

Influencer Marketing on Instagram

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Abstract

Whether it is for the brand or the consumers, marketers are always looking into the future to anticipate the upcoming trends in the market. With the rise of Web 2.0, more and more activities shift from offline to online; it has become critical for brands to differentiate themselves from competitors. Social media has fundamentally changed the balance of power between consumers and brands. Influencer marketing in its current digital form took hold in the early 2000s alongside the blogosphere. Over the years, the internet has changed the traditional ways of conducting business and establishing customer relationships.

One of the ways companies are using in social media marketing is to pay for influencers to promote their products or services on their social media platform, in our research, the Instagram app. The pressure of being able to measure the success accurately comes to attention as companies invest more money in influencer marketing. In the context of brand messaging and brand awareness, researchers investigate the influencers' credibility and authenticity. At the same time, the connection between popularity and influential power of the influencers has also been an interest for researchers.

This research studied the impact of the ratio number of followers to the number of followers (F/f-ratio), or the popularity threshold of an Instagram influencer, on the perceived influencer credibility and the attitude toward user-generated content (UGC), attitude toward the brand, viral intentions and purchase intention of the consumer. Moreover, the researcher tested if different product categories with varying levels of purchase decision involvement had a moderating effect on the relationship between the F/f-ratio and influencer credibility. This approach would provide a better insight into the impact of the popularity threshold of Instagram influencers on consumer behavior. These insights will add knowledge to the literature of influencer marketing, and more specifically to Instagram influencer campaigns.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, influencers, Instagram, social media, user generated content

1. Introduction

As the world has shifted to social media, consumers look at fellow consumers to inform their purchasing decisions. Instead of looking at companies, as they did in the past, they now look at each other and their favorite personalities. Digital influencers share valuable, user-generated content. These contents are effective because of their authentic nature, which makes influencer marketing programs a strategic content investment in addition to the media channel.

Social media influencers represent a new type of independent, third-party endorsers who shape an audience's attitudes through online activities. Through social networking sites, social media influencers create content promoting certain brands with the goal of obtaining a following and brand recognition. When a party attempts to influence another to take specific actions, a dynamic ensures that can change the course and content of their relationship.

Influencer marketing today is usually managed from the console of just one online

personal's digital device. Influencer marketing management firm Mavrk defined influencers as *online persons that have the power to affect their followers with their real or perceived authority, knowledge, position, or relationship*. An influencer does not necessarily have to be a celebrity, journalist, or blogger; they are a form of social micro-celebrity.

The rise of social media has opened up a new channel for brands to connect with the consumers. People follow influencers' lives through social media, and through the right execution, influencer marketing seems like a natural part of their lives rather than advertising. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are some of the most popular and prominent social networking system (SNS) of today. More than ever, consumers are looking to fellow consumers to inform their purchasing decisions.

The generation with the most purchasing power is heavily active with 90% of 18- to 29-year-olds being on social media. An online article by Amy Schade suggests that around 81% of shoppers try to do some research online before a purchase decision. However, per study,

only about 22% of businesses are satisfied with their conversion rates. Concerning these figures, visibility on SNS is critical for a modern business to success (Schade, 2014).

Amongst the multitude of platforms on which influencer marketing takes place, Instagram plays an important role. The visually engaging nature of the platform and the 1 billion active users make it a relevant channel for influencer marketing. Instagram reaches a younger demographic, the Millennials, between 22 and 37 years old. This generation has the reputation of being easily bored and hence prefers visual and attractive messages over text messages (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Due to the apps visual nature and high user engagement rate, Instagram is currently the market leader in online photo sharing services regarding reach and scope. As of March 2016, 98 percent of fashion brands had an Instagram profile. As of December 2016, the average number of image brand posts on Instagram was 27.9 posts per month. Influencer Marketing continues to gain momentum with advertisers looking to engage targeted, quality audiences at scale (Instagram, 2018). Instagram is a home for visual storytelling for everyone from celebrities, newsrooms and brands, to teens, musicians and everyone with creative passion. Over time, some users accumulate a high number of followers by providing a unique visual aesthetic of their contents and a close connection with their followers. These micro-celebrities serve as idols for their followers.

