

INFLUENCER MARKETING ON INSTAGRAM: AN ANALYSIS ON THE PERCEPTION OF THE INFLUENCER'S CREDIBILITY BY GENERATION - Z

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INTRODUCTION

With the evolution of advertising, advertisers have found ways and means to advertise products. Generation z being hooked onto their smart phones and gadgets hardly watch television and its advertisements. With OTT platforms there is all the more possibility to skip ads. Therefore advertising has become more challenging to reach the generation z audience. To target the generation Z through social media platforms, advertisers have found people who are celebrities having more number of followers. They are now considered as influencers, where they talk about a product and its uses, indirectly influencing their followers on that particular product.

All types of products are promoted by these influencers. Influencers who have hit the 1 million follower count are considered to be mega influencers. Unlike the television standards, advertisement or propagating alcohol brands is allowed through social media market. Ethical norms or standard does not apply in terms of alcohol brands through influencer marketing. Lily singh who is a mega influencer is taken up for the study. She is a stand-up comedian and endorses alcohol brands. Even though she lives in Canada, she is an Indian Punjabi and her content aims completely for Indians. Most of the followers that she has acquired are also Indians. The content for all her ads are scripted by her. Since she is a comedian, she uses the humour appeal and sarcastic appeal in her ads. One such endorsement during an Indian festival season called Diwali is taken for the study on the grounds of ethical persuasion using the TARES test that was done among generation Z. 20 participants were chosen for the study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INSTAGRAM

Social media makes it feasible to interact with the aid of computers to promote ideas, exchange information, aid professional interests and other types of expression through communities and virtual networks (Kietzmann et al., 2011). A person's user profile is linked with those of others so that one can develop online social networks (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). According to an online statistical report, it is found that Instagram is now in the 4th position concerning the world's most popular networks. (Statista, 2021). Researches support the fact that a majority of the world's population relocate their time from twitter and facebook, on Instagram (Forrester, 2015). In recent days, Instagram is being used widely for the purpose of advertising as companies believe that it affects the consumer buying behaviour to a greater extent (Rebel, 2017). It has also been found by researches that social media networks enhances the content through increased notifications, followings and likes, proving it to be effective enough. (Aragon, 2014 & Vilnai-Yavetz & Tifferet, 2015). Instagrams feature of visual story telling is considered as an asset to hold people's attention, grab their interest with an aim to attain purchase intention. Web 2.0 applications are continuously being used and incorporated by smart phones but largely based on the content created by its end users in the form of comments and feedback from social media (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2003).

CREDIBILITY

Recently, guidelines were imposed to influencers when they advertise a product. One of which was the essence of using the word "sp – sponsored ad" or "ad – Advertisement", so that people should not be fooled into a buying a product just because their favourite person suggests it. In a study done by Susanna Lee & Eunice Kim (2020) it was found that there was no major difference in terms of credibility on the influencer even if they had disclosed words such as sp or ad. Consumers were already well aware of the fact that these influencers advertise and consumers did not blindly trust them. It was also found that that the credibility of the influencer,

be it a highly credible one or not it was found it had no effect on the perceived credibility, purchase intention or Electronic word of mouth. This could be because of the fact that consumers already realise that it is an advertisement.

Consumers already have developed a negative opinion on Influencers and celebrities turned Influencers like Beyonce and Kardashian. Consumers say that the review that they give is not genuine but a result of a paid promotion. This was already confirmed by Wei and Lu (2013) in their study.

Consumers on the contrary trusted on credible brands rather than credible Influencers. It was found in previous researches by (Fombrun, 1996; Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990; Newell, 1993). Park & Lee, 2013 have found that brand power is the most important factor to retain loyal consumers.

It was also found in a recent study that the information filled content generated by the influencer positively affects the trust of the followers in terms of branded posts and purchase intentions (Chen Lou & Shupe Yuan (2018). These findings were partially confirmed with that of the study made by (Dao et al. 2014). Furthermore it was found that the Influencers attractiveness, trustworthiness and similarity connect between the followers and the influencer had a positive effect on the credibility of the Influencer. This was already found by the researchers (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). It was also found that Indian woman Influencer's are constantly been faced with conflict messages on various women's issues and the Influencer makes it a point to address those intentionally (Raj, D., Thiagarajan, A., & Vasanth. G, 2021).

