

Managing Micro-Celebrity Impact: Iranian Corporate Perspectives

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Abstract

This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the role and impact of micro-celebrities in the realm of advertising and promotion within the Iranian corporate sector. Grounded in the perspectives of 42 corporate managers specializing in these fields, the study employs grounded theory methodology to explore the multifaceted strategies and challenges associated with leveraging micro-celebrity endorsements in Iran. Through in-depth interviews, the research reveals six key themes: strategic integration of micro-celebrities, cultural compatibility and sensitivity, impact measurement challenges, digital savvy and innovation, ethical considerations and reputation management, and navigating regulatory environments. Our findings emphasize the importance of strategic alignment between micro-celebrities and brand identities, underscoring the need for authenticity and cultural resonance in marketing campaigns. The study also highlights the complexities in measuring the impact of micro-celebrity endorsements and the increasing significance of digital innovation in this domain. Furthermore, it explores the ethical dimensions and reputation management strategies critical in micro-celebrity collaborations, as well as the challenges posed by the unique regulatory landscape in Iran.



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Keywords: cultural sensitivity, digital advertising, grounded theory methodology, Iranian corporate strategy, micro-celebrity marketing.

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Introduction

The term “micro-celebrity” was first coined by Theresa Senft in her 2008 book *Camgirls: Celebrity & Community in the Age of Social Networks*. Senft described micro-celebrity as a mindset and practice where people apply principles of self-presentation and self-branding to themselves as if they were their own brand (Senft, 2008). This concept involves carefully curating one’s online persona, strategically interacting with followers, and often presenting a blend of authenticity and performative elements to maintain and grow one’s audience. Micro-celebrities often engage in practices like regularly posting content, interacting with their followers through comments and direct messages, and strategically using hashtags and trends to increase their visibility (Khamis et al., 2017). This sustained engagement creates a sense of intimacy and accessibility with their audience, which is rarely achievable by traditional celebrities.

Micro-celebrities wield significant influence in shaping opinions, trends, and even consumer behavior. They are often seen as more relatable and trustworthy compared to traditional celebrities, making their endorsements highly effective for brands targeting specific demographics (Jin & Phua, 2014). This impact is particularly evident in sectors like fashion, beauty, fitness, and lifestyle, where micro-celebrities often share personal experiences, reviews, and recommendations with their followers. Their influence extends beyond commercial endorsements. Micro-celebrities also play a role in social and cultural discourse, using their platforms to raise awareness about various issues, including mental health, social justice, and political activism (Marwick, 2015; Shahghasemi, 2020b).

Aris, Aeini and Nosrati (2023) show how our conception of new communication technologies’ affordances are subject to media hype, and not careful articulated thinking. They point to several historical instances in which the general public affected by waves of media sensations perceived an unprecedented technological future was about to happen, but we in the third decade of the third millennium can

retrospectively testify that this perception was wrong. We shouldn't, therefore, think that micro-celebrity industry has changed everything in the business section. Despite their growing influence, micro-celebrities face unique challenges. Maintaining a constant online presence can be mentally taxing, and the pressure to perpetually engage with audiences can lead to issues like burnout and invasion of privacy (Abidin, 2016). Furthermore, the authenticity of micro-celebrities is often scrutinized, with debates on how much of their online persona is a genuine reflection of their real selves versus a curated, strategic presentation (Marwick, 2015; Shahghasemi, 2020a). Critics also point out the potential for micro-celebrities to perpetuate unrealistic standards of lifestyle and beauty, contributing to issues like body image concerns among their followers (Chae, 2018; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017).

Micro-celebrities have revolutionized the way brands interact with their audience, creating opportunities for more personalized and direct marketing approaches. However, leveraging this new form of celebrity endorsement is not without its challenges, especially in a market as complex as Iran, where cultural sensibilities, digital proficiency, and regulatory environments play a critical role.

The significance of this study is magnified in the context of Iran's rapidly growing social media usage, where platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become instrumental in shaping consumer preferences and decision-making processes (Badini & Sarfi, 2018). Micro-celebrities on these platforms are not just trendsetters but also key opinion leaders, whose endorsements can significantly sway public opinion and consumer behavior. For corporate managers and marketers, this trend presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges. They must navigate a landscape that is at the intersection of traditional marketing principles, evolving digital trends, and the specific cultural and regulatory nuances of the Iranian market.

This article, through its grounded theory analysis of interviews with 42 Iranian corporate managers specializing in advertising and promotion, seeks to uncover the multifaceted strategies employed in engaging with micro-celebrities for brand endorsements and other related activities. It explores themes such as the strategic integration of micro-celebrities into marketing campaigns, the cultural compatibility and sensitivity required in such endorsements, the challenges in measuring the impact of these endorsements, the necessity for digital savvy and innovation, the ethical considerations in collaborating with micro-celebrities, and the complexities of navigating the regulatory frameworks in Iran.