One of the ways companies are using in social media marketing is to pay for influencers to promote their products or services on their social media platform, in our research, the Instagram app. Companies find a relevant influencer, someone who has a great fit with the brand and their values, and who has a high impact on the target market. The pressure of being able to measure the success accurately comes to attention as companies invest more money in influencer marketing. While there is no actual data on the influence meter, it is crucial for companies to identify relevant social influencers and have a good interaction with them because these social media users have a growing impact on a firm's corporate image and reputation. In the context of brand messaging and brand awareness, researchers investigate the influencers' credibility and authenticity. At the same time, the connection between popularity and influential power of the influencers has also been an interest for researchers.

De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders (2015) investigated the impact of the number of followers and the number of followers on the likeability and perceived opinion leadership of

Instagram influencers. Their study showed that Instagram users with a high number of followers, for example, 20,000, are considered more likable, mostly because they are considered more popular. Only in limited cases, these perceptions of popularity lead to perceptions of opinion leadership. Furthermore, low numbers of followers might negatively impact users' likeability.

Julie Messiaen from the University of Ghent, on the other hand, believes that it is not sufficient to only focus on the number of people who follow the influencer (i.e., number of followers). A company must also reflect on the number of people whom the influencer follows him/herself (i.e., number of followers). According to MacKenzie and Lutz (1989), the attitude toward the advertisement and the attitude toward the brand are predispositions to respond favorably or unfavorably to respectively an advertising stimulus or brand-related stimuli during an exposure.

Lavidge and Steiner (1961) developed a hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model explaining that consumers go through three different stages in responding to marketing communications: the cognitive stage, the affective stage, and the conative stage. The behaviors associated with the hierarchy-of-effects theory can be boiled down to "think," "feel" and "do," or cognitive, affective and conative behaviors. The cognitive stage is when a consumer is informed about a product or service, and how they process the information. The affective stage includes the attitude toward the ad and toward the brand. The conative stage is the action, when or how the consumer develops viral and purchase intention.

As past research had been done mostly in the North America market and European market and mostly studying the case after Facebook platform, the researcher of this study is motivated to explore the Instagram users' habitat within Taiwan. This research aims to examine the influencer's impact in Taiwan on the perceived credibility and the attitude of the Taiwanese consumers toward the user-generated content (UGC) on Instagram and toward the promoted brand. To further investigate, this research will take a more in-depth look into the influence upon viral intentions and purchase intentions. Based on the HOE stages, this research follows the following successive steps: influencer credibility, the attitude toward the user-generated content and brand, and viral and purchase intention of the consumer.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Silverman (2011) defined the world-of-mouth as ‘communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product or service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company.’ That is when people who are not involved with the brand talks about the product and service of the brand.

Influencer marketing is the concept of engaging key individuals to leverage their influence, transmitting through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). The Internet enables customers to share their opinions on, and experiences with, goods and services with a multitude of other consumers; that is, to engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication. Hennig-Thurau (2004) defined electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) as ‘*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet.*’ The consequence is that eWOM has been found influential on the consumer’s decision-making process, brand preference and purchase intention.

2.2 Influence Marketing

Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that uses key content creators to drive authentic conversation and engagement around a brand’s products and message. Brown & Hayes (2008) defined the word ‘influence’ as the power to affect a person, thing, or course of events. Influencer marketing identifies the individuals that have influence over potential buyers, and orients marketing activities around these influencers (Henderson, 2018). Influencer Marketing follows the concept of a ‘trusted advisor’ and is perceived as a resemblance to the older TV commercials, where celebrities are featured to leverage their popularity and advertise a brand.

2.3 Ratio Number of Followers to Number of Followees

When conducting an influencer marketing campaign, a common goal is to reach a higher number of an impression. As a higher number of followers will accelerate the diffusion of information across an audience, this may result in more massive reach and eWOM. Social media users perceive influencers with a higher number of followers as more popular, which has a positive effect on their perceived opinion leadership and likeability (Berger & Heath, 2007). However, these numbers do not imply

that followers will engage with the message, that is, the activity of liking, commenting, or sharing (Cha et al., 2010). De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders (2017) states that working influencers with a higher number of followers might reduce the brand’s perceived uniqueness. Messiaen (2017) believes that the ratio of the number of followers to followees (F/f-ratio), or the popularity threshold, is a better metric to measure the effectiveness of an Instagram influencer. The higher the F/f- ratio, or the lower number of followees, the people might consider the influencer as a true opinion leader.

