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Social Commerce and Influencer Marketing's Effect on Purchasing Decisions

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Abstract

Social commerce has rapidly become a growing topic of interest for both professionals and academics, highlighting the potential influence of social media and social networking tools on both online and offline business activities. This essay begins with a summary of current research and practice in social commerce, reflecting the significant attention it has received in the business world. We then introduce a research framework that offers a comprehensive perspective on social commerce, consisting of four essential elements: business, technology, people, and information. This framework aids in understanding the progress and direction of social commerce research and practice so far. Following this, we present initial findings from a bibliometric analysis of academic and industry publications in the field, aiming to identify recent trends and research areas, as well as validate the proposed framework. A face that a consumer has never met, touched, or experienced personally can still lead millions to spend money after just viewing a single reel or Story. What psychological connection allows an influencer to reach across the screen and influence a consumer's spending? Is it trust, a desire to imitate, a sense of connection formed in isolation, or a deliberate psychological approach? This paper explores the relationship between social commerce and influencer marketing, focusing on how interactions on social platforms—such as likes, comments, shares, reviews, and influencer suggestions—impact consumer buying choices. Unlike traditional advertising, which positioned the consumer as a passive observer, social commerce has changed this dynamic, making consumers active participants in creating, sharing, and assessing information. Influencers play a central role in this transformation, acting as trusted, personal, and approachable links between brands and customers. The paper investigates how factors such as credibility, closeness, authenticity, and social conformity—analyzed through theories like Source Credibility Theory, the Information Adoption Model, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Social Proof—collectively influence purchasing behaviour. It also includes an analysis of the Indian context, where live commerce is growing rapidly on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Meesho. The paper not only informs the reader but also encourages reflection on how significantly the link between 'trust' and 'purchase' has weakened in the digital era, and what this means for society and psychology.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the rapid growth of digital technology and social media has significantly changed the way people do business. In the twentieth century, consumers mainly relied on advertisements shown through television, newspapers, and billboards to make purchasing decisions. However, in the twenty-first century, consumers now complete all three actions—searching for products, comparing them, and making a purchase—within social networks on their mobile phones. This shift has led to the emergence of two closely connected trends: social commerce and influencer marketing together. These trends are now regarded as major influences on how consumers make buying decisions today. The growth of the internet and social media has changed the way people communicate, shop, and do business. Social media platforms, which were initially used mainly for communication and entertainment, have gradually become important spaces for businesses to promote their products, connect with customers, and generate sales. This changing pattern of online business has led to the emergence of social commerce. Social media influencers are users who gather followers by creating content online and then sharing that content in order to get a lot of followers (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). An influencer can forge a closer psychological bond with their followers by sharing content that revolves around lifestyle and interests (Audrezet et al., 2018). Furthermore, the influence of an influencer can make the message that is shared more effective and easily accepted by consumers so that it leads to purchasing decisions (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Social Commerce brings together the social nature of social media and the commercial activities of e-commerce. It is not only changing the way products are marketed and sold but is also influencing consumer behaviour and creating new opportunities for businesses, particularly small and emerging enterprises.

2. Social Commerce

Social commerce brings together the social nature of social media and the commercial activities of e-commerce. Through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, consumers can discover products, explore reviews, interact with sellers, and share their experiences before making a purchase. Recommendations from friends, online communities, and social media influencers can also play an important role in shaping consumers' buying decisions. What makes social commerce different from traditional e-commerce is its focus on interaction and participation. Consumers are no longer just buyers; they can also review products, share opinions,

create content, and influence the purchasing decisions of others. At the same time, businesses get an opportunity to understand their customers more closely and build stronger relationships with them. Thus, social commerce is becoming an important part of the modern digital business environment. It affects purchasing decisions by embedding shopping into community-centric, social environments that use interpersonal influence, reviews, likes, comments and real time interaction to shape decisions. It is not only changing the way products are marketed and sold but is also influencing consumer behaviour and creating new opportunities for businesses, particularly small and emerging enterprises. Hajli (Hajli, 2015) describes social commerce as a type of e-commerce that uses social interactions on social media platforms to improve the online shopping experience. In simpler terms, social commerce is a system where social networks serve not only as a way to communicate but also as a marketplace. Examples of this include Instagram Shopping, Facebook Marketplace, WhatsApp Business Catalog, Meesho's reseller network, and live-shopping features on YouTube and Instagram.

