The impact of influencer marketing and celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour within the South African context

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ABSTRACT

The rise of the internet has led to the advent of social media platforms as a new marketing strategy by organisations. Social media has transformed the way in which marketing was traditionally done as it brought with it a new trend of "Social Media Influencers" (SMIs). These SMIs are people who are capable of using their online proficiency to generate a dedicated large and loyal following of people who are enthralled by their posts, trends and videos pertaining to certain topics. This new marketing phenomenon has altered the mind-sets of traditional marketers. Celebrity endorsements by SMIs enable these influencers to create value for themselves as well as for the brands they endorse. The aim of this paper was to investigate the impact of influencers on consumer behaviour within the South African (SA) market. This study unpacked whether SMIs and celebrity endorsements create value in SA's retail environment. The study was conducted using secondary data gathered from various journals, online articles and books. The findings show how social media provides influencers with a platform to influence and facilitate consumer decision-making. Conclusions drawn from the study indicate that (1) social media is an influential, cost-effective platform that organisations and brands ought to use as an advertising strategy in this technological era and (2) influencers play a significant role in the consumer buying process and the product life-cycle. A conceptual framework for retailers has been proposed to understand the role of SMIs in the current marketing arena. The study concludes by suggesting that organisations that do not take into account social media and its positive traits as an advertising space will be pushed out of the market.

Keywords: Marketing; Influencers; Social Media Influencers (SMIs), Consumer Buying Process, Consumer behaviour; buying decisions; Influencer Marketing in South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The retailer plays an important role by creating jobs and providing products and services to satisfy the needs and wants of people in the community. Modern marketing in retail has advanced from bartering to offering a joyful shopping experience (Dehghan and Haghighi, 2015). Marketing activities divide communication into "above the line" and "below the line" (Pahwa, 2021). The phrase "above the line" refers to 'advertising' and "below the line" refers to 'publicity' (Pahwa, 2021). This division came about because of the way advertising agencies were paid. Marketing companies received commissions from the media in which they placed adverts and were charged high rates for editorials. Other forms of retail promotions used were coupons and the Internet. Coupons were very popular in newspapers and magazines, offering discounts on specific items purchased in-store. The Internet, regarded as an

electronic newspaper, offered retailers pop-up advertisements to potential customers (Mugobo and Malunga, 2015). Website Links included advertisements for potential customers to read further about the businesses offerings (Blythe, 2014). According to Ailawadi and Farris (2017), promotion strategies have grown over the years, bringing new cost-effective ways for marketers to advertise their products. Customers prefer opt-in promotional emails, interactive online chat and purchasing functions with speed of delivery (Moodley, 2019). Mohamed, Reddy and Naidoo (2017) aver that the balance of power has shifted to the customer - from being at the end of the supply chain to being in the driving seat. Moreover, online retailing has quickly become the preferred method of shopping (Berman, Evans and Chatterjee, 2018). For personalised services to meet customer needs, facilitated multiple online marketing channels are used to promote products online (Grewal, Bart, Spann and Zubcsek, 2016). Marketing elements such as the marketing mix have snowballed from the 4Ps (product, place, price and promotion) to the new 10Ps (product, place, price, promotion, people, processes, packaging, physical evidence, partnerships and personality) due to changing trends and to meet customer demands. In addition, there is a preference for customised marketing methods suiting individual needs and tastes (Moodley, 2019). The challenge that marketers face lies in creating the right balance between catering for the customers' needs and ever-changing tastes under constrained marketing budgets (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen, 2019). Access to the internet has changed the way businesses and society transact. Research in developing nations on the adoption of information communication technology (ICT) amongst SMEs reveals that access to the internet improves competitiveness, organisational communication and the flexibility of businesses (Cant and Wiid, 2016). Akram (2018) maintains that a seamless business online experience clearly contributes towards long-term customer-engagement. Online transacting and digital channels have been transformed due to social media and mobile channels (Melero, Sese and Verhoef, 2016). Unlike the brick and mortar stores, online stores have a vital role in creating a pleasant experience for potential customers. Therefore, online shopping has the potential to provide an alternative for convenience for customers conducting their purchasing (Akram, 2018). Social Media Influencers (SMIs) have become key role-players on social media platforms that impact retailers and followers (Audrezet, Kerviler, and Moulard, 2018). Although SMI marketing is a new phenomenon that is closely related to social media marketing, it is proving to be beneficial and most viable for marketers to build relationships and promote products to potential customers (Kadekova and Holiencinova, 2018).

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the paper is as follows:

To investigate the impact of SMI marketing and celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour within the South African market.

THEORETICAL BASIS

People have a variety of needs to be fulfilled on a daily basis. These factors are essentially drivers for sales. Marketers need to identify these motives for shopping in order to direct their marketing efforts towards a specific target market and to capitalise on this for business.

MOTIVES FOR SHOPPING

Marketers' decisions are guided by fulfilment and satisfaction as a strategic outcome for customers and consumers (Preko, Doe and Dadzie, 2019). Customers shop for various reasons in a retail store. These can be split into personal and social motives, as listed below.

Personal motives include:

- Role-play;

- Heterogeneity;

- Seeking self-sensational gratification;

- Learning;

- Self-indulgence (hedonism); and

- Relaxation.

Social motives include:

- Social interaction away from the residence;

- Mixing with peers;

- Fulfilling status and authoritarian needs;

- The challenge of bargaining and negotiation; and

- Being with others who share similar preferences.

