

The Impact of Micro Influencer Marketing on Brand Image

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree Bachelor
of Science in International Management

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

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Abstract

In recent years, social media platforms have assimilated into the social and corporate worlds. The rise of social media networks in the business industry has also led to the emergence of influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a powerful strategy for companies to enhance their brand image and connect with their target audiences. Lately, particularly micro influencers have emerged as a successful marketing alternative. However, because micro influencers are still a relatively new marketing strategy, little research has discussed the effects micro influencer marketing may have on brand image. Therefore, this thesis focuses on uncovering the power of micro influencers, especially on Instagram, and their impact on a company's reputation, goods, and services.

The researcher chose the qualitative research approach by conducting a survey following an exploratory research design. For this thesis, the researcher used primary and secondary to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The foundation is built by analyzing academic literature. However, to further discover the power of micro influencer marketing, the researcher conducted a primary data collection through an online questionnaire. This survey gathered information on the perception of Instagram users on micro influencer marketing and their experiences regarding the impact of influencers on brand image. The results were divided into two tables. The first table demonstrates the five main categories influencing Instagram users' opinions on influencer marketing: follower importance, business industry presence, brand attention, perception, and trust.

Additionally, the researcher has created five main categories to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' opinions on micro influencer marketing, namely: their understanding of micro influencer marketing, factors that play a role when considering following a micro influencer, reasons not to follow a micro influencer, micro influencer recommendations and industries in which one is most likely impacted by their recommendations. The findings revealed that micro influencer marketing could potentially have a significant effect on brand image; however, it is crucial for a micro influencer to resonate with their audience's values, interests, and visual preferences. Attributes that play a significant role in influencing individuals to follow

and trust a micro influencer are genuineness, relatability, and credibility. Nevertheless, the process of shaping customers' opinions can be further enhanced and improved. For future research, it may be useful to thoroughly investigate which aspects can support the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image and focus on long-term collaborations and studies.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have become integral to the social and business world (Svatošová, 2004). With the rise of social media, companies are granted the opportunity to market their products or services through an entirely new approach (Paquette, 2013). During the era of social media, influencer marketing has become a widely used marketing strategy for brands to maximize their profit and raise brand awareness causing traditional marketing to take a backseat (Das & Lall, 2016). Social media influencers, individuals with a considerable following and significant online engagement on platforms such as Instagram, have become invaluable assets in driving brand visibility and profitability (Glucksman, 2017).

While macro influencers have dominated the marketing scene in the past, recent years have witnessed the rise of micro influencers as a powerful marketing alternative for companies to present brand collaborations in a more intimate and personalized form online (Sinha & Fung, 2021). In today's digital era, consumers are more informed, empowered, and critical than ever. They seek authenticity, trust, and personal relationships with brands (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). Unlike macro influencers, micro influencers are social media users with a relatively small follower count of 10,000 to 100,000 followers. Specifically, they are known to have a high engagement and trusted online persona, which resolves in an active following (Wei et al., 2021). Micro influencers are individuals who work in niche communities based on shared interests, passions, and expertise. Therefore, despite the relatively small follower amount, there has been a substantial increase in the working relationship between micro influencers and firms (Rahmah & Ren, 2019).

As a result, it can be observed that brands have relied increasingly on working with influencers to build on their brand image, boost brand credibility, and gain overall brand awareness (Hermawan, 2020). The main benefit that companies have realized is that especially micro influencers can support the brand to have a stronger and more authentic connection with their target customers. Therefore, micro influencers help companies work on their customer loyalty and brand image. Brand image refers to consumers' opinions and overall perceptions about certain brands (Gupta & Mahajan, 2019). As micro influencers possess a strong connection with their followers on, e.g.,

Instagram, their brand promotion can significantly impact how their audience perceives a company. Especially in contrast to influencers with many followers, micro influencers are often seen as more relatable and genuine, giving them more power regarding customers' perceptions and purchasing behavior (Huevel, 2022). Due to this fact, it has become essential to evaluate the effectiveness of micro influencers in order to enhance brand image. The upcoming section will elucidate the purpose and objectives of the study.

1.1 Aim of the Study

This study investigates the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. Consequently, it is vital to understand how micro influencers can affect consumer behavior by examining existing literature and analyzing newly obtained data by conducting an online survey. This thesis seeks to understand to what extent micro influencers gain consumers' trust and in which field they can have the most impact. Additionally, the researcher wants to determine how significant the number of followers are for potential customers to rely on micro influencers recommendations.

Therefore, the author has formulated three research questions:

- To what extent does the effectiveness of micro influencer marketing on brand image depend on trust between micro influencers and their followers?
- How does micro influencer marketing affect the consumers' perception of brand image?
- To what extent is the number of followers of an influencer important in terms of the credibility of recommendations for customers?

To be able to answer the research questions, the author focused on academic literature and additionally conducted an online survey. The qualitative research approach was selected since the researcher wants to focus on the perception of individuals and their attitudes towards micro influencer marketing and brand image. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, academic sources have been

utilized and analyzed. The following section will explain the organization and layout of the thesis.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This research paper is structured into six distinct parts, each of which plays a critical role in exploring and understanding the emergence of micro influencer marketing and its impact on brand image. The thesis begins with an introduction, wherein the research topic is proposed, followed by articulating the study's aim. The research objectives and questions that will be addressed are formulated and outlined, providing an overview of the research scope. This section also explains the importance of the subject in today's marketing landscape, setting the basis for the following investigation of micro influencer marketing and its impact on brand image.

Afterward, the literature review provides relevant information on the topic from existing data. This section offers a comprehensive insight into social media platforms and their increasing role in shaping consumer behavior. The concept of traditional word-of-mouth marketing is analyzed, and its parallels are drawn with the rising phenomenon of social media influencer marketing. Additionally, the researcher discusses the characteristics of influencer marketing and how it may impact consumers' perceptions. Furthermore, influencer marketing and its effects on brand image will be analyzed. Moreover, the development of social media platforms is discussed, with a particular focus on Instagram. Throughout the thesis, emphasis will lie on micro influencers and their impact on consumers' perception of a brand's image.

Following the literature review, the methodology division presents this empirical study's research design, sampling approach, and survey development. Afterward, the data collection process and the analysis techniques are discussed. Furthermore, the results section demonstrates the survey outcomes. These findings are interpreted and discussed in the following discussion section in relation to the research objectives and the literature reviewed. This section integrates the empirical findings with theoretical insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. After the gathered data is discussed, the limitations of the research are explained. Additionally, propositions for future research are formulated. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the outcomes and answers the constructed

research questions. This section reaffirms the critical role of micro influencers in shaping brand image and underscores the need for businesses to effectively leverage their marketing strategy.

2 Literature Review

This thesis discusses the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. Therefore, this paper will focus on the power of influencer marketing and how it can affect brand image. In order to analyze and interpret the data collected in this paper, an explanation of preliminary terms may be helpful. The literature review will illuminate the necessary information.

2.1 The Development of Social Media Platforms

In the late 1990s, the internet started a revolution and introduced the tool of email, which was one of the first chances to communicate online. With the increasing development of the internet, the previous possibilities of media evolved (Thompson, 2011). The opportunities to transmit and receive information developed and were strengthened with the first ever social smartphone function, the Blackberry Messenger. Soon after the launch of the Blackberry Messenger in 2005, Whatsapp overtook the market and, therefore, changed the form of worldwide communication in 2009 (Xu, 2022). This form of communication is particularly important since the younger audience preferred text-based communication at that time (Miller et al., 2016).

Since the development of Whatsapp, social media platforms have had a profound impact on the marketing world (Bala & Verma, 2018). Social media networks have the ability to form and change the sense of community through online socio-technologies by covering a large number of human activities. Sense of community stands for the cohesion of social network users and the ability for users to link online (Lin et al., 2014). The easy accessibility makes social media a very powerful tool. The networks are constantly advancing, and increasingly new platforms are launched with all types of focuses allowing people to connect worldwide. Specifically, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have revolutionized how the private and business world communicate and interact (Thompson, 2011).

Apart from the apparent advantages social media has brought to our society, the development of social media platforms has not been without challenges. During the past years, social networks have faced a large amount of criticism (Xia, 2013). This critique mainly revolves around social media's role in spreading misinformation, allowing the opportunity to express hate speech and post harmful content. All these aspects have contributed to social media users' mental health issues (Braghieri et al., 2022). A study has shown that especially the mental health of adolescents and young adults in the United States has suffered since the increasing usage of social media began in the 2000s (Patel et al., 2007). Another study has published that between 2010 and 2015, an increase of 33% of the students in grades eight through twelve in the United States have noticed symptoms of depression (Twenge et al., 2017). Due to the fact that particularly young adults and adolescents spend more time connecting with people online than in person, it is essential to understand the functions of social media and the effects it can have on certain people (Miller, 2023).

The forthcoming section will explore a detailed discussion and analysis of one particular social media platform.

2.1.1 Instagram

Instagram is known to be one of the biggest social media platforms nowadays, with more than one billion active users (Robinson, 2021). The platform's key attribute is visual aesthetics, focusing on user-friendly features that make the application extra popular. Especially young users enjoy Instagram and can share their pictures/videos with the entire world (Douglas et al., 2019). The application allows you to post pictures and comment on those from others and enables users to edit and add filters to their creations. Therefore, specifically, those attracted to the network, enjoy visually stunning content that matches the image they want to promote (Hwang & Cho, 2018).

Instagram is a competitive platform for creating awareness or potentially increasing sales compared to other social media networks (Poulis et al., 2019). Especially the younger generations have switched from the original favorite application, Facebook, to Instagram over the years (DeLegge & Wangler, 2017). The differences between the platforms can be seen in Table 1.

	Instagram	Facebook
Age Group	18-24, 25-34	25-34
Content	Videos, photos, stories, questions, polls, live videos	Information, live videos, photos, videos
Approach	E-Commerce, social media marketing, influencer marketing, advertisements, community contact	Local marketing, relationship building, advertisements
Industries	Consumer goods, beauty, restaurants, sports, nonprofits	Finances, healthcare, beauty, employment
Weakness	Ad costs, influencer costs, many competitors	Out-dated, not easy to skim
Strengths	Broad reach, popular, easily accessible, universal	Reputable, known, trust, experience

Table 1: "Instagram in comparison to Facebook" (based on: [McCormick, 2022])

Instagram's power has increased over the years (Handayani, 2015). One potential reason for the growth is the gaining importance of influencer marketing. The social network has been integrated as a marketing and education tool in many industries (Jain, 2021). In a study, researchers found that 79% of marketers worldwide utilize Instagram to launch campaigns (Santora, 2023).

Especially two types of marketing strategies have been popular on Instagram: word of mouth and influencer marketing (Koay et al., 2021). These two approaches will be discussed throughout the thesis. However, for companies to be able to use Instagram as a useful marketing strategy to enhance their brand image, it is of great importance

to understand how the algorithm of the social media platform works (Haenlein et al., 2020).