RESEARCH GAP

Influencers Credibility perceived by generation Z in Tamil Nadu, India in the form of TARES test has to be identified. Research on developing TARES test for what was considered to be unethical brand like alcoholic is needed to be pursued especially when it is done by Influencers over social Media targeting generation Z.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used to carry out the research. Content analysis was done on one of the posts of lily singh dated November 4th, 2021. This particular post was chosen on two terms – festival paid partnership and because it was a banned product on mainstream media. Another analysis in the form of In - depth interview was conducted with 20 participants who belonged to the age category of 19 to 20. Twenty Questions were asked under the five categories namely, Trustworthiness, Authenticity, Respect, Equity and Social responsibility (TARES). Participants were shown the Ad before answering the questions. A brief introduction about the influencer was also given. The participants had to answer the questions based on the Ad that they had seen on the alcohol brand during the festive season of Diwali.

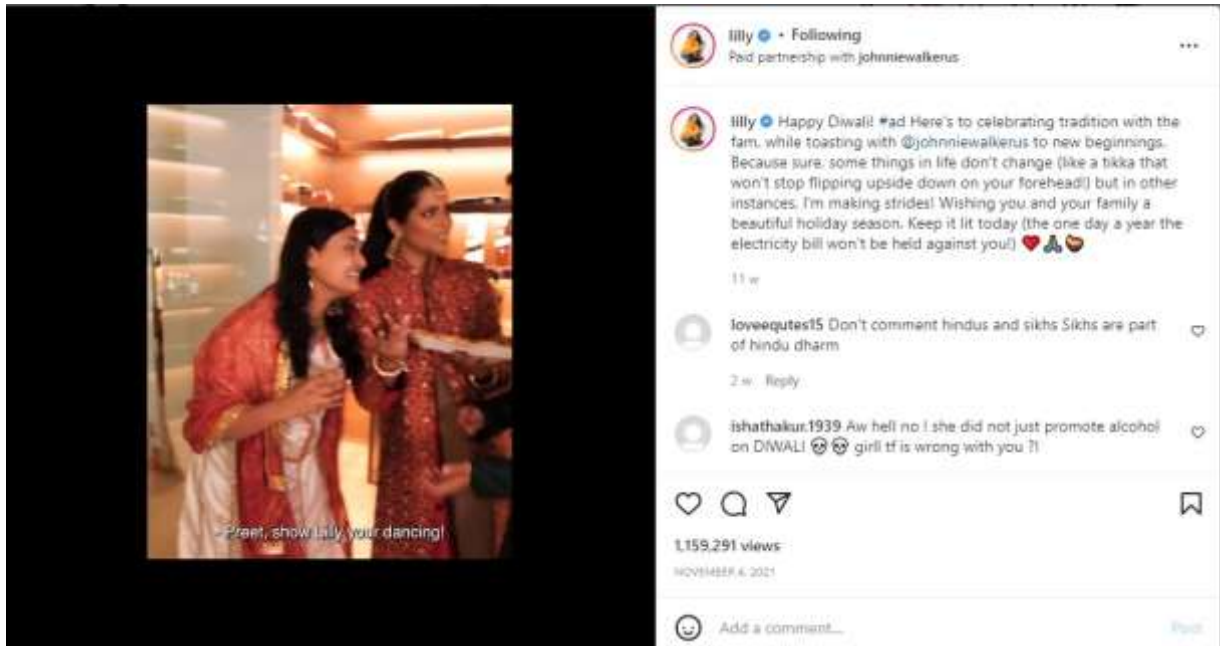
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To analyze whether Ethical persuasion was carried on by the influencer
- To understand the perspective of the generation Z on the persuasion by the Influencer.
- To understand how alcoholic ads by social media Influencers are perceived by generation Z.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Baker and Martinson (2001) developed the TARES test to comply on the five principles ethical persuasion namely truthfulness, authenticity, respect, equity and Social Responsibility. This s based on Utilitarianism where the results of the action are equally important to the action itself in terms of equating it to its ethicality (Patterson, Wilkins & Painter, 2019) Utilitarianism counts on everyone's happiness. Promotion of overall goodness is considered. Though Influencers try and influence people on various products, TARES helps in identifying the ethicality in persuasion done by the Influencers, to find out the aspect of goodness through the consumers perspective and how they perceive Influencers as.

