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EXPLORING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN BRANDS
COMMUNICATION

BY

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SUPERVISOR: DR. KOBBY MENSAH

SEPTEMBER, 2020.

DECLARATIONS

STUDENT'S DECLARATIONS

I do hereby declare that the work presented is the result of my own effort, original research and findings and that no part of it has been presented for another degree or diploma in this University or elsewhere. All references to other people's work have been duly acknowledged. I am therefore to be held responsible for any error that might be detected in this project work.

(Candidate's signature)

DATE

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....., **SEPTEMBER, 2020**

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this long essay was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of long essays as laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

(Supervisor's signature)

DATE

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....., **SEPTEMBER, 2020**

DR. KOBBY MENSAH

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the Almighty God for His direction and His help throughout my life in this Institution and also for inspiring confidence in me to go through with a positive zeal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Almighty God for aiding me to complete this study successfully. My sincere appreciation also goes to my supervisor, Dr. Kobby Mensah for all the patience and times he had for me throughout my work regardless of her busy schedule. His guidance and pieces of advice were very helpful and contributed tremendously to the completion of this long essay.

ABSTRACT

Many organizations have identified social media influencers (SMIs) as relevant intermediaries, most notably because they provide access to and might even influence hard-to-reach stakeholders, e.g., teenage and young adult consumers or special interest groups. This study therefore sought to explore the use of social media influencers in brands communication. The study then set the objectives to find out who SMIs are, to ascertain why organizations use SMIs in brand communication and to determine the impact of SMIs in brand communication. By employing a review of secondary data research approach, the study found out that SMIs represents a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media. Also, SMIs are particularly attractive to brands and marketers who have started to develop a new communication practice, “influencer marketing” to take advantage of SMIs' content. With actions that include expressing their opinions in product reviews, offering tips on product usage, and posting pictures or videos containing products or services, SMIs represent a new type of independent third party endorser who influence their audiences' attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Strategic influencer communication has become a major topic in strategic communication (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench and Verčič, 2016). Enke and Borchers (2019) posits that many organizations have identified social media influencers (SMIs) as relevant intermediaries, most notably because they provide access to and might even influence hard-to-reach stakeholders, e.g., teenage and young adult consumers or special interest groups. This way, SMIs have gained impact on organizations' goal attainment. This study thus sought to explore the use of SMIs in brands communication.

Enke and Borchers (2019) espouse the view that it is therefore a logical step that organizations have begun to develop and establish strategic SMI communication as a communication instrument, which extends their strategic communication toolbox. Although some scholars appear to view SMIs as competing, possibly hostile voices (Gorry and Westbrook, 2009; Fregberg Graham, McGaughey and Freberg, 2011), others recognize the possibilities of forging alliances with SMIs to promote a brand or organization.

Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard (2018) align with the thought that social media has led online user-generated content to become a prevalent consumer practice. Niederhoffer, Mooth, Wiesenfeld and Gordon (2007) as cited in Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard (2018) support this line of argument as they state that social media allow users to develop and share content on a variety of topics, such as technology, beauty, fashion, politics, and health. Contributors post on various platforms to give their opinions, inform their network, share their expertise within a field or express their passions (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012).

In the ever-increasing competitive conditions of modern society, Finn (1961) as cited in Bozkurt (2018) posits that enterprises no longer compete only within the dimensions of

products, functions, specifications and quality but also within the areas of corporate image, brand and reputation. As we analyze concept of image, it is detected that a myriad of disciplines such as marketing, public relations, environment and management are collectively intertwined as well (Finn, 1961: Bozkurt, 2018).

Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) assert that research into strategic communication and other fields has produced first valuable insights about, for instance, how organizations can engage with SMIs. Pang, Tan, Lim, Kwan and Lakhanpal (2016) as cited in Enke and Borchers (2019) add that this also extends to how to adapt organizational activities to SMIs' working routines and the impact of SMI communication on stakeholders (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). A mature Public Relations (PR) literature has identified the characteristics of effective spokespersons, but relatively little is known about audience perceptions of the SMI. A better understanding of the perceived personality of SMIs provides tools for optimizing an organization's SMI capital (Freberg et al., 2011).

