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Juxtaposing Social Media Influencers and Traditional Media in Business Promotions in Kenya

Roy Wafula
Lecturer, University of Kabianga, rwafula@kabianga.ac.ke

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, marketing strategies have been evolving from traditional forms of media marketing to social forms of media marketing. In the wake of influencer marketing in the advertising industry, the traditional forms of media marketing have felt the hit and their significance started to diminish because of the hybrid form of modern-day marketing. Evolution of marketing strategies from traditional media to social media requires comparison to understand the marketing landscape in Kenya. This study, therefore, set out to compare the two forms of business promotion. The study was purely a qualitative study and it yielded a number of realizations. First, it found out that the marketing industry will always be on the lookout for a better and beneficial strategy. Secondly it was found out that higher percentage of consumers, are spending more time behind screens thanks to increased Internet connection, as opposed to the past where people used to rely on television, newspaper and radio advertisement. Higher populations in Kenya today have access to internet thus making it easy for companies to reach them through social media influencers. However, traditional media marketing holds a higher degree of credibility as opposed to social media influencers.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Traditional Media

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Survival of any business cannot ignore the role of promotional initiatives that enable it to flourish (Dyer, 2008). These promotional initiatives or advertising rely on communication between businesses and the public. Advertising is one avenue through which businesses promote their products, making it a form of promotional oral strategy, that is key in promoting a business by making products and services known to the consumers with the intention of making them active public's who in return seek the services and goods through buying (Ogilvy,2013). Promotions can be through word of mouth, websites, social media, elevator pitch, business cards, wraps, flyers, and charity events. The main aim of advertising or promotion is to make one's product and services visible to the target audience with a view to making them consumers. Traditional forms of media advertising have been known to play this role very well, not forgetting the fact that, the need of understanding the significance of promotional initiatives to businesses is crucial since the purchasing decision has been known to be influenced by social factors like family (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). However, more recently social media, a new social factor has taken the business environment by storm influencing the public at a greater degree (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2016).

In 2018, Mediakix, an American marketing agency evaluated that by the year 2023 the influencer-based marketing which squarely relies on social media will be valued at approximately 5-10 billion dollars globally especially on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. This is because majority of consumers today admire influencers, and view their opinions as more credible, thus boosting a brand by sharing the information with their close acquaintances as the network grows. The influencer always has a larger influence on followers, and more specifically on their perceptions. These influencers can be categorized as macro, micro and Nano influencers, whose value relies on the brand they are promoting.

Social media influencers as third-party individuals whose content on social media is capable of shaping opinions, and behaviour of consumers towards products and services of an organization (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018), command big attention because of their content, expertise and personality which is deemed influential. The big attention they command always results in impacting the purchase decisions of the publics since the consumers view them and the information they give as reliable (Boateng & Okoe, 2015). This information conveyed by social media influencers is known as Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) and it is considered significant in persuasion of consumers (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017).

In Kenya social media and traditional media are at the centre stage of business promotions from start-up businesses to well established organizations. This is because of the appreciation of the fact that business promotion helps voice an organization's brand and message to the respective audience through reliable media platforms. The promotion of brands has been known to raise brand awareness, inform target audience about the product, encourage customer traffic and finally to boost sales and profits. By using the right media tool in business promotion, businesses can achieve their objectives for the interest of the company. In recent days social media influencers who are independent, third-party endorsers have been used to influence the audience views and attitudes through the social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2010). Businesses today can now either choose to promote their company, product and service through social media influencers or traditional media.

