

Students' Perception of Influencer Marketing on Instagram

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Abstract – Influencer marketing on social media is one of the fastest-growing trends in marketing and advertising campaigns. Advertisers are investing more and more funds in that type of marketing because influencers have big and loyal fan bases that they influence, especially when it comes to buying the products that they advertise. Social media platform Instagram is one of the most popular platforms for influencer marketing, given that it is a social media for posting photos and videos, and the captions are usually short (few words and hashtags), so they correspond to what the target audience of most of the advertisers (generation Z) wants. The research presented in this paper was conducted in the winter semester of 2022/2023 at VERN University and Algebra University College, on a sample of 106 students. The purpose of this research was to examine students' perception of influencer marketing, and whether they think that this method of marketing is something that encourages them to purchase a product that is advertised.

Keywords – influencer marketing; influencers; Instagram; social media; digital marketing; college students

I. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a profession that is present in every aspect of life in modern networked society. There is a saying that says marketing is everywhere around us, and that statement can be considered true because advertising is present in all segments of life (as ads in physical (real) world or ads on digital media).

Digital media have become more popular than traditional media, given that smartphones are the most popular devices for browsing digital media (social media, web news portals). Smartphones have enabled users to always be online, regardless of where they are, resulting in users being able to access media content whenever they want. Another feature of smartphones in digital media is the fact that smartphones allow users to create their own content, thus allowing users to actively participate in the creation of media content. Some users decide to create content that is not related to what the media publishes, so that they can use the social media platform to express their opinions or to earn money, if they have enough followers. The number of followers has become an important part of digital media because users who have many followers can be considered influencers.

According to Statista, Instagram is the leading platform for influencer marketing on digital media, which is why this platform was chosen as the research topic for this paper. According to Cambridge dictionary, there are two definitions of influencers. The first one is “someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave.”, and

the second one is “a person who is paid by a company to show and describe its products and services on social media, encouraging other people to buy them”.[2]

The two definitions of influencers presented in this paper show the difference between the word influencer and the meaning of influencer as a job in a modern networked society. Although the mentioned definition shows the work of an influencer that is strictly related to marketing, it is not the only work that influencers do, but for some influencers it is the main source of income.

The purpose of research presented in this paper is to examine students' perception of influencer marketing, and their considerations on influencer marketing as a method that potentially encourages them to purchase a product that is advertised.

II. TYPES OF INFLUENCERS

When starting a marketing campaign that involves influencers, advertisers need to be aware that there are different types of influencers. The type of influencer is important because the content should be similar to advertisers' products. Along with influencer content, there is another variable that is important for choosing an influencer, and that is the number of followers.

According to Jana Gross and Florian von Wangenheim, there are four types of influencers. Snoopers, Entertainers, Informers and Infotainers. Snoopers are creators that can be described as social media explorers who publish and share content as a hobby, and their goal is to find audience that has similar interest. Entertainers are creators who entertain their audience with their content. Informers are creators who provide information through their content. Infotainers are creators who combine information and entertainment.[3]

According to SocialMediaToday, five types of influencers are nano, micro, mid-tier, macro, and mega influencers. The distinction between influencers is defined by the number of followers that they have:

1. *nano* influencers - have one to ten thousand followers,
2. *micro* influencers - have ten to fifty thousand followers,
3. *mid-tier* influencers - have fifty thousand to five hundred thousand followers,
4. *macro* influencers - have five hundred thousand to a million followers, and
5. *mega* influencers - have over a million followers.[4]

III. INSTAGRAM

There is no exact definition of Instagram in literature, so it's hard to define it without using words that have already been used by other authors who gave their own definitions of Instagram, but Instagram can be defined as a free social media/network platform designed for publishing photos and videos and for connecting people. As already stated in this paper, Instagram is the most popular social media for influencer marketing campaigns. According to Mircea Fuciu, Instagram is the second largest social media platform, after Facebook. [5]

In addition to the number of followers of the influencer and all previously mentioned divisions, one of the most important things on Instagram is engagement. Engagement can be defined as the overall number of user interactions, according to Anil Narassiguin and Selina Sargent [6]. Engagement can be interpreted as: if an influencer has 10,000 followers on Instagram and has an average of 50 likes and comments per post, that is bad engagement, because this is a low engagement rate (of follower likes). Engagement on Instagram (but also on other social media) is another important factor that advertisers must consider when choosing influencers for marketing campaigns.

