

Spring 2020

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING AND IMPLEMENTING THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

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SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING
AND IMPLEMENTING THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

by:

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Submitted to the School of Honors Committee
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2020

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Abstract

This thesis dives into the importance of social media marketing within a business. It starts off with a literature review that explains how much people use social media, how businesses have begun to recognize this trend, and how to turn this trend into a successful marketing strategy. This strategy can be demonstrated through online ads, influencer marketing, and a strong social media presence. The thesis will identify and examine all of these methods. The second part of this thesis is based on an online survey provided to the general public (over 18) in order to discover if the findings in the literature review are correct. The survey shows that people use on average 3 hours on social media a day. And, they visit multiple different social media platforms. One of the most revealing findings in this study was that people are being influenced more by the things they view on social media, because they trust those opinions, then other forms of marketing. Social media marketing has replaced the importance of commercials, billboards, and print ads. The survey received 780 responses and gave a comprehensive understanding on this topic.

Keywords

KEYWORDS:

Social media, influencer, marketing, business, return on investment, company, brand

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Introduction:

Communication is the thread that weaves throughout all aspects of life. Due to this, it is essential to examine the *way* people communicate. Social media is the new way people communicate every day and all day long. When people spend a vast majority of their time scrolling, double tapping, and clicking, the implications and the benefits must be examined.

Not only are people wondering where social media fits in with the mold of life, but businesses have noticed this trend as well. Traditionally, a business was in charge of their portrayal and they were able to “save face” by creating an image they could uphold. The business made the decision on how they advertise and market their material. Now, this image is created and maintained by their consumers.

Why is this topic important? Everyone is immersed in advertisement; whether that is through print and traditional media or social media. Whereas traditional media has standards and guidelines for ethics and success, social media has a wavering line. Without investigation on how to implement a successful marketing strategy within social media, it will become mishandled. This mishandling will lead to unethical marketing strategies— such as ad-tracking that goes too far. This will lead to harassment of marketers or undisclosed advertisements that are meant to deceive people. The knowledge of social media marketing will allow businesses and consumers alike to enjoy the benefits while being aware of the costs. This will ensure the best possible return on investment for a business and the best quality advertisement to consumers.

Before delving into the logistics of a successful social media endeavor, it must be determined if people are actually spending *that* much time on social media and how much this affects their purchasing habits. This review is meant to guide as a framework for how social

media is an indispensable tool that businesses are meant to utilize. Not only should they use this for productive advertisement, they should *choose* this as the preferred form of marketing. By the strategies in this review, marketing agencies and people alike should have the tools to implement successful social media marketing.

However, people already have started using this style of marketing in their businesses, so what is the importance of surveying it? Because this marketing strategy is user-generated, it requires a certain amount of knowledge to execute it successfully. The consequences are significant for poorly handled public relations within a company. Word-of-mouth recommendations from consumers are beneficial and should be looked at as an advantage. Even though there is a loss of control, it will help the natural growth of a company's goals.

One of the most essential ways that social media marketing is implemented is through influencers. An influencer is someone who creates an account on social media, then, gains amount of followers who care about their posts. In turn, this person, promotes different companies and brands through pictures, videos, and blogs. The paper will delve more into the specifics of how this is beneficial to a company and how it is implemented.

The problem to be solved by my research is how the return on investment in social media marketing is worth the cost. It will investigate the definition, history, and methods used in social media marketing. Proving the importance of a successful social media strategy is the objective of this research, which will be accomplished using a survey correlating usage on social media with spending habits, and while this research will encounter challenges such as gaining an extensive amount of knowledge on all age groups.

Research Questions:

- Do people actually want to be reached from advertisement in their social media?
- Are people being influenced by the accounts they follow on sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, etc. to make purchases?
- How do businesses use the personal aspect of social media to their advantage?
- Is it better to market with people who have less of a following but will do it for free as opposed to paying for influencers who have a larger audience?
- What kinds of businesses succeed with social media marketing?

These questions guided the research and investigation through this review. While some of them are answered throughout this review, like the way people want to be reached through advertisement, others will require a more in-depth study.

Review of Literature

This literature review will examine (1) why people are entertained by media and how this indicates (2) successful marketing strategies. It will show how (3) the immense time spent on social media and “getting to know” influencers lead to a larger return on investment than traditional marketing techniques. It will also highlight the (4) moral and ethical obligations due to the time spent on cell phones and social media sites. Due to this fact, the research will investigate that (5) being aware of these implications can lead to better marketing while being conscious of respect to privacy and well-being.

Social Media Defined

In a general sense, social media shows people's personalities. It creates the illusion of a close relationship without actually being close (physically) at all. Social media is defined by The Merriam-Webster dictionary as: "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)" (social media, 2019). By this definition, social media *must* be online, and it *must* be user generated content. So, traditional forms of media, that only allow certain people to share, would not be considered. These sharing of ideas and personal messages, either builds trust or skepticism within a brand or company.

In recent years, social media is topic of discussion about the pros and cons. These speculations began to surface when people heard about fake news, privacy speculations, and body dysphoria. However, considering this is discussing morality, it is difficult to actually come to a conclusion.

While people accept social media as a normal addition in everyday life, this was not always the case. Social media usage was only at a 5% in 2005 (Terrell, 2019). It is difficult to pinpoint where social media truly began. People theorize that it could have started with telegraphs or messages sent to groups. However, from the definition that it must be on the internet and it must be user generated, this eliminates anything before the internet began. It also does not include things like messages because they were created by an individual for an individual (or individualized group).

With this in mind, the first website that fulfilled these terms was Six Degrees. Six Degrees was created in 1997 by Andrew Weinreich. It was intended to connect the theory that everyone is connected within six degrees of each other. This site allowed users to generate

profiles and add their friends (Terrell, 2019). Six degrees shut down in 2001. However, it peaked at 3.5 million users which made it extremely popular at that time.

