Emerging Trends in Influencer Marketing: Leveraging Micro-Influencers for Effective Brand Promotions

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of social media (SM), influencer marketing has evolved as an innovative and successful brand marketing approach that attracts to marketing managers. Partnership among brands and influential people is at the heart of influencer marketing, which may be an effective growth strategy for certain companies. Thousands of businesses and brands have made good use of it, and its popularity has only grown over the last decade. To market their products and services, the firms are now working with small or micro-influencers. This study's goal is to thoroughly examine earlier investigations into persuasive marketing or influencer marketing. The study's primary goal is to get an in-depth understanding of the function and current trends of micro-influencers in successful brand promotion. It has been observed that brands are being benefitted from these micro-influencers by way of increased engagement rates, high brand awareness along with improved website traffic leading to the generation of sales and an increased customer base.

Keywords: Micro-influencers, Influential Marketing, Brand promotion, Social Media Marketing (SMM), Business to Business Marketing

INTRODUCTION

By providing people with new venues for sharing their beliefs and attracting an audience, SM's proliferation has greatly amplified the influence of individuals. The rise of SM has made it possible for more people to share aspects of their lives and perspectives with a wider audience, allowing some to become influential figures over time (Vrontis et. al., 2021). Influencer marketing attracts and delights people to raise brand exposure and revenues. As firms recognize and respect influencers, influencer marketing methods are increasing significantly (Cotter, 2019). Additionally, millennials are more open to having fun and interacting with others, as well as being more invested in the success of the people and ideas that they like (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Therefore, customers may develop a stronger affinity for the brand through their connection and involvement with influencers, and brands may see more engagement and also co-creation from their followers on SM as a result.

Although businesses have been investigating influencer marketing strategies, relevant studies are only getting started (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Influencer marketing strategies and the psychological process that transforms viewers into consumers and keeps them engaged with the firm are not well-studied. Businesses also doubt influencer marketing's efficacy. Also, different influencers and channels yield different marketing results (Trivedi, 2021).

That's why it's so important to study the marketing process in its entirety, from influencer coaching leading to brand promotion. This study's overarching goal is to provide light on the trends in which influencer marketing on SM platforms influences audience engagement with brands and supports brand promotion.

Background of the study

Evolution of Influence and Influencer Marketing

The word "influencer" has just lately become commonplace in marketing publications. There is no agreed-upon theoretical definition of "influencer" at this time. According to (Brown and Hayes, 2018), "influencer marketing" happens when a third party influences a customer to complete a purchase. The goal of influencer marketing is to promote a company by having influential people (influencers) share the message with their followers on SM. Influencers' material is more credible to consumers than that from other online sources. Ad blockers are becoming popular among consumers as a means of avoiding advertisements (Connick, 2019). Influencer marketing is typically considered as less bothersome and more fascinating to the target audience than other prevalent kinds of online advertising such as pop-ups, banners, etc. Online "influencers" have replaced more traditional media outlets as go-to resources for information among digital audiences. Influencers were leveraged to generate two-way brand communication across SM platforms such as

Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc. Influencers are also being used by marketers to reach those who often ignore or fast-forward through commercials (Conick, 2018). Most marketers understand the importance of using important individuals to build relationships with potential and present clientele. The majority of businesses (58%) in 2017 were connected to between 15 and 25 influencers, according to a study released in April 2018 from ANA (Conick, 2018). This finding suggests that advertisers are looking to strengthen the connections among influencers and their target audiences.

Influencer Marketing

In this paper, "SM" applies to any website that lets its users create, share, and debate their own material. SM "influencers" are those who have a large fan base and regularly publish original material. SM influencers are "regular people" who focus on particular areas where they are interested (technology along with fashion & also fitness along with gastronomy, and subculture) and express themselves more personally on the platform (Cotter, 2019). They can introduce themselves to the target audience by posting about their everyday activities, revealing areas of expertise, and discussing topics of interest with others on SM. When brand managers work with well-known influencers who can help spread positive word of mouth about their product, it's called influencer marketing (Childers et. al., 2019). Once they've amassed a sizable following, influencers are in a prime position to promote products and services by providing high-quality content on SM in exchange for product endorsements and growing their audience.

