

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION OF FASHIONABLE PRODUCTS: EVIDENCE FROM TUNISIA

L'IMPACT DU MARKETING D'INFLUENCE SUR LES MÉDIAS SOCIAUX SUR L'INTENTION D'ACHAT DES CONSOMMATEURS DE PRODUITS DE MODE EN TUNISIE

Dr. AMAL BEN CHEIKH

Assistant professor
Institut Supérieur de Gestion de Tunis (ISGT)
University of Tunis; Tunisia
amalbencheikhisg@gmail.com

GHADA FERCHICHI

Master degree student
Avicenne Private Business School (APBS) Tunis
ferchichighada4@gmail.com

RAYENE CHAABANI

Master degree student
Avicenne Private Business School (APBS) Tunis
rayene.chaabani@gmail.com

RÉSUMÉ

Plusieurs recherches menées dans différents pays ont mis l'accent sur le concept de marketing d'influence. Ceci explique l'importance de ce phénomène tant sur le plan organisationnel qu'individuel. Ce travail de recherche se propose de focaliser sur les micro-célébrités. Ainsi, l'objectif de cet article consiste à étudier les facteurs qui influencent l'intention d'achat des produits à la mode sur le marché tunisien. Pour y répondre, une approche quantitative est choisie. Une enquête a été conduite auprès de 160 répondants. La méthode de la régression par les moindres carrés partiels a été mobilisée. L'analyse des données montrent que l'EWOM a un impact significatif sur la crédibilité des influenceurs. Néanmoins, l'impact de l'authenticité perçue sur la crédibilité est rejeté. En outre, la crédibilité s'est avérée être un antécédent de confiance. Ce dernier a un impact significatif sur l'intention d'achat des

consommateurs. Par ailleurs, les implications managériales et les recommandations sont proposées.

MOTS CLÉS: Instagram, micro-célébrités, authenticité perçue, E-WOM, crédibilité, confiance, intention d'achat.

ABSTRACT:

Several research studies in different countries have emphasized the concept of influencer marketing. This explains the importance of this phenomenon both on an organizational and individual level. This research paper focuses on micro-celebrities. Thus, the objective of this article is to shed lights on the factors that influence the intention to buy fashionable products on the Tunisian market. Accordingly, a quantitative approach is chosen. A survey was conducted with 160 respondents. The partial least squares regression method was used. Data analysis shows that E-WOM has a significant impact on credibility of influencers. Nevertheless, Perceived authenticity impact on credibility is rejected. Furthermore, credibility was found to be an antecedent of trust. The latter has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention. Moreover, managerial implications and recommendations are drawn.

KEY WORDS: Instagram, micro-celebrities, perceived authenticity, E-WOM, credibility, trust, purchase intention.

JEL: M30, M31, M37, M39

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the previous few years, the advancement of networking has furthermore shaped buying and selling methods. This phenomenon has led to the growing need for brands to create favourable customer experiences.

Therefore, in digital marketing, understanding consumer behaviour is essential for marketing success as consumers have increased the tendency of using the internet and online socializing. And with the rise use of social media and the changes in technology, they are now able to have a profound overview of brands and to describe and share their own experiences and opinions to others, building a unique type of viral marketing effect where the message and the information can be available to thousands of users with a few clicks.

Another form of social media technique that is very common nowadays is influencer marketing which have grown to be one of the most effective and efficient ways of sharing

previous experiences and recommendations that can be either positive or negative over the internet and it became a powerful tool of marketing products directly to the target potential customer with low cost. It demands working with people who are considered influencers to promote a brand, service, or product and so far it is considered as a highly useful and powerful method to boost reach, reinforce brand awareness, build up customer loyalty, and increase conversions.

In this context, this paper attempts to determine how the social media influencer marketing impacts the consumers' purchase intention of fashionable products.

