

The impact of Influencer Marketing on the Formation of the Mental Image of Commercial Products from Consumer's Perspective: A Field Study on a Sample of Followers of Algerian Influencers

تأثير التسويق التأثري في تكوين الصورة الذهنية للمنتجات التجارية من وجهة نظر المستهلك: دراسة ميدانية لعينة من متابعين المؤثرين الجزائريين

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the extent of the impact of influencer marketing on the formation of the mental image of commercial products across its three dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and affective; This is achieved through conducting a survey study on a sample that included 200 individuals following Algerian influencers, using the SPSS program. The results indicate the existence of a statistically significant relationship at the 5% significance level for influencer marketing on the formation of the mental image around the commercial products promoted by influencers on social media.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing; Mental Image.

JEL Classification Codes : L81; M31.

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1. Introduction

Influencer marketing is considered one of the most prominent and recent types of marketing in our current era, as it has become difficult for institutions and brands to build their marketing strategy without the help of influencers. Consequently, commercial enterprises have begun to rely on influencer marketing as a means to promote their products and highlight their brands. This provides a financial relief for commercial enterprises and saves time and effort for consumers in searching for various products that satisfy their desires and meet their different needs.

Influencers on social media have the ability to convey marketing messages and significantly and credibly influence the targeted audience towards the specified marketing goals, turning latent demand into active demand through creating a buzz on social media about the products and attracting attention to them, thereby contributing to the formation of a mental image of these products. From the foregoing, we can pose the following problem:

To what extent does influencer marketing contribute to the formation of the mental image of commercial enterprises' products?

. Based on the foregoing and relying on the posed problem, the main hypothesis on which the study is based is:

- There is a statistically significant impact at the 5% significance level of influencer marketing through Algerian influencers on the formation of the mental image around commercial products.

This main hypothesis branches into three sub-hypotheses:

- There is a statistically significant impact at the 5% significance level of influencer marketing through Algerian influencers on the formation of the cognitive dimension around commercial products;
- There is a statistically significant impact at the 5% significance level of influencer marketing through Algerian influencers on the formation of the affective dimension around commercial products;
- There is a statistically significant impact at the 5% significance level of influencer marketing through Algerian influencers on the formation of the behavioral dimension around commercial products.

This study primarily aimed to identify the influence of influencer marketing on the formation of the mental image of commercial products through the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions towards commercial products. The study aims in detail to achieve the following objectives:

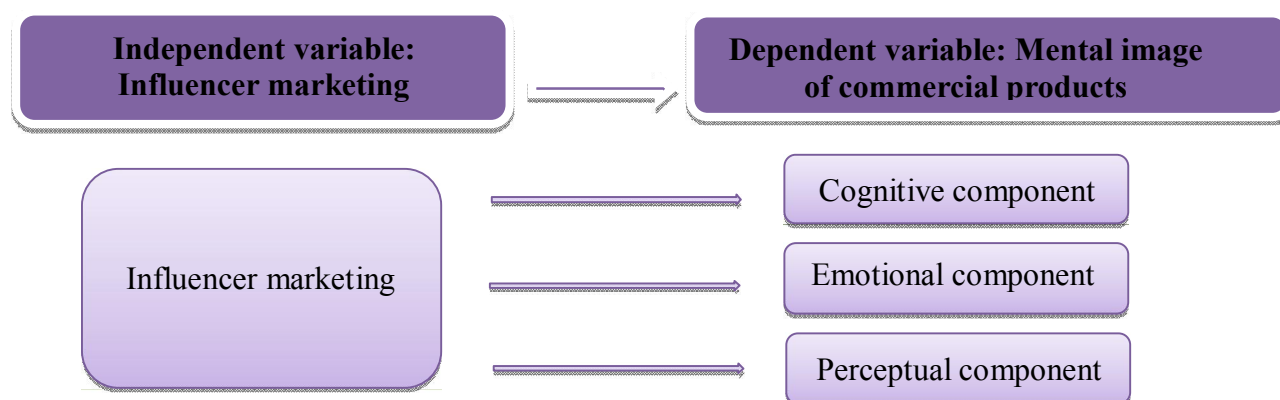
- To identify the influence of influencer marketing on the cognitive dimension around commercial products;
- To identify the influence of influencer marketing on the affective dimension around commercial products;

- To identify the influence of influencer marketing on the behavioral dimension around commercial products.

