

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH (SoGSAR)**



**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN OFFLINE CONSUMER
PURCHASE DECISION IN GHANA**

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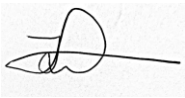
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**THIS DISSERTATION IS PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE
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DECLARATION

I, Justina Odoi, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and all materials used in this thesis have been duly acknowledged.



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DEDICATION

This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to both my parents. My father, the late Emmanuel Boye Armarh, who has always been an inspiration in my journey of life. His believe in me gave me the encouragement to go on every adventure, especially this one. His love and affection always created an environment for me to thrive. My mother, Mary Quarshie who has been a source of motivation and strength during moments of despair. Her prayers, motherly care and support has always been one that I can always fall on.

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To all my friends, thank you for your support and encouragements in my many, many moments of crisis and also sharing in my moments of joy. Your Friendship makes my life a wonderful experience.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media influencer marketing has become a critical marketing technique for many firms. As evidenced by the literature, social media influencer marketing has grown more effective than other strategic methods of marketing, such as celebrity endorsement marketing. As such, many organizations are employing this technique in attracting consumers. This study was interested in investigating social media influencers and the buying behaviors of consumers. The study employed the quantitative research approach while sampling 200 Masters students from the Ghana Institute of Journalism. The study employed the use of questionnaires to investigate respondents' perceptions on how social media influencers relate to their buying decision making processes. The study found that, much as empirical literature suggests, social media influencers play an important role in how consumers perceive products. It also shows that behaviors of respondents towards products and brands become positively positioned through recommendations from social media influencers. Hence the study found that social media influencers are crucial in the consumer decision making process and play a role in attracting consumers to a product.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

Social media influencers have become important parts of the marketing of products in today's internet driven economy. Influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. In the words of Geysler, "influencers make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels and generate large followings of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views" (Geysler, 2021, para. 5).

Ledbetter (2017) makes the point that, there is a difference between an influencer and a celebrity. To him, influencers seem to be closer to their followers because they need them to remain relevant and be able to promote and represent brands. On the other hand, celebrities may not necessarily remain as close to their followers as influencers because, by virtue of their position, they automatically attract large number of followers. This means that, while influencers take a great deal of time and effort to build their following, celebrities do not necessarily build their followership but attract them because of their craft. This explains why Ledbetter (2017) suggests that influencers tend to be closer to their followers than celebrities.

In this regard, Tapinfluence (2017) suggests that celebrities are preferred when a brand wants to create brand awareness among the public, but when they want to increase sales, they use influencers. The pervasive nature of the internet coupled with the advent of social media has brought about influencer marketing particularly in the field of advertising (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer marketing is an amalgamation of two words namely, 'marketing' and 'influencer'. According to Byrne, Kearney, and MacEville (2017), marketing is the act and art of communicating an organizations brand message to its target market, whereas influencers are social agents who enjoy a certain degree of trust from the public and as such are used by

organizations to create awareness about a product and/or service (De Veirman et al., 2017). By exploiting the ubiquitous nature of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, organizations can leverage on social media influencers who normally possess a large following to widely spread brand messages (Freberg et al., 2011).

Social media influencers can do this through a process called brand endorsement (Markethub, 2016). Endorsement is a critical element in marketing as it is vital for the organization to attain a good reputation. Endorsement of a brand necessitates that social media influencer develop a rapport between themselves and their followers by constantly keeping them in the loop about the latest news of the product or service they have endorsed (Liu et al., 2012). According to Abidin (2016), influencers must do this to establish some degree of trust and credibility with their followers. This will help take away any barrier that may adversely affect the believability of the brand message and will positively impact on consumer purchase behavior (Belagatti, 2017).

Over the course of the last decade, social media influencers are constantly being used by organizations to create awareness about their products. The use of catchwords by influencers that resonate with their followers serves as an avenue for organizations to position their brands in the minds of target markets (Patel, 2016). According to Talaverna (2015), the use of social media influencers as endorsers of a brand, compared to celebrity endorsement, is seen as a bargain financially by many organizations and quite more effective. This finding was substantiated by a statistical survey carried out by Forbes in 2017 about the effectiveness of the use of social media influencers to drive brand messages to target markets. According to the survey, more than 70% of questioned online marketers revealed that the use of social media influencers as endorsers of their brands had a positive impact on their online business (Forbes, 2017).

Due to the effects of influencers in the marketing process, many brands have become more affined to the use of influencers in their marketing process, especially when they want to increase sales, and to have positive affinity among their target audience on their brands. According to Zak & Hasprova (2020), the use of influencers in marketing is premised on the idea that influencers are popular, have a reputation and are good at what they do.

1.1 Problem Statement

According to Schouten et al. (2020), celebrities are popular people who are known for their crafts and talents. Celebrities include sportsmen, musicians, models, or actors. Celebrities thus, achieve fame through their craft and talents. Many companies tend to make use of these celebrities so that they can transfer their positive image and characteristics onto their brands.

On the other hand, the argument is made for social media influencers, such as famous Instagram users (instafamous) and vloggers to promote their brands (Marwick, 2015). Social media influencers (also called influencers), according to Khamis et al. (2017), achieve this status by strategically branding themselves as social media experts. They do this by continually engaging social media users with interesting content that they create including funny contents, food, fashion, or posts about fitness which allow them to gain large following.

Influencer marketing (use of influencers) is prevalent in firm strategies, yet little is known about the factors that drive success of online brand engagement at different stages of the consumer purchase process (Hughes et al., 2019). That is the way marketing practitioners may consider partnering with different influencers depending on their marketing campaigns' specific goals and take advantage of different influencers depending on whether marketers want to create more buzz about corporate initiatives or publicize products just launched (Kim, 2019). This is to say that marketers may decide to use celebrities or influencers to achieve specific marketing goals.

In similar studies, Saima and Khan (2020) suggest that influencer marketing is becoming more popular, because of the availability of a host of social media networking sites. It has been crowded with people with people having diverse experiences in various fields, making the use of social media as a marketing tool through influencers has become as an efficient and valuable means of marketing for brands and services (De Veirman et al., 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Godey et al., 2016).

This type of marketing has thus become very valuable in building long term relationships with customers for companies looking to grow their consumer base and convert them into long lasting and long-term customers of the company or brand (De Vries et al., 2012; Loureiro & Gomes, 2016; Pina et al., 2019; Raji et al., 2020). Many companies use influencers for different reasons, such as increasing sales, building a good reputation or create awareness about a product. Although companies may be able to use their own social media platforms to promote their products, this could be interpreted by the consumers as pure advertising. However, when influencers are used, they are seen as more trustworthy, and not as pure advertisements (Saima & Khan, 2020).

The use of social media has become important in the marketing process, and thus has become an area of interest for both academicians and market players. Previous studies have documented the benefits of social media use as a marketing tool (Arlı, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Loureiro & Sarmento, 2019; Raji et al., 2020). Although various scholars such as Saima and Khan (2020) and Zak and Hasprova (2020) have documented the use of influencers (sports personalities, musicians, and celebrities) in the marketing of products by companies and brands, very few inquiries have been advanced into examining the specific roles social media influencers play in consumer decision making in Ghana. This research thus seeks to fill this gap, by documenting the various roles social media influencers play in influencing consumers in their decision to get specific products or not.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to find out the role social media influencers play in the marketing of products and the eventual decision made by consumers. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the role played by social media influencers in the customer decision making process.
2. Find out the various ways by which social media influencers promote brands and products in Ghana.
3. Find out the level of trust of the public in social media influencers in Ghana

1.3 Research Questions

To realize the objectives of this research, the following research questions are raised:

1. What is the role of social media influencers in consumer decision process?
2. How do social media influencers promote brands and products in Ghana?
3. What is the level of trust of the public in social media influencers in Ghana?

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study examines the concept of social media influencers and their role in influencing consumer decision. It however does not specifically study influence of social media influencers on consumer purchase decision. The study covers four purposefully selected social media influencers, Ameyaw Debrah, Abena Manakekame, Kwadwo Sheldon and Teacher Kwadwo. Due to the time-bound nature of the study, it is limited to the student population of the Ghana Institute of Journalism over a 3-month period.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field of influencer marketing by providing empirical evidence that may serve as a foundation for future research. It serves as

invaluable information to companies who seek to leverage on influencer marketers to positively affect consumer purchase behavior towards their products and services, as it provides empirically backed statistics on what works and what does not.

1.6 Operational Definitions

1.6.1 Social Media

Social media are web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modifies, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017).

1.6.2 Social media influencer

Social media influencers are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic on social media (Geysler,2021).

1.6.3 Celebrity

An artist who has a large following/fanbase (Ledbetter, 2017).