This study is structured as follow: first, to get a clear and deep understanding of influencer marketing' impact on millennials in the fashion industry through Instagram, second, to establish a literature analysis on the topic of consumers' purchase behaviour and impact of social networks, third, to conduct a theoretical framework as well as empirical with the help of a questionnaire that aims to understand the purchase intention of consumers due to the impact of social media influencers, and finally to evaluate the findings and offer recommendations on the matter. Based on the given theme, the discussion revolves around the impact of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchase intention of fashionable products. The major and primary question asked here, whether indeed social media influencer marketing impacts the consumers' purchase intention in the current technologically advanced world.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Fashion industry in the digital era

As the rise of technologies and internet, businesses have rushed to take part into the multi-million dollar sector of e-commerce. (Blazquez, 2014) has explained the difficulty to duplicate the consumer experience of physical stores to the basis of online shopping in the fashion industry, linking all channels, adopting compelling technologies and online news, as well as considering social networks as a remarkable contact point with consumers. And that's where it comes the role of social media influencer marketing. As mentioned by (Hamalainen, 2016) it is important for companies to build trust as well as strong and long-term relationship with their consumers in order to create value and mutual benefits for both parties, and influencer marketing is an efficient and effective tool to do so because of its ability to advertise on social media platforms using social media influencers as they are seen as merited

and trustful instead of other type of paid advertising where it originates 11 times ROI (return on investment) compared to traditional methods yearly according to Tap influence (2016).

The online platforms were also the perfect space to create a mutual exchange and interaction between the fashion brands and consumers such as in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These interactions facilitated the relationship development between the brands and consumers. The more involvement of the customer with the brand via these online communities, the greater the brand awareness and brand loyalty of consumers to these brands. (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012) has also added that it is more and more noticeable that with the power of the internet, the majority B2C companies have built an online presence to some degree, seeking not only brand awareness, but also brand credibility. However, for consumers to interact with these brands through social media influencers, they must choose the right policy content. (Li, 2018) has identified the importance of a well-developed content leading to a more consumer engagement in the fashion industry. Captivating content about holiday travels, breaks, relaxation, hobbies, etc., as well as content related some knowledge about a specific topic elicit greater positive engagement from users when evaluating fashion brands profiles. With regard to the actual purchase decision of fashion products in today's world, it is proven that consumers appreciate social media influencer opinions to decide to buy a product.

For millennials, the view and the judgment regarding a product or service is considered as a factor that influence their fashion purchasing decision making, together with the influencers' authenticity and truthfulness, the brand, the style, and the price. When shopping fashionable items, they take into consideration the word of mouth communication as an essential factor for the buying decision. Since EWOM and recommendations have the capacity to reach a wider audience, they depend on trust, authenticity and credibility and an influencer must, hence, be trustworthy in order to reach and influence its followers as stated by (Kim et al, 2018). Besides, millennials attitude towards online reviews has the highest effect on explaining online purchase intention, and in the digital age, it is extremely easy to find reviews and critics as well as recommendations about a product that a person intent to buy. Thus, the experience turns into an extension of a personal identity. The consumers are investing in themselves when they make their purchases as described by (Mahoney & Tang, 2016).

1.2. The relationship between perceived authenticity and credibility

Schallehn et al (2014) describe brand authenticity as the natural relation between the personal identity and the individual behaviour. This does mean that consumers link the behaviour of the brand to its credibility, to as well as defining its identity because consumers believe what they see. In other words, just as stated by Schallehn et al (2014) consumers' lean towards connecting regularly perceived actions to the personality of a brand exactly the way they do with the actions of regular people and this results to trusting and believing the person or the brand.

Thus, building a relationship with an authentic person or brand is safer since his behaviour rely on his own credibility. In addition, authentic people adapts certain behaviour actions, therefore, the future outcome of the relationship is predictable.

H1: Perceived authenticity has a positive and significant impact on credibility.

1.3. The relationship between EWOM and credibility

High level of credibility occurs due the effectiveness of the information provided through EWOM (Kim et al, 2018). While previous researches done by (Goehring, 2016) showed that almost 77% of consumers rely on these types of recommendations since it gathers different opinions that can be collected and used for decision making.

Furthermore, it is substantial for influencers that have the intentions to collaborate with a brand and to be the brand ambassador, they have to choose the best alternatives among brands to associate with as it reflects both of their images and credibility as pointed by Gerardo (2017) where Jade (2018) also stated that millennials are perceptible regarding the promotional contents and paid and non-paid advertisements due to their recurrent use of social media networks.

H2: EWOM has a positive and significant impact on credibility.

