

IMPACT OF INFLUENCERS IN DIGITAL MARKETING: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

During COVID pandemic, traditional open-source market places faced severe struggle of existence. The progress of web technology normalized the spontaneity of virtual communication. This marks the rebirth of Web Searched Marketing throughout the world. Social media platforms played a significant role in developing influential marketing strategies. To aware the consumers about the contents, the marketing blockbusters adopted several policies & methods. The involvement of the social media influencers in Digital Marketing impactfully altered marketing policies towards the consumers. The study on influencers is in a great demand on Digital Marketing research. Influencer marketing is evolved from traditional marketing strategies like print advertisements, celebrity endorsement etc., the companies use influencers with lots of followers as marketing tool on social media platform affecting the attitude of targeted audiences. How the influencers motivate the consumers towards a particular brand is the scope of this study. Generation Z, the generational cohort following millennial generation, have been chosen as focus group. The collected data are justified using categorized indexing. As it explores and adds existing literature, the research used a deductive approach. The survey method has been adopted to imply theoretical analysis.

Since the sample type is within limited age group (born between late 1997s and early 2012s), the outcome of the research may vary for others. But since most of the popular social media sites like Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Whatsapp (2006), Instagram (2010) etc. have been developed and launched within this timeframe, the focused generation are well versed to use those. Instead of celebrity endorsement, the social media advertisers are using influencers to increase the potential consumers. The young generation is being easily influenced by the persons who have large number of followers. There is an obvious shift of attitude of gen z due to influencer marketing caused by alignment of promotions, degree of credibility and trust on the influencers.

[Keywords: Web searched marketing, Digital Marketing, Social networking, Influencer marketing, Social Media Advertiser]

INTRODUCTION:

The digital development was due to technological improvements. The changes in process and implementation of marketing tactics by the marketers was led by both internet technology and

information technology. Researches on traditional marketing through Television, Radio, Magazines argue that those are outdated because internet has changed the market & marketing concept & they have lost the effectiveness (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). Prior researches have also described the change in marketing strategies during recession period in 2008. At that time, to face the Global GDP decline which was -5.1%, several companies changed their marketing strategies by lowering their costs in order to survive but continuing revenue generation was also important (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011). At this point, Social Media marketing strategies were implemented due to its time, cost, reach & relations advantages (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011) in efficient way.

The recent COVID pandemic taught us how to use the internet technology in different forms. Majority of world population gained their access to the internet. 42% of the population are active in social media among over four billion online people. 9 out of 10 on social media access their accounts through mobile devices (Kemp, 2018). Keeping the number in mind, the advertisers changed their marketing strategy. Though advertising in social media was not something new but when the matter of Return on Investment (ROI) arose, the influencer marketing developed. It is well known that trustworthy and efficient advertising is by recommendations from family and friends and 92% of consumers around the world trust on Individual's recommendation rather traditional advertising.

The impact of social media advertising on youth by influencers can be quite significant and can be modeled by several key factors. Below is a proposed model that takes into consideration a range of probable effects and interactions:

Exposure and Awareness: The first step is the exposure of youth to influencer advertising on social media platforms. Youth follow their favorite influencers and through their posts, stories, and videos, they become aware of different products, services, or ideas.

Perception and Persuasion: Once youth are exposed to these ads, their perception of the products or services is influenced by the presentation, message, and persona of the influencer. If the influencer is successful in presenting the product or service in a positive light, it can lead to persuasion.

Identification and Aspiration: The effectiveness of influencer advertising lies in the fact that the youth can identify with the influencers on a personal level. They aspire to have a similar lifestyle, which can drive them towards the advertised products or services.

Trust and Credibility: The influencer's perceived credibility can significantly impact the effectiveness of their advertising. The more the audience trusts the influencer, the more likely they are to consider the advertised products or services.

Action: If all the above factors align, then the youth might take the desired action. This could be purchasing the product, subscribing to a service, or adopting a suggested behavior.

