Impact of social media influencers on brand awareness:
A study on college students of Kolkata

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Abstract

Social networks have undoubtedly emerged as a powerful mode of communication in which their platforms allow people to set up a personal page or profile to which they could post updates regarding product/service reviews. This has led to the rise of human idols referred to as Social Media Influencers (SMIs) allegedly operating as 'hidden persuader' who informs, motivates, and persuades their audience. Influencer marketing is an indispensable aspect of contemporary life, often held as a creative and glamorous area, to create an impact on Generation Z and society in general. Social media is in vogue, enables real-time interaction, and has considerably impacted people's lives worldwide. Every day social media users are confronted with multiple products and services through unsolicited pop-ups, telemarketing, and streaming, which lead to impulse lead purchases. With its ubiquitous and networkable features, social media is popular among youth to share and interact in a virtual environment. This study aims to examine how brand awareness and social media influencers affect the consumers' intention to purchase. Brand awareness reached by influencer appeal is positive and growing faster than digital advertising an insignificant influence on purchase decisions among college students of Kolkata. The findings of this study confirmed the widespread beliefs that media social influencers have a real and favorable influence on raising brand awareness; however, leveraging social media influencers to affect brand recall and awareness did not have a significant impact.

Keywords: social network; social media influencer; marketing; brand awareness

1. Introduction

With social media, it is possible to transmit messages that integrate texts, voices, moving images, music, and video as the distinct components of a single good or service. The ability of social media to break down the barriers of time and space to influence social and economic life outside of a village or small local community is primarily correlated with the increase in literacy. A new era of change in media and communication has been sparked by the transformation of telecommunications through a mix of technological advancement, governmental regulation, and industrial arrangement.

The expanding reach of Internet and mobile telephone acts to reconfigure the global experience and use of new media. More recently, the foundation upon which the conventional regulated broadcasting regime is founded is significantly altered by digitalization and convergence. As a result of digitalization and more affordable content production, data have become more widely available, increasing the flow of information and the number of channels available. Similar findings about the Internet have been made by Andrew Shapiro in his book entitled The Control Revolution (1999). He made compelling case for how the internet allegeradicallyical

expands power over interpersonal relationships. Internet significantly improves each person's ability to make and influence decisions about how we connect with others in social situations, and educational, professional, and political lives, as well as how we decide whether to explore the different points of view.

Social media has changed how people interact and communicate, opening up new marketing opportunities and posing challenges. It has evolved into a hub for business, sales, advertising, and consumer communication. In addition, more Influencers on social media (hence referred to as influencers) have emerged as a result of awareness of the potential and shifting nature of social media. Influencer marketing is a form of word-of-mouth advertising that emphasizes social context and fosters relationships. There are four main steps in influencer marketing: (i) identifying influential people and rating them according to their importance, (ii) educating the followers of influential brands, (iii) increasing the target market awareness, and (iv) influencing the consumers' perceptions of a brand through influencers. The basic concept behind influencer marketing is the idea of influencer traits including credibility, engagement, and trust (Singh & Banerjee, 2018).

The most powerful brands increasingly consider social media Influencers to be used as their brand promoters. Consumers seek assistance from other consumers while making lifestyle or buying decisions. Businesses employ influencers as

a dynamic outside voices in their advertising campaigns. Through social networks, influencers may rapidly, cheaply, and directly communicate with end users by utilizing their authority, dependability, and receptivity to client attitudes.

Influencer marketing is one of the marketing strategies that marketers employ to promote businesses. Customers, especially for those at a younger age are significantly influenced by social media influencers. On a variety of companies and products, they provide suggestions and opinions. In today integrated communication world, social networking is a crucial medium for both enterprises and media consumers. The members of this market are influenced by social media advertising, and this category's product advertising has fundamentally changed as a result of the social media environment.

The choice of an influencer is often crucial because his or her personality can get transferred to the brand with sufficient repetition. Anthropologist Grant McCracken has argued convincingly that influencers possess the extremely potent symbolic qualities that are then transmitted to the brand they support. A reference group is defined by V. Parker Lessig and C. Whan Park as a real or hypothetical institution or organization that significantly influences the target individual's assessments, goals, or behavior.

