Conceptual Review

Social Media Influencers and Egyptian Consumers' Purchase Intentions: A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT: Background: Social Media is a term that falls under the big umbrella of media. Media includes different communication tools, such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. The increasing power of social media in the past decade has made it a crucial part of people's lives. Not only did it change the way people interact together, but it changed the marketing concept in general. Therefore, the growing importance of social media in people's lives resulted in the appearance of social media influencers, also called SMI. **Objective:** This paper aims to present an overview of Social Media Influencers and how it affects consumers' purchase intention. It focuses on Egyptian consumers' context and contributes to the literature in this area. First, the research discussed the point of view of being a powerful marketing tool that is slowly being used by many companies worldwide. Next, the study discussed the origin and development of social media influencers, followed by a detailed illustration of the different social media influencers' related factors that affect consumers' purchase intention, as well as the literature for the study's independent variables of interest, meaning transfer, product match-up, and source credibility. Next, the study investigates the relationship between meaning transfer and customers' purchase intention, product match-up and purchase intention, and source credibility and customers' purchase intention. **Results:** A systematic overview of social media influencing marketing is discussed. Also, a proposed framework is presented as a base for future research to test the actual model in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, contributions to knowledge and recommendations for future research are presented.**Conclusion:** The main contribution of the research is the examination of social media influencers in the Egyptian context, highlighting the power of influencers over Egyptian consumers and how they trigger and affect their purchase intentions. A base for future research is accomplished through this research, and future recommendations are presented as well to help guide future research in the same area. Also, the research presents academic and practical implications for researchers and marketers to use for their studies and companies.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Media Influencers, Purchase Intentions, Product Match-Up, Meaning Transfer, Source Credibility

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a part of many people's lives. Almost one-third of the world's population uses social media daily. As a result, it has become popular and has not only begun to become a part of consumers' lives, but it also shapes their experiences and attitudes towards many things. As a result, companies are beginning to take advantage of the growing importance of social media, using it as a tool to shape customer opinions about their products and services and using Social Media as one of their marketing strategies (Freberg et al., 2011; Audrezet et al., 2018). Over time, regular Internet platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube have begun to turn the general public into public influencers through so-called "social media influencers" (SMIs). As a result, social media influencer marketing is now a phenomenon that competes with other offline or paid online marketing tools and strategies businesses use, and many companies use it to promote and market their products (Lim et al., 2017). In addition, it

has the advantage of being a free tool. However, the topic is still emerging and little research has been done on social media's impact on consumers' attitudes and purchase behaviors or intentions (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019). Therefore, this paper aims to present an overview of Social Media Influencers and how it affects consumers' purchase intention. It focuses on Egyptian consumers' context and contributes to the literature in this area.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media

Social Media as a term falls under the big concept of Media. Many previous books and research defined Media, and among the most famous definitions of Media is that of the Oxford dictionary, describing media as "The main means of mass communication such as television, radio, and newspaper". Social Media has been defined as "software tools that create user-generated content that can be shared" (Sinclaire and Vogus, 2011). Those websites help people engage and connect, share content, and join communities that share the same interests they have (Samarasinghe and Mannan, 2019). In the past decade, social media has become a crucial and massive part of people's lives, and its significance has been growing daily (Samarasinghe and Mannan, 2019; Pick, 2021). It has made a huge change in the way people interact together (Ertugan, 2017; Ertugan and Mupindu, 2019). Years after social Media was invented, it has become the most widespread activity on the internet and gained more popularity than e-mails in previous years ever did (Bright and Cunningham, 2012), while social networking sites have become one of the fastest growing applications on the internet (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). According to the researcher, the most commonly used social media type among people is blogs, followed by social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, virtual social worlds, joint projects like Wikipedia, content communities like Youtube, and gaming sites. People tend to visit those social media platforms not only for entertainment, but also to seek information about certain products or learn about new ones (Aw and Labrecque, 2020).

Furthermore, they become affected by media in different life fields, such as how to dress and what to eat (Vandanaa and Lenka, 2014). With the growth of social media's importance, marketers and companies started using different social media social media tools and integrating them as a part of their marketing plans (Vandanaa and Lenka, 2014; Samarasinghe and Mannan, 2019). This online presence of the companies and brands on social media has helped them create a stronger and more personal relationship with their customers, making customers feel like they have an actual relationship with the brand on social media (Samarasinghe andMannan, 2019). By 2011, 88% of companies used social Media as a tool in their marketing strategy techniques, spending up to 60 billion dollars every year (Smith, 2011). Those marketers do so because they believe that using social Media as a part of their marketing strategy will help more positively influence customers and communicate better with them (Samarasinghe and Mannan, 2019; Aw and Labrecque, 2020). Consequently, social media became a much more powerful tool than other traditional tools, as it connects people directly with their favorite celebrities through an online platform, rather than waiting to hear news about them from conventional tools like TV and magazines, which somehow creates a more intimate relationship (Bright and Cunningham, 2012; Kim and Song, 2016; Samarasinghe and Mannan, 2019).