ANALYSIS



Date : 4th November,2021
Caption : Happy Diwali!
Type of Post : Video
Duration of the video : 1 minute
Number of Views : 1,159,291
Number of Comments : 1338
Hashtag used : #ad
Environmental setting : Indoor, with family
Music : Original Audio
Appearance of the influencer : Fusion Indian Traditional attire
Gesture : Formal yet a casual representation of herself.

Content : Here's to celebrating tradition with the fam, while toasting with @johnniewalkerus to new beginnings. Because sure, some things in life don't change (like a tikka that won't stop flipping upside down on your forehead!) but in other instances, I'm making strides! Wishing you and your family a beautiful holiday season. Keep it lit today (the one day a year the electricity bill won't be held against you!) ❤️👍🙏

Discussion : The woman influencer tries to promote an Alcohol brand Johnnie Walkerus. She has mentioned it as a paid promotion and hashtagged it as an Ad. She has broken the gender based stereotype in the Ad. But in the comment section, people have not liked her promoting an alcohol brand for a religious festival like Diwali. They have spoken ill about her for promoting alcohol on an auspicious day for the Hindus and Sikhs where they don't drink. A majority of the comments are mostly negative. There is also another group of respondents who have supported lily for her bold move and her non hypocritical behaviour. International respondents apart from India have also applauded her initiative on the same.

TARES TEST

Truthfulness

When asked about whether the consumers rely on the influencer and believe what she propagates about the product, most of the respondents said that they don't trust the influencer, while few said that they trust her but not what she propagates. While one of them said that they trust her as an influencer. But a majority of them said that Influencers cannot be trusted and have motives.

Out of the 20 respondents, 18 of them observed that the influencer was sincere in her approach. They felt the way she tried to convey about the product was a very honest approach and she was being truthful to the brand that she is an ambassador for.

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Responders did have trust issues. They had trust issues because of an alcohol brand being advertised for an auspicious festival like Diwali. The Influencers reputation was being attacked here because of the product.

A majority of the audience seemed to believe and also like the content because of the humour content it had. They said Lily Singh is noted for her original humorous content and also people were aware that all her advertisements content are done only by her. Only few did not seem to like the content because of the product and its non reliability in a conservative society like South India.

A majority of the responders were quite confused about the ethical norms. They were not aware of the ethical norms and was not sure whether the influencer followed them. Few who followed Lily Singh said that since she is a renowned personality she will definitely follow ethical norms and abide by it. However, the researcher intended to know whether the influencer followed ethical norms in terms of representing a brand. Whether the Influencer advertised for rival brands or clash of ideologies for which there was no apt result.

Authenticity

A majority of the respondents feel that the Influencer has used the product as she also drinks the alcohol in the advertisement. As a woman breaking stereotypes advertising for a alcohol, respondents feel that she might have also used the product. Very few of them claim that they don't know and are not intended to find out about what she does.

While one section of the responders feel it is authentic, the other section of the respondents feel it is not authentic. The whole ideology of a festival celebration and alcohol consumption seemed very disjoint. Although respondents felt it was authentic, the idea of transitioning culture, ideologies were not much welcomed by the respondents even though they belonged to generation Z.

Respondents were highly unsure because only a few were following Lily Singh on Instagram whereas the others did not. Few felt since it was a paid promotion she may maintain brand loyalty whereas few others felt she need not maintain brand loyalty and it is up to her decision.

Most of the responders felt that the influencer was very sincere in her appeal. Respondents felt that the Influencer also conveyed to the audience of breaking stereotypes that alcohol isn't just gender biased but is a common thing for both men and women and that women need not drink secretly from their coffee mugs anymore but rather drink it as a family on any occasion such as the festival of lights – Diwali.

Since a majority of the audience were teetotalers and hail from conservative families especially from South India, they claimed they had not benefitted anything good from the advertisement.

