



## Comparison between Attributes related to Celebrity Endorsement and Social Media Influencer Marketing: A Conceptual Review

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### **ABSTRACT**

Influencer marketing is one of the emerging tools in the field of marketing and it is an area that has gained the attention of the researchers. The concept of social influencers has evolved with the rapid popularity of using peer reviews, comments and tweets on products and services when making the purchasing decisions. Subsequently the marketers have identified the vitality of user-generated content and leveraging the power of social influencers in order to promote their brands. However, there is always a grey area about the return on investment of this tool from the client's perspective. In contrary, the customer also have a doubt on whether the information provided by influencers are credible and unbiased. Most of the previous studies were conducted to investigate the impact of social influencers on purchasing intention, attitudes and public perception on social influencers and different attributes related to social influencers. Thus, limited number of researches have provided constructive models to analyze the attributes related to influencer marketing which affects the purchasing intention. In line with this concept, this paper reveals whether the models that are associated with celebrity endorsement such as source credibility model and attractiveness model can be adapted in order to identify the attributes related to social influencers. Furthermore, some of the new attributes were incorporated to the existing models as well. A deductive method was employed and extensive literature review was carried out as the main research tool in order to highlight the contextual explanations about the concept and finally, the paper presents future research directions in the field of social influencers.

**Keywords:** *Celebrity Endorsement, Influencer Marketing, Social Media Influencers, Source Attractiveness Model, Source Credibility Model*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional perspective of influencer marketing was celebrities appearing in a TV commercial or famous people posing on billboards with the companies' belief of showcasing people of interest to their target market, consumers will be more inclined to try the products or services that the company offers. However, with advancement of media, companies got the opportunity to choose marketing tools from a range of options to market their products. These options have also led to the evolution of social media influencer marketing. Now there are people representing companies through branded content on personal social media accounts, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube. Further, consumers inform their purchasing decisions to fellow consumers also by being interactive (Glucksman, 2017).

Social media influencers represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Subsequently influencer marketing has become a vital pillar in the modern marketing arena and companies expect to increase their spending on influencer marketing (Study: 39% of marketers will increase influencer marketing, 2017). Although some scholars view social influencers as competing and hostile (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009), others recognize the possibilities of building alliances with social influencers promote a brand or an organization (Freberg et al., 2011).

Instagram being one of the major sources of influencer marketing, spending in influencer marketing in Instagram will reach nearly \$ 2 billion in 2018 (The Remarkable Rise of Influencer Marketing [INFOGRAPHIC], 2017). Both recent statistics and research have identified influencer marketing as an emergent channel for advertisers to invest in, as it promises a close connection to customers and an uplift in sales. Hence, many companies are abandoning traditional forms of advertising and shifting to new forms such as influencer marketing (Knoll, 2016). Statistics prove a constant decrease in TV viewership and simultaneously increasing trend of YouTube worldwide viewership, which already exceeded the time consumers spend on Facebook or Netflix (O'Neil-Hart & Blumenstein, 2016; Nielsen, 2017). As more people start relying on peer endorsements and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in order to seek authentic opinions and reviews, it is necessary to find a less conspicuous and more effective alternative to advertisement.

Since influencers play a growing and important role in word-of-mouth marketing, marketers tend to engage them in their campaigns. As stated by Odell (2015), a poll of marketing professionals conducted by Tomoson found that marketers rate influencer marketing as their fastest-growing online customer-acquisition channel, outpacing organic search, email marketing and paid search. She has further stated that collaborating with an influencer can be a cost effective method since it generates high-quality content and can be targeted to very specific audiences. According to Wissman (2018) influencers have developed into content creators who possess enough marketing power to attract attention of the major

brands which are willing to engage in bidding wars over their next sponsored post. Thus, “influencing” has become their sole career and subsequently who enjoy millions of followers, have captured the spotlight and become celebrities by their own in their expertise area.

## **2. MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

This paper attempts to review the empirical and theoretical arguments to discuss whether the attributes related to celebrity endorsements’ effectiveness can be applied to measure the effectiveness of social influencers. There are arguments on the impact of social influencers on purchase intention, attitudes and public perception on social influencers, but limited number of studies have been done to identify the characteristics that social influencers should have in order to enhance the effectiveness of social marketing. Furthermore, attributes related to followers and the content generated by the social influencers will be discussed based on the previous literature.

