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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PERSUASIVE EFFICACY OF ADVERTISING APPEALS IN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has emerged as a crucial persuasion mechanism. Marketers look forward to the best possible strategies to increase customer engagement. Advertising appeals are pertinent tools and which social media influencer advertising appeals are most suitable as per the product category for effective consumer response remains unclear. There are studies addressing the issue as per traditional marketing settings, however the advent of influencers' marketing remain out of the scope of these studies. The present study aims to highlight various appeals available in the literature and their context (product category, online/off line settings) in literature. The findings suggest that as the results in literature are not consistent, the future studies need to empirically validate the results in influencers marketing context to find out the best advertising appeal (guilt/sensual, rational/emotional, utilitarian/value expressive) as per different product categories (slow fashion, beauty, food).

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Introduction:-

The internet has provided new modes of sharing, consuming, and marketing. Initially, Web 1.0 offered unidirectional provision of information to people where content generation was in fewer hands; Web 2.0 facilitates two-way communication by allowing user content creation for self-expression, lifestyle documentation, and promotions. Whereas, Web 3.0 introduced mobile devices and applications that resulted in the popularity of social media (Leung et al., 2022). The digital revolution affected various aspects of our lives e.g., from checking news updates on social media through mobile to booking a cab to ordering groceries online; people have a presence in a virtual world (Chopra et al., 2021). There had been 6 billion internet users worldwide as of October 2025 (Kemp, 2025), with 5.66 billion social media users accounting for 69 percent of the global population (Tamblé, 2026). Social media has gained tremendous popularity and is preferred by marketers due to its cost-effectiveness and interactive nature (Huang, 2015; Naz et al., 2022). Among various multimedia platforms such as print, and television, the highly interactive nature, multimedia format, and potential for dynamic communication make social media a great medium of advertising with elements like user-generated content, influencers, and feed algorithms (Pittman et al., 2022). Vrontis et al. (2021) stated that "given the internet's scalability and speed of diffusion, such contributors attract a mass audience, build a fan base, and become a source of advice for their followers thus, developing into social media influencers (SMIs)" (pp. 618). SMIs are opinion-centric consumers who share their

views regarding products and services on various social media platforms further affecting the purchase decisions of the masses. This new type of independent third-party endorser shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2011). The overall style of SMIs' communication is identified as their advertising appeal and is considered a powerful mechanism to build a connection with the audience. Some examples of such appeals include sensual vs. guilt appeal, product-focused vs. benefit-focused appeal, and emotional vs. rational appeal (Kapoor et al., 2023). The suitability of such appeals varies as per the context and product in question. For instance, explicit appeals are found to be effective for gentleness-related products (body lotion) and implicit appeals are relevant for strength-related products (detergent) (Gong & Wang, 2022). However, the effectiveness of advertising appeals differs with regard to culture, product category, and media type (Okazaki et al., 2010). The present study aims to identify various advertising appeals prevalent in the marketing domain and to analyse their effectiveness from SMIs' point of view.

Review of Literature:-

Social Media:-

Social media facilitate online means of communication, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Social media is understood as the different forms of online communication used by people to create networks, communities, and collectives to share information, ideas, messages, and other content, such as videos. Social media has turned into an online medium of communication, conveyance, and collaboration among interconnected and interdependent groups of people. Whereas, the utilization of social media (technologies and channels) for the creation, and exchange of offerings among marketers and consumers makes it social media marketing. It encompasses social networks, online communities, blogs, wikis, or any other online collaborative media for marketing, sales, public relations, and customer service (Jacobson et al., 2019; Tuten and Solomon, 2019). Social media serve as interaction platform among people and enable them to create, share, and exchange information and ideas within virtual communities and networks. Mobile and web-based technologies facilitate social media to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, embrace, and modify user-generated content. The social media's audience structure features- profiles where users tell others about themselves (i.e., their age, personality and interests); friends who are trusted members of the social network used (they are allowed to make comments that designated members of the network can read); groups within social networks help users find people with similar interests; social networks promote interactions among group members via "discussion groups" and by allowing members to post pictures, music, video clips and other tidbits for the groups' members to view (Schiffman, 2019).

Social Media Influencers:-

Consumers are generating information and sharing experiences on social media via posts, tweets, comments, and likes with friends, family, and the masses. Many social media users create content (blogs and vlogs) and get acknowledgment for their expertise in specific areas. Because of their content creativity, knowledge, and uniqueness, these users build huge followers base on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube). With evident social media presence and their sizable network, such users can influence and shape the purchase decisions of their audience. These micro-celebrities are of great significance to brands and companies for marketing purposes and are termed social media influencers (SMI) (Delbaere et al., 2021; Farrell et al., 2022; Hudders et al., 2021; Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022). The characteristics of social media influencers like perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness along with caliber to satisfy the needs of relatedness, idealism, and competence impact the follower's engagement (Tanrikulu, 2021). SMI can shape the decision-making of their audience which depends upon the perceived expertise, authentic identity, and unique selling point that separates them from others (Hudders et al., 2021). SMIs deal with various subjects namely- food, travel, beauty, and fashion. Due to their impactful position, companies create brand awareness by endorsing their products through influencers. SMI makes money from paid sponsorships and brand partnerships on various platforms including but not limited to Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok (Farrell et al., 2022; Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2022; Vrontis et al., 2021). Many brands are collaborating with such influencers for brand promotions and compensate them to endorse their products making it influencer marketing.

