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ABSTRACT

The rise of Influencer Marketing is one of the most relevant phenomena characterizing the evolution of the Marketing Communication scenario in the last years. Although research on the topic is being conducted, many aspects remain unexplored. This thesis is oriented at enhancing knowledge on the topic from a new perspective: the product being sponsored. The aim of this study is to test Influencer Marketing effectiveness in influencing Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, to understand whether and how consumers' responses differ according to the product category the sponsored good belongs to, and whether or not the use of Social Norms in framing the post has a moderating effect on the Influencer's ability to impact Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. To do so, it has been measured the difference in the effectiveness of an Influencer Advertising post when the product sponsored is a durable or a non-durable good, and when the post's caption is framed using or not using Social Norms. A survey has been used to conduct this research and data have been collected from 476 Italian subjects belonging to the age range 18-45 years. The proposed hypotheses have been tested using one-way and two-way ANOVA analyses. The results suggest that Influencer Marketing is effective in enhancing consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for both durable and non-durable goods; this positive effect has shown to be stronger when the product sponsored is a durable good. Collected data have not confirmed the moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, the Internet and related technologies have profoundly changed people's daily lives, including the way of working, entertaining, acquiring and using knowledge, and, most importantly, communicating with each other.

This has also impacted the way companies communicate with consumers. The uni-directional communication model, where content flew from one to many, has evolved into a network model, where multiple subjects are, at the same time, producers and users of content.

Social Networks are the primary incarnation of this phenomenon. These, in fact, are a virtual arena where people can share their thoughts and opinions in different forms, including pictures, videos, and text, and can comment on each other's content. Shortly, users are not passive recipients anymore, but they become active builders of a collective knowledge.

For companies, this offers new ways to influence consumers' attitude towards the brand and willingness to buy. As a matter of fact, consumers that are part of a Social Network are increasingly empowered and invert the traditional Marketing Communication process, becoming themselves creators, collaborators, and commentators of messages. Also, being perceived by other consumers as neutral to the company, they are considered credible and reliable sources of information. This is the origin of a new paradigm of Marketing Communication, namely Influencer Marketing.

The literature has shown that Influencers have a positive effect on consumers' acceptance of the message delivered by a company, thus increasing Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. However, no available studies analyze how the impact changes for different categories of products.

This thesis investigates whether the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention depends upon the product category the sponsored good belongs to. Specifically, two categories of products are investigated: durable and non-durable goods. This is because these categories are usually associated with different decision-making processes, due to both the lifespan and the economic significance of the purchase.

Social Networks are known to induce a mechanism of social comparison, where each user tends to compare and conforms his or her own behaviors to those of others. To explore this effect, the study also investigates whether a Moderating effect exists due to the use of Social Norms in the post framing.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 provides background on the Influencer Marketing phenomenon, discussing its origin and evolution, as well as its importance in companies' communication strategies. The chapter also introduces the theme of Social Norms and their impact in Marketing Communication.

Chapter 2 introduces the research purpose of this thesis in more detail by providing a definition of the theoretical framework and the underpinning theories of this study. A review of the literature paves the way to identifying open questions, the conceptual model of this thesis' study, and the assumptions to be tested.

Finally, chapter 3 is the core of the thesis: the study is detailed, data collection analysis is performed, and results are discussed. After testing the hypotheses, the chapter discusses managerial implications and identifies gaps for further research.

CHAPTER 1

The first chapter of this thesis is aimed at providing an overview of the main themes and variables characterizing this research study, and the links existing between them. This is essential to emphasize the relevance of the chosen topic and provide the information necessary to contextualize the empirical work that will be carried out later on.

The chapter will begin by explaining what Marketing Communication is and, most importantly, how it has been impacted by the rise and development of new technologies. Then, the Social Media phenomenon and its consequences for companies will be presented, and one of its most critical related phenomena explored: Influencer Marketing. The fourth paragraph will analyze what socially shared norms, such as social norms, conventions, and descriptive norms, are, their mechanisms, and their importance as tools for Marketing Communication. Also the way they are tied to Social Media marketing will be explored.

"The Internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow".
[Bill Gates]

In ancient Greece, the Agora, the town square, was the center of the city's athletic, artistic, social, business, and political life. It was the beating heart of the society and allowed the community of free and equal men to engage in dialogue with one another without consideration of power, wealth, and heritage. The Agora was a political and commercial space where people used to meet to govern the State and, equally important, exert trade. Today, this role is mainly played by the Internet, the new Agora, characterized by a rich potential for communication and almost unlimited access to information (Damiris & Wild, 1997). These characteristics make the Internet a perfect space for Marketing Communication; the mean companies have to inform and attract consumers, make them become customers, and remind them of products and brands.

1.1 Marketing Communication

Marketing Communication can be considered one of the main aspects of companies' marketing strategies and one of those most impacted by the development and spread of Internet Technologies.

1.1.1 Fundamentals of Marketing Communication

Marketing Communication is defined as the mean by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and directly or indirectly remind consumers about the products and brands they sell; it can be seen as the voice of the company and as a way to establish a dialogue and build relationships with consumers (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). In practical terms, it is the sharing of information, concepts, and meanings about both products and the company itself; it is targeted interaction with customers and prospects using one or more media (Kayode, 2014). Companies' goal in implementing Marketing Communication strategies is to acquire new customers, generating awareness and incentivizing trial, and build a relationship with current and prospective customers by sharing information about the company and its products and benefits (Kotler, Keller, Ancarani, & Costabile, 2017). Marketing Communication plays a pivotal role in a company's life as, by creating satisfaction and strengthening customer trust and loyalty, it can contribute to customers and the company's equity.

For companies to develop an effective Marketing Communication strategy, it is necessary to go through an eight-step process (Kotler, Keller, Ancarani, & Costabile, 2017). The first thing marketing managers have to do is to identify the *target audience*; this has, in fact, a critical influence on the communicator's decisions about what to say, how, when, where, and to whom. Equally important is to determine the *objectives* of the communication. These can be various and contribute to creating brand equity: establishing category needs, fostering brand awareness, generating a positive Brand Attitude, or increasing consumers' Purchase Intention.

On the chosen objectives depends the *design* of the communication, the third step. Formulating the communications to achieve the desired response involves solving three problems: what to say, how to say it, and who would say it. A message strategy is aimed at deciding what to say through finding and leveraging themes, appeals, or ideas that can tie into the brand positioning and help establish points-of-parity and points-of difference. A creative strategy, indeed, explains how to implement the communication. It is fundamental because the transmission's effectiveness does not rely only on the message delivered but also on how it is expressed. Who should deliver the message, the source, is also essential as messages provided by popular or attractive sources can achieve higher degrees of attention and recall.

The fourth step of the Marketing Communication strategy's creation process consists of selecting the communication *channels*. Today, it is pretty effort-requiring as the fragmentation and cluttering of the available media made choosing an efficient means to carry the message more difficult.

It is then crucial for companies to establish the total Marketing Communication *budget*; the fifth step, one of the most challenging decisions, is determining how much to spend on Marketing Communication.

The sixth step consists in the creation of the Marketing Communication *mix*. Companies have to allocate their budget over several significant communication modes such as advertising, events, public relations, promotions, direct marketing, interactive marketing, and so on. Based on the objectives, the target, and the industry, the choices can differ considerably.

The last two steps are the *results' measurement* and the management of the *Integrated Marketing Communication*. Results' quantification is fundamental to measure the revenues resulting from the communication investments and the impact in terms of consumers' behavior change.

Finally, it became imperative for the company to move toward an integrated approach to Marketing Communication given the wide range of communication tools, messages, and audiences. Companies must adopt a "360-degree view" of consumers to fully understand all

the different ways that communication can affect consumer behavior in their daily lives (Naik & Raman, 2003).

Nowadays, two aspects of Marketing Communication are attracting significant attention: communication channels and modalities. These are vital elements to understand how Internet technologies are influencing Marketing Communication.

There are many activities that companies can implement when building their marketing Communication Mix; these can contribute to brand equity and drive sales by creating brand awareness, improving brand image, or strengthening consumer loyalty. The products' price and styling, the packaging's shape and color, the store atmosphere, the salesperson's dress and manner, and many others are crucial ways a company has to communicate with consumers. Every brand contact, in fact, delivers an impression that can strengthen or weaken a customer's view of a company (Duncan & Moriarty, 2006). Even if the Marketing Communication modalities are almost unlimited, eight major modes have been identified. These are divided into the *above-the-line* ones, which are the most conventional, and the *below-the-line* ones, which are related to direct and interactive promotion and are mainly web-based (Bennett, 1995):

- *Advertising*. It comprises any form of nonpersonal promotion and presentation of products, services, and ideas realized and financed by a known promoter. These are carried out through broadcast media, such as radio and television, printed media, such as magazines and newspapers, network media, electronic media, and display media.
- *Sales promotion*. It is a multitude of short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or trial of a good or service. Different kinds of sales promotions exist: trade promotions, such as advertising and display allowances, consumer promotions, such as coupons and samples, and business and sales force promotions.
- *Events and experiences*. These are activities and programs sponsored by the company and aimed at building-up interactions with consumers. They can include formal and less formal, sport, arts, and entertainment events.
- *Public relations and propaganda*. They are programs aimed at promoting or protecting the company's image. These initiatives are directed both internally, to the company's employees, and externally, to other firms, consumers, and media.

- *Direct marketing*. It consists in direct communication with consumers or soliciting responses from specific actual and prospective customers using telephone, mail, fax, and e-mail.

- *Interactive marketing*. It involves a series of online activities and programs to engage customers and prospects, raise awareness, and promote and improve brand image.

- *Word of Mouth marketing*. It is a form of oral, written, or electronic communication about products or company's characteristics, purchase experience, and products' usage. This communication is characterized by being people-to-people and not controlled by the company.

- *Personal selling*. It is a form of direct face-to-face interaction with prospective customers aimed at presenting the products and the brand, answering questions, and collecting orders.

The second element attracting raising attention is the communication channel's choice, the definition of the means through which the marketing message is spread. These are divided into the personal ones and the nonpersonal, or mass, ones.

Personal communication channels allow face-to-face communication between two or more people, or a person-to-audience communication obtained through a phone or e-mail. Personal channels, such as interactive marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, and personal selling, derive their effectiveness from the opportunity to personalize and customize presentations and feedback. A further distinction can be drawn between *advocate channels*, consisting of salespeople contacting buyers in the target market, *expert channels*, independent experts making statements to target buyers, and *social channels*, consisting of friends and family members talking to target buyers.

On the other hand, *nonpersonal communication channels* are communications directed to a broad audience and include advertising, sales promotions, public relations, events, and experiences. The latter, in particular, has recently proven to be very effective, but there are some drawbacks too; events, in fact, can create attention, but their long-term effect on brand awareness and preference can vary depending on the product being sponsored and the event itself (Kotler, Keller, Ancarani, & Costabile, 2017).

These days, Marketing Communication's trend is to implement more direct and interactive communication forms and integrate, within a communication plan, all the possible ways needed

to establish a profitable and durable relationship with customers. This is today possible thanks to the positive impact that new technologies have had on Marketing Communication.

1.1.2 New Technologies and Marketing Communication

Since the invention of the World Wide Web in 1989 and the creation of the first website in 1991, an unstoppable digitalization process has started that has contributed to drastically change the way Marketing Communication is intended and implemented. The emergence of new technologies and the linked marketing digitalization, in fact, represent a disruptive innovation responsible for having completely changed the previous model of Marketing Communication (Bower & Christensen, 1995). Information Technology (IT) transformed the entire marketplace and Marketing Communication practice by greatly expanding the tool kit used to create, execute, and deliver Marketing Communication programs (Schultz & Schultz, 1998).

The rapid development of the Internet and, in general, of IT has been able to change the classical communication procedures thanks to three co-existing characteristics that transformed the profile and behavior of online users (Gurau, 2008):

- *Interactivity*. The Internet provides various interactive communication options serving both as an interface and as a communication agent. In this way, it allows interactions between users and applications.
- *Transparency*. All the information published online, unless specifically protected, can be accessed and used by any internet user.
- *Memory*. Internet is not only a valuable channel for information transmission but also for storing. The information published, in fact, remains in the memory of the network until it is erased.

Thanks to these characteristics, an epochal shift in Marketing Communication took place: the role historically played by consumers changed. In this new scenario, in fact, consumers are not anymore passive subjects and are playing a more significant and more explicit role in the success, or failure, of brands (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

The traditional marketing world involved brand managers using media to communicate with consumers; the communication direction was usually from manufacturer to consumer, and consumers provided limited feedback to manufacturers in turn. Thus, the audience was

generally passive recipients of carefully crafted messages sent by brand marketers. The institutions had the resources to send information to consumers through an extensive pipeline, while the audiences had only a minuscule pipeline for communicating back (Ihator, 2001). There was, basically, a *one-to-many* approach to communication (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020) which can be considered outdated.

With the spread of new technologies, the audience first became connected to the organization and then became connected to one another. The connection between the audience and the organization led the communication channel to develop into a network, no more a pipeline, and made the uni-directional communication process characterizing the one-to-many approach turn obsolete (Gurau, 2008). The old mass media channels, such as TV, print, and radio advertising, gave way to a greater emphasis on interactive or *one-to-one* communications between the brand and the customer (Holtz, 1999); everybody was involved in sending the message.

In recent years, these one-to-many and one-to-one channels are being supplemented or even replaced by *many-to-many* media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, where consumers have become broadcasters in conversation with one another and have become engaged in a two-way dialogue with brand marketers (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). In this new environment, everybody is a communicator, and the institution is just part of the network (Shankar & Malthouse, 2007); information has to be available where audiences can find it and must be customized or customizable (Rowley, 2004). The many-to-many approach made possible the development of a new paradigm of Marketing Communication with the consumers assuming the role content creators and taking an active part in the information exchange, with communication becoming consequentially participatory.

The growth of new channels related to the new Marketing Communication paradigm has fueled a sharp increase in the number of touchpoints that brand managers can choose to engage with and communicate to consumers. Therefore, the Consumer Decision Journey evolved and moved from a model based on a series of systematic stages, including awareness, consideration, purchase intention, and purchase, to a new funnel idea. In this new context, consumers may move through the different steps in no particular order, with further information about brands and products impacting the decision journey at any stage (Edelman, 2010). Brand managers should now account for various communication channels that provide consumers with brand and product-related information across all the decision-making process stages (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

New technologies also impacted Marketing Communication in other ways; for the first time, it became possible, for marketers, to capture information on individual consumers, customers, and prospects to an extent unthinkable before (Wang & Jackson, 1993). The development of the new communication channels has caused a rising availability of data; this, together with the exponential increase in storage capacity and the decline of storage costs, has made it possible for marketers to use information gathered from customers' online behavior to tailor their offerings to customer needs (Edelman, 2014). This has led to an unprecedented personalization, in terms of both product and message (Gregg, Kalaoui, Maynes, & Schuler, 2016), where it is possible to define personalization as "the tailoring of messages and offerings to individuals based on their actual behavior" (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

Thanks to these critical changes, the era of *Digital Marketing* has started. The meaning of this term has radically changed over time; it evolved from describing the marketing of brands and products obtained through digital channels to an umbrella term describing the process of using digital technologies to acquire and retain customers, promote brands, and increase sales. From this, Digital Marketing can be defined as "an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders" (Kannan & Li, 2017). The transparency, interactivity, and memory characterizing the digital world forces organizations to adopt a proactive-reactive approach to communication and combine consistency and continuity with flexibility and customization (Gurau, 2008).

The spread of the new technologies and their effect on Marketing Communication has also caused an increase in the competition for customers' attention. Consumers are, in fact, living in the attention economy (Alton, 2018) and are exposed to an incredible amount of marketing messages every day. It is becoming almost impossible to store and memorize all the presented stimuli (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Given the volume of information, it is fundamental for marketers to catch consumers' eyes and maintain their engagement in order to stay relevant in people's minds (Alton, 2018). Only the right mix of messages, modalities, and channels can help marketing managers in this purpose; an integration of channels and modalities is, in fact, fundamental to obtain people's attention. Integrated Marketing Communication enables companies to be more consistent in the information delivery done through multiple channels; and so, it helps managers to foster sales, raise brand value, and improve the company's ability

to engage consumers with the right message, at the right time, and in the right place (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

1.1.3 Integrated Marketing Communication

The wide range of messages, communication tools, and audiences requires companies to move toward Integrated Marketing Communication. It is fundamental for their growth to adopt a "360-degree view" of consumers to fully understand all the different ways that communication can affect consumer behavior (Naik & Raman, 2003).

The definition of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has been reformulated several times as new aspects of this approach emerged. Caywood, Schultz, and Wang formulated the first definition in 1991; they described IMC as a "concept of marketing communication planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact" (Caywood, Schultz, & Wang, 1991). Other definitions have been provided to emphasize that the IMC has not to be intended as a simple uniformity of the message transmitted across different media but as the coordination of the information conveyed through complementary channels to efficiently present a cohesive picture of the organization to the targeted audiences. An example is the definition by Keegan, Moriarty, and Duncan in 1992; they described IMC as "the strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to collectively influence its perceived brand value" (Keegan, Moriarty, Duncan, & Duncan, 1992). A more recent definition is the one formulated by the American Marketing Association in 2007: "a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospects for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time" (Kotler, Keller, Ancarani, & Costabile, 2017). According to this definition, marketers should investigate the marketing elements with a higher impact on each customer journey stage and implement the right mix of modalities, messages, and channels based on their ability to drive sales, fuel brand value, and foster customer awareness, attitude, and loyalty. From this, it is possible to understand that IMC represents a multi-faced phenomenon that comprises issues related to the communication function, the message, and the specific mix of channels (Gurau, 2008).

Integrated Marketing Communication's initial promise was to create "one sight, one sound" by establishing an overall structure to consolidate communication planning (Caywood, Schultz, & Wang, 1991). Some barriers emerged that made the implementation of IMC strategies a challenge for many companies: functional specialization, lack of horizontal communication, decentralization, lack of budget and database technology, corporate culture, and finally, fear of change (Gurau, 2008). It is fundamental to adequately understand and assess these obstacles to promote IMC adoption within an organization. Given the profound differences between different companies' organizational structures, it is challenging to create a universally applicable implementation model. Every organization's in-depth research will include a unique set of obstacles and potential synergies that must be considered when designing and implementing the IMC concept. However, according to Shultz' analysis, a general implementation pattern emerged that can be divided into four steps (Schultz & Schultz, 1998):

- *Level 1 – Tactical Coordination*. The main goal is to establish harmony among products and communication tools with an emphasis on brand external communication and enhance and improve the operation. This is the lowest degree of integration that an organization can strive for as a customer-oriented approach has not been developed yet.

- *Level 2 – Redefining the scope of Marketing Communication*. At this stage, a customer-centric approach is taken for the first time; the company, in fact, switches from a corporate and operation-driven point of view to that of consumers and starts considering all the possible points of contact with consumers. This makes it possible to shift the focus from the message to be transmitted, to an understanding of what customers receive.

- *Level 3 – Application of Information Technology*. At this stage, companies collect information about consumers' attitudes, habits, behaviors and use it to be able to deliver timely and personalized messages to them. Basically, companies use the growing information flow in their database and translate it into knowledge and expertise.

- *Level 4 – Financial and strategic integration*. At this stage, the organization can adopt closed-loop measurement systems that allow it to compare financial returns to investments. The company can assess changes in income flows and behaviors and determine the ROI for the Marketing Communication activities aimed at particular customers or consumer categories.
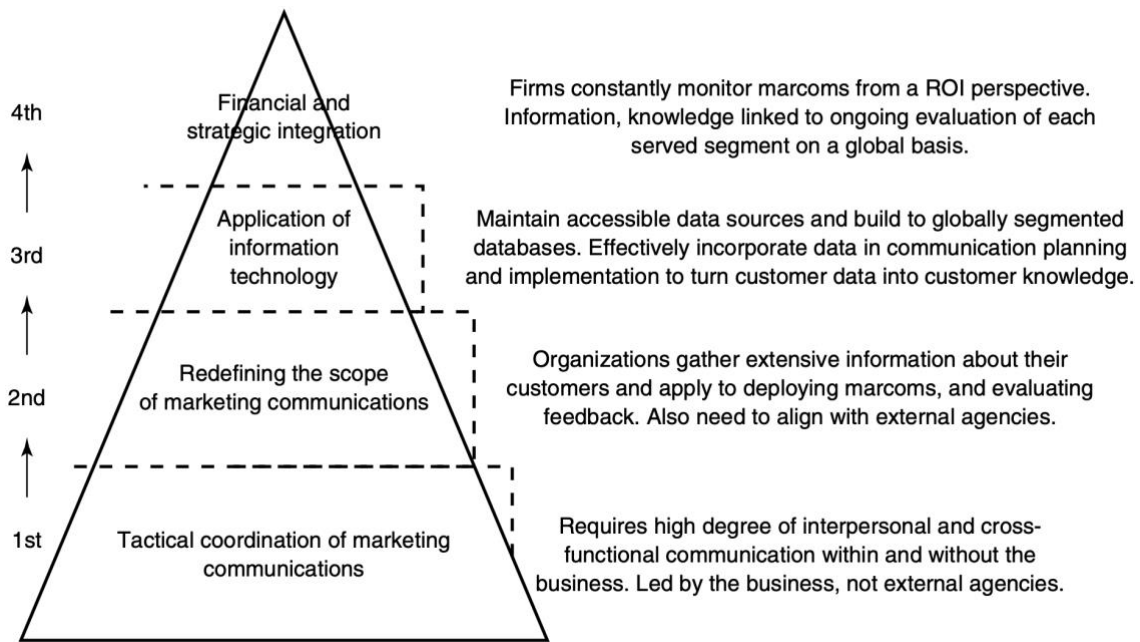
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         4th         Financial and            Firms constantly monitor marcoms from a ROI perspective.
                   strategic integration      Information, knowledge linked to ongoing evaluation of each
                                              served segment on a global basis.

                     Application of           Maintain accessible data sources and build to globally segmented
         3rd         information              databases. Effectively incorporate data in communication planning
                     technology               and implementation to turn customer data into customer knowledge.

                                              Organizations gather extensive information about their
                   Redefining the scope       customers and apply to deploying marcoms, and evaluating
         2nd       of marketing communications feedback. Also need to align with external agencies.

                                              Requires high degree of interpersonal and cross-
         1st       Tactical coordination of marketing   functional communication within and without the
                   communications             business. Led by the business, not external agencies.
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Figure 1 - IMC: a four stages model (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001).

An essential outcome of this process, and the implementation of an IMC approach, is that all tools of the communication mix, at least on the company's side, are integrated and support each other, resulting in synergy effects (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). These synergies are the key and primary benefits of bringing together all Marketing Communication facets, but there are some additional positive effects. For instance, companies can increase their flexibility by combining one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many modes, or they can send and receive messages in many forms enhancing their ability to customize communication techniques as the audience's needs require (Gurau, 2008).

The process leading companies to an Integrated Marketing Communication approach is not over; there are, in fact, new barriers to overcome and unique solutions to develop and implement. In response to this, companies are rethinking their IMC practices intending to strengthen the relationship with customers and are approaching their path toward IMC from a different and more consumer-centered perspective.

1.2 The rise of Social Media

A spectacular phenomenon related to the diffusion of the Internet is the development and spread of Social Media, a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, information, and multimedia content through the building of virtual networks and communities

(Dollarhide, 2020). As the role of Social Media has evolved from a single marketing tool to that of a marketing intelligence source, where firms can observe, analyze, and predict customer behaviors, it has become imperative for marketers to strategically leverage this source to achieve competitive advantage and superior performance (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Social Media use is basically gaining increasing importance as a component of firms' portfolio of strategies (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2020) and is becoming an essential element for companies to develop an effective Marketing Communication strategy.

1.2.1 Definition and characteristics of Social Media

According to Kaplan and Haenlein, Social Media can be 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 & Haenlein, 2010): however, their evolving nature and their numerous forms, such as forums, blogs, and social network, makes it challenging to define them in a more profound and specific way (Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

To better understand the definition developed by Kaplan and Haenlein, it is crucial to investigate two phenomena: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content.

Web 2.0 is a term coined in 2004 to define a new way software developers and end-users began to use the World Wide Web. This is closely connected with the idea, presented before, of the new active role consumers obtained thanks to the advent of new technologies. This can be seen, in fact, as a forum on which content and application are no longer developed and published by individuals, but they are indeed continuously updated and changed by the users in a way that can be defined as participatory and interactive (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is "a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of users" and "support the creation of informal users' networks facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing/refining of informational content" (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). In this context, users are seen as active subjects and have the opportunity to contribute to the platform update and play a leading role in web development.

The second element is represented by *User Generated Content* (UGC). This term achieved success in 2005 and, representing the sum of all ways people use Social Media, is usually employed to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created

by end-users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). User Generated Content to be considered as such, has to meet three specific requirements: first, it must be published on a publicly available website or a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people, excluding content sent by email or instant message; second, it must demonstrate a certain amount of creative effort, excluding replications of already existing contents; and third, it must have been produced outside of professional routines and practices (OECD, 2007).

Within the general definition provided by Kaplan and Haenlein, different types of Social Media can be distinguished based on their level of Social Presence and Media Richness on one side, and their level of Self Presentation and Self Disclosure on the other side.

Social Presence is the "acoustic, visual, and physical contact that can be achieved"; media differ in the degree of Social Presence they allow to emerge between two communicating partners. Basically, the higher the Social Presence, the larger the social influence that the partners have on each other's behavior (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Related to this is the idea of *Media Richness* that is the amount of information a media allows to transmit in a given time interval (Daft & Lengel, 1986). A first classification of the existing Social Media can be made based on the degree of Social Presence it allows and the medium's Richness; these can be high, medium, or low.

Behind the concept of *Self Presentation,* there is the idea that in any kind of social interaction, people feel the necessity to control the impressions other people form of them (Goffman, 1959) because they want to create an image that is consistent with their own personal identity. This presentation is usually done through *Self Disclosure*, which can be seen as the conscious or unconscious exposure of personal information consistent with the picture one wishes to project (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The second classification of Social Media can be based on the kind of Self Presentation it allows and the degree of Self Disclosure it requires; these can be high or low.

As shown by Kaplan and Haenlein, from the combination of these dimensions, a classification of Social Media can be obtained:

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 2 - Classification of Social Media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Applications such as *collaborative projects* (an example is Wikipedia) and *blogs* rank the lowest in terms of Social Presence and Media Richness because they are primarily text-based and therefore only allow for a relatively simple exchange. Blogs typically outperform collaborative projects in terms of Self Presentation and Self Disclosure, as the latter are more oriented on content domains. *Content communities* (such as YouTube) and *social networking sites* (such as Facebook or Instagram) are the next step as they allow the exchange of photographs, videos, and other types of media in addition to text-based communication, with social networking sites allowing for more Self Disclosure than content communities. Finally, *virtual game worlds* and *social worlds* (such as Second Life and World of Warcraft) are at the highest level, attempting to mimic all aspects of face-to-face experiences in a virtual environment. Virtual social worlds require a higher level of Self Disclosure than virtual game worlds, as the latter are ruled by strict guidelines that force users to behave in a certain way.

Despite the differences among Social Media cannot be ignored, they all can be seen as a communication mechanism that makes it possible for users to communicate with thousands, and perhaps billions, of individuals worldwide (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012). From this point of view, Social Media can be thought of as a collective term for different web-based software and services that make it possible for users to exchange pieces of information, communicate, discuss, and participate in different kinds of social interaction (Ryan, 2020). Such social interaction occurs in several virtual places whereas social media platforms and sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram have erroneously become synonymous with the category (Bakker, 2018).

1.2.2 Social Networks

The terms Social Media and Social Network are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonyms; their meaning is, in fact, radically different. Social Networks can be seen as one of

the most significant advancements in the field of Social Media and can be defined as the virtual communities that it is possible to create for users to share contents such as text, pictures, video, documents. Social Media can be considered the means needed to allow the creation of these communities. Kaplan and Haenlein defined Social Networks as "applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending emails and instant messages between each other" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010); however, it is not easy to find a deeper and more formal definition due to their evolving nature and the numerous forms they can take (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Another definition of Social Networks has been formulated by Boyd and Ellison and emphasizes their role as tools to build connections with other people and make these connections publicly visible. According to this study, Social Networks are network communication platforms where enrolled users can create a public profile, articulate a list of users with whom they are in a connection, and view and share their connections' lists and those made by other connected users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). From this, it comes that what makes Social Networks unique is not that they make it possible to create new connections among people, but that they allow users to articulate, share, and make visible their social networks. This can result in encounters between people that would not have happened otherwise, but that is not always the intention, and these meetings are often between "latent ties" (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

To explain how Social Networks work, in a 2011 study, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre developed the so-called *Honeycomb Framework*. Thanks to this model, it is possible to visualize the main features characterizing Social Networks, in the study referred to as "Social Media Platforms", and the related functions. The proposed framework is composed of seven blocks forming a honeycomb (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011):

- *Identity*. This block represents how much and what people reveal about themselves on Social Networks: both personal information such as name, gender, age, and location, and information on users' likes, dislikes, and feelings. This can be considered as a pivotal element as it allows users' Self Promotion and Self Branding. Given the importance played by identity, some crucial concerns are related, the most critical being privacy. Even if users voluntarily share data, in fact, they are worried about secondary companies using information.

- *Conversation*. This block represents how and how much people communicate on Social Networks, as many platforms are primarily designed to facilitate dialogue among individuals and groups. Reasons for communication can vary from staying in touch with friends, meeting new people, finding love, or making a message heard to impact other people positively. Because of the vast number and variety of conversations that can occur in this context, there are formats and protocol implications for companies hosting or monitoring these conversations.

- *Sharing*. As indicated by the terms "social", exchanges among people are crucial in this context. This block represents the extent to which people receive, distribute, and exchange content that can be pictures, videos, texts, and can variate according to platforms' requirements. Social network companies should be concerned about how the object can be shared and should fix some constraints to regulate it.

- *Presence*. This block represents the extent to which users can know whether other users are available or not. This happens through status descriptions like "available" or "hidden" and includes knowing where other people are in both the virtual and real worlds and if they are available.

- *Relationships*. By "relate", it is meant that two or more users have some forms of association that make them share content, meet up, converse, or just list each other as friends. This block represents the extent to which users can be related to each other. Depending on the extent and the way people are connected, it is possible to determine the what-and-how of a platform's information exchange; relationships can, in fact, be quite formal, regulated, and structured or more informal and unstructured. For social network companies, it is fundamental to investigate both the amount and the structure of users' relationships; thus, companies can understand how users build and maintain their relationships, and consequently it is possible to engage with them.