Numerous studies have shown that influencers do affect consumers' behavior. In the extended behavioral intention model, total behavioral intentions to purchasing it as well as an arbitrary standard. Such reference groups may include (a) benchmarks for evaluating one's performance, (b) knowledgeable authorities, or (c) sources of norms, standards, and attitudes. Today, a client's judgment of an idea's creativity or effectiveness may no longer be the only factor. Since any users of the internet may now post comments, reviews, and publications, all businesses must quit chatting and begin to pay attention to how they are regarded.

Social media also makes it easier for user-generated content to form and spread quickly (UGC). The usage of social media seems to be more widespread than previously thought, encouraging users' and consumers' social participation. Consumers without a doubt are more dependent on social media for their regular social interactions and purchases.

By investigating the impact on consumers' attitudes and purchasing intentions, this study aims to expand our understanding of the concept of social media influencers. In marketing, endorsement is crucial to accomplish a company's aims and positive reputation. As opposed to traditional marketing techniques, social media influencers have recently established themselves as possible endorsers by creating a variety of buzzwords.

A study investigated the impact of unfavorable reviews on retailer rating and customer intention. Findings suggested that a consumer's decision to shop online is influenced by the depth of their WOM search. Furthermore, familiarity with the retailer and if it operates exclusively online or offline organization influence the impact of unfavorable WOM data on consumers' perceived trustworthiness of the retailer and their propensity to purchase. It has been highlighted how management implications for positioning tactics can reduce the impact of unfavorable word-of-mouth. Delighted consumer could according to a study on word of mouth, a satisfied customer would tell some people about his/her experience with a business, but a disgruntled customer would tell everyone he/she meets (WOM) impacts. Virtual communities with engaged users who share assessments and opinions about goods and companies now offer a platform to spread the awareness of one of the most rapidly expanding phenomena on the Web. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that giving customers a platform to express their opinions, suggestions, and complaints as well as tracking this word-of-mouth activity has turned into a business.

Some companies even appreciate the contribution of customers by giving them money, rewards, or recognition. According to the current research, consumer familiarity with the retailer may be able to reduce the negative effects of bad customer evaluations on the retailer's perceived dependability and buy intention for both conventional retail and online businesses. Additionally, customers who shop at a well-known retailer are less susceptible to unfavorable WOM information and seek information less frequently. Compared to customers who choose a familiar company, those who choose an unknown merchant that provides a lower price seek more negative WOM information and are more inclined to believe that the problems might recur.

According to Bond et al. (2010), there are many spaces for marketers to embrace the idea by creating strategies that might potentially have a big influence in the quickly shifting customer environment. The results of this study showed that companies may engage with customers on social media platforms successfully with a potential to develop a sizeable, devoted fan base that will eventually serve as brand ambassadors. The adoption of permission-based communications or subscription-only material could significantly increase the acceptance and opinions of customers toward social media messages from businesses. To facilitate a more focused conversation about the advantages and disadvantages of an advertisement on social media and respondents' views toward the engagement with companies in this way, two social media marketing campaigns were shown to respondents during the focus groups.

Ohajionu and Mathews (2015) looked at the numerous advertising techniques that businesses can use to better serve their clients, provide higher-quality service, and generate more revenue. This study also aims to shed light on Malaysia's Generation Y consumers' use of social media. Companies have been able to establish relationships with both current and potential customers via social media and to create communities that actively work together to identify problems and provide solutions. Social media unquestionably enables businesses to engage with clients by utilizing richer material with a wider audience (Thackeray et al., 2008).

Social media's interactive features enable customers to communicate and share information in addition to allowing advertisers to do so with their target audiences. This study provided a conceptual framework for various advertising tactics in which companies may employ to improve customer satisfaction and service quality. This evaluation also identified the benefits and drawbacks of each social media platform. This study's findings suggested that businesses can use certain methods to spread their advertising messages and educate their targeted audiences.

A study examined how social media may be used for

branding and looked into how brand perception is impacted by social media. In addition to examine how social media usage relates to traditional media consumption and how significant social media is as a brand image influencer in comparison to traditional media, the thesis also examined a number of considerations that must be made while using social media for branding. This investigation was conducted using quantitative research. Comparable information on the use of social media and traditional media, as well as consumer opinions of branding in these channels was gathered using a quantitative technique. According to the findings, social media brand presence is often seen as being slightly more significant to consumer perception of brand trust. Additionally, it was believed that brand social media communication have a somewhat greater impact on the overall favorable brand image.

