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of Business and Management

Chair of Marketing Plan and Markstrat Simulation

The impact of Influencer Marketing on Willingness to Buy
Food Product: the effect of new frontiers on
Trustworthiness and Body Image

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I dedicate this thesis to those who, in life, were not as lucky as I was, to those who were born on the wrong side of the world, to those who could not continue their studies because they had to support their families.

I dedicate this thesis to all those people who did not have the privilege of studying at a prestigious university like mine.

I dedicate this thesis to all those women who still live-in patriarchy, to the 48 victims of femicide in Italy up to now, to all those women who still have the courage to report violence.

I dedicate this thesis to the 677 victims at work since the beginning of this 2021 in Italy.

I dedicate this thesis to all those men and women who cannot choose what to be or what to become, crushed by the weight of judgments and stereotypes.

I dedicate this thesis to the Uighur and Afghan men and women and all those peoples who have been deprived of freedom and the opportunity to choose.

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The impact of influencer marketing on willingness to buy food product: the effect of new frontiers on trustworthiness and body image

INTRODUCTION

The following paper will consider an increasingly growing sector, that of food products sold on social networks, and how companies are increasingly relying on influencer marketing tools for their value proposition, in order to innovate and adapt to new competition.

We will also consider psychological variables such as body image and the perception of it in the presence or absence of an influencer, a figure that now modifies and dictates the aesthetic canons that in society are considered those of perfection. Specifically, we will evaluate these psychological variables through food products. The food chosen for this study is ice cream. In fact, everyone likes ice cream, but it is often eliminated from the diet, especially the packaged one, because it is considered "fat and full of sugar".

The first chapter will provide data and practical evidence highlighting the use of social channels in an increasingly massive way by companies to reach consumers.

The release of COVID-19, which forced the world indoors, was the consecration of companies' use of social to sell their products. In fact, social and the Internet for almost a year were the only means of reaching consumers who could not go to physical stores.

In the second chapter we will see how the use of influencer marketing shapes and modifies the body perception of the consumer, who considers the influencers as aleatory figures unattainable on an aesthetic level and to which the consumer tries to resemble more and more, buying what they wear and imitating their behaviors and habits.

The third chapter will be devoted to quantitative research, which puts the respondent of an online survey in front of purchase choices with and without influencers that will then be analyzed with SPSS to determine the proposals are verified.

We will conclude by analyzing what may be the managerial implications on limitations for future research and final thoughts on the results obtained.

1. RELEVANCE

1.1 How Internet change Business

The Internet and the technological revolution have changed the way people live and buy. Prior to the introduction of the Internet, consumers purchased the products or services they needed from the nearest physical store. Today instead a consumer can buy the product or the service of which it needs to the price that considers more correct from every part of the world. Markets are therefore not only more complex but also extremely changeable. Today, the ease of access to the market and its products by the consumer leads the various companies to an ever-increasing price war.¹

Internet is not only a means of communication, but it is a channel that allows companies to enter in relation with customers. The company website itself is in fact a tool to present the company and tell the consumer what it believes in. Internet allows companies not only to be "visualized" by customers but also allows a real development and enhancement of their business, in other words, the industrialization of services favors the effectiveness and efficiency of interactive processes and exchange of markets.

An ISTAT study on business communication has shown that to date, Italian companies with an internet connection are 94.3% with a percentage that rises to 95% if we consider companies in northern Italy, companies that have a website are 62.3% demonstrating how more than half of entrepreneurs have understood the need to do business online.

The success of the Internet, which differentiates it from traditional media, is the interoperability of the medium, which takes it away from the risk of obsolescence. In fact, more than six trillion products are searched for each year on search engines, with the average person with Internet access doing 1,500 online product searches per year. (Northernlight)

¹ "Consumer preferences and new technologies are reshaping the communication environment" O'Guinn et al. (2015)

1.2 Social Media Marketing revolution

Social media is a web-based form of data communication that allows any person who is online to have access to an unlimited stream of information of any kind without the need to search for it or be previously informed. They come in many forms, and consist of blogs, networking sites, instant messaging, podcasts, etc.

The social world since 2004 has been growing and still has not reached the peak of its use, as of today there are 3.5 billion daily active users on social, about 45% of the global population (Emarsys 2019)

Social media not only influences our culture and economy but also our overall worldview, often in misleading ways. Social media has eliminated geographical barriers, allowing very quickly to be able to communicate with people thousands of miles away from us, creating a decentralized communication channel.

Social Media, defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; p. 61) have enhanced the potentialities of the Web by leading to a transformation in the way in which relationships with customers are managed (Cherubini and Pattuglia, 2012; Finotto and Micelli, 2010; Hanna et al., 2011; Lewis and Nichols, 2012; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The social and mobile technologies have changed the relationship between consumers and products, elevating the position of consumers from passive to active subjects.

The creation of social networks has led companies to create what is the social business, marketing activity with which companies establish a relationship of trust with the consumer based on information and respect for the need for autonomy of the consumer who decides what to buy, when and at what price. (Mediabuzz)

According to a study by Hootsuite, 86% of companies believe that a presence on social media is necessary, also evaluating them as an inexpensive tool to advertise their offers and attract target customers in a timely manner.

Research from The Nielsen Social Media Report in 2012 found that 53% of people share positive experiences with a brand on social media while 47% use it to express disappointment and criticism. Today, 65% of consumers learn about a brand through social media and 70% use them to research certain services and products.

We can therefore speak of a revolution that has led to the birth of the world of mouth that replaces the traditional word of mouth. (Erik Qualman)

According to a study conducted by McKinsey² the proliferation of media, the globalization of the market and the emergence of a new generation of information and communication technologies of which the Internet is the key part of this process, the rules of marketing and market dynamics are changing, weakening the competitive position of companies (Porter, 2001), while presenting individuals with many new opportunities and powers (Christopher, 1989; Wind and Mahajan, 1997; Rha et al, 2002; Bush, 2004, Urban, 2005).

"Web 2.0 is a set of economic, social, and technological trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet, a more mature and distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects" (Musser and O'Reilly, 2005).

Two Social Media marketing strategies are possible³: The passive approach that focuses on using the Social Media domain as a source of customer voice and market intelligence and the active approach, which is the engagement of Social Media as direct marketing and PR channels, customer influence channels, product personalization tools, and finally as platforms for customer-generated cooperation and innovation. Finally, the paper identifies future research directions around this new element of the marketing landscape.

Social media has made customers more sophisticated and helped them develop new tactics for researching, evaluating, choosing, and purchasing goods and services (Albors et al., 2008). The use of social has shown who customers, because of it, have new ingrained behavioral tendencies. For example, the demand for personalized products (Kera and Kaynak, 1997) and customers' desire to be actively involved in the product development process are increasing (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Piller and Walcher, 2006; Kim and Bae, 2008; Parise and Guinan, 2008; Drury 2008; Eikelman et al., 2008).

To date, customers want to have a say in more stages of the business process, not just the final part.

These developments affect the way marketers operate and influence marketing practices at the strategic and tactical levels by presenting marketers with difficult choices and challenges (Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Thomas, 2007; Winer, 2009). Marketers become open to the idea of offering products that can be customized to the desires of the end consumer; they are also often open to the idea of creating the conditions that allow for collaboration with customers in the development and testing of new products, a process known as co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Piller and Walcher, 2006).

A study by Zabin (2009) identified the effects of Social Media Marketing for three types of companies, depending on the degree of Social Media adoption. The study found that the experience of the top 20% of performance markers ("Best-in-class") engaging Web 2.0 applications as marketing tools improved the likelihood that customers would recommend the company's products or services 95% of the time, improved the return on marketing investment 87% of the time, and improved the rate of customer acquisition 95% of the time.

² The next step in Open Innovation, The McKinsey Quarterly, June 2008

³ Foundations of Social Media Marketing, E. Costantinides, August 2014

The company website must be able to serve as a business platform that meets the expectations of the online customer (Constantinides, 2004; Constantinides and Geurts, 2005).

Most of the strategic goals of Social Media marketing require the presence of a flawless corporate website: functional, efficient, reliable, organizationally integrated and customer-oriented so that it can reflect and communicate corporate positioning, quality, customer orientation and image.

Social Media marketing is the pinnacle of an integrated marketing effort, failing to adequately address issues that arise in the lower levels of the pyramid will lead to disappointment, wasted resources and loss of customer goodwill (Godin, 2007).

E-Marketing can be divided into levels: The first level concerns the product and the service. At the base of the marketing strategy there must be the quality of products and services and the customer/market orientation of the company. In the company's mission, the value of the product, the unique selling proposition, and the image you have in positioning yourself in the market must be fundamental pillars.

Failing to deliver the expected quality of the product in the age of social media is risky because the consumer is able, and willing, to find the truth.

By connecting with other users, reading technology blogs or searching for product reviews, continuous innovation and quality control systems are important strategic foundations needed.

The second level concerns the Marketing (and E-Marketing) organization.

Creating and maintaining a market-oriented organization that can support both traditional and online marketing activities allows the company to be as complete as possible to date.

This means that organizational processes such as manufacturing, logistics, customer service, sales, and procurement (Porter, 1985) provide high customer value and are flexible enough to support the company's online activities.

The problem with many traditional businesses adopting online marketing is that they find it more difficult to adapt their organization and achieve the level of sophistication required to operate online.

The need for organizational transformation depends primarily on the business will itself.

Online marketers should understand the importance of a well-designed, credible website and identify the roles the website must play to help achieve the company's marketing goals.

The online customer experience and the integration of the company's website into the marketing plan are basic elements of the strategy that aims to create an online business that can add value to the company's marketing. Social media marketing can be considered the highest level of this pyramid. If the foundations described above are not solid, Social Media Marketing cannot be done properly.

The resources and capabilities of the organization's back office must critically evaluate the goals of their Social Media strategy and their internal capabilities.

1.2.1 Instagram revolution

Although Facebook is the social that most of all has taught us new ways to communicate and collaborate through features such as feeds, profiles and groups, and although still to this day it is the most used in the world, with over 2.32 billion active users and 50% of the European population registered (Wired 2018), Instagram is considered the best social to inform the purchase of products and services.

According to a 2019 Statista analysis, daily active users on Instagram Stories increased from 150 million in January 2017 to 500 million in January 2019.

Instagram Stories thanks to polls, question boxes and music make the content produced by a company more engaging, which in this way achieves a more personalized and broader freedom of expression.

As it is possible to notice from the chart below, the number of monthly active Instagram users reached 1 billion within June 2018, and it was expected to reach 1.16 billion by the end of 2020 (Statista, 2018).

1.3 Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing is gaining momentum and is becoming a point of reference for companies that want to sponsor their products. In fact, in recent years, their strong impact on people has led them to have a huge increase in cooperation with marketing agencies. 90% of consumers blindly trust the opinions of other consumers, and according to a 2019 study by GlobalWeIndex, 54% of consumers rely on the judgment of influencers for purchases on social media. People have begun to stop believing in traditional forms of advertising and prefer the opinions of friends, family and influencers who they consider expert, reliable and almost family because through social channels you feel like you are actively participating in their personal lives on a daily basis. Through research conducted by the Influencer Marketing Hub Instagram is the platform where influencers express themselves and work best, creating and building a solid base of followers so much so that they can influence purchasing decisions.

Influencers are divided in 4 categories⁴, determined by the platform with which they interact with their followers:

⁴ (Zdenka KÁDEKOVÁ – Mária HOLIENČINOVÁ, Communication Today, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 2)

Blogger: shares photos, thoughts and comments showing them in chronological or alphabetical order on a personal website

Youtuber (vlogger): interacts with the public through videos on YouTube, expressing their ideas on topics through videos that are edited and edited. Their content, like that of bloggers, is not shared in real time.

Celebrities: actors, singers, presenters, and sportsmen who are known, before social, through movies, TV series, sports, or television. This category is different from the others in that celebrities are known before they land on social to seek them out. This category more than by followers tends to be followed to find out a little more about their private life by fans.

Instagrammer: This category includes the so-called "new celebrities" who have made themselves known on social networks through content of the highest quality, sharing seemingly perfect lives that everyone would like to have.

Influencers can then be divided into 4 categories based on the number of followers:

Micro - Influencer: 500 to 25,000 thousand followers

Mid-level Influencer: from 25,001 to 100,000 thousand followers

Macro-influencer: from 100.001 up to 1 mln followers

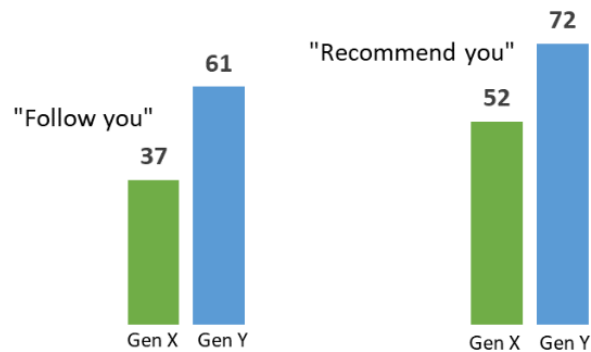
Mega influencer: more than 1 million followers

Millennials openly state that traditional media (such as TV, newspapers, magazines) are no longer essential to them. Instead, they prefer social media; social media is becoming their area of interest that they frequent on a daily basis. Attention in recent years has dropped significantly and young people, in a world that goes faster and faster, in which we are bombarded with news and changes daily, prefer visual content such as videos, photos or music and tend to ignore long written texts. Unlike thirty years ago, young people today travel a lot, dress well and care about their health and a healthy lifestyle. The influencer therefore shows them what they were already doing in a more modest way, also dictated by economic possibilities. The influencer is anyone who has added value to their social network, be it Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube, or others, reaching a large number of subscribers, friends or fans, bringing some of this added value to their followers and also expressing the ability to influence their behavior. (Li, 2013)

The new generation is not only in constant contact with the whole world but needs to feel part of this mechanism, as the Figure below shows, young consumers are more willing to follow a brand on social media and are more likely to recommend it to their friends than the older generation according to a global study Roland Berger Agency conducted in 2019. (Roland Berger Agency, 2019).

