

Social media and Customers' Relationship Research: A Case Study and Online Survey

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Abstract. Social Media, such as Instagram and Tiktok, are increasingly becoming more and more popular since it helps people build and maintain interpersonal relationships. Based on its huge popularity, more marketers are using social media as their selling channels or cooperating with social media influencers to promote their products. The present study sought to analyze whether the customers think social media facilitate their decision and stimulate their desire to purchase, their preferences between salespeople and social media influencers and what kind of concrete benefits are brought by using social media during market products. This paper presents successful examples of marketers using social media to sell their products. It is also conducted as an online survey via Amazon Turk. All participants will be asked to share their thoughts and complete the survey.

Keywords: Neural Network, Prediction Model, Big Data.

1. Introduction

In the era of technology, the Internet has gradually become one of the most imperative channels for marketers to sell their products. Such a groundbreaking change successfully shifted most offline sales to online sales and this trend is now on the rise [1]. So nowadays, having online stores or selling products through the internet are very common phenomena. However, another phenomenon that is also as common as this is that more and more marketers view social media as an indispensable and useful tool that helps marketers reach their potential customers much more accessible than before [2].

The phenomenon that marketers use social media as a channel to sell their products or increase communication between the brand and customers has been very common recently [3-4]. As one of the most popular marketing channels, the power of social media cannot be easily neglected. It can even be said that social media gradually becomes a necessity in the product-promoting process. According to *The Influencer Marketing research report from Business Insider Intelligence*, brands are set to spend up to 15 billion Us dollars on influencer marketing by 2022. Also, data from *Influencer Marketing Hub* shows that nearly four in five (79%) brands mainly use Instagram for influencer campaigns, compared with 46% of Facebook, 36% of YouTube, 24% of Twitter, and 12% of LinkedIn.

Besides, social media can easily affect people's emotions [5]. According to Frampton and Fox, social media can cause people's retroactive jealousy [6]. Besides, as Giles and Maltby indicated in their journal, their results prove that celebrities or influencers cause emotional autonomy and attachment during adolescence [7]. According to Delbaere, Micheal and Phillips, social media influencers significantly impact consumers' way of engaging with brands [8].

2. Methodology

The paper begins with an analysis of successful examples of marketers using social media to sell their products. Then, this research will be conducted as an online survey through Amazon Turk. All participants will be asked to share their thoughts and complete the survey. The survey includes both close-ended and open-ended questions.

The survey was conducted between July 19-20, 2022. The sample consisted of U.S citizenship, n=89, with a Credibility Interval (CI) similar to a poll's margin of error (MOE) of +/- 9.61 percentage points. It is important to remember that subsets based on gender, race and ethnicity, age distribution,

and education level carry higher margins of error, as the sample size is reduced. Data was collected using Amazon Turk and Question Pro. Coding in this survey is based on respondents' answers and attitudes and all references are from Census Reporter.

3. Case analysis

3.1 Kylie Jenner and her Kylie Cosmetics

Kylie Jenner was announced the youngest self-made billionaire by Forbes in May 2019. According to Forbes, she is one of the most successful and influential celebrities with over 350 million social media fans and a \$900 million net worth in 2022. However, her cosmetics brand, Kylie Cosmetics, should be the main contributor which brings her to today's status.

Kylie Jenner has smartly utilized social media platforms, such as Snapchat and Instagram, to market her brand. It can be said that her marketing strategy is heavily reliant on social media marketing. By posting her routine videos on Instagram, she shows her day while subtly inserting her brand ads. For example, she always posts moments of her life, her travels and her daughters behind the screen and immediately follows her brand and products. Since countless followers are willing to know her life details, after they click the latest post, they will also see those ads of Kylie Jenner's products at the same time.

Another benefit of social media is that she doesn't need to spend more money on seeking other influencers to promote her product since she is already a celebrity with tremendous influence. According to the 2018 Instagram Rich List compiled by Hopper HQ, Kylie Jenner makes an estimated \$1 million per sponsored post on her Instagram, which means she doesn't need to pay for those astronomical advertising fees to get the same amount of traffic and publicity. And these are also what social media benefits her.