Feedback and Continuation: Once the action is taken, the youth provide feedback through likes, comments, shares, etc. This feedback can then influence the influencer's future advertising content, creating a loop.

The proposed Research study model also considers several moderating variables, including:

Individual characteristics: Such as age, gender, income, personality traits, and personal values. These can influence how a young person perceives and reacts to social media advertising by influencers.

Social context: Including the young person's social circle, cultural background, and societal norms, which can affect their receptivity to influencer advertising.

Digital literacy and critical thinking skills: These can help the young person to discern the credibility of the influencer and the veracity of the advertising content.

Influencer's characteristics: Such as their popularity, authenticity, expertise, and the quality of their relationship with their followers. These can affect how their advertising content is received by the young audience.

PROBLEM DISCUSSION:

Many factors are needed to be taken into consideration to create a successful marketing collaboration between the business and the influencer. The influencer with bigger number of followers might be considered more credible compared to influencers with the smaller number of followers. In this study, we will focus on influencers with follower ratio 10000 and above. As for example, a post on Instagram that shows the picture of a product on a famous cafe in town and another post is a picture of an influencer together with that product with a caption as 'in collaboration with' then both pictures may influence the consumers. The second picture is paid advertisement but the first one is not. The collaboration with the influencer is the paid partnership for advertisement.

Regarding the selection of influencers, here, in this study we have given priority to micro influencers of having 10,000 to 1,00,000 followers because they are comparatively cheaper than macro but able to give quality result. Since Nano influencers are typically experts of a specific industry and they are able to offer better access to quality audiences over quantity with closer relationship with their followers.

Macro influencers, on the other hand, reside between micro and celebrity influencers having followers 1,00,000 to 1 million. They have low engagement with followers due to a specific demography. Investment in celebrity influencers is maximum since they have millions of followers throughout the world. They can influence more deeply regardless the demographic specification.

Actually, the concept of influencer marketing is not new. Celebrities and influenceable public figures were being used in marketing purposes long before the social media marketing but the impact of influences in social media is becoming more effective since most of our focus group users spend a lot of time on social media now-a-days. This focus group is quite interesting to study because they are changing their buying attitude & behavior irrespective of their purchasing capacities just due to the influencers. To investigate how the influencer marketing affects their attitude since they are frequently exposed to social media. The study will help to understand where to start for finding a perfect influencer who are just trying to go through as influencer marketing

program. The study is a great resource to identify social media influencers and can help to narrow down the decision-making process.

PURPOSE:

This paper analyses the data by investigating different parameters like trust, gender, fame, reason etc. which affect consumer attitude among millennials and gen Z on Instagram and other few social networking sites. It will be a foundation for constructing the strategy of business through influencer marketing in suitable way. Since influencer marketing is based on social media and it has several benefits like increasing brand awareness & reach, building credibility and trust, cost effectiveness etc. the result will help to design and develop new strategy in sustainable digital marketing.

PILOT STUDY:

This pilot study was conducted at the early stage of research process. It was done to find the actual focus group who are familiar with digital marketing and the impact of influencers on them. The final research can be structured on the basis of experiences and analysis drawn from this study. Several questions, gaps & loopholes have been experienced in this study.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Research in this area examines the audience perceptions of social media influencers. It also tries to find out the effect on purchase decisions and credibility judgement (De Jans et al.,2020). We can propose three research questions-

RQ1: What are the activities that the influencers do in social media videos to persuade the potential consumers.

RQ2: Is there any effect of influencers on the attitude of consumer in purchase decision?

RQ3: How the influencers affect the brand loyalty and customer loyalty?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

This section frames the previous studies on influencer marketing and other relevant literatures to understand how the attitudes of millennials and gen Z have been affected.

Attitude:

Attitude is the way by which a person evaluates something. It is also the way he or she responds towards certain idea, object, person or situation. There are several researches referencing the attitude of a consumer in marketing management. The cognitive, behavioral or emotional experiences of people can be formatted by the evaluations of objects, people and themselves (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) also concluded that both motivation and ability are required to attend to persuasive agreements. The Information is processed centrally or peripherally according to the motivational technique.

