

The Effects of Influencer, Brand Equity and Their Interplay on Consumer Responses on Instagram

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This study aimed to investigate whether purchase intention based on social media influencer endorsement on Instagram was higher for a product than, on the endorsement without a social media influencer. The condition of the product was varied between a low brand equity and high brand equity product and found that in both cases the above study proved positive. The study used an experimental method between-subjects design whether the brand equity type varied between two groups (with Social media influencer endorsement, without social media influencer endorsement). The participants of this study were 204 student Instagram users aged 18-25 years old, the Generation Z. The result showed that the average score of purchase intention on Social media influencer present endorsement was significantly higher than the non social media influencer endorsement for low brand equity product and high brand equity product. This result can be used as a basis for determining appropriate marketing strategy, especially in influencer marketing in Instagram.

Key Words: *Social Media Influencer, Influencer Marketing, Brand Equity, Generation Z, Purchase Intention.*

1. Introduction

The e-commerce sector has seen a boom in the Asian region in the recent years. India again has been fastest growing online retail market in 2019. The number of digital buyers across the country is estimated to be approximately 330 billion in 2020. This suggests that almost 71 percent of internet users in the region will have purchased products online for the mentioned time period. The sector is driven by personalized advertisements, attractive discounts, quick delivery and return infrastructure and a high penetration rate of smartphones. This retail ecosystem combined with the comfort of being at home and getting all your choices delivered to doorstep has turned the tables for the e-commerce sector quite significantly. E-commerce revenue in India is expected to grow to 66.2 billion U.S. dollars in 2024 (Statista, 2020).

One of the popular social media today as an online shopping platform is Instagram. Instagram was the fastest growing social network in 2019. In mid-2018 Instagram announced that it had reached 1 billion monthly active users, and is now well on its way to the second billion. These users post 95 million photos and videos per day, along with uploading 400 million Instagram Stories a day. Instagram users “like” an incredible 4.2 billion posts every day. (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020 report). Due to the app’s visual nature and high user engagement rate, Instagram is also a valuable social media marketing tool. The United States head the ranking of the countries with the most Instagram users with 120 million users accessing the photo sharing and editing app as of January 2020. India was ranked second with 80 million Instagram users, ahead of Brazil with an

audience of 77 million users. As of January 2020, Instagram is one of the most popular social networks worldwide, especially among young adults. Instagram emphasizes the visual features where users can easily upload creative photos or videos. The other facilities offered are commenting features to interact with fellow users, such as button to like other Instagram user uploads, explore features to easily view other user uploads, tagging features to help search photos and or videos, and more. Instagram developed its features in online shopping activities area, which facilitated brands, entrepreneurs and consumers online shopping needs. Nowadays, brands can easily upload photos and videos for promotions and those photos and videos can automatically appear on all Instagram users'timeline. Instagram users as potential consumers who see and are interested can open the photo or video and automatically directed to the official store website of the brand. Most of the brands in the market today have Instagram accounts and use this as a platform to communicate and engage customers.

