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The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer
Purchase Intention

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Introduction

Internet access through social media allows people to communicate with each other worldwide, exchanging information such as videos, photos, and texts. It allows people to connect due to shared mutual interests and create their content without any expenses. Influencer marketing includes the use of social media that relies on using an influencer to attract a wider audience with the message of a brand. In renowned media platforms such as Instagram, numerous followers promote products and services. Influencers often collaborate with various organizations, and they are paid for the efforts through either cash or free products and services to get the word out. Woerdl et al. (2008) argue that the internet and promotion techniques force businesses to understand the changes that happen through Internet utilization. Such corporations hire individuals who look to benefit from them and have a wider market range through introductory products and services.

According to Montgomery (2001), consumers have an improved opportunity to share their views and experiences, thoughts, and views through social media. Before purchasing products and services, consumers often use technology to gather information regarding a company and its products. Also, they are often more comfortable expressing their opinions because of the privacy offered through social media that promotes confidence in articulating experiences with a brand. Meanwhile, communication through social media strongly influences consumer purchase intention. While consumers readily appreciate each other's opinions, the increasing popularity of social media has influenced the way consumers share their experiences and opinions. Due to the increasing online engagement through social media, various companies have discovered different ways to use media to increase profit.

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Marketers are always looking into the future with anticipation of new trends in the market. In the world today, people are said to be mostly influencing the marketing and advertising aspects. This is because they are in better positions to offer accurate predictions on market trends. This ability will impact how brands connect and how firms will direct their innovative operations in the next few years. When people of all ages and countries have access to knowledge via the internet, the world is becoming more interconnected everyday. Contact between customers and enterprises has been greatly changed and strengthened with advent of social media channels.

This paper seeks to identify further impacts that these influential customers have on consumer behavior and purchase intention. The paper focuses specifically on Instagram as the social media platform for promotion and marketing.

Literature Review

The internet has gone through significant changes, especially in terms of the conventional techniques of doing business and maintaining customer relationships. The organizations' interactions with consumers and how transactions are carried out have also gone through a tremendous change. Online shopping has become more famous than it was in the past as more and more brands accept it as a purchasing tool for items and services. Social networking sites are not only emphasizing active user participation in the production of all written content but are also an open environment that focuses on information sharing (Alalwan, 2018). As a result, to form and maintain relationships, online media platforms can add value to organizations by allowing them to reach out to consumers all over the world (Singh and Cullinane, 2010).

This paper seeks to fill the gap on whether there is an existing connection between influencers and online customers' purchase intent. Limited sources are describing this connection

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and how Instagram influencer marketing impacts consumer behavior and purchase intent. Most of the existing research on influencers has been conducted to perceive them as brand enthusiasts, brand advocates, and their success in promoting personal brands. The influencers' credibility has been given more thought within the broader context of brand awareness and messaging.

Purchasing intention has also been researched by various scholars using varied contexts to get the most out of online shopping and marketing. According to Li, Kim & Park (2007), faith is identified as having a significant impact on the customer's purchasing plan. Consumers additionally contribute to the generation of trust within the online environment. They do this through their interactions as projected (Lee, Hong & Khong, 2014).

The consumer's purchasing decision is highly influenced by word of mouth that is done electronically. According to Gvili and Levy (2018), the more there is social power and reputation, the more people associate with electronic word of mouth. Algharabat (2018) also supported that the impact of consumer involvement in the online market on consumer purchasing behavior. This, in turn, impacts the purchasing intent in two significant ways, both positively and negatively. A great example is when a customer desires to buy a specific item or brand, their intent to purchase it is influenced by their positive attitude towards the particular item.

The literature review has shown an interconnection between influencers and the customer's purchasing plan and behavior. To better comprehend the features of influencers that affect the customers' purchasing intent, it is critical to understand influencers' roles. Influencers are gathering much recognition in the marketing world today, and this is attributed to the synthesized information they are offering in varied forms. The right information highly determines one factor that affects the consumer's tendency to be influenced by particular influencers. Influencers use

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social media platforms to spread information regarding various brands, share their consumption experience, and express their varied opinions about different services and brands (Alalwan, 2018).