Social media continued to grow into websites like LinkedIn in 2002, Myspace in 2003, and Facebook in 2004. All of these websites became increasingly popular as they were launched and more people began to create accounts (Terrell, 2019). While these became highly used, it had nothing on the impact social media made with smart phones. Social media is a completely different story now. With the emergence of smart phones, people are able to use multiple social media applications all throughout the day. They have a device in their hands at all times which navigates all the social media platforms, all day long.

The Pew Research foundation conducted a study to investigate social media usage in 2018. They discovered that the percentage of adults using social media sites were around 68% for Facebook, 27% using Snapchat, and 35% using Instagram. However, that number radically shifted when the age group was narrowed to only 18-24 year old users. Instagram and Snapchat skyrocketed their percentages into usage at 78%. On top of that, in the same percentage group 71% of those visited these sites multiple times throughout the day (Smith & Anderson, 2019). Based on these findings, it is evident the social media usage is high across the board. However, it must be recognized that the separate platforms people use to access content, varies by almost double with a shift in age group.

Companies used to be able to control the information available about them through strategic press announcements and a team of well-trained public relation officials. Today, firms have been increasingly regulated to the sidelines as mere observers, having neither the knowledge nor the chance to alter publicly posted comments provided by their customers. For example, Wikipedia expressly forbids the participation of firms in its online community (Kaplan,

2010). This is due to the fact that they want to create a natural space for user-generated content. Social media creates the space for opinions and information to be by the average person over just people who work at the company.

So, social media is the online platforms in which users generate content. This is demonstrated through words, pictures, videos, and reposts. It has significantly risen in usage since when it first originated based on the percentage differences from 2002-4 until 2018 (Smith & Anderson, 2019). This can be intimidating for those who work in business and marketing because of the loss of control.

People's Entertainment with Social Media

People are fascinated with the idea that their everyday life can be used to influence or encourage people. Users now generate advertisement rather than just consume it. Pierre Berthon, a researcher at Bentley University for the *California Management Review*, conducted a study that investigated numerous amounts of high-profiles and viewed *why* users interacted with these profiles. He also investigated the drive for people creating their own advertisement and content. He concluded that managers are better off viewing the consumer-generated advertising phenomenon as a word-of-mouth rather than a conventional advertising dilemma (Berthon, 2008). Their research and models are meant to guide as a framework for marketing and managers to use strategically in advertisement efforts. User generated content has shown that it is here to stay, so rather than look at it with a negative connotation, they should look for ways for it to function to their advantage. The loss of control in this situation can be viewed as good or bad, however marketers must embrace it in order to succeed.

A study conducted by Kuancheng Lin and her research team (2011) investigates how social networking sites are creating new networking opportunities. Lin used an online questionnaire to gather empirical research which explored factors that affect users who join social media. He also investigated how social networking sites create new networking opportunities for individuals and businesses. He analyzed data of 402 samples by the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. The SEM approach is just a scientific way to achieve the most accurate results from open-ended questions.

They explored factors that affect users who join social media; this study applied networking and motivation theory that will explain why people continue to join social networking sites. The research found that enjoyment is the greatest factor in people's continual use of social media; which seems self-evident. However, it is important to note that many people turn to social sites as fun instead of a task, work, or other obligatory accomplishment. This is especially essential when trying to discover why people *enjoy* social media, as opposed to just time spent on these sites. The next factors were number of connections and then how useful it can be.

Social media should continue to develop applications with pleasurable experiences to reinforce pleasurable effects in using the site and further to strengthen its stickiness (Kuancheng 2011). By incorporating pleasurable effects in social media sites, users will spend more time on them. This will expand the growth of marketing efforts through this influence. These pleasant experiences can be accomplished by immediate satisfaction (such as people liking and commenting on photos) or by long term satisfaction (such as a gradual but continuing increase in followers). Both of these affirmations help people to continue producing and consuming content.

The influence of social media: Social media is pivotal in the decisions people make to buy products. Min Sung, an author of a recent study about the reason *why* people are encouraged to buy products and the purpose of her study was to examine the social media attributes that promote product browsing and if it impacts purchasing.

She broke the purchase intent into two categories: utilitarian, the practical and useful, and hedonic, the fun and adventurous. These two reasons people purchase products was impacted by what people view on social media advertisements (Sung, 2018). The analysis of the collected data showed that social media marketing tactics crucially affect product selection. Sung also indicated that adventure, status, and vacation-style have positive effects for browsing product.

It is important to note that if people were only drawn to purchase items they already need and there was *not* an interest for the fun and adventurous purchases, it would limit how much businesses could succeed with social media marketing. However, since people are interested in new, fun, and dynamic products and interests, it allows an exponential market. This means that people *want* to be shown or told what to buy.

Based on this information, it is imperative for companies to provide to implement a social media strategy because it is so influential. People were drawn to products when they were shown in a unique and enticing way. If people are drawn to adventure, a business can benefit from featuring their product on social media presences in order to boost interest.

Statistics are essential in viewing why social media has become so influential. According to Smith's study, 68% of U.S. adults are now Facebook users (Smith 2019). However, there are substantial differences in social media use by age. They stated that 88% of 18- to 29-year-olds indicate they use any form of social media. That share falls to 78% among those ages 30 to 49, to

64% among those ages 50 to 64, and to 37% among Americans 65 and older (Smith 2019). So, it is accurate in stating, the younger the person is, the more likely they are active on social media.

Not only are people active on social media sites across the board, but roughly three-quarters of Facebook users – and around six-in-ten Snapchat and Instagram users visit each site *daily* and many of them multiple times every day (Smith 2019). Social media has monopolized the entertainment industry. It provides people with easy, achievable, and entertaining content all the time.