Generations (a group of people who were born around the same time and shared similar characteristics, preferences and values) are influenced by fashion trends, shared life experiences, language and nowadays, in particular, social Media. (Yadav, 2017). Generations are shaped by the context in which they emerged. Generation Z (a.k.a. Tweens, Baby Boomers, Generation 9/11, and Generation XD) was born after 1994 and are less than 25 years old as of 2020. Generation Z is the newest generation. Their parents marry later and are less likely to get divorced. They face global terrorism, the aftermath of 9/11, school violence, economic uncertainty, recession, and the mortgage crisis. Generation Z values authenticity and “realness.” Peer acceptance is very important to Generation Z, they need to belong. (T Williams, K. C. & Page, R. A., 2011). They believe that they can impact the world and can visualize changing places with someone else and can project possible behaviors. They quite possibly are the most imaginative generation and they think more laterally. (Matthews, V. 2008). A study conducted by (Olapic, 2018) indicates that people who are between 19 and 24 years old, called Generation Z are especially likely to follow Influencers on Instagram. In contrast, people between 25-and 35 years, called Generation Y or Millenials have been more likely to follow Influencers on Facebook. Companies has started paying attention to this target group of Generation Z as they comprise 32 per cent of the global population of 7.7 billion. In US alone Generation Z will become the largest consumer population by 2026 of 82 million against Generation Y of 80 Million.(Business Insider, 2020). They are also called True Gen because of this (McKinsey report, 2020). These generations are more brand conscious than the previous generations and are substantially different, henceforth addressing these generations should be done knowing the group preferences. Generation Z is also highly influenced by the social networking sites, giving feedbacks of the products and services they use and to connect with everyone (Palfrey &Gasser, 2008). Thus websites have to consider the preferences and requirements of these particular generations by giving them a tailormade solution. Else they will switch to another brand which can satisfy their requirements (Palfrey &Gasser, 2008).A study by (Mohammed, A. B., 2018) found out that some of the most classical influential factors such as price, ease of use and usefulness are no more important for Generation Z Whereas, Payment Options, Perceived Enjoyment Peer and Social Influence, Product Design, and Product Brand were way more influential on the decision of Generation Z to buy smartphones. Newer dimensions are being explored so there is a need of a wider research on their behavior to understand their purchasing intentions and the influence of the social influencer. This study tries to explore this group of subjects, and how influencer can positively affect their purchase intention for brands with different brand equities.

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Brand equity refers to the added value endowed to a product or service, through associations and perceptions of the brand (Chaudhuri, 1995). Similarly, (Dahlén, Lange & Rosengren, 2017) regards brand equity as the marketing efficiency and implies it for companies that customers choose their products over others. Brand equity is a collective term which can be seen from two dominating perspectives; financial and customer-based brand equity. The former considers the brand as an asset which generates profit through attracting new customers, retaining existing ones and allows the firm to charge a price premium (Farquhar, 1989). In customer-based brand equity, the focus is on the customers and their perceptions surrounding the brand (Dahlén, Lange & Rosengren, 2017). In the purpose of this study, brand equity is referred to the latter, customer-based brand equity. Previous literatures presents multiple theoretical views on customer-based brand equity. The consensus and accepted perspective of these views are that customer-based brand equity is built up by established associations to the brand (Aaker, 1996a; Lehmann, Keller & Farley, 2008). The two dominating sources yet with minor differences in their perspective, within customer based brand equity, is the theories by Keller and Aaker (Rios & Riquelme, 2010). Keller (1993) considers customer-based brand equity to be a result of differences in customer response, as a consequence of customers' previous knowledge about a brand. Knowledge about a brand affects the customers' reflection, perception and preference to the marketing of the same brand. , Aaker (1991) dimensionalised it and considered it as the value consumers associate with a brand, as reflected in the dimensions of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other proprietary brand asset. At a later time, Aaker (1996b) developed his view more into detail. According to this model Brand equity which was referred as The Brand Equity Ten, included ten sets of measures grouped into five categories. The first four categories represent customer perceptions of the brand along the four dimensions of brand equity—loyalty, perceived quality, associations, and awareness. The fifth includes two sets of market behavior measures that represent information obtained from marketbased information rather than directly from customers. It is a combination of (1) Loyalty (a. brand's real or potential price premium), (2) (b.customer satisfaction based), (3) perceived comparative quality, (4) perceived brand leadership, (5) perceived brand value (brand's functional benefits), (6) brand personality, (7) consumers perception of organization (trusted, admired or credible), (8) perceived differentiation to competing brands, (9) brand awareness (recognition & recall), (10) market position (market share), (prices and distribution coverage). In this study questionnaire items used to test the effectiveness of the high and low brand equity condition was adapted from Yoo and Donthu's (1997) brand equity scale. The scale employed 5 items representing the five brand equity dimensions originally proposed by Aaker (1991). Researches have indicated that brand equity positively influences consumer's brand preference and purchase intention. (Moradi, H., & Zarei, A. 2011).. Brand Equity alone can predict the Purchase Intention by explaining its more than 99 per cent variation as per the study by (Tharmi.U & Senthilnathan. S, 2011).

