Engaging social media influencers credibility on purchase behaviour through lens of brand engagement

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Abstract---This study aims to explore the impact of social media influencer credibility on brand engagement and its further effect on consumers' purchase behavior in reference to food blogging. Data was collected from 180 Indian consumers who use social media and follows social media food influencers. Further data was analyzed by applying Factor Analyses using SPSS 20.0, Confirmatory Factor Analyses and Structural Equation Model (SEM) using AMOS 23.0. The findings of the study supported the proposed hypotheses, and highlighted that social media food influencers credibility have the positive effect on brand engagement and further on consumers' purchase behavior. This study gives food influencers on social media and brand managers the importance as this research reveals the influencers influences brands to engage and purchase behavior of consumers.

Keywords---social media influencer, source credibility, brand, purchase behavior, social media.

Introduction

With people's growing usage of social networking sites, brands are more attentive to influencing consumers by engaging in social media. Market size for digital advertisement in India since 2015 has seen a rapid increase and have

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experienced around 199 billion Indian rupees in the year 2020 (Statista, 2021). Following this, influencer marketing has become an important marketing tool globally, and it leads to deal brands to engage with the consumers with lower costs (Evans et al., 2017; Weismuller et al., 2020). Social media has been the growing home for brands to promote their products and services, but it also has increased the influencer's presence (Taillon et al., 2020).

Social media influencers (SMIs) are ordinary people who use social media platforms to connect with their followers by promoting and recommending brands by narrating the product's/service's usage in their daily lives to influence social media users (Veirman et al., 2017; Abidin, 2016). These influencers are found on every social networking site like Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Research conducted by Twitter found that about 40% of online users purchase after seeing the product/service advertised through SMIs, and 49% of social media users reported that they had followed the recommendations given by the influencers (Swant, 2019; Taillon et al., 2020).

The credibility of the endorser is an essential constituent for every marketer. A credible endorser successfully influences the buying intention and behaviour; a credible endorser improves the credibility of conveying the message to consumers (Munnuka at al., 2016). Consumers play an active role in this relationship with firms by providing reviews and opinions regarding firms, brand's products and services (Singh & Cullinane, 2010; AIFarraj et al., 2021). A hub of data offers companies extensively but unstructured, early data directly from consumers. As a result, it creates the means to construct brands and goods that effectively satisfy customer wants and desires. Customers are accustomed to viewing their peers and the influencers they follow as the most reliable sources (Sharma et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2017). Approximately 49 percent of clients evaluated opinions and ideas offered by social media influencers in their purchasing choice. In reality, customers typically see influencers as a more reputable and trustworthy information source than other influenced resources, particularly conventional merchants (Oberlo, 2020). As a result, the influencers credibility has been consistently regarded as an important subject for marketers and brand managers in developed and developing markets, since this would result in a notable rise in revenue of a product or service when influencers have a solid credibility in their interaction with their followers (Rebelo, 2017; Kumar et al., 2019).

Consumer interaction via social media has garnered significant attention in recent years by both researchers and practitioners for various reasons, including its possible effect on purchase behaviour (Gambetti&Graffigna, 2010). Recently, researchers and academicians have increased their interest in brand engagement through social media (Solem et al., 2016). Brand engagement has a beneficial effect on businesses and benefits the business effectively (Hughes et al., 2019). There has been a need to research social media influencers credibility effect on brand engagement, as brand engagement has been analyzed through previous research to influence consumers' purchasing behavior (Hughes et al., 2019) positively. Thus, this research aims to find (i) The effect of social media influencer credibility on brand engagement in food blogging and (ii) The effect of brand engagement on purchase behavior.

Literature Review

Social media influencer credibility

Internet celebrities are popularly known as "influencers". Media has been celebrating the success and popularity the young influencers have been achieving, such as Indian YouTuber PrajaktaKohli, who gained popularity after the success of her comedy YouTube channel, which led her to an acting career on the OTT platform. This rise of ordinary people into celebrities has been quite influencing and motivating for the young generation. Influencers generally tend to target the single domain, such as Karan Dua, one of the most popular food bloggers. Gaurav Taneja, the fitness blogger, Savi and Ved, known as power couple travel blogger, KritikaKhurana,is quite known for her quirky fashion and Bhuvan Bam, the famous comedy YouTuber globally (Dignitas Digital, 2019). People, especially the young generation, follow them because of the genuine and credible knowledge they impart regarding their respective domains (Abidin , 2016). Social media has provided an active platform for consumers to share their views, opinions and feedback(Konstantopoulou et al., 2019).

The influencers tend to focus on various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube to reach out to the masses. The rise of social media platforms has completely changed the way brands target their audience(Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Influencers act as ambassadors while reviewing the brand for which they are paid or given free merchandise (Duffey, 2019; Scott, 2015).Looking out for an online review before making the final purchase is one of the most common phenomena nowadays(Zhang et al., 2014). Influencer's credibility can be measured using the model (Ohanian, 1990) proposed via three-dimension trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness(Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).Online reviews help consumers develop opinions about the product/brand; however, many reviews exist online(Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). Today consumers seek information about the product or brand before deciding on the purchase. At this point, social media walks in, and the role of influencers or opinion leaders begins. Consumers actively lookout for sources that are credible and trustworthy. Consumers develop trust within a brand based on the trust they have within the influencer (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019).