Marketers need to be conscious of the aspects highlighted above when they compile their marketing and advertising material and decide on the best way to implement the marketing mix (Terblanché, 2013). The customer can make the purchasing decision individually or may rely on the retailer for support (information, varieties and informed sales staff) over the entire decision process (Ali and Anwar, 2021). The main shopping motives that underpin online shopping are "convenience", "information seeking", "immediate possession", "social interaction" and "variety seeking" (Akram, Junaid, Zafar, Li, and Fan, 2021). The authors add that the difficulty for online retailers is that these retailers must identify the main motives underpinning online shopping for their target customers and address these motives in the online retail strategy.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE PRODUCT LIFE-CYCLE (PLC) AND MARKETING IN A RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

The job of a marketer is a complex one because marketers have to be conscious of the market environment which influences the revenue of the business, as well as a wider macro-environment, which contains factors that have a direct bearing on the business and its surrounding market location. Marketers form partnerships with SMIs with the aim of increasing brand equity and revenue for the retail enterprise. This partnership resembles a product life-cycle as the SMI is regarded as a new product or service in the relationship with the retailer (Young, 2018). The recruitment stage of the social media influencer resembles the development stage of the product life-cycle (Young, 2018). The formation of the relationship resembles the product growth stages from the development and introduction stages all the way through to maturity until their slow decline and eventual retirement, wherein a replacement of the influencer by other influencers would be an initiative of a new product development. According to Young (2018), finding and signing a new influencer is a full life-cycle commitment consisting of the following phases, which the marketer needs to carefully monitor:

- **Introduction**: Turnover is low. There are many rivals in the marketplace. The product may have initial quality issues and there is very little difference between various types of products. There are higher production costs per unit. A product newly introduced into the market has a low demand, and customers are less familiar with it. Therefore, the marketing objective is to disseminate as much information about the new product and to create as much awareness amongst the general public as possible. Marketing is costlier at this stage of the PLC because more frequent marketing campaigns are required.

- **Identify and discover**: In determining the goal and objective of the created campaign, the marketer sets performance indicators and identifies and discovers the right influencer to fit in with a specific brand.

- **Recruitment:** The objective is to get Influencers' attention, encouraging them to come on board and aligning the influencer with the brand campaign.

- **Accelerated increase in sales**: Once the influencer is recruited, marketing and promotion increases as the company invests effort and capital in promoting the product and getting it into the hands of consumers (Sraders, 2021).

- **Growth plateau**: At this stage, there is an accelerated increase in sales: sales revenue increases as buyer groups increase. Penetration is still increasing, but at a declining rate. Prices decrease rapidly and this becomes a significant issue. Assortment surges rapidly and there is a shift of focus towards product excellence. In addition, promotions are carried out intermittently.

- **Maturity**: At this stage, penetration of the market ceases and prices of products decline slowly. Marketing expenditure increases as more promotions are required to sustain the product.

- **Decline**: Prices continue to decline steadily at this stage. Some competitors exit the market as the demand for products decreases. Consequently, minimum promotions are undertaken (Bellini, Cardinali and Ziliani, 2011; Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, and Hansen, 2019).

Growth in terms of the assortment of channel mediums, as well as "the progression from single to multi, then to omni-channel marketing" has resulted in purchasing convenience for customers. On the other hand, this has become more complex for marketing managers. It has also become difficult for marketing managers to differentiate between the various stages of the product life-cycle (Ailawadi, 2021).

THE CONSUMER BUYING PROCESS

The retailer needs to be cognisant of the consumer decision process in order to position its products favourably in the marketplace. Online shopping has effectively contributed towards facilitating purchasing for busy individuals. Equally, it is vital for retailers of an online product or service to understand the dynamics that have an impact on customer satisfaction (van Scheers and Makhitha, 2016). In being conscious of the six steps in the consumer decision process, the World Wide Web has had an impact on changes with regard to the outlook and conduct of people globally, especially in terms of their buying-behaviour (Rudansky-Kloppers, 2014). Consumer decision-making processes are complex, involving stages from 'problem recognition' to 'post purchase' activities. This in itself poses several challenges to marketers. Subsequently, 'online shopping' materialized, influencing the way regular people transact with suppliers of goods or services (Rahman, Islam, Esha, Sultana and Chakravorty, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE RETAILING SPACE

The dawn and progression of the digital era introduced collaborative, dynamic and interactive platforms that no longer accepted static view-only websites (Zerman, 2022), based on the view that the World Wide Web is divided into three groups: Web 1.0, the web of cognition; Web 2.0, the web of human communication; and Web 3.0, the web of co-operation. In elaborating on the differences above, Zerman (2022) explains Web 1.0 as a connected network whereby web users are consumers of static and passive information. Web 2.0 is a totally different platform, offering control, freedom and activity. This freeway mobility allowed for advancements and improvements to the way in which customers access and assess contemporary trends such as Social Media (Almana and Mirza, 2013). Social Media is a tool presented to the world as a form of peer-to-peer communication. Social Media is currently regarded as the backbone of interactive Internet, positioning, for the first time in the history of marketing and trading, the producer of products or services at the rear of "the control pit". Customary mass-communication networks such as television, radio, media as well as direct marketing methodologies have vastly lost impact in terms of controlling both the medium and content of the commercial process (Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides and Alarcon-del-Amo, 2014). Studies show that generation X ("digital immigrants") are more active users of SMSs (Short Message Services) than any of the older Generation Z ("digital natives") (Alt and Agárdi, 2022). Consequently, a brand that targets these groups needs to devise effective strategies to keep them engaged, for example subjective norms and financial risks of mobile payment (Alt and Agárdi, 2022). Retailers should effectively use certain relevant communication strategies like "gamification" if they want to keep the younger generation infatuated, ensuring brand engagement on social media platforms like

Twitter, Instagram as well as Facebook (Florenthal, 2019). Social Media has radically changed the way people make purchasing decisions (Barysevich, 2020). The power and practice of retailers and traditional marketers have been greatly amputated with the balance of power now in the hands of consumers (Kotler *et al*., 2019).

THE GROWTH AND INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Tilahun (2017), the rapid power growth and influence of social media networks has bred a new marketing concept driven by Influencer marketing. In defining Influencer marketing, Tilahun (2017) articulates it as the basis of word-of-mouth leveraging on a social media platform. In intensifying the definition, Influencer Marketing (2020) posits that SMIs are people who build a 'knowledge and expertise' reputation on a specific topic by posting regularly on social media preferred topics that generate enthusiasm for followers to consider. By posting a view on social media which should be regarded as electronic Word-of-Mouth (WOM), also known as eWOM, SMIs stimulate prospective shoppers to either take up an offer or reject it (Rosario and De Valck, 2020). The main aim of posting is to spread information for followers on social media platforms (Almana and Mirza, 2013). eWOM is considered to be a fundamental influence of consumer decisions (Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa and Gómez, 2017). Depending on influence and following, social media classifies influencers as either micro-influencers or macro-influencers (Product Lead, 2019). A classification by Nizri (2022) and Akbarpour (2018) highlights that Macro-influencers have a social audience of more than 100 000 followers, whilst Micro-influencers would range between 10 000 and 100 000 followers and lastly, Nano-influencers with a following below 10 000 followers. Twitter influencers, specifically, make use of trending viral messages of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) via hashtags as a persuasive tweet within the network due to influential personality associations (Bokunewicz and Shulman, 2017). DMOs are usually entities that promote a location for people to travel.

