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OPINION LEADERS IN 2019- ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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With the rise of non-traditional mass media techniques, the communication flow and the relationship between the message benefactor and the message receptor has evolved. In the first decade of the 21st century, industries marketing a product or a service used to address various segments of targeted audience through customary advertising and public relations methods, such as public figures and celebrity endorsement, specialists 2 steps flow advertisement, and strategic promotional campaigns. The opinion leaders who influence the target audience decision making in those cases are either celebrities or specialists in their fields; influencers considered as idols and trusted by respective clients. For example, in 2010 “Sensodyne” toothpaste’s 30 seconds advertisement targeting Middle Eastern consumers is made of a 2 steps flow advertisement consisting of a short interview with a professional dentist recommending the product. In the second decade of the century, after the rise of digital media, the industry is witnessing a rapid change that is manifested in a growing switch from regular advertising and public relations practices to revamping innovations such as pop-ups, product placement, focused events, and blogs. According to Talcott Parsons’ collective behavior theory, humans are shifting from individual choices to mass-choices, especially when influenced by an accelerating factor, the opinion leaders. After 2010, people shifted the trust and choice dependence to bloggers with critical thinking (smart shoppers), especially that bloggers are at the same time consumers and contributors. Additionally, people also moved to digital advertisements going off the screens and to e-commerce marketing based on personal feeds and user searches interests. In 2019, 53% of the total population is internet users, consumers are influenced by “brand-new” opinion leaders. The blogs, digital advertisement, and e-marketing effectiveness continue to rise. Even more, some consumers are shifting from consuming products they were loyal to, into consuming other products advertised and recommended by opinion leaders. This study focuses on the clientele growth of three Lebanese well-known blogs, a food review blog “NoGarlicNoOnion”, a tourism blog “Live Love Lebanon” and a beauty blog “Feel 22”. Then again, would present-day opinion leaders remain dependable or would costumers be oriented to other marketing techniques?

Keywords: Advertising, Blogger, Celebrity endorsement, Influencer, Opinion leaders.

Introduction

Media advertisements, infomercials, promotions, sponsorships, are all communication tools used as IMC (integrated marketing communications) techniques to place a product or a service in the open market. All these techniques are still used, in variable place, along with other marketing methods- viral marketing, that showed being more perceived by the audience, especially the genre linked to social media usage such

as blogs, digital advertisements, and e-marketing, which allows a direct communication between the producer and the consumer.

This study particularly focuses on an online viral marketing type that small and big organizations are using to market their goods, products, services and thoughts, on blogs as a rising untraditional media, focusing on the Lebanese example as a case study. In Lebanon, a country of around 4.000.000 people, there are thousands of blogs reaching users looking for feedback on the subjects of food, beauty, clothes, tourism, tours, politics and many more. The study concentrates on 3 specific Lebanese blogs, NoGarlicNoOnions (NGNO), Live Love Lebanon and Feel 22.

Media Techniques Evolution

The roadmap of media evolution is quite simple; it started with it being informational manuscripts, developed into a material with a message, and then transformed to an interactive platform delivering multi-topics and affecting a wider range of general public.

Media naturally evolved, in parallel with public's progress. In other words, in ancient ages, the mass was a receptive stakeholder; in 2019 the mass is a conscious stakeholder who requests a responsive medium. Media had to shape new communication techniques that fit better the "unofficial judiciary"¹. The overall media environment have changed, various media channels are now globally available which makes the reach much wider, which also positively serves the concept of globalization, in effectively making the world a non-boundaries place.

Mobile phones and electronic devices replaced the TV screen, the newspapers and the magazines, as communicating through social media have become ingrained in social relations and have altered interpersonal communication significantly, it became a daily routine, if not a daily addiction.

In the 20th century media campaigns were the core component of public relations and mass relations. And because media was transforming into a booming industry, it attracted scientists who decided to transform it into a practiced social science, and tailored for it methodologies and published books on the topic. Media became a profession practiced by knowledgeable educated media graduates.

New media techniques (internet, social media blogs), twisted this adopted scientific track, generating new and more complex public relations and mass relations methodologies, which in turn created a need to study a new science, thus formulate new guidelines for media practices and communication activities.