1.6.4 Consumer

A consumer is a person (or group) who pays to consume the goods and/or services produced by a seller (Lumen,n.d).

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter one encompasses the background of the study, the objectives, as well as the significance and scope of the study. Relevant theories that serve as the framework for understanding the phenomenon under study will be reviewed in Chapter two. Chapter three focuses on the methodology of the study. Here, the research design, the study population, sample and sampling techniques, instruments for data collection as well as the software used in carrying out statistical analysis is discussed.

In Chapter four, findings of the study based on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected is discussed. Here, frequency tables and figures are used to represent statistical data. Chapter five is a summary of all the major findings of the study and conclusion. Limitations of the study are stated and recommendations for future studies are also intimated.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section of the study focuses on reviewing literature relevant to the core ideas and objectives of the research. This section presents a review of literature regarding social media and social media influencers' roles in marketing. Chapter two also looks critically at the concept of consumer purchase behavior and the role social media influencers play in changing such behavior, while also contextualizing the most appropriate theoretical foundations that underpin this study.

2.1 Marketing

The concept of marketing has been defined from varying perspectives since the concept itself became prevalent in professional business. Iwu (2009) mentions that if one were to ask a group of marketers and marketing students what the concept of marketing means, their answer would be varied and entertaining as a 'circus'. This goes to show, as Iwu (2009) argues that marketing, in the current business landscape, developed into a rather complex system that does not lend itself to easy definition. Iwu contends that the complexity of the concept is largely as a result of its constant evolution, interaction with an increasingly complex and evolving social environment as well as its relevance and linkage to other business communication related fields. Gronroos (2006) however posits that the variations in the definition and conceptualization of marketing is not an indication of confusion but a requisite for having a broad generic approach to understand the concept.

The American Marketing Association (as cited by Iwu, 2009) defines marketing as a process that consists of "the planning and execution of pricing, promotion and distribution strategies to satisfy the needs of individuals and organizations." (Iwu, 2009, p.28). The definition presented is hinged on the idea that marketing concerns a set of activities that an organization or individual

undertakes to sell some products or services to consumers as an indication of organizational objective. Thus, the definition holds that marketing is a critical tool reaching some organizational objective which is to sell products and services to consumers. Other authors such as Jorge (2006), Varadarajan (2010) and more contemporary ones such as Cross (2020) have also tried to place the definition of marketing within this context, arguing that the core purpose of marketing is to ensure organizational objectives attainment through promotional, pricing and distribution strategies of delivering goods and services to consumers.

Some other definitions also look at the concept as a managerial function entrenched with high-level decision-making processes. Cronje et al. (2007) define marketing as:

Consisting of management tasks and decisions directed at successfully meeting opportunities and threats in a dynamic environment, by effectively developing and transferring a need-satisfying market offering to consumers, in such a way that the objectives of the business, the consumer and society will be achieved. (p. 283)

While positioning the definition of marketing within the context of organizational managerial responsibilities might be accurate and currently contextually relevant, marketing has also been defined as beating competitor organizations to determining and supplying the needs and wants of target markets (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994).

Kotler et al. (2009) provide another definition to marketing that presents a shift from the usual definitions that authors have presented over the years. According to Kotler et al (2009, p.7) “Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and freely exchanging products and services of value with others.” Here, the authors argue that while the idea of marketing is centered on exchanges in order to satisfy needs and wants, these exchanges must occur within a social setting. Their definitions present a social front to the concept of marketing, emphasizing that marketing does

not exist in isolation but as a critical aspect of society which affects and can be affected by social issues (Kotler et al., 2009).

Regardless of the perspective from which the concept of marketing is defined, the crux of it is that it concerns essentially a continuous interaction between marketers (who are representatives of organizations) and consumers on goods and services which require managerial decision making that combine appropriate and pragmatic strategies with achieving organizational goals (Iwu, 2009). Marketing therefore regards an interaction between marketers and consumers that requires the marketer to adopt the best pricing, distribution, and promotional decisions to deliver products and services in satisfaction of wants and needs.

2.2 Social Media

With the rise of digital and mobile technologies as well as the internet, interactivity amongst media users became easier than ever. The essence of interactivity and feedback (a critical feature that other media forms do not have) is what has triggered the relevance of social media in our world today. Social media often refers to recent forms of internet enabled media that involve interactive participation (Manning, 2014).

Social media can also be seen as those forms of electronic communication through which media consumers create and manage virtual communities with the shared interests of sharing information, ideas, and other content (Edosomwan et al., 2011). According to Edosomwan et al. (2011) it is almost impossible to define the concept of social media without touching on the concept of social networks. Often the term Social Networking Sites (SNSS) are commonly referred to as the umbrella term for social media and computer-mediated communication (Boye, 2015; Brandtzaeg, 2012).

Social Networking Sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct profiles, display user connections and search and traverse within that list of connections (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007). Contrary to other media platforms and indeed other computer technologies developed for communication, SNS have provided virtual landscapes that mirror elements of pre-existing physical communities. They have the capacity to link people together and create feelings of belongingness that are a replica of physical social communities (Boye, 2015). According to Shirky (2010) SNS have caught on well with society becoming arguably the most preferred means of information sharing and community building due to their low costs of collaborating, sharing, and producing information.

At the advent of digital technologies and the internet that facilitated the proliferation of SNSs, social media emerged as specialised social networking systems that facilitated quick online interaction (Bercovici, 2010). Social media sites include popular platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

2.3 Social Media Influencers (Influencer Marketing)

Social media influencers represent a new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape the attitudes and behaviours of audiences through social media blogs, social media sites and platforms (Freberg et al., 2011). In the age of digitalized information flow social media influencers have emerged as persons who hold some socially recognized currency on social media and use this currency to influence the behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes of other social media users. Using a host of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc., social media influencers are popular persons on these platforms who regularly update their followers with some latest information of interest. Due to their large following and information sharing tendencies, product and service marketers use them to publicize product information and promotions (Lim et al., 2012).

The idea of social media influence emerges from influencer marketing which emphasizes the use of certain identified influencers as brand drivers to put across product or service information across to target audiences (Lim et al., 2017). The essence of social media influencers thus is to

use their large social media following to engage audiences and activate awareness of certain product information. Social media influencers have now become well sought after by organizations especially smaller online firms who seek certain levels of social media presence.

Due to their potency, some marketing structures in some African nations are beginning to pay critical attention to social media influencers. While some pre-existing forms of endorsement marketing such as celebrity endorsement marketing were some of the main marketing strategies a while back in major African countries, nations such as Ghana and Nigeria are beginning to adopt social media influencer marketing as crucial marketing strategies. In Nigeria for instance, some marketing organizations have found a way of merging celebrity marketing, which used to be a crucial marketing strategy, into social media influencer marketing, ensuring that celebrities use their images on social media as well as social media influencers to double the results and impact (Jarrar et al., 2020).

2.4 Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

In its simplest meaning, the term consumer purchasing behavior or consumer buying behavior captures the selection, purchase and consumption of goods and services for the satisfaction of consumers' wants and their needs (Ramya & Mohamed, 2018; Qazzafi, 2020). Qazzafi (2020) avers that the concept of consumer buying behavior is a critical aspect of the umbrella concept of Consumer Behavior which looks generally at the psychological process consumers go through while choosing and using a product or service. According to Nguyen and Gizaw (2014), consumer behavior has become the core concern of most organizations because they are interested in understanding how consumers process information concerning their products, how they feel towards them and how they choose products over other products. Consumer behavior is therefore defined as the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use and or dispose of the goods and services. It also bothers on the ideas and

experiences as well as feelings consumers develop while making decisions concerning products and services (Nguyen & Gizaw, 2014).

To Rani (2014), the concept of consumer buying behavior refers to “the buying behavior of the ultimate consumer” (p, 52). Although this definition may be quite short, it provides insight to some critical aspect of the concept of consumer buying behavior. The definition contends that consumer buying behavior is primarily concerned with the buying behaviors of ‘ultimate’ consumers. This offers some insight into differentiating consumer buying behavior studies from other forms of marketing research. Thus, while consumer buying behavior is more concerned about understanding the purchase decisions of product buyers it does not concern itself with studying prospective buyers’ psychology.

Ramya and Mohamed (2018) aver that marketers are concerned with answering seven core questions when dealing with the issue of consumer buying behavior, hence in trying to understand consumer purchase behaviors the marketer must answer the following questions

- (i) Who is the market and to what extent do their influence the organization?
- (ii) What do they buy?
- (iii) Why do they buy?
- (iv) Who is involved in the buying?
- (v) How do they buy?
- (vi) When do they buy?
- (vii) Where do they buy?

