

PERSONAL BRANDING ON INSTAGRAM: THE EFFECT OF INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract: In an era of digitalization and fast growing technologies, the place of social media became important in our daily life. Some individuals are trying with an active participation to have their own role and identity in order to influence a specific audience and shape its needs and motives using the personal branding. This phenomenon is a planned process by which individuals are making efforts in marketing themselves to be distinctively different from the mob and make themselves successful personally and/ or professionally. Instagram is one of the most used online platforms nowadays, it is a fast growing social network that is offering a large choice and a fruitful opportunity for the influencers to promote themselves in order to target the consumers and possibly act on their behavior.

The present thesis research is undertaken to study the impact of the influencers on Instagram on the consumer decision making process. With a quantitative study, the data gathered using a survey method, was analyzed via SPSS software according to the conceptual framework proposed and the hypotheses were tested with the regression analysis complementarily with Kruskal-Wallis H test. The findings ensure a significant relationship between Instagram Influencers and the decision making process for the consumer. Additionally, the impact of those influencers differs according to some demographic criteria like gender, age and employment status but does not present any significant difference when it comes to the family income.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Social Media; Influencer, Consumer behaviour, Consumer Decision Making Process.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Social Media took a huge position in our life. Companies, organizations even brands tend to be daily active on the Social Media Networks using their account activities and announces as a key marketing tool in order to target and inter-connect with their audiences. Among the platforms used, Instagram is getting more than 800 million subscriptions that grow rapidly. It becomes the most attractive platform where new trends of social media influencers (SMIs) or celebrities have emerged.

Social media influencers are known as trustable individuals on the network because they developed their personal branding strategies by asserting themselves and getting loose from the crowd. Nowadays, Consumers rely more than ever on the reviews or recommendations from the Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and their perception and decision-making process became shaped by an amalgam of all those factors. This research will be focusing on the personal branding on Instagram as a platform for study, and the consumer's behaviour and responsiveness to the online influencers. It attempts to study how social media influencers (SMIs) impact the decision making of the consumer, taking Instagram case as a popular fast growing online platform. It will also put the light on the personal branding as a key marketing tool used by influencers. The importance of this study is to be able to answers to the following questions:

- What makes an individual as an influencer?
- Instagram influencers have they any impact on the decision making process of the consumers?
- The impact of those influencers, does it differ according to any demographic criteria?
- At which level or levels of the process of decision making can the consumer be more influenceble?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

A. Personal branding

The notion of personal branding is a concept by which people are marketed as brands, they create then, notoriety between them and the people around that may lead to many opportunities in life. It is the process by which individuals crop up out of the mob and get personal or / and professional success (Labrecque, Markos and Milne 2011, Karaduman, 2013, Khedher, 2015).

Many academics and researchers followed the Shepherd's personal branding process based on a multidisciplinary perspective (Shepherd 2005) among them, Khedher (2015) states that Personal branding process covers phases that coincide in number with the Arruda (2005) conceptualization but differ in concept. Khedher implies that the process is following three phases that are personal brand identity, personal brand positioning and Personal brand assessment (Khedher, 2015) and explains :

- Personal brand identity: This first stage is regarding a development of an inventory about the attributes, motivations, and other characteristics and beliefs that make individuals self-designate their own person in a specific aspect (Khedher 2015); It's a self-auditing that should take in consideration a full knowledge of the target market or audience and also its rivals.
- Personal Brand positioning: This second step refers to a development of an online and offline marketing communication strategy that individuals use to focus on their characteristics and attributes toward specific target markets or / and audience, those attributes are also the ones considered as values that make them stand out from the crowd and distinguish them from the mob.
- Personal Brand Image Assessment: in this last step Khedher is stating that as a normal brand, personal branding is created to satisfy the market, accordingly, the market feedback is important as a sort of recognition of the brand itself and how it is perceived. He is adopting Schön's theory of reflexivity of 1983 (Khedher, 2015), he states that a success of a personal branding process is about referring to both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action theories which stipulate consecutively a reflection during the process (experimentations...) and a reflection related to what was done in the past. This last step in the process is considered also as a first step since it's a repetitive cycle.

