

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL INFLUENCERS IN THE CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE AND THE CONNECTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MARKETING ACTIVITIES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The presence of Social Media has changed the perspective of entrepreneurs in their marketing strategies and sales improvement. The emergence of platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Blogger content is crucial for expanding beneficial information for companies. Writers on Instagram, Twitter, and Blogs can be considered as digital influencers who influence the perceptions and views of their readers/followers through digital platforms. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between Bloggers or Buzzers (digital influencers) in the customer lifecycle stage. Furthermore, it is to investigate the relationship between the use of social media in marketing activities in Indonesia. The research method used is a qualitative method. Meanwhile, the data collection methods used are interviews, observations, documentation, and literature studies. The results of the study show that the communication pattern through social media applies to multi-step flow communication. That is a perception that can influence the opinions of its readers/followers. Thus, the use of social media in marketing activities is very beneficial.

Keywords: *digital influencer, customer lifecycle, social media, marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

Global progress advances swiftly and consistently demonstrate significant growth across various domains, notably in technology and communication. The presence of social media has changed the perspective of entrepreneurs in their marketing strategies and increasing sales. The emergence of platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Blogger content has become an important factor in expanding the reach of information that benefits companies.

Social media is used as a marketing communication tool to increase consumer awareness of products, improve product image, and ultimately increase sales (Kotler and Keller, 2016 in Fedianty Augustinah, 2019).

The Internet (Interconnected Networking) is the result of modernity and advancements in human-made science and technology. The utilization of the internet worldwide is experiencing rapid growth. According to data from statista.com in January,

the number of internet users worldwide reached 4.66 billion, with Indonesia ranking fourth (212.9 million people). With a high sales level, sellers will be able to achieve optimal profits.

Below is a ranking of countries with high social media use. Indonesia is among the top 4 countries with high usage. Therefore, the use of social media as a marketing tool needs to be considered.

Rank	Country	Number of users
1	China	1 billion
2	India	467 million
3	United States	246 million
4	Indonesia	167 million
5	Brazil	152.4 million
6	Russia	106 million
7	Mexico	94 million
8	Japan	92 million
9	Philippines	84.5 million
10	Pakistan	71.7 million

Picture 1. Countries with the most social Media users from CEOWORLD.BIZ

This strongly suggests that in this new era, social media can serve as a tool in marketing strategies to build and maintain relationships between sellers and buyers online. Many companies have recognized the power and influence of Bloggers (owners of Blogs). A Blogger can influence the attitudes and behaviors of their readers while also maintaining relationships with community members (Uzunoğlu & Müşcü Kip, 2014). Several Bloggers have transformed their blogs into main revenue streams utilizing advertising initiatives such as AdSense, sponsored content, affiliate marketing, link sales, among other methods.

The Twitter application is a new form of interactive and concise blogging, with messages limited to 140 characters (Nasrullah, 2015). Based on statistics from Statista.com, Indonesia stands as the fifth-largest hub of active Twitter users globally, boasting 24.69 million users (Statista.com, Jan 2024). As Twitter continues to grow in Indonesia, a new trend or phenomenon has emerged on Twitter, namely the presence of paid buzzers. The dissemination of information carried out by Bloggers or Buzzers follows the same concept of dissemination. Both utilize the concept of Viral Message.

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, especially

among teenagers. In the third quarter of 2023, the number of active Instagram users worldwide reached 1.07 billion. According to Statista, in Indonesia as of January 2024, the number of Instagram users is 91.77 million. The largest user group is in the age range of 18 to 24 years old, accounting for 64.8 percent. Instagram is the third most widely used social media platform after YouTube and WhatsApp. Instagram is also one of the promising social media platforms in the business world. Various features are offered to facilitate access to information that can be used to develop owned businesses or enterprises.

The Viral Message carried out by Bloggers and Buzzers employs a communication technique known as viral messaging. The concept of communication in disseminating this information is based on the Multi-Step Flow Theory written by Katz & Lazarsfeld. In the Multi-Step Flow Theory, there are news carriers known as opinion leaders. These individuals interpret the information they receive and then disseminate their interpretations to others. In this communication model, there is a reciprocal relationship from the media to the audience (who also interact with each other), back to the media, then back to the audience, and so forth (Stansberry, 2015). This suggests that opinion leaders can act as intermediaries and exert direct influence on society through their content. Bloggers or Buzzers can be classified as Digital Influencers or Opinion Leaders in the realm of digital media.

