

An exploratory study to assess the impact of social media influencers on consumer's buying behaviour for online apparel shopping

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically accelerated the growth of Online retail shopping platforms. Moreover, it has introduced the concept of social media marketing and the emergence of Social Media Influencers. This study is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response model of decision-making by Hebb 1950s. The study will analyse the impact of factors arising through content posted by SMIs and their influence on consumers' buying decisions. The study will use Smart PLS to perform factor analysis and assess the relationship between measured variables and latent variables using Structural Equation Modelling.

Subject Classification: D12, D91.

Keywords: Social media influencers, Online retail shopping, Consumer buying behavior, Purchase intention, Educators and learners.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has obligated humans to adapt to new ways of living, such as social distancing norms, work-from-home culture, or online shopping modes. Thus, COVID-19 has led to technological disruption by numerous companies and delivered to the needs during the lockdown period through innovative ideas such as online grocery shopping, medical consultations, online teaching platforms, and online

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fitness training sessions. Moreover, innovative technology is radically transitioning the world instantaneously. Companies are adopting new marketing techniques, forming strategic partnerships, maintaining customer management systems and leveraging global platforms. Eventually, in the new era of social media, every business has adopted the latest marketing trend of social media marketing. Social Media influencers are third-party endorsers businesses hire to target the audience (Khan et. al., 2022). Social Media Influencers are a popular communicating tool to promote the company's product.

The following study is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response decision-making model by Hebb, 1950s which suggests a linear relationship among the three stages, along with environmental and social stimuli acting as external antecedents to the organism. Similarly, the study considers the social media influencer's content as the stimulus which creates different impressions on a viewer (considered as a potential consumer) and leads the viewer to respond to the act of buying decision. Thus, the study will help us ascertain the impact of SMIs on consumers' buying decisions.

Theoretical Framework and hypotheses development

The pivotal keywords based on research papers published from 1996 to 2022 determine variables for the study using Vosviewer software. The literature review determines the study's themes to frame the latent and measured variables using the MAXQDA software.

Role of SMI's to Impact Customer's Buying Decisions

SMIs are digital opinion leaders, as their content and communication on social media platforms influence their audience's attitude towards the sponsored brand (Okono, n.d.). Moreover, companies hire SMIs with higher influencing and appealing capability (Lou, 2022). Marketers should regularly update their brand's social media accounts and optimise their website search engine (Gupta & Syed, 2022).

H1a: Social Media usage creates attention and leads to exposure in the viewer's mind.

H1b: Social Media exposure cause comprehension in the viewer's mind.

H1c: Social Media attention impacts consumers' pre-purchase buying behaviour.

H1d: Social Media exposure impacts consumers' pre-purchase buying behaviour.

H1e: Social Media comprehension impact consumers' pre-purchase buying behaviour.

SMIs are independent third-party endorsers who shape the attitude of their audience through their blogs or tweets (Freberg et. al., 2011). Thus, marketers have recognised their influential ability as an essential aspect of social media marketing (Khan et. al., 2022). SMI's trustworthiness, attractiveness and perceived similarity positively impact the consumer's trust towards the sponsored product (Balaban et. al., 2022). A study shows a strong relationship between trust and satisfaction (Christou, 2010). Additionally, SMIs with more followers and providing precise and clear messages to their followers are considered credible influencers (Castillo et. al., 2022).

H2: Social Media Influencers (SMIs) post content that creates a desire towards the product and influences consumers' buying decisions.

H3: Social Media Influencers (SMIs) post content that creates credibility and trust towards the product and influence Consumer's buying decision.

H4: Social Media Influencers (SMIs) post content that creates brand attention and influence consumers' buying decision.

H5: Social Media Influencers (SMIs) developing parasocial relations with consumers influence their buying decision.

H6: Social Media Influencers' (SMI's) content influences consumers' purchase intention and buying decisions.