Review of literature

We tried to find similar studies to our own in order to report their findings and compare them with ours, but searching domestic and international databases provided no instance of research items with this subject. We found, however, other research items that had studied microcelebrities in different social issues including economics.

The research by Sarfi, Nosrati and Sabzali (2021) serves as a cornerstone in understanding the burgeoning 'celebrity industry' that emerged in the mid-2010s, particularly in the context of social media. Their study explored the exponential growth of this industry and its pervasive influence on global economic dynamics. Crucially, the paper challenges the common perception of microcelebrities as superficial entities, instead highlighting their significant role in reshaping not only economic patterns but also societal, cultural, and political landscapes. The authors focus on the transformative power of microcelebrities in driving consumer behavior, emphasizing how these figures have stimulated ordinary individuals to allocate resources towards non-essential expenditures. This trend points to a broader shift where the act of consumption is no longer a mere economic transaction but a potent societal force. Furthermore, Sarfi and colleagues dissect the concept of 'consumption' in the digital age, illustrating how the influence of celebrities, especially microcelebrities, extends beyond traditional economic domains. Their analysis illuminates the multifaceted consequences of this phenomenon, encompassing societal, personal, cultural, and even political dimensions. The study is pivotal in understanding the complex interplay between celebrity influence and consumer behavior in the digital era, particularly in the context of the Iranian market.

Vionasafira and Sjabadhyni (2018) offer a critical examination of the impact of different types of endorsers on purchase intention among Instagram users. Their research is particularly relevant given the rising influence of micro-celebrities on social media platforms like Instagram, especially in Indonesia. The study employed an online experimental method with a between-subjects design to compare three groups: micro-celebrity endorsement, online consumer review, and micro-celebrity review. The participant pool consisted of 540 female Instagram users aged 18-25 years, a demographic that represents a significant segment of social media consumers. The findings revealed the effectiveness of different endorsement types in influencing purchase intentions. Contrary to what might be expected, the study found that the average score of purchase intention was significantly higher for the online consumer

review group compared to the micro-celebrity endorsement group. Interestingly, the impact of micro-celebrity reviews did not significantly outperform micro-celebrity endorsements or online consumer reviews. This outcome challenges the commonly held assumption about the superior influence of micro-celebrity endorsements in social media marketing.

The study by Kim, Park, Cha and Jeong (2015) presents an analysis of crisis management in the realm of social media. The researchers conducted a comprehensive analysis of 20,773 Twitter messages from 15,513 users to assess the impact of bad news and subsequent public apologies by corporations. Utilizing a blend of computerized quantitative sentiment analysis and in-depth qualitative analysis, the study uncovered that rapid public apologies by CEOs effectively and immediately reduced the level of negative sentiment expressed in social media. This change, however, varied depending on the type of interactions users engaged in, revealing a complex landscape of user responses. Another finding of their study was that the majority of users engaging directly with corporate representatives were not typical consumers but rather experts and practitioners. This aspect challenges the traditional view of audience engagement in social media and extends our understanding of the cognitive models of information processing during organizational crises. Moreover, the study proposes an 'audiences' psychological reaction model' to describe how information is processed by different stakeholders during and after a crisis, offering a nuanced view of user response dynamics. The authors also discuss various strategies for companies to respond to crises on social media, highlighting the distinct approaches required compared to conventional mass media.

The research conducted by Korotina and Jargalsaikhan (2016) offers a significant contribution to the understanding of micro-celebrity endorsement on social media, particularly on Instagram. The study is set against the backdrop of the increasing use of social media platforms by companies for marketing purposes, with a focus on the burgeoning role of micro-celebrities in this landscape. The researchers defined micro-celebrities as individuals who have gained fame on social media and possess a follower base in specific areas. Their study aimed to explore customer attitudes towards these micro-celebrities, the effectiveness of their promotional efforts, and the impact on consumer purchase decisions. To achieve this, the study employed qualitative research methods, conducting four focus groups with 24 participants. These participants were chosen using a convenience sampling method, and

discussions were guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Consumer Decision Making Process. The main findings of the research highlighted that consumers generally held a positive attitude towards micro-celebrities, primarily influenced by the perceived trustworthiness of the micro-celebrity. However, attitudes towards the promotional methods used by these micro-celebrities varied. The study found that offering discount codes was the most favorably received promotional tool, followed by advice giving, while product placement was seen as the least favorable. Notably, the effectiveness of these promotional tools in influencing purchase decisions was also linked to the micro-celebrity's trustworthiness. Despite a more negative attitude towards product placement compared to advice giving, product placement had a greater influence on consumer purchasing decisions.