3.2 Jeffree Star Cosmetics

Since Jeffree Star started his YouTube channel in 2006, he has become one of the most famous creators on YouTube with more than 16 million YouTube subscribers. As one of YouTube's highest-earning creators, Jeffree took advantage of YouTube and started building his amazing cosmetics empire. Jeffree Star Cosmetics's beauty brand annually sells \$100 million worth of products [9].

Among all his promotional marketing strategies, social media must be an indispensable tool on his way to success. One of the most significant examples is the Jeffree Star Shane Dawson Conspiracy, launched in 2019. According to Jeffree Star's Instagram Stories on November 4th, 2019, the collection sold over 1 million eye shadows within 30 minutes. Such an amazing success was largely due to his year-long YouTube documentary series, The Beautiful World of Jeffree Star, which showed the whole process of creating the product. As the first documentary showing the process of creating makeup on YouTube, it premiered on the YouTuber Shane Dawson's channel and each episode has over 10 million views.

This marketing is unique because this documentary gave viewers a high sense of participation. It shows every detail of creating, producing and promoting a product. For instance, viewers cannot only see the process of picking different eyeshadow colors and textures but also see board meetings and listen in on business calls. Because of those details the documentary provided, viewers may feel they are part of the team making the collection with Dawson and Star. Besides, this documentary can also help viewers to know some of Dawson's personal life. As a long-time YouTuber, Dawson's personal life can also attract some viewers to watch the documentary.

3.3 Hua Xizi

Another successful example of marketing by using social media is the cooperation between Chinese beauty brands, Hua Xizi and Jeffree Star. As the main character of Jeffree Star's first makeup unboxing and review video of 2022, Hua Xizi caused a massive sensation on YouTube. In his review video, Jeffree Star shows several products with extremely luxurious packaging, including eye shadow,

lipsticks and blushes. Jeffree Star highly praised the packaging, and three products won his approval. According to Hua Xizi, Jeffree's video had caused its website traffic to reach Black Friday levels and the online celebrity's product recommendations had resulted in astronomical sales. Meanwhile, many comments on Hua Xizi's Instagram mention that they became followers because of Jeffree Star's video. There is no doubt that this cooperation gained huge success by using social media's mighty power of social media as well as celebrity influences [10].

4. Findings

About 75% (78 respondents) of respondents indicate that they have bought a product because a social media influencer recommended it compared with 25% (26 respondents) who indicate they had never done so before. Question 1 and the distribution of respondents are shown in Figure 1.

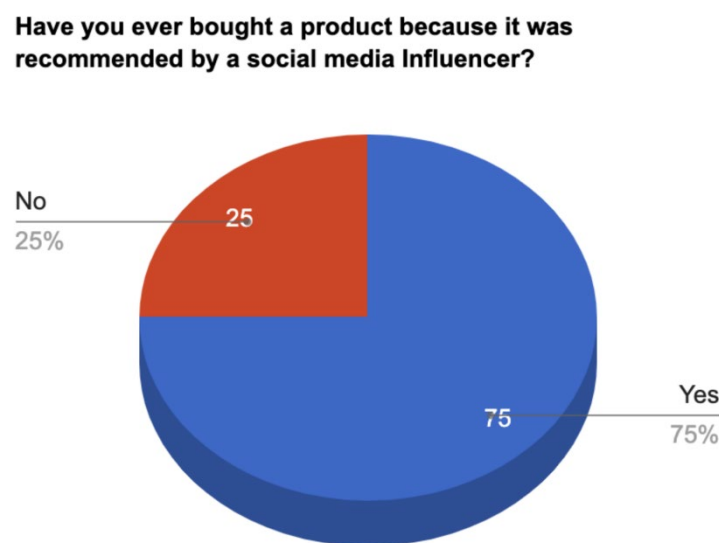


Figure 1. Question 1 and distribution of respondents

(1) There are 85.7% (6 respondents) of people who belong to Boomers II* (born between 1955 TO 1964) indicate that they had bought a product because of influencers' videos and recommendations compared with 80% (12 respondents) of Gen Z (born between 1997 to 2012) and 75.4% (49 respondents) of Millennials (born between 1981- 1996).