Social media influencers hold a large fan base globally on various platforms; they have the power that they can directly affect the image of a brand with one single post (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). Brands need to look out for influencers who are trusted by their target audience (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019)). Using credible influencers helps consumers develop a positive attitude towards a brand or product (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). Researches have been done contributing to various streams like how fashion influencers have impactedconsumers' purchase intention (Chetioui et al., 2020). This research paper targets food blogging, which is comparatively new to marketers and holds great insights for them.

Brand engagement

(Kahn, 1990) very first time introduced brand engagement in terms of employee engagement within an organisation. Since then, studies have been rigorously performed to analyse brand engagement in various domains. Brand engagement is generally considered a combination of cognitive, affection and activation activities while the consumer interacts with the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014). A high level of engagement explains a deep connection with the brand, which further induces the willingness to maintain a functional relationship (Zainol et al., 2016). According to (Keller et al., 2013), brand engagement can be defined as the extent to which consumers willingly invest their resources into the brand or product. A highly engaged consumer is expected to develop loyalty for the brand and development (Vivek et al., 2012; Wirtz et al., 2013; France et al., 2016).

Consumer engagement regarding a brand or product can be easily measured using likes, comments and shares of the post (Jayasingh, 2019). The higher the number of activities occurring on the post, the higher the reach and engagement of the brand. Social media hasconstantly playedan active role in engaging consumers (Carvalho&Fernandes, 2018). (Dwivedi, 2015) has proposed engagement to be a multi-dimensional model consisting of vigour, absorption and dedication. (Brodie et al., 2011) suggested consumer engagement comprising of three dimensions, namely cognitive, behavioural and emotional. (Doorn et al., 2010) presented consumer engagement as a combination of five dimensions: valence, scope, form, nature of the impact, and customer goals.

H₁: Social media influencer credibility has a significant impact on brand engagement.

Purchase behavior

Purchase intention can majorly be defined as the consumers' willingness to purchase a product or brand. In contrast, purchase behaviour measures the consumer making the final purchase they intend to buy (Morrison, 1979). Consumer behaviour can be called the accurate measure of consumers buying behaviour (Rahman et al., 2020).

Influencers can be considered leaders who hold the power to affect the purchase behaviour of their followers (Chetioui et al., 2020). Influencers direct communication (like; live streaming) with their followers directly impacts their attitude and behaviour (Cao et al., 2014). The consumer's information about the brand through online sources holds the strength to influence an individual's purchase behaviour (Park & Kim, 2003) directly. How the intermediary (like influencers) introduces a consumer to a brand or product can easily cause behavioural change (Venkatesh et al., 2012), Consumer values also have a direct impact on the purchase behaviour (Yau, 1994). When one talks about online reviews, the consumer's trust within the source plays a vital role in buying behaviour (Dou et al., 2012).

H₂: Brand engagement has a significant impact on Purchase Behavior.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Methods

Data collection and sample

An online survey was directed on social networking sites named Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat. The questionnaire was distributed to the followers of social media food influencers. Only followers of social media (food) influencers were included in the study. The final sample consists of 180 respondents, of which 48.9% are male, 48.3% are female, and 2.8% of people did not prefer to mention their gender. Male respondents seem to be more interested in participating in the survey than females as per the sample's gender disparity (Xiai et al., 2018). The age-grouped respondents from 20-25 years were the highest with 49.4%. 25-30 years of respondents were 18.3%, following 12.8% respondents of 30-35 years. Further, 35-40 years were 4.4%, and 40 and above were 3.3%.

Measures

The scale used for social media influencer credibility is adapted from (Ohanian, 1990) and (Munnuka et al., 2016) and were changed according to the need of the study. Further, Brand engagement was adapted from (Hollebeek et al., 2014), and construct purchase behavior was adapted from (Rahman et al., 2020). All the items were measured at 7 points Likert scale going from 1 been Strongly disagree to 7 been Strongly Agree, where four was Neutral.

Results

The study uses a structural model (SEM) to test the hypotheses relation. It is done in a two-stage process, first by testing the reliability and validity of the model and then examining the model's relationship (Shalender & Sharma, 2021). The study first carried out an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability test using SPSS 21.0 and then tested the model's validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 23.0.

EFA was done to remove the items to identify the sequential pattern of the study (De Vaus, 2013) as past studies has stated that to improve the quality of the measurement model, it is essential to remove questionable and unwanted items (Hatcher & O'Rourke, 2013; Li &Petrick, 2008). KMO & Bartlett's test, commonalities, Eigenvalues and rotated matrix analysed the EFA (Hussain et al., 2018). The results showed that social media influencer credibility has seven items, brand engagement has 3, and purchase behavior has twothings. The factor loadings were acceptable as they were more than 0.5 (Matsunga, 2010). After

that, reliability was tested by applying Cronbach's alpha, and it was 0.890, which exceeds the threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006).