Answer to the above listed question as Ramya and Mohamed (2018) posit gives the marketer a comprehension on the ways in which the buyer is most likely to respond to marketing stimuli.

Rani (2014) avers that for a consumer to make a purchase, certain critical issues affect how they think about the product before they go ahead to finally make the purchase. The factors that

affect consumer buying behaviors are diverse and are both intrinsic and extrinsic. They vary from factors such as culture, subculture, social class, membership groups, physiological factors, demographic factors among a plethora of factors. By understanding the core factors that influence customer buying decisions, marketers can develop marketing strategies and messages that are more efficacious, speak directly to the consumer and their informational needs and in the long run improve consumer purchase and even consumer purchase retention (Kotler et al., 2009). Literature such as the works of Rani (2014) and Kotler et al. (2009) suggest that there are four core factors that affect consumer purchase decisions. These include cultural factors which relate to consumers' beliefs and norms as well as cultural practices that inform their perceptions of products and services. Secondly there exist social factors that concern the influence of social structures, beliefs, and sub social cultures on consumers' perception on products and services. Also, personal factors such individual preferences, financial ability etc. Physiological factors of consumers are also critical factors that influence consumers' behaviours attitudes towards products and services (Rani, 2014; Kotler et al.,2009; Qazzafi, 2020).

2.4.1 Consumer Purchasing Decision Process Model

Before consumers make product or service purchases, they go through some active psychological process that enable them to decide on the product or service to buy vis a vis satisfying needs and wants. The consumer buying processes are the decision-making processes undertaken by the consumer when purchasing some goods or services (Qazzafi, 2019). The assumption of this model thus is that consumers go through a series of stages when deciding on what product or service to chooses when the need arises. Kotler et al. (2017) aver that the model first tells the marketer that the consumer is an active buyer and not passive. Thus the consumer has the potential to engage themselves in some cognitive processes when making a purchase. Also, the decision making model is essential for the marketer because it gives the marketer

some information on what strategies to implement and at what stage of the decision making cycle.

According to Kotler et al (2017) the buying decision making process follows a stage-by-stage processual format built on five core stages – problem identification, Information search, Evaluation of alternatives, Purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Regardless of the fact that the model is processual and follows a step-by-step approach some consumers on making decisions on certain products may tend to skip some stages. Qazaffi (2019) avers that this largely depends on the nature of the consumer making the purchase. For new purchasers however the entire five steps may be applicable.

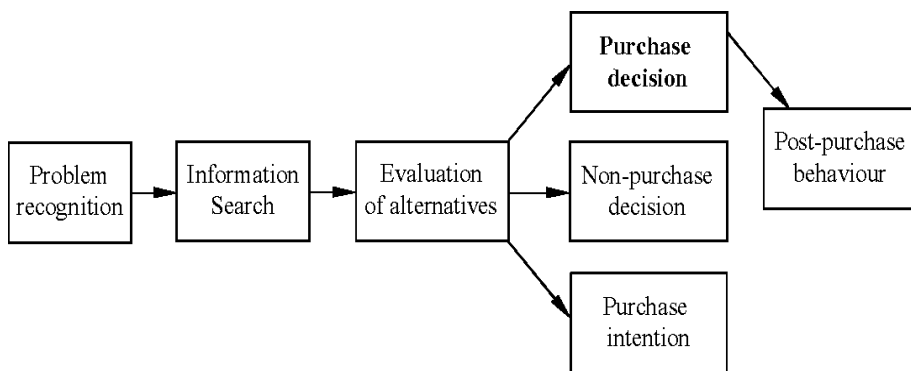


Figure 2.4.1: Consumer Purchase Decision Process (Munthiu, 2013)

i. Problem Recognition:

This is the first stage that consumers go through when making purchase decisions. It is sometimes known as Need Recognition. According to Engel et al. (1995, p. 176) need recognition is “the perception of a difference between the desired state of affairs and the actual situation sufficient to arouse and activate the decision process”. Need or problem recognition occurs when consumers perceive a difference between their condition or

state and some desired state they envision to be. The importance of this stage within the model is resident in the fact that until consumers can recognize that there is a problem or there is need to be satisfied, the process would not be initiated at all (Kotler, 2017).

The problem recognition stage therefore can be seen as a gap between a consumer's current situation and a desired one. Engel (1995) avers that two critical issues influence the desire of consumers to begin the problem recognition stage and for that matter the entire decision-making process. These are (i) the need must be highly important to the consumer and (ii) the solution should be within the means of the consumer (Engel, 1995).

ii. Information Search:

Once the problem or need has been recognized, the consumer now seeks information about possible solutions to the problem. The quantum of information as well as the quality that consumers search depends on the complexity of the product choice to be made as well as levels of involvement (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Korobinka & Bondarenko, 2017). According to Qazzafi (2019) this stage is more active for consumers who are trying out new products. For consumers who already know a product or service, the information search stage may be less cumbersome and may involve more of introspective information recollection than search. Hence, for such consumers they may rely on information from past experiences from using the product or service to formulate the kind of information they are in search of. Kotler and Keller (2017) however posit that for new consumers, information can be sought after from several sources such as family, friends, the media, neighbors etc.

iii. Evaluation of Alternatives:

The consumer now moves on to engage in evaluation of varying alternatives to the solution that they gathered from the information search stage. The core aim of the consumer is to make the best decision that helps him solve the need at hand. To do this the consumer will have to evaluate options and chose the most suitable one to his needs. This is usually done on two core aspects – objective characteristics of product alternatives and subjective characteristics (Korobinka & Bondarenko, 2017). Objective product characteristics simply regard attributes of alternative products such as features and functionality, while subjective aspects also include perceived value of the brand or product reputation.

iv. Purchase Decision:

Here, the consumer simply decides to on which product or brand to purchase. Consumers often purchase the brands that maximize benefits for them and solves their needs most.

v. Post-purchase Behaviour:

Once the product or brand has been purchased and used, the consumer evaluates its adequacy in line with its capability of solving their problem or satisfying the need. The consumer then decides whether he made the right choice or not. The consumer also forms some attitudes towards the product or brand depending on how satisfied he was with the purchase (Korobinka & Bondarenko, 2017).

The consumer buying decision process captures all these stages and presents marketers with a clear idea of the cognitive and affective processes consumers go through when making a purchase or a particular product or service or brand.

The Consumer Purchase Process Model is essential due to its linkage with the core activities of social media influencers – which is to disseminate product and service information amongst their followers. Social media influencers play critical roles at every stage of the model, influencing their followers to consider certain needs above others and hence initiate the whole process, give consumers information concerning products and services when they need to search for information, and re-enforce choice making for consumers.

2.5 Social Media Influencers and Consumer Purchasing Behavior

Talevena (2015) contends that product and service information shared by social media influencers are often regarded by their followers as reliable, making them compelling brand activators. Talevena argues that up to 82% of followers of social media influencers are likely follow their favourite influencers' recommendations. To Berger et al. (2016) their levels of potency in enforcing brand awareness among their followers the use of social media influencers has become a strategy that is more engaged by marketers than celebrity endorsement strategies.

In some instances, influencers marketing can yield up to 11 times higher the result of other digital marketing strategies (Lim et al., 2017). While some other strategies such as celebrity influence marketing can be critical to increasing brand awareness among consumers, social media influencer marketing gives the marketing the extra added advantage of increasing brand engagement and loyalty levels as they are more capable of communicating to a specific group of targeted audience.

Forbes reported in 2017 that 80% online marketers believed social media influencers are potential endorsers who boost online businesses remarkably. Forbes report indicated that social

media influencers were used by such online business as consumer purchasing intention stimulants who stimulated targeted audiences interests and intentions on purchasing certain products or services (Forbes, 2017).

Regardless of the seeming advantages of social media influencer marketing on consumer purchasing behavior, Jarrar et al. (2020) posits that the idea of social media influencer marketing is not as effective as some marketing personnel may make it seem. In their study while comparing the effectiveness of influencer marketing and social media advertisements, they found that paid advertisements on social media tend to be more effective than influencer marketing. They attributed this to the fact that audiences tend to psychologically store and retrieve messages from social advertisement than they do with influencers. However, Jarrar et al (2020) recommend that due to increasing relevance on social media influencers and 'social media celebrities', it would not be long before influencer marketing becomes the bane of online and digital marketing. Jarrar et al. (2020) found that 56% of respondents who were exposed to influencer marketing messages stated they intend to buy at least one of the products in the near future, when they could afford it.