Successful Marketing Strategies

Businesses View of Social Media:

Social media holds enormous potential for companies to build a closer relationship with customers and this increases revenue, cost reduction and efficiencies. Customers and their highly influential virtual networks are now driving the conversation, which can trump a company's marketing, sales and service efforts with their unprecedented immediacy and reach (Baird, 2011). Carolyn Baird conducted a study on how businesses should approach social media and view their marketing strategies. IBM surveyed over 1,000 consumers worldwide and 350 executives with questions on engagement and interactivity.

The study had surprising findings: people *view* businesses, but they do not look to comment and interact; they value the opinions of family and friends more, and consumers want tangible benefits more than social media incentives. They concluded businesses need a facelift with their social media posts. While they are communicating something, they are not

communicating effectively based on what consumers want to look at. The way to conduct beneficial posts will include coupons, giveaways, and informative information.

Social media is not beneficial just through existing, it is from *how* it is conducted. This study identifies how to not be discouraged by a business who has fewer comments, when in reality it could have higher sales. However, it also highlights how essential it is for a business to create a personal aspect with their consumer. When a consumer trusts a brand, they will continue to support and follow what the business does. It is an opportunity like never before which brands get to gain a relationship with their consumer.

Identifying Influencers:

So how does a brand build a relationship with their consumers? Through implementing influencer marketing. Influencers are people hired outside of an organization, either with free product or payment, by a company to promote their brand. There is not one specific model that companies follow when approaching or working with influencers. However, there are some common techniques businesses use in how they select influencers.

The thing about these influencers, is that there is no true “mark” a person must meet to become one. There are different tiers of people, micro influencers, mid-tier influencers, macro influencers and celebrities (Schomer 2019). Micro influencers are usually between 5k-15, mid-tier is usually between 16k-49k, macro influencers are usually between 50k-250k, and then anything above is usually considered a celebrity. The problem with putting people in these categories is that someone could have many followers but not receive many likes, comments, or engagement on their posts. This would show that their followers may exist, but they do not care

about the posts or brands that person is working with (Vierman, 2017). In turn, a company would recognize that this kind of influencer would not get them a very high return on their investment.

Based on this information, companies have to do investigating to find the key influencers for their brand. Ideally it would be someone with a large following, with people who care about their content, and is not too expensive to hire. However, usually brands have to decide based on their budget what they can compromise.

Influencer Marketing:

Influencer marketing is the act of a public figure promoting a brand or product on a media platform (Glucksman, 2017). It used to be thought of a celebrity promoting something in order to *influence* people who respect and admire that celebrity. However, recent trends have shown this to shift from merely celebrities to regular people. Morgan Glucksman, a student at Elon specializing in media communications, conducted a study to investigate this phenomenon. The author conducted a comparative and qualitative content analyses of posts by social media influencers. The discovery revealed that the use of social media influencer marketing has broken the wall between the consumer and the brand, changing the way the two interact (Glucksman, 2017). These findings support that public relations continues to show a shift from only being controlled by the company to being widely controlled by the public who represent that brand. If a brand is not using influencer marketing in their social media strategy, they may want to consider how effective it is.

Schomer (2019), is part of an online agency who identifies influencers, claims there are two main ways to categorize influencers: reach and niche. Reach: as a general rule this includes any profile with a dedicated following. This is cost-effective, ensure audience engagement, and

authentic. Whereas niche influencers can be more pinpointed (Schomer 2019). This would be like a fitness brand choosing an influencer who posts all about workouts and health. This ensures that brands can leverage relevant niche influencers to more intentionally target.

Just because someone has a large following, does not mean they will be valuable for a brand. It is essential to identify the key qualities an influencer should possess for representing each company. For instance, influencers with a high number of followers but who only receive minimal likes do not have an engaged audience. Due to this, their followers are unlikely to purchase any product they are promoting. It may be more beneficial to hire someone with less followers who are highly engaged in their content than the former.

Likewise, an influencer who has a highly engaged audience and they post about their family and household, may not be the best selection for sports equipment. While their audience may enjoy suggestions for household, baby, and family items, they may not be receptive to items outside of that realm. It seems simple to hire someone with a large audience in order to reach that crowd. But, if they are representing something outside of what they normally post about, it may not resonate with their followers.

Marijke De Veirman (2017) studied Instagram accounts with a large number of followers in order to experiment if they were viewed as more likable. His aim was to identify which characteristics make an influencer effective in marketing. Veirman experimented the perception of these popular figures and how this leads to a better drive in sales as opposed to more diverse accounts.

He conducted a study that showed a variety of people the same Instagram profile but with differing follower numbers and followee numbers. The experiment had one male and one female in order to eliminate gender bias. Those in the study rated things like trustworthiness, likability,

and if they were likely to engage with their content. The study found that the same profile with more followers rated higher in all the categories.

The experiment led to the conclusion that people trust the opinions of those who have following on their account.

He highlighted that a major challenge for brands is to identify and select which influencers are best suitable for the company's product. Also, he indicated the struggle of identifying how these influencers will impact the adoption of new products and help diffuse them in their social network through their posts (Vierman, 2017). This research concluded that the follower/followee ratio is an important factor in the reputation of an influencer. When considering an influencer to promote products, partnering with one with a high number of followers might not be the best option, this could lower the brand's perceived uniqueness and attitudes.

While companies can find it essential to view influencers as a tool to utilize, other companies turn to influencers as a way to build the image of their brand. In the Harvard Business Review, they highlight their research on 27 unique influencers. They found both the influencer and the brand they are working with have a better relationship when it becomes less about follower count and more about the identity (Kerviler, 2019). This ensures companies are hiring people who can best represent their demographic and core values.

There are two ways companies select or keep rehiring their influencers. The first is a transactional, low-cost, and low risk. The company selects an influencer for a campaign, if it works in their favor, they continue to use them. However, if they feel the campaign did not go as well (not a lot of likes, traffic to the website, engagement, etc.), they will not choose to work with them again. The second way is to develop fewer but more specialized relationships with

influencers. This second approach views the collaboration extending further than just one campaign (Kerviler, 2019). It allows the influencer to sign a longer-term contract and manage a day-to-day relationship. This partnership allows for a more authentic partnership because it is not based on a one-time transaction.