3. Influencer's Marketing

An online influencer is defined as an individual, group of individuals, or a virtual avatar that has established a Following on social media and is now a digital opinion leader and has significant social influence on their following. They are social media users who accumulate followers by telling stories about lifestyle and consumption of products or services (Childers, et al, 2019). Some influencers gain such an immense following that they are considered celebrities in the digital world; however, there is a distinction to be made between online influencers and celebrities. Unlike celebrities, who have gained notoriety in a legitimate, sanctioned, and institutional field (i.e. acting, music, sports), online influencers do not possess any certification and are not certified by any formal institution and accumulate followers by actively sharing content on social media (McQuarrie et al., 2013). By blogging, vlogging, or publishing short-form content (i.e. Instagram, TikTok), online influencers have published content that claims to show their day-to-day life, experiences, and opinions. They maintain active relationships and interact with and respond to their followers. By carefully managing their content, image and endorsements, influencers aim to create a distinct personal brand (Lee & Eastin, 2020; Thomson, 2006). Followers then choose and decide to follow online influencers. We define online influencer marketing as the process by which a company selects and offers a incentive to online influencers

to engage their followers on social media to promote their products, with the intention to increase company sales. This definition includes some of the most important characteristics that distinguish online influencer marketing from other types of marketing.

First, companies pay influencers to promote their product via social media. This is different from traditional word of mouth because existing customers are sharing information about a company's product without any incentive from the company. In influencers marketing, companies pay social media influencers to share word of mouth about their company. Unlike traditional methods, where companies "seed" or stimulate the first few purchases to create a virtual cascade or marketing campaign, before employees are expected to share the company's content, but aren't obligated to. Influencers marketing is different, as influencers are legally obligated to create content and post said content about the company's product. The fees are company specific, and can be influenced based on the number of the influencer's followers, previous engagement, industry, format of content, free gifts, and other untraditional methods of compensation. Second, influencers marketing asks online influencers to promote the company's offerings and services by having their followers change their attitudes and behaviours. Firms use social media to engage directly with customers too, typically by creating firm-generated content that provides informational or entertainment value (Kumar et al., 2016). Influencers marketing lets influencers push online content in order to influence attitudes and behaviours, increase awareness, and encourage sales. Similar strategies to these include advertising customers or celebrities using the products and services, incentivizing customer reviews, and product placement in a company's advertisements. Related strategies, such as celebrity endorsements, customer review programs, native advertising, and product placement, serve commercial purposes, but they do not seek to maintain an audience nor prompt deep engagement, as influencers marketing does (Haenlein & Libai, 2017). Third, organizations utilize the specific resources that influencers possess, such as followers, influencers' positioning, contents, and follower trust, for promotion of the offerings. As in case with seeding/viral marketing campaigns, influencers marketing allows organizations to target influencers' followers and to leverage their trust in the influencers. Yet, influencers marketing makes an active use of influencers' positioning and contents for promotion of the offerings of organizations. The organizations prepare the content briefs outlining the objectives, key messages, and deliverables for the campaign that need to be delivered by the influencers. Otherwise, the

organizations give the influencers considerable freedom to develop the contents according to their own positioning. Unlike the celebrity endorsements, over which the firm maintains full control, or viral marketing of messages developed and shared deliberately by the firm to stimulate word of mouth (Hinz et al., 2011; Van der Lans et al., 2010), influencers marketing demands organizations to cede considerable freedom to influencers concerning the way of promotion of offerings.

4. Effect on Purchasing Decisions

Purchasing decisions are studies of the processes involved when individuals or groups choose purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, and experiences to fulfill their needs and desires (Prasad, R, K, 2014). The growing use of social media has changed the way consumers search for information and make purchasing decisions. Earlier, consumers mainly depended on advertisements, newspapers, television, or recommendations from people they personally knew. Today, social media provides a much more interactive environment where consumers can discover products, compare alternatives, read reviews, watch product demonstrations, and communicate with sellers before making a purchase. In this changing environment, social commerce and influencer marketing have become important factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Social commerce affects purchasing decisions by making the buying process more convenient and interactive. Consumers can come across a product while using social media and immediately explore its features, price, reviews, and availability. Comments, ratings, customer experiences, and user-generated content provide additional information that may help consumers decide whether a product is worth purchasing. The opinions and experiences shared by other users can also reduce uncertainty and increase confidence in an online purchase. In this way, social interaction becomes an important part of the consumer decision-making process. Another important factor is the role of influencers. Social media influencers often develop a close connection with their followers by regularly sharing content related to their lifestyle, interests, experiences, and product preferences. Because followers may consider these influencers relatable and trustworthy, their recommendations can have a considerable impact on consumer attitudes towards a product. When an influencer demonstrates or reviews a product in a natural and understandable manner, consumers may become more interested in trying it themselves. The level of influence, however, is not the same for every consumer. Factors such as the influencer's credibility, expertise, authenticity, number of followers, quality of content, and relationship with the audience can affect