From the foregoing it can be concluded that in recent times social media influencers have become a critical part of marketing strategies for many organizations. Influencer marketing as it has now come to be known, is crucial in especially affecting consumer purchasing behavior. Influencer marketing is particularly essential in affecting core issues such as brand awareness, consumer purchase intent, brand loyalty among many others that provide organizations that adopt such strategies with competitive advantage.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory was developed by Bandura (1963) and has become widely applied in a lot of academic research particularly within the communication, marketing, and advertising fields (Lim et al., 2017). The theory acts as a framework to understand socialization processes. Within the enclave of marketing and advertising the social learning theory can be used to predict consumption behaviors amongst consumers. The core assumption of this theory is that human beings in society learn because of their interactions with another person within a social context. The theory assumes that by observing the behaviors and receiving certain information from some members of society, a person develops similar behaviors (Nabavi, 2012). Thus, the roots of human behavior can be traced to a social context of observing the action and consequences of actions of other persons with the society.

Individuals adopt some behaviors as a result of seeing such behaviors and their associated consequences (either rewards or punishments). The core of Bandura's argument as developed in the social learning theory is that learning does not only occur as a result of personal experiences alone. However, critical building blocks of individuals' behaviors are observation and imitation (Sherry & Zane, 2012). Bandura asserts that through observation individuals develop ideas about how to perform new behaviors. This information as received because of constant observation is coded, stored, and developed into the memory. This creates a schema or guide for behavior either immediately or after some time when necessary (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1961).

Bandura's Social learning Theory comprises four major components – attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. These components make up and explain how individuals are able to constructively observe the actions of other persons and imitate them as part of their behaviours:

Attention: According to Bandura, one of the most critical things needed for behavioural learning to take place is that the individual must pay attention to the behaviour they intend to model. Certain characteristics of the observer and the person being modeled have some effect on the degree of attention the observer can give to the modeled behaviour (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1961).

Retention: This component deals with the individual's ability to retain or remember whatever information they derived from the modeled behaviour as a result of observation. Retention and recall can be done through the use of imagery and descriptive language (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1961).

Reproduction: Here, the observer engages in translating the modeled behavior into their own action and behaviours. This component relies on a conversion of information stored as a result of paying attention, and retaining the information through imagery and descriptive language. As the observer is more exposed to the modeled behavior and consistently practices the new behavior, reproduction of the behaviour improves and the behaviour becomes a patterned attitude over time that is reproduced with very little effort or cautious imitation (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1961).

Motivation: For individuals to effectively reproduce behaviours they have learned they require some motivation to do so. Hence, without some reason, either intrinsically or extrinsically developed, individuals would not find the need to engage in new behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1961).

Within the enclave of marketing and advertising, this theory has been widely used to understand consumer behavior through the impacts of various socialization agents such as families, celebrities, the media, and peers (North & Kotze 2001; Clark et al., 2001; Martin & Bush, 2000;

Makgosa, 2010). These studies argue that consumers learn to adopt some consumer buying behaviors from other social members and not as a result of their personal experiences with products. Makgosa (2010) particularly avers that this is even more played out well for consumers who are purchasing new products. Thus, consumers in search of some product or brand learn to buy a particular product or brand because they have observed some social agents buy them, use, or endorse them.

The theory was adopted for this study mainly because it aids the researcher to critically assess the factors that come play to when one wants to understand how social media influencers affect consumers' purchase decisions. The researcher therefore argues that the theory of social learning provides theoretical backing for investigating into the impacts of social media influencers on purchasing behaviors of consumers.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on reviewing literature relevant to the research objectives of this study. This section looked critically at reviewing crucial concepts such as marketing, social media and social media influencing. The chapter focused on exploring the role and essence of social media influencers in current marketing landscape. This section argued that social media influencers are crucial in affecting consumers' behaviors and attitudes towards products and services.

The section furthered explored the social learning theory as theoretical framework for this study. The section argued that product consumers who are exposed to product messages from social media influencers can be influenced to behave in some intended way towards products and services. Thus, the theory is situated within the study as it helps the researcher explain how consumers are influenced by social media influencers to behave in a particular intended way towards products and services.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This part of the research outlines the methodology used for the study. It explores the research design, the sample and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, population of the study, among others. Emphasis is laid on the various techniques the researcher has adopted to collect data for the research. In so doing, critical attention is given to the nature of data sought, carefully also considering the purpose of the research.

3.1 Research Design

Research methodology describes the overall research strategies that will be used in going about the conduct of the research. According to De Vaus (2008), the research design allows for all the different parts of the research to be integrated in such a way that allows the research to examine the research problem under examination in a meaningful way. In other words, the research design describes the various methods that the researcher used to go about the overall research process.

For the purposes of the current study a quantitative research approach is adopted. According to Creswell (1999), quantitative research is the type of research in which there is the collection of numerical data that is analysed using mathematically based methods. Thus, the quantitative method allows the researcher to be able to represent data using numbers, charts, tables, and mathematical equations. It also assists the researcher with meaning-making by providing a numerical and quantifiable view of the data and variables in the study.

This design has been adopted to help the researcher quantify results and to be able to make predictions based on results from the study. The objectives of the research seek to establish the various roles and processes used by social media influences as well as issues of trust, which

make the use of surveys a good choice that will give respondents the opportunity to share their thoughts through the use of the questionnaire.

Bryman (2001) argues that one advantage of adopting the quantitative approach is the approach's tendency to favour statistical data tools which help the researcher to save time and resources. Eyisi (2016) mentions that the use of numerical and statistical tools adds to the objective nature of the quantitative research approach. Furthermore, the quantitative approach also allows for generalization of findings. These advantages led to the researchers' decision to select the quantitative approach over other approaches. However, the survey research has some disadvantages in that some respondents may not give accurate answers, as some may want to impress the researcher by showing that they are not ignorant about issues when they may actually have no idea about the research topic. This may lead to inaccurate results and affect the generalisability of results. Also, respondents may be unwilling to respond to some questions, or could decide not to return questionnaires, and this can create some difficulties for the researcher.

These notwithstanding, the survey research design is an excellent way of soliciting the views of large number respondents in a quick and efficient manner, which allows researchers to work with large volumes of data quickly and make predictions and generalizations.

3.2 Research Population

According to Dulock (1993), population is an aggregate of totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. In other words, the population of a study includes all the subjects in the region or locale of the study from which the study group is selected. For this study, the population consists of students at the Ghana institute of journalism (GIJ).

According to the GIJ 2021 master's graduation brochure there are about 7000 students at the Ghana institute of journalism from the undergraduate level up to the master's level. Students of the Ghana institute of journalism have been used for this research due to the convenience in data collection that it offers and the time-bound nature of the research.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample is a part of the population selected to take part in research (Brink, 1996). In this study, a subset of 200 master's students were selected out of the entire population to take part in the research. This process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population is known as sampling (Mapp, 2006). Both simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to achieve a good sample. Purposive sampling technique was used to select masters students. This sampling procedure was employed to limit the sampling size to only a specific group of students (masters students) because they are likely to be more knowledgeable about the research topic under consideration. After this, a simple random sampling was further used to select 200 students to respond to questions.

Simple random sampling according to Easton and McColl (2005) is the type of sampling procedure in which respondents are selected from a larger group by chance. In this way, every member of the group or population had equal chances of getting selected to partake in the research. This removes bias and increases the likelihood that the responses that are obtained are genuine and not influenced by the researcher (Alchemer, n.d).

3.3.1 Criteria for Selecting Social Media Influencers

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the research limited the scope of social media influencers. Four social media influencers were selected to be studied for this research. They include Ameyaw Debrah, Abena Manakekame, Kwadwo Sheldon and Teacher Kwadwo. These social media influencers were selected for diverse reasons relative to their activities on social

media and their influence on marketing. Ameyaw was selected because he owns a media and marketing firm and is often engaged in social media marketing. Furthermore, the celebrity blogger is currently one of Ghana's most followed influencers on Instagram with 631,000 followers. Hence it is perceived that respondents selected for this study often come into contact with him while engaged in product information search on social media. Kwadwo Sheldon was also selected due to his following on twitter (154,000 followers). He is also widely followed on other social media platforms such as YouTube (291, 000 subscribers) and Instagram (659,000 followers). He also owns a media and marketing organization known as House of Content which is actively engaged in social media marketing. Teacher Kwadwo, with a following of 367,000 and Abena Manokekame, with a following of 287,812 (as of November 2021) were also selected based on their following on Facebook as well as their average likes per posts on the platforms.