This study seeks to raise awareness among social influencers, commercial enterprises, and business owners in Algeria about the importance of influencer marketing and consider it an effective tool in promotion and creating or changing the mental image of products and brands.

This study relied on descriptive and analytical methods. The descriptive method was used to understand some concepts related to influencer marketing and brand image. The analytical method was employed to achieve the study's objectives and derive conclusions.

Figure 01. Proposed Study Model



Source: Prepared by the researchers.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study addresses the impact of influencer marketing on forming the mental image of commercial products. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of the study can be discussed through two axes:

2.1. Influencer Marketing

In the current period, influencer marketing has achieved widespread popularity, with the diversity of digital platforms that can be used to market various services and products. This is done through collaboration between influencers on social media sites and institutions.

2.1.1 Definition of Influencer Marketing:

Influencer marketing is regarded as "a modern approach to marketing and public relations, in addition to targeting influential individuals whom potential consumers turn to for information"(Agustina & Sari, 2021, p. 357).

It is also defined as "the use of opinion leaders and influencers to persuade consumers about products or brands through digital communication media such as social networking sites"(Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 530).

Moreover, it represents "one of the forms of marketing on social media sites, where institutions identify and select a group of influencers on these sites, build strong relationships

with them, and use them to convey their marketing message to the target audience and achieve some of their marketing objectives through social media sites"(Abu Abba, 2021, pp. 294,295).

From the above, we can define influencer marketing as one of the forms of marketing on social media sites, relying on influencers and content creators who own a specific segment of followers and have a significant impact on them. Influencer marketing is centered on the influencers' positive experience with the product or service, recommending and endorsing it to their followers.

The definition of influencer marketing is incomplete without defining the influencers, who are the focus of this activity; They are individuals who attract many followers on social media and become a source of advice for them. Followers treat them as trustworthy individuals who can be relied upon in making purchasing decisions based on the influencers' recommendations (Pradhan, Kuanr, & Pahi, 2022, p. 27).

2.1.2 Objectives of Influencer Marketing:

These can be summarized as follows: (Maazi & Kassoul, 2022, p. 358)

- Identifying what the audience prefers most about the brand and the least interesting products or services.
- Increasing social media audience's awareness and knowledge of the brand and increasing the number of visitors to its website through influencer marketing.
- Quickly and effectively reaching the most interested individuals in the services and products offered by the institution, due to the high number of followers that influencers have.
- Increasing sales through social media sites or through the institution's online store.
- Gaining as many potential customers as possible.
- Maximizing the benefits of influencer marketing at a lower cost than traditional marketing.

2.1.3 Elements of Influencer Marketing Strategy Building:

These are summarized in the following elements:

- a. **Defining Marketing Objectives:** These may include increasing product sales, increasing the number of subscribers to a service, creating awareness for a specific brand, enhancing brand image and value, spreading a certain social idea, or engaging in ideological political marketing, provided that the objectives are realistic, clearly defined, measurable quantitatively, and have a specific timeframe.
- b. **Identifying Suitable Influencers:** Influencers are identified based on two factors: first, their relevance to marketing objectives and the product being sold, and second, the extent of their influence in the virtual world. Before selecting an influencer, it is necessary to study several variables such as the characteristics of their audience on their various accounts, their interaction with them, their popularity and credibility, the type of

responses in the comments, and other brands the influencer is associated with, while ensuring that there are no other competitors dealing with the influencer in the same field.

- c. **Determining the Appropriate Interaction Strategy:** This involves defining the interaction framework between the influencer and their followers, by motivating the influencer to direct their audience towards the desired goal, through providing influencers with unique experiences capable of motivating them to express and talk about them and convey them to their followers.
- d. **Avoiding Direct Promotion and Marketing:** Influencers should not be directly encouraged or urged to promote the product in order to avoid undermining their credibility with their followers, which would affect the success of the marketing campaign.(Maharrem, 2020, pp. 389,390)
- e. **Measuring Achieved Marketing Results:** Measuring results is of paramount importance in identifying the factors that lead to achieving the best return on investment. This includes measures such as targeting accuracy, engagement, comments, and the value of influencers in the marketing campaign.(Belen, 2017)

