

Chapter 9

A Study on Influencers' Role in the Buying–Decision Process Within the Context of Word–of–Mouth Marketing: A Comparison Between USA and Turkey

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore influencers' role in buying-decision process within the context of word-of-mouth marketing and how it differs among different countries. Therefore, to make a comparison between the two countries, United States of America and Turkey are chosen. In the study, in-depth interview technique was used to obtain the data. Interviews were conducted with 20 participants who used Instagram and followed at least one influencer. Ten participants were from United States of America and 10 were from Turkey. In total, three themes were identified. Following the analysis, it was found that trust is very important. If the followers did not trust influencers, they would not prefer to buy or try the product that they have suggested.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in technology has started to change the business environment. Rather than using traditional marketing techniques, companies starts to communicate with their target audience through the use of social media, which is the most used medium and give the ability to users to create contents and share them (Boyd, 2014, p.6). As Kietzmann and his colleagues (2011, pp. 243-244) has defined, social media in globalized world is beyond an area where individuals and communities create content and share them, are aware of other people and new information are gained. Today, social media is also considered as a marketing platform. In order to comprehend the importance of social media, the reports prepared by We Are Social and Hootsuite (2019) showed that 4,388 billion people uses internet, and 3,484 billion people all over the world uses social media. This shows that internet and social media have a great importance for the people around the world.

While discussing the social media concept, its devices have been examined in the context of blogs, microblogs, wikis, sites on sharing media content, sites on social marking and tagging, podcasts, and social web sites. By examining the most frequently used social media platforms (CreatorDen, 2018; Rakuten Marketing, 2019; We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019), it was found that Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are the most frequently used three social media tools worldwide.

The aim of this study is to explore influencers' role in the buying-decision process within the context of the word of mouth marketing and how it differs according to the different countries. Therefore, in order to make a comparison between two countries samples from USA and Turkey is chosen.

BACKGROUND

Social Media Marketing and Viral Marketing

Social media marketing provides a communication between marketers and consumers. In addition, such marketing is defined as cheap and easily applicable which companies have frequently benefitted (Çinkay, 2017, p.23). According to Weber (2007, p.32), the role of marketing has not changed with social media. Social media marketing also pursues a variety of goals such as determining the target market, communicating with consumers and creating brand loyalty. But the difference is, it has performed such tasks by means of social media tools.

Neti (2011, pp.3-4) points out that, social media marketing is not just news sharing or reading platform, but it also a procedural process and different strategies needs to be used. Meanwhile, social media marketing is regarded as a factor which raises the reputation and brand value of the institution in the platforms where customers could create their own contents. Neti (2011, p.9) also states that, the businesses got the opportunity to easily express themselves and their products/services, to establish relationships with individuals whom they communicate.

Viral marketing is regarded as entertaining or informative contents designed to share with other people on the Internet (Womma, 2005). When considering the modern consumers who are surrounded by communicative technologies, such marketing is natural consequence of developments in communicative technologies (Karabulut, 2016, p.72).

Viral marketing also defined as the adaption of traditional word of mouth marketing context to the Internet (Karanfil, 2019, p.44) which is easy, cheap and fast (Hamed, 2017). In viral marketing, consumers

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