Instagram is a platform that is mostly used by younger users; according to Statista, 61,6 % of Instagram users are aged 18 – 34.[7] This statistical data is important for this paper, considering that the focus of this paper is to examine the opinion of students about Influencer Marketing on Instagram. Also, this data shows that students use Instagram the most, because most students belong to that age group. Those users can be considered a part of Generation Z because, according to House buyers 4u, users who were born between 1996 and 2010 are part of Generation Z. [8]

IV. INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing is a relatively new type of marketing which is becoming more and more popular every year. In addition to being very popular, influencer marketing is also very profitable for advertisers and organizations. According to the influencer marketing hub, advertisers and organizations earn 5.2 dollars for every dollar spent on influencer marketing.[5] There is no unique definition of influencer marketing because that type of marketing is still new on the market in the context of social media influencers. The previously mentioned definition of the Cambridge dictionary in which the term influencer is defined as a profession, can be used as one of the definitions for influencer marketing on social media.[2]

According to Rong-Ho Lin, Christine Jan, and Chun-Ling Chuang, social media influencers can be considered independent or third-party endorsers who can affect audiences' opinions about a brand or an organization. Influencers create content to raise the number of brand followers and to raise brand awareness. [10] In addition to influencers, users are also an important part of a brand's strategy on social media. Social media allows users to create and share user-generated content, which serves as a source of information for any user who wants to be informed about a product or organization. [11] The above definition

explains the importance of content in influencer marketing.

As already stated in this paper, influencers are divided into different types according to content. Another division is the division of the form of content used in the campaigns (how the message is presented to a potential buyer). Therefore, it is important to know what kind of presentation to use for chosen content and how to convey it to the user. According to Engaio digital, there are ten types of influencer marketing campaigns:

1. Giveaways and sweepstakes,
2. Contests and event activations,
3. Social media takeovers,
4. Affiliate marketing,
5. Sponsored posts,
6. Sponsored blogs,
7. Unboxing and reviews,
8. Guest blogs,
9. Brand ambassador programs,
10. Pre-release campaigns. [12]

Sponsored social media posts usually have a hashtag (#) that is used by an influencer in that particular marketing campaign. Influencer marketing hub defines a Hashtag campaign as a marketing campaign in which a specific hashtag is used to promote a brand or a product.[13] Another type of marketing that is closely related to hashtag campaigns is Viral marketing. According to Sprout social, Viral marketing is a method of promotion that expects audience activity (mainly sharing and creating their own content based on the advertised product) [14]. Audience activity in the campaign can be measured by analyzing how much the hashtag of the particular marketing campaign was used by the audience in their own posts.

V. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Two previous researches that are presented in this part of the paper had similar questions to the ones that were asked in the survey that follows. The first research results showed that the vast majority of the respondents buy a product after seeing an influencer's ad on Instagram. As for the most common use of social media, respondents answered that they use Instagram the most. And the last question that was highlighted was about influencer's ability to shape someone's opinion about a brand. The majority of respondents answered that influencers do in fact change their opinion about a brand or a product. [15]

The second research also had questions that are closely related to the questions asked in the survey conducted for this paper. As to the question concerning influencers and their recommendations on social media, most of the respondents answered that have a neutral opinion about that topic. That means that they don't consider influencer recommendations to be an important part of an influencer marketing campaign. The question that was highlighted was about buying habits. Most respondents answered that influencers do not influence their buying habits. [16]

VI. THE RESEARCH METODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The point of this research was to examine students' opinion about influencer marketing on Instagram. This study wanted to find out if students would buy a product after they see that product advertised by an influencer. This study also wanted to investigate if students think that having an influencer participate in advertising a product is important to encourage them to buy the product.

B. Research sample

The research for this paper was conducted on a sample of 106 students from Algebra University College and VERN University. This research was conducted in the winter semester of academic year 2022/2023. Undergraduate and graduate students were surveyed. 77 students answered that they attend Algebra University College, and 29 students answered that they attend VERN' University. The first five questions in the survey were informational. The questions were year of study, status of the study, gender and already mentioned questions on the level of the study and the University that they attend.