To get the most out of influencers regarding marketing and advertising, companies need to identify them as agents of social networks use for the creation of sales and increased profits. Companies should seek to identify the social proof of influencers because it confirms the influencer's legitimacy in the online world. This is determined through the number of likes, followers, and even comments. However, individual scholars have argued that the number of followers only shows an influencer's popularity and not their good performance at what they do. In this case, popularity is not a matter of concern, rather the influence these individuals have. Marketers must put their attention recognize these influencers and the culture in which they interact. According to Schaffer (2013), the involvement level of followers, follow-up e-mails, and the value of purchases made through the referral link are the main elements used to measure influence.

Within the marketing literature, purchasing intent is one of the main concepts used by companies to inform their performance. Purchasing intentions of consumers are identified as significant indicators of future outcomes (ČERNIKOVAITÉ, 2019). They show a company to what level the customers are willing to adopt a particular behavior. The past online experience has been identified as one aspect that influences a customer's purchase intention.

Instagram

As indicated by Tankovska (2021), Instagram is quite possibly the most well-known social media community with more than 1 billion dynamic users around the world. Instagram is presently perhaps the most mainstream mobile-based social media applications for influencer marketing. Companies use Instagram influencers for marketing and advertising their products. Instagram, with every unique capacity to share visuals, offers organizations to communicate with their potential and existing customers and influence their impression of the brand in a more notable way (Langton and Campbell, 2011). Purchases are attributed to favorable online experiences, peer recommendations and the accuracy of brand knowledge.

Rebelo (2017) observed the behavior of Instagram influencers and learned about the common topics of influential people and the titles of their preferred photos. The author also studied how social media affects marketing and how advertising develops. The author found that the attractiveness and trustworthiness of the influencers have a vital impact on consumer purchase intention. Lee and Hong (2016) expressed that social networking site advertisements would almost certainly actuate positive perceptions and reactions, and accordingly would make WOM impact and more noteworthy deals for the brand. For influencer marketing and WOM Instagram is one of the primary platforms.

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing where the marketer focuses on specific important individuals and not the target market in general. Primarily, marketers viewed influencer marketing as advertisements for celebrities (Lim et al., 2017). Thanks to the advancement of media and technology, today's companies have put forward various product marketing programs. This choice has led to influential social media marketing.

Instagram Influencer

According to Zeren and Gökdağlı (2020), influencers are a new third-party sponsor who influences the perceptions of different consumers through various online activities. Social media influencers can design content that promotes specific brands to gain followers and make the brand renowned. The apparent realness of the influencers and the profound connectedness bring about higher buying expectations of the items they endorse since customers relate to them and attempt to imitate them (Tran and Strutton, 2014). Most corporations use Instagram marketing to pay influencers for promoting their products and services on the Instagram platform.

Freberg et al. (2011) investigated how organizations consider important impacts and recruit appropriate influencers dependent on their qualities and brand benefits. Instagram influencers are a promising marketing strategy in the digital age. The uniqueness of influencers is showed by how they associate with their followers and the relational closeness is more profound than showing up in TV shows or standard motion pictures. While influencer marketing has been used through traditional media, social media's rise has contributed to the boom of influencer marketing through social media. Online media influencers are seen as more genuine in conveying and showing the supported item to their followers (Tapinfluece, 2017). Influencer advertising is notable and rewarding because that it opens up another channel for the brand to connect with its customers.

Influencers are innovations that have been able to attract an audience using their expertise and authentic voices (Stubb et al. 2019). Instagram influencers independently utilize various techniques to connect with their followers and maintain relationship by circulating messages through their content. YouTube and Instagram are the most used digital media to accumulate subscribers and followers.

Consumer Purchase Intention

Influencers associate buyers with brands through their exceptional capacities to target audiences and their associations (Mathew, 2018). As defined by Spears and Singh (2004), a person's conscious understanding to make an effort to buy a brand is purchase intention. The eagerness or thought to buy any promoted item is the consumer's intention to purchase any product.