Gen X and Gen Y - a comparison

"Would they follow you on social media and recommend you to their friends?"



1.4 The spread of Influencer Marketing in Food Industry

Selling food products online has never been easy because a good food product is also judged by its taste, something that obviously cannot be achieved through photos. The reliability of the influencers you follow and their use of stories and videos to sponsor food products, emphasized by expressions of taste and satisfaction, have allowed companies working in the food sector to use Instagram and other social media as a key means to sell their products. The key to success in communicating a food product is to be able to excite the customer, trying to reach all 5 senses. Research by Solution Communication Group has shown that 67% of Italian companies involved in the agri-food sector use social channels to promote, sell and raise awareness of their products, not only in support of individual products but incorporating sales into an ongoing strategic work integrated with the overall marketing activity.

Research from GlobalWebIndex found that 58% of Instagram users have a strong interest in food, cooking and restaurants and 36% of active users revealed that through Instagram they feel more inspired to try new things regarding the food industry.

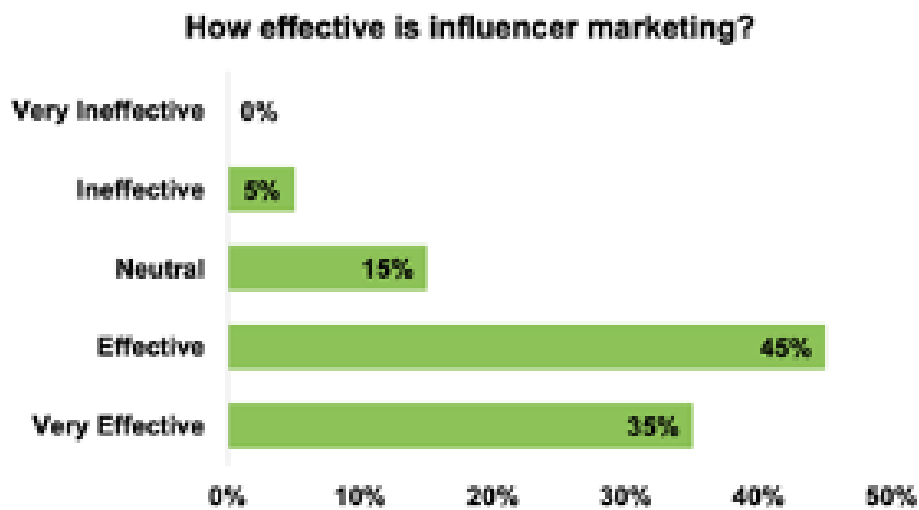
Communication from food companies on social has grown exponentially since the pandemic.

The COVID-19 in fact, has led consumers to a new type of spending, made of contingent entrances, allowed to only one individual per household, protective devices, and kilometer-long queues to then buy in the shortest time possible, leading online spending in 2021 to increase by 2% (Nomisma-Coop).

Thanks to social media, the storytelling of companies in the food sector has also changed, allowing producers to be in direct contact with consumers. In a period of uncertainty such as the one in which we find ourselves, through social networks, companies have understood how food serves to comfort and reassure: in times of pandemic, food was the key to remain attached to a family reality that we no longer recognized outside the home.

The web and social media, as Anna Zinola explains, influence our purchasing choices, condition the type of products we eat and have revolutionized the way we look at and consider food.

A study by Mediakix (2019), (figure below) showed how for marketer's influencer marketing is considered effective for the brand. For marketers, young people are a very important category because they will be the main consumers in the future



1.5 The psychological perspective

Body image is generally understood as a mental image of the body as it appears to others. It is often assumed in consumer culture that people deal with their body image instrumentally, as status and social acceptability depend on a person's appearance. (M. Featherstone)

There are many definitions of body image, and it is well established that over time and across cultures the perception and consideration of bodies changes significantly. Ferguson (1997), argues that in Europe there has been a shift from a relatively well-defined, singular, and closed body image in the nineteenth century (the classical bourgeois ego) to a more open and ambiguous sense of body image, moving to today on a shifting surface.

The body-schema promoted by Freund and Jung (2009) explains how the eye on an aesthetic level leads us to view aesthetics not only as mere beauty but as a tool that allows us to have positive perceptions and experiences of what beauty surrounds. The advertising of mass consumer culture presents the beautiful, the harmonious and the thin as an imperative, a duty, casting those who become fat, or take little care of their appearance, not only as lazy and disrespectful of themselves, but as if they were defective, not worthy of being accepted by the community and must therefore either adapt or be marginalized. On the opposite side, those who take care of themselves (relativizing the concept based on today's society) and look good will be able to enjoy a body and face that are more congruent with their "true" self. Pushing us to believe that "beautiful" improves all aspects of a person's life and their surroundings, adding new possibilities and positive opportunities. The transformative techniques of consumer culture, such as cosmetic surgery, automatically allow us to move better through interpersonal spaces, making us enjoy the full range of lifestyle opportunities and pleasures that are offered, while not valuing the distortion of our true being.

However, the relationship between body image and self-image may not work as simply as visual rationality. The desire to constantly improve, to look like someone else because society tells us that beauty and all that follows is represented by a body that does not reflect our own, causes almost half of today's adolescents to have anorexia or bulimia.

Social media are now one of the major causes for which a teenager falls ill with an eating disorder.

The constant confrontation with images of apparently perfect bodies and apparently perfect lives, in a delicate phase like adolescence in which one is not very sure of oneself and is uncertain about the future, risk creating psychological damage from which sometimes you must fight for years, and it is almost impossible to get out. It is therefore essential to understand how to use Social Networks in a safe and conscious way.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Since the advent of the internet, especially since the exponential expansion of social networks, there have been studies that prove the efficiency of innovative Influencer Marketing techniques.

To date, however, none of these studies have focused on how this specific marketing technique can influence the WTB of the consumer, in particular, how it can be influenced by the trust that consumers place, in different ways, in each influencer and the products they sponsor.

Previous studies have always focused on the role of mass media figures in the stereotypes into which many adolescents fell. Instead, this study wants to focus on the psychological impact and buying power that these influencers have on consumers. Specifically, we want to show, in almost contradictory terms, how those who have less self-esteem are the ones who will trust these models the most.

2.1 Overview about Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is one of the most effective marketing tools today, pushing many companies to use influencers to sponsor their products.

Influencer marketing was born almost by accident, starting to be used through a process of trial and error without a thorough vision of how social media influencers should use this new method in a strategic way also as a distinctive tool in the marketing mix (Ye, Hudders, De Jans, De Veirman).

Influencers increasingly gained high social clout and reputation, through their candor and transparency with customers, became the winning point of this strategy. (Buyer, 2016)

2.1.1 Influencer Marketing definitions

The advantage of Influencer marketing is that it is often not perceived by consumers as advertising and provides a broad reach to a highly engaged audience (Ye, Hudders, De Jans, De Veirman)

The influencer is the person who is able to influence a person, a thing or the course of events, creating a favorable environment to the point of being able to shape another person's opinion about a certain thing or topic, A third party who significantly shapes the customer's buying decision, but can never be responsible for it.⁵

⁵ Duncan Brown e Nick Hayes “influencer marketing “Who really influences your customers””

This definition is very important to understanding our research model. Legally, we know that an influencer cannot be prosecuted for sponsoring a product that was most likely not described to her in the first place but to ensure the trust of their followers they should all be able to understand what they are sponsoring and most importantly they must understand that if a sponsored product does not satisfy followers, they will hold the influencer, and not the company, responsible for that.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are ordinary people who have created social media profiles to influence follower behavior. (Laura Peltola, 2019) They are users of social media platforms who have developed a reputation for his or her knowledge and expertise on a topic. They continuously share their life stories and opinions on various topics on their favorite social media channels, many of which revolve around product and brand-related topics (Gillin, 2008), and generate massive followings of enthusiastic and engaged people who pay close attention to their opinions. (Carolina Stubb, 2019).

In contrast to celebrities, influencers turn out to be more open, more realistic, more authentic, and more normal for people to relate to because they share personal aspects of their lives with their followers. (Abidin, 2016; Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003).

The combination of strong personality, deep knowledge of the subject matter, and being in the right place at the right time are the winning combination to be an influencer.

2.1.2 Influencer Marketing literature review

Influencer Marketing is a form of online marketing that is based on a collaboration between a brand and an influencer who offers their visibility to raise awareness of a service or product of that particular company. Collaborations involve the publication of content such as photos, reels, videos, posts, and stories on their channels.

It is important to specify that influencer marketing is not reduced to the mere use of paying an influencer with many followers in order to get publicity from the latter, in fact, companies must also choose their testimonials based on the affinity they might have with the brand, so that the consumer can perceive more credibility in what is sponsored by the influencers they follow.

Influencer marketing must therefore appear genuine, relying on quality content and organic storytelling in line with the other content being offered.

If influencer marketing is done correctly, therefore choosing the most suitable influencers the return on investment is assured.

According to a study by TalkWalker, influencer marketing guarantees an ROI 11 times higher than other forms of digital marketing.

In 2020 for every dollar invested in influencer marketing companies earned an average of \$5.78 (The State of Influencer Marketing 2020: Benchmark Report).

Every communication activity should begin by defining a target customer or audience. A strategy will be chosen to target potential customers and what they will be talking about. The more we find out about the target group, the better we understand how they live, what they think, what they like, what discourages them, and then leads to the creation of an effective advertising campaign.

Influencer ecosystems are rarely based on a formal structure, they are in fact non-hierarchical networks of connection of which its members are at different levels of business, typically from more than one organization. This is important in the context of influencer marketing, because determining the internal influencers on a specific decision is very difficult, if not impossible.

The individuals that make up the network in which influencer marketing develops come from various industries and various backgrounds, the trust that is placed in influencers is primarily due to the decline of trust in traditional influencer types.

To understand how the network of influencer marketing develops, Gladwell⁶ identified three types of influencers: Connectors, Mavens and Marketers.

Connectors talk to people, like to give product presentations, and are part of an inner circle where they know people in the circles they frequent. Connectors are essential to word of mouth (WOM) in communicating a sales message.

Mavens are those who have expertise in what they are selling. They share their knowledge and information, most often identifying patterns and trends.

Salespeople, on the other hand, are extremely persuasive people. And charismatic, exerting an influence, often unconscious, to want to imitate them.

The problem with this theory is that it explains the existence of connectors but does not describe what types of messages are transmitted, the sequence or order of them.

The problem of message quality is reflected in the social world with the creation of false connectors.

False connectors allow, through BOTs to make an influencer gain popularity.

This popularity is seen by companies as a possible source of income that is, however, insubstantial as that influencer has only a small portion of real followers.

Influencers get influence from each other; it is in fact almost impossible to influence in isolation.

⁶ Malcom Gladwell, The Tipping Point (2000)

Companies need to be aware that partnerships with Influencers are typically not exclusive, this means that companies need to be aware that they are constantly competing with other competitors in the market. Partners for the same influencer are never equal in size or importance, this means that with the same influencer the results achieved by two companies can be extremely different.

Companies must therefore create ad hoc messages for the type of influencer they are sponsoring their product. Influencers, in fact, speak for their community, carrying the message of the company they need to sponsor in order to be credible.

In fact, influencers try as much as possible to have sponsorships that are in line with who they are to keep their offer and position high.

Studies have shown that young people chase popularity and fashion, care about their image, have a strong curiosity and want to follow and catch subtle changes in trends. (Li, 2013)

We have thus developed our first hypothesis:

H1: Influencer marketing have a greater and more positive impact on willingness to buy food product

2.2 Overview about Perceived Trustworthiness

Lack of trustworthiness, especially on the internet, is one of the biggest challenges and issues that businesses face.

Fear of not getting what you ordered that the sponsored item doesn't reflect reality, and that buying online will cause credit card problems are the main reasons many consumers don't trust buying online.

In a national survey of 1017 Internet users conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (PIP), 68% expressed concern about the disclosure of financial information, and 3% reported being scammed by an online merchant or having their credit card number stolen (Fox, 2000).

In another national survey of 1500 Internet users conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates (2002) for Consumer WebWatch, a project of Consumers Union, 64% of users expressed reservations about trusting e-commerce sites.