B. Personal branding on social media and Instagram

Internet has been developed into a social media growing spaces (Chen, 2013; O'reilly, 2005). The key change that the technological development brought to the Internet is that the new versions of the web such as Web 2.0 and beyond are clearly more interactive, while the first version of the Internet (web 1.0) was about websites that users can check in a passive way and where the information had a one-sided transmission from the websites to the user. Social media can be defined according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as " a group of internet-based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of the web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Moreover, Social media has not only offered individuals the possibility to connect and interact efficiently without boundaries but also gave the opportunity to them to create their own image online through their profiles where they can present themselves to their audiences and by this, creating their own personal brand identity (Labercque, Markos and Milne, 2011).

In other words, in such digital world where we are living, most of individuals are trying to step out of the mob and show themselves to the global audiences guided by a motivation to create their personal identity using online social networks that support clearly the growth of personal branding concept (Khedher, 2015 and Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

From this perspective, Instagram is a visual-based growing online social network with more than 800 million subscribers nowadays (Instagram, 2018). It takes its popularity from the fact that it focuses more on image and short video sharing with some features such as filters or tag where people can join different related words or expressions to their shared media in order to define them and help to the fast transmission of the content. This platform was launched in October, 2010 and gained according to the Pew research Center a significant popularity in 2014 involving mostly all essential demographic groups.

C. Social Media and Marketing of influencers

As discussed previously, the growth of the social media diversified the brands' approach (including personal brands) towards consumers; those brands direct a communication marketing messages effectively and globally. Abidin (2016), states that nowadays, consumers are in contact with enormous quantities of online information that are updated and growing fast and instantly; Meanwhile, other researchers highlight the impact that those information may have on the consumer's decisions and behaviours since the social media platforms has offered the users new ways of communications between each other and new opportunities for sharing their experiences about the conceived content. Social media has made marketers aware of the importance of the online advertising using the multiple platforms and the possibility of affecting the users' reactivity and attitude towards that, to this is added also the appearance and increase of the e-commerce's use making the online purchasing increasing significantly in a world that is becoming more and more digital (Bourlakis, Fox and Papagiannidis, 2008).

The idea that consumers and social media platforms users can communicate voice their opinions about a good or a service has facilitated them the enhancement of their purchasing decisions and follow the groups reviews; Nonetheless, there are some groups of people that tend to be more influencing than any others, those individuals that have special characteristics that make them followed by other users, they are labelled and known as social media influencers (Burgess, 2017).

Different definitions can be found for the influencer marketing in the literature, while Wong (2014) states that marketing of influencer is the marketing where activities and efforts are combined in order to create and identify the link and liaison with those people detaining abilities for influencing prospective consumers. Keller and Berry (2013) define it as an approach concentrated on using strategic public opinion rulers to enable the message of the brand to reach a considerable group of audience.

On another perspective, the marketing of influencers is seen by Woods (2016) as marketing where large groups of consumers and people are getting induced efficiently by a smaller number of individuals called influencers. A sort of group compared to a niche according to (Marwick, 2013). They are one form of micro celebrity; They can be journalists, bloggers, experts, celebrities, public figures or politicians etc ... or even ordinary individuals with a social appeal and an attractive personal brand marketing; they all have people following them through the online platforms where they post and share their personal lives including in some cases, an incidental but paid advertisement for a good or service (Woods 2016). While some influencers prefer be concentrated on one or two social media platforms, others see themselves engaged in a more global vision targeting the followers on many networks and platforms simultaneously taking names such Tweeters for Tweeter, YouTubers for Youtube or Instagrammers in relation with Instagram (Abidin, 2016); It should be noted that Instagram has taken and still, an increasing consideration in the brands' marketing of influencers lately as due to its ease of use and the connection individuals may feel with the Social Media Influencers across identification and a visual based content (Bevins, 2014).

