

The effect of Features of Instagram Influences on Customer Engagement and Purchase Intention with Mediating Role of Self-Concept

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Abstract

Background and Objective: The advent of various social media has considerably changed the marketing process via these electronic means. Instagram and influencers in this social network have provided organizations with a solution to expand purchases by engaging consumers in influencers' activities. Therefore, the extant study was conducted to examine the effect of Instagram influencers' features on engagement, self-concept, and purchase intention.

Method: The present paper was a quantitative study with the applied objective that was carried out using the descriptive survey method. The statistical population comprised 385 individuals who had Instagram accounts and followed influencers. The data were gathered from engagement, purchase intention, and influencers' features questionnaires. Confirmatory factor analysis and guidelines of experts were used to examine and approve the content validity. Moreover, the reliability of the aforementioned questionnaires was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha. Data analysis was done based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) through SMART PLS software.

Findings: The results indicated the significant effect of features (e.g., pleasant, credibility, and emotions) of Instagram influencers on followers' engagement, encouraging them to purchase products and services.

Keywords: Social Networks, Self-Concept, Marketing on Instagram, Customer Engagement with Influencers, Purchase Intention

Introduction

The emerging technologies have brought considerable changes in marketing, leading to diverse marketing styles (Khashei & Zargaran, 2018). Product recommendations by Instagram influencers receive a higher credit rate rather than the products introduced by family or friends; therefore, 40% of consumers use the products suggested by social networks' influencers (Sekhon, 2016). Social media influencers are individuals who actively use their social media accounts and are often involved in a certain topic, as well as providing new information (Loeper et al., 2014). Social media influencers share their lifestyles and personal reviews through their user accounts and mostly use the products they advertise (Munukka et al., 2016). An influencer can evaluate a product, praise, and encourage consumers to purchase a product. Moreover, influencers can share the latest information, attitude, and behaviors of consumers (Liu et al., 2015). Among researchers, the opinions of individuals about products are the most critical marketing goals of companies, and companies use social media to

find the opinions of consumers. Social media members play two roles at the same time. Sometimes they are content creators and sometimes are content users. The majority of creators of these messages are consumers whose messages are considered, as referenced, and are re-shared (Schivinski, 2019).

Expansion of social media has led to the concentration of influential marketing on using individuals influencing potential buyers directing marketing activities towards such areas. Influencers affect the form of marketing through social media based on online communications, which finally contributes to purchase decisions. Nowadays, buyers and consumers in social media become advocates of some brands based on the information sources provided via these media; therefore, social media have become means for marketing communications that affect the buyers' behaviors. Hence, companies can overcome the current competitive world through access to new marketing methods and advertisements via online social media.

Regardless of brand advertisement, consumers trust in recommendations given by their reliable and favorite person about a product or service. They pay attention to a brand based on its suggestions and advertisements provided by a well-known and reliable person who uses that brand. Consumers are indeed looking for recommendations and advice about the quality of products given by friends or families, and then they decide to buy that product. The recommendations given by famous and influential individuals also work as friends' suggestions. Businesses try to influence the behavior and decisions of their audiences to affect their purchase decision. According to the mentioned points, the present study aimed at finding how the features of Instagram influencers lead to higher engagement and purchase intention.

Literature Review

Features of Instagram Influencers

Every organization requires evoking feelings that bring a commitment to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in creating customer relationships. In this case, commercial goals are expanded, going beyond customer retention, focusing on interaction-based customer relationships and their enhancement, which facilitate the balance of sustainability objectives of financial and non-financial companies. Mutual relationships between customers and sellers have been facilitated based on advanced information technology (Lou et al., 2019).