- *Reputation*. This block represents the degree to which users can identify their own and other people's standing in a social media setting. Reputation is usually a matter of trust, but since such highly qualitative criteria are difficult to evaluate, social media platforms often use tools based on User Generated Content trustworthiness. Thus, reputation also refers to content created by users. It is fundamental for social network companies to choose the right metrics and tools to measure their reputation and audience's engagement. To assess users' sentiment is a crucial step in improving communication and consumers' perception.

- *Groups*. This block represents the extent to which users are able to form communities and subcommunities. The more "social" a network becomes, the more the group of friends, followers, and contacts become big. Two different categories of groups exist: the self-created ones, formed by friends or institutions, and the online ones, open to any person interested or with membership status. Social network companies need to manage protocols and regulations.
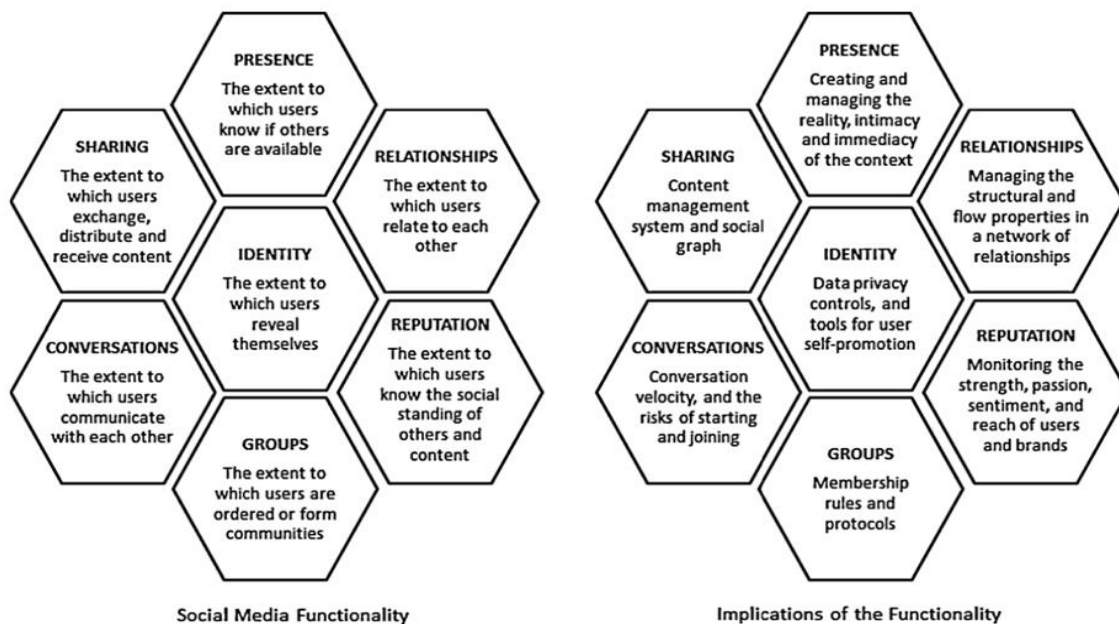

Figure 3 - The honeycomb of Social Media (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

Each Social Network can choose to focus mainly on just one or a few honeycomb's functional blocks and can create its own balance. In this way, even if they are based on the same technologies, different Social Networks can offer users various opportunities, serve different purposes, and better adapt to diverse audiences.

1.2.3 Social Media as a marketing tool

The Social Media phenomenon is growing, and firms cannot ignore the impact this aspect can have on their marketing strategies. As Mangold and Faulds affirmed in a 2009 research, Social Media represents a hybrid part of the promotion mix because it allows firms to communicate with customers directly and, at the same time, it grants consumers to directly interact with companies with an unprecedented level of freedom in terms of time, quality and frequency of the interaction for consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). From this, it comes that firms are taking advantage of social media platforms to build closer connections with customers (Rapp,

Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013), and consumers, who are increasingly empowered and are taking control of the marketing communication process, are becoming creators, collaborators, and commentators of messages (Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016). It has facilitated two-way communication and changed the consumers' attitude from submissive contributors into lively manipulators and originators (Al-Zyoud, 2018). From this, a new phenomenon is rising: Social Media Marketing (SMM).

The pivotal role played by Social Media is made even more critical by the fast and extensive spread of this tool. Nearly 67% of the world's population, 5.22 billion people, was already online in January 2021, and 53.6% of the global population, 4.2 billion people, was an active Social Media user, a 13.2% increase compared to the previous year (Starri, 2021). During the last year, the average time spent using Social Media was 2 hours and 25 minutes per day, and the percentage of internet users who has been using Social Media for work purposes is 40.4% (Starri, 2021). Social Media can be considered responsible for an epochal change in the way brands interact with consumers, being able to foster an environment where consumers have immediate access to information. The ways people discover new brands and decide what to buy are, in fact, evolving, with 7 out of 10 internet users saying that they now go beyond search engines when they are looking for information about products and brands to buy (Starri, 2021). Through Social Media, in fact, people gather input about brands and products and then make purchase decisions based on what they discover (TapInfluence, 2015). Consequently, Social Media represents an unrivaled resource for firms in the digital world and a marketing opportunity companies should not miss.

Social Media Marketing has been effectively defined in a 2012 study as "the way of promoting a website, brand or business by interacting with or attracting the interest of current or prospective customers through the channels of Social Media" (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). SMM consists of different branding and advertising strategies and techniques based on Social Media and online communities that enable firms to improve their online presence, reputation, and contacts, as well as strengthen their relationship with consumers. The main goal is to promote sales by increasing brand awareness, recognition, credibility, and reliability by creating a closer relationship with people and rising exposure and website traffic.

If compared with traditional marketing opportunities, Social Media Marketing offers three crucial benefits. First, it provides firms with the opportunity to both listen to customers and

deliver goods or services; second, it helps them to find potential brand evangelists who can help the brand develop or boost sales; and third, since most Social Networks are freely accessible, it is a near-zero cost strategy or has a lower cost than conventional promotion options (Neti, 2011). SMM, besides, allows companies to be easily accessible to interested customers while still being visible to those who are unfamiliar with the brand; in this way, brand awareness can be significantly raised. It can be very versatile and, thanks to the multiple ways it can be used, it can perfectly fit with the different companies' needs. Over and beyond these objectives, corporations use SMM more proactively, tracking and evaluating media conversations to understand what customers think about them.

Considering the increasing attention SMM is catching, much research is being conducted on the topic. It is mainly focused on practical applications and managerial implications for firms trying to implement a Social Media Management strategy. Being an evolving matter, in fact, managers are trying to find effective and efficient ways to do so. Newberry and LePage have created an eight-step process to guide companies in this implementation process (Newberry & LePage, 2020):

- *Choose Social Media Marketing goals*. The first step to the success of a campaign is to set the right objectives. These have to be aligned with the companies general marketing objectives and need to follow the S.M.A.R.T. framework, meaning they should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. In this way, goals will be able to guide actions towards actual business results.
- *Identify the target audience*. Knowing who the audience is and what people want is fundamental to create engaging content. It is a crucial step to convert followers into actual customers. For companies, it is crucial to obtain information about their audience to develop an ideal buyer persona and customize content and modalities.
- *Know competition*. A competitive analysis should always be conducted to understand what competitors are doing well, and what they are not. These can, in fact, be used as a benchmark for the companies' performances and can help understand how the industry is moving.
- *Do a Social Media Audit*. An assessment of the companies' assets should be carried out to understand what is appropriately working and what is not. To have a clear picture is fundamental to think about whether it is worth keeping on with some actions or not.

- *Set up accounts and improve profiles*. At this point, companies should identify the platforms that better fit with their goals, need, audience and market and should define a strategy for each of them. The profiles should then be created and managed accordingly.
- *Find inspiration*. For the brand to be unique, it is crucial to create a precise identity on Social Media and act coherently with it. To create it, companies can take inspiration from other companies' success stories or can use consumers as an inspiration source.
- *Create a content calendar*. Sharing content is essential, but it is equally important to have a plan for when and how to share content in order to get the maximum impact. Managers should create an editorial plan and a calendar to know the content and the related keywords to be published and when. This calendar should reflect the business statement, and the content should be aligned with the set goals.
- *Evaluate and adjust the strategy*. The measurement of the strategy's results is a crucial step to improve future performances. To do so, companies should set the right bundle of metrics to monitor based on the goals to be achieved and the platforms used. The most common are visits, impressions, reach, mention, the number of followers, engagement, and conversion rate.

If correctly implemented, Social Media Marketing strategies can effectively lead companies to success thanks to their ability to affect consumer behaviors such as attitudes, opinions, information acquisition, awareness, purchasing, and post-purchase assessment. Moreover, SMM has the potential to amplify recommendations, viewpoints, and opinions on brands and goods, primarily when this information is propagated and processed by subjects with a broad and engaged network of contacts. From this, concerning the new active role played by consumers thanks to new technologies, it is clear that consumers offer more trust and confidence to messages delivered by those in their network, seeing the latter as an essential online resource for information, news, and references (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). From this faith consumers have in their network's members and in the consequent consumers' empowerment, a critical Social Media phenomenon arose: Influencer Marketing.

1.3 A related phenomenon: Influencer Marketing

Companies operating in the new media environment and considering the Internet, and more specifically Social Media, as an effective strategic Marketing Communication tool, have also

recognized the power consumers have in the communication process. Thanks to the new active role they obtained through IT progress, consumers are the main characters in Web 2.0, and their opinions are a valuable resource for companies. These are considered as credible and reliable sources of information by other consumers and, if successfully shared, can lead a brand to success or failure (Constantinides, 2008). For this reason, it is acquiring rising importance for companies to understand and manage the opinions' sharing process in order to exploit its consequences better.

1.3.1 Word of Mouth and consumers' trust

As it has been already mentioned, in the marketing scenario characterizing the Internet era, marketers are in a continuous battle for catching consumers' attention and becoming part of their consideration set. As a result of this trend, many companies have moved a consistent part of their marketing expenditure from actively communicating with potential customers to incentivizing current clients to do so (Garnefeld, Eggert, Helm, & Tax, 2013). This is due to the growing acceptance that people are strongly affected by information obtained from others (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004) and that Word of Mouth (WOM) is the most important conduit of information to a consumer (Keller E. , 2007). Because of the simplicity of messaging, User Generated Content, and the speed at which knowledge spreads that define Social Networks, these can be considered the cradle of online WOM.

To better understand this phenomenon's mechanism and its consequences, it is essential to provide a formal definition. Westbrook was probably one of the first to describe Word of Mouth in 1987. He, referring to offline communication, defined WOM as the "informal direct communications to other consumers about ownership, use or characteristics of particular goods and service or their sellers (Westbrook, 1987). Therefore, it is possible to consider WOM every form of interpersonal communication that contains product discussion, opinion sharing, or just a mention of a product or a brand (Berger, 2014).

Thanks to its positive impact on communication, the spread of new technologies has amplified the WOM phenomenon. In fact, it is no longer an act working only on a one-to-one communication basis, but also on a one-to-many basis. Product reports, opinions, and reviews are nowadays shared online and distributed across the involved audience, allowing many potential customers to enter in contact with the product or the brand. Consequently, it is

possible to state that the spread and development of new technologies and media have made WOM an even more powerful tool to leverage for companies and has made experts talk about a unique aspect: Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). This is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company that expands its potential through availability for a multitude of people and institutions via the internet and thanks to the timeliness with which this information comes from source to end-user" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

Both traditional WOM and eWOM include all customer interactions with brands and products and are perceived by consumers as reliable and trustworthy; but eWOM is richer in content and is much more accessible than the former as it exploits the opportunities given by the Internet (Kannan & Li, 2017). Social Networks can be considered the cradle of eWOM thanks to the pivotal role they play in this context. Users, in fact, usually share contents and opinions about products and brands, creating conversations and discussions on these platforms, and, in this way, they necessarily influence other members' views and behaviors.

Many studies have been conducted to clarify how effective WOM can be and what its effectiveness is based on; from these, Word of Mouth has proven to be one of the sources of information consumers consider more trustworthy and reliable. According to a Nielsen's 2012 research, 92% of the interviewed people have shown to rely more on family and friends' recommendations than on different advertising forms. Online consumer reviews have resulted in being the second most trusted source of brand information (following recommendations from known people), with 70% of interviewed consumers indicating they trust these platforms as an information source (Nielsen, 2012). Basically, empirical studies confirmed that when making purchasing decisions, consumers strongly depend on the advice of people in their personal network and strongly believe in the information-sharing power of media platforms. Consequently, research has shown that constructive WOM has a positive effect on market outcomes and leveraging social influence can significantly decrease the costs of acquiring new customers (Roelens, Baecke, & Benoit, 2016). Word of Mouth effectiveness has also been proven in a Villanueva, Yoo, and Hanssens 2008 study; they have shown, in fact, that customers who join a firm as a result of WOM recommendations add almost twice as much long-term value to the firm than other customers and that the difference in customer lifetime value between the two customers categories is at least 16% (Villanueva, Yoo, & Hanssens, 2008). The most valuable customers, the ones with the higher customer lifetime value, in fact,

are not always those who purchase the most, but those whose WOM attracts the most profitable customers (Kumar, Petersen, & Leone, 2010).

To understand why Word of Mouth is so effective, it is fundamental to mention a 1966 study conducted by Dichter that stresses the importance of this tool and explains how marketers can employ it profitably. Ditcher found out that people consider advertising a sales promotional tool rather than an informational one while looking at other consumers' opinions as trustworthy sources of information. As a result, if companies build a WOM environment in their advertisements, and consumers perceive it as welcoming, authoritative, and reliable, they are more likely to accept the advertising recommendations. According to the author, these advices can come from different categories of sources: intimates (such as family and friends), people with similar interests, people close to and in touch with the product, actors, and commercial analysts (Dichter, 1966).

WOM mechanism is a crucial aspect to consider when designing and implementing a Marketing Communication campaign as it often brings to brand credibility and relevance and, therefore, can be beneficial in building brand equity. When consumers' expectations are met by the products created and sold by companies, the former tend to talk a lot about them; thus, they amplify the desired consequences and generate a buzz among people. From this, companies are always more interested in implementing various strategies leveraging and rising Word of Mouth, that is, they are interested in *Buzz Marketing*. For Buzz Marketing to be successful, companies need to create a message that is perceived as delivered by a genuine and independent source; and to do so, they can enlist some customers to endorse the brand naturally or pay influencers to introduce the product to their audience (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

Even if many people use the terms WOM and Buzz Marketing as synonyms, they are not. While the first is spontaneous and depends on the brand's emotional characteristics, in fact, the second is induced by the brand and generally focuses on functional and social features.

From this, it comes that Influencer Marketing, which can be considered a sub-category of Buzz Marketing (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010), is related to WOM, but it is not the same phenomenon. Whereas Influencer Marketing necessitates the engagement and participation of individuals who can exploit their influence among peers, WOM is the channel through which this form of communication occurs. Therefore, the generation of influences by definition involves Word of Mouth as a crucial part of its mechanism, but the opposite is not always true (TapInfluence, 2015). It is the fact of being based on Word of Mouth, in contrast

to traditional advertising, that makes Influencer Marketing a very effective tool in the implementation of a company's Marketing Communication strategy.

1.3.2 Influencer Marketing: an overview of the phenomenon

The idea of Influencer Marketing takes its first moves from the two-step flow theory, conceptualized by Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955 and subsequently modified to be adapted to the Internet and Social Media environment where a multi-step flow is observed.

According to the *two-step flow theory*, certain people identified as Opinion Leaders interpret media information they receive and then transmit it, in a personal conversation, to their reference social group, thus increasing its influence. Therefore, mass media messages may not always directly affect the public as Opinion Leaders play the role of intermediaries in the transmission of information (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In this way, both the information and the Opinion Leader's interpretation are delivered, and there is not a constant flow of information ranging from the source to the final recipients (Stansberry, 2012).

In the following years, some research has been conducted aimed at testing the model in the new Internet environment, and it has been shown how, in this new context, information tends to move in a multi-step flow with many different directions and interactions (Burt, 1999). In this new *multi-step flow model*, the number of potential paths the information can flow is increased and incorporates both cases of direct and longer chains of flow, including segments of the network such as people outside the direct sphere of influence (Weimann, 1982). This means that, according to this new model, also Word of Mouth has the power to influence people.

A crucial figure emerges from the two-step flow model: the *Opinion Leader*, defined as "an individual who is likely to influence another person in his immediate environment" (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This person takes a so-called relay function, which means that he serves as the transmitter of the medial contents and that, due to the position covered in the Social Network, he influences the effect of the message and assumes an additional amplifying role. An Opinion Leader is basically a particular source of social influence, someone who has some position or expertise that makes him an important source of relevant and credible information and "who acts as a broker between the mass media and the opinions and behaviors of an individual or group" (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2018).

Similarly, also the Social Media Influencer (SMI) phenomenon, on which Influencer Marketing is based, can be explained by these theories. Social Media Influencers, in fact, assume a mediating role between companies and consumers and distribute the messages to the less active audience on the Internet, and especially on Social Media platforms, and create a dynamic and participative environment for users. Basically, Influencer Marketing represents an adaptation of the multi-step flow theory applied to Social Media platforms (Stansberry, 2012).

Because of this similarity, Opinion Leaders has been a widely used term to explain Influencer Marketing, but they should not be used interchangeably. Using these two expressions as synonyms, in fact, obscures what is new and different about Influencers: they allow ongoing communication by ordinary consumers to a mass audience of strangers, creating a kind of megaphone effect (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). Influencers are able to mediate marketing messages and affect communities in the digital environment, where information can be disseminated rapidly and easily with a potential viral effect (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Influencers' incredible power in mediating, delivering, and spreading marketing messages has meant that Influencer Marketing (IM) rapidly became one of the most crucial Marketing Communication phenomena in recent years. IM can be defined as "the art and the science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messages with their audiences in the form of sponsored content" (Sammis, Lincoln, & Pomponi, 2016) and comes from the idea that customers express their opinions online, and in particular through Social Media, and can induce others to change their opinions (Pang & Lee, 2008). Brands work with Social Media Influencers to reach targeted customers, promote products, educate consumers about products and create content (eMarketer, 2015). It is essential for brands to implement Influencer Marketing strategies in order to attain an authentic and trustworthy presence among online communities (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Several definitions of Influencer Marketing have been provided, focusing the attention on different aspects and characteristics. For example, in a 2018 study, Bakker described IM as "a process in Digital Marketing where Influencers are identified and then integrated into a brand brands' communication on Social Media Platform" (Bakker, 2018). Signh and Diamond, in a 2012 widely accessible book, described IM as "a technique that employs Social Media (content created by everyday people using highly accessible and scalable technologies such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, microblogs, bookmarks, Social Networks, communities, wikis, and vlogs) and Social influencers (everyday people who have an outsized influence on their peers by virtue of how much content they share online) to achieve an organization's marketing and

business needs" (Singh & Diamond, 2012). What all these different definitions agree upon is that Influencer Marketing is a tool that implies using strategic leaders to push brand messages to a larger group of consumers (Keller & Berry, 2003), that it is based on Word of Mouth, and that is one of the most powerful tools companies can use to communicate with consumers; it is so influential that it has been defined as "the next golden goose of Marketing" (Newman, 2015).

Influencer Marketing has proven to be effective in pursuing different goals that firms consider to be crucial in the new Social Media environment; foster brand awareness, reach new audiences, generate sales, improve brand advocacy, drive lead generation, expand share of voice, manage reputation, and improve customer satisfaction (Bailis, 2020).

Thanks to its effectiveness, Influencer Marketing has become increasingly popular, with a recent industry study reporting that around 86% of the firms have engaged Influencers to promote their products in 2017, and 92% of these firms found this strategy to be effective (Linqia, 2017). In 2017, in fact, the audiences exposed to Influencer Marketing spent $639,700 more than the ones that had not been exposed (Sussman, 2017). These astonishing results IM is achieving are leading to incredible growth in its market size worldwide. The global Influencer Marketing value, in fact, moved from 1.7 billion dollars in 2016, to 4.6 billion dollars in 2018, to 9.7 billion dollars in 2020; and it is forecasted to reach 13.8 billion dollars to the end of 2021 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). This made Influencer Marketing the fastest-growing Online Marketing channel for customers (Vodák, Novysedlák, Čakanová, & Pekár, 2019).

The prominent reason firms choose to invest in Influencer Marketing is that it has proven to create 11 times more Return on Investment than traditional advertising yearly (TapInfluence, 2016), and this is possible thanks to the way it is built and the factors it leverages. A 2016 research, in fact, has shown that Influencers are more likely to be seen as credible and trustworthy compared to a paid advertisement (Abidin, 2016) and this authenticity leads to lower resistance towards the message communicated (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Influencer Marketing is the most effective way to motivate consumers because it harnesses the power of authentic, meaningful content created by consumers for consumers. Unlike traditional advertising, in fact, it is trusted and valuable rather than interruptive and contrived (TapInfluence, 2015).

1.3.3 Influencers: role and activities

The practice of endorsing celebrities to promote brands, products, and services is historically popular among marketing managers; they hope to trigger customers' intent to buy or use the advertised product or service by transferring the positive image and attributes of a celebrity onto the brand (Atkin & Block, 1983).

Today, in addition to using traditional celebrities such as models, actors, and athletes, companies are choosing to implement Influencer Marketing strategies, and are increasingly leveraging Influencers to endorse their brands (Marwick, 2015). In opposition to traditional celebrities who have obtained public attention and recognition thanks to their professional talent, Social Media Influencers have achieved popularity by effectively branding themselves as experts on Social Networks (Khamis, Ang, & Raymond, 2017). Through sharing self-generated content on different topics, in fact, Social Media users have been able to gain a large follower base, turning their online social presence into a profession (Lin, Bruning, & Swarna, 2018). Basically, traditional celebrities only focus on selling products and create value through exclusivity and reputation; Influencers, indeed, are more focused on generating Word of Mouth, and, to do so, they leverage their authenticity and connections (McCracken, 1989). This is also confirmed by the fact that usually Influencers autonomously create the message to be shared, or at least collaborate with its creation, while celebrities just deliver the company's message. From these differences, it comes that celebrities and Influencers can achieve different goals. While the formers are more effective in increasing brand awareness and attitude, purchase intention, and loyalty (Erdogan, 1999), Influencers are the best way to contribute to Word of Mouth and influence people's opinion on brands and products. This is possible thanks to the trust they transmit to users and the ability to conquer them through their authentic personalities (Newman, 2015). Influencers, in fact, not only have the power to influence the purchase decisions of a large audience directly, but their followers also judge them to be reliable information sources (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

Once the difference between traditional celebrities and Influencers has been clarified, it is fundamental to define the latter. The Business Dictionary defines Influencers as "individuals who have the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of their (real or perceived) authority, knowledge, position, or relationship" and whose strength is based on the fact that their followers trust them (Pogliani, 2016). They basically represent a new type of third-party endorsers who can shape people's attitudes (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

From this, anyone can be an Influencer by influencing someone else's brand affinity and purchase decisions. (Singh & Diamond, 2012).

A description of what an Influencer is cannot be considered complete until the main characteristics of these people are described. It has, in fact, been said that anyone could be an Influencer, but some features are fundamental in order to depict them as the primary source of meaning in online communities (Keller & Berry, 2003).

According to a 2018 study carried out by Grave, a person, to be considered an Influencer, has to be an Opinion Leader in his Social Network and has to be able to communicate to an unknown mass audience which has been acquired without any mediation (Grave & Greff, 2018).

More technical definitions of the characteristics needed have been presented. One of these can be found in a 2016 book by Pogliani. He said that the fundamental features are five (Pogliani, 2016):

- *Affect*. This is considered the ability an Influencer should have to stimulate and direct the decisions of other people.

- *Authority*. There are not "total" Influencers, and this characteristic is a consequence of the commitment put in a specific topic. It consists of the quality of being recognized as reliable in a given sector.

- *Knowledge*. Influencers should have a deep knowledge of the topic they are specialized in. This expertise validates an Influencer's authority and represents the basis of his followers' trust.

- *Position*. It is not possible to exert influence without a network of people. For this reason, building a connected network and assuming a central role within the system are decisive elements.

- *Relationship*. The relationships existing among people are the basis for the ability to influence and are fundamental to disseminating an idea or a message.

Another model that describes the fundamental characteristics an Influencer should have, and that can assist marketing managers in choosing the most appropriate Influencer is the *VisCAP model* of source effectiveness, introduced by Percy and Rossiter in 1980. This model provides a method for determining a message endorser's visibility, as well as credibility, attractiveness, power, and the primary source's characteristics (Rossiter & Percy, 1997). The components of

the model, that can be applied to evaluate how appropriate an Influencer is for the communication objectives and the target audience, are four (Percy & Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2016):

- *Visibility*. This feature describes how well-known or recognizable the source is from public exposure and can help the brand to be more visible and gain awareness. From this, visibility is probably the most important characteristic when the communication objective is related to brand awareness.

- *Credibility*. This characteristic is divided into two different components: *expertise*, which is the source's perceived knowledge of what is being advertised, and *objectivity*, the source's perceived trustworthiness or sincerity. Influencers should be experts in the product category being marketed, and people should trust them, and their credibility makes it possible to obtain a positive effect on brand attitude.

- *Attractiveness*. This is also divided into two components: *likeability*, meaning whether and how the Influencers are seen attractive by his audience, and the degree of *similarity* with the target audience. When the Influencer is a likable and appealing personality, the brand attitude can be easily enhanced.

- *Power*. This characteristic represents the source's perceived ability to instill compliance with the message on the part of the target audience. This is particularly important when the communication objective is to facilitate brand purchase intention.

Even if it is hard to find a complete list of the characteristics an Influencer should have, and many differences exist in the several definitions, Wiedmann, Hennigs, and Langner, in a 2010 study, made an effort to summarize them. They divided the crucial characteristics into two groups: the ones representing the *individual capital* and the ones delineating the *social capital*. The former includes personal factors such as education, gender, skills, knowledge, engagement with the subject, and commitment; the latter includes attributes related to their personality strength such as empathy and sociability (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Langner, 2010).

To summarize, Influencers are Social Media users who work hard to achieve a relevant position within their community and who, despite the fact they are often paid to advertise brands and products, strive to uphold their credibility while still demonstrating knowledge and expertise. Users' proclivity to trust them depends on their ability to deliver their messages to the right audience, at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way. They attempt to strike a

balance between sales marketing and auto-promotion, using both a commercial and a relationship-oriented strategy based on trust and reliability. They are committed to promoting the product in a conversational tone of voice, as is characteristic of ordinary people, but still using the subject's specialist language. Influencers' activity mainly consists of creating and sharing content, through their Social Networks' accounts, which usually takes the shape of a recommendation or a narration of a personal experience related to the sponsored product. According to Cola, it is the human aspect that distinguishes Influencer Marketing and shapes this technique; besides the fact that they are seen as a marketing tool by firms, Influencers are, in fact, individuals who engage with others, and their authority, credibility, and authenticity are essential in order to build strong connections with their audience (Cola, 2019).

All these characteristics can be considered functional to the execution of their primary mission: to influence consumers' behavior and to shape their attitude towards companies.

1.4 Group Influence and Social Norms

So far, what has been said indicates that Social Media may be a very effective tool for inspiring consumers' conduct as Social Networks offer many features that can provide aid in enhancing behavior changes (Carpenter & Amaravadi, 2019). When a person uses Social Media to compare his or her own behaviors to those of others, it becomes a form of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) that has been found to be especially valid at affecting behavior change (Allcott, 2011). Because of the interconnectedness of Social Media, in fact, people are quickly introduced to other users' behaviors, and this exposure is likely to influence personal behaviors leveraging attitudes and, most importantly, social and personal norms (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, social media could present a unique opportunity to encourage desired behaviors by using the impact of social comparison and personal values to influence social and personal norms (Hynes & Wilson, 2016).

Social norms are often a significant source of influence on the individual group member, shaping people's goals (Shah, 2005), experiences, and behaviors (Fiske, 2010). According to many, these norms can emerge from both what group members do (group's practices) and what group members expect people in their social context to do (group's expectancies). These two types of social norms are usually referred to as *descriptive social norms* and *injunctive social norms,* respectively, where the former indicate what is done, while the latter prescribes what ought to be done (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Both descriptive and injunctive social

norms can influence people's behavior, but in different ways as they are based on distinct mechanisms (Cialdini, 2012).

Because of the critical differences in the way they operate and the underlying structures, that will be further examined, according to Cristina Bicchieri, just injunctive social norms can be defined as social norms (Bicchieri, 2017). In the next pages, following Bicchieri's indication, the term social norms will exclusively refer to injunctive social norms; the other category will be referred to as descriptive norms.

1.4.1 Preferences, Attitudes, and Expectations

The terms descriptive norms, social norms, and conventions are too often used as synonyms even if they describe profoundly different phenomena. Their differences reside in the motivations and foundations they are based on; to better understand these peculiarities, some preliminary concepts need to be explained, particularly preference, attitude, and expectation.

Preferences are often interpreted as "liking better", but they can be defined as dispositions to act in a specific way in a given situation and are strictly connected with choices. From this, what preference really means is that, in a situation of choice, if a person chooses an option A over an option B, it must be the case that, all things considered, he prefers A. Preferences may be strictly individual or social; the latter may take into account beliefs, feelings, and behaviors of other individuals that matter to the person making a choice. Social preferences are *unconditional* when the choice is not influenced by knowing what others approve and disapprove or how they act in similar situations; on the contrary, they are *conditional* if the choice is made based on expectations about what others do or believe should be done (Bicchieri, 2017).

Preferences should not be confused with *attitudes*; the latter are, in fact, evaluative dispositions towards some behaviors, individuals, or objects that include personal normative beliefs expressing an individual's positive or negative evaluation of particular behaviors (Fishbein, 1967). These can be communicated through expressions such as "I like/dislike" or "I believe one should/should not".

From economics, it is known that preferences and choices are positively correlated (Varian, 2011), and one might expect that people who favorably judge a particular action will partake in it to a greater extent than others. Unfortunately, it has been repeatedly found that general

perceptions and actions are only weakly correlated, if at all (Wicker, 1969). Individuals could, in fact, express favorable judgments about behaviors they do not participate in. The reason resides in the fact that humans are social beings, and their actions have consequences for both themselves and others; *interdependence*, not independence, rules, in fact, social life. Indeed, as Fishbein said, the critical variable influencing actions is not what one wants, likes, or believes he should do, but one's belief in what other people approves of (Fishbein, 1967).

People who have conditional social preferences care about what others who matter to them do and/or approve; so, they have *expectations* that influence their behavior (Bicchieri, Lindemans, & Jiang, 2014). These expectations are just *beliefs* and can be seen as assumptions about what will or should happen. Therefore, social expectations are people's impressions of other people's behaviors and beliefs. Some social expectations are *factual*, or empirical, and can be defined as beliefs about how other people will behave or respond in certain circumstances; some others are *normative*, meaning that they express the belief that other people believe that certain behaviors are praiseworthy and should be carried out, while others should be avoided. Basically, normative social expectations are beliefs about other people's personal normative beliefs, so they are second-order beliefs (Bicchieri, 2017). Expectations play a pivotal role in people's behavior; belief change is, in fact, a crucial part of social change. People always need some reasons to change, and social expectations, both factual and normative, can influence people's behavior and lead people to a behavioral change.