2.1.2 The Algorithm of Instagram

A significant aspect that has led to the success of Instagram is its algorithm (Maares et al., 2021). The network's algorithm is created to display the type of content the user engages most in. This allows users to connect that might share passions and, therefore, build communities and active followers (Cotter, 2019). In 2018, Instagram introduced a new system that works with artificial intelligence. According to the Collins Dictionary, the definition of artificial intelligence is: "The capability of computers or programs to operate in ways believed to mimic human thought processes, such as reasoning and learning" (Collins Dictionary, 2010).

This new system was introduced to improve the accuracy of likes, follows, comments, and unfollows (Agung & Darma, 2019). In the past, users have automated specific processes to fake their like counts. This automation can be achieved by simply buying likes with a different application or starting the process of "like for likes." This procedure can be achieved through hashtags and direct messages to increase the number of followers or likes in order to fake engagement (Meshram et al., 2021).

There are several main factors that influence Instagram's algorithm. One impactful factor is the user preference. Many applications nowadays feature algorithms that take users' past behaviors into account (Zhang et al., 2016). The algorithm of Instagram considers the users' likes, comments, and shares on their profiles to gain a better knowledge of their application usage and preference. With the help of the gathered information, the algorithm enables Instagram to predict the content which a specific user may like, which increases user engagement (Chen et al., 2002).

The algorithm can also analyze the interest relevance of postings for an individual. This is created because the algorithm is able to remember the posts an Instagram user liked by evaluating the captions and hashtags which were used (Argyris et al., 2020). Therefore, the system can recognize topics that match the user's interest. As a result, the algorithm suggests corresponding content on their Instagram page. Furthermore, an aspect that also plays a role in the social media system is newness. The algorithm suggests recent content to display new content that may be attractive to the user. To

stay up-to-date, recent posts are most likely the first content a user sees when looking at the Instagram feed. This function helps to ensure that users do not miss out on news or updates (Fouquaert & Mechant, 2022).

Apart from relevance, recentness, and interests, the Instagram algorithm also considers the engagement metrics. The engagement metrics measures the engagement performance on an Instagram account. Factors that influence the engagement metrics are likes, comments, views, and shares (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). With the help of these factors, the algorithm can assess which content is popular and which is not. The more engagement a post has, the higher chances there are for the post to be displayed to a broader audience (Bene et al., 2022). Moreover, the algorithm considers the relationships between users. If Instagram notices two users frequently interacting via the platform through shared postings, etc., the algorithm suggests their content. Also, the application then proposes their account when one is about to share a post or a story (Register et al., 2023).

The perfect timing also plays an essential part in achieving high engagement. Instagram's algorithm tracks user behavior patterns on the platform, such as the time spent on the app. By considering the time users spend on the app, how often and when they visit the platform, the algorithm can recommend certain posts to a specific time in order to achieve the optimal time to attract the user's attention (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013).

As can be analyzed, high engagement on Instagram is achieved partly because of its algorithm. In order to increase engagement, users can incorporate Word of Mouth marketing. The concept of Word of Mouth marketing can support users to appear on the feed of other Instagram users and, therefore, increase overall social media performance (Erkan, 2015). The next section will encompass a detailed explanation of the actual definition and nature of Word of Mouth marketing.

2.2 Word of Mouth Marketing

During the past years, social media platforms have become increasingly popular in the marketing industry (Wright et al., 2010). Online word of mouth marketing, also known as WOM, has established its reputation as an information source and a root for

reliable recommendations (López & Sicillia, 2014). What originally served as a measure of sharing experiences with friends and family has evolved into a powerful electronic marketing strategy (Anderson, 1998). Nowadays, WOM is an essential mean of distribution and has the potential to market any type of product or service (Ahmad et al., 2014).

WOM is distinguished from alternative marketing strategies because the advertising method requires lower costs while creating increased propagation (Li et al., 2018). Nevertheless, WOM can affect customers' decisions both positively and negatively. Through WOM, consumers gain knowledge about a particular product, service, or company through the recommendation of influencers (Bughin et al., 2010). A study has shown that 74% of consumers consciously identify WOM as the main reason for a purchase decision (Mosley, 2022).

In 2022, a researcher announced that 82% of marketers use WOM to increase brand awareness, and 43% expect WOM marketing to improve their direct sales (O'Neill, 2022). As a result, electronic WOM is very efficient due to having a far customer reach and increasing the response rate, involving all users that clicked on the posted content. Therefore, marketers can accurately measure marketing performance (Liu et al., 2015).

WOM is an essential marketing tool since many users rely on it to build customer loyalty (Mohtasham et al., 2017). The key benefit of this communication is trust, which can be applied in many different forms, one way being influencer marketing. This trust is created over a certain period in which influencers maintain an honest and reliable relationship with their followers. Users follow specific influencers primarily because of similar experiences, interests, or lifestyles (Wolf, 2020). Over time, the influencers have gained their followers' trust by being relatable, significantly impacting their decisions. WOM marketing affects consumers purchasing choices and, thus, also influences the company's financial performance (Chen & Yuan, 2020).

Meanwhile, WOM can manifest itself in various forms. The subsequent section will introduce a noteworthy category of WOM that has gained considerable recognition.

2.2.1 eWOM

Through the development of the internet, new and growing opportunities in the marketing field have developed (Lo & Campos, 2018). One progressed marketing strategy is WOM. WOM has evolved into an electronic marketing strategy, namely electronic word of mouth, also known as eWOM. The rise of eWOM has revolutionized the way information spreads and influences consumers' perceptions and behavior. During eWOM, users share their opinions, recommendations, and experiences on shopping platforms and social media networks such as Instagram (Hu & Ha, 2015).

The marketing strategy can be found in different forms, such as reviews, comments, ratings, and social media postings, which all enable users to inform themselves about a vast network of opinions (Chen et al., 2014). EWOM has increasingly gained importance as consumers switch from face-to-face opinion exchanges to online communication (Alcocer, 2017). Customers use eWOM to gather information or spread their opinion on goods or services before making their product decisions. Therefore, eWOM has the ability to influence consumer perception and potentially influence their purchasing decision (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2013). As a result, eWOM has become a powerful strategy that can shape consumers' perceptions and behaviors. Positive eWOM can support firms by enhancing their brand image and increasing their customer loyalty (Al-Zyoud, 2021).

Businesses now start to recognize the importance of understanding the concept and power of eWOM (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2014). Companies and marketers actively observe and engage with eWOM to understand consumer behavior, address customer concerns, and leverage positive feedback for the brand's image. Additionally, companies may also introduce strategies to encourage and incentivize customers to share positive eWOM by offering discounts or rewards for online reviews or social media mentions (Srivastava et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, working with eWOM has several challenges. Negative eWOM can displease customers, harm brand image, and can possibly have a negative impact on sales (Jalilvand et al., 2011). The reliability and credibility of online content can be questionable due to users posting fake reviews and manipulating ratings. This calls for businesses to employ effective monitoring strategies to maintain the authenticity of

eWOM content (Ha, 2015). Additionally, businesses need to respond promptly and transparently to negative eWOM by addressing customer concerns or negative experiences to allow a positive customer experience (Moran & Muzellec, 2017).

Furthermore, eWOM requires companies to stay up-to-date and adapt to fast-changing trends and new platform opportunities (Daowd et al., 2021). As new social media channels emerge and consumer behaviors evolve, businesses must continuously refine and enhance their eWOM strategies in order to proficiently reach and engage with their intended target audience. This ongoing effort is indispensable for maintaining relevance and maximizing efficiency in the marketing field (Le et al., 2023).

EWOM can be divided into four main classifications, namely specialized eWOM, affiliated eWOM, miscellaneous eWOM, and, lastly, social eWOM (Ha, 2015). In order to comprehend the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image, it is essential to understand the concept of social eWOM, which will be elaborated on in the ensuing discussion.

2.2.2 Social eWOM

Social eWOM is a useful form of eWOM during which social media users share their informal opinions, recommendations, and experiences with brands and products through social media platforms and online communities (Brown et al., 2007). The new eWOM form takes advantage of the interactive and viral nature of social media platforms such as Instagram, which allows users to easily share their thoughts regarding specific goods and services with a wide and intended audience. The large and diverse reach of audience is the key advantage of social eWOM (Pihlaja et al., 2017).

When individuals share their experiences or opinions on, e.g., Instagram, their posts can quickly spread and potentially reach many people. This effect can significantly impact a brand's visibility and reputation, both positively and negatively (Arora et al., 2019). Social eWOM allows users to build relationships through trust and similar interests (Pihlaja et al., 2017). In return for posting recommendations, users expect to make more friends or potential customers to see their opinions in the future and, hopefully, influence their decision-making process (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017).

Therefore, social eWOM can also increase engagement and conversation among social media users. Through comments, likes, shares, and retweets on social media, users can actively participate in discussions about brands and their products (Rossmann et al., 2016). This real-time interaction allows users to exchange information whilst influencing each other's perceptions and purchasing decisions (Dolan et al., 2016).

To effectively make use of social eWOM, businesses need to actively engage with consumers on social media platforms and respond to any reviews or statements their customers make (Nair, 2011). They should monitor conversations and encourage positive user-generated content. By working on meaningful and authentic connections with their current and potential customers, firms can enhance their brand loyalty and positively impact their brand image. The relationship between the company and the customers can especially be strengthened through the support of social media influencers (Gommans et al., 2001).

In the realm of social eWOM, influencers have a crucial role as they have the ability to influence users' perceptions (Zhou et al., 2021). Social media influencers have established a significant following on social media platforms and have gained their followers' trust over time (Kim & Kim, 2021). Brands often collaborate with influencers in order to generate positive eWOM and improve their brand image (Singh et al., 2020).

Social media influencers have introduced a new form of eWOM in recent years. In the following section, social media influencers will be further analyzed in detail.

2.3 Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers create a relatable online persona to increase the number of followers or strengthen the relationship with their community. They share personal content that often revolves around a particular topic, such as health or fashion (Tafese & Wood, 2021). Social media users follow specific influencers due to finding them similar to one's self and being able to interact with them (Jin et al., 2019).

Influencers can be divided into two major subgroups: macro and micro influencers. Macro influencers are seen as celebrities, whereas micro influencers have fewer

followers and post more personal and frequent content (Conde & Casais, 2023). Nevertheless, regardless of follower count, all influencers must incorporate three critical marketing functions: potential reach to highly engaged followers, a trustworthy persona, and the fundamental competencies in social media management. Highly engaged followers can be obtained by posting interactive content such as polls or reactions to comments and opinions. Due to having a public and viewed social profile, influencers function as an authority persona. To be able to pursue the job of an influencer and have the authority persona, one must feature a basic knowledge of social media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The job of an Influencer is to post social media content for a specific client who fits their profile (Trusov et al., 2010). The companies benefit from these product and service placements because the influencers incorporate the goods into their everyday lifestyle. This placement gives the followers an insight into how the products would be used in reality (Djarafova & Rushworth, 2017). In exchange for posting a company's product or service, influencers can demand a specific budget. Influencers with a strong social media engagement rate may receive over six-figure amounts for posting one piece of content (McCoole, 2018). However, especially smaller influencers with 100.000 followers or less may also be paid in form of free experiences, travel, products, or services (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

An example of a famous social media influencer is Chiara Ferragni (Roberti, 2022). The former law student has turned her life around and quit her studies to become an influencer. Since 2009, Chiara Ferragni has focused on her social media presence through her blog "The Blonde Salad." With over 29 million followers on Instagram, the Italian entrepreneur has made herself a living out of social media. Chiara Ferragni has followers worldwide and receives several hundred thousand likes on her Instagram posts. Her active profile engagement enables the opportunity for her to work together with luxury brands such as Dior and Louis Vuitton (Kay, 2017). Meanwhile, the influencer has her brand named after her and has been on the Forbes 30 under 30 list twice in the past. According to Elle, in 2022, Chiara Ferragni's cost per post on Instagram was approximately 99,000 USD (Malivindi, 2022).

