Transformation of business marketing. Influencers and conventional advertising in the digital era

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Abstract

This study explores the transformation of marketing in the province of Santa Elena, Ecuador, focusing on the influence of digital influencers versus conventional advertising methods. The main objective is to analyze consumer preferences regarding these advertising channels in an environment of rapid change towards digital. Through a survey applied to young people in the region, data was collected on their frequency of online purchases, the relevance of influencers' recommendations in their purchasing decisions and the perception of trust they generate compared to traditional advertising. The results show that social networks with influencer content capture significantly more consumers' attention and generate greater trust than traditional media, especially among those shop online frequently. Through cross-variable analysis, a correlation was observed between the frequency of online shopping and the relevance of influencer recommendations in purchase decisions, highlighting that consumers who regularly shop online value these recommendations more highly. The findings suggest that influencers have established themselves as a key tool to capture consumers' attention and guide their decisions, surpassing in several aspects the effectiveness of conventional media.

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Transformación del marketing empresarial. Influencers y publicidad convencional en la era digital

Resumen

Este estudio explora la transformación del marketing en la provincia de Santa Elena, Ecuador, centrándose en la influencia de los influencers digitales frente a los métodos publicitarios convencionales. El objetivo principal es analizar las preferencias de los consumidores con respecto a estos canales publicitarios en un entorno de rápido cambio hacia lo digital. A través de una encuesta aplicada a jóvenes de la región, se recopilaron datos sobre su frecuencia de compras online, la relevancia de las recomendaciones de los influencers en sus decisiones de compra y la percepción de confianza que generan en comparación con la publicidad tradicional. Los resultados muestran que las redes sociales con contenido de influencers captan significativamente más la atención de los consumidores y generan mayor confianza que los medios tradicionales, especialmente entre aquellos que compran online con frecuencia. A través del análisis de variables cruzadas, se observó una correlación entre la frecuencia de las compras online y la relevancia de las recomendaciones de los influencers en las decisiones de compra, destacando que los consumidores que compran online con regularidad valoran más estas recomendaciones. Los resultados sugieren que los influencers se han establecido como una herramienta clave para captar la atención de los consumidores y guiar sus decisiones, superando en varios aspectos la eficacia de los medios convencionales.

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of commerce has accelerated significantly in recent years, especially in Latin America, where e-commerce grew by 39% during the 2022 period (PCMI, 08/22/2023)1. In Ecuador, and specifically in the province of Santa Elena, this phenomenon has intensified due to socioeconomic and public safety factors that have modified traditional consumption patterns.

Ecuador's security crisis in 2024 (Araque Jaimes et al., 2017), characterized by periods of electricity rationing exceeding ten hours a day, has prompted consumers to seek digital alternatives for shopping. This context presents both challenges and opportunities for the commercial sector in the province of Santa Elena, where a significant number of businesses have not yet established a presence in the digital environment.

Digital marketing, and specifically influencer marketing, has emerged as an effective strategy to connect with consumers i(Runyan et al., 2013) In the digital space. According to a study by PuroMarketing (01/31/2024)2, 67% of marketers globally include influencers in their strategies, with a growing emphasis on micro- and nano-influencers. The latter have been shown to generate engagement rates up to five times higher than macro-influencers, with a significantly lower cost per interaction.

(Villegas Zamora, 2019) Data from the Pew Research Center (11/21/2022)3 supports the relevance of this trend, indicating that approximately 30% of users claim to have purchased something after seeing a post about it from an influencer or content creator on social media. This influence is particularly notable in the young adult segment, although it varies according to demographic factors such as age, gender and ethnicity.

In the specific context of Latin America, (Paredes, 2019) a STATISTA study (02/10/2023)4 indicates that between 13% and 44% of consumers, depending on the country surveyed, trust influencer recommendations more than traditional advertising, especially in categories such as fashion, technology and everyday consumer products. However, the comparative effectiveness of traditional and influencer-based campaigns in specific regional markets, such as the province of St. Helena (Kazama et al., 2022), has not yet been sufficiently studied.

This research seeks to fill that gap by comparing the effectiveness of influencer-based campaigns with traditional campaigns in terms of their impact on consumer purchase intent in the province of St. Helena.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a comparative design to evaluate the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns versus traditional campaigns in the province of Santa Elena, Ecuador, at the time of consumer purchase decision. The research was conducted during the fourth quarter of 2024.

Stratified probability sampling was used, considering the population distribution of the province of Santa Elena. The sample size was 384 participants, a number calculated with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, based on a population of 401,178 inhabitants (INEC, 2024). The inclusion criteria were: (a)

residing in the province of Santa Elena, (b) having access to internet and social networks, and (c) having been exposed to both traditional advertising and influencer content in the last three months.

