The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Intentions Toward Beauty Brands After the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Influencer marketing is extremely used nowadays by brands all over the world. Influencers give brands an edge to achieve their goals and sales. As they impact consumers' intentions to buy beauty products, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 made many companies reach to influencers to market their products as it was easier and faster. The main purpose of this paper is to identify the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding whether the beauty influencer's credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and product match-up, impact consumers' intentions. The paper set up the four factors of influencer marketing (credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and product match-up) as independent variables, and the dependent variable is consumers' intentions. The research data of this paper based on quantitative research through using online survey. The sample comprised 202 target consumer who lives in Iraq and uses social media platforms to buy beauty products. The results show that there is a crucial relationship between influencer marketing and its dimensions (credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and product match-up) and consumers' intentions. However, not all influencer marketing dimensions are influencing the consumers' intentions.

***Keywords**: Influencer Marketing, Consumers' Intentions, Social Media and Covid-19.*

Introduction

Modern life and the high level of using social media among people have provided brands with opportunities to connect with consumers. Among many new approaches, influencer marketing has appeared as a successful approach to connecting with potential customers on social media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Likewise, marketers benefit from social media, particularly acquaintances with digital influencers, to connect with customers and initiate interest for what they are selling. (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Social media has increased online purchasing behaviour therefore many businesses and consumers are engaged because it aids take optimal buying decisions (Alalwan, 2018). As we acknowledged, the Covid-19 pandemic has formed an unpleasant situation for the whole world. This situation has created a tremendous economic challenge because most businesses and organisations either do not operate or run out of funds due to several limitations. Throughout this time, firms have used social media to maintain their presence and boost brand recognition while also assisting customers in managing the problems of the moment by delivering uplifting content. (Dias, Pessôa, & Andrade, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how people live and communicate (Dias, Pessôa, & Andrade, 2020). The beauty industry like any other industry was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This

market in 2020 noticed a decrease in their market compared to the previous years, especially those brands with brick-and-mortar locations (Gerstell, Marchessou, Schmidt & Spagnuolo, 2020). Total sales globally were $483 billion in 2020, and this figure is predicted to rise to $716 billion by 2025. (Sickler, 2021). In recent years, demand for men's beauty products such as skin care, hair care and shaving products has increased as men have become more aware of their appearances as a result of the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, where they are exposed to social media influences' routines and introducing new products that offer targeted solutions for the growing need of men's products (Smedley, 2023). The men's beauty products industry has been expected to grow. According to a report done by Future Market Insights (2022), the worldwide men's beauty market such as skincare will reach $28.34 million by 2029 witnessing a double-digit CAGR. As the cosmetics sector is one of the dominant industries in which to establish a business in Iraq. However, digital marketing has grown in popularity accounting for 12.7% of total beauty sector revenue in Iraq (Salim & al, 2023). This business has grown rapidly in recent years, with a global market value of 571.1 billion USD and 2.8 billion USD in Iraq alone (Salim & et al., 2023).

With our descriptive study, we pursue to understand the concept of influencer marketing in social media by investigating the impact on consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the success or failure of social media influencers is determined using four components, which are: source credibility, source attractiveness, source expertise and product match-up on the intention of consumers to purchase the products.

Literature Review

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a category of marketing that the focal point of it is the leaders that direct your brand's message to the market (Tapinfluence, 2017). This type of marketing has been increasing remarkably over the years as companies believe that there is eleven times more of a return on investment with influencer marketing than the traditional forms of marketing (Tapinfluence, 2017). According to a survey conducted with more than 800 brand managers estimated that their investment in influencer marketing grew from US$1.7bn in 2016 to US$6.5bn in 2019 (Drummond-Butt, 2019). Influencers use their social media platforms to introduce latest products (e.g. skincare products) to motivate consumers to boost their interaction with their accounts. Influencers develop not only content about the product on various social media platforms but also important knowledge about beauty products and help consumers in decision-making. Many studies show that people's purchasing decisions are influenced more by their immediate surroundings and living environment than by traditional marketing approaches (Kempe, Kleinberg , & Tardos, 2003; Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Given that people are spending more and more time on online social platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. It is natural for them to regard the influencers they follow as reliable sources of information and recommendations. With the spread of Covid-19 pandemic influencers and brands have begun to displace their communication away from goods and services and toward values and this caused the rise of "everyday influencers" (Enberg, 2020).

