

Instagram and Malaysia's Beauty Queen Influencers: Strategies of Self-Branding for Local Fashion Brand Development

Darel Nicol Luna Anak Agam

INTI International College Subang (IICS), Malaysia

Abstract: National title holder beauty queen influencers Instagram contents are filled with product reviews and make up video tutorials. Social media influencers' share posts via Instagram Stories, Instagram Live and most of the influencers reveal more than they do in their Instagram content feed. Social media influencers are creating a persona on social media for their social media audiences (Liu, Jiang, Lin, Ding, Duan, Xu, 2015). They focus on product reviews and beauty-related conversations with their Instagram followers. Through these tools offered by Instagram and other social media platforms, social media influencers play a role in shaping their audience attitudes towards products and brands (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry, 2018). In 2017, the United States had the most profitable beauty pageant industry in the world generating 86.1 billion dollars in revenue, followed by China with 53.5 billion (Lisa, 2018). Between 2004 and 2018, the industry has only continued to grow. In Malaysia itself, in 2018, it grew 5.5% compared to the previous year (Lisa, 2019). The beauty pageant industry in Malaysia also benefited as most of the SME invested amount of budget to get their product or services to be featured via social media of these beauty queen influencers. The implication of this paper is to assist potential SME investor on the best alternative of Instagram feature to boost up their product brand awareness via national title holder beauty queen influencers' Instagram profile.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, Instagram, Social Media Marketing, Beauty Pageant.

1. Introduction

This study aims to identify the strategies of self-presentation used by national title holder beauty queen influencers on Instagram and tailored their behaviour to fit a specific image that would affect better engagement with their audiences. With the rise of virtual communities, it has become a common method through which to study the behaviour of online users and communities.

It is flexible and can be adapted to the researcher's needs and the platform's capabilities (Pink et al., 2016). Christine Hine (2000) refers the Internet as a product of culture, a "technology that was produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities. It is also a technology which is shaped by the ways in which it is marketed, taught, and used".

In order to identify the ways through which beauty queen influencers on Instagram, this will establish a community and connection content engagement with their audience. This research followed the behaviour on the social networking site of a select group of 3 micro-influencers from the beauty pageant niche for two weeks, from January 21, 2019 to February 2, 2019.

For the purposes of this study, a micro-influencer was defined as an Instagram user with a following between 10,000 and 500,000 (Wissmann, 2018). The behaviour on the platform was defined by content posted to feed, Instagram Stories and IGTV, in addition to their interactions with other users via the comments of their posts or via Instagram Stories features (polls, questions, etc.).

Components that were considered included captions, hashtags used, and content posting. To identify the beauty micro-influencers to follow during the two-week period, a search of the hashtags #bikini, #fitness, #fashion, and #bodygoals was done.

Three beauty queen micro-influencers were selected: @lishalillynkanaran, @malveenkaur_ and @pooranirajoo. They will only be referred to by their Instagram handle. The content of all 3 accounts focuses on bikini and fitness attire product. No background information was known about each of the micro-influencers prior to the start of the

study. All three of the micro-influencers identified their current Title presenting Malaysia for their profile biography, @lishalillynkanaran identified as Miss Grand Malaysia 2021, @malveenkaur_ identified as The Miss Globe Malaysia 2021 and @pooranirajoo identified as Miss Intercontinental Malaysia 2021.

Therefore, the main research questions of this paper are: Which content post via Instagram that has better engagement with Instagram audiences? Do the details of the caption can boost up the brand awareness that posted via Instagram? Consequently, the objective of this paper is:

- To propose the best Instagram feature to be use by the beauty queen influencers through the finding of this research for future potential SME who are interested to invest their product or services. The rest of the paper is structured as followed: Firstly, a discussion on elements that should be insert on Instagram caption that able to grab viewer attention while they access Instagram feed. Secondly, type of characteristics either photo quality, videos, or boomerang that can attract the viewer to engage with the Instagram content. Thirdly, a presentation of the research methodology and finally the conclusion and the recommendation for future research. We believe that the proposed suggestion in this study can contribute to better understand the role of Instagram feature that affect the brand awareness for Malaysia pageant industry. Further, it may help the potential SME to better achieve the social media ROI for the product or services that they choose to post via Instagram. ROI for social media is a metric showing the amount of value generated by your investments in social media. ROI is typically measured in terms of monetary value. However, in cases where the direct impact on revenue is difficult to attribute, ROI can first be quantified by non-monetary metrics.

Literature review

Like with other social media platform, there are certain needs users seek to satisfy when using Instagram. An Instagram study identified five primary motivations to use Instagram, Social Interaction, Archiving, Self-Expression, Escapism, and Peeking (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). A second study identified Surveillance/Knowledge about others, Documentation, Coolness, and Creativity as motives for Instagram use (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

The findings show Snapchat taking the lead for four of the motivations except for self-expression where Instagram came first. This reflects that Instagram is commonly used as a space for users to express themselves via images in their feed, the textual captions, and the stories.