Over the recent 20 years, technology has changed the passive role of users to an active influence by using internet and web instruments to create and share information and increase users' participation through shared content. Therefore, this is influential marketing that brings customer involvement, attraction, and pleasantness, which in turn leads to profitability. Researchers have suggested organizations be present in popular social networks and produce professional content (Aminsaremi et al., 2019). Simplicity, high quality, and durable visual content must be at the center of attention. Moreover, the information is increasingly conveyed to consumers through brands' images. However, among variables including quality, content, the number of followers, credibility, age, place, gender, job, industry, hobby, and entertainment, the number of followers has the highest effect since it indicates the popularity of the influential network. Therefore, there are four types of mega, macro, micro, and nano-influencers based on the number of followers. Macro- and micro-influencers are highly employed in companies with commercial goals (Northman, 2020).

Bloggers or advertisers of cyberspace do some tasks voluntarily beyond their job role and description. On the other hand, branding and brand management are popular categories in the marketing field, so the creation of a powerful brand in the market is the final goal of many organizations. In this lieu, the behavior of employees can lead to the success or failure of the brand. Many companies consider the brand as a source of competitive advantage due to increased competition in service markets. To this end, many service companies and sectors try to make a relationship with customers and create a good image and individual credit in the mind of customers by influencing the customers' perception of received services (Tag & Hawley, 2009). Marketing, advertisements, and sustainability of companies serve as criteria evaluating the role of Instagram influencers in creating motivation for customer

engagement with the branded product by choosing three features of pleasant, credibility, and feelings (Boerman, 2020).

Engagement with influencer

The possibility that consumers can develop strong emotional attachments to brands because of products and services advertised by influencers is important to brand loyalty research. As attachment theory in psychology suggests, the degree of emotional attachment to an object predicts the nature of an individual's interaction with the object (Kim, 2007).

If a person feels an emotional attachment to a brand or engaged with a marketer, then tends to pay more for that brand. Emotional attachment to a brand and engagement with a blogger is positively correlated to brand support and mental anxiety resulting from brand separation expectations or actual brand separation. Accordingly, individuals have a strong tendency to buy from those brands they love. Hence, they tend to pay more to buy that brand. The amount of money they desire to pay for the brand marketed by their favorite influencer depends on their emotional attachment. The brand loyalty of customers that is created by improved quality can be taken into account as a solution to promote the most valuable intangible asset of the company, which is brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000).

Engagement is defined as a state in which the person sees no difference between him/herself and the influencer considering successes or failures of the brand as his/her success and failure. In organizational behavior studies, a sense of organizational belonging is a specific type of sense of social belonging. A person who has a sense of belonging to an organization or brand advertised by a specific person defines him/herself concerning that organization or person. In the sense of engagement with a favorite person, three aspects of similarity, membership, and loyalty are considered. According to the sense of belonging to a brand, the person imagines an effective and important role in forming consumer behavior. This consistency affects the promotion effectiveness facilitating positive attitudes towards products and brands, and influences the consumer choice, tendency, perceived quality, brand preferences, and brand loyalty (Valette-Florence, Guizani, Merunka, 2011). Moreover, product recommendations by Instagram influencers receive a higher credit rate rather than the products introduced by family or friends; therefore, 40% of consumers use the products suggested by social networks' influencers (Sekhon et al., 2016).

Social media influencers are individuals who actively use their social media accounts and are often involved in a certain topic, as well as providing new information (Loeper et al., 2014).

Also, consumers receive more messages about products from social media influencers rather than companies. Solomon (2017) found the effect of social media influencers on consumers' product perception. Furthermore, Ateke (2013) indicated the higher the perception, the more the product brand images are used by influencers. Research result indicated that social media users consider the social media influencers as their indirect role model in terms of lifestyle because consumers can see the congruence between themselves and influencers through social media (Choi & Rifon, 2012).

Self-Concept

Self-concept means general evaluation of a person about the personality of self, which results from the perception of a person's behavioral characteristics; therefore, self-concept can be positive or negative. According to Kohut (2018), psychological health and balance stem from the equilibrium growth of self and its integration. In the opinion of a famous author, Purkey, self-concept is defined as the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. As a complex and cognitive structure of personal generalizations towards self, self-concept includes characteristics, knowledge, values, attitudes, roles, and other topics defined by individuals who continuously integrate the data about them. Self-concept can be defined as a human performance utilizing external factors, which is affected through indirect processes associated with self (Kohut, 2018).

