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The Impact of Influencer Marketing as a New Strategy for Brands[1]

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Abstract: In today's business world, brands are related to more than the goods or services they represent. Thus, they could signify a social status, a consumerist lifestyle, or a level of perceived quality. Moreover, the main research objective addressed by this thesis is to know if the intentions of customers to make purchases from companies that use influence marketing are positively influenced by influencers. In Turkey, convenience sampling was used to examine a survey of 300 respondents. In addition, the data collected was then subjected to a quantitative analysis. The examination of the study's results reveals that presentations of ideas and products have a favorable impact on customer behavior. Consumers are affected by the negative and positive influencers' activities.

Keyword: Influencer Marketing, Social Media Influencers, Brands, Consumer Decision

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing is a type of promotion that relies on opinion leaders to promote a novel good or concept (Kirsten, 2022). These influencers could be well-known individuals or trustworthy information providers. Influencer marketing focuses marketing efforts around individuals or websites that have the power to influence consumers. Influencers may adopt a false identity to publish content that reads like a recommendation by impersonating other people or potential clients. Both supply chain participants and value-added influencers (journalists, academics, industry analysts, business advisors, etc.) include retailers, distributors, manufacturers, and other third parties. The objective of an influencer is to express their opinions to a brand so that their audience would be affected by goods and services that may affect them. The influencer has created a community of devoted followers around a particular topic, which may or may not be quite specific. As a result, it can target a segment of customers who are becoming more difficult for

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companies to reach. The influencer obtains a brand advantages (free product or cash), but in order to protect themselves from accusations of deceptive business practices, they must be transparent about it. Influence marketing must therefore go by strict legal and ethical guidelines on transparency, such as those established by the body responsible for the regulation of advertising (Geyser, 2023).

2. Literatute Review

2.1. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a type of marketing approach that enlists the support of influential people or decision-makers to improve consumer brand identification and/or purchasing behavior (Hayes, 2008). Influencers must possess certain qualities in order to get brands and advertisers to beware to them. Brands can choose more influential people at reasonable costs as opposed to the high fees spent to sign one or more celebrities (Hall, 2015). Because of this, online influencers typically show that they may succeed by concentrating on specific topics. Customers are more inclined to accept, influence, or trust influencers when they deal with companies that are related to their personal areas of skills, according to this theory (Hall, 2015). 94 percent of advertisers have utilized effective marketing methods, according to a recent survey on social media trends (Ahmad, 2018). Researchers have found users are frequently viewed as ordinary individuals who transmit e-WOM (electronic Word of Mouth) which is more trustworthy than brand advertising (Marijke, Cauberghe, & Liselot, 2017). Classical communications are therefore no longer as effective as it once was. Influencers contribute to strong supporter morale since they are viewed as role models by their audiences (Duncan & Hayes, 2008). As a result, some academics contend that social media marketing efforts can leverage online advertising (Norman, 2011) (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Based to other studies, leveraging social media influencers like bloggers and celebrities also significantly increases purposeful purchase and branding. The ability to find influencers who work with a business' social media strategy enables consumer devotion to obvious outcomes and favorably influences a favorable perception of the brand (Booth, 2011). (Kulmala, Mesiranta, & Tuominen, 2013) are other references. Frequently stress how crucial it is for a blogger or influencer's personal style to align with the business because, otherwise, the advertisements won't come out as reliable and genuine. To develop relevant marketing material for influencer marketing, a firm must comprehend what draws in the general public.

2.2. Social Media Influencers

Academics and business experts are very interested in social media influencers because of their potential as a tool for brand promotion. SMIs have substantially impacted how social media marketing looks (Cheung, Leung, Eugene, & Koay, 2022) .Since influencers require the visibility that these platforms offer to become well-known and since these platforms draw at least some of

their appeal from the content that influencers share there, social media and influencer marketing are intimately interwoven (Haenlein, et al., 2020).

