

WHAT MOTIVATE SOCIAL MAVENS AS MICRO-INFLUENCERS TO CREATE BRAND RELATED CONTENT IN INSTAGRAM? AN INSTANOGRAPHY APPROACH

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Abstract-The present research is an exploratory study by which, we attempt to understand what motivate social mavens as micro-influencers to create brand related content in Instagram. Being savvy and market experts, the social mavens are highly engaged in branded content creation. The goal of our study is to explore the determinants of maven generated brand content, through the lens of Instagram influencers.

Data were collected from Tunisian instagram micro-influencers, using a new qualitative approach, coined *Instanography* and analyzed using Nvivo software. Findings suggest that social mavens create posts about products and brands to fulfill content-related factors. This study contributes to the influence theory and draws an original qualitative technique in the digital marketing era.

Keywords-social maven, micro-influencer, instagram, branded content, *Instanography*

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital platforms in emerging countries, such as Tunisia, provide a huge scope for studying relevant issues related to branding engagement in social networking sites ([29]). Social networking sites encompass a group of Web-based applications that facilitate branding related activities engagement among users, such as content consumption, contribution and creation ([56] ([70]). Consumer engagement with brands on social media is receiving increasing consideration because of its potential to **influence behavior** ([71]). Social media influence marketing has gained increased interest from marketing researchers and practioners in recent years ([74]). Social mavens are market influencers, who have information about many kinds of products, brands, places to shop, and other market's facets ([68]). They initiate conversations with consumers and respond to

requests from users to share market information ([14]; ([25]). Mavens have high media consumption and are online word of mouth referrals ([79]; [31]). Despite the sizeable literature on market mavenism concept, little is known about the maven's brand engagement mechanism. Thus, motivations of social maven in influence marketing and branded content creation, remain underexplored ([4]; ([31]).

According to the COBRA's model (Consumer online brand related activities), introduced by Shao (2008), social mavens are considered as content creators. They write brand related articles, upload brand related pictures, videos... ([71]). Hence, social mavens are the new social influencers in different digital platforms like facebook, Tweeter and Instagram. ([32]; ([84]). According to the Digital Discovery agency (2019), Instagram represents the second most used community by the Tunisian consumer after Facebook.

The research question that can be addressed is the following:

What motivate social mavens as new media influencers to create brand- related content in Instagram?

II. THEORITICAL UNDERPINNINGS

A) *Social media mavens*

Inspired by Feick and Price's classical conceptualization of market mavens and building on social influence in the digital era , the **social media maven** is defined as “*a consumer of the social network's marketplace who exhibits an elevated level of maven-like behavior, which leads him or her to be psychologically and emotionally attached to own account, and to commonly assume an opinion leadership role toward the social network*” ([4], p.3). According to the Uses and Gratification Theory ([52]), social mavens are affected by social media motives, such as community, information seeking, empowerment, and innovativeness ([25]; [42]), and can be identified via their social media brand engagement as they comment, share, recommend and importantly create original content featuring products and brands in different areas . Obviously, social mavens match the Z generation regarding personality and shopping characteristics ([28]). Gen Z are young people born between 1997 and 2012 ([89]) The newest generation of market mavens in Gen Z are an attractive segment for social media marketing campaigns, since they are always connected to social media networks. Moreover, they are highly engaged in branding management practices, and perceived as authentic and credible in promoting products and services, comparatively to traditional celebrities ([28]; [24]).

By reference to the Reasoned Action Theory (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), the market mavens in social media, are driven by a set of attitudinal and experiential factors the digital platform offers. Consequently, they advise others, share and create relevant content, such as images and stories of products they do not intend to buy ([4]). They shape hence consumer preferences and choices ([7]) and drive marketing and social commerce outcomes ([28])

What are the underlying influence mechanisms of social mavens in social media?

To answer this question, we have chosen to focus on micro-influencers, as presented in the following section.

B) *Social media influencer marketing : a focus on micro-influencers*

The digital influencers are prominent sources of inspiration and experience for social media users. They are viewed as market experts in several domains of interest, such as fashion, lifestyle, travel, photography and so forth ([1]). The relevance and the uniqueness of their posts are key aspects for effective content marketing ([50]). Companies are reaching out social media influencers, like “instafamous” for professional collaboration in brand awareness creation ([16]). The social influence theory ([40]) highlights three eminent processes: compliance, identification, and internalization, that can be applicable to social media setting. Influence through identification and internalization is deeper than compliance ([74]). Whereas identification relies on the influencer

characteristics and qualities within a given network, internalization implied that followers accept influence, tanks to the content usefulness.