Impact on consumer's buying decision

SMI's posted content creates influence on the consumer's buying decision. Consequently, the satisfaction of new experiences creates stickiness in the consumer's mind (Kohli et. al., n.d.). According to a study, a consumer's attitude towards a sponsored product is more favourable than a non-sponsored product (Ibáñez-Sánchez et. al., 2022). Moreover, in the study, the customer buying decision is bifurcated into pre-purchase and post-purchase decisions to assess the satisfaction level with SMI's recommendations.

H7a: Social Media Influencers' (SMI's) posted content create desire and impact consumers' buying decision.

H7b: Social Media Influencers' (SMI's) posted content create credibility and impact consumers' buying decision.

H7c: Social Media Influencers' (SMI's) posted content create brand attention and impact consumers' buying decision.

H7d: Social Media Influencers' (SMI's) posted content create parasocial relations and impact consumers' buying decision.

H7e: Social Media Influencers' (SMI's) posted content create purchase intention and impact consumers' buying decision.

Based on the above literature review, the study has bifurcated the impact of Social Media Influencers on consumers' buying behaviour into three stages, i.e., stage of initiation, stage of influence and stage of decision. The stage of initiation consists of three constructs attention, exposure, comprehension and their impact on consumer's pre-purchase buying behaviour. Secondly, the stage of influence occurs due to SMIs' posting sponsored content and initiating five constructs, i.e., desire, credibility, brand attention, parasocial relation and purchase intention in potential consumers' minds. Finally, the stage of decision, i.e., post-purchase buying decision, is the consequence of the stage of influence. Thus, the study will analyse the impact of Social Media Influencer's content on consumers' buying decisions. Thus, we have measured different factors that act as stimuli, i.e., indicators and constructs, and hence create responses, i.e., consumers' pre-purchase and post-purchase buying behaviour.

Research Methodology

Type of Study

The following research is an exploratory sequential mixed method design to apply the qualitative method to research themes and quantitative methods to analyse data on themes, i.e., assess the influence of Social Media Influencers' content on Consumer buying behaviour. The research focused on the content created by social media influencers on Online Apparel Shopping. The study analysed the impact of different independent factors influencing a customer and their buying decision. Therefore, the following research is a multivariate causality study as it proposes to establish a compact system structure. The study uses G*Power

statistical analysis to determine the total sample size of 352 respondents. Responses were collected using snowball sampling to collect responses from the individuals who use online shopping platforms irrespective of age, gender or occupation.

Data Description

For the following study, the data were categorised into different demographics. The total number of respondents (n) is 352. First is gender, i.e., 55.1% male and 44.9% female respondents. Second is age, i.e., 60.5% of respondents were 18-25 years, 9.4% were 25-35 years, 6.5% were 35-45 years, 2.8% were 45-55 years, and 20.7% were respondents >55 years. Third is occupation, 60.2% students, 8.8% educators, 27.6% working professionals and 3.4% homemakers. Last is personal disposable income; 75.9% earn between 0 - 25,000, 18.5% earn between 25,000 - 50,000, 4% earn between 50,000 – 1,00,000, 0.6% earn between 1,00,000 – 2,00,000, and 1.1% earn more than 2,00,000.

Assessment of the structural model

The quality of reflective and formative measurement models is assessed in terms of the reliability and validity of the constructs. Indicator/outer loadings determine the bivariate correlations between a construct and the indicators. Exposure 1 is 0.99, exposure 2 is 0.82, attention 1 is 0.90, attention 2 is 0.93, comprehension 1 is 0.95, comprehension 2 is 0.91, customer buying behaviour 1 (pre-purchase) is 1.00, desire 1 is 0.77, desire 2 is 0.80, desire 3 is 0.82, desire 4 is 0.77, desire 5 is 0.74, credibility 1 is 0.79, credibility 2 is 0.81, credibility 3 is 0.89, credibility 4 is 0.83, credibility 5 is 0.83, brand attention 1 is 0.81, brand attention 2 is 0.82, brand attention 3 is 0.81, brand attention 4 is 0.86, brand attention 5 is 0.79, parasocial relation 1 is 0.79, parasocial relation 2 is 0.80, parasocial relation 3 is 0.73, parasocial relation 4 is 0.83, parasocial relation 5 is 0.73, purchase intention 1 is 0.78, purchase intention 2 is 0.82, purchase intention 3 is 0.81, purchase intention 4 is 0.79, purchase intention 5 is 0.81 and customer buying behaviour 2 (post-purchase) is 1.00. The constructs for the following study show acceptable outer loading/ weights, i.e., recommended above 0.708 (Hair et. al., 2021).