> *H1: Influencer marketing positively impacts consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic.*

1-   Source Credibility

After the rise of influencers and the genuine content that they have accelerated (Enberg, 2020). Influencers are perceived as genuine, people who are more attainable and more reliable than typical celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). A number of researchers assume that source credibility is a crucial aspect of developing effective influencer marketing campaigns. (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). When an influ-

encer's credibility weakens, so does his or her ability to influence. (Zietek, 2016). Previous research has found a positive link between influencer credibility and followers' intentions. (Lou & Yuan, 2018).

> *H1.1: Source credibility positively influences consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic.*

2- Source Attractiveness

The appealing qualities of digital influencers is perceived to have a high impact on encouraging the acceptance rate of advertising. Various past research has discovered a positive correlation between source attractiveness and consumer opinions, as well as purchase intention (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). Pornpitakpan (2003), discussed how physical attractiveness was important only when the purchasing involved an attractiveness-related product, such as beauty products like skincare, and cosmetics. For more illustration, attractiveness will be more effective in some integral products compared to other products; such as fashion, perfumes and beauty products (e.g. Beauty soaps, body lotion, facial creams, and other products.) (Khan, Rukhsar & Shoaib, 2017).

> *H1.2: Source attractiveness positively influences consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic.*

3- Source Expertise

The "perceived capabilities of the source to make valid assertions" is referred to as expertise (Mc-Cracken, 1989). Accordingly, the creditor with information places a high level of trust in the individual who has actual experience and understanding in the current era (Gupta, Kishore & Verma, 2015). Napi & Said (2015), stated that the more knowledge the endorser has about the product, the more the customer will be persuaded (Nguyen, 2020). This element is considered one of the very important elements and has a strong effect on the viewer (Rachbini, 2018).

> *H1.3: Source expertise positively influences consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic.*

4- Product Match-up

To achieve outstanding outcomes, there must be consistency between an endorser and the product. In other words, as a brand's representative, social media influencers must be a good match for the products attributes (Shimp, 2008). Therefore, marketers must carefully consider which influencers are most suited to promote their goods because a solid product-endorser match demonstrates competence and fosters confidence (Schouten, 2020). Therefore, influencers should carefully examine their image and the expectations of their audience when choosing whom to cooperate with, and they should only work with brands that they can genuinely recommend (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020).

> *H1.4: Product match-up positively influences consumers' intentions toward beauty brands after the Covid-19 pandemic.*

Consumers' Intentions

The dependent variable is consumers' intentions toward any brand and it is one of the considerations in purchasing the products. According to Meskaran et al (2013), the readiness of a consumer to conduct online transactions is referred to as online purchasing intention. Making an online purchase is a procedure that starts off with an intent. This triggers the consumer to browse products, which may result in the final purchase of the product (Vineyard, 2014). Purchasing intent has a significant aspect on actual purchase decisions. Hence, marketers treat even purchase intent as an important purchase factor because it is connected to their desire to maximise sales and increase revenue (Hosein, 2012). The rise in online purchases has provid-

ed consumers with a certain amount of comfort and flexibility in terms of efficiency and the ability to review product information before buying a product (Shareef, Kumar, Kumar, & Dwivedi, 2015). According to Ling et al (2010), there must be an element of trust in order to influence an online consumer's decision-making.

Relationship between Influencer Marketing and Consumers' Intentions

It is the main point to measure the relationship between the two variables; influencer marketing and consumers' intention. Accordingly, consumers who adhere to a particular influencer will feel more connected to that influencer and will develop a stronger affection for that influencer. Furthermore, earlier research found that a greater degree of attachment results in a greater level of confidence as well as commitment (Thomson, 2006). According to Skolova & Kefi (2019), as reported by a recent Business Insider study, it has become necessary for numerous companies to establish and cultivate acquaintances with online influencers. Nowadays, product/service recommendations, reviews, and other forms of influencer marketing have a major effect on buyers' intentions. According to Mediakix (2019), approximately 80% of online marketers believe that social media influencers are possible future endorsers who can help their online businesses grow. These statistical findings effectively validate the utility of digital influencers in inspiring consumers' purchase intentions.