Respect

Responders felt the message was persuasive enough through humour approach. Responders denied the fact that it was manipulative, however they felt that the content was quite misleading. In a society where liquor drinking is discouraged, this ad seemed to encourage everybody in the family to be a little merrier. They felt that the ideology in which they were brought up was questioned big time through this advertisement.

They felt as an Influencer she did her job but the product that she chose to propagate during a festival seemed unfair to many. Even though the respondents belonged to an educated population belonging to generation Z, they were not able to accept that an alcoholic brand is propagated in lieu with a traditional festival like Diwali. This alone seemed to be unfair to many.

Equity

Everybody were well aware of the fact that she is an Influencer and her job is to influence many. Nobody claimed the advertisement to be an organic suggestion of a product but knew it was a paid promotion. Everybody knew that it was an Influencer post and they were all under the Influence of that Ad. But everybody denied the fact that they got influenced. There was not one who felt like using the product or even wanted to try it after seeing the Advertisement. However, they enjoyed the content of the Ad as it was humorous.

One part of the responders felt that they were duped because of the fact the Influencer addresses that if it is a celebration, then it is time for alcohol. The fact that she stresses that alcohol is fun during celebrations and festive seasons made them feel duped. While another part of the responders felt that they were not duped and the Influencer is trying to convey a culture of fun and festive mood.

When asked the question on how much they believed the Influencer on a scale of one to five, the five being the highest, A majority of them replied with a 2. Most of the responders were not ready to believe an Influencer. They felt that Influencer marketing is no more an organic way of telling about a product but rather a paid promotion. Hence, most of them did not believe the claims of the Influencer.

Respondents felt that the audience were treated right and not manipulated. They also felt that they were not taken for granted and the message was genuine in a very humoristic way. Very few responded that they were not treated right because of the brand the Influencer propagated. Alcohol brands that were not aired on mainstream media is being propagated through influencers on social media is what respondents felt.

Social Responsibility

Everybody the fact that a right society can be created through this advertisement. Respondents felt that more of westernization was creeping into India in all these forms. They also felt that a conservative South Indian society can be made worse through all these type of exposure and this cannot be considered for the betterment of the society.

It was very unclear that the Influencer was working towards the betterment of the society. While the Ad spoke more o equality and women empowerment, it was also deteriorating the Indian cultural values and standards it holds. Therefore, respondents were a little confused whether the Influencer was working for the betterment of the society.

Respondents did not find any unfair stereotyping done through this advertisement. In fact, they found gender equality which was much appreciated.

The Entire Advertisement affects the society at large. While the mainstream media discourages alcohol usage by not streaming Ads pertinent to it, Social media through Influencers encourage Alcohol usage. Respondents felt a lot of westernization creeping in. Respondents felt that Alcohol usage must not be encouraged, especially in a conservative society like South India.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Lily singh hit the 1 million follower and is considered as a mega influencer. She is known for her wit and humour. She does paid promotions for varied products. One such product was her paid partnership with Johnie Wakerus for the season of Diwali. In the analysis done it was fond that her paid partnership with an alcohol brand was not appreciated much by her audience. Being from an Indian family advertising for an alcohol brand was not welcomed. Culture played a very important role to the product an Influencer advertises for. Also the Festival that she advertised was for a very auspicious day for the Sikhs and Hindus, therefore religion also is an important factor for the product an Influencer promotes.

Although respondents felt that she was very sincere in her approach, there were trust issues that they faced. Respondents were not ready to trust an Influencer as they believed it was just a paid promotion and not an organic review. The reputation and trust of the Influencer seemed to wane through the TARES test that was conducted.

