

Evaluation of the use of influencers for the development of consumer satisfaction in the Baltic consumer goods market

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Abstract

A business focused on the consumer and its satisfaction is an important factor in ensuring the company's competitiveness. The process of attracting new customers always involves more money, time and energy. In order for a company to retain existing customers and gain only new ones, one of the main tasks is to know the factors that make them happy. Within the framework of this work, the authors want to study the theoretical foundations of consumer satisfaction, to understand the peculiarities of the development of consumer satisfaction using digital content creators - influencers. The use of influencers is an integral part of today's business development, enabling companies to operate successfully in a competitive environment. This study identifies factors that influence consumer satisfaction with the use of influencers to enable companies to improve their use and become more competitive. The study uses both secondary data analysis and expert interviews and consumer surveys. The study describes the situation in the field of influencer marketing use in the Baltic States. The study finds that influencers provide a higher level of consumer satisfaction. In order to achieve the goal of the research, three tasks were set: 1) to analyse theoretical basis of consumer satisfaction and the use of influencers; 2) describe the use of influence agents and their contribution to consumer relations; 3) to study consumer evaluation of influencer activities. A monographic or descriptive method was used to analyse the theoretical aspects of the use of influencers, an analysis of secondary data was used to describe the situation, and a consumer survey was conducted to examine consumer perceptions of influencer activity and its contribution to consumer satisfaction.

Keywords: *Influencers, consumer, consumer satisfaction.*

1. Introduction

The development of the digital age and the increase in the number of social networking sites have led to changes in consumer behaviour. This transformation has created more and more opportunities and challenges. The growing importance of digital influencers has been recognized by both practitioners and academics. However, given its contemporaneity, the academic literature on the subject faces some limitations. This study looks at digital content creators or influencers. With the development of influencers, their power over brand and company perception has developed significantly, so it can greatly affect both the company's operations and its reputation (Vodas, Novyzedlák, Čakanová & Pekár, 2019). These new opportunities for providers need communication professionals who are constantly working with target customers through a variety of social media channels. In turn, consumer satisfaction and its management has become the basis of the company's competitiveness and an integral part of the business. It is important for businesses to ensure and promote consumer satisfaction and to develop a system that makes them want to stay in business. Based on the research, it has to be concluded that attracting a new consumer is 5-10 times more expensive than selling to an existing consumer, and the existing consumer spends 67% more money than new consumers (Anderson, Jolly, Fairhurst, 2007). So working with consumers and building relationships in the long run is an essential foundation for a successful business. By gaining an understanding of the factors that make up consumer satisfaction and using them skilfully using digital influencers, the company gains more customer confidence and significantly increases its competitiveness. Consumer relationship management is the company's business strategy to attract, serve and retain consumers through understanding and meeting their needs, developing long-term cooperation. In order to achieve the goal of the study, three tasks were set:

1. To analyse the theoretical basis of consumer satisfaction and the use of influencers;
2. Describe the use of influence agents and their contribution to consumer relations;
3. To find out the consumer's assessment of the activity of influencers.

A monographic or descriptive method was used to analyse the theoretical aspects of influencer marketing and their use, secondary data analysis was used to describe the situation, and a consumer survey was conducted to study consumer attitudes towards influencers.

The research period is from June 1, 2021 to January 1, 2022. As a result of the study, it was found that the selection of appropriate influencer agents and the development of guidelines for cooperation with them can be used by companies to ensure consumer satisfaction and, as a result, increase competitiveness. After reading the scientific literature, the authors

conclude that there are many conceptual Different definitions of consumer satisfaction for different practical purposes.

2. Literature Review

Attempts to summarize these multifaceted definitions of consumer satisfaction have been made by J.L. Giese and J.A. Cote (2000), summarizing the definitions of consumer satisfaction offered in the scientific literature over thirty years and comparing their wording with respondents' perceptions of the essence of satisfaction. As a result of the research, a three-dimensional framework has been created, the aim of which is not to offer a general definition of satisfaction, but to crystallize the basic components of consumer satisfaction:

- A total emotional reaction, the intensity of which may vary;
- Satisfaction related to product selection, purchase / purchase and consumption;
- Depending on the situation, the time taken to carry out the assessment is limited, with each of the components being adaptable to the specific situation and the range of consumers (Giese, Cote 2000).