Consumers generally look to the content released by influencers before making a purchase decision, as they are seen as a reliable source of information on SM. Experts agree that influencer marketing's effectiveness on SM can be attributed to its high credibility (Veirman, 2017). Consumers can make educated choices when presented with data from reputable sources (Xiao et. al., 2018). In order to win over consumers' preferences and earn their trust, influencer marketers need to foster genuine relationships between their content creators and their target audiences. Influencers are seen as more accessible and genuine when their audiences engage with them on SM (Men et. al., 2016). Influencer endorsements work best when the target audience already knows and likes the endorser since this increases the audience's confidence in the brand and increases the likelihood that they will make a purchase. As a result, influencer marketing relies on a steady effort to strengthen bonds with fan bases.

SM influencer marketing relies heavily on content production as a means of audience communication (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Influencers advocate for the company by making original and authentic content, such as telling customers about their own personal experiences with the product. In keeping with who they are as people, the information they produce is typically interesting, informative, and culturally relevant (Sokolova, 2020). Audiences will react emotionally and take action in response to information in a variety of ways, depending on a number of factors. Brand positioning, sponsorship disclosure, and influencer traits have all been discussed in depth in the literature as driving factors in influencer marketing's ability to steer audiences. On the other hand, SM influencers place a premium on engaging their followers in rich media (such as video platforms) through compelling narratives and user participation (Xiao et. al., 2018). Influencers may get more people to engage with them and learn about their products by blending genuine anecdotes and engaging tales with promotional material. To lessen the impression of overt manipulation, influencers might direct their followers to the product or brand in question while also providing them with entertaining content.

Brand Promotion

The breadth of content distribution connected to brands has expanded Web 2.0s SM. As a result of this, a lot of attention has been paid to the idea of brand promotion through SM, both in the commercial world and in academic circles (Gomez et. al., 2019). The promotion of a company's brand is a tried-and-true strategy that has been shown to increase profitability. The quality of a firm's reputation and public profile is directly related to the capacity of that company to successfully promote its brand in a competitive market environment. The marketing of a brand is dependent on either the extension of the brand or its devotion to the brand (Khoshtaria et al., 2020). When done correctly, marketing a brand may assist provide a company with an advantage in a competitive market.

The marketing of a brand may be calculated based on input from customers. Increasing product exposure and name recognition, conducting product testing, favouring a brand, and being loyal to a brand are all examples of brand marketing strategies. On the other side, promoting a brand is thought to be the most useful instrument that a company can utilise.

Businesses may use influencer marketing to tap into the power of SM stars to promote their goods by attracting new consumers, getting them to engage with the brand, and solidifying strong customer ties (Khamis et. al., 2017). This is all accomplished by tapping into the power of SM stars. The actual and long-lasting connection that is created between an influencer and their audience via SM and the content that is created by the influencer is a major reason leading to influencer marketing being beneficial to brands. Instead of just trying to persuade customers to purchase a product, influencer marketing puts more emphasis on eliciting favourable associations with the product. People are considered to

be "engaged" with a brand when they have an emotional connection to that brand (Storbacka et al., 2016). Someone who is involved in a product or service to the maximum extent possible has the potential to be recognised as a co-creator of the brand as well as an advocate for the brand.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to look at different research papers written & published about influential marketing and the emerging trend of Influential Marketing i.e. the role of micro-influencers in brand promotion. The study also aims at the benefits of working with micro-influencers, to speculate on the future of micro-influencer marketing, considering upcoming innovations, technological advancements, and the integration of micro-influencers with other marketing channels.

Research Questions
1. What are the emerging trends in influencer marketing that highlight the increased utilization of micro-influencers for effective brand promotions?
2. What are the key factors that make micro-influencers effective in promoting brands, and how do these factors contribute to higher engagement and conversion rates?
3. What are the long-term implications and sustainability of leveraging micro-influencers for brand promotions, and how can brands develop ongoing relationships with micro-influencers to maximize their impact on brand awareness and sales?