The audience component is what make social media influencers particularly special and the relationship with their audience, different from traditional advertisement. Studies show that consumers trust the opinion of their peers, family and friends the most (McCaskill, 2015).

While celebrities like Kourtney and Kim Kardashian are considered influencers, the rise of micro-influencers is one that this study will focus on. While there is no universal definition for “micro-influencer,” some have defined it as a social media user with anything from 3,000 Instagram followers (Tait, n.d.) to 100,000 followers (Wissman, 2018), but most importantly, micro-influencers have an engaged audience. Unlike celebrities, micro-influencers will spend time making sure they’re building a strong connection with their audience.

The importance of eWOM lies in the new information provided by influencers, and not the information released by the companies putting out the products (Reichelt, Sievert & Jacob, 2014). Research has shown the influence of eWOM on purchase decisions. It highlights content from blogs and rating sites, comparing them to chat rooms and IM where eWOM is not as valuable (Riegner, 2007). For this reason, it is important for companies to choose their influencers wisely, sending products to those who connect with their audience and reflect the brand’s values, beliefs, and desires (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Because of the potential social media micro-influencers have in spreading messages online and reaching their audience, brands have started investing more in influencer marketing (Brouwer, 2017). Described as “a type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive your brand’s message to the larger market” (TapInfluence, 2015, par. 5), influencer marketing was found to be the second most effective promotional strategy in 2017 among U.S. marketers (as cited in Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, in press).

The beauty and personal category is a mature necessity-driven market, which is reflected in steady growth year-over-year. With high level of consumer confidence, shoppers are trading up to higher-priced offerings while also opting for professional beauty services. More importantly, as younger consumers continue to rely on online resources for information, it is imperative for brands to be transparent and honest in their practices. (as cited in Macke, 2018). While most of the industry reflects growth, the nail color and care category has struggled (Gaither, 2018).

The continued growth of the beauty pageant industry in Malaysia is evidenced that Malaysia is getting more attention from Small Medium Enterprise business. (Lisa, 2020). In the next five years, “revenue is anticipated to grow an annualized 2.5 billion as consumers buy more cosmetics that collaborate or sponsored beauty pageant events.” (Lisa, 2021).

2. Research Methods

Visually, all three-beauty queen micro-influencers showcased having a clear and distinctive understanding of the look they wanted their Instagram content to have. All three of them gathered in one group direct message via Instagram. All three of them being provide with hashtag and Instagram holder.

For the fitness product the Instagram content was set as 60 second video. This video featured all three beauty queen influencer and much like the video content shared in Instagram Stories, the photographs shared to the feed featured the fitness products. These video posted by all the three queens influencer on the same date and same time.

For the bikini product, the editing of the photos are all the same. This played an important role. By building a cohesive feed and a unique image, the micro-influencers reinforced their authenticity by creating a look that was personal to them. While there were some similarities in the way products were displayed, this video posted by all the three queens’ influencer on the same date and same time.

Findings

Regardless of these two different contents based on the engagement of the insight which gathered via Instagram profile of these three queens, apparently the bikini Instagram photo post received high engagement between the social media influencer with the products presented in a positive light. There were no visual differences between a positive and a negative review. The user saved the content and share it with their friends and family via Instagram. This three beauty queen influencers showed a lot of effort in the quality of the photos that they shared during the two-week period which reinforced the importance of Instagram’s visual quality.

Goffman (1971) developed the theory of self-presentation before the age of social media and mediated communication via smartphone screens. While some of the strategies discussed by Goffman still apply in terms of individuals putting up performances when interacting with others in order to achieve their goals, in the age of social media and micro-influencers there is an economic transaction taking place.

As for the fitness attire product, the video got very low engagement between the content with the brand itself. Each post received lots of likes and comments, but none of the comments are related with the brand. The comments are more associated with the pageant journey of these three queens.

In terms of the video content for the fitness attire product, beauty micro-influencers’ tailoring their content to present a version of themselves that better resonated with their audience, the data collected showed how important the focus on beauty is but not the benefits of the products.

As a result, Instagram photos content is the one that work very well for the best strategy for improving the self-branding to associate with the product. It is important to consider and acknowledge that the authenticity constructed by the beauty queen influencers during the two-week period might not be the “real them,” and a role they’re playing to appear authentic to their followers.

3. Conclusion

Research shows how authenticity is valued by consumers and individuals who *need* to believe in the idea that there is still realness in a capitalist world (Banet-Weiser, 2012). On Instagram, the authentic image built by the micro-influencers is rewarded in engagement, followers, and getting noticed by brands that might want to potentially work with them. Therefore, building an “authentic” image is not a selfish act. The engagement of Instagram audiences with content is influenced by various factors, particularly regarding social media influencers, such as the theme, storytelling, and authenticity of the content. Research in this domain has underscored significant findings.

As from this finding, it shows consistently indicate that Instagram posts with a coherent theme and a compelling narrative tend to garner higher engagement levels. For instance, Smith et al. (2020) found that narrative-driven content on Instagram receives more likes, comments, and shares compared to posts lacking a clear storyline.

