Compared with Traditional Marketing, How Influencer Marketing Affect costumers' Purchasing Behaviors in the Clothing Retailing Industry

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Abstract: Social media is becoming increasingly important in people's life, while the clothing retailing industry is in urgent transformation during the COVID 19 pandemic. This paper thereby explores how influencer marketing affects the clothing retailing industry in the aspect of consumer adoption, which includes the cognitive stage (Inform), affective stage (Persuade), and behavioral stage (Remind) of customer purchasing behaviors. This framework is derived from Keller's brand pyramid, which is also known as the Customer-Based Brand Equity. The concept of Keller's brand pyramid is that in order to build a strong brand, companies must shape how customers/consumers think and feel about the product. When it has strong brand quality, consumers will more likely to buy this brand again. There are two parts in the pyramid, emotional or more rational, both parts will get to Resonance. After conducting an experiment periement, we found that online influencer marketing is more effective when applied to consumers at the cognitive stage, while traditional marketing is more effective when applied to extroverts at the affective stage.

1. Introduction

Social Media has been playing a significant role in people's daily life, especially during the outbreak of COVID 19, as offline activities have been largely restricted. At the same time, internet celebrities known as influencers have been collaborating with companies to recommend their product through posts and videos. Such processes facilitated the growth of online shopping, generating benefits for both customers and retailers. In addition, during the COVID 19 outbreak, people increasingly turn to online platforms to purchase clothes and apparel. Consequently, the E-commerce apparel industry grew by 29.6% in 2020. This, however, also means a loss of customer experience as customers could no longer interact with salespeople face to face, which further highlights the importance of clothing retailers to cope with influencer marketing.

2. Literature Review

Past study indicates that influencer marketing could be effective in influencing consumer purchasing behavior in both the cognitive stage and also the affective stage

2.1 Cognitive Stage

The cognitive stage refers to the process where businesses make customers both aware and attracted to the product.

A study shows that expertise, trustworthiness, social advocacy, and inter-activity were significant heuristic cues for the evaluation of the credibility of influencers on YouTube . Influencers that are deemed to possess those qualities are viewed by customers as a more reliable source of information, making them highly influential in informing the audience as well as raising awareness about a certain brand/product. Furthermore, Instagram, one of the social media that influencers heavily use, is rated as the most trustworthy platform, which further highlights the trustworthiness of influencers in customers 'minds.

Another study found that media agencies significantly value high-quality content as it is important for brand communication and to attract more customers.. In addition, if the image of the chosen influencer accords with the brand, the advertisement result can be magnified. This means that influencer marketing and branding, when used correctly, reinforce each other and have an amplifying effect[1].

While having influencers and video blog content carefully chosen, the level of social media platform engagement plays a significant role in deciding the success of the advertisement. The more often the influencer interacts with the audience/customers, the more likely that customers will view the influencer as a credible source of information. This further highlights the importance of interactivity and trustworthiness of brands in the cognitive stage, which are all characteristics of influencer marketing.

In addition, the cognitive stage is significantly essential in the clothing industry. Smith stated how clothing is one of the most important ways people express their personal image and identity. As the clothing one wears is strongly correlated with their identity, brand images and the way the public percepts certain brands also become highly important. For example, people who percepts themselves as the elite are likely going to wear clothes that the public percepts as high-end. Internet influencers, being opinion leaders, could easily shape cognitions of brands. In such an industry where brand images are particularly crucial, influencer marketing could be a highly effective tool in the cognitive stage. As a result, influencer marketing in the cognitive stage is highly effective in the fashion industry. Schouten concluded that 84.5 percent of the population were familiar with fashion celebrities, and followers also found internet influencers as a more reliable source of information than celebrity endorsement ads[2].

2.2 Affective Stage

The affective stage refers to the process where businesses persuade customers into purchasing the product. In this stage, customers moves from being attracted to the product to purchasing it.

One research found that whether a consumer determines to buy a product or not is largely affected by social media influencers. Furthermore, comments on the internet will also exert a stronger impact on customers 'price perception than a traditional advertisement, illustrating the effectiveness of influencers' comments. As customers 'perception of price changes, their inclination at purchasing products also alters correspondingly[3].

Rinka and Pratt concluded that the consistency between Social media influencers' perceived image and consumers' ideal self-image positively affects consumers' willingness to visit destinations that SMIs recommend. Similarly, Lim, Mohd, Jacky, and Wong used the social learning theory from the marketing field and found a positive relationship between the effectiveness of social media influencers towards consumer purchase intention. This means that social media influencers exert a significant impact on the purchasing behaviors of customers. Another study also proves that

celebrity worship has a direct positive relationship with advertisement attitude and purchase intentions. , which illustrates the effectiveness of influencer marketing. In particular, consumers' purchasing behaviors in the clothing retailing industry are highly subjected to emotional messages. Hambleton noted that consumer purchasing behaviors in the clothing industry are heavily influenced by the emotional image of self aspect as well as impulse purchases.

