

Is Influencer Marketing Really a Lifesaver?

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, influencer marketing has become one of the key strategies for branding. This essay explores the effectiveness of influencer marketing and its application in different market environments. Through a literature review and case studies, we find that influencer marketing has significant advantages in increasing brand awareness, driving sales and enhancing consumer loyalty. However, its effectiveness depends on a number of factors, including the credibility of the influencer, the engagement of fans, and the fit between the brand and the influencer. Despite the many potential benefits of influencer marketing, brands need to carefully select the right influencers and develop a clear strategy to maximize their ROI. This article summarizes current trends and future research directions in influencer marketing to help companies make better use of this marketing tool.

KEYWORDS

Influencer Marketing; Digital Marketing; Brand Awareness; Social Media; Consumer Behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital and social media-driven marketing environment, influencer marketing is an emerging strategy increasingly valued and adopted by businesses and brands. Influencer marketing works by partnering with individuals in a specific field or with specific social influences and leveraging their influence and reputation to promote a brand, product or service. [1] These individuals typically have many fans or followers on social media platforms and can directly influence their purchasing decisions and behavior. As consumers become increasingly numb to traditional forms of advertising, they are more likely to rely on personal trust and recognition on social media to make purchasing decisions.

The success of influencer marketing depends on several factors: from choosing the right influencers to building authentic and meaningful partnerships, to ensuring that brand values are aligned with influencer content. This thesis aims to explore how influencer marketing is implemented, how its effectiveness is evaluated, and how it affects a brand's marketing strategy in the long run. Through in-depth analyses and case studies, influencer marketing can be very beneficial, but whether or not it can be a "savior" needs to be judged by its importance to achieving specific marketing objectives.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Entering the 21st century, the rapid development of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter have changed the way people access information and interact with each other. Social media is no longer just a social tool but has become an important battleground for brand marketing. Compared with traditional media, content on social media spreads faster, reaches a

wider audience and is more interactive. In this context, individual users began to accumulate a large number of fans by sharing their lives and opinions, gradually developing into influencers.

In the early 2000s, influencer marketing slowly began to emerge. Viral marketing using internet forums and websites before the film's release spread the horror story and captured the audience's curiosity, creating a great deal of attention and box-office success. [2] Without some bloggers marketing the film online to let the audience know about the upcoming release of the film and revealing some eye-catching points, there would have been only a handful of original fans who would have gone to watch the film. It was only through this kind of online marketing that the film became a box office success. At that time, blogs and forums were the main online social platforms, and some bloggers attracted a lot of attention by sharing interesting content or professional knowledge. Brands also began to realize the potential of these bloggers with a large number of followers in their marketing and started to work with them to promote their products.

3. THE MECHANISM OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

Firstly, influencers are classified into Mega-Influencers, Macro-Influencers, Micro-Influencers and Nano-Influencers, according to the number of followers and their influence, and each of them has a different coverage and interaction rate. Mega-Influencers have a wide reach but a low interaction rate, while Micro and Nano-Influencers are more suitable for precision marketing due to their close relationship with their fans and higher interaction rate despite their limited reach. Second, different social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, etc.) are suitable for different types of influencers and content forms, and each of these platforms has its own unique audience and communication characteristics. Brands often use strategies such as sponsored content, affiliate marketing and brand ambassadorships to work with influencers and measure and optimize the effectiveness of influencer marketing through social media analytics tools and influencer evaluation platforms (e.g. Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Influencer. co, Traackr, etc.). When influencer explicitly discloses sponsorship in social media posts, consumers are more likely to recognize the content as advertising and adjust their attitudes and behavior accordingly. [3] This transparency helps to improve consumers' persuasive knowledge, which enhances their critical perceptions of advertisements and, in turn, influences their electronic word-of-mouth behaviors. Although sponsorship disclosure may reduce consumers' immediate goodwill towards a brand, it can increase the credibility of the brand and the authenticity of the influencer, which in the long run helps to build a stronger brand-consumer relationship.

4. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISM

While influencer marketing has many advantages, it also faces many challenges and criticisms. Firstly, the issue of authenticity is a major challenge for influencer marketing. Many influencers inflate their popularity by purchasing fake followers and fake interactions to deceive brands and consumers, reducing the overall credibility of influencer marketing. In addition, many influencers fail to clearly label their products as advertisements when promoting them, leading to transparency and integrity issues that trigger consumer distrust. Secondly, market saturation and consumer fatigue are also challenges for influencer marketing. As more and more brands enter the influencer marketing space, consumers are faced with too much-sponsored content, leading to advert fatigue and resistance. This requires brands to be more invested in creativity and content to avoid being drowned in the plethora of sponsored content. At the same time, frequent commercial promotions have caused consumers' interest in influencer content to wane. Brands and influencer stars need to balance commercial promotions and content creation to maintain the diversity and authenticity of content. Finally, measuring the success of influencer marketing is also a major challenge. Brands are often faced with the challenge of accurately assessing their reach, and commonly used metrics such as likes, comments,

shares and click-through rates, while providing some data, do not fully reflect the actual effectiveness of marketing campaigns. In addition, brands need to consider the long-term impact of influencers on brand awareness, consumer sentiment and purchasing decisions, and need to consider the balance between short-term gains and long-term brand building. By recounting personal experiences and stories, online celebrities create an emotional connection with their audience, thus enhancing the credibility and appeal of the brand. Online communities provide an interactive platform that allows consumers to share and discuss these narratives, thus further extending the brand's reach. [4] Kozinets et al. (2010) used a qualitative research methodology to analyze in-depth online narratives and word-of-mouth communication in online communities. By telling authentic and engaging stories in online communities, brands can be more effective in word-of-mouth marketing. However, brands need to be mindful of authenticity and transparency when implementing this strategy, otherwise they may be challenged and offended by consumers. Second, qualitative research methods are highly interpretive of results but lack extensive quantitative data support, which may limit the generalisability of the research. Finally, with the rapid development of social media and technology, some of the findings in the study may need to be reassessed and updated to suit the new marketing environment.