2.1.4 Influencer Marketing Methods:

Organizations utilize influencers on social media platforms to market their brands through various marketing methods, including:

- a. **Sponsored Posts:** Organizations pay influencers a certain fee for each post they create about a product. The content of the post or video can be crafted by the influencer; however, it is crucial for the advertising organization or the contracted advertising agency to intervene in the editing process to ensure the posts have a uniform appearance and are product-related.
- b. **Participation in Events and Activities:** Influencers can be leveraged during their presence at different events and activities to promote a product.
- c. **Lectures:** Some influencers resort to giving brief lectures about the products they promote as a marketing strategy through educational content via influencers.
- d. **Increasing Traffic to Websites and Brands:** This method is one of the most significant marketing strategies for influencers on social networks, aiming to increase user traffic to the product's website.(Maharrem, 2020, pp. 390,391)
- e. **Affiliate Marketing:** A marketing method where organizations rely on influencers to sell their products by mentioning product information and placing text links or promotional codes. Customers click on the link, contact the organization (prospective customers), or purchase the recommended products, and influencers receive a commission from the organization.(Patrick & Hee, 2019, pp. 703, 704)

- f. **Influencers Speaking About the Brand:** Transmitted through their accounts and pages on social media platforms, this method plays a role in spreading the brand and increasing customer awareness and perception of the brand's value.
- g. **Celebrity Endorsements:** Organizations use celebrities as influencers to promote their brand, which are published through the organization's accounts or those of the celebrities and influencers on social media platforms.
- h. **Influencers' Experiences and Uses of the Brand:** As part of their personal and daily lifestyles, these are published in the form of photos and video clips on the pages and accounts of the organization or celebrities and influencers on social media platforms.(Al-Hariri, 2019, p. 167)

2.2. The Mental Image of Commercial Products

The mental image of commercial products is a crucial reference for consumers as they rely on it to choose products that meet their requirements, through their emotional perceptions, knowledge, or evaluation of these products and their brands.

2.2.1 Definition of the Mental Image of Commercial Products

The mental image of commercial products is defined as "a set of attributes and features perceived by the public, on which they base their attitudes and directions towards the commercial enterprise and its products. This image is formed through the public's personal experience based on direct communication or through mass communication processes, as well as the public's perception of the commercial enterprise's personality, its functions, goals, legitimacy, and the core values it adopts".(Kadri & Djellouli, 2016, p. 46)

As you know, it is "the actual image formed in people's minds about various business institutions. This image may be formed from direct or indirect experience, rational or irrational, and may rely on evidence, documents, rumors, and undocumented statements. However, in the end, it represents a true reality for those who hold it in their minds" (Al-Sheikh, 2009, p. 5).

It is also referred to as "the final outcome of self-impressions formed in individuals' minds about commercial products. These impressions may be formed through direct and indirect experiences, and these experiences are linked to individuals' emotions, attitudes, and beliefs regardless of the accuracy of the information contained in the summary of these experiences. Ultimately, they represent a genuine motive for their holders to view and understand their surroundings based on them".(Mane, 2014, p. 279)

From the foregoing, the mental image of commercial products can be defined as a mental impression of the consumer towards the commercial product, and this impression is based on their knowledge, emotional perceptions, and experiences.

2.2.2 Types of Mental Images of Commercial Products:

These types can be indicated through the following points:(Hijab, 2020, p. 17)

- a. **Mirror Image:** This is the image through which the commercial institution sees itself;

- b. Current Image:** This is how others see the commercial institution;
- c. Desired Image:** This is the image that the commercial institution wishes to have in the minds of the masses;
- d. Ideal Image:** This is the ideal image that can be achieved considering the competition of other commercial institutions and their efforts to influence the masses;
- e. Multiple Image:** This occurs when individuals are exposed to different representatives of the commercial institution, each giving a different impression of it. It is natural for this multiplicity not to continue for long, either turning into a positive image or a negative one, or combining both sides into a unified image that remains positive or negative depending on the strength of the influence of each.