Wright et al. (2016) examined social media developments, including mobile marketing and social media opportunities, as well as any potential long-term impacts on advertising. For marketers, the rise of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter has created a plethora of opportunities. One of the reasons why these social media are so successful is their inherent capacity to automatically segment the market. Customers can alter their social networking and Facebook sites in order for the information they get to be relevant to them. Additionally, social media platforms make it easier for marketers to communicate with influencers and industry experts. The expansion of social media marketing reflects marketers' desire to forge tighter ties with their customers.

Lee and Lau (2018) in their study analyzed the work of advertising that has changed since the era of social media advertising creative has been expanded to include strategy and technological production in addition to the development of creative ideas. To put it another way, it appeared that there has been a shift toward a triadic creative function requiring them to work with more stakeholders and complete more duties. The significance of integration and collaboration in this specific creative industry was underscored by this enlarged creative function. The study aimed to support their claims by demonstrating how advertising creative looked to be taking responsibility for defining their job identities, acquiring new skills, and changing the way they approached their work in the social media era of advertising. This study has advanced our understanding of the ways in which social media are impacting marketing and advertising strategies.

Kolo and Haumer (2018) in their study on social sciences mentioned that the fundamental idea of influencers and WOM is well-known and highly regarded as an element for the successful communication. The popularity of social media has increased brands' opportunities to interact with their target markets. This study examined YouTube videos combined from influencers' uploads, a representative audience survey, and observational data from followers of influencers. The findings demonstrated that influencers no longer communicated to each other limited to specific demographics and that their fans consumed social media content in a manner that was remarkably similar to how they consumed any contents from conventional media. The study also demonstrated that, under specific circumstances, followers could cognitively anticipate and accept advertising despite its ubiquitous presence. The study data also hinted that audience preferences in terms of

themes were fluid and that influencers must modify their material to reflect new trends (such as food or interior design) in order to succeed. The study findings lent additional credence to the presumptions about influencers' monetization strategies.

Wirtz et al. (2019) discovered and investigated a number of factors affecting the authenticity of online reviews and the way they affected the consumers' purchasing intentions. The study provided numerous contributions to social media and e-commerce research and practice. Most intriguingly, in contrast to the first expected direction of effect and previous research findings, the review number exhibited a considerable negative impact on review credibility. This study suggested that consumers considered more online reviews of a particular good or service to be less reliable. One explanation for this contradictory finding may be found in the growing consumer interests in online reviews as such and, in particular, the increasing consumer awareness of fake reviews and businesses' deceptive practices as the results of the recent public debate about fake online reviews and the corresponding increased media coverage. Customers may be wary of a large number of online reviews if they are aware that businesses want as many favorable ratings as possible because they believe these businesses may have contributed falsely to the multiplicity. They could consider more reviews to be unreliable as a result. Finally, the findings showed that review credibility and its determinants were significant precursors to customers' buying intentions, reflecting that consumers' purchase decisions are influenced by more than just the typical aspects of online shopping and consumer attributes (Cha, 2011).

This result generally agreed with other research findings that highlighted the critical impact of review trustworthiness in determining consumers' purchasing intentions (Chih et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2011). The current study, however, goes beyond these strategies by illuminating the underlying causal chain in greater depth and highlighting the key levers for boosting customers' purchase intentions in this situation.

Jin, et al. (2019) analyzed because they were perceived as being more similar to average audiences, Instagram influencers can engage with audiences more effectively, are more likely to interact with followers, and are simpler to relate with or identify with than other types of content creators. Customers react more favorably to other Facebook influencers than to conventional celebrities, especially when their peers have similar demographic and psychological characteristics. This study extended the concept of celebrity credibility to encompass the new types of celebrities and to pinpoint the key psychological factors that increase consumer attraction. Micro-celebrities distinguish apart from individuals who take part in TV shows or blockbuster movies due to the greater level of interpersonal closeness they have with fans. Luxury branding was the only topic covered in this paper because it is becoming common particularly on visual sites like Instagram or Pinterest in social media marketing. Second, information on the participants' nationalities and cultural backgrounds is missing from the existing data collection. Third, it is crucial to remember that different social networking apps have features and philosophies that are distinct from what Instagram offers.