Studies has also been done to investigate the relationships between marketing mix elements and the creation of brand equity.(Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. ,2002) found that frequent price promotions, such as price deals, are related to low brand equity, whereas high advertising spending, high price, good store image, and high distribution intensity are related to high brand equity. Also studies of Brand Equity on Generation Z also shows that domestic brands do have serious challenges to create global brand equities. They have to adapt and develop social media brand management strategies to reach this new generation. (Nakay, E.,2017). Further, it was also noted that successful branding camping

can enhance the value of the firm and to allow the firm to raise the financial leverage (Krishnan, R., & Mohandas, N., 2013.)

Daniel Newman describes Influencer Marketing as the “next golden goose” of Marketing (Newman, 2015). It is, therefore, no surprise that in recent years we have experienced an entirely new form of brand communication via Social Media: Influencer Marketing. The term Influencer can be defined as follows: “A third party who significantly shapes the customer’s purchasing decision..”(Brown and Hayes, 2008) However, this form of marketing is not a new concept. For decades, paying well-known and influential personalities to promote a brand has long been part of the marketing strategy. What is new in the current research is that the advertising media superstars are not celebrities in the classical sense. Instead, they are convincing, brand-aware multipliers which are also consumers themselves. (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). Effective and planned formal and informal communications within the stake holders can result in a sustainable form of brand image, be it at firm level or at product level (Krishnan, M. R., & Ganesh, C., 2014). Its very important for brands to be aware of what are the factors that will influence the online shopping behavior on Instagram. The need for Influencer Marketing is highlighted by a study conducted by Influencer Marketing Hub 2020 in their Marketing Benchmark Report 2020. In this they surveyed 4000 marketing agencies, brands, and other industry professionals to gather their perspectives on the state of influencer marketing in 2020. 91 per cent of survey respondents believe influencer marketing to be an effective form of marketing. 80 per cent of firms take their influencer marketing spending from their marketing budget. 87 per cent of respondents use Instagram for influencer marketing. Nearly 90 per cent of all influencer campaigns include Instagram as part of the marketing mix. Moreover previous literature available in this area suggests that, 92 per cent of the marketers surveyed said it is an effective strategy. (Sweeney, 2018. An Influencer promoted branded content is considered to have more authentic, organic and direct contact with potential consumers than brand generated ads(Talavera, 2015). The popularity of influencer marketing has gone up exponentially. It is expected to grow to \$9.7 billion in 2020 from a figure of \$6.5 billion in 2019. Companies have started allocating part of their marketing budget for influencer marketing. It is also important to identify the influencer that they should be choosing to promote their brand as the influencer currently vary from mega-influencers (with one million-plus followers) to micro-influencers (with fewer than 1,00,000 followers). (Hatton, G.& Porteous, J. (2018).. The number of micro influencers have risen sharply over the years against the mega influencers. Studies also show that brands are very clear as to how to use the influencers in their campaign. 40 per cent of marketers use it to increase awareness. 36per cent place more emphasis on Sales, 24 per cent, to build up a library of user-generated content (Influencer Marketing hub 2020).

Markets have always remained dynamic with frequent introduction of new brands in the market. There are definite market share advantages for pioneering brands in the market (Urban, G. L., Carter, T., Gaskin, S., & Mucha, Z. 1986). The image of key person in a firm can make up what various stakeholders perceive about the firm, and this is also possible how an influence would make up the perception of product in the market (Krishnan, R., & Sebastian, F., 2021). New brand launches are risky endeavors for marketers, as many fail to attract a sustainable customer base. These brands with a low brand equity due to the low awareness, low perceived quality, low brand association will find it difficult to gain the consumer base from the brands with high brand equity. Also the experience of buying the new brand creates weaker memory traces in new buyers and that these buyers need additional marketing reinforcement to consolidate the memory of buying the brand to establish the brand in their ongoing repertoire (Trinh, G., Romaniuk, J., & Tanusondjaja, A. 2016). This research focus on whether this additional marketing reinforcement can be provided by influencer marketing with the help of social media influencers so that there is a positive impact on the customers buying intention.