If online trustworthiness can be understood and improved by reputable online merchants, then the number of people engaging in e-commerce should increase substantially. More importantly, it will create an overall climate of online trust in which shoppers will feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive information, sellers will feel confident conducting business online, and there will be intense interactions, transactions, and associations that benefit both consumers and merchants. Simply put, the future of e-commerce depends on trust,

Building consumer trust is therefore a process that takes time and perseverance, but necessary in order to grow a company's earnings and reputation.

2.2.1 Perceived Trustworthiness definitions

Trustworthiness is often described as the willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations of others (Butler, 1991; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998).

Blau, 1964; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996 hypothesized that trust is influenced by relationship length. This theory can also be applied to influencers, they in fact establish a relationship of trust with their community, which consolidates as time goes by. In this way, followers feel almost like participants in the life of the latter who share successes and achievements.

Holton differentiates trust from reliance in that, in trust, the trustee assumes the "participant position."

In fact, Russell Hardin (1996, p.28) argues that trustworthiness is often mistaken for confidence.

According to Hardin as the opportunity for the trustee to act against the wishes of the trustor decreases, the trustworthiness of the trustee increases. This can best be understood from the belief that if people are trustworthy, they will do what we ask. We can then hypothesize that trustworthiness is simple conformance and that followers, will follow what they are told by the influencer out of simple conformity.

For Karen Jones, the trustee considers the expectation of the trustor as the motivation to be trustworthy when deciding how to act (Jones,1996, p.6)

Most probably the definition given by Doney and Canon (1997) is the most effective and the most useful to apply to a marketing strategy. For them, in fact, "customers can trust the supplier company, its seller, or both".

2.2.2 Perceived Trustworthiness literature review

Trustworthiness has been studied long before the advent of the internet and Influencers, conceptualized in different forms and in completely different domains.

Kumar (1996) and other researchers agreed that trust, rather than power, helped manufacturers or retailers receive more tangible benefits and realize their full potential, not only faster but permanently.

Relationship marketing focused not on discrete transactions, but rather on relational exchange, which was "longer in duration, reflecting an ongoing process" (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987, p. 23). Second (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987, p. 23). Trust in marketing requires 4 pillars, without which nothing lasting can be built.

1. In any trusting relationship there must be two specific parties: a trusted party and a party to be trusted. The two parties, consisting of people, organizations and/or products, must evaluate the actions of each party. The development of trust is based on the ability of the trustee to act in the best interests of the trustor and the degree of trust the trustor places in the trustee.
2. Trust involves vulnerability. Trust is needed, and actually flourishes, only in an uncertain and risky environment. Trustors must be willing to make themselves vulnerable for trust to be operational, taking the risk of losing something important to them and counting on trustees not to exploit the vulnerability.
3. Trust leads to actions that require risk taking. The form of the action depends on the situation, and the action may involve something more tangible or intangible.
4. Subjective matter. Trust is a subjective matter. It is directly related to and influenced by individual differences and situational factors.

We have thus developed our second hypothesis:

H2: When Influencer marketing is present the perception on trustworthiness will increase. Moreover, the increase in the perceived trustworthiness will positively influence willingness to buy food product

2.3 Overview about Body Image

Body Image is treated in studies in a particularly wide way especially when it comes to Traditional Media.

Television, along with print advertisements has always been blamed as the main culprit of the commodification of the body and has dictated for years the standards and canons of beauty that entire generations have shaped the concept of the body of young people and adults.

This study wants to understand how social networks have shaped the generations of the last 20 years. In fact, today it is common to normalize normal bodies and body positivity is one of the pillars of companies. Despite this, eating disorders, according to research of the ASN (American Society for Nutrition) have increased significantly and cause, in the United States alone, about 10,200 deaths per year ⁷

This research wants to understand and investigate how nowadays, the new generation uses and considers social networks, how they affect their lifestyle choices, including nutritional ones.

2.3.1 Body Image definitions

According to the (NEDA) National eating disorders for body image means the perception, including visual, that we have of ourselves when we see ourselves in the mirror or when we imagine ourselves in our minds.

This includes:

- What one believes about one's appearance
- How we feel about our body
- How you perceive your body and how you control it

A second definition, also given by NEDA, is that body image is defined as a person's thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes about their physical appearance.

⁷ Eric Graber, February 22, 2021; Eating Disorder Are on the Rise.

According to the Merriam-Wester dictionary, body image is a subjective image of one's physical appearance established either through self-observation or by noticing the relationship of others.

This definition makes us understand how often the rules we apply to ourselves are most often dictated by others, or by what we perceive to be the judgments of others.

Accepting ourselves and feeling confident in our bodies not only allows us to have a favorable perception of our bodies but also makes us aware that physical appearance has little to do with character and especially the value of a person.

People who experience high levels of body dissatisfaction have a perception that their body, compared to others, is defective. These people are more likely to suffer from depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders (Stice, 2002)

2.3.2 Body Image literature review

Concerns about body image increasingly begin at a young age and increasingly last throughout life.

To date, girls begin expressing concerns about their weight at age 6, and approximately 40-60% of adolescent girls are concerned about their weight or feel fat (Smolak, 2011).

Over half of adolescent girls and one-third of adolescent boys use methods such as smoking, vomiting, taking laxatives, fasting, or saturating meals to control their weight (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).

Body image is nothing more than "the image that we form of our bodies, that is, the way in which our bodies manifest themselves to us".⁸

Unlike advertising images, where most of us know that they are retouched by professionals who seek perfection for their work, in social media there is still a belief that the photos are authentic, that they are not retouched by professionals, because of the "raw" images used to publish a post it is still believed that they are simply taken with a phone and not modified much. This belief is the main reason why girls and boys are constantly comparing themselves to girls on social networks and not to cover or billboard girls.

Publishing your own photos on social networks makes your photos available to everyone, this means that you no longer have to face the judgment of people who see you in a restricted manner physically but of all those who we have as "friends" on social are entitled to judge us.

⁸ Nutr Hosp, 2013;28: 27-35

The body image is not unique but is made up of a set of components: the perceptual component (the perception of the body or parts of it), the cognitive component (evaluations of the body or parts of it), the affective component (feelings or attitudes about the body or a part of it) and the behavioral component.

Each historical period has its own canons of beauty, so it is inevitable that each historical period or culture develops different concepts of body image.

The concept of subjectivity (depending on the context or culture) of the canon extended must be the basis of any assessment we make about our body.

Therefore, we must first understand that we must like our body according to our canon of beauty, because those dictated by society are totally ephemeral and random.

Numbers studies have shown that although 43% of women are underweight, about 60% of them would like to have less fat.

Three types of body image disorders can be distinguished:

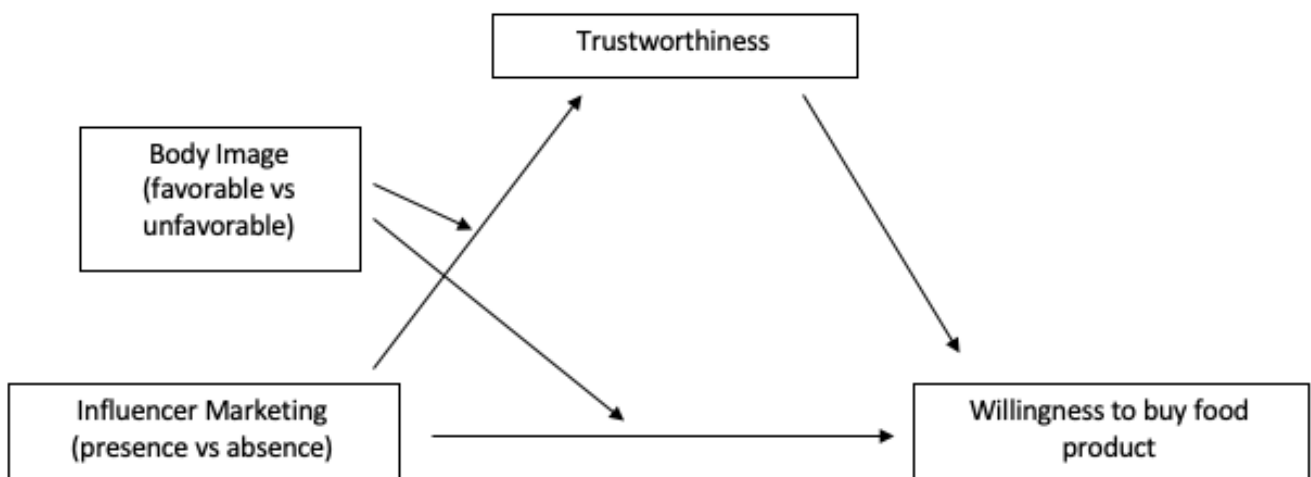
- Perceptual disorders: techniques aimed at assessing the degree of distortion or perception of body size. For this purpose, the real figure and the figure believed to be the same and the degree of distortion are checked.
- Alterations in subjective aspects: techniques aimed at detecting alterations in emotions, thoughts, attitudes about one's image.
- Miscellaneous aspects. A large number of techniques have been proposed for the evaluation of body image that measure various aspects.

We thus developed our third hypothesis:

H3: body image will moderate the relationship between the presence of influencer marketing and the perceived trustworthiness. Specifically, who have an unfavorable body image will have a greater perception of trustworthiness when influencer marketing is present

2.4 Research model development

In order to test the previously mentioned hypotheses, the following research model was developed (see figure). The presence or absence of Influencer Marketing is the independent variable (IV), while the willingness to purchase a food product is our dependent variable (DV). Moreover, a moderated mediation (WTB) is involved: perceived trustworthiness is expected to mediate the relationship between presence of Influencer Marketing and consumer's willingness to buy food product, so as to explain how influencers increase consumers' desire to buy products. Body image is also expected to have a double moderation, body image in fact is thought to moderate (moderator) the relationship between the presence of Influencer marketing and Trustworthiness, as it is expected that even with a body in which one does not feel confident, trust in influencers increases. Body image is expected to play its role as a double moderator between the presence of influencer marketing and consumers' willingness to buy, in particular it is expected that even if the perception of our body is unfavorable, to be more specific the greater the negative perception of our body, the greater will be the willingness to buy food product if they are sponsored by an influencer



3. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The final part of this thesis project will explain the methodology adopted to conduct the quantitative analysis, the type of survey used to conduct this analysis, and the process of coding the variables used in the study. Before analyzing the data in depth, we will look at the descriptive analysis of our sample, dissecting the questions posed to them and confirming the validity of the stimuli they were subjected to.

The final goal will be to confirm or reject our hypotheses and evaluate how Influencer Marketing can influence a consumer's willingness to buy a food product through the trust they place in it and how the image we have of ourselves can influence not only the trust we place in influencers but also our willingness to buy the product itself.

3.1 Study and Methodology

For this study, a nonprobabilistic descriptive casual between subject statistic was used.

For the study of our variables, we use data collection of qualitative descriptive statistics, particular conclusive research that is focused on discovering the nature of the specific events under study. The presentation of data from a qualitative descriptive study involves a straight forward descriptive summary of the informational contents of the data that is organized in a logical manner.⁹ This study will use two scenarios (presence of an influencer for product sponsorship vs. absence of influencer for product sponsorship) and each participant will take part in only one of the two possible conditions in order to have two separate unconditioned groups that will allow us to understand how the two groups react differently to the two different scenarios. Our experiment therefore consists of a causal between subject research design.

The sample of participants in this study was selected through a non-probability sampling method, specifically a convenience sample, in order to collect data in an easier way. In fact, this method allows for results to be obtained quickly and at a low cost. The chosen group is composed of men and women aged 30 and under in order to focus the research on the millennial and Gen Z generation who use the internet and social media on a daily basis.

Study participants were contacted by sending them a link, created through the Qualtrics platform, via the instant messaging app Whatsapp.

⁹ Vickie A. Lambert, Clinton E. Lambert

3.1.1 Participant and Procedure

The goal of the questionnaire, generated through the Qualtrics platform, was to collect a minimum of 200 valid responses for analysis. There were 204 valid responses, which were then subsequently analyzed. The questionnaire was administered through the WhatsApp messaging app and was only fillable online.

Participants before beginning the survey were informed that the responses would be used by a LUISS student in a completely anonymous form, analyzed in aggregate, and used solely for the purposes of this research.

To conduct the experimental study on the positive effects that Influencer Marketing has on consumers' Willingness to Buy and how Trustworthiness influences it, we developed an 18-question questionnaire (13 specific, 3 attitudinal, and 2 demographic) using Qualtrics.

As mentioned above, respondents were informed of the purpose and anonymity of the survey, then asked questions about their perception of their own body before showing the stimuli precisely to prevent survey respondents from being influenced by the 'randomized image they would later see.

Prior to randomly subjecting the participants to one of the two stimuli, questions about the perception and consideration of one's own body were asked of everyone, regardless of the stimulus to which they would be subjected next.

Since our sample consisted exclusively of respondents of Italian nationality, the questions, like the entire questionnaire, were administered in Italian.

Respondents were subjected to five questions derived from the Body Image Satisfaction Questionnaire (BIS; Rauste-von Wright, M., 1989) scale and later expanded by the Italian adolescent study "I like My Body; Therefore, I like Myself" (E. Gatti, C. Ionio, D. Traficante, E. Confalonieri, 2014).