3. Methodology

An experiment was conducted to determine the effectiveness of influence marketing over traditional marketing in the cognitive and affective stage

I randomly chose 25 participants and conducted an experiment with pre-exposure and exposure stages. The purpose of the experiment is to gather data and answers regarding customers' decision-making process. During the pre-exposure stage, we asked the interviewee about their preferences when they purchase clothings. They were asked to rate the extent to which influencer and traditional advertisement influence their purchase intention. After that, we exposed them to 2 advertisements for the same pants made by a new Chinese clothing brand, one being a traditional advertisement while the other one being a video made by an internet influencer. Lastly, we asked the interviewee which one is more effective at informing and attracting them[4].

4. Results and Findings

Figure 1 illustrates the effect of influencer marketing and traditional marketing after interviewees are exposed to advertisements of both types. Overall, the number of people who choose Internet Influencer is higher than in traditional advertisement in both category, while the difference between the two advertisements is larger in the informative section. This suggests how influencer marketing is more effective at attracting and informing customers.
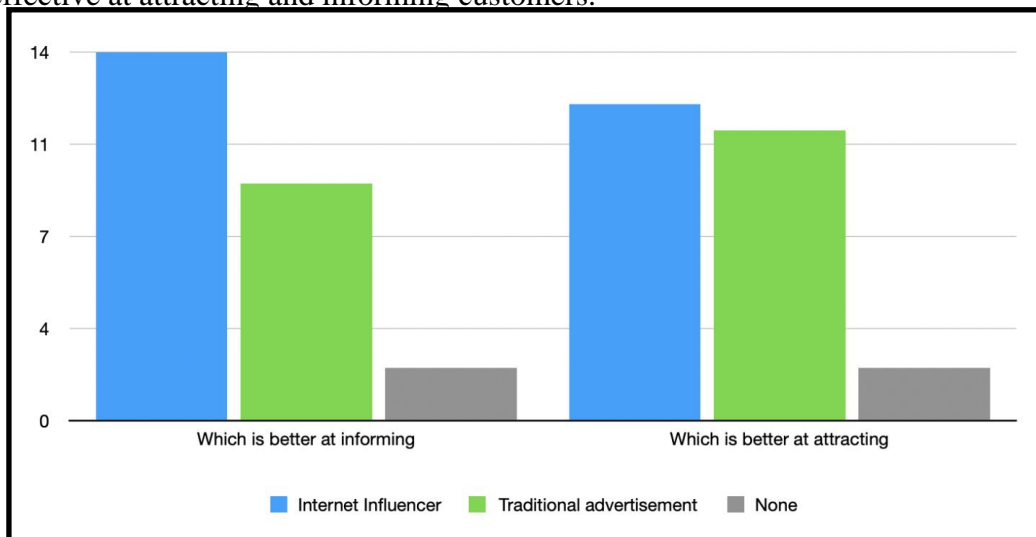

Figure 1: The effect of influencer and traditional marketing

Figure 2 illustrates how information on social media and in-store recommendations influence the purchase intention of customers[2]. 25% of the interviewee were influenced by 0-20% by information on social media, while 32% of them are influenced by 0-20% by in-store recommendations. Nevertheless, 17% of the interviewee are influenced by social media by 60-80%, while 20% of the interviewee is influenced by in-store recommendation by the same leve[5].
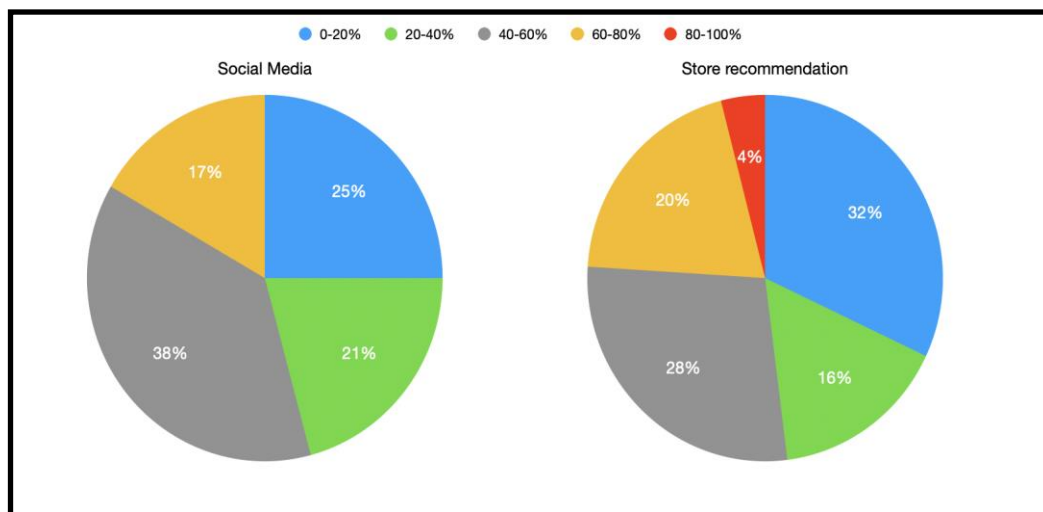
Figure 2: The effect on purchase intentions

5. Discussion

Based on the result of the experiment, it can be concluded that influencer marketing is overall more effect in the cognitive stage, while the effectiveness of influencer marketing in the affective stage varies based on certain traits of costumers

5.1 Cognitive Stage

The Cognitive Stage refers to the process of companies informing customers. It often includes making customers aware and attracted to their product. This process corresponds with the rational side of Keller's brand pyramid of reaching resonance.