Based on the communication concept above, it would be very interesting to see the extent of the role of digital influencers in marketing activities. Based on the roles and functions of Bloggers or Buzzers and linking them to the Multi Step Flow Theory, researchers feel the need to explore further and find answers to the relationship between the use of Bloggers or Buzzers in the customer lifecycle stages to enhance marketing in Indonesia. Based on the above explanation, the research questions raised are: [1] How is the relationship between Bloggers and Buzzers (digital influencers) in the customer lifecycle stages?; [2] What is the role of social media in marketing activities in Indonesia?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied the descriptive qualitative method. According to Moleong (2017), this method refers to the focus on understanding a phenomenon by examining its

characteristics and qualities on words. It is used to explore the topic in depth to gain a better understanding of a previously studied topic by applying different perspectives. This type of research explored the phenomenon's characteristics, rather than explaining the underlying causes or mechanism.

It involves the collection and data analysis in the form of words, images, or other non-numerical forms or information. In other words, this descriptive qualitative method provides a great opportunity to create alternative, critical, and meaningful interpretations (Sobur, 2014).

The data collection techniques used are interviews, observations, and literature review. Informants with specific criteria are: (a) Three business owners or managers who use social media in sales. (b) Three Buzzers or Bloggers involved in marketing activities. The interviews conducted in this study are in-depth interviews, where they are more freely conducted compared to structured interviews (Sugiyono, 2011). The observation conducted is Non-Participatory Observation by monitoring the Blogs, Instagram, and Twitter of the above Informants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

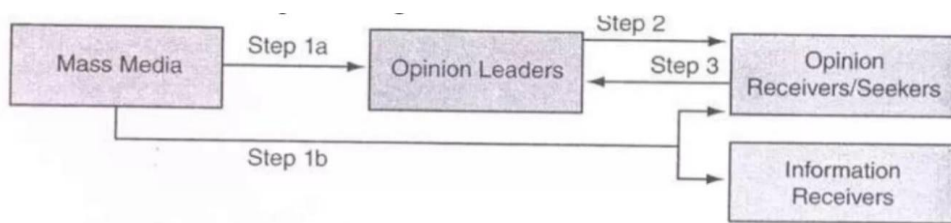
Communication models : Multi-Step Flow Theory and the Two-Step Flow Theory.

Communication models have played a crucial role in understanding how information spreads through societies. Two prominent models in this context are the Multi-Step Flow Theory and the Two-Step Flow Theory. Both theories propose different pathways of information dissemination and emphasize the role of opinion leaders and intermediaries.

The multi-step flow theory assumes ideas flow from mass media to opinion leaders before being disseminated to a wider population. This theory was first introduced by sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld et al. in 1944 and elaborated by Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955. The Multi-Step Flow Theory is a prominent communication model that seeks to explain the intricate dynamics of information dissemination and influence within society. Developed as a response to the limited applicability of the Two-Step Flow Theory, this theory explores how information moves through various steps and intermediaries, affecting public opinion and decision-making. The multi-step Flow of communication goes through several 'channels' of interpretation before it finally gets to the intended or targeted

user. According to it, opinion leaders interfere between the media’s direct message and the audience’s reaction to it. Opinion leaders influence others to change their attitudes and behaviors more quickly than formal media because the audience can relate to an opinion leader more than an article in a newspaper or news program.

The concept of the 'two-step flow of communication' suggests that the flow of information and influence from the mass media to their audiences involves two steps: from the media to certain individuals (i.e., the opinion leaders) and from them to the public. As seen in a diagram below:



Picture 2. Multi-Step Flow Theory and the Two-Step Flow Theory

Figure shows:

- In Step 1a and 1b information from mass media flows simultaneously to- the Opinion Leaders, Opinion Receivers and Information Receivers. Opinion Seekers are those who ask information and advice from Opinion Leaders. Information receivers are those who neither influence nor are influenced by others. Opinion receivers receive information in two ways;
 - 1) They receive information directly from mass media,
 - 2) They receive "processed and interpreted" version of information from opinion leaders.
- In Step 2, both information and influence are transmitted from the Opinion Leaders to the Opinion Receivers.
- Step 3 shows the two-way exchange and transfer of information and influence from Opinion Receivers to Opinion Leaders.

