UTILIZATION OF ONLINE INFLUENCERS AS AN EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING TOOL: A CASE OF INSTAGRAM MICRO-CELEBRITIES

Filiz EROĞLU•
Elçin BAYRAKTAR KÖSE**

Abstract

Micro celebrities are a kind of online influencers who have numbers of online followers. Despite the great potential of micro celebrities, influence of micro celebrities through making them feel the brand experience still remains underexplored in the literature. The purpose of this study is to review the concept of micro celebrity in relation to experiential marketing and search the relationship between followers' perceptions about the micro celebrities and their perceptions about brand experience. Within the context of this exploratory and descriptive research, 14 active Instagram users were asked specific questions about elements of influencer effect and dimensions of experiential in an uncomplicated and simple survey. This research's most notable finding is that followers see their micro celebrities as trustworthy and attractive, but they don't feel the experience about brand so much. Conclusion part includes some implications for further research.

Keywords Experiential marketing, Instagram, Influencer, Micro-celebrity.

1.Introduction

Max Kalehoff, marketing and innovation specialist said, "*customer experience is the new advertising department*". It doesn't seem an exaggerated expression that experience is such an important phenomenon because experiential marketing provides companies a competitive advantage comparing with traditional communication tools (Aronne and Vasconcelos, 2009, 1). As Nigam (2012, 71) stated, experiential marketing provides a basis for producing experiences and emotions for the customers as well as enables customers to be involved with products and brands. Customers are appealed by experiential marketing via in-dept experiences connected to a product or brand (Adeosun and Ganiyu, 2012, 22) and all marketing communication related issues deliver an experience (Schmitt, 1999, 53).

On the other hand, the advent of social media has created a new landscape for business world. Social networking sites (SNS) are growingly used by consumers to be informed about brands and interact with other consumers. Instagram, as one of the most important SNS, distinctly has a rapid rise among consumers (Garifova, 2016, 135) - from 90 million monthly active users since 2013 to 700 million monthly active users in 2017 as Casalo, Flavián and Sánchez (2017, 371) said - so that companies are attracted to exist in such a fruitful environment.
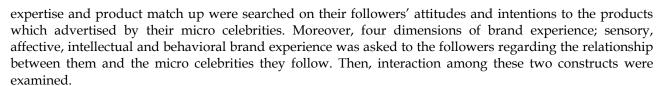
Social media allows to the emergence of some people who are dubbed as *influencers.* Youtubers and instagrammers, as the most common influencers who engage with their numbers of followers and they also endorse some products and brands in social media arena. In this context, companies and brand owners are attracted to use these influencers because as Aronne and Vasconselos (2009, 1) notified, companies try to manage the best possible brand experience for their customers.

Micro celebrities are important influencers and they seem so favorable for the brand owners (Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017). They are famous people just around their followers. They share many things, especially visual things, with their followers so they make many things around them visible, consciously or unconsciously. They naturally show, recommend or use products on their selfies / videos / pictures so brand owners intend to benefit this improvised, natural, intimate advertising platform. By this way, brand owners may also aim their products to be experienced by their customers through micro celebrities.

This exploratory and descriptive research responds to the call for a comprehensive understand of the effect of Instagram micro celebrities on their followers regarding how the followers perceive brand experience which the micro celebrities endorse. Influence of four structures; trustworthiness, attractiveness,

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• Asst. Prof. Dr., Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University.
** Res. Asst., Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Univesrity.

expertise and product match up were searched on their followers' attitudes and intentions to the products which advertised by their micro celebrities. Moreover, four dimensions of brand experience; sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral brand experience was asked to the followers regarding the relationship between them and the micro celebrities they follow. Then, interaction among these two constructs were examined.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Experiential Marketing

In the recent years, marketers try to create competitive strategies to address the evolving consumer profiles. Consumers have changed their demands that they are more interested in hedonistic feelings. Srinivasan and Srivastava (2010, 193) stated that everything is about feel, relate and act in today's global market. So, concentration of the companies has transferred from product-focused approach to experientialist-focused approach (Tsai, 2005, 430) then they aim to stimulate their customers' emotions and sensations (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007, 396). For this reason, experiential marketing which is hard to substitute and imitate is become favorable and a useful notion which satisfies companies and consumers (Srivastava, 2008).