The rise of social media influencers can be analyzed throughout the past years. Therefore, influencer marketing has become increasingly attractive (Brown & Hayes,

2008). In the following section, further information on the concept of influencer marketing will be provided.

2.3.1 Influencer Marketing

With the rise of social media, agencies and companies worldwide are shifting their focus toward social media platforms to maximize their profitability (Saputra et al., 2022). Influencer marketing is a form of marketing in which specific individuals are targeted rather than an entire market. Influencers are selected with the objective of reaching potential consumers as efficiently as possible. The influencers that a business works with are chosen mainly based on the influencer's followers. If a company can see that the influencer's followers are related to the firm's target group, a cooperation may be beneficial (Whitler, 2014). Fundamentally, influencer marketing is a form of WOM marketing, indicating that customers are more likely to trust a recommendation when given by a familiar person (Woods, 2016). According to a past study from AC Nielsen, 92% of consumers are more likely to depend on a recommendation made by relatable people such as friends or family rather than any other advertising form (Nielsen, 2012).

Another study published by the Digital Marketing Institute stated that 49% of consumers trust the recommendations made by influencers, and 82% base their purchase decision on opinions shared on social media by friends, family, and influencers (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). Due to these aspects, the influencer marketing industry has been growing steadily. In 2020, influencer marketing was estimated to be a 101 billion dollars industry worldwide (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The Influencer Marketing Hub declared that more than 75% of brand marketers expected to allocate their budget to influencer marketing in 2022. Additionally, 68% of marketers are willing to increase their spending in the industry (Geysler, 2023). Instagram, a social network platform, is the most popular platform for influencer campaigns. According to a study by Dencheva, 94% of the influencer campaigns worldwide took place on Instagram in 2021 (Dencheva, 2023). These Influencer marketing campaigns can be analyzed by considering different key performance indicators.

How do you measure success of influencer marketing programs?

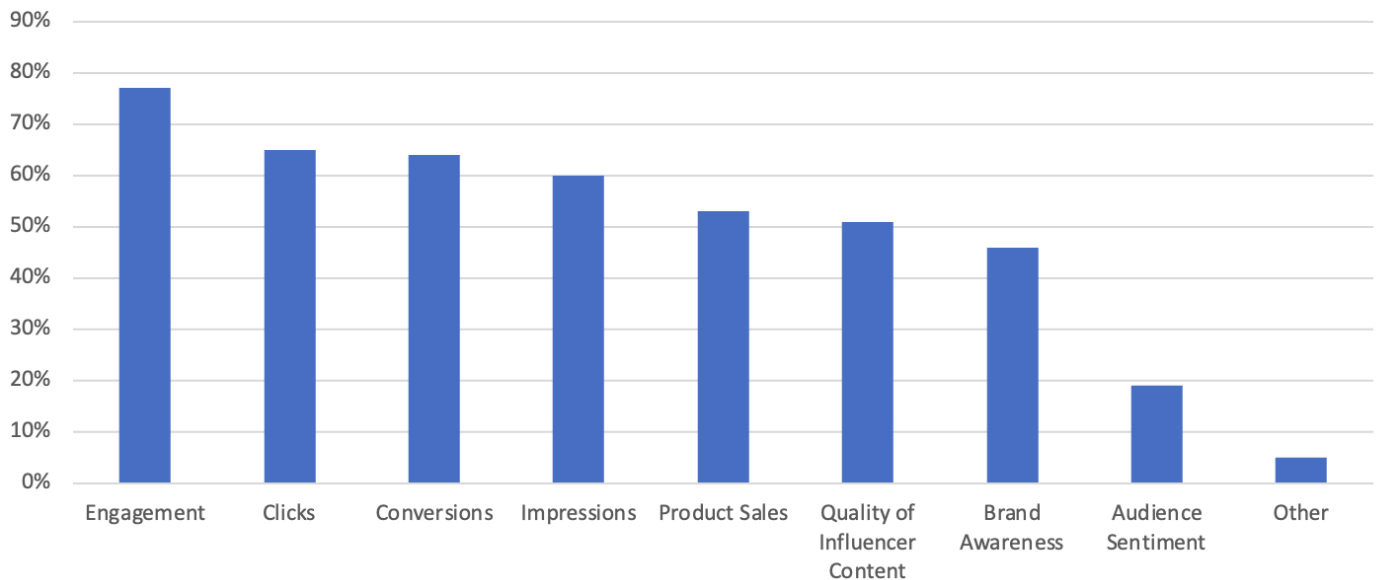


Figure 1: "Success of Influencer Marketing Campaigns" (based on: [Linqia, 2021])

As seen in Figure 1, 77% of marketers rely on engagement as a metric of measurement regarding the success of influencer marketing (Linqia, 2021). Engagement includes all possibilities to interact with the posted content through likes, comments, shares, and saves (Adobe Express, 2022). When the engagement is high, then the connection to the followers is said to be strong, which increases the probability of them purchasing the influencer's recommendations. The formula to calculate the engagement rate is the number of likes and comments the influencer received per post, divided by the number of followers they have and then multiplied by 100. It is a good engagement if the result lies between one and three. Everything above three is considered as excellent (Adobe Express, 2022).

While companies often struggle with the modern adaptation to the influencer marketing strategy, influencers are experts in the field. Influencers are specialists in creating user engagement and visions that fit individual companies' campaigns (Cartwright et al., 2022). As a result, social media has encouraged companies to direct more budget into the new marketing strategy. In 2022 a study showed that 68% of marketers want to increase their spending in the social media influencer industry (Geysler, 2022). The communication between a firm and its customers, as well as

potential customers, has increasingly changed since the ability to use influencer marketing on social media (Nurhandayani et al., 2019). Due to this aspect, companies specializing in the field of influencer marketing have been evolving worldwide. In 2021, a total of 18,900 influencer marketing companies existed, proving a 75% increase compared to 2019. Additionally, the majority of firms (7,300) were located in the United States (Dencheva, 2023).

Throughout the thesis, the researcher has concentrated on specifically the impact of micro influencers on brand image. The following section will enable a deeper understanding of what micro influencers are and which qualities they have.

2.3.2 Micro Influencers

Micro influencers are known to be individuals with fewer followers on social media than macro influencers; however, they directly influence their followers. The direct influence is created because the followers of micro influencers tend to be friends and family (Liu et al., 2021). Nevertheless, micro influencers have enough followers on social media to make an influencer career. Their follower range lies between 10,000-100,000 followers (Tiautrakul & Jindakul, 2019). What also distinguishes micro influencers is that their reach is more regionally focused. The majority of these micro influencers' revenue is gained through affiliate-link systems or periodic cooperations with a variety of brands (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Affiliate programs allow users to visit a specific website through a coded link that is hosted on the previous website. Therefore, the user is directed from one website to another. As a result, a percentage of the products sale is transferred to the host website (Haq, 2012).

Influencers with fewer than 100.000 followers are paid around 200 dollars per post (Ruby, 2022). Micro Influencers often partner with several brands rather than focusing on a few large companies. In addition to receiving tangible goods and services, micro influencers can also realize intangible advantages such as authenticity, connecting with their users, and, therefore, attracting new followers. The videos they post can significantly affect sales because users rely on the micro influencer's opinion and recommendations. The aspect of authenticity is the reason why marketers increasingly tend to work with micro influencers (Wissman, 2018). A survey by Linqia in 2021 showed that 90% of entrepreneurs want to work together with micro

influencers rather than celebrities or macro influencers (Linqia, 2021). Figure 2 represents the most popular influencer types companies wanted to work with in 2021.

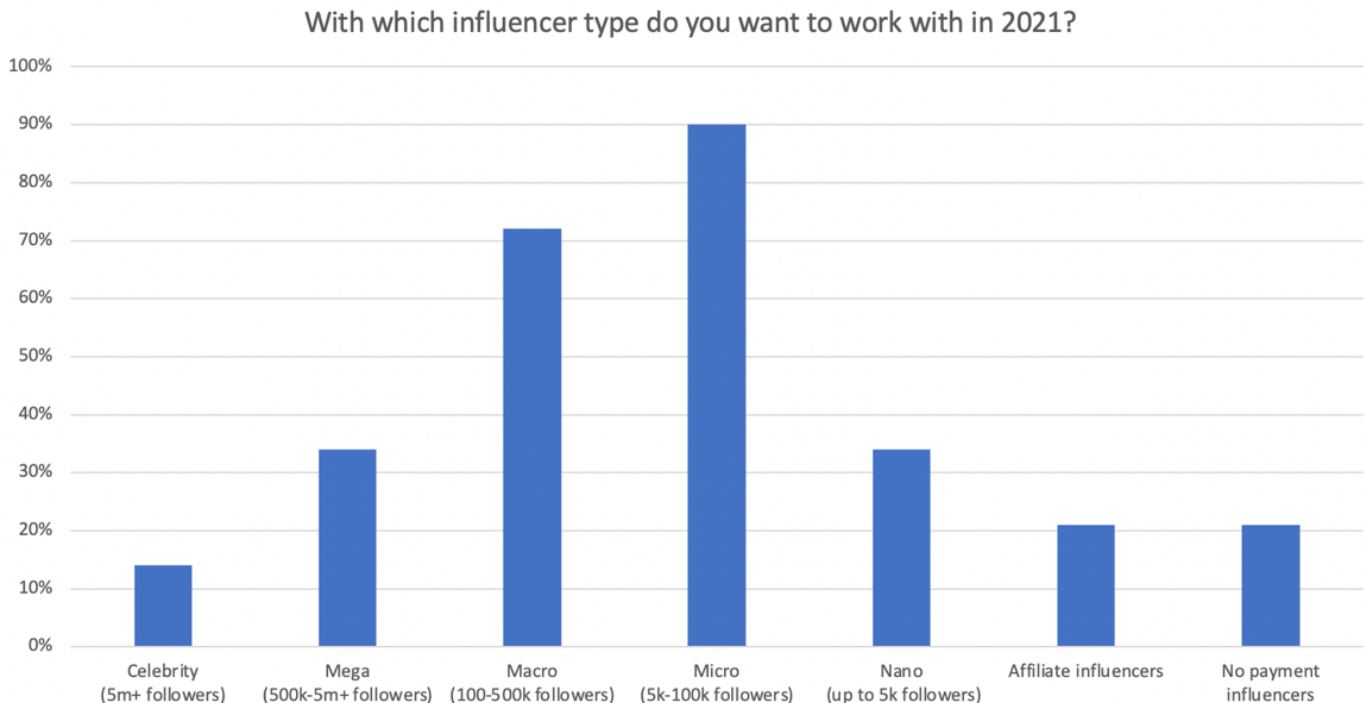


Figure 2: "Influencer type preference" (based on: [Linqia, 2021])

During the examination of the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image, it is valuable to consider the theoretical framework of the Social Influence Theory by Kelman.