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A positive corporate image according to Lizarraga (2010) provides organizations with individual features that lead to brand recognition. Worcester (2009) in this regard notes that, this improves consumer and employee loyalty as well as corporate reputation that corporate image consists of product image, brand image and brand consumer image. Adeniji, Osibanjo, Abiodun and Oni-Ojo (2015) posit the view that organisations are understandably concerned with managing their corporate image. This shows that there is a strong positive correlation between how people perceive an organization and the pro-corporate supportive behavior. Cetin and Tekiner (2015) argue that corporate image is the picture emerging in the mind of target mass that any given enterprise aims to reach.

Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) are of the view that organizations considering the internet as a strategic communication tool have also recognized the power of influential members of this medium. Thus, bloggers who frequently share their brand experiences on a regular basis. These digital influencers have an effect on the members of particular communities gathered around similar interests (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014). These influencers can mediate messages and affect communities in the digital environment, where messages can be disseminated rapidly and easily with a potentially viral effect. Consequently, it is essential for brands to engage with bloggers, online influencers, in order to attain authentic and trustworthy presence among online communities (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014).

Strategic social media influencer communication in the view of Enke and Borchers (2019) has become a major topic in strategic communication. However, despite the growing relevance of this new strategic communication instrument, research has paid only limited attention to elaborating its basic concepts (Enke and Borchers, 2019). The growing power of bloggers to influence their connected network has emerged as a new communication venue for brands (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014).

With the views garnered from these various arguments in mind, the basis for exploring this topic is further solidified. The gap this study identifies was that even though the literature touches on SMIs and brand communication respectively, there appeared to be little work done especially in the case of exploring how organizations use SMIs as a means of projecting their various brands. This study thus attempted to fill this lacuna identified by exploring the use of SMIs in brands communication.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to explore the use of SMIs in brands communication.

This notwithstanding, these specific objectives looked at were set in order:

1. To find out who SMIs are
2. To ascertain why organizations use SMIs in brand communication
3. To determine the impact of SMIs in brand communication

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the objectives set for the study, the researcher attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. Who are SMIs?
2. Why organizations use SMIs in brand communication?
3. What is the impact of SMIs in brand communication?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Among the diverse ways this paper is relevant, the primary significance is to that it added on to the literature on brand communication by exploring how SMIs could be used to communicate in favour of brands. On another feat, this study thus helped understand this phenomenon and how to harness its advantages while serving as a means of equipping organizations with strategies which can help deal with the disadvantages of brand communication challenges. All this in the long run helped enlighten the role SMIs in brand communication.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This paper comprised of four (4) chapters. The first chapter was the opening part of the paper and included a background to the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions and the significance of the study. The next chapter then bothered on the reviewing

of literature. This chapter discussed the concepts and theories relevant to the study as well drawing on empirical studies to guide this study. The next chapter covered the research methodology of the study. The fourth chapter discussed the findings of the study and summarizing the study primarily. This then extended to the recommendations made by this study as well reflections from the researcher.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gave an introduction into the idea behind conducting this study. It comprised a background of the study which placed the study in a properly defined contextual setting. This was then followed by establishing the problem the paper seeks to solve as well as outlining research objectives and research questions which guided the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is organised under two main sections thus, theoretical framework and related studies. This chapter reviews literature related to this study. This was done with the expectation that relevant information would be obtained to help shape and enrich the study.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.1 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Kaminski (2011) espouses the view that the Diffusion of Innovation Theory was first discussed historically in 1903 by the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (Toews, 2003) who plotted the original S-shaped diffusion curve, followed by Ryan and Gross (1943) who introduced the adopter categories that were later used in the current theory popularized by Everett Rogers (1962). Katz (1957) is also credited for first introducing the notion of opinion leaders, opinion followers and how the media interacts to influence these two groups. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory is often regarded as a valuable change model for guiding technological innovation where the innovation itself is modified and presented in ways that meet the needs across all levels of adopters. It also stresses the importance of communication and peer networking within the adoption process (Kaminski, 2011).

It originated in communication to explain how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The end result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, or

product. Adoption means that a person does something differently than what they had previously. The key to adoption is that the person must perceive the idea, behavior, or product as new or innovative. It is through this that diffusion is possible.

Adoption of a new idea, behavior, or product does not happen simultaneously in a social system; rather it is a process whereby some people are more apt to adopt the innovation than others. Researchers have found that people who adopt an innovation early have different characteristics than people who adopt an innovation later. When promoting an innovation to a target population, it is important to understand the characteristics of the target population that will help or hinder adoption of the innovation. There are five established adopter categories and while the majority of the general population tends to fall in the middle categories, it is still necessary to understand the characteristics of the target population.

