

Consumer Perception Research on Online Influencer Marketing: A Review of Key Findings and Implication

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Abstract

Online influencer marketing has emerged as a popular strategy for brands to engage with consumers and promote their products or services. Understanding consumer perceptions of influencer-driven content is crucial for marketers to effectively leverage this marketing approach. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of consumer perception research on online influencer marketing, exploring key dimensions that influence consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and purchase decisions.

The research delves into the critical factor of trust and credibility, investigating how authenticity, expertise, relatability, and transparency contribute to consumers' trust in influencers. It also explores the concept of source credibility and its persuasive effect on consumers. Factors such as source expertise, likability, and perceived similarity are analyzed in relation to influencer persuasion. The study further explores the influence of different social media platforms on consumer perceptions of influencers and influencer marketing, as well as the distinctions between various influencer types, such as macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and nano-influencers.

Key words: digital marketing, influencers, consumers, Social Media, online

J.E.L. classification: M31

1. Introduction

This article presents the main findings from a quantitative research on consumers' perception about online marketing by dint of influencers through exploring the persuasive effect of influencers on consumers' attitudes, beliefs, and purchase intentions. By understanding the mechanisms through which influencers influence consumer behavior, marketers can optimize their influencer selection, content strategies, and collaboration approaches to maximize the impact of influencer marketing campaigns. This introduction sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of consumer perception research on online influencer marketing, highlighting the significance of understanding consumer attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes in this context from the main quantitative research. By gaining insights into consumer perceptions, marketers can refine their influencer marketing strategies to effectively engage with their target audience and build long-lasting brand relationships in the digital age (Bochenek, 2019).

2. Literature review

Online marketing is a changing subject, evolving so rapidly that with each passing day someone comes up with a new idea of using existing technology, a new idea of new technology, or simply implements and tests something new. Orzan and Orzan 2004, says that: "No matter the environment in which it is practiced or the type of activity performed, marketing remains marketing. However, the

unprecedented influence of cutting-edge IT&C technologies on the marketing phenomenon must be acknowledged. Marketing is different on the Internet: it is constantly changing, fast, uses new tools and addresses an ever-increasing number of users".

Motivation represents an inner state that internally mobilizes individuals to act accordingly for the fulfillment of a certain goal (Cătoiș and Teodorescu, 2004). When we think about motivation, we also think about what motivation affects. Marketing represents a modern concept that has its foundation in the premise that any type of activity, be it of an economic nature, must have as its finality the satisfaction of the current and prospective needs of consumers, not anyway but with maximum efficiency (Balaure et al, 2002).

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, online influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful strategy for brands to connect with their target audience (Kotler and Armstrong, 2011). With the rise of social media platforms and the increasing influence of individuals known as influencers, consumer perceptions and responses to influencer-driven content have become a topic of great interest and importance. Understanding how consumers perceive and engage with influencer marketing is crucial for marketers aiming to build effective and successful campaigns in this domain. Consumer perception research on online influencer marketing focuses on investigating the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of consumers in relation to influencer content. It aims to uncover the factors that shape consumer perceptions, trust, and credibility towards influencers, as well as the impact of such perceptions on consumer decision-making processes. By studying these dynamics, marketers can gain valuable insights into how to strategically leverage influencer marketing to enhance brand awareness, engagement, and ultimately, drive consumer actions (Bochenek, 2019).

3. Research methodology

The research carried out was a quantitative based on a survey with 200 complete answers. The studied population, which here forms the basis of the sample, is made up of all the simple units made up of individuals from Romania, men and women from urban and rural areas. The observation unit in the sample is one and the same here as the survey unit, consisting of individuals with Internet access, who have encountered online advertising at least once, and who are aware of online marketing through influencers. The method with which we determined the sample is a non-random, therefore implicitly non-probabilistic method. The probability that a survey unit is included in the sample is not known. I chose the "snowball" method because the typology and size of the population is unknown and small. So this method also involves choosing a small number of units from the population. The individuals who were subjected to the investigation are initially people who present the characteristics that I mentioned above, following that later, I would ask those people to forward the questionnaire to other people who consider that they could be characterized in turn by the same characteristics.

4. Findings

Marketing through influencers represents a new type of promotion in the online environment increasingly preferred by brands (Woodroof et al, 2020). Companies choose to invest more and more in collaborations with influencers, being a faster way to reach a relevant audience, with very high chances to convert (Lindstrom, 2010).

