Social Media Influencers: The Perspective of Elaboration Likelihood Model

Ayrıntılandırma Olasılığı Modeli Perspektifiyle Etkileyici Pazarlama

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Abstract

With the development of technology, businesses have stressed to the usage of social media platforms as a marketing tool. Thanks to social media, consumers share their pleasures or complaints about a brand and people check the messages before buying a product or experiencing a service. Therefore, with the increase of social media usage, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) had a bigger role and opinion leaders are one of the fundamental sources of e-WOM. This study stresses the updated literature about e-WOM, influencer marketing and their effects on consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions in the food and beverage (F&B) industry by focusing the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Although, there is limited sources in the F&B sector, the results give clues about the relationship between influencer marketing and ELM. Consumers pay close attention to source quality while purchasing food products, however it could be reflected as different routes (central or peripheral) on different product category. Therefore, this gives opinion leaders a perspective to use the ELM by detecting and measuring the effects of the message.

Keywords: Social Media, Consumer Behavior, Food and Beverage, ELM, e-WOM

Özet

Teknolojinin gelişmesiyle birlikte işletmeler sosyal medya platformlarının bir pazarlama aracı olarak kullanılmasına önem vermişlerdir. Sosyal medya sayesinde tüketiciler bir markayla ilgili memnuniyetlerini veya şikayetlerini paylaşmakta ve bir ürünü satın almadan veya bir hizmeti deneyimlemeden önce ilgili ürün ya da hizmetle ilgili çevrimiçi bilgileri kontrol etmektedirler. Dolayısıyla sosyal medya kullanımının artmasıyla birlikte elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletişim (e-WOM) daha büyük bir role sahip olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, kanaat önderleri elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletişimin temel kaynaklarından biri haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmada 'Ayrıntılandırma Olasılığı Modeline' (ELM) odaklanılarak, elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletişimin ve etkileyici pazarlamanın önemi vurgulanmaktadır. Böylelikle yiyecek ve içecek endüstrisinde tüketicilerin tutumları ve satın alma kararları üzerindeki etkileri hakkında güncel literatür aktarılmaktadır. Literatürde yiyecek ve içecek sektörüyle ilgili sınırlı kaynaklar olmasına rağmen, literatür taraması bulguları etkileyici pazarlama ve ELM arasındaki ilişki hakkında bilgiler vermektedir. Tüketiciler, gıda ürünlerini satın alırken kaynak kalitesine çok dikkat etmekte, ancak bu durum işletmeler tarafında farklı ürün kategorilerinde farklı yollar (merkezi veya çevresel) olarak yansıtılabilmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma fikir liderlerine mesajın etkilerini tespit ederek ve ölçerek, ELM'nin yollarından faydalanması konusunda bir perspektif sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Tüketici Davranışı, Yiyecek ve İçecek, ELM, e-WOM

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1. INTRODUCTION

People use social media to participate, socialize, receive information and share experiences thanks to technological advancements and the emergence of social networking sites (SNSs). With regard to this, social media has become a crucial marketing instrument. Social media applications relieve businesses to spread the shared marketing content or information to large audiences. Businesses started to adopt social media because it has turned as a layer of their customer communication and marketing plans (Naylor et al., 2012). Therefore, word of mouth (WOM) has started to give its role to its online version known as online or electronic WOM because of the increase of social media utilization.

Opinion leaders are defined as someone who influences people's thoughts and behaviors due to their position, knowledge, experience and expertise (Nunes et al., 2017). Opinion leaders excite a lot of interest of internet users. For this reason, they play very significant role in e-WOM. Brands, in addition to this, evaluated this trend, asked opinion leaders to advertise themselves by allocating a marketing budget or sending sample products. This valuable shopping between brands and opinion leaders has been transferred to social media as "Influencer Marketing" with the rapid change of the digital world (Köletavitoğlu, 2018).