63.2 % of students who participated were female, and 36.8 % were male (N=106). 86.8 % of students who participated were undergraduate students, and 13.2 % were graduate students (N=106).

C. Data collection and analysis

The answers for this paper were collected by an online survey that was created using Google forms. The students had a link on their student portals to voluntarily access the survey. The survey had 10 questions + 5 already mentioned informational questions. All questions were closed-ended and had a pre-offered answers. 9 questions were asked on the Likert scale and 1 question had 2 offered answers. Students' answers are presented by gender. Division by Universities is not shown considering that the majority (72.6 %) of surveyed students attend Algebra University College.

VII. THE RESEARCH RESULTS

In this part of the paper, the results of 10 question related to the research are shown. The results are displayed in percentages.

Question 1: How often do you buy a product, after seeing an ad on Instagram?

The respondents' answers to the first survey question show that 72.6 % (of which 38.7 % are female and 33.9 % are male) of surveyed students never or rarely buy products that are advertised on Instagram. (N=106)

These results show that surveyed students do not consider Instagram to be an important advertising "tool" in marketing campaigns.

The summary results of all respondents' answers are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. HOW OFTEN STUDENTS BUY A PRODUCT, AFTER SEEING AN AD ON INSTAGRAM (N=106)

FREQUENCY OF BUYING A PRODUCT AFTER SEEING AN INSTAGRAM AD	Students in percentages
Never	36.8 %
Rarely	35.8 %
Sometimes	22.6 %
Often	3,8 %
Always	0,9 %

Question 2: What type of content do you prefer in Instagram advertising?

The second question in the survey was related to the type of content that students prefer in advertising on Instagram. As mentioned earlier in the theoretical part of this paper, content is a very important part of Instagram and influencer advertising. 55.7 % (of which 36.8 % are female and 18.9 % are male) of students answered that they prefer ads with photos and text, and 44.3 % (of which 26.4 % are female and 17.9 % are male) of students answered that they prefer video ads (N=106).

Question 3: Do you agree with this statement: "Instagram influencer marketing is a way of advertising that encourages me to buy (a product)?"

The third question of this survey refers to students' attitudes toward influencer marketing as a way of advertising a product or service. This question was asked to see how many students think that influencers can encourage them to buy a product.

50.9 % (of which 22.6 % are female and 28.3 % are male) of surveyed students answered that they completely or partially disagree with the statement, while 33 % (of which 29.2 % are female and 3.8 % are male) of surveyed students answered that they completely or partially agree with the statement. The summary results of all respondents' answers are presented in Table 2.

The results showed that influencer marketing on Instagram can encourage a third of students, mainly female, to purchase a product.

TABLE 2. STUDENTS' AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: "INSTAGRAM INFLUENCER MARKETING IS A WAY OF ADVERTISING THAT ENCOURAGES ME TO BUY (A PRODUCT)" (N =106)

FREQUENCY OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ENCOURAGING TO BUY	Students in percentages
I completely disagree	28.3 %
I partially disagree	22.6 %
I neither agree, nor disagree	16 %
I partially agree	22.6 %
I completely agree	10.4 %

Question 4: How often do you participate in Hashtag campaigns (Viral marketing)?

The fourth question of this survey is about the use of hashtags and viral marketing. Brands and influencers often use hashtags (#) in their campaigns. The hashtag is made for users to put that hashtag in their post so advertis-

ers and influencers can see how many users participated in their campaign. 71.7 % (of which 42.5 % are female and 29.2 % are male) of students answered that they never participate in hashtag campaigns.

These results show that the majority of the surveyed students never participate in hashtag campaigns. The summary results of all respondents' answers are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN HASHTAG CAMPAIGNS (VIRAL MARKETING) (N=106)

FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN HASHTAG CAMPAIGNS	Students in percentages
<i>Never</i>	71.7 %
<i>Rarely</i>	17.9 %
<i>Sometimes</i>	9.4 %
<i>Often</i>	0.9 %
<i>Always</i>	0 %

Question 5: **Do you agree with this statement: "It is important to me that an influencer participates in the campaign of a product that is advertised to me on Instagram?"**

The fifth question in this survey refers to students' preferences in advertising on social media. Due to the growth in the popularity of influencer marketing, this question aimed to check whether students think that influencers are an important part of the marketing campaign of the product that they are interested in.