Over the years marketing interaction has changed with the emergence of social media. The growing importance of various social networking sites (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) in customer's lives demonstrates a developing impact on their communication behaviors. Therefore, it is rewarding for companies to collaborate with influencers and promote through social media as it enables the possibility to reach consumers directly and engage with several followers of a specific influencer. According to Racherla and Friske (2012), Customers generally sign on to social media to search for product details and influencers feedback to buy any product, as they depend more on the content created by different influencers, particularly on Instagram.

To utilize influencer marketing effectively, there are significant and fundamental techniques to follow for a brand. The initial step to constructing a powerful influencer marketing campaign includes deciding the goals of the brand. Campaigns that do not build up appropriate targets, limit the chance of accomplishment (Brown and Hayes, 2008). Hence, marketers must first choose what they are anticipating to accomplish when working with a social media influencer.

Working with influential people is an essential way of increasing awareness of the brand and driving customers' engagement. These influencers play the role of expanding the relationship between brands and their consumers because their followers trust them. To select the correct influencer, advertisers need to focus on the demographics of the followers, level of commitment

with the followers, and an effective presence across various social media platforms (De Veirman et al., 2017).

The purpose of the study is to explore the effect of Instagram influencers on consumer's behavior and factors affecting the consumers purchase intention. For a successful marketing campaign, it is necessary that marketers provide influencer the essential equipment. While the brand needs to make a clear definition of a content requirement, it is also important to leave room for creativity and personalization.

Pretest

It was decided to perform a pre-test before conducting the focus group interviews. The aim was to gain real experience of a focus group and to see how to organize the interviews and learn about the various situations that could occur during the sessions. As suggested by (Kezar, 2000; Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllås, Rose & Shevlin, 2019), pre-tests are important, because they allow researchers to gain real-world experience, which leads to higher validity and reliability. Pre-tests also improve the research quality and research design, which leads to better analysis of the data and, as an outcome, better results.

A pilot study was conducted in the form of an interview with two Instagram users, who fit the sampling standards of the focus group interview. The pre-test resulted in the development of the interview questions as the two participants provided helpful advice which contributed to improvements to the structure of the interviews, the language of the questions, and the adjustment of some questions. The adjustments were introduced to eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding.

Methodology

The main research interest is to see how Instagram influencer marketing has an impact on consumer's purchase intention. To find this, three qualitative focus group interviews of twelve participants have been conducted in Vienna, Austria. Each focus group had four participants. Focus groups are group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues such as people's opinions and understandings of the matter (Barker and Ricb 1992, Zimmerman et al. 1990). The focus group is based on the sense that some form of mutual interaction is involved, such as watching a video, looking for online-offline news or discussing a certain selection of questions. Focus groups encourage participants to communicate with one another, increasing the quality and reliability of the scientific evidence obtained as they work together to understand a trend.

The pre-requisite for the people who participated in the interview was, they are active users of Instagram, follow Instagram influencers, or at least have an understanding of the influencers. The participants were selected from a Facebook post after ensuring that they met the criteria and the plan was to organize focus groups at a time and place that is suitable for the majority of the participants. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are ethical concerns about how focus groups are need to perform. As a result, if focus groups are to be used ethically, they must be conducted online to reduce the risk of the new virus within participants. So, keeping in mind the safety and ethical considerations, focus groups were conducted online using the zoom application. In total, 12 people participated including six males and six females. They were all international students residing in Vienna aging from 26 years to 29 years old. Confidentiality was assured to the participants, asked not to use their real names, and informed of the study's purpose. The three sessions lasted, on average, 45 minutes (See table 1).

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The sessions were moderated by the author, guiding the session with semi-structured questions. The author clarified the idea of the study before the beginning of every session and as a conversation starter, participants were asked to familiarize themselves to know each other better. Then the moderator used few in general questions and at last asked more specific questions about the topic. The three key arguments that were focused are: 1) Overall Perception of Influencer 2) Believability 3) Buying behavior.