Purchase Intention

Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1995) present the most recognized model of consumer purchase decision-making (Chi et al., 2009). This model divides the consumer purchase decision process into five stages: (1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase decision, and (5) post-purchase behavior (Chi et al., 2009). Kotler (2003) proposes that individual attitudes and unpredictable situations will influence purchase intention.

According to Douglas and colleagues (1983), purchase behavior is affected by purchase intention and other market conditions (Quoted from Itsarintr, 2010).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) defined purchase intention as the possible purchase of consumers after receiving promotional messages (quoted from Wu et al., 2012). Moreover, Spears and sing (2004) define purchase intention as a behavior in which consumers buy products informedly. If consumers feel good about a product, they will form purchase intention that is the likelihood of consumers to purchase the product.

Background

AlFarraj et al. (2012) examined the impact of influencers' credibility dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise on the purchase intention in the aesthetic dermatology industry. This study aimed to investigate the influencers' credibility dimensions (i.e., attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise) on purchase intention (PI) through the mediating role of cognitive and affective online engagement among the aesthetic dermatology consumers in Jordan. The data analysis revealed an excellent fit for the data and indicated an impact of attractiveness and expertise on online engagement and PI. Moreover, a mediating influence was also found for online engagement on the path between influencer credibility and PI.

Marques et al. (2021) examined the effect of microcelebrity and micro-influencer on consumer-brand engagement in Instagram. Several brands are striving in their endeavors to find new ways to improve their consumer engagement through social media. The results suggest that both influencers have generated varying levels and types of interactions. In sum, this exploratory study revealed that the chosen celebrity's posts attracted more followers to the brand's Instagram page when compared to the micro influencer's publications. However, the latter has garnered more clicks, comments, and likes, thereby increasing consumer-brand engagement through social media.

Taillon et al. (2020) studied the relationships between social media influencers and their followers, as well as the moderating role of closeness. The purpose of this paper was to better understand the role of closeness and the relationships between social media influencers and their followers and, more specifically, how social media influencers can effectively manage their human brands. Results found attractiveness and likeability to predict attitudes positively toward the influencer, word-of-mouth, and purchase intentions, whereas similarity only predicted word-of-mouth from the follower. Closeness served as a moderator but had different effects. Closeness positively moderated the effect of attractiveness on purchase intentions; however, it had a negative effect with similarity on purchase intentions. Moreover, closeness moderated the effect of likeability on attitude toward the influencer.

Jamali and Khan (2018) examined the impact of consumer interaction on social media on brand awareness and purchase intention. This study was conducted on Samsung Brand for the statistical population of three private universities. This study suggests that brands should build communication channels on social media platforms be respond to query of the consumer and lunch time-to-time social media campaigns.

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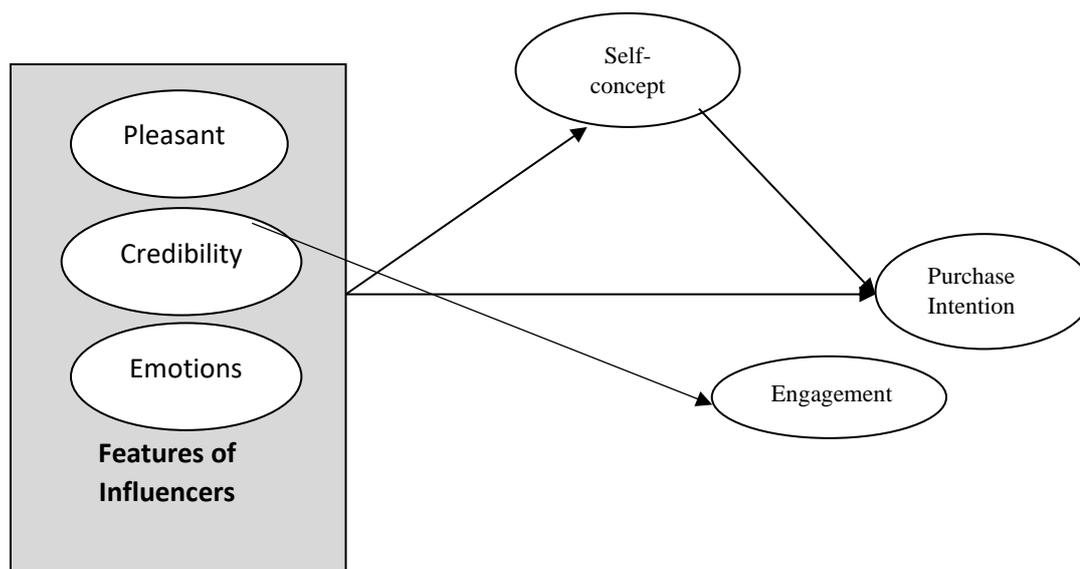