EFFECTIVE DISPLAY OF BRANDS USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The choice of effective ways of displaying brands and related content as well as influential, augmented image methodologies by means of Instagram as a social media platform is essential for "fashionistas" (a designer of haute couture) than for well-known products as this improves brand-recall (Pink, 2022). Instagram "fashionistas" (also known as promoters or followers of the latest fashion or brands) have been successful concerning aggregating the trust element amongst females (Jin and Ryu, 2019). Instagram conveys rich images positioned for females that place a high emphasis on themselves as leaders and those that are fashion-conscious. Brands advertised by the Instagram profile source are considered more credible, and this assists in increasing males' brand-trust by conveying product-centric graphic imagery for males that take pride in themselves (Jin and Ryu, 2019). Eighty percent of Americans will require past experience in the form of recommendations before purchasing a brand (Akbarpour, 2018). However, Kadekova and Holiencinova (2018) posit that ninety-two percent of consumers have more confidence in WOM recommendations by associates, groups or influencers than they do on any publicizing brand. According to Explosive Social (2021), seventy percent of teenage YouTube subscribers trust influencers more than traditional celebrities, further entrenching the platform as a main driver of influencer marketing.

THE IMPACT OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS AND INFLUENCERS

"A celebrity is a person who has become widely known thanks to media" (Kádeková and Holienčinová, 2018). This "celebrity" may be an athlete, actor, singer, etc. These celebrities frequently have vast numbers of followers on social media, thus the communication they send is presented to a very high number of audiences. Cristiano Ronaldo, for example, has approximately 156 million followers on Instagram and Beyoncé has approximately 125 million followers. It can however be quite expensive and complicated for companies to align themselves with some celebrities because of the magnitude of offers the celebrities can choose from (Ágústsson, 2019). "Celebrity endorsement" can be regarded as the original form of "influencer marketing", but presently "influencers" on social media with their niche group of followers are often better suited for marketers of retail businesses (Newberry, 2019). Users garner followership to be

able to connect with various brands and businesses and to facilitate social interactions with customers. As a result of the scale of influence, celebrities are known as "Instafamous" (Dewey, 2014). According to Jin and Muqaddam (2019), SMIs are currently becoming a new type of celebrity. These SMIs have a unique identity and a large number of followers.

Celebrity endorsements

"Celebrity endorsement is the promotion of a brand by a celebrity" (Hashaw, 2019). It is brand awareness by organisations using well-known people to influence consumer behaviour. It is not every celebrity that can endorse brands, as it is important to consider that the brand and the celebrity match (Hashaw, 2019). Brand owners ought to view celebrity endorsements with caution as celebrities have the potential to transfer their values onto the brand they endorse (Molelekeng and Dondolo, 2021). Too much reliance on celebrity endorsements can give an impression that the celebrity is not genuinely interested, causing brand inauthenticity. According to Liu and Wilson (2009), a brand without a thorough understanding of the environment in which it is functioning or operating has high chances of experiencing the Pinocchio Effect. The effect thereoff is that consumers perceive the "Pinocchio effect" as untrustworthy (whereby influencers are used to endorse products - referring to Pinocchio's nose growing when he is lying) (Temperley and Tangen, 2006). For traditional celebrities, endorsements were only considered once one added value for their own careers via sport, music or movies (mOOnshot digital, 2022). However, with the upsurge of reality television stars, the world is witnessing alternative forms of celebrity status, and customers are feeling more connectedness and perceive these celebrities as being more authentic (Escalas and Bettman, 2017). Recently, all celebrities have been treated as "influencers" (Jankowski, 2021). The era of social media platforms has further exacerbated social celebrity statuses (Escalas and Bettman, 2017). Social media has given well-known influential South Africans 'Celebrity Endorsement' status. Brands attach the popularity and influence of a celebrity to their brand or product, for example Robert Marawa and the Nivea body cream endorsement. In using this strategy, the brand is acquiring customers who idolize the personality and align themselves with the products so that they can purchase. The market has seen a spring of vlog comedians or motivational speakers attracting an immense following on their social media time-lines, providing a platform for young aspiring comedians to flourish. These social media "crowd-pullers" like Trevor Noah and entrepreneur Vusi Thembekwayo start small and, over time, grow a following to be mammoth market influencers.

Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

The South African benchmark for SMIs compiled a report indicating that between 20 and 27 percent of SMIs have unverifiable followers (Masinga, 2019). This paradigm is of insignificant value to marketers as only one in two followers in South Africa (SA) are likely to turn into an actual impression. This creates a significant gap for the number of followers and actual reach (Masinga, 2019). SA marketers are an inventive crew, using real story-lines that hit above the globe's monotonous endeavours at humour to vivid locally-developed advertising platforms, like the "Please Call Me" text tag adverts (Rosen, 2019). Social media marketing is swiftly evolving with the preferred use of popular SMIs as a marketing tool for brand marketers (WordStream, 2020). However, apart from "likes, retweets and shares", concrete responses from consumers to this form of advertising are unclear (Woodroof, Howie, Syrdal, and VanMeter, 2020; and McKay, 2017). Contrary to the above narrative, Hashaw (2019) is of the view that SMIs enhance credibility and glamour for a brand. According to Explosive Social (2021), seventy percent of teenage YouTube subscribers trust SMIs more than traditional celebrities. Thus for the purposes of this paper, the impact of SMIs on the consumer buying process will be discussed further.