Parallel to this media evolution, generates public relation evolution, marketing evolution, advertising evolution and opinion leading evolution, on both international and national levels. This developmental process is interpreted in obvious variations in media techniques.

Opinion Leaders Evolution

The German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman (1916-2010) finds that public opinion as an integral ingredient of a person's daily life, where this person is affected in his everyday choices (even if he/ she does not know) by opinion leaders, especially that in the current century individuals cannot isolate themselves from their surrounding that is jam-packed with people sharing their thoughts and opinions- the influencers and the opinion leaders. Based on previous scientific research, the opinion leaders' evolution can be distributed on 3 phases: no opinion leader, single opinion leader and multiple opinion leaders. In social psychology, the persuader is the person that belongs to a group and has a passive opinion that is shaped by the collective attitude.

Opinion leading, as a concept, emerged in the 1940s, it was an indirect opinion leading (interpersonal communication). As per the mass media specialist Robert K. Merton (1949), the "local opinion leader" is able to address 500 citizen in two hours by adopting the "one to one" technique. But this method, almost immediately evolved into single opinion leader of what is known "the two steps

¹ Culter (1999) described the audience in the 20th century as "unofficial judiciary"

flow”. As labeled, the two steps flow is composed of two constituents, the first is the medium (radio, TV, newspaper, magazine) and the second is an expert delivering a message (influencer). A classic example of this technique opinion leading would be having a trustworthy professional advising the audience through media channels, to use a specific products that he/she already consumed and was satisfied of, explaining the scientific and non-scientific aspects that led to this satisfaction.

A simple example of a two steps flow advertisement would be a toothpaste advertisement, where it became, for a certain period of time, a global trend to endorse a famous dentist (professional) recommending the advertised brand. The model of “Crest” is a typical one, in 1985 the market share of the brand reached 40% after adopting the “dentist’s choice” slogan, and the strategy of professional dentist endorsement recommending the product based on both scientific satisfaction (the chemical composition of the product) and daily use unscientific satisfaction (whitened teeth). At this period of time, the opinion leaders were professionals from the field. The same brand, in 2013, also adopted the two steps flow technique, with a TV Commercial featuring the singer Shakira, at this period of time, opinion leaders are no more professionals from the field, they are public figures acting as role models in the wider market. Those influencers cannot build on the composition of the product; instead they only highlight the direct consumption satisfaction. In 2019, Crest is adopting a new reach technique, it is abundantly present in beauty blogs and focusing on reviewers comments, trying to attract and receive positive feedback from health and beauty influencers as a catchy trending technique.

Another example of the “two steps flow” advertising campaigns evolution would be for the sports brand “Adidas”. After 2011 the brand was identified as a star’s selected type, especially after a series of advertisements endorsing international athletes celebrities (in 2011 the advertisement endorsed the most famous football players playing all together as one team and all wearing Adidas outfit, in 2016 the advertisement endorsed the famous tennis player Ana Ivanovic). Advertisements were showed on TV, in print media, on billboards and in metro stations. The main target audience was youth.

Beginning 2019 the brand still endorses celebrities for their campaigns, yet using their social media platforms, the celebrity is not necessarily an athlete, instead he/ she is an active member on social media and a blogs influencer (the e-advertisement endorses the 22 years old singer Dua Lipa). Going further with the social media movement, Adidas announced, in August 2018, the blogger and beauty influencer Kylie Jenner as its new brand ambassador (with more than 120 million followers on Instagram and 22 million followers on Facebook). Kylie does not have any athletic background, or sportswear background, she is a cosmetics professional who influences the audiences’ purchasing decisions. Still the main target audience is contemporary youth who have always been the key strategy of the company’s campaigns.

As for the sport’s brand Puma, it featured in 2013 the famous athletes: sprinter Usain Bolt, golfer Lexi Thompson and football player Mario Balotelli. The campaign aimed at making the target audience identify with their powerful sports models. However, Puma’s decision to sign Rihanna as a creative director in 2014 for its women’s category, led to a 7% jump in sales for its women’s category in a year. Puma’s industry executives have proved that celebrity endorsements are more effective with boosting sales than sports athletes are.

