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HOW SUSTAINABILITY INFLUENCERS DRIVE GREEN LIFESTYLE ADOPTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE PROCESS OF GREEN LIFESTYLE ADOPTION EXPLAINED THROUGH THE LENSES OF THE MINORITY INFLUENCE MODEL AND SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

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ABSTRACT: Social media permeated almost every aspect of our lives. As it enables consumer socialization through peer communication, it has the power to influence and encourage adopting behaviors that might contradict beliefs held by our offline reference group (or the majority). For instance, green lifestyle which promotes conservation and non-purchase behaviors stands in a stark contrast to the cult of consumption held by majority of people in many developed countries. This research asks how sustainability advocates on social media drive their followers to embrace the minority view i.e. green lifestyle. To map the process of green lifestyle adoption, we draw from real experiences of social media users. We examined netnographic data from over 8000 Facebook posts of green lifestyle advocates from the past 3 years, and interviewed their followers. To contribute to the existing body of knowledge, we identify the key elements of social media communication that drive green lifestyle adoption. By the two combing two seemingly contrasting theories, i.e. minority influence theory (MIT) and social learning theory (SLT), we provide a more complete picture of the process of green lifestyle adoption and reveal how both types of influence suggested by the theories, informational influence (II) and normative influence (NI), impact customers at different stages of new behavior adoption. We open the debate on how minority influence can be exerted in an online setting. This research offers a number of practical implications for social agents and policymakers that promote green behaviors.

KEY WORDS: minority influence theory, social learning theory, green lifestyle adoption, social media, green lifestyle advocates

1. INTRODUCTION

While many people proclaim that they care about the environment, neither environmental concerns nor positive attitudes toward green products translate into behavioral changes (Kumar, 2017). Only 1 in 5 of the 80% individuals, who claim that they care about the environment, is ready to make additional effort and alter daily habits to reduce ecological footprint (GIA 2017). The key barriers to green purchases are availability, high cost, lack of awareness, perceived lack of effectiveness (Pagiaslis & Krontalis 2014; White & Simpson 2013), social pressure and feminization of sustainable behaviors (Bennett & Williams, 2011; Brough, et al. 2016). Moreover, as greenwashing resulted in consumer cynicism of green products and distrust, positioning a product as green or ethical can even negatively influence purchase intentions (Luchs, et al. 2010).

Therefore, many consumers are reluctant to use sustainable product alternatives and have negative attitudes toward green products (Luchs, et al. 2010). Therefore, environmental concern is insufficient to provoke behavior change. As individuals adopting green behaviors remain a minority (GIA, 2017) encouraging people to embrace green behaviors remains one of the biggest challenges (Peattie, 2011). Moreover, scholarship endorses the idea that 'the way through the environmental crisis created by excessive and unsustainable consumption, is yet more consumption' (Peattie & Crane, 2005, p. 368). Without an adequate analysis of behaviors that focus on non-purchase

behaviors, we predispose individuals toward consumption rather than conservation.

Despite excellent research on barriers to purchasing green products, to date, little work thoroughly examined non-purchase behaviors (product sharing, maintenance, disposal, recycling, and reuse). Thus, the research on what drives people to adopt sustainable behaviors remains an understudied area and calls were made to study how people adopt green lifestyle (Kotler, 2011, Goldstein, et al. 2008, Mick, 2006). Kotler (2011), Goldstein, et al. (2008) and Mick (2006) call for better understanding the factors driving green lifestyle adoption, with emphasis on outlining the process of behavior adoption over time (Kumar, 2016). Another call recommends studying the relevance of social media in the promotion of green lifestyle (Kumar, 2016; Meyers, et al. 2000) with emphasis on whether this influence reaches outside the online setting and translates into sustained behavioral adoption offline. Yilmaz and Youngreen (2016) call for studying how minority influence occurs in computer-mediated communities.

Thus, to answer these calls, we study how green lifestyle influencers exert minority influence in social media. As netnography is the most suitable methodology to employ when studying online communities (Kozinets, et al. 2010), we scrutinize netnographic data for opinion leader–follower and follower–follower social interactions on social media platforms. By doing so we are able to identify the key elements of social media communication that drive green lifestyle adoption and

outline the process of green lifestyle adoption and reveal the role of informational and NI at different stages of behavior adoption.

While previous research looked at barriers or motivations for buying green products, this study focuses on how to make people open to adopting green lifestyle, which involves both consumption and non-purchase behaviors. Our investigation of communication-specific factors that drive green lifestyle adoption and behavior adoption process bears three significant contributions. First, the findings help academics and practitioners to understand the key factors of social media communication driving green lifestyle adoption. By combing two seemingly contrasting theories (MIT and SLT) we provide a complete picture of the process of consumer behavior change and green lifestyle adoption. We also gain a deeper understanding of how the minority influence is exerted in computer-mediated communities and extend the MIT to online context.

2. GREEN LIFESTYLE

As research focuses on buying green products (Bonini & Oppenheim, 2008; Lin & Chang, 2012; White, et al. 2012), "the paradoxical proposition is that the way through the environmental crisis created by excessive and unsustainable consumption, is yet more consumption" (Peattie & Crane 2005, 368). Therefore, while previous studies focused solely on buying environmentally-friendly products, this research considers green behaviors beyond consumption.