SMIS AND THE CONSUMER BUYING PROCESS

According mOOnshot digital (2022), digital marketing started with blogging and YouTube which initially did stimulate purchasing. However, Instagram took SMI marketing to a higher level, incorporating distinctive features centred on "visual aesthetics" as well as "filtered images", which make it a suitable medium for promotions of beauty products, advocating lavish existences and prominent luxury brands (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Blight, Ruppel

and Schoenbauer (2017) comment on the positive impact of SMIs, particularly via Instagram, on retailing since 2011. During the lock-down in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a distinct shift towards SMI marketing (Abe and Mugobo, 2021). Regular posts by SMIs stimulated online purchasing. The traditional stages of the consumer buying process (recognising needs, searching for information, evaluation of merchandise or alternatives, the purchase decision, post-purchase decision as well as impulse buying) have been drastically altered by SMIs (Moodley, Buthelezi and Cloete, 2021). SMIs have a direct impact on every stage of the consumer buying process (Chopra, Avhad and Jaju, 2021). The various stages of the consumer buying process and the impact that SMIs have on each stage are highlighted below:

Recognising needs

SMIs are very effective at this step (need recognition) of the buying decision process. When the SMI starts a conversation pertaining to a product, this initiates the buying decision process and stimulates a need for it. This can also be relating to a product the consumer has not seen before and did not know they needed or wanted until they saw the SMI talking about it (Ágústsson, 2019).

Searching for information

South African consumers take a large interest in SMIs' views and online trends during their search for information, similar to people from the United States and Europe (Marketing Influencer hub, 2019). Inasmuch as SA still has a long way to go, brands are however recognising the worth of smaller SMIs (frequently called Micro or Nano-influencers) because they are so closely connected with their audiences, hence their reliability and strength is valued (Thulo, 2019). Consumers are now directed to a specific website address, eliminating the need to search multiple websites (George 2021).

Evaluation of merchandise or alternatives

With enough following on social media platforms, anyone has the ability to influence the behaviour of others (Kadekova and Holiencinova, 2018). Technology has enabled people to use language, image recognition paired with artificial intelligence, machine learning and deep learning to understand variables such as gender, age, interest, activity and previous mentions of specific brands (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, Jacobson and Wang 2020). As an alternative, the use of hashtags and emojis are included to position persona and to attract and influence the social and cultural perspectives where SMIs are fully active (McFarlane and Samsioe 2020). Therefore, SMI marketing has now become a prevalent trend in S.A. to evaluate alternatives.

The purchase decision

Woodroof, Howie, Syrdal, and VanMeter (2020) and Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu (2019) agree that the manner in which an influencer is perceived has an impact on a customer's perception of product efficiency and also has a bearing on their purchasing intent. To avoid consumers' tendency of browsing products once reaching a store, SMIs are employed to influence the target audiences' attention by steering interest and arousing the target audiences' minds on specific products and hence triggering sales (Tokmak, 2019; and Padhi, 2021). From a study conducted by Bokunewicz and Shulman (2017), high profile DMOs use the influence of high profile SMIs to stimulate purchasing. It is from these remarkable attributes relating to stakeholders that entities such as hotels, restaurants and other businesses have partnered with SMIs and are assisting DMOs to enlarge their scope of influence and therefore expand their efficiency on social media campaigns. In some cases, the consumer may not go through all previous steps. Consumers may, for example, go directly from problem recognition straight through to purchase decision as a result of the influence of the SMI.

Post-purchase evaluation

Post-purchase evaluation refers to the manner in which the consumer decides whether the product has been successful or not. This often involves the consumer comparing what they expected to get to what they really got. The evaluation determines the satisfaction of the consumer. If the product does not meet the expectation, the consumer will be disappointed. If the product meets expectations, then the customer will be satisfied (George, 2021). Finally, if the product exceeds expectations, the consumer will be delighted (Kotler *et al.*, 2019). Sometimes, when the consumer is disappointed with the product, and even when the product is as expected or better, post-purchase dissonance can occur. This evaluation and satisfaction level can make a difference when the consumer is deciding if they will buy the product again. The SMI plays a critical role at this stage. An additional stage of the buying decision process is called "divestment", which refers to "the way the consumer disposes of the product after use" (Kotler and Keller, 2016). This can include everything from throwing away a small plastic container to the disposing of a vehicle. This stage is becoming increasingly important to marketers. Consumers are more aware of the environment and even shunning items that are enveloped in a needless amount of plastic. If the disposal of the product has a more damaging effect on the environment than another competing product, it can cost brands their customers (Chernev, 2019). Hence, brands can make use of SMIs to make consumers aware of their environmentally friendly products (Hughes, Swaminathan and Brooks, 2019).

Impulse buying

In promoting luxury products, high-end brands are making use of top-tier SMIs to stretch the reach of their brands, as well as boost planned and unplanned purchasing (Jin and Ryu, 2019). Retailers are spending large amounts on SMIs since these influencers have proven to prompt impulse buying (Müller, Mattke and Maier, 2018). Together with this, research shows that young consumers enjoy the engagement and stories of SMIs, which triggers impulse buying (Childers, Lemon, and Hoy 2019; MediaKix, 2019). Unplanned buying, without a strategic plan, which occurs after a spontaneous need, is also known as "reactive purchasing". This became known as the Diderot Effect. Consequently, one finds oneself purchasing unnecessary items that are neither fulfilling nor bring happiness. SMIs can largely contribute towards these unplanned purchases (Singh, 2021). The Diderot Effect refers to "obtaining a new possession that often creates a spiral of consumption, leading one to acquire more new things" (Tokmak, 2019). Consequently, one finds oneself purchasing unnecessary items that are not fulfilling or bring happiness. In addition, influencers have the ability to gain target audience attention by steering interest and arousing the target audiences' minds, hence triggering sales (Tokmak, 2019).