2.4 Social Influence Theory

In order to understand how individuals can be influenced, Herbert Kelman created a specific theory. The social influencer theory created by the American psychologist was developed to gain a deeper understanding of how people are affected by those surrounding them. The framework is based on three forms of social influence, namely, compliance, identification, and internalization. Kelman's theory explains how these three forms can achieve behavioral intent (Kelman, 1958).

Compliance is the first process that a consumer may experience. This action occurs when an individual agrees to be impacted by the opinion and recommendations of other customers or the company itself. The individual accepts the process intending to receive a reward or to evade punishment. Therefore, the consumer agrees to the

action because of the potential consequence rather than trusting in the benefit of the procedures (Goodwin, 1987). An example of compliance in the social media industry could be that an influencer posts their fashion brand and encourages their followers to buy from the online store. As a result, the followers purchase the fashion pieces created by the influencer, however, not necessarily because they like the products but more so because they want to be associated with the influencer.

In addition to compliance, a different form of social influence can be identification. In this case, consumers make a specific decision because they feel like their action is essential for a mutual obligation in which they are in. Similar to compliance, the identification process does not base on the beneficial consumers' adoption of an action but instead on the potential consequences (Kelman, 1958). An example of this process may be that a celebrity or macro influencer posts their voted political candidate. As a result, their Instagram followers may adopt the exact political opinion just because they admire the influencer and not because they have the same political standing.

The last influencer process is internalization. During this action, a consumer accepts to collaborate with a firm or other consumer because the process aligns with their pre-existing values (Goodwin, 1987). An example of the internalization aspect of Kelman's social influencer theory could be that an individual follows a famous climate activist on social media. The influencer demonstrates how to live a sustainable lifestyle on Instagram and posts a study showing how much CO2 Emissions can be reduced when someone takes a bike instead of driving a car. The follower strives to be eco-friendlier, and as a result, the follower may internalize and practice this suggestion. Therefore, the follower may start riding their bike rather than driving by car because it creates a benefit for the environment and fits into their specific values.

Kelman's Social Influence Theory is a helpful framework to understand and analyze individuals' intentions regarding their decisions in their social circle. The theory presents the different processes people undergo when influenced by their social environment and the reasons they might take action. Since the development of the Social Influence Theory, many marketers have been using this framework to understand consumers' behavior based on their social surroundings to optimize marketing and increase brand awareness and image (Bhukya & Paul, 2023).

Gaining a thorough understanding of how Kelman's Social Influence Theory functions can provide helpful insights into its direct influence on shaping brand image. The next analysis will examine the precise definition and nature of brand image.

2.5 Brand Image

Due to Kelman's framework stating that external social circles influence people's behavior, it is important for companies to analyze the individual's behavioral intention (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). With the rise of influencer marketing, firms have the opportunity to collaborate with influential social media users (Zhao et al., 2018). Not only does influencer marketing support companies with increasing profits, but it can potentially help with a positive brand image. In order to develop a brand, it is essential for a company to pay attention to its brand image. According to Kotler, a brand is a company that has meaning and association. Brand image is the customers' connection between a brand and its reputation (Kotler, 2003). This reputation and brand credibility can quickly impact the usage of the product or service and, therefore, influence the purchasing decisions of the target audience. Brand image is connected to the customer experience, which will have a direct effect on customer loyalty. According to a research study made by Salesforce, 93% of customers are more likely to be loyal to a product or service from a company if the firm offers excellent customer service (Redbord, 2022). A company must provide a good customer experience in order to maintain its brand image and, therefore, prevent customers from switching to another competitor. The brand image is an overall reflection of how the company is perceived, which is why it is essential to maintain a good brand image (Kotler, 2003).

Brand image is built on three main components of the image; however, there are different conceptualizations. One perception includes the image of the provider of the product, the image of the user, and the image of the product on its own. However, how important each aspect depends on the company. With certain companies, for example, the origin of the product is not as important as it may be for a different firm (Biel, 1992). How much each component weighs highly depends on the values and ethics of the individual companies. Understanding the elements and dimensions of brand image can support firms and influencers in implementing successful strategies in order to enhance the company's reputation (Elli, 2017).

Brand image can be analyzed through various factors. An American organizational theorist, David Aaker, formulated one framework that explains the different dimensions of brand image (Day & Aaker, 1970).

2.5.1 Five Dimensions of Brand Image

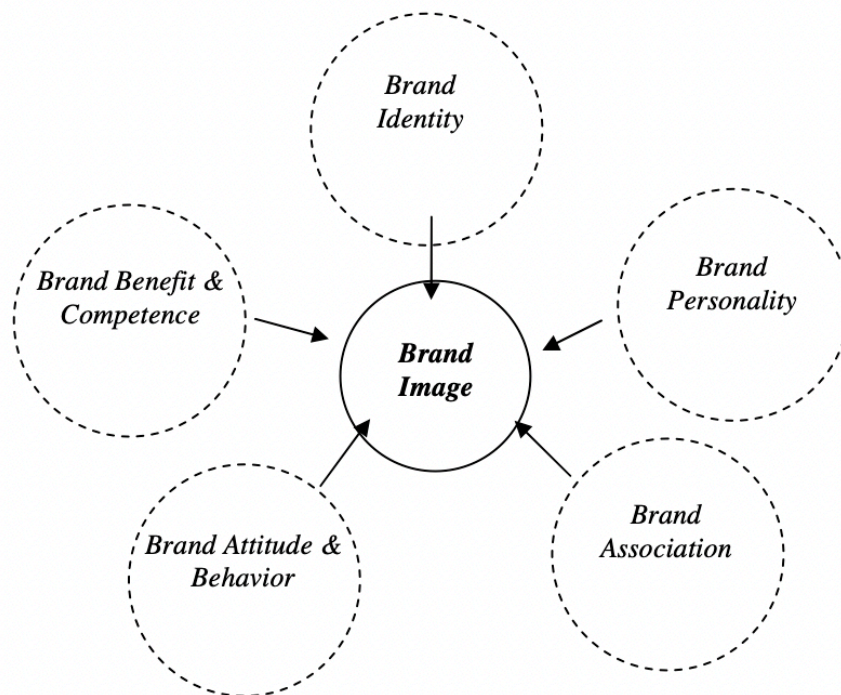


Figure 3: "Dimensions of Brand Image" (based on: [Aaker, 1991])

Although brand image can be analyzed through various factors, Aaker identified five main dimensions. He claims that all these dimensions can influence a brand's image, as shown in Figure 3.

According to Aaker, brand image is closely related to the dimension of brand identity. Brand identity includes all tangible aspects that relate to the company. These elements allow the connection between the customer and the firm. An example of this could be a logo or slogan (Aaker, 1991).

Brand personality has gained significant importance when considering the success of a company (Robertson et al., 2019). The goal of this dimension is to obtain a finer view of the customer needs and wants to be able to establish long-term customer relationships. Brand personality includes the unique characteristics of a company that can be compared to competitors (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015). A firm may be

sophisticated, while another may release excitement for customers. These attributes help customers understand the company's values, impact overall consumer behavior, and can positively influence the brand's image (Aaker, 1997).

A further dimension is the brand association. A brand association is a mental connection that is made by a customer between a product or a company and a specific feeling or person. Brand association is a unique aspect of a company that distinguishes itself from its competitors. An example would be the linkage between Barack Obama and the first black president of the United States (Wijaya, 2012).

The next dimension is known as brand attitude and behavior. During this dimension, the form of communication and values of a company are analyzed. This behavior can then influence the customer's perception and, therefore, decide whether or not consumers are interested in the brand. Due to this, companies that communicate poorly often lack a good reputation. This interaction can take place between the company and its customers, as well as between the company and its employees (Keller, 1993).

The last dimension is brand benefit and competence. This dimension focuses on the advantages for customers and the competencies a company owns to solve consumer problems. Benefits that can be observed can include emotional, functional, symbolic, or social (Afzal et al., 2010). An example of a social benefit is that a customer may enjoy a healthier lifestyle while ensuring that no unnecessary environmental damage is done. All these aspects improve customer experience and, therefore, influence the brand reputation (Wijaya, 2012).

Nowadays, companies have many opportunities to work on their brand image. One strategy that has been increasingly used to enhance a brand's image is influencer marketing (Ali & Alqudah, 2022). The potential effects influencer marketing may have on a firm's image will be considered in the following.

2.5.2 The impact of influencer marketing on brand image

As already discussed, influencer marketing has established itself as a powerful strategy in the business world (George et al., 2021). The relatively new marketing strategy is especially interesting for businesses that are willing to enhance their brand

image and further connect with their target audiences. As soon as businesses link with influencers, they may realize specific changes in their company's engagement, such as an increase in social media profile clicks (Hughes et al., 2019).

According to a research study, influencers have a significant positive impact on the relationship between a company and its customers (Glucksman, 2017). Social media influencers promote specific products or services that fit their profile and lifestyle. As a result, the followers get to see how the products or services are used in real life and can imagine themselves using them as well (Hermanda et al., 2019).

Consumers often use influencers' opinions as trustworthy information sources because influencers focus on posting relatable or desirable content. Followers rely on social media influencers and may even see them as role models in certain aspects, such as fashion (Park & Cho, 2012). Therefore, consumers may adjust their perceptions of a brand after considering the influencer's opinion of the product. This can positively impact the brand image and encourage the followers to purchase specific products leading to an increase in sales (Hariyanti & Wirapraja, 2018). Especially influencers have the potential to increase sales enormously due to the new marketing approach. Instead of focusing on the entire target market, influencers target vital individuals that could be interested in a certain product or service. The brand selects an influencer considering the listeners the individual has. The goal is to work with influencers that have followers who could be potential buyers and, therefore, spread the word about the brand (Bijen, 2017).

Overall, influencer marketing has a complex and multifaceted impact on brand image (Rundin & Colliander, 2021). Researchers have identified various factors that may help or hinder an influencer's impact on the company's image. Therefore, it is extremely important for firms to understand the aspects that may influence their image to effectively utilize the power of influencer marketing on the brand image (Glucksman, 2017).

3 Methodology

This research paper will gather information from primary data to obtain a deeper understanding of the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. The

methodology section is divided into four main parts, explaining the research design, sampling approach, survey development, and data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Design

Selecting the most appropriate research design is an essential part of conducting research. The research design guides the researcher through the process of collecting and analyzing the obtained data. In general, two main types of data exist primary and secondary data. Preliminary data is compiled through the direct collection of a researcher, such as interviews or surveys. This data is collected specifically for the research problem at hand (Hox & Boeijs, 2005).