Respondents had to answer by indicating on a scale from 1 (Completely dissatisfied) to 7 (Completely satisfied) to what extent they agreed with the following statements:

- Sono soddisfatto/a del mio corpo
- Il mio corpo mi rende sicuro/a
- Mi sento attraente

- Sono critico/a sul mio corpo
- Rispetto il mio corpo

To manipulate the independent variable (absence vs. presence of Influencer Marketing), it was necessary to develop the questionnaire with two different visual stimuli (in one a well-known influencer is present with an ice cream of a generic brand in order not to influence participants in the other the same food product was presented without the presence of an influencer).

The moderator and mediator were then submitted in the same manner to both groups of respondents.

Randomization via Qualtrics ensured equal exposure with respect to the first and second stimuli. The two stimuli depicted two different Instagram mock-up stories created using the Photoshop program.

Survey respondents viewed both stories as if they were posted by an ice cream brand. The brand in question, in order to avoid having results influenced by the notoriety and sentimentality of a particular brand or logo the latter were created ad hoc for this study always with the use of Photoshop.

The name of the brand "Gelatique" as well as the logo of the brand were created in a fictitious way without the possibility of being able to remind the respondents of a well-known brand.

The phrase of description of the Instagram post "The irresistible lightness of Gelatique" was chosen precisely to understand even more if an ice cream, a product in the collective imagination fat and full of sugar, could instead be considered a lighter food through influencer marketing. It's important to understand if someone who doesn't feel at ease with their body and feels fat, if they see an ice cream being eaten by an influencer, who in the collective imagination is thin and perfect, then that particular ice cream can be eaten because it obviously doesn't make them fat.

Visual stimuli:

 **Gelatique** • Follow
Italy



Liked by john and 1,560 others

Gelatique L'irresistibile leggerezza di Gelatique! ... more

[View all 20 comments](#)

5 MINS

 **Gelatique** • Follow
Italy



Liked by john and 1,560 others

Gelatique L'irresistibile leggerezza di Gelatique! ... more

[View all 20 comments](#)

5 MINS

After viewing one of the two visual stimuli all respondents were administered the same questions, all based on a 7-point Likert Scale.

The first 4 questions were based on our dependent variable Willingness to Buy (WTB) scale.

- Ho intenzione di acquistare il prodotto
- Comprerò il prodotto
- C'è una forte possibilità che io acquisterò il prodotto
- La probabilità che io acquisterò il prodotto è alta

The last 4 questions based on the trustworthiness mediator

- Questa pubblicità è onesta
- Questa pubblicità è veritiera
- Questa pubblicità è credibile
- Questa pubblicità è affidabile

3.2 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis begins by cleaning and preparing the data to make it as consistent and accurate as possible. Fortunately, all 204 responses collected were consistent, so we were able to not eliminate and discard invalid or incomplete responses. Descriptive statistics allow us to understand the characteristics of the reference sample. We then verify through stimulus validation that the stimuli used for our survey are meaningful. The reliability analysis allows us to measure the scales present in our research model (in our case three) and to verify the internal consistency of the model. The reliability analysis is critical before we can perform PROCESS Model 8, so we can understand if our scales are validated. Through the analysis of PROCESS Model 8 we can understand if there is a meaningful existence of a moderate mediation model.

3.2.1 Descriptive statistics

The main purpose of descriptive statistics is to provide a summary of the samples and measurements made in a study. Primarily, descriptive statistics is used to describe the behavior of a sample of data.¹⁰

Respondents were 93.6% female (191) while 6.4% were male (13), the age of survey respondents ranged from 22 to 27 years old with the majority of respondents being 24 years old (50%).

Respondents were then asked questions pertaining to internet and social media use. They were asked how much time on average they spent using the internet, how often they shopped online, and which social network they used the most.

The majority of respondents answered that they are always connected (60.8%). Interestingly, only 1% of respondents report less than one hour per day on the Internet, proving that we are now always connected.

Quanto tempo durante la giornata dedichi mediamente all'utilizzo di Internet?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Meno di un'ora	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Dalle 2 alle 3 ore	13	6.4	6.4	7.4
	Dalle 3 alle 6 ore	65	31.9	31.9	39.2
	Sono sempre connesso	124	60.8	60.8	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

The most used social is Instagram, but it is interesting to note that the percentage of the social Facebook (the most used social in the world) is the same as Tik Tok (the social with the most exponential growth in absolute).

¹⁰ Sohil Sharma (2019), Descriptive Statistics and Factorial Design

Quale social usi più frequentemente?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Facebook	11	5.4	5.4	5.4
	Instagram	172	84.3	84.3	89.7
	Tik Tok	11	5.4	5.4	95.1
	Snapchat	10	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

The majority of respondents buy online between 5 and 10 times a month (60.8%). These results are perhaps also given by the fact that the average age of respondents is characteristic of Generation Z (the first generation born and raised with the internet).

Quanto spesso ti capita di acquistare online?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Mai	7	3.4	3.4	3.4
	Dalle 2 alle 5 volte al mese	27	13.2	13.2	16.7
	Dalle 5 alle 10 volte al mese	124	60.8	60.8	77.5
	Sempre	46	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

3.2.2 Reliability Analysis

Before conducting the main study, we needed to validate our 7-point Likert scales.

The scales used to measure Willingness to Buy (WTB), Trustworthiness (TW), and Body Image (BI) were already pre-validated, but it was important to prove their absolute accuracy within our model.

Reliability analysis allows us to understand if the scale used consistently reflects the construct it is measuring. Cronbach's (1951) Alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, it allows us to understand how closely related a group of items are.¹¹

Since values above 0.60 are considered acceptable while those above 0.70 are considered sufficiently reliable, our scales are considered extremely reliable. From the tables below it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha of the Willingness to Buy (WTB) scale is 0.992, that of Trustworthiness (TW) is 0.990 and that of Body Image (BI) is 0.922.

WTB Reliability

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.992	.992	4

TW Reliability

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.990	.990	4

¹¹ Statistical Consulting Group

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.922	.927	5

3.2.3 Stimuli Validation

Prior to conducting the main study, we developed a pre-test with the purpose of performing stimulus validation. The goal was to verify that the presence or absence of Influencer Marketing was perceived differently by survey respondents.

The pre-test was constructed to use the same visual conditions as the main test, to avoid having biased data. Again, the Qualtrics was administered in Italian.

The pre-test results were obtained by administering the questionnaire, created with the online platform Qualtrics, to 50 individuals via the instant messaging application WhatsApp.

Also, in the pre-test the research sample considered follows the parameters used for the main test, i.e. people belonging to Generation Z or Millennials.

Again, the responses of the 50 respondents were all valid and meaningful, so we did not have to eliminate any data.

In the pre-test, the majority of respondents were female (54%) while the remainder were male (45%) and only one respondent preferred not to specify (1%).

The pre-test study was divided into three parts.

The first part, as in the main test, it was specified that the study was created for an experimental master's thesis and that all responses would be analyzed guaranteeing the anonymity of the respondents and that the questionnaire would last approximately 3 minutes.

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were randomized to one of the two stimuli, and all were asked the same question.

Randomization ensured that there was an equal amount of exposure to both stimuli.

Again, we used a 7-point Likert Scale, asking them to indicate from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) how much they agreed with the following statement:

- Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer?

The scale used was created specifically for this study as no valid scales were found for consumers' perception of the presence or absence of influencer marketing.

Since this scale consisted of only one item, previously mentioned, we did not perform a factor analysis to examine scale validity and labeling. Therefore, it was not possible to perform the scale reliability analysis through Cronbach Alpha.

The last part of the pre-test was devoted to demographic questions, asking respondents their age and gender. Once all the data was collected through the Qualtrics online platform, it was analyzed by exporting it to the SPSS Statistics platform.

The pre-test study we performed consists of a conclusive between-subjects causal research design (2x1) in which each of the two conditions were tested and each respondent was exposed to only one of the two scenarios.

For this reason, we decided to perform an independent sample t-test.

The independent samples t-test compares the means of two independent groups to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different. The t-test for independent samples is a parametric test.¹²

The Independent sample t - test can only be used, as in our case, to compare of two groups. Therefore, it cannot be used if we were to compare the mean of more than two groups. In this type of test there must be no relationship between the subjects in each sample. For this reason, the subjects in the first group cannot also be in the second group, and no subject in either group can influence the other group.

Following these assumptions, we decided to calculate statistical averages related to consumers' perception of transparency for both visual stimuli (coded as condition 1= the product is sponsored by an influencer and condition 2= the product is not sponsored by an influencer).

The objective of the independent sample t-test was to measure a higher mean value in the perception of the presence of influencer marketing when respondents were exposed to visual stimulus 1 (presence of influencer marketing) and a lower mean value in the perception of the presence of influencer marketing when they were exposed to stimulus 2 (absence of influencer marketing).

¹² Kent State University Library

To conduct the independent sample t-test on the perception of presence or absence of influencer marketing, we developed the hypotheses:

H0: There are no mean differences in consumers' perceptions of the presence or absence of influencer marketing when viewing stimulus 1 and stimulus 2.

H1: There are average differences in consumers' perceptions of the presence or absence of influencer marketing by viewing stimulus 1 and stimulus 2.

Hence, hypothesis H0 implies that the image with the influencer-sponsored food product generates the same perception as the image with the influencer-unsponsored food product.

Hypothesis H1, on the other hand, implies that the image with the influencer-sponsored food product does not generate the same perception as the image with the non-influencer-sponsored food product.

By analyzing the data and observing the group statistics, we could see that the number of respondents exposed to stimulus 1 (presence of influencer marketing) was 27 with a mean of 6.63 and a standard deviation of 0.492. The number of respondents exposed to stimulus 2 (absence of influencer marketing) was 23 with a mean of 1.61 and a standard deviation of 0.492

Statistiche gruppo

	InfMkt	N	Media	Deviazione std.	Media errore standard
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer	1.00	27	6.63	.492	.095
	2.00	23	1.61	.783	.163

In order to understand if we could accept the hypothesis H1 and reject the null hypothesis (H0) we observed within the test the part dedicated to Levene's test to calculate if the two groups have the same variance, if F is close to 1 with significance higher than Alpha=0.05 (>0.05), or not, F very large with significance lower than Alpha=0.05 (<0.05).

Analyzing the data our F is very large (9.729) and our significance level is 0.003.

Since our p-value = 0.003 ($p < 0.05$) is below the level of significance (Alpha = 0.05) we can say with certainty that we can reject the null hypothesis H0.

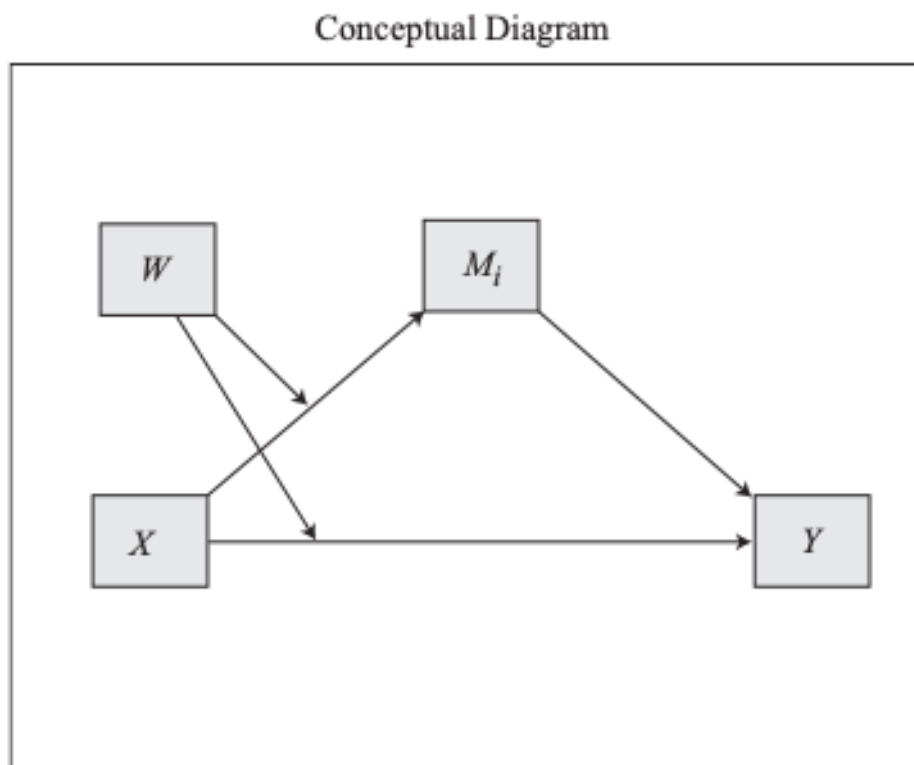
		Test campioni indipendenti								
		Test di Levene per l'eguaglianza delle varianze		Test t per l'eguaglianza delle medie						
		F	Sign.	t	gl	Sign. (a due code)	Differenza della media	Differenza errore standard	Intervallo di confidenza della differenza di 95%	
									Inferiore	Superiore
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer	Varianze uguali presunte	9.729	.003	27.568	48	.000	5.021	.182	4.655	5.387
	Varianze uguali non presunte			26.609	35.869	.000	5.021	.189	4.638	5.404

Looking at the figure, one can also see that the significance of the t-test for equality of means is 0.000. This value is less than alpha/2 (0.025). This confirms our H1 hypothesis that consumers have a greater perception of influencer marketing when it is present than when it is not.