METHODOLOGY

The study is grounded on earlier literature reviews conducted in the field of influence marketing. The researcher has compiled pertinent studies and research articles that concentrate on the function of micro-influencers and brand promotion. Conducted a comprehensive review of academic research, industry reports, and relevant publications focusing on influencer marketing, micro-influencers, and brand promotions. Identified key themes, trends, and insights related to the utilization of micro-influencers in brand promotions. Related abstracts were evaluated for relevance, and publications that weren't appropriate were removed. The researcher chose 24 of the most pertinent and applicable studies on "micro-influencers," "SMM" "SM influencers," and "Influential marketing for brand promotion" out of the 43 research papers that were accessible with regard to the study's topic. Additionally, these keywords were used to look for relevant publications on Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Web of Sciences. The literary works consulted for this study span the years 2016 through 2021. Only academic publications that addressed the general subject of the study were chosen. Theses, dissertations, reviews, and conference papers were among the materials that were omitted.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to disseminate the message of a brand and communicate with customers, influencer marketers go to prominent members of the online communities that are specific to the niche. SM "influencers" are those who have gathered a large number of followers and who are regarded as an authority in a given sector or field (Sudha and Sheena, 2017). As a direct result of the spread of the internet and the increase of SM users all over the world, the next logical step in the development of digital marketing is the implementation of influencer marketing. As a direct consequence of this, changes have been observed in consumer behaviour (Zahoor & Quereshi, 2017; Awobamise, 2018). This is a result of the fact that around one-third of the population of the globe has access to the internet and makes frequent use of SM platforms. The purchasing patterns of consumers and the ways in which they get information are adjusting to account for these new realities. As a consequence of this, there is a universal consensus that the marketing business needs significant change. To be more specific, in order to be successful in today's rapidly developing digital marketplace, traditional media and even traditional digital marketing strategies like sponsored posts, pop-up ads, and so on need to be supplemented with influencer marketing (Khamis et al., 2017; Awobamise, 2018,). This is because traditional media and even traditional digital marketing strategies like sponsored posts, pop-up ads, and so on have become less effective over time.

All of this debate indicates the conclusion that the term "influential marketing" refers to the practice of promoting a product, or service, utilising SM followings. Marketers can reach out to SM influencers whose audiences are likely to be interested in the products and services they offer and strike a deal with those influencers to have those influencers promote the products and services they offer to their tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of followers. Influencer marketing on SM is becoming increasingly important for businesses all around the world. This was made feasible by the extensive use of SM websites such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, which allowed average people a platform to communicate their thoughts and opinions with the world (Khamis et al., 2017). This was made possible by the widespread use of SM websites such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Not only will influencer marketing continue to exist in spite of the growing number of people who have access to the Internet, but it also has the potential to develop into a highly successful alternative to more traditional kinds of advertising. These traditional types of

advertising might include more traditional forms of SM or online advertising. According to Awobamise and Jarrar (2018), politicians utilise celebrities to help shape their political objectives, while advertisers use celebrities to help promote their products. Endorsements have long been seen as one of the most successful marketing strategies for influencing public opinion. Because the general public looks up to public figures and celebrities as role models, it has long been presumed that the public will place more weight on the opinions expressed by those individuals. Endorsements help firms develop and maintain excellent reputations in a way that is both cost-effective and efficient (Awobamise, & Jarrar, 2018). The widespread usage of the internet has made it possible for a new class of people to become "celebrities" or influencers. As a result, marketers have a responsibility to capitalise on the opportunities that are given by this development

Who are Micro-Influencers?

People who have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers and are regarded as the authority in their respective disciplines are considered to be micro-influencers. They have a diverse spectrum of opinions, as well as an increasing number of devoted followers (Sudha, 2017). These influencers are able to create more natural interactions between companies and their target audiences because they are familiar with the requirements of a variety of platforms and the algorithms used by those platforms. Not only does the enthusiasm and passion that a micro-influencer brings to a campaign provides room for fresh ideas, but it also gets the campaign closer to being genuine and approachable to the population that it is intended to reach (Gupta and Mahajan, 2019).

Instagram users who are considered "micro-influencers" often portray an idealized version of themselves and their lifestyles in order to attract and gain followers. According to Eagar and Dann (2016), many Instagram celebrities place themselves in the middle between the celebrity and the average person to become credible resources for their fans. Posting evidence of an item or service's greatness might affect other SM users' perceptions. Micro-influencers may estimate building expenses using public information about famous individuals and their organizations.

Influencers typically receive payment for SM promotion. SM influencers and micro-influencers are among the most sought-after business influencers due to their large online following and influence throughout numerous SM platforms. SM influencers help brands stand out in a congested market (Abreu, 2019). However, there is a great deal of preparation and strategy involved in dealing with SM influencers. However, in order to reap the full benefits of micro-influencer marketing, organisations need to do some research and figure out how to connect with the correct micro-influencers. Creating material that will resonate with each influencer's specific audience requires careful thought and planning. The material will get more exposure and views as micro-influencers are able to easily share it with their followers. As a result, the connection becomes mutually beneficial for both people involved.

Why Brands want to Indulge in Influential Marketing Via. Micro-Influencers for promoting themselves?

