The effect on purchase intention of social media influencers recommendations

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the impact of involvement (measured through fashion conciousness), perceived authenticity of the message, and perceived risk on purchase recommendations made by influencers. Furthermore, the relationship between these variables is investigated as a risk mitigator in the purchase intention, being induced by influencers in their followers. The global rise of social media has created a new context in which the figure of influencers has become a strategic communication tool that makes the product more familiar, acceptable and desirable to the audience. However, the negative aspects that could influence the purchase intention, such as the risk perceived by the audience, have not yet been studied in depth. To fill this gap, we present a structural equation model using the SmartPLS tool on 948 influencer followers. The results obtained suggest the remarkable influence of involvement with the product, the authenticity of the message and the presence of risk derived from the recommendations; as well as a strong impact of the authenticity of the message as the main mitigating factor of the perceived risk.

Keywords: Influencer marketing; Purchase intent; Social media; Perceived Risk; Involvement.

1. Introduction

In these fast-paced and changing times, the global rise of the digital age and the Internet economy have established social media marketing as a pervasive activity for society and an essential part of almost every company's promotional strategies. (Dumitriu et al., 2019). The massive dissemination of all kinds of content through consolidated social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube (Arora et al., 2019), the progressive arrival of increasingly dynamic and versatile new media such as Twitch, or Tik Tok (Cabeza-Ramirez et al., 2021), their unprecedented integration into people's daily lives (Tafesse and Wood, 2021), as well as the increase in their popularity have given companies and organizations new opportunities to spread brand awareness, attract customers and improve their relationships in a way that had not been done before (Lou and Yuan, 2019). In the field of marketing, it is striking to observe how the figure of the influencer fits perfectly into the definition of marketing, becoming a strategic communication and persuasion tool that makes the product more familiar, acceptable and desirable for the audience (Enke and Borchers, 2019). The use of influencers is linked to the informal communication process that arouses the interest of the potential client (Schwemmer and Ziewiecki, 2018), aligning it with the new paradigm that represents the user of social media as an independent brand ambassador (Boerman, 2020).

However, the emerging literature on influencer marketing has not yet deepened the understanding of the most negative aspects that could influence the purchase intention (Enke and Borchers, 2019; Hudders et al., 2021), particularly those related to the risk perceived by the audience on the recommendations received. This issue has perhaps been overlooked when most approaches consider the absence of risk, and assume that the recommendations are always received as reliable. This probably happens under the premise of an audience that presupposes the influencer as a person who is close, reliable and highly knowledgeable about the product (Casalo et al., 2020).

2. Objectives and hypotheses

The present study seeks to fill this research gap and aims to examine the impact of involvement (measured through fashion conciousness), perceived message authenticity, and perceived risk in purchase recommendations made by influencers. Several mitigating factors of risk are studied in depth, such as the involvement of the follower with the type of sponsored product (Mou et al., 2020), as well as the perception of authenticity of the message transmitted by the influencer (Hudders et al., 2021; Martínez- Lopez et al., 2020). To fill this gap, this research letter proposes the exploration of the model represented in Figure 1, and the following hypotheses:

-H_1: The perception of message authenticity has a positive effect on the purchase intention of the product or service recommended by the influencers.

-H_2: The perception of the sponsored message authenticity, decreases the perceived risk of the recommendations made by influencers.

-H_3: The perception of risk in influencers' suggestions has a negative impact on purchase intentions.

-H_4: Involvement with the product through fashion awareness positively influences the perception of authenticity of the influencers' message.

-H_5: Involvement with the product through fashion awareness has a positive impact on the purchase intention of the products suggested by the influencers.