Relational partnerships lead to a more authentic posts, but they are difficult to pinpoint attributes that are numerically benefiting the return on the initial investment. However, brands who have initiated the relational partnerships with influencers, like L'Oreal and Asos, have seen an enormous growth on their social media platforms (Kerviler, 2019). L'Oreal, a hair care line, grew their page from 4.6 million to 6.3 million in the past year through implementing successful influencer partnerships with long term and quality people. Asos has almost doubled their followers in the past year after also implementing their brand to numerous influencers (as per data on www.socialblade.com). Brands are looking for long term partnerships with influencers they trust to represent the company (Schomer 2019). Based on these figures, companies have seen an extremely positive increase in their engagement with their customers on social media platforms.

Based on Mediakix data (an influencer marketing agency), they predict that the influencer marketing industry has an estimated worth of \$15 billion in 2019. This is due to the fact that people are having numerical and quality success in reaching their audiences. Brands are succeeding in more than selling a product, they are succeeding in accomplishing a personality with their consumers (Schomer 2019). This is essential for brands to build their reputation with their publics.

Ad placement:

While being aware of social media's purchasing impact is essential, this still leaves room for interpretation on *how* to accomplish successful social media. The author is a newer researcher, John Wolfe, who did a study on the relationship between the locations where brand influencers place their ad disclosure (e.g., "#ad") in a social media post and consumer attitudes towards the social media post and how they are impacted by the nature of the caption. Instead of selecting tweets by specifics, Wolfe investigated the first 100 tweets that Twitter provided using the disclosure #ad. The study then traced the interaction of those tweets by looking at the likes and online traffic they received (Wolfe, 2018). The study found that posts with #ad at the end did better overall than one's with #ad somewhere in the middle.

Return on Investment:

Within a business, it is imperative for them to analyze if they are seeing results from the money, they spend on marketing efforts. This can be difficult to pinpoint in social media marketing because people can be influenced in so many different ways. However, one of the most critical ways to analyze the return on investment is to view the traffic gained.

Kumar (2013) researched the marketing strategies of a specific company, Hokey Pokey. He completed observations on how to identify social media influencers, how they interacted with their community, and who their followers are. To ensure credible information they stated that their tracking methodology randomly identified users and snowballed their networks by tracking their connections until each clique was completely accounted for (Kumar, 2013). The social media campaign received complete positive sale lift in every aspect after implementing the social media campaign. The article concluded that their total sales increased from 3% rate of a second purchase to a 60% rate. Kumar acknowledged the goal of this paper was to implement a general

process for marketing strategy and not to consistently identify the specific underlying relationships.

Application:

While it is identified that creating and upholding a brand based on social media is beneficial, it is essential to examine how to make this possible. In different cases, brands have found a way to pinpoint where they are seeing the greatest return on their investment.

In this example, Yating Pan (2019) addressed a gap in the analysis and explanation of the different types of social messages with the existing social media marketing literature. With the feedback from social media sites, businesses can improve decisions on how to serve clients and create more satisfying products and services, thus increasing customer loyalty and sales (Pan, 2019). The author concluded that companies who can balance their strategies and communicate appropriately with their customers could best take advantage of the social media platforms and hence maximize sales.

Social media marketing is evident on all social networking platforms. However, four in five brands use Instagram for influencer marketing opposed to Facebook (49%) Youtube (36%) Twitter (24%) (Schomer 2019). Therefore, it seems like majority of influencers are working through Instagram. In 2018, 19% of all U.S. consumers — including 36% of those aged under 25 — purchased a product or service because a social media influencer recommended it (Charry 2019). This indicates how essential it is to know the audience. When a brand knows the age and preferences of their audience, they are able to build a marketing strategy that will fit their needs.

Social Media and Influencers

Social Media influencers are an emerging way that marketing is successfully being implemented. They organically gain their followers and because of this, their followers trust the recommendations they provide.

An article written by Mehita Iquani (2019), lecturer in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand with a PhD in Media and Communications, examines the cultural work of social media influencers who market luxury brands on their Instagram profiles. It analyzes the brand material posted by six social media ‘influencers’ (Iqani, 2019). Iquani describes in depth how these influencers are categorized and able to work on behalf of social media. She argues there are multiple types of value created by the influencers: by attempts at becoming a celebrity, in telling the story of the brand, and as role of models of aspirational consumer-citizenship. It proves that those influencers create the dynamic of different companies’ brand.

Who to use?

While social media is identified as having a substantial impact, how do businesses know who to use for their campaigns?

Michael B. Goodman conducted research to identify the new influential community on social media platforms and how it wields significant power over the perceptions of brands and companies. These perceptions largely drive the rapid expansion of social media channels through which these influencers communicate. The people who were “nobodies” (as this article deems the average person) are now the new “somebodies.” They draw attention of the prior communication professionals who seek this repetition of engagement with consumers through the channels of the social web (Goodman, 2011). The purpose of this article is to present a way

to identify these new “somebodies” who are taking over the social media in a stride. This article uses an algorithm created to identify who these influencers are and how they create brand awareness for companies. The algorithm measures the variables that rate influencers in the social media realm about a particular company, product or service.

Another study which agrees with the previous one was done by researcher Andrew Stephen, who is the associate dean for research for L'Oréal and the head of the marketing faculty at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

His research looks into the market influencers who have not been used and who can also have positive effect on brands. They investigated the role of everyday influencers in spreading product information via word-of-mouth. Also, they researched how valuable information is to spread through particular incentives to these influencers for spreading information based on the economic idea of promotion.

The research found that if they could get regular people who want to share information with their well-connected friends, they could achieve better results than if we just went after the well-connected people in the first place (Stephen, 2018). However, they identified they still need key influencers, but don't always need to target them directly, if it is difficult or costly to do so.