Woods (2016), continues and states that the marketing of influencers is originated due to the ineptitude of advertising on social networks like Facebook or Instagram. Later, thanks to relentless technology and social media growth, this downside changes and got improved to make the advertisement possible nowadays on all the existing platforms. Nevertheless, For Karp (2016), although this advertising is now an option and it is possible, organizations and marketers are still invoking the Social Media Influencers or SMIs due to the reputation they created; Karp (2016) follows and affirms that the endorsements of the Social Media Influencers as earned and not paid since they the SMIs are categorized as trustful and convincing sources to consumers. However all the Social Media influencers see their ability to influence the followers emerges thanks to some factors and also some features that characterize them such as: Authenticity and truthfulness; Content; Trustworthiness and Credibility and Attractiveness.

D. Consumer Decision Making process

While talking about the consumer decision making process models in the literature, multiple results can be found in different varieties, all of them have been developed in order to enlarge the understanding of the process through what the consumer is passing to make his decision regarding a good or service (Bruner and Pomazal, 1988). A decision making is a study by which alternatives are identified or chosen regarding the decision maker's values and preferences; Even though, some of the models may describe multiple stages that vary in complexity from one to another, many researchers state that all models are exposing common steps consisting in five major phases that are respectively (Kotler *et al.*) :

- Need Recognition
- Information Search
- Evaluation of alternatives
- Purchasing
- Post-purchasing behaviour

In the same optic, the outcome step of the process is a decisive phase which can judge the repurchasing of the product or the evaluation of its features; as a matter of fact, the degree of satisfaction the individual can get from the product translated in the minimal divergence between the consumer expectations and the products' results and features; in a case where the performances of the products are matching and even higher than the expectations of his expectations, the consumer will see himself satisfied and even highly pleased, for the opposite case, if the results are below the expectations, the consumer will be non-satisfied and negatively affected from the gap that the products' performance are causing. (Mitchell and Boustani, 1994)

E. Hypotheses development

This research is studying the impact of the influencers on the consumer's decision making process while taking Instagram as a specific social media platform for those influencers. Since the decision making process is including many phases, this study will cover the steps. The 8 hypothesis that have been defined are as following:

- H₁: There is a significant relationship between Instagram Influencers' effect and consumer's gender
- H₂: There is a significant relationship between Instagram Influencers' effect and consumer's age
- H₃: There is a significant relationship between Instagram Influencers' effect and consumer's employment status
- H₄: There is a significant relationship between Instagram Influencers' effect and consumer's family income
- H₅: Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the revelation of the need of recognition of the consumers
- H₆: Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's information search
- H₇: Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's evaluation of alternatives
- H₈: Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's purchasing behaviour or choice

III. METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

A. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of the influencers on the consumer's decision making process while taking Instagram as a specific social media platform for those influencers, in addition to this also if this influence differs according to their age, gender, employment status and family income.

B. Methodology and results' findings

A sample of 400 international students in turkey replied to the survey regarding this research, such number was calculated according to Slovin's formula and using 150 000 (Anadolu, 2019), students as the population size. Only 284 participants answers were taking in consideration for the analysis due to the fact that the rest of the respondents affirmed in their

answer regarding if they are using Instagram or not that they do not have any or did not follow any influencer on this social media platform.

Data collection was made using a questionnaire of 25 questions based on the questions used by Elshan, M, (2017) and Mwaisaka, F. W. (2017); the first part was regarding the four demographic questions about the age of the participants, their gender, their employment status and family income. The second part of the questions was regarding the Instagram usage. The last two parts are a Likert scale questions focusing on Instagram Influencers and the consumer decision making process. The questionnaire was spread online targeting the international students in Turkey using some social media platform and also emails. Collected data was analysed using the SPSS program 25 and 21 versions.

The analysis as mentioned previously was having a quantitative aspect. The SPSS program with two of his versions was used for the statistical analysis regarding the data and the hypothesis testing. The techniques used are :

- Reliability Cronbach's Alpha reliability test
- Frequencies, Descriptive and Crosstabs for conducting Descriptive Statistics
- Kruskal Wallis Test for comparing means which have the non-parametric data
- Multiple response analysis for the question respondents has the opportunity to choose more than one answer.
- Linear regression analysis with a significance criterion of 0.05 to test the hypothesis regarding the decision making process steps.