Nuseir (2019) studied on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp growing in popularity, changing how people communicate and exchanging

data on a personal and professional level. Small and large businesses may communicate with their clients frequently thanks to social media. It often takes very little time for an advertisement to reach its target audience. The use of social media is gradually replacing traditional advertising methods. The "Big Four," or the top four, social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and Instagram) were the subject of this study. Businesses that use these social media platforms may be able to draw in more clients and boost sales because they have large user bases. This study made the case for the significance of creating advertisements that not simply take into account the preferences of both the demands of individual users as well as those of social media users as a collective. Businesses must be prepared to understand how to use social media effectively and which platforms to use to reach their target audiences and this involves an internal examination of marketing procedures.

Unlike previous studies, this research on "The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Brand Awareness: A Study on College Students of Kolkata" aims to achieve the following specific objectives: (1) to find whether participants actively seek online reviews before making a purchase decision, (2) to study the brand awareness reached by media influencers on college students, (3) to find out whether influencer marketing is growing more than digital advertising, and (4) to examine whether social media influencers are a reliable source of information.

2. Methodology

A quantitative method was used for this particular study and convenient sampling was used due to economic and time constrain. The population of the study was the college students of Kolkata. A sample size of 216 respondents was ascertained for this study. Meanwhile, the data were collected through Google forms.

The quantitative approach was used for the research, which lasted roughly three months from October to December 2022. The primary data were gathered using online surveys that were shared on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp and stored in a Google Docs link. The questionnaires used the contained (closed) structural questions.

The evaluation of the consistency between the research data and the data collected from the study's real research subjects is presented in pie charts.

3. Results and Discussion

The finding survey suggested that out of 216 respondents (College Students), 65% were Female and 33.8% were Male, as shown at Figure 1. It was found out that females were more likely than males to participate in online surveys. Figure 2 illustrates that the majority of the youth preferred YouTube and Facebook as their social networking sites.

Youth with 87.6% preferred to follow influencers because they felt more connected to their followers when they interacted with them frequently, especially young individuals, as shown at Figure 3. The survey's results confirmed the idea that six primary motivations—information seeking, information sharing, cool and new trends, leisure activities, friendship,

boredom/habitual pleasures, and leisure activities—drove young people to follow their favored social influencers.
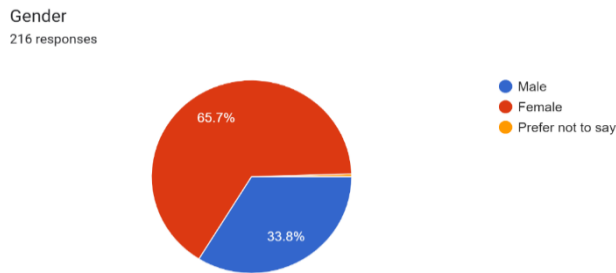

Fig. 1. Gender
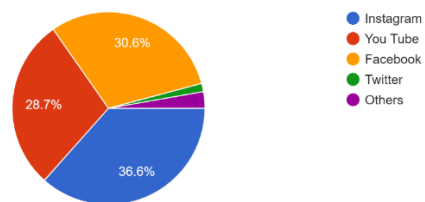
Fig. 2. Social media platform
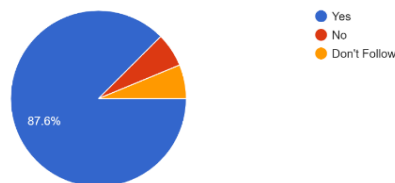
Fig. 3. Following influencer or celebrity accounts
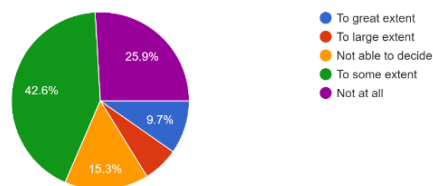

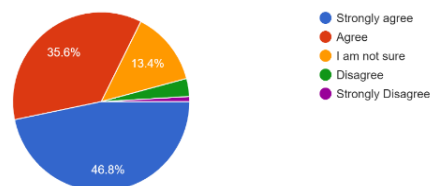Fig. 4. Subscribing to the product/concept promoted by influencers

Fig. 5. Seeking out online reviews before making purchase decisions

Figure 4 represents 42.6% of products and concepts promoted by influencers who considered thoughts to be used and noteworthy and inspire others to action. Marketers liked to target these people because, by doing so, they could influence

or persuade numerous people to make purchases from them.

Figure 5 represents online reviews actively sought out with 46.8% of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) being regarded as a trustworthy information source. Reviews from customers and influencers both qualified as eWOM. They signified consumers' sharing of feedback and assessments of a good or service with other potential customers. The impact of eWOM on purchasing intention was strongly supported by studies.

