



Exploratory study on the influence of influencers and content creators on purchase intention

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Abstract :

The objective of the research is to study the influence of content marketing via social networks on purchase intention. This research focused on the power of influence of content published by influencers and content creators via social networks (Instagram pages) on consumer purchase intention.

The research then focused on the construction of a hypothetical model that articulates content published on social networks, appreciation, effectiveness, relevance, trust and consumer engagement as well as purchase intention. A qualitative exploration was implemented by carrying out an interview guide with influencers and content creators in order to decide on the variables to be retained in the conceptual model.

The results confirm the major contribution of relevance, effectiveness, engagement and trust in the decision-making process and on the development of purchase intention and sharing intention.

Keywords : social networks – Content marketing – Purchase intention – Trust – engagement

Introduction

In recent years, social media has become a popular channel through which customers and businesses can act and interact. Due to their characteristics, these networks are used by individuals because they offer the opportunity to search for information online (Chua and Banerjee, 2013), express themselves, react, and engage in discussions or debates within a community (Stone, 2009). It is also argued that consumers are emotionally sensitive to this form of online communication, through Web 4.0, designed to facilitate communication through user-friendly interfaces and networking platforms (Pannunzio, 2008).

However, the early 2000s marked a revival in content marketing, accelerated by the arrival of the Internet. It was during this period that social media emerged, launching and projecting content marketing as a promotional tool for brands that had distribution platforms outside those offered by traditional networks. LinkedIn was launched in 2002, followed by Facebook in 2004, then YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, and finally Instagram in 2010. Content marketing evolved into a site that would become a major publisher of content on motherhood ((Pullizi, 2016)) with Johnson's purchase of BabyCenter in 2001. Content marketing has currently become a rapidly and rapidly growing marketing strategy due to technological developments. It is now possible for all companies to publish prominent brand stories across multiple media channels.

Our research aims to better understand and analyze the influence of social media on consumer purchase intentions and the factors that influence this intention. This research also demonstrates the influence that content marketing can have in increasing content sharing intentions and, subsequently, consumer engagement behaviors. It confirms the importance and weight given to the relevance of a publication's content. Furthermore, it can be a valuable tool for companies that wish to use content marketing to demonstrate and prove the effects on consumer engagement behaviors.

In the context of the digital revolution, taking into account the evolution of the social web, which challenges the balance of relationships between consumers and organizations, content marketing has increasingly become perceived as an alternative to traditional advertising and influences consumers' purchasing intentions. The central question of this research seeks to study: To what extent does content published on social networks influence consumers' purchasing intentions?

Answering this question pushes us to seek to understand and explain the role of influencers and content creators in consumers' purchasing decisions.

Hence, the following research objectives:

1- Highlight the influence of content marketing via social media on consumer purchase intention: We draw a parallel between this content marketing and the motivations for sharing content on social media. The objective is to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of content marketing on purchase intention and the feasibility of substituting it for traditional marketing strategies. By considering content marketing as stimuli that trigger internal reactions that lead to consumer purchase intention.

The research is well conducted and highlights key factors in digital marketing.

2- Highlight the role of consumer engagement, as a multidimensional concept and as an approach to explaining purchase intention and sharing intention: In many studies, the concept of engagement remains a vague concept and is often studied from a unidimensional perspective. In this sense, we seek to identify the extent to which the major role of consumer engagement can be considered in our research.

3- Identify the impact of content shared by influencers and content creators on purchasing decisions and sharing intentions. The objective is to determine the nature of the relationship between the different variables influencing sharing intentions and the most salient factors for making a purchasing decision.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Emergence of Content Marketing:

Content marketing is a concept that has actually existed for several years. It is defined as the title of Bauer's article, "It's Not as New as You Think."

Indeed, content marketing encompasses all these formats, namely blogs, websites, webinars, and social media posts. This marketing allows you to sell without actually selling. That is, talking about the product or service through the aforementioned formats represents an introduction to sales without necessarily trying to encourage or push the consumer to make a purchasing decision, which automatically reduces what is known as consumer fatigue. However, consumer fatigue represents one of the key factors that has fostered the rise of content marketing. Content marketing represents the set of strategies and tactics aimed at attracting, attracting, engaging, and engaging prospects, influencers, or customers through successive, regular, and high-quality written and editorial non-commercial content.