Existing literature lacks different areas of research that would benefit from critical cross-subject areas and concepts. Thus, it limits the usefulness of social influencers. In order to enhance the usefulness of these concepts, applicability of brand endorsers’ attributes on social influencers will be recognized and critically evaluated in this paper. Subsequently credibility model and source attractiveness model will be used to investigate the adaptability of the attributes associated with celebrity endorsers on social influencers. Accordingly, paper follows a deductive approach to review the concepts and empirical contributions. Research tools include literature survey methods and journal articles, case studies, industry reports and theories were examined to organize the arguments and conclusions. Paper provides a discussion based on empirical arguments and it concludes future research directions accordingly.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1. Influencer Marketing and Social Influencers**

The digital world enhanced the freedom for the ordinary people to express their thoughts and suggestions and nevertheless it was perceived as authentic and interesting. Subsequently it captured the attention of the people who followed their content and the content became viral (Alic, Pestek, & Sadinlija, 2017). As a result of that user generated content as well as the social influencers gained the attention of both the marketers and the customers and thus influencer marketing became a marketing tool in the modern marketing era. Influencer marketing is defined as companies convincing individuals with a significant social network of followers to endorse their products and thus, to generate purchase intentions (Müller, Mattke, & Maier, 2018). This has been further elaborated as individuals with a sizable social network of followers, acting as trustworthy experts and trendsetters in a specific niche (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017).

Due to the rapid development in technology and social media, the concept of social media influencer grew substantially in the past 10 years. In the early stages influencer marketing was done through blogs and online diary platforms with more focus on providing elaborated written posts, whereas now photos and videos are shared in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram real time as and when the events are happening (Alic et al., 2017). According to recent statistics, Jamie Oliver with 6.7 million followers, Annette White with 99.2k followers, Alexa Chung with 3.1 million followers and Jannid Olsson Delér with 1.4 million followers are the top Instagram influencers in the fields of food, travel, fashion and lifestyles respectively (The Ultimate List of Instagram Influencers in Every Industry (135 and Counting!), n.d.) and they are being paid to endorse the products and services in their specialized areas. Contrarily to celebrities who are generally public figures with many fans, influencers produce their own content (user-generated content) on social media, focusing on a niche audience genuinely interested in specific topics. Influencer marketing is considered as word of mouth marketing, where user generated content is the message, word of mouth is the medium and influencer marketing is the process (Berger & Keller Fay Group, 2016). According to Conick (2016), consumers are more likely to buy products endorsed by non-celebrity bloggers than a celebrity. He had further elaborated it by saying, this phenomenon is more visible among the 18- 34 age group which represents the youth.

As per literature, the reasons to work with an influencer can be listed as existence of personal touch, trust, no hidden agendas, truly powerful paid content than just an advertisement, no politics, target marketing made easier and cost effectiveness (7 Reasons to Work with Online Influencers, 2015). Furthermore three relevant types of perceptions influencing customers' purchase intention which is generate by influence marketing can be listed as; perceptions about the influencer, perceptions about the advertisement and perceptions about the advertised product (Müller et al., 2018). As per the studies conducted 89% have agreed that quality of content is the first step of selecting a good social influencer, but an influencer could be ruled out if their profile shows more than 44% (Micro-, Nano-Influencers Elbow Celebs Out of the Spotlight, 2018). Literature has even questioned whether the social influencers are more effective than the celebrity endorsers are. As per Conick (2016), social influencers are the people who are closer and known to their followers and they comment or reply to their followers unlike the celebrity endorsers. Thus, it is authentic and real. However, it is difficult to conclude on whether influencer marketing really generates purchase intention. Thus, companies cannot be guaranteed, if their investments will pay off in the end or if they do not increase their purchases. On the contrary, influencers do not know the best manner to promote their ads to generate purchase intentions, which is essential to optimize the efficiency of influencer marketing (Müller et al., 2018).