1.4. The relationship between credibility and trust

As declared by Erdem & Swait (2004), brand credibility is a three term dimensions based on reliability, capacity and attractiveness. Reliability means that it is trustful that a brand will provide what is promised, capacity signify that the brand is capable of delivering the promises and attractiveness which means also that the brand is also fulfilling the promise it has made about its good appearance. Brand managers are firmly in search of motivators such as perceived authenticity and uniqueness that can considerably work, towards the strengthening

of brand credibility. Having the belief that the brand guarantees its advertised qualities can build up a strengthened and ongoing confidence between the brand and its customers. Maathuis et al (2004) and Swait and Erdem (2007) have focused on the impact of brand credibility on consumers' purchase decision-making and his selection pattern. Brand credibility decreases the risk for customers when going through the selection of a product as it is reinforced by the brand qualifications as well as the element of psychological motivation which can be compelling and helps facilitate the decision making. It results in both risk-minimization, which the customers perceive, and time-minimization to look for information while reaching a decision to use the product and thus increases brand trust. As affirmed by Shugan (1980) a credible brand leads towards higher levels of consumer trust.

H3: Credibility has a positive and significant impact on trust.

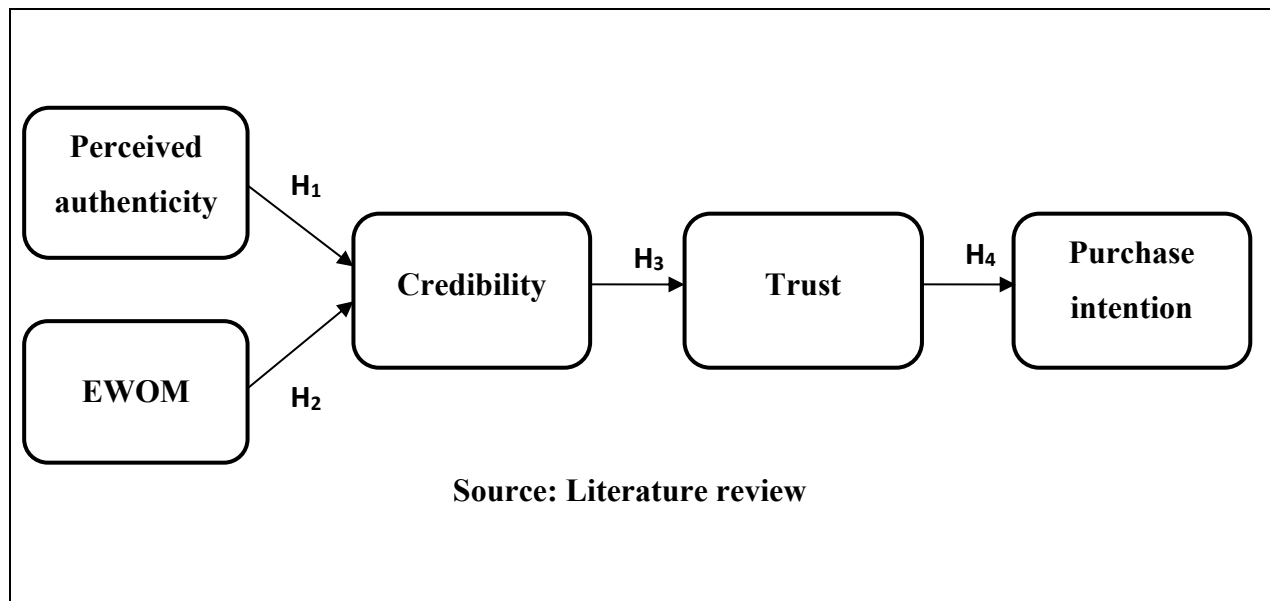
1.5. The relationship between trust and purchase intention