Influencer marketing is defined as marketing through people who have gained the trust of the large masses and have the power to influence consumers' perceptions of a product or service. Consumers prefer to reduce their risk by using opinion leaders to make decisions (Cho et al., 2012). As a result, although opinion leaders or influencers refer to third parties who have no responsibility for the purchased product and/or service of a brand, can significantly shape the purchasing behavior of the customer (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

In a nutshell, the study reflects the relationship between online opinion leaders and consumers, especially in the food and beverage (F&B) industry, which has been researched limited in this sector so far. In short, the importance of this study is to present information from the updated literature on whether persuasive messages presented by social media opinion leaders, will be accepted by consumers or to what extent the shared message affects the consumer behavior. Additionally, this study seeks the impact of messages provided by opinion leaders with the scope of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

Considering the integrative nature of the ELM, the persuasiveness of a message depends on the strength and plausibility of the argument in the message (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Therefore, it is aimed to focus on the role of influencers such as being credible, attractive, compatible with the brand and the quality of argument. As considered by ELM, there are two different routes (central and peripheral) to penetrate information. The effect of the persuasiveness of messages on social media consumers' attitude and purchase intention are investigated with focusing on both routes of ELM.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study emphasizes the updated literature about social media opinion leaders and their effects on consumers' purchase decisions by focusing ELM. It especially underlines the role of e-WOM, influencer marketing and attitudes and purchase intentions of consumers in the F&B industry.

2.1. Social Media and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)

With the development of technology and SNSs, Internet usage has become very significant all around the world. Therefore, online marketing has been taking the place of traditional marketing day by day. Businesses started to adopt technology in order to reach their consumers easily and effectively while introducing or trying to sell their products. According to Salehi et al., (2012), in traditional marketing it is hard to create a high domain of effect, online marketing gives

opportunities to the businesses to introduce their goods or services with reaching specific users (Salehi et al., 2012). Hence, a new technological dimension has arisen with online marketing and social media has turned into a new communication tool. People from every age and every class utilize from social media to engage, socialize with others, obtain information and share experiences among themselves. With regard to this, social media can be considered as a crucial marketing instrument and the perspective of this instrument has changed considerably. According to Dean (2021), the utilization of the social media all around the world is 4.48 billion in 2021 and it has more than doubled compared to 2015. Hence, businesses benefit from social media properly to create a suitable environment for follow up purchases (Leung et al., 2013).

Furthermore, social media alters the habits of F&B businesses in terms of interacting and communicating with consumers heavily. A study by Cankul et al. (2018) reveals the benefits of social media applications in the F&B industry in Turkey. The study claims that F&B businesses use social media platforms actively, benefits from social media to acuate their marketing activities, communicate faster with their customers and utilize from its cost efficiency. When the motivators of social media usage are investigated within food and beverage businesses of the study, businesses use social media to get customer feedbacks, complains and comments (89,3%), to introduce the business (85,7%), to increase sales (82,1%) and for corporate image and product or brand awareness (78,6%), to involve their customers for product development and innovation process of business (60,7%) (Cankul et al., 2018).

When the marketing strategies are considered in order to reach the commitment and trust toward brand, WOM (consumers' feedbacks and reviews or brands' comments) could be considered as the most crucial one to create an intention to purchase (Lee, et al., 2011; O'Connor, 2010; Pantelidis, 2010; Zhang et al., 2010; Arsal et al., 2010). According to the research called Global Trust in Advertising conducted by Nielsen in 2012, consumers responded that they respect the comments spread through WOM marketing more than other advertising studies (Pophal, 2016). Wigmo and Wikström (2010) claim that social media marketing is defined as a new way of promoting products, aiming to establish relationships and realize word of mouth marketing, rather than a one-way channel where you talk and discuss with consumers.

WOM is an unchanged and significant marketing research topic from all eternity; especially it affects attitudinal intentions and future attitude of a WOM receiver (Tax et al., 1993). When there is a positive WOM, it creates an advantageous image of a brand and awareness of that brand even though people do not know the brand (Phillips et al., 2013). Therefore, WOM is a well supporter of a brand (Woodside and Moore, 1987) that is known as the most effective source of getting information before buying a product or service (Bickart and Schindler, 2002).