### 3.2. Attributes related to Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrity endorser is “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989; Seno & Lukas, 2007). Friedman & Friedman (1979) further explained this as, celebrity endorser is an individual who is known to the public for his or her achievement in areas others than of the product class endorse. Thus, they can be athletes, musicians, actors, chefs and any other public figure. Endorser’s role can take the form of the celebrity as an expert, as a spokesperson associated with a product in a long-term capacity or as an aspirational figure with no particular knowledge of or relationship with the product (Seno & Lukas, 2007). Weerasiri and Wanninayake (2009) further elaborated this as celebrities are playing four promotional roles such as testimonials, endorsement, actor and spokesperson. However, irrespective of the role the cost involved with this must be taken into consideration. Several studies have identified the impact of celebrities in advertisements on consumer behaviour. Thus findings highlight that celebrities make advertisement believable (Kamins, 1989) and enhance the message recall (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Furthermore, celebrities help to create a positive attitude towards the brand (Kamins, 1989) and create a distinct personality for the brand (McCracken, 1989). Ultimately, celebrity advertisements generate a greater likelihood for the endorsed brand (Heath, McCarthy, & Mothersbaugh, 1994).

Literatures reveals five different factors that characterize celebrity product endorsement. These five celebrity endorsement factors are divided into two distinct categories as source-based factors and management-based factors. Source-based factors consists of celebrity credibility (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000; Ohanian, 1990) and celebrity attractiveness (Langmeyer & Shank, 1994; Solomon, Ashmore, & Longo, 1992). Source credibility model can be further divided into two as expertise and trustworthiness while source attractiveness as familiarity, liking and similarity (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Priyankara, Weerasiri, Dissanayaka, & Jinadasa, 2017).

Management-based factors are activities that are executed by the managers of the celebrity relationships. Thus, three activities were found in the literature that fitted this classification. Those are celebrity-product congruency (Kamins, 1990), celebrity multiplicity (Hsu & McDonald, 2002) and celebrity activation (Farrell, Karels, Monfort, & McClatchey, 2000; Till & Shimp, 1998). Celebrity-product congruency is defined as the consistency between the characteristics of an endorser and the attributes of the product that they endorse (Misra & Beatty, 1990). The second component, which is celebrity multiplicity, refers to the management practice of employing multiple celebrities who complement each other in terms of the meaning that they transfer to a brand (Hsu & McDonald, 2002). The third component, which is celebrity activation, describes the management practice of singling out celebrity activities and communicating the information to the brand’s target market for brand-development purposes (Seno & Lukas, 2007).

### 3.3. Adaptability of Source Based Factors

From the perspective of social media influencers, literature shows that the endorsement of an influencer is regarded as highly credible (De Veirman et al., 2017). Prior literature has identified that eWOM can have a significant influence on customers' purchase intention, as long as it arises from a credible source (Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016). This also resembles insights from other research streams that, identifying the credibility of a brand or company as an influencing factor on customers' purchase intention. (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). Adapted to the context of influencer marketing, this means that to generate purchase intention, customers have to perceive the influencer as credible to develop purchase intentions towards the endorsed product. In line with prior research (Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006), credibility can be defined as the perception that the influencer is a competent and reliable source of information. A social media influencer can be defined as a user of social media who accumulates a greater base of followers, established credibility and whose high reach and authenticity leads to impact and persuasion in interaction with their followers (De Veirman et al., 2017). The influence they have is earned through time and engagement in the relationship between the influencer and their followers. It is developed through a two-way communication that an influencer genuinely provides to people who are interested in what they post on their social media profiles (Alic et al., 2017).

According to the Source Credibility Model in celebrity endorsement there are two sub elements namely, expertise and trustworthiness. As suggested by Erdogan (1999), expertise is defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions. It refers to the knowledge, experience or skills possessed by an endorser. Thus if a celebrity has expertized in his/ her field, it will be more persuasive and subsequently will motivate the decision makers to buy the endorsed product or service. Social media key influencers are subject matter experts since they are resourceful people who share meaningful information. They build their loyal audiences from follower trust because they are honest, credible and authentic. In 2016, 51% of marketers believed they [get better customers from influencer marketing](#). That is because relationships begin with trust in the influencer's knowledge about the subject matter. Followers believe trusted experts have developed skills through formal and/or informal training, which is showcased when they speak about the referenced topic (Williams, 2017).