Beauty Brands

People are influenced easily nowadays. More and more people are checking social media platforms to see what is currently trending. But more than everything, when it comes to the implementation of influencer marketing, the beauty industry easily takes the cake (Madill, 2019). Influencers easily bring things into existence and assist in building a link between online retailers and social media platforms that have significant funds as well as less tangible products than fashion. (Madill, 2019). The reason why influencer marketing works effectively for beauty brands is that influencers can easily create content using the products and showcase the results in real-time through video or live-streaming, two of the top trending digital content in social media (Madill, 2019). According to the surveys that were conducted 62% of young people use social media to research beauty products before buying them. Furthermore, 67% of those who love beauty will seek advice from influencers before making a purchase. (Anonymous, Lion Spirit Media, 2022).

According to numerous surveys, more than 65% of consumers decide to purchase a cosmetic shortly after getting a review from a social media influencer. (Maumelat, 2021). To summarise, influencer marketing has become a critical success factor for beauty and cosmetic brands throughout their entire selling process, from increasing brand awareness and building communities of brand fans to driving e-commerce traffic and increasing sales in traditional retail, As the possibilities appear limitless for this area (Schwarz, 2022).

Methodology

Data and Sample Collection

The current study's target population consisted of Iraqi males and females aged 16 to 45 years old. According to a survey, most people who buy beauty products are around this age (Midova, 2017). Online survey was created and distributed through social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Viber, and Messenger). We were able to collect 202 responses. All items in the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

Scales of measurement

All of the scales in the paper were adapted and modified from previous research, and they have all been validated. The credibility of influencer marketing was evaluated by **5** items adopted from McCracken (1989),

Ohanian (1990) and Bizel (2021). Source attractiveness was measured by **5** items adopted from McCracken (1989), Ohanian (1990) and Bizel (2021). Source expertise was measured by **3** items adopted from McCracken (1989) and Ohanian (1990). Product match-up was measured by **2** items adopted from McCracken (1989) and Ohanian (1990). Consumers' intentions was measured by **7** items adopted from Jamieson et al (1989), Putrevu et al (1994) and Bizel (2021).

Results

For the demographic, the majority of the respondents aged between 18 to 24 years old, both females (72%) and males (28%), 34.7% of the respondents spent 3-5 hours on social media, and the majority bought beauty products every few months. For the descriptive statistic the overall value of means for all the variables are around **3.0** which indicates that a large percentage of the respondents agree with questionnaire's statements as shown in Table **(1)**. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) reflects the reliability of a scale and a good reliability of statements ranges from 0.765 to 0.886. Furthermore, all variables reflected an acceptable level of internal consistency and reliability since all Cronbach's alpha variables were greater than **0.5** as shown in Table **(2)**. In the correlation test as we notice in Table **(3)** the value of all the variables are less than **0.05**. Therefore, there is a significant positive relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable. As stated in Table **(4)** the coefficients of the regression model; these coefficients Illustrate with confident **95%**: the intention will increase by **0.668** when the value of in-

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Model's Constructs

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Source credibility	202	1.3	5.0	3.1	1.0
Attractiveness	202	1.0	5.0	3.1	0.9
Expertise	202	1.0	5.0	3.4	0.9
match up	202	1.0	5.0	3.3	0.9
Influencer Marketing	202	1.3	5.0	3.2	0.7
Intention	202	1.4	5.0	3.1	0.7

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 2: Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire by Using Cronbach's Alpha

Constructs	Number of Statements	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Item Correlation	AVE	Item	Loading
Source credibility	4	0.886	0.745	61.983%	SC1	0.809
					SC2	0.732
					SC3	0.718
					SC4	0.786
Attractiveness	3	0.782	0.675	78.65%	ATT1	0.806
					ATT2	0.876
					ATT3	0.816
Expertise	3	0.786	0.698	61.57%	Exp1	0.786
					Exp2	0.891
					Exp3	0.876
Product Match up	2	0.765	0.653	79.86%	Match up1	0.886
					Match up2	0.953
Intention	7	0.876	0.834	79.85%	Int1	0.789
					Int2	0.914
					Int3	0.976
					Int4	0.885
					Int5	0.896
					Int	0.794
					Int7	0.984