When promoting an innovation, there are different strategies used to appeal to the different adopter categories. *Innovators* are those people who want to be the first to try the innovation. They are venturesome and interested in new ideas. These people are very willing to take risks and are often the first to develop new ideas. Very little, if anything, needs to be done to appeal to this population. *Early Adopters* are people who represent opinion leaders. They enjoy leadership roles and embrace change opportunities. They are already aware of the need to change and so are very comfortable adopting new ideas. Strategies to appeal to this population include how-to manuals and information sheets on implementation. They do not need information to convince them to change. The *Early Majority* as well are people who are rarely leaders, but they do adopt new ideas before the average person. That said, they typically need to see evidence that the innovation works before they are willing to adopt it. Strategies to appeal to this population include success stories and evidence of the innovation's effectiveness.

The *Late Majorities* are individuals who are skeptical of change and will only adopt an innovation after it has been tried by the majority. Strategies to appeal to this population include information on how many other people have tried the innovation and have adopted it successfully. The final stage of the categories, the *Laggards* are individuals bound by tradition and very conservative. They are very skeptical of change and are the hardest group to bring on board. Strategies to appeal to this population include statistics, fear appeals and pressure from people in the other adopter groups.

2.1.1.1 Limitation and justification

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory also has some limitations which are worth noting. Chile (2017) notes that diffusion scholars often collaborate with manufacturers when examining a new product or innovation. Giving the needs of the manufacturer priority can compromise the quality of these studies. For this reason, study results are often weaker and less reliable when they focus on a business model as opposed to the social process by which diffusion occurs.

Again, Rogers (1962) ignored to mention that variables such as cultural norms and lack of the necessary infrastructure or networks to promote and adopt a new technology may hinder the process of adoptions. Also, Rogers (1962) focused more on the innovation itself rather than these socio-cultural differences as Chile (2017) again notes that poorly defined attempts at introducing an idea or innovation can impede diffusion. It works better with adoption of behaviors rather than cessation or prevention of behaviors. Again, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory does not take into account an individual's resources or social support to adopt the new behavior.

In light of these limitations however, the theory is relevant to this study because it has been used successfully in many fields including communication, agriculture, public health, criminal justice, social work and marketing. Bethapudi (2013) is of the view that the introduction of technology enables more accessibility, visibility of information, availability of variety of products and satisfaction. This therefore dovetails into the context of this study as in the race to employ the services of SMIs, not all organizations or businesses will take the action at a go.

2.1.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Many theories have been proposed over the years to explain the developmental changes that people undergo over the course of their lives. These theories differ in the conceptions of human nature they adopt and in what they regard to be the basic causes and mechanisms of human motivation and behavior. In the latter part of the 20th century, Bandura (1986) sought analyzes human development from the perspective of social cognition. This he did propounding the Social Cognitive Theory. The theory posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment and behavior.

The unique feature of Social Cognitive Theory is the emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. Social Cognitive Theory considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behavior, while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behavior. The theory takes into account a person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioral action will occur. These past experiences influences reinforcements, expectations and expectancies, all of which shape whether a person will engage in a specific behavior and the reasons why a person engages in that behavior.

Many theories of behavior used in health promotion do not consider maintenance of behavior, but rather focus on initiating behavior. This is unfortunate as maintenance of behavior and not just initiation of behavior, is the true goal in public health. The goal of Social Cognitive Theory is to explain how people regulate their behavior through control and reinforcement to achieve goal-directed behavior that can be maintained over time.

2.1.2.1 Limitation and justification

LaMorte, (2019) is of the view that there are several limitations of Social Cognitive Theory. One of such limitations is that the theory assumes that changes in the environment will automatically lead to changes in the person, when this may not always be true. Also the theory is loosely organized, based solely on the dynamic interplay between person, behavior and environment. It is unclear the extent to which each of these factors into actual behavior and if one is more influential than another. Social Cognitive Theory heavily focuses on processes of learning and in doing so disregards biological and hormonal predispositions that may influence behaviors, regardless of past experience and expectations. The theory does not focus on emotion or motivation, other than through reference to past experience. There is minimal attention on these factors. The theory can be broad-reaching, so can be difficult to operationalize in entirety (LaMorte, 2019).