Erdogan (1999) has stated, trustworthiness refers to the target audience perception related to an endorser regarding his/her honesty, integrity and believability. According to a research carried out by Weerasiri and Wanninayake (2009), among 175 respondents, 52% respondents indicated that they paid their special attention to celebrities' trustworthiness when taking the purchasing decision. Social media has transformed into a marketing communication tool that allowed phenomena like viral advertising, buzz marketing and e-WOM to emerge. They are perceived to be more trustworthy than traditional media (Instagram Marketing: Does Influencer Size Matter? – Markerly Blog, 2009), mainly because the content is produced by users to express themselves and communicate with others (Lister, Dovey,

Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2009), also called user generated content. Thus, social media influencers have the ability to communicate and interact with the masses by emphasizing the fact that they are experts in their field and they are trustworthy. Therefore, these attributes lead to the purchase decision of the followers directly.

According to McGuire (as cited in Seiler & Kucza, 2017), not only credibility affects the effectiveness of a message and testimonial advertising, but attractiveness too plays an important role as attractiveness plays a role in the categorisation of stereotypes. Source attractiveness model comprises of familiarity, liking and similarity (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Priyankara et al., 2017). Similarity is defined as a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message. Familiarity as knowledge of the source through exposure, and likability as affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behaviour. Attractiveness does not mean simply physical attractiveness, but includes any number of virtuous characteristics that consumers might perceive in a celebrity endorser. For example, intellectual skills, personality properties, lifestyles or athletic prowess (Erdogan, 1999).

Research shows that consumers are more likely to listen to the recommendations coming from those whom they can relate to (Warner, 2018). Macro influencers are perceived as celebrities, and users may feel unable to relate to them in an authentic way. They often get lower engagement than the power middle influencers do. Not only that, but also macro influencers tend to get a lot of negative sentiment in their comments and have become so commercial, that followers are desensitized and impervious to what they are selling. In contrary, micro influencers are perceived as more real, and thus people tend to trust their recommendations even more. An influencer marketing strategy will only work if followers genuinely like and respect the influencer, and when the influencer sincerely wants to create value for their followers (Halabi, 2018).

### **3.4. Adaptability of Management Based Factors**

Celebrity-product congruency, which comes under the management-based factors related to celebrity endorsers, can be seen as an attribute related to influencers as well. To increase the impact of the products' promotion, companies need to carefully select the most suitable influencer, depicting the maximum value as an opinion leader (De Veirman et al., 2017). The challenge for companies is to find an influencer, who has the power to convince customers to buy a certain product and whose self-presentation in social media matches the type of product or the advertising message they want to promote (De Veirman et al., 2017; Muk, 2013). This attribute is explained in the matching hypothesis as the congruence between the celebrity and the product. Thus from the perspective of a social media influencer, how they present their self in social media affects the purchasing decision of the followers.

### **3.5. Exploration of New Factors**

#### **3.5.1. Attributes related to influencers**

According to Glucksman (2017), authenticity is influencers being genuine, honest, and open with their followers. Authenticity allows an influencer to relate with followers on a new level and aids in building a relationship between followers and brands. Alic et al. (2017), further elaborate it by stating, a social media influencer is seen in the eyes of their followers as someone approachable, natural and real. The informal tone of their content and friendly tone of communication on their profiles make the followers feel close and authentic and that makes it a massive source of their appeal. As per Conick (2016), social influencers are the people who are closer and known to their followers and they comment or reply to their followers unlike the celebrity endorsers. Thus, it is authentic and real. Furthermore Mains (2017) confirmed the need of authenticity stating that, the social influencers provide trusted source of information with original thoughts and are not merely retweeting stuff other people say. Therefore, as a result of followers perceiving the influencers are being authentic, they tend to share their personal thoughts, opinions, and style with others which leads to the creation of user generated content.

Being interactive is one of the key attributes of a social influencer. Traditional public relations influencer marketing tactics utilize media such as newspapers, television and radio to reach the audience. These traditional tactics can be successful in terms of increasing brand awareness, but do not create a relationship between the brand and consumers like social media influencer marketing does today. Through interactive video content, influencers build a positive impression on the brand and product and subsequently invite their followers to purchase a product and experience it by themselves (Glucksman, 2017). According to the Influencer Orchestration Network, 37% better retention is reported through word-of-mouth advertising (Influencer Orchestration Network, 2017). Thus, literature explains electronic word of mouth as a strategy, which refers to any statement made by potential, actual and former customers about a product or company via the internet.