Therefore, we can affirm the success of our pre-test and consequently the validity of our stimuli.

3.2.4 Moderated Mediation Analysis with PROCESS Model 8

After conducting the pre-test, Factor analysis and Reliability test, we performed a Regression analysis, applying F. Hayes' model 8, updating the SPSS software to version 4.0 of the PROCESS macro function. We used model 8 since that is what our study represented.



Regression analysis allows us to assess the significance and validity of our hypotheses and theories in our study.

As a first step, we set influencer marketing (coded as condition 1=presence of influencer marketing and condition 2=absence of influencer marketing) as an independent variable (IV), Willingness to Buy (WTB) as a dependent variable (DV), Trustworthiness (TW) towards Influencer Marketing as a Mediator (M) and Body Image as a Moderator (W).

H1: Influencer marketing have a greater and more positive impact on willingness to buy food product

H2: When Influencer marketing is present the perception on trustworthiness will increase. Moreover the increase in the perceived trustworthiness will positively influence willingness to buy food product

H3: body image will moderate the relationship between the presence of influencer marketing and the perceived trustworthiness. Specifically, who have an unfavorable body image will have a greater perception of trustworthiness when influencer marketing is present

Specifically, to examine the significance of the main hypotheses, we observed whether the p-value of each variable was below the Alpha 0.05 significance level or not. In this way, the hypotheses were accepted with a 95% confidence interval.

Applying PROCESS 8 we tested the first hypothesis H1, observing the direct effect obtained from IV (influencer marketing presence/absence) on DV (WTB).

What we expect is that Influencer Marketing increases consumers' Willingness to Buy.

The SPSS output obtained demonstrated a positive coefficient (beta β 0.5654), and a p-value of 0.0641 ($p > 0.05$). Our p-value being 0.0641 is not below the significance level. We also have adverse Bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI= -0.0333; ULCI=1.1641).

From this we can see that this output does not confirm our first hypothesis since the direct effect is not statistically significant. Therefore, we can say that influencer marketing does not directly affect WTB, we reject our H1.

Outcome H1:

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  WTB

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
      .9664      .9339      .2232    703.0604    4.0000    199.0000    .0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    -.4362    .3818   -1.1427   .2545   -1.1891    .3166
InfMkt       .5654    .3036    1.8622   .0641   -.0333    1.1641
TW           .9296    .0445   20.9116   .0000    .8420    1.0173
BI           .1407    .1414    .9950    .3209   -.1381    .4195
Int_1       -.1574    .0846   -1.8611   .0642   -.3242    .0094

Product terms key:
  Int_1      :      InfMkt      x      BI

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W      .0012      3.4638      1.0000      199.0000      .0642
  
```

Testing hypothesis 2, we observed the indirect effect of IV (infmkt) on DV (WTB) mediated by Mediator (TW); in particular we expected Influencer Marketing to positively influence Trustworthiness which in turn would influence even more on Willingness to Buy.

In the SPSS output, we found in the relationship between IV and Mediator a positive coefficient (beta $\beta=4.9118$), a p-value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$). Our p-value is therefore below the level of significance, and a favorable Bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI= 4.2501; ULCI=5.5735). As regards the relationship between Mediator and DV, a positive coefficient (beta $\beta 0.9296$), a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) which is also below the level of significance, and a favorable bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI = 0.8420; ULCI = 1.0173).

From this we conclude that this output confirms our H2 since the indirect effect between IV and DV mediated by TW (mediator) is statistically significant. We can therefore deduce that the presence of Influencer Marketing positively influences the Trustworthiness of respondents, which has a positive impact on the Willingness to Buy of possible consumers. We thus accept H2.

Outcome H2:

```

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
TW

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2
p
.9107    .8293    .5646  323.9394    3.0000    200.0000    .00
00

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  -3.6876    .5484   -6.7242   .0000   -4.7690   -2.6062
InfMkt     4.9118    .3356   14.6377   .0000    4.2501    5.5735
BI          1.2605    .2065    6.1052   .0000    .8533    1.6676
Int_1     -.6713    .1259   -5.3331   .0000   -.9195   -.4231

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
WTB

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2
p
.9664    .9339    .2232  703.0604    4.0000    199.0000    .00
00

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant  -.4362    .3818   -1.1427   .2545   -1.1891    .3166
InfMkt     .5654    .3036    1.8622   .0641   -.0333    1.1641
TW          .9296    .0445   20.9116   .0000    .8420    1.0173
BI          .1407    .1414    .9950   .3209   -.1381    .4195
Int_1     -.1574    .0846   -1.8611   .0642   -.3242    .0094