The attitude is likely to impact consumer responses when favorable relationship marketing is used. This type of marketing is found when the strategy helps to establish, develop & maintain

relational exchanges like loyalty etc. (Jones et al., 2015). Influencer marketing also helps in relationship building between marketers and potential consumers. Duffett (2017) studied to examine the influence of social media marketing on consumer attitudes. His survey showed that influencer marketing via social media holds a positive attitude to consumers in most cases.

Influencer Marketing:

This is relatively newer marketing technique where the brand related messages are endorsed by some public figures. Li & Du (2011) realized in their study that influencers are nothing but the opinion leaders who has strong personal branding of his/her own. Influencer marketing uses some public figure who has already built up a lot of followers on social media platform like Instagram etc. and the person is quite trustable to spread product or brand awareness (De Veirman et al., 2017). The authenticity also establishes lower resistance to communicated message (De Vries et. al, 2012). Researcher De Veirman in his article "Marketing through Instagram influencers..." stated that the major challenges for brand positioning is still to identify and choose right influencers. I compare with direct marketing, influencer marketing is also dependent on the power of WOM (Word Of Mouth) for marketing products or services (De Veirman et. al, 2017). Celebrity endorsement is common in designing marketing strategy. The difference lies in the accessibility only. Influencers are more accessible and easier to relate because they often shares their personal life stories with the followers.

This may create a story of personal relationship between the influencer and follower (Abidin, 2016). The relationship between a company and an influencer is a partnership and should be beneficial for both the parties. There is a close correlation between influencer and electronic word of mouth, eWOM (Liu et al., 2015). Consumers are able to read other consumer's reviews and comments about the product, who are unknown to them even though they have never met each other (Tiago and Verisimmo 2014). eWOM became a very popular during & after the global financial crisis in the year 2008 (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011). Researches done earlier has shown that worm recommendation is more effective compared to other marketing strategies (Weiss, 2014).

Focus Group:

The Focus group, in this study, belongs to millennials and gen Z categories. They have high exposure in modern digital landscape. Though, the definite date range of these generations varies from studies to studies, here, individuals born between the years 1981 to 1996 and between 1997 to 2012 have been specified as millennials and gen Z respectively.

Millennials are more inclined using the mobile, presently in smartphones, for connecting brands and social networking (Moore, 2012). Moreover, this generation comprises large and influential consumer segment high purchasing power (Bush at al., 2004). Since this generation can easily influence the purchase for their friends, the marketers find this generation profitable for their companies (Lu et al.,2013). Individuals belonging to millennial and gen Z are educated and mature with technological understanding (Syrett and Lammiman, 2003). While a Public figure is endowed for their brand promotion, it can be used as marketing tool to attract millennial's interest (Qian

Ying Soh et al, 2017). When the marketers use influencers in their marketing strategies, the actually imply the attitude changes among millennials and gen Z.

Consumer Loyalty and Brand Loyalty:

An influencer is always an active choice. Positive attitudes and loyalty are most likely to be created to the influencer after a definite time period (Huang et al., 2014). There are several key determinants of brand loyalty, brand attitude, brand trust, value for money and customer satisfaction (Pappu & Quester, 2016). Collaboration between two brands may be called as co-branding. Previous researches showed that companies choose influencers wisely. A wrong choice of partnership may cause difficulties when consumers are experiencing a hard time relating to it. This can create a negative effect changing their attitudes with decreasing the consumer loyalty towards a brand (Xiao & Lee, 2014).