3.4 Data Collection Methodology

According to Muhammed and Kabir (2016), data collection involves the collection of information from respondents in a logical and systematic way to ensure that the researcher can get meaningful information regarding the research problem. The survey method of data collection was used in this study. Survey is defined as the process of conducting research using questions that researchers send to respondents (Creswell, 1999). The data collected from surveys is then statistically analysed to draw meaningful research conclusions. Survey helps because it allows researchers to get data that is quantifiable from respondents

3.4.1 Instrument for Data Collection

The goal of data collection is to provide strong evidence about the research problem and ensure that findings of the research are credible. The instrument used for collecting data in this research was the survey questionnaire. Students were questioned using questionnaires. The questions were aimed at identifying the relevant issues and objectives of the study and structured in a way

to ensure that objectives stated were fulfilled through the response provided. The questionnaires were divided into two sections. The first section dealt with respondents' demographic data such as gender and age. The second section was made up of both open –ended and closed-ended questions.

Open-ended questions are questions that ask respondents to provide unstructured or spontaneous answers or to discuss an identified topic (Simmons, 2017). The open-ended questions enabled respondents to give reasons for their choices of answers while, closed- ended questions (sometimes called forced choice) asked respondents to choose from a fixed set of alternatives or to give a single numerical value (Simmons, 2017). The combination of both types of questions enabled the researcher to solicit adequate information from the respondents.

3.5 Sources of Data

Data for this study was obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data were obtained using survey questionnaires which provided the researcher with first-hand information about the influence of social media influencers on their purchase decisions. Secondary data was obtained from previous studies conducted on the topic under consideration. The data was analysed using literature review strategies, which afforded the researcher the opportunity to use the ideas of other researchers in support of the present studies.

3.6 Data Presentation and Analysis

Data analysis according to Srivastava and Thomson (2009) involves examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the data. This means data analysis can also be said to be an expansion of data to make meaning using different methods, whether quantitative strategies or qualitative representations. Famili et al. (1997) also argues that analysis is a systematic method for analysing textual information in a standardized way that allows evaluators to make inferences about the information. Data from the surveys were analysed manually using statistical methods such as graphs, tables, and charts that show the distribution and frequency

results of respondents. This allowed the researcher to present graphic images of responses in numerical formats that can easily be read and interpreted. The use of statistical tools also allowed the researcher to generalise findings on the general population of respondents.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Respondents in the study were asked for their permission before being involved in the research. Respondents were assured of confidentiality of information provided, as well as guaranteed anonymity. Respondents were also given the option to opt out of the research at any point in the process if they felt they were no more interested in answering questions.

Finally, respondents were assured that a copy of final research will be made available to them upon their request.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter presented the research methodology adopted for this study. It included the research design, data collection instrument, sampling, and sampling procedure as well as how the data was obtained, analysed, and presented. The subsequent chapter details the findings of the research by analysing and presenting collected data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on presenting analysis of the data that were gathered through the survey method. The chapter presents analysis of 200 respondents who responded to questionnaires administered by the researcher. It is essential to note that to clearly present findings made from the study, the researcher employed the use of simple tables and graphical charts such as pie charts, bar charts etc. The analysis of data has been presented in line with the research questions of the study.

4.1 RQ1: What is the role of social media influencers in consumer decision process?

4.1.1 Respondents' Awareness of Social Media Influencers

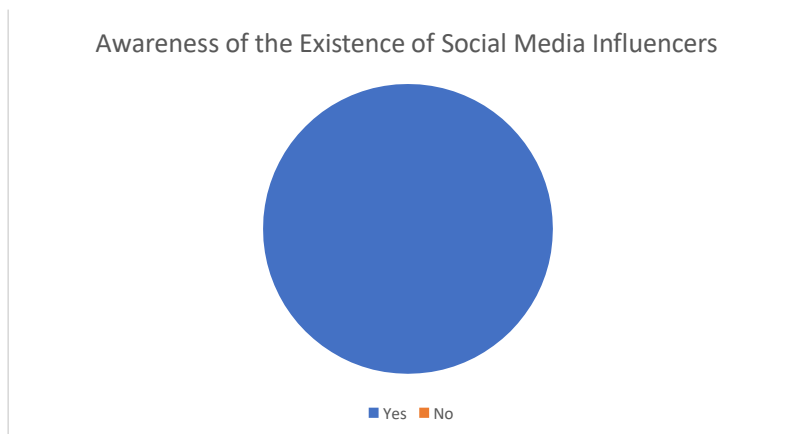


Figure 4.1: Pie Chart indicating respondents' awareness of the existence of social media influencers

(Source: Field Data, 2021)

The study sought to investigate respondents' awareness of the existence of social media influencers. The data gathered illustrates that all of the respondents sampled for the study were aware of social media influencers as indicated in Figure 1 above. This indicates that the sampled

respondents are aware of the idea of social media influencing and who social media influencers are.

4.1.2 Respondents' Preferred Social Media Influencers

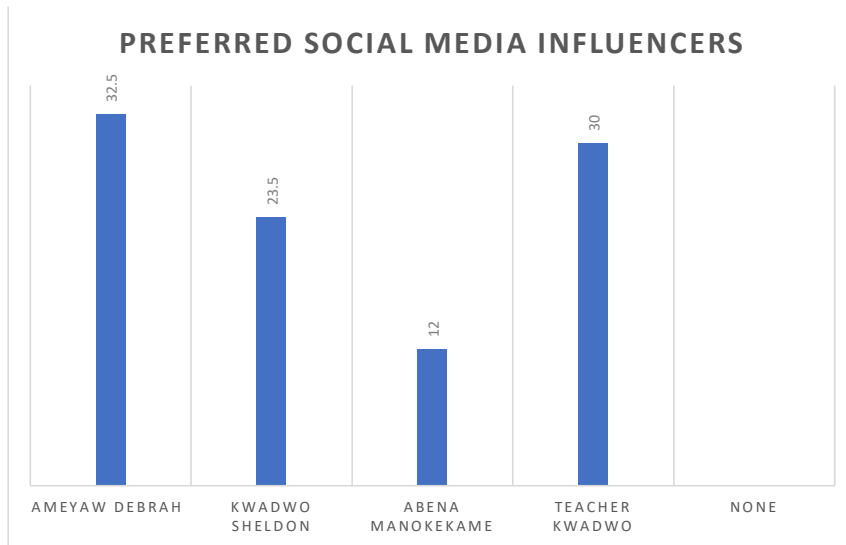


Figure 4.1.2: Bar Chart Illustrating Respondents' Preferred Social Media Influencer (Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The findings of the study indicate that most (32.5%) of the respondents identified Ameyaw Debrah as their favorite social media influencer. This is closely followed by 30% of respondents who perceived Teacher Kwadwo as their preferred social media influencer. 23% of respondents identified Kwadwo Sheldon as their favorite social media influencer while just 12% of the sampled respondents preferred Abena Manokekame. It is essential to note that all the respondents had at least one preferred social media influencer and hence none of them did not identify with none of the influencers. The findings thus imply that majority of the respondents believed that Ameyaw Debrah influenced their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors towards products and services. This is followed by Teacher Kwadwo, Kwadwo Sheldon and Abena Manokekame respectively.

4.1.3 Respondents' Perceived Roles of Social Media Influencers

The study was interested in investigating the roles of social media influencers in consumer purchase behaviour. Thus, the first objective of the study was to ascertain the roles respondents believed social media play regarding their attitudes and behaviours towards product and service purchase.

The data presented in Figure 5 indicates that more than half (56.5%) of the respondents perceived that the role of social media influencers in consumer purchase behaviour is to inform consumers about new products. 23% of the respondents also perceived that social media influencers inform consumers about product benefits while 19.5% of the respondents perceived that the role of social media influencers is to persuade consumers to try out new products. Lim et al. (2017) identifies that one of core roles of social media influencers in marketing today is informational. Thus, influencers' basic roles within marketing today is to keep consumers aware of products, services and brands as well as their benefits. The data however indicates that 1% of the respondents believed that social media influencers do not play any significant role in their decision making of purchasing products.