In 2018, the new Puma brand ambassador is “The Weeknd” the famous rap singer, yet who is tremendously active on social media and well followed by millions of youth around the globe (20.1 million followers on Instagram and 7.3 million followers on Facebook). As part of this new partnership, The Weeknd has also designed his own collection of sneakers and apparel for Puma.

In beauty industry, the international brand “Maybelline” in 2014 featured, using the “two steps flow” strategy, a professional 25 years old make-up artist to professionally recommend the latest foundation product. In 2017 another campaign endorsed the celebrity “Gigi Hadid” who already used to publish beauty and make up tutorials on social media and YouTube. In 2018 the brand shifted to endorsing the beauty blogger “Nikkie”, who is followed by 11.4 million followers on her Instagram account “nikkietutorials”, and followed by 1.1 million on Facebook. Nikkie, as her profile indicates is a “professional Hair & Makeup Artist & Beauty Guru on YouTube”.

“Maybelline’s” 21st century “two steps flow” advertising campaigns, demonstrate the rapid evolution of the opinion leaders’ movement: professional from the field, than a famous celebrity and at last a famous blogger.

The multiple opinion leaders’ phase peaked with the massive usage of social media platforms (especially Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube). A new media pattern showed up, the message emitter does not have to be a media professional or an expert in the field; he/ she is simply a blogger (from any professional background) with an increasing number of followers (followers in millions).

Lebanese Opinion Leaders

The opinion leaders’ evolution develops in parallel with the media evolution, as opinion leaders generate an important content for media, and media is a necessary platform for opinion leaders.

In the Lebanese case, in the 19th century, under the Ottoman Empire colony, the country was a *mélange* of multi-cultural multi-religious groups, due to its strategic geographical presence on the Mediterranean, connecting the east to the west. Despite of that, the oppression of freedom of expression was a rigid policy set to persecute the public views. In response, a group of moralist and bourgeois intellectuals shaped the Lebanese public opinion concept calling upon violence elimination and prompting the less privileged societies to revolt and become a confronting force, creating a new “leaders” culture that has the right to monitor the political mechanism, deliver unfalsified information and judge upon mass evaluation.

By late 19th century, the available newspapers represented and affected the mass attitude. The newspaper editors were back then called trustworthy “reform makers”. The topics discoursed in print, were definitely the next day most trending issue. Newspaper editors were the major opinion leaders in many fields, political, social economic and cultural. They were the people the reference calling for progress and reforms in the country.

In the early 20th century, the country was controlled, still under the ottoman colony, by sectarian groups and religious influential. Sheikhs and priests used their network to direct the mass to elect specific people. Therefore, that era was controlled by two different types of opinion leaders the journalists and media specialists as reformers (leading the intellectuals) and the religious leaders (leading the less privileged).

Over time, political lobbying groups started to emerge, however it was mainly based on party-political inheritance. As a result the country’s structure was familial-political, and certain families were becoming the mass representatives. Publics identified with the families that match their religious and political belongings. Those mass representatives were also either media owners or media financiers.

With French mandate, and throughout independence in 1943, Beirut- the Lebanese capital became an intellectual attraction, appealing bourgeois and cultivated people from nearby countries. At this time, different nations were experiencing new leadership models, where it has been defined as a process of using public relations through which a person influences and motivates others to get involved a particular task (religious, inspirational, artistic, economic, cultural, political, social...). Lebanon couldn’t be alienated from this international drift. Leaders used to communicate with the mass in streets, in shops and even in restaurants and pubs. It is distinguished that at this period, opinion leaders were not necessarily individuals; they might have been a group of individuals (a lobby) founders of a social network, a political party, public relations practitioners, or philosophies carriers. This opinion leading outreach was not that costly, yet it was slow in terms of speed of spreading the word.

In 1975, Lebanon experienced a civil war, which shifted the mass into a totally different rational. The country was segmented; politics became the primary and almost the sole concern of a suffering society, the leading political figures overrun all capacities (social, economic, agricultural, cultural, educational...), they turned into the imposed public leaders. After the Taif agreement in 1989, this leader-nation relationship became hereditary and sectarianized, thus opinion leading gone biased. Those politicians (7 charismatic political parties’ leaders) addressed people through traditional (social) media

platforms, mainly TV, radio and newspapers. In status of war, like any other life aspect, media and public relations were chaotic.