Influence can be multi directional and not necessarily be downwards. Influence can be upwards or even backwards towards the media as well. The influence could also be peer to peer where audience with similar opinion share insights with each other. Information reached to a member of audience can be direct or second hand, third hand or even fourth hand. Many times, the information reaches the mass audience in a totally different form from the original piece of information. Everyone who passes the information adds his or her own interpretation to it giving it a new meaning.

One of the advantages of multi-step flow theory is the presence of several networks that work between the media and the audience to continue spreading the message.

Meanwhile, the disadvantage is that the reception of messages by each audience can be different from each other. This model states that the reciprocal relationship from the media to the audience will return to the media, then back to the audience, and so on (Nurudin, 2011).

Social Media

Henry, Muhammad Yusuf in Armayani, R. R., Tambunan, L. C., Siregar, R. M., Lubis, N. R., & Azahra, A. (2021) describe social media as online platforms akin to web-based services, enabling users to create public or semi-public profiles within a controlled system, along with a list of connections established through the system. As promotional media technology advances, it also grows and expands, particularly through internet-based platforms. Desi Khamaria (2019) writes, utilizing internet media allows companies to promote products without requiring substantial financial investments, simplifying the promotional process, and widening the audience reach.

In today's era, social media helps a lot in people's daily lives. At this time it cannot be separated from social media (Adelia Septiani Restanti Tania: 2020). Social media allows users to communicate with millions of other users. This is an opportunity for entrepreneurs to use it as a marketing communications tool. (La Moriansyah: 2015)

Thus, based on various definitions, it can be inferred that social media is an online tool that facilitates business operations, enabling connectivity between business entities and numerous users for promotional endeavors related to products and services.

Viral Message

Viral Message is a concept of message dissemination that refers to the concept of Viral Marketing. Viral Marketing is a marketing strategy associated with creating original and entertaining online messages that encourage consumers to pass the message on to other consumers, spreading the message within the web like a virus (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014).

Blog, Blogger & Twitter Buzzer

A blog is short for "weblog," which refers to a type of website resembling written entries on web pages, typically arranged chronologically (by time of occurrence), with the newest posts appearing at the top of the main page (homepage), followed by older posts

below. The term "blog" was first coined by Jorn Barger in December 1997. Jorn Barger used the term "weblog" to refer to a group of personal websites that are continuously updated and contain links to other websites they find interesting, along with their own comments. In essence, a weblog can be summarized as a collection of personal writings that allows its creators to easily display various types of content on the web, such as written works, collections of internet links, documents like Word, Excel, PDF, images, or other multimedia. (www.dinamika.ac.id)

A blogger is an individual who generates content on their own blog. Bloggers enjoy the liberty to cover a wide range of topics on their platform. They can serve as valuable sources of reference and information when their content offers insights to others. Engaging with bloggers has become a standard practice, but it's essential to establish communication regarding advertising and sponsorship opportunities beforehand (Park & Jeong: 2011).

Bloggers can be likened to journalists who publish stories and events to the public or their readers, which are then disseminated and become topics of discussion (Breakenridge, 2012).

Twitter buzzer is a Twitter user who can influence others solely through the tweets they post. This is the primary identity of a Twitter buzzer, as fundamentally, a buzzer must possess the ability to influence others. Hence, some also refer to a buzzer as an influencer. However, fundamentally, both terms carry the same meaning. The Twitter buzzers have the task of composing tweets containing information or recommendations about an event or product from the clients who hire their services. Most of these clients are large companies or business owners who aim to increase the visibility of their businesses in the online world. As quoted by Semiocast, a social media market researcher, this is what makes Twitter users in Indonesia a suitable platform for promoting specific brands or products through paid Twitter Buzzers (Musofa, 2014).

Opinion leader

Opinion leader is defined as an individual who actively filters, interprets, or provides products and brand information relevant to their family, friends, and colleagues (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, & Best, 2015). Blogger, twitter user, instagram users are considered as opinion leaders. Communication built by opinion leaders on bloggers, Twitter, or

Instagram can be considered effective because of the feedback from both sides.