2.4 Influencer Credibility

Credibility and perceived trustworthiness of influencers are two of the features making a candidate online personal an effective brand promotor (Chu & Kamal, 2008). Credibility is one of the main protruding factors in persuasion, especially in an online setting when the consumer cannot feel and touch the product. For the influencers, credibility is vital as it nurtures their effectiveness and boosts their brand.

Erkan & Evans (2016) studied the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers’ purchase intentions by integrating the Information Adoption Model (IAM) and related components of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The variables in this model include information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, information adoption, and purchase intention. The stronger the perceived credibility of the online consumer reviews, the higher the purchase intention. Source credibility refers to the extent to which a person perceives a source or person as credible and is a significant contributor to the effectiveness of advertisements. To measure the relationship between ratio of followers to followees and the influencer credibility, the first hypothesis, H1: *Ratio of followers to followees (F/f) has a positive effect on influencer credibility*

2.5 Attitude Toward User-Generated Content & Attitude Toward Brand

User Generated Content (UGC) is defined as any content that has been created and put out there by unpaid contributors or, using a better term, fans. A promoted Instagram post can be seen as an advertisement since it contains a photo and text designed to inform a target group. Attitude toward the UGC affects the viewing time of the content, brand consideration, and consumer’s purchase intention (Messiaen, 2017). Attitude toward UGC also has a direct positive influence on attitude toward the brand and familiarity with the brand.

Brand attitude is the most critical predictor of consumer's purchase intentions (Wu & Wang, 2011). The positive relationship between the attitude toward UGC and attitude toward brand will influence purchase intention and the purchase action.

Source credibility is also dependent upon the quality of the argument. When consumers perceive reviews on statements of influencers about products and services as credible and valid on Instagram, the consumer will develop a positive attitude toward the brand. If the reviews of the endorsed products are perceived as false and invalid, consumers will have a negative attitude toward the influencer and the brand. Positive eWOM message with higher message source credibility indicates a better brand attitude than an eWOM message with lower message source credibility (Wu & Wang, 2011). The credibility of the celebrities and their reviews positively influences the credibility of the endorsed brand.

Therefore, it is supposed that,

H2: Influencer credibility has a positive impact on attitude toward the UGC

H3: Attitude toward the UGC has a positive impact on attitude toward the brand

2.6 Viral Intentions

Messiaen (2017) stated that viral intentions of a social media user cover not only liking, commenting on or sharing a post, but also the intention to follow brands and to tell others about the post. In this way, the viral intentions of consumers create extra buzz for an online campaign. Therefore, *H4: Attitude toward the brand has a positive impact on viral intention*

2.7 Purchase Intentions

The concept of purchase intention can be identified as one of the components of consumer cognitive behavior on how an individual intends to buy a specific brand or product. Purchasing are routinely measured and used by marketing practitioners as an input for sales or market share forecasts for both existing and new products and services, as the purchase intention's data can assist managers in their marketing decisions related to market segmentation and promotional strategies (Goyal, 2014). A purchase intention arises as an outcome of the information search and alternative evaluation stages, once consumers have satisfied their comparison with competitor products (Belsh, 2003).

Wu & Wang (2011) states that a positive attitude toward the brand results in a continuous preference of the consumer for this brand and also has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. Perceived value is the overall evaluation made by consumers of the usefulness of a product or service, based on the difference they perceive between what they receive and what they give in return, i.e., what it costs them. The higher the perceived value, the higher the interest of consumers in that product or service, the higher the purchase intention is (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). Therefore, to investigate whether the positive relationship between the consumer's attitude toward the brand and consumer's purchase intention is also applicable to influence marketing on Instagram, we have,

H5: Attitude toward the brand has a positive effect on purchase intention

2.8 Purchase Decision Involvement

Although there is a direct link between eWOM and purchase intention, this link might vary according to product categories (low, medium, or high purchase decision involvement. Purchase decision involvement is the outcome of a consumer's interaction with the product and the purchase situation (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1988). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), there are two ways to convince and persuade consumer make decisions and hence get persuaded. One is when the consumer is motivated and able to pay attention, they take logical, conscious thinking, the central route to decision-making. Another one is when the consumer accepts the peripheral course, this is when they make the decision based on whether they like the speaker, or in this research, the influencer (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Given the difference between high and low purchase involvement, the impact of the F/f-ratio of the Instagram influencer on the consumer's purchase decision might be different according to the type of the product. In situation when consumer is attracted to unique products, the positive relationship between the product diversity and brand attitude through perceived unique-ness is weaker when an influencer posts the product with a very high number of followers compared to an influencer with a moderate number of followers (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2015).