Social media influencers' impact is not a reflection of the number of followers, but it is the way those followers are impacted. If they are impacted by the influencer in a creative, authentic, and confident way, they are more likely to care about the brand being promoted. This is essential for brands to identify key influencer that have a genuine impact on their followers (Glucksman,2017).

Many influencers take to Instagram first because of the ease to post pictures, tag brands, and be personal. Instagram allows people to follow along with the lives of the influencers they

choose and admire. It allows influencers to personally comment, direct message, and build relationships with their following (Glucksman, 2017). This platform is especially important for business with a younger demographic. According to an influencer network back in 2016, “50 percent is the pace of Instagram’s annual user growth. Snapchat is at 56 percent” (Burgess, 2016).

Even though people do not truly know the influencers, consumers feel as if they do because of the daily updates and following along with their lives. This allows consumers to form interpersonal relationships with them. According to Shan, a higher degree of confidence of a consumer leads to a greater connection with a influencer of high confidence. In addition, consumers’ identification mediates the relationship of an endorsement’s effectiveness (Shan, 2019). This means that people want to be connected with likeminded influencers.

Moral Dilemma

The Federal Trade Commission established the necessity for influencers to disclose brand partnerships. Many brands and influencers alike feared this would make engagement go down if most of their content has the disclosure: #ad. However, from the platform Aspire IQ, a digital agency that enables marketers and content creators a platform to connect, views this differently. They have found when an influencer discloses, they are in a partnership, their engagement rate stays the same (Charry 2019). At this point, social media users understand influencing is a job. It is better to be upfront about sponsorships rather than have it seem like a genuine review with no benefits, only to find out that the influencer was paid. Transparency builds trust in the social media industry.

A good way to hire influencers while still getting authentic branding is to send free product before hiring (Charry 2019). That way, the influencer can try it or style it and reach back out if that is something they genuinely love. This may seem like a longer process; but in the end, it builds trust with the audience. It eliminates the negative feelings people have towards “ads” from influencers who seem like they are not being honest about their review of a product.

Deception:

Social media influencers increasingly get approached or they reach out to brands. So, how do they continue to be authentic and not deceptive to their audience? Research done from Alice Audrezet, culminates responses of qualitative results in order to understand the process social media influencers go through. This research is conducted through observations, interviews, and comparison in the data between these two sources. They articulated two successful strategies, passion and transparency. The goal of this research was to find the most beneficial practice for companies to hire influencers and influencers to work with companies. In the end, most companies are not aiming to deceive people, they truly want to market to the consumers who will love their products (Audrezet, 2018). This study went into depth about how to make those practices a reality so that both parties can be the most successful.

Social media is so starkly different from other marketing platforms because it is user generated. This has allowed the average person to go to a micro influencer all the way to a celebrity status. There are many different niches for people to be involved in. However, it takes talent to curate a social media page that attracts a mass audience. Influencers have done this through mastering beautiful photography, outfit inspiration posts, funny videos, relatable quotes, interesting business endeavors, and the list goes on. Especially with fashion and lifestyle,

aesthetic judgment and taste discrimination are qualities that only a select group can truly capitalize (Audrezet, 2018). Influencers create a whole different dynamic because they embody the realistic life goal. They are attractive to brands because they can relate and communicate a presentation of personal and clothing taste. In regards to this, marketers developed a new communication practice which is deemed, “influencer marketing” (Audrezet, 2018).

People turn to these social media influencers to get authentic opinions and influence from those they look up to (Audrezet, 2018). However, what happens when these “authentic” people, become just as staged things seen on previous platforms? People start to lose trust in their opinions and view them as commercialized. As Audrezet says, “SMIs' intrinsic desires to create content about their personal passions might be sidetracked by commercial opportunities to promote brands or products they would not ordinarily be interested in” (2018). On one hand the influencer wants to create content about products they love. However, it comes into question if they need to balance this with companies who they may not normally work, but are offering them money.

Body Image: Body image is affected more from social media than regular media like fashion magazines or television shows. Jasmine Fardouly, a postdoctoral researcher for the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University, (2015) conducted an experimental research study to investigate Facebook’s effect on women’s mood and body image. Her goal was to discover whether this effect was different than a fashion magazine.

The participants in the study were under the impression they were helping research for media effects on memory. They chose 112 female participants between the ages 17 and 25. The

research team created three groups: one to scroll on Facebook, one to scroll on a popular fashion website, and one to scroll on an appearance-neutral control website.

The participants took pre and post state-measured tests that tested mood, body, weight, appearance dissatisfaction, and comparison. The research found those who spent time on Facebook had a more negative mood than those on the appearance-control site. The research also discovered those who were on Facebook had more face, hair, and skin dissatisfaction than those who were on the fashion website (Fardouly, 2015). Based on these findings, it showed girls who spent time on Facebook were in a more negative and self-deprecating mood than those who were not.

What is social media and how does it differ from other closely related things like user-generated content? Businesses must understand how to effectively approach social media in making profitable endeavors. Due to the fact social media's key components are blogs, collaborative projects, social networking, and virtual reality, social media is for all age groups. Through investigation they discovered that social media allows firms and companies to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency (Kaplan, 2010). This is more easily achieved with more traditional communication tools.

Another study conducted done by Blair Burnette (2017) on an all-girls private school, to investigate body image and the impact of parental and school support on confidence. The research examined the nature of early adolescent engagement with social media and correlation with the way they viewed their body image. The research team consisted of four doctoral students who studied qualitative methods and data analysis. They created eight focus groups of four to five girls in middle school to do this research study.

It discovered that 90% of the girls used social media multiple times a day (Burnette, 2017). Questions were posed about the use of social media and the way the girls viewed their appearance. The research concluded that social media exposure is not the only cause of a negative self-image. While some of the girls expressed that prolonged use on apps (specifically Instagram) made them feel less pretty, they also concluded that it was a temporary feeling based on who they follow (Burnette, 2017). This was such a low expressed feeling and it appeared that all of the girls studied had a strong grasp on self-awareness and confidence. The research also discovered the focus group had strong parental supervision and a school environment that encouraged body positivity.