Customer Lifecycle



Customer lifecycle is a concept that describes the journey of a customer, from first learning about a product/service to becoming a loyal customer. In digital marketing, the customer lifecycle is important as it can assist businesses in planning and implementing marketing strategies. By understanding each stage, businesses become more effective in targeting and communicating with customers, thus enhancing marketing efforts. The concept was first introduced by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1898 under the name of the AIDA model, which stands for Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action. (Buttle, Francis: 2013).

Stages in customer lifecycle: (Kumar, Ashok &Murthy, Sreenivasa (2021)

1. **Attract/Reach:** Sometimes called the *discovery stage*, this involves your organization’s attempts to attract customer. Most often, this means marketing to a broad or narrow niche of potential customer. Much, though not all, of that marketing takes place online and includes using your website, social media, and other digital channels.
2. **Acquisition:** You’ve identified and started to engage with a specific prospective customer to tell them about the benefits of doing business with you.
3. **Conversion:** You’ve converted the prospect into a customer (to first buy your product or service).
4. **Retention:** At this stage, you’ve won the client. Now your organization needs to do everything possible to serve the client well and convince them to retain your services. The first phase of the retention stage, onboarding, is critical. Onboarding starts when you introduce a client to your service or product. You may also introduce the customer to the team.
5. **Loyalty:** The final stage is about turning satisfied customers into brand ambassadors. Loyal customers not only make repeat purchases but also tend to recommend the product/service to others. Building strong and continuous relationships with customers through effective communication and appreciation of their loyalty is key in this stage.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The involvement of Bloggers or Buzzers (digital influencers) in the customer lifecycle stages.

1. The involvement in the Reach Stage

In this first stage, customers become aware of your product through targeted advertising or through their own research on an issue or problem they need to solve. Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and other advertising techniques should be used to put your brand on the customer's radar. This step is considered successful when the product or brand has garnered attention from customers. Digital influencers are a source of reference or information that provides knowledge to others. Bloggers have an influence on their followers/visitors when writing preferences about a brand on their blog. In detail, Bloggers can be described as: Content creators, individuals who freely share their opinions and personal feelings through the internet. As Influencers/Opinion leaders, someone who can influence readers or blog visitors based on attitudes, perceptions, and even purchasing behavior; and as Internet Phenomena, a situation in which bloggers are utilized in advertising activities on several social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram).

2. The involvement in the Acquisition Stage.

After customers become aware of the product, the next stage is to capture their interest to engage further. This process can be through visiting the website or direct interaction with the sales or customer service team. Typically, a blogger has a hobby of writing to express themselves through their writings. In this stage, it's important to provide relevant and convincing information to customers about the value of the product/ service. Based on research, a blogger is chosen because they have a hobby of writing that allows them to express themselves through their interesting writings.

3. The involvement in the Conversion Stage

The conversion stage occurs when potential customers make the decision to purchase and become customers. This stage is a "critical moment" where user experience and satisfaction in the purchasing process can influence their decision. Based on research findings, it was discovered that bloggers serve as opinion leaders in managing content presented through their blogs. A blogger as an opinion leader is someone who can influence readers or blog visitors on specific issues through social

media. According to the research, bloggers who have more knowledge and experience in a certain field than their readers or blog visitors will be chosen because their blog content can provide new information or give testimonials about a product. With the advancement of social media, all content from blogs can now also be linked to other social media platforms. This will undoubtedly create a viral effect on the spread of content from a blogger, in relation to the number of followers or visitors they have.

4. The involvement in the Retention Stage

After the purchase, the focus shifts to retaining those customers. This process ensures customer satisfaction with the product/service and encourages repeat purchases. Strategies in this stage include providing proper customer service, special offers, and loyalty programs. At this time, the two sides exchange information and particulars to ensure that work for the customer, and the customer relationship, starts out well. A blogger has the power to influence or persuade people around them. An opinion leader has a unique way of delivering their message to the audience to elicit a response or feedback. Based on research findings, some blogs become opinion leaders because the messages conveyed receive feedback from the audience. This certainly provides satisfaction to the readers or blog visitors. From a marketing perspective, this is very advantageous because it facilitates two-way communication. Companies receive information from customers about their products.