Experience, as a word, is a noun which is something affecting the way person feels or knowledge or skill from doing, seeing or feeling things and as adjective, *experiential* means that it is based on experience (Same and Larimo, 2012, 481). According to the Experiential Marketing Association (2011), *experiential marketing* allows consumers to engage with brands in sensory ways. Smilansky (2009) noted that companies identify and satisfy customer expectations fruitfully via *experiential marketing;* they engage with products and it provides add value to the consumers through two-way communications.

Caru and Cova (2008, 168) explained four major stages of consumer experiences: The first stage is Pre-consumption experience which is related to the expectation, the search, planning and foreseeing of the experience. Then purchasing experience is coming which includes the selection, payment and packaging of the product. Core consumption experience is about sensations, satisfaction levels and the remembered consumption experience, as the last stage, nostalgia experience is classification of memories, used to re-lived and remember past experiences.

Years ago, Schmitt (1999) was mentioning about experiential marketers as they see consumers as rational and emotional beings who aim to get pleasurable experiences. He also defined five experiential modules which are sensory, affective, cognitive, physical (behaviors and lifestyles) and social-identity experiences. Gentile et al. (2007) developed these modules and noted that customer experience has six components: sensorial component, emotional component, cognitive component, pragmatic component, lifestyle component and relational component. All among these, sensorial component stimulates the senses as hearing, touching, etc. while emotional components stimulate feelings, emotions and moods.

Masterman and Wood (2008) underlined seven issues which improve consumer experience: Involvement with brand, interaction with brand agencies, immersion of all senses, high impact intensity leading memories, individuality of experience, innovation concerning content, location, timing, audiences and integrity providing real, authentic benefits.

Companies employ numbers of instruments to provide experience to the consumers. Behind some ordinary traditional instruments like brand communities, sponsorship, product placement (Aronne and Vasconselos, 2009, 5), Smilansky (2017, 5) mentioned about physical stores that provide an opportunity for consumers to have e sensory experience -touch, smell, taste, hear and feel- with the brand.

An empirical study performed at Taipei Zoo revealed that experiences with experiential marketing tools have positive effects on the emotion then the emotion also has a positive effect on the behavioral intention via satisfaction (Tsaur, Chiu and Wang, 2007). Another study (Yang, 2009) focused on sense marketing in experiential marketing showed that every construct of sense presented significant correlation between customer satisfaction of a specific restaurant in Taiwan and repurchase intention. A research likely revealed that pleasure and arousal dimensions of experiential marketing driven emotions increase level of satisfaction and the degree of favorable behavioral intentions, leading loyalty and willingness to pay (Bigne and Andreu, 2004).

Smilansky (2017, 21) mentioned Katy Howell's research which aims to find out how and why live experiences and social media work together to deliver a better brand value. Over half of the participants said that they would buy a product after live brand experience combined with social media while 38 per cent of them told that they become loyal customers after live brand experiences driven by social media.

Brakus and friends (2009) mentioned four kinds of brand experience; sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual. Sensory experience is about a consumer's senses. Affective experience is about emotional experiences with the product while behavioral experience means interaction with the brand physically. Intellectual experience is about engaging with the brand. Social media influencers may provide different types of brand experiences for their followers during their brand endorsement and each these types of experiences may influence followers' buying intention differently. However, the related research is scarce in the literature.

2.2 Using Influencers for Marketing Purposes

In recent years, using influencers has gained importance in consumer research literature as well as in marketing implications. Recently, consumers have perceived influencers more credible (Nielsen, 2013) while they become more skeptical about traditional marketing advertisers (Campbell and Kirmani, 2000, 81). Influencer marketing, as another kind of marketing approach, is a marketing practice based upon influence theory which supports the opinion which purposes a limited number of key people can persuade the decisions of a great number of others (Braatz, 2017, 6). Influencer marketing produces ROI (Return on Investment) eleven times higher than digital marketing (Tapinfluence 2017). Influencers were existed before internet too as opinion leaders in traditional market. Online influencers are the new opinion leaders with the advantage of reaching wider range of people through their online social network (Lyons and Henderson, 2005, 320). Bloggers, celebrities or other individuals who have great number of followers in online channel can be an online influencer (Ehrlich, 2013) by means of blogs or social media sites like Instagram, Facebook or Twitter.