The three sessions were audio-recorded, and the recordings were fully transcribed. The advantages of transcribing data as soon as possible, explained by Saunders et al. (2009), are primarily due to the enormous amount of time required to transcribe audio records. Therefore, each session is transcribed before the following one, to understand areas where the following interview can be improved. The qualitative data analysis Mayring (2002) was used to code the transcriptions. The coding has to be the same way for every focus group and the analysis aspects are grouped into categories that are precisely justified. The categories were divided and found most 3 important aspects: a) Motivations to follow b) Credibility c) Buying Preference. All these categories have different sub-categories which helped to reach the results.

A two-staged analysis was used to investigate people's interactions with Instagram and the influencers, as well as to relate these experiences to concrete outcomes. The codebook was used to conduct inductive thematic analysis in stage one. Although thematic analysis revealed how the participants view Instagram influencers, it did not yield a list of potentially observable outcomes that the researcher might highlight. As a result, in the second stage of the study, an interpretive analysis was used to transform the focus groups' perspective meaning into the scientific terminology of academic research.

In this paper, the following research questions would be answered:

- RQ1: what are the factors that effects consumers purchase decision?
- RQ2: What are the motivations involved following the Instagram influencers?
- RQ3: How do the followers trust Instagram influencers?

Table 1:

Participants of Focus Groups 1,2 & 3.

Focus Group 1			
Participants	Gender	Age	Country
P1	Male	29	Bangladesh
P2	Female	28	Chechenia
P3	Male	28	Austria
P4	Female	29	United States
Focus Group 2			
Participants	Gender	Age	Country
P5	Male	28	Germany
P6	Female	28	Austria
P7	Male	25	Bangladesh
P8	Female	26	Austria
Focus Group 3			
Participants	Gender	Age	Country
P9	Female	27	Brazil
P10	Male	27	Germany
P11	Male	27	Turkey
P12	Female	28	Germany

Ethical Considerations

Since the study is using focus group interviews with people and analyzes their data, ethical concerns appeared while planning the research. Concerning to the rights of the interviewee, research ethics may refer to the behavior of the researcher (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). According to Saunders et al. (2009), within business study, there are two main ethical philosophies;

teleology and deontology. The teleological view claims that the aim of the study justify the means (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). On the other hand, the deontological view argues that if research is unethical, the purpose served by the research can never justifies its use (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). It is morally and ethically correct to impose the deontological view, even if the deontological view can reduce the credibility and validity of the analysis, as the objective of the study and the research question is posed to the participants before the interviews are performed.

By adopting the deontological view, three main concerns can be considered. First, the purpose of the study and the research questions will be provided to the participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011), so that they can choose whether or not they want to participate. The purpose of the study will be clarified again, before starting the interview. Secondly, if a verbal agreement is not sufficient between the researchers and the interviewees, a consent form will be sent to the participants. Finally, to make the participants more comfortable during the interview, their names would be anonymous.

Results

After analyzing the data and categorizing the main findings, guided by the research questions, three dimensions were created, Motivations to follow, Credibility, Buying Preference. These dimensions summarize the main findings and will be presented as following.

Motivations to Follow

To better understand the reason and their inspiration behind following any influencer, a couple of questions were asked regarding why they follow any influencer, what are the reasons or what motivates them to follow influencers. Reflecting upon their answers and the discussion

raised, it is possible to point that for them the most important concepts in their motivations to follow influencers are: 1) Information Value 2) Personal Aspiration 3) Entertainment.

Information Value: The dimension of information value reflects how the participants decide to follow an influencer based on the information that influencers provide. Raquel Sánchez-Fernández & David Jiménez-Castillo (2021) researched the role of perceived information value in the process of influence and found it as a determinant of followers' apparent influence. Most of the participants argued that they choose to follow Instagram influencers to get information about products they like, to get influencers expert opinion or review on products and keep themselves up to date with the trend. They also mentioned that influencers share applicable and exciting topics about fashion, new trends, and useful idea for the daily lives e.g. cooking, makeup etc.

Participant 1: "I follow influencers to get their expert opinion on topics that I am interested in."