Trust and Credibility:

It has been mentioned that trust and credibility are built on eWOM (Kim et al., 2018). To influence their followers, the influencer should be trustworthy to them. Trust to influencer marketing is closely relevant to this research. Trust is nothing but the relational establishment between the trustor and the trustee. Here, the parties are influencer and followers (Aljazzat et. al., 2010). For successful marketing in digital space, creating trust by establishing personal relationship is very crucial (Jabr & Zheng, 2014). Positive correlation between attitude & trust is also very common as concluded by Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997. The consumers trust the influencer's recommendation which leads to both, the product and buying behavior (Hsu et al., 2013).

METHODOLOGY:

Since, this is an exploratory research, Primary data has been collected from focus group through questionnaire. From the very beginning, the research has been started with a deductive approach by testing validity of the existing theories based on observations. Inductive approach has also been used in contrast by collecting and analyzing data to develop a new approach to the study. It is a qualitative study using the information from the respondents.

But the online survey may have few limitations while collecting information for this study. The subject is quite complex in nature to reveal correct information through this method. Some behavioral activities, gesture, facial expression, tone of voice etc. are needed to investigate the impact of influencer marketing to consumer attitude, which are not possible to collect through online survey. This pilot study focuses on the understanding of influencer marketing on consumer behavior but not generalizing it to a large population.

FINDINGS & RESULTS:

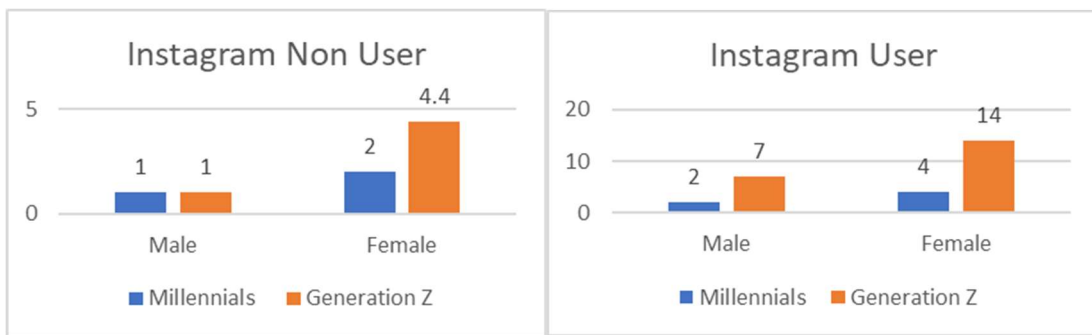
As mentioned previously, to analyze the perception of influencer marketing effecting the consumer lifestyle, the online data are not sufficient. Few conclusions have taken from early researches related with this field. The small sample group study is not sufficient to conclude but it will obviously reflect the trend and effect in this regard.

FINDINGS:

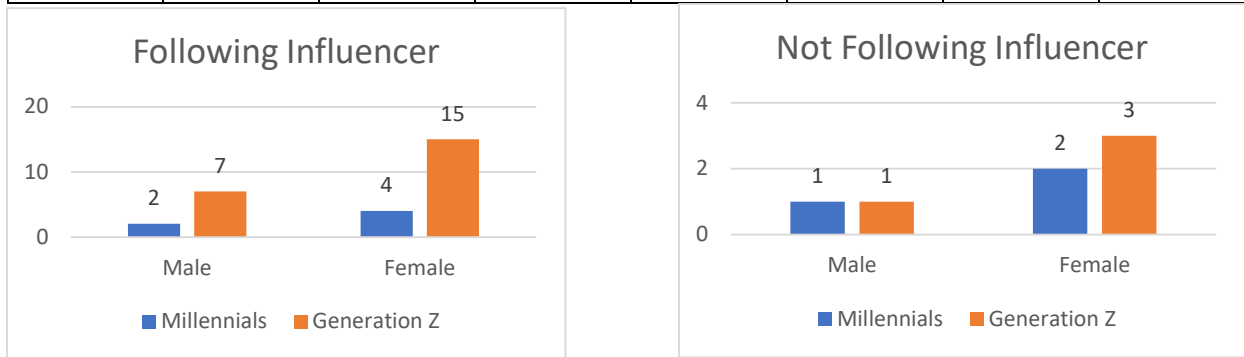
This **PILOT Study** survey had been done **among 35 respondents** only, out of which **11 are Male & 24 are Female**.