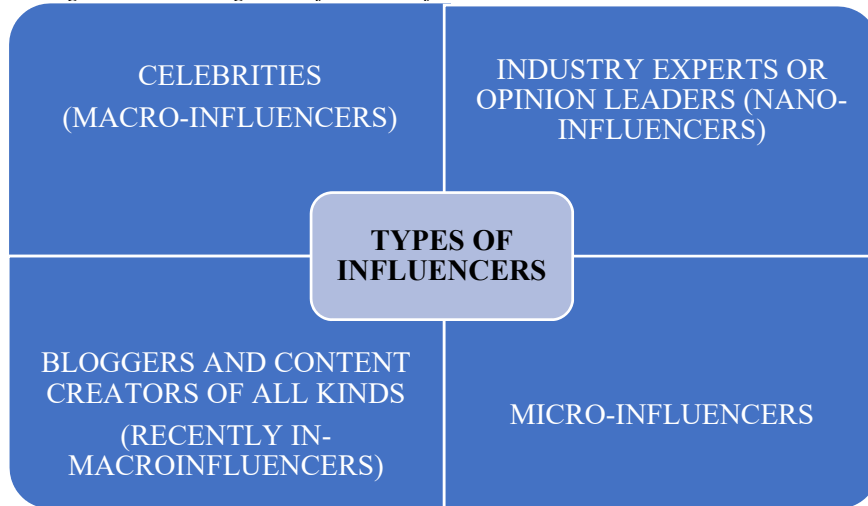
Influencers are those people known in Social Media for their opinions and recommendations, with a significant impact on the online community through the content they create and post (Freberg et al, 2010).

Consumers perceive online influencers as experts in their field. Recognizing the expertise of influencers leads to a phenomenon called "reason disconnection" on the part of consumers, where they stop thinking independently, the brain areas responsible for making decisions being disconnected when the advice or recommendations received come from "experts" (Lindstrom, 2009).

Depending on the number of followers, influencers can be classified into 3 categories: nano-influencers, micro-influencers and macro influencers (Whatmough, 2018).

Nano-influencers are people who have between 1,000 and 10,000 followers, a high engagement rate. The costs with these influencers are low, but the disadvantage is the reach, which is quite low. Micro-influencers are those who have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers. They are influencers with a large reach who can bring you very good exposure. Macro-influencers are those who have over 100,000 followers. Celebrities, very well-known people, usually belong to this category. They can guarantee you the most exposure, but the downside is that only a small fraction of their followers actually interact with that account. Also, their costs are high and it is very likely that such collaborations will not pay off (Bochenek, 2019).

Figure no. 1 Categories of online influencers



Source: livecom.ro, 2019

From more thorough research, it can be seen that the trend of social media in Romania is to become more segmented, the use of the Instagram application is increasing, which is developing more and more every day, and of course the consumption of video content is increasing. The most important aspect and trend followed by online marketing through influencers seems to be video content. At a strategic level, Romanians consume more and more video content and of course, a good part of it from mobile phones. Reuters(2022) predicts that video will grow 14 times in the next 5 years, and 70% will be consumed from mobile devices. Even in 2016-2020, video has proven to be one of the most effective marketing strategies, especially for branding and engagement. At a tactical level, probably the main challenge that stands between entrepreneurs or marketing specialists and the use of this trend is the difficulty of creating video content (livecom.ro, 2019).

From the results of my own research from my work of dissertation (Apostol, 2020), the most important things discovered are the following:

- To identify the devices most used to connect to the Internet by the respondents, a question with multiple answers was introduced. Following the analysis of the respondents answers, it was found that the most frequently used devices are the smartphone and the laptop with percentages of 55% and 35% of the respondents.
- Another important aspect that was the basis of the research is represented by the identification of the opinion of the respondents in relation to the frequency with which they are exposed to advertising through influencers in the online environment. Following the analysis of the answers of the participants in the study, it was found that only one third of the respondents believe that the current level of exposure is acceptable, while the vast majority of respondents, with a weight of over 65%, believe that the exposure to this type of advertising is one far too frequent. At the opposite pole, only 4% of respondents believe that it is too rare in the online environment.