Composite reliability (Rho_a) for the indicators are as follows exposure is 0.90, attention is 0.85, comprehension is 0.90, customer buying behaviour 1 (pre-purchase) is n/a, desire is 0.88, credibility is 0.92, brand

attention is 0.91, parasocial relation is 0.88, purchase intention is 0.85, and customer buying behaviour 2 (post-purchase) is n/a. Cronbach's alpha α for the indicators are as follows exposure is 0.86, attention is 0.82, comprehension is 0.85, customer buying behaviour 1 (pre-purchase) is n/a, desire is 0.84, credibility is 0.89, brand attention is 0.88, parasocial relation is 0.84, purchase intention is 0.78, and customer buying behaviour 2 (post-purchase) is n/a. Additionally, $AVE > 0.5$ indicates that the underlying latent variable explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance. Exposure is 0.83, attention is 0.85, comprehension is 0.87, customer buying behaviour 1 (pre-purchase) is n/a, desire is 0.61, credibility is 0.69, brand attention is 0.67, parasocial relation is 0.60, purchase intention is 0.55, and customer buying behaviour 2 (post-purchase) is n/a. Fortunately, all the constructs show more than the minimum acceptable AVE.

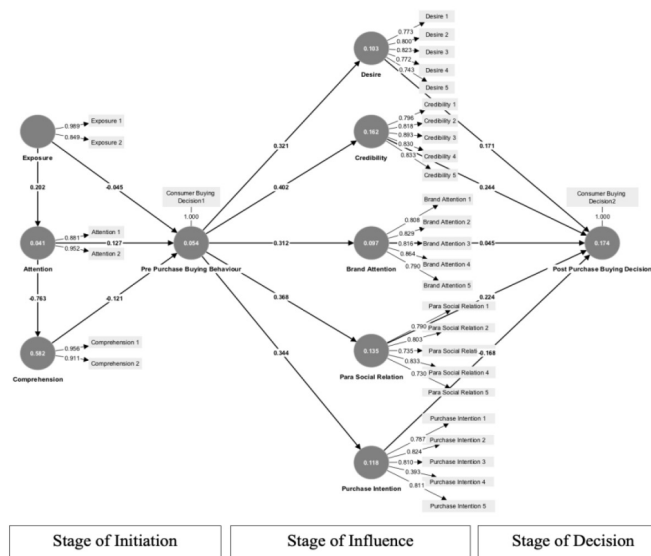
Furthermore, VIF between 1 to 5 indicates a moderate correlation (Hair et. al., 2021). Exposure 1 is 2.36, exposure 2 is 2.36, attention 1 is 1.93, attention 2 is 1.93, comprehension 1 is 2.27, comprehension 2 is 2.27, customer buying behaviour 1 (pre-purchase) is 1.00, desire 1 is 1.68, desire 2 is 1.96, desire 3 is 2.00, desire 4 is 1.74, desire 5 is 1.68, credibility 1 is 2.00, credibility 2 is 2.02, credibility 3 is 3.25, credibility 4 is 2.52, credibility 5 is 2.67, brand attention 1 is 2.19, brand attention 2 is 2.35, brand attention 3 is 2.12, brand attention 4 is 2.41, brand attention 5 is 1.87, parasocial relation 1 is 1.86, parasocial relation 2 is 1.94, parasocial relation 3 is 1.69, parasocial relation 4 is 1.84, parasocial relation 5 is 1.61, purchase intention 1 is 1.69, purchase intention 2 is 2.67, purchase intention 3 is 2.51, purchase intention 4 is 1.10, purchase intention 5 is 1.51 and customer buying behaviour 2 (post-purchase) is 1.00. Thus, the data shows no problematic collinearity issue amongst indicators.