Participant 2: "There are those who really test products without advertising, then you can get an idea of some products. Or if you like the style and lifestyle of an instagrammer you can get tips for example; clothes / recipes / makeup."

Participant 10: "I follow to identify latest fashion trend, discount promotions, keep up to date about gadgets and technology."

Participant 6: "I like that they share very interesting ideas about different topics and I have tried out many ideas such as decorating, cooking, etc."

Personal Aspiration: A few people discover similarity, others accept they share many things for all intents and purpose with the influencer, while others aspire to become like the

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influencer (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005). When people feel they share the same desires and characteristics as influencers, they are far more likely to behave on their views and activities (Kelman, 2006).

When asked if the participants follow Instagram influencers because of their own desire to become influencer or not, few of the participants expressed that they follow to learn about the tricks, get some tips about how to attract and gain followers and they want to influence people in a good way. Many of the participants expressed admiration for one or more aspects of the influencers they follow, and the majority of them believe that, it is important for influencers to provide information that has positive effect on people.

Participant 3: “If you are passionate about creating digital content, then there is no better profession to turn your passion into a full-time job than being an influencer. I follow them and try to grow my Instagram as well.”

Participant 5: “I want to Learn the tricks of an influencer and know some good location.”

Participant 8: “Inspiration, role model/idol, beautifully prepared content that matches my own interests or even dreams.”

Participant 12: “Personally, I follow people on Instagram for their content and recently I decided to explore the beauty industry more. Through sharing my love for the industry, I wish to bring a positive influence among everyone who are following me on Instagram. So, if I see the influencers are sharing/promoting content relating to my likings, I follow them.”

Entertainment: Even within the diverse structure of uniting media use on social media sites, the entertainment-oriented application of digital media is gaining consequence (Alhabash and Ma, 2017, p. 9; Frees & Koch, 2018, p. 406). According to Alhabash and Ma (2017, p.6), “entertainment was considerably expected by Instagram use.” Some participants mentioned they follow influencers to be entertained by their content and to pass the time when they feel bored.

Participant 4: “I follow influencers depending on their content category like beauty or make up, food, travel and I mostly follow for entertainment purposes.”

Participant 7: “Most of the time we follow an Instagram influencer because he/she is famous. Instagram influencers post many informative contents and funny contents too, so I follow them to get entertainment.”

Participant 11: “I don’t really follow too many influencers, but it’s just for passing my time and entertainment when I get bored or something.”

Credibility

The term credibility applies to how trustworthy a piece of information and its sources are (Rebelo, 2017). When someone is seen as legitimate, it suggests that they are reliable and trustworthy. Credibility has a range of aspects related to one’s skill and desire to hold committed to performance enhancing credentials (Dwivedi, A., Nayeem, T. and Murshed, F. (2018)).

To reflect upon the aspect of believability of the participants, it was asked what are the reasons to trust or how they decide to believe an influencer. The participants brought two interesting insights regarding the credibility which are: 1) Number of followers 2) Paid/ Sponsored post.

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Number of Followers: A large number of followers indicates that many users are willing in a certain account, as shown by the fact that they have subscribed to its account. If an influencer is well-known in the internet with countless followers, it is practical to believe that the influencer is likeable. But, Likeability can stem from user's perception of the influencer as a valuable source of intelligence- an opinion leader- rather than from simple popularity (Yoganarasimhan, 2012).

When asked about what they think or is it important to have a lot of followers to be trusted, participants shared views differently. A small number of participants agree that having a large number of followers is essential for an influencer to be trusted, as they feel it assists with persuading other Instagram users also.

Participant 1: "The first thing that I notice is their followers, in my view if they have a good amount of followers that is because they are doing their best."

Participant 4: "Absolutely. The numbers convince others to believe this person has creative contents that should not be missed out on."

Participant 12: "A good amount of followers is important to me. If I see anyone has a lot of followers, it means the person provides quality content or information. Otherwise people wouldn't have follow this account."