Influencer marketing is fed from endorsement theory too. Endorsement means the backing, support or approval from a third party (Canning and West, 2006, 2). This third party may be a typical customer, an expert, a company president or a celebrity (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). Influencers create, deliver and spread advertising messages of the brands to their followers (Brown and Hayes, 2008). In influencer marketing, brands send free samples of their products to online influencers to use, like and recommend them to their followers (Braatz, 2017, 7). Online influencers are expected to deliver their positive opinions about products and services they experienced and approve it for a fee (Abidin, 2016, 87).

Lim et al. (2017) noted that there are four essential models in the literature to analyze consumers' perceptions about influencers as source credibility, source attractiveness, product match-up and meaning transfer. Source credibility -an important element of the process - which was initially been presented by Hovland and Weiss (1951), has been used to analyze celebrity testimonial advertising and celebrity approval (Seiler and Kucza, 2017, 3). Credibility has a positive effect on the persuasiveness of a message (Harmon and Coney, 1982, 256). Trustworthiness and expertise are two crucial factors argued in this phenomenon (Lim et al., 2017). Trustworthiness is crucial because it represents believability and honesty (Erdoğan, 1999, 293), reliability, being dependable, sincere and trustworthy (Ahmed, Farooq and Iqbal, 2014). It is the most demanded issue by the customers because it's the intangible side of the celebrity related to trust (Moynihan, 2004, 103). On the other hand, when the source -like an Instagram influencer- is credible, the information which this influencer share may influence consumers' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (Wang et al., 2017, 12). Also, since they are expert on the topic, people perceive them as persuasive (Aaker and Myers, 1987). As a result, trustworthy and expertise together result in higher level of acceptance of the message so more credible influencers are perceived more influential and more effective on their followers' behaviors (Lim et al. 2017).

Source attractiveness is also important for the people' perceptions of influencers. Source attractiveness model is related to similarity, familiarity and likeability of an endorser (McGuire, 1985). Similarity represents the similarity between the source and the audience while familiarity means knowledge of the source through exposure. Likeability is affection for source based on its physical appearance or behavior and attractiveness means how attractive consumers perceive the source (Sertoğlu, Çatlı and Korkmaz, 2014, 68). Physical appearance is important (Seiler and Kuzca, 2017) and attractive influencers' messages are noted as more persuasive (Chaiken, 1979).

Product match-up model (Kamins, 1989) presents the congruence between the product and the influencer. The model consists of image, expertise and attractiveness (Till and Busler, 2000; Forkan, 1980). An influencer with a congruent image with the product ensures a better advertisement and credibility (Kamins and Gupta, 1994: 570). Expertise is found more appropriate for matching products with the influencer (Till and Busler, 2000). Match is also seen as the relationship between the influencer and the receiver of the message (Seiler and Kuzca, 2017). The match between the influencer and the message of the receiver

positively influences the effectiveness of the communication and credibility (Till and Busler, 2000, 1998). A degree of congruence between the influencer and the receiver's ideal-self has also positive affect on message's effectiveness (Choi and Rifon, 2012). Moreover, product type and the influencer should also match. For instance, while for cleansing pumps, experts are more persuasive influencers, for jewels, famous influencers would be more persuasive (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). Create the appropriate meaning transfer between the celebrity endorsement and the product positively affect the attitude of consumers towards the brand (Hoekman, 2008).

According to the Meaning Transfer Model developed by McCracken (1989), there are three phases which are named as culture, endorsement and consumption. On the culture phase, the meaning is transferred to celebrity. Then, it transfers to product on the endorsement phase. On the consumption phase, meaning is transferred from the product to the consumer. The meaning transfer model suggests that the society deliver specific meanings to influencers, especially celebrities and when these influencers approve a product, all meanings transfer to this product (Amos, Holmes and Strutton, 2008; McCracken, 1989).

Celebrities are important influencers on both traditional and online channels. Friedman and Friedman (1979, 64) defined the term *celebrity* as an individual who is familiar with the public for his/her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed. Celebrity endorsement, on the other hand, is defined as a channel of communication where a celebrity acts as the advocate of a product and his/her popularity and personality is extended to this product. Hassan and Jamil (2014) founded that attributes of the celebrity are not important for the intent to purchase the product but quality, brand image and brand loyalty are crucial for intention to purchase.