57.5 % (of which 33 % are female and 24.5 % are male) of students answered that they completely or partially disagree with that statement, but 22.7 % agree at least partially. The summary of all respondents' answers is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4. STUDENTS AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: "IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT AN INFLUENCER PARTICIPATES IN THE CAMPAIGN OF A PRODUCT THAT IS ADVERTISED TO ME ON INSTAGRAM" (N=106)

IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCER PARTICIPATION IN A MARKETING CAMPAIGN	Students in percentages
<i>I completely disagree</i>	43.4 %
<i>I partially disagree</i>	14.2 %
<i>I neither agree nor disagree</i>	19.8 %
<i>I partially agree</i>	14.2 %
<i>I completely agree</i>	8.5 %

Question 6: **Do you support Instagram campaigns involving influencers that are presented negatively by the media (those influencers usually have a large number of followers)?**

Influencers are public figures, given that they address the public, so that is why the media write about them. Popular influencers are usually the subject of media articles, and they are almost always presented in a negative

context. This question was asked to see if students are affected by the fact that media writes negatively about an influencer that is a part of a campaign. 51 % (of which 35.9 % are female and 15.1 % are male) of students answered that they completely or partially do not support those campaigns and 38.7 % (of which 19.8 % are female and 18.9 % are male) of students answered that they neither support nor do not support those campaigns.

These results show that the majority of surveyed students do not support those campaigns. The summary of all respondents' answers is presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5. STUDENTS' SUPPORT TO INSTAGRAM CAMPAIGNS INVOLVING INFLUENCERS THAT ARE PRESENTED NEGATIVELY BY THE MEDIA (N=106)

SUPPORTING INFLUENCERS PRESENTED NEGATIVELY BY THE MEDIA	Students in percentages
<i>I completely do not support</i>	36.8 %
<i>I partially do not support</i>	14.2 %
<i>I neither support nor do not support</i>	38.7 %
<i>I partially support</i>	4.7 %
<i>I completely support</i>	5.7 %

Question 7: **Do you agree with this statement: "Through advertising, influencers focus on a connection with a product (brand), while classic ads are only focused on sales?"**

Advertisers often hire influencers to increase sales of their products, but also to raise brand awareness. This question was asked to examine students' views on the role of influencers in Instagram campaigns.

34 % (of which 18 % are women and 16 % are male) of students answered that they completely or partially disagree with that statement, while 40.6 % (of which 27.4 % are female and 13.2 % are male) of students answered that they completely or partially agree with that statement.

These results are not straightforward, but it can be concluded that surveyed students have very different opinions about this statement, with a larger number of surveyed students who believe that the statement is correct. The summary result of respondents' answers is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6. STUDENTS' AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: "THROUGH ADVERTISING, INFLUENCERS FOCUS ON A CONNECTION WITH A PRODUCT (BRAND), WHILE CLASSIC ADS ARE ONLY FOCUSED ON SALES" (N=106)

AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT THAT INFLUENCERS FOCUS ON SALES AND BRAND AWARENESS	Students in percentages
<i>I completely disagree</i>	20.8 %
<i>I partially disagree</i>	13.2 %
<i>I neither agree nor disagree</i>	25.5 %
<i>I partially agree</i>	28.3 %
<i>I completely agree</i>	12.3 %

Question 8: *How often do you search for product information on Instagram?*

This question was asked to investigate if students prefer being informed about a product on Instagram.

26.4 % (of which 8.5 % are female and 17.9 % are male) of students answered that they never search for product information on Instagram, while 55.7 % (of which 37.7 % are female and 18 % are male) of students answered that they rarely or sometimes search for product information on Instagram. These results show that surveyed students do not consider Instagram to be an important media for finding information about a product.