5. CASE STUDIES AND REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

The effectiveness of influencer marketing varies across brands and industries, and the factors that contribute to its successes and failures can be seen more clearly through the analysis of specific case studies.

5.1. Successful Influencer Marketing Campaign

(1) Daniel Wellington is a Swedish watch brand that was previously a virtually unknown brand that grew into a globally recognized fashion watch brand by partnering with internet celebrities. The company gave away watches to internet celebrities and asked them to share photos of them wearing the watches on social media, and the celebrities incentivized their fans to buy them by offering exclusive discount codes in promotional posts. That's how the company quickly grew from millions of dollars in annual sales to hundreds of millions of dollars, with more than 5 million Instagram followers and a significant presence in the fashion watch market. [5]

(2) Fenty Beauty, the beauty brand founded by Rihanna, emphasizes that its products are suitable for all skin tones, launching 40 shades of foundation and promoting its products through beauty bloggers and internet celebrities on YouTube and Instagram, encouraging users to share photos and videos of them using the products and tagging them with the brand. [6] The strategy of using social media platforms for precision advertising and expanding the brand's reach has resulted in Fenty Beauty having more than 10 million Instagram followers, and the brand becoming one of the largest beauty brands in the U.S., leading the way in terms of diversity and inclusivity with more than \$500 million in sales in the year following its launch.

(3) Glossier is already a well-known brand, but its successful start can serve as an example of how a small brand can succeed through influencer marketing. [7] The brand partnered with beauty bloggers and influencers on Instagram and YouTube to promote its cosmetic and skincare products, built an active brand community on social media, partnered with influencers to share beauty and skincare tips, and interacted with its fans through the platform to share development and brand stories. [8] The brand has achieved hundreds of millions of dollars in annual sales growth in a few years, with over 3 million Instagram followers, and has grown from a startup to a globally recognized beauty brand.

5.2. Failed Influencer Marketing Campaign

(1) Fiat cooperated with some web celebrities to try to raise the brand's awareness among young consumers through their influence. However, some of the influencers that the brand sought out did

not match the brand's target audience, resulting in poor promotional results; these influencers promoted raw and unnatural content that did not appeal to the audience. The result of the company's influencer marketing was that the adverts failed to significantly increase brand awareness and sales, but instead hurt the brand.

(2) BooTea, a healthy tea brand, worked with internet celebrity Scott Disick to promote its products on Instagram. When posting the promotion, Scott Disick accidentally posted the full promotional instructions given to it by the brand, exposing the commercial nature of the advert. Consumers found that the promotional content was an exact copy of the copy provided by the brand, leading to questions about the authenticity of the promotion. [9] The influencer's mistake damaged the brand's image leading to the brand being perceived as faking the consumer experience losing the trust of some consumers and the advert failing to significantly boost sales instead triggering negative comments and criticism.

Firstly, brands must ensure that their fan base is highly compatible with the target audience when choosing a partner influencer, otherwise it may lead to poor or even counterproductive marketing results. Secondly, the content of the cooperation needs to be consistent with the style and brand image of the influencer to ensure the authenticity and attractiveness of the message delivered. Lastly, brands need to use data analytics tools to carry out pre-survey and post-survey to make timely adjustments to their strategies and optimize resource allocation to ensure the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns and return on investment.

6. FUTURE

As consumer demand for authenticity and personalized content increases, micro-influencers and nano-influencers will play an increasingly important role in influencer marketing. Compared to mega-influencers, these niche influencers have a stronger connection with their fans, with higher interaction rates and trust. Brands will make more use of these influencers for precision marketing to reach specific segments and build deeper customer relationships. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics will further revolutionize influencer marketing. AI can help brands identify the most suitable influencer and develop personalized marketing strategies based on audience data and behavioral patterns. In addition, through data analytics tools, brands will be able to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns in real-time, optimize content and placement strategies, and improve return on investment (ROI). As the younger generation becomes a major consumer group, brands need to focus more on emotional connection and value alignment with consumers. The future of influencer marketing will go beyond product promotion and involve more brand storytelling and social responsibility. For example, issues such as environmental protection, sustainability and social justice will become an important part of influencer content, helping brands to win consumer recognition and loyalty.

7. CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing, a modern digital marketing strategy, has demonstrated significant advantages in raising brand awareness, engaging target audiences and driving product sales. By partnering with influencers with high influence and a loyal fan base, brands can effectively deliver their messages and build an emotional connection with consumers. However, influencer marketing also faces a number of challenges, including authenticity issues, market saturation, and the difficulty of measuring success. Nonetheless, the future of influencer marketing is full of potential. The rise of micro- and nano-influencers, the use of AI and big data, the convergence of emerging technologies, and changes in consumer preferences will drive influencer marketing to continue to grow and evolve. Brands need to keep up with these trends and optimize their strategies by selecting influencers that are highly

compatible with their values and target audience for collaboration while focusing on creativity and authenticity of content.

Through scientific analysis and strict management, brands can succeed in this challenging but opportunistic field. To sum up, although influencer marketing is not a 'lifesaver', under the right strategy and execution, it is undoubtedly a powerful marketing tool that can bring significant business value and competitive advantage to brands.

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