1.4.2 Descriptive Norms and Conventions

As it has already been said, what other people do in certain specific situations can be a guide for an individual's behavior, and the perceptions of what most others usually do can provide guidance about what is "normal" in an ambiguous or novel context for individuals (Stiff, 1994). The resulting collective behaviors can show different degrees of interdependence, depending on whether the expectations are unilateral or multilateral, and normative or empirical.

The term *descriptive norm* is used to refer to all those interdependent behaviors where preferences are conditional on empirical expectations alone (Bicchieri, 2017) and is widely employed to mean "what is commonly done" (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007). These norms can deliver social proof of how to behave in a given situation, and people are likely to behave consistently with them in order to maximize their social

behaviors' effectiveness (Shaffer, 1983). Basically, these norms provide a standard from which people do not want to deviate as they measure the suitability of their behaviors by how far away these are from the norm (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007).

While the perception of the existence of a custom, formally described as "a pattern of behavior such that individuals (unconditionally) prefer to conform to it as it meets their needs", does not really induce people to partake in it, the perception of the existence of a fashion or a common signaling system does (Bicchieri, 2017). A custom is, in fact, a set of independently driven actions that happen to be similar to one another, while a common signaling mechanism triggers action by the combined influence of expectations and a need to coordinate with other people in the system. Because of the existence of expectations and the urge to emulate the trendy, the presence of an existing fashion triggers a behavior that is consistent with it. From this, it comes that, as Bicchieri said in a 2006 study, defining descriptive norms as the way people typically act is too vague; a descriptive norm is "a pattern of behavior such that individuals prefer to conform to it on condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it" (Bicchieri, 2006). Basically, in descriptive norms, empirical expectations about other people's behaviors play a pivotal role in setting the actions to be undertaken and to be avoided. Therefore, people do not prefer to engage in a particular behavior irrespective of what others do, as it happens in customs; instead, their preference of conformity is conditional upon observing their behaviors.

In her 2006 book "The Grammar of Society", Bicchieri gave a rational definition of descriptive norms finalized at explaining the conditions to their existence (Bicchieri, 2006):

> Let R be a behavioral rule for situations of type S, where S is a coordination game. We say that R is a descriptive norm in a population P if there exists a sufficiently large subset of P (P_{cf}) such that, for each individual i belonging to P_{cf},
>
> 1. *Contingency*: i knows that a rule R exists and applies to situations of type S;
> 2. *Conditional preference*: i prefers to conform to R in situations of type S on the condition that:
>   a. *Empirical expectations*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P conforms to R in situations of type S.

Thus, a descriptive norm tells what an individual would do if he had certain expectations and constitutes a situation in which the preference for conformity is conditional on just empirical

expectations, so on expecting others to follow the behavioral rule under examination. This conditional preference for conformity may be based on the desire to emulate individuals considered to be more informed, or by the hope of being part of a group, or just by the desire of doing what individuals think the majority of people do. Regardless of which the reasons can be, the preference for conformity depends on the expectation that other people conform to the behavioral rule.

From what has been said, it can be inferred that descriptive norms, as opposed to customs, have a causal influence on people's behaviors. Expecting people to behave accordingly to the descriptive norm, and having preferences conditional on these expectations, induce individuals to adhere and conform to that pattern. It comes that a descriptive norm that people practice constitutes an equilibrium in the sense that the beliefs of the adherents are self-fulfilling. If one assumes that the behavioral rule is widely practiced, it is in one's interest to follow the rule too; as a consequence, if a sufficient number of people come to assume that this behavioral rule is the "norm", they will act in ways that validate those beliefs (Bicchieri, 2017).

Descriptive norms can fade over time, or they can solidify into stable *conventions*, which are very useful as they coordinate people's expectations and serve as cues that facilitate interaction and communication. Usually, conventions do not have an intrinsic value, but violating them can be very expensive because the violation cost is strictly related to the effect of breaking a coordination process. When a convention is in place, in fact, there is a shared presumption of conformity, and expectations of compliance are *mutual*. When people want to coordinate with other individuals, in fact, any change in expectations will lead to a change in conditional preferences and behaviors, as expectations, are multilateral. Such reciprocal desires, though, are never a valid excuse to follow a convention; it is needed that one has a conditional preference for coordinating and communicating so that failing to coordinate has a personal cost. A crucial difference between conventions and descriptive norms is that the latter do not need to be followed to exist; conventions, on the contrary, cannot exist without being followed. In fact, since it makes sense to conform to a convention only if there is fair assurance that it is still in place, people comply with it because they believe others would act in the expected manner (Bicchieri, 2006).

In the real world, the boundaries between descriptive norms, conventions, and social norms, that will be presented further, are very diluted; what is a social norm for someone, can be a

convention or a descriptive norm for someone else, and what begins as a descriptive norm may develop into a stable social norm over time. This passage is often characterized by the emergence of a new preference for universal conformity and, when a coordination system is broken and produces negative externalities, conventions can be expected to become social norms (Bicchieri, 2017).

1.4.3 Social Norms

Social norms are often referred to as *injunctive norms* and represent what people collectively believe ought to be done, what is socially approved or disapproved (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). Given their nature, they play a crucial role in balancing individuals' selfish desires and the group's survival, as well as the need for social control (Triandis, 1994).

As for descriptive norms, also to understand the mechanism regulating social norms, it is fundamental to consider preferences and expectations. Social norms, in fact, are characterized by being always socially *conditional*; this means that people's preference for following them depends upon their expectations of collective conformity and compliance. Of course, people may find valid reasons to internally support some of those principles, but most individuals obey these norms because they know that these are generally followed and expect most people in their reference network to follow them. Social norms, like descriptive norms, are founded on empirical expectations; however, when it comes to social norms, the normative influence is strong too and plays a crucial role in driving compliance. It is essential to an individual, in fact, that the majority of people in his reference network think he ought to follow a given behavioral pattern (Bicchieri, 2017).

A social norm can thus be defined as "a rule of behavior such that individuals prefer to conform to it on condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it (empirical expectations), and that most people in their reference network believe they ought to conform to it (normative expectation)" (Bicchieri, 2006).

A characteristic of social norms is that they are informal, in the sense that they are not promulgated by an official source, such as a legislature or a court, nor are enforced by the threat of a legal sanction, yet they are regularly followed (Posner, 1997).

Nevertheless, even if they are not formal, some *sanctions* exist related to social norms. In fact, social norms are typically enforced by sanctions which can be either punishments for carrying

out behaviors considered to be harmful or rewards for actions deemed proper (Coleman, 1990). The existence of these sanctions distinguishes social norms from habits, which are a form of goal-directed regular and unconscious behavior that does not necessitate intentional preparation (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000) and necessitate limited focus and deliberate control (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). There is reason to believe that a failure in adapting to social norms can cause prejudice as, according to Crandall, the factors that contribute to the "prejudiced personality" are mainly measures of the unwillingness or inability to adapt to social change (Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013). On the other side, adaptation to social norms leads to the suppression of the prejudice (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002); this prejudice can therefore be seen as a sanction related to conformity to social norms.

Considering all the beforementioned characteristics of social norms, in 2006 Bicchieri provided a rational definition of the phenomenon and of its existence conditions (Bicchieri, 2006):

> Let R be a behavioral rule for situations of type S, where S can be represented as a mixed-motive game. We say that R is a social norm in a population P if there exists a sufficiently large subset of P (P_{cf}) such that, for each individual i belonging to P_{cf},
>
> 1. *Contingency*: i knows that a rule R exists and applies to situations of type S;
> 2. *Conditional preference*: i prefers to conform to R in situations of type S on the condition that:
>   a. *Empirical expectations*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P conforms to R in situations of type S;
>   b. *Normative expectations*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P expects i to conform to R in a situation of type S;
>   or
>   c. *Normative expectations with sanctions*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P expects i to conform to R in situations of type S, prefers i to conform, and may sanction behavior.

From this definition, if compared to the one representing descriptive norms, it is possible to notice the main difference among these two categories of norms. The normative expectation condition (condition 2b of the social norms' definition) says, in fact, that expectations are believed to be reciprocal in the case of social norms meaning that not only people expect others

to conform to the norm, but they also believe others to expect them to conform. Basically, normative expectations play a causal role in social norms, but not in descriptive norms, where only empirical expectations play this role.

For some people, the existence of empirical and normative expectations is sufficient to induce a preference for conformity, indeed for others the possibility of sanctions, both positive and negative, is essential to instill this preference. By the way, the normative expectations with sanctions condition (condition 2c of the social norms' definition) do not affirm that compliance will be rewarded, and transgression will be punished; it notes that a broad enough subset of the population might be willing and capable to sanction others. Sanctions can be, in fact, instrumental in strengthening conditional preferences considering that, as it has already been said, sometimes following a social norm can be contrary to self-interest. Considered together, the conditions of the social norms' rational definition suggest that social norms motivate action, but they do so only indirectly (Bicchieri, 2006).

According to a 1998 study carried out by Cialdini and Trost, three conditions might influence social norms' strength. First, the members of the reference network should have the opportunity to communicate in order to spread the norm among people; second, they should be inclusive and cohesive, valuing cooperative behaviors; and third, the group should cohesively consider the norm as important and valuable for all the members (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Once the preferences have been identified and the penalties for non-consistent conduct have been established, members of the reference network would deter deviant behavior by specifying what they ought to behave as a group member (Opp, 1982).

Once it has been clarified what social norms, descriptive norms, and conventions are, and the mechanisms they are based on, it is possible to understand why it is so important not to confuse them. As it has been said at the beginning of the paragraph, in fact, many people use the term social norms to refer to both descriptive norms and injunctive norms (actual social norms), but this is not correct because, at is has been explained the two phenomena are based on different conditions and, consequently, have different outcomes. Since it includes (social) conditional preferences, a social norm differs from a shared prudential or moral norm, and from a descriptive norm. Descriptive norms, in fact, lead to influence by conversion and education, through a process called *informational social influence*, that results in attitudes and behaviors that are seen as genuine and unstrained. On the other side, injunctive norms generate attitudes

and behaviors that are considered ambivalent, managed, less genuine, and often ambivalent, and to do so, they rely on the *normative group pressure* process (Kelman, 1961). These differences are much more relevant than many people could imagine; identifying societal expectations and discovering agreement on what ought to be done, in fact, does not make a shared norm a social one; normal expectations are needed, so people expecting others to expect them to conform.

1.4.4 Social Norms for commercial purposes

Policymakers and advertisers understood social norms' potential to affect customer attitudes and habits, and it is not shocking that these are becoming an essential instrument for modifying socially relevant behaviors. Moreover, social norms are also employed for commercial purposes; a new tendency has emerged from this, in alternative to more traditional approaches, the so-called *Social Norms Marketing*, designed to reduce undesirable conduct (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007). This is based on the idea that consumer behavior is largely influenced by perceptions of what is "normal" or "typical" in a given social context and, therefore, consumers are more likely to follow a behavior when they perceive this to be in accordance with the norms regulating their reference environment (Thorbjørnsen, Pedersen, & Nysveen, 2007).

It is fundamental to clarify that, in this context, when marketers talk about social norms, they refer to socially shared norms; this means that, despite theory, Social Norms Marketing do not employ only injunctive norms but also descriptive norms and conventions. Even if they present relevant differences, in fact, they have in common that they are indicators of appropriate behaviors and correct choices, and that can effectively affect decisions and behaviors thanks to group influence (Pliner & Mann, 2004).

Research on how marketers and organizations can leverage social norms has mainly focused on reducing negative and harmful behaviors such as smoking or alcohol consumption or on modifying general lifestyle trends like engaging in environmental protection programs (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). Given the rising importance of Social Norms Marketing, research is also being conducted to understand the impact these norms can have on the consumption of particular goods or services. Until now, it has been found out that social norms are significant predictors for consumer behaviors; for example, for young adults, peer-

imposed social norms have been proven to increase consumer loyalty to cell phone service provider (Lee & Murphy, 2009), and to affect ready meals purchase and consumption (Mahon, Cowan, & McCarthy, 2006).

Some companies have implemented Social Norms Marketing to stimulate purchase behavior. One of these is TalknSave, a cell phone company based in Israel that in 2010 has created a marketing campaign leveraging shared behaviors by saying that 7 out of 10 students in Israel were using their service and inviting people to join the group of the users. Another example is represented by Suzuki Insurance company that, in the United Kingdom, has realized a marketing campaign based on the sentence "9 out of 10 riders save money with Suzuki Insurance". Many other examples exist that, focusing on peer influence, have had a more significant impact on individual behavior than biological, personality, familial, religious, cultural, and other influences (Perkins, 2002).

In recent years, social norms have also been applied to the field of Social Media Marketing. Social Media has recently shown to shape both social and personal norms and attitudes through the intense and quick sharing of contents, images, and information (Hynes & Wilson, 2016), and from additional research emerged that people use Social Networks to assess descriptive norms (Carpenter & Amaravadi, 2019). The interconnected nature characterizing this tool, in fact, enables individuals to be continuously exposed to other people's behaviors, and through this exposure, makes it possible to impact both personal norms and behaviors (Zeng, Huang, & Dou, 2009). When a person uses Social Media to compare his or her own acts to that of others, it is engaged in a form of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), and this type of analogy has been shown to be exceptionally successful at affecting behavior change, especially when the behavior is contextualized (Allcott, 2011), and for issues where social comparison is high (Kropp, Lavack, & Silvera, 2005). As a result, Social Media can offer a great and timely opportunity to promote behavioral change and consumption-related actions by using the impact of social comparison to influence social and personal norms (Hynes & Wilson, 2016).

Also Social Media Influencer can be helpful in this process; the fact that celebrities, such as Influencers, can influence moral and social norms, in fact, has been long recognized (Gossling, 2019). Companies should consider this and leverage social norms in creating Social Media and Influencer Marketing campaigns.

As emerged until this point, new technologies have astonishedly impacted Marketing Communication through a long series of tools they have made it possible to develop. Social Media, and the related phenomena of Social Media Marketing and Influencer Marketing are among the most important. They have caused a radical change in the way Marketing Communication takes place and how the relationship between consumers and companies is shaped, and for this reason, they have contributed to the rise of a new idea of Marketing that is spreading every day more. Therefore, companies are using Social Networks and Influencers to direct consumers' decisions and behaviors. To do so, they can also leverage social norms, a kind of rules of behavior based on the effect that the reference network can have on an individual's preferences and behaviors. These have proven to be effective in influencing consumers' behaviors and purchase decisions, and, for this reason, they are spreading as a marketing tool. There are no doubts that Influencers and social norms are among the most potent tools marketing managers have access to, and, for this reason, their mechanisms and effectiveness deserve to be better investigated.

CHAPTER 2

The second chapter of this thesis is aimed at identifying and clarifying the topic and the goals of the empirical research that will be conducted. This is fundamental to lay solid foundations, a crucial step to obtain reliable results.

The chapter will begin by setting the theoretical framework of the study; in particular, Instagram, one of the most used Social Networks, will be presented and the reasons why it can be defined as the Golden Valley of Influencer Marketing will be explained. Then, the specific literature produced on the topic will be analyzed and the most important gaps will be identified. The third paragraph will be fundamental to state the objective of the research and the research questions. Finally, in the fourth paragraph, the conceptual model and the variables will be presented, and the hypotheses formulated.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The technological development characterizing the last decades has irreversibly impacted the way people communicate and, consequently, how firms deliver their messages to consumers. As already highlighted in the first chapter, the impact this epochal change has had on Marketing Communication has been astonishing, as the roles played by both companies and consumers changed. In this new scenario, in fact, consumers are not anymore passive subjects and are playing a more significant and more explicit role in the success, or failure, of brands (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). The traditional marketing paradigm involved brand managers using media to communicate with consumers in a unidirectional information flow consisting of carefully crafted messages sent by companies and directed to a generally passive audience (Ihator, 2001). With the spread of new technologies, the audience first became connected to the organization and then became connected to one another; this has caused the one-to-many approach to communication characterizing the pre-technological era to turn obsolete (Gurau, 2008) and has led to the rise of new paradigms. The old mass media channels, such as TV, print, and radio advertising, first gave way to a greater emphasis on interactive or one-to-one communications between the brand and the customer (Holtz, 1999), and then left the stage to many-to-many media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, where consumers have become broadcasters in conversation with one another and have become engaged in a two-way dialogue with brand marketers (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). The many-to-many approach allowed the development of a new paradigm of Marketing Communication with the consumers assuming the role of content creators and taking an active part in the information exchange, with communication becoming consequentially participatory.

A spectacular phenomenon related to the diffusion of the Internet and the new shape Marketing Communication has assumed, is the development and spread of Social Media, a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, information, and multimedia content through the building of virtual networks and communities (Dollarhide, 2020). Different categories of Social Media exist with specific features but, despite these differences cannot be ignored, they all can be seen as a communication mechanism that makes it possible for users to communicate with thousands, and perhaps billions, of individuals worldwide (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012). Thanks to the opportunity offered, the role assumed by Social Media has soon evolved from a single marketing tool to that of a marketing intelligence source, where firms can observe, analyze, and predict customer behaviors; for this reason, it

has become imperative for marketers to strategically leverage this source to achieve competitive advantage and superior performance (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Social Media use is basically gaining increasing importance as a component of firms' portfolio of strategies (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2020) and is becoming an essential element for companies to develop an effective Marketing Communication strategy.

Moving from this news characterizing the Marketing Communication scenario, in the first chapter of this thesis, it has also been investigated how companies are taking advantage of Social Media to communicate to their target audience without appearing too intrusive, to build a stable relationship with consumers (Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013), and to get financial results despite the non-commercial purpose of Social Networks. The fact that consumers, who are increasingly empowered and are taking control of the Marketing Communication process, are becoming creators, collaborators, and commentators of messages (Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016), and that they are considered as credible and reliable sources of information by other consumers (Constantinides, 2008), offered a great opportunity in this direction and led to the rise of what has been defined as the "golden goose of Marketing" (Newman, 2015): Influencer Marketing.

The idea of Influencer Marketing (IM) represents an adaptation of the multi-step flow theory applied to Social Media platforms, as it is based on the fact that Social Media Influencers assume a mediating role between companies and consumers, distribute the messages to the less active audience on the Internet, and create a dynamic and participative environment for users (Stansberry, 2012). Influencers are third party figures (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) able to promote products interactively and creatively by showing their use and utility in a real-life context; they engage followers by regularly delivering them the latest information, and can punctually reach companies' target audience influencing buying decisions. Influencers' incredible power in mediating, delivering, and spreading marketing messages has meant that Influencer Marketing, defined as "the art and the science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messages with their audiences in the form of sponsored content" (Sammis, Lincoln, & Pomponi, 2016), rapidly became one of the most crucial Marketing Communication phenomena in recent years with around 86% of the firms having engaged Influencers to promote their products in 2017, and 92% of these firms having found this strategy to be effective (Linqia, 2017). The prominent reason why firms choose to invest in Influencer Marketing is that it has proven to create 11 times more Return on

Investment than traditional advertising yearly (TapInfluence, 2016), and this is possible thanks to the way it is built and the factors it leverages. Influencer Marketing is considered the most effective way to motivate consumers because it harnesses the power of authentic, meaningful content created by consumers for consumers; Influencers are, in fact, more likely to be seen as credible and trustworthy compared to a paid advertisement (Abidin, 2016) and this authenticity leads to lower resistance towards the message communicated (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Influencer Marketing's success derives from the idea that consumers express their opinions online, and in particular through Social Media, and can induce others to change their opinion (Pang & Lee, 2008).

As already investigated, an essential element strengthening the effect of Influencer Marketing is social comparison and what is commonly referred to as Descriptive and Social Norms, so what is commonly done (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007), and what people collectively believe ought to be done, what is socially approved or disapproved (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). When a person uses Social Media to compare his or her own behaviors to those of others, it becomes a form of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) and this has been found to be especially valid at affecting behavior change (Allcott, 2011). Because of the interconnectedness of Social Media, in fact, people are quickly introduced to other users' behaviors, and this exposure is likely to influence personal behaviors leveraging attitudes and, most importantly, social and personal norms (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, Social Media could present a unique opportunity to encourage desired behaviors by using the impact of social comparison and personal values to influence social and personal norms (Hynes & Wilson, 2016). Influencers represent a pivotal part of this process, considering their recognized ability to influence moral and social norms (Gossling, 2019).

In this context, Instagram deserves a special mention. It is the most important platform on which Influencer Marketing is conducted, being used by 89% of sellers who use Influencer Marketing (Krasniak, 2016). Besides, being considered more authentic, Instagram is the most used social platform to research information (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019) and the leading platform companies are planning to raise the investment in (Hootsuite, 2021).

2.2.1 The golden valley of Influencer Marketing: Instagram

Instagram, commonly referred to as IG or Insta, is a social networking site created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and acquired by the Facebook group in 2012 for approximately $1 billion in cash and stock (Sengupta, Perlroth, & Wortham, 2012).

Among all platforms, with 1.22 billion users worldwide as of January 2021, Instagram is the second most used platform by marketers (Starri, 2021). Moreover, even if all the social platforms are able to attract marketers to some degree, Instagram represents the gold standard for the group; nearly four out of five (79%) brands, in fact, predominantly tap Instagram for Influencer Marketing, compared with Facebook (46%), YouTube (36%), Twitter (24%), and LinkedIn (12%) (Intelligence, 2021). This success is addressable to the feature this platform presents as it enables a new form of communication among users; indeed, the latter can post photos and videos tweaking them with filters in order to share their updates within their network (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). From a business point of view, Instagram's success depends on the tools for brand development it provides. It allows companies to "share and grow their brand with its diverse, global community" (Instagram, About us, 2021), raise brand exposure and awareness thanks to the opportunity for targeted advertising and partnership, and make their offers more visible by placing them in a more engaging and interactive environment where a participative relationship with consumers can be created. Through their personal profiles, in fact, firms can operate as users, which allows them to share engaging content and start conversations with customers, collaborating to create real communities.

The idea on which this platform is based on is to bring users "closer to the people and things they love"; it is, in fact, created to build a "secure and supportive" environment in which users would "stand out" by voicing themselves and engaging others in a creative and innovative way (Instagram, About us, 2021). Thanks to the way it is shaped and the feature it presents, Instagram enables users to "connect with more people, build influence and create compelling contents that are distinctly theirs" (Instagram, About us, 2021) and, for this reason, a growing number of Influencers has begun to operate on this platform in order to become a focal point for other users and build an audience (Thakur, Angriawan, & Summey, 2016).

To better understand the reasons behind this stunning success, it is fundamental to explore Instagram's main features. The main characteristic of this platform, which can also be

considered a point of difference from other Social Networks, consists in the content it allows to share. While sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook allow users to share content consisting of both text and images, Instagram is defined as an image-based Social Network, enabling the sharing of pictures and videos (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020). According to a 2019 study, 68% of the posts shared consists, in fact, of photos, while 18% of videos, and 14% of carousels composed of several photos and videos (Quintly, 2019), making it generally known as a photo-sharing social networking platform (Karimkhani, Connett, Boyers, Quest, & Dellavalle, 2014). These typologies of content can be considered an incredible success factor. As Sundar stated in a 2008 research, people's brains implicitly trust visual modalities such as images and videos more than text as those modalities cue the realism heuristics causing that a photograph of something is inherently more real than text written about the same thing; that is "people trust those things that they can see over those that they merely read about. This heuristic also underlies people's general belief that pictures cannot lie, even in this day and age of digital manipulation, and the consequent trust in pictures over textual descriptions" (Sundar, 2008). Basically, the image-based nature of Instagram, compared to the shape assumed by other Social Networks, conveys greater social presence than text alone (Pittman & Reich, 2016) and generates a higher level of trust in users, and in particular younger generations, who consider this platform particularly attractive (Ting, Wong Poh Ming, Cyril de Run, & Lau Yin Choo, 2015). It comes that, unlike other Social Networks, Instagram offers brands the opportunity to post aesthetically pleasing, creative, and charming content focusing exclusively on visuals, and to showcase their products in an appealing way (Lyfe Marketing, 2018). Consumers seem, in fact, to react and behave differently on Instagram compared to other platforms, since they seem to take more actions, such as follow the brands or visit their websites, and purchase more often after looking at brands' posts (Buckle, 2015) and their rate of engagement is higher (Ahmed, 2017).

The sharing of images rather than words alone has also made communication with friends and broader groups of users who share similar interests more ideal, convenient, and fascinating (Bakhshi, Shamma, & Gilbert, 2014) making Instagram a valuable and captivating tool for both private users and companies.

Another point of strength characterizing Instagram that has contributed to its success, particularly among business as a means to communicate to a large audience, is its attribute of being asymmetric. Instagram, in fact, is not a symmetric Social Network, like Facebook, meaning that if a user follows another user, for the latter is not mandatory to follow back the former, and so a unidirectional relationship can be created. Also, by default, users' posts are

publicly accessible so that everyone can see them and reach the person's profile (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014); in this way, it is easier for companies to spread their message and share their contents with a larger audience.

Although its image-based nature does not allow sharing text content, Instagram offers a wide array of tools and features users can leverage to create the content they want to share with their audience. These feature help people to "express themselves and connect with the people they love"; they are (Instagram, Features, 2021):

- *Reels*. This feature represents a way to create, watch, and share short, entertaining videos. It offers the opportunity to create multi-clip videos lasting less than 30 seconds and edited with easy-to-use text, transition moments, AR filters, and audio, both originally produced or from the Instagram music library. This function is made more participative through the possibility to remix a reel by recording a video next to someone else's so to add a personal perspective and collaborate with the community of users.

- *Stories*. This feature is created to share everyday moments. Stories consist of short videos, up to 15 seconds, or photos that can be enriched through music, text, stickers, gif, effects, and filters. Even if stories are visible for only 24 hours, users can post them as *Highlights* on their profiles, making them available for a longer time. Users can also reply to other users' stories and add to their Stories stickers involving polls, challenges, questions, quizzes, donations, and invitations to chat, making this feature more interactive.

- *Live Video*. This function allows users to record and share real-time videos that can be removed or made available as Stories once the live sharing is over. Also the Live Video feature encourages users' participation; it is, in fact, possible for people to participate in another user's video starting a duet and to interact with the creator through commenting and liking the video in real-time.

- *Messenger*. This feature consists of a messaging platform that enables users to send directly and privately messages, photos, posts, audio files, and videos to friends across Instagram and Facebook and connect on a video chat. A vanish mode can be used to have conversations with messages and multimedia contents that disappear after seeing or when the chat is left. This function has the purpose of enabling one-to-one communication among users or small groups of people.

- *IGTV*. This function allows users to watch and share long-form and immersive videos; the latter, in fact, are not limited to one minute and can be played in full screen. Users can browse videos based on their interests as IGTV is personalized to each person, making it easier to discover and watch desirable content. Interaction in also allowed through liking, sharing, and commenting.

- *Shopping*. This feature is created to let users discover and buy from brands and creators they love and connect businesses with a vibrant community of shoppers. There are many ways to shop on Instagram, from tapping product tags to reveal details like name and price and saving items on wish lists to buying directly with checkout.

- *Search and Explore*. Thanks to this function, users can discover and dig into topics that inspire them as it offers content based on followed people and liked posts. By refreshing the Explore page, an entirely new set of photos and videos, all curated based on the user's interests, appear so that people can continuously enter in contact with new content and creators.

In addition to all of these features, there is Instagram's beating heart: the *feed*. This represents the original feature of this Social Network and can be described as the main page where users can access and interact with posts shared by the profiles they follow, the stream of all the content they share listed in reverse chronological order (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). These posts can assume the shape of a picture, a video, or a carousel, which is a series of a maximum of ten photos or videos. The content shared to the feed are available on the main user's profile page for an unlimited time and, for this reason, many people choose to carefully curate their feed so that it feels cohesive when viewed as a whole. The feed can be thought of as the main facade of the profile and so represents the user's identity on the platform; thereby, this is particularly important for companies to share content consistent with their personality to communicate a positive message to the potential customers visiting the profile. Nowadays, consumers consider Instagram a reliable source of information on brands and products and use it to stay up to date (Statista, 2020); thus, companies should manage their feed in a way that allows the diffusion of a positive opinion among users.

Given its potential and growth, Instagram is constantly updated with new features and functions able to enrich the users' experience on the platform. Among the most crucial side features, it is fundamental to mention the tag, the geotag, and the hashtag functions. Through the *tag* function, user can mention other accounts in the content they are sharing; this enables the creation of a hyperlink that makes it possible for people to reach the mentioned profile directly

from the picture, without searching for it. The *geotag* function is based on the same principle and allows the mention of places (Lee K. , 2019). The *hashtag* function is probably the most important of the three, in particular for businesses. Hashtags are tags or words prepended with the "#" symbol used to indicate the content of the picture or the video they are related to, allowing users to search for posts easily. Locating and retrieving content uploaded on the platform can, in fact, be challenging and this function offers an opportunity to do so in a more effective and efficient way; this fast and easy way to identify and locate contents offers a unique opportunity for companies to increase their posts and profiles' visibility (Giannoulakis & Tsapatsoulis, 2016).

Moreover, Instagram offers different filters that are updated on a daily basis by which creators can change the color shade, the light, and the resolution of the photos and videos they are sharing in order to make the content appear more "artsy", and "cool" so to be more attractive and engaging for users (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

The vast array of tools Instagram offers allows users to become part of a community where "everyone is welcome" (Instagram, Community, 2021) and where they can express themselves, their identity, and their personality by generating creative content. A connected community is the key to success on Instagram and, to create this, it is fundamental to engage people and build loyalty. In doing this, some users are able to stand out on the platform becoming creators thanks to their ability to generate captivating and trustworthy content; this can lead them to connect with a vast audience and build their personal brand on Instagram, so to "turn what they love into a career" (Instagram, Creators, 2021). The authenticity and uniqueness of the content shared, as well as their originality and creativity, are critical factors in rising users' visibility and popularity and standing out from other users by obtaining a higher and increasing number of followers; those factors turn simple users into creators that can be considered the antecedents of Influencers (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). This is what makes Instagram the golden valley of Influencer Marketing. Thanks to its sense of immediacy, high engagement rate (Ahmed, 2017), and higher number of creators in comparison to other platforms, in fact, Instagram welcomes the largest community of Influencers (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020).