Product terms key:
Int_1 : InfMkt x BI

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W    .0012    3.4638    1.0000    199.0000    .0642

```

Testing Hypothesis 3, we observed the interaction effect yielded by moderation of the moderator (BI) on the IV link on the mediator (TW); specifically, we would expect Body Image to positively affect Trustworthiness, which in turn would affect consumers' Willingness to Buy even more.

In the SPSS output, we found in the interaction effect produced by the moderator on the ratio of IV to mediator a negative coefficient (beta β - 0.6713), a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) that is below the significance level, and favorable bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI= -0.9195; ULCI= -0.4231).

From this we conclude that the interaction effect produced by the moderator in the IV-mediator relationship is statistically significant. For this we can deduce that body image will moderate the relationship between the presence of influencer marketing and the perceived trustworthiness. Specifically, who have an unfavorable body image will have a greater perception of trustworthiness when influencer marketing is present. So, we accept H3.

Outcome H3:

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
TW

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.9107	.8293	.5646	323.9394	3.0000	200.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-3.6876	.5484	-6.7242	.0000	-4.7690	-2.6062
InfMkt	4.9118	.3356	14.6377	.0000	4.2501	5.5735
BI	1.2605	.2065	6.1052	.0000	.8533	1.6676
Int_1	-.6713	.1259	-5.3331	.0000	-.9195	-.4231

3.3 Results and Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to determine how Influencer Marketing increased consumers' Willingness to Buy and how trust in influencers affected not only consumers' purchases but also their body perceptions.

We developed three main hypotheses, the first to observe the direct effect obtained from IV (Influencer Marketing) on DV (Willingness to Buy), the second hypothesis was developed to understand 'effect of IVs on mediator mediated DV (Trustworthiness), the third to observe the interaction effect from BI moderation (moderator) on the link between IV and mediator (Trustworthiness).

Our first hypothesis (H1) was rejected while the other two hypotheses (H2 and H3) were accepted.

Our first hypothesis (H1) was that the presence of influencer marketing increased the Willingness to Buy of food products.

The fact that we had to reject this hypothesis depends on the fact that influencer marketing alone does not increase Willingness to Buy.

The lack of significance of the first hypothesis serves to strengthen the entire research model of this study, as it demonstrates that the direct relationship between our IV (Influencer Marketing) and our DV (Willingness to buy) needs the mediating effects of the mediator (Trustworthiness) and the presence of the moderator (Body Image)

The first of the two confirmed hypotheses (H2) states that the indirect effect of IV (Influencer Marketing) on DV (WTB) mediated by the mediator (Trustworthiness); In particular we expected that Influencer Marketing would positively influence Trustworthiness which in turn would influence even more on Willingness to Buy.

Accepting this hypothesis shows us that consumers increase their Willingness to Buy in the presence of Influencer Marketing only when they place trust in the chosen Influencer subjects.

Hypothesis 3 accepted we observed the interaction effect obtained by BI moderation (moderator) on the link between IV on the mediator (TW); Specifically, we expected BI to positively influence TW which in turn would influence even more on WTB.

This means that one's perception of one's body not only positively influences WTB when one has the presence of Influencer marketing but also the trust one places in Influencers. In particular, this happens when you have low self-esteem and perception of your body, precisely because consumers are looking for ways to improve them by mirroring what influencers do.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

Our research model aims to broaden the conceptual background derived from previous academic articles, linking influencer marketing to a psychological aspect not only of persuasion but to a deeper aspect, based on self-confidence and consideration of others.

This study therefore allows for an in-depth study of a new marketing technique, created in recent years thanks to the advent of the internet and especially social media.

Influencer marketing can therefore increase sales only if consumers trust the influencer chosen by the company.

It is interesting to note on a psychological level how the less confidence you have in yourself, the more you trust the influencer you want to resemble, so much so that you want to buy or do what the latter buys or sponsors.

From a theoretical point of view, this research has contributed to the growing field of Influencer Marketing, enriching the current literature of a study that questioned how potential buyers of food products responded to the sponsorships of influencers, how they trusted them, taking into account for the first time a very important scenario today, that of body perception.

The only study in the literature on influencer marketing is the following paper (Influencer Marketing as a modern phenomenon creating a new frontier of virtual opportunities; Kadekova & Holiencinova,2018) in which, however, only the potential of this technique and its actual effectiveness in the market are analyzed.

The major studies also analyze the harmfulness of the figures of influencers on adolescents without considering that often, even if you have a negative perception of your body the influencers can be a safe haven, as if the community that would be created is a place where, as opposed to reality you feel at ease and above all you do not feel judged.

4.2 Managerial Implication

One of the main objectives of this research is to help managers in their marketing strategies, understanding at a deeper level how the use of the technique of Influencer marketing to be effective must be credible by consumers in these figures must be reflected and take as a model and reference point.

Because the final results obtained from the data analysis showed the overall significance of our conceptual model, we can demonstrate managerial relevance by ensuring that in the future, marketers in companies can leverage the practices provided by this research in many ways.

In our study could provide relevant insights for both the type of influencer that is chosen by the company and the type of product they are trying to sponsor. Particularly for a food company, marketing depends heavily on visual communication in packaging to influence consumers at the point of purchase.¹³

The decision to sponsor one's product through an influencer can facilitate the sale of products whose big problem is the inability to taste them before buying them.

Communicating with an influencer can be the key to gaining more consumers, such as young people who often do not go shopping because their parents go in their place, and it allows them to have more visibility on the shelf because they will remember the product for those who sponsored it and thus gain more potential customers.

Managers should therefore choose their testimonials by deepening their market research, consistently understanding who that person is followed by the target audience and if that person also sponsors other products, if they are in line with those they will have to sponsor and the values.

From a managerial point of view, this research project has increased the knowledge that companies have of the psychological factors that characterize Influencer Marketing. Food companies have thus understood that Influencer Marketing can be a source of income even for those who would not normally buy certain products. The influencer is seen by consumers as a friend, a confidant they can trust blindly, so the consumer's idea is to want a life as similar as possible to that of the influencer, with the same hotels, the same clothes and the same bags, and that if the influencer, beautiful and thin, can eat a certain food and be so fit (maybe even without working out because in the stories it is not done or it is expressly said not to be a sporty person), then we too will want that particular food.

¹³ Omar et al., 2011

4.3 Limitation for future Research

Although significant results were obtained, this study has limitations.

The sample taken into consideration is characterized by the fact that the age of the respondents is below 30 years, despite the fact that in the future there will be generations increasingly social and technologically advanced, it is now recommended to consider other age groups.

In addition, the influencer chosen as a stimulus for this study is the well-known Chiara Ferragni, well known and loved by the generation under consideration.

It is therefore not certain that the same result will be achieved if a lesser known or less loved influencer, involved in scandals or unpleasant situations, is taken into consideration.

It is important to note that the type of product chosen can also modify the study. First of all, we should study what could happen with a non-food product. If the stimuli used are, for example, clothing or cosmetic products, this study will not necessarily be effective. Even changing the type of food product could be interesting to understand if the stimuli give the same effect.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

Main test Questionnaire

Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni

	Completamente Insoddisfatto/a	Insoddisfatto/a	Abbastanza insoddisfatto/a	Ne soddisfatto/a- Ne insoddisfatto/a	Abbastanza soddisfatto/a	Soddisfatto/a	Completamente soddisfatto/a
Sono soddisfatto/a del mio corpo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il mio corpo mi rende sicuro/a	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mi sento attraente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sono critico/a sul mio corpo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rispetto il mio corpo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni

	Completamente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Abbastanza in disaccordo	Né in disaccordo né d'accordo	Abbastanza d'accordo	D'accordo	Completamente d'accordo
Ho intenzione di acquistare il prodotto	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comprerò il prodotto	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
C'è una forte possibilità che io acquisterò il prodotto	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La probabilità che io acquisterò il prodotto è alta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni

	Completamente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Abbastanza in disaccordo	Né d'accordo Né in disaccordo	Abbastanza d'accordo	D'accordo	Completamente d'accordo
Questa pubblicità è onesta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Questa pubblicità è veritiera	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
questa pubblicità è credibile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Questa pubblicità è affidabile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Quanto tempo durante la giornata dedichi mediamente all'utilizzo di Internet?

- Meno di un'ora
- Dalle 2 alle 3 ore
- Dalle 3 alle 6 ore
- Sono sempre connesso

Quanto spesso ti capita di acquistare online?

- Mai
- Dalle 2 alle 5 volte al mese
- Dalle 5 alle 10 volte al mese
- Sempre

Quale social usi più frequentemente?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Tik Tok
- Snapchat

A che genere appartieni?

- Uomo
- Donna
- Preferisco non specificare

Quanti anni hai?

Quale immagine hai visionato? 1= influencer, 2=senza influencer

- 1
- 2

APPENDIX II

Pre-Test Questionare

Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni

	Completamente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Abbastanza in disaccordo	Ne in disaccordo- Ne in accordo	Abbastanza d'accordo	D'accordo	Completamente d'accordo
Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

A che genere appartieni?

- Uomo
- Donna

Quanti anni hai?

APPENDIX III

Descriptive Statistics

Statistiche						
		Quanto tempo durante la giornata dedichi mediamente all'utilizzo di Internet?	Quanto spesso ti capita di acquistare online?	Quale social usi più frequentemente?	A che genere appartieni?	Quanti anni hai?
N	Valido	204	204	204	204	204
	Mancante	0	0	0	0	0

Tabella delle frequenze

Quanto tempo durante la giornata dedichi mediamente all'utilizzo di Internet?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Meno di un'ora	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Dalle 2 alle 3 ore	13	6.4	6.4	7.4
	Dalle 3 alle 6 ore	65	31.9	31.9	39.2
	Sono sempre connesso	124	60.8	60.8	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

Quanto spesso ti capita di acquistare online?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Mai	7	3.4	3.4	3.4
	Dalle 2 alle 5 volte al mese	27	13.2	13.2	16.7
	Dalle 5 alle 10 volte al mese	124	60.8	60.8	77.5
	Sempre	46	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

Quale social usi più frequentemente?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Facebook	11	5.4	5.4	5.4
	Instagram	172	84.3	84.3	89.7
	Tik Tok	11	5.4	5.4	95.1
	Snapchat	10	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

A che genere appartieni?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Uomo	13	6.4	6.4	6.4
	Donna	191	93.6	93.6	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

Quanti anni hai?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	22	8	3.9	3.9	3.9
	23	31	15.2	15.2	19.1
	24	102	50.0	50.0	69.1
	25	51	25.0	25.0	94.1
	26	11	5.4	5.4	99.5
	27	1	.5	.5	100.0
	Totale	204	100.0	100.0	

Statistiche descrittive

	N	Minimo	Massimo	Media	Deviazione std.
Quanto tempo durante la giornata dedichi mediamente all'utilizzo di Internet?	204	1	4	3.52	.662
Quanto spesso ti capita di acquistare online?	204	1	4	3.02	.705
Quale social usi più frequentemente?	204	1	4	2.10	.544
A che genere appartieni?	204	1	2	1.94	.245
Quale immagine hai visionato? 1= influencer, 2=senza influencer	204	1	2	1.50	.501
Numero di casi validi (listwise)	204				

APPENDIX IV

Independent Sample t-test

Independent Variable: Influencer Marketing

Condition 1: Presence of Influencer Marketing

Condition 2: Absence of Influencer Marketing

Statistiche gruppo

	InfMkt	N	Media	Deviazione std.	Media errore standard
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer	1.00	27	6.63	.492	.095
	2.00	23	1.61	.783	.163

Test campioni indipendenti

		Test di Levene per l'eguaglianza delle varianze		Test t per l'eguaglianza delle medie					Intervallo di confidenza della differenza di 95%	
		F	Sign.	t	gl.	Sign. (a due code)	Differenza della media	Differenza errore standard	Inferiore	Superiore
		Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer	Varianze uguali presunte	9.729	.003	27.568	48	.000	5.021	.182
	Varianze uguali non presunte			26.609	35.869	.000	5.021	.189	4.638	5.404

APPENDIX V

Factorial Analysis: Independent variable WTB

	Comunalità	
	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - Ho intenzione di acquistare il prodotto	.955	.959
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - Comprerò il prodotto	.957	.961
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - C'è una forte possibilità che io acquisterò il prodotto	.975	.987
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - La probabilità che io acquisterò il prodotto è alta	.963	.969

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

	Matrice dei fattori ^a	
	Fattore 1	
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - Ho intenzione di acquistare il prodotto	.979	
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - Comprerò il prodotto	.980	
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - C'è una forte possibilità che io acquisterò il prodotto	.993	
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni - La probabilità che io acquisterò il prodotto è alta	.985	

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

a. 1 fattori estratti. 4 iterazioni richieste.

Varianza totale spiegata

Fattore	Totale	Autovalori iniziali		Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
		% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	3.907	97.686	97.686	3.876	96.896	96.896
2	.044	1.088	98.774			
3	.031	.787	99.561			
4	.018	.439	100.000			

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

Factorial Analysis: Mediator Trustworthiness

	Comunalità	
	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Questa pubblicità è onesta	.938	.946
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Questa pubblicità è veritiera	.952	.963
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – questa pubblicità è credibile	.962	.975
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Questa pubblicità è affidabile	.956	.967

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

	Matrice dei fattori ^a
	Fattore 1
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Questa pubblicità è onesta	.973
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Questa pubblicità è veritiera	.981
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – questa pubblicità è credibile	.987
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Questa pubblicità è affidabile	.983

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

Varianza totale spiegata

Fattore	Totale	Autovalori iniziali		Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
		% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	3.888	97.196	97.196	3.851	96.268	96.268
2	.051	1.278	98.474			
3	.034	.858	99.332			
4	.027	.668	100.000			

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

Factorial Analysis: Moderator Body Image

Comunalità

	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Non sono soddisfatto/a del mio corpo	.677	.714
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Il mio corpo mi rende insicuro/a	.775	.825
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Mi sento poco attraente	.790	.852
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Sono critico sul mio corpo	.749	.803
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Rispetto il mio corpo	.441	.450

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

Matrice dei fattori^a

	Fattore 1
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Non sono soddisfatto/a del mio corpo	.845
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Il mio corpo mi rende insicuro/a	.908
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Mi sento poco attraente	.923
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Sono critico sul mio corpo	.896
Indicare su una scala da 1 (completamente insoddisfatto/a) a 7 (completamente soddisfatto/a) in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni – Rispetto il mio corpo	.671

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

Varianza totale spiegata

Fattore	Autovalori iniziali			Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	3.890	77.798	77.798	3.643	72.865	72.865
2	.511	10.226	88.024			
3	.264	5.285	93.309			
4	.184	3.677	96.986			
5	.151	3.014	100.000			

Metodo di estrazione: Massima verosimiglianza.

APPENDIX VI

Reliability Test WTB

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

		N	%
Casi	Valido	204	100.0
	Escluso ^a	0	.0
	Totale	204	100.0

a. Eliminazione listwise basata su tutte le variabili nella procedura.

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.992	.992	4

Reliability Test Trustworthiness

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

		N	%
Casi	Valido	204	100.0
	Escluso ^a	0	.0
	Totale	204	100.0

a. Eliminazione listwise basata su tutte le variabili nella procedura.

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.990	.990	4

Reliability Test Body Image

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

		N	%
Casi	Valido	204	100.0
	Escluso ^a	0	.0
	Totale	204	100.0

a. Eliminazione listwise basata su tutte le variabili nella procedura.

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	Alpha di Cronbach basata su elementi standardizzati	N. di elementi
.922	.927	5

APPENDIX VII

Regression Analysis PROCESS 8

Matrice

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.0 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 8
Y : WTB
X : InfMkt
M : TW
W : BI

Sample
Size: 204

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
TW

Model Summary						
	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2
p	.9107	.8293	.5646	323.9394	3.0000	200.0000
00						.00

Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-3.6876	.5484	-6.7242	.0000	-4.7690	-2.6062
InfMkt	4.9118	.3356	14.6377	.0000	4.2501	5.5735
BI	1.2685	.2065	6.1052	.0000	.8533	1.6676
Int_1	-.6713	.1259	-5.3331	.0000	-.9195	-.4231

Product terms key:
Int_1 : InfMkt x BI

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0243	28.4422	1.0000	200.0000	.0000

Focal predict: InfMkt (X)
Mod var: BI (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

CI	BI	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	UL
51	2.0000	3.5692	.1247	28.6260	.0000	3.3234	3.81

51	2.0000	3.5692	.1247	28.6260	.0000	3.3234	3.81
94	3.2000	2.7637	.1347	20.5125	.0000	2.4980	3.02

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
WTB

Model Summary						