the extent to which consumers trust a recommendation. Consumers are generally more likely to respond positively when an influencer appears genuine and when the promoted product is relevant to the influencer's area of interest. On the other hand, excessive promotion, unrealistic claims, or advertisements that appear purely commercial may reduce consumer trust. Social commerce and influencer marketing also influence consumers through social proof. When consumers see that a product has received positive reviews, comments, likes, shares, or recommendations from people they follow, they may perceive the product as more reliable or popular. This can create a sense of confidence and encourage them to consider purchasing it. At the same time, negative reviews or criticism can have the opposite effect and may discourage consumers from buying a product. Another significant aspect is emotional influence. Influencers often present products within everyday situations rather than through conventional advertisements. For example, instead of simply explaining the features of a skincare product, an influencer may show how they use it as part of their daily routine. Such presentations can make the product appear more relatable and relevant to consumers' lives. As a result, purchasing decisions may be influenced not only by practical factors such as price and quality but also by emotions, aspirations, lifestyle preferences, and the desire to identify with the influencer. Therefore, social commerce and influencer marketing have made consumer purchasing decisions more socially connected and interactive. They have reduced the distance between businesses and consumers and have provided consumers with more opportunities to obtain information before making a purchase. However, the effectiveness of these strategies largely depends on trust, authenticity, relevance, consumer engagement, and the quality of information provided. As social media continues to become an important part of everyday life, the influence of social commerce and influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour is likely to remain an important area of study in contemporary commerce. The growing use of social media has changed the way consumers search for information and make purchasing decisions. Earlier, consumers mainly depended on advertisements, newspapers, television, or recommendations from people they personally knew. Today, social media provides a much more interactive environment where consumers can discover products, compare alternatives, read reviews, watch product demonstrations, and communicate with sellers before making a purchase. In this changing environment, social commerce and influencer marketing have become important factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Social commerce affects purchasing decisions by making the buying process more convenient and interactive. Consumers can come across a

product while using social media and immediately explore its features, price, reviews, and availability. Comments, ratings, customer experiences, and user-generated content provide additional information that may help consumers decide whether a product is worth purchasing. The opinions and experiences shared by other users can also reduce uncertainty and increase confidence in an online purchase. In this way, social interaction becomes an important part of the consumer decision-making process. Another important factor is the role of influencers. Social media influencers often develop a close connection with their followers by regularly sharing content related to their lifestyle, interests, experiences, and product preferences. Because followers may consider these influencers relatable and trustworthy, their recommendations can have a considerable impact on consumer attitudes towards a product.

5. Conclusion

When an influencer demonstrates or reviews a product in a natural and understandable manner, consumers may become more interested in trying it themselves. The results from this study imply the use of emerging technologies in the form of touchpoints such as chatbots (Han, 2021) and voice assistants (Lee et al., 2021) by s-commerce firms. Their use might allow customers to achieve their respective instrumental values leading to satisfaction and consequential behavioural intentions (Coursaris & Van Osch, 2016). Influencer marketing can influence different stages of the purchasing process. At the awareness stage, influencers introduce consumers to products that they may not have previously known about. At the evaluation stage, product reviews, demonstrations, comparisons, and personal experiences shared by influencers can help consumers assess whether a product meets their needs. At the purchase stage, discount codes, promotional offers, direct shopping links, and limited-time campaigns can encourage consumers to complete the purchase. After purchasing, consumers may themselves share reviews or content about the product, further influencing other potential buyers. The effect is not uniform. Perceived risk weakens or reshapes the path from emotions and cognition to purchase intention in social commerce environments. Emotions and purchase intentions as well as cognition and purchase intentions are moderated by perceived risks. Social Commerce and influencers marketing improve purchasing decisions, especially when they create trust, authenticity and active interaction. The main qualifiers are that risk, user experience and study design limitations shape how large and how generalizable those effects are.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research. This study was conducted independently without any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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