Analyzing the Effectiveness of Influencers on Irish and Mexican Students' Purchasing Behavior

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Resumen

Este informe compara los resultados obtenidos al analizar la efectividad de los influencers en el comportamiento de compra de los estudiantes. El objetivo de este estudio es comprender las diferencias de hábitos de pensamiento y compra entre los estudiantes de dos países: Irlanda (Europa) y México (América Latina). La comparación se realizó con los resultados obtenidos aplicando el cuestionario en el Instituto de Tecnología de Waterford (Irlanda) y en FACPyA (México). La importancia de hacer este informe es que nos brinda una perspectiva multicultural sobre los hábitos de compra de los estudiantes de ambas escuelas. Desde una perspectiva gerencial, este documento ofrece algunas recomendaciones que se pueden hacer al seleccionar un influencer de redes sociales para respaldar su producto o servicio, dirigido a estudiantes universitarios en ambos países.

Palabras clave: comportamiento de compra, estudiantes, influencers, multicultural, redes sociales.

Abstract

This report compares the findings obtained by analyzing the effectiveness of influencers on student purchasing behavior. The aim of this study is to understand the thinking and purchasing habits differences between the students of two countries: Ireland (Europe) and Mexico (Latin America). The comparison was made with the results obtained by applying the questionnaire in the Waterford Institute of Technology (Ireland) and in FACPyA (Mexico).
The importance of doing this report is that it gives us a multicultural perspective about the purchasing habits of the students of both schools. From a managerial perspective, this paper offers some recommendations that can be made when selecting a social media influencer to endorse their product or service, targeting college students in both countries.

Key words: influencers, multicultural, purchasing behavior, social media, student

1. INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes the effectiveness of influencers on student purchasing behaviour. Though it is not a new event that celebrities are endorsing products (Kaikati 1987, cited by Erdogan, 1999) in the recent few years, the way of sponsoring has shifted to where we stand at the moment. These days, in the information era, the traditional media is being replaced by the social media (Bruhn et al. 2012, quoted by Brison, Byon and Baker, 2016).

In this age of the information explosion and the influence of the media, advertisements play an essential role in change of perception or thought of the consumer (Kaushik and Baliyan, 2017)

Influencer marketing is the virtue and the science of engaging people who have influence on the Internet to spread the message of a specific trend and its targeted audience in the form of sponsored content (Sammis, Lincoln, Pompei, 2015 cited by Bognar, Puljic and Kadezabek, 2019). Influencers contribute to attracting new users, create a strong community, start actions, strengthen the idea or brand and raise brand awareness, as well as helping to develop loyalty (Vareško,2017 cited by Bognar, Puljic and Kadezabek, 2019).

Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, and Freberg (2011) defined SMIs as "a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media".

Marketers are using celebrity endorsers to influence the purchasing decisions of consumers to increase sales and increase market share. Celebrity endorsement is the way to maximize advertising effectiveness. As a promotional strategy, advertising serves as a major tool in creating product awareness in the mind of a potential consumer to take eventual purchase decision (Kaushik and Baliyan, 2017).

It is vital for traders to be aware of the factors that influence consumer behaviour and motivation because more and more consumers are in the marketplace creating content on brands, something that was previously only controlled by companies (Heinonen 2011 cited by Kaushik and Baliyan, 2017).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Influencers are one of the most effective promotion forms, since people trust them and the costs are comparatively low in comparison to the different forms of promotion (Bognar, Puljic and Kadezabek, 2019).

Cox (2010) cited by Kaushik and Baliyan, (2017) researched the Correlation between Age and Attitude and found out that the social media user attitude towards online advertising (blogs, video and channel or brand page) were differing from some on different age groups.

She explained that those users who fall in the 18-28-year-old age have strong positive attitudes to blog, video, and branded channel ad formats. This was because users found this ad formats to be eye-catching, informative, and enjoyable.

The benefit of influencers on social networks is considered more trustworthy compared to celebrity promotion strategies, for companies that target younger audiences (Lim and Associates, 2017:20 cited by Bognar, Puljic and Kadezabek, 2019).

Today, any user of a social network can gain a large audience in no time. This is where a new type of opinion leader is born: citizen influencers. These new influencers, since they represent the end users of the products or services, their UGC is far more reliable and far more influencing than traditional marketing (Cheong and Morrison, 2008; Eccleston and Griseri, 2008; Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson, 2012 cited by Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018).

Investigating research on the experience of the source in persuasive communication commonly states that the perceived experience of the source has a positive impact on the change of attitude (Horai, Naccari and Fatoullah, 1974 cited by Ohanian, 1990).

A study conducted by Crisci and Kassinove (1973) cited by Ohanian (1990) ("the effect of the perceived level of communicator experience and the strength of behavioural compliance counselling") stated that respondents' compliance with source recommendations was directly correlated with the perceived level of experience and strength of the counselling.

