



Instagram Advertising through Influencers: Effects on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intent

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Abstract

This study examines how Instagram advertising through influencers impacts consumer brand awareness and purchase intent, with a particular focus on the Vietnamese market. While prior research highlights influencer marketing as a growing trend, limited attention has been given to the mediating role of brand awareness in shaping purchase decisions. Using a mixed-methods approach, qualitative expert discussions and a quantitative survey of Instagram users in Ho Chi Minh City were conducted. Findings reveal that influencer credibility—defined by attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise—significantly enhances brand awareness, which in turn increases purchase intent. The study contributes to understanding the dynamics of influencer marketing in emerging markets and provides practical insights for marketers seeking effective Instagram advertising strategies.

Keywords: Instagram Advertising, Influencer Marketing, Brand Awareness, Purchase Intent, Social Media Marketing, Source Credibility

Introduction

Social media has transformed the way brands engage with consumers, offering platforms for interactive and personalized marketing. Among these platforms, Instagram has become a leading channel for digital advertising, especially through influencers who act as opinion leaders (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017) ^[3]. In Vietnam, the surge of Instagram users and the growing reliance on online shopping make influencer marketing a critical area of study.

Despite widespread adoption, research on how influencer credibility translates into consumer outcomes remains limited, particularly in emerging markets. Previous studies emphasized influencers' impact on consumer trust but overlooked brand awareness as a mediating factor (Rebelo, 2017) ^[14]. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Instagram advertising, mediated by brand awareness, shapes purchase intent.

The central research questions guiding this study are:

- Does Instagram advertising increase brand awareness?
- Does influencer credibility affect customer brand awareness?
- Do influencers play a role in shaping purchase intent?

Literature Review

Social Media and eWOM

Social media platforms facilitate consumer interaction and brand engagement. Social media marketing (SMM) emphasizes content sharing and engagement to enhance awareness and loyalty (Rouse, 2011) ^[16]. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays a vital role, as consumers increasingly rely on peer and influencer recommendations when making purchasing decisions (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004) ^[8].

Instagram as an Advertising Platform

Instagram's growth has been driven by interactive features such as Stories, Posts, and Reels. These formats provide opportunities for brands to increase visibility and create immersive experiences. Engagement metrics—likes, comments, and shares—serve as indicators of brand resonance (Arman & Sidik, 2019) ^[2].

Influencer Credibility

Influencers act as independent endorsers whose credibility is rooted in three constructs:

- **Attractiveness:** Influencers with appealing looks or lifestyles are more persuasive (Joseph, 1982; Kahle & Homer, 1985) ^[10].
- **Trustworthiness:** Honesty and reliability enhance consumer confidence (Ohanian, 1990) ^[13].

Expertise: Knowledge and experience foster perceptions of authority (Erdogan, 1999; Till, 2000) ^[5, 18]. Prior studies suggest that these dimensions shape consumer perceptions and attitudes toward promoted brands (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) ^[6].

Brand Awareness and Purchase Intent

Brand awareness serves as the foundation for consumer decision-making. Recognizing or recalling a brand influences its likelihood of being considered during purchase (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) ^[1, 11]. Purchase intent, defined as a consumer's willingness to buy, is directly influenced by brand awareness and moderated by trust in influencers (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991) ^[4]. This study hypothesizes that Instagram advertising boosts awareness, which subsequently drives purchase intent.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach. Preliminary qualitative research included expert discussions with digital marketing professionals to refine constructs. Quantitative data were collected via an online survey using purposive sampling. Respondents were Instagram users in Ho Chi Minh City, aged 18 and above, who followed at least one influencer.

The questionnaire measured perceptions of Instagram advertising formats (Stories, Posts, Reels), influencer credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise), brand awareness, and purchase intent. Responses were analyzed using structural equation modeling to test hypothesized relationships.

Results and Discussion

Findings show that Instagram advertising positively affects brand awareness across all three formats, with Stories and Reels generating stronger engagement compared to static posts (Hanh, 2022) ^[7]. Influencer credibility significantly influences brand awareness, with trustworthiness and expertise exerting stronger effects than attractiveness (Xiao, Wang, & Chan-Olmsted, 2018) ^[19].

Brand awareness mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intent. Consumers who recognize and recall brands promoted by trusted influencers are more likely to consider purchasing those products. This aligns with prior studies emphasizing the role of familiarity and credibility in shaping consumer decisions (Rossiter &

Percy, 1987; Nedungadi, 1990) ^[12, 15].

Managerial Implications

- **Influencer Selection:** Brands should prioritize influencers perceived as authentic and knowledgeable, rather than solely attractive.
- **Format Strategy:** Stories and Reels are effective for building awareness and engagement, particularly among younger consumers (Sashittal *et al.*, 2020) ^[17].
- **Brand Building:** Marketers should view influencer campaigns as tools for long-term brand recognition, not just short-term sales boosts.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence on how Instagram influencer advertising shapes brand awareness and purchase intent in Vietnam. By highlighting the mediating role of brand awareness, it extends prior literature on influencer marketing. The findings suggest that credibility-based influencer partnerships are essential for maximizing marketing effectiveness.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited to Ho Chi Minh City, which may not fully represent Vietnam's diverse consumer base. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias. Future research could compare Instagram with other platforms like TikTok, or explore cross-regional differences in influencer marketing effectiveness.

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