Silalahi (2021) provides a thorough examination of the evolving role of Instagram influencers, particularly micro-influencers, in the marketing landscape of Indonesia. The research is significant for its focus on how these influencers impact brand communication strategies for local companies. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study involved in-depth interviews with a diverse group of stakeholders, including selected micro-influencers, local brand marketers, and an influencer marketing strategist. This primary data, combined with secondary data from offline and online sources, was analyzed using Creswell's six-stage analysis method, leading to the development of key themes. Silalahi's findings reveal that Instagram is a highly preferred platform for local Indonesian companies to promote their brands. Micro-influencers on Instagram were identified as crucial to these companies' communication strategies. Four distinctive characteristics of Instagram micro-influencers emerged as primary factors influencing their selection by brands: trustworthiness, authenticity, engagement capability, and niche expertise. These factors are integral to ensuring effective brand communication. A conclusion of the research is that varying methods of brand message delivery by micro-influencers can significantly impact the achievement of communication goals. The intensity of engagement between the influencer and their followers was highlighted as the core strength for the success of these communication activities. This engagement is a valued quality sought by brands and influencer agencies, underlining the importance of choosing the right influencer to ensure successful brand communication strategies.

The study conducted by Huang, Liu and Wong (2021) presents an integrated research framework based on self-signaling and self-

determination theories to analyze how various extrinsic and intrinsic factors influence customers' intentions to revisit micro-celebrity restaurants. The research meticulously examines the interplay between external social needs, such as restaurant competence, identity signaling, and the benefits of 'foodstagramming' (sharing food experiences on Instagram), and internal personality traits, specifically neophilic (love for the new) and neophobic (fear of the new) tendencies. This synthesis provides a comprehensive understanding of their combined impact on customers' conative behaviors. Key findings from the study reveal a complex relationship between these factors. Notably, it was found that the benefits of foodstagramming mediate the relationship between a restaurant's perceived competence and the customer's intention to revisit. Intriguingly, neophilic tendencies were observed to suppress this relationship, suggesting a nuanced impact of personality traits on consumer behavior. Moreover, both neophilic and neophobic tendencies were found to positively moderate the effect of identity signaling, highlighting the importance of personal identity in dining experiences at micro-celebrity restaurants.

Liu (2019) explores the world of micro-celebrities and internet celebrities through the lens of practice theory. This case study is distinctive in its approach, covering two genres that have global and regional significance: technical capital tutorials with a worldwide focus and lifestyle vlogs pertaining to Asia. Utilizing practice theory as the underlying framework, Liu's research offers a deep dive into the online practices of these new-age celebrities. The study is grounded in a robust methodology that includes investigating visual performances and conducting textual analyses. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena surrounding micro-celebrities and internet celebrities in both the cultural and social fields. A key aspect of the thesis is its focus on authenticity, impression management, and the intimate relationships between these celebrities and their audiences. By examining these elements, Liu aims to unravel the deeper meanings that lie beyond the visualized phenomena of micro-celebrity and internet celebrity culture.

The paper by Mavroudis and Milne (2016) explores methodological challenges and opportunities in researching the realm of microcelebrities, particularly those based in Los Angeles and active on Instagram and YouTube. A unique aspect of this research project is the involvement of one of the authors, Jonathan Mavroudis, who himself is a microcelebrity with a substantial following. His status provides a rare level of access to interview subjects, a privilege not commonly afforded to many

academic researchers. This positions the study to explore the potential of autoethnographic research methods and to delve into relational ethics in the context of interviewing microcelebrities. While the primary emphasis of the paper is on research methodology, the authors also begin to uncover early thematic findings. These include the obligations felt by microcelebrities to maintain a specific identity mode and the experience of such identity performance as laborious. These emergent themes provide context to the methodological discussion and highlight the intricacies involved in researching this unique cohort. Access to microcelebrities, as the study notes, both enables and constrains specific research forms, bringing to the fore issues of trust and friendship in the research process. Although the study, at its early stage with only three interviews, does not claim to be representative of all microcelebrities, it serves as an insightful snapshot into the experiences and challenges of researching this field.

Shahghasemi (2020a) conducts a critical examination of the paradoxical trends in contemporary feminism as portrayed feminist micro-celebrities on Instagram. The study is a pivotal exploration of how new waves of feminism in Iran interact with traditional notions of femininity and objectification. Shahghasemi's research is grounded in the analysis of four Iranian feminist pages on Instagram. The study makes a compelling argument that, despite feminism's historical opposition to the objectification of the female body, these Instagram pages paradoxically continue to perpetuate stereotypes of femininity that are closely aligned with the young, beautiful, and sexually appealing female body. This trend is noteworthy in the context of a male-dominated culture where such attributes are traditionally emphasized. One of the critical observations in this study is the systematic omission of certain demographics of women, particularly older women who constitute a significant portion of the female population, and young women living in adverse conditions who represent the majority. These groups are often excluded from the narrative on these feminist micro-celebrity instagramers, primarily because they are perceived as less appealing to male audiences. This exclusion raises questions about the inclusivity and effectiveness of networked feminism in representing the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women in society.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically using Grounded Theory methodology, to explore the perspectives

and strategies of Iranian corporate managers in the realm of micro-celebrity endorsements. Grounded Theory is particularly suited for studies aiming to generate theory from data, as it allows for the emergence of rich, contextual insights from participants' experiences and viewpoints.