As already discussed, micro-influencers are those who have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers, placing them on the lowest end of the influencer spectrum. They interact with their fans in ways that mainstream celebrities rarely do. The use of micro-influencers in advertising and brand promotion has shown to be quite effective (**Sop, 2020**). Brands can expand their reach and stimulate more interest from consumers by employing them to promote website visits, product launches, and other forms of audience interaction.

In today's oversaturated market, modern companies really need to have well-thought-out marketing strategies in place in order to thrive and grow. It is likely that partnering with micro-influencers may assist in spreading the word about the firm and collecting vital feedback from customers. Due to the fact that they tend to concentrate on a more specific area, micro-influencers have a fan base that is far more targeted than that of bigger influencers. Because of this, it is possible for marketers to make direct touch with the audience that they have in mind with the assistance of well-chosen micro-influencers. Businesses can also benefit from developing long-lasting connections with micro-influencers by sending them products for review purposes. It has been approved that establishing and maintaining long-term connections with micro-influencers is more successful in boosting sales than a single mention of a firm by a celebrity.

How brands are Utilizing Micro-Influencers in Promoting them?

Sponsored content:
A paid photo, video, or blog post promoting the brand's product or service is the "classic" kind of sponsored content. This is a popular kind of media since it is easy to understand and implement. There should be no obvious sales pitch in sponsored content. It should flow easily, convey a story, and provide relevant data (Abreu, 2019: Khamis, 2017). By submitting a campaign brief outlining your brand's criteria, posting instructions, and needs, you can get the ball rolling on sponsored posts. In addition, influencers may reach out to you if they determine your company is a good fit for their

followers. Each influencer is given a unique tracking mechanism (UTM) link or promotional code to promote the company's online store or special offer. When endorsing paid material, influencers must be transparent about it. Both flat fees and pay-per-click arrangements (with guaranteed minimum payouts) are used to compensate influencers by marketing firms.

Affiliate links or discount codes:
The marketers provide a special promo code and link for the influencers to distribute to their respective audiences (Labrecque, 2020). This material taps into the influencer's network to promote the brand's business to their followers. The business then provides the influencer with a sample of the product to use in creating authentic content. This strategy works best when used by highly effective influencers with expansion potential. Brands and businesses may monitor their influence and conversions in this space. Affiliate connections may be lucrative for influencers, too. The typical commission for an influencer is 10% to 20% of the purchase price when a buyer clicks on the link.

Contests and giveaways:
People tend to talk about contests and freebies when they hear about them. They pique the interest of possible buyers, spark conversations about your company, and ultimately lead to sales (Khamis, 2017). Some influential people in exchange for brand involvement provide a freebie. The process kicks off when the followers spread the word to their own social circles (Abreu, 2019). It's recommended that SM influencers base their contest around a desirable prize that will entice others to enter. Simple actions like "liking," "sharing," or "commenting" on the post, "tagging" friends, "following" your brand's SM channel, "subscribing" to a newsletter, "submitting user content as entries," or "registering an account with the brand's e-commerce store" are all that is required to enter the giveaway and have a chance to win. To increase traffic even further, you should use a mix of content genres, as freebies may only have a temporary impact.

Running content from influencers on the brand's channels:
When businesses or firms promote the blog posts or other material of influencers on their platform, everyone ends up in a position where they come out ahead (Sop, 2020). The audience of the influencer is being directed to the channels of the brand, which the influencer then utilises to promote themselves in turn. Content creators, often known as "influencers," are always thrilled when their work is highlighted. Hence the brands are interested in collaborating with people who already have a committed following so that the greatest increase in the number of views and clicks can be observed.

Brand ambassadors:
Brand ambassador partnerships are frequently long-term. They promote corporate trust and recognition. Brand ambassadors promote new items and the brand. They may work with firms for weeks, months, or years. Influencers can create more engaging content with more time. As fans recognize and trust the brand, business should increase. Some organizations prefer a high-profile spokesperson, but others have found better results with a network of smaller, more powerful voices. (Khamis, 2017; Labrecque, 2020).

Micro-influencers' tales and experiences resonate better with customers, thus businesses now utilize them. Micro-influencers' product endorsements frequently go unnoticed since they are personable. The personality of a micro-influencer might make them more convincing than that of a macro-influencer. Micro-influencers, in contrast to macro-influencers, who just mention the brand and the items, introduce the products' genuine merits (Sop, 2020).