(2) It appears that educational level impacts attitudes towards the results. Respondents with a bachelor's degree also indicated that they had bought a product under social media influencers' impact with 86.9% (53 respondents), while 73.7% (14 respondents) of respondents with post-grad or higher degree and 66.7% (4 respondents) with high school or less degree.

There are 76.9% (80 respondents) of people who said they had changed their attitude towards a product due to the opinions of social media influencers. In comparison, 23.1% (24 respondents) thought influencers didn't impact their attitude. Question 2 and the distribution of respondents are shown in Figure 2.

Have you ever changed your attitude or opinion about a product due to the views and opinions of social media influencers?

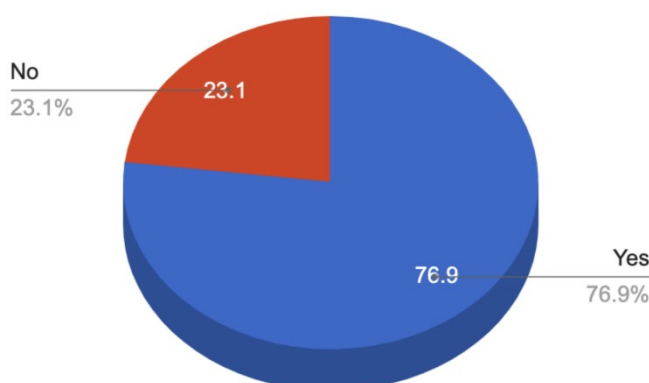


Figure 2. Question 2 and distribution of respondents

(1) 78.6% (33 respondents) of males and 79.7% (47 respondents) of females believed that influencers had caused some impact on their opinions about a product before.

(2) 100% (7 respondents) of Boomers II* believe influencers had impacted their attitude, while 86.7% (13 respondents) of Gen Z and 75.4% (49 respondents) of Millennials also think so.

(3) It appears people's educational level impacts the results. There are 100% (6 respondents) of people with a high school or less degree agree that they had changed their attitudes due to social media influencers, compared with 82% (50 respondents) of people with bachelor's degree and 73.7% (14 respondents) of people with post-grad or higher degree.

62.5% (65 respondents) of people prefer to trust social media influencers rather than salespeople when they want to buy a product, compared with 37.5% (39 respondents) of people who trust salespeople. Question 3 and the distribution of respondents are shown in Figure 3.

Do you prefer to trust the salespeople selling products in the stores or the influencers using or selling products on social media?

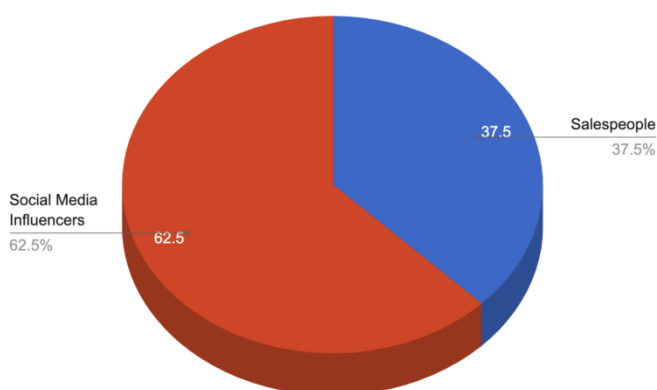


Figure 3. Question 3 and distribution of respondents

(1) 52.4% (22 respondents) of males indicated that they trust social media influencers more than salespeople, compared with 71.2% (42 respondents) of females also believed so.

(2) 69.2% (45 respondents) of Millennials believed social media influencers are more trustworthy, and 60% (9 respondents) of Gen Z also indicated that they prefer to trust social media influencers. However, 56.3% (9 respondents) of Gen X indicated they are more willing to trust salespeople.

(3) There are 100% (5 respondents) of people who identified themselves as Asian alone prefer to trust social media influencers, compared with 75% (3 respondents) of people who identified as Hispanic or Latino and 72.7% of people who identified as Black or African American alone.