Marwick (2015, 139) mentioned celebrity in the social media arena as a series of techniques and strategies which can be executed by anyone with mobile phone, tablet, laptop, etc. In other respects, a new type of celebrity emerged in social media, named as *micro-celebrity*. Microcelebrities are people -not famous people in common way- who use social media, create numbers of fans, gain followers other than friends, relatives and use it as a way for celebrity (Clarewells, 2014). Hills (2004) defined microcelebrities differently as subcultural or local celebrities. According to Marwick and Boyd (2011) and Senft (2013, 2008), microcelebrity phenomenon is a self-presentation technique in which microcelebrities see themselves as a public personality who are consumed by other people and they use strategic familiarities to influence their followers as well as view their followers as their fans. Microcelebrity is someone who does, rather than someone is.

Micro celebrities may be used to endorse the company's product to their followers. They are expected to mention/show the benefits of the product and promote it to their followers. "*Consumers want to interact with brands and get to know the face behind the mask*" said Mary C. Long (2018). By this way, a more direct and strong bridge can be developed between customers and the company according to the companies' goals.

2.3 Using Instagram Micro-celebrities as Online Influencers on Experiential Marketing

As Garifova (2016) remarked that Instagram is the fastest growing social media network platform among all other social media platforms. For this reason, using Instagram as marketing tool has become a great part of social media strategies employed by companies/brands (Raice and Ante, 2012). It is true because it reached to 700 million active users in 2017 while the number was only 90 million in 2013 regarding monthly active users (Statista.com, 2017). So, most of the companies took great attention to this area.

Companies may directly place an ad in Instagram, or they may use influencers. Herein, choosing the right influencer is crucial for the company (Barker, 2016). An influencer should be a natural proponent of the brand/company to raise consumer's confidence and legitimate apparent brand-influencer relationship. Typical one-off promotion may involve sending a product to an influencer. She/he then endorses the product in her/his Instagram account or create a content about it – which is not exactly proof of a genuine advocacy. Nowadays, micro celebrities are typically preferable influencers for the brands.

Micro-celebrity term was first used by Senft in her book *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Network* to present a new form in which people empower their popularity among their readers, viewers, and those to whom they are linked online (Senft, 2008). Although there is an increasing movement of using micro celebrities with marketing purpose, it is still ambiguous how lucrative this kind of product endorsement is. Moreover, there is limited research on consumers' attitudes towards this way of marketing effort, especially focusing on Instagram rather than Facebook and Twitter.

Micro-celebrities perceive their audiences as fans and share their information strategically with them to rise their popularity and attention within a network (Marwick, 2015, 139). Companies select suitable micro-celebrities who are familiar with the product/sector and pay them to place their products on their personal account or create a content about it. Micro celebrities, then, state the benefits about the products to their followers and encourage them to purchase. Through the alliance with a micro-celebrity, the companies desire to build a more direct relationship with consumers in their everyday life. Micro celebrities deliver companies' message to their target audience, -hundreds, thousands, or millions of followers.

The social learning theory purposes that an individual's intention to buy products is greatly affected by the effectiveness of social media influencers through source credibility, source attractiveness, product match-up and meaning transfer issues (Lim et al., 2017). A research which examined the relationship between using Instagram and the personal feelings of its users revealed that they follow fashion and sociability as well as Instagram may create higher level of brand community commitment and engagement (Ariño, Flavián and Sánchez, 2017, 370). Brand owners believe that Instagram is the most efficient platform in which micro celebrities have the greatest influence on their followers as well as pay attention to the number of followers and "like"s of the micro celebrities (Aslan and Ünlü, 2016).

Consumers experience products via different ways. They sometimes experience the product themselves and sometimes experience with others' comments. Micro celebrities use a product and share their experiences with their followers. By this way, experiences of the micro celebrities convey to the other consumers, as the followers of this micro celebrity. However, scientific findings are lacking in the literature of the attitudes of the followers to their micro celebrities and their experiential perceptions regarding the product which the micro celebrities endorse.