WOM started to give its role to its online version known as online or electronic WOM because of the increase of social media utilization. E-WOM gain a significant importance day by day. WOM is a marketing approach in terms of cost efficiency and especially hospitality businesses benefit from it (Litvin et al., 2008). Hereby, empirical data supports that positive comments on social media affect target market's behavior towards brand positively (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Therefore, such platforms can be considered as the best way to influence potential future consumers (Gupta and Harris, 2010). As result with qualified information, uncertainty between consumers and brand decreases.

In SNS, social attractions like e-WOM, trust and commitment are parallel to the accomplishment of businesses positively. Therefore, it helps to increase the intention of purchases (Lee and Choi, 2014), ongoing usage attitude (Hashim, 2012; Li et al., 2006; Pi et al., 2012) and to create sustainable relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Thus, committed customers involve in community activities such as positive e-WOM which affects consumers' decisions and purchase intentions (Noori et al., 2016). Therefore, according to findings of the study which was conducted by Leung (2012), feedbacks, reviews or comments on social media sites affect people's attitudes in terms of visiting (Tussyadiah et al., 2011), booking in a hospitality business (Sparks and Browning,

2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Xie et al., 2011), trying a new F&B business (Wang, 2011) and purchasing hospitality products or services (Huang et al., 2010). As a result, the feedbacks, reviews and comments might change consumers' attitudes and also affect the intention to spread e-WOM (Leung, 2012).

2.2. Opinion Leaders in the Digital World

Opinion leaders are one of the fundamental sources of e-WOM (Shi and Wojnicki, 2014). They are defined as someone who influences people's thoughts and behaviors due to their position, knowledge, experience and expertise (Nunes et al., 2017). Seth Godin (2000:37) describes the importance of opinion leaders in terms of brands as "sneezers" as follows: "Some people are more likely to tell their friends about a great new idea. These people are at the heart of the idea virus. Identifying and courting sneezers is a key success factor for idea merchants." Buzz marketing which is the sub-branch of word of mouth marketing focusing on opinion leaders, pioneers, celebrities, influencers, and with the help of these people, there is an idea of spreading the issue with their environment. According to Seth Godin's literature these people sneeze at every opportunity and spread the issue around them (Kaya, 2010).

According to Rogers (1983), opinion leaders are known to be the most influential people in the social environment. When a potential consumer does not know about a product or service, there is a risk in his/her mind of buying that product. Therefore, it depends on the tendency of another individual to test new features so that the product/service can be perceived and adopted (Ortega, 2011). Opinion leaders are usually concentrated on a particular area. Therefore, they share their knowledge of specific product/service categories (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). Thus, they generally have more knowledge about the product or service category, are more interested in it, and exhibit more explorative and receptive behavior (Lyons and Henderson, 2005) that reflects the power of influencing other people (Eck et al., 2011). When people associate opinion leaders with digital platforms, they influence internet users and play a very significant role in e-WOM. Thus, they influence people's attitudes by creating messages and user content for other people (Meng et al., 2011). In SNS, increasing consumer use of user generated contents (UCG) is important (Cummins et. al, 2013). As consumers become knowledgeable about UCG, it is imperative to manage the quality and perceived accuracy of this content (Chen et al., 2013).

Opinion leaders are enthusiasts of many different subjects ranging from health, food, fitness to automotive and technology, and have gained an interested audience by publishing their ideas on their blogs. Brands, on the other hand, evaluated this trend, asked bloggers to advertise themselves by allocating a marketing budget or sending sample products. This valuable shopping between brands and bloggers has been transferred to social media as "Influencer Marketing" with the rapid change of the digital world (Köletavitoğlu, 2018).