#### **3.5.2. Attributes related to the content**

The Altimeter report on the rise of digital influence identifies three pillars namely reach, relevance and resonance which are directly associated with the content shared by the social media influencers (Solis & Webber, 2012). Reach is the starting pillar that deals with how far influencers' information travels across the communities at large and it is the measure of popularity, affinity and potential impact of the content. At this point the state of how well liked, familiar and appreciated the influencer, plays the most important part of influence. Relevance is the glue of the interest and the communities in focus of the content. In this pillar, the main points of influence are authority or respect gained from expertise and specialty or uniqueness, trust as the source of meaningful relationships and belief in reliability and truthfulness of an influencer and affinity or natural liking and sympathy for someone. The last pillar,



resonance, is the measure of the duration, rate and level of interactivity around topic or content coming from the influencer. Higher resonance is, more people are affected by the posts (Alic et al., 2017).

### **3.5.3. Attributes related to followers**

In the context of influencer marketing, existing literature has identified different types of social influencers based on their followers' size namely; nano influencers, micro influencers, macro influencers and mega influencers. However, different sources have different views about the number of the follower's size of each influencer type. According to Chief Marketer (n.d.), micro influencers typically have 50,000 to 200,000 followers on Instagram. In contrary, it is suggested that macro influencers' audience size is normally in between 100,000 and a million followers (The 6 Types of Influencers and How To Identify Them, 2018). Similarly, nano influencers are perceived to be an influencer type who has around 1000 or less followers (The Different Types of Influencers, 2018). However, a study on influencer marketing platforms showed, that while smaller influencers (less than 1,000 followers) were reaching a like rate of about 8%, the ones with up to 10,000 followers had a like rate of 4%. Thus, as the follower base was growing in size, the like-to-follower ratio was decreasing (Instagram Marketing: Does Influencer Size Matter? – Markerly Blog, 2016).

Micro influencers act as real people who happen to be everyday experts, with higher reach than average person and with highly targeted and niche follower base, but not big enough to have their credibility and approachability questioned (Berger & Keller Fay Group, 2016). Recent evidence points to the trend of small- to middle-sized influencers (micro-influencers) yielding better results in converting consumers and persuading strength of the advertising message (Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 2013). Moreover, using YouTube as a marketing tool might result in even higher customer engagement, since it is the second largest search engine in the world and people use mainly this platform to search for reviews and opinions (Wagner, 2017).

Even though the influencers have a small number of followers and fewer views, they often have higher engagement and loyalty that is harder to find in macro or mega influencers. Irrespective of the followers' size, influencers' audience needs to be fully engaged. Because having 10,000 followers is meaningless if none of them have the purchase intention, whereas in contrary having just one paying customer may be all ever needed (Sensis Pty Ltd, 2017). Thus, strong influencers can be identified by their engagement, which includes likes, comments and retweets. According to Odell (2015), when choosing an influencer to promote a product or a service, it is essential to look at both the reach and the engagement as those are the potential indicators to identify how content will be received by influencers and their audience. It is important not to just offer the people with the widest reach, but to also target influencers with the right audience and the right engagement for your target audience. As suggested by Jacquelyn (n.d.) there are five factors which confirm why the engagement is more important than the

number of followers namely; audience is real, user generated content is created, conversions are made, trust is earned and relationships are built with the engaged followers.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Unlike celebrity endorsement, there are only few model to assess the attributes related to social influencers. However, there are standalone attributes, which were identified as the attributes associated with social influencers that leads to the effectiveness of communication and subsequently positively affects the purchase intention. In this paper, those attributes are divided into three namely; attributes related to social influencer, attributes related to the followers and attributes related to the content. Attributes related to the influencers are directly adapted by source-based factors and management-based factors. Thus, four attributes are identified from those models as trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness and congruence between product and self-presentation. Apart from that, two new attributes are added namely authenticity and interactivity by extracting from the available literature.