In addition, third-party endorsers who utilize blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms to sway the attitudes of people who follow them are known as social media influencers. (Freberg, 2011). Social media influencers generate material supporting brands on websites like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook in an effort to build a following and obtain marketplace exposure. According to the Freberg report, social media influencers' performance is crucial for marketers, thus research has been done to find and monitor influencers who are relevant to a company or a specific person. Influencers construct their online personas and reputation differently than traditional celebrities since they produce content for social media sites. On the other hand, traditional celebrities are known through conventional means and interact with their fans mostly through social media (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Influencers on social media help brands by promoting them through their personal lives, which makes them more approachable to the typical consumer. According to Ledbetter (LedBetter, 2017), "when one person attempts to persuade another to take certain actions, a mechanism emerges that can alter the course and substance of their relationship." Because of their candor and transparency with customers, brands have a huge impact on the whole relationship between them and their customers. Influencers are well-known because of their great media impact and trustworthiness (Burgess, 2016). Whereas conventional marketing is mostly focused on mass audiences, influencers will concentrate on niche targets that have been previously unachievable (LedBetter, 2017).

2.3. Brands

For many years, branding has been used to distinguish between the products of one producer and those of another. The fact that there isn't a single accurate definition for the notion of "brand" should be noted. The root of the term brand is the Old Norse verb brand, which literally means "to burn." Indeed, those who own livestock now utilize tags to identify their animals (Keller, 2013). As a result, it is clear that the term "brand" has a variety of connotations. However, it frequently refers to something that sets one producer's goods or services apart from another and offers its clients a certain assurance. Customers receive several unique and important services from brands. A brand, first and foremost, enables a customer to assign responsibility to a product's suppliers and distributors and to immediately identify the source of a good or service. (Keller, 2013) Additionally, brand recognition boosts the credibility of the brand in four different ways: by creating an association with the brand in the consumer's memory, fostering a sense of brand familiarity in

their minds, acting as a symbol of brand confidence, and offering sufficient justification for the consumer for including the brand in their list of considerations (Fraj–Andrés & Elena, 2007).

2.4. Consumer Decision

The availability of social networks substantially aids consumers with a variety of behaviors, interests, habits, opinions, and lifestyles by allowing them to learn about their choices for anything that might be found on social networks (Sutaguna, Sumerli, Razali, & Yusuf, 2023). Many individuals believe that the moment a buyer pays is the most significant one in the sale. But in reality, each stage of the customer decision–making process matters when it comes to how to affect consumer behavior. Businesses must carefully consider each step of the purchasing process if they want to optimize their profits (Millwood, 2021). Each customer makes a distinct choice based on the necessities they have in their everyday lives. Depending on how the consumer feels about a specific product, evaluates and compares, chooses and purchases among the various product categories, these decisions may be complicated. As a result, many businesses and individuals are beginning to share the belief that it is important to comprehend the fundamental problem with the way consumers make decisions and to put ideas into reality (Dudovskiy, 2021). The process of making a purchase involves a customer becoming aware of and identifying their wants, learning about the best ways to satisfy those needs, evaluating a variety of available options, choosing what to buy, and finally reviewing their purchase (Millwood, 2021).

The consumer decision–making process is divided into five stages:

Identification of needs/problems: When a consumer discovers a considerable disparity between his or her existing situation and a desired or ideal scenario, this happens. The concept of "social identification" explains why people nowadays are concerned with how others see them (Solomon, Bamossy, & Askegaard, 2006). As a result, social media content boosts customer expectations.

Detailed information: A customer's quest is the process of searching for relevant information in order to make an informed decision. "Googlization of search" refers to the practice of doing information searches on Google, the first and most frequently used search engine (Solomon, Bamossy, & Askegaard, 2006).

Alternative assessment: Almost everyone nowadays searches for internet reviews, which provide more detailed, accurate, and trustworthy information because the feedback comes from individuals who have really used the options. Customers are thus more likely to consider the advantages of the decision, making it easier to choose the best one to buy.

Purchasing: Buying decisions may be affected more by appealing social media postings and positive customer feedback than by reasoning, a practice known as "spontaneous shopping."

Post-purchase: People may use social media to express their dissatisfaction with a purchase by sending corporate emails, making accounts on social media sites, commenting on open postings, and submitting negative testimonials (Gillin, 2007).