2.2 Social Media Influencers

Social Media Influencers, who are also referred to as "SMI" are regular people who have become known celebrities through their social media exposure (Lou and Yuan, 2018). They have specific knowledge in particular fields, like fashion, lifestyle, travel, and others. As social media grew to power, they started gaining power with it and became more influential than ever. Social media did not just change customers' opinions but also their beliefs, attitudes, ideas, decisions, and purchases (Al-Emadi and Yahia, 2020). Therefore, it is regarded as a good source and opportunity for regular people to become famous and build a base of customers. Before the internet, people used to be influenced and inspired by people that we call opinion leaders, who used to shape others' opinions and even behavior. Nowadays, with the internet breakthrough in a change in digital media, Influencers have become the new role models and opinion leaders. People perceive those influencers as trustworthy, credible, and "accessible experts, " as recently described by Taillon et al. (2020). In addition, social media lets customers learn about new products, ideas, and worldwide events. Therefore, online opinion leaders have become very important, as they shape viewers' opinions regarding new products, especially if it's within their expertise (Akdevelioglu and Kara, 2020).

Subsequently, "Social media influencers" has recently become one of the new trending topics in marketing, with the growth of their importance and role in the business world. The topic of SMI has gained popularity in the practical world, especially from a marketing perspective, but yet academic research is still limited in this area (Pick, 2021). By 2019, the influencer marketing industry hit 6.6 billion dollars, while the number of influencers worldwide reached hundreds of thousands (Taillon et al., 2020). The audience considers those influencers ordinary people who were able to build a base of followers simply by talking about their daily routine, everyday life, and ideas through different online platforms. They may or may not be celebrities, but they earn money from the "human brands" they created in both cases. Nowadays, people treat them as "microcelebrities", a term that Senft introduced in 2008. Those are non-celebrities who managed to create a certain image of themselves on social media, through which they interact and communicate with the public and create a stream of followers on their public pages (Veirman et al., 2017; Pick, 2021). Akdevelioglu and Kara (2020) introduced another term, "Nano influencers". They are online influencers who have a small presence on social media and a small number of followers. Over time, these nontraditional celebrities became more influential and popular than ever (Al-Emadi and Yahia, 2020). And with the increase in their followers, they began to take

advantage of their wide range of followers and the fact that their followers are more likely to believe them than in traditional advertising by companies who are only trying to sell their products.

To be considered a social media influencer, one has to have at least one million followers. The more the audience engages and participates with influencers by commenting, liking, or simply sharing their posts, the more it shows how successful and efficient those influencers are (Wiedmann and Mettenheim, 2020). Through this large pool of followers, influencers became more engaged with them, and consequently, the followers' trust in them increased. Influencers with a smaller number of followers are considered a "micro-influencer". Micro-influencers have the advantage of being observed as more accessible and relatable, focusing only on a much smaller group of followers, making them closer and more connected. This growth of social media influencers has thus begun taking the eyes of researchers in the past years. Their influence on their audience is starting to increase, and they are playing a huge role now in shaping the attitudes and opinions of the public, whether by influencing them to live a certain lifestyle or to buy certain brands (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019). As time passes, the brand collaboration between SMI and companies has become the main source of income for those SMI. Through this collaboration, companies sponsor the influencer and compensate them in return for writing a review or creating video content of their brand on their page (Stubb et al., 2019).

2.3. Social Media Influencers' Endorsement
Many factors have been discussed as social media influencers' related factors with no consensus on one specific model. However, the following three factors were used and discussed repeatedly in the most recent studies as influential factors related to social media influencers: meaning transfer, product match-up, and source credibility. Therefore, the study aims to enhance the narrow perspective of previous studies and propose a comprehensive model that includes the most important factors related to social media, as mentioned before.

2.3.1.   The Meaning transfer
McCracken was among the first researchers to discuss meaning in 1986, highlighting how meanings transfer to the products we buy through the different advertising tools, and consequently, this meaning transfers to the customers when they buy the product. It is a way to transfer certain meanings from the endorser to the product or brand so that the customer believes the message and evaluates the product positively (Darnell and Sparks, 2007). Those meanings can be values, feelings, beliefs, or simply the endorser's personality as a whole. This is based on the fact that customers only use products that are endorsed by their idols, which helps them build a certain self-image through the consumption of this particular brand (Aw and Labrecque, 2020). Thus, consumers don't only purchase goods for their actual function but for the meanings lying behind using these products (Willis and Wang, 2016). That's why through endorsement, a celebrity transfers the meanings related to him to the product they endorse, and customers will link those meanings to the product or brand itself (Miller and Allen, 2012; Laila and Sjabadhyni, 2017). Consequently, a positive correlation between meaning transfer and consumer attitudes or purchase intention is created (Lim et al., 2017). The image of the company or the brand is also upgraded in the eyes of consumers because they feel valued (Miller and Allen, 2012; Laila and Sjabadhyni, 2017).

