Mega-influencer and celebrity brand engagement: antecedents and effect on fans' purchasing behaviours.

Anna K. Zarkada

Department of Public Communication, Cyprus University of Technology, 30, Arch. Kyprianos str., 3040, Limassol, Cyprus; Email: anna.zarkada@cut.ac.cy

Introduction

Since 2017 influencer marketing spend is reported to have grown exponentially but its growth rate is slowing down (Statista Research Department 2023) and lags behind that of traditional channels (The Business Research Company 2023) despite claims that influencer marketing is "the fastest-growing channel for brands" because "[i]nfluencers are trusted by millions of consumers" who "depend on influencer recommendations" for their purchases (Digital Marketing Institute 2021). This paper puts the hype to the test and presents an in-depth *in vivo* investigation of actual consumer engagement with a celebrity Social Media Influencer (SMIs) and her product brands.

Literature review

Despite the controversy over definitions of consumer brand engagement (CBE), especially on SM platforms and through SMIs (Bu, Parkinson, and Thaichon 2022), there is adequate consensus that CBE is has cognitive, emotional, experiential and social dimensions and empirically detectable behavioural manifestations (Zarkada 2021; Argyris et al. 2020; Bu, Parkinson, and Thaichon 2022; Dhaoui and Webster 2021; Zheng, Li, and Na 2022). It is higher for celebrity than endorsed brands (Kennedy, Baxter, and Kulczynski 2021) and has been found to predict eWoM (Maree and van

Heerden 2020) and purchase intention (Bianchi and Andrews 2018) but what is still unclear is how different SMI engagement behaviours are related to brand engagement, and actual consumer behaviour.

There seems to be a consensus the higher the sense of identification, the greater the probability of engagement (Argyris et al. 2020; Bu, Parkinson, and Thaichon 2022; Jin and Phua 2014) and value cocreation behaviours (Bu, Parkinson, and Thaichon 2022). SMIs' effect on behavioural intent is also a function of: (a) credibility (Sokolova and Kefi 2020; Hassan et al. 2021; Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu 2019) which is a function of trustworthiness (Giertz et al. 2022; Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu 2019), expertise or knowledge (Hassan et al. 2021), physical attraction, trustworthiness, and competence (Jin and Phua 2014) and attractiveness (Dada and Jazi 2022), (b) inspiration, enjoyability, similarity and informativeness (Ki et al. 2020), and (c) authenticity (Kennedy, Baxter, and Kulczynski 2021).

Methodology

The study departs from the norms of SMI research which either focuses on engagement analytics (e.g. Gross and Von Wangenheim 2022; Argyris et al. 2020; Lou, Tan, and Chen 2019) or adopts the 'think of a SMI' approach (e.g. Farivar and Wang 2022; Ki et al. 2020) and stops at the behavioural intent of students (e.g. Jin and Phua 2014) or panels (e.g. Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu 2019).

Brand communications were conceptualised as perception episodes of which the target (Rihanna and her Fenty Beauty™ brand) and the situation (Facebook™) were kept constant. A judgement sample of 250 potential respondents (Millennial women living in the USA who had commented on at least one of Rihanna's Posts in English) were contacted for an interview and a total of 92 useable responses were collected.

Content analysis was iteratively performed during the interview (as per Neuendorf 2016) and the coded data was analysed using SPSS 29 with bootstrapping.

Data analysis and findings

The sociodemographic profile of the sample was accurately representative of Rihanna's follower statistics (HypeAuditor 2023). CBE was very high (97% regularly see the SMI's content), but only 61% Follow her. The majority (78%) had bought at least one product but the reported expenditure was low and, given the prices, the Brand was not their main one.

The SMI was perceived as pretty (Mean 4.17) but with moderate levels of expertise (3.73) credibility (3.70) and sincerity (3.54). The ANOVA tests showed that only objective ethnic similarity influences the perception of sincerity ($F = 9.761$, Sig = .002). Factor analysis with Alpha factoring and EQUAMAX rotation indicated that perception is a single factor construct explaining 69% of the total variance in the data (80%. for the high ethnic similarity group). The Cronbach's α was .849 .919 for the high ethnic similarity group). Both Identification and Attraction were moderately positive (Mean 3.33 and 3.55) contrary to the pundits' reports. Ethnically similar consumers were more likely to identify with the SMI and like her.

Discriminant analysis was used to explore product usage predictors. One Canonical Discriminant Function was generated (Eigenvalue .722, Wilk;s Lamda .581, Sig. <.001) and classified 93.1% of product users correctly. The best predictors of use were (i) actively seeking the SMI's content, (ii) Following the SMI, (iii) liking her and (iv) identifying with her. Ethnic similarity marginally made it in the Function (standardized canonical discriminant functions .622, 579, .530, .454, .317 respectively). SMI perception was not a predictor of product use (.196).

Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

The study highlights the voluntariness of engagement thus confirming digital natives' reluctance to passively receive promotional messages, the existence of a strong halo effect and the importance of objective similarity. Neither of them, however, did much to turn fans to customers of value. The study contributes to understanding millennial female consumers, but a wider perceiver sample is needed for the theoretical contributions to be confirmed. Moreover, the target and situation control limit the generalisability of the results so more work is needed to compare platforms and SMIs. Nevertheless, for brands, it offers a word of caution: all that glitters does not necessarily at bring in the gold.

References

Argyris, Young Anna, Zuhui Wang, Yongsuk Kim, and Zhaozheng Yin. 2020. "The effects of visual congruence on increasing consumers' brand engagement: An empirical investigation of influencer marketing on instagram using deep-learning algorithms for automatic image classification." *Computers in Human Behavior* 112:106443. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106443.

Bianchi, Constanza, and Lynda Andrews. 2018. "Consumer engagement with retail firms through social media: an empirical study in Chile." *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 46 (4):364-85. doi: 10.1108/IJRDM-02-2017-0035.

Bu, Yi, Joy Parkinson, and Park Thaichon. 2022. "Influencer marketing: Homophily, customer value co-creation behaviour and purchase intention." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 66:102904. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102904.

Dada, Shehrazed, and Salima Jazi. 2022. "The Impact of Digital Influencers on Consumer Behavior: Towards a Conceptual Framework of Purchase Intention." In *Brand, Label, and Product Intelligence Second International Conference, COBLI 2021*, edited by Joseph Kaswengi and Aurore Ingarao, 195-205. Springer International Publishing.

Dhaoui, Chedia, and Cynthia M. Webster. 2021. "Brand and consumer engagement behaviors on Facebook brand pages: Let's have a (positive) conversation." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 38 (1):155-75. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2020.06.005.

Farivar, Samira, and Fang Wang. 2022. "Effective influencer marketing: A social identity perspective." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 67:103026. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103026.

Giertz, Johann N., Linda D. Hollebeek, Welf H. Weiger, and Maik Hammerschmidt. 2022. "The invisible leash: when human brands hijack corporate brands'

consumer relationships." *Journal of Service Management* 33 (3):485-95. doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-06-2021-0211.

Gross, Jana, and Florian Von Wangenheim. 2022. "Influencer Marketing on Instagram: Empirical Research on Social Media Engagement with Sponsored Posts." *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 22 (3):289-310. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2022.2123724.

Hassan, Siti Hasnah, Shao Zhen Teo, T. Ramayah, and Nabil Hasan Al-Kumaim. 2021. "The credibility of social media beauty gurus in young millennials' cosmetic product choice." *PLOS ONE* 16 (3):e0249286. doi: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249286.

HypeAuditor. "badgalriri." HypeAuditor, Accessed 25/01/2023. https://hypeauditor.com/public/instagram/badgalriri/?fh=0ccc3d29ff00545beb42fcadaba9e147.

Jin, S. Venus, Aziz Muqaddam, and Ehri Ryu. 2019. "Instafamous and social media influencer marketing." *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 37 (5):567-79. doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2018-0375.

Jin, Seung- A. Annie, and Joe Phua. 2014. "Following Celebrities' Tweets About Brands: The Impact of Twitter-Based Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Source Credibility Perception, Buying Intention, and Social Identification With Celebrities." *Journal of Advertising* 43 (2):181-95. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2013.827606.

Kennedy, Amanda, Stacey M Baxter, and Alicia Kulczynski. 2021. "Promoting authenticity through celebrity brands." *European Journal of Marketing*.

Ki, Chung-Wha, Leslie M. Cuevas, Sze Man Chong, and Heejin Lim. 2020. "Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 55:102133. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102133.

Lou, Chen, Sang-Sang Tan, and Xiaoyu Chen. 2019. "Investigating Consumer Engagement with Influencer- vs. Brand-Promoted Ads: The Roles of Source and Disclosure." *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 19 (3):169-86. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2019.1667928.

Maree, Tania, and G. van Heerden. 2020. "Beyond the "like": customer engagement of brand fans on Facebook." *European Business Review* 33 (2):255-71. doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-02-2019-0025.

Neuendorf, Kimberly A. . 2016. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Sokolova, Karina, and Hajer Kefi. 2020. "Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 53:101742.

Statista Research Department. "Global influencer marketing value 2016-2022." Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/.

The Business Research Company. "TV Advertising Global Market Report 2023." The Business Research Company,. https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/tv-advertising-global-market-report#:~:text=The%20global%20TV%20advertising%20market,(CAGR)%20of%206.3%25.

Zarkada, Anna K. 2021. "Listening to a unicorn's pink narrative: Scheduling of brand Posts on Instagram for maximum consumer brand engagement." In *19th*

International Conference on Research in Advertising (ICORIA) virtual conference. European Advertising Academy.

Zheng, Run, Zhuyuan Li, and Sanggyun Na. 2022. "How customer engagement in the live-streaming affects purchase intention and customer acquisition, E-tailer's perspective." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 68:103015. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103015.