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Jan 1st, 12:00 AM

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Advertising Effectiveness by Social Media Influencer Type: The Moderating Role of Consumer Social Comparison Orientation

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Keywords: Social media, Influencer, Social comparison orientation

Introduction An influencer is an individual who can impact the potential customers of a brand/product by assisting marketing activities (Brown & Hayes, 2008). As social media provides a network to reach a large population of consumers in a short time, influencer marketing has become prominent (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017). Thus, it is imperative for brand managers to relay their marketing messages to right influencers for their brands/products. This study attempts to understand the effect of social media influencer type on advertising effectiveness. In so doing, this study examines the moderating role of consumer social comparison orientation.

Literature Review The desirable influencer attributes for successful advertising include credibility, expertise, enthusiasm, and connectivity (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). Chatterjee (2011) also suggested that the influencer's membership duration, share of posts, and network size predicted his/her propensity to generate referral visits. As social media is a digital platform to promote social interaction among consumers (Nejad, Sherrell, & Babakus, 2014), the perceived social identity of the influencer as a significant characteristic should be investigated. The current study suggests that advertising effectiveness differs across two influencer types defined by social identity: Admired vs. Friendly.

Social media facilitates consumers' self-presentation and social comparative information (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014). The authors found that social comparative information revealed on a social media network affected users' self-esteem and self-evaluation. In addition, prior research supports the notion that, if users' perceptions toward a particular influencer's popularity and social capital are positive, this may trigger their upward comparison of the influencer (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2011; Vitak & Ellison, 2013). In line with this perspective, this study further proposes that the two influencer types distinguished by social identity (admired vs. friendly) will have differential effects on advertising effectiveness according to social media users' social comparison orientation. Consumers with high social comparison orientation are likely to respond positively to the admired (vs. friendly) type. They would want to imitate the admired influencer they aspire to be alike (Kapitan & Silvera, 2015), but less likely to be affected by the friendly type. On the other hand, the advertising effectiveness among consumers with low social comparison orientation would not be different across the two types.

H1. The admired (vs. friendly) type of influencers will have a significant effect on advertising effectiveness among social media users with high social comparison orientation.

H2. The admired (vs. friendly) type of influencers will not have a significant effect on advertising effectiveness among social media users with low social comparison orientation.

Method The study was conducted in a 2 (Admired vs. Friendly influencer type) by 2 (High vs. Low social comparison orientation) between-subjects experimental design. Influencer type was manipulated with actual female Instagram influencers who have different social identities. The research setting chosen was a cosmetic product as there are many influencers focusing on cosmetics in both admired and friendly types. Female participants who had used Instagram was recruited through Amazon's. Mechanical Turk. The influencer was introduced to the participants with the profile and a few exemplary postings to reveal her identity. Perceived admiration and friendliness they felt for the influencer was checked for the manipulation. Then, the posting of a fictitious perfume by influencer was shown to the participants. The participants were asked to answer their attitude toward the posting, the perfume, and the influencer, and the perceived effect on the brand. In the next section, a multi-item scale was used to measure the participants' social comparison orientation.

Result Female participants (n=144) aged 17 or older and currently living in the U.S. were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 62 and they reported to use social media. Majority of participants answered that they use social media daily (n=133, 85.3%). Reliability was confirmed for the attitude for posting, attitude for perfume, attitude for the influencer, and social comparison orientation, respectively (α= 0.95, 0.96, 0.96, 0.87). 2 (Admired vs. Friendly influencer type) x 2 (High vs. low 2 social comparison orientation) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted through SPSS 18.0 software. Social comparison orientation showed significant main effects on the attitude for the posting (M_{High}=4.81, M_{Low}=3.99, $F(1, 142) = 13.20$, p=.000), attitude for the perfume (M_{High}=4.77, M_{Low}=4.08, $F(1, 142) = 9.25$, p=.003), and attitude for the influencer (M_{High}=5.12, M_{Low}=4.36, $F(1, 142) = 13.06$, p=.000). However, there was no significant main effect of influencer type on the attitudes. There was a marginally significant influencer type x social comparison orientation interaction effect on the attitude for posting ($F(1, 142) =3.32$, p=.07). The interaction effect was not significant on the attitude for perfume ($F(1, 142)=1.84$, p=.18) and attitude for influencer ($F(1, 142)=1.20$, p=.28). Thus, hypotheses were partially supported.

Discussion The result indicates that the effect of the influencer type was significantly different by consumers' social comparison orientation. As previous studies suggested (Kim & Lee, 2011; Vitak & Ellison, 2013), the admired type of social media influencers can exert upward social comparison, implying that it is effective when targeting social media users with high social comparison orientation. However, the admiration and friendliness induced by the influencer's social identity did not affect advertising effectiveness for the low social comparison orientation group. The findings suggest that the influencer type can be defined with the perceived social identity on social media. It is important for managers to understand the perceived characteristic of an influencer to identify a receptive user segment to the influencer. The influencers' specialty in their image, contents, and communication style (Mediakix, 2017) can be useful to predict the effectiveness. Future researchers may want to investigate the process in which social media users are persuaded by different types of influencers.

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