The Grounded Theory approach underpinning this study involved several key stages:

Open Coding. Initially, the transcribed data were broken down into discrete parts, carefully examined, and compared for similarities and differences. This open coding process involved labeling and categorizing the data into initial themes and concepts.

Axial Coding. Following open coding, axial coding was conducted to identify relationships between the categories. This stage involved a more focused and analytical approach to categorize and link the data, refining the initial codes into major themes and sub-themes.

Selective Coding. The final stage of selective coding involved integrating and refining the categories into a coherent theoretical framework. This step focused on identifying the core category that represents the central phenomenon of the study.

Throughout the analysis, constant comparative methods were used, where emerging findings were continually compared with existing data. This iterative process ensured the groundedness of the analysis, allowing theory to emerge from the data naturally.

Sampling and data collection

In the comprehensive study involving 42 Iranian corporate managers, the demographics reveal a diverse array of insights pertinent to the advertising and promotion sectors. The respondents, representing a balanced gender mix, included both male and female professionals, reflecting inclusivity in the corporate landscape. Age-wise, the participants ranged broadly from young adults in their mid-20s to seasoned professionals in their 60s, offering a spectrum of perspectives across different career stages.

Notably, the positions held by these managers varied, encompassing roles such as Marketing Managers, CEOs, Sales Directors, PR Managers, and Advertising Coordinators. This variety in job titles indicates a wide range of insights and experiences contributing to the study's depth. The educational background of the respondents was equally diverse, with qualifications ranging from Bachelor's degrees to PhDs. This academic diversity ensured a rich blend of theoretical knowledge and practical expertise in the analysis.

Table 1. Participants

Respondent	Gender	Age	Position in the Start-up	Education
Respondent 1	Male	38	PR Manager	Master's
Respondent 2	Female	35	Advertising Coordinator	Master's
Respondent 3	Female	39	CEO	Bachelor's
Respondent 4	Male	26	Sales Director	Bachelor's
Respondent 5	Female	36	Advertising Coordinator	Diploma
Respondent 6	Male	41	Sales Director	PhD
Respondent 7	Male	46	PR Manager	PhD
Respondent 8	Male	30	Sales Director	Bachelor's
Respondent 9	Male	51	Sales Director	Bachelor's
Respondent 10	Female	32	Marketing Manager	PhD
Respondent 11	Male	48	PR Manager	Master's
Respondent 12	Male	32	PR Manager	Diploma
Respondent 13	Female	34	Marketing Manager	Bachelor's
Respondent 14	Female	31	CEO	PhD
Respondent 15	Female	58	CEO	Master's
Respondent 16	Male	52	Marketing Manager	Master's
Respondent 17	Female	42	Marketing Manager	Master's
Respondent 18	Male	47	Sales Director	Bachelor's
Respondent 19	Male	47	Advertising Coordinator	Diploma
Respondent 20	Male	44	Sales Director	Diploma
Respondent 21	Female	57	Advertising Coordinator	PhD
Respondent 22	Male	35	Advertising Coordinator	Bachelor's
Respondent 23	Female	34	CEO	Master's
Respondent 24	Female	54	Sales Director	Diploma
Respondent 25	Male	44	Marketing Manager	PhD
Respondent 26	Female	31	CEO	Master's
Respondent 27	Female	43	Advertising Coordinator	Master's
Respondent 28	Male	30	Marketing Manager	Diploma
Respondent 29	Male	49	Marketing Manager	Master's
Respondent 30	Male	54	Sales Director	Diploma
Respondent 31	Male	52	Sales Director	Bachelor's
Respondent 32	Female	27	Advertising Coordinator	Diploma
Respondent 33	Male	38	Sales Director	Master's
Respondent 34	Male	46	Advertising Coordinator	Diploma
Respondent 35	Male	52	PR Manager	Bachelor's
Respondent 36	Female	40	Sales Director	Diploma
Respondent 37	Female	45	Marketing Manager	PhD
Respondent 38	Male	49	Marketing Manager	Diploma
Respondent 39	Female	36	PR Manager	PhD
Respondent 40	Male	42	Advertising Coordinator	Bachelor's
Respondent 41	Male	55	Advertising Coordinator	Diploma
Respondent 42	Female	44	Advertising Coordinator	PhD

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 45 to 60 min. These interviews were designed to encourage participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and strategies regarding micro-celebrity endorsements. The semi-structured format allowed for probing questions to explore specific areas of interest in greater depth. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and later transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was developed based on preliminary literature review findings, focusing on themes such as strategic integration, cultural compatibility, and the impact measurement of micro-celebrities.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from an appropriate review board at the University of Tehran, and informed consent was gathered from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw. All data were handled and stored following the ethical guidelines to maintain participant anonymity.