Based on research about body image being linked to social media, it appears that while social media has an impact on the body image, it is combatted by a supportive family figure and social influence.

While it is essential to be aware of the impacts of social media, it appears social networking sites are making an effort to combat these effects. Instagram identifies that body dissatisfaction that has been reported from children, teens, and adults. They have already begun “hiding” posts from minors in order to ensure safety. This is demonstrated through the picture being blurred and an icon to unblur it must be clicked. They have hidden things like violent and provocative content. Now, they are using the new algorithm to limit the amount of fitness, weight loss, and cosmetic procedure posts that appear on user’s timelines. Their hope is that this encourages influencers to post more real content or their engagement rate will go down (Walker, 2019). If influencers are being encouraged to be more authentic, people will have less unrealistic body and life examples in front of them.

This is not just the case with small brands or a few boutiques, even high-end brands are looking to partner with relatable and real life influencers. This is evident through Louis Vuitton collaborating with Emma Chamberlin (a lifestyle youtuber and Coach's campaign with Rickey Thompson). These influencers do not promote unrealistic body image, unrealistic lifestyles, or excessive body proportions (Walker 2019). In fact, they promote the opposite. Emma Chamberlin often shows her real life through her acne struggles, common teen problems, and bad days.

It appears that companies want influencers with confidence in themselves to be promoting their product or brand. An influencer can show their confidence through something as simple as smiling, simply writing how they are happy, or spreading positivity. When an influencer does this, it also promotes confidence in the brand. This allows people to have trust in the brand and in return feel confident about making a purchase (Glucksman, 2017). According to the Influencer Orchestration Network, "51 percent of marketers believe they get better customers from influencer marketing. That is because the relationship began with the trust of the influencer" (Burgess, 2017). This trust is built from the authenticity people feel when a brand uses people who show their real, everyday life.

Being upfront and genuine helps build trust with consumers. It is no longer the best thing to appear perfect and untouchable. This encourages those who have a platform and audience watching them to be transparent. This will potentially impact the negative emotions people have towards social media. Social media platforms and brands are actively making a change in the way they are reaching and emotionally impacting their consumers. The way people want to be reached is through realistically making life look appealing, while promoting a brand in a transparent way.

Conclusion

The research presented answered if people are actually entertained from social media and content creating. It was found that people feel encouraged to highlight their interest in content that they personally enjoy and be involved with word-of-mouth referencing. However, there still needs to be investigation on more simple matters with social media; such as, the percentage of people who spend their time on social media, what age range these are, what sites, and what brands do they follow. There also needs to be more in-depth studying on the monetary value of hiring social media influencers to represent a product.

Social media is essential and beneficial within a brand or company. However, more research needs to be done about practical practices to incorporating this necessary step. Social media is the face of today. It is the first thing many users will look at. It has the ability to make or break a company. It cannot be regarded as an after-thought.

Methodology:

In relation to the literature review conducted, the aim of this paper is to identify through a study if these findings are accurate. While scientific articles provide a broad scope of understanding, it is essential to continually collect numerical data to pinpoint findings. It is also imperative to compare the results of the study with the findings from the literature review.

The study used an online questionnaire to collect data. The survey included closed and open-ended questions about how social media platforms impact purchase habits. Different questions covered how much time the user spends on social media sites, what accounts they

follow, what their spending habits are recently, and if sponsored content makes them more/less likely to purchase something. This questionnaire was developed from copious amounts of research on social media usage and spending habits. It used a deductive approach and all the questions had fixed answers in order to ensure the ability to measure specific data. The survey was made available through Sona systems and through a link provided on the researcher's social media accounts. This survey was created on Google Forms. Participation was voluntary and with no incentive.

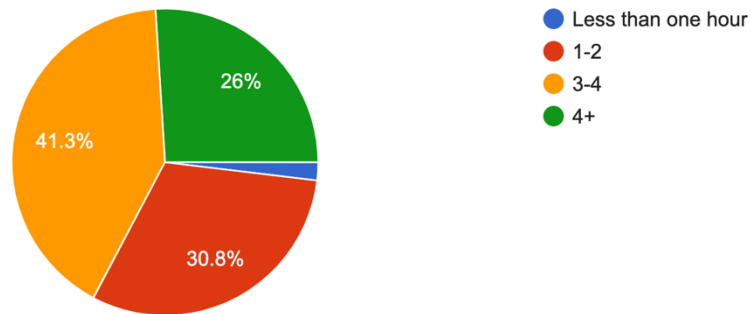
Data were collected from a small private university in central Florida with around 3,000 students through Sona Survey. It was also posted on the researcher's personal Instagram account with a swipe up to the Google Form link to a total of 4,000 people who viewed the story. The google form must be submitted with an email to ensure people only respond one time to the survey. Due to this, it ensures people are not recording multiple responses for the same person. A total of 785 people completed this study.

Data Analysis:

In analyzing the data from this study, the goal was to determine answers to the research questions. One of the main research questions is how often do people actually use social media? Is it something people check on occasionally throughout the day? Or are they consuming hours of content each day?

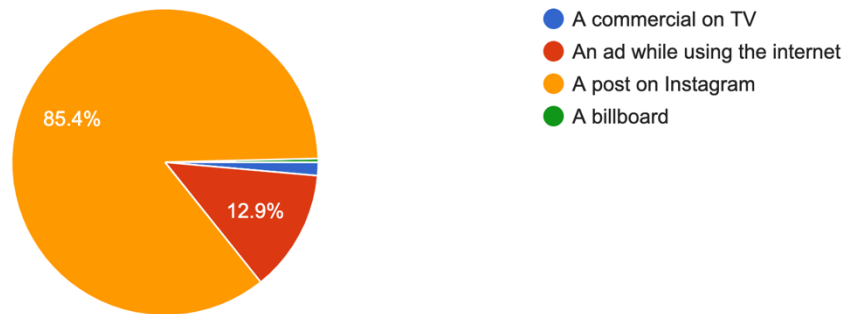
How many hours a day do you spend on social media?