However, content marketing is a set of content produced by a company whose mission is to reach a target audience and acquire, retain, or retain customers. However, content marketing can be written either by individuals developing and improving their businesses or by those looking for a job, or by companies themselves. Indeed, the content distributed must be of high quality and provide better and real added value to the internet user who reads it. This content

or information must first persuade and convince them of the company's know-how and expertise so that they agree to a collaboration or a business transaction.

1.2.Opinion Leaders (Influencers) in Marketing

In marketing, the concept of "opinion leader" originates from the diffusion of innovations theory, which indicates and explains how individuals indirectly influence the attitudes and behaviors of others through the concept of social influence (Lin et al., 2018). These leaders can therefore influence the purchasing decisions of others, particularly due to certain personal attributes, their specific knowledge, or their connection with their audience (Lin et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2019). Today, these leaders are used via social media to exert influence over their followers and are known as "influencers." Thus, the concept of influencer refers to anyone capable of influencing the decision-making process of a third party. This research focused on social media influencers, who can be defined from a communication perspective: "Social media influencers are third-party actors who have established a significant number of relevant relationships and who exert influence on their community through content production, content distribution, interaction, and their appearance on the web."

1.3.Consumer Engagement with Influencers

The concept of engagement applies equally to influencers. On social media, we observe an interaction between the influencer and the internet user. This interaction occurs when consumers react and interact in one way or another (like, comment, share) with the influencer's content. The internet user's engagement translates into trust, satisfaction, attachment, and loyalty to the influencer (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013).

For an influencer, the engagement rate of their followers is a crucial piece of data, as it will be the factor a brand focuses on when choosing the right influencer to collaborate with. This rate corresponds to the proportion of followers who interact with the influencer on a social media platform. It represents the requirement, complicity and involvement of a community through all publications, Stories (a photo or video visible to users for 24 hours only), IGTVS (longer video content), Reels (15-second sequences enhanced with effects and/or music on Instagram) and any other type of content published by an influencer.

1.4. Instagram and Influencers

"Instagram influencers are described as 'Instafamous.' This new adjective refers to people who have a strong, vibrant presence on the social network and who exert a certain influence over their followers. Previous research has shown that Instagram is a positive medium, and therefore increases users' self-esteem. Instagram users confirm that they follow influencers in search of inspiration. To do this, they seek out captivating, attractive, and positive images, although they

are aware that these do not represent reality. Indeed, the use of filters to enhance images is considered the norm on Instagram. Therefore, users are well aware that influencers make their images more desirable and attractive and are not disappointed by this behavior. However, some users report 'stalking' people whose lifestyle and physical appearance they feel jealous of.

1.5.The Impact of Consumer Engagement

Morgan and Hunt (1994) identified the precursors and pioneers of the trust and commitment relationship. The ability and possibility of increasing prices, benefits, and shared values play a vital and preponderant role in both trust and commitment, hence the need to address the role of communication, whose primary objective is to limit opportunistic behaviors.

However, we define marketing engagement as "the voluntary effort made by the company to motivate and measure the consumer's contribution to the company's marketing functions, at the heart of economic transactions." However, marketing engagement can take several forms. First, it may be experiential or task-based. The ultimate goal of engagement in experiential marketing is to generate, generate, and strengthen positive emotions, positive vibes, and change the individual's perceptions of themselves through consumer experiences outside of the purchasing process. However, it has been observed that companies organize events with the main objective of seducing and attracting consumers, making them autonomous and independent in the use of the product, and encouraging them to make the purchase.