Result and Discussion

The study has used a resampling technique, i.e., bootstrapping, that ascertains the significance of estimated path analysis. Bootstrapping was applied to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients based on T-values, P-values and confidence intervals. Moreover, the P-Value is two-tailed for the following study. Suppose the $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$; the hypothesis is accepted; otherwise not accepted. Similarly, T-value is a variation of the p-value.

H1a (Exposure $\rightarrow$ Attention) p-value is 0.006 and t-value is 2.768, H1b (Attention $\rightarrow$ Comprehension) p-value is 0.385 and t-value is 0.868, H1c (Attention $\rightarrow$ Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour) p-value is 0.090 and t-value

is 1.698, H1d (Exposure -> Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour) p-value is 0.445 and t-value is 0.764, H1e (Comprehension -> Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour) p-value is 0.048 and t-value is 1.982, H2 (Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour -> Desire) p-value is 0 and t-value is 5.490, H3 (Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour -> Credibility) p-value is 0 and t-value is 7.644, H4 (Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour -> Brand Attention) p-value is 0 and t-value is 6.113, H5 (Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour -> Para Social Relation) p-value is 0 and t-value is 7.888, H6 (Pre-Purchase Buying Behaviour -> Purchase Intention) p-value is 0 and t-value is 7.381, H7a (Desire -> Consumer Buying Decision) p-value is 0.022 and t-value is 2.299, H7b (Credibility -> Consumer Buying Decision) p-value is 0.001 and t-value is 3.343, H7c (Brand Attention -> Consumer Buying Decision) p-value is 0.530 and t-value is 0.627, H7d (Para Social Relation -> Consumer Buying Decision) p-value is 0.042 and t-value is 2.033, H7e (Purchase Intention -> Consumer Buying Decision) p-value is 0.139 and t-value is 1.478. Thus, the comparison of t-value against a threshold of 1.96. Therefore, based on p-value, t-value and PCI, we accept the H1a, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7a, H7b, and H7d. Contrarily, we do not accept the H1b, H1c, H1d, H1e, H7c and H7e (Figure 1).



Source: Author's research

Figure 1
Model Testing

The tested model signifies three stages of SMIs' influence on consumers' buying decisions. Firstly, the stage of initiation consists of three constructs, i.e., exposure, attention and comprehension of social media content. The PLS-SEM path coefficients signify that exposure to SMIs' recommendations, opinions and beliefs creates attention in the viewer's mind. The components of the stage of influence, i.e., desire, credibility, brand attention and parasocial relation, influence the consumer's post-purchase buying decision, i.e., the satisfaction level exception to purchase intention that negatively affects the consumer's post-purchase buying decision.

Conclusion

The stimulus-Organism-Response decision-making model by Hebb 1950s asserts that stimulus triggers a response in an organism based on its internal feelings. The following study validates the theory, as mentioned earlier, that SMIs (stimulus) trigger responses in consumers (organism) concerning their buying behaviour (response). Thus, the analysis exhibits that most respondents regarded SMIs' impact on consumers' pre-purchase and post-purchase buying behaviour as satisfactory. Similarly, the research reveals that most respondents agree that SMIs' belief systems, attractive personalities, recommendations, reliable information, content knowledge, parasocial relations, friendly and approachable behaviour, likeability and familiarity positively impact the consumer's buying decision. Thus, the study concludes that marketers should tactically use SMIs' product endorsement strategy to accumulate potential consumers by leveraging their mass subscribers and followers.

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