Consumers are highly dependent on the relevant information in a certain period of time which is provided by a specific influencer that is considered as trusted and reliable source (Wu, 2012). Influencers are considered as the new celebrities that withstand a particular part in the virtual community by spreading different sorts of information via different social media channels where they share their personnel experiences and opinions to users and somehow they are influencing their decision behaviour and their intentions to purchase the promoted products and/or services (Alsulaiman et al, 2015; Alhidari et al, 2015). Thus, marketers started using influencers as endorsers as they are perceived as more credible and trusted than other celebrities. A previous study made by Hsu et al (2014) showed that trust is influenced positively by the quality of the website, and the purchase intention is influenced positively by trust. Moreover, the accessibility of reliable and relevant online information positively effects consumers' purchase intention posteriorly guide to the actual purchase taken into consideration the past online experience. Hence, trust is an important element in making such a decision which will encourages consumers to make the next step and conduct purchases online, while this has a presumed impact on the consumers' intentions as they are sometimes sort of dealing with web vendors that are unfamiliar and this will cause an increase in the level of uncertainty for these online shoppers. The lack of trust and the high level of uncertainty are deemed as major limitation. In contrast, the elevated level of trust will generate positive attitude and thus, an increase in the purchase intentions of online shoppers that they will be encouraged to make their purchases.

H4: Trust has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention.

The hypothesis discussed in this part show that it is important to test the role of Ewom and social media influencers' perceived authenticity and credibility leading to the customers' trust which will subsequently impact their purchasing intention, thus, validating that the framework shown below can demonstrate these connections for this topic.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



II. METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

2.1. Sampling and measurements

The methodology used in this study in order to collect the data that will be extracted from the statistical software Smart PLS3, is the quantitative research as it is more reliable and objective, and it is employed for quantifying the attitudes, opinions, behaviors and to conclude results from a larger sample population, by extracting a numerical data that can be converted into statistics, which leads to the choice of non-probability sampling as it helps us to collect data and extract results to generalize the entire population and not to mention being easy to use, cost and time effective and gives space for judgment.

Hence, the quantitative approach is applied and it was designed a Google forms questionnaire to gather quantitative data.

Therefore, this part demonstrated the sampling and data collection methods, used for drawing deductions and followed by a type of statistical testing to offer a deeper view and analysis for our results in the next section.

We used, as mentioned previously, the SmartPLS software which is a variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique that is widely applied in business and social sciences, its ability to model composites and factors which makes it an essential statistical tool for new technology research as it is also a useful tool used to measure, create and verify models.

A sample of 160 respondents was collected and the data was later analyzed using PLS algorithm and bootstrapping. Results were interpreted through exploratory analysis for purification of constructs and confirmatory analysis for hypothesis testing. SmartPLS examines the statistical robustness, the validity and reliability to assess the construct statistical value using CR, AVE and Cronbach's alpha and to confirm/reject hypothesis through T statistics and P value.

Table 1: Indicators' characteristics

Indicator	Definition	Rule
Composite Reliability (CR)	A measure of internal consistency in scale items also called construct reliability.	Must be greater than 0.7
Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	An indicator of the consistency of the item in the scale.	Must be greater than 0.7
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Used to assess the convergent validity of the scale	Must be higher than 0.5
T-statistics	Used to support or reject the hypothesis and used also with a small sample size in case the population standard deviation is unknown.	If the T-values > 1.96%, then the hypothesis is accepted.
P value	The level of marginal significance within a statistical hypothesis test representing the probability of the occurrence of a given event.	If P-value \leq 0.05 then the hypothesis is accepted.

Source: Statistics How To

After describing the set of indicators' characteristics to be employed in this study in order to draw the most reliable deductions, the next table presents the measurement scales used for the variables of the conceptual model. A scale of measure is a classification that describes the nature of information within the values assigned to variables.

Table 2: Measurement scales of conceptual model variables

Variables	Measurement scale
------------------	--------------------------

Perceived authenticity	Scale of (BURNS, 2018)
EWOM	Scale of (ERKAN and EVANS, 2016)
Credibility	Scale of (OHANIAN, 1990)
Trust	scale of (HSU ET AL, 2013)
Purchase intention	Scale of (TARIQ ET AL,2017)

Source: Literature review

2.2. Empirical findings

3.2.1. Respondents' analysis

Since this study was focused on millennials, the data collection was gathered using the social media channels that would attract the audience. As it is reflected in the table 3, both the ages of 18 to 23 years old and 24 to 35 years old has the highest percentage with 67% and 31%, totaling 98% of the data population. Where, the 1% resulting from age under 18 (generation Z) and above 35 years old are not measured in our study.