Following Kotler and Armstrong (2009) definition of green marketing as "marketing that meets the present needs of consumers and businesses while also preserving or enhancing the ability of future generations to meet their needs", we define green lifestyle as a lifestyle that involves actions which aim at minimizing or eliminating negative effects of our behavior on the environment. Thus, it involves using renewable energy sources, buying products that are environmentally friendly (Pagiaslis & Krontalis, 2014), carrying a reusable coffee cup, bringing a reusable grocery bag, reducing the number of plastic bought, limiting produced waste, recycling and reusing, buying locally, or eating a plant-based diet.

3. GREEN LIFESTYLE AS A MINORITY VIEW

Majority of the customers in many developed countries care whether or not the company they buy from is environmentally-conscious (e.g. Bonnell, 2015). However, this environmental concern is "an insufficient condition for the enactment of pro-environmental behaviors" (Cleveland, et al. 2012, p. 294), and does not result in behavioral changes with consumers embracing green lifestyle remaining a minority.

Consumers are not ready to pay the premium for sustainable products (White & Simpson 2013) and are concerned about their effectiveness (Luchs et al. 2010). This so called 'sustainability liability' oftentimes results in negative attitudes toward green products (Bonini & Oppenheim, 2008; Lin & Chang, 2012; White, et al. 2012). The negative attitudes are further intensified by companies using greenwashing to take advantage of environmentally oriented customers (Luchs et al. 2010; Peattie & Crane 2005).

Minority is defined, following Yilmaz and Youngreen (2016, 693), as "members of a group who have or share ideas that are not held or shared by most (i.e. the majority) group members" and adopted, or are trying to adopt, green lifestyle. Majority in

the context of this paper is society at large consisting of individuals who do not embrace green lifestyle.

Often ignored barrier to green lifestyle adoption is social influence. Bennet and Williams (2011, p. 40) show that in the U.S., those who adopt green lifestyle feel "ostracized from their neighbors, families, and friends, as if they joined a crazy cult or religion (…) are besieged by unwanted attention at parties". They feel marginalized and perceived as deviant. The actions of their social circle are in line with social psychology which suggest that majority tries to marginalize those who adopt the deviant behavior (Bazarova, et al. 2012). Individuals who hold minority views are ridiculed if they maintain their behavior despite the NI of majority (Schachter, 1951). Social pressures imparted by community members prevent individuals from escaping the majority norms and commonly held perceptions of normality. This NI prevents them from publically embracing eco-friendly behaviors.

Moreover, for 82% of the respondents "going green is more feminine than masculine" (Bennett & Williams, 2011). Because of this green-feminine stereotype, the social barriers to green lifestyle adoption are even greater for men (Brough et al. 2016). The feminization of green lifestyle prevents them from publically adopting behaviors such as bringing a grocery bags or a reusable coffee mug. The effect imparted by this social barrier is reflected in lower percentages of men adopting green behaviors than women (Bennett & Williams 2011; Brough et al. 2016).

Therefore, social pressures and feminization, unwillingness to make an extra effort, negativity surrounding green companies coupled with other barriers to green purchases such as availability, pricing, and lack of awareness (Bennett & Williams 2011; Bonini & Oppenheim 2008; Brough, et al. 2016) result in market share of sustainable products still remaining low (Luchs et al. 2010; GIA 2017). While previous studies focused on barriers to purchasing environmentally-friendly products, this research looks at how to drive green lifestyle adoption, and thus provides suggestions how these barriers can be overcome.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A VENUE FOR EXPRESSING MINORITY INFLUENCE

As social media becomes a part of our daily lives, it also plays an important role in influencing behavior change (Adewuyi & Adefemi, 2016) and is used to spread awareness of many important issues. Peer communication on social media allows consumers to connect with their peers and influence each other (Kozinets, et al. 2010). Therefore, social media facilitates consumer socialization i.e. processes through which people "acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974, p. 3; Wang et al. 2012). Online opinion leaders facilitate knowledge dissemination and new information processing and drive new behavior adoption. This makes social media an important venue for advocating sustainability as it offers unique conditions for minority influence (Yilmaz & Youngreen 2016).

Previous research suggests that the influence exerted by the minority is stronger in remote (including written) context than in face-to-face context of immediate interactions (Dennis, et al. 1997; Wood, et al. 1994). Social media communication offers interactivity, and asynchrony of communication, and thus might yield stronger influence than offline face-to-face communications (Dennis, et al. 1997; Yilmaz & Youngreen 2016). The ability to remain anonymous enhances the influence as it gives individuals the possibility to freely voice their

opinions (Spears, et al. 2002; Wood, et al. 1994). Depending on the social media platform, users might not remain totally anonymous, but at the very least they have a sense of social anonymity due to the separation of time and space (Christopherson, 2007). The interactive nature of social media allows for the discussion and consistent argumentation (Yilmaz & Youngreen 2016).

As previous studies involving minority influence focused on face-to-face context (Meyers et al. 2000), our understanding of how influence is exerted in an online setting remains limited (e.g. theoretical papers of Bazarova et al. 2012; Yilmaz & Youngreen 2016). This study addresses this gap. As social media allows for studying behavior change in the natural context it occurs, rather than in a laboratory setting, we offer a reliable insight into the process of behavior adoption, and, identify key elements of social media communication that drive this process.

5. METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research design follows multiple case study approach with embedded design through multiple levels of analysis within a single study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). In order to maximize the utility from the small sample in case study research (Yin, 2003), the social media pages were chosen based on their differences in terms of the overarching theme they are devoted to (See Table 1), and the size (popularity) of the page. Content on social media pages posted by green lifestyle advocates and peer interactions (comments) were analyzed.