2. Research Methodology:

"In management science, qualitative methods aim to seek meaning, to understand phenomena or behaviors" (Coutelle, 2005). This exploratory research aims to understand and uncover a phenomenon that has been little studied in the Moroccan context, rather than verifying pre-established relationships. To achieve this, a qualitative method is appropriate, following a logic of exploration and discovery. Adopting a positivist stance with a hypothetico-deductive approach, the study also follows an inductive approach through semi-structured interviews, allowing for a deeper understanding of the concepts studied and a more precise definition of the problem. Initially, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand Internet users' behavior regarding the functioning of Instagram, and more specifically, Instafamous (Instagram influencers), as well as to explore followers' attitudes regarding partnerships between brands and influencers. During the exploration phase, new theoretical connections between concepts can be established, and other concepts can be integrated into a specific theoretical framework. This phase can take different forms: theoretical, empirical, or hybrid (Charreire & Durieux, 2007). At this stage, qualitative research methods are favored to analyze and interpret field observations in light of theoretical

knowledge. The objective is to understand the direction of processes, explaining how and why things are done (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By conducting semi-structured interviews, we identify the different essential factors to better understand and analyze the relationships between variables.

2.1. Choice of field: the social network Instagram as a research site

Instagram is a social network launched on October 6, 2010, by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. It allows users to share photos and videos, apply filters to enhance their content, and interact with a wide audience through likes, comments, and following (Wally and Koshy 2014). Designed primarily for mobile use, Instagram stands out for its visual and aesthetic orientation, making it a preferred platform for content related to fashion, luxury, and aesthetics. In 2021, Instagram had over one billion monthly active users worldwide, according to Hootsuite, the majority of whom are young people under the age of 34, representing a key target audience for fashion brands. The social network is also recognized for its high engagement rate, higher than that of other platforms like Facebook, offering brands a unique opportunity to promote their products to an engaged audience. Instagram has also played a key role in the emergence and success of influencers, particularly in the fashion and lifestyle sector. These content creators, often referred to as "Instafamous," use the platform to share recommendations, promote products, and collaborate with brands (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Their ability to build authentic relationships with their followers makes them ideal ambassadors for companies looking to reach a target audience. According to De Veirman et al. (2017), Instagram influencers significantly contribute to the dissemination of new products, the launch of trends, and increased sales. Thanks to their strong online presence and ability to generate engagement, influencers have become essential players in social media marketing campaigns, particularly in the fashion, luxury, and beauty sectors.

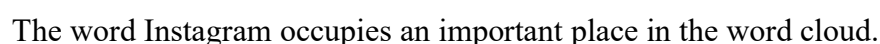
2.2. Interview guide and analysis method used:

The choice of the exploratory qualitative method allowed us to initially explore the issue of the influence of content marketing on purchase intention. We emphasize that, to our knowledge, this is a little-explored issue in the Moroccan context, and we aim to better understand how this manifests itself among Moroccan consumers. The objective is to deepen our knowledge of this phenomenon as well as the exploration of the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer behavior. Secondly, this study provides a relevant and well-structured analysis of the influence of content marketing on purchase intention. It highlighted the opportunity of our conceptualization to extract the variables that can explain consumers' purchase intention following the influence of social networks and to know to what extent these variables manifest