A remarkable amount of advertising and communication research suggests that physical attractiveness is a significant indicator of an individual's initial judgment of someone else (Baker and Churchill 1977; Chaiken 1979; Joseph 1982; Kahle and Homer 1985… cited by Ohanian, 1990). Joseph (1982) cited by Ohanian (1990) concluded that attractive communicators (compared to unattractive ones) are always more valued and have a positive impact on the products with which they are partnered.

According to McKinsey (2017), loosely, those born between 1995 to 2010 are part of the Generation Z. This generation has been exposed to the internet, to social networks, and to mobile systems since early youth, which has produced a generation who is very comfortable with collecting and cross-referencing many sources of information and with integrating virtual and offline experiences.

3. OBJECTIVES
3.1 Research objectives:
To identify the most effective form of social media to influence students.
3.2 Research hypothesis:
H_1: There is a significant difference between the most effective form of social media to influence students among both schools.

4. METHOD
This study aimed to examine the effects of social media influencers on student purchasing behavior, focusing on the most effective form of social media to influence students. This investigation used a questionnaire to answer the research questions. Survey method was used to examine respondents' perceptions of a specific social media influencer they follow and their purchasing behavior.

The questionnaire contained questions measuring demographic variables, five-point scale questions measuring respondents' perceptions, purchasing behavior, influencer-follower relationship, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) regarding a specific social media influencer they follow. Other questions included measuring social media usage and area of interest.

4.1 Sample Profile
For this study, a convenience sample was chosen from college students at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), Ireland and at FACPyA, Mexico. College age students (between the ages of 18 to 25 in Waterford and between 18 to 23 in FACPyA) were chosen as respondents as they are the most active population on social media (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

The questionnaire asked a qualifying question as to whether respondents follow social media influencers and to name one. If they answered no, they were thanked and did not participate in the survey. If they answered yes, they could continue and answer the rest of the questionnaire, keeping in mind the aforementioned influencer, making the final sample size of 131 respondents from the students in Waterford and 50 respondents from FACPyA.

The number of respondents in both schools is because of the Theorem of the Central Limit was applied; given that all the students are around the same age, have very similar backgrounds, and living conditions, among other factors, their perception of the influencers are similar and have a similar distribution. The mean of the age of the population is 20.57 for WIT and 21.72 for FACPyA (there are only 4 years of bachelor's degree for WIT).

5. RESULTS
Preferred form of social media by students was analyzed with the answers from the questionnaire applied to students from both colleges. This information is displayed in the Figure 1 for the Waterford Institute of Technology, in a simple manner. Showing the frequency of the preferred platform for following social media influencers. The preferred social media platform for students from Waterford Institute of Technology turned out to be Instagram on the first place. Followed far behind by YouTube. Snapchat is also portrayed on a smaller way. Facebook, Twitter, and "Other" social media platforms make a brief appearance on the histogram. However, they are preferred by the minority of the students from WIT.

Figure 1: Population of Interest by Preferred Platform for Following Social Media Influencers for WIT.
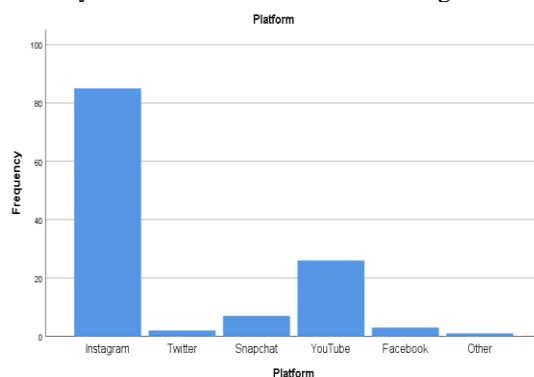
Source: made with information obtained from survey.

In the Table 1, the relation of area of interest to preferred social media platform for following influencers for Waterford Institute of Technology students, is presented. The information is presented first by Area of Interest; showing the percentage of the influencers (chosen by the responders) that endorse for a specific industry, and then by platform that the students prefer for following their influencer, also by percentage.

These areas of interest are then divided by the percent of social media platform in which the students follow their influencer.

Beauty and Fitness/Health influencers are clearly popular on Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat; as well as Fashion, Lifestyle and Music influencers for Instagram. Gaming and Travel influencers are preferred to be watched on YouTube.

Table 1. Relation of Area of Interest to Preferred Social Media Platform for Following Influencers for WIT students.