3. Methodology

The essential aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of the followers about the micro celebrities they follow and whether the micro celebrities' experiences with the product transfer to the followers as brand owners wish. Current literature presents limited information about the efficiency of social media micro celebrities, so this study tries to understand the influence of especially Instagram micro celebrities.

As scholars suggest, qualitative and quantitative research methods have both strengths and weaknesses. For example, qualitative research may yield more comprehensive and deeper findings on consumer research while it has weaknesses regarding reliability and validity issues. On the other hand, quantitative research may provide more generalizable findings (Sekaran, 1992, 84).

In this study, although the qualitative method with in-dept interviews was believed to yield more extensive information, an uncomplicated quantitative method was chosen due to time limit. The data was collected through a simple structured questionnaire form adopted from the previous research. Moreover, among other social media platforms, Instagram was chosen because it is gaining popularity uttermost among other social networking sites and brand owners too (Casalo, Flavian and Sanchez, 2017).

In the beginning, 20 Instagram users were selected by and asked them whether they follow some micro celebrities. Purposeful sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling method due to the need for specific participants (Kurtuluş, 2011). who follow some Instagram micro celebrities who advertise a product All the participants chosen were female in order to provide standardization among the participants. Then, it was asked whether they were influenced by the micro celebrities' endorsement actions. As a result, 14 Instagram users enrolled to the research.

After that endorsement of what type of product these participants are mostly exposed was asked. According to the results, fashionable products were selected as product type which micro celebrities endorse. This type is assumed to consists of clothes, bags, jewelry, shoes. Participants were asked to think about *just one* of the micro celebrities they follow who advertise this kind of products during answering the questionnaire form.

The questionnaire form consists of two parts. All expressions were translated to Turkish through English instructors' recommendations and prior Turkish related literature. Later, expressions were asked to 20 university students who active Instagram users are. In the first part, attitudes towards micro celebrities and influence of micro celebrities on their followers were also analyzed. Dimensions of source trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise and product match-up were adopted from Ohanian (1990). Participants graded their micro celebrities from "Very poor – 0" to "Very good – 5". The dimensions are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Influence of Micro Celebrities on the Followers

	Very poor					Very good
Dependable	0	1	2	3	4	5
Reliable	0	1	2	3	4	5
Sincere	0	1	2	3	4	5
Honest	0	1	2	3	4	5
Trustworthy	0	1	2	3	4	5
Physically attractive	0	1	2	3	4	5
Classy	0	1	2	3	4	5
Beautiful	0	1	2	3	4	5
Elegant	0	1	2	3	4	5
Expert	0	1	2	3	4	5
Experienced	0	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable	0	1	2	3	4	5
Qualified	0	1	2	3	4	5
Skilled	0	1	2	3	4	5
Involvement with product	0	1	2	3	4	5
Product-Celebrity Match	0	1	2	3	4	5

On the second part of the survey, brand experience dimensions (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009) were asked to the participants. They were told to choose the best answer regarding the product/brand, the micro celebrity they choose. They are four dimensions: Sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual. The participants pointed the items again from "Very poor – 0" to "Very good – 5". The dimensions are displayed in Table 2

Table 2: Brand Experience Dimensions

Sensory
1. This brand makes me a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses.
2. I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.
3. This brand does not appeal to my senses.
Affective
4. This brand induces feelings and sentiments.
5. I do not have strong emotions for this brand.
6. This brand is emotional brand.
Behavioral
7. I engage in physical actions and behavior when I use this brand.
8. This brand results in bodily experiences.
9. This brand is not action oriented.
Intellectual
10. I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand.
11. This brand does not make me think.
12. This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.

4. Results

There are 14 female participants answered the survey. The answers of the participants are given at Table 3. There are two groups of questions asked to the participants. The items at the first part aim to understand the influence of micro celebrities on the followers. It includes the followers' perceptions about the micro celebrities they follow. The second part is placed to examine the participants' brand experience perception. The items try to understand whether micro celebrities' experiences with the products transfer to their followers through product endorsement. In other words, could followers engage with the product/brand through the micro celebrities' experiences?