For people who prefer social media influencers rather than salespeople, there are 18.5% (12 respondents) of them believed social media influencers can build a stronger emotional connection

with them, compared with 16.9% (11 respondents) of people who thought influencers are more honest because there are not too much business interests between influencers and the product. Besides, 13.8% (9 respondents) of people believe videos from influencers can easily attract audiences' attention.

For people who think salespeople are more truthful, 23.1% (9 respondents) of them believed salespeople know more about the product than social media influencers. In comparison, 20.5% (8 respondents) of them indicated that they refuse to trust social influencers for no reason, and 15.4% (6 respondents) of people felt they could have stronger emotional connections built through in-person communication with salespeople.

5. Discussion

This paper aimed to analyze whether people believe social media influencers can change their purchase decision and specific reasons why they choose to trust influencers or not. By comparing factors such as genders, generation, race groups, and educational levels, the paper reveals several similarities and differences between these factors, which will discuss in the remainder of this paper. Besides, this study shows people's preferences between salespeople and social media influencers when considering buying a product.

As the respondents indicated, social media influencers do have an impact on promoting people's desire to purchase. As the study shows, more than 75% of respondents indicate that influencers had changed their original attitudes towards some products. It appears that people who belong to Boomers II are more likely to be influenced by social media influencers and the next group of people should be Gen Z. One of the possible reasons might be that these two groups are the two groups of people with the most spending power. They are more likely to be influenced because they have enough time and money to watch influencers' videos and buy their recommended products. Besides, the study also shows that educational levels contributed to the different results. More people with bachelor's degrees and post-grad or higher degree reports that they had bought products under social media influencers' influence.

Social media created a new channel for companies to promote and sell their products, so many people think social media influencers are similar to online salespeople. There is some overlap in their roles, so there is an increasing trade-off between salespeople and social media influencers. Some people may prefer to trust salespeople more, but some may gradually choose to trust social media influencers. According to the results from the survey, it seems like social media influencers are easier to gain people's trust and goodwill, with more than 62% of people who think social media influencers are more trustworthy. The first reason is that people think social media influencers can easily build close relationships with customers. The common situation proves that some influencers, such as Kylie Jenner, like to post videos about their personal lives. For instance, Kylie Jenner always likes to post stories about her daughter, and her family members. These videos can reduce the distance between potential customers and the influencers because customers may think they are engaged in the influencer's life. Influencers share stories and posts that are like sharing their routine and interesting moments with their close friends. For followers, they may even feel they are part of influencers' lives.

In addition, some people think social influencers' opinions are much more trustful than that of salespeople because sometimes they are not completely sponsored. Take Jeffree Star as an example. He has special serials for unboxing and reviewing different cosmetics. As Jeffree star promised, some brands shown in his serial have no business relationships with him. Because people know that salespeople are hired by different companies which means they have to review and introduce the product positively to attract more customers. As long as this kind of relationship existed, salespeople's words were not so trustful.

The last reason why more people trust social media influencers is that they think videos from influencers can easily attract audiences' attention. This can be true because social media does provide more possibilities for influencers to show the product or increase the attractiveness of the product. An example is that influencers introduce a new product when doing a video about their traveling

which can be an advertorial. Besides, they can also do a video on how to make the product. For example, they can go into a factory and interview the workers. Compared with plenty of unique and varied ways and video content, putting products at the showcase and selling them at the store is not so attractive and exciting for customers. So this might be why people think promoting on social media is more attractive and they are more willing to trust social media influencers rather than salespeople.

6. Conclusions

The survey results prove that most people believe that social media impacts their attitudes towards products and can also promote peoples' purchasing desires. Boomers II are more likely to be influenced based on the survey results.

Besides, compared to salespeople, more people prefer to trust social media influencers. The biggest reason social media influencers can easily gain trust is that their daily posts or videos can decrease the distance between them and the followers, making it easy for them to build close relationships with their potential customers.

In addition, social media influencers are more trustworthy than salespeople because sometimes social media influencers do not necessarily have a business interest in the brand. Still, salespeople must have an interest because the brand employs them.

Finally, social media provides a better platform for influencers to gain more traffic and potential customers. The publicity of using social media as a selling channel is much stronger and bigger than selling them at stores. Also, social media helps influencers have more creative ways to show the product, which can attract more people.

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