The measurement model (CFA) was applied in the second stage to test the construct reliability and validity of the model (Hair et al., 2006). The reliability test results were used to compute the internal stability of the items and constructs. All the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were above the required values i.e. 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006; Malhotra, 2010). Further, AVE (Average variance extracted) to check the validity of the measurement model was done and all the values are above 0.5 (Li &Petrick, 2008; Hair et al., 1998).

	CR	AVE
Social Media Influencer Credibility	0.878	0.546
Brand Engagement	0.70	0.504
Purchase Behavior	0.846	0.648

Table 1: Reliability and Validity values

To measure the nomological validity of the measurement model, model-fits values were analysed. The GFI (goodness of fit), NFI (non-normed fit index), CFI (comparative fit index), IFI (incremental fit index), TLI (tucker lewis index), AGFI (adjusted goodness-of-fit), root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) were used to examine the model fit. In this study value of GFI (.929), NFI (.91), CFI (.963), IFI (.963), TLI (.952) & AGFI (.892) are above 0.08 which shows a good model fit (58). The value of RMSEA is .063, which is less than 0.08 and is acceptable (Hair et al., 2006). Other values like $x2 = 87.331$ and df= 51.

Structural model (SEM) was applied to check the hypothesized relationship of the model at AMOS 23.0. The model suggested a good model-fit according to the values of (Hair et al., 2006). NFI= .913, GFI=.926, CFI= .960, IFI= .960, TLI= .949, & AGFI= .889. RMSEA value is .065, which is less than 0.08. Value of $x2 = 91.255$ and df= 52. In last, the study analysed the hypotheses relationship among the constructs. Table 3 shows the results of the hypotheses by examining the structural path coefficient, p-values and standard error (Hussain et al., 2020). Both H_1 and H_2 were accepted, as shown in the table. H_1 suggested that social media (food) influencers credibility has the positive relationship with the brand engagement ($y = 1.335$, t-value = 5.019, p = 0.000). Further, brand engagement has a positive relationship with purchase behaviour ($y = 0.753$, t-value = 8.064, p = 0.000) whereas suggesting H_2 is supporting the study.

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
BE <---	SMIC	(H_1)	1.335	.266	5.019	***	Supported
PB <---	BE	(H_2)	.753	.093	8.064	***	Supported

Table 2: Hypotheses relationship

Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to discover the effect of social media influencers' credibility on brand engagement and further its relationship with the consumers purchase behavior. After applying the structural model in the study, results

discovered that social media food influencer credibility positively affects brand engagement through social networking sites. The findings also found that there is also a positive effect of brand engagement on consumers purchase behavior. Also, the study has shown that social media food influencers are attractive, honest and expertise, i.e. credible.

Previous studies have analyzed how consumers' recommendation implies a strong relation with endorser's credibility (Batra et al., 1996; Munnuka et al., 2016). But there is little evidence to discover how influencers credibility on social media influences consumer behaviour with the effect of brand engagement through social networking sites. Therefore, this study was aimed to explore three objectives; first, to investigate how social media food influencer credibility affects brand engagement through social networking sites. Second, to analyze the impact of brand engagement on consumers purchase behaviour, and lastly, to explore whether the social media food influencers are credible.

The present study has explored that source attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness positively influence brand engagement at social networking sites when endorsed by social media food influencers, which almost supports previous findings (Munnuka et al., 2016; Ohanian, 1990). The study results have explored that social media food influencers credibility are positively correlated with brand engagement. The results also supported the second objective of the study. They discovered that brand engagement through social networking sites, especially linked with social media food influencers, positively impacts consumers' purchase behavior. Findings added that consumers find social media food influencers credible.

Implications

On a theoretical basis, this study is one of the few studies that have analyzed the impact of social media food influencers credibility on brand engagement and consumer purchase behavior. This study filled the last gap by focusing on social media food influencers and investigated how brand engagement through influencer marketing has influenced consumers' purchase behavior. For a managerial basis, this study has shown how influencer marketing can benefit food places and products advertised by influencers on their social media platforms. Such companies/brands can hire or tieup with such influencers to promote their products and services. This study has shown the positive impact of brand engagement on consumers purchase behavior through social media influencer marketing. Although this study suggests that brands' engagement through influencers can positively influence the consumers to purchase, influencer marketing shall be the most prioritized strategy for marketers.

Limitation and Future Research

As all studies have some limitations, this one also has some which give directions for future research. First, this study has only analyzed the influencer's credibility in the food context, and other studies may research other areas, such as health & fitness, fashion & beauty, etc. Second, this study is limited to Indian consumers; future studies may be done on other consumers from different countries. Further,

this study has collected data quickly, but future studies may collect data by longitudinal studies. This study has only focused on influencers, but future studies can explore the comparative research between influencers and celebrities through social media platforms.

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