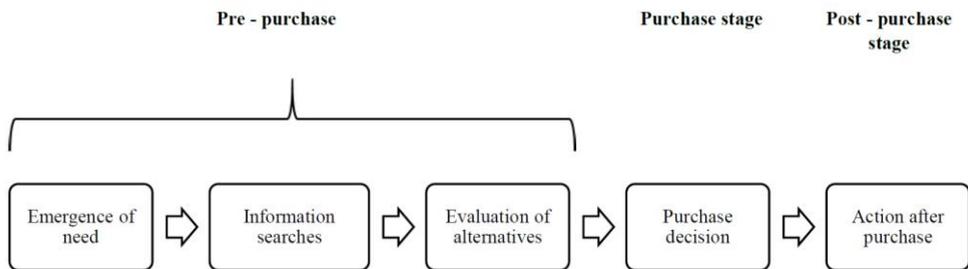


Figure 1. Stages in the process of consumer behaviour in the market. Source: (Elliot & Percy, 2007, 6)

It is in the first stage of pre-purchase that a relationship with the consumer is established, which will be the basis for successful relationship building and satisfaction in general. As there is no direct contact with the consumer, it is important to address it correctly and build a successful communication. Communication is an interactive communication process in which participants realize their goals and interests by influencing each other. Effective communication pays attention not only to the process of information transfer, but also to the full reception and processing of information. The goal of effective communication is to present the message in a way that is not only understandable, but also able to be remembered, analysed and used by the recipient.

Entrepreneurs perceive influencers as an advertising channel with a directly reachable potential audience, so they pay for advertising on their social accounts. Significantly, at a

time when various ad-blocking tools are popular in the digital environment, ads on social networking accounts are able to bypass them because they are unable, at least for the time being, to filter out social networking ads from influencers.

Influencers can be defined as a social networking person who, by creating his or her original content in one of the fields, has gained thousands of followers and advertises the products or services of various companies, institutions and organizations to his audience for a fee, a commission or a product. The need for product experimentation through the exchange of experiences and views of digital influencers is an important tool for building relationships with consumers. Credibility in influencers makes followers communicate with them and trust their views and serves as a means of communication, as they can shape brand messages in their stories, incorporate them into their daily lives in a natural and authentic way and reach a variety of audiences, as shown by several studies (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Veirman et al., 2017). It is the consumer's choice and following the particular influencer that is the basis for building a long-term relationship between the business and the consumer, where the influencer acts as an intermediate in this relationship. Studies also indicate that influencers are given creative freedom to communicate with the consumer (Casaló, Flávian & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). However, industry experts point to the importance of existing guidelines and the approval of content before publication (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017), which will enable companies to use influencers as an important factor in building relationships with consumers that will further ensure consumer satisfaction. Today's consumer has the ability to block corporate advertising in a variety of ways, but influencers address a circle of followers who trust him. It is the best method to gain consumer trust, and the established relationship between the consumer and the influencer is almost impossible for the brand itself (Hall, 2016). Given the scale and speed of the Internet, influencers can quickly attract mass audiences and gain "fame," by accumulating the cultural capital and making a company competitive (McQuarie, Miller, & Phillips 2013).

3. Research and discussion

One of the most pressing issues is how to measure the influencer's outcomes. Quantitative indicators of success (such as the number of Likes) are generally readily available and are mainly used by both stakeholders and companies. However, it is still unclear what the value of these metrics is for influencer marketing and whether they are an appropriate substitute for content quality. This is of particular interest as companies have only limited control over the content published by influencers. In general, professionals consider the reach of the influencer and the number of their interactions to be the most important indicators of success. Contrary to that, when professionals face a trade-off between multiple indicators,

they rely primarily on the mood of user comments as a basis for determining consumer satisfaction (Grave & Greff, 2018).

A study was conducted to further explore consumers' attitudes toward influencer activity. Consumer satisfaction is seen as a phenomenon that looks at consumer and process perception in the context of a particular study, so the study is considered analytical and the research paradigm is positivism (Kumar & Thondikulam, 2005). The current study has a mixed methods approach. First, it is quantitative because it aims to characterize consumers' attitudes towards the influencer activity in the digital environment as a phenomenon based on an assessment of consumers' current supply (Kristapsone, Kamerāde et al. 2011, 49-81).

The population sampling was carried out by the purposeful snowball method (Kristapsone, Kamerāde et al. 2011, 71), using the personal contacts of the study authors, the questionnaire was sent via e-mail to the respondents, who further shared this link. The questionnaires were filled out by 1448 respondents, they all were recognized as valid for the research. In 2020, the population of all three Baltic States was taken as a general population. At the 95% confidence level and the 5% margin of error, the minimum sample size in each country was calculated to be 1155 respondents (Arhipova & Băliņa, 2006, 98–104). The research questionnaire consisted of closed, open-ended questions, and in order to evaluate the consumer experience, questions with a Likert scale of 5 points were created, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good. The responses were processed with SPSS software. The characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic indicators of the survey respondents.

Nr.	Socio – demographic indicators of respondents	Number of
1.	Gender	
	Women	842
	Men	606
	In Total	1448
2.	Age	
	0-25	205
	26-40	607
	41-55	332
	56-63	101
	64>	3
	In total	1448

Source: Created by the authors.

Respondents use from one to three or more social networks. When it comes to how many content creators they follow, more than half, that is 73%, failed to answer this question. Although 57% of respondents stated that the follow-up was not spontaneous, it was a balanced decision. When asked whether they are more attracted to high-quality photos or video content, the overwhelming majority indicated that 87% referred to video content. Although in the open question about video, respondents indicate that they prefer short, meaningful video clips.