Table 3: Age and Gender

Age	Number of respondents
Under 18	1
18-23	108
24-35	50
35-55	1
55+	0
Gender	Number of respondents
Female	115
Male	45

Source: Google forms

As we can see from the gender table that there is a huge difference between the percentage of men and women when it comes to following influencers. The data in this study has shown that 28% of men tend to follow fewer influencers compared to women with a percentage of 72%.

While for table 4 that highlights the social media platforms, it shows that Instagram is the most used platform when following influencer marketing with the percentage of 44, 75%. However, this result doesn't precisely hide the significant importance of both YouTube and

Facebook in also providing the adequate space for influencers to deliver their best content, with the percentage of 27, 8% and 14, 20%.

Table 4: Social media platforms

Social media platforms	Number of respondents	Percentage
Instagram	145	44,75%
YouTube	90	27,78%
Facebook	46	14,20%
Pinterest	13	4,01%
LinkedIn	13	4,01%
Snapchat	9	2,78%
Blogg	6	1,85%
Twitter	2	0,62%

Source: Google forms

Following table 5 of consulted items, the majority of respondents are female with 72% as mentioned previously, the results are then quite obvious and predictable as normally female are more interested in the fashion industry, precisely in the area of clothing and beauty products with 28, 44% and 29, 05%, making a total of 57, 49%, which is more than the half of the consulted items percentages, following health or diet supplement with the 14, 68% and electronic filed with 11, 31%.

Table 5: Consulted items and reasons to follow influencers

Consulted items	Number of respondents	Percentage
Beauty products	95	29,05%
Clothing	93	28,44%
Health or diet supplement	48	14,68%
Electronic	37	11,31%
Furniture/Home Décor	24	7,34%
Car	19	5,81%
None	5	1,53%
Food	2	0,61%
Travel	2	0,61%
Books	1	0,31%

DIYs	1	0,31%
Reasons to follow influencers	Number of respondents	Percentage
Inspiration	89	29,37%
Inspiration Entertainment	86	28,38%
To be updated according to trends	82	27,06%
Discounts	32	10,56%
None	8	2,64%
To optimize the choice	2	0,66%
Reviews	2	0,66%
To consider several points of view regarding a product/service	1	0,33%
To guarantee the effectiveness of the product	1	0,33%

Source: Google forms

Lastly, for the reasons as to why people follow influencers, the prime most highlighted reason is inspiration with the percentage of 29, 37% so basically consumers are looking for influencers with whom they can relate to, as well as motivate and inspire them.

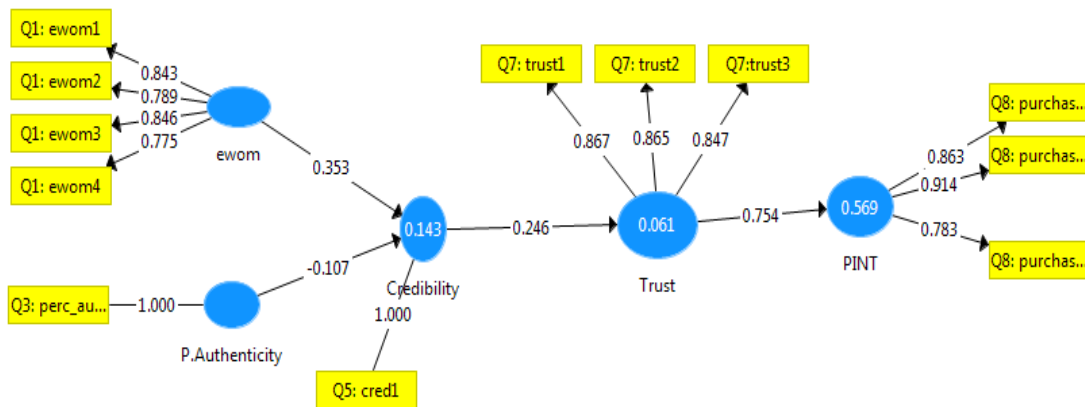
3.2.2. Data analysis: measurement and structural models

Measurement model analysis

Indicator reliability refers to the proportion of indicator variance that is explained by the latent variable. Manifest variable with outer loadings of 0.7 or higher are considered highly satisfactory. Loadings which are between 0.4 and 0.7 should be considered for elimination.

