

Can macroinfluencers have an impact on the customers' journey of their followers?

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Abstract

Consumer marketplaces have been changing due to the evolution of digital technology, especially with the creation and popularity of social networking sites. The rise and massive use of social media by consumers opened a door to new forms of communication between brands and consumers. One of them is through the use of social media influencers (SMI), which now assume a pivotal role to connect brands with consumers. This has led many companies and brands to increasingly include in their marketing strategy influencer-based campaigns, although as Janssen et al. (2022) alert, much remains to be explored to gain a better understanding of the value of digital influencers as an instrument for marketing communication. One of the issues that warrant further research is what types of influencers are effective in which situations and for what purpose (Vrontis et al., 2020). Given that the empirical research is mainly focused on a broader and generic concept of social media influencers, scholars have already highlighted the need to address potential differences among the several types of SMI and examine if they have a distinct impact on the customers' journey (e.g., Boerman, 2020; Vrontis et al., 2020). There are numerous typologies of digital influencers depending on factors such as their status, practices, or their impact and presence on specific social media platforms, but the most popular classification is related to audience size, that is, their number of followers. In this study, we depart from the last criteria (number of followers) to examine the role and impact of a specific SMI type – the macroinfluencer - on the customers' journey of their followers.

The authors collected and analyzed data from approximately 460 Instagram users in Portugal that followed one or more lifestyle macroinfluencers on this digital platform. These followers, mostly women between 18 and 45 years old, use Instagram on a daily basis. In this survey, we examined the role of the social media macroinfluencers' perceived credibility, perceived content utility, their perceived similarity with their followers, the perceived fun and satisfaction that followers derive from following them, as well as consumer motives to follow, on the consumers' decision process. Overall,

the results show that the perceived macroinfluencers characteristics are positively related to the consumers' intentions to search for and purchase products and services announced by these SMI. According to the findings, the examined macroinfluencers' perceived characteristics are also positively related to the followers' intentions to keep following the SMI in the future. The results are discussed and the academic and business implications of the study are examined.

Keywords: Social networking sites, Instagram, influencer marketing, macroinfluencers, customers' journey