A structured questionnaire was designed using Google Forms. The instrument was structured in five sections:

Demographic data (5 items)

Exposure to advertising campaigns (3 items)

Perception of advertising impact (3 items)

Purchasing behavior (4 items)

Additional comments (1 item open)

Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) for perception and behavioral questions.

Data collection was carried out in three phases:

Preparation Phase (2 weeks):

Harvest Phase (3 weeks):

Processing Phase (1 week):

Data Analysis

The following analyses were performed:

Quantitative analysis by question

Analysis to establish relationships between categorical variables

Content analysis for open-ended responses

A total of 400 responses were obtained, although the sufficient sample was 384.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consents were obtained from all participants. Data were anonymized and processed in accordance with the Organic Law on Personal Data Protection of Ecuador.

Methodological Limitations

The data collection coincided with a period of instability in the electric service.

RESULTS

The results of this study shed light on consumer trends in the province of Santa Elena, Ecuador, in a context where digital advertising, particularly influencer marketing, competes directly with traditional channels. The findings show that social networks, supported by influencers, significantly capture the attention and trust of consumers, especially among young people, who show a greater willingness to make purchasing decisions based on recommendations from digital personalities. This highlights the growing effectiveness of influencer marketing compared to conventional ads, aligning with previous studies suggesting that the modern consumer values the perceived authenticity of personal recommendations over institutional messages in traditional media. (Lavoie & Main, 2022) The majority of respondents report that influencer recommendations are "moderately" to "very relevant" in their purchasing decisions. This suggests that, in a context of content saturation, consumers tend to prefer voices with whom they feel a personal or trusted connection. In addition, the data reveals that consumers who shop online more frequently consider the influence of influencers to be more relevant. This could be explained by greater exposure to digital platforms and constant recommendations from public figures on these platforms, which fosters a process of familiarity and loyalty to influencer content.

In contrast, traditional methods still have some relevance, particularly among respondents, who may perceive these media as more trustworthy. However, the continued growth of social media suggests that this generational gap may diminish in the future, and influencer marketing is likely to continue to gain traction.

Practical Implications:

For (Subióte et al., 2013) Santa Elena's retailers, these results underscore the importance of adopting digital marketing

strategies, especially in social media. Collaborating with local or relevant influencers for the target audience can an effective strategy to capture attention and improve brand perception, as well as to foster a relationship of trust that traditional media does not always achieve. This approach allows companies to connect in a more personalized and less intrusive way, which can improve the effectiveness of their campaigns.

Study limitations:

A relevant limitation of this study is the concentration of responses in a youth audience, which could bias the results towards a preference for digital marketing and influencers, but it should be noted that according to the "Population and Housing Census of 2022"5, the distribution by age group is as follows: 0 to 14 years: 27.5% of the population.

15 to 64 years old: 63.5%.

65 years old or older: 9%.

In addition, the survey focuses only on one province, limiting the generalizability of the results to other regions with different consumption dynamics. The rapid evolution of digital trends also presents a challenge, preferences and use of social networks can change over time and require continuous analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has revealed that, in the province of St. Helena, influencer marketing on social networks has a significant influence on purchasing decisions, especially among young consumers and frequent online shoppers. Unlike traditional methods, influencers offer a more personal and relatable approach, which increases consumer trust in the brands they promote. The results underscore consumers' preference for perceived authenticity in recommendations from digital figures, transforming the way companies should approach their marketing strategies. The

importance of these findings lies in their practical application for marketers and marketers, who can benefit from integrating influencers their advertising campaigns. Leverage social media as a primary channel for promoting products and services, focusing on collaborations with influencers. In addition, optimize online stores and create promotions that encourage recurring purchases. This strategy not only increases visibility and outreach, but also facilitates an emotional connection with the consumer, which in turn fosters brand loyalty. In addition, the study suggests that digital marketing, particularly influencer marketing, is a dynamic and growing field that requires continuous attention to adapt to changing market needs.

Influencer marketing has proven to be a valuable and effective tool for capturing the attention of consumers in St. Helena. Its relevance highlights the need for local businesses to incorporate these digital channels into their advertising strategies, aligning with the preferences of an audience that increasingly values connection and authenticity in their consumer experiences.

Future Lines of Research

This study suggests several directions for future research:

Longitudinal analysis of the impact of digital transformation on local commerce. Study of specific barriers to e-commerce adoption in the region. Research on the adaptation of influencer marketing strategies to the local context.

Evaluation of the impact of socioeconomic factors on the effectiveness of different marketing strategies.

Delve deeper into the psychological and emotional impact of influencer campaigns compared to traditional campaigns to better understand why young audiences show this preference. This analysis can also help identify whether these campaigns are more effective in specific product categories.

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