Contrary to primary data, secondary data is gathered for another reason and is reused for a different problem. The researcher does not directly accumulate the information but instead relies on primary sources of material such as scientific journals, which allow the researcher to collect information tailored to the specific research objective. Additionally, the researcher has complete control over the data collection process by creating a survey and, therefore, presents unique insights (Rabianski, 2003).

There are three main research design approaches that can be implemented in gathering primary data: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative method includes all types of observations which may not necessarily have the ability to be generalized. Forms of qualitative research are known as open-ended questions and interviews. Qualitative researchers need to possess an open mindset to gain a more profound, inductive understanding of a certain experience or opinion (Hollstein, 2011). In contrast, quantitative research is based on statistical characteristics which focus on testing a relationship between certain variables. This research can be built on surveys and experiments in which the questions are close-ended and the method is deductive (Creswell, 2014). Finally, the mixed methods approach combines both research designs: qualitative and quantitative. During this approach, a greater perspective is gained to understand the research problem in depth. The researcher may decide to either start the study with quantitative or qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014).

For this paper, the qualitative research approach has been selected. This approach is the most appropriate for exploratory research because the focus lies on individual opinions, which can hardly be represented numerically. The goal of the study is to extend knowledge and understanding of the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image by analyzing the perception within the sample. The data of the sample will be collected through an online survey with open-ended and general questions.

A survey is a traditional examination of a sample that gathers information by asking the respondents a series of questions (Tierney, 2000). Mainly, surveys are used in social science research, market research, and opinion polling. The survey then provides the researcher with information about the respondents' opinions, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and demographic characteristics (Althaus, 1998). In contrast to other qualitative methods, such as focus groups, surveys allow to standardize the data collection from individuals to create a meaningful conclusion of the sample (Jansen, 2010). There are several ways to conduct a survey. Researchers can collect data through face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and questionnaires. Face-to-face interviews may be suitable for sensitive subjects or complex questions; however, this type of interview is labor intensive (Kazmer & Xie, 2008).

Nevertheless, in-person interviews can obtain high-quality data. Telephone interviews are specifically helpful if the sample is widely geographically distributed. Consequently, this type of survey features a limited complexity due to the missing aspect of visual support. Lastly, questionnaires are a cheaper survey method while still having a far reach. Nonetheless, the missing personal contact requires the survey to be well thought through (Fricker & Schonlau, 2002).

3.2 Sampling Approach

In addition to selecting an appropriate research design, it is equally crucial to determine an appropriate sampling approach. The sample size is an important feature of any observed study, and it helps the researcher make a conclusion about a specific population. However, in order to generalize a sample, it is crucial to address an appropriate sample size. It should be noted that the appropriate sample size can vary depending on the nature of the research problem and the chosen methodological approach (Taherdoost, 2017).

In this thesis, the researcher aims to comprehend the effects micro influencer marketing may have on brand image. The researcher has chosen to distribute a qualitative online questionnaire to obtain efficient and useful information. This survey supports the researcher in understanding the perceptions of the respondents about the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. To participate in the survey, respondents needed to be regular users of Instagram and possess a fundamental understanding of influencers. A non-probability convenience sampling method has been utilized in this study, as this sampling approach allows for the efficient gathering of data from individuals who are easily accessible and willing to participate. This sampling technique provides practical advantages such as convenience, cost-effectiveness, and time efficiency. The qualitative nature of the survey allows for a more in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, providing richer and more detailed data compared to quantitative methods.

3.3 Survey Development

Conducting this survey aids in understanding the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. Therefore, it is essential that the questions are well-defined and relevant to answering the research questions. The survey aims to shed light on the impact of micro influencer marketing and how this marketing strategy may change people's opinions regarding the brand image. The researcher wants to discover how followers can become potential customers for any firm and how their trust can be gained. Additionally, the researcher wants to understand in which industries micro influencers most likely affect brand image opinions and why users may not rely on the recommendations of micro influencers. The gathered data will help the author of the thesis to answer the following three questions:

- To what extent does the effectiveness of micro influencer marketing on brand image depend on trust between micro influencers and their followers?
- How does micro influencer marketing affect the consumers' perception of brand image?
- To what extent is the number of followers of an influencer important in terms of the credibility of recommendations for customers?

The questionnaire was generated through the website www.google.com/forms. It consisted of 17 questions that included open-ended as well as close-ended questions. During the close-ended questions, the participants had to choose one direct answer (e.g., age or gender), whereas the open-ended questions requested long answers. The first part of the developed survey contains 14 open-ended questions, which were asked to create an in-depth understanding of the perception of influencer marketing. Afterward, three close-ended questions are asked, which are necessary for the participants' overall understanding. For example, one of the close-ended questions asked the participants to choose which social media platform they use most, e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Snapchat.

The first section of the survey focused on the social media usage of the participants and their perception regarding the importance of followers. This segment consisted of nine questions. One of the questions was closed-ended (hours of social media usage per day), whereas other questions were open-ended (for what reason they use social media). Furthermore, the question was asked if the participant follows influencers and how many followers these influencers have. Afterward, the participant was asked whether the number of followers is important and why it could or could not be beneficial for companies to use social media to promote their products. One question asked if the participant pays more or less attention to a brand after an influencer has mentioned it and if they may have changed their perception after hearing an influencer's opinion. Lastly, a question stated if the contender trusts influencers' recommendations if they have fewer than 100.000 followers.

After completing the first survey section, the participant was asked to state their understanding of micro influencer marketing. Following this question, a short definition of micro influencer marketing was added to the survey to help the participants answer the upcoming questions. Several questions were then asked about micro influencers and their effect on the participant's brand image opinion, such as: "What factors do you consider when choosing to follow a micro influencer on Instagram, and how does this impact your opinion of the brands they promote?" The survey ended with a few general questions that asked the participant's age and gender.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was shared on Instagram and was available from the end of March till the end of April 2023. The published survey can be found attached in the appendix.

The sample size consists of 42 respondents. Additionally, the researcher wishes to emphasize that all information gathered in the data collection is handled with great care and confidentiality. All participants took part in the questionnaire voluntarily, and their anonymity was maintained throughout the research process.

The information which was received in the data collection is then analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis can be used for quantitative as well as qualitative research in either deductive or inductive reasoning (Bengtsson, 2016). Deductive reasoning is implemented when a researcher aims to confirm or test a specific hypothesis. In contrast, inductive reasoning is utilized when the researcher aims to generate new hypotheses, and there is only limited knowledge available in a particular research area. Additionally, deductive reasoning only provides one logically valid conclusion (Goswami, 2002). Due to micro influencer marketing being a rather new marketing strategy with not too much accessible research, inductive reasoning is applied in this specific thesis. Additionally, the researcher has chosen to rely on qualitative content analysis, which is known as a process used to categorize raw data. The focus of this analysis lies in finding similarities and differences between data gathered from the survey participants' lived experiences (Graneheim et al., 2017).

In 2000, Philipp Mayring introduced his step-by-step model, which outlines a systematic approach for conducting inductive qualitative content analysis. The primary idea of the process builds on creating a standard for defining the criteria based on theoretical knowledge and research inquiries. This standard is used to determine the relevant elements within the text being analyzed. Using this standard, the data is carefully examined. Afterward, the researcher generates gradually derived categories through a systematic approach (Krippendorff, 2004). However, before the categories can be created, the researcher must fulfill the first steps from Mayring's model. The first step requires the researcher to study the textual material to comprehensively understand the survey results. After investigating the participants' answers, the researcher extracts specific units of meaning. This process is known as

„open coding“ and involves identifying and naming units with descriptive codes that capture the main message. Next, the researcher analyzes the codes in order to find similarities among the units. These patterns are then formed into various categories. Each category must have a clear description that represents the units. After forming the categories, the researcher examines the relationships between the codes and categories to find trends or frequencies. Lastly, the researcher must interpret the findings and draw a conclusion (Mayring, 2000).

For this thesis, the researcher utilized the online survey results to follow the step-by-step model by Mayring. The author examined the answers provided by the survey participants thoroughly. The key answers were then summarized in order for the researcher to create two tables: categories of opinions on influencer marketing and categories of opinions on micro influencer marketing. The first table consists out of the participants' perception of influencer marketing. The main categories formulated are: follower importance, business industry presence, brand attention, perception, and trust. The second table created consists of the participants' opinions on micro influencer marketing. The key categories are: definition of micro influencer marketing, factors that play a role when considering following a micro influencer, reasons not to follow a micro influencer, micro influencer recommendations, and industries in which micro influencers' recommendations most likely impact one. Finally, connections between the categories were made to eventually interpret and conclude the results. The results demonstrate how the survey participants view micro influencer marketing and how the marketing strategy may impact their perception of certain brands.

4 Results

This section aims to explain and interpret the data collected through the online survey. These results should support the author in formulating a conclusion for the research objective and answering the three stated research questions on the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. Altogether, 42 filled-in surveys were collected with the age group ranging from 19-29 years old. However, most people were 21 or 22 years old (each 8%). Of the 42 participants, 54.8% are female, and 45.2% are male.

The first two questions asked how much time the participants spent on social media and which platform they preferred most. When taking the mean from all the participants' answers, the average time spent on social media is around four hours per day. Moreover, it can be recognized that Instagram is the most popular social media platform among the participants, with a total of 97.6% of people who use this network. Snapchat emerged as the second most popular used social media platform. 42.9% of the participants favor this particular network. Additionally, Facebook received the least votes, with 0%.

Afterward, the participants were asked why they use social media. Figure 4 demonstrates with which intentions the respondents may utilize social networks such as Instagram. Some of the most common reasons are entertainment, friends, boredom, information, keeping up to date, and inspiration. 59% of the respondents said that they use social media in order to stay in touch with their friends and family. Inspiration was the second most popular reason to use social media, with 38%. Nevertheless, some participants also listed reasons such as fear of missing out and trends. Both reasons were stated by 3% of the participants.