Social media influencers have been classified into four main types, regarding their followers' number. The mega-influencers, have a wide range of followers (more than 100 000), the macro-influencers have a number of followers up to 100 000, the micro-influencers, have a number of followers ranging from 1000 to 100 000. Finally, the nano-influencers are emergent nodes with a lower number of followers ([78]). Nevertheless, a large follower base does not necessarily guarantee increased follower engagement ([16]) and popularity on social media is not equivalent to opinion leadership ([61]). Followers are more likely to engage with **micro- influencers**, as they are perceived trustworthy, authentic, and relatable. In support of this argument, Instagram users tend to trust influencers with more modest numbers of followers ([16]). From practionr's perspective, social media influencers with lower followers are more likely to be highly ranked in terms of engagement rate. Accordingly, instagram micro- influencers can generate up to 50% engagement per post ([87] ([88]).

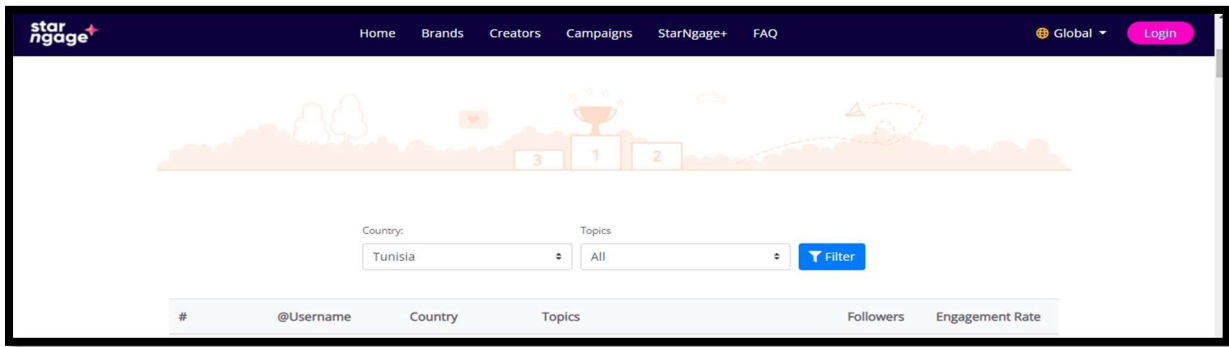
III. RESEARCH DESIGN & APPROACH

To investigate the emergent phenomenon of branded content creation among social mavens in Instagram, a qualitative approach is crucial. Inspired by twetnography ([34]), and recently Facenography ([8]), we have used an **Instanography** approach (a netnography in Instagram), during one year.

Basically, netnography relies on observation, primarily using online sources from websites, and available digital platforms ([45]). Netnography can also make use of offline qualitative research techniques, as complementary pieces to the online data, like interviews ([10]; ([45]). Social networking analysis "SNA" relates to the idea of mapping out networks. [30], used SNA to better understand the networks involved in word of mouth marketing communication. They assumed that the marketing area has ignored this technique, despite its insightful role in qualitative research. In this study, inspired by SNA, we have analyzed StarNgage platform to identify the influential ones in Instagram, as our research context ([44]. p.64) and to pick their interest domains ([34], p.179). We have blended hence the aforementioned methods (observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital tool analysis) as a part of our Instanography approach. In summary, we have conducted instanography among 6 Tunisian micro-influencers and 5 semi-structured interviews.

The baseline data for this study was obtained from the website StarNgage.com. StarNgage is a communication agency specializing in influence marketing, and connects influencers to different brands. StarNgage maintains a database of thousands of social media influencers based in many countries, located in North America, Asia & Africa. Importantly, the database is publicly available, allowing access to a large number of influencers active in different areas. To our knowledge, StarNgage is the best platform, providing users with insightful information regarding the **best social influencers**, in terms of follower's number and engagement rate. It permits also to filter the top instagram influencers according to the country and relevant topics of the influencer.(figure 1, p. 4). The ranking data is monthly updated.

