

Impact of Influencer Marketing on Youth: Analytical study Based on the Fashion Industry of Kottayam, Kerala.

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Abstract

The influence of social media on individuals has experienced a remarkable surge, especially within the fashion sector. Platforms like Instagram have empowered individuals to become their own magazine editors, showcasing their distinct style to millions through online. This shift has fuelled the rise of emerging method of marketing using influencers, with 94% of marketers have confidence in its efficacy. About 71% of new generation marketers think working with influencers is the most fruitful one when compared to other marketing strategies. Influencers' popularity is ongoing and does not have a finite window of effect. The study strongly emphasizes influencer's marketing effects on Youth, specifically in the trend. This study attempts to give a comprehensive insight into the underlying reasons which influence young followers to subscribe to social media influencers. The principal method employed for gathering data in this research is a structured questionnaire distributed across the city of Kottayam. Various techniques and testing have determined that influencers significantly impact young people's purchasing decisions and aid in developing potential clients for the fashion industry and has a significant effect on Youth. The findings of this study add to existing knowledge and offer practical insights for marketers looking to better connect with youth through Influencer Marketing (IM)....

Keywords: Social media, Expansion, Fashion industry, Marketing strategies, Purchase decisions, Youth..

Introduction

With the emergence of online medias, the information creation, dissemination and consumption process have undergone substantial changes, and the transfer of consumer opinions, the creation of electronic communities across the world, and the creation of increased user-generated multitudes of data have become a reality (1). Such sites, especially social networking sites, have changed the nature of communication by facilitating interpersonal and functional interactions between the user and organization. Consequently, companies are more than ever being demanded to create user-oriented content that their prospective buyers can relate to, based on their tastes and expectations. In this respect, social media content creation and blogging have become a valuable instrument used by marketers and are frequently combined with the involvement of an influencer since they are the cost-efficient and effective ways to share experience, recommendations, and information related to the product in the online environment (2).

The rapid growth of social media has provided organizations with new possibilities to reach out to consumers in a more personalized, authentic and direct way. One of the most recent trends in the marketing and personal relations landscape is the emergence of social media influencers that serve as the connection between the brand and its audience. (3). As opposed to classical celebrities, these influencers can be viewed as people with whom the users can connect, whose views and recommendations are based on personal experience. Marketers and practitioners are becoming more and more active in using these influencers to develop products, deliver brand information, and connect with his target audience. The extensive growth of social media has steered a significant growth in application of IM in varied sectors.

The social media marketing has transformed the brand-consumer interaction to a more interactive and relationship-based model, as opposed to the one-way communication model. Influencers are people who have power, authority, and experience in specific field, and they are very important when it comes to affecting purchasing behaviours of their followers (4). Influencers can frame opinion and be motivating and compelling

behavioural results through replicable and interesting content on a variety of platforms. Social media networks can be used as effective sources of reaching younger generations, as they rely on peer recommendations rather than on the conventional advertising approaches (5). In the fashion industry, especially, social networking sites like Instagram have become very effective in enabling the brands to directly deal with the target audience, unswervingly communicate products, and enable them to be displayed in photos of messages that are captivating (6).

In the modern digital world, marketers are depending on social media to have effective relationships with consumers. Being one of the cornerstones of modern-day communication campaigns, IM assists brands in responding to and competing in the context of a more and more diverse market environment (7). The crux of this style of marketing is to find people with a large following of target audiences to use their influence to increase brand awareness and use their content to motivate consumers to take action. This strategy is sort of a marketing style based on relationships, which focus on socializing, building trust, and community participation (8).

Ranga and Sharma (2014) have defined IM as a dented procedure with multiple steps. These involve the identification of the relevant influencers, raising awareness of different brands in followers, activating awareness at the target markets, and forming the perception in order to develop positive attitudes towards brands in ideal followers. Also, IM can be divided into the following stages: creating awareness, reaching a larger audience, and making influencers a brand advocate. These phases reiterate the strategic relevance of this marketing style in terms of attaining major aspects of marketing such as brand awareness, consumer contact, and customer conversion.

The surge of a digitally enabled ecosystem has framed IM as an adaptable and adaptive model, which includes establishment of customized relationships with consumers represented by various demographic profiles, interests and geographic profiles (8). Another impact of consumers depending more on peer recommendation in their purchasing decision making and also in influencing their lifestyle choice. Organizations can easily capitalize on this behavioural trend by incorporating influencers in marketing approaches. This, respectively, increases the overall marketing campaigns performance and improves brand-consumer relations (9). The credibility and trust, as well as engagement, are among the critical elements that determine the efficiency of IM. The success of Influencers is not limited only by the number of their followers, but these actions are closely linked to their genuineness, trustworthiness, and emotional resonance with their followers (10). Influencers that are authentic and transparent are likely to build valuable relationships with their followers, hence enhance their influence. Moreover, a influencer can also appeal to emotions and influence consumer perception with their content, which is very important to drive their buying behaviour. Brand attitudes and consumer response largely respond to the perceived credibility of influencers, which supported the need to show trust in IM strategies (10).