Influencers act on Instagram as online Opinion Leaders. They post original content perceived as unique, credible, and reliable, creating a positive image and opinion about the Influencer in consumers' minds. This causes followers to raise interaction, recommend the account, and

follow the advice. Instagram celebrities, in fact, are able to influence the buying behaviors of their followers thanks to the fact that they are considered reliable, and users trust what they say (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017); for this reason, marketers invest in them when it comes to creating marketing campaigns. Instagram Influencers are paid by companies to create and share photos and videos about their products and services and spread an original and honest message about the brand; thus, consumers can enter in contact and interact with both the product and the brand.

Engaging an Influencer to endorse a brand in an Influencer Marketing campaign is not the only means companies have to sponsor their brands and products on Instagram. Firms, in fact, can post sponsored content on their own profiles, being themselves the source of the communication. Sponsored posts are an influential marketing tool companies can leverage and are defined as "promotional messages that are made to look like the content that other users post from a person's network of friends. They show great resemblance in format and style and are embedded in a person's newsfeed amid regular posts from befriended contacts" (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017).

The most effective way to realize a marketing campaign on Social Networks is probably to leverage both Influencers' posts and company-sponsored posts. The latter, in fact, are very useful as they appear on the feed of the target audience independently by people's intention to follow the brand; the former, on the other side, as it has already been mentioned, are considered more trustworthy and reliable. The commercial nature is, in fact, always evident in content sponsored by companies, while it is less visible in Influencers' posts, and it comes that sometimes can result difficult for people to understand whether a content shared by an Influencer is promotional or not. Since Instagram allows users to look and take part in Influencers' lives, people can think they authentically and spontaneously consume the products being sponsored; it could seem that products are not being promoted but just reviewed (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017).

To protect consumers from the consequences this confusion can have in its extreme forms, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) intervened, making it mandatory to clearly disclose the collaboration between the company and the Influencer. The FTC guideline states, in fact, that Influencers must maintain transparency and follow the regulations which help consumers to identify advertising posts on Instagram (Federal Trade Commission, 2017); this means that they must disclose sponsorship using labels such as "sponsored", "adv", or "supplied". At this point, it becomes even more critical for consumers to perceive that Influencers believe in the

products they are sponsoring in order to avoid the counterproductive effect. In fact, if consumers believe that the only reason behind the Influencer's recommendation is the payment received, they could build a negative opinion of both the brand and the Influencer (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017).

To conclude, Instagram has become a modern and advanced showcase for companies and a way to present their offer to the public, and this goal can be achieved through both a personal account owned by the company and Influencers' profiles. The success of the strategies involving Influencers finds its roots in their ability to generate awareness about brands and, most importantly, influence consumers' purchasing decisions. To properly leverage Influencers on Instagram and make Influencer Marketing campaigns effective on this platform, it is fundamental to understand why and how they can influence people's buying decisions.

2.2 Literature review

Considering the scale Influencer Marketing has assumed in recent years, many academics are trying to deeply investigate the phenomenon; a considerable amount of research is, in fact, being conducted nowadays.

Most investigations are focused on the main character of Influencer Marketing: the Influencer, the third-party endorser who influences a large audience through blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Previous research has mainly focused on how to leverage Influencers to shape corporate brand perceptions (Booth & Matic, 2012), on consumer behavior towards Influencer Marketing (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014), and on how to identify effective Influencers (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). In particular, an effort has been made to identify the features an Influencer needs in order to be effective: visibility, credibility, divided into expertise and objectivity, attractiveness, divided into likability and similarity, and power (Bakker, 2018). The type of Influencer and the related characteristics, in fact, are considered an essential choice in planning a marketing campaign as the attributes that consumers link to the Influencer can have an impact on the effectiveness of the advertising (Wymer & Drollinger, 2014). Also Purchase Intention, defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand", and Brand Attitude, "the evaluation an individual's do of a brand", have been explored (Spears & Singh, 2004) as they are among the most critical objectives of Marketing Communication campaigns and as Influencer Marketing has been shown to have a positive effect on both Purchase

Intention (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017) and Brand Attitude (Jin, Muqqadam, & Ryu, 2019).

Although the literature covers a wide variety of topics related to Influencer Marketing, this review will focus on the most important themes for the object of this thesis.

As it will be better explained later on, the object of this thesis is to explore the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for different product categories, in particular durable and non-durable goods, trying to understand if the intrinsic characteristics of these categories of products lead to a different strength in the effectiveness of the message delivered by the Influencer; also, the framing of the message will be explored as a moderating element. The themes that this literature review needs to explore in order to conduct the empirical research characterizing this study are the process through which Influencers are able to influence and affect consumers' decisions, their effect on Purchase Intention and Brand Attitude, the framing of the Influencer's posts, and the characteristics of the products being sponsored with special attention paid to the purchasing processes related to the different products' categories.

2.2.1 Influencers' effectiveness in shaping consumers' behaviors

As it has already been mentioned, Influencer Marketing is a phenomenon showing an incredible diffusion so that it has been defined as the fastest-growing Online Marketing channel for customers (Vodák, Novysedlák, Čakanová, & Pekár, 2019). The prominent reason firms choose to invest in Influencer Marketing is that it has proven to create 11 times more Return on Investment than traditional advertising yearly (TapInfluence, 2016), and this is possible thanks to the way it is built and the factors it leverages.

Research has shown that Influencers are more likely to be seen as credible and trustworthy than a paid advertisement or company-branded content (Abidin, 2016), and this authenticity leads to lower resistance towards the message communicated (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Consumers, in fact, trust peer consumers more than they trust corporations and are likely to use information provided by fellow consumers to evaluate products and services before they make a purchase decision (Lee & Koo, 2012). Influencer Marketing is considered the most effective way to motivate consumers because it harnesses the power of authentic, meaningful content created by consumers for consumers and, unlike traditional advertising, it is trusted and valuable rather than interruptive and contrived (TapInfluence, 2015). In fact, Influencers are

seen as a more profitable resource than the use of mass media as they can directly reach the company's target audience (Baker & Hart, 2007) and, therefore, brands using them to promote their products can directly communicate to their target through them.

Influencers are not the only means companies can leverage when designing marketing campaigns on Social Networks, as they can also choose to use company-branded content shared from their own profile to share their message (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017); but they are probably the most effective. Influencers are becoming able to timely affect other people's intentions and actions and are doing so in a more confidential way through direct and interactive communication (Kannan & Li, 2017). Content produced by Influencers, in fact, is considered to have more organic, authentic, and direct contact with potential customers than brand-generated ads (Talavera, 2015) and, for this reason, they appear to create more engagement and brand awareness than company-branded posts (Lou & Yuan, 2019), positively affecting purchase behaviors (Alhabash, McAlister, Lou, & Hagerstrom, 2015).

2.2.1.1 Source Models

In previous research, four constructs have been mainly used to understand and measure Social Media Influencers' effectiveness: source credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), source attractiveness (McGuire, 1985), product match-up (Till & Busler, 1998), and meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989).

These constructs, known as *source models*, were initially formulated to understand celebrity endorsement's effectiveness in promoting products and influencing consumers' purchasing behaviors (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008), but were successively found to be proper to explain the Social Media Influencers' effectiveness in shaping consumers' behaviors (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017). The idea at the basis of these models is that the characteristics of a communication source can have a beneficial effect on the way consumers accept and respond to a message (Kelman, 1961).

The *Source Credibility Model* was first developed by Hovland in 1953 and stated that the efficacy of a message is linked to the endorser's perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Source credibility can, in fact, be defined as "a communicator's positive characteristic that affects the receiver's acceptance of a message" (Ohanian, 1990) and consists of two components: trustworthiness and expertise (Sternthal,

Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). *Expertise* refers to the relevant knowledge, skills, or experience the endorser is perceived to be possessing, whereas *trustworthiness* refers to perceptions of honesty, integrity, and believability of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999). According to this model, consumers are more likely to positively evaluate products and brands endorsed by people perceived to be credible (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016); a credible endorser, in fact, generally exhibits a positive effect on consumers' perception (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000) and so the information presented by a credible source can affect consumers' beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Wang, Kao, & Ngamsiriudom, 2017). This is possible because an endorser who is perceived to be trustworthy and expert is able to generate consumers' indifference towards the advertising message, resulting in higher acceptance of the delivered message (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). It comes that Social Media Influencers who are held with high expertise and trustworthiness are viewed as more influential and can better shape consumers' behaviors; in particular, they have a positive effect on consumer Attitude and Purchase Intention (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017).

The *Source Attractiveness Model*, arguing that the attractiveness of the source directly influences the effectiveness of an endorsement (McGuire, 1985), was suggested in a social-psychology study carried out by McGuire in 1985. Three are the components of this model affecting the efficacy of the message delivered by the endorser: *familiarity*, described as the receiver's knowledge of the source through exposure; *likeability*, defined as the affection for the source derived from the source's physical appearance and behavior; and *similarity*, that is the supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message (McCracken, 1989). Among these factors, physical appearance has proven to be particularly effective in changing consumers' opinions and attitudes (Kumar A. , 2010). Physical attractiveness of Social Media Influencers, in fact, is perceived to have a high tendency in driving the acceptance rate of advertising and in capturing followers' attention, leading to a higher consumers' attitude (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017). This is possible thanks to an identification process that leads the receiver to positively evaluate the information delivered by the endorser considered attractive in an attempt to be like the endorser (Cohen & Golden, 1972). However, the impact of source attractiveness on Purchase Intention is yet to be clearly investigated as the research produced until this point is controversial; nevertheless, it can be argued that endorsers perceived as attractive have a positive effect on the attitude towards brand but do not necessarily lead consumers to an action (Kumar A. , 2010).

The *Product Match-up Model* suggests that the efficacy of a message is impacted by the presence of a recognized fit between the endorser, on one side, and the brand, the product, or the service sponsored on the other (Till & Busler, 1998). This fit is linked to the presence of shared attributes between the object of the sponsorship and the endorser (Misra & Beatty, 1990); advertising messages showing a high level of compatibleness between the product and the source have shown, in fact, to be more effective than ones endorsed by less compatible sources (Erdogan, 1999). Moreover, a good endorse-product fit also benefits the endorser as it increases the perceived reliability and appeal, leading to higher perceived expertise (Ohanian, 1990). Conversely, if the fit is not perceived, consumers could consider the sponsorship the result of just the endorser having been paid, with a negative impact on the message's effectiveness (Erdogan, 1999). Also, the perception of a mismatch has a negative impact as it could lead to a vampire effect, meaning that the endorser obscures the sponsorship's object, and consumers cannot remember the product sponsored; they can only remember the endorser (Kumar A. , 2010). An ideal match-up, on the contrary, results in a positive attitude towards the endorsed brand (Kamins & Gupta, 1974) and represents a fundamental element in achieving consumers' Purchase Intention (Shimp, 2000). Thus, a perfect match between the Social Media Influencer and the product sponsored can significantly strengthen the advertising effectiveness (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017).

The *Meaning Transfer Model* states that endorsement can be seen as a movement of meaning from the endorser's professional and personal world to a particular product and has consequently an impact in building consumers' self-image through consumption (McCracken, 1989). Marketers, in fact, believe that consumers tend to purchase products endorsed by their idols as they want to be similar to their heroes (Fowles, 1996). Basically, as the endorsement effect is driven through meaning transfer, an endorser's effectiveness is often based on his ability to convey product meanings alongside the endorsement process (McCracken, 1989). This model is characterized by a three-step process starting with the identification of the values to be transferred to the product and that the products convey and with the pinpoint of the right endorser related to these values; continuing with the product's personality creation based on the symbol moved from the endorser to the product; and ending with consumers identifying the symbolic properties of the product and "transferring them into meanings for themselves by putting them to work in the construction of their self-image" (Kumar A. , 2010). Despite being based on theoretical assumptions, this model has proven to have realistic feedback (Langmeyer & Walker, 1991). There is, in fact, a positive relationship between consumers' Purchase

Intention towards brands endorsed through meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989), and empirical studies have shown that meaning transfer exhibits a correlation on consumer attitude and positively influences Purchase Intention (Peetz, Parks, & Spencer, 2004).

Influencer Marketing has proven to be effective in pursuing different goals that firms consider to be crucial in the new Social Media environment; foster brand awareness, reach new audiences, generate sales, improve brand advocacy, drive lead generation, expand share of voice, manage reputation, and improve customer satisfaction (Bailis, 2020). Among the most widely explored variables Influencer Marketing has been proven to be effective on, it is possible to find Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

2.2.1.2 Brand Attitude

According to what Ajzen and Fishbein stated in their Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), an attitude, defined as "an internal evaluation of an object" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), plays a pivotal role in guiding people's thoughts, influencing their feelings, and affecting their behaviors; an attitude towards a behavior is, in fact, one of the critical determinants of behavioral intentions (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2018).

In the existing literature, several definitions have been provided of Brand Attitude (BA). Kotler and Armstrong, for example, explained Brand Attitude as "an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of a specific brand or product in the market" (Kotler & Armstrong, 1996), while Sheinin, Varki, and Ashley defined it as a "general disposition toward the brand" (Sheinin, Varki, & Ashley, 2011). Basically, Brand Attitude can be seen as an evaluation of a brand or how a brand is generally perceived and what consumers think about it (Spears & Singh, 2004). Consumers are slow in changing their attitudes as these are formed over a period through experiences (Boone & Kurtz, 2001); this disposition towards the brand, in fact, is usually long-lasting and can change with the acquisition of new experiences and opinions by consumers (Solomon, 2009).

Many researchers have studied the effect that Marketing Communication has on Brand Attitude. In a 2005 study, for example, Yoo and MacInnis studied the development of Brand Attitude through both emotional and informative advertising; they found out that ads based on both emotional and informative aspects cause a decrease in consumers' negative feelings and

an increase in positive ones and enhance thoughts about the credibility of the ad, leading to an increase in the overall attitude towards the brand (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). Furthermore, a 2012 research by Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer distinguished Social Media from Traditional Media and found that both have a positive impact on Brand Attitude through Brand Awareness and Brand Image (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). This is something fundamental for companies designing their Marketing Communication strategies, and it is even more important when they are planning to include Influencers. Past research has, in fact, shown that the chosen endorser can have a direct influence on how the brand is seen or the attitude people have towards the brand (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). In particular, Brand Attitude seems to be linked to the credibility of the endorsed, and so his trustworthiness and expertise (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008); this is a fundamental characteristic Influencers' effectiveness is based on (Abidin, 2016) and one of the main reasons why people show lower resistance towards the message communicated trough Influencers than through paid advertisement or company-branded content (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Also source attractiveness and product match-up have proven to be positively linked to Brand Attitude (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017); attractive celebrities or domain experts, in fact, are the key Influencers employed by marketers to build a consumer-brand relationship (Trivedi, 2018).

As it has already been said, attitudes play a fundamental role in affecting people's behaviors. As reported in various studies, Brand Attitude is an established mediator in the relationship between advertising stimuli and several variables, such as Purchase Intentions; thus, the study of the attitude towards the brand is important in marketing to predict consumers' Purchase Intention (Trivedi & Sama, 2020).

2.2.1.3 Purchase Intention

Purchase Intention (PI) is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004) and, according to many studies, it is the function of Brand Attitude (Bennett & Harrell, 1975). Many other definitions have been provided of Purchase Intention; Kuo, Wo, and Deng, for example, defined it as a "tendency" people have concerning the advertised product or brand (Kuo, Wu, & Deng, 2009), while Yoo, Donthu, and Lee described it as "the consumer's propensity of buying the brand in the future" (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). All these definitions agree that Purchase Intention covers consumers' willingness to purchase the advertised product or brand in the near future.

Measuring consumers' intention to purchase a given product is of great interest for companies as it reveals whether the Marketing Communication is effective or not (Bird & Ehrenberg, 1966). According to Morwitz, in fact, Purchase Intention is a widely used tool to assess a strategy's effectiveness and to make predictions about sales and market share (Morwitz, 2014). It is effective in forecasting buying process (Ghosh, 1990) as it is considered a predictor of consumers' actual behaviors (Younus, Rasheed, & Zia, 2015); for this reason, it is also used in academic research as a proxy measure for purchase behavior (Schlosser, 2003). Basically, when managers and academic researchers rely on Purchase Intention, they assume that this will be predictive of subsequent purchases (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007).

Academic research has shown Purchase Intention to be influenced by several factors such as the knowledge of the product being sponsored, an attractive packaging and design, the product's quality and price, but also celebrity and Influencer endorsement and peers' opinions (Younus, Rasheed, & Zia, 2015). In particular, opinions of people in a consumer's reference group have a bearing in the decision to proceed with the purchase or not (Witt, 1969). Moreover, Pornpitakpan found that celebrities as endorses have an influence on Purchase Intention (Pornpitakpan, 2004) and later research stated that this was due to their "symbolic aspirational reference group association" (Kumar A. , 2010). Referring to Social Media, the recommendations of Opinion Leaders and Influencers have a positive effect on Purchase Intention. The perceived realness of these non-traditional stars and the deep connectedness result in higher Purchase Intention of the products they endorse because consumers personally identify with them and try to imitate them (Tran & Strutton, 2014). In accordance, research shows that publicity delivered via blogs can generate higher Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention than publicity delivered via online magazines, simply because of the blogger's credibility (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). Several studies have explored the impact of using an endorser, such as a Social Media Influencer, on Purchase Intention. What has been found out is that the popularity, experience, and beauty of an endorser can affect consumers' intention to buy (Chi, Yeh, & Huang, 2009) and that an endorser's advertising exposure rate can change consumer preferences and attitudes, incentivizing purchasing behaviors (Laroche, Kim, & Zhou, 1996). Furthermore, research shows that leveraging endorsers makes it possible to influence Purchase Intention by transferring consumers' attitudes towards the endorser on the product being sponsored (Chi, Yeh, & Huang, 2009). Also the source credibility has been proven to have a positive effect on Purchase Intention (Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998), as well as a positive correlation has been seen between the source attractiveness, the consumer's attitude,

and his intention to buy (Till & Busler, 1998). In a 2017 study conducted by Djafarova and Rushworth, the impact of Instagram on source credibility, consumer's intention to buy, and social identification was explored. It has been found that people refer to Instagram reviews to reduce perceived risk when making a purchase based on their admiration and trust in their idols; it also emerged that users' trust in Influencers' product reviews is shaped by the Influencer's expertise and knowledge about the products, his attractiveness, and his relevance to users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). These results are in line with those of Lou and Yuan who demonstrate that the informational value of the generated content, the Influencer's reliability and attractiveness, and his similarity to followers, positively influence users' trust in the Influencer's posts, thus enhancing Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

2.2.2 The post framing

A key question for both marketing managers and Influencers is how Social Media posts can be best framed to generate positive user reactions and interactions (Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017). The literature on the topic is scarce, but some research is being conducted, and some has already been carried out primarily in the field of advertising to study the communication effectiveness of different message designs (Mulken, Hooft, & Nederstigt, 2014).

Studies on communication effectiveness in a Social Media context have mainly focused on the essential characteristics of a post, such as the presence or absence of pictures of videos. For example, a 2014 research by Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, and Lebherz suggests that the richness of the content, such as the inclusions of images and videos, raises the impact of the post in terms of likes, and using images and a proper publication time significantly influences the number of comments (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014). Also the message length has been proven to affect performance measures such as the click-through rate (Baltas, 2003). Basically, post appeal, defined as the overall theme of a post, might be a central driver for user interaction (Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017). In describing how consumers' can be persuaded, academics often differentiate between two different approaches to message appeal. The first approach focuses on the emphasis of factual information (Puto & Wells, 1984) and leverages the use of a rational appeal used to induce a favorable attitudinal or behavioral outcome through arguments based on logic and reason (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999). The second approach focuses on emotions and leverages the feelings and emotions that

are experienced while using or owning a product (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Research has shown that the use of emotional appeals has a positive impact on consumers' attitudes (Edell & Burke, 1987) and on recall (Friestad & Thorson, 1986), while rational advertisements are generally better liked by audiences (Golden & Johnson, 1983). The effectiveness of a message approach may also depend on the product type; a rational approach, in fact, seems to be the most effective with utilitarian products, whereas emotions might be more effective with value-expressive products (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). To change attitudes in a favorable way, a match is needed between the message's content and the consumers' motives and needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, Uses and Gratification research, 1973). In addition, according to Sterne, the person sharing the content should adopt a consumer's perspective and only publish those posts that really provide value-added information for the reader (Sterne, 2010).

2.2.3 The product being sponsored

As it has already been mentioned in Chapter 1, the first step in the implementation pattern of Integrated Marketing Communication, named Tactical Coordination, is aimed at establishing harmony among products and communication tools with an emphasis on brand external communication (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Both the product being sponsored and the tool used for the sponsorship assume a crucial role in the success of a Marketing Communication campaign and need to be matched appropriately in order to produce beneficial effects. A difficulty in developing tools that are appropriate for high-level communication goals is, in fact, the belief that sponsorship effects may depend on such things as the type of sponsor and the type of object being sponsored (Olson, 2010). This means that the effectiveness of a Marketing Communication campaign depends not only on the tool used but also on its suitability for the product sponsored. Hence the main goal of this thesis: to understand the different effectiveness' magnitude Influencer Marketing can have on different types of products, specifically durable and non-durable goods.

2.2.3.1 Durable and Non-durable goods

Products can be divided into different categories in accordance with several dimensions; for example, they can be durable or non-durable, leisure or utilitarian, search or experience, consumer or industrial, new or existing. These categorizations are based on three main factors, durability, tangibility, and use (Kotler & Keller, 2012), and are fundamental as each type of product has an appropriate marketing-mix strategy (Murphy & Enis, 1986). Products belonging

to distinct categories, in fact, present differences in the way consumers approach the purchasing decision process (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). According to durability and tangibility, products fall into three different categories: durable goods, non-durable goods, and services (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The distinction that will be considered in this study is the one between durable and non-durable goods.

Both durable and non-durable goods are considered tangible goods, but they differ in the level of durability. Durable goods can, in fact, be defined as "tangible goods that normally survive many uses", while non-durable goods are "tangible goods that are normally consumed in one or a few uses" (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Durables are used repeatedly, and they tend to be higher in price than non-durables; the potential negative consequences of making an incorrect purchase decision may therefore be large for durable goods (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). Reliability, defined as the probability of breakdown during the normal life cycle, is, in fact, a determinant purchase criterion for goods belonging to this category (Jourdan, 2001). In contrast, non-durable goods are usually lower in price and are typically consumed over much shorter time periods; so, mistakes are easily corrected at the subsequent purchase occasion (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). The differences in durability and price level make so that purchase decisions for durable goods are seen as more important to consumers than purchase decisions for non-durable goods; for this reason, the former are often characterized by having high degrees of involvement (Antil, 1984). In deep, the difference between a purchase decision involving durable goods rather than non-durables can be described in terms of product lifetime (Pickering, 1978), availability of credit, the perceived risk, amount of information available (Pickering, 1981), and prior experience (Winer, 1985). These differences lead to different decision-making processes as they are responsible for variation in the amount of pre-purchase information searched, the characteristics and attributes evaluated, and the length of the decision process (Molander, 1998). Research has shown that there are differences in online product information search attitudes and behaviors when consumers look at different product types (Huang, Lurie, & Mitra, 2009). In fact, consumers are likely to spend more time gathering information and evaluating alternatives when they consider purchasing high-involvement durable goods than when they consider purchasing low-involvement non-durable goods (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). Basically, the involvement is higher for durable goods than for non-durables (Jourdan, 2001). In addition, because of the more formal nature of the decision process characterizing durables (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979), the purchase behavior for non-durables

can be considered to be more random as there is more variation in consumers' tastes and the purchase environment (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007).

2.2.3.2 Difference in the decision-making process

When a purchasing decision involves a low-cost item that is frequently bought, basically a non-durable good such as bread or toothpaste, the buying process is quick and routinized; buying a new car, a durable good, is quite different. While low-involvement decisions are characterized by being relatively inexpensive and related to low-risk products, high-involvement decisions are made after carefully considering many factors as they are complex, risky, and expensive (Jain, 2019). The higher the risk in what consumers are searching for, like the economic risk of buying a new car, the more they are engaged in finding information (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2018).

These differences in the decision-making process between durable and non-durable goods make it crucial for marketers to establish harmony among products and communication tools (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Different marketing tools can, in fact, have different effects on the purchase decisions related to products belonging to these categories, and marketers should understand these differences in order to most effectively leverage tools and strategies. A 2015 research by Akbari studying the different impacts of advertising appeals on advertising attitude for high-involvement and low-involvement products, for example, has shown that both the rational and emotional advertising appeals have a positive effect on consumers' Attitude and Purchase Intention; but whereas for low-involvement products emotional appeals have a more significant effect, for high-involvement products rational appeals are more influential (Akbari, 2015). For what concerns endorsement, for example, a 2018 study by Makwana, Sharma, and Phatak, has shown that a significant effect of celebrity endorsement on consumers' buying behaviors exists for both durable and non-durable goods; however, the difference in magnitude has not been explored (Makwana, Sharma, & Phatak, 2018). Moreover, a 2017 study stated that the efficacy of each endorser type varies with the product being sponsored (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). To the best of our knowledge, no research has been carried out yet to explore the difference between high-involvement durable goods and low-involvement non-durable goods in the context of Influencer Marketing.

At this point, strictly related to low-involvement buying decisions, it is important to mention Impulse Purchasing. This is a purchase decision that occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful, and persistent urge to buy something immediately (Rook & Fisher, 1995), which can be seen as an unexpected purchase based on a solid feeling (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2018). Impulse purchases are characterized by an intense or overwhelming feeling of having to buy the product immediately, a disregard for potentially negative purchase consequences, a feeling of euphoria and excitement, and a conflict between control and indulgence (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990). In 1962, Stern identified nine product-related factors that might be influential in conceptualizing impulse purchasing; among these, the low price of the product and its short life (Stern, 1962). This suggests more expensive products and those requiring more time and effort, so a condition of high-involvement purchase, such as durable goods, are less likely to be bought on impulse (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998).

While the relationship between Influencer Marketing effectiveness and product categories has not been explored yet, a few studies have been conducted on the relationship between Influencer Marketing and impulse purchase. In a 2016 research, for example, Instagram usage has been proven to act as a stimulus for impulse purchasing (Xiang, Zheng, Lee, & Zhao, 2016). Moreover, a 2018 study indicates that Social Media Marketing can easily increase the level of impulsive behavior in purchasing, considering that the chances that are presented by Social Media, such as liking, commenting, and reviewing, can help consumers in deciding whether to make the purchase decision (Al-Zyoud, 2018). A 2020 research has shown that, in a Social Media context, Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on people to conduct impulse buying behavior (Wang & Gao, 2020).

2.2.4 Gap in the Research

From what has been said so far, it clearly appears that Influencer Marketing is a powerful tool in influencing consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, two essential variables in predicting future buying behaviors. Despite the mounting interest of academics and practitioners, and even if a considerable amount of research is being conducted on this topic given its relevance in the marketing world, the resulting scholarly work remains partial and fragmented; the Influencer Marketing phenomenon, in fact, has yet to be fully explored, and many facets are still uninvestigated.

Until this point, according to a thematic analysis conducted by Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, and Thrassou, the studies concerning Influencer Marketing have mainly focused on five research themes: source characteristics and consumer outcomes; psychological-related influential factors and consumer outcomes; content attributes and consumer outcomes; sponsorship disclosure and consumer outcomes; and strategic assessment of Social Media Influencers as a marketing tool. The most common antecedents characterizing studies on this topic are: credibility, attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, popularity, prestige, and influential power for what concerns the first theme; inspiration, enjoyability, sense of friendship, similarity, and endorser-product-brand fit for the second theme; product divergence, visual congruence and attractiveness, informative and interactive content, post's commercial orientation, originality, uniqueness, and quality content, for the third one. Moreover, among the most studied consequences, it is possible to find post, product, and Brand Attitude, Purchase Intention, Brand Awareness, image, and trust, Influencer-brand congruence, attitude towards the endorsement or the Influencer, trustworthiness, and expertise (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, & Thrassou, 2021). More specifically, most researchers have focused on analyzing the impact of endorsers' characteristics on the intention to buy, the consumers' attitude towards endorsers' characteristics on Purchase Intention, or the endorser-product fit on Purchase Intention (Makwana, Sharma, & Phatak, 2018). Analyzing the literature, it also appears that Instagram is the most examined Social Network (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, & Thrassou, 2021); this is not surprising as it is the most popular and important platform for Influencer Marketing (Breves, Liebers, Abt, & Kunza, 2019).

Analyzing the literature produced on the topic some unresolved gaps emerged. Among the most crucial ones there is the fact that the role of the product being sponsored onto the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing has not been explored yet. Most of the studies aimed at investigating Influencers' effectiveness in affecting different variables, in fact, considered an indistinct class of products or some specific categories such as fashion (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021), food (Folkvord, Roes, & Bevelander, 2020), or luxury goods (Jin, Muqqadam, & Ryu, 2019). To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies investigating how the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing varies among different product categories, and, for this reason, examining various product categories has been indicated as one of the main future research direction in the content attributes and consumer outcomes area (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, & Thrassou, 2021).

Moreover, analyzing the literature concerning content attributes and consumer outcomes, it emerges that the effect of leveraging Social Norms in the post's framing has not been explored yet. In recent years Social Norms are being employed for commercial purposes and some companies are implementing Social Norms Marketing to stimulate purchase behaviors (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007) but, despite researchers are exploring this field, the use of Social Norms as a marketing tool to frame the Influencers' posts have not been tested.

The aim of this thesis is to be an initial research representing a first step in filling these gaps; its main contribution is to start exploring the Influencer Marketing phenomenon from a new perspective.

2.3 Objective of the Research and Research Questions

So far, it has been done a review of the studies conducted by scholars on how Marketing Communication has evolved thanks to the development of the new Internet technologies, and the topics of Social Media and influencer Marketing have been explored. Special attention has been paid to how Influencer Marketing has changed Marketing Communication and how this tool can help companies reach their goals. In deep, the ways through which this tool impacts Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, and its effectiveness have been explored. Finally, the gaps in the existing literature on the topic have been identified.

The main goal of this study is to deeper explore the Influencer Marketing phenomenon. The aim of this work, in fact, is to constitute an initial research representing a first step in fulfilling one of the main gaps that emerged in the existing literature regarding the impact of content attributes on consumer attitudes: examining the different impact and effectiveness of Influencer Marketing for different product categories.

From the literature, it also emerged that the use of Social Norms in framing an Influencer's post has not been explored yet. This study also wants to constitute a preliminary study to explore how using Social Norms in framing an Influencer's post can moderate the effectiveness of the message delivered by the Influencer.