The Meaning Transfer Model by McCracken in 1986 discusses that an endorser possesses certain meanings that match the product the endorser is advertising for. Those meanings are delivered to consumers through the right marketing channels and efforts, resulting in the target audience purchasing these products. It is regarded as a complete model since it explains the endorsement process as a whole, unlike previously discussed models that focus only on certain aspects and ignore others (Darnell and Sparks, 2007; Aw and Labrecque, 2020). In that matter, consumers start connecting the endorsers with the brand, leading them to make repetitive associations of the brand with its endorser so that each time the endorser creates a new message, more positive correlations are created in the mind of consumers (Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010).

2.3.2.   The Product match-up
Product match-up is vital when studying endorsers or social marketing influencers. It has been described as the fit between the influencer and the brand or product they are trying to present to the audience (Lim et al., 2017). It is referred to as the "fittingness" of the product and the endorser (Gaied and Ben Rached, 2015). The stronger the fit and the match between the endorsed product and the influencer, the more influential the influencing process will be (Darnell and Sparks, 2007; Lim et al., 2017). Therefore, a strong association between endorser and brand must be created for the social media influencer to affect their customers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Lim et al., 2017). This fit is critical between the endorser, the brand or product, and the message to be delivered (Apejoye, 2013). In early studies, it was highlighted how the effectiveness of an endorser differs according to the product that is being advertised. Some endorsers were found to be effective in endorsing specific products while ineffective in supporting other products that fall under different categories. That's when the idea of the product match-up appeared. It discusses how important it is for a fit between the endorser and the product they endorse or advertise for, or otherwise, and the whole endorsement process will be ineffective (Till and Busler, 1998).

2.3.3.   Source credibility
Source credibility is among the first variables considered as a main feature or attribute of a successful endorser or celebrity. Goldsmith et al. (2000) defined source credibility as "the extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject". The most famous theory and model

discussing source credibility is the source credibility model by Hovland & Weiss (1951). The theory discusses that an effective message by an endorser is only considered adequate if consumers believe in the expertise and trustworthiness of the endorser, which is the source in that case. This way, customers' confidence in the brand or product increases because they trust the endorser (Darnell and Sparks, 2007). The source credibility model explains how a credible source affects customers' perception and acceptance of the message delivered. People tend to be affected by experienced, trustworthy and knowledgeable sources, whether endorsers or simply communicators of a certain message (Roy et al., 2013).

2.3.3.1. expertise
The first component of source credibility is expertise. It describes the knowledge and level of expertise the endorser has in the specific area related to the product. The more experienced a source is, the more they tend to be more believable, resulting in a positive consumer attitude (Ohanian, 1990) and impacting their purchase intentions (Roy et al., 2013). Waldt et al. (2009) highlighted how expertise is considered the most crucial component of credibility since it establishes a strong link between the endorser and the endorsed product in customers' minds. Therefore, expert sources are more qualified to persuade customers to buy a certain product (Roy et al., 2013). Lou and Yuan (2018) described it as the level of experience an endorser has in a specific area, making them regarded as persuasive in the eyes of the target audience.

2.3.3.2. Trustworthiness
Another component of source credibility is trustworthiness. It discusses one's ability to be truthful and honest to make the message believable and well perceived by the target customers (Lim et al., 2017). Trustworthiness discusses features like integrity, dignity, believability and honesty of the endorsers in customers' minds. The more trustworthy the endorser is, the more influential the communicated message will be (Waldt et al., 2009). Hence, it is found that credible celebrities guarantee customers that the brands and products they endorse are credible (Apejoye, 2013). Thus, an endorser trusted and liked by others will automatically lead to liking and trust the brand or product endorsed by them (Waldt et al., 2009; Lou and Yuan, 2018).

2.3.3.3. Attractiveness
Another critical factor when evaluating an endorser is source attractiveness. The term source attractiveness describes the unique physical characteristics of a source or endorser that attract the viewer's attention (Martensen et al., 2018). It is defined as "the degree to which a stimulus person's facial features are pleasing to observe" (Wiedmann and Mattenheim, 2020). Another definition by Wei and Li (2013) is "the endorser's appealing nature – such as physical beauty, personality, familiarity and likeability to consumers". Therefore, features such as sex appeal, beauty and figure are usually stressed and highlighted when endorsing a product (Apejoye, 2013). McGuire (1969) added source attractiveness as a component of the source credibility theory. Some studies discuss the source attractiveness model as a separate model, as McGuire introduced in 1985. However, most previous studies, especially in the endorsement field and social media study field, use the source credibility model that was created with its three dimensions; expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, and therefore will be discussed as a dimension of source credibility in this study as well. To sum up, it is argued that a credible endorser is someone who positively affects consumers' attitudes and perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors.