The next figure (figure 2) presents the results after the last algorithm.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework after the last algorithm



The objective of eliminating these indicators is to improve the composite reliability. Figure 2 displays the outer loadings for the manifest variables of the conceptual model with each indicator depicting loadings above 0.7. These loadings are considered highly satisfactory and prove that individual item reliability criterion has successfully been met.

As a rule of thumb, values of both the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability must be greater than 0.7. As presented, both the variables values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability are greater than 0.7 which leads to conclude the validity, the reliability of the test as well as the internal consistency reliability.

Table 6: Construct Reliability and Validity of the last algorithm

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Credibility	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
P.Authenticity	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
PINT	0,814	0,836	0,890	0,731
Trust	0,824	0,824	0,895	0,739
Ewom	0,833	0,864	0,887	0,662

Source: Smart PLS Software

As for The Average Variance Extracted (AVE), each latent variable is evaluated to check the convergent validity. As a rule of thumb, the value of the AVE must be higher than 0.50. All AVE values were above 0.50 thus signaling that latent variables explain more than half of their indicators' variance as indicated above in table 6.

Structural model analysis

When it comes to T statistics, when T is superior to the critical value (1, 65; 1, 96 and 2, 57), the coefficient is significant to a certain probability of error (respectively 10%; 5%; 1%) as mentioned by (Hair et al, 2014).

Table 7: Path Coefficients bootstrapping

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Credibility -> Trust	0,246	0,244	0,087	2,834	0,005
P.Authenticity -> Credibility	0,107	0,108	0,078	1,375	0,169
Trust -> PINT	0,754	0,757	0,041	18,579	0,000
Ewom -> Credibility	0,353	0,361	0,071	4,993	0,000

Source: Smart PLS Software

Based on this statement and according to our analysis output in table 7, all of our T statistics values are greater than 1, 96. Thus, all of our hypotheses are confirmed and their coefficients are significant to a 5% probability of error. Except for the T statistics value of perceived authenticity's impact on credibility which is ($t = 1,375 < 1, 96$) and so this hypothesis is not supported.

The T statistics value of credibility and trust path coefficient is ($t = 2,834 > 1, 96$), so as mentioned above the coefficient is significant to a 5% probability of error.

The same goes for both the T statistics value of both the Ewom and credibility path coefficient is ($t = 4,993 > 2.57$), and the T statistics value of the trust and purchase intention path coefficient is ($t = 18,579 > 2.57$).

The greater the T, the more evidence you have that your results are significantly concrete and have a lower probability of error, which exactly what is shown in our results.

Now for the p-value, it is compared with the desired significance level of our test and the smaller it is, the more significant the result would be. That is, when the null hypothesis is

rejected at a significance level of 5%, this would be reported as " $p < 0.05$." Having a small p-value suggests that the null hypothesis is unlikely to be true.

As conducted in our database, the p-value of all the path coefficients analyzed are less than 0.05 which suggests that the null hypothesis is unlikely to be true except for the p-value of perceived authenticity and credibility path coefficient which is $(0.169 > 0.05)$, meaning that in this case, the null hypothesis is likely to be true and so the hypothesis of perceived authenticity impacting on credibility is not supported.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The goal of this study is to observe the factors that lead to the impact of influencer marketing on the customers' purchase intention of fashionable products. The factors that were supported by the previous results includes both perceived authenticity and EWOM and their impact on influencers' credibility and consumers' trust which leads to the purchase intention of the latter.

Result 1: E WOM has a significant positive influence on the customer purchase intention.

From the overall opinions of respondents, the correlation between the electronic EWOM and the customer purchase intention was verified. The outcome proved that electronic EWOM is positively and significantly influencing the customer when it comes to the intent of buying. EWOM is considered as a new form of communication to spread information to a large base of consumers in a short amount of time and it is perceived as reliable, credible, and trustworthy.

Various reasons are known as to why people love to share information online. First, they like to network and express their experience in order to facilitate the information search for others. Second, they like to be seen as somebody who has a significant knowledge and a certain expertise about a product or a brand and also to be perceived as a person with a set of connections. Therefore, E WOM could be presented as a chain, social media influencer share information and then customers share the information with other peer customers and so on. This is how E WOM could easily become viral.