3.2.2 Dimensions of the Mental Image of Commercial Products

There is a consensus among most researchers that the mental image should include three basic components or dimensions, as follows:(Al-Sheikh, 2009, p. 8)

- a. Cognitive Dimension or Component:** By this dimension, it is meant the information through which an individual perceives commercial products. This information is the foundation upon which the mental image individuals form about various commercial products is built. Depending on the accuracy of the information and knowledge we obtain about others, the accuracy of the mental images we form is determined. According to the cognitive dimension, the errors in individuals' images are primarily errors resulting from incorrect information and knowledge they have acquired.
- b. Emotional Dimension or Component:** The emotional dimension refers to the positive or negative inclination towards commercial products within the framework of the set of mental images individuals form. The emotional aspect forms alongside the cognitive aspect, and over time, the information and knowledge individuals have acquired fade away, leaving behind the emotional aspects that represent individuals' attitudes towards various commercial products. The emotional dimension ranges from positivity to negativity, influenced by various factors, most notably the limits of knowledge sources availability. Additionally, the construction of the emotional dimension is influenced by the characteristics of peoples such as color, gender, and language. Differences in these characteristics are factors that contribute to building negative attitudes, while homogeneity in these characteristics contributes to building positive attitudes.
- c. Behavioral Dimension or Component:** Individual behavior reflects the nature of the mental image they have formed in various aspects of life. The importance of the mental image lies in one of its dimensions, as it enables the prediction of individuals' behavior. Logically, individuals' behaviors are expected to reflect their attitudes in life.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Method and Tools

3.1.1 Study Population and Sample

The study population consists of individuals who follow Algerian influencers on social media engaged in influencer marketing and enjoy significant popularity. A purposive sample of 200 individuals was chosen to ensure certain characteristics in the sample, such as their use of social media and their following of Algerian influencers through it, as well as their selection and preference for commercial products promoted by Algerian influencers on social media, during the period from March 17, 2023, to July 18, 2023.

3.1.2 Study Tool

Based on the study's objectives, variables, and proposed model, a special questionnaire was designed as a tool to collect primary data from the sample, consisting of two sections:

- **The first section:** Pertains to influencer marketing and includes 7 statements.
- **The second section:** Contains statements related to the dimensions of the mental image of commercial products, consisting of 12 statements.

3.1.3 Validity and Reliability of the Study Tool

Table 01. Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients for the Study Variables Using Cronbach's Alpha

Study Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Marketing	0.818
Mental Image of Commercial Products - Cognitive Dimension	0.664
Mental Image of Commercial Products - Affective Dimension	0.771
Mental Image of Commercial Products - Conative Dimension	0.748
Total for Mental Image of Commercial Products Variable	0.897

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

It is observed from Table No. (1) that the reliability coefficients for the dimensions of the study variables range between (0.66) and (0.89). Therefore, all coefficients are above the acceptable minimum of 60%, indicating the validity and reliability of the study questionnaire, which confirms its accuracy and suitability for analyzing results and addressing the study's questions and testing its hypotheses.

3.2. Descriptive Analysis of the Study Sample Responses

Table 02. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for the Study Variables

Study Variables	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Trend
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Influencer Marketing	3.7043	0.71758	Agree
Mental Image of Commercial Products - Cognitive Dimension	3.7128	0.70744	Agree
Mental Image of Commercial Products - Affective Dimension	3.5729	0.85988	Agree
Mental Image of Commercial Products - Conative Dimension	3.7726	0.81279	Agree

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

The results from Table No.(2) clearly indicate a high level of agreement in the respondents' answers about the statements of the independent variable related to influencer marketing, as demonstrated by the weighted general arithmetic mean for this axis, which reached (3.7043). The standard deviation was (0.71758), which is less than one, indicating homogeneity in the sample responses and a lack of dispersion, reflecting the convergence in the respondents' views about this axis.

Furthermore, it is evident that the respondents' attitudes and opinions revealed a positive reflection of influencer marketing on the mental image of commercial products. This is shown through all dimensions of the study for the dependent variable being in agreement. As illustrated, the arithmetic means for measuring the mental image of commercial products—the main dependent variable—and its dimensions, which represented the subsidiary dependent variables according to the study model, were high, as shown through the values (3.7726, 3.7128, 3.5729) corresponding to the dimensions (Conative, Cognitive, Affective) respectively. The deviations for these variables were not significant, as shown through the values (0.81279), (0.70744), (0.85988), indicating a convergence in the respondents' answers around the dimensions of the mental image of commercial products.