Advertising Appeals:-

The employment of persuasive tactics to attract attention, generate relevance, raise awareness, and encourage execution on the part of the target audience is referred to as advertising appeal (Armstrong & Lukeman, 2010). The advertising appeals help to connect a brand with the consumer's requirements and induce purchase intention (Dix

and Marchegiani,2013). These can be categorized into hard appeal (also referred to as rational informational or utilitarian appeal) and soft appeal (also referred to as emotional affective or transformational appeal) (Dolan et al., 2015; Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Zhu et al., 2021).

Soft and hard appeal: Soft message appeal includes triggering human emotions to get an effective consumer response. Human emotions can be induced with the illustration of an emotional story that results in positive (happiness, security, pride) or negative (guilt, fear) consumer response. The soft message appeal is further categorized into feeling (affect), implicitness (subtle suggestion), and image (user product image). Whereas, hard message appeal emphasizes rational thinking by providing consumers with facts and logic behind the product claims and is processed intellectually. It usually exhibits health, performance, economy, and durability aspects emphasizing the utilitarian value of consumer offering. Hard sell appeal has been categorized into thinking (utilizing cognitive thoughts), fact (product information), and explicitness (direct suggestions) (Kusumasondjaja, 2018; Mueller, 1987; Okazaki et al., 2010).

Individualist and collectivist appeal: Originating from cultural comparison, individualist and collectivist appeal depict the prevailing trend in society. The individualistic appeal is characterized by attributes such as independence, achievement, freedom, and a highly competitive spirit. Whereas, the collectivistic appeal includes harmony, family security, and interdependence (Han & Shavitt, 1994). The literature claims that the boomer generation is persuaded by collectivist appeal and Gen X is affected by individualistic appeal (Zhang, 2010).

Value expressive (symbolic) and utilitarian appeal: The value expressive or symbolic approach includes building the personality of a product/brand thereby exhibiting the user identity in congruence with brand personality. The appeal aims to create an image of the user of the advertised product/brand. The utilitarian appeal exhibits the key perceived advantages that are expected of the product in terms of its functionality (Johar & Joseph Sirgy, 1991).

Self-benefit and other-benefit appeal: The appeal is based upon two motivational aspects i.e., egoistic (self-benefits appeal) and altruistic (others'-benefit appeal). The former exhibits individualistic benefits generally pertaining to the user for instance discounts; whereas, the latter exhibit benefits of other as a collective good for instance low carbon emission(White et al., 2009).

Abstract vs concrete appeal: Abstract appeal can be described through the use of vague terms where product features are described in an unspecified manner. Concrete appeal refers to the detailed and information-rich description of the product features. Literature claims concrete appeal to be more effective in consumer decision-making (Yang et al., 2015). Jäger and Weber (2020) investigated the effectiveness of self-benefit (health) and others' benefit (environmental effect) advertising appeal in the context of organic food. And results revealed that others' benefit acts as persuasive power rather than self-benefit. Emotional and rational appeals were tested in the sports products context and emotional advertising was found to be more effective in building the purchase intention of sports products (Ghasemi Siani et al., 2021). Kapoor et al., (2023) analyzed the effectiveness of abstract and concrete appeals with regard to sustainable consumption of utilitarian/hedonic product types. The findings revealed concrete appeal to be effective consumer purchase intention. While discussing about utilitarian and value expressive appeals. Johar and Joseph Sirgy (1991) claimed value expressive appeal is related to the self-congruity of the consumers whereas, utilitarian appeals depend upon the functional congruity of the products. The literature provides inconsistent findings as the variation in product category and suitability of advertising appeal also differs

Discussion:-

As of 2025, the global influencer marketing industry was valued at 23.59 billion US dollars with projected growth to USD 27.54 billion in 2026 (Influencer Marketing Platform Market Report [2026-2034], n.d.). This growing trend makes the influencer consideration vital from a research viewpoint. SMIs' have the capacity to engage mass audiences and influence their decision-making. To leverage this power, industry experts are utilizing influencers for their product/brand promotions. However, there is no single advertising appeal that is applicable to all the scenarios. From the viewpoint of SMIs, it is necessary to understand the effectiveness of appeals (guilt/sensual, utilitarian/value expressive) on the basis of a product under consideration and, the cultural values of the target group. The present study suggests empirical investigation of the applicability of various advertising appeals used by SMI in beauty, slow fashion, organic food, and e-tourism contexts. This will help the practitioners to utilize the utmost suitable appeals for maximum results.

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