Besides, 9 times out of 10 when customers are looking for information to make a purchase decision, thus, they always rely on information shared by influencers about the product or service they tend to buy. Hence, when the consumers feel they have obtained the requested

information that would affect their overall desire of purchasing, especially when considering buying durable or expensive products.

Thus, E WOM is more useful and impactful than the traditional one due to the reason that via the internet, social media influencer can reach hundreds of people, even thousands and also the advantage of the post or review cycle life which can be forever on the internet and could be easily be seen by anybody at any time.

Result 2: Both Credibility and Trust has a significant positive influence on the customer purchase intention.

The results of the questionnaire reveal that the majority of the millennials consider social media influencers who make recommendations without receiving a certain financial perk from companies are perceived to be more dependable. However, a significant number of individuals do not associate either positively or negatively Influencers being sponsored with their credibility. In the literature review section, studies showed that consumers consent and convenience if influencers receive a financial incentive from brands to review a product/service as long as it is clearly stated as declared by (Lu et al, 2014).

Findings also uncovered that millennials consider recommendations as more trustworthy when influencers are not giving recommendations just because they are sponsored by the brand. Being sponsored can negatively affect the credibility of a social media influencer. (Bruns, 2018) also revealed that people who tend to follow influencers are more likely to believe that the overall credibility is affected negatively by the advertising messages. Independent reviews have a major impact on millennials trust and thus, they will feel confident buying a product recommended by the influencer. Therefore, it makes more sense that credible reviews are much appreciated by this generation, as it can facilitate for them the purchasing decision of a product. This research found that the matter of influencers being paid or not to promote a product doesn't bother millennials, communicating with them however represents a more important factor for trust.

This study also showed the belief of the majority of respondents in the social media influencers' commitment to tell the truth about brands aside from being sponsored by a certain company. The results show that millennials belief in the influencers' honesty increases his/her confidence in buying the recommended product. This finding is supported by the research presented in previous papers in which the credibility of the source of recommendations is critical to purchase decision (Chen et al, 2015; Lu et al, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The social media marketing development has led to a significant level on how marketing strategies are working now comparing to the past. The considerable shift from the traditional marketing tools towards social media marketing has been recognized as the new face of marketing in this era of the internet technology. The social media marketing is now considered as an interactive network for businesses to communicate with their consumers, as well as receive insightful and useful feedback that would consequently help the businesses upgrade and improve their products or services. As the constant seeking for new products and services is the main driver of why consumers reach social media platforms looking for useful information, customers' experiences and reviews and promotions before the commitment to any purchase. Businesses should use this valuable opportunity of interaction and engagement with customers on social media platforms especially on Instagram since it is the most popular among them. In the past, the majority of businesses were not reachable over the internet, but now interactive social media pages are created and managed to increase brand awareness and win the consumers' loyalty.

Not to mention, the growth of word of mouth to electronic word of mouth in the Internet era has made a considerable change in people interaction with one another and thus it has become the strongest basis for marketing strategies.

The creation of discussions like message posts on social media platforms has the power to spread around the world and reaches individuals in a short matter of time. Brands and businesses must provide customers on social media platforms with a reason to interact with their content for various reasons such as the quality of products, the excellent customer services, the enriching personalized experiences and stories that customers would be excited to hear about. The privilege given to potential customers will make discussions and opinions shared within the various circles of the community grow and consequently outreach many others.

Hence, this will make the trust and confidence towards business increase, something that will eventually lead to more customers purchases or repurchases intentions.

So to conclude, there are several ways to influence customers' purchase intention through social media by focusing on brand exposure, electronic word-of-mouth and customer engagement.

Thus, as a first recommendation, brands can influence brand exposure in social media among target audiences by posting regularly content (brand posts) in social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, by encouraging followers to use hashtag #brandname to increase the number of mentions in Instagram, by utilizing hashtags strategically to reach target audiences, by tagging location, by working in co-operation with selected social influencers or non-competing brands, and by encouraging followers electronic word-of mouth.

Lastly, as a second recommendation, E-WOM can be encouraged by offering incentives or organizing lotteries and competitions, and by activating followers with questions and increased communication. Due to higher engagement rate in Instagram, more inspirational content is more likely engaging for customers than highly promotional content.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

During this research, we noticed some limitations that should be highlighted and discussed. Though they did not deflect the relevance of the resulted outcomes, however they can be helpful for future studies and thus, we must take them into consideration.