The data was collected through netnography, which is defined as "written account resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from on-line, computer mediated, or Internet-based communications, where both the field work and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology" (Kozinets 2002, p. 62). Netnography, which employs naturalistic insights from naturally occurring conversations, is an unobtrusive tool that provides access to objective information on the occurring behaviors (Kozinets 2002). It also allows us to gain interpretive depth of the participatory study without direct participation in the online community (Kozinets, et al. 2010). Studying netnographic data from social media pages allowed us to analyze occurring interactions. By analyzing user comments, we were able to evaluate the effectiveness of minority social media communication.

Case selection

First, suitable green lifestyle influencers were identified. To choose social media communities appropriate for the research objectives, several types of social media platforms were considered (blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Snapchat, and YouTube). Hundreds of pages were identified through Google search, as well as, searches conducted on those social media platforms utilizing keywords "green", "organic", "sustainable", "bio", "natural", "environmental", "ecological". To narrow down the number of green lifestyle influencers, several criteria were employed (1) the communication language is English, (2) the page is public, (3) the comments are allowed, (3) it is not an online store, (4) it is not a page of a paper magazine, (4) its main purpose is not commercial (less than 20% of the last month contain affiliate links to products), (5) the page is not administered by an anonymous person/entity, and (6) the page is active (most recent post is not older than 2 weeks). This process narrowed the number of potential pages to over 300 pages. Approximately 70 of them were duplicates (the same page maintained across different social media platforms e.g. a blog having its Facebook page, and Twitter account). Around 50 existed for less than a year, or published sporadically and were removed. The remaining 180 pages focused on the following topics: green beauty care, health, food, or wide range of generally green or sustainability-related lifestyle topics. In the next phase, from over 180 pages, 4 cases were chosen based on the following criteria (1) the page is present across at least 3 social media platforms (all pages that met that criteria were present on Facebook), (2) the page has at least 10,000 'likes' on Facebook, followers on Twitter or equivalent on other platforms, (3) the ratio of 'people talking about this' to the number of 'likes' is at least 2%, (4) at least one of the social media communication pages (from the single case) exists for over 3 years. This narrowed the search to 8. To maximize the utility of the case study data, the final (5) criteria was that each of the cases chosen represents one of the following areas: beauty, health, food, or green/sustainable lifestyle in general, and varying numbers of followers and intensity of posting activity.

Table 1 summarizes the information on the social media green lifestyle advocates. The analysis involved a period of three years. The longitudinal character of the study facilitates the analytic depth of the analysis and provides rich data for the theory development (Kozinets, et al. 2010). The final data consists of a total of 8,045 Facebook posts, and 138,181 comments under the posts.

Table 1. Key characteristics of the cases

CASE	A	B	C	D
Main focus	Organic food	Organic beauty care	Holistic health	Green and sustainable lifestyle in general
Social media presence	Blog Facebook Twitter Pinterest Instagram YouTube	Blog Facebook Twitter Instagram Pinterest	Facebook Twitter Pinterest Google +	Blog Facebook Pinterest Google + Instagram
Years existing	6,5	4,5	7	6
Number of followers	> 500,000	> 11,000	> 44,000	> 270,000
Average number of posts per week[a,b]	17	6	15	9
No. of posts and comments[a]	2,799 posts 81,954 comments	729 posts 3,949 comments	2,293 posts 1,725 comments	2,224 posts 50,553 comments

| Key communication strategies | Meal recipes 'What I eat in a day' 30 day challenge Q&As Benefits Foods for … Eating healthy on budget Product recommendations | Inspirational quotes Recipes Beauty tips Personal reflections Consequences of not-natural living Benefits Product reviews | Food medicine Health benefits of… Reasons why you should… Foods to treat and prevent… Exercise Natural remedies Reviews | Meal recipes Cosmetics recipes Financial tips Organization tips Benefits Do-it-yourself projects Product recommendations |

[a] presented for Facebook pages

[b] based on the last 12 months

Data analysis

Data analysis followed netnographic methods (Kozinets, 2002; Kozinest, et al. 2010) and ethnographic approach (Watson, 2011), we also draw from Yin (2003), and Eisenhardt (1989) approach to case study research. The data was captured and archived with NVivo11 NCapture. All posts and comments were classified into files devoted to each case and categorized based on the social media platform (Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube), and were classified as posts (posted by the page owner i.e. green lifestyle advocate) or comments (submitted by readers, or advocate's replies to readers).

Data analysis entailed constantly moving between posts, comments and coding diary, and constantly comparing the data and the theory. The analysis focused on identifying theoretical elements, which remained constant across all studied cases (Van Maanen, 1983), this iterative process was continued after we gained full confidence of providing a thick description of the communication, and the process of green lifestyle adoption. Comparisons and reporting of the evidence followed Sutton and Vallahan (1987). Triangulation of multiple investigators was used as recommended by Eisenhardt (1989). Multiple meetings with 4 employed research assistants took place to discuss the emerging theory. The proposed theoretical elements are grounded in the evidence from the netnographic material including posts and comments from each case. Also the model of the minority consumer influence and learning on social media (Figure 2) is a result of the constant comparison of the data from all four cases. After this procedure, we categorized the data using minority influence and social learning theories.