SMIS AND THE PRODUCT LIFE-CYCLE (PLC)

Brown and Forrella (2013) mention that SMIs have added a new dynamic to the PLC and consumers are now responding differently at each stage. Social media contains augmented benefits that can track sales conversions triggered by SMIs. This can effortlessly be tracked from the onset of the initial touch-point to the final purchase (Bakker, 2018). A recent study on SMI marketing shows that 31% of the respondents stated that they purchased a product or service after seeing a SMI's post (Connolly, 2017). This has implications for marketers who traditionally spend more money during the introduction and growth stages of the PLC to stimulate purchasing. A product goes through various stages in the PLC: introduction, growth, maturity and decline. The choice of marketing communications messages is vital at the various PLC stages. Eslami, Ghasemaghaei and Hassanein (2021) elaborate that at the introduction stage, the best marketing strategy is to appoint reputable SMIs with a large following to communicate valuable information about the recently launched product. These SMIs have the potential to drastically increase a product's market reachability with minimal costs. A SMI's popularity on social media is the determining factor in relation to increasing customer engagement in the PLC, as well as across social media platforms (Eslami, Ghasemaghaei and Hassanein 2021).

METHODOLOGY

To develop a conceptual framework, this article builds on secondary data collected and reviewed from various established theoretical frameworks, namely (I) the consumer buying process; (II) the product life-cycle and (III) the Kano model developed by Professor Noriaki Kano of Tokyo Rika University in 1984. The proposed conceptual framework developed for this paper adopts a theoretical approach for the purpose of assessing the impact of market influencers within the South African context. The paper reviews theories that define various global consumer behaviours, as well as in the South African market, identifying the main determinants of market influencers. The second approach reviewed the purchasing evaluation process. The article investigated several pertinent aspects relating to marketing influence, namely post-purchase dissonance, product usage and disposal of the product or package relating to celebrity influence. The last approach uses Kano's model to discuss the placing of products online as a multifaceted initiative faced with the influence from online reviews or promotional actions when customers are making purchasing decisions, and the convergence of accessibility that meets customer needs, which can be of relevance to the demand for goods or services now, particularly for South African consumers (Zhao, *et al*., 2019).

DISCUSSION

In 1984, Professor Noriaki Kano of Tokyo Rika University developed what is revered as one of the most customer progressive customer-satisfaction models – the Kano model (Bi, Liu, Fan and Cambria, 2019). The model provides an invaluable understanding on customer attraction, satisfaction and inferring customer requirements. According to Jesse (2021), improving products' attributes does not necessarily increase customer satisfaction, as the relationship between quality attributes and customer satisfaction is asymmetrical and non-linear. However, some attributes have the potential to increase customer satisfaction. Therefore, having knowledge of the various types of product attributes can align the product design to modify quality attributes to gain competitive advantage (Mostafa, Batool and Parvaneh, 2013). This article discusses how using Kano's model to understand customer needs and availing brands online through the influence of a marketing influencer can be of relevance to the demands by brands.

THE KANO MODEL AND THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY:

The model addresses three types of requirements, namely:

- *Satisfying basic needs:* Allows a company to get into the market.

- *Satisfying performance needs:* Allows a company to remain in the market.

- *Satisfying excitement needs:* Allows a company to excel, to be world class.

Prasad (2015) and Dlamini (2019) confirm that in Kano's model, factors that contribute to dissatisfaction are called *"must-be" factors or Basic need*. Their perceived necessity classifies customer needs into expected quality. If these factors are not fulfilled, customer satisfaction can never be attained. Within the online space, influencers are expected to have attractive image captions and eye-catching profile images for a huge following.

On *satisfying performance needs,* an influencer recruited by a brand is expected to adhere to certain implicit expectation requirements for customer satisfaction. This includes to post on social media content relevant in influencing followers to purchase or consume the brand that the influencer is carrying.

Lastly, *satisfying excitement needs* requires the enterprise to exhibit unexpected features to impress customers, alternatively referred to as 'delighters'. This could be an influencer taking selfies with followers at the promotional launch of a brand being promoted. If the influencer is at the promotional brand launch and not taking selfies, it does not cause dissatisfaction. However, the taking of selfies is a delighter.

THE KANO MODEL AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

To determine the success of any business, it is vital to be aware of the insights that customers have of products and service offerings. Therefore, it is imperative that businesses concentrate on satisfying customers' daily consumption requirements and improving total quality management and business development as measures for sustaining their businesses (Materla, Cudney, and Antony, 2019). As per Figure 1 below, "The Kano Model of Customer Satisfaction" categorizes product attributes in terms of how customer needs are perceived and their attractiveness in offering customers maximum satisfaction. The multi-faceted Kano model has revealed how, through an identification and classification of quality attributes by the marketing production concept (an online space), a previously producer-oriented market can be led by customers. The availing of products or services online for public consumption has revealed the potential to further influence or fuel consumption due to *accessibility*, *an anticipated expectation of quality products for the customer* and lastly, the "*impulsive purchase*" effect (Haber, Fargnoli and Sakao, 2020). For the online space, a combination of higher income and access to the internet is an epitome of increased financial prospects, quality of life and customer satisfaction (Rudansky-Kloppers, 2014). This quality is epitomized by customers who were initially required to physically go into the store to do shopping, but now having the ability to shop online and read product reviews and compare goods with less effort (Moodley, 2019). These online shopping identification features are expected by customers and are therefore considered a "must". Improving the performance of these attributes does not guarantee increased customer satisfaction, as it may only add to the cost of products. However, their absence or even poor performance would cause dissatisfaction (Prasad, 2015). Therefore, for online consumption to achieve better performance, it has to rely on a persuasive advertising range that will change performance from dissatisfaction to indifferent. Online product reviews, together with the influential marketing influencer, commands an influential edge that compels one to make an instant purchase (Akbarpour, 2018; and Patel, 2015).