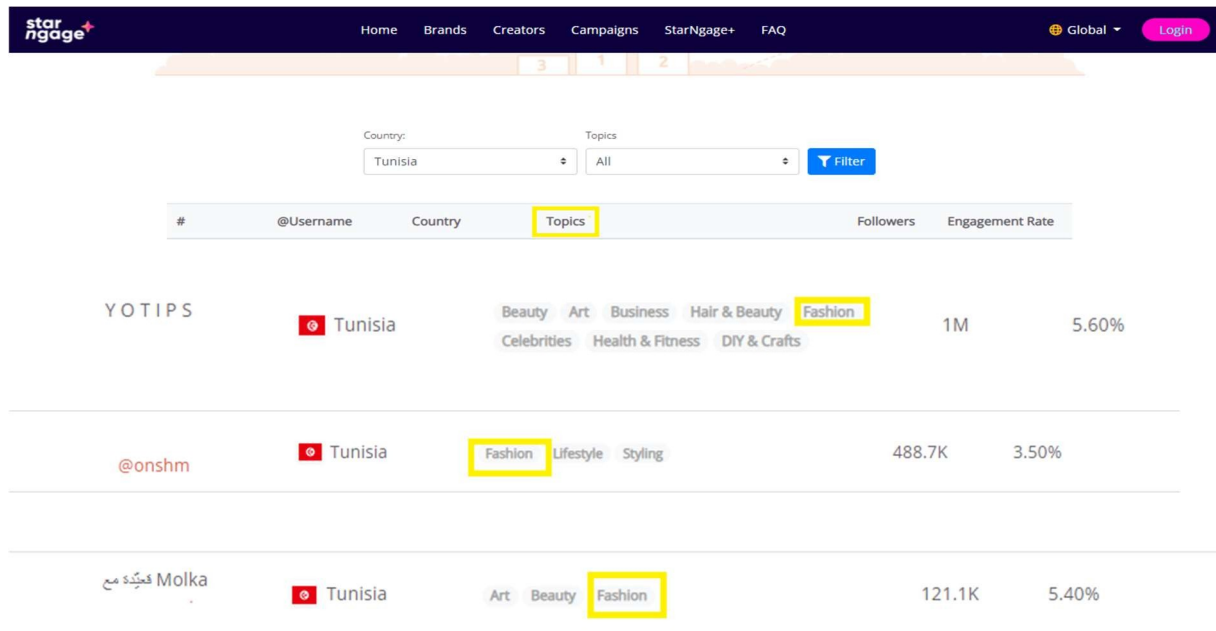
FIGURE 1 : INSTAGRAM INFLUENCER RANKING IN STARNGAGE INTERFACE



SOURCE : <https://starngage.com/app/global/influencer/ranking>

According to StarNgage, the instagram influencer is active in more than one area, where fashion is the most common one (figure 2, p. 4). Thus, micro-influencers could be considered as social mavens.

FIGURE 2 : INTEREST DOMAINS OF TUNISIAN INFLUENCERS



SOURCE : <https://starngage.com/app/global/influencer/ranking>

Nvivo software was used to make content analysis easier and more structured ([26]). ([44], p.222) stated that netnography allows much more flexibility in coding and takes an inductive, orientation in the data analysis. All data in this study, were transcribed, and relevant instanography data were encoded with specific themes. To ensure analysis reliability, two experienced coders, both with PhDs in marketing, were selected for this study. Both coders had previous experience conducting research content analysis.

A) SAMPLING

Data were collected from 11 Tunisian Instagram micro influencers, active in different areas, such as beauty, lifestyle, fashion, travel....