Where few of the participants see it as a positive side of the influencers, most of the participant differs with this opinion. As they believe quality content is more important than the number of followers. They also mentioned it is hard for them to trust with number of followers because followers can be bought and the influencer might have fake followers. They feel trust can be built with valued content and would follow someone whose content is more connected.

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Participant 2: “A certain number of followers wanted to be there but I do not really pay attention now as long as I like the content.”

Participant 3: “An influencers number of followers obviously holds a certain value and contributes on getting more followers but I think trustworthiness comes from the quality of the respective digital content, either it’s a product, a place to visit, a food or a service.”

Participant 6: “Followers can be bought. I believe the trust between the influencer and audience is made when the audience can relate to the content an influencer is sharing. The trust is also built when the audience finds the content of the influencers helpful. Influencers also do motivate you with their work or content they share. I would certainly follow someone I feel connected to without considering how many followers he / she has.”

Participant 8: “No, because there are now many fake followers or you can buy followers to appear successful to the outside world. I think that the number of followers is only a limited reflection of the quality of a profile, even if it is usually the first thing you focus on when you discover a new profile.”

Paid/Sponsored Post: A successful influencer is someone who has earned the confidence of their followers to the point that a sponsored content in a post looks genuine, even though they are being compensated (Woods, Steven, 2016). Influencers earn the faith and confidence of their fans by regularly generating content and developing relations with them.

Most of the participants expressed their views on the sponsored post as they do not like to see such posts, they do not trust those posts since they feel, influencers are promoting the product

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only because they are getting paid from the brand or company and they will advertise any product even if they do not relate with the product itself.

Participant 6: “I don’t like or take such posts seriously because I know that they review or recommend the product not because the product itself is good but because they are getting paid for it.”

Participant 11: “They do it for business purposes what I believe because they even promote the products which are not relevant with their content or do not match their profile style.”

Participant 12: “Nowadays, I take sponsored content with a grain of salt. It is a well-known fact that there are certain terms/words that must be said and avoided when doing a sponsored add or partnership. So to me that seems fake and misleading.”

Few participants also mentioned that they would consider paid posts positively as long as the sponsored post is unbiased or neutral and the influencer is related to the product.

Participant 10: “I understand it is sponsored but I look if it is a neutral review or not. I don’t have any problem if it is sponsored or not. Also it tells me that influencer has greater sense of communication with the companies.”

Participant 8: “It depends on what it is about and whether I am interested in this product. I’m not interested in everything and then I like to swipe on without listening to what it’s about.”

Buying Preference

When asked about what motivates the participant to buy something from the influencer, they brought three interesting perceptions: 1) Discounts 2) Interest 3) Expertise.

Discounts: Discounts are the terms used to describe how the price of product is presented in order to influence the behavior of customers (Gendall, Philip, Janet Hoek, and Tracy Pope., 2006). For the participants the most important and most commented characteristic of Instagram influencer is that they offer promo codes and discounts. Most of the participants shared that they decided to buy something because of the discount.

Discounts will enhance a customer's desire to buy any item. Previous study shows that consumers usually do not feel bad when they purchase anything at a sale and they see this as a cost saving opportunity. As a result, a discount will boost the sales of a product (Khan, Uzma, and Ravi Dhar., 2010).

Participant 3: "I have purchased lot of products from influencers. I purchased few products because I got a small amount of discounts and then bought a few because they were reviewed by influencers and I trusted that."

Participant 6: "I have bought some makeup and clothes which I actually liked and they were also offering some discounts."

Participant 7: "Last year I bought a t-shirt which was advertised by an influencer and offered 15% discount if anyone uses his promo code."

Participant 8: "Bought beauty products because they offered a promotion code and I have been already using that product so I had not any doubt in my mind."

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Interest: Interest is one of the psychological factor that influences behavior which can be used to motivate others to perform an action (Boutang and De Clara, 2016). Purchase interest is a psychological reaction to emotions and ideas about a desired good or service. The desire to buy can be described as a positive attitude toward an object that motivates a person to seek out the object and pay for it with money (Lee, 2019).