2.4.1. Engel, Kollat and Blackwell Model of Consumer Decision

Engel et al. (1978) developed a model of consumer decision-making. This model is also known as the EKB model. It describes the consumer decision-making process and how decisions are created while choosing from a list of accessible options (Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1978). The model is based on consumer psychology principles and models such as Howard's (1963) theory of buyer behavior and Nicosia's (1976) theory of the consumer decision process (Howard & Sheth, 1969) (Nicosia, 1976). On the other hand, environmental elements are additional variables that influence the EKB Model's formulation of consumer decisions. The EKB model is one of the most prominent consumer behavior studies (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2008).

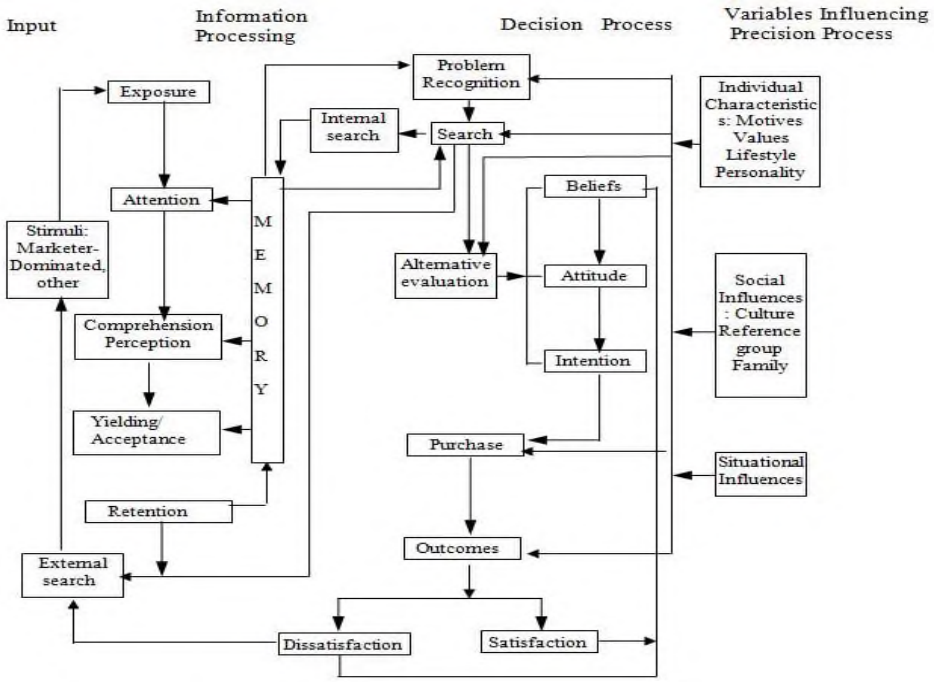

Figure 1. The Engel Kollat Blackwell Model

2.4.2. Howard-Sheth Consumption Model

This model takes into account the consumer's behavior from the moment they notice a stimulus until their acceptance or rejection reaction is reported (Howard & Sheth, 1975); as a result, and by the model's meticulous simplification, Table 1 shows four sets of variables. The input columns –

inputs – and output columns – outputs – are positioned in the two extreme columns. Perceptual and learning creations distinguish the two types. The Howard–Sheth model is based on a comprehensive integrative theory of consumer behavior in which the subject engages in rational choice–making despite restricted information and capacities (Manzuoli, 2005). The buyer behavior notion in the model follows a process in which the customer is motivated by introducing a "new" product.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Howard–Sheth Consumption Model, inspired by Vivar (1991)

Inputs	Constructs		Outputs
Data display:	**Perceptive:**	**Learning:**	Purchase
Significant and symbolic: Quality, Price, Distinction, Service, Availability	Open search	Intention	Intention
	Ambiguity in stimuli	Trust and evocation	Attitude
Social: College classmates, Like-minded friends, Family, Social networks	Attention	Selection criteria	Understanding
	Perceptual bias	Satisfaction	Attention