13. Do you think the company's trustworthiness increase if it gets promoted by the influencer of your choice?
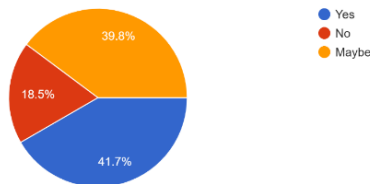216 responses

Fig. 6. Trustworthiness towards the product promoted by influencers

Figure 6 shows a trustworthiness increase with 41.7% and 39.8% may be as Influencers interacting with their followers and sharing personal information. They stood apart from their well-known rivals by returning messages, providing feedback on goods, and being friendly. These actions established a bond and increased trust between the influencer and the customer.

15. Does online recommendations helps in brand recall
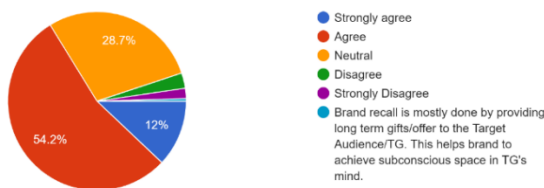216 responses

Fig. 7. Online recommendations and brand recall

Figure 7 shows that 54.2% online recommendation consumers were more likely to remember a well-known brand name, which increased market share. Significant brand equity can result from high brand recall.

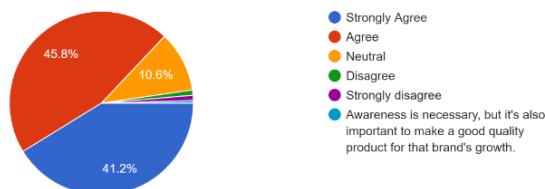19. Awareness of a brand is necessary for the its growth
216 responses

Fig. 8. Brand awareness

Figure 8 shows that 41,2% strongly agreed and 45.8% agreed that the brand's first stage in establishing trust is raising awareness; therefore, the more people are aware of brand or business, the more successful it will be. It is essential for luring customers, helping them to understand and feel comfortable with your products and services, and increasing sales and your brand equity.

21. Is influencer Marketing the future of Social Selling?
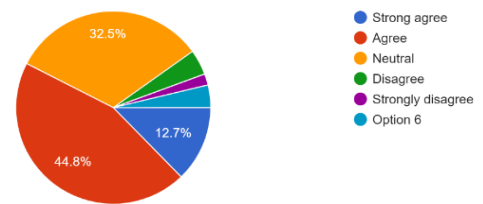212 responses

Fig. 9. Influencer marketing dan the future of social selling

Figure 9 shows 44.8% youth agreed that social media has evolved into a useful tool for marketing. Your potential audience expands as social media users continue to increase.

25. Is social media influencers are a reliable source of information about products I desire?
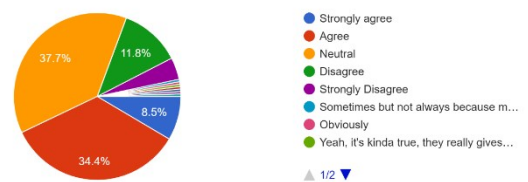212 responses

Fig. 10. The role of social media influencer

Figure 10 shows that 37.7% were neutral about social media influencers when it came to consider celebrities, famous personalities, or influencers as reliable sources. Also, 34.4% were positive about influencers as a genuine source of information when it came to purchase a product. So, yes followers can be influenced by influencers. However, not every influencer can be.

Online recommendations by media influencers in social media help in brand recall. Also, Influencer marketing is the future of social selling. Even it was found that a company's trustworthiness increases if it gets promoted by influencers. Most of the participants of the respondents followed influencers, celebrities, or other popular accounts on social media. The study also revealed that Instagram and YouTube are the most preferred social media platforms among youth. Also, influencers emerge as a reliable source of information.

Consumers are impacted, and their brand preferences are influenced by social media as well. Firms can target clients directly through social media, which is a particularly rich source of data. This enhances the likelihood of people purchasing things, making any campaign utilizing social media influencers more efficient in terms of achieving the objectives. Marketers must recognize the scale of social media and investigate the extent to which it influences client brand selection. The current study is to investigate the impact of social media on brand selection study the brand awareness reached by media influencers on college students.