Many participants mentioned that they buy from the influencer out of their interest. As they have constructed trust with the influencer since they follow the influencer for a long time, it is an easy decision to make to buy from the influencer.

Participant 1: “2 weeks ago. I decided to buy because I trust the influencer as follow him for a long time and I believe the product he suggested was good and it matches my interest.”

Participant 2: “Yes, because I really liked the product that was promoted by the influencer and thus I decided to buy it out of my interest on that product.”

Participant 9: “I do not buy too many products from them. Last one was 1 year ago because I liked the product and I was searching something like that.”

Expertise: Expertise is defined as, a person having sufficient knowledge, experience, or qualifications to advertise the product (Van der Waldt et al. 2009, p.104). Another characteristic brought by the participants is that they look for product reviews or recommendations from the influencers. Product reviews from influencer help them to decide whether to buy the product or not and the participants see this is an advantage.

An influencer would not be considered as knowledgeable in a specific field until his or her followers trust in him or her as qualified, competent, and skilled (Schouten et al. 2019). According

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to Schouten (2019), expertise can affect not just the degree of reputation viewed by influencers, but also the consumers' purchasing behavior and purpose.

Participant 10: "I bought in the year 2019, a Sony Camera. I decided it to buy because the influencer uses that camera to make his contents and he reviewed the camera as one of the best. So I believed it would be a good camera to buy as one of the content creator is using it and rated it."

Participant 12: "During Christmas time, November/December 2020, I bought skincare products based on product reviews of influencers. Because of my fascination with makeup and skincare, I follow many influencers who are in the beauty industry. Now, as a consumer it is not possible for me to purchase every product that is out there and test it out to see if I like it or not, if it suits me or not. So it is a big help to watch the product reviews the influencers give and decide if I should spend my money on a certain product or not."

Participant 3: "I bought a few products because they were reviewed by influencers and I trusted that."

Discussion

The main goal of the paper is to discover and comprehend the effect of Instagram influencers on consumer behavior and factors affecting their purchase intention. The gap identified and one that the paper seeks to address is the fact that most studies conducted in the past have not acknowledged the specific features of influencers that result in their impact on customers' purchase intention. This paper identifies discounts or promo codes, product review, and trustworthiness as the major features of influencers that affect the purchasing power of the customers.

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When it comes to their motivations to follow Instagram influencer, most of the participants follow just to be informed about new trends including fashion and lifestyle and keep updated about new gadgets and technologies. Apart from that, almost every participant follows influencers for entertainment purpose. The more an influencer's characteristics are welcomed, the more attention is paid to messages being accepted (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

To trust the influencers participants shared that, quality and informative content from influencers are more important than their number of followers. They mentioned followers can be bought, those numbers can be just to attract people. It is argued that people with countless followers however few followees are considered false users (Siegler, 2009) or their followers are artificially gathered or fake (Cresci, Di Pietro, Petrocchi, Spognardi and Tesconi, 2015). When influencers promote any product and it does not relate with the influencer, participants tend to assume that the influencer is advertising the product not because the product or service is good, rather just to be benefitted from the brand or the company. When Instagram users perceive influencers as sound, stable, dependable, and truthful, their trustworthiness is taken into account (Ceyhan et al., 2018; Ohanian, 1990; Munnukka et al., 2016).

When it comes to the participant's intention to buy something from the influencer, discounts have a huge impact on them. As influencers offer promo codes now and then, it plays a vital role in consumer's decision-making process. An important aspect that has been raised by the participants, is the product review or expertise of Instagram influencers. Since it is not possible for them to buy every product in the market and try, they feel it is helpful for them when influencers give an honest review about products or services. An influencer with more experience and who is seen as a specialist will be more convincing and boost brand interaction (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian,

1990). As a result, social media influencers' expertise may have a significant impact on consumer interaction and, as a result, their purchasing intent.

