brands usually reach for sound names from the world of celebrities to present luxury, exclusivity and interest. However, this method is usually not possible for smaller and start-up brands, mainly because of high costs. Therefore, it is important for them to select a person with whom they can identify the target segment of our product and is considered trustworthy in their area, even though it is not known to the wider public.

Influencer marketing has a great meaning as an effective branding strategy and in their marketing efforts, companies increasingly abandon traditional celebrity endorsers in favour of social media influencers, such as vloggers and instafamous personalities [14, 15]. The companies should also remember that engaging an influencer in the promotion process does not automatically mean people's trust in the quality of the product. Our research has shown that a large proportion of consumers think that influencers agree to promote a product simply because they get paid for it. People in our survey expressed the view that only an attractive or successful personality is not enough, and the success of the product is primarily up to him. For a successful marketing campaign, a combination of these two factors is therefore important: a quality product and a trusted influencer.

As an influencer can evoke positive emotions and encourage consumers to buy, it can also have the opposite effect. It is relatively common for some personalities to build up negative publicity over time, and the public does not receive them with enthusiasm. The biggest risk of influencer marketing is the connection of a company with a personality who is involved in a scandal or causes too many negative reactions. Our survey also found respondents who were discouraged by such personalities from buying the product themselves, even though they were convinced of the purchase before they were promoted. Brands and companies that are thinking about influencer marketing should therefore spend sufficient time on the selection process and make sure they have enough information before making the final decision.

However, it should also be remembered that not only the brand can be negatively influenced by personality, but the promotion of an inappropriate product can also harm the influencer himself. Our survey was also attended by respondents who changed their mind about a popular person so far just because they promoted an inappropriate product. The credibility and popularity of such a person is thus declining, and any other project on which it will collaborate may be at risk as it will be perceived by the public as untrustworthy. From the answers of our survey, we can conclude that at present, mainly influencers, who promote products in which animals have been harmed, are perceived negatively - fur coats.

The survey also showed that the promotion of some products through influencers may be more advantageous than others. Influencers will have the greatest impact when buying clothes, shoes, cosmetics and, surprisingly, services. Companies offering their products in these areas should therefore definitely consider such cooperation. Meanwhile, people rely heavily on other factors to buy food, jewellery and electronics, but it is not excluded that influencer marketing could affect them as well.

4 Conclusion

Influencers promoting products and brands have become part of consumers' daily lives. We can find an advertising campaign with an influencer several times a day, especially on social networks. Influencers promote various products such as clothing, shoes, cosmetics, but also services. Using influencer marketing can bring many benefits to a brand, but most importantly, positively impact the sales of its products. Consumers, however, need not only be positively influenced, and companies that choose to implement this strategy should also be aware of the risks involved in working with influencers.

This paper is an output of the science project *VEGA (S.G.A.) 1/0657/19 The role of influencers in the consumer decision-making process.*

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