Due to the observed limitation of the time frame to apply the quantitative method that is conducted in a form of a questionnaire and in order to collect the required data for our research which was dealt in a short period of time where most of the respondents' focus was on their exams, pointing out also the events that are trending all over social media that may somehow effects the answers of some.

We had 160 respondents from the entire collected sample and it is true that this number is not sufficient to fairly represent the population of Tunisians' consumers demographically.

However, we collected a fair number of concrete and honest answers to gather our results. Accordingly, the gender ratio did not also represent an adequate comparison among males and females since it is hard to determine which gender category is more active on social media platforms and especially on Instagram.

With that being said, indicating the limitations we have faced during our research, this paper would benefit from future research suggestions in order to extend and further test the theory we have developed here.

As mentioned previously that a small sample was investigated which limited the possibility to draw general conclusions and further examine the influencer marketing impact on customer purchase intention of fashionable products, a larger demographic sample, with different ages

and other geographical areas could be included. With a larger sample in a wider geographical area, a more generalized conclusion could be drawn.

Besides, this study also noted gender differences. Men are not as frequent followers of influencers as women, as presented in the empirical findings. Therefore, influencers must reach more men, in order to build positive attitudes among them that will lead to the creation of brand awareness and as a result the lead to a higher conversion rate.

Lastly, future research should include more variables, as well as using other tools for data collection. And by examining a broader range of customers, it could shed more detailed insight as to what kind of variables is needed to impact the purchasing decisions of customers. The results of one research would be different than the other, resulting to a better understanding on the actual impact of social media influencers towards consumer purchase intention.

REFERENCES

- Abidin, c., (2016). Visibility labour: engaging with influencers' fashion brands and advertorial campaigns on instagram. *Media international australia*, 161 (1), pp.86-100.
- Bryman a. & bell, e. (2015). *Business research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: oxford university press.
- Byrne, e., kearney, j., & macevilly, c. (2017). The role of influencer marketing and social influencers in public health. *Proceedings of the nutrition society*, 76.
- Cheung, m., luo, c., sia, c., & chen, h. (2009). Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations. *International journal of electronic commerce*, 13(4), 9-38.
- De veirman, m., cauberghe, v., & hudders, l. (2017). Marketing through instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International journal of advertising*, 36(5), 798-828.
- Edson escalas, j., & bettman, j. R. (2015). Managing brand meaning through celebrity endorsement. *Review of marketing research*, 12, 29-52.
- Goyette, i. Ricard, l. Bergeron, j. Marticotte, f (2010). E-wom scale: word-of-mouth measurement scale for e-services context, *canadian journal of administrative sciences / revue canadienne des sciences de l'administration* volume 27, issue 1.
- Hsu, c., chuan-chuan lin, j., & chiang, h. (2013). The effects of blogger recommendations on customers' online shopping intentions. *Internet research*, 23(1).
- Hsu, c. P., huang, h. C., ko, c. P., & wang, s. J. (2014). Basing bloggers' power on readers' satisfaction and loyalty. *Online information review*, 38(1), 78-94.
- Kim, s., kandampully, j., & bilgihan, a. (2018). The influence of ewom communications: an application of online social network framework. *Computers in human behavior*, 80, 243-254.
- Khamis, s., ang, l. & welling, r., (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity studies*, 8 (2), pp.191-208.
- Kotler, p., kartajaya, h. & setiawan, i., (2017). *Marketing 4.0: moving from traditional to digital*, hoboken, nj: wiley.
- Lee, k., & koo, d. (2012). Effects of attribute and valence of e-wom on message adoption: moderating roles of subjective knowledge and regulatory focus. *Computers in human behavior*, 28(5), 1974-1984.
- Lu, l., chang, w., & chang, h. (2014). Consumer attitudes toward blogger's sponsored recommendations and purchase intention: the effect of sponsorship type, product type, and brand awareness. *Computers in human behavior*, 34, 258-266.
- Ohanian, r. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of advertising*, 19(3), 39-52.
- Weiss, r. (2014). Influencer marketing. How word-of-mouth marketing can strengthen your organization's brand. *Marketing health services*, 34(1), 16-17.