The attributes related to the content is adapted by the three pillars model suggested by the Altimeter report namely; reach, relevance and resonance. The attributes related to the followers are extracted by available research, which were listed as standalone attributes namely; size and the engagement of the followers. The following diagram graphically illustrate the attributes related to social influencers', which affect the purchase intention.

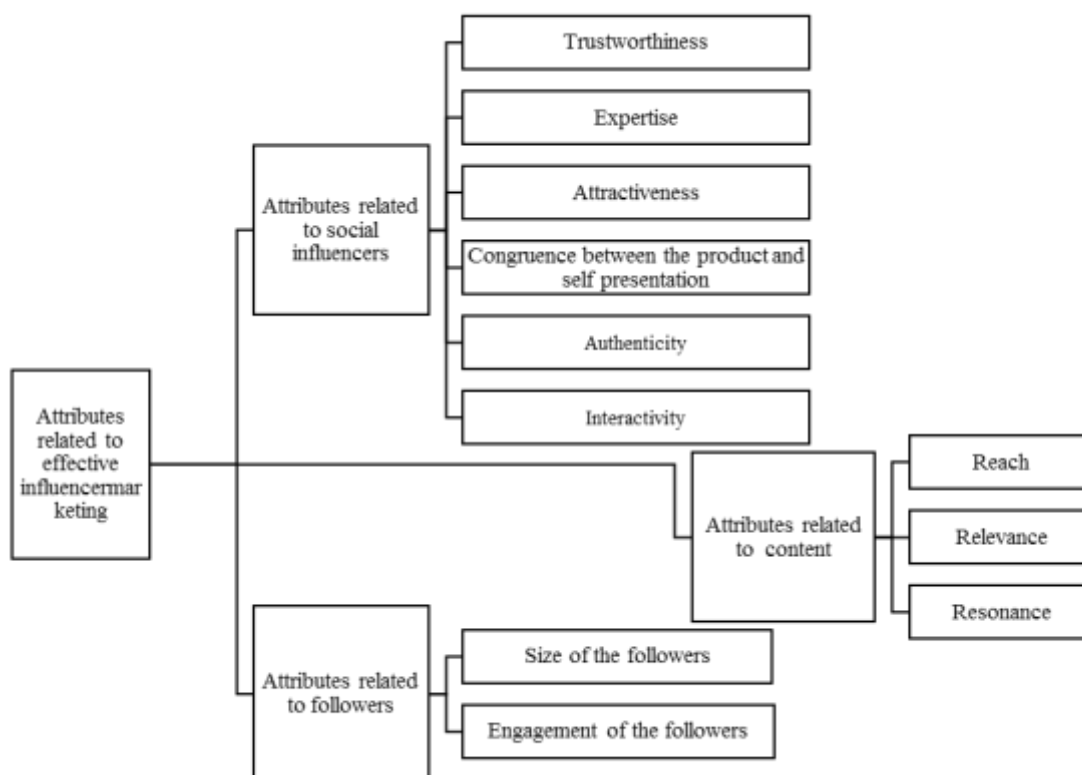


Figure 1: Attributes related to effective influencer marketing

## **5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Influencer marketing has become an important column of marketing for advertisers to address their customers. As influencer marketing promises higher sales, companies invest in influencers endorsing their products, even though they cannot be sure, if their investments will pay-off and increase purchase intentions among customers. In global literature, there is no common agreement on a conceptual model concerning the effectiveness of influencer marketing. However, different sources have mentioned standalone attributes relating to social influencers, their content and the followers, which affect the purchase decision. Even though, the studies carried about the concept of influencer marketing is rapidly growing and receiving majority of the marketers' attention, no constructive model has been developed. In this paper, the attributes related to effective influencer marketing were identified from different perspectives. However, future research should seek to clarify the significance of each of these attributes on the purchase intention. Thus, it will help the marketers to choose the best social media influencer for their brand by assessing the attributes given in the above model. Furthermore, social media influencers only affect their loyal followers or whether they also affect the larger public needs in-depth examination. There is no literature to identify the distinct characteristics of mega, macro, micro and nano influencers from the perspective of the followers' size. Thus, there is a research gap for future research to be addressed.

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