Area of Interest	Percent	Preferred Platform	Percent
Beauty	33%	Instagram	80.6%
		YouTube	11%
		Snapchat	8.4%
Fitness/ Health	26%	Instagram	72.4%
		YouTube	20.7%
		Snapchat	6.9%
Fashion	12%	Instagram	74%
		YouTube	26%
Fun	10%	YouTube	36.4%
		Instagram	27.3%
		Facebook	12.1%
		Twitter	12.1%
		Other	12.1%
Lifestyle	10%	Instagram	72.7%
		YouTube	13.7%
		Facebook	13.6%
Travel	4%	Instagram	80%

		Twitter	20%
Music	3%	Instagram	60%
		Snapchat	40%
Gaming	2%	YouTube	100%

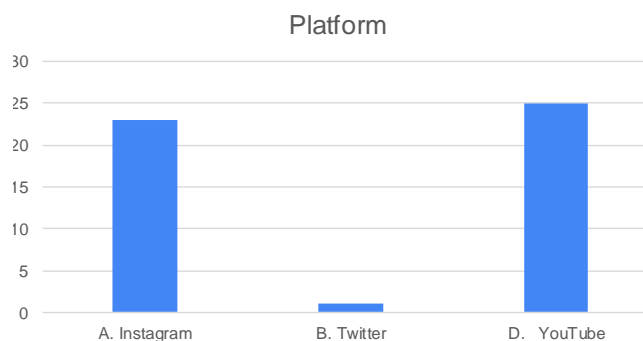Source: made with information obtained from survey.

Some prominent results are the obvious preference of the students for Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat, in concordance with the theoretical framework.

For the students from FACPyA, the results are shown on the Figure 2. Even though the questionnaire applied was the same one for both campuses (translated to Spanish for easier access), the choices for social media platform were reduced by their answers from 8 to 3.

The preference for Instagram and YouTube as platforms for following their influencers are both clear and almost equal. With only Twitter as the third option, with a great difference between them.

Figure 2: Population of Interest by Preferred Platform for Following Social Media Influencers for Facultad de Contaduria Publica y Administracion.

Source: made with information obtained from survey.

On Table 2, the answers for FACPyA's students on the relation between the area of interest and the preferred social media platform for following their influencer are made known.

As with Table 1, the results are presented first by Area of Interest; showing the percentage of the influencers (chosen by the responders) that endorse for a specific industry and then by platform that the students prefer for following their influencer, also by percentage.

For Mexican students, *Fun* is the main area of interest (with 20%), followed closely by *Beauty* (19%) and *Lifestyle* (18%). The first two on Instagram, then YouTube; and the third one with 100% following their chosen influencer on Instagram.

While Gaming and Music were only selected by 14% of the respondents, 100% of them follow influencers for this area of interest through YouTube.

Table 2. Relation of Area of Interest to Preferred Social Media Platform for Following Influencers for FACPyA.

Area of Interest	Percent	Preferred Platform	Percent
Beauty	19%	Instagram	55.6%
		YouTube	44.4%
Fitness/ Health	7%	Instagram	40%
		YouTube	60%
Fashion	10%	Instagram	60%

			YouTube	40%
Fun		20%	YouTube	70%
			Instagram	30%
Lifestyle		18%	Instagram	100%
Travel		12%	YouTube	50%
			Instagram	40%
			Twitter	10%
Music		6%	YouTube	100%
Gaming		8%	YouTube	100%

Source: made with information obtained from survey.

For both Irish and Mexican students, the most prominent social media platforms are Instagram and YouTube. Which were chosen from 8 social media platform options on the questionnaire, singling them out as the favorites for following social media influencers.

The following observations can be made when comparing the results from Tables 1 and 2:

• On *Beauty*, *Fashion* and *Lifestyle* for both populations Instagram is liked better.

• YouTube is picked when following *Gaming* or *Fun* influencers.

• For *Travel*, in each case, YouTube, Instagram. and Twitter are present.

• Music is a divided area, with some opting for YouTube at 100% and the others not choosing YouTube but Instagram and Snapchat.

• Fitness/Health is also divided; with some (FACPyA) being partial to YouTube and others (WIT) to Instagram.

6. CONCLUSION
6.1 Discussion
Through this study, a better understanding of what a digital influencer is was gained. This paper also revealed the major influences on student purchasing behavior concerning social media influencers in both countries.

Throughout this research, the specific social media platforms that are consumed by college students (aged 18 to 25), to make endorsements effective when targeting them; as well as the most effective form of social media to influence students, for each area of interest was recognized.

As explained by Cox (2010), users between the ages of 18 and 28, have strong positive attitudes to blog, video, and branded channel ad formats. This was confirmed by the outcome of this paper.

In this project, respondents specifically between the ages of 18 to 25, acknowledged that they deem Instagram and YouTube as the main social media platforms for following influencers who promote endorsements.

Instagram is an app that relies heavily on visual content, such as photographs and short videos, which allows influencers to post blog-type content; while, YouTube is a free video sharing website (with a premium option) that makes it easy to watch and share videos online.