"Influencer Marketing" has become a marketing method that rises its importance day by day due to benefits such as creating a feeling that people have discovered something new or exciting, inspiring, being more original and encouraging creativity, instant measurement of results and facilitation of personalized marketing (Tobin, 2018). Opinion leaders mostly prefer Instagram as a digital social media platform to give information about products or services (Nunes et al., 2017). Although Instagram has some similar features with other social networking sites, the study of Ting et al. (2015) revealed that it is more effective thanks to its feature of photo sharing and simplicity. According to the research conducted in Turkey, the social media platform where influencer marketing activities are available, Instagram is preferred with a rate of 48%. Facebook follows Instagram with a rate of 21%, YouTube with a rate of 16%, and Twitter with a rate of 15% (Bayuk and Aslan, 2018: 181). Businesses try to reach more consumers by sharing advertising and promotional messages about their brands, thanks to Instagram, which is popular in the world and in Turkey (Yıldız and Avcı, 2019).

2.3. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Influencer Marketing

ELM which is developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1984) is based on the Information Adoption Model (IAM). ELM is an "important variations in the nature of persuasion are a function of the likelihood that receivers will engage in elaboration of (that is, thinking about) information relevant to the persuasive issue" (Mun et al., 2013; 285). ELM is a model that identifies dual processing as central and peripheral routes. Some changing attitude processes require intense thinking, while others may change attitude with little mental effort. Therefore, central route that permits the user to choose significant information from less relevant information (Yan et al., 2016) has high motivation or strong ability to judge an information (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984) and uses cognitive elaborations for rational outputs (Wu and Shaffer, 1987). Thus, it is important for central route to evaluate the quality of information that can be also considered as systematic evaluation (Chaiken and Maheswaran, 1994). On the other hand, people tend to follow peripheral route when heuristic evaluation is more predominant (Chaiken and Maheswaran, 1994) and motivation or ability to judge is less (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). On the web, when the content is elaborative and reviews of other web users are available, people tend to evaluate the information in detail (Tam and Ho, 2005). However, if people are able to make less cognitive effort using heuristics rules that be considered as focuses on the environmental cues of the message (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993), the probability of following peripheral route increases (Tang et al., 2012).

A consumer's attitude can change to be positive/negative or strong/weak depending on whether they get enough information or not (Nolder and Kadous, 2017). Such attitudes can turn into an action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977) by affecting the behavior of the consumer (Petty et al., 1995). In order to facilitate the consumer's decision-making process, useful information about products from other users is required (Kumar and Benbasat, 2006). When the relationship among attitude and purchase intention of consumers is considered, it is strongly claimed that positive attitude affects the purchase intentions of consumers in digital environment (Hsu et al., 2013). Additionally, social media influencers have a positive relationship on attitude and intention of consumers (Lim et al., 2017). Additionally, e-WOM has a big role that is considered as a social influence when it is spread by especially opinion leaders (Chenung and Thadani, 2012). Businesses try to increase interest, awareness and loyalty towards the brand and prefer to adapt influencer marketing in their activities in order to rise the number of users and the time spent in social media environments, creating interactions among consumers, measuring the results and creating personalized communication activities (IAB TR, 2019)

In the literature, there are studies analyzing the effects of influencers on consumers' buying behavior and brand attitude. A study supports that the contents of online websites affect consumer attitude and purchase intention (Milhinhos, 2015). The visual posts of Instagram influencers had significant effects on brand attitude, brand change and e-WOM intention while verbal posts on only brand attitude and e-WOM intention (Yıldız and Avcı, 2019). Additionally, it is claimed that, consumers have positive attitudes towards micro influencers (have less followers). If they are trusted to micro influencers, their attitudes towards the brand change after their sharing and it affects their purchasing decision (Jargalsaikhan and Korotina 2016). Additionally, gender and age has a role on purchasing decision in influencer marketing. Sudha and Sheena (2017) determined that influencers have an effect on the purchasing intention of young women.