Traditional media promotions relate to pioneer forms of media communications such as television, newspapers, radio and billboards. These forms of traditional media promotions have been in existence for long with far reaching impacts in the advertising world, and have defined lifespans. For example, in a case of a once off promotion, a marketing media with a short lifespan will be best suited (Gibson & Neilson 2000). Traditional media promotions have been viewed as having a more creditable aspect besides being more visually appealing (Katz, 2008). In Kenya, a number of media houses have embraced the three traditional forms of media for instance Radio Africa Group (RAG), the Nation Media Group Limited (NMG), the Standard Group (SG), and Mediamax Networks run television, radio, and print media (Media council of Kenya, 2016). According to Geopoll audience measurement data in 2017, newspaper reach in Kenya is at 65%, Radio is at 89%, and television is at 77%, an indication that traditional media roots in Kenya are still firm.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For decades now, traditional forms of advertising such as newspapers, television, and radio have dominated the advertising industry. These communication vehicles have given businesses a number of options to advertise with depending on their budget and target group. Channels such as television have proved to be costly for small businesses, however in the wake of internet and social media platforms such as Facebook, Tiktok and YouTube, businesses with low income have found it possible to advertise themselves and develop their own content in the shortest time possible, since there is no lead time required as it is in the traditional media. Influencer marketing has been trending in the recent past bringing in a new competition against the traditional media marketing when it comes to the field of advertising. The growing numbers of social media users and several platforms has enabled the social media influencers to gain ground (Carlson, 2017). As a result, this calls for attention to determine the impact of this new form of marketing vis-à-vis the traditional form of marketing. This determination can be made possible by comparing the numbers social media influencers and traditional media command, because social media influence being recent, needs to be weighed against traditional media which has stood the taste of time to be able to understand where Kenya is in terms of dynamic state of the Kenyan market.

The dynamic state in the Kenyan market dictates that, what is trending today may not necessarily be trending tomorrow. Therefore, consistency in promotion when it comes to influencer marketing and traditional marketing calls for scholarly investigation. This is paramount since today there is a high number of consumers spending more time behind screens thanks to increased internet connection, as opposed to the past where people used to rely on television, newspaper and radio advertisement (Darwish Omar, 2019). Thus, this begs the question how is the traditional media form of marketing fairing and where is influencer marketing standing today in the Kenyan market?

3. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to compare social media influencer marketing and traditional media marketing in business promotion in Kenya today.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Theoretical Framework

Bandura (1969), a social science theorist, engaged in research to try and explain how individuals are influenced by social situations through Social Learning Theory. This scholar achieved that by emphasizing on the mediating processes. This happens between stimuli and responses and also through the environment behavior is learnt through observation.

According to Bandura social learning systems, is a concept where fresh behavioral patterns are assimilated via one-on-one experience or observation of others. This reasoning informs the fact as to why the media always have significant impact on influencing the public. This is to say that, for example through the social media, consumers of information are likely to conform and embrace behaviour exhibited by the influencers (Langner, S., Hennigs, N., Wiedmann, K.-P. 2013). Hence based on this knowledge, companies tend to invest on social media influencers with the hope that the followers will be influenced to adopt their brand courtesy of the social media influencer.This is because consumers tend to copy and act as the person they are following (Bandura 1969).

The concept of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has also contributed in understanding tactics that result in the successes of social media influencers (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017). This concept looks at negative and positive comments from latent, aware and active publics concerning the services, products and the organization through the internet. This is achieved by creating a conducive environment whereby customers will be more than willing to share their views and opinions with other publics. From the several techniques of marketing, word of mouth is looked at to be more credible, hence social media influencers have capitalized on this fact by taking control in influencing consumer opinions on the company and its products (Gillin, P. 2008). The influencer will spearhead online interactions concerning the company and the products towards a positive conclusion, by encouraging consumers to give the products or the company a try, through creating a mind set on the side of consumers that by making a purchase or seeking the service it is in his or her best interests.

5.2 Social media vs Traditional media

Social media is one of the avenues where more than 3 billion people are getting connected globally (Swan, 2012), an indication that social media is actually here to stay. Social media platforms such as Tiktok, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter have brought significant changes in how people communicate, especially in the business world. The power of information sharing has shifted from companies to consumers (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Apart from their families and close friends, consumers can now on a large scale communicate to an audience far much larger than their close friends or acquaintances., In fact, communication has been enabled to a global scale through the social media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). These changes in communication have resulted in businesses looking out for and adopting new forms of communications to get through to their target audiences by using the social media and more specifically “influencer marketing” (Jaakonmäki, Müller, & Vom Brocke, 2017). Some studies have indicated that today it is not a secret anymore; companies are allocating substantial budgets to cater for influencer marketing, since a good percentage of the public no longer pay attention to tradition advertising (Carter, 2016). A report by Kenya data science company Odipo Dev (2020) opines that influencers under life style category in the social media tend to outperform influencers from traditional media outlets. The active involvement by consumers in production of content through influencer marketing has meant that the traditional forms of marketing are facing a stiff competition in staying relevant in the digital media environment (Bolter and Grusin 1999).