Over the last couple of years, influencers have become the latest type of digital celebrity. Most of these people can have a niche, in fashion, beauty, fitness, and lifestyle to create content that is easy to browse and snackable and fits the interests of their subscribers (11). The evidence provided by the research shows that the influencers can work in generating positive attitudes toward the brand and can influence the purchases choice significantly. Reliability, expertise, consistency is some of the attributes which make them sound promoters of old products and new ones as well because of their perceived credibility. Installing a new product among uninformed consumers becomes quite essential through influencers, as they extend the insights on their experiences and present suggestions that may promote product knowledge and adoption (12).

Ethical issues have also become predominant in IM, specifically in terms of transparency and publication of sponsored content. Influencers must strive to follow ethical principles and ensure they inform their audience about paid partnerships without bringing any doubts (13). Disclosing personal experiences and details of their everyday lives also increase the bond between the influencers and their followers, creating the effect of candidness, empathy. Moreover, the influencers tend to have several brands, thus increasing their coverage and effectiveness on the various market segments (14). Influencers have been integrated into the online marketing ecosystem, defining consumer attitudes, preferences and purchasing behaviour.

Although a lot of research is done in the sphere of IM, it still has a number of gaps, especially when it comes to fashion industry. There is limited empirical research at the effects of IM on the purchasing behaviour of young customers in region-specific situations, specifically Kottayam. In the context of the socio-cultural and economic specifics of this region, one should learn how IM technologies are perfectly perceived and accepted by the young population in the area. Filling these gaps can offer important insights into the consumer behaviour and be helpful in enhancing more effective and specific marketing strategies (15). The shift towards the digital platforms like the internet, which has seen the replacement of the conventional media outlets such as television, has led to the fragmentation of the audiences making access and engagement with their respective target consumers a tedious

task to the marketers (3). One way in which this challenge has been overcome is through IM which allows a brand to directly interact with consumers through believable and identifiable faces. The study concentrates on assessing the impacts of IM on social media on youth in Kottayam, in particular, the fashion industry. Through examining the relationships between influencers and customers, this study will offer a full picture of the style of IM and how it influences consumer attitudes, preferences and consumer decisions, making it a worthwhile contribution to both scholarly studies and real-world marketing (16).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design involved the use of the survey research design to gather primary data using an online questionnaire administered using Google Forms. The sample size included the young people in Kottayam since the research is specifically aiming at behaviour of the youth with respect to IM. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to select the respondents in the study with the participants being selected due to their availability and desire to respond. This was deemed as the right method, considering time and resource limitation, and yet enabling the researcher to gain support insights on the active social media users. One hundred and eighty valid responses were gathered and used in the analysis.

The instrument of data collection was a structured questionnaire that was created based on the objectives of the study. It contained close ended questions that aimed at quantifying the main constructs of awareness of influencer marketing, trust in influencers, perceived credibility, information quality and purchase behaviour. Consistency in response was supported by the use of standardized questions and the standard questions were used to enable the quantitative analysis.

In order to determine how reliable, the instrument can be, the value of Cronbach alpha has been calculated and the value is 0.715 (Table 1), which is better than the generally accepted level of 0.70 in social science research. It shows that there is good internal consistency exhibited by the measurement scale. Moreover, factor analysis was performed to investigate the construct validity, commonality > 0.5 proved to be material, which supports the appropriateness of the variables moving on to the next stage of statistical needs.

Data analysis was done in Microsoft Excel and SPSS (Version 24.0). Demographic features and patterns of responses were summarised using descriptive statistics whereas Chi-square and ANOVA were the tools of assisting the inferential statistics to test relationships and differences between the variables. The techniques offered a holistic insight into the role of demographic aspects and characteristics of influencers in the buying behaviour of young consumers.

Reliability Statistics

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability

Reliability Stat	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.702	11

Source: SPSS generated

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measures of Sample Adequacy	.821

Source: SPSS generated

The methodology employed in this study entails a comprehensive study of all the available data. KMO value higher than 0.5 indicates a noteworthy correlation within the data, pointing towards robust interrelationships among the variables being examined. In this specific research, the value obtained in table 2 is 0.821, which indicates a robust relationship between the selected items for the study (18). This suggests that the variables included in the analysis are strongly correlated with each other and collectively contribute to the research objectives. The high KMO value provides confidence that the data is fit for further exploration and interpretation in addressing the research questions or hypotheses at hand.