785 responses



Based on the research from this study, it is evident people are consuming hours of media every day. Only 1.9% of respondents answered time spent on social media as “less than one hour. The most common answer with 41.3% of respondents was “between 3-4 hours.” The other answer choices were fairly even. They had 26% with “more than four hours” and 30.8% with “between 1-2.” Due to these answers, it can be deduced that people are spending on average between 3-4 hours of their day on social media sites. These estimates are taking into account all the different social media platforms.

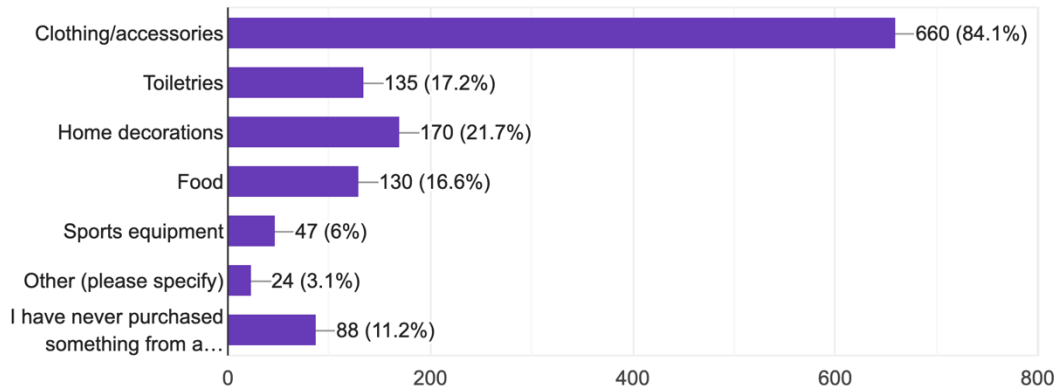
Are you more likely to purchase something from:
785 responses



The next question had a staggering finding about people's influence on purchases. The question asked the likelihood of purchasing something from a post on Instagram, commercial, billboard, or internet ad. Based on this chart, more than three fourths of respondents are more likely to purchase something seen on Instagram than from any of the other advertisement techniques listed. Due to this finding, it proves how influential social media marketing can be. If 85% of respondents are influenced to actually make a purchase from a post on Instagram, companies should be utilizing how to implement this platform for the optimal return on investment.

What item have you purchased from a social media post?

785 responses

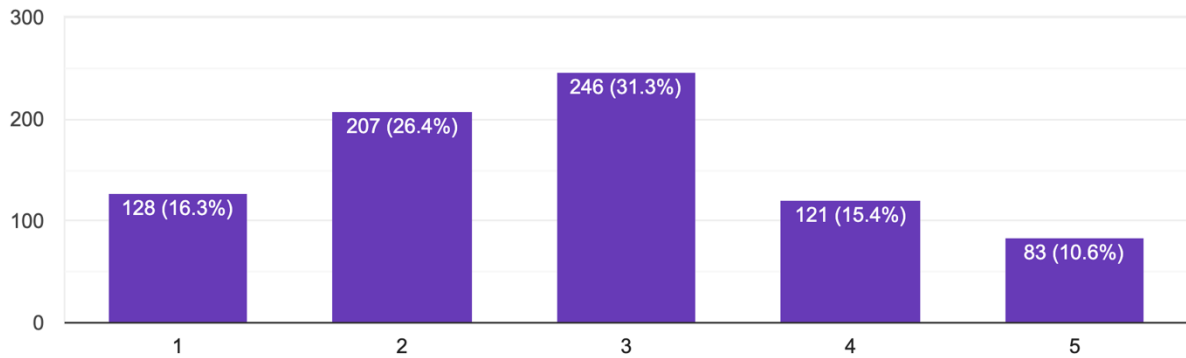


In the next question, it identifies which kind of item people are more likely to purchase from a post. The answers led heavily to the answer “fashion and accessories” with 84% of respondents answering that. However, after that, the answers were fairly scattered as identified.

Based on this finding, it can be concluded that fashion posts are the most influential. Because social media is heavily picture based, this would make sense because it is easy to show off clothing in pictures naturally.

How likely are you to purchase something from a post on social media in the next month?

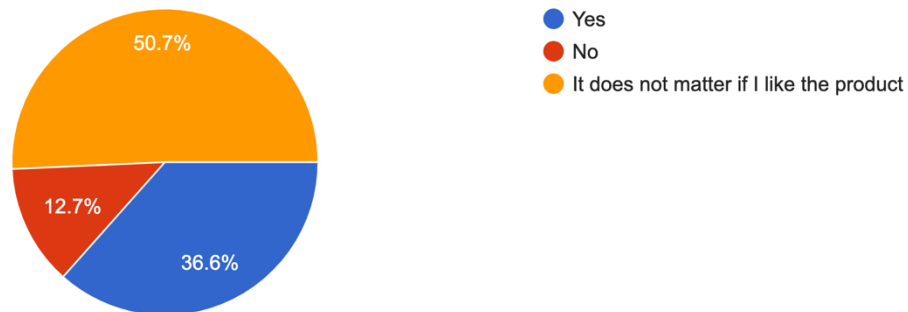
785 responses



In the next question it asks respondents to rate their likelihood of purchasing something they see on a post on social media in the next month. The scale ranged from one (not likely) to five (highly likely). The most common response was directly in the middle with 31% selecting three.

As identified by the chart, people rated themselves higher on the middle and less likely to purchase something in the next month. Only 10.6% rated they were highly likely to make the purchase. This data is interesting based on the fact that 85% of people rated a social media post as the most probable advertisement to promote a purchase. However, when actually making that purchase, the number is low.