3. The Analysis of the Impact of Influencer Marketing as a New Strategy for Brands

3.1. Research Methodology

This study's methodology involves conducting an online survey questionnaire of 300 respondents in Turkey utilizing convenience sampling. They were contacted initially, using this way between March and June 2023, and after that, a quantitative methodology was used to analyze the information acquired. The frequency distributions pertaining to the sociodemographic and social media usage traits of the participants served as the starting point for the study reporting. The scale judgements' detailed descriptive statistics were computed. For each of the five categories on the Likert scale, percentage responses were computed independently, and the results were analyzed. The relevant tests were run for this purpose using the SPSS 26 program. The data was used to test hypotheses, and the findings were interpreted.

3.2. Hypotheses

H1: Influencers effect on consumer's opinion on brands.

H2: Influencers effect on brand awareness and perception.

H3: Influencers provide knowledge about new products.

H4: Positive social media influencers effect on consumers buying decision.

H5: Negative social media influencers effect on consumers buying decision.

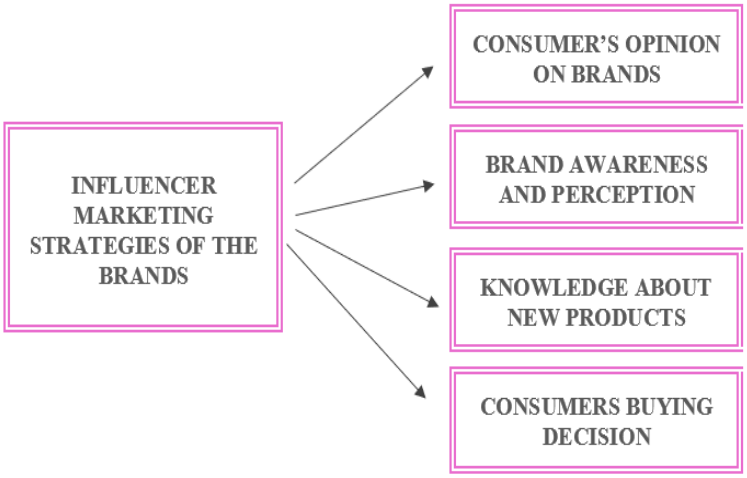

Figure 2. Research model

3.3. Findings

Details about survey respondents were looked into. 69% of customers are between the ages of 21 and 30, 15% are between the ages of 15 and 24, and 13% are between the ages of 31 and 40. Only 3% of the population is between the ages of 41 and 50. A graduate degree is held by more than half of the customers (57%). Of them, 13% have high school graduates. 7% of graduates earned a Ph.D. They make up 23% of undergraduates. Participants' occupations, or working lives, were inquired about. 54.7% of them, it was determined, were students. 25% of people work. It is evident that 8.3% of them work independently, 6.6% work as employees in an establishment, and 5.7% are housewives.

Additionally, we examined user statistics from social media. Instagram is the most popular social media network among users. Of the 300 participants, 76% are Instagram users, 17% are Tiktok users, and 7% are Facebook users. People were questioned about their use of Instagram. 48 individuals chose not to answer, while 252 people did. The Instagram app is actively used by 84% of participants. The findings show that the majority of respondents do follow influencers. 89 percent—267—of the 300 participants follow influencers. Therefore, the majority of responders represent a considerable force that will help to boost online word-of-mouth advertising. Whether a product recommended by an influencer may sway participants' purchase decisions was the question. The study found that 67% of customers' shopping decisions are influenced by influencers. The percentage of purchases is 64%. 192 out of 300 consumers purchase a product that influencers have endorsed.