-H_6: Greater involvement with the product (measured through awareness of fashion), will mean an increase in the perceived risk of the product recommended by the influencers.
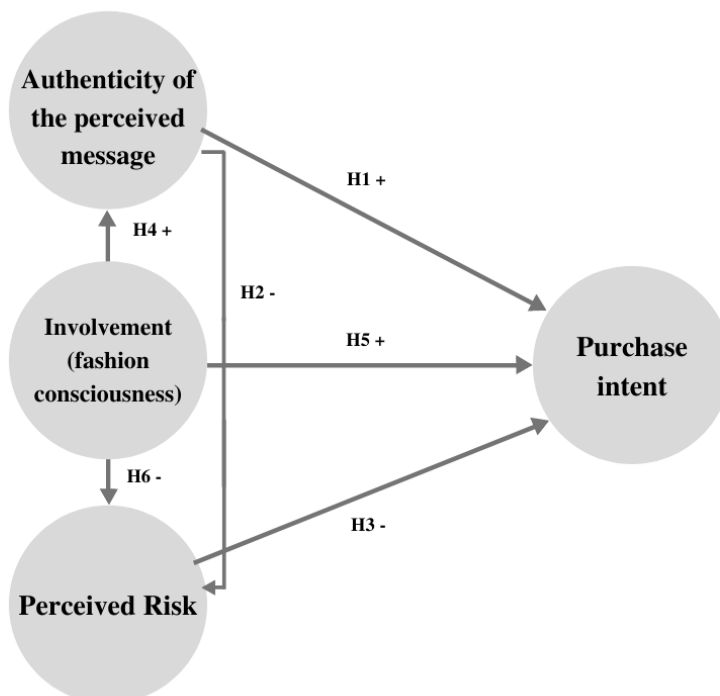

Figure 1. Hypothesis model

3. Methodology and Results

A measurement instrument was designed based on previous studies and specialized literature on the health passport composed of 4 blocks: (a) Perceived Risk (PR) (3 items, (Alalwan et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2021)) ; (b) Authenticity of the Perceived Message (APM) (3 items, (Martínez-López et al., 2020)); (c) Involvement, measured through fashion conciusness, (Inv) (4 items (Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012)); (d) Purchase intention (Int) (3 items (Hwang and Kim, 2020)). The final sample collection was performed using the SurveyMonkey platform. A link to collect answers and a QR code were generated. The link or the code was distributed through social networks, and through the Moodle learning management tool in different university centers in the south of Spain. The questionnaire remained open during the months of April and May 2021.

The survey was answered by 948 Spanish participants aged 18 or over, followers of an influencer in the field of fashion. Is a exploratory survey, the sample is self-selected no probability based. The sociodemographic data reflect a sample made up of a higher percentage of women (66.7%). Regarding age, we mostly found people between the ages of 18 and 30 (80.1%), with a university or higher educational level (54.85%). Table 1 shows the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The items were evaluated according to the values suggested by Hair et al. (2014), ranged from 0 to 1. External loads exceeded the cutoff value of 0.707 suggested by Carmines and Zeller (1979), so no load had to be removed. The validity and reliability criteria of the construct were measured with the criteria proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the composite reliability coefficient (CR) and Cronbach's alpha were above 0.7. In addition, all the AVEs (Average Variance Extracted), as presented in Table 1, range from 0.662 to 0.822, which exceed the recommended 0.50 threshold (Hair, et al. 2017).

The proposed theoretical model was estimated using the SEM structural equation modeling technique through Partial Least Squares (PLS). The SmartPLS 3.3.7 software, developed by Ringle,Wende, and Becker (2015), was used to analyze the relationships proposed in the hypotheses (see figure 1). Table 2 shows the results and the results in relation to the proposed hypotheses. Five of the six proposed relationships are supported. Hypothesis 6, which relates involvement with the product (measured through fashion conciousness), and the perceived risk of recommendations made by influencers (H_6), is rejected as it is not significant ($\beta= 0.059$, $p \geq 0.1$).