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One of the most significant advantages of influencer marketing over using official company accounts is the scalability of the campaigns in terms of reach. For a bigger campaign, all brands need to do is to work with more influencers with larger followings. While organic influencer marketing may be challenging to scale, because of the time needed for influencer identification and wooing, that has also now been simplified by the presence of 740 platforms influencer-focused agencies that businesses can use to help scale their efforts. That has become a separate business (Influencer-marketing-benchmark-report-2020). Influencers can also make people spend more even during difficult times (George N.L., & Krishnan, M. R., 2021). All these data shows how serious this marketing strategy has evolved over the years.

The common way to predict consumer shopping behaviour is by measuring the consumer purchase intention. This study focuses on purchase intention because intention has wider implications and will often have a positive impact on an individual's actions (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Pierre et al., 2005; Schlosser et al., 2006). This has been supported by many scholars who have studied the significance of purchase intention in the context of brand consumption (Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Yoo & Lee, 2009; Zeithaml, 1988). Many researches have done study on purchase intention and has postulated definitions of purchase intention. Purchase intention is a consumer's objective intention toward a product (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Purchase intention is also defined as a consumer's conscious plan or intention to make an effort to purchase a product. (Spears & Singh, 2004). In addition, online purchase intention focuses on whether consumers are willing and intending to buy a certain product via online transaction platforms (Pavlou, 2003). (Morwitz, 2014) interprets purchase intention as a widely-used marketing tool to estimate the effectiveness of a marketing strategy, which can be used to predict sales and market share. Purchase intention is known to have a positive relationship with the actual buying behavior. It means that the higher the purchase intention, the higher the actual purchase behavior will occur (Bhakar et al., 2015; Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000; Wang, Cheng, & Chu, 2013). Therefore, purchase intention is valued as an important indicator in predicting consumer spending behavior, particularly actual buying behavior (Wu, Yeh, & Hsiao, 2011). Moreover studies have proved that social media influencer can have an impact on the purchase intention (Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. M., Cheah, J. H., & Wong, M. W. 2017). Also earlier studies have proved that, the brands with the higher brand equity generated significantly greater brand awareness and purchase intention (Cobb-Walgren, C. J., Ruble, C. A., & Donthu, N. 1995). Therefore, identifying the effectiveness of influencer marketing with social media influencers on products with low brand equity on purchase intention could potentially offer valuable insights to marketing practitioners, whereby they can develop promotional strategies to shape positive and impactful customers' attitude and decision-making towards their new and existing product.

According to the study conducted by (Goh, K. Y., Heng, C. S., & Lin, Z. 2013). It is proved that the purchase intention based on social media influencer endorsement was higher than firm generated endorsement on Social Media for different brands. Therefore, the question arises whether the purchase intention based on social media influencer endorsement is higher than firm based endorsement on Instagram and what would be the effect of the same on high brand equity and low brand equity brands. A Research gap is identified here and the following hypothesis was developed:

H1. The average score of purchase intention on social media influencer endorsement is significantly higher than endorsement without the presence of influencer on Instagram for brands with a difference in brand equity.

2. Methods

We now turn into a discussion of study, which was conducted to examine the hypothesis. The design for study was 2 (Type of Social Media Marketing (Influencer present / Influencer absent) x 2 (brand equity: high/low), all variable was manipulated between – subjects and assignment to condition was random.

Sample. This study's participants were 204 student Instagram users aged 18-25 years old. The sampling method used in this study was **purposive sampling**. Two hundred and ten students were recruited from a university research pool to participate in the study. From this seven was removed due to falling above the confounding limits. The final sample of (N=204) had 60 per cent female population and 40 per cent Male population. 79 per cent were aware of influencer marketing. Participants were given a questionnaire with a short study description and questionnaire and was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Participants were asked to read the description which contained the stimuli and then answer questions regarding the stimuli.

Research Design. This study used between **subjects post-test only we use descriptive analytical research design**, using four experimental groups. The endorser type was varied into social media influencer endorsement and endorsement without social media influencer between low brand equity and high brand equity products and participants were given post-test to measure their purchase intention.