The results according to the hypothesis elaborated are presented as a summary in the following table:

Table I: Tables of Hypotheses' Testing Results

| Hypothesis | Result |
|------------|--|
| 1 | The effect of Instagram Influencers differs according to the gender |
| 2 | The effect of Instagram Influencers differs according to the age |
| 3 | The effect of Instagram Influencers differs according to the employment status |
| 4 | The effect of Instagram Influencers does not differ according to the family income |
| 5 | Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the revelation of the need of recognition of the consumers |
| 6 | Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's information search |
| 7 | Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's evaluation of alternatives |
| 8 | Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's purchasing behaviour/choice |

IV. RESULTS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Among the marketing strategies the most used nowadays comes the personal branding. It is a concept that people are using to market themselves similarly to brand in the market and become an influencer. The main aim and objectives of the present research were regarding the study of the effect of Instagram Influencers on the consumer decision making process.

At the beginning of this research a section was dedicated to the literature review regarding the main subtitles of our present topic. A framework was elaborated in order to clarify the target of the analysis and research. It was including two parts, the first one regarding the effect of Instagram Influencers depending on some of the demographical parameters, and the second part was about the impact of the Instagram Influencers on the consumer decision making process phases.

The results of the study showed that, on all the decision making process, a positive effect was noted for the Influencers in Instagram. According to findings only one hypothesis (H_4) was rejected concerning the effect of family income on the impact of Instagram Influencers, this was due to the result of the Kruskal-Wallis H test where $\chi^2 = 10.278$, and $p=0.068$; since $p>0.05$. the other hypotheses were accepted as :

- H_1 : The effect of Instagram Influencers differs according to the gender since $\chi^2 = 16.059$, and $p=0.00$ ($p<0.05$)

- H_2 : The effect of Instagram Influencers differs according to the age since $\chi^2 = 20.250$, and $p=0.00$; because $p<0.05$
- H_3 : The effect of Instagram Influencers differs according to the employment status since $\chi^2 = 16.746$, and $p=0.02$; since $p<0.05$ employment status

Other hypotheses regarding the decision making process were accepted according to the results of the regression analysis as following:

- H_5 : Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the revelation of the need of recognition of the consumers, the regression equation is : $Y = 2.179 + 1.18 X$ Where :

X = Instagram Influencers and Y = Consumer's Revelation of the need of recognition

- H_6 : Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's information search, the regression analysis equation is as following : $Y = 3.198 + 1.114 X$

Where : X = Instagram Influencers and Y = Consumer's information search

- H_7 : Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's evaluation of alternatives, the regression equation is as following : $Y = 2.852 + 1.228 X$

Where : X = Instagram Influencers and Y = Consumer's evaluation of alternatives

- H_8 : Instagram Influencers have a positive impact on the consumer's purchasing behaviour /choice, the regression equation is as following : $Y = 2.302 + 1.162 X$

Where : X = Instagram Influencers and Y = Consumer's choice

Using a multiple response analysis, other findings were tested regarding the categories in which the Instagram Influencers are involved and where the choice of consumers or followers is important. The findings showed that the Travel is in the top of the list with a percentage of with a percentage of 22.6 of total responses and 73.1% of all the cases. In the last levels we note the presence of the Food category with a percentage of 13.4% and a number of 124 responses detected which represents as well 43.4% of the total cases, then comes the DIY category making a percentage of 7.2 since the total responses for this category was about 67 responses that makes 23.4% of the total cases. Finally, the category 'Others' with a percentage of 0.9% of total responses that represents 2.8 of total cases.

The Personal Branding and Influencers on Social Media are becoming one of the most discussed topics that attract the attention of the researchers; therefore, a lack of numbers of articles can be noticed in the social science field targeting this specific theme, mixing the phenomenon of Personal branding and also the influencers. This research highlighted some aspect of the personal branding and the effect of Instagram Influencers on the consumer decision making process using a limited number of respondents but offered a line for further studies in the same field. Future research could focus on other aspects of the concerned topic by choosing other criteria such as the category of Instagram influencers, the activity used or even other social media platforms creating new and diversified variables to study.

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