Influencer marketing is defined as marketing through people who have gained the trust of the large masses have the authority to influence consumers' perspective of a service or product and their purchasing decisions. Therefore, opinion leaders or influencers although refer to third parties who have no responsibility for the purchased product and/or service of a brand, can significantly shape the purchasing behavior of the customer (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

When the role of influencers are considered, the fact that influencers are reliable, attractive, compatible with the brand and the quality of the argument offered can change the attitude of consumers towards the brand. According to the research, the credibility of the message sender is

important in researches to change the persuasion and attitude of the message recipient (Ohanian, 1990). Similarly, Nadezha and Zeina (2017) stated that influencers' characteristics such as originality, reliability, expertise, and honesty have an effect on purchase intention. Bruns (2018) concluded that originality and trust factors in influencer marketing have an effect on purchasing intention.

Furthermore, attractiveness of influencers based on the fact that when consumers who are message recipient are familiar with the celebrity used as a message sender in the advertisement (Amos et al., 2008). Consumer attitude has a mediator effect on the relationship between attractiveness of source and intention of purchase (Lim et al., 2017). Additionally, according to Misra and Beatty (1990), the compatibility between the brand image and celebrity image (the characteristics seen by the followers/consumers) is important. According to study of Lim et al. (2017) the combability between the product and social media influencers' has an important effect on attitude and purchase intention of consumer. Otherwise, as it is stated in the study of Thaichon et. al, (2019), the characteristics of the influencers, the incompatibility with the company and the perception of customers may result in complexity in managing the communication of the company. Besides, argument quality expresses "the persuasive power of arguments embedded in the information message" (Sanford and Bhattacherjee, 2006). Therefore, Lim et al. (2017) argued that by developing a positive attitude of their followers towards a product or service recommended by influencers, it could affect their purchase intention.

Considering the integrative nature of the ELM, the persuasiveness of a message depends on the strength and plausibility of the argument in the message (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). When the message pursuits the central route, it needs to have some features to be persuasive. These features are related to the quality, reliability, attractiveness of the argument and how the person perceives the message (Teng et al., 2014). On the other hand, when the message pursuits the peripheral route, the person evaluates the message using environmental cues, without elaborating the arguments (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

As a result, the credibility of source is very significant for the adoption of e-WOM and the ELM. Therefore, it is important to know whether the content of a message is suitable for a targeted people or not (Leong et al., 2019). The persuasiveness of the messages can attract the attitude and purchase intention of consumers based on the ELM's two distinct routes to process information (Nunes et al., 2017). Therefore, opinion leaders can use ELM via e-WOM by detecting and measuring the effects of the message, they can make the message more impressive (Nunes et al., 2017). In this way, the individual is likely to process the information and influence that informed behavior (Leong et al., 2019).

2.4. Influencer Marketing and Food and Beverage (F&B) Sector

Although there is limited studies that focus on the attraction of influencer marketing on consumers of F&B sector, it can be easily said that influencer marketing has a big effect on consumers of this sector. As it is stated in the study of Si and Kom (2015), when F&B businesses are collaborated with food influencers, consumers of the businesses are encouraged to purchase their products/service. Saldamlı and Özen (2019) studied on the effect of influencer marketing on consumers of F&B sector. They claimed that if an opinion leader shares friendly without creating a perception of advertising, and if consumers find this sincere, interest may increase for that F&B business. In this direction, influencer marketing activities with opinion leaders who interact closely with their followers and share details such as price, quality and the features of the place clearly and sincerely will be even more effective. Otherwise, there is a perception of advertising in consumers and consumers stay away from that F&B business (Saldamlı and Özen, 2019).

In another study, De Jesus Oliveria et al. (2019) investigated the impact of influencers on consumers in terms of food and nutrition posts via Instagram. In this study, they observed that the interaction between influencers and their followers was high and consumers took into account the recommendations of especially food influencers and took them as models (Oliveria et al., 2019). In

addition, food bloggers' advises have an important impact on attitudes and behavior of consumers (Hanifati, 2015).