Three graduate students provided member checks which led to revisions. After the preliminary draft was completed, all cases were requested to read the findings and submit their comments. Two of them provided comments within three weeks. They presented favorable comments and confirmed that presented netnography constitutes an accurate depiction of the way they communicate the content. We recruited 12 users from among the followers commenting on social media pages in exchange for a small compensation. 7 users returned their comments and agreed to follow up with an interview. They presented favorable comments and confirmed that the presented netnography is a fair presentation of how they feel social media facilitates their peer learning and how it encouraged their green lifestyle adoption.

6. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Minority Influence Theory

According to the MIT, minority can influence the majority in spite of its ideas not conforming to widely accepted social norms. On the one hand, majority exerts normative social influence through rewards and punishments, the basis of the majority influence is public compliance (Schachter, 1951). Generally accepted social norms provide cues of what is the effective behavior in specific situations (Schultz, et al. 2007). On the other hand, minority cannot exert normative social influence, because the majority is rarely concerned of what minority thinks of it. Therefore, informational social influence is the basis for the minority influence (Moskovici & Nemeth, 1974). II occurs as minority provides the majority with new ideas and information that stimulates majority members to re-think their views.

MIT suggests that informational social influence takes place through communication that employs four strategies (1) behavioral style, (2) thinking style, (3) non-dogmatism, and (4) identification.

The most critical aspect of the behavioral style is consistency – a consistent and unchanging in its views minority is more successful at changing the majority views than inconsistent minority (Bazarova et al. 2012; Moscovici, et al. 1969; Meyers, et al. 2000).

The style of thinking refers to the minority's ability to involve the majority members in systematic thinking. Systematic thinking, in contrast to superficial thinking, involves considering arguments for and against the debated behavior (Bazarova, et al. 2012; Nemeth, 1986; Yilmaz & Youngreen 2016). Thus, the minority is more influential when it can get the majority to discuss the minority arguments (Nemeth, 1986).

Flexible and compromising minorities that have moderate rather than extreme views and cooperative attitude are more likely to influence the majority than rigid and dogmatic minorities (Bazarova et al. 2012).

Lastly, identification refers to the minority's ability to have the majority group identify with the minority. When the majority identifies with the minority, the minority views are more likely to be taken seriously (Maass, et al., 1982). By applying these four strategies minority is able to exert II over majority.

Social learning theory

SLT emphasizes the environmental sources of learning and NI. Through socialization process, communication with peers allows for the diffusion of behavioral norms (Moschis & Moore, 1984; De Gregorio & Sung 2010). Consumer peer communication influences our cognitive, affective and behavioral attitudes (Ward, 1974). NI is exerted through (1) modeling, and (2) reinforcement and social interaction.

In the modeling phase, a learner imitates the behavior of the socialization agent. This imitation takes place under specific circumstances – the social agent is successful, s/he demonstrates the skill learner is lacking, and the learner recognizes that the

social agent's behavior is beneficial to the agent (McLeod & O'Keefe, 1972).

In the reinforcement stage, the imitation of new lifestyle meets positive and/or negative reinforcement from socialization agents (Churchil & Moschis, 1979; McLeod & O'Keefe, 1972). Social interaction involves the interactions with the socialization agents and other community members through which "characteristic social norms involved in the person's interactions with other significant persons shape the individual's attitudes, values, and behavior" (Churchil & Moschis, 1979, p. 25).

Summary of the Theoretical Basis

According to the MIT, minority can influence majority by exerting II through properly executed communication. According to SLT, it is the NI that drives socialization and behavior adoption (Figure 1).
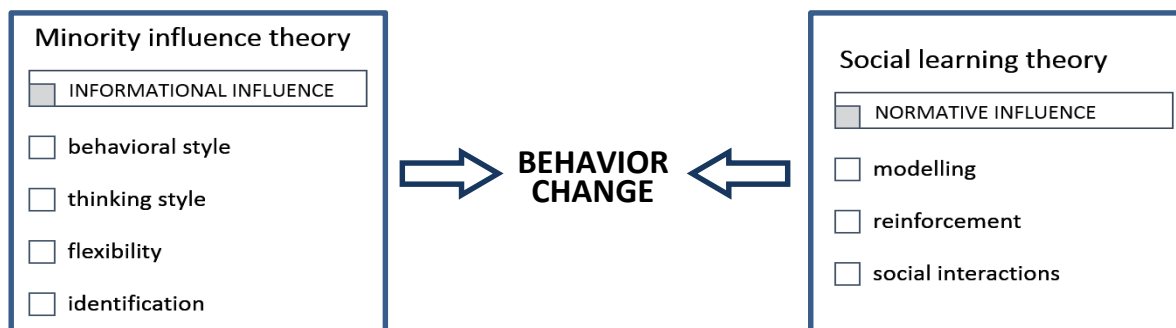

Figure 1. MIT versus SLT

By integrating MIT and SLT, the main premise of the theoretical model (Figure 2) is that by deploying II, social agents (here green lifestyle influencers) stimulate initial modelling behavior, which is then reinforced by the NI through peer communication and stronger immersion in the community. Our theoretical model indicates that both informational and normative influences sustain and strengthen each other over time through peer learning, and socialization process. Thus, we show that the two theories complement each other in explaining the green lifestyle adoption.

7. FINDINGS

Minority communication style

The MIT suggest four factors related to how minority's views should be communicated. To identify the key elements of social media communication that drive green lifestyle adoption, we analyze the social media content posted by green lifestyle influencers.