To re-organize media regulations (especially TV and radio sectors), in 1994 the Lebanese National Council for Audiovisual Media shaped an “Audiovisual Law” including press, TV and radio, that is founded on scientific measurements, so that political and sectarian opinion leaders can stop controlling media interpretations.

Nevertheless, the huge evolution the media has witnessed after year 2000 has changed the nature and the concept of opinion leaders on the international level. Media changed from social-science approach to public influence approach. In terms of pure advertising, and promoting brands, celebrity endorsement strategy was implemented; commercials starred celebrities, journalists, higher education professionals and sometimes politicians. A good example would be “Pepsi” commercials, where the advertisement company “Impact BBDO” chose to feature the famous Lebanese singer “Elissa” who is an idol for many Lebanese women and an icon for a large group of youth. Elissa is not a food scientist, nor a media practitioner, yet at the time she was a mass influencer.

In 2019, e-commerce and online platforms are serving as the up-to-the-minute medium the audience trust and consume to define their choices, especially if the platforms are specialized ones and offer a margin of knowledge on a topic or service or opinion. The new opinion leaders are so-called the “influencers”, ordinary people (non-politicians) who are on top of “what is new”, they are community members who succeeded in gaining people’s trust. They earned their marketing and public relations power, they did not enforce it.

The chronological development of opinion leading in advertisements public relations in the Lebanese case can be tabulated as follows:

Advertisement (2 steps flow)	Public Relations
Specialist endorsement	Public events with wealthy and politicians as special guests
Celebrity endorsement	Public events with celebrities as special guests or as brand ambassadors
Influencers via blogs – social media and digital platforms	Public events with influencers and bloggers of specific field of interest as special guests. Stories of the event are shared on social media, tagging the influencers and bloggers.

Lebanese Influencers

By definition, influencers are, “influential members of a community, group, or society to whom others turn for advice, opinions, and views”. Influencers might retrieve their data from traditional media outlets, but interpret the message their own way and share it with the public.

A successful influencer is a social media manipulator with a massive number of followers. This person, certainly has to be proficient in communication skills, knowledgeable in various topics, has a large network of business leaders or famous referees, able to offer up-to-date facts and dynamically active. One significant criterion for a successful influencer is providing something new and different.

For Lebanese, an influencer is a credible person, who objectively judges matters, which differentiates him from the sponsored and promotional marketing tools. He is someone who is always ready to share with his followers the latest trends/ opinions and the most significant ones. Influencers are now celebrities with opinions.

With the emergence of digital media, blogs and online social networking tools, most specifically among the young generation, media power drifted to online communities.

In line of this influencer- consumer liaison, most companies are now partnering with one of the top social media influencers, to promote its goods and services. The same goes for politicians, who once were

influencers, they are associating with top social media influencers (considered critical thinkers) to market their philosophies and policies, and thereby gain additional audience.

Case Studies and Influencers Profiles: NoGarlicNoOnion - Live Love Lebanon – Feel 22

NoGarlicNoOnion (NGNO) is a blog that offers advice on restaurants, bars, cafes, recipes, hotel stays, service and products, NGNO became a Lebanese reference for hospitality with around 78,592 followers on Facebook and more than 100 K followers on Instagram. For NoGarlicNoOnions, some business/projects partners are “Souk ElAkel” (a huge mobile food market), “The Foodie’s Trail” (special food tours across Lebanon), “Spot Crepe” (sweets shop), “Scoop Lab” (restaurant), “Fairy” (dish washing detergent).

Anthony Rahayel, NoGarlicNoOnions, is a dentist who can’t eat anything cooked with onions or garlic, and used to face a lot of problems in finding recipes clean of those two most popular ingredients of Mediterranean cuisine. Being frequent traveler, he started creating a data of meals that matches his taste, and then decided in 2012 to share it with a wider audience that might be facing the same difficulty. Soon, after gaining the trust of a certain number of followers who appreciated his honesty and his “rafiné” taste in food; he progressed to offering feedback and recommendation on restaurants he visits and meals he tastes (nationally and internationally).