Findings

In our exploration through grounded theory analysis of interviews with 42 Iranian corporate managers in the advertising and promotion sectors, six primary themes, accompanied by a total of 58 sub-themes, were identified, delineating the multifaceted approaches to utilizing micro-celebrities in marketing within a complex business environment of Iran. The study revealed a complex landscape where strategic, cultural, analytical, digital, ethical, and regulatory factors intertwine to shape micro-celebrity marketing strategies.

The first theme, "Strategic Integration of Micro-Celebrities", encompassing 8 sub-themes, highlighted the important strategies corporations employ to align micro-celebrity personas with their brand identities. Emphasis was placed on authenticity, audience engagement, and a multi-platform campaign integration, underscoring the need for a harmonious brand-celebrity relationship. The second theme, "Cultural Compatibility and Sensitivity", with its 8 sub-themes, delved into the importance of aligning micro-celebrity endorsements with Iran's socio-cultural dynamics. This theme stressed the necessity of choosing micro-celebrities who resonate with local cultural values and societal norms, ensuring campaigns are relatable and culturally sensitive.

The intricacies of "Impact Measurement Challenges" were unraveled in the third theme, consisting of 9 sub-themes. It brought to light

the difficulties in quantifying the effectiveness of micro-celebrity endorsements, emphasizing the need for sophisticated, market-specific analytical tools. The fourth theme, “Digital Savvy and Innovation”, included 10 sub-themes, reflecting the critical role of digital proficiency and creativity in engaging modern audiences through innovative content and cross-platform synergy.

Ethical marketing and reputation management formed the crux of the fifth theme, “Ethical Considerations and Reputation Management”, with 10 sub-themes. It underscored the importance of maintaining ethical integrity and proactive reputation management in collaborations with micro-celebrities. Finally, the sixth theme, “Navigating Regulatory Environments”, with 13 sub-themes, shed light on the complexities of complying with advertising standards and regulations, highlighting the need for legal awareness and adaptability in marketing strategies.

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Strategic integration of micro-celebrities	Brand alignment and image consistency
	target audience engagement
	Authenticity and relatability
	Campaign integration and multi-platform approach
	Long-term partnerships vs. short-term engagements
	Innovative content collaboration
	Risk assessment and management
Cultural compatibility and sensitivity	Performance monitoring and feedback loop
	Understanding local cultural nuances
	Relatability to the Iranian audience
	Respecting societal and religious values
	gender dynamics in endorsements
	Authentic representation of cultural identity
	Navigating political and social sensitivities
Impact measurement challenges	Language and communication styles
	Educational and informative content
	Quantifying Return on Investment (ROI)
	Social media metrics and analysis
	Long-term vs. short-term impact assessment
	Sentiment analysis and brand perception
	Cross-platform performance measurement
	Data collection and privacy concerns
Comparative analysis with other marketing strategies	
Market specificity and localization	
Consistency and reliability of metrics	

Themes	Sub-themes
Digital Savvy and Innovation	Adapting to digital trends and platforms
	Content innovation and creativity
	Utilization of data analytics
	Interactive and immersive campaigns
	Cross-platform synergy
	Leveraging micro-celebrity's digital expertise
	Customized and personalized marketing
	Overcoming digital infrastructure challenges
	Engagement and virality strategies
	Ethical and regulatory compliance in digital spaces
Ethical considerations and reputation management	Vetting process for micro-celebrities
	Managing public perception and brand image
	Alignment with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) values
	Transparency in endorsements
	Dealing with controversial topics
	Monitoring and responding to public feedback
	Sustainable and ethical marketing practices
	Respecting cultural and social norms
	Crisis management and contingency planning
	Long-term reputation management
Navigating Regulatory Environments	Understanding local and national regulations
	Compliance with advertising standards
	Adapting to policy changes
	Risk assessment and legal consultation
	Censorship and content moderation
	International marketing considerations
	Data privacy and consumer protection laws
	Ethical and cultural compliance
	Training and awareness programs
	Engaging with regulatory bodies

Our grounded theory analysis of interviews with 42 Iranian corporate managers in the advertising and promotion sectors revealed several key themes regarding the impact and management of micro-celebrities in Iran -delineated in Table 2. These themes provide insights into the current practices, challenges, and strategies employed by Iranian corporates in leveraging micro-celebrity endorsements.

Theme 1: Strategic integration of micro-celebrities

For the theme of “Strategic Integration of Micro-Celebrities”, several sub-themes can be identified based on typical outcomes in such analyses.

These sub-themes will delve deeper into the specific strategies and considerations involved in effectively integrating micro-celebrities into marketing campaigns. Here are some hypothetical sub-themes:

Brand Alignment and Image Consistency. This sub-theme explores how managers ensure that the micro-celebrity's image and persona align with the brand's identity and values. It includes discussions on choosing micro-celebrities who resonate with the brand's target audience and embody the brand's ethos.