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Main Hypothesis

Features (pleasant, credibility, emotions) of Instagram influencers have a significant effect on purchase intention with mediating role of self-concept.

Sub-Hypotheses

- Features (pleasant, credibility, emotions) of Instagram influencers have a significant effect on self-concept.
- Self-concept has a significant effect on purchase intention.
- Features (pleasant, credibility, emotions) of Instagram influencers have a significant effect on purchase intention.

Method

The extant study was applied research in terms of objective and a descriptive-survey study in terms of data collecting method. The purpose of this study aimed to examine the relationship between variables based on the research objective by using SEM. To collect information from theoretical foundations and literature, bibliographic references, papers, required books, scientific databases, and e-journals were used. The data were gathered from questionnaires through the field method. Finally, the relationships between variables were assessed and modeled by using SEM through Smart PLS software. A questionnaire served as the main means for data collecting. Accordingly, a 20-item questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was employed.

To ensure the content and face validity of the questionnaire, the primary version was evaluated by experts and scholars then required reforms were done based on their opinions. The approved questionnaire was used ultimately. The designed hypotheses were tested using structural and PLS models through Smart PLS software. The mentioned method was the best instrument for analysis of the studies on the complex relationships between variables and small sample size. In the SEM method with the PLS approach, the model fit and hypothesis testing are done, respectively. The model fit is done within two stages of specification of measurement and structural models (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2013).

Convergent and divergent validities were used to assess measurement model fit; composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were used to assess model reliability. Table 1 reports the results.

Table 1. Results of convergent validity and reliability of constructs

Variable	Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	The average variance extracted (AVE)
Triple features of Instagram influencers	Pleasant	0.799	0.882	0.715
	Credibility	0.779	0.877	0.455
	Emotions	0.782	0.847	0.699
Customer engagement with influencer	-	0.775	0.837	0.491
Purchase intention	-	0.828	0.886	0.663
Self-concept	-	0.758	0.845	0.580

As seen in Table 1, all variables had high reliability. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values of all variables were greater than 0.7, indicating appropriate model fit. The validity of the questionnaire was examined based on two convergent and divergent validity criteria associated with SEM. AVE value indicates the degree of correlation between a construct and its indicators; the higher the correlation, the higher the model fit will be. AVE values of construct reported in Table 1 were greater than 0.5 indicating convergent validity of the model and appropriate measurement models fit. In terms of divergent validity, the correlation between a construct and its indicators is compared to the correlation between that construct and other constructs (Hulland, 1999).

Table 2. Results of divergent validity of constructs

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. pleasant	0.845					
2. credibility	0.603	0.674				
3. emotions	0.713	0.609	0.836			
4. self-concept	0.609	0.605	0.598	0.761		
5. customer engagement with influence	0.203	0.331	0.258	0.361	0.700	
6. purchase intention	0.455	0.337	0.596	0.299	0.266	0.814

According to results of divergent validity reported in Table 2, constructs had higher interaction with their indicators rather than with other constructs implying suitable divergent validity of the model.