Live Love Lebanon is an entrepreneurial touristic blog that highlights the hidden Lebanese sites. They have a team of employees (from various backgrounds) and volunteers. The blog delivers daily content to hundreds of thousands of blog followers, and around 318,539 followers on Facebook and around 321K followers on Instagram. For Live Love Lebanon, the major partners are the “ministry of tourism”, top Lebanese private higher education institution, and municipalities.

Edouard Bitar, Live Love Lebanon, is a young man passionate about Lebanese unrevealed natural places, he founded the blog in 2012, with the help of 4 friends, in 2019 the team assisting him in creating awareness about Lebanese sites is formed of 55 volunteers. He is considered to be a social- entrepreneur; who, in addition to highlighting the best Lebanese touristic destinations and attractions is working to gather photos of Lebanese living abroad or touring other countries. The concept of the photo is to show a hand wearing a “Live Love Lebanon” bracelet in front of an international touristic symbol with the implication of being proud of Lebanon wherever the person is.

Feel 22 is a fashion and beauty blog, it is a Lebanese e-commerce website/ blog launched in 2016 by 4 Lebanese (from different backgrounds), who have preferences in makeup, haircare, skincare, perfumes and other beauty products. This leading beauty platform is followed by more than 15 000 people. Feel 22, has as partners, “Face of Dee” (cosmetics), “Cosmaline” (personal care products), “Bioderma- Lebanon” (dermatology products); “Dettol” (health and hygiene), and many more.

Feel 22 was founded in 2016 by Maurice Mattar and Darine Sabbagh who both are IT oriented youth, and fans of e-commerce. Their main idea was to offer proper guidance to first time users of make-up through assisting them in choosing products with good quality versus price. Then the idea developed into purchasing and quick delivery of brands that might not be accessible in rural areas.

What the influencers exactly do is the following; they influence other people’s purchasing approaches by conveying what they learned about a certain brand based on a personal consuming experience.

The influencers behind the success of the studied blogs are people with strong characters, who have solid leadership and communication skills, they are great team leaders/ players; they can collaborate with individuals of different attitudes and always ready to expand their horizons.

Influencers Falling out

Bloggers, community outreach professionals, social good makers, passionate about a topic, motivators, are all terminologies the operational influencers refer to present themselves. It was essential in this paper to personally interview the people behind the considered case studies to know more about the regular operation of their organizations.

Rahayel created the food blog in 2012, in 6 years he was able to place more than 6500 reviews that more than 79,000 individual followed. In 2014 he started hosting a TV and YouTube show “Meshwar” (translation: Journey) focusing on introducing traditional food of various Lebanese villages. More than 4,000,000 people watched every episode (a rating that exceeds the rating of most of the shows hosted by professional media presenters). The objective of this program was to demonstrate the significance of Lebanese food.

For Rahayel, the reason for his success is his credibility; therefore he refuses to be paid from any client and he makes sure to pay for the food he tastes and post the paid receipts before making his reviews. Because the desire to promote Lebanon and its foodstuff, NGNO never posts on social media negative reviews, it only highlights the positive examinations. “Neutral influencers are only to use social media for progressive marketing”.

On the blog, which is daily viewed by more than 55,000 visitors, the food and restaurants rating is over 100, and it evaluates the overall ambiance (taste, display, hygiene, presentation, staff, location, architecture, services and facilities). It is indeed rare that a place or food gets rated less than 50/100.

Anthony insists that influencers should remain transparent and honest, that is exactly why he refuses invitations related to attending events, and he refuses endorsement offers. Being paid for sharing a post will forfeit his credibility.

Edouard Bitar is currently focusing on 3 pillars, environment, society and culture, not only to show the beauty of Lebanese places, but also to improve the conditions of abandoned sites and progress with constructive projects in terms of ignored or postponed developmental acts.

The imminent danger in Lebanon is the garbage crisis, which is worsening day after day, and needs immediate attention. As an influencer Edouard (Eddy) is raising, with his team, full programs to create awareness on combatting pollution and encouraging the 3R (reuse, reduce, recycle). This awareness campaign results in cleaning projects conducted by volunteers and funded by big Lebanese corporations, who should be socially responsible, and who in a way or another are blamable if they do not positively act and give back to the environment. Live Love Lebanon is surviving from the funds obtained from those business partners.