Because of the prevalence of social media platforms and their significant influence on people's lives, social media influencers serve as online opinion leaders in various areas, and some of them have already been invited to endorse brands or products.

Nowadays influencer endorsement has been widely used in the clothing industry as an effective marketing strategy. Due to the influencer's lower endorsement fees and visible effect, more and more clothing retailing companies are willing to invite influencers who have a large number of fans on social media. With the development of short video platforms, people could spend less time reading traditional advertisements like text introductions. They could get more information through a 1-min video made by an influencer, which is both time-efficient and also more appealing. In addition, customers are also more attracted by videos with someone they are familiar with introducing a product than by text and pictures outlining the basic information about a product.

Because of the popularity of internet influencers, the video made by them tends to be more attractive than the traditional advertisement. In fact, after exposing both traditional and influencer advertisements to participants in an experiment, 65% of them found the video made by the influencer to be more attractive. This can be explained by 2 key characteristics of influencer marketing, which are its trustworthiness as well as its interactivity, which ultimately reinforce each other.

In addition, the interactive feature of influencer marketing is also significant in informing and attracting customers. For example, comments under a video made by social media influencers often reflect the user experience of others that has used the same product. Influencers sometimes also join these discussions. The online interactions between customers and influencers as well as other users online allow everyone to share their opinions and concerns in such a transparent way. Even

introverts that dislike in-person recommendations are comfortable voicing their questions or concerns on social media. The transparent interactions between people essentially make information seems more credible and trustworthy to customers, causing them to highly trust the information that is shared by social media influencers.

5.2 Affective Stage

The affective stage of purchasing refers to the process of persuading. In contrast with the cognitive stage, the affective stage is often emotional and impulsive. Customers, in this stage, change from being attracted by a product to purchasing the product. It also corresponds with the emotional side of Keller's brand pyramid.

The effect of influencer and traditional marketing have two different results. As the evolution of the internet is gradually increasing, social media have been taking advantage of how to attract consumers. Famous celebrities or cosmetic bloggers are strong and persuasive under this circumstance. Videos often include more information and details about this product while traditional advertising is more based on "interruption", which means when consumers need to stop what they are doing and focus on the marketing message, such as telemarketing calls, pictures, and posters.

Graph 2 highlights the impact on purchase intention by in-store recommendations and social media. In-store recommendation acts as a representation of traditional advertisement. Graph 2 displays an interesting pattern. The category "0-20%" is considered an ineffective persuasion as customers are merely influenced by such marketing campaigns. 32% of the interviewee placed traditional marketing in this category, while only 25% of the interviewee did so for influencer marketing. By itself, this would suggest how traditional marketing is ineffective in influencing the purchase intention of customers. However, the pattern displayed in other parts of graph 2 seems to contradict it. The category "60-80%" is considered a successful persuasion as customers 'purchase intentions are heavily influenced. While 17% of the interviewee placed influencer marketing in such category, 20% of the interviewee placed traditional marketing in such category. This indicates how traditional marketing tends to be highly effective for a narrow range of people, while influencer marketing tends to be moderately effective for the general population in influencing purchasing intentions. This is likely because in-store recommendation involves more face-to-face interaction between salesmen. Such ways of communication could be highly persuasive for those who prefer it, yet it could discourage purchasing behaviors for those who do not prefer interactions with strangers. On the other hand, influencer marketing does not require any exchange of information, but only the influencer delivering information to customers. Such ways of communication is more applicable to the general population, but are not as effective as the active exchange of information for those who prefer it.

6. Conclusion

To summarize, online influencer marketing is more effective when applied to consumers at the cognitive stage, which is related to rational decision-making; The affective stage, however involves more nuances. Traditional marketing works better for a narrow group of people in building an emotional connection between the consumers and products, thus improving chances of a successful deal at the effective stage. Influencer marketing, on the other hand, are moderately effective for the general population.

Despite all the benefits that influencer marketing brings, there are also certain costs or features that have to be abandoned. One of which being in-store experience. If customers are solely affected by influencer advertisement, they are likely going to purchase the product online, which means the

process of trying the product out has to be abandoned. This further highlights the importance for retail corporations to conduct business strategy that combines both influencer marketing and traditional marketing, applying them to each stage of the consumer decision-making process respectively. Further study can be based on how influencer and traditional marketing balance each other in real cases to maximize company profit and consumer experience.

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