Table 1: Measurement model. Factor loadings

Constructs	Items	Factor Loads	Mean (SD)	α Cronbach	CR	AVE
Perceived risk (PR)	PR1. It is risky to buy products recommended/promoted by influencers.	0.925	3.99 (1.77)			
	PR2. Buying products recommended/promoted by influencers adds uncertainty about the results I will get from buying the product.	0.82	4.05 (1.83)	0.818	0.882	0.715
	PR3. Influencers' recommendations expose me to a general risk about the outcome of the product.	0.785	3.82 (1.83)			
Authenticity perceived message (APM)	APM1. I perceive that the influencers' fashion suggestions are authentic.	0.875	3.19 (1.69)			
	APM2. Online influencers' fashion posts look real to me.	0.909	3.25 (1.70)	0.864	0.917	0.787
	APM3. The opinions of influencers on fashion are reliable.	0.877	3.20 (1.67)			
Involvement (Inv)	Inv1. I usually have one or more items of clothing that are in the latest fashion.	0.748	4.56 (2.14)			
	Inv2. When it comes to choosing between two outfits, I go by what is in fashion rather than comfort.	0.779	3.43 (2.00)	0.829	0.887	0.662
	Inv3. Dressing fashionably is important to me.	0.876	3.46 (2.01)			
	Inv4. It is important to me that my clothes are as trendy as possible.	0.846	3.40 (1.99)			
Purchase intent (Int)	Int1. I intend to buy fashion products recommended by influencers	0.899	2.54 (1.77)			
	Int2. In the future I will try to buy products sponsored by influencers	0.928	2.50 (1.70)	0.892	0.933	0.822
	Int3. I will make an effort to buy fashion products recommended by influencers	0.891	2.12 (1.61)			

Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Structural model. Path coefficients and result of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Path coefficients (p-values)	Results
H_1	APM →	Int	0.465 (0.000)***	Support
H_2	APM →	PR	-0.141 (0.000)***	Support
H_3	PR →	Int	-0.058 (0.055)*	Support
H_4	Inv →	APM	0.435 (0.000)***	Support
H_5	Inv →	Int	0.195 (0.000)***	Support
H_6	Inv →	PR	0.059 (0.134)	Not Support

***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.05$; *$p<0.01$

Source: own elaboration

4. Discussion and Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, our research is one of the few that addresses the effects of product involvement on perceived authenticity of the sponsored message as mitigators of perceived risk in influencer-sponsored recommendations. Therefore, it proposes a valuable approach in gaining insight into the presence of general risk associated with influencer endorsements. In the first place, we explore the perception of the authenticity of the influencer's message from a double perspective: as a determinant of the consumer's intention to follow the recommendations towards the product (H1), and as a mitigator of the risk perceived by the audience (H2). The results obtained from hypothesis 1 add to the abundant previous literature that points to trust, authenticity and credibility of the transmitted message as the main causes of the impacts on attitudes and purchase intention in different contexts (Yoon and Kim, 2016; Chakraborty and Bhat, 2018). Regarding the incidence of the authenticity of the message on the perceived risk, the relationship was also verified, in line with the findings of Kim and Lennon (2013) who showed how credibility through reputation has a determining effect on the emotions of consumers and a significant negative effect on perceived risk (Hussain et al. 2017). The third relevant finding have a bearing on the incidence of risk perception on purchase intention (H3). In a way, this finding highlights the need to consider the construct in future research, since it could be a mistake to assume that endorsements generated by influencers are always received as trustworthy (Casalo et al., 2020). Concerning the direct effect between the implication with the product and the perception of the authenticity of the message (H4), it complements the findings reported by Xue and Zhou (2010), which indicate that the greater the implication with the product, the greater the trust towards the source. On the other hand, the significant and positive influence of involvement on purchase intention (H5) stands out, in line with the effects previously identified by Huang et al. (2010) in their work on the involvement of travel blog followers and their purchase intention. Finally, hypothesis 6, which relates

involvement with the product and the perceived risk to the recommendations made by influencers (H6), is rejected. This result could be explained based on the work of Chu and Chen (2019), and Liao et al., (2021) who pointed out that when online consumers have the need to buy products with high perceived risk, they are more active in gathering information, and more receptive to the opinions of others. This research is subject to limitations, among which we can find: (1) the exploratory nature of the model; (2) the concept of risk used, measured as a general perception; (3) a large convenience sample, in a particular context, after the Covid-19 lockdown, and for a specific product (fashion). Consequently, future analyses should consider these limitations as new opportunities for future work.

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