To fill the overmentioned gaps, this research will measure the difference in the effectiveness of an Influencer Advertising post when the product sponsored is a durable or a non-durable

good, and when the post's caption is framed using or not using Social Norms; the use of Social Norms in the post framing, in particular, will be considered as a moderating variable. To test this difference in the effectiveness, the Influencer's post will be compared to a Social Media Advertising post shared through the profile of the company producing the good sponsored. The effectiveness will be measured through the impact of the Influencer's post on consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

Basically, the aim of this thesis is to test Influencer Marketing effectiveness in influencing Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, to understand whether and how consumers' responses differ according to the product category the sponsored good belongs to, and whether the use of Social Norms in framing the post has or not a moderating effect on the Influencer's ability to impact Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

To conduct this research, an empirical study consisting of a survey will be carried out. The empirical study will be focused on Instagram as this is the most critical platform on which Influencer Marketing is conducted, being used by 89% of sellers who use Influencer Marketing (Krasniak, 2016), and being the top platform companies are planning to raise the investment in (Hootsuite, 2021). The sample will be constituted by people belonging to the age range 18-45 years; these people, in fact, are active on Social Networks, have a high propensity to follow Influencers, and have purchasing power, ability, and willingness. Two product categories will be considered: durable goods and non-durable goods. The vast majority of the products sponsored on Instagram are, in fact, addressable to one of these two categories. Products belonging to these categories differ in terms of price and life length, two characteristics that substantially impact the purchase decision process (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). It will be assumed that consumers are aware of the sponsored purpose of the posts.

Thus, the Research Question this thesis is willing to answer is:

Nowadays, many companies rely on Social Networks, particularly Instagram, to attract consumers and shape their attitudes and behaviors; to pursue these goals, marketing managers are increasingly leveraging Influencers Marketing. The number of Influencers' posts on Instagram is growing day by day, ranging over different types of products, from food, to low-cost t-shirts to high-end sport cars.

Is there any difference in the way Influencer Marketing affects consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention depending on the category the product sponsored belongs to? In particular, has the effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention a statistically

different magnitude for durable and non-durable goods? Moreover, given the importance the post framing has in shaping consumers' responses, has the use of Social Norms in framing the post a moderating effect on this relation?

2.4 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Based on the abovementioned Research Questions, the conceptual model of this research work can be developed. Considering the early discussed literature, it is possible to speculate that Influencer Marketing will positively impact both Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention and that the magnitude of this effect will differ according to the product category the sponsored product belongs to. Moreover, the use of Social Norms in the Post Framing is expected to moderate the main relationship positively.
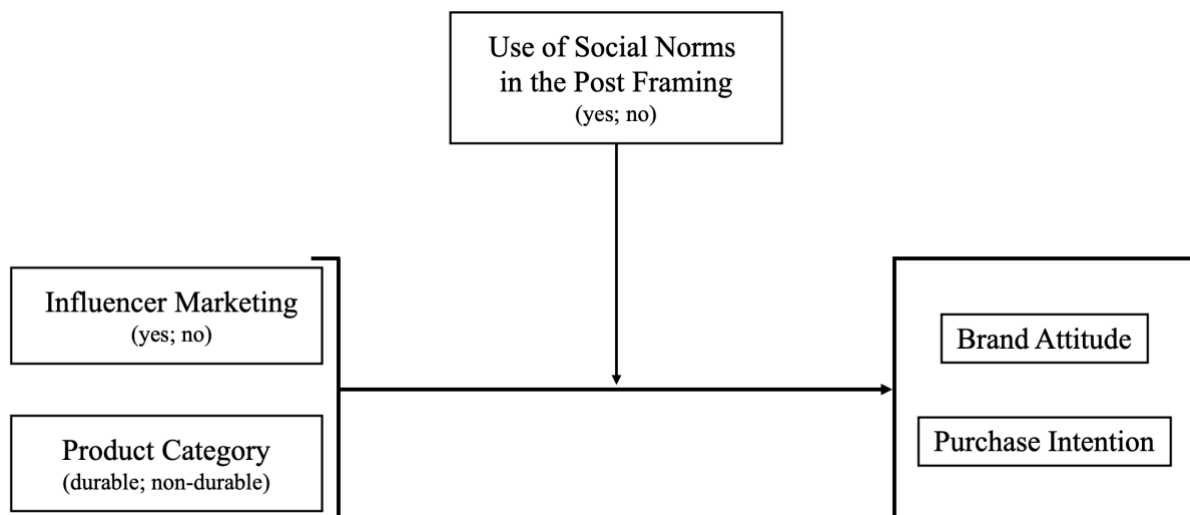
Figure 4 - Conceptual Model; Author's elaboration.

It comes that the Independent Variables considered in the model will be the presence of *Influencer Marketing* and the *Product Category* the sponsored good belongs to. These will be manipulated in order to understand if their interaction has a statistically significant effect on the Dependent Variables, *Brand Attitude* and *Purchase Intention*, thus exploring whether or not the effect of Influencer Marketing on the Dependent Variables varies according to the durable or non-durable nature of the product sponsored. Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention have been chosen as Dependent Variables as they play a fundamental role in affecting people's behaviors; the former, in fact, is crucial in marketing to predict Purchase Intention (Trivedi & Sama, 2020), and the latter is a widely used tool to assess a strategy's effectiveness and to make predictions about sales and market share (Morwitz, 2014). The *Use of Social Norms in the Post*

Framing will be used as a moderator, as it is expected to enhance the main effect of Influencer Marketing on the Dependent Variables for both durable and non-durable goods; consumers, in fact, are more likely to follow a behavior when they perceive this to be following the norms regulating their reference environment (Thorbjørnsen, Pedersen, & Nysveen, 2007).

Previous research has shown that endorsers can have a direct influence on the attitude people have towards the brand (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008) and that Brand Attitude seems to be significantly linked to the endorser's trustworthiness and expertise (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008), two fundamental characteristics Influencer Marketing effectiveness is based on (Abidin, 2016). Moreover, the recommendations of Influencers have a positive effect on Purchase Intention; in fact, the perceived realness of these non-traditional stars and the deep connectedness result in higher Purchase Intention of the products they endorse because consumers personally identify with them and try to imitate them (Tran & Strutton, 2014). As it has already been mentioned, all these studies have been conducted without taking into account the durable or non-durable nature of the product sponsored. For this reason, before measuring the difference in the Influencer Marketing effectiveness' magnitude between the two product categories, it is necessary to check whether the main effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention exists for both the categories examined. Thus, the first questions to be answered and the relative hypotheses are:

Q1: Has Influencer Marketing a positive effect on Brand Attitude for durable goods?
H1: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

Q2: Has Influencer Marketing a positive effect on Purchase Intention for durable goods?
H2: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

Q3: Has Influencer Marketing a positive effect on Brand Attitude for non-durable goods?
H3: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

Q4: Has Influencer Marketing a positive effect on Purchase Intention for non-durable goods?

H4: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

Then, the existence of a statistically significant difference in the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on both Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for durable and non-durable goods can be tested. What is expected is that Influencer Marketing has a stronger effect on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for non-durable goods than for durables. This is because Influencer Marketing has proven to be particularly effective in leading people to conduct impulse buying behavior (Wang & Gao, 2020), and impulse buying has proven to be related to the low price of the product and its short life (Stern, 1962). These two characteristics are the primary identifiers of non-durable goods (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). Thus, the following two questions and hypotheses are:

Q5: Is there any statistically significant difference between the effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude for durable and non-durable goods?
H5: *Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.*

Q6: Is there any statistically significant difference between the effect of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention for durable and non-durable goods?
H6: *Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.*

Finally, the moderating effect of the use of Social Norms in the post framing can be tested. Social Norms are indicators of appropriate behaviors and correct choices, and so can effectively affect decisions and behaviors thanks to group influence (Pliner & Mann, 2004). People, in fact, tend to be largely influenced by perceptions of what is "normal" or "typical" in a given social context and, therefore, they tend to be more likely to follow a behavior when they perceive this to be in accordance with the norms regulating their reference environment (Thorbjørnsen, Pedersen, & Nysveen, 2007). The related questions to be investigated and hypotheses are:

Q7: Has the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing a moderating effect on the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Brand Attitude for durable goods?

H7: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

Q8: Has the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing a moderating effect on the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intention for durable goods?
H8: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

Q9: Has the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing a moderating effect on the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Brand Attitude for non-durable goods?
H9: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

Q10: Has the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing a moderating effect on the relationship between Influencer Marketing and Purchase Intention for non-durable goods?
H10: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

To test the hypotheses above, a quantitative experimental study will be conducted. This will be the object of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

The third chapter of this thesis represents the last mile and the beating heart of this research; in fact, in the following pages, a series of statistical analyses will be carried out to verify the assumptions made.

The chapter will begin by characterizing the research methodology and will continue by describing the variables involved. In particular, the scales and the items used will be explained, and the context and the conditions of the study defined. Then, the data collection process will be reported with an emphasis on the sampling method, the sample size, and the survey structure. The fourth paragraph will focus the data pre-processing phase and, in particular, on the data cleaning process. In the fifth paragraph the preliminary analysis will be reported; a special attention will be devoted to general descriptive statistics, and to the validity and reliability checking of the scales employed. Then, the moment will come to test the hypotheses proposed. Finally, in the last paragraphs, the results, the managerial implications, and the gaps for future research will be discussed.

3.1 Research Methodology

According to Imre Lakatos, the Hungarian philosopher of mathematics and science known for having introduced the concept of "research programme" in his methodology of scientific research, the latter can be seen as a specific activity aimed at contributing to the understanding of a phenomenon (Lakatos, 1978). Marketing research, in particular, has been defined by the American Marketing Association (AMA) as a function able to connect consumers and customers to marketers through identifying and defining marketing opportunities and problems; it has been said able to generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions, to monitor marketing performance, and to improve the understanding of Marketing as a process. Marketing research, in fact, "specifies the information required to address these issues, designs the method for collecting information, manages and implements the data collection process, analyzes the results, and communicates the findings and their implications" (Malhotra, 2020). Based on these definitions, this thesis can be thought of as a *marketing research* on the topic of Influencer Marketing aimed at exploring the phenomenon from a novel perspective to obtain insights valuable to deeper understand its characteristics and effectiveness.

In conducting this research, a *positivist philosophy approach* has been embraced. Dealing with an observable social reality that leads to the formulation of a generalizable law, this approach is based on the formulation of assumptions and hypotheses that can be tested to assess a universal rule and represents the best way to explore social and human behaviors (Kumar, 2010).
This work is consistent with this position as it comprises an observable, objective, social reality, and a research paradigm including verifiable hypotheses to expand knowledge of the phenomenon considered.

Moreover, this study embraces a *deductive approach* since it aims at testing and validating the assumptions done and drawing conclusions that can be generalized thanks to the statistical analysis of the gathered data. This approach is intended to explain the relationship between variables that can be operationalized quantitively, keeping the researcher separate from the observed representations of the phenomenon under investigation; in this way, the principle of scientific rigor can be guaranteed, and results can be generalized (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Consequently, a *quantitative methodology* has been chosen to carry out this research. This methodology seeks to quantify the data and, typically, applies statistical analysis (Malhotra, 2020); it can be considered more accurate and reliable than a qualitative methodology as it provides statistical findings useful to support the study. This approach allows generalizing results from the sample to the population of interest through retrieving and analyzing data from a broad sample. In addition, quantitative research is less costly in terms of time and resources and can provide a reliable predictive understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Babbie, 1990). According to Malhotra, quantitative research has to be preferred when the study's outcome is to recommend a final course of action (Malhotra, 2020); it is the case of this study aimed at providing marketers insights that can support their decisions in the choice of the right Marketing Communication tool.

Since this research is aimed at quantitively measuring a phenomenon, testing hypotheses, and investigating relationships between independent and dependent variables, an *experimental design* has been adopted. To be implemented, this design requires the information needs to be clearly stated, the research process to be structured and formal, and the sample to be large and representative of the population of interest (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

One of the most used methods to collect primary data, especially useful in marketing research, is the *survey*; this is a structured questionnaire given to a population sample and designed to elicit specific information collecting facts, opinions, and attitudes from respondents. The survey method has several advantages: first, it is simple to administer; second, the data obtained are reliable because the responses are limited to the alternatives stated, and the use of fixed-response questions reduces the variability in the results; finally, coding, analysis, and interpretation of data are relatively simple (Malhotra, 2020).

A survey has been chosen for this study as the primary approach to the public and the means to obtain primary data to be statistically analyzed. The specific type of questionnaire used in this research is the *online survey* which can be conducted using the Internet through personal computers and mobile devices. This tool has been chosen because of its advantages, such as the speed and quality of responses collection, the low cost, and the opportunity to gather a considerable quantity of data from respondents located in different geographic areas (Bethlehem & Biffignandi, 2011). Furthermore, online surveys can delete the potential for interviewer bias and allow respondents to answer whenever they prefer making them feel more comfortable and so more willing to collaborate (Malhotra, 2020).

Basically, in this thesis, an experimental study has been carried out to test the hypotheses of the conceptual model previously presented; quantitative data have been collected via an online questionnaire developed through the Qualtrics software and analyzed through the SPSS Statistics analysis program.

3.2 Variables of the study

The goal of this research is to test Influencer Marketing effectiveness in positively affecting Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, to understand whether and how consumers' responses differ according to the product category the sponsored good belongs to, and whether the use of Social Norms in framing the post has or not a moderating effect on the Influencer's ability to impact Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. In practical terms, this research is aimed at measuring the difference in the effectiveness of an Influencer Advertising post, through observing its impact on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, when the product sponsored is a durable or a non-durable good, and when the post's caption is framed using or not using Social Norms.

From this, the variables can be named. As largely explained in the second chapter, the study is characterized by the presence of two Independent Variables, two Dependent Variables, and a Moderator.

The *Independent Variables*, or treatments, are those that are manipulated and whose effects are measured and compared (Malhotra, 2020); these are the presence of Influencer Marketing, and the Product Category the sponsored good belongs to; in particular, their interaction is fundamental for this study. The manipulation of these variables allows understanding if their interaction has a statistically significant effect on the Dependent Variables, thus exploring whether or not the effect of Influencer Marketing varies according to the durable or non-durable nature of the product sponsored.

The *Dependent Variables* are those that measure the effect of the treatments on the test units, the entities whose responses are being studied (Malhotra, 2020). For this study, the Dependent Variables are Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

Finally, the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing will be used as a *Moderator*, as it is expected to enhance the main effect of Influencer Marketing on the Dependent Variables for both durable and non-durable goods.

3.2.1 Scales used

As underlined at the beginning of this chapter, this study represents a quantitative research; for this reason, it is based on numerical and measurable data, and so a measurement process is needed. Basically, it is necessary to assign numbers to variables representing abstract concepts, and this has to be done under specific rules.

In this study, the two Independent Variables and the Moderator, so those factors manipulated through the experimental conditions, are *categorical variables* as they can assume one of a limited and fixed number of possible values, allowing data unit to be assigned to a broad category for classification. Specifically, these are *dichotomous variables* as they can assume only two different values. The Presence of Influencer Marketing can only assume the values "yes" or "no"; the same can be said for the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing; while the Product Category the Sponsored Good belongs to can be "durable" or "non-durable". From each of these non-numerical variables allowing $K = 2$ values, $K - 1 = 1$ dummy variable has been obtained to conduct the statistical analysis.

The process of assigning numbers to variables representing abstract concepts is quite different for the two Dependent Variables of this study, namely Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. These, in fact, are *metric variables* and, to be measured, first have to be transformed into constructs. The latter are theoretical abstractions that generally cannot be observed but can be measured through a scale, a grouping of items progressively arranged according to value or magnitude to quantitatively represent something in a scaling continuum (Malhotra, 2020). In the survey developed to gather data, specific scales have been used to measure the constructs presented in the conceptual model.

To minimize measurement errors, it is fundamental to develop a rigorous, reliable, and valid research tool; thus, it has been preferred to use items belonging to scales already validated and present in the literature. The scales employed to capture Brand Attitude (Mitchell & Olson, 1981) and Purchase Intention (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2013) are composed of three items and are adapted from the literature to better fit this study's context.

All the items employed consist of simple statements easy to be interpreted. Respondents have been asked to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement to these sentences on a *7-point Likert scale* ranging from 1, meaning "completely disagree", to 7, meaning "completely agree", with a middle score of 4, meaning "neither agree nor disagree". A Likert scale has been chosen

as it is a balanced rating scale with an odd number of categories and a neutral point, and as it is easy to construct and administer (Malhotra, 2020).

The scales of the two Dependent Variables and their items are presented in Table 1:

Scale	Source	Item
Brand Attitude	Mitchell & Olson (1981)	I really like the shown brand. My attitude towards the shown brand is positive. I think the shown brand is desirable.
Purchase Intention	Schivinski & Dabrowski (2013)	I would buy the shown brand rather than any other brand available. I am willing to recommend that others buy the shown brand. I intend to purchase the shown brand in the future.

Table 1 - Scales and Items; Author's elaboration.

3.2.2 Context and Conditions

As it has already been said, this research is aimed at testing the effect of two categorical Independent Variables (the presence of Influencer Marketing and Product Category the sponsored good belongs to) on two metric Dependent Variables (Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention), and at verifying the existence of a moderating effect of a categorical variable (the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing).

To test the hypotheses, the study has used a 2 (Influencer Marketing: yes; no) x 2 (Product Category: durable, non-durable) x 2 (Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing: yes; no) *between-subjects experimental design*.

By manipulating the two Independent Variables and the Moderating Variables, the eight experimental conditions shown in Table 2 have been obtained:

Condition	Influencer Marketing	Product Category	Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing
1A	yes	durable	yes
1B	yes	durable	no
2A	no	durable	yes
2B	no	durable	no
3A	yes	non-durable	yes
3B	yes	non-durable	no
4A	no	non-durable	yes
4B	no	non-durable	no

Table 2 - Conditions; Author's elaboration.

As described in the previous chapter, Instagram is the most used Social Network by marketing managers to carry out an Influencer Marketing campaign (Starri, 2021), and the preferred platform for Influencers to share their messages with the audience (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). For this reason, Instagram has been chosen as the general context for this research.

Companies can leverage Instagram to advertise their products both engaging Influencers and sharing posts from their own profiles, being themselves the source of the communication. This distinction is fundamental in the manipulation of the first Independent Variable: the presence of Influencer Marketing.

The manipulation, in fact, has taken place randomly assigning respondents to one of the eight conditions mentioned above, represented by eight different Instagram posts. These posts differ for three factors representing the three manipulated variables: the profile sharing the post, the product sponsored, and the framing of the post. Basically, the three variables have served as a basis for the stimulus material and have been combined into eight different Instagram posts,

one per condition. Therefore, screenshots of existing Instagram posts have been used to create a realistic image, which have subsequently been modified for the purpose of the study.

Respondents assigned to the conditions 1A, 1B, 3A, and 3B, characterized by the presence of Influencer Marketing, have been shown a post shared by an Influencer.

The Influencer chosen is Chiara Ferragni, a well-known Italian Influencer with almost 24 million followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2021), ranked number one by Forbes as Top Fashion Influencer (The Blonde Salad, 2020).

On the contrary, respondents assigned to the conditions 2A, 2B, 4A, and 4B, characterized by the absence of Influencer Marketing, have been shown a post shared by the company producing the good sponsored in the post.

To avoid confusion, in all the shown posts, the commercial purpose has been disclosed; in the posts shared by the Influencer, this has been obtained by using the hashtag #adv.

For what concerns the sponsored good, respondents assigned to the conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B have seen a post sponsoring a durable good, specifically a car, a BMW X3.

Respondents assigned to the conditions 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B, on the other side, have been shown a post sponsoring a non-durable good, a Mozzarella Santa Lucia, produced by Galbani, a famous Italian brand of milk-derived products.

These brands have been chosen because they are among the brands Chiara Ferragni collaborates with. All the posts used in this study, both the ones shared by the Influencer and the ones shared by the company producing the good, are existent posts. In order to use real posts, it has been necessary to find companies Chiara Ferragni had collaborated with and had shared sponsoring posts for, and that also had used their own profiles to advertise their products. This correspondence has been found for BMW and Galbani; the German car manufacturer, in fact, collaborated with Chiara Ferragni to sponsor the BMW X3, and the Italian food brand collaborated with her to sponsor Mozzarella Santa Lucia.

The posts shown represent:
- Chiara Ferragni sponsoring a BMW X3 for conditions 1A (Influencer Marketing, Durable good, Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing) and 1B (Influencer Marketing, Durable good, No Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing)

- The BMW profile sponsoring a BMW X3 for conditions 2A (No Influencer Marketing, Durable good, Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing) and 2B (No Influencer Marketing, Durable good, No Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing)

- Chiara Ferragni sponsoring a Mozzarella Santa Lucia for conditions 3A (Influencer Marketing, Non-durable good, Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing) and 3B (Influencer Marketing, Non-durable good, No Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing)

- The Galbani profile sponsoring a Mozzarella Santa Lucia for conditions 4A (No Influencer Marketing, Non-durable good, Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing) and 4B (No Influencer Marketing, Non-durable good, No Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing).

The captions of the posts shown have been modified to manipulate the variable Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing. The captions of the posts shown to respondents assigned to the conditions 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A have been formulated leveraging Social Norms, while the others have excluded this element. In creating the captions, the style of the profiles sharing the posts has been considered and respected.

The stimuli respondents have been shown corresponding to the eight conditions are shown in Figures from 5 to 12:

Figure 5 - Condition 1A; Author's elaboration.

Figure 6 - Condition 1B; Author's elaboration.

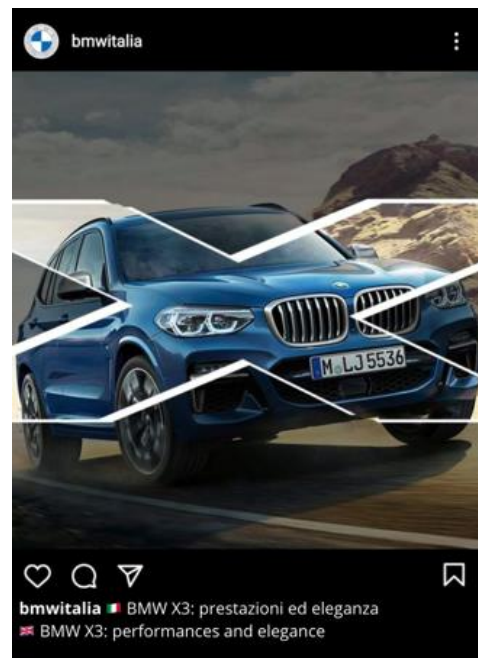*Figure 7 - Condition 2A; Author's elaboration.*

Figure 8 - Condition 2B; Author's elaboration.

Figure 9 - Condition 3A; Author's elaboration.

Figure 10 - Condition 3B; Author's elaboration.

Figure 11 - Condition 4A; Author's elaboration.

Figure 12 - Condition 4B; Author's elaboration.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection can be considered the first step in the quantitative statistical analysis characterizing this study. Usually, for this kind of research, both primary and secondary data can be used, where secondary data are those that have already been collected for purposes other than the problem at hand, and primary data are originated for the specific purpose of addressing the problem at hand. Even if collecting primary data can be expensive and time-consuming, they are more recent, precise, and refined than secondary data; moreover, they are considered more reliable and to better fit the research problem (Malhotra, 2020). For these reasons, it has been chosen to collect *primary data* for this research to create a reliable investigation for the proposed conceptual model. The data have been gathered through a questionnaire created ad hoc for the present study.

3.3.1 Sampling method and sample size

The survey has been developed on Qualtrics, a subscription software for collecting and analyzing data, and has been distributed through an anonymous link sent by personal messages to potential respondents, via WhatsApp and Telegram, and shared on Social Networks, specifically Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. In this way, it has been possible to reach a vast number of people in a short time.

A *nonprobability sampling technique* has been employed to select respondents. Since the data collection method is based on spreading a survey distributed via Social Networks and private messages, the sampling technique characterizing this research is basically a *convenience sampling method*, also presenting some elements of a *snowball sampling method*. Participants, in fact, have been asked to spread the questionnaire via word of mouth.

Convenience sampling attempts to obtain a sample of convenient elements and, when this method is employed, the selection of the sampling units is left primarily to the interviewer. This is the least expensive and time-consuming technique as the sampling units are accessible, easy to measure, and cooperative (Malhotra, 2020). Basically, the only criteria considered in this type of sampling technique are the availability of potential respondents and their willingness to answer the questions proposed in the questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This has made it possible to quickly and easily reach a large number of people, distinguished by different personal characteristics, who have taken the role of participants in the survey drawn up.

To people constituting the potential research sample has not been offered any money reward; each potential participant in the study, after reading the introduction of the questionnaire, in which the topic and the purpose of the study in question have been specified, has been free to choose whether to proceed with the compilation or not.

Between May the 15th and May the 23rd, 754 responses to the survey have been collected. From these, only responses given by Italian people belonging to the age range 18-45 years have been analyzed; these people, in fact, constitute the sample of this research as they are active on Social Networks, have a high attitude to follow Influencers, and have purchasing power, ability, and willingness. Basically, people belonging to this age range represent the 81.5% of the Instagram's advertising audience (Kemp, 2020).

3.3.2 Survey structure

Even if the sample is composed of only Italian people, the questionnaire has been developed both in Italian and in English and, during the survey completion, people have been given the opportunity to choose the preferred language. Also, the conditions respondents have been assigned to are expressed in both languages; the captions of the Instagram posts are, in fact, written in Italian and English as frequently happens in companies and Influencers' sponsoring posts.

The survey developed for this study comprises 23 questions divided into 15 blocks, with an average compilation time of 4 minutes, and can be seen in Appendix A of this thesis. The questions are divided into 13 questions that do not require respondents to provide an answer but have only the function of illustrating the content of the different sections, and 10 closed-ended questions for which respondents are required to select one response option, depending on the kind of question asked.

The choice of only using *closed-ended questions* has been based on the advantages related to this type of question, namely the ease of response for the participants and the speed with which they can conduct the survey. Questions belonging to this category also represent an advantage for those conducting research, as the answers obtained can be quickly recorded and are easily classifiable and usable for the analysis that follows (Malhotra, 2020).

In the first block of the questionnaire, called "Introduction and instructions", an introduction page is shown briefly explaining to people the research topic and asking them to participate in the study by filling the survey. In this section, also information regarding the compilation time and the anonymity of the responses are provided.

Responses, in fact, have been treated confidentially and kept completely anonymous. The choice of maintaining responses anonymous and making so that participants are aware of this is driven by the fact that people usually do not easily express their own thoughts, feelings, and opinion aroused by external stimuli as they are intimidated and influenced by other people's opinions.

The first section is closed by the instruction to follow for taking part in the research, basically carefully looking at the following pictures, reading the captions, and answering the questions.

The blocks from the second to the ninth contain the Instagram posts corresponding to the study's conditions. Before answering questions, in fact, respondents have been randomly assigned to one of the conditions and so have been shown one of the eight posts described and shown in paragraph 3.2.2.

The tenth and eleventh blocks assume the function of *manipulation check* on the two Independent Variables. In block 10, in fact, respondents are asked whether the Instagram post shown is shared by an Influencer or the company producing the good. In block 11, after a brief definition of durable and non-durable good, people are asked whether the product sponsored belongs to the first or the second category.

Blocks 12 and 13 are addressed to measure the two Dependent Variables. The first contains a question on Brand Attitude divided into the 3 items presented in paragraph 3.2.1, and an *attention check* consisting of an instructed-response question. The second contains a question on Purchase Intention; this is divided into 3 items as explained in paragraph 3.2.1. To answer all the questions in these two blocks, respondents have been asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement to some sentences using a 7-points Likert scale.

In block 14 demographic questions are contained. Specifically, respondents have been asked information about their gender, age, nationality, occupation, and level of education. Also, their use of the Social Network has been tested by asking whether they have or not an Instagram account.

Finally, participants have been thanked for their time and their contribution to this study.

3.4 Data pre-processing

Before starting the execution of the statistical analysis aimed at verifying the proposed hypotheses, a data preparation phase is essential to proceed with proper and effective treatment of the gathered data. Data pre-processing can, in fact, be considered the first step of the data analysis process. This consists of a series of adjustments required to organize the information obtained during the data collection phase; the goal is to create a comprehensive data set easily accessible, containing all the information relevant for the research, and that can be effectively used in the subsequent steps of the study (Pyle, 1999).

In particular, data cleaning is a fundamental step in conducting marketing research since any incompleteness, incorrectness, or inconsistency in the data can lead to distortions in results and final findings. Data cleaning can be defined as the process of detecting and correcting or removing errors in the data to get consistent information (Wu, 2013). Basically, it consists of fixing or removing incorrect, corrupted, duplicate, incomplete, or incorrectly formatted data within the dataset.

In conducting this research, the data cleaning phase has mainly consisted of treating survey responses detected as incomplete, provided by people with characteristics different from the sample, and whose presence could have led to distortions of the results.

Between May the 15th and May the 23rd, the window of time during which data were collected, 754 responses have been recorded. The original dataset, containing all the responses, has been exported directly from Qualtrics to Microsoft Excel, and the first adjustments have been made.

The first step has been treating missing responses, those values of a variable that are unknown because respondents have not provided unambiguous answers to the question. This lack of information, also known as item nonresponse, can occur because the respondent refuses, or is unable, to answer specific questions or items because of the content, form, or the effort required (Malhotra, 2020). In this research, the *casewise deletion method* has been chosen to treat missing responses, in which subjects with any missing values are discarded.

Out of 754 responses collected, 589 (78%) were complete. For this reason, according to the casewise deletion criterion, the remaining 165 (22%) responses have been deleted.

The second step has been deleting information gathered from respondents not fitting the sample conditions. Al already said, the sample for this research comprises Italian people belonging to the age range 18-45; only responses provided by people with these characteristics are kept for analysis.

Out of the 589 responses considered after the previous step, 15 (2.5%) were provided by non-Italian respondents, 15 (2.5%) by people younger than 18 years old, and 12 (2%) by people older than 45 years old. These responses have been deleted. After having cleaned the data on the basis of the sample characteristics, the observations in the dataset are 547.

Finally, data have been cleaned based on the attention check. This is considered a simple way to filter out careless respondents and isolate not significant data (Kung, Kwok, & Brown, 2018).

As already mentioned, Block 12 is characterized by the presence of an instructed-response question which is an item embedded in a scale with an obvious correct answer; more specifically, respondents have been said to "select the answer neither agree nor disagree for this line". Because anyone who has read the item should be able to answer it correctly, wrong answers to the indicated-response item are a proxy of inattention (Meade & Craig, 2012) and, for this reason, have been not considered in the statistical analysis.

Out of the 547 responses kept after the previous step, 71 (13%) presented an incorrect answer to the indicated-response question and have been deleted.

At the end of this phase of data cleaning, the number of responses in the dataset was 476; this is the sample on which the analysis aimed at testing the hypotheses of this research has been carried out.