3. Theoretical Framework

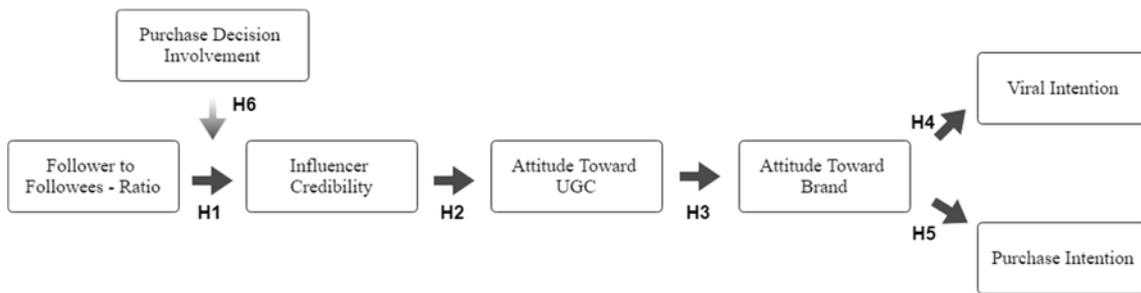


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

This research aims to examine the impact of F/f-ratio of Instagram influencers on the influencer credibility and attitude toward the UGC, attitude toward the brand, viral intentions, and purchase intention of the consumer. These relationships were tested across three different product categories with different levels of purchase decision involvement. Based on the results from the pretest, the author retained car as the high involvement product, the mobile phone as the medium involvement product, and coffee as the low involvement product.

The study features a fictional influencer without any kinds of physical attractiveness indicated, and the fictional influencer was not recognizable in the Instagram posts. Respondents filled out their survey based different given Instagram posts for the various product categories.

The influencer credibility was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale of Chu & Kamal (2008). The attitude toward the UGC, attitude toward the brand, and viral intentions was measured with questions of a seven-point semantic differential scale of Mac-

Kenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986). These items were also adopted from Chu et al., 2007. This study measured the respondent’s purchase intention with questions from Baker and Churchill (1977). Each Instagram post was followed by a question that measures the interest in the product category on a 5-point scale from ‘No interest’ to ‘High interest.’

The hypotheses of the main study are tested with a 4x3 between-subjects factorial design. The F/f-ratio (Ratio Number of Followers to Number of followees) was manipulated at four levels: High(H)/high(h), High(H)/low(l), Moderate(M)/high(h), and Moderate(M)/low(l). The second factor is the product category and is manipulated at three levels: high, medium, and low purchase decision involvement (PDI).

Respondents were presented three Instagram posts of the three different products with randomly assigned F/F-ratio. Products were showing in the order of car, mobile phone, and coffee to avoid any leading order of the PDI. The survey flow is visualized in Figure .

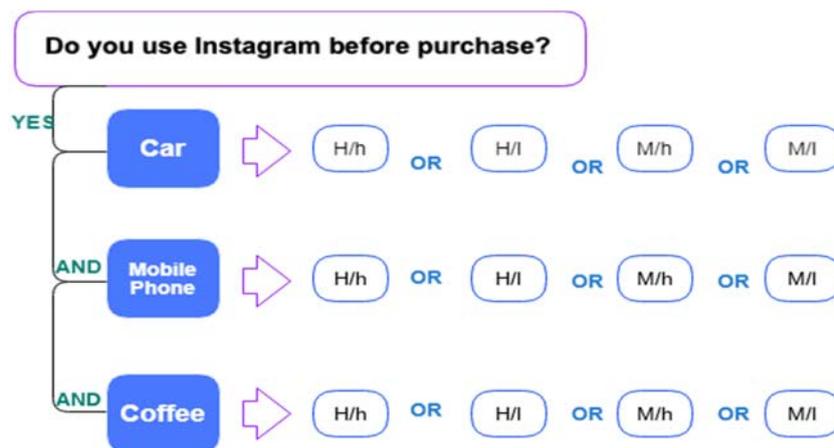


Figure 2: Survey Flow

The four F/f-ratios provided four conditions for the experiment. The ideal sample for this experiment is at the number of 120 – 200 respondents (30 – 50 per condition).