Instrument and Measurement. The construct purchase intention was measured with 5 items that were obtained from (spears & singh, 2004). Participants were asked whether they would like to choose Headset from XYZ sounds. Purchase intention was then measured with four items : unlikely/likely; impossible/possible; never/definitely; low purchase intent/ high purchase intent; definitely not buy it/ definitely buy. and was measured by 5 points Likert scale ranging from point 1 which was "Very unlikely" to point 5 which was "Very likely". Reliability measurement result showed that the purchase intention instrument is reliable ($\alpha = 0,89$).

Procedure. Before the experiment, a preliminary study using online survey was conducted to determine a suitable social media influencer for Instagram and suitable products for the endorsement. The preliminary study's participants were 51 students from a Southern Indian university aged between 18 to 25 years. Participants were asked about which social media influencer they liked and considered famous, and what kind of products suitable for endorsement by their chosen social media influencer on Instagram. The results showed that the most frequently named social media influencer on Instagram and the highest frequency product suitable for him is Marcus Brownlee commonly known as MKBHD and blue tooth headphones. The firm generated endorsement was taken considering the different brands present in Instagram. Endorsement content was taken from one of the marketing content captions on Instagram.

We also made a fictional brand name to avoid participants' prior experience with the brand. The number of likes for social media influencer on Instagram stimulus was based on the number of likes of the last post updated by MKBHD at the time. The number of likes for the firm generated endorsement was made the same as the influencer so that there is no bias related to the same. Then we asked a professional graphic designer to create ad with Instagram smartphone version view.

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The next pretest was the selection of the fictitious brand name and product code. Again a discussion was held in this focus group of 10 from the earlier sample of 30 and the most realistic one suggested by the group was selected.

After all the stimulus were ready, we distributed the Questionnaire randomly on the four treatment conditions to the subjects. Each participant was asked to view the stimulus ad and fill in the questions below the ad in the questionnaire. They were asked some questions related to manipulation check and participant's demographic data.

3. Results

Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were included in the questionnaire to determine if the subjects interpreted both influencer manipulation and the brand equity manipulation. Influencer manipulation was done by asking whether they found the presence of influencer in the ad. It was measured using five point scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this was found to be .97. It was found that there was a significant difference in the respondents scores between the influencer present and absence conditions (M influencer present = 3.98 , SD = .916: M Influencer absent = 2.2, SD = .96 , F (1,202) =163.95 , p= .000)

Questionnaire items used to test the effectiveness of the high and low brand equity condition was adapted from (Yoo &Donthu's, 1997) brand equity scale. The scale employed 5 items representing the five brand equity dimensions originally proposed by Aaker (1991). The 5 items were evaluated on a five-point scale with (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91). An ANOVA test revealed that the manipulation was successful. (M High Brand Equity = 3.98 , SD = .44: M Low Brand Equity = 2.2, SD = .40, F (1,202) =697, p= .000)

Confound checks

A mean t test detected no difference in perceived, M Influencer Present = 4.16 versus M Influencer absent – 4.08, with p value= .67

Source of the data given in the Table 1. is primary data

Table 1. The Average Score of Purchase Intention of Each Experimental Group

Dependent Variables	Influencer Marketing			
	Mean scores and Standard Deviations			
	Influencer Present		Influencer Absent	
	Low Brand Equity	High Brand Equity	Low Brand Equity	High Brand Equity
Purchase Intention	4.21 (.72)	3.7 (.74)	2.67 (.55)	3.29 (.61)
N	57	44	55	48

The analysis, however did reveal a significant interaction. The univariate tests for the influencer marketing and brand equity shows that the interaction effect was attributed to the dependent variable purchase intention ($F(1,201) = 36.36, p=.000$). From this result we can say purchase intentions for different brand equity conditions depend on influencer marketing. This means that purchase intentions of different brand equity product are more positive if there is an influencer present in the social media endorsement than an endorsement without an influencer.

Simple effects test

To interpret the interaction and test the hypotheses, performed a simple effects test. It was predicted that purchase intention will be greater for participants in the low brand equity condition when the influencer is present, than when the influencer is not present.

The simple effect test results suggest that there is a significant difference in purchase intention between influencer present and influencer absent endorsement. Under low brand equity conditions, participants in the influencer present endorsement type had greater purchase intentions (M influencer present = 4.21, $SD = .72$) as compared to influencer absent (M Influencer absent = 2.67, $SD = .55$), $F(1,200) = 149.9, p = .000$. These results confirm Hypotheses H1.