Findings

In the next step, the relationships between variables were examined by using SEM with the PLS technique within two modes of significance values and standard estimation. First, Bootstrapping command was run through Smart PLS to confirm hypotheses based on the obtained t-values (Figure 2). If t-values are greater than +1.96 and less than -1.96, the relevant parameter is significant, and the hypothesis is confirmed. As seen in Figure 2, t-values between the three main constructs are greater than 1.96; hence, hypotheses are confirmed.

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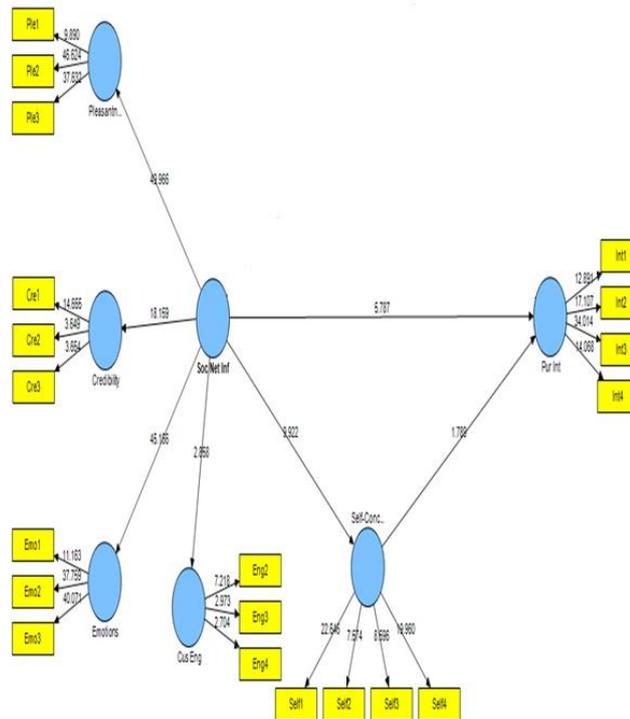


Figure 2. Model run in significance values mode

After standard estimation, the causal relationship between constructs was examined using Smart PLS software. The results have been illustrated in Figure 3 (model run in standard estimation mode).

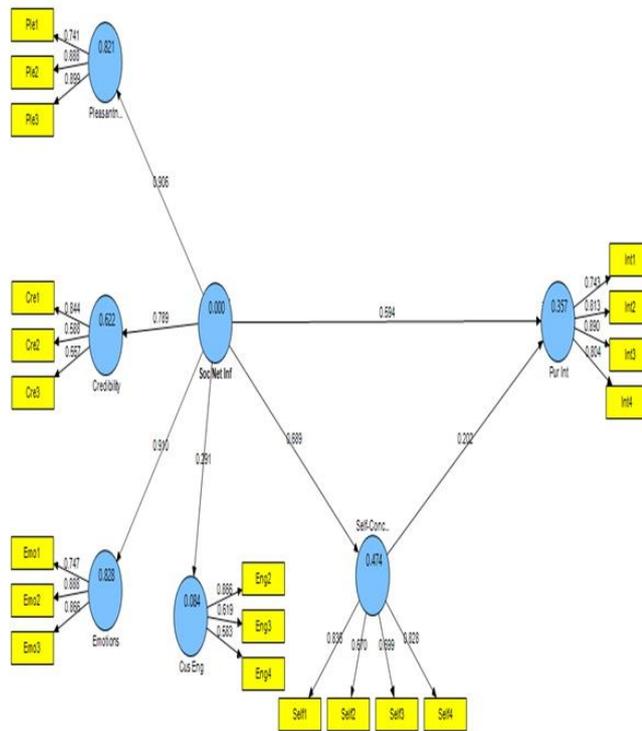


Figure 3. Model run in standard estimation mode

Table 3. Results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Indirect path coefficient	Z value	Result
Features (pleasant, credibility, emotions) of Instagram influencers have a significant effect on purchase intention with mediating role of self-concept.	0.139	1.766	Confirmed
Hypothesis	Direct path coefficient	T value	Result
Features (pleasant, credibility, emotions) of Instagram influencers have a significant effect on self-concept.	0.689	9.922	Confirmed
Self-concept has a significant effect on purchase intention.	0.202	1.789	Confirmed
Features (pleasant, credibility, emotions) of Instagram influencers have a significant effect on purchase intention.	0.594	5.787	Confirmed