Reasons for social media usage

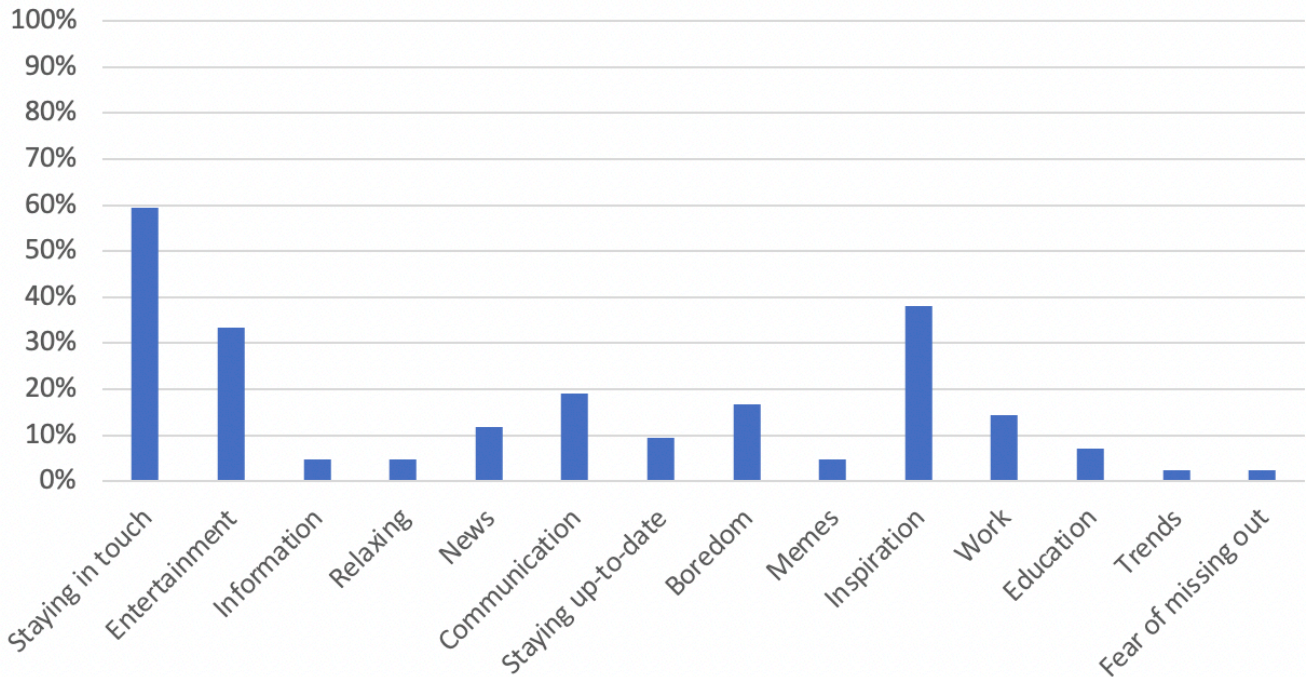


Figure 4: Why do you use social media?

In another question, the participants were asked if they follow influencers and, if so, how many followers they have. 40 of 42 respondents answered that they follow influencers, and most of them said that the influencers have up to several million followers. One participant stated that they follow celebrities such as Gigi Hadid or Shawn Mendes. Another participant answered that they only follow two influencers that have less than 30.000 followers. Nevertheless, many said that they start following influencers from 15.000-30.000 followers onwards.

The collected data revealed that there are several different reasons why or why not Instagram users follow influencers and how influencer marketing may be important for the business world. The main aspects have been summarized into five categories: follower importance, business industry and social media, brand attention, perception, and trust.

Categories	Participants Answers
Follower importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not at all important - A higher follower count makes an influencer more influential; however, influencers with fewer followers are more relatable - Very important: will not follow an influencer with 100.000+ followers
Business industry presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is extremely important for companies to present themselves on social media - It is not important for companies to present themselves on social media, but it is helpful
Brand attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influencers impact my decision process regarding a company and its products or services - I skip the sections in which influencers promote products
Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When influencers promote products or services, it can be perceived as annoying - If influencers post a product or service, I am more aware of what I consume and how much - Brands may be perceived as cooler
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of followers of an influencer does not matter regarding trust - I trust smaller influencers less than larger ones because I am worried that they take any kind of deal for the money - If I know someone, I trust them

Table 2: Categories of Opinions on Influencer Marketing

As seen in Table 2, there are three main opinions regarding the importance of followers concerning influencers. Four out of 42 respondents said that they care about the number of followers regarding influencers. One of the four participants that cares about followers said: “I believe that a higher number of followers makes an influencer more influential. But I do think that “smaller” influencers or people who share what they love to do with fewer followers, might be more honest and relatable for normal people like me”. Another person that cares about the follower number said: “It is very important. I will not follow people with more than 100k”.

The next category is “Business industry and social media”. Nearly all survey participants agree that companies should integrate social media into their marketing concept. Regarding whether companies should use social media to promote their products or services, one respondent answered: “Yes, it is the easiest way to reach a larger audience and easy to track and target a specific group”. In contrast, two participants answered that they do not think social media marketing is necessarily important for companies. One respondent answered: “No, because sometimes I am nervous that they have false information because they are promoting products for money and not because they like them”.

According to the participants, raising brand awareness is a benefit for firms when using social media. This leads to the next category, namely, “Brand attention”. The survey asked respondents how much or less attention they pay to a brand after an influencer has mentioned it. The collected answers demonstrate three different views on influencers and their recommendations. Many people said that they do not care about influencer recommendations, whereas another respondent wrote that they listen to recommendations made by influencers they trust. In addition, several other participants answered that influencers definitely impact their decision behavior and may convince them to buy a certain product. One respondent wrote: „I pay more attention to the brand just because I memorized the name of the company“. However, some participants have a more critical view of influencers’ recommendations. One survey respondent answered: “Since all influencers do some sort of advertising, these become less significant to me“. Another participant said: “Often I find ads annoying, so I’ll deliberately boycott the brand“.

“Brand perception” is the next category created. The survey included a question asking how the participants' perceptions regarding influencer marketing may have changed in the past. The questionnaire answers show that most respondents do not think that their perception changes when confronted with influencer marketing on social platforms. Nevertheless, several participants agreed that influencer marketing could be perceived as irritating. One person wrote: “Sometimes it can honestly get annoying to always be exposed to advertisements”. To add to this viewpoint, another respondent said: “Often there is just too much advertising, and then I unfollow the influencer”. These statements show that obvious advertising cannot only lead to users being annoyed but can also be the reason for them to unfollow certain influencers. Contrary to those opinions, others said that influencer marketing could raise increased awareness and may lead to purchasing a specific product. A survey participant wrote that influencer marketing: “Creates a new level of awareness”. Another respondent represented both views by saying: “It has made me realize how fast we can be influenced by social media and opinions in general. It has made me be more careful about building my own opinions on brands and content, but also having an appreciation for being able to gather information like that”.

The participants' lack of certainty regarding influencer marketing is analyzed through the category “trust”. The respondents were asked to what extent they trust influencers' opinions and recommendations if they have less than 100.000 followers. Many people answered, saying that they do not think that the number of followers of an influencer has anything to do with the reliability of their recommendations. One person wrote: “The followers do not affect the credibility of the influencer”. Another participant expressed their worries regarding their trust in influencers with fewer followers by saying: “Actually less than influencers with a big following because I feel like they take every deal they can get”. Another view was represented when some respondents answered that they trust smaller influencers more. One respondent answered: “I trust them more since they seem more authentic”.

To be able to gain a deeper understanding of what impact micro influencer marketing has on brand image, Table 3 was created. This table presents the survey participants' opinions on micro influencer marketing which are summarized into five categories: perception of micro influencer marketing, factors that play a role when considering

following a micro influencer, reasons not to follow a micro influencer, micro influencer recommendations and industries in which one is most likely impacted through micro influencers recommendations.

Categories	Participants Answers
Perception of “micro influencer marketing”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influencers with less than 50.000 followers - Influencers that are not very publicly known yet that still promote brands - Influencers in a specific niche
Factors that play a role when considering following a micro influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust and loyalty - If the content is interesting for oneself - Cool feed - Authenticity
Reasons not to follow a micro influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not famous enough - I do not like product placements - Lack of honesty
Micro influencer recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I do not buy products that I see on social media - If I hear an influencer recommendation, I look into the products - I only trust recommendations if influencers use the products privately
Industries in which one is most likely impacted by micro influencers' recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Niche markets - Beauty - Fashion - Food

Table 3: Categories of Opinions on Micro Influencer Marketing

The first category in Table 3 is the “Definition of micro influencer marketing”. The survey participants were asked what they understand under the concept of “micro influencer marketing”. Many responses involved the number of followers; however, the participants have different opinions on how many followers micro influencers have. Two people said that a micro influencer needs to have at least 1000 followers and a maximum of 50.000. Others wrote that a micro influencer has a maximum follower number of 30.000 or even 5000. One participant's response to the question about their understanding of micro influencer marketing was: “Marketing with smaller scale influencers who do not have a large audience and less public recognition”.

The next category is “Factors that play a role when considering following a micro influencer”. The participants were asked which factors they consider when choosing to follow a micro influencer on Instagram and how this decision impacts their opinions on brands the influencer promotes. One respondent answered: “I usually only follow them because they give me inspiration on their style and life, not necessarily because of the products they advertise”. Another survey participant said: “I tend to follow micro influencers when we have something in common, and they can give me advice on a certain topic”. Nearly all participants wrote that they follow influencers because they are interesting, have a nice feed, and seem authentic. An aspect that was addressed frequently was also the feeling of trust and loyalty. One respondent wrote: “I consider trust and loyalty to the followers as very important aspects”. The replies demonstrate that the sample has a very similar opinion regarding why they follow micro influencers. The majority said that they follow micro influencers solely for the reason that they like their content and profile aesthetics.

To gain a better understanding of the motives of why the participants follow specific micro influencers, the category “Reasons not to follow micro influencers” was created. In the survey, the question was asked for what reason they may not follow micro influencers and if the number of followers plays a potential role in the decision. A respondent claimed that: “I believe that the number of followers mirrors their success and, therefore, also the likelihood that I would follow them. I wouldn't necessarily follow micro influencers as the first impression would be that they aren't as experienced”. Similar to this opinion, a further participant wrote: “I like micro

influencers, but I notice that influencers with a higher follower count make me feel like I am keeping up with trends and let me be part of a bigger crowd". Several responses said that they dislike product placements and advertising. Additionally, most survey participants said that they do not care about the number of followers and that they follow micro influencers.

After collecting these answers, the category "Micro influencer recommendations" was created. During the survey, the participants were asked whether or not they had changed their perception or made a purchase as a result of hearing a micro influencer's recommendation. Nearly all respondents answered that they have never changed their mind about a brand or purchased a product solely because of the opinion of a micro influencer. An answer was: "Never. I don't buy things I see on social media". Nevertheless, some participants shared a different view. One person wrote: "Yes, especially if it seems like every micro influencer I follow is promoting the same products. Therefore, I will be more likely to buy them".

Lastly, the category "Industries in which one is most likely impacted through micro influencers recommendations" was created. During this category, the participants were asked in which industry micro influencers are most likely to affect their brand image opinion and why. Figure 5 shows which industries the participants are most likely affected by micro influencers.

