Innovation White Paper

University of Florida
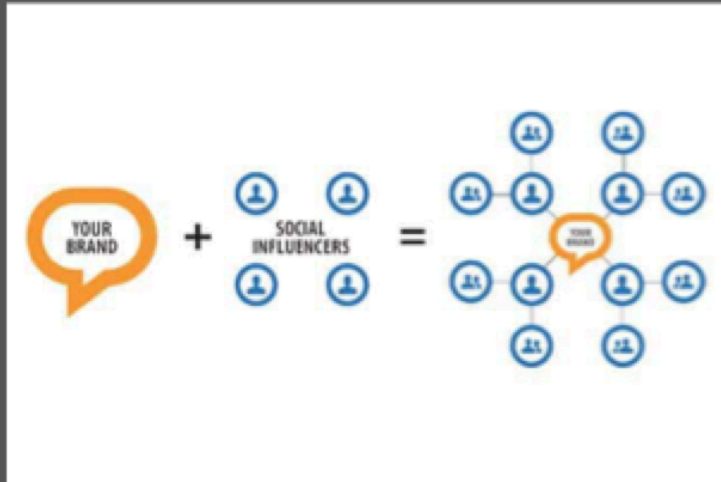ENC3254

Figure 1

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IN PUBLIC

RELATIONS

THE

INFLUENCER

The Current State of The Influencer

How does the influencer/an influencer work?

The new wave of social media has led the marketing and advertising world into building the new innovative technique for product sales known as an influencer. An influencer is a branding technique job for those people who share, publish, post, and review products and companies on social media; typically those people have a large following on their social media in order to fully promote products to an audience. Thus, individual evaluations may now gain wide attention, regardless of the status and structural position of the sender (Etter, Ravasi, and Colleoni 2019). Over time the connection between companies and their consumers has become closer and closer together through the use of hiring brand influencers. Customers are appealed by experiential marketing via in-depth experiences connected to a product or brand (Adeosun and Ganiyu, 2012, 22) and all marketing communication related issues deliver an experience (Schmitt, 1999, 53). The use of social media "Micro-Celebrities"-influencers with large followings on their social media platforms that create a lot of attention for social media platforms when they post on them, place interactions between the customers and the brands and products through the micro-celebrities profiles. Each profile, as an influencer, highlights the brands and products the person represents and thus showcases them to the customers in a real and relatable way. Distributed via social media that enables Internet users to access, share, engage with, add to, and co-create (Alhabash, Mundel, and Hussain 2017), the interactions are almost infinite. Therefore, how the influencer showcases the product then allows the customer to mimic them easily and in their own way, ultimately building brand communication. Figure 2 below expresses the indirect way an extensive marketing team reaches its' customers versus the direct relationship between the influencer and the customer, expressing the value of the influencer. Hiring influencers give producers direct contact with customers; the influencers themselves and their following, by skipping over the middleman for feedback on products the influencer can save companies time and money. Although, influencers are not working for free, they usually work with their own brand in mind, themselves.

Figure 2; the connection between the company and its' market

The History

Why was the influencer created?

The evolution of the influencer begins with social media. Once social media hit platforms across the world, the influencer made its way into becoming a huge branding technique. Initially, the mass media were meant to inform and entertain the public that had access to them, being unidirectional channels of communication; but with the arrival of the Internet it was possible to democratize and facilitate access to information and communication (Galvez 2019). As social media floored into a way larger phenomenon than ever expected, the way in which someone communicates with others started to rely heavily on social media platforms. Therefore, Galvez (2019) explains the model that shows the transformation in favour of network structures where each node can transmit information and become a communicator. Thus, the days where Internet reviews and telephone surveys took feedback on products are well over. Since consumers began to indulge themselves in their social media platforms, brands and companies had to keep up with the masses. Given the diversity and continuous evolution of 2.0 platforms, there has been a revolution within the traditional communication model (Freire & Gutierrez-Rubi 2010). Moreover, the motivation and usage of social media is a reflection on the psychological needs and perspective of each individual; different applications, however, tend to have different salient affordances and their use is motivated by different sets of psychological needs (Karahanna, Xin Xu, Xu, and Zhang 2018). Thus, over time the influencer is then created to adhere to a wider range of customers who are motivated on different scales. The influencer can then represent a brand directly, those who will feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is "theirs" (Pierce et al, 2003). Lastly, the making of the influencer, predominantly on Instagram (as shown in figure 3), expresses the evolution of social media as visual representations of oneself and of various brands and products. According to a recent survey conducted by Statista (2018), 58 percent of the brand strategists and marketers surveyed report that influencer marketing will become integrated in all of their forthcoming marketing activities (Colliander and Stubb 2019). As trends and movements on social media platforms develop and play out, the influencer must evolve as well.
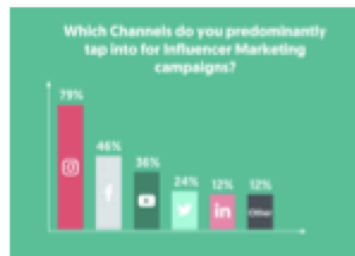
Figure 3; social media platform dominances

Detailed Example of The Influencer

How is the influencer used to the real-world?

The overall use of an influencer is to promote a brand and sell a product. An example of an influencer who branded herself through the media is Kylie Jenner. The self made billionaire "created" herself through social media; social media enables consumers to transmit social information; thus, a key motivation on social media may be to share self-relevant content that signals identity (Back et al. 2010; Reed et al. 2012; Swann 1983; Toubia and Stephen 2013). Although Kylie Jenner had an upbringing on television, she broke away from just being another Kardashian Jenner and made a name for herself by creating her makeup company. Through the tremendous following Ms. Jenner has on her social media, she was able to fully brand and promote her products. Through posting stories- short clips and images that can be viewed multiple times only over the span of 24-hours, pictures, and videos to her social media she showcased her products using friends, family, and herself as the initial testers of the products. This gave the customers a real look into how her products worked and how well they worked over time, thus customers can look back on her profiles at the first few posts to the most recent posts to get a full feel for the products themselves. Although social media advertising (SMA) finds to confirm the intervening role of value and attitude in our hierarchy of effects theory and expectancy value theory-based framework of SMA belief-value-attitude-behavior (Cheng, Johnston, Khalil, and Hanh Le 2018). Moreover, as Kylie Jenner grew her brand on her own she also had a strong PR team behind her that sent out her products to various other influencers. Who then expanded her brand even further, ultimately creating a billion dollar company through social media and the influence on its' users behaviors.

Figure 4; Kylie Jenner showcasing *FitTea in which she stands as an influencer for

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Figure 4. Kylie Jenner *FyTe influencer post 2018. Instagram. Rich List of top influencers revealed. 2018. BBC.com. Copyright BusinessofApps.

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