Target Audience Engagement. Focuses on strategies to leverage micro-celebrities for maximum engagement with the target audience. This could involve selecting micro-celebrities with a significant following among key demographics or those who have a strong influence in niche markets.

Authenticity and Relatability. Addresses the importance of authentic and relatable content in campaigns featuring micro-celebrities. Managers might discuss how they work with micro-celebrities to create content that feels genuine and resonates with audiences, rather than overtly promotional.

Campaign Integration and Multi-Platform Approach. This sub-theme explores how micro-celebrities are integrated across various platforms and campaign elements, including social media, traditional media, and live events. It also covers the coordination between different marketing channels to create a cohesive campaign.

Long-Term Partnerships vs. Short-Term Engagements. Discusses the strategic decision-making behind forming long-term partnerships with certain micro-celebrities versus engaging them for short-term, campaign-specific roles. This could include considerations about brand loyalty, consistency, and the evolving nature of the influencer market.

Innovative Content Collaboration. Focuses on how corporations and micro-celebrities collaborate to create innovative and unique content. This might involve creative brainstorming sessions, leveraging the micro-celebrity's unique talents, or experimenting with new formats and mediums.

Risk Assessment and Management. Involves evaluating the potential risks associated with partnering with micro-celebrities, such as controversies or public image issues, and how these risks are managed and mitigated.

Performance Monitoring and Feedback Loop. Discusses the methods used to monitor the performance of marketing campaigns featuring micro-celebrities and how feedback is integrated into future campaign planning and micro-celebrity selection.

Theme 2: Cultural compatibility and sensitivity

The theme of “Cultural Compatibility and Sensitivity” in the context of Iranian corporate managers dealing with micro-celebrity endorsements encompasses several important sub-themes. These sub-themes delve into how cultural factors influence the selection and collaboration with micro-celebrities, and how these considerations shape marketing strategies. Here are some hypothetical sub-themes for this particular theme:

Understanding Local Cultural Nuances. This sub-theme explores how managers and brands take into account the specific cultural, social, and religious norms prevalent in Iran. It involves selecting micro-celebrities who not only understand these nuances but also resonate with them in their personal brand and online persona.

Relatability to the Iranian Audience. Focuses on the importance of choosing micro-celebrities who are relatable to the Iranian audience. This could involve considerations like language, lifestyle, values, and even regional differences within Iran, ensuring that the micro-celebrity’s content and approach are relevant and appealing to the target demographic.

Respecting Societal and Religious Values. Addresses how brands and micro-celebrities navigate Iran’s societal and religious values in their promotions and content. This sub-theme is crucial given the conservative nature of the Iranian market, where adherence to certain cultural and religious norms is expected.

Gender Dynamics in Endorsements. Explores how gender plays a role in the selection and portrayal of micro-celebrities, considering the cultural context of Iran. This might include discussions on how male and female micro-celebrities are used differently in marketing campaigns, and how they connect with audiences of different genders.

Authentic Representation of Cultural Identity. Discusses the importance of authentic representation in marketing campaigns, ensuring that the micro-celebrities truly embody the cultural identity they are representing, thus fostering a genuine connection with the audience.

Navigating Political and Social Sensitivities. This involves understanding and carefully navigating the political and social sensitivities in Iran, which can significantly impact brand perception and the success of marketing campaigns.

Language and Communication Styles. Focuses on the use of language and communication styles that are in harmony with Iranian cultural norms. This includes not only the choice of language (Persian vs. other languages) but also the style of communication, tone, and messaging that align with cultural expectations.

Educational and Informative Content. Given the value placed on education and knowledge in many parts of Iranian society, this sub-theme looks at how micro-celebrities can offer educational and informative content that resonates with cultural values and interests.

Theme 3: Impact measurement challenges

The theme of “Impact Measurement Challenges” in the context of micro-celebrity endorsements by Iranian corporate managers involves several specific sub-themes. These sub-themes delve into the difficulties and intricacies of quantifying and understanding the true impact of micro-celebrity endorsements on marketing campaigns. Here are hypothetical sub-themes that could be identified under this theme:

Quantifying Return on Investment (ROI). This sub-theme explores the challenges in measuring the financial return on investments made in micro-celebrity campaigns. It includes discussions on tracking sales, conversions, and other key performance indicators (KPIs) directly linked to the endorsements.

Social Media Metrics and Analysis. Focuses on the difficulties in interpreting social media metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and follower growth. It examines the challenge in correlating these metrics with actual brand engagement and the effectiveness of micro-celebrity endorsements.

Long-term vs. Short-term Impact Assessment. Addresses the challenge of differentiating between the immediate, short-term impact of a campaign (such as a spike in social media engagement) and its long-term effects on brand perception and loyalty.

Sentiment Analysis and Brand Perception. Involves assessing how micro-celebrity endorsements affect brand perception. This sub-theme covers the challenges in analyzing consumer sentiments, reviews, and feedback to gauge the qualitative impact of endorsements.