This theory is relevant to the study because the Social Cognitive Theory considers many levels of the social ecological model in addressing behavior change of individuals. Social Cognitive Theory has been widely used in other disciplines as well. With the aim of this study to explore the use of SMIs in brands communication, this theory comes in handy. This is because this theory explains how the phenomenon begins to catch the attention of the organizations or brands so that it becomes a common norm in business.

2.2 DISCUSSION OF RELATED STUDIES

In order to fully immerse ourselves into a different mind-set and figure out how others think and feel discussion of related studies is relevant. For this reason, this study reviewed the works of Enke and Borchers (2019), Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014).

Enke and Borchers's (2019) study was on s SMIs in strategic communication which took the form of a conceptual framework for strategic social media influencer communication. The researchers adopted a strategic communication perspective to develop a conceptual framework for strategic social media influencer communication. Particularly, Enke and Borchers (2019) drew on research findings that identify the external resources SMIs contribute to organization influencer cooperation. Enke and Borchers (2019) used these findings to systematically develop functional definitions of SMIs and of strategic social media influencer communication. Enke and Borchers (2019) defined SMIs as third-party actors who have established a significant number of relevant relationships with a specific quality to and influence on organizational stakeholders through content production, content distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social web (Enke and Borchers, 2019).

Subsequently, Enke and Borchers (2019) defined strategic social media communication as the purposeful use of communication by organizations or SMIs in which SMIs are addressed or perform activities with strategic significance to organizational goals. Enke and Borchers (2019) then situated these definitions within the broader framework of strategic communication by discussing related concepts and by describing the strategic action field that had emerged around strategic social media influencer communication (Enke and Borchers, 2019).

Uzunoğlu and Kip's (2014) study elaborated on the role of bloggers in brand communication and revealed how brands could engage with bloggers, currently considered as online opinion

leaders, from the perspective of the two-step flow theory (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014). Following clarification of the aims of the study, Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) reported on in-depth interviews with 17 brand and digital agency representatives, selected because they regarded communication with bloggers as an important strategy in increasing the influence of their brands among online communities (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014).

This exploratory study according to Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) reflected current blogger communication implementations and concluded with a discussion of seven major issues arising from the literature review and inter-views. These areas represent relatively unexplored areas of blogger engagement from both an academic and managerial perspective. Based on the findings of the interviews, Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014) proposed a model which traced the influencer role of bloggers from the two-step flow theory perspective. This model was named as the brand communication through digital influencers' model (Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014).

2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter was hinged on reviewing the literature on how certain theories could help ground this study theoretically. Also, the researcher introduced related studies to bring to light an empirical perspective. The next chapter gives a presentation of the research methodology that was employed by the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research methodology this paper adopted. This will include discussing the various research designs which will then narrow in on the approach this study adopted.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Kothari (2008) is of the view that research design is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It comprises the various steps that are adopted in studying the problem. Creswell (2011) in line with this suggests that there are three (3) research methods namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. The research design provides a tense for how the research is carried out; it contains an overview of the methods used and the procedures followed and also it contains reasons or justification for choosing specific methods and or procedures.

3.1.1 Quantitative Research Design

This research will employ the quantitative approach which Creswell (2011) notes that quantitative research is the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study. Matthews and Ross (2010) also back this argument by suggesting that quantitative research methods are basically applied to the collection of data that is structured and which could be represented numerically. Generally quantitative data is collected when

researcher has adopted the positivist epistemological approach and data is collected that can be scientifically analysed.

3.1.2 Content Analysis

This study will employ the content analysis method. Columbia University Libraries (2019) defines content analysis as a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given data. This method helps researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts. This then gives researchers the opportunity to make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding the text. The study will in extension mainly explore the use of secondary data.