When it comes to selecting the geographical locations that needs to be emphasized, two major elements are taken into concern: the magnitude of the occurring problem (and obviously the greatness of an implemented way out), and the visibility in terms of work reflectiveness on other worthy initiatives. Therefore, the social work started in the capital city Beirut and diverted into different Lebanese areas.

Darine Sabbagh believes it is really important to present a full catalogue of beauty products and related information to beauty lovers. The products cannot be but of good quality. The marketing personal is responsible of the catalogue management, therefore “whenever a new brand approaches us or whenever we find an interesting beauty product, we firstly test the product internally and secondly we pick clients to test it and get back to us with their feedback, and then decide whether to recommend or not.

The criterion for advisable products is based on the users’ profile (type skin and preferences) and the blog recommendations or interest in introducing specific brands like any other initiative interested in wholesale.

Usually Feel 22 introduces the brands that suit the blog users, and in addition to that “we educate people on what would be convenient to them”. Darine said in its first year, the blog was self-funded, and now it is funded by business partners.

Influencers’ Impact

In the last decades, many scholar researches are focusing on the impact of digital media and digital marketing techniques worldwide, including influencers as marketers on their social media channels and personal blogs.

This paper focused on the impact of three influencers- on three aspects, food, tourism and beauty, where it was proven that the mentioned opinion leaders massively contributed in the success of specific

places or products after being referred or endorsed via corresponding blogs and networks. The effect is measured through comparing the market share/ status before the bloggers responsiveness, versus the market value of the types after being recommended by the bloggers- influencers.

“Emm Salim Bakery” is a small bakery at a northern Lebanese coastal village, its customer ship was limited to neighborhood residents, its peak hours were from 7:00 a.m. till 10:00 a.m. (breakfast time), and its menu comprises traditional Lebanese pastries (Manakish). After being accidentally visited by Anthony Rahayel, and rated as best “Ejjet Bayd” (egg pastry) producer, the place became tremendously known and visited by not only Lebanese from all cities and villages, but also by tourists checking food blogs to find tasty and cheap traditional providers.

The exact words Anthony used to recommend the place were: “My latest discovery is a must try! Emm Salim’s bakery is one of the many places that have made Anfeh famous. Located in the old souk, the famous “Tahet el Rih” resort and surely the Phoenician sea fortress... Hidden in the old village with no signboard or name, Emm Salim’s bakery is a place you really want to try and is worth making the journey to Anfeh for. Wait! Ask for an egg wrap... it’s so good... “3ejjet Bayd” like you’ve never tasted before. It is loaded with spices, mixed with onions and parsley and baked with love. Bravo is the least I can say. Fluffy bread, moist eggs, parsley for added flavor, a mix of endless spices... two thumbs up! I have a favorite hidden gem and I’m sure it’s going to be yours too.”

Rani Saliba, who is one of the family business “Emm Salim’s bakery” owners, expressed that the business before the influencer was similar to any other small town bakery, while after Anthony’s visit it became a famous destination, especially during summer time to many Lebanese who sometimes specially come from the two Lebanese biggest cities Beirut and Tripoli to taste the food. Rani explained that the menu is still the same, yet the list of options they have is becoming more and more attractive to clients. This increase in customer ship definitely reflected an increase in income.

“Kfarhelda Waterfall” is a very tall waterfall in a small Lebanese village, it was only known by the area citizens, and occasionally visited by villagers who go this quiet yet abandoned and dirty place. After being evaluated by “LiveLove” as a must visit Lebanese site in September 2 017, 170 volunteers picked up 3 550 garbage bags from the site. In 2 019, 6 829 followers are following this site’s page on Instagram, and the site is continuously cleaned by volunteers and now considered a natural touristic destination.

Tom Makdessi, the person in charge of the waterfall management, claims the huge impact of “LiveLove” on this touristic site, that became after 2 017 a real Lebanese waterfall landmark that is now sustained in terms of keeping it clean and accessible to tourists and hikers. The place has now a safe walking trail; it has been receiving hiking groups and nature lovers for 2 years now.