Advertising frequently appeals to a consumer's desires for group identity, belongingness, and conformity to social and community norms. Advertising heavily relies on group influence. Regarding how susceptible they are to peer pressure and group influence, consumers vary. Younger consumers have been discovered by C. Wahan Park and Parker Lessig to be more receptive to persuasion. This can be due to their lack of

product category expertise, increased social contacts and visibility, or more intense continuing identity-seeking and socialization processes. Many other purchasing decisions are influenced implicitly by personal factors. Many purchases that seem to be made for oneself are made with the consideration of another person or group in mind. The extent to which these characteristics enhance the function of social and group influences in each situation must therefore be considered by an advertiser who is thinking about using advertising to promote social or group influence.

Regardless of the product kind, using celebrities has the advantage of their exposure and attention-grabbing abilities. The celebrity can be instantly recognizable and relatable to large sectors of the public, and the allure and goodwill attached to the person can be transferred to the product. It is frequently effective to use the local celebrities or lesser-known actors and actresses in local or regional market situations. The most important factor in choosing an influencer must be the "fit" or "match" between the influencer's qualities and the needs of the brand. Utilizing consistency theories of attitudes, it is possible to comprehend how an influencer affects consumer attitudes regarding the marketed product. When consumers aspire to the lifestyle or reference group represented by the celebrity endorser, or when the cultural implications desired for the brand's imagination are tied to the celebrity endorsement, a celebrity endorser may also be highly helpful.

The choice of an influencer to be included in an advertisement must therefore be done carefully. If the strategy is to try to increase positive attitudes, the high-credibility influencer should be used. However, if the strategy is to induce behavior such as trial directly, it is possible that using a highly credible influencer can undermine the formation of "real" positive and thus reduce the incidence of future repeat purchases and brand loyalty. That is why so-called "hidden camera" ads that show ordinary "people on the street" not being paid to say what they are saying, they must believe it. When it is anticipated that the audience would identify strongly with the role being played, the individual is "like" many audience members, and honesty and dependability are likely to come across, a generally delighted consumer is frequently the ideal option. The market, advertising ecology, and consumer culture have all been affected by the quick uptake of social media advertising methods. The introduction of social media advertising methods has had a huge impact on the global advertising sector.

4. Conclusion

Due to the rapid growth of social media, understanding consumer behavior and consumption trends in the new millennium present marketers with new challenges and the attention it has attracted from consumers and marketers on a worldwide scale. Interactive influencer marketing is one of the many ways that brands can interact with customers on social media. Research indicated that social media advertising via influencers/celebrities and famous personalities has a major impact on customer engagement and brand loyalty when incorporated into a multichannel marketing plan. Micro-celebrities distinguish apart from individuals who take part in TV shows or blockbuster movies due to the greater level of

interpersonal closeness they have with fans. Permission-based communications or subscription-only material could significantly increase Generation Z attitudes and acceptance regarding receiving messages from businesses on social media. Influencers on Instagram are skilled at introducing and popularizing trends, pushing new products, and boosting sales. Influencers, seen as more similar to typical audiences, are more likely to communicate with followers and are simpler to relate to or identify than traditional; therefore, celebrities have a higher chance of connecting with audiences. Youth will be more accepting of influencers' fashion advice and the brands/products they support since they view them as more trustworthy.

While taking care to make the study as full, objective, and systematic as possible, research work was carried out within the parameters that have been established. This study also had several shortcomings in its methodology. The study was conducted on a sample of students in Kolkata, which may not be a real representation of Social Media Influencers as the profile of social media users is rapidly changing. Also, the data were acquired through a questionnaire, which could have been influenced by the respondents' personal biases and preconceptions. The sample size also was insufficient to identify the impact of various types of social media on consumer perceptions and behaviors; however, this issue can be addressed in future study. To validate the conclusions of the studies, additional research incorporating other sample frames is required.

Several recommendations that could be used in additional research have been made as a result of the research's findings. Future studies can think at using fictitious brands or social media influencers to remove any potential bias that might affect survey respondents' responses. This study aims to analyses intrinsic and extrinsic features in SMIs and assess their effects on brand awareness, image, and trust in sponsored content. By compiling factors from prior literature and developing intrinsic and extrinsic constructs, the study took a deductive and quantitative approach.

Micro-celebrities and their impacts were discussed with responders. As a result, typical celebrities were excluded. A comparative study effort examining the distinctions between traditional celebrities and modern media influencers can add to the topic.

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