Component Matrix

Table 3: Component Matrix

Component Matrix ^a	
	Component
	1
Awareness	.869
Trust Factor	.922
Credibility	.837
Information Quality	.832
Promote to Buy	.691
Impact	.850

Source: SPSS generated

Using factor extraction technique shown in table 3, it is clear that all the measured items are having values much greater than 0.5, the standardized value. This means that each of the chosen variables possesses a significant contribution to the construct that is going to be analysed, and the inclusion of these variables in the further analysis is justified. Every measurement factor has a value contribution to the analysis, enhancing the overall validity and strength of the model results.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Table 4: Percentage Analysis

Content	Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Male	117	65

Gender	Female	63	35
Age	18-20	31	17
	21-23	71	39
	23-26	39	22
	Above 26	39	22
Education	Diploma	29	16
	UG	72	40
	PG	32	18
	Other	47	26
Area of Dwelling	Urban	74	41
	Semi-urban	48	27
	Rural	58	32
Income	10k and below	48	26
	11 k to 20 k	49	27
	21 k to 30k	44	25
	31 k to 40 k	19	11
	Above 40 k	20	11
Awareness of IM	Strongly agree	35	19
	Agree	86	48
	Neutral	6	3
	Disagree	39	22
	Strongly disagree	14	8

Trust level in the influencer is a vital element	Strongly agree	48	27
	Agree	85	47
	Neutral	10	6
	Disagree	37	20
	Strongly disagree	0	0
The credibility of the influencer is considered	Strongly agree	50	28
	Agree	83	46
	Neutral	20	11
	Disagree	27	15
	Strongly disagree	0	0
The information quality of influencers makes me choose the products	Strongly agree	41	23
	Agree	82	46
	Neutral	30	16
	Disagree	27	15
	Strongly disagree	0	0
Influencers promote buying of new products	Strongly agree	19	11
	Agree	34	19
	Neutral	87	48
	Disagree	30	16
	Strongly disagree	10	6
	Very high	41	23
	High	33	18

Influencer impact on me for buying products	Medium	39	22
	Low	30	17
	Very low	37	20

This study has helped to identify some key information regarding the demographic composition of respondents and their attitudes towards IM. Table 4 shows that most of them were men and mostly those in the 21-23 age group, which implies that the amount of young people that use digital platforms actively was highly represented. The vast majority of the respondents had undergraduate degrees, which implies that they were more exposed to social media spaces and modern-day marketing practices. Respondents in terms of income showed a high percentage (11K-20K) indicating a segment with moderate purchasing capacity, and consumer-active behaviour.

The findings also reveal the degree of awareness of IM among the respondents, proving that they were aware of the concept and it became topical in the digital market. Such aspects as the credibility and trust of the influencer, quality of information, and consumer purchase decisions were found to be the major determinants. These factors greatly influence the perception of the consumers and increase the persuasiveness of the content made by influencers (21). The research findings put a significant emphasis on the fact that influencer promotions are an important element of persuading people to buy new goods. The respondents did not deny the fact that influencers were strong opinion leaders who have a direct influence on their purchasing behaviour. It is interesting to note that most of the participants indicated that the overall impact of influencers on consumer behaviour was rated as very high, which highlights how well IM can be effectively used in the fashion industry to influence youth consumer behaviour.

Chi-Square Analysis

The goal of the analysis is to study the connection between the age of the respondents and their awareness related to IM. Using statistical testing, the research assesses the significantly varying awareness among the various age groups.

H0: There is no association between Age and Awareness of IM

Table 5: Chi-square analysis: Age and Awareness of IM

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Significance (2-sided)
Pearson ChiSquare	80.352 ^a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	95.414	12	.000
Linear by Linear Association	.105	1	.746
No of Valid Cases	180		

Ssource: SPSS generated

The values given in Table 5 are statistically significant because they have a p-value that is less than 0.05. This proves that age has a significant relationship with the level of awareness, implying that there is a difference in how different age groups are exposed to IM. Regarding the research problem of studying the level of awareness of youth, this result indicates that there is a significant difference in the awareness of IM among groups of different

ages. It emphasizes the fact that age is an essential factor in the development of exposure, familiarity, and responsiveness to influencer-driven content, which supports the significance of age-related targeting approaches in IM campaigns.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Analysis

H0: There is no relation between impact of the IM and demographic factors of customers in the fashion industry.