“Face of Dee” is a new Lebanese make-up blenders brand created by a lady passionate about make-up and latest trends. “Face of Dee” is featured on “Feel 22” and is continuously displayed on most recommended items, and most viewed items. It is also identified as “high definition makeup blender”. In few months, this national brand became one of the most attractive to young women, and started bringing to the market a variety of new products (line launched end of October 2 018). Nevertheless, many fashionistas and make-up artists and beauty figures knew of the brand from “Feel 22” blog, used the blender and shared videos on YouTube recommending the brand and it went viral. One example of a video of 11.5 minutes published on YouTube on March 5, 2 018 by “Beauty by Lama” with 1,483 views, under the title “First Impression: Face of Dee Sponge” had the following statement “Holaaaa! Here’s my first reaction of the new Face of Dee. I ordered it on Feel22.com”. This entrepreneurial business couldn’t have made it, couldn’t have been able to compete with international brands such as “Maybelline” and “L’Oréal” without the support of Lebanese beauty blogs.

Darine Samarni, “Face of Dee” entrepreneur, said that Feel 22 was the first source that adopted and started recommending her brand. Furthermore, it was the blog directly responsible of increasing her sales at the beginning of her initiative, especially that they were informing the audience, in very constructive way about the beauty products. In addition to that, “Feel 22” lovers were the initial customers who encouraged “Face of Dee” to get involved in a wider market share.

Conclusion

In the Lebanese case, digital media and digital influencers are affecting openly the Lebanese market in its various sectors, including tourism, food industry and beauty commerce. The comparative table below shows the constructive bloggers effect on the showcased businesses.

Comparative Table

Before bloggers responsiveness			After bloggers responsiveness		
	Geographic markets	Impact	Geographic markets	Income	
Emm Salim’s bakery	Neighborhood and town Mothers	Small family shop	Lebanese willing to explore tasty food and coming various Lebanese areas, some tourists specially during summer	Business benefiting many members	
Kfarhelda Waterfall	Few Kfarhelda inhabitants	Barely 1 visitor per day	All Kfarheldqa inhabitants, hikers, youth groups, tourists	Average of 20 visitors per day	
Face of Dee	Online make-up shoppers	Started with one product (blenders)	In addition to beauty lovers, Make-up artists and beauty professionals	Launched a whole series of beauty products	

Nowadays public opinion is different due to the massive presence of social media and media communication platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. In 2 019 people have access to information about almost all topics, including opinionated information proposed by digital opinion leaders who gained their customer ship, not because they are knowledgeable and not because of they are professionals in a field, nor because they are famous figures, rather, they are social media gurus.

The definition of Social media influencers represents a new type of third-party endorsers who shape an audience’s attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media channels. They reached a point where they can shape their followers’ life choices, and that is exactly why they are titled “opinion leaders”. Those revamping opinion leaders are touching many disciplines, the social, the economic, the political, the educational, the community services, technology, and as shown in this study they are also affecting the tourism, the food sector and the beauty sector.

A brand’s communication strategy, in 2 019, must include bloggers endorsement, especially if the competing brand already adopted the strategy and already reserved a digital ambassador. Nowadays influencers increase the potential of reaching millions of loyal customers.

Digital opinion leaders influence is somehow quantitatively measured by their number of followers, therefore those influencers rigidly work on continuously increasing this number. In 2 019, most influencers are becoming brands or services or concepts (political and social) promoters, by publishing descriptive information, expressive photos and videos, advising messages, or simply by sharing personal moments of their daily life on various online platforms (endorsing specific products).

As the study shows in the field of food industry, tourism and beauty, influencers are still the ones affecting the audience purchasing decisions with their direct or indirect suggestions, although to some academics and traditional media professionals, their credibility is becoming a controversial topic. Therefore, a very important question outcome: till when bloggers and virtual influencers will remain the valid advertising and public relations peoples? And who would be the next influencers in line? After all, those influencers, as a fact, started receiving a return to favor a product or a service over another, how would that, once recognized by their audience, be affecting their credibility? Future research will be showing, if this marketing strategy will continue to evolve, or if it would be replaced by a new-fangled one as a continuation to media evolution.

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