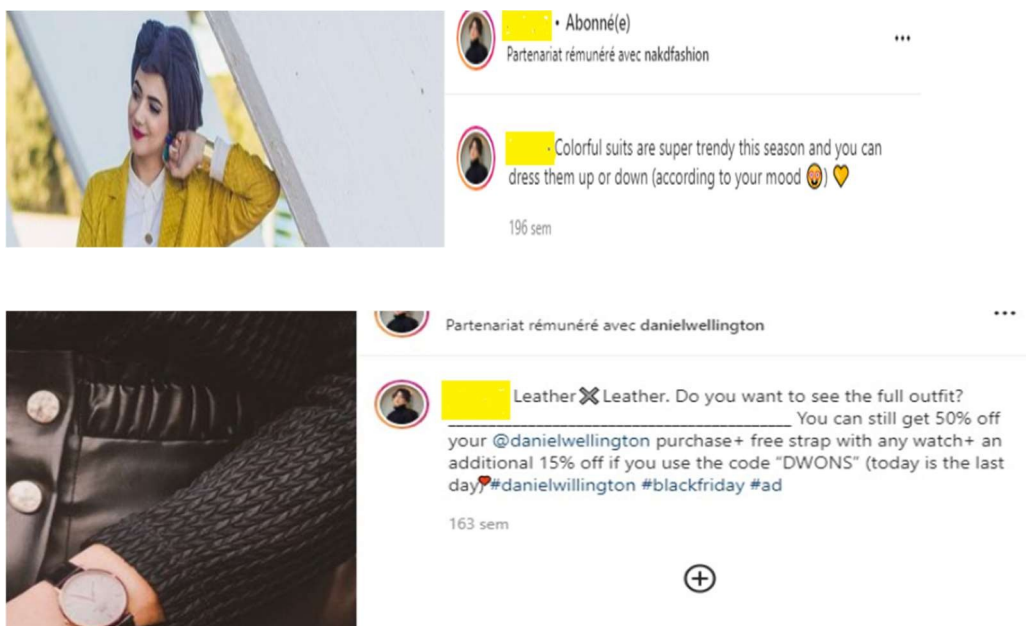
IV. RESULTS

Data thematic analysis was done to find out the social mavens motivations to produce brand related content. As micro-influencers, social mavens create posts, stories featuring a myriad of products, stores, brands to fulfill different gratifications, particularly related to the content. Content-related factors are presented as follows: brand co-creation, brand evangelism, social coupon sharing and discount deals. We have hidden the micro-influencers names in the screenshots to ensure data privacy.

A) Brand co-creation

In a competitive environment, brands are built through a co-creation process involving different players, especially brand managers and the brands' consumers ([21]). [37] noted that co-creation is an active, creative and social process based on collaboration between companies and participants that generate mutual benefits. Hence, **brand co-creation** is a social process of active participation in the brand community and collaboration, based on the overall brand experience ([23]). According to [38], brand co-creation can be of direct or indirect nature. Its direct form, describes the interactions that occur between the customer and the brand ([80]). However, indirect co-creation refers to active consumer participation, through social media, without necessarily communicating with the brand directly ([37]), providing advice to other brand users ([80]) or sharing social media branded content ([23]). Being engaged into the process of brand co-creation, active consumers, like social mavens, perceive that they are able to influence when and how brand content is generated and exchanged ([81]). The results of our qualitative study reveal that social mavens tend to collaborate with brands across different product categories, through paid partnership and/or instagram contests techniques.

In paid Partnership, the micro influencers must mention the brand with which, they collaborate in Instagram. This type of collaboration enables social mavens to generate a relevant content, through attractive pictures and professional posts, as shown in the following screenshots:



Whereas paid partnership seems to be of an utilitarian value, instagram contests involve hedonic sequential steps as follows: liking the post, sharing the post, tagging the target persons (instafamous, followers...) and following the target brands.



Consequently, Social mavens tend to co create value to guarantee the brand's visibility in instagram and other social networking sites.

B) Brand Evangelism

In today's digitally connected marketplace, modern companies are paying careful attention to a relatively smaller, but highly influential, group of consumers called brand evangelists, who actively disseminate brand-related content to others, attempt to recruit consumers to try and experience the brand ([33]). Brand evangelism is defined as "a more active and committed way of spreading positive opinions and trying fervently to convince or persuade others to get engaged with the same brand." ([51], p. 27); [9]), noted that brand evangelism is as an intense form of supportive brand-related behaviors that include the brand's purchasing and providing positive referrals regarding the brand.

Other than positive e-wom disseminators, brand evangelists are opinion leaders ([6]). [17] see brand evangelists as altruist consumers, since they share brand experience with others without an expected reward. Literature on marketing suggests that brand evangelists are, inspirational consumers, advocates, brand zealots, and brand ambassadors ([17]; [64]). Most evangelical behaviors occur on social media, which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content ([33]). In support of these arguments, we can claim that social mavens are the brand evangelists in different product categories.

Findings in our research indicate that, social mavens support brands, through positive word of mouth. As micro-influencers, social mavens tend to spread positive emotions and experiences toward their followers in Instagram. Interviewees express brand evangelism through positive words like passion, love..., as shown in the following screenshots:



We Are Mini : Spot Mini Cooper

Nos histoires définissent qui nous sommes. Ils expriment où nous avons été, ce que nous avons fait et ce que nous avons appris tout au long de notre chemin. Derrière chaque MINI se cache une belle histoire à raconter. Alors, en l'honneur de son 60ème anniversaire, j'ai eu le plaisir de collaborer avec Mini, une marque avec qui je partage mes plus beaux souvenirs et qui m'a accompagné durant mes 10 dernières années, pour raconter mon "histoire MINI" préférée. Rejoignez moi sur le site Mini (lien dans ma bio) pour partager vos expériences, vos aventures et vos passions. Une surprise vous attend ! #WeAreMINI #mini #ad 😊



You already know how much I love the @esteelauder double wear foundation. I've been trying the new double wear nude foundation for the last couple of weeks and it is now one of my favorite foundations ! It is lightweight and comfortable on my skin, the coverage is medium but definitely buildable and it blurs out my imperfections. The finish is natural and dewy, it lasts up to 9 hours without touch ups, oil free and hydrating. I highly recommend it for normal to combination skin. What's your all-time favorite foundation? 🍷

C) Social coupon sharing

Social coupons, are considered as referral coupons (referral reward programs), by which one coupon is introduced for an individual, most likely an existing customer, while the second coupon is introduced to be shared with a secondary recipient in the customer's social network ([69]). In the offline context, mavens are super-couponers because they tend to spend time and effort collecting and sometimes buying coupons ([61]).