This paper sheds both light and doubt on the marketing executives regarding how influential influencers are. It shows companies the main areas they should focus their efforts on regarding the use of influencers to grow their brand, increase sales and earn more profit. By identifying the features that increase the impact of influencers, companies will be able to invest in such influencers to get the most out of the use of social media.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has some limitations and boundaries while doing the study. First of all, conducting focus group interviews in the time of COVID-19 is a limitation in itself with lockdowns and social distancing. Due to this reason, the author decided to conduct the focus group interviews online. Owing to the multiple participants, gestures such as facial reactions and body language became more challenging to observe online.

Secondly, it should be considered that the participants would not be totally honest with their answers since respondents tend to feel they need to give "right" answers in a focus group and sound good in front of their peers. Their answers might be biased. As the time to write this paper was limited, a large number of participants could not be reached. Since the sample size is small, it is difficult to generalize and conclude about how people feel about Instagram influencers. A large number of participants would have helped to write a more generalized conclusion.

For future research a broader population survey of diverse ages and geographical regions should be included to further investigate the influencers impact on the followers. A more generic

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assumption can be reached if the sample size is large. Future research should consider and examine the difference between male and female Instagram users.

It would be great if potential researchers looked at what motivates Instagram users to engage with influencers on Instagram, and then also examine other popular social networking sites including Facebook or YouTube.

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Appendix A:

Focus Group Interview Questions:

Introduction and thank participants. Remind them that there are no right or wrong answers and the discussion will be audio recorded but the participants will be anonymous.

Ice breaker: to start the discussion, everyone will be asked to tell about themselves (age, country, studies etc.)

- What do you think when you hear the term “Instagram Influencer”?
- What are the reasons to follow an influencer? (if they follow)
- Do you wish to be seen as an influencer?

- What do you like about the influencers?
- In what way did the influencer motivate you? (vouchers, discounts...)
- What makes you decide on a spontaneous purchase from an influencer?
- How much of an effect does an Instagram influencer have on you?

- Have you unfollowed any influencer? And why?
- Do you believe that an influencer’s number of followers is important and contributes to their trustworthiness?
- What is your opinion when see a paid or sponsored post?
- Do you suggest your friends or family about any influencer?

Additional question: Do you have anything to add?

Abstract

Popular marketing tactics such as print advertising, celebrity promotion, and internet marketing have developed into influencer marketing. Influencer marketing falls into the category of native advertising because it flows naturally on Instagram. Opinion leaders are also known as Instagram influencers are persons who have a great number of followers and have the power to influence others' opinions, behavior, and attitudes. Since Instagram influencers and influencer marketing is becoming popular now-a-days, this paper explores and understands the impact of Instagram influencers on its followers. To evaluate that, three focus group interviews were conducted with 12 participants from different countries in Vienna, Austria. Findings suggest that influencer's expertise on products or services, discounts they offer, and trustworthiness are the most important factor in consumer purchase intention.

Keywords: Instagram, Influencer Marketing, Instagram Influencer, Followers, Consumer Purchase Intention

Abstrakt

Bekannte Marketingtaktiken wie Printwerbung, und Internetmarketing haben sich zum Influencer Marketing entwickelt. Influencer Marketing fällt in die Kategorie der nativen Werbung, weil es auf Instagram auf eine natürliche Art fließt. Meinungsführer, auch Instagram-Influencer genannt, sind Personen, die über eine große Anzahl von Abonnenten verfügen und die Macht haben, die Meinung, das Verhalten und die Einstellung anderer zu beeinflussen. Da Instagram-Influencer und Influencer-Marketing in der heutigen Zeit immer beliebter werden, beschäftigt sich diese Arbeit damit, herauszufinden, welchen Einfluss Instagram-Influencern auf ihre Follower haben. Um dies herauszufinden, wurden drei Gruppendiskussionen mit 12 Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmern aus verschiedenen Ländern in Wien, Österreich, durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass das Fachwissen der Influencer über Produkte oder Dienstleistungen, die von ihnen angebotenen Rabatte und ihre Vertrauenswürdigkeit die wichtigsten Faktoren für die Kaufabsicht der Verbraucher sind.

Schlagwörter: Instagram, Influencer Marketing, Instagram Influencer, Follower, Kaufverhalten