- Another objective of the study was to identify the impact that advertising through influencers has on the respondents, thus following the analysis it was found that the majority of respondents, with a percentage of 41%, go to the website of the product or service to find out more details, this being the most impactful action within them. The top is completed by the absence of a reaction, by ignoring, in percentage of 18% of the respondents, because 15% of the study participants say that the resulting impact was the purchase of the product/service promoted by the influencer. At the opposite pole, the least common action following interaction with advertising through influencers is the awareness of the fact that a product / service is better than what was initially known about it.

- The frequency with which respondents view influencers' posts on different social networks was another factor studied in the paper. Thus, following the statistical analysis, it was found that Instagram is the place where most of the respondents had contact with influencers' posts, approximately 4 out of 10 participants in the study declaring a daily frequency, while on the Facebook social media platform only 21% of respondents declare this frequency of interaction.

- Another important objective of the paper to study the impact that advertising through influencers has on the purchase decision was to identify the products/services that the respondents would purchase based on the recommendation of an influencer.

- As can be seen from the figure above, personal care and cosmetic products/services have the highest chance of conversion from recommendation to purchase, being chosen by 2 out of 10 respondents. They are followed by clothing items and tourism services with percentages of 16 and 13%, respectively. At the opposite pole, the products with the lowest probability of being purchased following the recommendation of influencers are food products (10%), household appliances (10%) and health services, which with a percentage of only 5% are the least likely to acquisition.

- Another objective of the work was to identify the extent to which the gender of the respondent is correlated with the decision to purchase products and services based on the recommendation of influencers. Therefore, following the statistical analysis, it was found that there is no statistically significant link between the gender of the respondent and the predisposition to purchase products and services based on the recommendation of influencers, the P-value result of the Chi-Square test being 0.176, which is above the maximum accepted limit of 0.05.

- The link between the environment in which the respondents live (rural or urban) and the decision to purchase products and services based on the recommendation of influencers was also studied. Following this analysis, it was found that there is no statistically significant link between the 2 variables, the P-value result of the Chi-Square test being 0.859, which is above the maximum accepted limit of 0.05.

- Another objective of the paper was to identify the extent to which there is a link between the level of education of the respondents and the credibility they attribute to advertising through influencers. Following the statistical analysis by means of the Spearman correlation test, it was found that there is no statistically significant link between the 2 variables.

- The subject of the study was also the extent to which there is a correlation between the age of the respondents and the extent to which they agree with the statement that advertising through influencers convinces them to buy the respective good or service. Thus, following the statistical analysis by means of the Spearman correlation test, it was found that there is no statistically significant link between the 2 variables, resulting in a P-value of 0.155, which is above the maximum allowed limit of 0.05.

5. Conclusions

Consumer perception and behavior research on online influencer marketing provides valuable insights into how consumers perceive and respond to influencer-driven content (Bray, 1995). Through an analysis of existing studies and findings from nowadays I see that my findings from 2022 are still valid and even much more used and meaningful now that content creation has become a regular job. Influencer marketing has a significant impact on consumer purchase decisions. Consumers are

influenced by endorsements, product placements, sponsored content, and affiliate links shared by influencers. Marketers can leverage this influence by strategically aligning their products or services with relevant influencers who resonate with their target audience.

For future research I have in mind to analyze the if the source credibility is a persuasive factor in influencer marketing.

Different social media platforms and influencer types influence consumer perceptions. Each social media platform has its own characteristics, and consumers may perceive influencers differently across these platforms. Moreover, different types of influencers, such as macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and nano-influencers, may have varying impacts on consumer perceptions. Marketers should consider platform-specific strategies and select influencers based on their relevance and reach within the target audience.

For future research in this direction I have in mind to look deeply into the differences in terms of content, credibility and conversion rate between Instagram and Tiktok. I am saying this because if Tik Tok in my research was not so popular, back in 2020, now in 2023 based on my research in secondary data, it is the most used and known.

As a general conclusion, I am sure we can agree that influencers who promote products and brands have become part of the everyday life of consumers. Influencers promote various products such as clothing, shoes, cosmetics, but also services. Using influencer marketing can bring many advantages to a brand, but most importantly, a positive impact on the sales of its products. However, consumers should not only be positively influenced, and companies that choose to use this strategy should also be aware of the risks involved in this approach, considering that the respondents of this questionnaire did not put in first place as the main reason for purchase, the influencer who promotes the characteristics of the product/service.

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