3.5 Preliminary analysis

Once the data pre-processing has been executed and the dataset does not contain incorrect, corrupted, duplicate, incomplete, or incorrectly formatted data, some preliminary analysis can be conducted. The latter is a fundamental step to fulfill before starting the hypothesis testing as it is finalized at describing the sample, assessing the validity and the reliability of the item scales adopted in the study, and checking whether the manipulation has been correctly conducted. Preliminary analysis is essential to verify whether data have been correctly

collected and are ready to be analyzed, and so whether it is possible to proceed with the assumption testing.

All the analyses performed in this study, both the preliminary analysis and the hypothesis testing, have been carried out on SPSS Statistics 26, a statistical software whose license has been provided by Luiss Guido Carli University.

3.5.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics are brief descriptive coefficients that summarize a given data set and help to describe and understand its features by giving short and readable summaries of the sample and measures of the data (Investopedia.com, 2021); basically, they are a method for organizing, summarizing, and presenting data in a convenient and informative way. They do not have any inferential power but provide a general overview of the information obtained.

First, the study sample has been analyzed using the information gathered through the demographic questions. It resulted in being composed of 476 Italian respondents belonging to the age range 18-45. In particular, 60.3% of respondents, namely 287 people, belong to the age range 18-25 years; 22.9%, namely 109 people, belong to the range 26-35; and 16.8%, namely 80 people, belong to the range 36-45. The absence of respondents younger than 18 or older than 45 is because of the data cleaning phase; responses collected from people presenting these characteristics have, in fact, been deleted as they did not fit the sample.
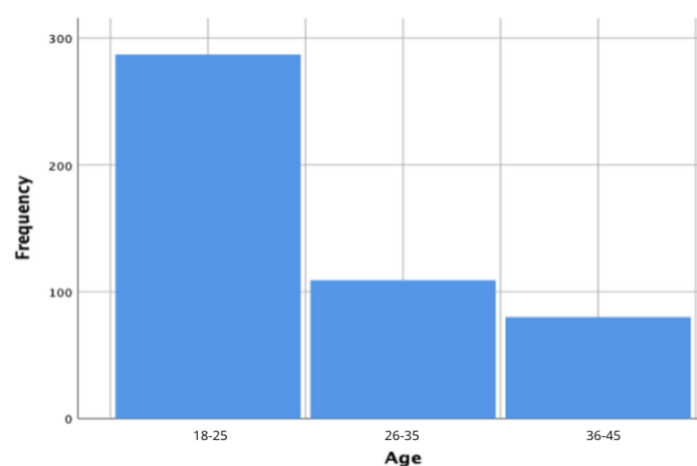
Figure 13 - Sample distribution: Age; Author's elaboration.

For what concerns the gender, 298 respondents (62.6%) are females, 174 respondents (36.6%) are males, 3 have selected the option "other", and only 1 has preferred not to disclose gender information.
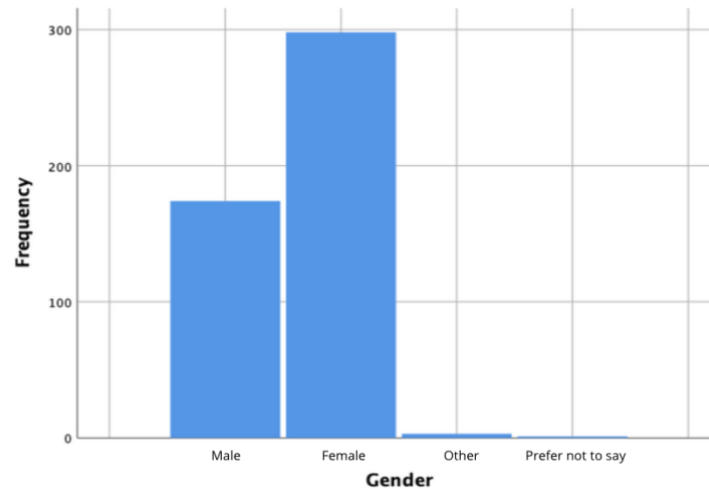
Figure 14 - Sample distribution: Gender; Author's elaboration.

From the data, it is also possible to obtain information regarding respondents' education level and occupation. Only 0.6% of the sample, namely 3 people, have achieved a Middle School Diploma as the highest level of education; while, 28 people, representing 5.9% of the sample, have achieved a PhD. Moreover, 123 people (25.8%) have achieved a High School Diploma as the highest qualification, 154 people (32.4%) have achieved a Bachelor Degree, and 168 people (35.3%) have achieved a Master Degree.
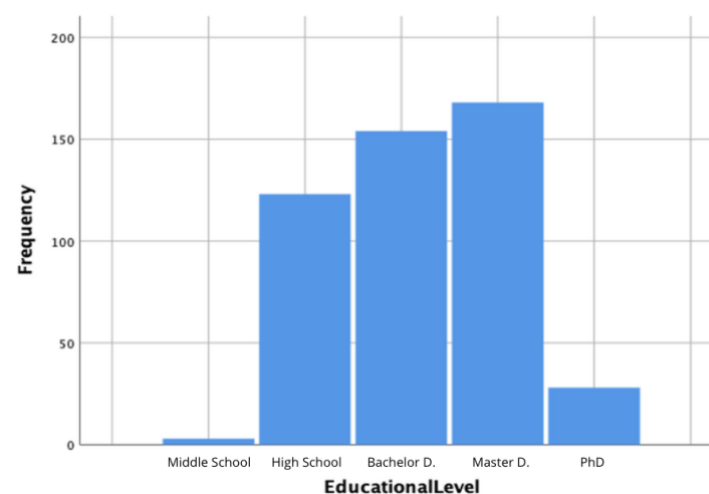
Figure 15 - Sample distribution: Educational level; Author's elaboration.

By observing data concerning occupational status, it emerges that more than half of the sample is composed of students, namely 241 people representing 50.6% of the whole sample. The second class in terms of frequencies is represented by employees accounting for 29.4% of the sample (140 people). Moreover, 14.1% of the sample, namely 67 people, is represented by freelance workers; while 22 people (4.6%) are unemployed and only 1 (0.2%) is retired. Finally, 5 people (1.1%) have selected the option "other" specifying an occupation in the education sector (teaching).
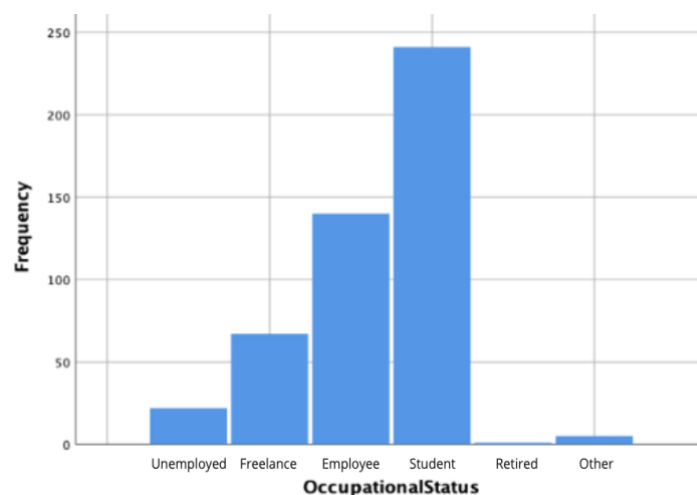
Figure 16 - Sample distribution: Occupational status; Author's elaboration.

Finally, as in the survey people have been asked whether they had an Instagram account or not, respondents can be divided into two groups: 429 people out of 476, representing 90.1% of the sample have an Instagram account; only 47 people (9.9%) do not have an account.
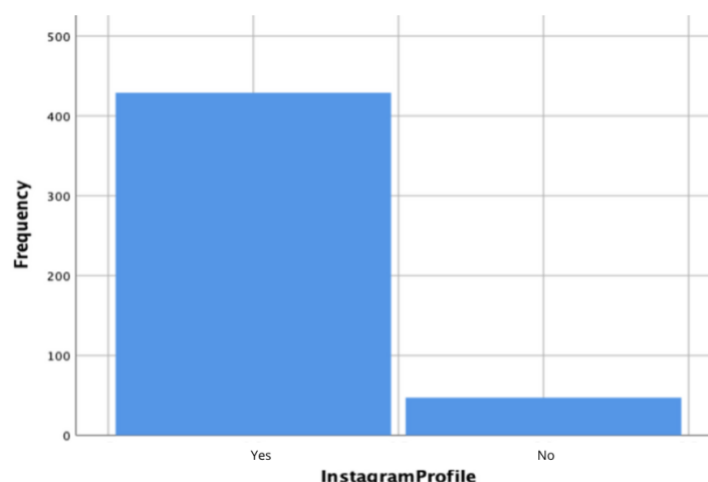
Figure 17 - Sample distribution: Instagram Profile; Author's elaboration.

After conducting a descriptive analysis of the sample, it has been possible to move a step further, so it has been investigated, through a manipulation check, whether the independent variables had been correctly manipulated.

3.5.2 Manipulation Check

A manipulation check is a test used to determine the effectiveness of manipulation in an experimental design. To conduct this test, in the survey, two questions have been formulated, allowing to understand if respondents had correctly perceived the manipulation conducted. After having seen one of the Instagram posts corresponding to the different scenarios, people have been asked two questions aimed at checking the manipulation of the two Independent Variables.

First, respondents have been asked "Based on the picture you have seen before, who shared the Instagram post?" and two options have been presented, namely "an Influencer", and "the company producing the good shown". This question is aimed at verifying if respondents assigned to conditions 1A, 1B, 3A, and 3B have correctly perceived the presence of Influencer Marketing.

To verify this aspect, a dummy variable called "InfManCheck" has been created, assuming value 0 when people have said that the post was shared by the company producing the good, and value 1 when people have said that the post was shared by an Influencer. This has been compared to the Independent Variable "InfluencerMarketing", assuming value 0 when people have been assigned to a condition without Influencer Marketing, and value 1 otherwise. As both the variables are non-parametric, the comparison has been conducted through a Chi-Square test on their frequencies; the Chi-Square statistic, in fact, is used to test the statistical significance of the observed association in a crosstabulation. According to this test, an association between the two variables exists $(Chi - sq(1) = 359.831, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05)$. As the p-value is lower than the alpha level, in fact, the null hypothesis of the test, claiming that there is no association between the two variables, can be rejected.

Moreover, as this is the case of a 2x2 table, the phi coefficient can be used to measure the strength of the association. This test $(Phi = 0.869, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05)$ suggests a strong positive association between the variables analyzed.

This analysis confirmed that the manipulation of the first Independent Variable, the presence of Influencer Marketing, has been successfully conducted.

In addition, a question to check the manipulation of the second Independent Variable, the Product Category the sponsored good belongs to, has been inserted in the questionnaire. Expressly, respondents have been provided a definition of what durable and non-durable goods are and then have been asked "Based on the definition provided and on the previous picture, which option do you consider true?". Two options have been presented to answer this question: "the product shown is a durable good", and "the product shown is a non-durable good". This question is aimed at verifying if respondents have correctly perceived the category of the sponsored good and its characteristics.

A dummy variable called "DurManCheck" has been created to verify this aspect, assuming value 0 when people have said that the good was non-durable, and value 1 when people have said that the good was durable. As in the previous case, this has been compared to the Independent Variable "ProductCategory", assuming value 1 when people have been assigned to a condition involving a durable good (conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B), and value 0 otherwise. According to the Chi-square test, an association between the two variables exists ($Chi-sq(1) = 275.516, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). As the p-value is lower than the alpha level, in fact, the null hypothesis of the test, claiming that there is no association between the two variables, can be rejected.

Also the Phi test ($Phi = 0.761, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) suggests a strong positive association between the variables in analysis.

This analysis confirmed that the manipulation of the second Independent Variable, the Product Category the sponsored good belongs to, has been successfully conducted.

The crosstabulation, the Chi-square test, and the symmetric measure tables related to both the manipulation checks can be seen in the dedicated section of Appendix B.

After conducting the manipulation check, it has been possible to inspect the general validity and reliability of the multi-item scales of the variables Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. As already explained, both the scales used to measure these variables had been pre-validated in previous research; for this reason, examining their validity and reliability can be considered an additional check.

3.5.3 Validity

The validity of a scale can be defined as the extent to which differences in observed scale scores reflect true differences among the objects on the characteristic being measured, rather than systematic or random error. To make this sentence clear, it is fundamental to specify that a systematic error can be thought of as an error that affects the measurement in a constant way and represents stable factors that affect the observed score in the same way each time the measurement is made; on the contrary, a random error is not constant and arises from random changes or differences in respondents or measurement situations (Malhotra, 2020).

To analyze the validity of a multi-item scale, a Factor Analysis has been run through SPSS Statistics in this research. This study technique investigates the construct validity of a multi-item scale; it aims to find underlying patterns in data to identify factors (or components) that can largely explain the observed constructs. Basically, the primary purposes are data validation and reduction (Malhotra, 2020).

In this study, two variables have been measured through a multi-item scale whose validity needs to be investigated: Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. Both the scales have been built employing three items; therefore, the total number of items to examine was six. Being factor analysis a correlation-based interdependence technique, all the items should have been analyzed together, but the sample size was too small to do so. It has to be guaranteed, in fact, that the number of cases exceeds the number of items examined by at least 10 to 1, according to a liberal rule-of-thumb, or 20:1, according to a conservative rule of thumb (Harrell Jr, Lee, & Mark, 1996). For this reason, the items have been grouped based on a theoretical ground in two subsets (one for Brand Attitude and one for Purchase Intention), and the factor analysis has been conducted independently on the two subsets.

In conducting the analysis, three different criteria have been employed to explain the number of factors to be retained: the eigenvalue criterion, the cumulative percentage of variance, and the scree plot.
An eigenvalue represents the amount of variance in the original variable associated with a factor and, in this approach, only factors with eigenvalues higher than 1 are retained as they explain more variance than the average component. Plotting the eigenvalues against the number of factors, a scree plot can be obtained. The shape of this plot is used to determine the number

of factors to retain; this, in fact, is indicated by the presence of an elbow point. Finally, the number of factors can be determined so that the cumulative percentage of variance explained by the factors reaches a satisfactory level, usually at least 60% of the total variance; this is the criterion based on the cumulative percentage of variance (Malhotra, 2020).

To check the validity of the Brand Attitude scale, first, the suitability of data for the structure detection has been investigated through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The first is to indicate the proportion of variance in the variables in analysis that underlying factors might cause. The latter is aimed at testing the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which could indicate that the variables in analysis are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection (Malhotra, 2020). For the Brand Attitude scale, the KMO statistic value is 0.77, which is higher than the adequacy threshold; values lower than 0.6 (some authors say 0.5) indicate, in fact, that the sampling is not adequate. Moreover, according to the Bartlett's test ($B(3) = 1420.495, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), the variables are related and so suitable for structure detection.

Once these initial requirements have been met, the three methods above have suggested to retain one factor; according to the data obtained in fact, it has an eigenvalue higher than 1, namely 2.726, and explains the 90.852% of the variance in the original variable. Moreover, communalities problems have not been detected as all the variables present a value higher than 0.3, that is the threshold for acceptance, indicating that the extracted components represent the variables well.

Thus, the Brand Attitude scale is valid.

The same process has been conducted to analyze the Purchase Intention scale. Also in this case, the KMO statistics ($= 0.699$) and the Bartlett's test ($B(3) = 2617.472, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) indicate that the sample is adequate and that the variables are related, and therefore suitable for structure detection.

Looking at the eigenvalues and the cumulative percentage of variance explained by the factors, it has been found that only one factor has to be retained; its eigenvalue is, in fact, 2.739 and explains 91.303% of the variance in the original variable. Also in this case, communalities problems have not been detected as all the variables present a value higher than 0.3.

Thus, the Purchase Intention scale is valid.

The KMO and the Bartlett's test, the communalities, the correlation matrix, the component matrix, the scree plot, and the table of the total variance explained related to both the variables can be seen in the dedicated section of Appendix B.

To conclude, it is important to mention that factor analysis is a subjective process as the number of factors is subjectively determined and understood; for this reason, there are no correct or incorrect results. Once that the validity of the multi-item scales had been assessed, their reliability has been investigated.

3.5.4 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which a scale produces consistent results if repeated measurements are made and so can be thought of as the degree to which measures are free from random error; systematic sources of error, in fact, do not have an adverse impact on reliability as they affect the measurement in a constant way without leading to inconsistency (Malhotra, 2020).

Reliability is assessed by determining the proportion of systematic variation in a scale. This is done by observing the association between scores obtained from different scale administrations; if the association is high, the scale yields consistent results and is therefore reliable (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

In this research, to assess the scales' reliability, a Cronbach's Alpha analysis has been conducted. Cronbach's Alpha, in fact, measures the average of all possible split-half coefficients resulting from different splittings of the scale items and so indicates the internal reliability of multi-item scales. This coefficient varies from 0 to 1, and a value of 0.6 or less generally indicated unsatisfactory internal consistency reliability while values larger than 0.8 are considered very good, and values larger than 0.9 are considered excellent (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Analyzing the reliability of the Brand Attitude scale, it has been found that its Cronbach's Alpha is equal to 0.949, which represents excellent reliability. Moreover, looking at the item-total statistics table, it has been found that there are no items whose exclusion leads to an increase in reliability.
Thus, the Brand Attitude scale is reliable.

Moving to the Purchase Intention scale, an even higher level of reliability has been detected as the Cronbach's Alpha of this scale is 0.950. However, it has been noticed that not including the third item, namely PurchaseIntetion_3, in the scale further increases the alpha value; the Cronbach's Alpha of the scale when the third item is removed becomes, in fact, 0.996.

Thus, the Purchase Intention scale is reliable.

The reliability statistics, the inter-item correlation matrix, and the table of the item-total statistics related to both the variables can be seen in the dedicated section of Appendix B.

Once that the reliability of the two scales has been assessed, two new variables have been created to quantitatively represent Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention in the following hypothesis testing. The Cronbach's Alpha methodology, in fact, involves the generation of a new variable that is the average of the original ones included in the analysis.

To represent Brand Attitude, a new variable has been created, called "BrandAttitude_mean", by the average of the three items BrandAttitude_1 (corresponding to people's agreement to the sentence "I really like the shown brand" in the survey), BrandAttitude_2 (corresponding to people's agreement to the sentence "My attitude towards the shown brand is positive" in the survey), and BrandAttitude_3 (corresponding to people's agreement to the sentence "I think the shown brand is desirable" in the survey). The obtained variable has a mean value of 5.112 and a standard deviation of 1.531.

The same process has been done to represent Purchase Intention. A new variable has been created, called "PurchaseIntention_mean", by the average of the two items retained: PurchaseIntention_1 (corresponding to people's agreement to the sentence "I would buy the shown brand rather than any other brand available" in the survey), and PurchaseIntention_2 (corresponding to people's agreement to the sentence "I am willing to recommend that others buy the shown brand" in the survey).

Once the data pre-processing had been completed and the preliminary analysis had been carried out, it has been possible to go through the hypothesis testing.

3.6 Hypothesis testing

As already mentioned, the goal of this thesis is to test Influencer Marketing effectiveness in influencing Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for both durable and durable goods, to detect

a difference in the effect of Influencer Marketing between the two categories of product, and to investigate the Moderating effect on the Use of Social Norms in the Framing of the Post. The Research Question this thesis is willing to answer is:

Is there any difference in the way Influencer Marketing affects consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention depending on the category the product sponsored belongs to? In particular, has the effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention a statistically different magnitude for durable and non-durable goods? Moreover, given the importance the post framing has in shaping consumers' responses, has the use of Social Norms in framing the post a moderating effect on this relation?

To answer this question and test the hypotheses presented in the second chapter, descriptive statistics, one-way, and two-way ANOVA analyses of variance have been employed, setting a significance level of 95% ($p = 0.05$). ANOVA is a statistical technique for examining the differences among means for two or more populations (Malhotra, 2020). It has been used to test the difference in the mean of the two metric Dependent Variables, namely Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, among the different combinations of factors, the categorical Independent Variables.

The variables employed in the hypothesis testing are five. Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, the two Dependent Variables, have been obtained through the process explained in the previous paragraph and are named "BrandAttitude_mean" and "PurchaseIntention_mean". The three categorical variables are dichotomic. The presence of Influencer Marketing is represented by the variable "InfluencerMarketing", assuming value 0 when respondents have been assigned to a condition without Influencer Marketing (conditions 2A, 2B, 4A, and 4B), and value 1 otherwise. The Product Category the sponsored good belongs to is represented by the variable "ProductCategory", assuming value 1 when respondents have been assigned to a condition involving a durable good (conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B), and value 0 otherwise. Finally, the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing is represented by the variable "UseofSocialNorms", assuming value 1 when respondents have been assigned to a condition involving a post framed with the use of Social Norms (conditions 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A), and value 0 otherwise.

Below are the analyses conducted and the results for each hypothesis, while the tables can be found in the dedicated section of Appendix B.

H1: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

To test this hypothesis, a subset of the entire dataset has been employed. In fact, since this assumption refers only to durable goods, the responses provided by people who have seen Instagram posts sponsoring a durable good have been considered in the analysis; basically, this means considering the subjects assigned to conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B ($ProductCategory = 1$).

On this data, a one-way ANOVA has been run with BrandAttitude_mean as the Dependent Variable and InfluencerMarketing as the factor.

First, the homoscedasticity assumption has been verified; in fact, one of the assumptions to conduct ANOVA is that the variances of each group are approximately equal. This has been checked through the Levene's test of homogeneity of variances (H0: variances of groups are equal). The Levene's test ($F(1,244) = 0.397, p = 0.529 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown that the variances of the groups are equal; thus, it has been possible to proceed with the analysis.

The ANOVA test ($F(1,244) = 27.929, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude. Respondents who have seen an Instagram post shared by an Influencer ($InfluencerMarketing = 1$) have reported higher values of Brand Attitude ($M = 5.887, SD = 1.046$) than those who have seen an Instagram post shared by the company producing the good sponsored ($M = 5.140, SD = 1.134$) and this difference is statistically significant.

It is possible to conclude that Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good, thus confirming the first hypothesis.

H2: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

As in the previous case, to test this hypothesis, only data of subjects assigned to conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B ($ProductCategory = 1$) have been considered in the analysis; this is because this assumption refers only to durable goods.

On this data, a one-way ANOVA has been run with PurchaseIntention_mean as the Dependent Variable and InfluencerMarketing as the factor.

First, the homoscedasticity assumption has been verified. The Levene's test $(F(1,244) = 1.182, p = 0.278 > \alpha = 0.05)$ has shown that the variances of the groups are equal; thus, it has been possible to proceed with the analysis.

The ANOVA test $(F(1,244) = 24.860, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05)$ has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention. Respondents who have seen an Instagram post shared by an Influencer $(InfluencerMarketing = 1)$ have reported higher values of Purchase Intention $(M = 5.321, SD = 1.067)$ than those who have seen an Instagram post shared by the company producing the good sponsored $(M = 4.550, SD = 1.292)$ and this difference is statistically significant.

It is possible to conclude that Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good, thus confirming the second hypothesis.

H3: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

Also to test this hypothesis, a subset of the entire dataset has been employed. In fact, since this assumption refers only to non-durable goods, the responses provided by people who have seen Instagram posts sponsoring a non-durable good have been considered in the analysis; basically, this means considering the subjects assigned to conditions 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B $(ProductCategory = 0)$.

On this data, a one-way ANOVA has been run with BrandAttitude_mean as the Dependent Variable and InfluencerMarketing as the factor.

First, the homoscedasticity assumption has been verified. The Levene's test $(F(1,228) = 3.045, p = 0.082 > \alpha = 0.05)$ has shown that the variances of the groups are equal; thus, it has been possible to proceed with the analysis.

The ANOVA test $(F(1,228) = 372.102, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05)$ has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude. Respondents who have seen an Instagram post shared by an Influencer $(InfluencerMarketing = 1)$ have reported higher values of Brand Attitude $(M = 6.132, SD = 1.007)$ than those who have seen an Instagram post shared by the company producing the good sponsored $(M = 3.333, SD = 1.187)$ and this difference is statistically significant.

It is possible to conclude that Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good, thus confirming the third hypothesis.

H4: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

As in the previous case, also to test this hypothesis, only data of subjects assigned to conditions 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B ($ProductCategory = 0$) have been considered in the analysis; this is because this assumption refers only to non-durable goods.

On this data, a one-way ANOVA has been run with PurchaseIntention_mean as the Dependent Variable and InfluencerMarketing as the factor.

First of all, the homoscedasticity assumption has been verified. The Levene's test ($F(1,228) = 4.372, p = 0.038 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown that the variances of the groups are not equal, but the p-value is close to the significance threshold. For this reason, homoscedasticity has been further investigated on a median basis. This test ($F(1,228) = 2.262, p = 0.134 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown that the variances can be considered equal; thus, it has been possible to proceed with the analysis.

The ANOVA test ($F(1,228) = 333.812, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention. Respondents who have seen an Instagram post shared by an Influencer ($InfluencerMarketing = 1$) have reported higher values of Purchase Intention ($M = 5.672, \ SD = 1.032$) than those who have seen an Instagram post shared by the company producing the good sponsored ($M = 3.044, \ SD = 1.148$) and this difference is statistically significant.

It is possible to conclude that Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good, thus confirming the fourth hypothesis.

H5: *Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.*

To test this hypothesis, the entire dataset has been used. On this data, a two-way ANOVA has been conducted to compare the main effects of InfluencerMarketing and ProductCategory as well as their interaction effect on BrandAttitude_mean.

First of all, the homoscedasticity assumption has been verified. The Levene's test ($F(3,472) = 1.242, p = 0.294 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown that the variances of the groups are equal; thus, it has been possible to proceed with the analysis.

Before checking the main and interaction effects, also the model fit has been assessed ($F(3,472) = 150.595, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).

InfluencerMarketing and ProductCategory effects have proven to be statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. The main effect of InfluencerMarketing yields an effect size of 0.394, indicating that 39.4% of the variance in BrandAttitude_mean is explained by Influencer Marketing ($F(1,472) = 306.633, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). The main effect of ProductCategory yields an effect size of 0.112, indicating that the Product Category explains 11.2% of the variance in BrandAttitude_mean   ($F(1,472) = 59.507, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).   Moreover,   the interaction effect InfluencerMarketing*ProductCategory has proven to be significant ($F(1,472) = 102.784, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), indicating that there is a combined effect for Influencer Marketing and Product Category on Brand Attitude.

Mean values have been compared to understand how Influencer Marketing's effect changes for durable and non-durable goods, as shown in Figure 18.
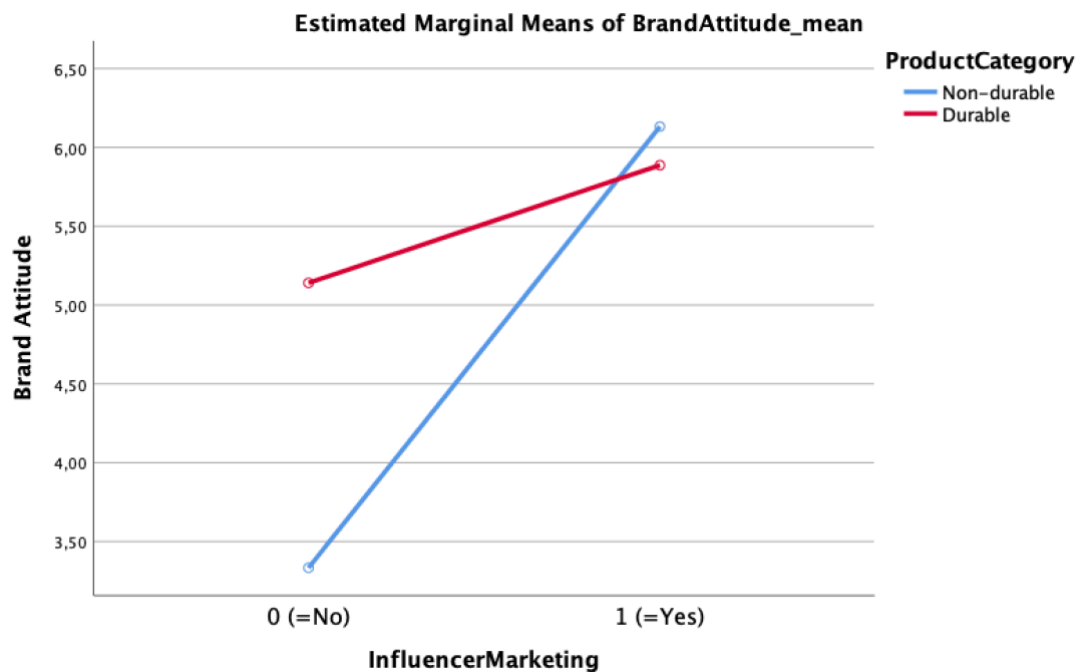

*Figure 18 - Interaction effect: Influencer Marketing*Product Category on Brand Attitude; Author's elaboration.*

Lines are not parallel, supporting the presence of a significant interaction effect.

Brand Attitude for non-durable goods (blue line) is significantly higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 6.132,\ SD = 1.007$) compared to the case where there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 3.333,\ SD = 1.187$). For durable goods (red line), Influencer Marketing has a positive effect, too. Brand Attitude for durable goods is higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.887,\ SD = 1.046$) compared to the case where there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.140,\ SD = 1.134$).

The graph shows that the increment of Brand Attitude is much higher in the case of non-durable goods. It is possible to conclude that Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good, thus confirming the fifth hypothesis.

H6: *Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.*

Similarly to H5, to test this hypothesis, the entire dataset has been used. On this data, a two-way ANOVA has been conducted to compare the main effects of InfluencerMarketing and ProductCategory as well as their interaction effect on PurchaseIntention_mean.

First, the homoscedasticity assumption has been verified. The Levene's test ($F(3,472) = 1.895, p = 0.130 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown that the variances of the groups are equal; thus, it has been possible to proceed with the analysis.

Before checking the main and interaction effects, also the model fit has been assessed ($F(3,472) = 117.245, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).

InfluencerMarketing and ProductCategory effects have proven to be statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. The main effect of InfluencerMarketing yields an effect size of 0.353, indicating that 35.3% of the variance in PurchaseIntention_mean is explained by Influencer Marketing ($F(1,472) = 257.687, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). The main effect of ProductCategory yields an effect size of 0.059, indicating that 5.9% of the variance in PurchaseIntention_mean is explained by the Product Category ($F(1,472) = 29.723, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Moreover, the interaction effect InfluencerMarketing*ProductCategory has proven to be significant ($F(1,472) = 76.968, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), indicating that there is a combined effect for Influencer Marketing and Product Category on Purchase Intention.