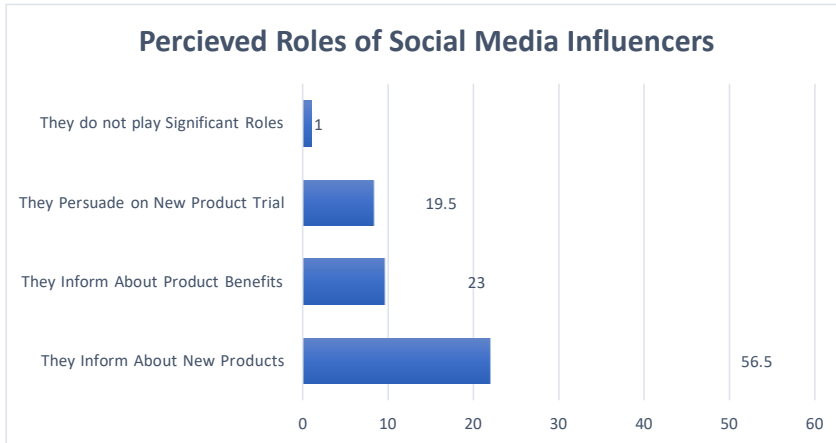


Figure4.1.3: Bar chart illustrating respondents perceived roles of social media influencers in product purchase decisions making

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

4.1.4 Perceived Roles of Social Media Influencers in Product Marketing

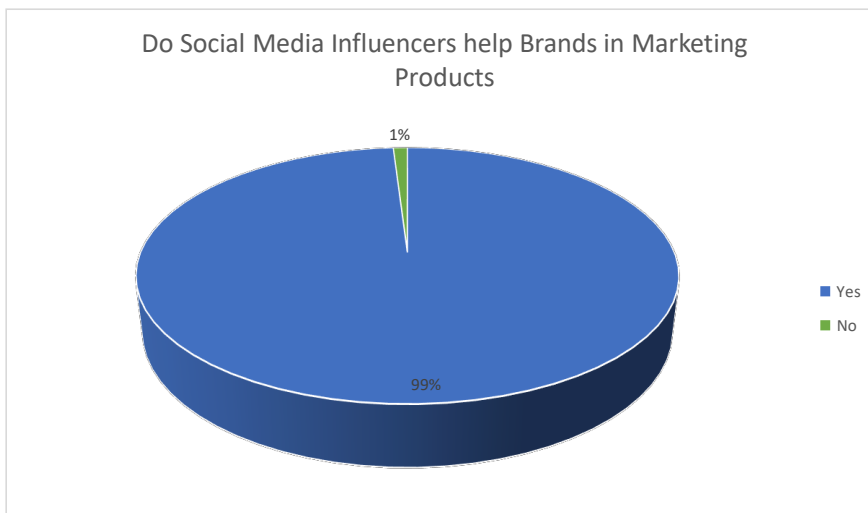


Figure4.1.4: Pie chart illustrating respondents view on social media influencers' role in marketing products

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The findings of the study presented in Figure 6 point out that majority of the respondents (99%) believed that social media influencers aid brands in marketing their products to consumers. The findings indicate that just 1% of the respondents perceived social media influencers did not play any significant role in marketing products and services to consumers. This implies that respondents perceived social media influencers as crucial parts of product marketing of most brands. This finding syncs partly with Jarrar's 2020 findings when he investigated a similar phenomenon. Jarrar (2020) found however that just a little over half of social media users he sampled perceived that influencers play crucial roles in their purchasing decision making processes.

4.2 RQ2: How do social media influencers promote brands and products in Ghana?

The second research question of the study was focused on ascertaining how social media influencers promote brands and products in Ghana. The objective of this was to investigate the strategies and set of activities respondents perceived social media influencers to engage in while promoting brands and products in Ghana. The objective was hence focused on understanding certain crucial strategies such as the various tactics employed by social media influencers in influencing consumer perceptions on brands and products. The objective was also interested in investigating the social media platforms influencers often used to promote brands and products.

4.2.1 Social Media Influencer Strategies in Promoting Brands and Products

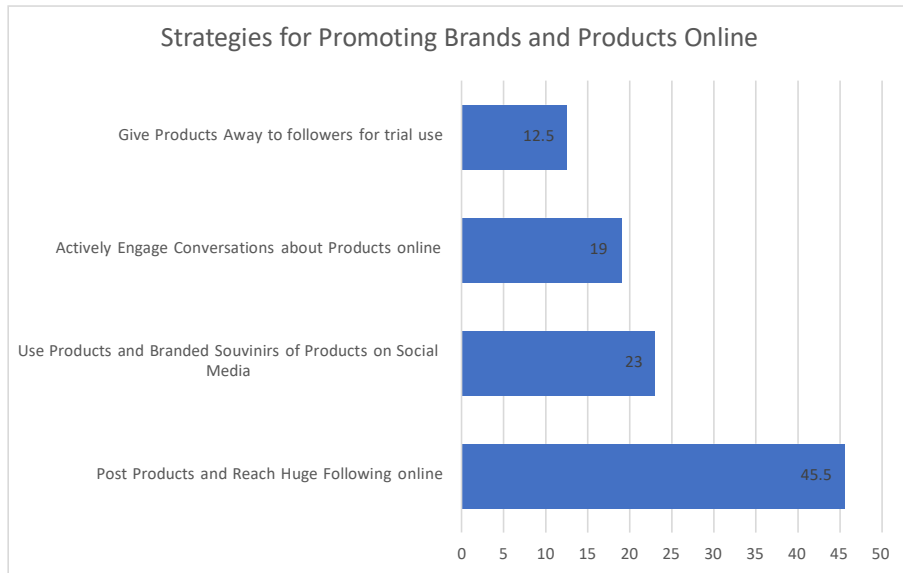


Figure4.2.1: Bar chart illustrating strategies Social Media Influencers employ in Promoting Brands and Products Online

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The study found that to promote brands and products to consumers, social media influencers adopt diverse strategies to influence the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of consumers towards products and services.

The findings of the study indicates that most of the respondents (45.5%) perceived those strategies that social media influencers employed in promoting brands and products to followers largely involved posting products on social media platforms to inform their large following about the products. According to Talevena (2015) up to 82% of social media followers of social media influencers are likely to be aware of a brand or product because of the influencer sharing information of products or a brand on their social media platforms. Talevena avers that simply

posting products on social media or sharing information about a product or brand on social media increases brand awareness of such products or brands.

23% of the respondents believed that social media influencers make videos and take pictures of themselves using products and product souvenirs and post them on social media platforms to influence their followers to also purchase such products. This is typified by Lim et al. (2017) who aver that a critical characteristic in the way that social media influencers operate is to develop videos and other media contents of themselves using products they want to promote in order to trigger some urgency of need amongst their large following. The study also found that 19% of the respondents perceived that as a brands and product promotion strategy, social media influencers actively engage in online interactions with their followers concerning the products and brands.

Furthermore, 12.5% of the respondents believed that social media influencer engages in 'giveaways' to promote some brands and products. Thus, social media influencers give away some products they are seeking to promote to some of the followers for trial use and to also activate word-of-mouth promotions from their followers.

4.2.2 Social Media Platforms Often used to Promote Products and Brands

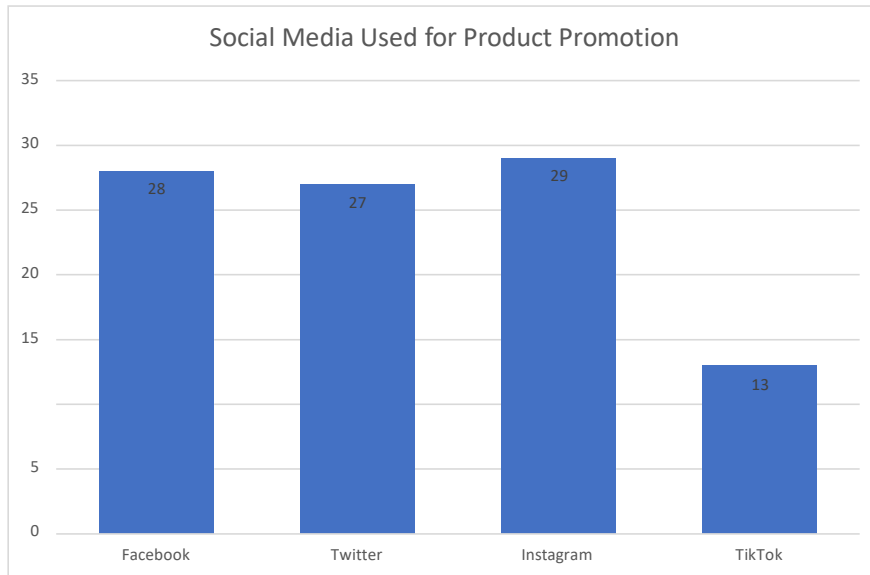


Figure4.2.2: Bar chart showing social media platforms social media influencers often operate on

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The data indicates that most of the respondents perceived that, social media influencers operate and promote brands and products mostly on Instagram. This is represented by 29% of the sampled respondents. Furthermore, the findings point that 28% of respondents believed Facebook to be a viable social media platform where influencers promote products and brands. Meanwhile 27% of the respondents indicated that social media influencers use twitter often while just 13% pointed out that influencers use TikTok often. Freberg et al (2011) as well as Lim et al (2012) assert that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are among the popular social media platforms that social media influencers often operate on. They posit that this is largely as a result of the interactive nature of these platforms as well as their tendencies to carry multiple media contents other than other social media platforms.