Under High brand equity condition the purchase for participants in influencer present endorsement had (M influencer present = 3.7, $SD = .74$) compared to those in the influencer absent campaign (M influencer absent = 3.29, $SD = .61$), $F(1,200) = 8.67, p = .004$. Purchase intention was greater in case of influencer present campaign than influencer absence campaign for high brand equity conditions too. This results confirm Hypotheses H1.

From these results it can be implied that influencer play a key role in improving purchase intention of low brand equity product as well as a high brand equity product. This supports the researches on influencers and influencer marketing and support the case that an influencer do play a key role in improving the purchase intentions of products with different brand equity and can be used as an effective marketing tool by brands to improve the sales.

4. Findings and discussions

This study serves to show how things are changing when it comes to business and social networking. It has been suggested by researchers that presence of celebrity endorsing the product can improve the purchase intention.(Younus, S., Rasheed, F., & Zia, A. 2015). Online celebrities referred as a micro-celebrity(Senft, 2008) or Social Media Influencer (Khamis, S., Lawrence, A., & Raymond, W. 2017) promoting the product are also proved to improve the purchase Intention. Empirical evidence also shows that brand equity has a positive effect on consumer preferences, purchase intentions and brand choice (Chang & Liu, 2009; Irshad, 2012). The main purpose of this study was to determine how manipulating the type of influencer in social media marketing endorsement can affect the purchase intention in case of brands with high and low brand equity.

This findings from this study suggests some evidence that when the brand equity of the product is low, the company including a social media influencer in their social media endorsement can improve the purchase intentions. The social media influencers or micro celebrities are the non traditional celebrity which differs from traditional celebrities. They are preferred by the potential customers as they often uploads interesting photos or videos and their customer engagement is much higher with their followers(Setiawan et al., 2016). They have high influence on the followers and the

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cost of using their services is not as high as traditional celebrities (Setiawan et al., 2016).). Also the results pertain to Generation Z who comprise 32 per cent of the global population of 7.7 billion (Bloomberg News, 2018). This population will be the focus for the brands and this study has shown their intention to buy are more positive in the presence of a social media influencer, which is a clear marketing strategy brands can use to woo them into their fold. Considering these facts using them can be an economical way to use their marketing budgets effectively for companies and get better customer engagement.

Managerial implications

For social media marketing practitioners, this study emphasizes the efficacy of relying on Instagram influencers in branding campaigns, especially for consumer electronic brands. It points to the power of social media as an informational and inspirational source for marketing planning. From the perspective of marketing planning, the current findings point to Instagram influencer marketing as an effective branding strategy. There are many examples of companies that have transformed their businesses and presence across the world using this strategy of Social Media Influencers. Nowadays, It is hard to find a business that does not have an account on any social media network, and we can safely say that social media is a crucial aspect for any business enterprise - to sell their products, to be seen and, obviously, to make more money. (Backaler,J, 2018) in his book on Digital Influence talks about how Airbnb transformed itself from a US local company to a global company by effectively using the strategy of the local influencers-both celebrities and online personalities. They opened the door for Airbnb in different markets across the globe. Airbnb instead of communicating directly to customers they chose local influencers who can speak with authenticity and authority. Critical to its success was the company's use of local influencers to drive brand awareness through a series of cleverly designed campaigns. One of their memorable campaign was “ Don't Go there, Live There”. In 2016, Airbnb's London team designed an exclusive experience townhouse in London, where visitors could come and experience local food and music. The purpose was to show travellers” the real London” not found in guide books. It enlisted 25 Local influencers to amplify the event on social media- while 1400 guests visited the townhouse over four days, several millions learned about it online as a result of the influencer engagement. Literature talks about so many success stories like this. How companies like Nike, Starbucks, Louis Vuitton, Dior regularly use this strategy to improve their customer engagement and brand attitude.