MILLENNIAL (9)		GENERATION Z (26)	
Male	Female	Male	Female
3	6	8	18

INSTAGRAM USER (27)				INSTAGRAM NON-USER (8)			
Millennials (6)		Gen Z (21)		Millennials (3)		Gen Z (5)	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2	4	7	14	1	2	1	4



FOLLOWING INFLUENCER (28)				NOT FOLLOWING INFLUENCER (7)			
Millennials (6)		Gen Z (22)		Millennials (3)		Gen Z (4)	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2	4	7	15	1	2	1	3



FOLLOWING SOCIAL MEDIA					
		Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	Youtube
Millennials	Male	0	2	1	1
	Female	2	1	0	4
Gen Z	Male	2	6	0	3

	Female	5	12	1	8
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REASON TO FOLLOW INSTAGRAM OR OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA					
		Entertainment	Inspiration	Trend	Other
Millennials	Male	2	0	1	0
	Female	2	1	1	2
Gen Z	Male	3	3	0	2
	Female	5	9	2	2

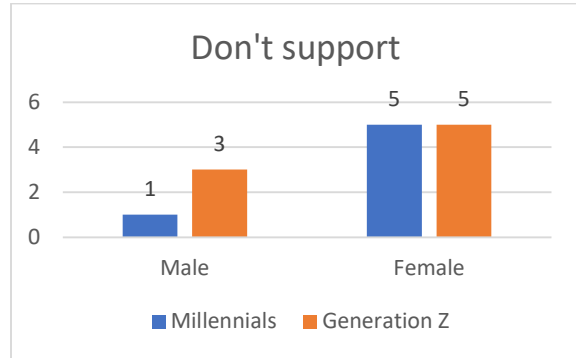
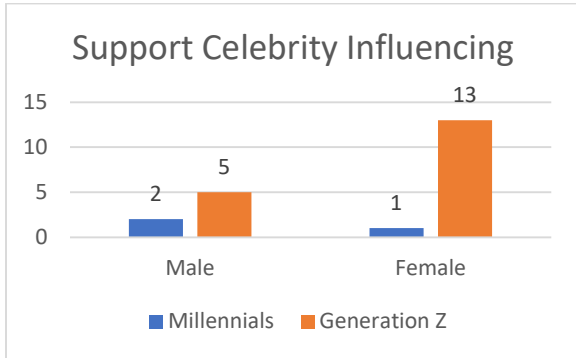
AFFECTED BY INFLUENCER					
		Not at all	Great extent	Large extent	Some extent
Millennials	Male	0	0	0	3
	Female	4	0	0	2
Gen Z	Male	3	0	0	5
	Female	2	2	1	13

FACTOR OF PURCHASE DECISION				
		Content	Requirement	Review
Millennials	Male	0	0	3
	Female	4	2	0
Gen Z	Male	5	2	1
	Female	7	3	8

BELIEVE IN LARGE FOLLOWER TO TRUST							
YES (19)				NO (16)			
Millennials (8)		Gen Z (11)		Millennials (1)		Gen Z (15)	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
3	5	4	7	0	1	4	11

SUPPORTING CELEBRITY INFLUENCER							
YES (21)				NO (14)			
Millennials (3)		Gen Z (18)		Millennials (6)		Gen Z (8)	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female

2	1	5	13	1	5	3	5
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Calculations:

ITEM / QUESTION	MILLENNIALS		GENERATION Z	
	Male	Females	Males	Females
Number of Respondents	03	06	08	18
Do you have Instagram account?	66.6%	66.6%	87.5%	77.7%
Do you follow influencer in social media?	66.6%	66.6%	87.5%	83%
Facebook follower	0	33.3%	25%	27.7%
Instagram follower	66.6%	16.6%	75%	66.6%
Twitter follower	33.3%	0	0	5.5
YouTube follower	33.3%	66.6%	37.5%	44.4
follows Instagram or other social sites for Entertainment	66.6%	33.3%	37.5%	27.7%
follows Instagram or other social sites for Inspiration	0	16.6%	37.5%	50%
follows Instagram or other social sites for Trend	33.3%	16.6%	0	11.1%
follows Instagram or other social sites for other reasons	0	33.3%	25%	11.1%
Not at all affected by Influencer	0	66.6%	37.5%	11.1%

Affected by influencer to some extent	100%	33.3%	62.5%	72.2%
Affected by influencer to large extent	0	0	0	5.5%
Affected by influencer to Great extent	0	0	0	11.1%
Purchase decision depends on Content	0	66.6%	62.5%	38.8%
Purchase decision depends on Requirement	0	33.3%	25%	16.6%
Purchase decision depends on Review	100%	0	12.5%	44.4%
Believes in creating Trust on large number of followers	100%	83.3%	50%	38.8%
Supports Celebrity influencer	66.6%	16.6%	62.5%	72.2%

Fig. Table with percentage calculations from different perspectives

Results:

- Generation Z have more Instagram account than Millennials and Gen Z males have most.
- Most Gen Z males like to follow influencers.
- Millennial Females have Facebook accounts mainly.
- For both the categories, very few are interested in Twitter.
- Millennial Females enjoy YouTube
- Most millennial males follow social sites for Entertainment
- Social sites Inspire most Gen Z females.
- Millennial males use social sites to update in Trends.
- Millennial females follow social sites for other reasons.
- There is notable impact of Influencers on Millennial Females.
- Gen Z females are affected by influencers to great or large extent.
- Influencers have at least some impacts on almost all millennial males and most Gen Z females.
- Millennial Females decide purchasing product or service online on the basis of Content and Requirement.
- All Millennial Males and Gen Z Female consider review while online marketing.
- All millennial Males show trust on the influencer having large followers
- Females from Millennial & Gen Z categories don't trust on counting the number of followers.

- Most Millennial Males & Gen Z Females support celebrity influencer in online marketing strategy.

CONCLUSION:

Proper influencer marketing strategy represents a number of benefits like building company's image, establishing goodwill, increasing brand value, selecting quality content to consumers, ensuring positive feedback from consumers, increasing potential customers and finally increase in sales. The Gen Z are much more familiar with online purchasing and hence they are prone to be inspired by influencers on social networking sites. They also rely on celebrity marketing but for them establishing trust is not dependent on number of followers though that can be established through personal relationships. For Gen Z, influencers, mainly YouTubers play a significant role in developing sustainable online economy. But the question is, how the phenomenon of influencer marketing can be developed as sustainable marketing strategy. Main problem is the oversaturation of social sites that leads to reduction in trustworthiness and authenticity of some influencers mostly in macro influencers. Presently, marketing using influencers is developing and on its rise. If the influencer can be able to keep their authenticity and trust, it can be possible that their popularity would remain uninterrupted for a long time. Though there is a scope for future research on the issue of impact of influencer marketing on consumer lifestyles, this study can conclude that qualitative study is much more effective than quantitative study in this case.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE SCOPE:

Though the study is a pilot project and restricted to sub-urban millennials and gen Z respondents, it explores a new concept of establishing communication theories of earlier types. Future study may be done to determine the strategy of value communication through influencer marketing.

Numerical & non-numerical information, which have been collected through questionnaire from focus group, are the only way for primary data collection in this study. Here focus group is relatively small and hence generalization of attitude change from this small focus group is not possible by qualitative approach of study.

In future, quantitative study using large respondents may validate consumer acceptance model of influencer marketing. Future research may also compare the opinions of urban and rural consumers with the study of impact of popular influencer vs. celebrity influencer. There may have an opening to study on the Brand personality and Influencer personality.

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