Table 2. Evaluation of Influencers Performance from the Consumer Perspective.

Assessing the performance of influencers from a consumer perspective	Arithmetic mean	Standard Error of mean	Median	Moda	Standard deviation	Variation
Consumer confidence in influencers	4.52	0.04	4	4	0.82	4.00
Assortment of advertised products	3.55	0.05	4	4	0.99	3.00
Quality of inflator content creation	3.28	0.05	4	5	1.09	3.00
Influence of the influencers on the positive attitude towards the product manufacturer	4.15	0.05	5	5	1.07	4.00
Influence of the influencers on the positive evaluation of the product	3.99	0.05	4	4	0.96	2.00

Source: Created by the authors.

As can be seen from the Table 2, consumer confidence in influencers is very high - 4.52 out of 5 possible ($\bar{X} = 4.52$; Me = 5.00; Mo = 5.00). Respondents rated the range of products offered by influencers much lower (3.55; 4.00; 4.00), while the quality of influencer content was rated even lower (3.28; 4.00; 5.00). Respondents rated the ability of the influencer with the content of its profile towards the product to be high (4.15; 5.00; 5.00), but against the manufacturer of the product only slightly lower (3.99; 4.00; 4.00).

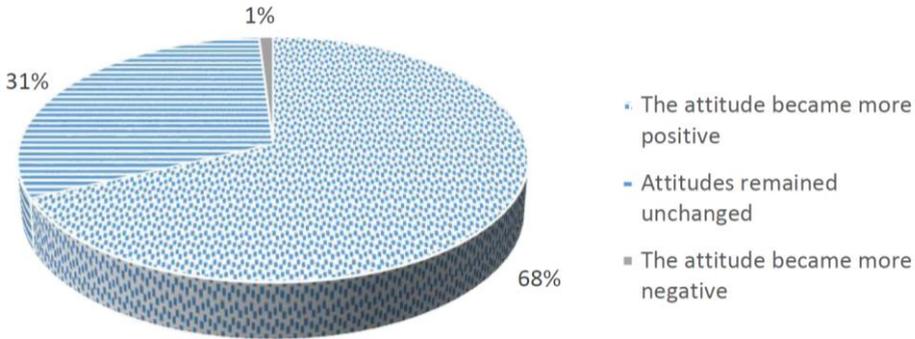


Figure 2. Respondent's opinion on the change of attitude under the influence of influencers. Source: created by the authors.

Respondents were also asked about the impact of influencers on his opinion and how it changed. In this question, it was found out that 68% of respondents' opinion about goods / services as well as about the company itself changes in a positive direction due to influencers, only 31% does not change it, but in the case of 1% it may change to a negative side (see Figure 2).

The study also calculated correlations based on demographic factors.

Table 3. Correlation between respondent's age and influencer's impact assessment.

Evaluation of influencer operation	Age of the respondent
Pearson Correlation	0.870

Source: Created by the authors

It was concluded that the correlation between the respondent's age and more positive evaluations of influencer activity is 0.87, which is very significant (see Table 3). No correlation was observed between the impact assessment and the gender of the respondents.

4. Conclusions

Consumer satisfaction is the result of both the cognitive and emotional response of the consumer, and consumer satisfaction can be seen as a process whose final outcome is influenced by certain factors, a comparison of alternatives, and so on. The process also involves a satisfaction assessment, which involves five stages, which can be summarized in three stages: the pre-purchase stage, the purchase stage and the post-purchase stage. The pre-purchase stage consists of the emergence of a need, the search for information and the evaluation of alternatives. It is at this stage that the relationship with the consumer is

initiated and ensures the further development of this relationship and can be the basis for ensuring consumer awareness and building relationships. Consumer relationship management is the company's business strategy to attract, serve and retain consumers through understanding and meeting their needs, developing long-term cooperation.

In the digital age, influencers are a new type of independent third party that uses a variety of content creation tools to shape consumer attitudes towards business and the brand, using social media as a communication channel. These activities can be very diverse, involving both the expression of opinions, such as product reviews, video tips and tricks, the organization of competitions, and the publication of images containing products or services (Bernitter, Verlegh, & Smit, 2016).

Influencers are one of the key factors in building relationships with consumers and play an important role in the development of the brand and the attitude towards the company as a whole. As a result of the research, it was proved that it is important for companies to work together with influencers to develop guidelines for cooperation in order to target the target audience in a more targeted way.

The study also showed that in 68% of cases, the successful choice of influenza and its effects on consumers can lead to a change in the attitude towards the goods / services and the company itself, which can be the basis for building a relationship with the consumer.

The study found a positive correlation between respondents' age and trust and satisfaction with the brand and the company, which further strengthens the role of influencers in communicating with consumers in the future.

Based on the contribution of influencers to the creation of digital content, which provides an increase in the number of followers, the company can communicate with consumers to ensure trust in the company and its product / service and can build long-term relationships that increase business value and competitiveness.

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