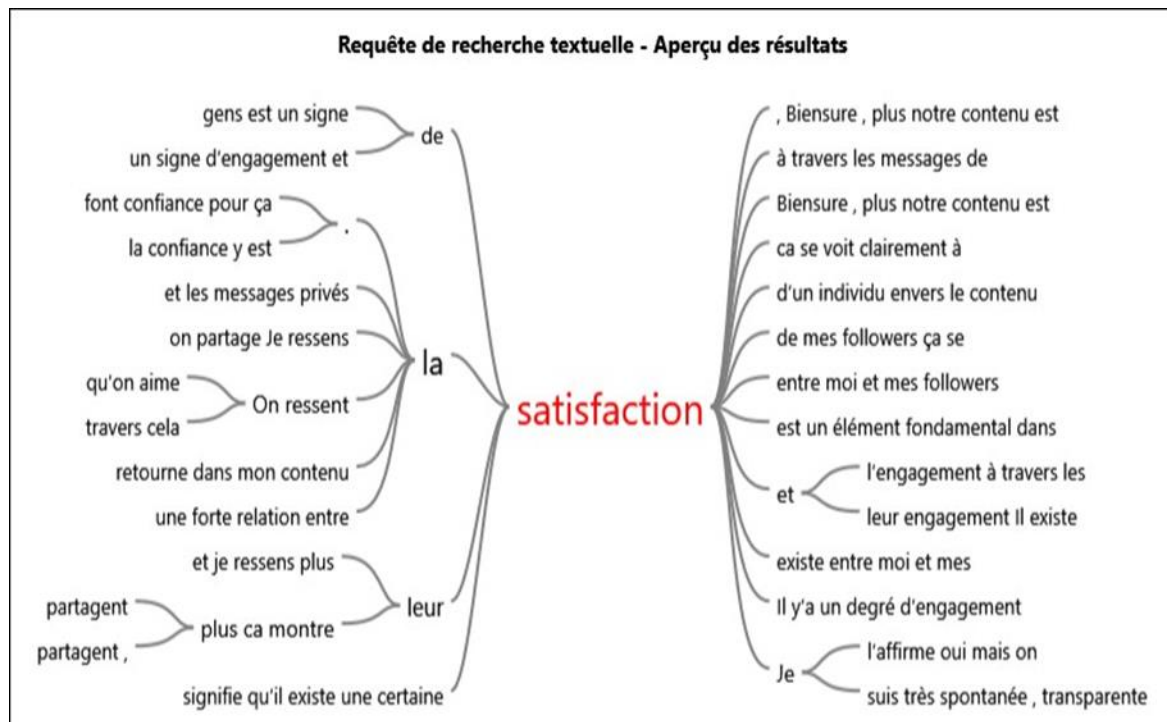
Semi-structured interviews: To gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of social media on consumers' purchasing intentions, we conducted semi-structured interviews in a very open manner, setting the theme of the survey. The objective was to explore variables from the literature as well as consumers' motivations for following and engaging with influencers on Instagram.

2.3. Analysis and Discussion of Results

2.3.1. First axis word cloud:



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Ce schéma représente toutes les liaisons possibles qui relient la satisfaction à d'autres concepts.

Voici un exemple de phrases qui ont une relation avec la satisfaction.

“La satisfaction de mes followers ça se voit à travers le partage de mon contenu à d'autres amis”

“ Le partage est un signe de satisfaction et d'engagement”

“ On peut dire la satisfaction ou l'appréciation du contenu”

Cette requête représente un résumé de toutes les réponses des influenceurs et des créateurs de contenus sur la satisfaction.

2.3.3. Elements grouped by coding similarity

This diagram groups the elements by coding similarity. We take the first triangle, which consists of three nodes: appreciation, motivation, and sharing intention. We can confirm, based on what was discussed in the literature review and what we collected through the Nvivo analysis results, that there is a strong relationship between the three concepts.

Given that the majority of influencers' motivation to be active on Instagram is passion and to share good ideas and varied content, followers' appreciation of the content plays an important role in sharing intention.