To understand how Influencer Marketing's effect changes for durable and non-durable goods, mean values have been compared, as shown in Figure 19.
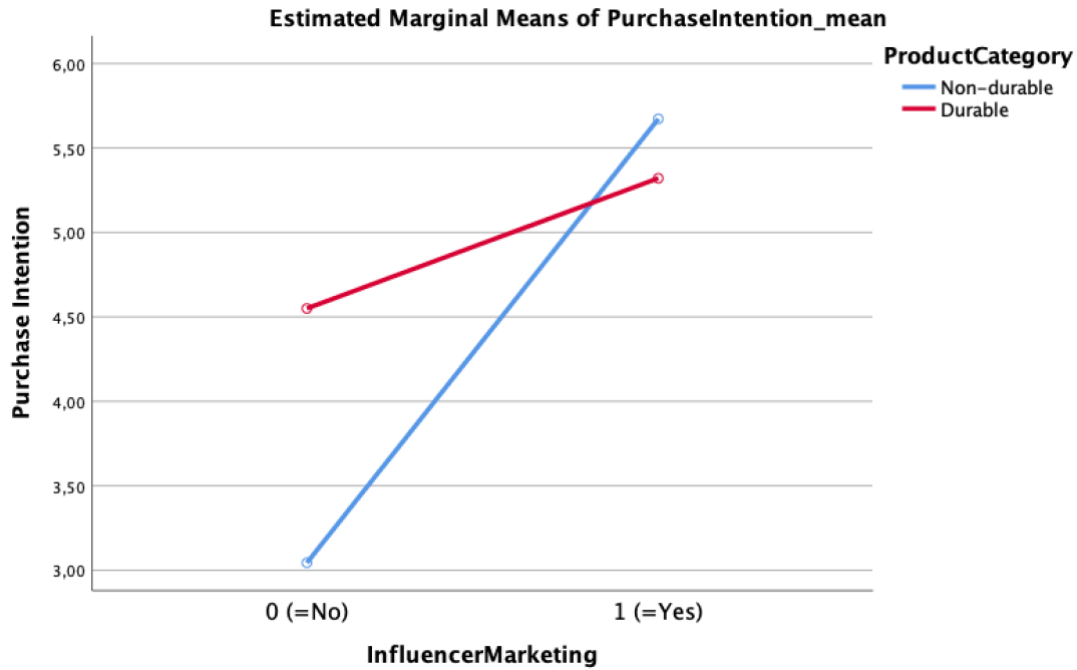
Figure 19 - Interaction effect: Influencer Marketing*Product Category on Purchase Intention; Author's elaboration.

Lines are not parallel, supporting the presence of a significant interaction effect.

Purchase Intention for non-durable goods (blue line) is significantly higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.672$, $SD = 1.032$) compared to the case where there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 3.044$, $SD = 1.147$). For durable goods (red line), Influencer Marketing has a positive effect, too. Purchase Intention for durable goods is higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.321$, $SD = 1.067$) compared to the case where there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 4.550$, $SD = 1.292$).

The graph shows that the increment of Purchase Intention is much higher in the case of non-durable goods. It is possible to conclude that Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good, thus confirming the sixth hypothesis.

H7: ***The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.***

As for H1 and H2, only subjects assigned to conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B ($ProductCategory = 1$) have been considered.

A two-way ANOVA has been performed using InfluencerMarketing and UseofSocialNorms as factors, and BranAttitude_mean as the dependent variable.

The Levene's test ($F(3,242) = 1.445, p = 0.230 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown the applicability of the model.

Before checking the main and interaction effects, also the model fit has been assessed ($F(3,242) = 9.791, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).

The main effect of InfluencerMarketing on Brand Attitude is significant ($F(1,242) = 26.917, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) as expected given H1. The test has not revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,242) = 0.007, p = 0.935 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction term InfluencerMarketing*UseofSocialNorms ($F(1,242) = 1.433, p = 0.232 > \alpha = 0.05$).

This means that the moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing cannot be confirmed, thus rejecting the seventh hypothesis.

H8: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

As for the previous hypothesis, only subjects assigned to conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B ($ProductCategory = 1$) have been considered.

A two-way ANOVA has been performed using InfluencerMarketing and UseofSocialNorms as factors, and PurchaseIntention_mean as the dependent variable.

The Levene's test ($F(3,242) = 1.348, p = 0.259 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown the applicability of the model.

Before checking the main and interaction effects, also the model fit has been assessed ($F(3,242) = 8.899, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).

The main effect of InfluencerMarketing on Purchase Intention is significant ($F(1,242) = 24.433, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) as expected given H2. The test has not revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,242) = 0.425, p = 0.515 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction term InfluencerMarketing*UseofSocialNorms ($F(1,242) = 1.179, p = 0.279 > \alpha = 0.05$).

This means that the moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing cannot be confirmed, thus rejecting the eighth hypothesis.

H9: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

As for H3 and H4, only subjects assigned to conditions 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B ($ProductCategory = 0$) have been considered.

A two-way ANOVA has been performed using InfluencerMarketing and UseofSocialNorms as factors, and BranAttitude_mean as the dependent variable.

The Levene's test ($F(3,226) = 1.375, p = 0.251 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown the applicability of the model.

Before checking the main and interaction effects, also the model fit has been assessed ($F(3,226) = 124.767, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).

The main effect of InfluencerMarketing on Brand Attitude is significant ($F(1,226) = 360.682, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) as expected given H3. The test has not revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,226) = 0.912, p = 0.341 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction term InfluencerMarketing*UseofSocialNorms ($F(1,226) = 1.205, p = 0.274 > \alpha = 0.05$).

This means that the Moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing cannot be confirmed, thus rejecting the ninth hypothesis.

H10: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

As for the previous hypothesis, only subjects assigned to conditions 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B ($ProductCategory = 0$) have been considered.

A two-way ANOVA has been performed using InfluencerMarketing and UseofSocialNorms as factors, and PurchaseIntention_mean as the dependent variable.

The Levene's test ($F(3,226) = 1.801, p = 0.148 > \alpha = 0.05$) has shown the applicability of the model.

Before checking the main and interaction effects, also the model fit has been assessed ($F(3,226) = 110.826, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$).

The main effect of InfluencerMarketing on Purchase Intention is significant ($F(1,226) = 324.413, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) as expected given H4. The test has not revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,226) = 0.525, p = 0.469 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the

interaction term InfluencerMarketing*UseofSocialNorms $(F(1,226) = 0.132, p = 0.716 > \alpha = 0.05)$.

This means that the Moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing cannot be confirmed, thus rejecting the tenth hypothesis.

3.7 Discussion and managerial implications

Although many researchers are investigating the Influencer Marketing phenomenon, until today, no studies have explored how the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing varies among different product categories and whether the framing of the post impacts this effectiveness. This research has been conducted to fill this gap and to explore this phenomenon from a new perspective. The aim of this thesis, in fact, was to test Influencer Marketing effectiveness in influencing Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, to understand whether and how consumers' responses differ according to the product category the sponsored good belongs to, in particular, according to its durable or non-durable nature, and whether or not the use of Social Norms in framing the post has a moderating effect on the Influencer's ability to impact Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

The results obtained are summarized in the Table 3.

Hypothesis	Verified/Rejected
H1: Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.	verified
H2: Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.	verified
H3: Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.	verified
H4: Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.	verified

H5: Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.	verified
H6: Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.	verified
H7: The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.	rejected
H8: The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.	rejected
H9: The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.	rejected
H10: The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.	rejected

Table 3 - Results; Author's elaboration.

The findings show that posts shared by an Influencer on Instagram evoke higher scores for Purchase Intention and Brand Attitude than posts shared by the company producing the sponsored product. Influencer Marketing has proven effective in enhancing consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for both durable and non-durable goods, thus confirming hypotheses from one to four. The mean values of both the dependent variables were, in fact, significantly higher for people assigned to conditions involving Influencer Marketing.

By the way, the magnitude of this positive effect has been shown to differ between the two product categories. The effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, in fact, has proven to significatively interact with the product category the sponsored good belongs to in impacting the two Dependent Variables. Specifically, the effect Influencer

Marketing has on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention is stronger when the sponsored product is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good, thus confirming the fifth and sixth hypotheses.

On the other side, the Use of Social Norms in the post framing has not shown a significant effect on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention; also, its interaction with Influencer Marketing has not proven to be significant. For this reason, the Moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing cannot be claimed, thus rejecting the hypotheses from seven to ten.

This research provides insights to marketing managers interested in leveraging Influencer Marketing in their integrated communication strategies.

The size of this phenomenon is growing at an incredible pace; Influencer Marketing is becoming increasingly popular, with around 86% of the firms having engaged Influencers to promote their products in 2017 (Linqia, 2017). This growth is proven by the fact that Influencer Marketing value moved from 1.7 billion dollars in 2016, to 4.6 billion dollars in 2018, to 9.7 billion dollars in 2020, and it is forecasted to reach 13.8 billion dollars by the end of 2021 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021).

Considering how fast this phenomenon is evolving, to implement Marketing Communication strategies leveraging Social Networks and involving Influencers, companies need some guidelines; academic research is crucial to fulfilling this role.

Existing research aimed at exploring Influencer Marketing effectiveness has considered an indistinct class of products, but companies produce and sell specific goods with distinct characteristics. For this reason, it is crucial to approach the problem from a new perspective: that of the product being sponsored. This research represents the first step in this direction.

From the results obtained, it emerged that leveraging Influencer Marketing is effective to enhance consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention both when the products sponsored is a durable good and when it is a non-durable good. By the way, this effectiveness has proven to be higher for non-durable goods. This means that, while Influencer Marketing is an effective tool for companies producing goods belonging to both the categories considered, it is especially beneficial for firms producing non-durable goods.

To conclude, marketing managers designing strategies for companies producing this kind of products should integrate the findings of this study into their strategies to enhance their companies' communication and performances. The main recommendation is to consider Influencer Marketing as a fundamental part of an Integrated Marketing Communication strategy, particularly for companies producing non-durable goods.

3.8 Limitations and gap for future research

Once that the main results of this study have been discussed, and their relevance for practical purposes has been explained, it is fundamental to define some limitations and possible directions for future research on the topic.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, a non-probability method has been employed for the sample selection to conduct this study. The sampling technique characterizing this research, in fact, is basically a convenience sampling method, also presenting some elements of a snowball sampling method. Although the number of responses collected is high, a non-probability technique cannot guarantee the sample to be representative of the population as it is characterized by selection bias. For this reason, the study should be replicated in the future by applying a probability sampling method to make the results obtained generalizable to the entire population.

Furthermore, the fact that the study focuses only on Italian consumers highlights another limitation. Therefore, future research could include respondents of different nationalities to obtain a more heterogeneous sample and results generalizable on a larger scale.

The main limitation of this study is concerned with the creation of the eight conditions respondents have been assigned to.

To make the study adherent to the real world and obtain results the more similar as possible to those achievable through a field study, it has been chosen to use existent Instagram posts, i.e. pieces of content actually shared on the platform.

In particular, Chiara Ferragni's posts have been employed to represent the Influencer Marketing conditions as, given her success, she can be considered a representative of the entire category. On the other side, in manipulating the second Independent Variable, the Product Category, posts sponsoring a Mozzarella Santa Lucia, produced by Galbani, have been chosen to represent non-durable goods, and posts sponsoring a BMW X3 to represent durable goods.

This choice has contributed to making the research more realistic, but at the same time, is responsible for the main limitation characterizing this study. The use of a known Influencer, and in particular of existing brands, in fact, could have influenced people's opinions and attitudes. In particular, Brand Attitude could have been influenced by respondents' previous experiences with the brands.

To address and mitigate this effect, future research could replicate this study employing fictitious Influencers and brands and could compare the results obtained with the present study's ones. In this way, an estimation of this possible undesirable effect can be obtained, and a more realistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation depicted.

This research constitutes a study aimed at paving the way for investigating the Influencer Marketing phenomenon from a new perspective, but there is still a long way to go in order to fill the gap existing in the literature.

Following the path indicated by this study, future research could explore other product categories. For example, Influencer Marketing effectiveness for utilitarian and leisure goods could be investigated and compared, as well as for luxury and non-luxury goods, experience and search goods, or new and existing goods.

Moreover, a conceptual model involving the features characterizing these product categories could be built to investigate which of those have a mediating effect on the main relationship. This could be helpful in identifying the specific product characteristics that can lead to a difference in the Influencer Marketing effectiveness and could generate useful and immediately applicable managerial insights.

Finally, given the stunning results Influencer Marketing is obtaining, also companies selling services are leveraging Influencers. Thus, also a comparison between products and services could be an interesting object for future research.

CONCLUSION

Influencer Marketing can be considered one of the most relevant phenomena characterizing the Marketing Communication scenario of the 21st century. It is a powerful tool companies are leveraging to reach several goals: from increasing consumers' Brand Attitude and Awareness, to lowering their resistance towards the message communicated, to enhancing their Willingness to Buy.

Given its importance and considering the social and economic size it is assuming, academic research is fundamental to explore new and hidden aspects of this phenomenon. Although many studies on the topic are being conducted, several aspects still remain unexplored. This thesis has been produced with the goal of enhancing knowledge on the topic; in fact, even if the way to go is still long, this study is aimed at laying the groundwork for future research ideas, and at paving the way for investigating the Influencer Marketing phenomenon from a new perspective: that of the product being sponsored.

Based on a quantitative approach, this study has explored the impact of content attributes on consumer attitudes; it has examined, in fact, the different effect of Influencer Marketing on consumers' responses for different product categories as well as the impact of the post framing. More in detail, Influencer Marketing effectiveness in enhancing Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention has been measured for durable and non-durable goods and a comparison between the effects has been made to understand whether and how consumers' responses differ according to the product category the sponsored good belongs to. The interaction between the presence of Influencer Marketing and the use of Social Norms in the post framing has also been explored to find out whether the latter has or not a moderating effect on the Influencer's ability to impact Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

While the results obtained have not confirmed the assumptions regarding the role played by the Use of Social Norms in the post framing, that has not been found to be significant, all the hypotheses regarding the two Independent Variables, namely Influencer Marketing and the Product Category, have been confirmed. This means that Influencer Marketing has proven to enhance Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for both durable and non-durable goods, and the impact on the latter has proven to be stronger.

These findings provide helpful insights to marketing managers interested in leveraging Influencer Marketing in their integrated communication strategies but, most importantly, they constitute the first stone of a new research path aimed at exploring the Influencer Marketing

phenomenon from a new and different perspective, that of the product being sponsored. This is thrilling from both an academic and managerial point of view. For researcher, in fact, this study opens the way to a vast amount of research finalized at exploring several product categories and their main characteristics; for managers, on the other side, it could lead to more specific and detailed information and guidelines to invest in Influencer Marketing.

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APPENDIX A: THE SURVEY

English

Block 1: Introduction

Q1 Choose language ENG or ITA from the menu at the top right.

Hello,
my name is Benedetta Canfora, and I am a Marketing Analytics & Metrics student at Luiss Guido Carli University.
I am carrying on my Master Thesis Research, and I would be grateful if you could spend a few moments to answer some questions.

Your responses to this study will only be used for academic purposes; they will be treated confidentially and kept completely anonymous.

This study is about Influencer Marketing, and aims at characterising differences of influencing mechanisms for durable and non-durable goods.

Only a limited number of individuals are being surveyed; thus, your opinion on these topics is very important to the success of the research. Answering the survey will take only 5 minutes.

Please answer as openly and truthfully as you can; there are no correct answers!
Thank you for participating!

Q2 Look carefully at the following picture and read the caption, then answer the questions.

Block 2: Condition 1A_Inf, Dur, SN

Q3 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.

Block 3: Condition 1B_Inf, Dur, No-SN

Q4 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.

Block 4: Condition 2A_No-Inf, Dur, SN

Q5 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.

Block 5: Condition 2B_ No-Inf, Dur, No-SN

Q6 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.

Block 6: Condition 3A_Inf, Non-dur, SN

Q7 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.

Block 7: Condition 3B_Inf, Non-dur, No-SN

Q8 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.

Block 8: Condition 4A_No-Inf, Non-dur, SN

Q9 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption
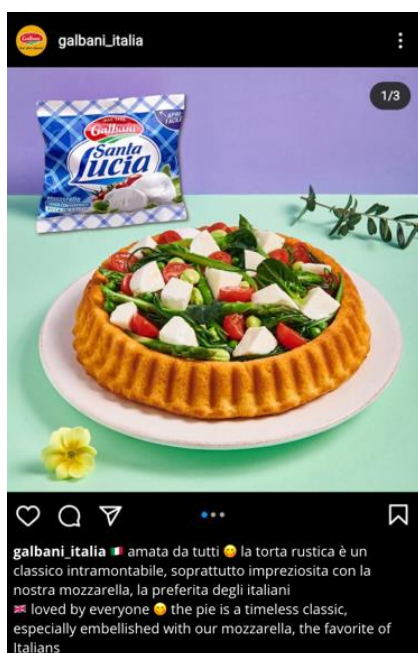
Block 9: Condition 4B_No-Inf, Non-dur, No-SN

Q10 Imagine browsing Instagram and noticing this post in the feed. Look at it carefully and read the caption.
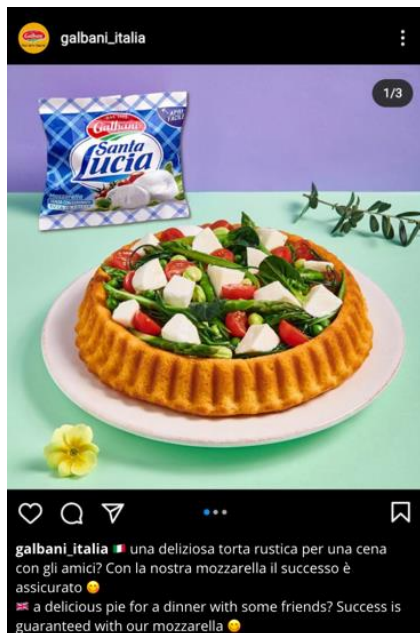
Block 10: Manipulation Check_Influencer Marketing

Q11 Based on the picture you have seen before, who shared the Instagram post?

○ An influencer (1)

○ The company producing the good shown (2)

Block 11: Manipulation Check_Product Category

Q12 Read the following definition carefully.
A durable good is defined as a tangible good that normally survives many uses, while a non-durable good is a tangible good that is normally consumed in one or a few uses.
Durables are used repeatedly, and they tend to be higher in price than non-durables; in contrast, non-durable goods are usually lower in price and are typically consumed over much shorter time periods.

Q13 Based on the definition provided and on the previous picture, which option do you consider true?

○ The product shown is a durable good (1)

○ The product shown is a non-durable good (2)

Block 12: Brand Attitude + Attention Check

Q14 Based on the picture you have seen before, how much do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Completely agree (7)
I really like the shown brand.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitude towards the shown brand is positive.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the shown brand is desirable.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Select the answer "neither agree nor disagree" for this line.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Block 13: Purchase Intention

Q15 Based on the picture you have seen before, how much do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Completely agree (7)
I would buy the shown brand rather than any other brand available.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to recommend that others buy the shown brand.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to purchase the shown brand in the future.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Block 14: Demographic questions

Q16 The survey is almost over.
Now I would just like to ask you a few questions about yourself.

Q17 What is your gender?
- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Other (3)
- ○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q18 How old are you?
- ○ <18 (1)
- ○ 18-25 (2)
- ○ 26-35 (3)
- ○ 36-45 (4)
- ○ >45 (5)

Q19 What is your nationality?

- ○ Italian (1)
- ○ Other (specify) (2)

Q20 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ○ Middle school (1)
- ○ High school (2)
- ○ Bachelor degree (3)
- ○ Master degree (4)
- ○ PhD (5)
- ○ Other (specify) (6)

Q21 Do you have an Instagram account?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Q22 What is your occupational status?

- ○ Unemployed (1)
- ○ Freelance (2)
- ○ Employee (3)
- ○ Student (4)
- ○ Retired (5)
- ○ Other (specify) (6)

Block 15: Conclusion

Q23 The survey is over, thank you for your participation!
Tap on the arrow at bottom right to send your replies and close the session.

Italian

Block 1: Introduction

Q1 Scegli la lingua ENG o ITA dal menu in alto a destra.

Ciao,
mi chiamo Benedetta Canfora, e sono una studentessa di Marketing Analytics & Metrics presso l'università Luiss Guido Carli di Roma.
Sto conducendo una ricerca per la mia tesi di laurea magistrale e ti sarei grato se potessi dedicare qualche minuto del tuo tempo a rispondere ad alcune domande.

Le tue risposte a questo studio saranno utilizzate solo per fini accademici; saranno trattate in modo confidenziale e rimarranno completamente anonime.

Lo studio riguarda l'Influencer Marketing e mira a comprendere come i meccanismi di influenza cambiano tra beni durevoli e non durevoli.

Solo un numero limitato di individui viene intervistato; quindi, la tua opinione è molto importante per il successo della ricerca. Ci vorranno solo 5 minuti per completare il sondaggio.

Per favore rispondi il più apertamente e sinceramente possibile; non esistono risposte giuste o sbagliate!
Grazie per prendere parte al progetto!

Q2 Osserva attentamente l'immagine che segue e leggi la didascalia, poi rispondi alle domande.

Block 2: Condition 1A_Inf, Dur, SN

Q3 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 3: Condition 1B_Inf, Dur, No-SN

Q4 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 4: Condition 2A_No-Inf, Dur, SN

Q5 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 5: Condition 2B_ No-Inf, Dur, No-SN

Q6 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 6: Condition 3A_Inf, Non-dur, SN

Q7 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 7: Condition 3B_Inf, Non-dur, No-SN

Q8 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 8: Condition 4A_No-Inf, Non-dur, SN

Q9 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.

Block 9: Condition 4B_No-Inf, Non-dur, No-SN

Q10 Immagina di navigare su Instagram e di notare questo post nel feed. Guardalo attentamente e leggi la didascalia.
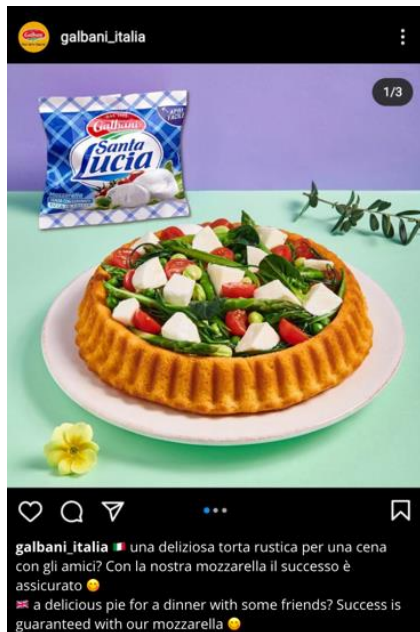
Block 10: Manipulation Check_Influencer Marketing

Q11 Riferendoti all'immagine vista precedentemente, chi ha pubblicato il post Instagram?ed on the picture you have seen before, who shared the Instagram post?

○ Un influencer (1)

○ L'azienda che produce il bene mostrato (2)

Block 11: Manipulation Check_Product Category

Q12 Leggi attentamente la seguente definizione.
Un bene durevole è definito come un bene tangibile che normalmente sopravvive a molteplici usi, mentre un bene non durevole è un bene tangibile che normalmente si esaurisce in uno o pochi usi.
I beni durevoli sono usati ripetutamente e tendono ad avere un prezzo più alto rispetto ai non durevoli; al contrario, i beni non durevoli hanno generalmente un prezzo inferiore e vengono usati per periodi di tempo molto più brevi.

Q13 Riferendoti alla definizione fornita e all'immagine precedente, quale opzione consideri vera?

○ Il prodotto mostrato è un bene durevole (1)

○ Il prodotto mostrato è un bene non durevole (2)

Block 12: Brand Attitude + Attention Check

Q14 Riferendoti all'immagine vista precedentemente, quanto sei d'accordo/in disaccordo con le seguenti informazioni?

	Completamente in disaccordo (1)	In disaccordo (2)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (3)	Né d'accordo o né in disaccordo (4)	Abbastanza d'accordo (5)	D'accordo (6)	Completamente d'accordo (7)
La marca mostrata mi piace molto.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Il mio atteggiamento verso la marca mostrata è positivo.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Trovo la marca mostrata desiderabile.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Seleziona la risponsta "nè in accord né in disaccordo" per questa riga.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Block 13: Purchase Intention

Q15 Riferendoti all'immagine vista precedentemente, quanto sei d'accordo/in disaccordo con le seguenti informazioni?

	Completamente in disaccordo (1)	In disaccordo (2)	Abbastanza in disaccordo (3)	Né d'accordo o né in disaccordo (4)	Abbastanza d'accordo (5)	D'accordo (6)	Completamente d'accordo (7)
Comprerei la marca mostrata rispetto a qualsiasi altra marca disponibile.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Consiglierei ad altri di comprare la marca mostrata.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Intendo acquistare la marca mostrata in futuro.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Block 14: Demographic questions

Q16 Il sondaggio è quasi finito.
Ora vorrei solo che tu rispondessi a qualche domanda su di te.

Q17 A che genere ritieni di appartenere?
○ Uomo (1)
○ Donna (2)
○ Altro (3)
○ Preferiso non rispondere (4)

Q18 Quanti anni hai?
○ <18 (1)
○ 18-25 (2)
○ 26-35 (3)
○ 36-45 (4)
○ >45 (5)

Q19 Qual è la tua nazionalità?

- ○ Italiana (1)
- ○ Altro (specificare) (2)

Q20 Qual è il più alto titolo di studio che hai conseguito?

- ○ Scuola secondaria di primo grado (1)
- ○ Scuola secondaria di secondo grado (2)
- ○ Laurea triennale (3)
- ○ Laurea magistrale (4)
- ○ Dottorato (5)
- ○ Altro (specificare) (6)

Q21 Hai un account Instagram?

- ○ Si (1)
- ○ No (2)

Q22 Qual è la tua occupazione?

- ○ Disoccupato (1)
- ○ Libero professionista (2)
- ○ Imiegato (3)
- ○ Studente (4)
- ○ pensionato (5)
- ○ Altro (specificare) (6)

Block 15: Conclusion

Q23 Il sondaggio è finito, grazie mille per la tua collaborazione!
Tocca sulla freccia in basso per inviare le risposte.

APPENDIX B: DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

Age: frequency table and histogram

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18–25	287	60,3	60,3	60,3
	26–35	109	22,9	22,9	83,2
	36–45	80	16,8	16,8	100,0
	Total	476	100,0	100,0	
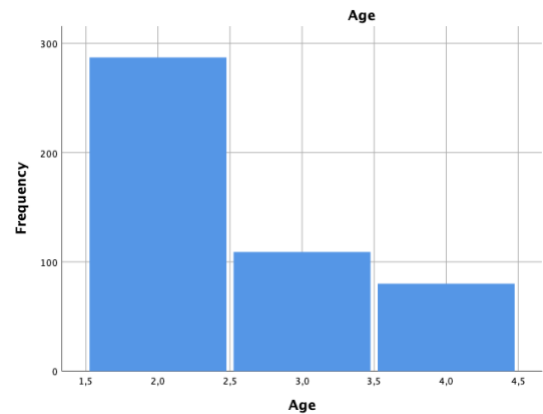
Gender: frequency table and histogram

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	174	36,6	36,6	36,6
	Female	298	62,6	62,6	99,2
	Other	3	,6	,6	99,8
	Prefer not to say	1	,2	,2	100,0
	Total	476	100,0	100,0	
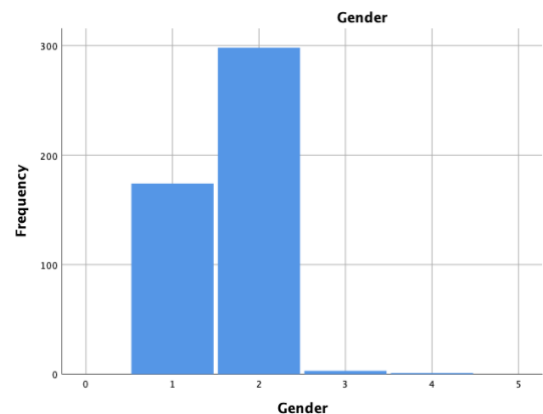
Educational Level: frequency table and histogram

EducationalLevel

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Middle School	3	,6	,6	,6
	High School	123	25,8	25,8	26,5
	Bachelor Degree	154	32,4	32,4	58,8
	Master Degree	168	35,3	35,3	94,1
	PhD	28	5,9	5,9	100,0
	Total	476	100,0	100,0	
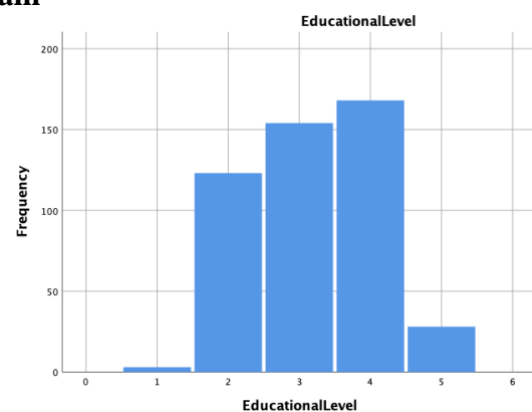
Occupational Status: frequency table and histogram

OccupationalStatus

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unemployed	22	4,6	4,6	4,6
	Freelance	67	14,1	14,1	18,7
	Employee	140	29,4	29,4	48,1
	Student	241	50,6	50,6	98,7
	Retired	1	,2	,2	98,9
	Other	5	1,1	1,1	100,0
	Total	476	100,0	100,0	
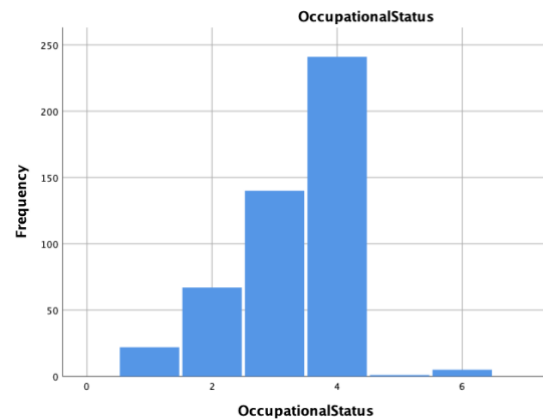
Instagram Profile: frequency table and histogram

InstagramProfile

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	429	90,1	90,1	90,1
	No	47	9,9	9,9	100,0
	Total	476	100,0	100,0	
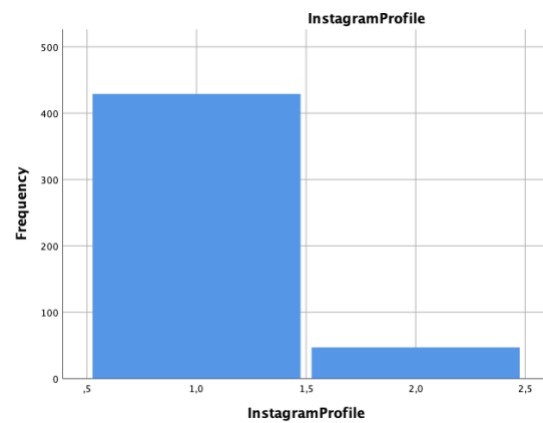
Manipulation Check