H1: There is a relation between impact of the IM and demographic factors of customers in the fashion industry

Table 6: ANOVA Results

ANOVA						
		Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	Between Group	2.827	4	.707	.679	.607
	Within Group	182.084	175	1.040		
	Total	184.911	179			
Gender	Between Groups	16.676	4	4.169	30.057	.000
	Within Groups	24.274	175	.139		
	Total	40.950	179			
Education	Between Groups	29.511	4	7.378	7.721	.000
	Within Groups	167.217	175	.956		
	Total	196.728	179			
Area of Dwelling	Between Groups	16.059	4	4.015	6.135	.000
	Within Groups	114.519	175	.654		
	Total	130.578	179			
Income	Between Groups	75.404	4	18.851	14.760	.000
	Within Groups	223.507	175	1.277		
	Total	298.911	179			

ANOVA test was used to investigate the role of demographic factors on the purchasing behaviour of youth when it comes to IM. The null hypothesis is rejected at 5 percent level of significance in all variables except age as

indicated in Table 6, which means that gender, education, residential area and income have significant influence on consumer purchase decisions. This result is an indication that purchasing behaviour does not turn out to be the same amongst all consumer groups but it is instead influenced by differences in socio-economic and education. An example is that more educated people might be more critical of the content of the influencers, whereas incomes can differentiate the possibility of taking purchase intentions into action. Residential background (urban, semi-urban, and rural) might have an effect on exposure to digital platform and influencer content. The fact that the age factor does not influence significantly suggests that there is a relative consistency in the awareness and sensitivity to IM among youths in the segment that was used in this research. These findings strongly emphasize the relevance of marketing according to the specifics of a segment, in which brands are able to execute influencer campaigns with respect to the unique attributes of their target audience.

DISCUSSIONS

As the hypotheses of the study are to determine the effects of IM upon young consumers, the results show that the effect is less likely to be constant and experienced by whole groups, but rather to be different in various groups. Rather, it depends on the particular demographic factors, indicating that young consumers have a higher susceptibility to influencer persuasion than not (21). As the analysis indicates, influencer-based promotion is critical in influencing consumer decisions, especially when it comes to purchasing anything that is related to fashion, with peer-based digital content being more compelling than the conventional types of advertising. This highlights the importance of marketers being more segment-specific and targeted in the effort to get the most out of influencer campaigns.

The results of this research show that the sampled demographic group is highly aware of IM due to the high importance of the quality of information and the credibility and trust of influence in the purchase decision process (22). The factors are identified as some of the most important factors that need to be considered in order to make content that is influenced by an influencer more persuasive. The paper highlights the significant impact of influencers in promotion of new products and prompting consumer behaviour in making purchases, which proves the importance of influencers as opinion leaders in the digital marketing sphere.

The findings also support the conclusion that age matters when it determines the awareness level regarding IM, indicating that the level of responsiveness and exposure to IM strategies is different between the age groups. Besides, the results indicate that the educational level affects how people judge and assess the effectiveness of the people who share use of influence, and hence, the way people make a decision. Altogether, the research illustrates that IM style can have a noteworthy impact on the buying behaviours of the young generation when marketing clothing, which justifies the use of influencer as a useful marketing instrument.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The paper mentions how fashion affects the lifestyles of people and underlines the rising importance of the social media, especially of IM, on the consumer behaviour in the sphere of fashion. The results prove that the effect of IM on the buying behaviour of youth cannot be ignored, and the influence of trust on influencers is becoming one of the crucial issues affecting the levels of apparel and accessory purchases. The evaluations and recommendations given by influencers significantly affect the consumers, which means that they are very convenient in the digital market. The paper also indicates that IM and use of social media platforms and blog posts also meaningfully impact the consumer perception, which often beats the effects and impact of traditional way of advertising. This highlights the capacity of influencers to have an impact on attitudes, preferences, and purchase behaviour among the younger generations, thus helping to create a pool of prospective buyers in the fashion industry. Accordingly, the IM strategy may be an extremely valuable tool to use by fashion companies that are interested in communicating and attracting younger buyers.

Concerning the scope of the research in the future, additional studies can be done to examine whether IM has any long-term effects on brand loyalty and consumer retention. Research can also be done to understand the performance of various classes of influencers, including micro and macro influencers, in varying product lines and geographical locations. Also, the next generation studies can be devoted to cross-cultural comparisons and the impact of newly emerged digital opportunities on consumer behaviour. It can be included as well that extending the area of study to psychological and behavioural aspects can offer further understanding of how IM campaign can be streamlined to become an effective instrument of maintaining consumer interest.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors affirm that they do not have any competing interests with this publication.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USE DECLARATION.

The AI-based tools were adopted only in terms of grammar check to increase the readability of the entire manuscript. The authors conducted all important parts of the study such as the development of their idea, the data analysis and its interpretation independently.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The conceptualization of the study, data collection and statistical analysis, preparation of the initial draft of the manuscript were done by Ramesh Krishnan S. S. Jegadeeswari also helped in the research design, offered supervision, critically reviewed the manuscript and gave the final copy to be published.

ETHICS APPROVAL

The ethical standards were followed in the study. All those who understood the essence of the research were engaged in the study voluntarily and informed consent was given by all respondents before data collection.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data created and processed in this research can be made available to the respective author on a fair request.

ABBREVIATIONS

IM- Influencer Marketing

ANOVA – Analysis of Variance

KMO – Kaiser Meyer Olkin

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

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