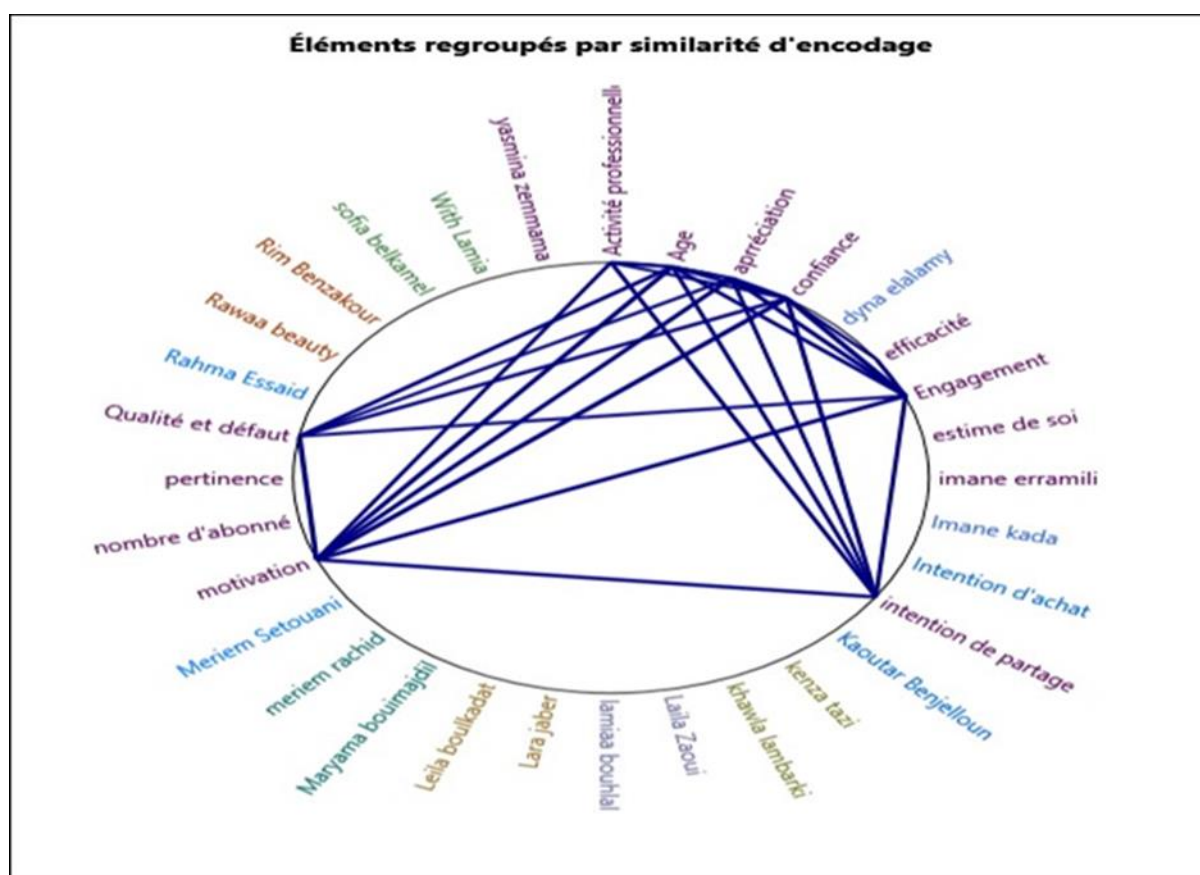
So we can say that when we appreciate content and are satisfied with what is shared, we are more likely to share this content with other people around us; therefore, content appreciation influences sharing intention. For the second triangle, which is professional activity, trust, and

sharing intent, there is a strong link between the three concepts, given that most influencers hold other jobs at the same time: community managers, influencer coaches, digital marketing and influencer managers. Therefore, we can confirm that these influencers and content creators have a good grasp of this area of influence and are able to understand influencers' expectations in terms of shared content. Therefore, if content is interesting, followers will appreciate this content and automatically trust them. The more trust followers perceive, the greater their sharing intent.

For the third triangle, Trust, Engagement, Sharing Intent

When followers like the content that influencers and content creators share, they automatically trust you, so they share the same content with their friends, and this sharing is a sign of their engagement. For the fourth triangle: Effectiveness, Trust, and Engagement

When we talk about effectiveness, we distinguish two types: connective and informative effectiveness. When we want to publish content, it must be interesting, effective, and rich in information to meet the expectations of followers. Followers trust influencers when they like the content; trust from followers is a sign of engagement.



3. Contribution of the qualitative analysis:

During the period of our analysis, the content published by influencers and content creators elicited different reactions from members of their communities. The number of "likes," "shares," and comments refers to members' behavioral engagement, while the other indicators refer to the emotional dimension. Consistent with the findings of Brodie et al. (2011b), sharing is highly prevalent on social media and allows followers of influencers and content creators to exchange experiences, ideas, or simply interesting content. Consistent with fundamental research on co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), engagement in online communities relies heavily on the exchange of experiences (Vivek et al., 2012) and informative, useful, and entertaining content. Just like sharing, clicking the "like" button also represents a behavioral manifestation of consumer engagement (Gummerus et al., 2012).