Influential Industries

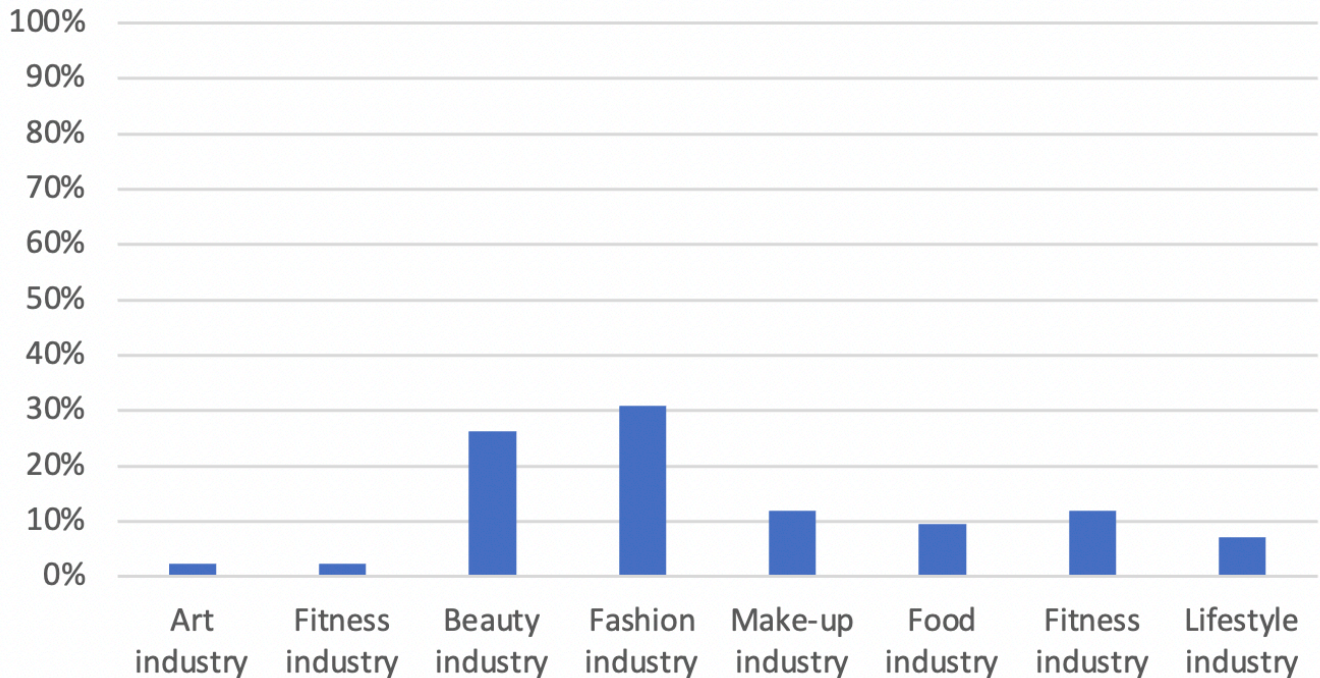


Figure 5: Influential Industries

As can be seen in Figure 5, eight main industries were suggested by the participants. 31% of the respondents claimed that they are most likely to be persuaded by a micro influencer in the fashion industry. Additionally, 26% are most susceptible to being influenced by micro-influencers in the beauty sector. However, other participants stated that they are most likely influenced by the lifestyle, food, or make-up industry. Only around 3% of the participants stated that they were most likely influenced by the art and fitness industry.

The next section will discuss and interpret the findings obtained from the analysis of the collected data offering valuable insights into the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image.

5 Discussion

The following chapter examines the collected findings of the online survey. The gathered results will be interpreted and analyzed. Moreover, the main aspects considering micro influencer marketing on the brand image will be summarized into categories and explained in detail. The researcher will identify patterns that will be displayed with the help of two tables and graphs.

The age distribution of the respondents suggests that the survey sample primarily represents young adults, and the nearly equal distribution of genders allows a balanced representation of both male and female respondents. According to the survey results, participants spend an average of four hours per day on social media. This shows that social media plays a significant role in the lives of the participants and, therefore, highlights the potential influence social media can have on the opinions, behaviors, and brand perceptions of the respondents. Additionally, the distribution of the genders show that micro influencer campaigns can potentially reach both male and female and, therefore, enables a wide audience range. The data also revealed that Instagram is the most popular social media platform among the survey participants, with approximately 98% of individuals using the network. This finding is crucial for the understanding of the potential impact micro influencer marketing can have on brand image, as Instagram is a prominent network for influencer marketing and brand promotions. Furthermore, this discovery indicates a clear shift among younger generations from Facebook to Instagram, as 0% of the participants said that they use Facebook. This finding validates the statement made by DeLegge and Wangler (2017) regarding the decreasing popularity of Facebook.

When considering the survey question “For what reason do you use social media?” several findings can be discussed. The collected data indicates that 59% of the respondents use social media platforms intending to stay connected with their family and friends. This finding suggests that micro influencers can have a significant impact on brand image as the respondents are actively engaging with content to maintain social connections. Also, as discussed previously, micro influencers are mostly followed by family and friends, which suggests that this type of influencer can have the most impact on the opinions of the survey respondents (Nielsen, 2012). Therefore,

if companies work with micro influencers who have a strong relationship with their followers, this could positively influence the brand image among the surveyed individuals.

Additionally, the survey revealed that 38% of the respondents utilize social media for inspiration. This finding indicates that micro influencer marketing campaigns can potentially be effective when the company's products or services are displayed in an inspirational manner. By collaborating with micro influencers who align with the company's values and aesthetics, the firm can make use of the power of inspiration and be as creative as possible. As a result, individuals may have a positive perception of the company's brand image. The findings also showed that a part of the surveyed individuals use social media due to the "fear of missing out" or following trends. The fear of missing out may suggest that users are easily influenced. This aspect can be analyzed by considering Kelman's Social Influence Theory. Fear of missing out is a form of compliance. It indicates that individuals are influenced by external recommendations or opinions due to fear of the consequences if they do not listen to the suggestions (Kelman, 1958). This shows that the individuals may be impacted by micro influencers' opinions because they may be afraid that otherwise, they would miss out on a product or service, which explains the fear of missing out. Also, the individuals may want to be associated with certain influencers because they are afraid that they would be excluded otherwise.

Nevertheless, because the majority of survey participants argued that they do not listen to social media influencers' product advice, the Social Influence Theory cannot be entirely accepted in this research. Moreover, the respondents rather questioned the recommendations of the micro influencers and, therefore, did not just follow their advice in order to be associated with the social media influencer or because they were afraid of the consequences. Additionally, when considering the survey results, individuals' brand perception can potentially be influenced if micro influencer marketing campaigns highlight trendy items that align with the interests of the participants. Therefore, it could be important for companies to stay up to date with new and emerging trends, as emphasized by Daowd et al. (2021). This could be achieved by conducting frequent marketing research and actively following social media influencers, observing relevant hashtags, and recognizing frequent mentions

on Instagram. By staying informed about emerging trends, companies can then align their products and services with the preferences of their target audience. This allows the company to capitalize on the current market trends and work with influencers who are already promoting popular trends in order to enhance brand image.

When considering the data regarding the participants' following behavior on social media, the number of followers the influencers have, and who they follow, unique insights can be analyzed. The data revealed that 40 out of 42 participants follow influencers which indicates that possibly the individuals in the surveyed population actively engage with influencer content. This finding suggests that influencer marketing on Instagram could be an effective strategy for a positive brand image amongst the respondents because potential customers can be reached via the social media platform. Additionally, the data revealed that most respondents follow influencers who have several million followers. This finding implies that the surveyed participants are drawn to influencers with a significant social media presence that have many followers rather than following influencers with fewer followers. As a result, the participants may be more likely to consider the recommendations of macro influencers rather than micro influencers.

According to the survey results, various interpretations can be made regarding the categories of opinions on influencer marketing. For the first category, namely follow importance, three main different opinions regarding the importance of followers concerning influencers can be analyzed. Even though four participants emphasized the significance of follower numbers regarding influencers, one respondent answered that smaller influencers might be considered more relatable and trustworthy. A survey made by Linqia in 2021 uncovered that 90% of companies want to work together with micro rather than macro influencers (Linqia, 2021). However, upon analyzing the survey responses, it is difficult to determine a definitive preference between macro and micro influencers. The answers to this question show that the perspectives on follow importance can vary. As a result, companies could potentially balance the reach of smaller and larger influencers to achieve the most effective impact on brand image and address all respondents.

The next category, business industry and social media, revealed a clear consensus among the participants. Nearly all survey respondents agreed that companies should

integrate social media into their marketing strategies. This finding proposes that firms could achieve more successful marketing efforts and cultivate a more favorable brand image by integrating social media into their strategies. When examining the preferences of the surveyed participants regarding the most popular social media networks, it becomes apparent that Instagram holds significant importance as a platform to integrate into a company's marketing strategy.

Nevertheless, some respondents expressed their concerns about the reliance on influencers' recommendations which highlights the importance of authenticity in influencer collaborations. The opinions on brand attention paid after an influencer has mentioned it varied. Some respondents said that they do not like influencer recommendations and can even feel annoyed by them. However, other participants answered that they could be impacted in their purchasing behavior if an influencer makes a recommendation. The influencer's suggestion can potentially convince the participant to buy a certain product or service and, therefore, adjust their perception of a brand.

The mixed views of the participants on influencer advertising highlight the need for genuine influencer partnerships to avoid upsetting the audience. Successful micro influencer marketing campaigns should strive for authenticity and relatability to positively influence customers' brand perception. The respondent's answers regarding brand perception were very similar. Most participants stated that their perception of a company does not significantly change after hearing an influencer recommend the company or its goods and services on social media. However, some respondents have found that influencer marketing is irritating to them and, therefore, even unfollowed certain accounts. This emphasizes the importance of balancing promotional content with authentic content in order to maintain a strong relationship with their followers. In order for influencers to seem more authentic and reliable, companies could introduce long-term relationships between the specific influencer and the firm. This approach could enable Instagram users to observe the influencer's frequent usage of the company's products or services, thereby fostering trust among users towards the firm's goods. To prevent user annoyance, influencers can seamlessly incorporate the products and services of the firms in a natural manner. This can be achieved, for example, by integrating the products into their storytelling

process and using them as part of the narrative. By doing so, influencers can avoid obvious promotion and instead include the goods in a subtle way.

According to Hariyanti and Wirapraja (2018), consumers potentially adjust their perceptions of a company after considering influencers' opinions on a product which can positively affect brand image and even encourage the purchase of a product. In this research survey, the statement from Hariyanti and Wirapraja can partly be validated. Even though the respondents have a critical view regarding the effect of micro influencer marketing on consumers' perception of brand image, and many said that they are not consciously influenced, some participants answered that micro influencers could affect their decision-making process.

Lastly, the category trust demonstrated the different opinions of the respondents regarding influencers' credibility based on their follower number. While many participants said that they do not care about the number of followers, others stated their concerns about smaller influencers taking every collaboration deal they could get. Nevertheless, others said they trust smaller influencers more because they seem more authentic and reliable. Based on the analysis of the survey results, it is evident that the researcher can validate the claim made by Wissman (2018) regarding trust being the key reason why companies work together with micro influencers. The respondents' answers show that they seek reliance and guidance from influencers. As a result, brands should further consider the trustworthiness of their potential influencer collaborations. This can be achieved by asking the influencer to send proof of their engagement. The influencer could send the company their story views to show how active their community is. If the influencer has an active community, the high engagement could potentially have a positive impact on the firm. As a result, the firm could see if a cooperation with the influencer would be beneficial for the firm's brand image and customer loyalty.