3.3 Testing Study Hypotheses

- Testing the main hypothesis of the study:

Table 03. Simple Linear Regression Analysis of the Impact of Influencer Marketing on the Mental Image of Commercial Products

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Significance Level
Regression	75.040	1	75.040	495.401	0.000
Residual	29.929	198	0.151		
Total	105.032	199	/		
A = 0,856	B = 0,845	R = 0,845	R² = 0,714		

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

In light of this hypothesis, a functional relationship was formulated between the actual value of the marketing performance variable (Y) and the influential marketing explanatory variable (X), with the regression equation as follows: $Y = \alpha + bx$. Here are the values for the regression equation: Mental Image of Commercial Products = 0.845 + 0.856 (Influencer Marketing).

From the preceding table, it is observed that the study variables are significantly correlated. The correlation coefficient between Influencer Marketing and the Mental Image of Commercial Products is 0.845, and the coefficient of determination (0.714) indicates that approximately 71.4% of the variation in the Mental Image of Commercial Products is attributed to the variation in Influencer Marketing.

It is evident that there is a significant impact of Influencer Marketing on the Mental Image of Commercial Products. This significance is affirmed by the significant F-value ($F = 495.401$) at a statistical significance level ($\text{sig} = 0.000$). Consequently, the regression is significant, and the study model is statistically acceptable.

Based on this, we accept the main hypothesis stating that **"There is a statistically significant effect at a 5% significance level for Influencer Marketing through Algerian influencers on shaping the Mental Image of Commercial Products."**

- Testing the sub-hypotheses of the study:

Table 04. Linear Regression Analysis Results of the Impact of Influencer Marketing on the Cognitive Dimension

Independent Variable :Influencer Marketing	B1	Calculated T-value	Table T-value	Sig	Correlation Coefficient R	Explanation Coefficient R ²
Dependent Variable: Cognitive Dimension	0.798	18.600	1.98	0.000	0.798	0.637

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

From the table above, we notice that the value of B1 (0.798) represents the slope of the regression equation. This means that any change in the value of the independent variable (Influencer Marketing) by one unit leads to a change in the value of the dependent variable (Cognitive Dimension) by 0.798 units. Additionally, the correlation coefficient (R) between the independent variable (Influencer Marketing) and the dependent variable (Cognitive Dimension) equals 0.798, indicating a strong correlation between them. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.637, which means that approximately 63.7% of the variation in the Cognitive Dimension is explained by Influencer Marketing.

The calculated T-value measuring the significance of the simple regression model is 18.600, which is greater than the tabular T-value (1.98) at a significance level of 0.05. Considering the significance level of the T-test ($\text{sig}=0.000$) smaller than ($\text{sig}=0.05$), we conclude that there is an effect of the independent variable (Influencer Marketing) on the dependent variable (Cognitive Dimension). Thus, we accept the hypothesis stating that there is a

statistically significant effect at a 5% significance level for Influencer Marketing through Algerian influencers on shaping the Cognitive Dimension about Commercial Products.

This suggests that Influencer Marketing contributed to the formation and alteration of cognitive assets related to the displayed commercial products by Algerian influencers through marketing them on social media platforms, discussing and disseminating information about them repeatedly, which solidified these products in their minds, thus creating awareness and a desire to explore them.

Table 05. Linear Regression Analysis Results of the Influence of Influencer Marketing on the Affective Dimension

Independent Variable :Influencer Marketing	B1	Calculated T-value	Table T-value	Sig	Correlation Coefficient R	Explanation Coefficient R ²
Dependent Variable: Cognitive Dimension	0,810	19,374	1.98	0,000	0,810	0,656

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

From the table above, we note that the value of B1 (0.810) represents the slope of the regression equation, indicating that any change in the value of (x) influencer marketing by one unit leads to a change in the value of (y) affective dimension by (0.810). The correlation coefficient R between the independent variable (influencer marketing) and the dependent variable (affective dimension) equals (0.810R=), indicating a strong correlation. Also, from the explanation coefficient R² value of (0.656), it is clear that influencer marketing explains 65.6% of the changes occurring in the affective dimension.

The calculated T value, measuring the significance of the simple regression model, is (19.374), which is greater than the table T value of (1.98) at the significance level (0.05). Considering the significance level of the T test (sig=0.000) being less than (sig=0.05), we conclude that there is an effect of the independent variable (influencer marketing) on the dependent variable (affective dimension).

Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is a statistically significant influence at the 5% significance level of influencer marketing through Algerian influencers on forming the affective dimension around commercial products is accepted. This indicates that Algerian influencers have managed to reach followers' emotions and influence their feelings by highlighting the positives and enjoyment that followers consumers will achieve through acquiring and experiencing the commercial products presented to them by Algerian influencers, ensuring that it matches their desires and aspirations.

Table 06. Linear Regression Analysis Results of the Influence of Influencer Marketing on the Cognitive Dimension

Independent Variable :Influencer Marketing	B1	Calculated T-value	Table T-	Sig	Correlation Coefficient	Explanation Coefficient
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Dependent Variable: Cognitive Dimension	value	R	R ²
	0,732 085.15 1.98 0,000 0,732 0,536		

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

From the table above, we note that the value of B1 (0.732) represents the slope of the regression equation, indicating that any change in the value of (x) influencer marketing by one unit leads to a change in the value of (y) cognitive dimension by (0.732). The correlation coefficient R between the independent variable (influencer marketing) and the dependent variable (cognitive dimension) equals (0.732R=), indicating a strong correlation. Also, from the explanation coefficient R² value of (0.536), it is clear that influencer marketing explains 53.6% of the changes occurring in the cognitive dimension.

The calculated T value, measuring the significance of the simple regression model, is (85.15), which is greater than the table T value of (1.98) at the significance level (0.05). Considering the significance level of the T test (sig=0.000) being less than (sig=0.05), we conclude that there is an effect of the independent variable (influencer marketing) on the dependent variable (cognitive dimension).

Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is a statistically significant influence at the 5% significance level of influencer marketing through Algerian influencers on forming the cognitive dimension around commercial products is accepted. This is attributed to the high ability of Algerian influencers to attract and influence, enabling appropriate influencers to reach consumers with limited experience and weak ability to choose and distinguish between options. Consequently, this helps influencers influence these follower consumers under their ideas and attitudes they spread about the commercial products they promote, positively reflecting on the perception of the commercial products' mental image.

5. Conclusion

Through the study, the extent of the influence of influencer marketing on the perception of the mental image of commercial products was identified. The results are based on field research conducted on a sample of Algerian influencer followers on social media platforms. Statistical analysis of the data was performed using SPSS V20, leading to the following results and suggestions:

4.1 Results:

The study concluded the following results:

- There is a statistically significant effect at a 5% level of significance for influencer marketing on shaping the mental image of commercial products.
- There is a statistically significant effect at a 5% level of significance for influencer marketing on shaping the cognitive dimension regarding commercial products.

- There is a statistically significant effect at a 5% level of significance for influencer marketing on shaping the affective dimension regarding commercial products.
- There is a statistically significant effect at a 5% level of significance for influencer marketing on shaping the behavioral dimension regarding commercial products.
- Social media influencers play an effective role in influencing consumers' perceptions and decisions, as well as in shaping their opinions and attracting them to the promoted commercial products.
- Exposure of commercial products by influencers contributes to reinforcing them in the minds of followers, thereby creating awareness.
- The credibility of influencers and their personal experience with commercial products reassure followers and increase their desire to purchase them.
- Businesses benefit from social media influencers in creating buzz and excitement around their commercial products and fostering a positive image to encourage purchases and consumption.
- Influencer marketing contributes to creating a positive mental image of commercial products by increasing awareness among influencer followers and generating a desire to visit, due to the emotional connection the influencer builds between the commercial product and their followers.

4.2 Suggestions:

The following suggestions can be derived:

Businesses should utilize social media influencers due to their significant ability to achieve outstanding marketing performance.

- Governments should enact legislation and laws specific to the influencer activity and provide mechanisms to regulate their practices to protect their rights and the rights of the parties dealing with them.
- Businesses should choose influencers whose content on social media platforms aligns with their services' nature and interests, and whom they wish to promote.
- There is a need to shift towards content marketing to keep up with developments in the marketing field and reach a larger target audience for the presentation of commercial products.
- Adoption of e-commerce in Algeria and providing an electronic environment for consumers, especially in terms of providing information, offers, financial transactions, and more.

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