Table 3: Table of the Test Results

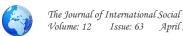| Participant No	Perceptions about influencers				Brand experience			
	Trustworthy	Attractive	Expert	Product match	Sensory	Affective	Behavioral	Intellectual
1	4,40	4,75	3,80	4,00	3,33	4,00	2,33	3,66
2	3,80	3,00	3,40	3,00	2,00	2,66	3,66	3,66
3	3,40	4,75	2,40	3,50	3,66	4,00	2,66	2,00
4	4,20	3,50	4,00	3,00	4,00	4,33	3,66	2,66
5	4,20	4,50	3,20	4,00	3,66	4,00	2,66	1,33
6	4,20	3,75	4,40	4,00	2,66	3,66	2,66	1,00
7	4,60	4,25	4,00	3,00	1,66	2,00	1,66	1,33
8	4,80	4,50	4,40	4,00	3,33	4,33	3,00	2,66
9	5,00	4,25	4,40	4,50	4,33	4,00	4,00	3,66
10	4,20	4,50	4,00	4,50	3,33	3,66	1,66	2,00
11	4,00	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,00	2,33	1,00	0,66
12	2,60	3,00	2,40	2,50	1,66	2,66	1,66	1,00
13	3,80	4,25	3,20	4,00	2,33	3,00	2,66	1,33
14	4,00	4,25	4,00	4,50	4,00	4,33	2,00	2,66
Mean	**4,09**	**4,02**	**3,61**	**3,68**	**3,00**	**3,50**	**2,52**	**2,12**

At the first step, the means of the grades were evaluated on the first part. It is 4,09 for trustworthy; 4,02 for attractiveness; 3,61 for expert and 3,68 for product match. Six participants marked trustworthy with the highest grade while five participants gave the highest grade to attractiveness and each of two other participants gave the highest grade to expert and product match. Two of the participants who gave the highest mark to trustworthy marked to attractiveness as the second choice and two of them gave the second highest point to expert. Two participants who gave the highest degree to attractiveness marked trustworthy and two of them marked product match as the second highest item. The participant who gave the highest grade to expert also gave the second highest grade to trustworthy. Additionally, just one participant gave the highest point to product match and she gave the second highest point to attractiveness.

"Sincere" is the most graded element in trustworthiness and "trustworthy" follows it. In attractiveness, "classy" has the highest grade and "physical attractiveness" then comes. In expertise dimension, "expertise" has the highest grade and in product match up, perception of congruence between product and micro celebrity has more points.

At the second step, the means of the grades of the second part were evaluated. It's 3,00 for sensory, 3,50 for affective, 2,52 for behavioral and 2,12 for intellectual dimension. Affective dimension which has the highest mean was given the highest grade by 12 participants. 8 of these 12 participants gave the second highest grade to affective and three of them gave sensory and behavioral the same grade as a mean. Intellectual has the lowest grade of mean (2,12) among all brand experience elements.

In sensory, Item no 3 "*This brand does (not) appeal to my senses.*" has the highest grade. In affective, item no 4 "*This brand induces feelings and sentiments*" has the highest point. In behavioral, item no 7 "*I engage in physical actions and behavior when I use this brand.*" has the highest point and item no 11 "*This brand does (not) make me think.*" has the highest grade in intellectual dimension.

At the third step, points of two columns are valued together. All the participants who have the highest mean of attractiveness also gave the highest mark to affective in the second column (Participant No 1, 3, 5, 10, 12, 13). Participant No 2 gave the highest grade of mean to both behavioral and intellectual brand experience, while she gave the highest point of degree to trustworthy (3,80), expert (3,40) and attractive and product match (3,00). Besides, Participant No 9 has the highest grade of mean for sensory in the second

column while she has the highest points in trustworthy (5,00), product match (4,50), expert (4,40) and attractive (4,25).

5. Conclusion

Experiential marketing as the new marketing approach of the recent years took eligible interest from both business and academic environment. It is supposed that it provides a competitive advantage to companies comparing with traditional marketing approaches. Experiential marketing is defined as allowing customers to engage and interact with brands, products and services in sensory ways by the definition of the Experience Marketing Association (2011).