4. Results

4.1 Participants

After unqualified respondents from the data, a sample of n=145 respondents remained. These respondents were randomly, but evenly distributed, assigned to one ratio for each

product. The demographic characteristics of the respondents was even in gender upon the respondents, with 74 female respondents (51%) and 71 male respondents (49%). 63% of the respondents aged between 22 and 37 years, according to The Pew Center, the Millennials group. This sample matched the users of Instagram, which are mostly categorized into the Generation Y Group.

4.2 Profiling Variables & Influenceable Variables

The researcher believed that the three most critical dependent variables of this research in representing consumer behavior are the influencer credibility, viral intentions, and the purchase intentions. The last section of the survey was used to measure these potential links with the 'influenceable variables' – Influencer Credibility, Viral Intention, and Purchase Intention.

Results also revealed that the degree of the post being influenceable appeared to be independent on how often the participants use Instagram, how long they own an Instagram account, whether they have a YouTube/Pinterest/Snapchat account, how often they request information from social media for purchase decisions, age, or income. However, the degree of the post being influenceable appeared to be dependent on gender and interest in the product category.

4.3 Analysis & Discussion

The results of H1 suggest that the F/f-ratio has a positive impact on perceived influencer credibility. An influencer with a high number of followers to a low number of followees is perceived as more credible, followed by an influencer with a higher number of followers to a high number of followees and an influencer with a medium number of followers to a low number of followees. An influencer with a medium number of followers to a high number of followees is perceived as the least credible. Matching with the source credibility theory (Chu & Kamal, 2008), the influencer with a high number of followers to a low number of followers and the influencer with a high number of followers to a high number of followees are perceived as the most credible, explaining that a high number of followers lead to higher perceived influencer credibility. This suggests that people will behave like the community and act like their peers or relatable people, as they see that many people are following an Instagram influencer, they believe that the Instagram influencer is more skilled, sincere, trustworthy, experienced, and thus more credible.

The results for H1 also confirmed that a high number of followees leads to a lower per-

ceived degree in influencer credibility. This matched with Cresci et al. (2015) that consumers interpret a high number of followees as a sign that the user's followers base consists of people who followed the user back after he/she followed them first. Thus, this result is contradicting the statement of De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2015), who claimed that low numbers of followees negatively impact the positive relationship between the number of followers and the influencers' likeability.

The results of H2 suggest that influencer credibility has a positive impact on the consumer's attitude toward UGC. The higher the perceived influencer credibility, the higher the attitude toward the user-generated content. If someone perceived the influencer as credible, the person would have a positive attitude toward the Instagram campaign in which the influencer promotes the product. Subsequently, our results of H3 confirmed that the higher the attitude toward the UGC, the higher the attitude towards the brand. If a person experiences a positive attitude toward the Instagram campaign, they will have a positive attitude toward the brand promoted by the Instagram influencer. This result confirms the statements of MacKenzie & Belch (1986), as the positive relationship between attitude towards advertisement and attitude towards brand can also be applied to Instagram marketing campaigns.

The analysis of H4 confirmed that the attitude towards the brand has a positive impact on consumer's viral intentions. Based on the results findings, consumer's intention to like, comment, and share based on their attitude towards the brand. H5, the higher the brand awareness, the higher the consumer think of the brand, the higher the intention they would share the brand with other people, the higher the brand awareness, was confirmed. These findings are in line with other studies, that stated that attitude toward the brand has a positive effect on consumers' viral and purchase intentions (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986).