6.2 Implications for Marketing Managers
From a managerial perspective, this paper offers some recommendations that can be made when selecting a social media influencer to endorse their product or service, targeting college students (aged between 18-25):

It is recommended that either Instagram or YouTube are used as the main platform for the social media influencer to display the content regarding a product or service endorsement, since it would be more effective on the target market, as shown as a result of the previous analysis.

Marketing managers should know that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of social media influencers' characteristics to students of both schools' college students; with the only exception that for Irish students Snapchat is still a relevant

social media platform for following influencers for specific areas of interest.

Additionally, managers are advised to use digital influencers in their social media communication strategy when they aim at generating interest, recognition and engagement to their brands.

In conclusion, marketing managers can benefit from the evidence shown on this document on which platforms are the most effective when targeting college students as market for influencer endorsement.

6.3 Areas for Future Research

There are certain limits to this study, only 180 students of a specific age responded the questionnaire, and therefore it is possible that neither of the schools/countries are accurately represented.

This study can be further developed by applying the statistical analyses to social media influencers' characteristics to have a better understanding of the perception of the students on them and therefore, which ones to look for when searching for a social media influencer to endorse an specific product or service. This analysis is in progress.

The questionnaire can also be applied to the equivalent academic programs on a larger quantity for greater accuracy; or even to apply it to people of different ages, level of studies or living conditions when researching for other markets.

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APPENDICES

Questionnaire: Investigating Social Media Influencers' Impact

Filter questions: Do you follow a social media influencer such as Pewdiepie, James Charles, Jenna Marbles, etc.*? If no – thank them and move on to someone else. If yes, ask them:*
Who is the main social media influencer that you follow? _____
Based on your answer above, please complete the rest of the questionnaire using the person you indicated above (for example, if you indicated James Charles above, you would answer each of the following questions based on your perception of him).

1.   Please indicate, by placing a tick in the appropriate box, what social media platform do you <u>mostly use</u> to follow him/her? (Tick only one).

A.	Instagram ☐	D.	YouTube ☐	G.	LinkedIn ☐
B.	Twitter ☐ ☐	E.	Blog ☐	H.	Other
C.	Snapchat ☐	F.	Facebook ☐		

2.   Please indicate your social media influencer's main area of interest (tick only one):

A.	Beauty ☐	D.	Travel ☐	G.	Music ☐
B.	Fashion ☐	E.	Fun ☐	H.	Gaming ☐
C.	Fitness/Health ☐	F.	Lifestyle ☐	I.	Other ☐

3. Thinking about the influencer that you indicated above, please answer the following. For each of the statements listed underneath, indicate your level of agreement with the statement by placing a tick in the appropriate box:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I consider that my social media influencer is an expert on the products/brands he/she promotes.					
I believe that he/she is trustworthy.					
The higher the price of the product/brand that I am buying, the more likely I am persuaded to follow my influencer's recommendation.					
I consider that he/she is qualified to advise on the products/brands he/she promotes.					
Based on his/her recommendation on a product/brand, I have searched for more information on it.					
I feel that my social media influencer is sincere.					
Seeing my influencer use products/brands on social media platforms increases my interest in buying them.					
I consider that my influencer and the products/brands that he/she promotes are a good match.					
I consider that she/he is honest.					
I am more inclined to trust a social media influencer's recommendation if they are not being paid to promote the brand/product.					
I consider he/she is classy.					
I feel that he/she has experience with the products/brands that they promote.					
I feel he/she is similar to me.					
I would pay more for a product/brand than a cheaper competitive one if my influencer gave it a good review.					
I believe that he/she thinks like me.					
It is likely that products/brands endorsed by my favorite influencer would be my first choice to buy.					
I use affiliate links posted by my influencer to other websites.					
I think my social media influencer is reliable.					
Based on his/her recommendation on a product/brand, I have considered purchasing it.					
Based on his/her information on a product/brand, I have actually purchased it.					
I find him/her to be attractive.					

I feel that products/brands endorsed by him/her are of very high quality.					
I consider that social media influencers with small numbers of followers are more authentic than those with very large followers.					
I often make comments or share experiences with my friends about the products/brands I have seen recommended by my social media influencer.					
I consider that he/she is dependable.					
I wouldn't purchase a product/brand if my influencer gave it a bad review.					
. I consider him/her as a peer.					
. I think he/she is sexy.					
. I believe that my social media influencer is knowledgeable about the products/brands that he/she promotes.					

Demographic/Classification Questions.

1. Please indicate your gender:

☐Male   ☐ Female   ☐Other

2. What is the year of your birth? _____

3. What college year are you currently in (for visiting students, use year at home university)?
     _____