Green lifestyle influencers publish their content on Facebook several times a week. Their content consists of textual posts accompanied by photos, links to their blog posts, guest posts, or videos. Topics involve (a) reviews of green products and recommendations, (b) do-it-yourself (DIY) recipes for natural cosmetics, laundry detergents, meals, smoothies, (c) tips on how to maintain green lifestyle while traveling (e.g. how to remain 'waste-free' when going on a trip), and at work (e.g. how to be raw vegan when working at 9-to-5 job); (d) 14-30 day challenges (e.g. 30 days smoothie challenge), (e) "What happens when…" posts (e.g. What happens when you quit eating diary), (f) tips on how to deal with negative comments or family/peer pressure to 'act normal', and (g) personal transformation e.g. by comparing photographs from the past and now.

Thus, the posts by green lifestyle advocates are rich in information, consistent with the premise of MIT that minorities exert II. In what follows, we focus on the communication style of green lifestyle advocates and how they exert II.

Consistency

The influencers' social media pages have been maintained for 4.5-7 years and continuously support the same message. The claims about the benefits from adopting green lifestyle are consistently communicated across social media platforms used. Posts on several platforms serve to convey the same message, e.g. "I eat this way, and as a result, I feel good, have energy to do all the things you see me doing". The posts show how the benefits are applicable to many areas of life. This strategy is reflected in e.g. Facebook posts with information and recipes accompanied by Snapchat or Twitter posts that show the advocate in the context of everyday situations.

The MIT suggests that consistent minorities are more successful at persuading majority than inconsistent minorities (Moscovici, 1980). In the case of our green lifestyle influencers, consistent communication across different social media channels reinforces the message and leaves the follower with an impression that one can have a normal life, look healthy and taken care of even when living a green life.

Non-dogmatic approach

In their communication, influencers avoid phrases that would convey the message 'this is the only way'. They say instead 'this makes me happy, I am sure it would make you feel good, I recommend trying at least one such meal a day'. They encourage their followers to take it 'one step at a time', e.g. pick just one meal per day, try just one DIY project a week, live waste-free for just one day a week and not judge those who are not fully committed to living green.

They show that they have friends or family members who do not share their lifestyle and do not to isolate themselves from those who do not conform to their views. It is also notable how they deal with internet bullies and critics who attack their message. They respond with compassion, and call for not condemning those who e.g. do not recycle, or eat animal products.

Influencers also do not pretend that adopting green lifestyle is easy and share challenges they face. Among those challenges are: dealing with jokes at work, trying to maintain green lifestyle during travel, or family opposition to living green. Their content is full of examples how they overcome these challenges.

MIT suggests that non-dogmatic minorities which have cooperative attitude and are moderate in their views are more successful at influencing the majority rather than dogmatic

minorities (Moscovici, 1980). As reflected in the examples above, green lifestyle influencers adopt non-dogmatic approach in their communication on social media, avoid assertive reactions toward critics and are honest about challenges they face. Assertive messages are less persuasive especially when relating to individuals who are not convinced that the minority cause is right (Kronrod et al. 2012; Quick & Cinsidine 2008). Acknowledging the inconvenience, cost-related and other challenges leads to an increase in compliance behavior (Paulson & Roloff, 1997; Meneses & Palacio 2007).

Involving the majority in systematic thinking

It is notable that influencers' communication focuses on personal benefits from adopting green behavior rather than on the benefits for the environment at large. Content published by the green lifestyle influencers provides anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness and benefits of green behaviors. They demonstrate positive effects of adopting the lifestyle on their life, body, mind, health, and family. At times, the posts are supported by links to academic research, or articles and blog posts by medical doctors. There are also many posts on 'Why I do…' (e.g. Why I use only natural products, Why I buy from the local farmers' market"), 'Why I do not...' (e.g. Why I do not drink store-bought juice, Why I do not eat animal products), or 'I have been … [living this lifestyle] for X years – is it time to change?'.

This argumentative communication style prevents the majority members from automatically dismissing the minority's message (Yilmaz & Youngreen, 2016). Being exposed to the minority view can challenge the validity of the majority's views in the eyes of the majority member, and influence how the majority members think (Moskovici & Nemeth, 1974; Nemeth, 1986). The following quotes show how followers respond to this kind of posts:

"I somehow discovered her YouTube video, which opened my eyes, I then binge-watched several hours of them that night, then started following on Facebook, it totally explained everything. This got me thinking. Over time I have been reading more and more…" (Informant 1)

"(…) so this really made me think that perhaps what I put on my body and inside my body makes me feel not so great (…) at that point I did not care about the environment, this came later when I started thinking about my choices and how 'I vote with my money' on the way" (Informant 5)

According to MIT, the minority has to get the majority to consider minority arguments. Followers describe how they (skeptical at first), started to consider arguments posted by the green lifestyle advocate and think of their own lifestyle choices and how those choices affect how they feel. Therefore, content communicated by green lifestyle influencers encourages systematic rather than superficial thinking. Moreover, systematic thinking implies involvement, and high involvement results in transferring of the attitudes and intentions to actual choices (Tarkiainen & Sudqvist, 2009).