There was a contradiction in the assumptions about the impact of purchase decision involvement (PDI) on the relationship between the advertisement and purchase intention and apply this to Instagram influencers. The author decided to replace the purchase intention by the influencer credibility in this relationship. As shown in the tested results, influencer credibility is an important factor in explaining the successive behavioral variables, since it positively influences the attitude toward the UGC, which positively influences the attitude toward the brand and this in turn positively influences viral and purchase intentions.

Influencer credibility also indirectly positively influences the purchase intention. Since the PDI was no moderator in the relationship, the positive impact of the F/f-ratio on influencer credibility is not differing according to the product category. This means that people do not take the type of product promoted by the Instagram influencer into account when defining whether the Instagram influencer is credible or not, in contrary to the F/f-ratio.

The results of the significant main effect of the product showed that people perceive the Instagram influencer as more credible when he/she promotes a mobile phone or coffee compared to promoting a car. The difference between promoting a mobile phone and promoting coffee was not significant in defining influencer credibility. People perceive an Instagram influencer promoting a car as less credible, probably because this product is of high value. In order to make a purchase decision, they need more reliable information about it and prefer to search for this information online or elsewhere. Aside from being an important product, a high involvement product, car is also a product that has low purchase frequency. So, this suggests that people will not easily fall for Instagram influencers promoting a car and they will not rely on them when making a purchase decision for a car. Thus, influencer campaigns for this type of products will not have a good impact.

In contrary, coffee is a consumable product, so the purchase decision is not of big importance and it will not bring risks if a wrong decision was made. Subsequently, for this type of low-involvement products, people will more easily fall for the attempts of the influencer and find him/her more credible. The main effect of the ratio revealed the same effects like the tests for H1, namely that an influencer with a high number of followers to a low number of followers (H/l) is perceived as the most credible, followed by an influencer with a high number of followers to a high number of followers (H/h) and an influencer with a medium number of followers to a low number of followers (M/l). An influencer with a medium number of followers to a high number of followers (M/h) is perceived as the least credible.

In order to profile the different respondents, the relationships between the product interest, social media usage and the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and how influenceable the respondent is. The credibility of influencers is found to make them more effective promoters of brand messages, as a credible influencer is more effective in influencing attitudes and behavioral intentions. Second, the viral intention of consumers is an

essential factor for the success of an online campaign, as these intentions will create extra buzz, brand awareness, consumer interest, and product trials. Moreover, clicking like or the intention to forward an ad contributes to brand recall. Lastly, purchase intention is often used to measure the effectiveness of social media campaigns. This stage is what advertisers are aiming for and therefore an undeniable goal.

5. Conclusion

This research studied the impact of the F/f-ratio of an Instagram influencer, on the perceived influencer credibility and the attitude toward UGC, attitude toward the brand, viral intentions and purchase intention of the consumer. Moreover, the researcher tested if different product categories with varying levels of purchase decision involvement had a moderating effect on the relationship between the F/f-ratio and influencer credibility. This approach would provide a better insight into the impact of the popularity threshold of Instagram influencers on consumer behavior.

A valuable insight that was first discovered was that the F/f-ratio of an Instagram influencer has a positive impact on perceived influencer credibility. Specifically, an influencer with a high number of followers to a low number of followers (H/l) is recognized as the most credible, followed by an influencer with a high number of followers to a high number of followers (H/h) and an influencer with a medium number of followers to a low number of followers (M/l). An influencer with a medium number of followers to a high number of followers (M/h) is perceived as the least credible. This explains that a higher number of followers leads to higher perceived influencer credibility and a higher number of followers to lower perceived influencer credibility.

The second result was that influencer credibility positively influences attitude toward the Instagram post. Subsequently, attitude toward the Instagram post has a positive impact on attitude toward the promoted brand. The next insight was that attitude toward the advertised brand positively influences both viral intentions and purchase intention of the consumer.

Briefly, one of the most important findings was that the F/F-ratio of Instagram influencers positively impacts influencer credibility. Influencer credibility is an essential factor in our research because it positively influences attitude toward the UGC, which has a positive impact on the attitude toward the brand. The attitude toward the brand has a positive effect on the viral and purchase intentions. In sum, all the successive behavioral variables are positively based on influencer credibility. Most of

the hypotheses could be confirmed. These insights will add knowledge to the literature of influencer marketing, and more specifically to Instagram influencer campaigns.

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