The summary results of all respondents' answers are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7. STUDENT SEARCH FOR PRODUCT INFORMATION ON INSTAGRAM (N=106)

FREQUENCY OF SEARCHES FOR PRODUCT INFORMATION ON INSTAGRAM	Students in percentages
<i>Never</i>	26.4 %
<i>Rarely</i>	27.4 %
<i>Sometimes</i>	28.3 %
<i>Often</i>	14.2 %
<i>Always</i>	3.8 %

Question 9: *How important is it to you that the content that influencers publish is similar to the product that they are advertising?*

Content is a crucial part of an influencer marketing campaign because the advertised product should be similar to the influencer's content. For example, if someone is a sports influencer, that person could not (or rather should not) advertise alcohol. This question was asked to examine what students think about the importance of content in an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram.

57.5 % (of which 42.5 % are female and 15 % are male) of students answered that influencers' and product's content similarity is completely or partially important to them. These results show that surveyed students think content is an important part of an influencer marketing campaign.

The summary results of all respondents' answers are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8. STUDENT IMPORTANCE ASSESSMENT THAT THE CONTENT WHICH INFLUENCERS PUBLISH IS SIMILAR TO THE PRODUCT THAT THEY ARE ADVERTISING (N=106)

IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCERS' CONTENT SIMILARITY TO PRODUCT THEY ADVERTISE	Students in percentages
<i>Not important at all</i>	17 %
<i>Partially not important</i>	3.8 %
<i>Neither important nor not important</i>	21.7 %
<i>Partially important</i>	29.2 %
<i>Completely important</i>	28.3 %

Question 10: *How often do you participate in giveaways organized by influencers in collaboration with a brand on Instagram?*

This question was asked to see if students participate in this type of influencer marketing campaigns. 44.3 % (of which 21.7 % are female and 22.6 % are male) of students answered that they never participate in giveaways and 14.2 % (of which 11.4 % are female and 2.8 % are male) of students answered that they often participate in giveaways.

These results show that the majority of surveyed students do not participate in giveaways but there is a solid percentage of those who often participate, so it is hard to provide a correct conclusion about this question.

TABLE 9. STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN GIVEAWAYS ORGANIZED BY INFLUENCERS IN COLLABORATION WITH A BRAND ON INSTAGRAM (N=106)

FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN INFLUENCER GIVEAWAYS	Students in percentages
<i>Never</i>	44.3 %
<i>Rarely</i>	25.5 %
<i>Sometimes</i>	15.1 %
<i>Often</i>	14.2 %
<i>Always</i>	0.9 %

VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to examine students' perception of influencer marketing, and to find out if that type of marketing is something that encourages them to buy a product advertised by an influencer.

The first question of this research showed the direction in which the answers of the surveyed students will go, considering that 72.6 % of students answered that they do not buy a product after seeing an ad on Instagram. Hashtag campaigns are also a type of influencer marketing campaign which are not popular with surveyed students. 76 % of them answered that they do not participate in hashtag campaigns on Instagram.

And the last question that was very one-sided was the question about participating in giveaways. 69.8 % of students answered that they never or rarely ever participate in giveaways that are organized by influencers in collaboration with the brand. These results show that the majority of surveyed students do not participate in campaigns in which their engagement is expected.

Questions that were strictly related to influencer marketing showed that for a little above half of students influencer marketing is not a way of advertising that encourages them to buy, but also that for a third of them it is.

For more than half of the students that participated in this survey, influencer's participation in marketing campaigns for products that are being advertised to them on Instagram is not important to the students, but for every seventh student their participation is important.

Also, more than a half of surveyed students never or rarely search for product information on Instagram. This can be the case considering that users are probably using

Google search to inform about a product. This research did not have many obstacles, but it would be recommendable to survey a larger number of respondents to reach much more concrete conclusions.

These results show that majority of surveyed students believe that influencers do not influence their decision to buy a product, and more than half of the students answered that they never or rarely search for product information on Instagram.

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It can be concluded that the results of previous research do not match the results collected in this research. This fact leads us to the conclusion that the influence of social media is individual, that is, each user uses social media in their way, but also that each user has their way of interpreting the content presented to them. This information is important for people involved in influencer marketing, since the individualization of content is very important for the success of every campaign.