Encouraging identification

Rather than acting like celebrities, influencers try to communicate that they are just like everyone else. They show that they have normal social life in spite of their restricting lifestyle. On Snapchat or Twitter, influencers show that they do the same things others do. For instance, they present 'a moment in life' – a capture of the issues we all identify with. They also talk about everyday struggles such as caring for the family (e.g. "I have not posted yesterday… kids are returning to school"), or

managing limited money (e.g. 'eating healthy on budget series'). This helps learners identify with the advocate and recognize that they share everyday challenges. Influencers also address many of the concerns regarding green products, e.g. they show that a natural cream does not have to look gross, that an environmentally-friendly detergent can be effective, or that one can maintain minimalistic wardrobe and look trendy without creating unnecessary waste. They show that they share and understand the concerns surrounding green products. Their early posts usually present a personal story of a struggle related to health-issues (A, C), skin and health issues (A, B), burnout (C, D), with which many of the learners and newcomers to the community can identify. As one of the followers puts it:

(…) I really appreciate her authenticity, she shows her vulnerable side, this makes you feel how human she is, yet I am learning so much from her, and there are so many people who comment and thank her for not only the message she spreads but how 'normal' and authentic she is. (…) I think seeing her in everyday situations makes you think 'hey' we are not that different from other people, this sort of normalizes the whole thing". (Informant 6)

According to the MIT, for the majority members to consider the minority arguments, they have to identify with the minority (Moscovici, 1980). Followers points to how important it is that the advocate is a person that he can relate to. He is also appreciative of her authenticity. Seeing influencers' everyday challenges normalizes both her and the lifestyle she propagates. Through normalizing the behaviors they encourage, green lifestyle influencers support identification.

Normalizing green behavior and encouraging identification by emphasizing the commonalities and similarities between the minority and the majority is vital to avoid the 'double minority' perception which has detrimental effect on the influence attempts. Double-minority effect takes place when an individual holding a minority view is "disregarded if that member is seen as different than other members in some additional important respect" (Bazarova et al. 2012, 299). If the minority influencer belongs to a different social category, double minority perception can be an important barrier (Maass, et al. 1982) because people assess themselves through comparisons with those who share their characteristics and are more likely to be influenced by those who are similar to them (Goldstein, et al. 2008).

In sum, the key elements of green lifestyle advocates' social media communication are message consistency, non-dogmatism, encouraging systematic thinking, and stimulating identification through normalization of green behaviors. By communicating information-rich content in a way that incorporates these four elements, green lifestyle influencers exert II. In what follows, we outline the process of green lifestyle adoption.

8. PROCESS OF GREEN LIFESTYLE ADOPTION

The SLT suggests that consumers adopt behaviors through communication on social media. To map the process of green lifestyle adoption, we analyze the peer communication (social media comments) and interviews with followers.

Modelling and behavior imitation

Through communication described in the previous section, green lifestyle advocate is presented as successful and benefiting from promoted lifestyle. S/he manifests health, beauty, energy,

and lifestyle that looks desirable to learners and newcomers. The following quotes show how followers perceive green lifestyle influencers based on their social media posts, and decide to imitate their behavior:

"She looks absolutely beautiful, and I believe this is authentic. I have always thought such people [eating vegan] look not taken care of, are weak, do not really have energy to do sports. And here she is looking great, having all this energy, running a marathon! healed from the horrible disease, I wanted to be, well feel like that, so this really made me think" (Informant 5)

"I know no one else who is like me. People feel I am crazy. But then she looks much better than my colleagues and friends so why should I care. I preferred to feel and look like her than like those who judge me, with time they will be jealous of me - he who laughs last laughs longest, she has become my role model." (Informant 6)

"Over time I have been reading more and more, also about the experiences of other people on the page. Over time my knowledge increased tremendously. And I realized she was right. This has totally opened my eyes and transformed me. I gradually stopped eating refined sugars, then quit (…) started going to the local farmer's market for my produce. I will never forget that experience, I ate (…) and then one day I just could not believe how great I was feeling". (Informant 1)

According the SLT, behavior change takes place under specific circumstances – the social agent is successful, s/he demonstrates the skill learner is lacking, and the learner recognizes that the social agent's behavior is beneficial to the agent (McLeod & O'Keefe 1972). The followers describe the process of modeling. The role model (here the green lifestyle advocate) is perceived as successful and has something others do not have. Reading his/her influencers' posts makes followers admire the advocate. Recognizing the change agent as a successful person, who has something they lack, makes them perceive the green behavior as beneficial. Thus, the modeling occurs and users start to imitate the green lifestyle. This leads us to the next step in the social learning process i.e. reinforcement.

9. REINFORCEMENT AND LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION

Once the modeling of the green lifestyle occurs and followers imitate the behavior, they share the outcomes of adopting the new lifestyle.

"I have followed her for the past 3 years, I have been vegan since May 1, 2015. well had a few cheats! It is amazing what changes occurred, my skin cleared, my moods stabilized, and this is the best decision I have ever made in my life. At first it started small, I took her 14-day challenge, tried some recipes, read all those comments who were writing that she is an inspiration and transformed their lives". (Informant 2)

"I have seen all those comments of people trying the recipes or making other recommended changes (…) I finished his 30-day challenge and realized how easy it was. (…) It has totally transformed me, and I am now going with my own reusable produce bags for every shopping trip, it was so easy. (…) I am so thankful for all the information he shares and the motivation, he is such an inspiration to me and motivated me to be a better me, and join on the green and healthy lifestyle bandwagon! (…) I felt encouraged, and seeing appreciative comments was rewarding" (Informant 7)

According to the SLT, once the follower imitates the encouraged behavior, he/she meets positive reinforcement (Churchil & Moschis, 1979). Followers express that they find the tips posted by green lifestyle advocate inspiring and helpful. After adopting the new lifestyle, they see how their health or life has been transformed and describe the benefits they experience from adopting green behaviors.