To analyze the impact of influencer marketing on consumers, a Likert Scale was utilized. On a scale of "1–Totally disagree, 2–Disagree, 3–Neutral, 4–Agree, 5–Totally agree," consumers were asked to rate their opinions. The averages of the results were used to generate some concepts. The following details are explained.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Scale Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I do get attracted by a product / Brand which is endorsed by an influencer	3,19	1,322
2. I do think that ads having influencers on social media are more effective than those which don't have?	3,41	1,317
3. I would switch from my regular product which will be endorsed by my favorite influencer or celebrity	3,14	1,398
4. The presence of an influencer helps me in recognizing a brand	3,43	1,331
5. Claims made in advertisements by influencers are reliable	3,24	1,284
6. Influencers also use products they endorse	3,29	1,311
7. If my influencer recommends a brand /product on 1 I am more likely to try it	3,36	1,297
8. If an influencer I disliked would be endorsing a brand I often purchase, this changes my consumer interests	3,04	1,427
9. I find product endorsed by influencer is interesting	3,37	1,243
10. Influencers help me more to remember a brand/ products	3,56	1,288
11. My favorite influencers give a positive image to the endorsed brand	3,52	1,273
12. Negative publicity about an influencer's endorser can influence my decision of buying a brand	3,27	1,300
13. I will stop buying a brand if my favorite influencer or celebrity endorsing it gets involved in scandal	3,18	1,411
14. I think influencer's endorsement is an important factor when I made my decision	3,25	1,357
15. Influencers are important for marketing on social media	3,68	1,231
Sample (n): 300		

The judgements with the highest participation rates had the highest averages. All of the figures in the table are higher than 3.00, as can be observed by looking at it. In these judgements, people tend to lean toward the 'undecided' choice. The power of social media and the effect of influencers

on consumer notions are generally believed to exist. Following are the decisions with an average of 3.5 or above.

3.3.1. Reliablity Analysis Test Meaning and Results

3.3.1.1. Reliability

The study's reliability assesses its correctness and dependability, as well as the possibility that the same results would be obtained if the analysis were repeated (Collis & Hussey, 2014). As a result, quantitative research tactics are more usually associated with dependability than qualitative research procedures (Golafshani, 2003) (Bell, 2019). A survey was done in conjunction with this study, and the results should be more trustworthy than those of qualitative studies. However, it is likely that each respondent viewed the scale differently. The theory's credibility may be jeopardized since "agree absolutely" might mean various things to different people.

3.3.1.2. Reliability Results

The table below interprets the results of the reliability analysis performed on all questions connected to the 15-item scale.

SPSS was used to test the scale's reliability. The Cronbach Alpha was used to assess reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency of the items, is used to explain or challenge the scale's homogenous structure. It is assumed that the items in the scale with a high Cronbach's alpha coefficient measure the same trait and are consistent with one another.

Table 3. Reliability statistics

Scale	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Scale for Social Media Research	0,836	0,865	15

When the Cronbach alpha values in the table are evaluated, all of them are more than 0.850. In this scenario, the dimensions acquired are appropriate for study and have a high level of dependability.

The following is an evaluation of the aforementioned alpha coefficient: O. S. K. A. R. Larsson (2015). Lund University lecture notes on reliability analysis.)

- Between 0–0.4 is not reliable.
- 0.4–0.6 low reliability.
- 0.6–0.8 quite reliable.
- 0.8–1.0 high reliability.

As shown in the table, the test's reliability values are greater than 0.80, suggesting that it is very trustworthy for our research.

3.3.2. Hypothesis Results and Interpretation

H1: Influencers effect on consumers' opinion on brands.

When the ratios, averages, or percentages of customer replies are analyzed, this notion is supported. The percentage of persons who concur with the following claims is between 50 and 55 percent. Additionally, the fact that people who aren't sure about something are thinking about it also suggests that influencers have an impact on them. This is a crucial element as well.

H2: Influencers has effect on brand awareness and perception.

Consumers have been encouraged to consider the effect of influencers on brand awareness and perception. Consumers believe that influencers have an impact on them. Influencers are trusted by consumers to identify a business and the promises that are made in its marketing. Additionally, they believe that they actually utilize the things they promote. About 55% of the replies were positive, which is consistent with the premise.

H3: Influencers provide knowledge about new products.

It is obvious that customers value influencer marketing. They responded favorably when asked whether they had learnt about new companies and goods. It is clear that the hypothesis is supported since they agree with the following judgements in about 55% of cases.

H4: Positive social media influencers effect on consumers buying decision.

