Understanding informational influence of influencer marketing: A perspective of information adoption model

Chang Zhang  
*School of Economics and Management, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China*

Zhiqin Cui  
*School of Economics and Management, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China*

Chongyang Xie  
*School of Economics and Management, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China*

Fei Wang  
*School of Economics and Management, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China*  
wangfei086071@163.com

Feiyan Lin  
*School of Logistics Management and Engineering, Nanning Normal University, Nanning, China*

See next page for additional authors

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Understanding informational influence of influencer marketing: A perspective of information adoption model

Chang Zhang1, Zhiqin Cui1, Chongyang Xie1, Fei Wang1*, Feiyan Lin2, Maomao Chi1, Jing Zhao1

1 School of Economics and Management, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China
2 School of Logistics Management and Engineering, Nanning Normal University, Nanning, China

wangfei086071@163.com (Fei Wang)

1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Influencer marketing becomes increasingly popular. To enhance the effectiveness of influencer marketing, marketers require to figure out what influence of social media influencers stimulates consumer purchases. Social media influencers' influence comes from their generated expert and knowledgeable content on a particular product domain[4]. Influencer-generated content is viewed as information that shares knowledge, suggestions, and ideas about products. The extent to which consumers are influenced by this information is determined by their assessment of its usefulness. In this sense, consumers are influenced to adopt influencers’ recommendations to purchase through informational influence. Therefore, exerting informational influence holds the key to achieving effective influencer marketing. Although existing studies have examined the effectiveness of influencer marketing from different angles, there is still a lack of understanding of the informational influence of influencer marketing. First, few studies focus on the information influence process of influencer marketing, which is a key distinction between influencer marketing and traditional marketing using celebrities. Second, most prior studies employ consumer purchase intention as the performance of influencer marketing, without examining the impact of information influence in real-world, field settings. Third, the latest influencer marketing literature review implies that the impact of influencer marketing on performance relies on product type[4]. It is worthy to empirically explore how product type fits with the characteristics of influencer marketing.

To fill up the research gaps, this study aims to investigate how consumers are informationally influenced to adopt influencers’ recommendations to purchase promoted products. Especially, this study focuses on two research questions: (1) What characteristics of influencer marketing could exert informational influence on consumers to encourage them to purchase promoted products? (2) How does product type moderate in the process of informational influence?

2. THEORY AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Following the perspective of the information adoption model, the hypotheses and research framework are shown in Figure 1.
This dataset is derived from objective data from the smartphone circle and the beauty circle in the WeChat shopping circle from 1 June 2017 to 31 December 2017, taking a post as the research unit to develop the measurement of variables and employ negative binomial (NB) estimation method to test our research model.

3. RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The main research findings are as follows: (1) As for the information adoption process of influencer marketing, we found that consumer purchases are directly determined by information usefulness. (2) We found that the expertise and novelty of influencer-generated content that reflect information quality exhibit significant impacts on information usefulness. Meanwhile, platform endorsement that represents influencer credibility significantly and positively affects consumers’ perceived information usefulness. Our results also show that platform endorsement has a significantly positive effect on consumer purchase behaviors even though including information usefulness in the model. (3) We found the type of promoted product works as an important moderator in the informational influence process of influencer marketing. The effect of content novelty on information usefulness is no different for search product or experience product. We guess this is because consumers’ assessment of content novelty relies on post content itself, and has not to matter with the product type.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study contributes to influencer marketing literature in three ways. First, this study advances our understanding of the informational influence of influencer marketing by extending information adoption model into the influencer marketing context and highlighting the importance of informational influence to actual consumer purchase behaviors. Second, this paper sheds light on what characteristics of influencer marketing could exert informational influence on consumers. Third, our study contributes to influencer marketing research by surfacing the fit between product type and influencer marketing characteristics. Our study also offers influencers and managers several practical implications when they perform influencer marketing. First, given the importance of content expertise and content novelty, influencers should accumulate professional knowledge and include product knowledge in their generated content. Meanwhile, they need to differentiate their posts’ content from other influencers’ posts to ensure content novelty. Second, apart from improving their content quality, influencers should actively get involved in third-party influencer marketing platforms to earn platform endorsement. Third, the findings about the moderating effects of product type suggest that managers should select appropriate influencers to perform marketing activities based on the type of products that they want to promote. Since our data was collected from just one platform, the research results may be limited.

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