But it is not only the effects that the behavior has on them that constitute the positive reinforcement. Aside from the content posted by the green lifestyle influencers, followers also read comments posted by other followers who adopted the diet, tried a recipe, or complimented the influencers for living the life they encourage. These comments and the feeling of being a part of community further encourage newcomers to imitate the desired behavior. Social interactions in the new-found community also plat an important role. The following informant also discusses the role of social interactions in the new-found community:

"I am ashamed that before I have seen this community as 'weird', my view has changed over time as I was sinking deeper and deeper into this, trying new recommended things, just taking small steps (…) and then to consider the effects on one's own body. The effects totally exceeded my expectations (…) it blew my mind. That is when I realized that my body had really cleansed. (…) and she [the green lifestyle advocate] and the community with whom you can share it, and learn from their tips and mistakes is such an immense support, and the support I received through the comments within the community and just by watching the discussions was invaluable I think this is what keeps you going. At the beginning you want to be a part of this beautiful experience. After some time, you forget about what 'normal people' do or think about you". (Informant 1)

According to SLT, interactions with socialization agents and other followers lead to the community becoming a new reference group, where positive reinforcements from the community members constitute a NI (Churchil & Moschis, 1979). Commentators discuss how reinforcement occurs through peer interactions in the online community. Their comments receive clicks 'like' and appreciative feedback from other members of the green community. This positive feedback is further reinforced by positive comments from the influencer. Followers learn from the mistakes of others and their tips on how to make the behavior adoption easier. Thus, the reinforcement occurs through both experiencing positive effects of adopted behavior and social interactions with other members of the newfound reference group.

These social interactions and NI exerted by the new reference group play an important role as community members support each other when the newcomers face social pressures in their offline world. Family pressure is often a concern of many newcomers.

"I wanted to live a more minimalistic life for a long time but I was afraid of how people will see me, she showed me that this is not only my problem and that there is the whole community of people like me. (…) the information she shared about her social and family struggles empowered me to take a leap and showed me how to navigate this transition publicly and not only keeping those ideas to myself. I no longer feel like a weirdo (…) I know we are in this together". (Informant 3)

Followers describe how the influencer made them feel not alone in their struggle to build understanding with their families which initially are not supportive of the newly adopted lifestyle. Knowing that there are more people like them gives them a

reference group to identify with and empowers public manifestation of the new behavior. Realizing that there are 'more people like me' is important as the larger the minority seems, the more competent it appears to be (Nemeth, et al. 1977; Yilmaz & Youngreen, 2016). Similarly, using linguistic representations (such as 'we') enhances the perception of the minority competency.

Continuous modelling and positive reinforcement of the newly acquired norms takes place through the social interactions discussed above, which reinforce the sense of shared identity. Through these interactions, followers immerse themselves in the community which becomes their new reference group and can now exert NI. Consequently, the follower adopts minority views, behaviors and attitudes.

10. DISCUSSION

This research explored how sustainable lifestyle is encouraged in an online setting and how green minority exerts its influence in social media. Our objectives were to identify the key elements of social media communication that drive green lifestyle adoption and map the process of behavior change. Based on the data from four case studies and over 8,000 Facebook posts and thousands of comments, as well as, interviews with followers, we provide a comprehensive theoretical model anchored on two theories, namely minority influence and social learning theories. The study findings offer relevant insights into the process driving the green lifestyle adoption.

The minority influence in the context of driving consumer behavior changes has been mostly neglected. Moreover, previous minority influence research used noninteraction-based controlled experiment methodologies, which do not allow for studying real interactions and evaluate outcomes outside of the laboratory (Meyers, et al. 2000).

Therefore, we answer the calls for studying behavior change in the natural context it occurs. As recommended by Yilmaz and Youngreen (2016) and Meyers et al. (2000), we capture the minority influence as it occurs with methods that allow for studying real interactions between the sender and the receiver, i.e. nethnography. We also answer the calls by Kumar (2016) who suggested that qualitative, as well as longitudinal studies are needed.

Our research focused on two types of influence i.e. informational and normative influence. It shows that both II and NI play an important role at different stages of behavior adoption. When building their persuasive messages marketers usually focus on appealing to social norms (Goldstein, et al. 2008). We show, however, that normative social influence is important at later stages of green lifestyle adoption, when a majority member was already persuaded to imitate the green behavior. For NI to actually prompt behavioral change, first, II has to be exerted through appropriate communication. This communication, as emphasized by the MIT, should be characterized by consistency, non-dogmatism, the use of strategies that encourage systematic thinking and identification with the minority group through normalization of behaviors.

Influencers' consistency is reflected in the length of their advocacy and presence in social media, as well as, frequency of posting. Moreover, they use different social media platforms as an integrated communication tool to convey the same message. By sharing moments from their own lives they demonstrate that they stand by their words and lead a sustainable life. By consistently communicating information-rich content,

influencers address the lack of awareness as a barrier to green lifestyle adoption.

Influencers' non-extremist and flexible approach is reflected in the posts that do not picture their lifestyle as 'the only right way', and do not discriminate against those who do not share their views. By avoiding assertive reactions toward their critics (Kronrod, et al. 2012; Quick & Cinsidine 2008) and acknowledging the inconvenience (Paulson & Roloff, 1997; Meneses & Palacio 2007), green lifestyle influencers address the distrust as a barrier to green lifestyle adoption.