The evaluations relating to purchasing intentions often garnered a 50% favorable response. Additionally, consumers were questioned whether a product supported by influencers might sway their decision to make a purchase at the outset. According to research, 67% of customers' shopping decisions are influenced by influencers. As a result, 67% of people's purchase intentions are influenced by influencer marketing practices. Even an influencer's backing of an unpopular company may change customers' perceptions of that subject, both positively and negatively.

H5: Negative social media influencers effect on consumers buying decision.

Positive consumer impact comes from ideas and product displays. Consumers are affected by the negative influencers' activities. Purchase decisions are adversely impacted by unfavorable product marketing. A well-liked influencer's involvement in a disastrous event or controversy has a detrimental impact on consumers' purchase decisions. In general, purchase decisions are heavily influenced by external factors (50%-58%).

Table 4. Summary of the hypothesis testing reults

Hypothesis	Present Research Results
Hypothesis 1: Influencers effect on consumer's opinion on brands.	**Supported**
Hypothesis 2: Influencers has effect on brand awareness and perception.	**Supported**
Hypothesis 3: Influencers provide knowledge about new products.	**Supported**
Hypothesis 4: Positive social media influencers effect on consumers buying decision.	**Supported**
Hypothesis 5: Negative social media influencers effect on consumers buying decision.	**Supported**

4. Conclusion

Based on the quantitative examination of customers' opinions about influencers, it can be said that these individuals aid in keeping brands in consumers' minds and drawing people to the company. The findings show that consumers think influencer marketing is fascinating and helpful for understanding the items. This study's findings suggest that customers are adjusting their opinions of certain items or businesses when the influencer has a dubious reputation or has been implicated in a crisis. The majority of customers, according to the analysis of consumer attitudes, are impacted by influencers in this regard because they perceive that companies are connected to the event or controversy.

This thesis investigates influencer marketing as a new strategic social media marketing technique that promotes new goods through word of mouth and contacts people through social media via influencers. The purpose of this study is to discover whether influencer marketing has the ability to impact customer behavior regarding branding and whether it influences brand image (awareness and perception) from the consumers' perspective.

The findings imply that influencer marketing, particularly when the influencers are involved in a controversy or have a negative reputation, has an impact on the business. Normally, the customer believes that the major issue is the influencer, not the brand; and this incident may occur after the brand has been promoted. Because of this circumstance, the firm will cancel the arrangement and replace the influencer. When reviewing the data, customers are fascinated and drawn by influencers that promote items in conjunction with companies.

The inability to perceive the larger picture in this issue was a hindrance encountered throughout the research phase of this thesis. We were unable to collect qualitative information through interviews with businesses and marketing influencers. The reason for this restriction is that some answers from brands and influencers were required, but they did not respond to emails sent to them or messages left for them on Instagram. In this instance, even the agencies did not respond, so the necessary information could not be gathered. Social media marketing is not a recent development, but it is constantly evolving. With the changes on the consumer side, there are several journals and papers on this subject, but relatively few ties to social media. The study is provided in an all-encompassing way.

To increase the degree of concentration of the study, objectives can be reduced, and the research only contains information on what has to be researched in light of the objectives.

As this study is expected to be impacted by the continual development of technology and social media platforms, further research might be undertaken by conducting direct interviews with influencers. Another intriguing area for future research may be the varied levels of customer interaction on social media.

Influencer marketing has been practiced since the Middle Ages, with fictional characters, celebrities in TV ads, radio stations, reality programs, and social media platforms, among other things. It gathers both acclaim and criticism. Many influencers have come under scrutiny during the COVID-19 epidemic for their lack of self-awareness and understanding of their advantages. While there is much discussion about influencer marketing, its effects on audiences, and what it stands for, it does not appear to be gaining traction. If customers are learning more about influencers, I recommend exploring influencer marketing throughout the COVID-19 time. If the marketing of influencers suffers as a result of the crisis? What are the Covid-19 wave's negative and positive property influencers doing? Has the popularity of social media marketing risen in the middle of the present problems caused by Covid-19?

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