Does the #ad or #sponsor in the caption make you less likely to purchase something on a post?
785 responses

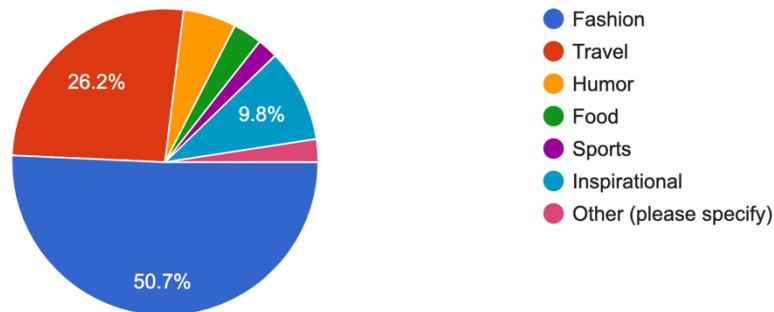


The following question asked respondents if indicating that a post was sponsored, or an ad made people less likely to purchase the thing being shown. This was based on the research in the literature review revealing that people have less trust towards a product if the person posting was paid to promote it. Due to this, the expectation would be that the majority of people would vote that a #ad or #sponsored in the caption would make them less likely to post. However, 50.7% of respondents answered that "it does not matter if they like the product." The next highest answer was "yes" with 36.6%. The lowest answer was 12.7% with a simple "no."

Due to this question, it seems that people on average do not mind seeing a sponsored post if the creator is posting about applicable things.

What is your favorite type of account to follow?

785 responses



The final question asked users to identify their favorite account to follow. The answer options varied with seven different answers. However, a mistake in the research is that the last answer “other (please specify)” did not allow an area for people to type what the “other” account not listed was.

“Fashion” is the most favored of accounts to follow with just barely over half of respondents selecting this. “Travel” was the next most followed with a quarter of respondents. After that, the answers are fairly scattered with “inspirational” peaking above the others by just a little bit.

Based on this research, people are using on average 3-4 hours of social media a day. This concludes that it is captivating, highly used, and highly effective in keeping people entertained. People are most likely to purchase something from a social media than other common forms of advertisement. While this is true, they are on the fence or on the low side of actually purchasing

something in the near future. The most common account to follow is a fashion account. This correlates with the fact the most common answer of what people have purchased is something fashion and accessories. Most people are not affected by the knowledge that a post is sponsored. However, a quarter of people say this makes them less likely to trust a product to post.

Weakness or Further Research:

While this literature and study achieved an overall comprehensive view of social media marketing with a focus on implementing influencers, it did not get as specified as it could have. Some of the factors that made this study weak: not specific to gender or age, making the survey primarily answered on Instagram which has more of a representation with the younger generation, and not allowing people to type in their answers if they felt they were not represented by one of the pre-selected answers.

On one hand, the literature review briefly touched on differences with age and gender in social media usage. On the other, the study did not ask questions to correlate if one gender or. Age answered drastically different. Based on the facts from the literature review, age plays a pivotal role in social media usage and targeted audience. This includes which social media sites they are on, how many times a day it is visited, how long is spent on each one, and spending habits. This could be easily solved by including a question to identify age and gender.

While the survey was offered on Southeastern Universities Sona survey, a large amount of surveys are posted on there and it does not have many active users. This resulted in only a handful of representation from this platform. So, the researcher posted a link to fill out the survey simply through Instagram. While it was not the intent to skew the responses merely to this platform, many more respondents occurred through there. If this had not been done, the number

of responses would have dramatically shifted. So, while the answers may be more in favor of a younger demographic through Instagram, it provides a wider variety of results based on the amount of responses.

This survey was only made available for pre-selected answers. The purpose behind this was to ensure accurate data could be concluded. This allowed the researcher to make predictions and comparisons from the findings. While allowing respondents the opportunity to answer with personalized responses would have broadened the results, this ensured accurate data.

For further research, it would be interesting to continue to follow social media trends. Because this is a new field emerging and changing every minute, the definitions shift, job opportunities arise, and new data is waiting to be collected. In a future study one could draw more specific conclusions about the impact of gender and age group. This could dive into categorizing how each individual person interacts with social media, chooses to spend their time on the platforms, and how their spending habits are impacted by the social media decisions they are making.

These categories of identifying the groups most commonly impacted by different people or platforms could then be studied. The study could draw conclusions if they like influencers who live the same lifestyle as them, travel frequently, are authentic, live a glamorous life, or only post about a certain topic.

The future research for this topic is endless and continually emerging. While it is concluded that social media is useful and growing in usage, the way it is being used will keep shifting.

Conclusion:

The findings in this research conclude the questions researched in the literature review. People want to be reached by social media. They seek out different social media platforms every day, multiple times a day. However, they want to view authentic, positive, and realistic advertisements. This is most easily expressed with influencers who are authentic in sharing their everyday life.

People are truly being influenced by social media marketing to make spending decisions. They follow accounts, brands, and personalities that they trust and based on this; they make purchase decisions. So, businesses must use these platforms to build that relational bond with their consumers. People want to consume from brands they identify with and trust.

The best way to select influencers to use for social media marketing is to select people who are already living a lifestyle that lines up with a brand. If a brand boasts about positivity and bright colors, they should be selecting someone who has those same qualities. If they lean more towards athletics and sports, they should select someone who plays and posts about sports. This will ensure they create authentic partnerships with the influencers they work with.

One of the most successful ways a brand can grow is to select influencers who they can build long term relationships with. This way, people can develop a genuine trust that the influencer personally uses the brand is confident in the products. When people see that someone is actively working with a company, they begin to build a trust with that company. Brands should be seeking long term partnerships so they attract long term consumers.

It is important to note that all businesses can benefit from social media marketing. However, the ones who appear to see the most growth according to the study are those in travel, fashion, lifestyle, and cosmetic. These are companies who can most authentically integrate into the content people are already following along with.

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