Advances in social media have created a new platform for experiential marketing. Online influencers seem as perfect tools to be used in experiential marketing. Companies send free samples to the online influencers to use, like and recommend them to their followers (Braatz, 2017). By this way, consumers are supposed to experience the product through influencers. When the influencers use the product, followers may experience the usage of the product. Micro celebrities are special online influencers who are not known for mass population but just for their online followers (Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017).

Although the influence of micro celebrities on their followers' behaviors -as a general- is already approved, there is a limited comprehensive research in the literature on this issue. This exploratory and descriptive research aims to form a better understanding of find out how micro celebrities are perceived by their followers and the transferring the experiences of micro celebrities to their followers as well. For gathering data, purposeful sampling technique was employed because active Instagram users who follow some micro celebrities and are influenced by them would be more effective for the research. 14 active female Instagram users enrolled to the research. They were sent a structured survey that contains two parts; perceptions about micro celebrities and experiential brand perceptions.

Results show that participants perceive the micro celebrities they follow as trustworthy and attractive at the first degree. These findings are consistent with the prior research results (Jargalsaikhan and Korotina, 2016) for trustworthiness of micro celebrities. Due to the absence of a sufficient micro celebrity literature, the results may compare with the literature on the effect of social media influencers in general. Lim and his friends (2017) found that expertise and attractiveness of social media influencers on consumers' purchase intention is insignificant while product match is significant. In this study, expert and product match scores were found lower than trustworthiness and attractiveness. Since the product type was chosen as fashion, it's predicted that followers see their micro celebrities as attractive, particularly classy and physically attractive. They perceive a good match between the micro celebrity and the product which the micro celebrity endorses. They also see them as expert about the product type, but the score is not high comparing with trustworthiness and attractiveness.

On the other hand, brand experience scores are averagely lower than the scores of the perceptions about influencers' scale. The highest score belongs to "affective" dimension by far and "sensory" dimension follows it. Results reveal that feelings and sentiments are the most important issues in brand experience regarding "affection" for the participants. Secondly, the brand experience is assumed to appeal the participants senses. Experiential marketing is essentially based on the consumers' self-experiences with the brand. However, experiences of the other people, especially the influencer people' experiences with the products are also effective on their followers' brand perception. Authors assumed that the micro celebrities' endorsement, using, introducing of a product influences their followers' brand perceptions in a way. But the scores show that the micro celebrities' experiences with the product/brand don't transfer to their followers in especially intellectual and behavioral way.

Due to the fact that the number of the sample is not sufficient and the sampling technique is a kind of non-probability sampling, the results can not be generalized. The results are for the purpose of providing a primary overview for the relationship between attitudes towards micro celebrities and experiential perception of the followers.

6. Managerial Implications, Limitations and Further Research

This study provides some implications for managers. The results reveal the crucial importance of trust and attractiveness on the followers' perceptions about the micro celebrities they follow. Additionally, product and micro celebrity congruence is also important so building and maintaining trust through micro celebrities, providing an appropriate match between the micro celebrities and the product/brand would be an important managerial implication of this research for brand owners who intend to use micro celebrities as

a marketing tool. Moreover, attractiveness and being classy are important characteristics of the micro celebrities that effect the perceptions of the followers. The results also show that the brand experience does not seem to be transferred to the followers via micro celebrities' endorsement.

On the other side, there are obvious limitations of the research. First, an in-debt interview method may be more suitable and comprehensive way for this study in order to get deeper information from Instagram users about their perceptions and attitudes towards the micro celebrities. Besides, a multi-functional quantitative research method like structural equation model may be helpful to understand more precisely the correlational and causal relationships between the variables. Probability sampling methods and a greater number of participants would provide more accurate results.

Due to the time limitation, purposeful sampling technique, a kind of non-purposeful sampling, was employed in this research. Authors needed the best appropriate sample in the shortest time. For this reason, limited numbers of people were invited to the research and solely 14 participants were included in this study. Moreover, results of two scales which are perceptions about influencers and brand experiences, were evaluated only with their mean scores. Further research may develop a model including the same variables and analyze the relationships with more complex analyses that would be realized with a greater sample. In this research, some dimensions' scores seem low comparing with the other dimensions. Both micro celebrity and experiential marketing are crucial topics. The results of this study are explicable with the features of these variables, a specific kind of product and this specific sample, but even so a different sample, different analyses or a different product type would give different results.

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