Table 3 was constructed to understand the viewpoints of the surveyed participants regarding their opinion on micro influencer marketing. The first category, which was created, demonstrates the participants' perception of micro influencer marketing. The results show the different opinions on how many followers micro influencers should have. This finding indicates that the respondents do not have a clear opinion on the follower count, which qualifies an individual as a micro influencer. However, it

is important to note that the concept of micro influencer marketing is generally associated with individuals who have a smaller but engage in a niche audience. In the next category, the participants mentioned various factors that potentially influence their decision to follow a micro influencer. These factors include style inspiration, authenticity, trust, and loyalty which suggest that people are more likely to follow micro influencers if they have a personal connection to them and, therefore, can relate to the products they promote. This finding again highlights the importance of aligning interests and values between micro influencers and their audience. To gain a better understanding of what users look for in a micro influencer, the respondents were asked to list their reasons why they do not follow specific influencers. Some participants answered by expressing their concerns about certain micro influencers due to associating the follower count with experience and credibility. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents said that they do not care about the number of followers and, therefore, follow micro influencers. These findings imply that the influence of micro influencer marketing on brand image might not necessarily be affected by the number of followers but rather by factors such as relatability and content quality.

To further understand the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image, the participants were asked if they have ever changed their perception of a brand after hearing the opinion of micro influencers regarding the brand. The results show that the majority of respondents have never changed their perception or made a purchase solely based on a micro influencer recommendation or opinion. The findings suggest that micro influencers may not have a direct impact on brand image; however, some participants mentioned that frequent promotions from a micro influencer could make them more likely to consider a brand or their products. This shows that a collective impact from micro influencers within a specific field could potentially influence a brand's image. Additionally, this finding also suggests that establishing enduring partnerships between an influencer and a company could be beneficial for the company's brand image.

Lastly, the respondents were asked in which industry micro influencers are most likely to affect their brand image opinion. The respondents identified several industries in which they feel most influenced by micro influencers, including fashion, beauty,

lifestyle, fitness, and more. The fashion industry was mentioned most frequently, with around 30%, and the beauty industry was mentioned by approximately 26% of the participants. These results suggest that micro influencer marketing can have a significant impact on brand image in certain industries if they align with personal style, appearance, and self-expression.

In the process of analyzing and discussing the results, certain research limitations have been identified. These limitations will be further explained in the following section.

6 Limitations

This thesis critically explores the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image. The focus of the research questions primarily revolves around consumer trust regarding micro influencers' recommendations, if micro influencers can affect consumer perceptions, and to what extent the number of followers matters in relation to brand credibility. A qualitative survey was conducted to gain a more profound understanding of the subject. By gathering relevant primary literature, the researcher was able to establish a solid basis for the paper and draw a conclusion for the research objective.

Nevertheless, the researcher faced certain limitations regarding the study, which are worth mentioning. Foremost, the researcher was only able to gather 42 participants for the survey, which might potentially limit the diversity of perspectives. However, even with this limited number of participants, the collected data is still considered adequate for qualitative research. In this survey, the age ranged between 19-29 years old, potentially leading to a skewed representation of opinions on micro influencer marketing, particularly excluding the views of older generations who may also interact with micro influencers and brands on social media.

Furthermore, another potential limitation that may have taken place is the language barrier. Due to the fact that the questionnaire was posted on Instagram, it reached a diverse group of individuals from around the globe. Therefore, some respondents may not have had English as their primary language, which may have led to difficulties comprehending certain survey questions. Additionally, because the survey was only posted on the social media platform Instagram, important opinions may have been

missing regarding micro influencer marketing. Especially the application TikTok is also popular for influencer marketing and could have collected useful information on the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image.

Lastly, a limitation of the research was the limited amount of literature in the field of micro influencer marketing. Due to the fact that micro influencer marketing is a relatively new marketing strategy, there was a restricted volume of literature to use.

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the sphere of micro influencer marketing and its influence on brand image, serving as a foundation for future research in this rapidly evolving field.

7 Future Research

In order to gather and analyze further useful information on the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image, a few future research recommendations can be made.

Addressing the limitations identified in this study, a specific age group was represented in the survey. Even though 42 responses were collected, it would have been interesting to evaluate how the results would have potentially changed if a more diverse and larger pool of individuals had participated. Additionally, in future research, it could be worthwhile to explore a wider age range. Therefore, the research would not only reflect on a certain generation but moreover demonstrate the perception of all age groups. Also, for future research, it may be interesting to create an audience segmentation in order to analyze how different audience segments respond to various micro influencer campaigns. By understanding the different audience preferences and perceptions, the research may have insights that can help a brand adapt its strategies accordingly with the aim of enhancing its brand image.

To overcome the language barrier in the survey, the researcher could provide an online survey in various languages to collect more answers from a more diverse sample size in future data collection. An idea would be to offer the questionnaire in English, Chinese, Spanish, and French.

Additionally, to further comprehend the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image, it would be beneficial to contrast the effectiveness of micro influencers with that of macro influencers. Only then can the researcher conclusively state that micro influencers are the most advantageous influencer marketing strategy companies can utilize to boost their brand image. Furthermore, instead of just sharing the survey on Instagram, the researcher could integrate the social platform TikTok. Over time, TikTok has emerged as a popular tool for influencer marketing (Yang et al., 2021). This new force could provide the researcher with important information on the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image.

When considering the results of the survey, the researcher was able to realize that users were more likely to consider a brand when an influencer promoted it frequently. Therefore, it may be interesting to analyze long-term brand image effects. In future research, it may be insightful to investigate how a brand perception evolves over time and whether micro influencer campaigns have the ability to maintain a lasting impact.

By exploring these aspects, future research may provide more comprehensive and helpful insights that support the understanding of the effects that micro influencer marketing may have on customers' perception of a company. In the upcoming section, the researcher will present their conclusion regarding the impact of micro influencer marketing on brand image.

8 Conclusion

The objective of this thesis is to build upon existing research information that has explored the impact of micro influencers on brand image. After considering and interpreting the primary and secondary data gathered, it can be concluded that micro influencer marketing can have an impact on brand image; however, the process of influencing customers and prospective customers can be further optimized. The study explored various aspects of social media usage, follower importance, the business industry, brand attention, perception, trust, and opinions on micro influencer marketing. Since micro influencer marketing has become more popular amongst businesses, it is of great importance for companies to understand how to utilize the marketing strategy and how to inspire the target audience.

The created questionnaire revealed that Instagram is the most popular social media platform among the participants, with a majority of them spending an average of four hours per day on social media. The reasons for using social media vary, including entertainment, staying connected with friends, combating boredom, and finding inspiration. While some participants expressed concerns about their fear of missing out and the need to follow trends, others highlighted the relatability and honesty of influencers with fewer followers.

Based on the findings and examinations presented in the discussion, it can be concluded that the research questions “To what extent does the effectiveness of micro influencer marketing on brand image depend on trust between micro influencers and their followers?”, “How does micro influencer marketing affect the consumers’ perception of brand image?” and “To what extent are the number of followers of an influencer important in terms of the credibility of recommendations for customers?” can partially be answered.

The study results validate that the effectiveness of micro influencer marketing on brand image is indeed impacted by the trust established between micro influencers and their followers. The participants' feedback revealed a clear inclination towards influencers they perceive as genuine and authentic, highlighting the key role of trust-building in achieving successful influencer collaborations on social media.

Moreover, the research question regarding the effect micro influencer marketing has on consumers’ perception of brand image can be answered with the conclusion that the impact is relatively insignificant. Despite a few participants acknowledging that micro influencers could indeed influence their decision-making process, the majority of respondents expressed a critical perspective on the impact of micro influencer marketing. However, the findings suggest that balancing promotional content with authentic content can help maintain a strong relationship between influencers and their followers and may increase the effect the influencers have on the consumers’ brand image perception.

Furthermore, nearly all participants stated that the number of followers is not important to them. Nevertheless, several respondents did confess to trusting smaller influencers more than celebrities, for example, due to their authenticity. Therefore,

the research question “To what extent is the number of followers of an influencer important in terms of the credibility of recommendations for customers?” can neither be entirely confirmed nor denied. The participants agreed to trust recommendations made by the people they know. This finding suggests that the respondents would potentially rather trust micro than macro influencers.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that micro influencer marketing can have an impact on brand image. However, to enhance brand image, a micro influencer needs to align with the values, interests, and aesthetics of their audience. Authenticity, relatability, and trustworthiness were identified as important attributes that impact the decision to follow and rely on a micro influencer. While direct purchase decisions might not be heavily affected by micro influencers, repetitive promotions from influencers within a specific industry could contribute to shaping the brand image.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Bachelor Thesis Questionnaire Research: The Impact of Micro Influencer Marketing on Brand Image

Dear Participants,

My name is Charlize Diehl and I am a student in international management and marketing at Modul University Vienna. For my bachelor thesis, I want to research the field of micro influencer marketing and the impact it can have on brand image. In the following, you will be asked questions related to your social media habits, brand image, and micro influencer marketing.

I would appreciate your voluntary participation in my survey consisting of 14 open-ended questions which will take approximately 7-10 minutes.

All data collected will be highly confidential and held securely.

If you have any questions regarding your privacy or the research in general, please feel free to contact me via the following E-Mail:

61903980@modul.ac.at.

Thank you in advance for participating!

Kind regards,

Charlize Diehl

I consent to participate in the research project and my participation is completely voluntary.

Yes

How often do you use social media per day?

Your answer

Which social media platform do you use most?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Youtube
- Twitter

For what reason do you use social media? Please mention as many reasons as come to your mind.

Your answer

Do you follow influencers? If yes, how many followers do these influencers have?

Your answer

To what extent is the number of followers important to you?

Your answer

Do you think it is important for companies to use social media to promote their products or services? Why or why not?

Your answer

How much more or less attention do you pay to a brand after an influencer has mentioned it?

Your answer

How has your perception changed after being exposed to influencer marketing?

Your answer

To what extent do you trust influencers' opinions and recommendations if they have fewer than 100.000 followers?

Your answer

What do you understand under "micro influencer marketing"?

Your answer

Definition "micro influencer marketing"

Micro influencers are social media users who have between 1000 and 100.000 followers (Isyanto et al., 2020). These influencers work together with companies to market products and services in an authentic and relatable way (Zietek, 2016). In general, micro influencer marketing is a form of word-of-mouth marketing, which represents that customers are more likely to trust an opinion and recommendation when it is given from a familiar person (Woods, 2016).

What factors do you consider when choosing to follow a micro influencer on Instagram, and how does this impact your opinion of the brands they promote?

Your answer

Please elaborate on any reasons why you do not follow micro influencers. To what extent is the number of followers an decisive factor?

Your answer

Have you ever made a purchase or changed your perception of a brand as a result of a micro influencer's recommendation? If so, can you describe your experience?

Your answer

In which industry are micro influencers most likely to affect your brand image opinion and why?

Your answer

Can you explain how micro influencers impact your trust in the promoted brand/product?

Your answer

What gender do you identify as?

- Female
- Male
- Diverse
- Prefer not to say
- Other

What age are you?

Your answer

SURVEY END

Thank you very much for joining my survey!