Findings

It's possible that working with micro-influencers would replace sponsored postings often made by celebrities. Numerous companies have recently come to the realization that working together with multiple micro-influencers at the same time is not only simple but also quite inexpensive. Micro-influencer marketing has gained significant traction in recent years due to several advantages it offers over traditional influencer marketing approaches. Some of the advantages are

1. **Cost-effectiveness and Efficiency**:
   Working with micro-influencers is generally more cost-effective compared to collaborating with macro-influencers or celebrities. Micro-influencers typically have a smaller follower base, which allows brands to allocate their marketing budgets more efficiently. Since micro-influencers often charge lower fees or may even collaborate in exchange for products or services, brands can stretch their marketing dollars further.
2. **Higher Engagement and Authenticity**:
   Micro-influencers tend to have a more engaged and loyal audience. They often have a closer relationship with their followers, resulting in higher engagement rates for brand collaborations. Micro-influencers are often seen as trusted and relatable individuals within their niche communities, making their content more authentic. As a result, their recommendations and endorsements have a stronger impact on their followers, leading to more effective brand promotions.

3. **Targeted Reach and Niche Audience Segmentation**:
   Micro-influencers typically specialize in specific niches, catering to a highly targeted audience. This enables brands to reach a more relevant and interested audience. By leveraging micro-influencers who align with the brand's values and target demographic, marketers can ensure that their message reaches the right people. The niche nature of micro-influencers' followers allows for precise audience segmentation, making it easier to tailor campaigns to specific interests and demographics.

4. **Enhanced Credibility and Trust**:
   Micro-influencers are often seen as more credible and trustworthy compared to celebrities or macro-influencers. Their smaller follower base allows for more personalized interactions, fostering stronger relationships and a sense of community. Micro-influencers are known for their expertise, passion, and authenticity within their niche, which translates into higher levels of trust from their followers. When micro-influencers endorse a brand or product, their recommendations are perceived as genuine and reliable, further enhancing brand credibility.

5. **Authentic User-Generated Content (UGC)**:
   Micro-influencers often encourage user-generated content (UGC) as a part of their campaigns. UGC not only increases engagement but also provides brands with valuable and authentic content that can be repurposed for marketing purposes. The organic nature of UGC resonates well with audiences and helps create a sense of community around the brand.
   By leveraging these advantages, brands can harness the power of micro-influencers to achieve more effective and targeted brand promotions. However, it is crucial for brands to carefully select micro-influencers based on their alignment with the brand's values and target audience to maximize the impact of their campaigns.

CONCLUSION

Micro-influencers are well-known SM users who haven't had any official training in marketing or advertising but nonetheless manage to amass a sizable online following anyway. Typically, they promote items or services they think their followers would be interested in and produce information that is tailored to their audience's interests. Even while micro-influencers may be located anywhere online, SM is where their impact can be maximised. It's the hub of people's social and informational lives, so it makes sense. To rephrase, the most direct route for marketers to reach their intended consumers is through SM. Brands can successfully reach more individuals with their message when they collaborate with micro-influencers. By doing so, they are able to establish greater credibility and confidence among their followers. In addition, it strengthens the bonds between the followers of the influencer and the influencer themselves.

The literature reviewed in this study provides valuable insights into the emerging trends in influencer marketing, particularly the increased utilization of micro-influencers for effective brand promotions. It highlights the advantages of working with micro-influencers, including their authenticity, targeted reach, niche expertise, and the potential for collaborative long-term relationships. By understanding these trends, brands can leverage micro-influencers to optimize their influencer marketing strategies and achieve successful brand promotions.

In general, micro-influencers are useful for businesses because they allow them to bypass the constraints of traditional advertising and directly connect with consumers. With their one-of-a-kind insight, they are perfectly suited to advertise brands in a genuine and engaging approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this research, it is quite evident that using micro-influencers to promote companies is a highly efficient and successful strategy. Micro-influencers have real-world applications for businesses, and further study is needed in this field. Analysing the characteristics of micro-influencers has revealed that they may meet the needs of businesses and brands at a considerably cheaper price. For newer brands without much name recognition yet, the word-of-mouth effect that may be built with the help of micro-influencers can be invaluable. Micro-influencers have the potential to grow into a significant and long-lasting channel for introducing consumers to new firms as Social Media platforms add more features and users.

Conflict of Interest

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and that there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. We further confirm that the order of authors listed in the manuscript has been approved by both of us.

We confirm that we have given due consideration to the protection of intellectual property associated with this work and that there are no impediments to publication, including the timing of publication, with respect to intellectual property. In so doing we confirm that we have followed the regulations of our institutions concerning intellectual property.

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