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Ashlyn Moore

Kiseol Yang  
kiseolyang@gmail.com

HaeJung Maria Kim

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## **Influencer Marketing: Influentials' Authenticity, Likeability and Authority in Social Media**

Ashlyn Moore, Kiseol Yang, HaeJung Maria Kim, University of North Texas, USA

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### **Influencer Marketing**

Consumers often have doubts about the true intentions of marketing messages from the corporation and the influencer, and particularly the mega celebrity, due to scandals in the past few years. These scandals came on the back of seemingly consistent marketing messages which had for a few years given the consumer a false sense of trust in the companies. Depending on these individuals' affinity or relation to the brand or company, they are then chosen to relay marketing messages to the consumer with the aim being the improvement of brand and product visibility that will eventually lead to sales (Gladwell, 2002). Influencer marketing is used to allude to a certain experience or feeling, and with numbers of social media and internet users rising all across the world, the potential influence and usefulness of influencer marketing continues to rise (Ranga & Sharma, 2014). While the choice of influences often follows the conventional persuasion theories, trust theories also play an immense role in determining how believable and 'influential' the influencer, their message and by extension the company, is.

### **Theoretical Orientations of Influencer Marketing**

Information plays an enormous part in influencing the behavior of consumer in today's social media dominated world (Cascio et al., 2015). An influencer marketer on the social media is a main agent who delivers brand and product messages out (Ranga & Sharma, 2014). Consumers are likely to look for trustful sources primary that filter fake and unnecessary information in the topic of interest. Credible sources can be determined with the quality and persuasiveness of the content. Besides, due to the impersonal nature of trust online where the lack of direct contact with an identifiable person (Shapiro, 1987b), consumers look for trustees providing credible and persuasive content. Consumers tend to determine whether influencers are credible trustees sharing the information of products and brands with the message/content persuasiveness. A persuasive message has four elements: quality, quantity, manner and relevance. Any messages that tend to violate any of these four elements are considered less than honest than those that do not (Yeung et al., 1999). Grounded upon the extended-self theory (Belk, 2013), consumers are likely to follow and trust influencers who are extended self into the digital world through dematerialization and concepts like the avatar. Polanski (2012) explicates six principles (i.e., 'reciprocation, social proof, commitment and consistency, liking, authority, and scarcity) in composing persuasive messages that are of interesting in influencer marketing in social media.

### **The Propositions for Influencer Marketing in Social Media**

Upon integrating the trust and persuasion theories, the four propositions in relating six principles of Polanski (2012) are of interest for advancing the influencer marketing knowledge. **P1.** 'Authenticity' is the biggest determinant of success for the influencer and the messages they

Endorse to their audience. Audiences look for opinions they can trust, and this is determined by how trustworthy the sender is. They must display a certain level of consistency in values, attitudes and behavior, for the audience to respond positively (White, 2017).

**P2.** 'Likeability' of information is pertinent when uncertainties are increasing in social information. The influencers people are most likely to look to are those that are similar to them, who they present themselves as or who they want to be, those that are attractive or those that pay them compliments (Polanski, 2012).

**P3.** 'Authority' of information is a prominent attribute in influencer marketing (Lee, 2014). If a message is delivered by an expert in the particular subject, then the message will appear more believable than non-experts in the said field.

**P4.** 'Scarcity' is rooted in the principle of supply and demand (Polanski, 2012). Consumers tend to respond to scarcity urgently.

### **Methodology and Findings**

A total of 30 observations with power influencers at YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are extracted by using the phenomenographic interpretive approach (Atwater et al., 2008). The 1<sup>st</sup> stage involved categorizing the way; in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, all transcripts were grouped according to commonalities in their summaries; in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, a common set of attributes was identified, and described the operational aspects based on the research propositions. Inferences were made using descriptive data on the number of followers, views on certain ad campaign videos and the reach of influencer campaigns. In determining the factors that influence the effectiveness of the influencer marketing campaign, the target market, the image of the influencer, and their fit with the brand was also taken into consideration.

Data analysis revealed the followings findings: First, the three most influential attributes were identified. More than 80 percent influencers out of 30 relied on their authenticity, likeability, and authority in delivering a message. Second, in most cases, popular combinations of influencer attribute were their likeability and authenticity, or a combination of authority and authenticity. Third, interestingly targeting was emerged as an important factor of effectiveness of the influencer marketing. Finally, most of influencers were shifted from celebrity to non-celebrity.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Trust theory is applicable to influencer marketing practices. Specifically, authenticity, likeability and authority carry an important weight in the influencer practices. Consumers trust an influencer who provides them with information based out of genuine skill and knowledge, and that applies to their situation. Interestingly, the most effective influencers are the non-celebrities; the knowledgeable individuals in certain niches with the power to appeal to their peers. Their opinions tend to be more believable because they have been providing consistent, useful and honest information to their followers. Thus, influencer marketers should judiciously consider the authentic, likeable, and authoritative influencers in how they relate with the target audience, as well as the follower affinity for the brand (Gladwell, 2002). One of the potential limitations was the general lack of data with regards to the actual effectiveness of the campaigns in driving sales numbers up.

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