Moreover, content communicated by green lifestyle influencers encourages systematic rather than superficial thinking. The argumentative communication style and resulting involvement prevents the majority members from automatically dismissing the minority arguments (Moskovici & Nemeth, 1974; Nemeth, 1986; Tarkiainen & Sudqvist, 2009; Yilmaz & Youngreen, 2016) and leads to behavior change. Thus, as a result of engaging the majority members in systematic thinking, influencers debunk a prevalent among the consumers myth that green products are less effective (Lin & Chang 2012), and at the same time show that adopting green behaviors is worth the extra effort.

People will only conform to the group norms if they identify with their reference group (Goldstein, et al. 2008). Therefore, to avoid double-minority perception (Bazarova et al. 2012; Maass, et al. 1982), influencers encourage identification by emphasizing the commonalities and similarities between themselves and their followers i.e. majority members. By doing so, they normalize green lifestyle. Thus, by encouraging identification, influencers lay ground to overcome social barriers to green behavior adoption.

These four characteristics of communication allow influencers to exert II. For many consumers, high prices of the green products discourage them from buying environmentally-friendly alternatives (Kalafatis et al. 1999). Thus, rather than appealing to emotions, exerting II by informing about the benefits for the influencer (and consequently a learner) e.g. about product effectiveness, or personal savings rather than about benefits for the environment at large, results in modeling and encourages the imitation and adoption of behaviors advocated by the MIT. Rather than relying on consumers' willingness to adopt green behaviors out of the love for planet, we show that emphasizing personal gains from green behavior encourages newcomers to move toward greener options. This finding is especially important when we take into account that when a product is positioned as green, the perception of its effectiveness is lowered (previously discussed sustainability-liability) (Luchs, et al. 2010). Emphasizing personal benefits helps to establish the effectiveness of green products. In this context, the communication about green products should focus on the benefits from product use in terms of overall cost of ownership and savings related to the energy efficiency rather than on price competition with products not marked as green. Moreover, offering products that are not only green in terms of being environmentally-friendly but are also healthier and less harmful than conventional ones should encourage more consumers to buy them.

In line with the SLT, as shown by this study, consumers not only passively acquire knowledge (modelling) from the content posted by social agents (here green lifestyle advocates), but also adopt the propagated behaviors (behavior imitation) and play an important role in spreading the message through peer communication. By sharing the effects of adopting the specific

lifestyle, they provide a testimony and positive reinforcement to the 'newcomers' (reinforcement). This supports new members of the green community as they still remain immersed in the majority in their daily lives offline (social interaction).

This study shows that social media drives consumer change by building a community that informs about products and their harmful effects, and promotes green and sustainable options through proper communication. As discussed earlier, by allowing the anonymity, social media communication facilitates stronger minority influence than face-to-face communication. While geographical closeness reinforces the sense of a shared group identity (Postmes, et al. 2006), in this context, social media interaction gives this sense of closeness, even when the community members are far geographically. By showing that consumer adopts attitudes and behaviors through peer communication, we confirm that social media can constitute socialization agent (Kohler, et al. 2011). In this case, consumer is socialized by adopting specific green behaviors and the reinforcement occurs through experiencing positive effects of the adopted behavior and written comments from peers.

In terms of theoretical contributions, we integrate two rival theories into a cohesive theoretical model of the factors driving behavior change to map the process of green lifestyle adoption. We present empirical evidence of the interplay of II of the minority idea advocate (emphasized by the MIT) and NI of peer learning community (the focus of the SLT) and show how they impact individuals at different stages of the process. The study offers important new theory foundation, on which to build further research on the use of social media to generate behavioral, attitudinal and cognitive changes, on which to base future studies in the areas of green behavior, driving consumer welfare, and peer consumer learning, and behavior change. By identifying the key communication factors that drive green behavior modeling, we answer the call of Yilmaz and Youngreen (2016) to adapt and extend the MIT to the online context. Furthermore, in one of the first attempts to use netnographic data collection method in studying consumer green lifestyle adoption, we assert that netnography offers strong and convincing evidentiary basis for the processes that constitute the very fabric of minority influence in social media, and thus validate the use of the method in this contexts.

The findings offer a number of implications for managers and social agents driving consumer behavior change. The main takeaways for companies selling green products and policy makers promoting the green lifestyle adoption are that the key to promoting one's product is building a brand in social media over a long period of time, in a consistent way, and living the propagated lifestyle, without judging those who do not conform to the behavioral recommendations. Picturing the easiness of use, as well as, normalizing the consumption of green products is necessary to stimulate the identification with 'green community'. Emphasizing personal savings would also be a persuasive claim appealing to lower income families that argue that they cannot afford buying environmentally friendly products.

Future experimental research could compare whether benefits to oneself or environmental claims have more profound influence. While in this study netnographic approach have been used, future researchers could utilize network analysis approach to study the interplay between different minority idea influencers and followers. We also provide the basis for larger quantitative, as well as, mixed methods studies to test the proposed relationships and delve deeper into studying how other factors such as social norms of the environment offline, personality traits, or cultural dimensions moderate the effect of peer learning on the green lifestyle adoption and behavioral changes proposed by a minority. Researchers might also explore the motivations that drive intentions to follow and embrace the information from the minority social media agents.

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