2.4. Purchase Intention and Social Media Influencers
Purchase intention is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears and Singh, 2004) or "the predisposition to buy a certain brand or product" (Sallam and Wahid, 2012). Previous studies considered purchase intention a factor to help evaluate consumers' attitudes and perceptions towards a product since consumers' attitudes towards a certain product or brand usually affect their purchase intentions (Lou and Yuan, 2018). Furthermore, as previously discussed, social media influencers generally affect customers' purchase intention, showing a good indication of consumers' likeliness to buy specific products, followed by actual purchase behavior by consumers.

3. Proposed Research Framework
As per the previous discussion, the following framework is proposed. The research aims to test the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, taking a sample of Egyptian consumers to see the effect of social Media on their purchase intentions. The model is to be tested using SPSS-AMOS statistical program.
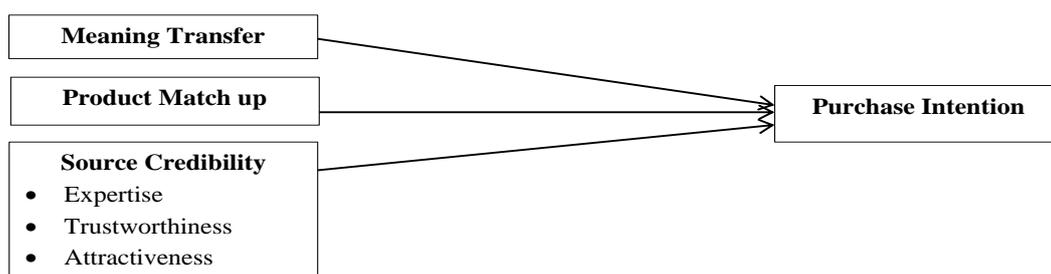

Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework, Source: (Lim et al.,2017)

4. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The research at hand contributes to both the academic and the applied fields. Concerning the educational implications, the study contributes to the literature of social media influencers and their relationship with purchase intention. This is particularly a contribution to the literature concerning Egyptian consumers and their behaviors and attitudes since most past research focused on developed countries, such as Germany, USA, and Malaysia. At the same time, little attention was given to the topic in developing countries. Regarding the applied applications of the study, the research is considered a guide to marketers to help them understand the customers better and successfully merge the social media influencers or celebrities in their marketing plans and strategies. The findings suggest what characteristics and attributes of the social media influencers or celebrities are more impactful and meaningful than others. Thus, marketers can better choose the right endorser and character to represent their product or service and avoid choosing the wrong person that could harm the image of their brands. Furthermore, the research acts as a guideline to companies on how to better make use of social media influencers or celebrities in their advertising campaigns and marketing plan in general, through understanding the suitable characteristics to look for in an endorser to better impact customers and shape their opinions and attitudes more effectively.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Social media in general and social media influencers, in particular, are now a vital part of people's lives worldwide. Companies that do not take advantage of its power and broad reach and engage themselves with its different activities will eventually be left behind and unable to survive with the rise in competition worldwide or even in their narrow context (Altman, 2007). Therefore, the topic is worth studying in different contexts to investigate the effect of social media influencers on people nowadays and how they can influence their intentions and behaviors.

6. CONCLUSION

Social media has been a topic of interest for so long now, especially in recent times, where its importance has grown dramatically (Pick, 2021). The objective of this paper is to present a review of the past studies concerning social media influencers, their influence on customers' purchase intentions, and the theories related to the topic of interest while applying them in an Egyptian context. The main theory discussed was the source credibility theory by Hovland & Weiss (1951). It was thoroughly discussed in the context of social media influencers as a related factor, along with other variables, namely, meaning transfer and product match-up. Each variable was defined and its dimensions were discussed in detail. This study adopts the same assumptions previously discussed, highlighting the dependency of customers' purchase intentions on the SMI endorser's credibility and its dependence on meaning transfer and product match-up.

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The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: Introduction: Monika Fayez; literature review: Monika Fayez, Ashraf Labib and Mohamed Abdelazim Abo El-Naga; proposed framework and contribution to knowledge: Monika Fayez; recommendations: Mohamed Abdelazim Abo El-Naga; Conclusion: Ashraf Labib. The first author Monika Fayez reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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