4.2.3 Respondents' Perception on Effectiveness of Social Media Influencers in Consumer Decisions Making

The study tried to investigate respondents' perceptions on the effectiveness of social media influencers on consumer purchase decision making processes. The findings indicate that about two-thirds (74%) of the respondents perceived social media influencers are effective in promoting brands and products. 22% of the respondents how indicated that social media influencers were not so effective in promoting brands and products while 4% could not determine whether social media influencers are effective or not. This implies however that majority of the respondents believed that social media influencing is crucial in influencing how consumer perceive products and brands. It therefore suffices to state that social media influencers are crucial in influencing consumer behaviours towards products and brands. Forbes reports that one of the most potent online strategies for stimulating brand awareness and subsequent brand and product purchase is social media influencing. The report indicates, in line with the findings of this study that

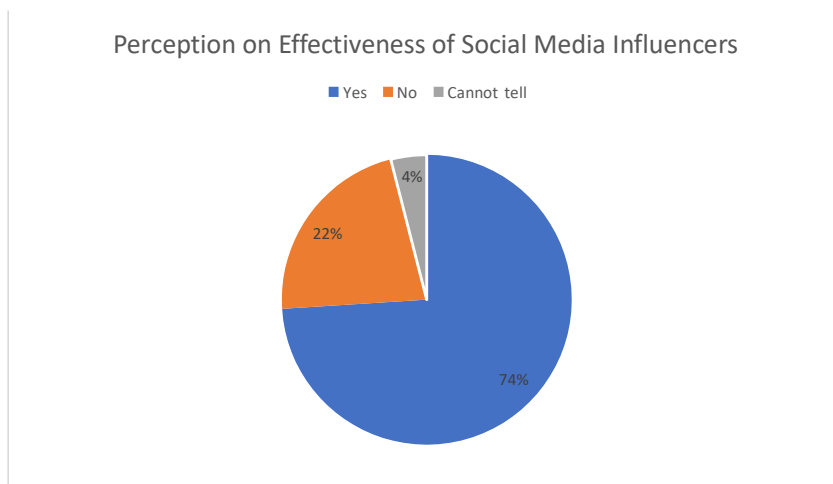


Figure4.2.3: Pie chart indicating respondents' perception on the effectiveness of social media influencers in consumer purchase decision making

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

4.3 RQ3: Do consumers trust social media influencers in Ghana?

The study further investigated trust levels among consumers towards social media influencers in Ghana. The study thus tried to investigate whether or not consumers trust social media influencers and the trust levels among respondents.

4.3.1 Respondents' Trust towards Social Media Influencers in Ghana

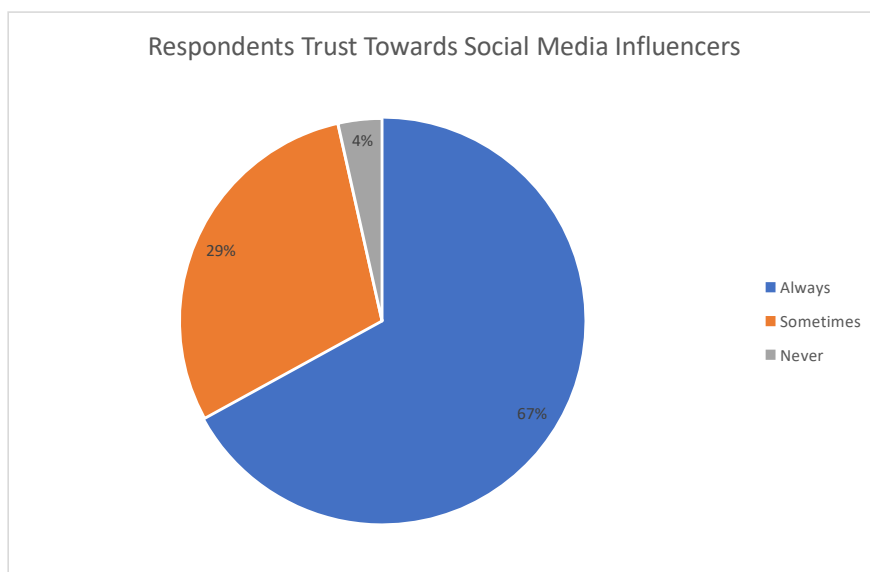


Figure4.3.1: Pie chart showing respondents trust towards social media influencers

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The findings of the study point that, more than half of the respondents (67%) indicated that they always trust social media influencers. Furthermore, the data shows that 29% of the sampled respondents sometimes trust social media in products decision making while just 4 % noted they did not trust social media influencers at all. The findings imply therefore that a significant majority of the respondents always trusted social media influencers on the products and brands they advertised or marketed on social media platforms while some maintained some levels of scepticism towards social media influencers. It is also essential to mention that regardless of the seeming high levels of trust towards social media influencers some respondents maintained

that they did not trust social media influencers at all when it comes to making decisions on buying products or patronizing some brands.

4.3.2 Trust Levels towards Social Media Influencers in Ghana

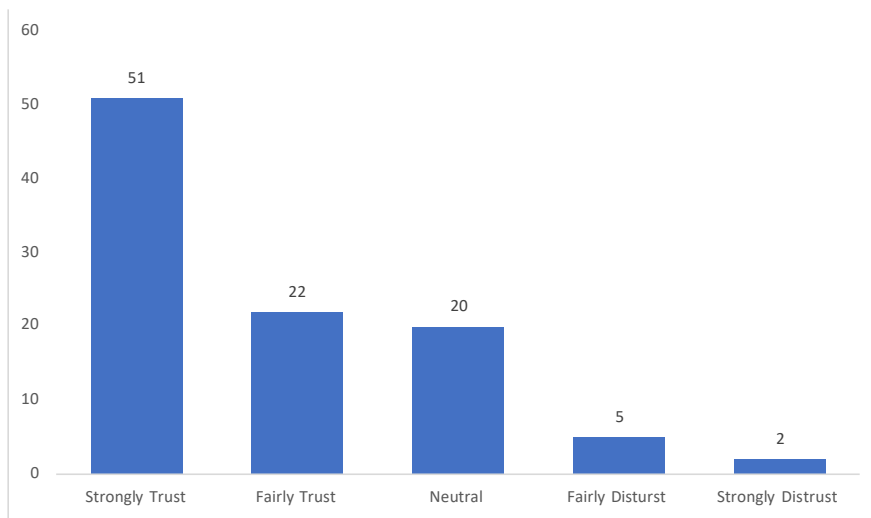


Figure4.3.2: Bar chart showing trust levels of respondents towards Social Media Influencers (Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The findings indicate that a little over half of the respondents strongly trusted social media influencers in terms of product and brand quality. 22% of the respondents also fairly trusted social media influencers while 20% of them were neutral to the question. Furthermore, 5% of the respondents held fair levels of distrust towards social media influencers while 2% of the respondents had very high levels of distrust towards influencers.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings of the study point that, social media influencers play crucial roles in affecting consumer perceptions towards products and brands. This is largely because consumers have high levels of trust for some identified social media influencers. Hence, while performing their functions as social media influencers such as promoting product information and creating awareness on new products, consumers perceived they felt strong levels of influence to either believe the information or act on the information being given them by these influencers regarding products and brands.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This part of the research presents a summary of the study, the conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of this research. The conclusions are made with the hope that this research would serve as a guide to future researchers and relevant stakeholders.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Social media has become an increasingly ubiquitous feature in human endeavors. The essence of social media and its numerous benefits have perhaps been felt more within the enclave of business and marketing. As a result of the advent of social media, owing to the rise of digital technologies, marketing strategies and principles have seen a great revolution. This revolution has become the bane of modern marketing and advertising for most businesses.

The benefits of social media as facilitated by digital technologies that enable fast paced information sharing and interactivity cannot be understated. Within the world of business, social media has become that crucial spine that holds together promotion, advertising, and marketing strategies. Literature concerning social media marketing highlights the crucial features of social media that marketers cannot forego in marketing strategies. Such features as high-level interactivity with consumers, instantaneous feedback, low-cost levels of operation, and comfortability amongst others have been touted with social media marketing as some of the core features of social media that has made the concept essential in marketing today.

This study has argued that in recent times a new wave of social media marketing strategy has emerged and with it are enormous benefits that marketers are beginning to pay attention to. Social media Influencer marketing concerns the strategic use of prominent persons on social media with large following to activate brand awareness and influence consumer behaviors and attitudes towards product. Literature suggests that this new wave of marketing has become more

essential than other forms of social media marketing as they have the tendencies to directly influence the purchase behaviors and attitudes of consumers. Thus, the use of social media influencers has become a potent strategy for activating some behaviors from the large following of social media influencers.