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients

Correlations						
	Intention	Influencer Marketing	Source credibility	Attrac-tive-ness	Expertise	Match up
Intention	1					
Influencer Marketing	.668**	1				
Source credibility	.700**	.765**	1			
Attractive-ness	.480**	.737**	.491**	1		
Expertise	.359**	.777**	.367**	.403**	1	
Match up	.495**	.793**	.456**	.351**	.654**	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 4: Coefficients of the Regression Model

	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.922	.173		5.340	.000
Influencer Marketing	.668	.053	.668	12.700	.000

Source(s): Created by authors

fluencer marketing increase by one unit. The Multiple Regression Analysis as explained in Table **(5)** shows that (**H1.1, H1.2 and H1.4**) have positive impact on consumers' intentions. Therefore, those hypothesis are accepted. For **H1.3** since it has a negative outcomes therefore, this hypothesis is rejected as it does not have an impact on consumers' intentions.

Table 5: Coefficients of Multiple Regression Analysis

	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics		Outcome
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF	
(Constant)	1.054	.159		6.630	.000			
Source credibility	.391	.043	.538	9.151	.000	.667	1.500	Accepted
Attractiveness	.117	.043	.156	2.725	.007	.702	1.425	Accepted
Expertise	-.041	.053	-.050	-.770	.442	.539	1.857	Rejected
Match up	.180	.053	.228	3.417	.001	.519	1.928	Accepted

Source(s): Created by authors

Discussion

Influencers have an important role in marketing beauty brands and it affect purchase intentions. According to many researchers as was mentioned in the literature review stated a positive relationship exists between influencer credibility and consumer intentions (De Veirman, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2018). The results of this study showed that the statement was supported by the majority of respondents that they purchased from credible influencers. Moreover, the literature review has shown that the attractiveness of the influencers has a positive impact on consumers' intentions (Gilal et al., 2020; Sufian et al., 2021). The findings revealed that respondents naturally agreed with all the statements and they thought attractiveness is an important characteristic for influencers. However, the study's findings revealed that that expertise does not have a positive impact on consumers' intentions. Furthermore, the literature review has shown that the product match-up of the influencers has a positive impact on consumers' intentions (Schouten & et al., 2020; Maumelat, 2021). The results of the study showed that the respondents followed influencers that are qualified to endorse the product.

Conclusion

From this study, it is clear that influencer marketing is an important marketing tool nowadays and it does have an effect on consumers' intentions, after all the tests and analyses that were done for this paper, there was an unpredicted finding that the expertise of influencers did not significantly impact the consumers' intentions while all the other dimensions have an impact on consumers' intentions. For this reason, further study needs to be done. Source credibility is an important element. As was shown when a person trusts an influencer, the more willing she/he will be to buy the recommended beauty products. From this, we conclude that influencer marketing influences consumers' intentions to purchase beauty products. As a result, influencers play an important part in impacting consumers' intentions, and after the Covid-19 pandemic beauty brands are acknowledging the power of influencer marketing on social media and the impact that they have to influence people around the world.

Limitations of the Study

The participants were requested to select an answer in general for the beauty products. However, they are very likely to have different preferences for different beauty products. This can lead to inaccurate results because they may be unable to describe their alternate preferences. The sample size was not very big (202 respondents) because there were barriers to obtaining a larger audience via social media, such as respondents not responding due to a busy schedule or being unable to comprehend questions, so they missed out

on questions, making it difficult to apply all of the results to the entire sample. To keep respondents engaged and motivated to answer all of the questions, researchers can look into a simpler pattern of questions.

Future Recommendations

This research will propose that a future study should adopt a method that will help make a more in-depth conclusion. As this research was only quantitative. It is, therefore, recommended that future studies could either adopt a qualitative approach to involve interviewing methods with not only consumers but also influencers to have both of their opinions. This research focused on beauty brands since it is very popular now and people are taking a great interest in them, but for future studies, it can be another area like fitness or real estate. Lastly, in general, brands need to recognise completely how customers seek for information and product recommendations in social media platforms. In addition, it is advised when looking for an influencer to represent a brand they should select someone who has great credibility as the number one trait.

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