3.1.3 Secondary Data

Boslaugh (2007) as cited by Martins and Serra (2018) defines secondary data as every dataset which is not obtained by the author. Secondary data may include data that has been previously gathered and is under consideration to be reused for new questions, for which the data gathered was not originally intended (Vartanian, 2010). Martins and Serra (2018) suggest that the usage of secondary data in research has proved itself a valuable approach to finding suitable data and encourage that this should be used more often in research. By doing so, research may be done in a quicker pace, without loss of quality and confiability (Martins and Serra, 2018). As a result of the methodology adopted, this study will rely mainly on secondary data. These secondary data will be used till span books, journal articles, online/internet materials, among other publications on SMIs and brand communication and branding generally. On the issue of ascertaining influencers whose activities are “live” and for that matter “realtime”, measuring tool such as Keyhole, Hootsuite, Twitter Counter, Digimind, Tweet Reach, Sprout Social, Klout among others can be used in that regard (*SocialMediaToday*, 2020). *SocialMediaToday* (2020) for instance notes that one way to

make social media work is by monitoring audience behavior and seeing what they have to say about the organization or brands products and services as well as competitors.

3.2 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Ensuring the reliability of this paper was very essential as it was a fundamental basis for replication among other things. The research thus worked closely with the supervisor extensively for guidance throughout the span of the paper. Also, the researcher ensured the paper was reviewed by peers in order to garner different perspectives.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

In ensuring ethical research ethics, the researcher adopted a strict policy of citing all scholarly work or materials used for this paper. This was done in an attempt to refraining from committing academic plagiarism and intellectual theft.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the research methodology this paper adopted. The paper adopted a quantitative approach where content analysis was employed. This method was limited to employing only secondary data to analyse the phenomenon at hand and for analysis purposes. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study and summarizes the study as well as suggesting recommendation and spelling out limitations among other things.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses findings of the study as well as a summary. The chapter will further outline the originality of this study as well as recommendations made for stakeholders and future research.

4.1 FINDINGS

Brand communication has to do with distinguishing and idea or image of a product or service so that the distinctiveness is identified and recognized by many consumers (Jones and Kim, 2011; Chinomona, 2016). According to Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı and Özşahin (2011), the objective of brand communication has been to expose the audience to a brand, whereby the effect can be maximized in terms of increased awareness and higher recall, so that the customer will buy the brand which has the highest recall and to satisfy the customer to the optimum level. Several previous studies have shown that direct brand communication can influence consumers' satisfaction for a brand (Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı and Özşahin, 2011). This section discusses the research objectives set in order to achieve the research questions set by the study.

4.1.1 To find out who SMIs are

As contributors gain increasing numbers of engaged followers, they may develop into social media influencers (Etter, Colleoni, Illia, Meggiorin and D'Eugenio, 2018). With actions that include expressing their opinions in product reviews, offering tips on product usage and posting pictures or videos containing products or services (Bernritter, Verlegh and Smit,

2016), SMIs in the view of Freberg et al. (2011) represents a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media. Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-Manière & Stankeviciute (2013) posit that there has been an increasing relevance of digital influencers and the mechanisms through which they affect the formation of their followers' attitudes and decisions.

Leveraging on a number of social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube, SMIs are publicise product information and latest promotions to online followers (Markethub 2016). SMIs typically engage with their followers by regularly updating them with the latest information (Liu, Jin, Briones and Kuch. 2012). Talaverna (2015) asserts that SMIs are often perceived as more reliable and compelling to consumers therefore organizations generally invite SMIs as their brand ambassador (Tapinfluence, 2017).

Consumers are reported to be more likely to follow their favorite influences' recommendations (Talaverna, 2015). Compared to celebrity endorsement promotion strategy, the use of SMIs are regarded as more credible, trustworthy and knowledgeable due to their amiability in building rapport with consumers (Berger et al. 2016: Lim, Radzol, Cheah and Wong, 2017), especially for businesses that target the younger generations.

4.1.2 To ascertain why organizations use SMIs in brand communication

By taking advantage of Web 2.0 technologies, companies are using social network sites to promote and relay information about their brands (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012). With Internet World Stats (2013) disclosing that the number of people accessing the Internet exceeding 34 per cent of the world's population and over 3.6 billion active users accessing the social network sites a number projected to increase to almost 4.41 billion in 2025 (Clement, 2020), several brands stride to connect with customers and enhance their brand communication using social media channels (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Social media is changing traditional marketing communication and also, internet users are gradually shaping brand

communication that was previously controlled and administered by marketers (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015).