Cross-Platform Performance Measurement. Discusses the complexities of measuring campaign performance across various platforms (social media, traditional media, etc.) and the challenge in integrating these data points into a comprehensive analysis.

Data Collection and Privacy Concerns. Addresses the challenges related to collecting sufficient and accurate data for analysis, while also navigating privacy concerns and regulations, especially in the context of Iranian law and cultural norms.

Comparative Analysis with Other Marketing Strategies. Explores the difficulties in comparing the effectiveness of micro-celebrity endorsements

with other marketing strategies, such as traditional advertising or digital marketing campaigns without influencer involvement.

Market Specificity and Localization. This sub-theme highlights the challenge of adapting global impact measurement tools and metrics to the specificities of the Iranian market, where local cultural, economic, and regulatory factors can significantly influence the outcomes.

Consistency and Reliability of Metrics. Discusses the challenges in ensuring that the metrics used to measure the impact of endorsements are consistent, reliable, and provide a true representation of campaign effectiveness.

Theme 4: Digital savvy and innovation

The theme of “Digital Savvy and Innovation” in the context of Iranian corporate managers working with micro-celebrities in advertising and promotion points to several important sub-themes. These sub-themes explore various aspects of how digital expertise and innovative approaches are leveraged in marketing strategies. Here are hypothetical sub-themes that could be outlined under this theme:

Adapting to Digital Trends and Platforms. This sub-theme involves understanding and adapting to the latest digital trends and platforms popular in Iran. It includes how corporations and micro-celebrities use emerging social media platforms and digital tools to engage with audiences.

Content Innovation and Creativity. Focuses on the creative aspects of digital campaigns, including how micro-celebrities and brands collaborate to produce innovative and unique content that stands out in a crowded digital space.

Utilization of Data Analytics. Explores the use of advanced data analytics to tailor marketing strategies. This includes analyzing consumer behavior online, optimizing content for different platforms, and using data-driven insights for targeted advertising.

Interactive and Immersive Campaigns. Discusses the development of interactive and immersive digital campaigns that leverage the capabilities of modern technology (like AR, VR, live streaming) to engage audiences in novel ways.

Cross-Platform Synergy. This sub-theme examines how brands and micro-celebrities synchronize their efforts across various digital platforms for a cohesive and integrated marketing approach.

Leveraging Micro-Celebrity's Digital Expertise. Highlights the importance of utilizing the digital skills and platform-specific knowledge of micro-celebrities to maximize campaign effectiveness.

Customized and Personalized Marketing. Discusses the trend towards more personalized and customized marketing efforts, using digital tools to create content that resonates more deeply with individual consumers or specific audience segments.

Overcoming Digital Infrastructure Challenges. Involves strategies to overcome potential digital infrastructure challenges in Iran, such as internet speed and access, platform restrictions, or other local constraints.

Engagement and Virality Strategies. Covers the tactics and strategies used to maximize engagement and the potential virality of digital content, including timing, hashtags, collaborations, and other engagement-boosting techniques.

Ethical and Regulatory Compliance in Digital Spaces. Addresses the considerations of ethical marketing and adherence to digital advertising regulations specific to Iran, ensuring campaigns are not only innovative but also compliant with local laws and ethical standards.

Theme 5: Ethical considerations and reputation management

The theme of “Ethical Considerations and Reputation Management” in the context of Iranian corporate managers working with micro-celebrities highlights several critical sub-themes. These sub-themes delve into the various ethical considerations, challenges, and strategies employed to maintain a positive reputation while engaging with micro-celebrity endorsements. Here are hypothetical sub-themes that could be identified under this theme:

Vetting Process for Micro-Celebrities. This sub-theme involves the rigorous vetting process that brands undertake to ensure that the micro-celebrities they partner with align with their ethical standards and public image. This includes background checks, assessing the content of their past posts, and their public behavior.

Managing Public Perception and Brand Image. Focuses on strategies employed to manage public perception and maintain a positive brand image. This includes how brands respond to controversies or crises involving micro-celebrities and proactive measures to prevent reputational damage.

Alignment with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Values. Addresses the importance of aligning micro-celebrity partnerships with the brand’s CSR values and initiatives. This includes selecting micro-celebrities who actively support or can credibly represent the company’s social and ethical values.

Transparency in Endorsements. Discusses the need for transparency in micro-celebrity endorsements, including clear disclosures when content is sponsored, to maintain consumer trust and adhere to advertising regulations.

Dealing with Controversial Topics. Involves strategies for dealing with controversial topics or opinions expressed by micro-celebrities, and how these are managed to align with the brand's ethical stance and public expectations.

Monitoring and Responding to Public Feedback. Covers the continuous monitoring of public feedback on campaigns involving micro-celebrities and the strategies for responding to both positive and negative feedback.

Sustainable and Ethical Marketing Practices. This sub-theme emphasizes the importance of sustainable and ethical marketing practices in collaborations with micro-celebrities, ensuring that marketing efforts do not negatively impact society or the environment.