This study suggests that its not only the strong brands that can take the advantage of the social media influencers, the brands with low brand equity can ideally build their brands and improve the purchase intention by leveraging the advantages that an influencer have on their followers. Since the cost to involve them is much less than the traditional celebrity and the customer engagement is much high as against the traditional celebrity, the ROI in this kind of a campaign will be much better than any other mode marketing. The study focused on Generation Z as, researches have found that nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of Generation Z adults (ages 18-24 years old) actively use Instagram, followed by Snapchat (63 per cent) and YouTube (62 per cent). (Statistica, 2019). Though 89 per cent of the companies are in Instagram, are they effectively using this platform to built their brand is still a question.

Instagram has evolved as a major social networking site for this purpose as of now. Disruptive advertising tactics used by marketers on common social networking sites like facebook, you tube invade seemingly every piece of content that users try to access on these platforms. The

download on ad-blocking filters are on the rise due to this. People are becoming less trusting of brands. Globally, adblocking has costed advertisers billions of dollars and the losses are growing year on year. In 2019, the display ad market was worth around 100 billion U.S. dollars worldwide, but some 40 percent of that amount was believed to be lost because of adblocking, roughly 10 percent more than in the previous year. Unsurprisingly, marketers around the world have grown increasingly wary of the growing popularity of adblocking usage. However, many consumers express willingness to disable adblockers in return for the ability to view relevant content. Which creates a window of opportunity for marketers, who can conquer ad blocking by offering personalized advertising and increasing the chances it will reach their target audiences. (Statistica, 2019). This again gives huge scope for social media influencer marketing and for Instagram to be one of the most important social media network for promotion. These ads becomes part of the feed. Also research has found that Instagram is one of the preferred kind of visual brand communication to engage with content that personally engages the user and thus evokes an emotional response, this drives higher engagement and also encourages lurkers to engage visibly (M Hellberg, 2015)

Companies worldwide can effectively use social networking sites like instagram to actively promote their brand with the help of social media influencers. The triangle of company- influencer-customer can be one of the best marketing mix possible for building the brand. The current findings speak the power of influencer marketing as a method for branding in social media environments.

Theoretical Implications

Since influencer marketing as an effective marketing strategy employed by brands continues to grow, both in India as well as in western countries, the present study adds to the existing literature giving a perspective to how consumers intention to buy can be positively impacted by the presence of influencer with different brand equity conditions.

Limitations of the study

Even as this study is based on influencer marketing and brand equity, it also has several limitations that needs to be acknowledged.

The first relates to the sample. This study was conducted using a student sample in the age group 18 – 25 years, to get a homogeneous group among all treatment conditions and control for confounds. This is a limitation that could challenge the ability to generalize the findings.

Participants were asked to read through the instagram post that sets the context of the study. In processing the story given in the post, there is a possibility of getting involved with the subject more than they might have been in real world settings.

The product category though having chosen after pretest and focus group discussions, belonged to an affordable category, can the result for an expensive product be different, future research need to consider this. It only focused on a single product category and brand.

The influencer characteristics also having decided after a focus group discussion there can be a possibility of subjects not ok with the influencer chosen.

Fictitious brands and influencer were used to eliminate pre existing biases. Experiments with actual brands, while controlling for the biases, could also be tried in future studies to check for inconsistencies with theory.

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It is important to note that various social media apps have affordances and spirits different from what Instagram offers. Future studies can consider cross-platform comparisons.

Scope for future research

This research poses several questions that merit future work. The influencer studied here belongs to micro celebrity category. The marketers are slowly thinking of moving towards the nano influencers who have any thing between 1000 to 5000 likes. A study on them warrants further research. Generation Z has been considered as subject in this study. To extent this to millennial behaviours also warrants further research. The different dimensions of brand equity like the brand awareness, quality, resonance etc that can mediate the relation between influencer and intention to buy also needs further studies. There is a parallel research needed to address the negativity associated with influencer marketing and how it can affect the brands.

Conclusion

This study found indications that influencer marketing plays an important role in changing consumer decisions in favour or against the brand. The study also looked at the responses when an influencer is not present and how the consumer decisions changed both for high brand equity and low brand equity products.

These study reiterated the fact that influencer can make or break consumer perceptions for brand and is not too small a thing for marketers to ignore in the current social media boom.

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