One way brands can harness SMIs' content is to engage in influencer marketing, which involves SMIs incorporating brand messages within their posts in return for rewards (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2017). Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard (2018) assert that this is also referred to by some practitioners as “sponsored” or “seeding campaigns” and “organic” or “native advertising,” influencer marketing represents a growing trend in promotional strategies with varying degrees of brand encroachment. As such, influencers can complement traditional branding communication by serving as an embodied presentation of their personal tastes and clothing choices (Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard, 2018). Thus, SMIs are particularly attractive to brands and marketers have started to develop a new communication practice, “influencer marketing” to take advantage of SMIs' content (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017).

4.1.3 To determine the impact of SMIs in brand communication

WARC (2019) notes that the popularity of social media has prompted corporate brands to employ online personalities, who endorse the brand and influence followers' perceptions with their communications. These personalities, also known as SMIs, have amplified the popularity of influencer marketing globally (Schomer, 2019). Reports indicate that over two thirds of multinational brands around the world plan to increase expenditure on influencer marketing within the next few years (World Federation of Advertisers, 2018), with global spending in the area expected to reach \$15 billion by 2022 (Schomer, 2019).

Lu, Chang & Chang (2014) argue that SMIs enhance consumers' positive perceptions about a brand and consequent purchase intentions. This according to Hwang & Zhang (2018) is prevalent especially when influencers are able to build a connection with consumers and are perceived as credible (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). SMIs in Cocker & Cronin (2017)

thought tend to gain credibility and popularity by forging communal relationships based on collaboration and the sharing of mutual benefits with followers. Taken together, existing studies suggest a positive impact of SMIs' presence on consumers' perception, thereby indicating that brands benefit from investing into influencer marketing (Singh, Crisafulli and Xue, 2020).

Singh, Crisafulli and Xue (2020) espouse the view that often, organizations partner with SMIs to bolster brand image and that these influencers have largely positive effects on brands. Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard (2018) are of the view that as a result of the persuasive power of SMIs, technologies have been developed to identify and track the influencers' relevance to a brand or organization. Most of these efforts to identify SMIs rely on factors such as number of daily hits on a blog, number of times a post is shared, or number of followers (Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard, 2018). Given the recognition that online influence is about quality, not quantity, these methods should be viewed as a starting place only (Basille, 2009; Straley, 2010). PR practitioners need additional tools to evaluate the quality and relevance of particular SMIs to their organizations and brands and to compare audience impressions of one SMI relative to others (Audrezet, De Kerviler and Moulard, 2018).

4.2 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the findings of the study. This was done by addressing the objectives set the study. The next chapter presents the conclusion and recommendation of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 DISCUSSION OF SUMMARY

The extant literature shows that brand communication has been consistently found to play an important role in creating positive brand attitudes (Keller and Lehman, 2006; Chinomona, 2016). It is therefore, the primary integrative element in managing brand relationships with customers and creates positive brand attitudes such as brand satisfaction and brand trust (Sahin, Zehir and Kitapçı, 2011). This study therefore sought to explore the use of social media influencers in brands communication.

The study then set the objectives to find out who SMIs are, to ascertain why organizations use SMIs in brand communication and to determine the impact of SMIs in brand communication. With actions that include expressing their opinions in product reviews, offering tips on product usage, and posting pictures or videos containing products or services, SMIs represent a new type of independent third party endorser who influence their audiences' attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Freberg et al., 2011). From the literature reviewed, the underlying and resounding view is that as much as brand communication was essential to organizations and brands, the role of SMIs is very essential to achieve this feat.

5.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE WORK TO KNOWLEDGE

The contribution of this paper to the body of knowledge cannot be underscored. This study is relevant as it has raised certain pertinent questions about the use of SMIs in brands communication, probed and answered them. This feat will help guide the scholarly discourse on and around how SMIs could be harnessed to corporate bodies.

5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study set out to be a five-chapter project work however as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope of the study was adjusted to fit a four-chapter paper. Aside this mishap, the scope of the study was limited to only reviewing of secondary data. Future studies should endeavour to replicate this study by generating primary data. This could present the possibility of multiple perspectives.

5.3 RECOMMENDATION

After an assessment of the literature and reconciling with reality, the study recommends that organizations should take advantage of the phenomenon of SMIs in order to ensure effective brand communication. In order to tread on the side of caution, organizations should institute some form of policy to guide their interactions with SMIs. In the long run, this can emanate to become a norm in the corporate limelight as well as in governmental agencies space. Also, further studies can be done along the lines of replicating the study in other variables such as brand loyalty, brand equity among others.

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