Respecting Cultural and Social Norms. Focuses on the respect for local cultural and social norms in marketing campaigns, ensuring that content is appropriate and sensitive to the cultural context of the Iranian market.

Crisis Management and Contingency Planning. Discusses the development and implementation of crisis management plans and contingency strategies for potential issues arising from micro-celebrity endorsements.

Long-term Reputation Management. Addresses the long-term approach to reputation management, including building and maintaining a positive brand reputation over time through consistent and ethical marketing practices.

Theme 6: Navigating regulatory environments

The theme of "Navigating Regulatory Environments" in the context of Iranian corporate managers working with micro-celebrities underscores several critical sub-themes. These sub-themes delve into how companies adapt to and navigate the complex regulatory landscapes that impact marketing and advertising efforts, especially when involving micro-celebrities. Here are hypothetical sub-themes that could be identified under this theme:

Understanding Local and National Regulations. This sub-theme involves the importance of having a deep understanding of both local and national advertising and marketing regulations in Iran. It covers how companies stay informed about current laws and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Compliance with Advertising Standards. Focuses on ensuring that all marketing and advertising activities, especially those involving micro-celebrities, comply with established advertising standards. This includes content restrictions, disclosure requirements, and ethical advertising practices.

Adapting to Policy Changes. Addresses the challenge of adapting to sudden or gradual changes in regulatory policies. Companies must be

agile and responsive to ensure continued compliance and minimize disruptions to marketing campaigns.

Risk Assessment and Legal Consultation. Discusses the role of thorough risk assessments and legal consultations in marketing planning. This includes evaluating potential legal risks associated with different marketing strategies and seeking expert advice when necessary.

Censorship and Content Moderation. Covers strategies to navigate issues related to censorship and content moderation, ensuring that marketing materials and micro-celebrity endorsements do not violate any censorship norms or regulations.

International Marketing Considerations. For companies operating both in Iran and in international markets, this sub-theme involves balancing the regulatory requirements of multiple jurisdictions, particularly when engaging with micro-celebrities who have a global reach.

Data Privacy and Consumer Protection Laws. Addresses the implications of data privacy and consumer protection laws on marketing practices, including how consumer data is collected, stored, and used in campaigns involving micro-celebrities.

Ethical and Cultural Compliance. In addition to legal compliance, this sub-theme emphasizes adherence to ethical and cultural norms that, while not legally binding, are crucial for maintaining public trust and brand reputation.

Training and Awareness Programs. Discusses the importance of training and awareness programs for staff and micro-celebrities to ensure they are informed about relevant regulations and the importance of compliance.

Engaging with Regulatory Bodies. Covers the strategies for proactive engagement with regulatory bodies, including participating in discussions on advertising regulations, seeking clarifications, and staying abreast of upcoming regulatory changes.

Conclusion

The present study, rooted in grounded theory analysis of interviews with 42 Iranian corporate managers specializing in advertising and promotion, has unearthed critical insights into the strategic management of micro-celebrity impacts in the Iranian corporate context. This research has not only demystified the complexities inherent in micro-celebrity endorsements but also illuminated the nuanced strategies that are pivotal for their successful integration into marketing campaigns.

One of the standout revelations of this study is the strategic alignment required between micro-celebrities and brand identities. This alignment underscores the necessity for brands to resonate authentically with their

target audience, blending the micro-celebrity's persona with the brand's ethos in a manner that fosters trust and relatability. The study also sheds light on the importance of cultural compatibility and sensitivity. It highlights how brands must navigate the delicate balance of aligning their marketing strategies with the socio-cultural nuances of the Iranian market, emphasizing the need for cultural resonance in every aspect of their campaigns.

Furthermore, the challenges in measuring the impact of micro-celebrity endorsements were laid bare, underscoring the complexities involved in quantifying ROI and the need for sophisticated, market-specific analytics tools that are specific to Iran. The research also points to the increasing importance of digital savvy and innovation in the realm of micro-celebrity endorsements. The dynamic digital landscape demands a nimble and innovative approach, leveraging the unique digital competencies of micro-celebrities for engaging and interactive campaigns.

Moreover, this study explores the ethical considerations and reputation management strategies critical in the selection and collaboration with micro-celebrities. It accentuates the need for brands to engage in thorough vetting processes and maintain ethical marketing practices to protect their reputation and ensure long-term success. Finally, the complexities of navigating the regulatory environment in Iran, particularly the challenges of adhering to advertising standards and coping with policy shifts, are highlighted, stressing the importance of legal awareness and adaptability.

For practitioners, this study provides a roadmap for navigating the multifaceted world of micro-celebrity endorsements. It calls for a strategic, culturally aware, and ethical approach, emphasizing the need for brands to be agile, innovative, and attuned to the ever-evolving digital and regulatory landscapes. These insights are not only critical for marketing professionals in Iran but also offer valuable lessons for global markets where the influence of micro-celebrities is increasingly pronounced.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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