FIGURE 1:
ONLINE PURCHASING DECISIONS AS PER THE KANO MODEL
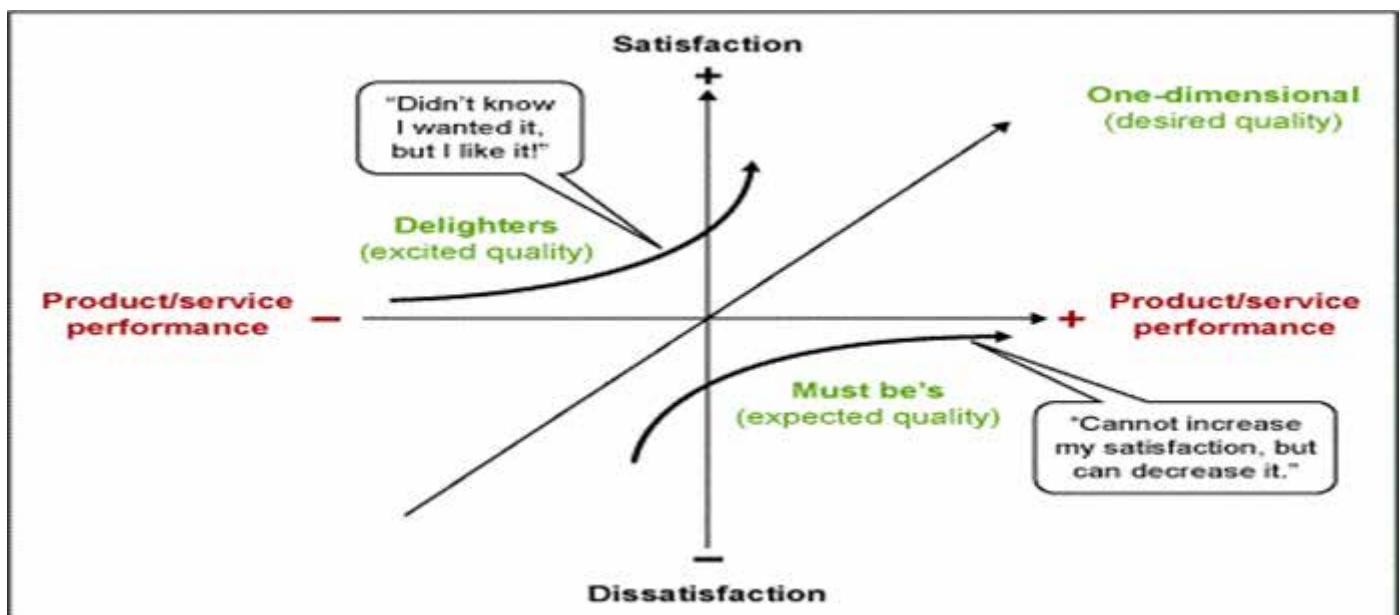
Source: Harahap and Amanah (2018).

Various economic sectors, including social media marketing, have managed to utilize and adopt the Kano model. The model is framed in a four-quadrant level of customer satisfaction that indicates the degree of implementation. It classifies the quality of a product or service using two axes dividing the quality of elements into five classifications. However, to achieve the purpose of the study, only the first 3 classifications will be discussed: (1) the excited quality attributes; (2) the one-dimensional quality attribute; (3) the must-be quality attribute; (4) the indifferent quality attribute;

and (5) the reverse quality attribute. The creation of attractive elements, such as online reviews and promotional strategies, is meant to increase customer satisfaction and level of confidence, whilst dissatisfaction is not necessarily attracted by low levels of performance (Chen, Yeh and Chen, 2018).

The Kano model of customer satisfaction is relevant in understanding the different types of customer needs as indicated in Figure 1 above. Thus, businesses can factor these aspects into product design and modifications, and may gain a competitive advantage over others (Mostafa, Batool and Parvaneh, 2013).

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Technological developments like social medial platforms have had an impact on the way organisations engage with online consumers. This doctrine is upheld by Jarrar, Awobamise and Aderibigbe (2020), who assert that technological communication determinists such as social media are the sole cause of societal change. O'Brien's (2019) opinion of the current reality of the digital consumer is that consumers want to be involved and understand the companies they engage with. Eckstein (2021) argues that in building brand loyalty, enterprises are required to have a relationship that is transparent and to personalize their online presence to avoid the Pinocchio effect.

Technology through the use of social media has empowered customers to engage with businesses to either appreciate or denounce their offerings. This further proves the importance of consumer engagement in interacting with individual customers quickly, openly and transparently (Goga and Paelo, 2019). Digital marketing and social media platforms have proven that customer engagement is an important differentiator to brand nuance Acar and Puntoni (2016) and have also proven to be a cornerstone to influencer marketing and communicating with current and past customers, with the aim of building an effective relationship and loyalty (Ozturk and Hancer, 2022). To enhance effective relationships and loyalty, organizations make use of celebrity endorsements or marketing influencers to enable brands to reach consumers easily and quickly. Accenture executives Watling, McCabe and Seedat (2019) concur in their "Rethinking the Ecommerce opportunity in South African" report that South Africans are increasingly becoming digitally savvy. More than half the population has access to the internet and use it to window-shop. With an increasingly digital savvy growth, it becomes apparent for organizations to embrace ecommerce and make use of celebrity endorsements to influence the digitally savvy generations Y and Z (Nyamakanga, Ford and Viljoen, 2019). Jose (2017) is of the opinion that reaching out to influencer marketers via celebrity endorsements or social media helps in engaging customers of all ages. This view is upheld by Nyamakanga, Ford and Viljoen (2019) who confirm that the advent of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter has seen celebrity endorsements increase exponentially in relation to digital marketing. The industry has further seen the emergence of micro-celebrities who are ordinary people becoming famous by regularly endorsing company products and brands on social media (Nyamakanga, Ford and Viljoen, 2019). Brands need to be proactive in assisting and increasing their influence over customers to buy the product. In contemporary marketing, a business cannot depend solely on its own efforts, it should take advantage of eWOM and other online platforms (Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa and Gómez, 2017). There is a need for instant consumption, therefore the ability for an organization to satisfy the customers "demands for goods or services now" and the use of online shopping fulfills that need. Rahman et al. (2018) feed into the belief by Bocock (2009) that consumer demands for "goods now" affects the way in which peoples' overview of psychoanalytic theory and practice impact on other disciplines. By placing products online for easy accessibility and influence, the Kano model's relevance to the demand for goods or services now, particularly for South African consumers, is revealed.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed conceptual framework is based on the consideration of unique challenges identified in the literature review in both the South African context and developed countries. The literature review provides the groundwork for the conceptual framework discussed. Validating the use of social media by marketing influencers (as the main instrument of influence on brand consumption) gives retailers the belief that influencers have the ability to grab the target market's attention (Ndlela and Chuchu, 2016). Literature from various scholars Nyamakanga, Ford and Viljoen (2019); Ndlela and Chuchu (2016); Geyser (2022) and Watling, McCabe and Seedat (2019) further aided