Existing literature on **coupon sharing** is too limited. Two key articles by [75] and [83] provide initial insights into coupon sharing triggers: the high sociability and reciprocity motives. Whereas reciprocity has been established as a crucial maven's characteristic ([4], [32]) noted that high sociability is a key aspect of market mavens in social media. Accordingly, social mavens will be likely to share a social coupon regardless of their social distance from the secondary recipient because of their increased enjoyment, and high engagement in sharing information within a network (Price & al, 1988). Moreover, individuals with socializing gratification are more likely to share mobile coupons in their social network ([82]). Market mavens are brand-focused and deal-prone consumers ([31]). They focus on the cost/benefit evaluation of coupon campaigns ([54]). The second recipient is invited to use the social coupon, through a promotion code delivered by the micro-influencer, as explained in the following quotes:

"I often share promotion codes with my followers regarding Tunisian brands" (Micro-influencer 2).

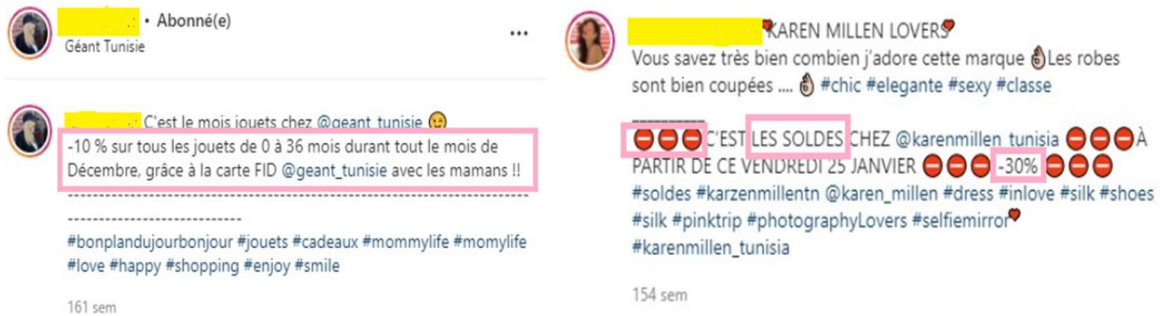
"My followers in Instagram are receptive to promotion codes for new brands. They ask me for more details regarding products of the tagged brand".

(Micro-influencer 4).

D) Discount deals

Market mavens tend to be more deal prone and value-oriented, they have more favorable attitudes toward advertising, than frugal shoppers ([61]). Given their awareness of new products and brands in different product categories, market mavens are open to price promotions and daily deals information ([36]). Generally, deal prone consumers use promotional information to make purchase decisions easier ([60]) They share information about deals and they tend to "go from deal to deal" ([11]).

Micro-influencers share information featuring details about products (the product category, the discount rate, the users category) and tag the target brands and stores, as presented in the quotes below:



“I create pictures, promoting discount pricing for specific products and share the daily best deals in food and fashion domains, with my followers in Instagram” (Micro-influencer 6).

“I often write short articles about brands after trying its products, especially in private sales period. I post also in store selfie- images to share the best offers with my followers” (Micro-influencer 4)

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study makes an important contribution that shows the potential of social mavens in social media influencer marketing strategy. Building on [66] recommendation, we have uncovered the role of market mavens, as micro-influencers within Instagram community.

Our results indicate that social mavens are driven by brand co-creation, brand evangelism, social coupon sharing and discount deals. These concepts are basically, content related factors. Despite limited literature on social mavenism concept, the findings of our study align with previous work regarding branding behaviours among market mavens.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first research to suggest instanography as an original approach in data analysis.

Research on social media influencers has inherent implications for practice. Targeting social mavens remains a critical strategy to encourage word-of mouth and user generated content in the digital branding era. Accordingly, marketers should explore the ways in which social mavens promote products and brands within digital platforms. This study offers several directions for future research. First, our study focused on brand related gratifications as micro-influencers motivations to generate a valuable content in Instagram. It would be useful to explore other types of gratifications in different social networking sites. Second, it is of paramount importance that this study sheds light on the role of micro-influencers in the branding practices. Future research can focus on the relevant potential of nano-influencers in social media, as an emergent segment in the marketplace ([78]).

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