Additionally, Coates et al. (2019) investigated the impact of influencers' snack publications on child consumers via YouTube. According to the result of the research, it was explained that the snacks shared by influencers were consumed by children 41% more than similar brands (Coates et al., 2019). Aytaş (2019), on the other hand, examined the effect of product promotion by influencers on brand extension and purchasing behavior on the basis of gender. As a result of the research, there is a significant difference between influencer exposure and gender in purchasing food and beverage products. As a result, it has been determined that women are more affected by influencers than men in purchasing food and beverage products /services in the F&B sector.

Furthermore, according to a study conducted in Turkey, it has been suggested that the high number of followers of influencers does not have a serious effect on influencing the followers. Food influencers who have niche followers and shares posts especially in the regions where consumers live (local restaurants) could be more effective than macro influencers (Satı and Kazancoglu, 2020). As it is stated by Jargalsaikhan and Korotina 2016 above, also food influencers, who generally have 200,000 or less followers on social media, are considered to be more ordinary people, so consumers may create more intimate relationships with that influencers (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2019).

When it is considered from ELM perspective, the quality of source can also be evaluated as central and peripheral routes of ELM. People pay close attention on source quality while purchasing food products, however it could be reflected as different routes on different product category (Hussain et al., 2016). It is obvious that there is a positive attitude towards the products or services recommended by online opinion leaders. The quality of the information conveyed and the fact that the information source is reliable and attractive will increase the purchase of that product (Nunes et al., 2017).

3.   CONCLUSION

Today, social media plays a huge role in building relationships with and reaching customers. In this context, good management of persuasive messages directed to customers by companies has gained importance. Therefore, it has become very important for companies to collaborate with online opinion leaders in order to increase awareness of the product or service. Furthermore, social media engagement plays a big role in terms of the purchase intentions of consumers (Giantari et al., 2020). In the light of this information, this study reveals the relationship between e-WOM, influencer marketing and their effects on consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions in the F&B industry by focusing ELM. In this study, approximately 90 different updated sources (books, theses, articles and sector reports) were researched within the scope of the study and bibliographic method based on literature review was used.

According to the results obtained from the sources, the role of influencers has become significant for the adoption of e-WOM and ELM. The literature claims that opinion leaders have a power to persuade consumers (Eck et al., 2011). Considering the integrative nature of the ELM, the persuasiveness of a message depends on the strength and plausibility of the argument in the message (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Consumers are more likely to follow opinion leaders' choice when they provide love and trust towards them (Meng and Wei, 2015). However, although opinion leaders have a strong role in brand extension, they remain weak in the consumer purchasing decision process (Aytaş, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand the image and target audience of the influencers that are cooperated with. As a recommendation, businesses can allow influencers to adapt the ads to their followers and increase their impact by organizing sales promotion activities such as discount codes, sweepstakes, etc.

Although e-WOM plays big role in the hospitality sector, fashion and beauty sector is the leader in terms of influencer marketing (Geyser, 2022). In the F&B sector, marketers can use online

opinion leaders and their persuasive messages in order to create a positive attitude on consumer. Therefore, the marketers can also create consumer purchase intention. Because the studies clearly show the magnitude of influencer marketing's impact. As a result of a study carried out with approximately 2000 multicultural marketers, about 75% of companies' marketing experts spread the information about their products and brands by using influencers (Geyser, 2022). Moreover, influencers mostly prefer Instagram as a digital social media platform to give information about products or services (Santora, 2022). Therefore, the results show the power of influencer marketing which should be adopted more by the hospitality sector.

As a limitation of this review is to have limited sources about the relationship between influencer marketing and ELM in the F&B sector. The results give clues about how to match them. Consumers pay close attention to source quality while purchasing food products, however it could be reflected as different routes (central or peripheral) on different product category (Hussain et al., 2016). Therefore, opinion leaders can use the ELM by detecting and measuring the effects of the message. Thus, they can make their messages more impressive (Nunes et al., 2017). In this way, the individual is likely to process the information and influence that informed behavior (Leong et al., 2019). Furthermore, regarding to future study, influencers on alternative social media platforms (TikTok, Facebook and YouTube, etc.) should be investigated.

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