in identifying key constructs within the South African context that will assist brands to develop, perform and realize their full potential. The designed conceptual framework is centred on access to the internet. Social media space is seen as the main tool of influence by celebrities and influencers to have an impact on customer behaviour. A review of the literature identifies four (4) major constructs, namely (1) Access to the internet; (2) Brand/Market experts and Celebrity influence; (3) Social media following; and lastly (4) Brand growth. The imperfection of Figure 2 below is indicative of challenges that customers face with online shopping. This is evident in, for example, limited trust with online payment systems, network connectivity for payment systems and limited choice in payment methods (Watling, McCabe and Seedat, 2019; and van Eeden, 2021). The proposed conceptual framework is designed by the researchers using literature from influencer marketing and consumer behaviour with ethos from the Kano Model. Moreover, it is imperative to explain that modifications are made in relation to the Kano model depicted in Figure 1. The designed model takes from the ethos of the Kano model - a non-linear correlation is said to exist between social media space and marketing Influencers and celebrity endorsements. The growth of social media as a communication and sales and marketing tool is depicted in Figure 2 below at approximately forty-five degrees anti-clockwise to that of figure 1's "must be" and "delighters", highlighting the influence on attributes such as the customer purchasing decision. The theory taken into consideration in designing a conceptual framework in Figure 2 below communicates that celebrity endorsements influence consumer behaviour through social media platforms.

FIGURE 2:
BUTTERFLY ONLINE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
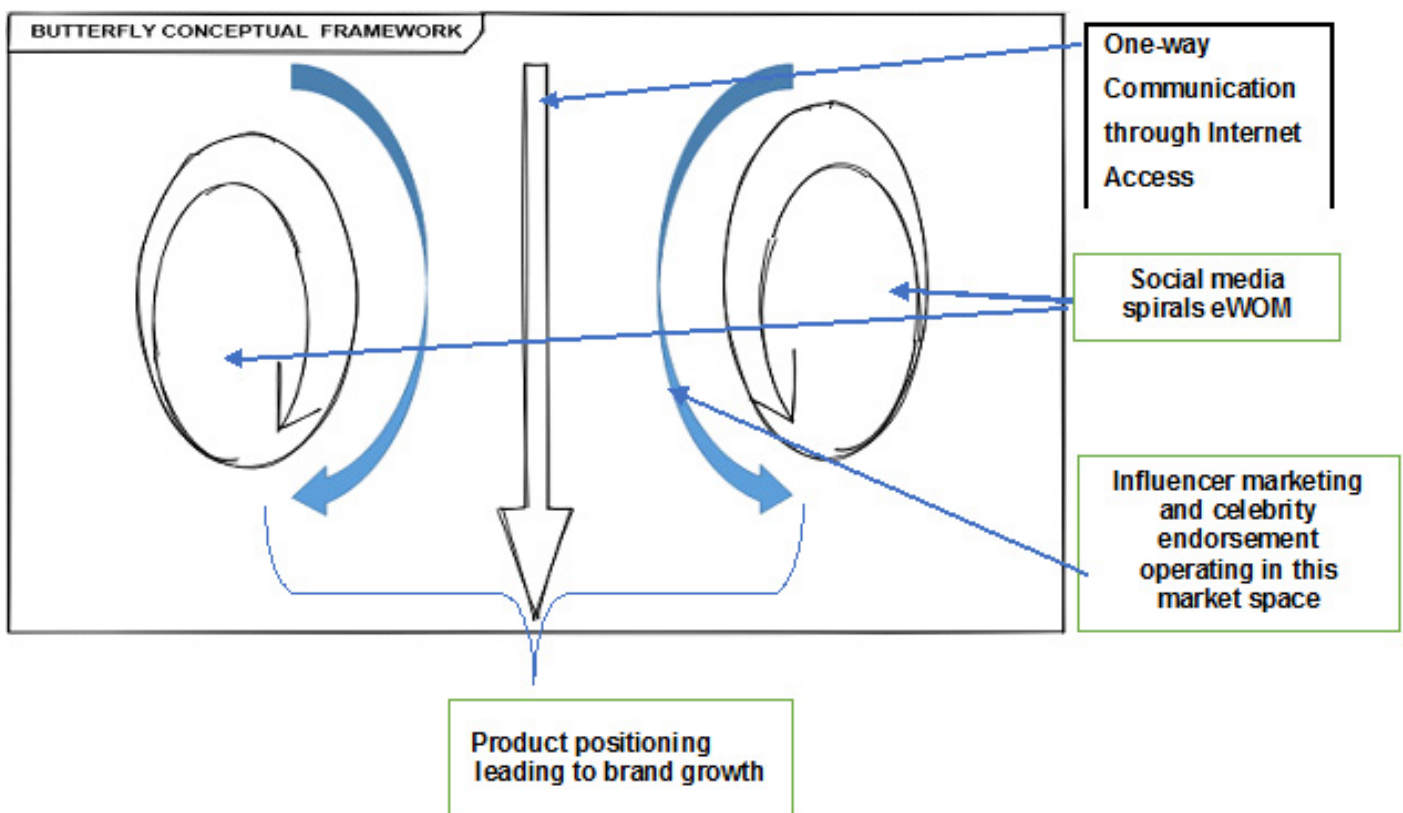
Source: Researchers' own work (2022)

DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework displays how influencer marketing is characterised by celebrities in the social media space luring followers to consume brands that they have been endorsed to promote. These influential groups have become part of the main drivers influencing the market. Communication through access to the Internet is shown on the diagram as a one-way direction from the market influencer or celebrity to consumers. Celebrity endorsements cause traction through influencers appealing to various consumers and markets to follow them by either interacting on single or multiple message platforms. Hence, the Diderot Effect ensues. Accessibility to the social media platform

via the internet is aimed at targeting many followers by creating viral messages via hashtags. The diagram above displays access to the internet and social media as being critical features of the market space (Geppert, 2020). Consumer markets operate within this enclosed internet access space, indicating a flow from top to bottom spiral, to either side via access to the internet. Spiral consumption demonstrates how social media consumer behaviour revolves around this market by vying for the attention of millennials or Generation Z. Keeping the brand relevant and in demand promotes brand loyalty and lets today's consumer know that their organisation is still alive. Marketers are not to undermine the use of influencer marketing when thinking of increasing market dominance and product presence. The internet and social media have proven to be influential, accessible, cost-effective and critical in this technological era. Organisations that do not recognise social media and its attributes as an advertising space will be pushed out of the market (Pick, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual framework displays how influencer marketing is used by retailers in employing the services of celebrities as influential consumers with access to the internet, specifically in the social media space. The influencer endorses the brands for followers to purchase the brands. The influencer becomes a means of brand communication by acting as the brand's spokesperson through spreading their personality, popularity and status in promoting the brand (Ndlela and Chuchu, 2016). Communication through access to the Internet is shown on the diagram as a one-way direction from the influencer or celebrity to consumers. These celebrity endorsements have the potential to create a social media frenzy, also referred to as eWOM. The social media spiraling on either side appeals to various consumers and markets, motivating them to purchase the advertised brand or follow the brand by interacting with the celebrity on either single or multiple message platforms. Accessibility on the social media platform via the internet is aimed at targeting many followers by creating viral messages via hashtags. Stemming from the Kano model, the new framework as shown in Figure 2 displays access to data, or the internet and social media, as being critical features of the market space. This is also congruent with the views held by Geppert (2020) and Jarrar, Awobamise and Aderibigbe (2020) that the spread of the internet and the rise of social media has made influencer marketing the logical step to digital marketing. The consumer behaviour operating within this enclosed internet access space is indicated by a flow from top to bottom and a spiral on either side via access to the internet. In developing economies like Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, access to the internet is defined in terms of cost, not in terms of signal connectivity (Jarrar, Awobamise and Aderibigbe, 2020). South Africa ranked the highest in mobility and broadband Internet affordability out of 18 African countries. However, it ranked 91st out of 110 countries with its number of Internet users (Monzon, 2022). The spiralling consumption demonstrates how social media consumer behaviour revolves around this market, vying for the attention of millennials or Generation Z. Keeping the brand relevant and in demand promotes brand loyalty and lets today's consumer know that their organisation is still alive. Marketers are not to undermine the use of influencer marketing when thinking of increasing market dominance and product presence (Jarrar, Awobamise and Aderibigbe, 2020). The internet and social media have proven to be influential, accessible, cost-effective and critical in this technological era (Watling, McCabe and Seedat, 2019). Organisations that do not recognise social media and its attributes as an advertising space will be pushed out of the market (Pick, 2020). Partnering with the SMIs has the potential of allowing retailers as well as DMOs to expand their reach and improve the effectiveness of their campaigns. Once the audience feels closer to the SMI, they embrace the influencer who is promoting the brand and are persuaded to purchase according to the recommendations of the SMI. Thus, SMIs play a significant role in the consumer buying process as well as the product life-cycle. This new dynamic needs to be taken into consideration by marketers (1) who spend a lot of money ensuring that their websites have content to cater for customers in the "search for information" stage in the customer buying process and (2) who traditionally spend more money during the introduction and growth stages of the PLC to stimulate purchasing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is vital to understand that social networking sites should promote the sensible use of social media platforms such as Instagram, with a focus on becoming aware of threats and hacks that may occur on these social media platforms. In addition, users should be aware of addiction and negative outcomes such as "instastress" (stress resulting from social media fatigue). This concurs with the views of Sanz-Blas, Buzova and Miquel-Romero (2019) who state that the social media can become addictive and that over-use can have negative consequences. Mechanisms should be put in place so that the social media account can time out after a specified period in order to prevent over-use. Alternately, a sign-in and out mechanism needs to be included after short periods.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Business models are changing so rapidly that international legal experts are struggling to peg these online platforms with rigid legal criteria. This is also compromised by rigid criteria and broad general clauses (Broadbent, 2020). Good Samaritan liability protection is no longer effective as the third parties used by these social media platforms are often non-compliant. These platforms are international and need standardised protection. Moreover, transparency and due diligence is required. Avatars and fake influencers should not be allowed or used on social media platforms. Online platforms, for example Amazon and Takealot, are now part of a regulatory chain and will need to verify and classify any third parties used on their sites. Reputation systems and systems for credible reviews also need to be included to prevent the abuse of vulnerable consumers.

COMPULSORY LEARNING TO CONTINUE ENJOYING FREE ACCESS

LinkedIn Learning stimulates and encourages learning on its platform. A variety of valuable courses can be worked through at a comfortable pace. Other social media sites should encourage an hour or two of valuable compulsory learning to ensure that users are also engaging with credible academics and industry experts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RETAILERS

In the new competitive retailing environment, retailers need to take cognisance of evolving consumer preferences and the way consumers currently search for information, evaluate alternatives and make purchasing decisions, essentially to survive and stay relevant. It is imperative for retailers to understand the consumer buying process so that they can respond to consumers' needs accordingly (Erasmus, Donoghue and Dobbelstein, 2022). Retailers should focus on the shared content when searching for a SMI they want to contract, rather than starting from the number of the influencer's followers, as popularity does not necessarily affect the impact on the followers and their behaviour. This is congruent with the views of Masuda, Han and Lee (2022) and Hughes *et al.* (2019). Retailers should also consider using artificial intelligence (AI) and AI influencers that can potentially enable an infinite number of micro-targets, or even entirely personalise influencers to be rapidly created by a brand. All consumers could be targeted with their own personalised influencer bots. These personalised AI influencers have the ability to learn about current trends, consumer desires and customise offers, and also show-casing consumers own aspirational versions of themselves. Sands, Campbell, Plangger and Ferraro (2022) concur with this view. Retailers need to take cognisance of the various stages of the PLC and ensure that they employ suitable SMIs with larger followings for the introduction and growth stages to ensure steady customer engagement.

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