	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2
p	.9664	.9339	.2232	703.0604	4.0000	199.0000
00						.00

Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-.4362	.3818	-1.1427	.2545	-1.1891	.3166
InfMkt	.5654	.3036	1.8622	.0641	-.0333	1.1641
TW	.5296	.0445	20.9116	.0000	.4420	1.0173
BI	-.1407	.1414	-.9950	.3209	-.1381	.4195
Int_1	-.1574	.0846	-1.8611	.0642	-.3242	.0094

Product terms key:
Int_1 : InfMkt x BI

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0012	3.4638	1.0000	199.0000	.0642

Focal predict: InfMkt (X)
Mod var: BI (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

CI	BI	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	UL
96	2.0000	.2506	.1770	1.4159	.1584	-.0984	.59

96	2.0000	.2506	.1770	1.4159	.1584	-.0984	.59
60	3.2000	.0617	.1492	.4135	.6797	-.2326	.35

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Conditional direct effect(s) of X on Y:

CI	BI	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	UL
96	2.0000	.2506	.1770	1.4159	.1584	-.0984	.59

96	2.0000	.2506	.1770	1.4159	.1584	-.0984	.59
68	3.2000	.0617	.1492	.4135	.6797	-.2326	.35

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y:

INDIRECT EFFECT:						
InHkt	->	TW	->	WTB		
BI	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
2.0000	3.3180	.2576	2.8017	3.8105		
2.0000	3.3180	.2576	2.8017	3.8105		
3.2000	2.5692	.2251	2.1157	3.0016		

Index of moderated mediation:				
BI	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
---	-.6240	.1690	-.9638	-.3028

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
5000

W values in conditional tables are the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles.

----- END MATRIX -----

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The following paper will consider an increasingly growing sector, that of food products sold on social networks, and how companies are increasingly relying on influencer marketing tools for their value proposition, in order to innovate and adapt to new competition.

We will also consider psychological variables such as body image and the perception of it in the presence or absence of an influencer, a figure that now modifies and dictates the aesthetic canons that in society are considered those of perfection. Specifically, we will evaluate these psychological variables through food products.

The release of COVID-19, which forced the world indoors, was the consecration of companies' use of social to sell their products. In fact, social and the Internet for almost a year were the only means of reaching consumers who could not go to physical stores.

How Internet change Business

The Internet and the technological revolution have changed the way people live and buy. Prior to the introduction of the Internet, consumers purchased the products or services they needed from the nearest physical store. Today instead a consumer can buy the product or the service of which it needs to the price that considers more correct from every part of the world. Markets are therefore not only more complex but also extremely changeable. Today, the ease of access to the market and its products by the consumer leads the various companies to an ever-increasing price war

Internet is not only a means of communication, but it is a channel that allows companies to enter in relation with customers. The company website itself is in fact a tool to present the company and tell the consumer what it believes in. Internet allows companies not only to be "visualized" by customers but also allows a real development and enhancement of their business, in other words, the industrialization of services favors the effectiveness and efficiency of interactive processes and exchange of markets.

Social Media marketing revolution

Social media is a web-based form of data communication that allows any person who is online to have access to an unlimited stream of information that influences our culture, economy and our overall worldview, creating a decentralized communication channel.

The creation of social networks has led companies to create what is the social business, marketing activity with which companies establish a relationship of trust with the consumer based on information and respect for the need for autonomy of the consumer who decides what to buy, when and at what price. (mediabuzz)

The rules of marketing and market dynamics are changing, weakening the competitive position of companies (Porter, 2001), while presenting individuals with many new opportunities and powers (Christopher, 1989; Wind and Mahajan, 1997; Rha et al, 2002; Bush, 2004, Urban, 2005).

Two Social Media marketing strategies are possible: The passive approach that focuses on using the Social Media domain as a source of customer voice and market intelligence and the active approach, which is the engagement of Social Media as direct marketing and PR channels, customer influence channels, product personalization tools, and finally as platforms for customer-generated cooperation and innovation.

Marketers become open to the idea of offering products that can be customized to the desires of the end consumer; they are also often open to the idea of creating the conditions that allow for collaboration with customers in the development and testing of new products, a process known as co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Piller and Walcher, 2006). The company website must be able to serve as a business platform that meets the expectations of the online customer (Constantinides, 2004; Constantinides and Geurts, 2005).

Social Media marketing is the pinnacle of an integrated marketing effort.

Instagram revolution

According to a 2019 Statista analysis, daily active users on Instagram Stories increased from 150 million in January 2017 to 500 million in January 2019.

Instagram Stories thanks to polls, question boxes and music make the content produced by a company more engaging, which in this way achieves a more personalized and broader freedom of expression.

As it is possible to notice from the chart below, the number of monthly active Instagram users reached 1 billion within June 2018, and it was expected to reach 1.16 billion by the end of 2020 (Statista, 2018).

Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing is gaining momentum and is becoming a point of reference for companies that want to sponsor their products.

People have begun to stop believing in traditional forms of advertising and prefer the opinions of friends, family and influencers who they consider expert, reliable and almost family because through social channels you feel like you are actively participating in their personal lives on a daily basis.

Through research conducted by the Influencer Marketing Hub Instagram is the platform where influencers express themselves and work best, creating and building a solid base of followers so much so that they can influence purchasing decisions.

Influencers are divided in 4 categories, determined by the platform with which they interact with their followers: Blogger, Youtuber (vlogger), Celebrities, Instagrammer Influencers can then be divided into 4 categories based on

the number of followers: Micro – Influencer, Mid-level Influencer, Macro-Influencer and Mega Influencer. The influencer is anyone who has added value to their social network, be it Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube, or others, reaching a large number of subscribers, friends or fans, bringing some of this added value to their followers and also expressing the ability to influence their behavior. (Li, 2013). The new generation is not only in constant contact with the whole world but needs to feel part of this mechanism.

The spread of Influencer Marketing in Food Industry

Selling food products online has never been easy because a good food product is also judged by its taste, something that obviously cannot be achieved through photos. The reliability of the influencers you follow and their use of stories and videos to sponsor food products, emphasized by expressions of taste and satisfaction, have allowed companies working in the food sector to use Instagram and other social media as a key means to sell their products. Research by Solution Communication Group has shown that 67% of Italian companies involved in the agri-food sector use social channels to promote, sell and raise awareness of their products.

Communication from food companies on social has grown exponentially since the pandemic. COVID-19 in fact, has led consumers to a new type of spending, made of contingent entrances, allowed to only one individual per household, protective devices, and kilometer-long queues to then buy in the shortest time possible, leading online spending in 2021 to increase by 2% (Nomisma-Coop). Thanks to social media, the storytelling of companies in the food sector has also changed, allowing producers to be in direct contact with consumers. In a period of uncertainty such as the one in which we find ourselves, through social networks, companies have understood how food serves to comfort and reassure: in times of pandemic, food was the key to remain attached to a family reality that we no longer recognized outside the home. The web and social media, as Anna Zinola explains, influence our purchasing choices, condition the type of products we eat and have revolutionized the way we look at and consider food.

The psychological Perspective

Body image is generally understood as a mental image of the body as it appears to others. It is often assumed in consumer culture that people deal with their body image instrumentally, as status and social acceptability depend on a person's appearance. (M. Featherstone)

The advertising of mass consumer culture presents the beautiful, the harmonious and the thin as an imperative, a duty, casting those who become fat, or take little care of their appearance, not only as lazy and disrespectful of themselves, but as if they were defective, not worthy of being accepted by the community and must therefore either adapt or be marginalized. On the opposite side, those who take care of themselves (relativizing the concept based on today's society) and look good will be able to enjoy a body and face that are more congruent with their "true" self. Pushing us to believe that "beautiful" improves all aspects of a person's life and their surroundings, adding new possibilities and positive opportunities. The transformative techniques of consumer culture, such as cosmetic

surgery, automatically allow us to move better through interpersonal spaces, making us enjoy the full range of lifestyle opportunities and pleasures that are offered, while not valuing the distortion of our true being. Social media are now one of the major causes for which a teenager falls ill with an eating disorder. The constant confrontation with images of apparently perfect bodies and apparently perfect lives, in a delicate phase like adolescence in which one is not very sure of oneself and is uncertain about the future, risk creating psychological damage from which sometimes you must fight for years, and it is almost impossible to get out. It is therefore essential to understand how to use Social Networks in a safe and conscious way.

Theoretical Background

Since the advent of the internet, especially since the exponential expansion of social networks, there have been studies that prove the efficiency of innovative Influencer Marketing techniques. To date, however, none of these studies have focused on how this specific marketing technique can influence the WTB of the consumer, in particular, how it can be influenced by the trust that consumers place, in different ways, in each influencer and the products they sponsor.

Overview about Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is one of the most effective marketing tools today, pushing many companies to use influencers to sponsor their products. Influencer marketing was born almost by accident, starting to be used through a process of trial and error without a thorough vision of how social media influencers should use this new method in a strategic way also as a distinctive tool in the marketing mix (Ye, Hudders, De Jans, De Veirman).

Influencer Marketing definition

Social media influencers (SMIs) are ordinary people who have created social media profiles to influence follower behavior. (Laura Peltola, 2019) They are users of social media platforms who have developed a reputation for his or her knowledge and expertise on a topic. They continuously share their life stories and opinions on various topics on their favorite social media channels, many of which revolve around product and brand-related topics (Gillin, 2008), and generate massive followings of enthusiastic and engaged people who pay close attention to their opinions. (Carolina Stubb, 2019).

In contrast to celebrities, influencers turn out to be more open, more realistic, more authentic, and more normal for people to relate to because they share personal aspects of their lives with their followers. (Abidin, 2016; Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003).

Influencer Marketing literature review

Influencer Marketing is a form of online marketing that is based on a collaboration between a brand and an influencer who offers their visibility to raise awareness of a service or product of that particular company. Collaborations involve the publication of content such as photos, reels, videos, posts, and stories on their channels.

It is important to specify that influencer marketing is not reduced to the mere use of paying an influencer with many followers in order to get publicity from the latter, in fact, companies must also choose their testimonials based on the affinity they might have with the brand, so that the consumer can perceive more credibility in what is sponsored by the influencers they follow.

Influencer marketing must therefore appear genuine, relying on quality content and organic storytelling in line with the other content being offered.

If influencer marketing is done correctly, therefore choosing the most suitable influencers the return on investment is assured. Trust that is placed in influencers is primarily due to the decline of trust in traditional influencer types. To understand how the network of influencer marketing develops, Gladwell identified three types of influencers: Connectors, Mavens and Marketers.

Companies need to be aware that partnerships with Influencers are typically not exclusive, this means that companies need to be aware that they are constantly competing with other competitors in the market. Partners for the same influencer are never equal in size or importance, this means that with the same influencer the results achieved by two companies can be extremely different.

We have thus developed our first hypothesis:

H1: Influencer marketing have a greater and more positive impact on willingness to buy food product

Overview about perceived Trustworthiness

Lack of trustworthiness, especially on the internet, is one of the biggest challenges and issues that businesses face. Fear of not getting what you ordered that the sponsored item doesn't reflect reality, and that buying online will cause credit card problems are the main reasons many consumers don't trust buying online.

If online trustworthiness can be understood and improved by reputable online merchants, then the number of people engaging in e-commerce should increase substantially. More importantly, it will create an overall climate of online trust in which shoppers will feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive information, sellers will feel confident conducting business online, and there will be intense interactions, transactions, and associations that benefit both consumers and merchants. Simply put, the future of e-commerce depends on trust, building consumer trust is therefore a process that takes time and perseverance, but necessary in order to grow a company's earnings and reputation.

Perceived Trustworthiness definition

Blau, 1964; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996 hypothesized that trust is influenced by relationship length. This theory can also be applied to influencers, they in fact establish a relationship of trust with their community, which consolidates as time goes by. In this way, followers feel almost like participants in the life of the latter who share successes and achievements.

Holton differentiates trust from reliance in that, in trust, the trustee assumes the "participant position." Most probably the definition given by Doney and Canon (1997) is the most effective and the most useful to apply to a marketing strategy. For them, in fact, "customers can trust the supplier company, its seller, or both".

Perceived Trustworthiness literature review

Trustworthiness has been studied long before the advent of the internet and Influencers, conceptualized in different forms and in completely different domains.

Kumar (1996) and other researchers agreed that trust, rather than power, helped manufacturers or retailers receive more tangible benefits and realize their full potential, not only faster but permanently.

We have thus developed our second hypothesis:

H2: When Influencer marketing is present the perception on trustworthiness will increase. Moreover the increase in the perceived trustworthiness will positively influence willingness to buy food product

Overview about Body Image

Body Image is treated in studies in a particularly wide way especially when it comes to Traditional Media. Television, along with print advertisements has always been blamed as the main culprit of the commodification of the body and has dictated for years the standards and canons of beauty that entire generations have shaped the concept of the body of young people and adults.

Body Image definition

According to the (NEDA) National eating disorders for body image means the perception, including visual, that we have of ourselves when we see ourselves in the mirror or when we imagine ourselves in our minds.

This definition makes us understand how often the rules we apply to ourselves are most often dictated by others, or by what we perceive to be the judgments of others.

Accepting ourselves and feeling confident in our bodies not only allows us to have a favorable perception of our bodies but also makes us aware that physical appearance has little to do with character and especially the value of a person.

Body Image literature review

Body image is nothing more than "the image that we form of our bodies, that is, the way in which our bodies manifest themselves to us".

Unlike advertising images, where most of us know that they are retouched by professionals who seek perfection for their work, in social media there is still a belief that the photos are authentic, that they are not retouched by professionals, because of the "raw" images used to publish a post it is still believed that they are simply taken with

a phone and not modified much. This belief is the main reason why girls and boys are constantly comparing themselves to girls on social networks and not to cover or billboard girls.

Publishing your own photos on social networks makes your photos available to everyone, this means that you no longer have to face the judgment of people who see you in a restricted manner physically but of all those who we have as "friends" on social are entitled to judge us.

Each historical period has its own canons of beauty, so it is inevitable that each historical period or culture develops different concepts of body image.

The concept of subjectivity (depending on the context or culture) of the canon extended must be the basis of any assessment we make about our body.

Therefore, we must first understand that we must like our body according to our canon of beauty, because those dictated by society are totally ephemeral and random.

We thus developed our third hypothesis:

H3: body image will moderate the relationship between the presence of influencer marketing and the perceived trustworthiness. Specifically, who have an unfavorable body image will have a greater perception of trustworthiness when influencer marketing is present

Research model development

To test the previously mentioned hypotheses, we developed a Moderated Mediation with PROCESS Model 8. (Hayes)

The presence or absence of Influencer Marketing is the independent variable (IV), while the willingness to purchase a food product is our dependent variable (DV). Moreover, a moderated mediation (WTB) is involved: perceived trustworthiness is expected to mediate the relationship between presence of Influencer Marketing and consumer's willingness to buy food product, to explain how influencers increase consumers' desire to buy products. Body image is also expected to have a double moderation, body image in fact is thought to moderate (moderator) the relationship between the presence of Influencer marketing and Trustworthiness, as it is expected that even with a body in which one does not feel confident, trust in influencers increases.

Body image is expected to play its role as a double moderator between the presence of influencer marketing and consumers' willingness to buy, in particular it is expected that even if the perception of our body is unfavorable, to be more specific the greater the negative perception of our body, the greater will be the willingness to buy food product if they are sponsored by an influencer