Based on this information and the verbatim examples presented, we can affirm that the content shared by influencers and content creators generates consumer engagement in three dimensions: affective engagement, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), drawing on the definition by Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), assert that trust is a concept that is more important in situations of information asymmetry, uncertainty, fear, and opportunism. Thus, the role of trust is to reduce uncertainty and information asymmetry and put customers at ease (Liang and Xue, 2007). One aspect of social media's ability to improve trust is the dissemination of information about products and services, as well as the opinions and recommendations of others. Such information sharing helps reduce uncertainty and information asymmetry, and increases transparency (Ba, 2001). However, social media facilitates the information dissemination process, and the literature suggests that repeated, long-term interactions between consumers and influencers and content creators foster the improvement of trust (Wang and Emurian, 2005).

According to Plangger and Bal (2011), consumer engagement is considered the dynamic involvement of a consumer with a product, brand, service, or company, expressed, for example, through the creation of content on social media. It includes all consumer-business, consumer-content creator, and consumer-to-consumer communications (such as electronic word of mouth). Even the smallest gesture, such as commenting or liking an Instagram page, can also be interpreted as a form of engagement.

Engagement is particularly relevant in social media communication, since social media is centered on relationships, interactions, and sharing between users.

Based on our interviews, it turned out that all the factors influencing purchase and sharing intentions, drawn from the literature and validated by the analysis presented using Nvivo

software and content analysis, were perceived by all participants, but to varying degrees, depending on each participant's needs and motivations.

This demonstrates a valuable contribution for professionals in the field.

Consumer cognitive engagement is reflected in cognitive availability voluntarily dedicated to the existing interaction between different online communities. Throughout our interviews, the consumer's availability and attention, as well as the learning that accompanies their information search, reveal a great deal about their cognitive and behavioral engagement. They believe that by learning more about a product through the information received, their trust automatically improves. This explains the effect of engagement on the quality of the existing relationship between followers and content creators.

The results of the qualitative analysis complement and support our choice of variables that make up our theoretical propositions. All aspects of content marketing identified in the literature have an impact on consumer engagement to varying degrees. Each consumer has their own motivations that drive them to engage in one way or another. When an individual finds quality, relevant, and effective content, they automatically engage, comment, and interact with community members. To double their chances of winning, they comment multiple times. The same goes for consumer purchase intention, which develops following consumer engagement and the improvement in the quality of their relationship with influencers and content creators.

In conclusion, we can say that the results of the qualitative analysis allowed us to contextualize the variables of our relational diagram, presented in the form of theoretical propositions, and to validate the links between them. After this exploration, we can now transform our theoretical propositions into research hypotheses within the framework of a relational scheme that we can verify empirically through a quantitative study to arrive at more relevant conclusions in terms of links between the variables, with a hierarchy of the effect that there may be between them.

Conclusion

With the advent of the internet, social media allows consumers to access low-cost information, information that is generally very difficult and expensive to collect, especially when it comes to new products. Consumers are therefore increasingly incorporating social media as a source of information in the purchasing process. Indeed, 9 out of 10 internet users prepare their purchase by first consulting the accounts of influencers and content creators, and 77% practice ROPO (Research Online/Purchase Offline), i.e., researching information online before purchasing in-store.

77% of internet users say they are influenced by other consumers' online comments before purchasing a product. The conclusions of our research affirm that the notion of engagement, in

an online context, remains a fundamental and much-debated issue. Positive messages and reviews positively influence sharing intent, while negative comments and reviews negatively influence sharing intent.

Indeed, when the argument is weak, it is negative messages and reviews that most influence purchase intent. When the argument is strong, with specific attributes, the consumer can form their own opinion about the product's qualities and flaws.

Similarly, our research allowed us to test relationships, which to our knowledge have not been previously tested, concerning the effect of appreciation, relevance, and effectiveness of content on purchase intent, as well as the effect of engagement on sharing intent and purchase intent.

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