The radio medium in Kenya is growing steadily with over 100 radio stations already in operation. TV stations as well have evidently increased thanks to the digital migration. This upward progress has also been reflected in mobile phone usage which has made Kenya to go down on record as having highest internet penetrations on the continent. The BBC Media Action's nationally representative survey (2015), had the following result as far as the media land scape in Kenya is concerned, the survey found out that 98% of the adult population had accessibility to the radio, 97% had access to mobile phones, 81% had access to TV and over 51% of the adult population had access to internet. Despite the above percentages regarding accessibility to various forms of media, internet has made influencers so effective in Kenya. In 2018 Frecia Mbugua a digital and reputation analyst, explains that this is due to the huge following they tend to enjoy through various social media platforms and adequate engagement in their respective content in the form of Likes, Retweets and Shares. However, despite all these, she adds that it is not just enough for companies to have influencer promotions on the basis of huge followings attached on respective influencers. There is also the need to be keen not to compromise on the quality of their targeted audiences, because as Odipo Dev (2019) reports, 14% of consumers preferred influencers for product recommendation as opposed to 53% who preferred brand adverts and 33% trust friends online. The Odipo Dev (2019) report indicated that the reason why influencers garnered a low percentage was because of little trust towards the influencers due to their endorsement of multiple brands; sometimes competing brands affecting their credibility, and as a result making consumers to rely on their own opinions.

According to Global Web Index (2018) report, the most used social media platforms in Kenya are WhatsApp with over 80%, Facebook at 80%, YouTube slightly above 60 %, Instagram over 45%, Messenger above 40%, above 30%, LinkedIn above 15%, Skype 15%, Snapchat 15%, Pinterest 10%, Viber 5%, Tumblr 5%, Badoo below 5%, Wechat below 5%, Reddit below 5%, and Line 5%. The above was a survey of internet users between the age 16 and 64. According to the report, there has been a steady increase of social media users, especially of the audience between aged 18 and 24 (Kepios Analysis, 2019) with above 70% frequency of internet usage (Google Consumer Barometer, 2018). The above outcome indicates that the most dominant social media platform is WhatsApp.

Kenya's 2019 Social Media Overview report by Keipos Analysis (2019), recorded that on a monthly basis there are around 8.2 million social media users who are active, translating to 16% of the total population noting the fact that a good number of Kenyans are not engaging in social media platforms. However, in relation to social media consumption in Kenya, a report by the United States International University Africa (USIU-Africa) indicates that internet penetration in Kenya is the major reason behind progressive consumption of social media in Africa. This explains why according to the report internet usage both in the urban and rural areas is between 40-50% making it easier for influencer marketing to reach both the urban and the rural publics.

6. METHODOLOGY

This study was purely a qualitative study. It relied heavily on secondary data obtained through critical review of existing literature, including published books, articles and journals. The basis on which data was collected and upon which analysis and interpretations were done was purely content analysis.

7. CONCLUSION

Both influencer marketing and traditional forms of media marketing are here to stay, however the degree of influence will keep on changing. Internet penetration has made it easier for a more audience specific influencer marketing that consumers can relate with at a more personal level than just watching, listening or reading from the traditional forms of media. Influencer marketing has provided an avenue for start-up businesses to build a sound database of customers within a short period of time through social media hype as compared to traditional media. This has been made possible by the low budgets involved.

Despite influencer marketing gaining recognition and being embraced by a good number of brands, traditional media marketing enjoys a lot of credibility from its audiences who view information from traditional media as authentic due to the processes the information tends to undergo before being conveyed to the audience. This is something that social media does have because of lack of clear policies of regulating the information passed through such avenues.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Since WhatsApp is the most dominant social media platform in Kenya, brand owners in Kenya should embark on finding out ways of tapping into this platform which has a potential of reaching even a larger audience at very cost-effective charges. The fact that influencer marketing is taking the advertising industry by storm; there is need for clear policies to regulate promotions coming from such avenues. On the same note, since the traditional media platforms are firmly grounded in the Kenyan market, they should reinvent themselves and tap more into the digital technologies. Adopting to digital technologies will bring down the cost of advertising and compete fairly with influencer marketing.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Social media influencers have been found to be wielding a great influence on consumers ((Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). That said, there is need for further research towards coming up with clear policies that can help regulate such forms of marketing due to the potential danger of such influencers negatively influencing audiences, including underage audiences.

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