Table 3 reports the results of the model run within two modes of significance values and standard estimation. This criterion measures the fit of both structural and measurement models simultaneously, which were calculated separately in previous sections. This is a general criterion for model fit measurement along with items of each variable.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to Table 3, the Z-value of the main hypothesis was greater than 1.65 at an error level of 10%; hence, this hypothesis was confirmed. The indirect path coefficient of this hypothesis equaled 0.139, which indicated the significant effect of features of Instagram influencers (pleasant, credibility, emotions) on the purchase intention with mediating role of self-concept.

According to Table 3, the T-value of the first hypothesis was greater than 1.96 at an error level of 5%; hence, this hypothesis was confirmed. The direct path coefficient of this hypothesis equaled 0.291, which indicated the significant effect of features of Instagram influencers (pleasant, credibility, emotions) on the customer engagement with the influencer.

According to Table 3, the T-value of the second hypothesis was greater than 1.96 at an error level of 5%; hence, this hypothesis was confirmed. The direct path coefficient of this hypothesis equaled 0.689, which indicated the significant effect of features of Instagram influencers (pleasant, credibility, emotions) on the self-concept.

According to Table 3, the T-value of the third hypothesis was greater than 1.65 at an error level of 10%; hence, this hypothesis was confirmed. The direct path coefficient of this hypothesis equaled 0.202, which indicated the significant effect of self-concept on purchase intention.

According to Table 3, the T-value of the fourth hypothesis was greater than 1.96 at an error level of 5%; hence, this hypothesis was confirmed. The direct path coefficient of this hypothesis equaled 0.594, which indicated the significant effect of features of Instagram influencers (pleasant, credibility, emotions) on the purchase intention.

According to the obtained results, the advent of social media in cyberspace has been one of the most effective communicational phenomena in the 21st century. Social media on the internet base have created a wide area of databases and different semantic manifestations. Different individuals with various thoughts, tastes, and desires have been connected via social media. The huge number of people with various ethnicities and nationalities via social media has led to the attraction of numerous businesspersons, managers, and merchants to the new market in these networks.

Moreover, marketing via social media, especially Instagram, leads to followers' engagement with influencers who encourage them to buy provided products and services. According to conducted studies, influencers in social media, in particular Instagram, can make their followers interested in the promotional products. Hence, digital marketing and Instagram promotions can pace the way for the effectiveness of advertisements, awareness of customers, the path of consumers in the sales funnel, and increased purchase intention. However, it is recommended that organizations choose influential people that are reliable, can make consumers and followers good and pleasant. Therefore, the most important measure before a promotion is finding the best influencer for the advertised product.

Limitations

- Although all initial data were gathered from questionnaires based on the research framework, some respondents who were interested in research works might answer the questions voluntarily due to the reluctance and noncollaboration of some participants. Hence, opposite opinions might have been ignored.
- Since the relationship between variables was explained based on the model and theoretical foundations, this relationship is not controllable under trial conditions. Hence, caution must be taken in generalizing results.

Recommendations

- Designing and creating promotions suitable for products and services regarding their branding via Instagram
- Identifying reliable individuals of relevant products in Instagram and promotion design by influencers in social media of Instagram

- Bringing the sense of empathy, compassion, and kindness in advertising products in Instagram to achieve better promotion by influencers
- Surveying on considered products in influencers' pages
- Preparing an intimate and friendly negotiation between influencers to address issues considering the advertised product (secretly) and creating a sense of pleasure among followers.

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