Quantitative Analysis

Before analyzing the data in depth, we will look at the descriptive analysis of our sample, dissecting the questions posed to them and confirming the validity of the stimuli they were subjected to.

The final goal will be to confirm or reject our hypotheses and evaluate how Influencer Marketing can influence a consumer's willingness to buy a food product through the trust they place in it and how the image we have of ourselves can influence not only the trust we place in influencers but also our willingness to buy the product itself.

Study and Methodology

For this study, a nonprobabilistic descriptive casual between subject statistic was used.

For the study of our variables, we use data collection of qualitative descriptive statistics, particular conclusive research that is focused on discovering the nature of the specific events under study. The presentation of data from a qualitative descriptive study involves a straightforward descriptive summary of the informational contents of the data that is organized in a logical manner.

This study will use two scenarios (presence of an influencer for product sponsorship vs. absence of influencer for product sponsorship) and each participant will take part in only one of the two possible conditions in order to have two separate unconditioned groups that will allow us to understand how the two groups react differently to the two different scenarios. Our experiment therefore consists of a causal between subject research design.

The sample of participants in this study was selected through a non-probability sampling method, specifically a convenience sample, in order to collect data in an easier way. In fact, this method allows for results to be obtained quickly and at a low cost. The chosen group is composed of men and women aged 30 and under in order to focus the research on the millennial and Gen Z generation who use the internet and social media on a daily basis.

Study participants were contacted by sending them a link, created through the Qualtrics platform, via the instant messaging app Whatsapp.

Participants and Procedure

To conduct the experimental study on the positive effects that Influencer Marketing has on consumers' Willingness to Buy and how Trustworthiness influences it, we developed an 18-question questionnaire (13 specific, 3 attitudinal, and 2 demographic) using Qualtrics.

Respondents were subjected to five questions derived from the Body Image Satisfaction Questionnaire (BIS; Rauste-von Wright, M., 1989) scale and later expanded by the Italian adolescent study "I like My Body; Therefore, I like Myself" (E. Gatti, C. Ionio, D. Traficante, E. Confalonieri, 2014).

Respondents had to answer by indicating on a scale from 1 (Completely dissatisfied) to 7 (Completely satisfied) to what extent they agreed with the following statements:

- Sono soddisfatto/a del mio corpo
- Il mio corpo mi rende sicuro/a
- Mi sento attraente
- Sono critico/a sul mio corpo
- Rispetto il mio corpo

To manipulate the independent variable (absence vs. presence of Influencer Marketing), it was necessary to develop the questionnaire with two different visual stimuli (in one a well-known influencer is present with an ice cream of a generic brand in order not to influence participants in the other the same food product was presented without the presence of an influencer).

The moderator and mediator were then submitted in the same manner to both groups of respondents.

Survey respondents viewed both stories as if they were posted by an ice cream brand. The brand in question, in order to avoid having results influenced by the notoriety and sentimentality of a particular brand or logo the latter were created ad hoc for this study always with the use of Photoshop. The phrase of description of the Instagram post "The irresistible lightness of Gelatique" was chosen precisely to understand even more if an ice cream, a product in the collective imagination fat and full of sugar, could instead be considered a lighter food through influencer marketing.

After viewing one of the two visual stimuli all respondents were administered the same questions, all based on a 7-point Likert Scale.

The first 4 questions were based on our dependent variable Willingness to Buy (WTB) scale.

- Ho intenzione di acquistare il prodotto
- Comprerò il prodotto
- C'è una forte possibilità che io acquisterò il prodotto
- La probabilità che io acquisterò il prodotto è alta

The last 4 questions based on the trustworthiness mediator

- Questa pubblicità è onesta
- Questa pubblicità è veritiera
- Questa pubblicità è credibile
- Questa pubblicità è affidabile

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis begins by cleaning and preparing the data to make it as consistent and accurate as possible. Fortunately, all 204 responses collected were consistent, so we were able to not eliminate and discard invalid or incomplete responses. Descriptive statistics allow us to understand the characteristics of the reference sample. We then verify through stimulus validation that the stimuli used for our survey are meaningful. The reliability analysis allows us to measure the scales present in our research model (in our case three) and to verify the internal consistency of the model. The reliability analysis is critical before we can perform PROCESS Model 8, so we can understand if our scales are validated. Through the analysis of PROCESS Model 8 we can understand if there is a meaningful existence of a moderate mediation model.

Descript statistics

The main purpose of descriptive statistics is to provide a summary of the samples and measurements made in a study. Primarily, descriptive statistics is used to describe the behavior of a sample of data. Respondents were 93.6% female (191) while 6.4% were male (13), the age of survey respondents ranged from 22 to 27 years old with the majority of respondents being 24 years old (50%).

Most respondents answered that they are always connected (60.8%). Interestingly, only 1% of respondents report less than one hour per day on the Internet, proving that we are now always connected.

The most used social is Instagram, but it is interesting to note that the percentage of the social Facebook (the most used social in the world) is the same as Tik Tok (the social with the most exponential growth in absolute).

Most respondents buy online between 5 and 10 times a month (60.8%). These results are perhaps also given by the fact that the average age of respondents is characteristic of Generation Z (the first generation born and raised with the internet).

Reliability analysis

Before conducting the main study, we needed to validate our 7-point Likert scales.

The scales used to measure Willingness to Buy (WTB), Trustworthiness (TW), and Body Image (BI) were already pre-validated, but it was important to prove their absolute accuracy within our model.

Since values above 0.60 are considered acceptable while those above 0.70 are considered sufficiently reliable, our scales are considered extremely reliable. From the tables below it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha of the Willingness to Buy (WTB) scale is 0.992, that of Trustworthiness (TW) is 0.990 and that of Body Image (BI) is 0.922.

Stimuli Validation

Prior to conducting the main study, we developed a pre-test with the purpose of performing stimulus validation. The goal was to verify that the presence or absence of Influencer Marketing was perceived differently by survey respondents.

The pre-test was constructed to use the same visual conditions as the main test, to avoid having biased data and also here most respondents were female (54%) while the remainder were male (45%) and only one respondent preferred not to specify (1%).

The pre-test study was divided into three parts.

The first part, as in the main test, it was specified that the study was created for an experimental master's thesis and that all responses would be analyzed guaranteeing the anonymity of the respondents and that the questionnaire would last approximately 3 minutes.

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were randomized to one of the two stimuli, and all were asked the same question.

Randomization ensured that there was an equal amount of exposure to both stimuli.

Again, we used a 7-point Likert Scale, asking them to indicate from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) how much they agreed with the following statement:

- Il prodotto è sponsorizzato da un'influencer?

The scale used was created specifically for this study as no valid scales were found for consumers' perception of the presence or absence of influencer marketing.

Since this scale consisted of only one item, previously mentioned, we did not perform a factor analysis to examine scale validity and labeling. Therefore, it was not possible to perform the scale reliability analysis through Cronbach Alpha.

The pre-test study we performed consists of a conclusive between-subjects causal research design (2x1) in which each of the two conditions were tested and each respondent was exposed to only one of the two scenarios. For this reason, we decided to perform an independent sample t-test.

We decided to calculate statistical averages related to consumers' perception of transparency for both visual stimuli (coded as condition 1= the product is sponsored by an influencer and condition 2= the product is not sponsored by an influencer).

The objective of the independent sample t-test was to measure a higher mean value in the perception of the presence of influencer marketing when respondents were exposed to visual stimulus 1 (presence of influencer marketing) and a lower mean value in the perception of the presence of influencer marketing when they were exposed to stimulus 2 (absence of influencer marketing).

To conduct the independent sample t-test on the perception of presence or absence of influencer marketing, we developed the hypotheses:

H0: There are no mean differences in consumers' perceptions of the presence or absence of influencer marketing when viewing stimulus 1 and stimulus 2.

H1: There are average differences in consumers' perceptions of the presence or absence of influencer marketing by viewing stimulus 1 and stimulus 2

By analyzing the data and observing the group statistics, we could see that the number of respondents exposed to stimulus 1 (presence of influencer marketing) was 27 with a mean of 6.63 and a standard deviation of 0.492. The number of respondents exposed to stimulus 2 (absence of influencer marketing) was 23 with a mean of 1.61 and a standard deviation of 0.492

To understand if we could accept the hypothesis H1 and reject the null hypothesis (H0) we observed within the test the part dedicated to Levene's test to calculate if the two groups have the same variance, if F is close to 1 with significance higher than Alpha=0.05 (>0.05), or not, F very large with significance lower than Alpha=0.05 (<0.05). Analyzing the data our F is very large (9.729) and our significance level is 0.003.

Since our p-value = 0.003 ($p < 0.05$) is below the level of significance (Alpha = 0.05) we can say with certainty that we can reject the null hypothesis H0.

Therefore, we can affirm the success of our pre-test and consequently the validity of our stimuli.

Moderation Mediation Analysis with PROCESS Model 8

After conducting the pre-test, Factor analysis and Reliability test, we performed a Regression analysis, applying F. Hayes' model 8, updating the SPSS software to version 4.0 of the PROCESS macro function.

Regression analysis allows us to assess the significance and validity of our hypotheses and theories in our study. As a first step, we set influencer marketing (coded as condition 1=presence of influencer marketing and condition 2=absence of influencer marketing) as an independent variable (IV), Willingness to Buy (WTB) as a dependent variable (DV), Trustworthiness (TW) towards Influencer Marketing as a Mediator (M) and Body Image as a Moderator (W).

H1: Influencer marketing have a greater and more positive impact on willingness to buy food product

H2: When Influencer marketing is present the perception on trustworthiness will increase. Moreover the increase in the perceived trustworthiness will positively influence willingness to buy food product

H3: body image will moderate the relationship between the presence of influencer marketing and the perceived trustworthiness. Specifically, who have an unfavorable body image will have a greater perception of trustworthiness when influencer marketing is present

Specifically, to examine the significance of the main hypotheses, we observed whether the p-value of each variable was below the Alpha 0.05 significance level or not. In this way, the hypotheses were accepted with a 95% confidence interval.

Applying PROCESS 8 we tested the first hypothesis H1, observing the direct effect obtained from IV (influencer marketing presence/absence) on DV (WTB).

What we expect is that Influencer Marketing increases consumers' Willingness to Buy.

The SPSS output obtained demonstrated a positive coefficient (beta β 0.5654), and a p-value of 0.0641 ($p > 0.05$). Our p-value being 0.0641 is not below the significance level. We also have adverse Bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI= -0.0333; ULCI=1.1641).

From this we can see that this output does not confirm our first hypothesis since the direct effect is not statistically significant

Therefore, we can say that influencer marketing does not directly affect WTB, we reject our H1.

Testing hypothesis 2, we observed the indirect effect of IV (Influencer Marketing) on DV (Willingness to Buy) mediated by Mediator (Trustworthiness); in particular we expected Influencer Marketing to positively influence Trustworthiness which in turn would influence even more on Willingness to Buy. In the SPSS output, we found in the relationship between IV and Mediator a positive coefficient (beta β = 4.9118), a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Our p-value is therefore below the level of significance, and a favorable Bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI= 4.2501; ULCI=5.5735). As regards the relationship between Mediator and DV, a positive coefficient (beta β 0.9296), a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) which is also below the level of significance, and a favorable bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI = 0.8420; ULCI = 1.0173). From this we conclude that this output confirms our H2 since the indirect effect between IV and DV mediated by TW (mediator) is statistically significant. We can therefore deduce that the presence of Influencer Marketing positively influences the Trustworthiness of respondents, which has a positive impact on the Willingness to Buy of possible consumers.

We thus accept H2.

Testing Hypothesis 3, we observed the interaction effect yielded by moderation of the moderator (BI) on the IV link on the mediator (TW); specifically, we would expect Body Image to positively affect Trustworthiness, which in turn would affect consumers' Willingness to Buy even more. In the SPSS output, we found in the interaction effect produced by the moderator on the ratio of IV to mediator a negative coefficient (beta β - 0.6713), a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) that is below the significance level, and favorable bootstrapping in the confidence interval (LLCI= -0.9195; ULCI= -0.4231). From this we conclude that the interaction effect produced by the moderator in the IV-mediator relationship is statistically significant. For this we can deduce that body image will moderate the relationship between the presence of influencer marketing and the perceived trustworthiness. Specifically, who

have an unfavorable body image will have a greater perception of trustworthiness when influencer marketing is present.

So, we accept H3.

Our first hypothesis (H1) was that the presence of influencer marketing increased the Willingness to Buy of food products. The fact that we had to reject this hypothesis depends on the fact that influencer marketing alone does not increase Willingness to Buy.

The lack of significance of the first hypothesis serves to strengthen the entire research model of this study, as it demonstrates that the direct relationship between our IV (Influencer Marketing) and our DV (Willingness to buy) needs the mediating effects of the mediator (Trustworthiness) and the presence of the moderator (Body Image). The first of the two confirmed hypotheses (H2) states that the indirect effect of IV (Influencer Marketing) on DV (WTB) mediated by the mediator (Trustworthiness); In particular we expected that Influencer Marketing would positively influence Trustworthiness which in turn would influence even more on Willingness to Buy.

Accepting this hypothesis shows us that consumers increase their Willingness to Buy in the presence of Influencer Marketing only when they place trust in the chosen Influencer subjects.

Conclusions

Theoretical Contributions

Our research model aims to broaden the conceptual background derived from previous academic articles, linking influencer marketing to a psychological aspect not only of persuasion but to a deeper aspect, based on self-confidence and consideration of others.

It is interesting to note on a psychological level how the less confidence you have in yourself, the more you trust the influencer you want to resemble, so much so that you want to buy or do what the latter buys or sponsors. From a theoretical point of view, this research has contributed to the growing field of Influencer Marketing, enriching the current literature of a study that questioned how potential buyers of food products responded to the sponsorships of influencers, how they trusted them, taking into account for the first time a very important scenario today, that of body perception.

The major studies also analyze the harmfulness of the figures of influencers on adolescents without considering that often, even if you have a negative perception of your body the influencers can be a safe haven, as if the community that would be created is a place where, as opposed to reality you feel at ease and above all you do not feel judged.

Managerial implications

One of the main objectives of this research is to help managers in their marketing strategies, understanding at a deeper level how the use of the technique of Influencer marketing to be effective must be credible by consumers in these figures must be reflected and take as a model and reference point.

The decision to sponsor one's product through an influencer can facilitate the sale of products whose big problem is the inability to taste them before buying them.

Communicating with an influencer can be the key to gaining more consumers, such as young people who often do not go shopping because their parents go in their place, and it allows them to have more visibility on the shelf because they will remember the product for those who sponsored it and thus gain more potential customers.

Managers should therefore choose their testimonials by deepening their market research, consistently understanding who that person is followed by the target audience and if that person also sponsors other products, if they are in line with those they will have to sponsor and the values.

From a managerial point of view, this research project has increased the knowledge that companies have of the psychological factors that characterize Influencer Marketing. Food companies have thus understood that Influencer Marketing can be a source of income even for those who would not normally buy certain products. The influencer is seen by consumers as a friend, a confidant they can trust blindly, so the consumer's idea is to want a life as similar as possible to that of the influencer, with the same hotels, the same clothes and the same bags, and that if the influencer, beautiful and thin, can eat a certain food and be so fit (maybe even without working out because in the stories it is not done or it is expressly said not to be a sporty person), then we too will want that particular food.

Limitations for future Research

Although significant results were obtained, this study has limitations.

The sample taken into consideration is characterized by the fact that the age of the respondents is below 30 years, despite the fact that in the future there will be generations increasingly social and technologically advanced, it is now recommended to consider other age groups.

In addition, the influencer chosen as a stimulus for this study is the well-known Chiara Ferragni, well known and loved by the generation under consideration.

It is therefore not certain that the same result will be achieved if a lesser known or less loved influencer, involved in scandals or unpleasant situations, is taken into consideration.

It is important to note that the type of product chosen can also modify the study.

We should study what could happen with a non-food product. If the stimuli used are, for example, clothing or cosmetic products, this study will not necessarily be effective. Even changing the type of food product could be interesting to understand if the stimuli give the same effect.