Secondly, content that triggered emotional responses from audiences tends to perform better in terms of engagement. Johnson and Lee (2019) noted that Instagram posts evoking positive emotions like joy or inspiration

are more likely to resonate with audiences and drive interactions such as likes, comments, and shares. Moreover, authenticity and originality are crucial factors in engaging Instagram audiences. Chen and Wang's (2021) research highlighted that maintaining a genuine and authentic persona on Instagram leads to higher engagement levels among social media influencers. Audiences tend to connect more with influencers who share authentic stories and experiences rather than those promoting overly curated or staged content.

Additionally, the personality of social media influencers significantly impacts audience engagement. Kim et al. (2022) found that influencers exhibiting distinct and relatable personality traits, such as sincerity or humor, are more likely to build strong connections with followers and foster higher engagement rates.

In conclusion, research emphasizes the importance of content theme, storytelling, emotional connection, authenticity, and influencer personality in driving engagement with Instagram audiences. Prioritizing these factors and crafting content that resonates with followers on a personal and emotional level, influencers can enhance their engagement levels and cultivate a loyal and engaged audience base. On Instagram, the original image built by the beauty queen influencer is rewarded in engagement, followers, and getting noticed by brands that might want to potentially work with them. Therefore, building an "authentic" image is the best strategy to become the country representative.

Recommendations

While the numbers provided some insight into the overall performance of the micro-influencers, two-week period was not enough to draw conclusions on what caused some to gain more followers than others. This would be a great opportunity for further research where two or three Instagram profiles are closely monitored for a longer period of time. More importantly, Instagram is an algorithmic platform.

The algorithm affects all of the activities that take place on it (Barnhart, 2019), and it is not public which makes it impossible to know what exactly the social networking site is doing and how it reacts to users' behaviours. Based on this study, the limitation was the two-week period was not enough to draw conclusions on what caused some to gain more followers than others. This would be a great opportunity for further research where it can be fully monitored for a 4 weeks or equal to one month.

4. References

- [1] Audrezet, A., De Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (in press). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>.
- [2] Aynsley, M. (2019). The 2019 Instagram hashtag guide – How to use them and get results. Hootsuite. Retrieved from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-hashtags/>
- [3] Bahtar, A. Z., & Muda, M. (2016). The Impact of User – Generated Content (UGC) on Product Reviews towards Online Purchasing – A Conceptual Framework. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 37, 337-342.
- [4] Caliandro, A. (2018). Digital Methods for Ethnography: Analytical Concepts for Ethnographers Exploring Social Media Environments. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 47(5), 551-578.
- [5] Chen, J. (2018). How to use hashtag marketing to dramatically boost brand awareness. Sprout Social. Retrieved from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/hashtag-marketing/>
- [6] Chung, S., & Cho, H. (2017). Fostering parasocial relationships with celebrities on social media: Implications for celebrity endorsement. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(4), 481-495.
- [7] Anger, I., & Kittl, C. (2013). Measuring Influence on Twitter. 10.
- [8] Aslam, S. (2017, April 29). OMNICORE. Retrieved May 2017, 2017, from Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts: <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/Instagram-statistics/>.
- [9] Bruyn, A. D., & Lilien, G. L. (2008). A multi-stage model of word-of-mouth influence through viral marketing. *Intern. J. of Research in Marketing*, 13.
- [10] Cheong, B. (2017, MARCH 22). Star2.com. Retrieved MARCH 24, 2017, from Malaysians using social media to help build their fashion brands: <http://www.star2.com/people/2017/03/22/malaysians-using-social-media-to-help-build-their-fashion-brands/>

- [11] Groeger, L., & Buttle, F. (2014). Word-of-mouth marketing influence on offline and online communications: Evidence from case study research. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1/2), 21-41. doi:10.1080/13527266.2013.797736
- [12] Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.
- [13] Hung, E. S. & Calderón, C. A. (2011) Líderes de opinión en Colombia, Venezuela e Irán. El caso de los 20 usuarios más vistos en Twitter. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 24(1), 75-100. Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2011). Ideological Segregation and the effects of social media on news consumption.
- [14] The Borneo Post Online, Lisa Benjamin Jude (2018).
- [15] J. Levy, S., & K. Luedicke, M. (2013). From Marketing Ideology to Branding Ideology. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 27.
- [16] Jackson, D. (2015, August 11). Sprout Social. Retrieved may 29, 2017, from Instagram vs Facebook: Which Is Best for Your Brand: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/Instagram-vs-facebook/>
- [17] Klopper. (2012). Viral marketing: a powerful, but dangerous marketing tool. 8.
- [18] Larson, R. J. (2009). The Rise of Viral Marketing through the New Media of Social Media. *Faculty Publications and Presentations*, 28.
- [19] Lekhanya, L. M. (2014). The Impact Of Viral Marketing On Corporate Brand Reputation. *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 63.
- [20] Leskovec, J., Adamic, L. A., & Huberman, B. A. (2008). The Dynamics of Viral Marketing. 46.