5. The involvement in the Loyalty stage

This is the goal of the company. At this stage, an influencer leader has done a great job for the company and won. As influencers who have established credibility and trust with their audience, bloggers and buzzers can leverage their platforms to provide authentic testimonials, share positive experiences, and advocate for brands they genuinely support. In this stage, customers have done business with the company repeatedly and become "brand ambassadors," praising your company publicly, which is perhaps the most powerful propaganda tool in attracting new customers.

The relationship between Bloggers or Buzzers (digital influencers) in the customer lifecycle stages can vary depending on the context and marketing strategies used. In the initial stage, they can act as information providers and sources of inspiration for potential

customers. During the consideration stage, influencers can help strengthen brand awareness and provide testimonials that can influence purchasing decisions. During the purchase stage, they can offer discount codes or affiliate links to encourage conversions. Furthermore, during the post-purchase stage, influencers can provide product reviews and promote positive experiences, which can strengthen customer loyalty and trigger repeat purchases. Thus, influencers play a significant role in influencing the customer journey throughout the lifecycle.

The Role of Social Media in Marketing Activities in Indonesia.

In recent years, social media has revolutionized the landscape of marketing in Indonesia, becoming an integral part of marketing strategies for businesses across various industries. Its pervasive reach and interactive nature have transformed how companies engage with their target audience, driving brand awareness, customer engagement, and ultimately, business growth.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blog have provided businesses with unprecedented opportunities to connect with consumers on a personal level. Through compelling content, targeted advertising, and strategic engagement, companies can establish a strong online presence, fostering brand loyalty and trust among Indonesian consumers. One of the key roles of social media in marketing is its ability to facilitate two-way communication between brands and customers. Unlike traditional forms of advertising, social media allows for immediate feedback and interaction, enabling businesses to address customer inquiries, resolve issues, and solicit feedback in real-time. This direct line of communication not only enhances customer satisfaction but also enables companies to gain valuable insights into consumer preferences and behavior, informing future marketing strategies.

Moreover, social media has become a powerful tool for digital influencer marketing in Indonesia. Leveraging the popularity and influence of social media personalities, brands can reach a wider audience and establish credibility through authentic endorsements and collaborations. By partnering with influencers who resonate with their target demographic, businesses can amplify their marketing messages and drive engagement more effectively.

Additionally, social media plays a crucial role in driving website traffic and generating leads for businesses in Indonesia. Through strategic content distribution and promotion,

companies can drive users from social media platforms to their websites, where they can further engage with the brand and convert into customers.

Furthermore, social media provides a platform for showcasing products and services, enabling businesses to showcase their offerings in a visually appealing and engaging manner. Through high-quality imagery, videos, and user-generated content, companies can captivate their audience's attention and inspire action, whether it be making a purchase, signing up for a newsletter, or attending an event.

In conclusion, the role of social media in marketing activities in Indonesia cannot be overstated. From fostering brand awareness and customer engagement to driving website traffic and generating leads, social media has become an indispensable tool for businesses looking to succeed in the digital age. By embracing social media as a strategic marketing channel, companies can effectively reach and connect with Indonesian consumers, driving growth and achieving their business objectives in an increasingly competitive market.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, social media serves as a crucial marketing communication tool categorized based on marketers' motivations. Companies utilize social media for advertising to enhance awareness, while some appoint brand ambassadors to share recommendations, aligning with viral marketing where consumers exchange opinions and experiences. This utilizes online word-of-mouth (WOM) facilitated by social media's ability for viral and buzz marketing, in line with the Multi-Step Flow Theory, bolstering bloggers' roles as opinion leaders in influencing reader decisions across every stage of the customer lifecycle.

Furthermore, the significance of social media lies in its ability to create a social media effect, allowing real-time dissemination of messages or content anytime, anywhere, and to anyone. The strength of bloggers or buzzers lies in their blog readership and followers. Companies can improve customer relationships through social media by engaging in two-way communication, ultimately impacting sales positively. Social media enables customers to access extensive information, including feedback from other customers about a product, benefiting both customers and companies alike. Combining social media

with traditional media can yield optimal results, enhancing overall marketing effectiveness.

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