The core of this study was built on the need to investigate how social media influencers influence the purchase decisions and behaviors of consumers. Hence, the study was interested in investigating how social media influencers influence the purchase decisions and behaviors of consumers towards brands and products.

The study found that, respondents were aware of the existence and operations of social media influencers on various social media platforms. Thus, respondents asserted to understanding who a social media influencer is and what they do. Furthermore, when respondents were presented with a list of popular social media influencers which included Ameyaw Debrah, Abena Manokekame, Teacher Kwadwo and Kwadwo Sheldon, the results indicated varying levels of preferences for the identified influencers. The study found that, respondents identified celebrity blogger, Ameyaw Debrah as their most preferred social media influencer. The preference is followed by a relatively strong preference for other social media influencers such as Teacher Kwadwo, Kwadwo Sheldon and Abena Manokekame respectively. This indicates indirectly that respondents held different preferences when it comes to social media influencers.

The findings further indicate that respondents perceived social media influencers to play very diverse roles in marketing and advertising products on social media platforms. The findings point that majority of the respondents believed that social media influencers. These roles are expressed in informational and persuasive roles. Thus, the findings illustrate that social media influencers inform on new products as well as inform on product benefits and use. They are therefore crucial in brand and product awareness creation. They also play persuasive roles where they help persuade consumers to use or try products and brands.

As have been ceded in empirical literature, this study also finds that social media influencers are significant players in current marketing and promotions landscape. The findings point out that respondents perceived that social media are essential in marketing and promoting products and brands to them. Thus, in informing consumers about new products, product benefits, among other things, the use of social media is considered as crucial for most respondents.

The study also tried to investigate the strategies that social media influencers employ while promoting products and brands on social media platforms. The findings indicate that social media influencers employ strategies such as posting media contents of products and brands on their social media platforms to reach large audiences; using products and products souvenirs on social media; actively engaging their followers in online conversations about products and brands and; gifting some followers, products to try out. The findings identified that most of the strategies adopted by social media influencers concerned mostly, posting media contents of products such as images of products, videos and audios on social media platforms. The findings identified, as ceded in literature that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are among the top social media platforms social median influencers often operated on while promoting products and brands.

Additionally, the study found that respondents held very high levels of trust towards social media influencers. The study found that more than half of the respondents always trusted brands and products that social media influencers informed them about. Notwithstanding, the study also finds that some sections of respondents fairly trusted social media influencers in the products they advertised while some others did not trust influencers at all. The findings suggest that there are very strong levels of trust amongst majority of respondents although some respondents did not trust social media influencers at all.

The general findings of this study typify the Social Learning theory, which provided theoretical foundation for this study. The findings of the study, in line with the core arguments of its

theoretical framework, suggest that consumer learn purchasing behaviours from social media influencers. The Social Learning theory suggests that individual members of a particular society learn behaviours and attitudes from other social member who they often perceive as role models (Lim et al, 2017). As Sherry and Zane argue the Social Learning theory is premised on the assumption that individuals learn behaviours from studying actions of role models and their associated punishments and rewards. Similarly, the findings of this study point that by consumers model their purchasing behavior after social media influencers as a result of seeing them exhibit these products on social media. The findings of the study hence sync with the core arguments of the Social Learning theory.

5.2 Conclusion

Social media influencer marketing has become a crucial marketing strategy for many businesses in recent times. As literature suggests, social media influencer marketing has become more potent in marketing than other strategic forms of marketing such as celebrity endorsement marketing. This study argues in line with empirical literature that social media influencer marketing holds immense benefits to marketers in recent times. This is largely because social media influencers have the potential to influence the perceptions, behaviors and attitudes consumers hold towards products and brands.

This finding of this study suggests that indeed, social media influencers have the tendency of affecting the way consumers perceived products and services. They are essential in brand awareness strategies as they inform consumers on products and services, their use and benefits while playing crucial roles in influencing purchase or buyer decisions. The findings indicate that the nature of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter enables social media influencers to adopt certain strategies in order to reach large followers with product and brand information.

This study concludes therefore that social media influencer marketing is crucial in influencing the perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards brands and products. Furthermore, it is conclusive that social media influencer marketing is essential because majority of social media influencers have very large followings who hold very high levels of trust in the information they disseminate about products and product benefits.

5.3 Recommendations

The researcher suggests the following recommendations based on the findings of this study

- Marketers should devise proper mechanisms for sharing products and brands information to consumers through social media influencers as such influencers hold and manipulate the attention, attitudes and behaviors of a lot of consumers.
- Marketers should identify and train social media influencers on the rudiments of marketing as well as the negatives and positives. This is in order as social media influencers need to understand the basics of marketing to maximize their marketing efforts and in the long efficiency for organizations.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

- Other researchers should consider investigating the roles of social media influencers in brands and product promotion from the perspective of social media influencers and marketing organizations themselves and not from the perspectives of consumers as this study did. This will help generate data from a different perspective from this study
- Other researcher who intends to conduct similar studies should consider an increased number of participants as well as the adoption of a different research approach (preferably mixed methods approach). This will enable the researcher develop

pragmatic means to collect data using different diverse approaches to enrich data regarding the phenomenon.

- Future research should consider researching in a younger sampling frame with a diverse demographic background other what this study considered. This will make way for the possibility of making diverse findings other than what this study has revealed.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear student, my name is Justina Odoi, a student of the Ghana institute of journalism. I am conducting research on social media influencers and how they affect consumer purchase decision and will kindly request your views to help me complete the research. This research is entirely for academic purposes, and your responses will be strictly kept anonymous and will not be shared with any third party, except for academic use. Thank you for your time. (*This survey takes approximately 5mins*)

Bio

1. Age
 - a. 18-23
 - b. 24-29
 - c. 30-34
 - d. 34-39
2. Course
3. Sex

Objective 1. Examine the role played by social media influencers in the customer decision making process

4. Are you aware of the existence of any social media influencer or influencers?
 - Yes
 - No
5. Which of these social media influencers do you know? Please choose only one among the following influencers
 - a. Ameyaw Debrah
 - b. Kwadwo Sheldon
 - c. Abena Manokekame
 - d. Teacher Kodwo
 - e. None of the above
6. Please select (only one) which of the following statements best describe the role of social media influencers. Please select (tick) the best that apply to you.

Statement	Please tick
a. Social media influencers inform me about new products	
b. Social media influencers tell me about product benefits	
c. Social media influencers persuade me to try new products	
d. Social media influencers do not play any role in my view. I decide what I want to buy	
e. None of the above	

7. In your view, do social media influencers help brands in marketing their products?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. If your answer to question 10 is yes, how do they do this in your view? Please select only the best that applies to you.

- a. By posting products on social media
- b. By posting product information, promotions, and discounts on social media
- c. Post product location
- d. Change my view on which product to buy by giving me information
- e. Others, please specify.....

Objective 2. Find out the various ways by which social media influencers promote brands and products.

9. In your view, in what ways are brands and products promoted by social media influencers. Please select the best that applies to you

- a. They post new products and reach a lot of followers
- b. They wear the branded souvenirs of brands, and this makes them visible to social media users
- c. They actively engage in talking about products and brands on their social media space through posts and videos
- d. Others, please specify.....

10. Which social media platform do you most see influencers promoting products and brands? Please select the best that applies to you.
- Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
 - Tiktok
 - Others, please specify
11. Do you think social media influencers change your mind on what brands and products to buy?
- Yes, always
 - Yes sometimes
 - Never
 - I don't know
12. In your view, is it a good marketing strategy to use social media influencers?
- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know

Objective 3. To find out if consumers trust influencers or not.

13. Do you trust social media influencers as credible information sources?
- Yes, always
 - Yes, sometimes
 - Never
 - I don't know
14. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly Trust, 2 is Trust, 3 is Neutral, 4 is Distrust and 5 is Strongly distrust, please rate your level of trust in social media influencers in promoting brands and products
15. I trust social media influencers in promoting the right brands and products to me.
- Strongly trust
 - Trust
 - Neutral
 - Distrust
 - Strongly distrust

16. Between a celebrity and a social media influencer, who are you likely to trust more when they advertise products and brands to you?

- a. Social media influencer
- b. Celebrity
- c. None of them

17. In your view, are social media and celebrities the same or they are different?

- a. Social media influencers are different from celebrities
- b. Social media influencers are not different from celebrities
- c. I don't know

18. Do you have anything else to say regarding social media influencers and their roles ?
Please feel free to write it here.

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