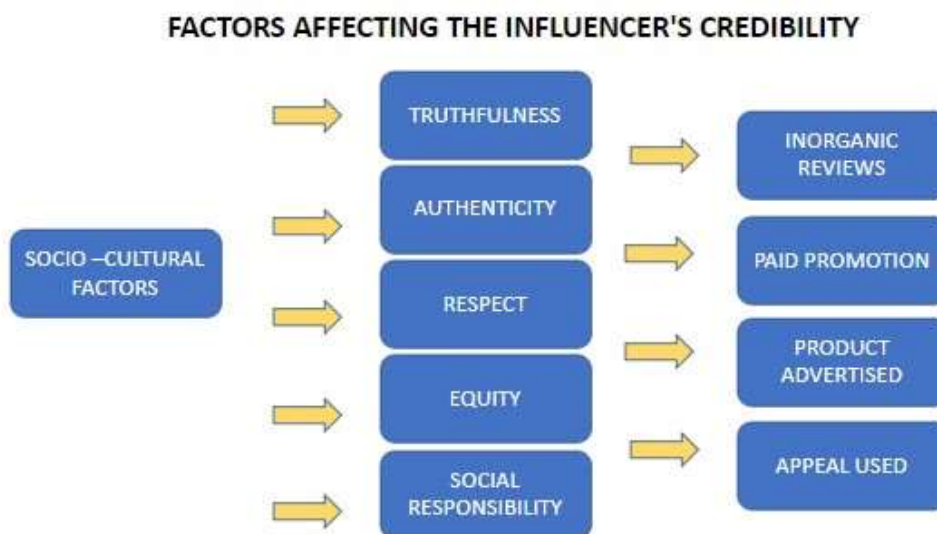
Responders loved the approach of the message which had a humour appeal. The content of the Ad was much appreciated and liked. Although the ad was not manipulative, they found that the ad was misleading the Indian culture. This ideology was questioned by the educated class of generation Z.

Responders felt duped because the Influencer insisted that alcohol and celebrations go hand in hand. Most of the responders never believed the claims of the Influencer and everybody claimed that what the influencer did was not an organic review but a paid promotion.

Most of them never complained the way the audience were treated through the message, however their only concern was the product the Influencer vouched for.

The Ad never had a social responsibility. Through this ad a right society cannot be born. Respondents felt westernisation creeping in all the more. Although it supported gender equality, respondents felt it was for the wrong purpose and the society at large could never be benefitted.

Diagram:1



CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to analyse the ethical persuasiveness of the influencer by analysing the credibility through the perspective of Gen – z consumers. The credibility of the influencer was tested through a TARES test by conducting an in depth interview with 20 gen - z participants. Questions were framed to identify factors contributing to analyse the credibility of the influencer through truthfulness of the message, authenticity of the persuader, respect for the persuadee, equity of the appeal and social responsibility for the common good. Analysis was done based on the answers given by the responders. A content analysis was also done on one of the post by the Influencer. Through the analysis it is found that culture plays a very important role when an Influencer promotes a brand or a product. People’s trust on an Influencer has waned because of the fact that it is no more organic. Also, the content is much like when it has a humour appeal. The ad was never considered to uplift the society in any way. Although gender equality is much stressed upon, people felt it was the wrong purpose. Although, the responses were from generation –Z who were educated and had much more of an open mind, the results were mostly negative and did not support the Influencer in any way.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FOR TARES TEST

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE INFLUENCER

1. Do you rely on the influencer? Do you believe what he says about the product?
2. Do you feel that the Influencer is sincere in his claim about the product? Or in other words – Honest in his approach?
3. Is the message trustworthy? Do you believe his claim?
4. How truthful do you think the content is?
5. Do you think the Influencer follows ethical norms? Do you assess any brand clash or clash of ideologies?

AUTHENTICITY

1. Do you feel that the influencer has used the product or experienced it?
2. How authentic do you feel the message is about the product?
3. Do you think the Influencer maintains brand loyalty?

4. Do you think the influencer is sincere to with his appeal to the audience?
5. Are you able to benefit out of this Ad?

RESPECT

1. Does the influencer respect the audience in terms of
 - Persuasion
 - Manipulation
 - Misleading information
2. Do you think what the Influencer does is unfair?

EQUITY

1. Are you aware of the fact that you are being Influenced?
2. Do you feel you are being duped?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 what level would you believe the Influencer?
4. Do you feel that the Influencer is treating his audience right? Or well?

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. Do you think a right society can be formed through his appeals?
2. Is the influencer working towards the betterment of the society through his influence?
3. Do you find unfair Stereotyping done through this Ad?
4. Do you find anything that is affecting the society through this AD?