Influencer Marketing: crosstabulation, Chi-square test, and symmetric measures

InfluencerMarketing * InfManCheck Crosstabulation

			InfManCheck 0 (=No)	InfManCheck 1 (=Yes)	Total
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	Count	243	11	254
		Expected Count	140,3	113,7	254,0
		% within InfluencerMarketing	95,7%	4,3%	100,0%
		% within InfManCheck	92,4%	5,2%	53,4%
		% of Total	51,1%	2,3%	53,4%
	1 (=Yes)	Count	20	202	222
		Expected Count	122,7	99,3	222,0
		% within InfluencerMarketing	9,0%	91,0%	100,0%
		% within InfManCheck	7,6%	94,8%	46,6%
		% of Total	4,2%	42,4%	46,6%
Total		Count	263	213	476
		Expected Count	263,0	213,0	476,0
		% within InfluencerMarketing	55,3%	44,7%	100,0%
		% within InfManCheck	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	55,3%	44,7%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	359,831[a]	1	,000		
Continuity Correction[b]	356,334	1	,000		
Likelihood Ratio	429,611	1	,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				,000	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	359,075	1	,000		
N of Valid Cases	476				

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,869	,000
	Cramer's V	,869	,000
N of Valid Cases		476	

Product Category: crosstabulation, Chi-square test, and symmetric measures

ProductCategory * DurManCheck Crosstabulation

			DurManCheck 0 (=Non-durable)	DurManCheck 1 (=Durable)	Total
ProductCategory	0 (=Non-durable)	Count	205	25	230
		Expected Count	114,5	115,5	230,0
		% within ProductCategory	89,1%	10,9%	100,0%
		% within DurManCheck	86,5%	10,5%	48,3%
		% of Total	43,1%	5,3%	48,3%
	1 (=Durable)	Count	32	214	246
		Expected Count	122,5	123,5	246,0
		% within ProductCategory	13,0%	87,0%	100,0%
		% within DurManCheck	13,5%	89,5%	51,7%
		% of Total	6,7%	45,0%	51,7%
Total		Count	237	239	476
		Expected Count	237,0	239,0	476,0
		% within ProductCategory	49,8%	50,2%	100,0%
		% within DurManCheck	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	49,8%	50,2%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	275,516[a]	1	,000		
Continuity Correction[b]	272,480	1	,000		
Likelihood Ratio	311,551	1	,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				,000	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	274,938	1	,000		
N of Valid Cases	476				

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,761	,000
	Cramer's V	,761	,000
N of Valid Cases		476	

Scale Validity

Brand Attitude: crosstabulation, Chi-square test, and symmetric measures

Correlation Matrix

		BrandAttitude_1	BrandAttitude_2	BrandAttitude_3
Correlation	BrandAttitude_1	1,000	,884	,841
	BrandAttitude_2	,884	1,000	,863
	BrandAttitude_3	,841	,863	1,000

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,770
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1420,495
	df	3
	Sig.	,000

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
BrandAttitude_1	1,000	,908
BrandAttitude_2	1,000	,924
BrandAttitude_3	1,000	,894

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
BrandAttitude_1	,953
BrandAttitude_2	,961
BrandAttitude_3	,945
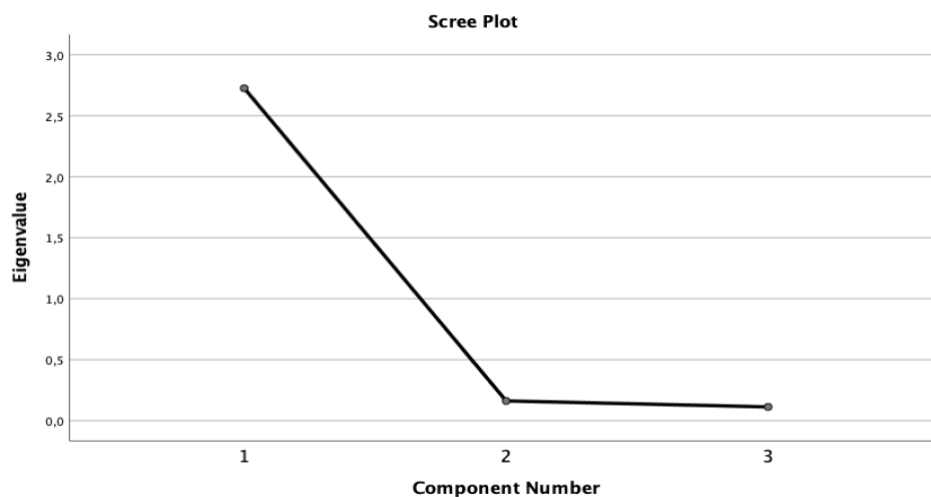
Scree Plot

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2,726	90,852	90,852	2,726	90,852	90,852
2	,162	5,392	96,243			
3	,113	3,757	100,000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Purchase Intention: crosstabulation, Chi-square test, and symmetric measures

Correlation Matrix

		PurchaseIntention_1	PurchaseIntention_2	PurchaseIntention_3
Correlation	PurchaseIntention_1	1,000	,994	,806
	PurchaseIntention_2	,994	1,000	,803
	PurchaseIntention_3	,806	,803	1,000

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,699
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2617,472
	df	3
	Sig.	,000

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
PurchaseIntention_1	1,000	,960
PurchaseIntention_2	1,000	,958
PurchaseIntention_3	1,000	,821

Component Matrix[a]

	Component 1
PurchaseIntention_1	,980
PurchaseIntention_2	,979
PurchaseIntention_3	,906
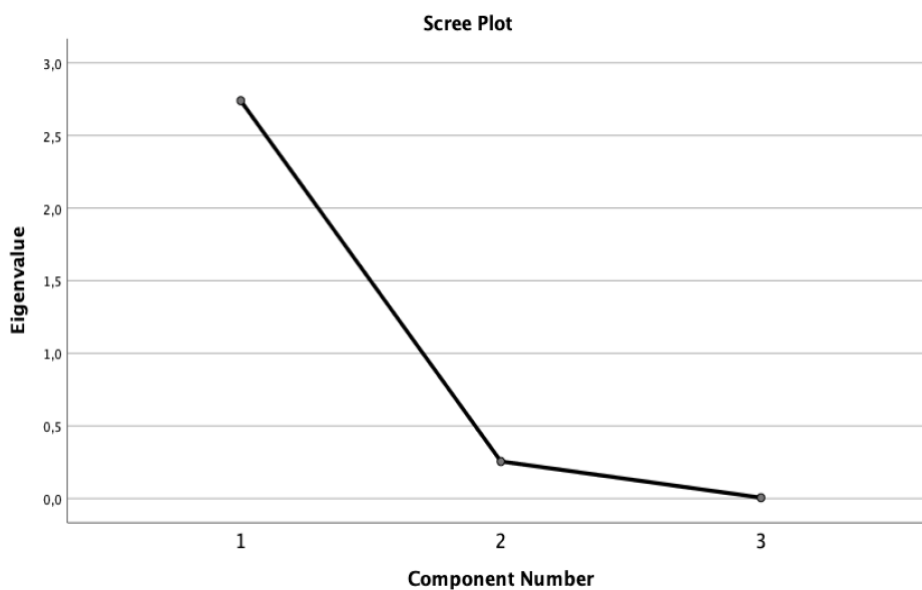
Scree Plot

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2,739	91,303	91,303	2,739	91,303	91,303
2	,255	8,508	99,811			
3	,006	,189	100,000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Scale Reliability

Brand Attitude: reliability statistics, inter-item correlation matrix, and item-total statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,949	,950	3

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	BrandAttitude_1	BrandAttitude_2	BrandAttitude_3
BrandAttitude_1	1,000	,884	,841
BrandAttitude_2	,884	1,000	,863
BrandAttitude_3	,841	,863	1,000

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
BrandAttitude_1	10,30	9,577	,893	,805	,926
BrandAttitude_2	10,23	9,823	,910	,830	,914
BrandAttitude_3	10,17	9,475	,878	,773	,938

Purchase Intention: reliability statistics, inter-item correlation matrix, and item-total statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,950	,952	3

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	PurchaseIntention_1	PurchaseIntention_2	PurchaseIntention_3
PurchaseIntention_1	1,000	,994	,806
PurchaseIntention_2	,994	1,000	,803
PurchaseIntention_3	,806	,803	1,000

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
PurchaseIntention_1	8,8761	9,111	,946	,989	,891
PurchaseIntention_2	7,9097	8,668	,941	,989	,890
PurchaseIntention_3	9,2689	9,157	,806	,650	,996

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

Descriptives

BrandAttitude_mean

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
0 (=No)	140	5,14047619	1,13379019	,095822760	4,95101756	5,32993482	1,00000000	7,00000000
1 (=Yes)	106	5,88679245	1,04591601	,101588343	5,68536153	6,08822337	2,00000000	7,00000000
Total	246	5,46205962	1,15554721	,073674999	5,31694242	5,60717682	1,00000000	7,00000000

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
BrandAttitude_mean	Based on Mean	,397	1	244	,529
	Based on Median	,615	1	244	,434
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	,615	1	241,673	,434
	Based on trimmed mean	,619	1	244	,432

ANOVA

BrandAttitude_mean

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	33,600	1	33,600	27,929	,000
Within Groups	293,545	244	1,203		
Total	327,146	245			

Hypothesis 2

Descriptives

PurchaseIntention_mean

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
0 (=No)	140	4,550	1,2923	,1092	4,334	4,766	,5	6,5
1 (=Yes)	106	5,321	1,0672	,1037	5,115	5,526	1,5	6,5
Total	246	4,882	1,2578	,0802	4,724	5,040	,5	6,5

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PurchaseIntention_mean	Based on Mean	1,182	1	244	,278
	Based on Median	2,006	1	244	,158
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2,006	1	236,248	,158
	Based on trimmed mean	2,160	1	244	,143

ANOVA

PurchaseIntention_mean

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	35,837	1	35,837	24,860	,000
Within Groups	351,744	244	1,442		
Total	387,581	245			

Hypothesis 3

Descriptives

BrandAttitude_mean

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
0 (=No)	114	3,33333333	1,18744663	,111214567	3,11299722	3,55366945	1,00000000	6,00000000
1 (=Yes)	116	6,13218391	1,00710453	,093507308	5,94696393	6,31740389	3,00000000	7,00000000
Total	230	4,74492754	1,78098776	,117434855	4,51353657	4,97631851	1,00000000	7,00000000

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
BrandAttitude_mean	Based on Mean	3,045	1	228	,082
	Based on Median	3,857	1	228	,051
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3,857	1	227,682	,051
	Based on trimmed mean	3,533	1	228	,061

ANOVA

BrandAttitude_mean

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	450,396	1	450,396	372,102	,000
Within Groups	275,973	228	1,210		
Total	726,369	229			

Hypothesis 4

Descriptives

PurchaseIntention_mean

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
0 (=No)	114	3,044	1,1475	,1075	2,831	3,257	1,0	5,5
1 (=Yes)	116	5,672	1,0323	,0958	5,483	5,862	2,5	6,5
Total	230	4,370	1,7087	,1127	4,148	4,592	1,0	6,5

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PurchaseIntention_mean	Based on Mean	4,372	1	228	,038
	Based on Median	2,262	1	228	,134
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2,262	1	223,426	,134
	Based on trimmed mean	3,985	1	228	,047

ANOVA

PurchaseIntention_mean

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	397,255	1	397,255	333,812	,000
Within Groups	271,332	228	1,190		
Total	668,587	229			

Hypothesis 5

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude_mean

InfluencerMarketing	ProductCategory	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0 (=No)	0 (=Non-durable)	3,33333333	1,18744663	114
	1 (=Durable)	5,14047619	1,13379019	140
	Total	4,32939633	1,46530128	254
1 (=Yes)	0 (=Non-durable)	6,13218391	1,00710453	116
	1 (=Durable)	5,88679245	1,04591601	106
	Total	6,01501502	1,03083422	222
Total	0 (=Non-durable)	4,74492754	1,78098776	230
	1 (=Durable)	5,46205962	1,15554721	246
	Total	5,11554622	1,53186846	476

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	254
	1 (=Yes)	222
ProductCategory	0 (=Non-durable)	230
	1 (=Durable)	246

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
BrandAttitude_mean	Based on Mean	1,242	3	472	,294
	Based on Median	1,602	3	472	,188
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,602	3	468,710	,188
	Based on trimmed mean	1,482	3	472	,219

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: BrandAttitude_mean

b. Design: Intercept + InfluencerMarketing + ProductCategory + InfluencerMarketing * ProductCategory

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude_mean

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	545,126[a]	3	181,709	150,595	,000	,489
Intercept	12362,709	1	12362,709	10245,842	,000	,956
InfluencerMarketing	369,986	1	369,986	306,633	,000	,394
ProductCategory	71,802	1	71,802	59,507	,000	,112
InfluencerMarketing * ProductCategory	124,020	1	124,020	102,784	,000	,179
Error	569,519	472	1,207			
Total	13571,000	476				
Corrected Total	1114,645	475				

a. R Squared = ,489 (Adjusted R Squared = ,486)

Estimated Marginal Means of BrandAttitude_mean

Hypothesis 6

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

InfluencerMarketing	ProductCategory	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0 (=No)	0 (=Non-durable)	3,0439	1,14745	114
	1 (=Durable)	4,5500	1,29234	140
	Total	3,8740	1,43842	254
1 (=Yes)	0 (=Non-durable)	5,6724	1,03231	116
	1 (=Durable)	5,3208	1,06724	106
	Total	5,5045	1,06145	222
Total	0 (=Non-durable)	4,3696	1,70868	230
	1 (=Durable)	4,8821	1,25776	246
	Total	4,6345	1,51303	476

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	254
	1 (=Yes)	222
ProductCategory	0 (Non-durable)	230
	1 (=Durable)	246

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PurchaseIntention_mean	Based on Mean	1,895	3	472	,130
	Based on Median	1,582	3	472	,193
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,582	3	458,380	,193
	Based on trimmed mean	2,129	3	472	,096

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

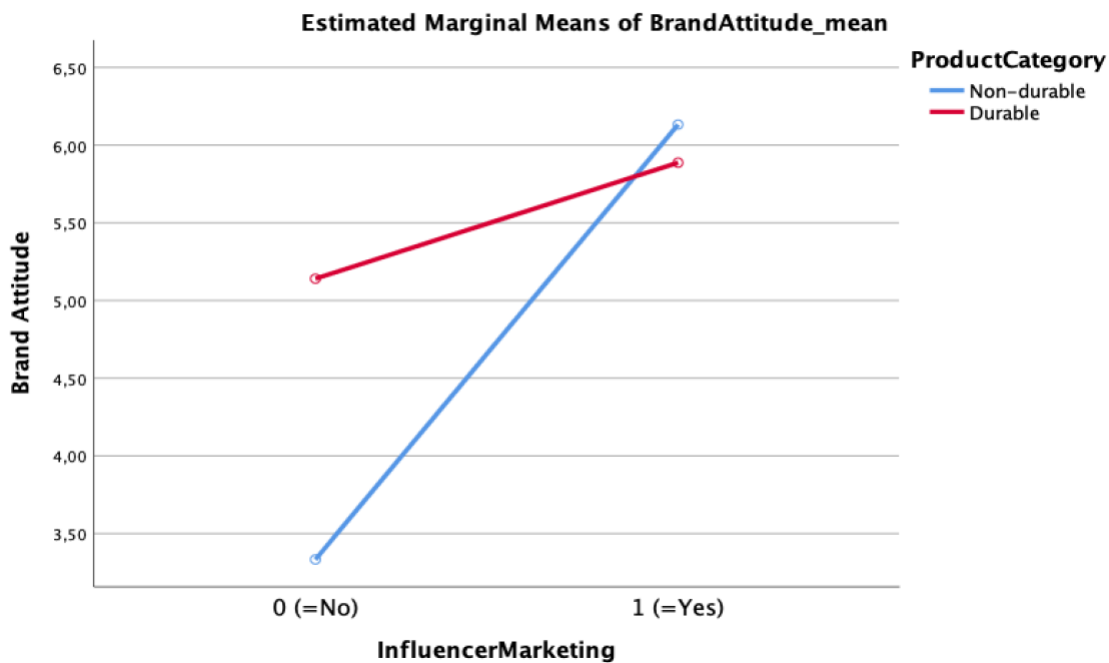a. Dependent variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

b. Design: Intercept + InfluencerMarketing + ProductCategory + InfluencerMarketing * ProductCategory

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	464,318[a]	3	154,773	117,245	,000	,427
Intercept	10170,248	1	10170,248	7704,279	,000	,942
InfluencerMarketing	340,168	1	340,168	257,687	,000	,353
ProductCategory	39,236	1	39,236	29,723	,000	,059
InfluencerMarketing * ProductCategory	101,604	1	101,604	76,968	,000	,140
Error	623,077	472	1,320			
Total	11311,000	476				
Corrected Total	1087,395	475				

a. R Squared = ,427 (Adjusted R Squared = ,423)

Estimated Marginal Means of PurchaseIntention_mean

Hypothesis 7

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude_mean

InfluencerMarketing	UseofSocialNorms	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0 (=No)	0 (=No)	5,2300	,94716	71
	1 (=Yes)	5,0483	1,29891	69
	Total	5,1405	1,13379	140
1 (=Yes)	0 (=No)	5,7971	1,13850	46
	1 (=Yes)	5,9556	,97321	60
	Total	5,8868	1,04592	106
Total	0 (=No)	5,4530	1,05904	117
	1 (=Yes)	5,4703	1,24067	129
	Total	5,4621	1,15555	246

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	140
	1 (=Yes)	106
UseofSocialNorms	0 (=No)	117
	1 (=Yes)	129

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
BrandAttitude_mean	Based on Mean	1,445	3	242	,230
	Based on Median	1,159	3	242	,326
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,159	3	209,101	,326
	Based on trimmed mean	1,400	3	242	,243

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: BrandAttitude_mean

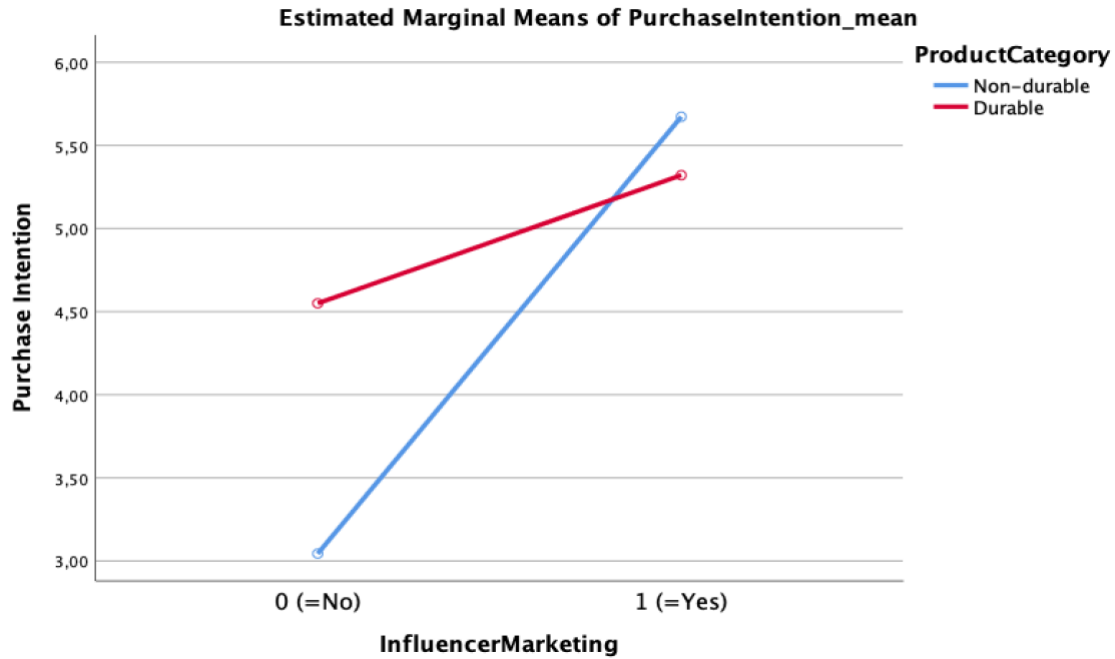b. Design: Intercept + InfluencerMarketing + UseofSocialNorms + InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude_mean

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	35,410[a]	3	11,803	9,791	,000	,108
Intercept	7246,094	1	7246,094	6010,760	,000	,961
InfluencerMarketing	32,449	1	32,449	26,917	,000	,100
UseofSocialNorms	,008	1	,008	,007	,935	,000
InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms	1,728	1	1,728	1,433	,232	,006
Error	291,736	242	1,206			
Total	7666,333	246				
Corrected Total	327,146	245				

a. R Squared = ,108 (Adjusted R Squared = ,097)

Hypothesis 8

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

InfluencerMarketing	UseofSocialNorms	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0 (=No)	0 (=No)	4,6831	1,15028	71
	1 (=Yes)	4,4130	1,41929	69
	Total	4,5500	1,29234	140
1 (=Yes)	0 (=No)	5,2826	1,13359	46
	1 (=Yes)	5,3500	1,02221	60
	Total	5,3208	1,06724	106
Total	0 (=No)	4,9188	1,17620	117
	1 (=Yes)	4,8488	1,33112	129
	Total	4,8821	1,25776	246

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	140
	1 (=Yes)	106
UseofSocialNorms	0 (=No)	117
	1 (=Yes)	129

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PurchaseIntention_mean	Based on Mean	1,348	3	242	,259
	Based on Median	1,293	3	242	,278
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,293	3	225,994	,278
	Based on trimmed mean	1,200	3	242	,310

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

b. Design: Intercept + InfluencerMarketing + UseofSocialNorms + InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	38,507[a]	3	12,836	8,899	,000	,099
Intercept	5810,777	1	5810,777	4028,394	,000	,943
InfluencerMarketing	35,244	1	35,244	24,433	,000	,092
UseofSocialNorms	,613	1	,613	,425	,515	,002
InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms	1,700	1	1,700	1,179	,279	,005
Error	349,074	242	1,442			
Total	6251,000	246				
Corrected Total	387,581	245				

a. R Squared = ,099 (Adjusted R Squared = ,088)

Hypothesis 9

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude_mean

InfluencerMarketing	UseofSocialNorms	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0 (=No)	0 (=No)	3,5069	1,21260	48
	1 (=Yes)	3,2071	1,16173	66
	Total	3,3333	1,18745	114
1 (=Yes)	0 (=No)	6,1212	1,04500	55
	1 (=Yes)	6,1421	,98029	61
	Total	6,1322	1,00710	116
Total	0 (=No)	4,9029	1,72425	103
	1 (=Yes)	4,6168	1,82240	127
	Total	4,7449	1,78099	230

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	114
	1 (=Yes)	116
UseofSocialNorms	0 (=No)	103
	1 (=Yes)	127

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
BrandAttitude_mean	Based on Mean	1,375	3	226	,251
	Based on Median	1,237	3	226	,297
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,237	3	216,897	,297
	Based on trimmed mean	1,498	3	226	,216

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: BrandAttitude_mean

b. Design: Intercept + InfluencerMarketing + UseofSocialNorms + InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms

Tests of Between–Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude_mean

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	452,907[a]	3	150,969	124,767	,000	,624
Intercept	5103,990	1	5103,990	4218,148	,000	,949
InfluencerMarketing	436,428	1	436,428	360,682	,000	,615
UseofSocialNorms	1,103	1	1,103	,912	,341	,004
InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms	1,458	1	1,458	1,205	,274	,005
Error	273,462	226	1,210			
Total	5904,667	230				
Corrected Total	726,369	229				

a. R Squared = ,624 (Adjusted R Squared = ,619)

Hypothesis 10

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

InfluencerMarketing	UseofSocialNorms	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0 (=No)	0 (=No)	3,1354	1,23228	48
	1 (=Yes)	2,9773	1,08639	66
	Total	3,0439	1,14745	114
1 (=Yes)	0 (=No)	5,7000	1,06110	55
	1 (=Yes)	5,6475	1,01384	61
	Total	5,6724	1,03231	116
Total	0 (=No)	4,5049	1,71712	103
	1 (=Yes)	4,2598	1,70067	127
	Total	4,3696	1,70868	230

Between–Subjects Factors

		N
InfluencerMarketing	0 (=No)	114
	1 (=Yes)	116
UseofSocialNorms	0 (=No)	103
	1 (=Yes)	127

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PurchaseIntention_mean	Based on Mean	1,801	3	226	,148
	Based on Median	,829	3	226	,479
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	,829	3	208,764	,479
	Based on trimmed mean	1,627	3	226	,184

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

b. Design: Intercept + InfluencerMarketing + UseofSocialNorms + InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention_mean

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	398,029ª	3	132,676	110,826	,000	,595
Intercept	4320,567	1	4320,567	3609,018	,000	,941
InfluencerMarketing	388,373	1	388,373	324,413	,000	,589
UseofSocialNorms	,629	1	,629	,525	,469	,002
InfluencerMarketing * UseofSocialNorms	,158	1	,158	,132	,716	,001
Error	270,558	226	1,197			
Total	5060,000	230				
Corrected Total	668,587	229				

a. R Squared = ,595 (Adjusted R Squared = ,590)

SUMMARY

Introduction and Theoretical Background

The technological development characterizing the last decades has irreversibly impacted the way people communicate and, consequently, how firms deliver their messages to consumers.

The impact this epochal change has had on Marketing Communication has been astonishing, as the roles played by both companies and consumers changed. In this new scenario, consumers are not passive subjects anymore; they are playing a more significant and more explicit role in the success, or failure, of brands (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

The traditional marketing paradigm involved brand managers using media to communicate with consumers in a unidirectional information flow consisting of carefully crafted messages sent by companies and directed to a generally passive audience (Ihator, 2001).

With the spread of new technologies, the audience first became connected to the organization and then became connected to one another; this has caused the *one-to-many* approach to communication characterizing the pre-technological era to turn obsolete (Gurau, 2008) and has led to the rise of new paradigms. The old mass media channels, such as TV, print, and radio advertising, first gave way to a greater emphasis on interactive or *one-to-one* communications between the brand and the customer (Holtz, 1999), and then left the stage to *many-to-many* media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, where consumers have become broadcasters in conversation with one another and have become engaged in a two-way dialogue with brand marketers (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). The many-to-many approach allowed the development of a new paradigm of Marketing Communication with the consumers assuming the role of content creators and taking part in the information exchange, and with communication becoming consequentially participatory.

A phenomenon related to the diffusion of the Internet and the new shape Marketing Communication has assumed, is the development and spread of *Social Media*, a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, information, and multimedia content through the building of virtual networks and communities (Dollarhide, 2020).

Different categories of Social Media exist with specific features but, despite the differences, they all can be seen as a communication mechanism allowing users to communicate with thousands, and perhaps billions, of individuals worldwide (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012).

Thanks to the opportunity offered, the role assumed by Social Media has soon evolved from a single marketing tool to that of a marketing intelligence source, where firms can observe, analyze, and predict customer behaviors; for this reason, it has become imperative for marketers to strategically leverage this source to achieve competitive advantage and superior performance

(Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Social Media use is basically gaining increasing importance as a component of firms' portfolio of strategies (Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2020) and is becoming an essential element for companies to develop an effective Marketing Communication strategy. Nowadays companies are taking advantage of Social Media to communicate to their target audience without appearing too intrusive, to build a stable and close relationship with consumers (Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013), and to get financial results despite the non-commercial purpose of these tools. The fact that consumers, who are increasingly empowered and are taking control of the Marketing Communication process, are becoming creators, collaborators, and commentators of messages (Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016), and that they are considered as credible and reliable sources of information by other consumers (Constantinides, 2008), offered a great opportunity in this direction and led to the rise of what has been defined as the "golden goose of Marketing" (Newman, 2015): Influencer Marketing.

The idea of *Influencer Marketing* (IM) represents an adaptation of the *multi-step flow theory* applied to Social Media platforms, as it is based on the fact that Social Media Influencers assume a mediating role between companies and consumers, distribute the messages to the less active audience on the Internet, and create a participative environment for users (Stansberry, 2012).
Influencers are third party figures (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) able to promote products interactively and creatively by showing their use and utility in a real-life context; they engage followers by regularly delivering them the latest information, and can punctually reach companies' target audience influencing buying decisions. Influencers' incredible power in mediating, delivering, and spreading marketing messages has meant that Influencer Marketing, defined as "the art and the science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messages with their audiences in the form of sponsored content" (Sammis, Lincoln, & Pomponi, 2016), rapidly became one of the most crucial Marketing Communication phenomena in recent years with around 86% of the firms having engaged Influencers to promote their products in 2017, and 92% of these firms having found this strategy to be effective (Linqia, 2017). The prominent reason why firms choose to invest in Influencer Marketing is that it has proven to create 11 times more Return on Investment than traditional advertising yearly (TapInfluence, 2016), and this is possible thanks to the way it is built and the factors it leverages.
Influencer Marketing is considered the most effective way to motivate consumers; Influencers are, in fact, more likely to be seen as credible and trustworthy compared to a paid advertisement (Abidin, 2016) and this authenticity leads to lower resistance towards the message communicated (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Influencer Marketing's success derives from the idea that consumers express their opinions online, and in particular through Social Media, and can induce others to change their opinion (Pang & Lee, 2008).

An essential element strengthening the effect of Influencer Marketing is social comparison and what is commonly referred to as Descriptive and Social Norms, so what is commonly done (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007), and what people collectively believe ought to be done, what is socially approved or disapproved (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). When a person uses Social Media to compare his or her own behaviors to those of others, it becomes a form of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) and this has been found to be especially valid at affecting behavior change (Allcott, 2011). Because of the interconnectedness of Social Media, in fact, people are quickly introduced to other users' behaviors, and this exposure is likely to influence personal behaviors leveraging attitudes and, most importantly, social and personal norms (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, Social Media could present a unique opportunity to encourage desired behaviors by using the impact of social comparison and personal values to influence social and personal norms (Hynes & Wilson, 2016). Influencers represent a pivotal part of this process, considering their recognized ability to influence moral and social norms (Gossling, 2019).

In this context, Instagram deserves a special mention. It is the most important platform on which Influencer Marketing is conducted, being used by 89% of sellers who leverage Influencer Marketing (Krasniak, 2016). Besides, being considered more authentic, Instagram is the most used social platform to research information (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019) and the leading platform companies are planning to raise the investment in (Hootsuite, 2021).

Literature review

Considering the scale Influencer Marketing has assumed in recent years, many academics are trying to deeply investigate the phenomenon. Until this point, studies concerning Influencer Marketing have mainly focused on how to leverage Influencers to shape corporate brand perceptions (Booth & Matic, 2012), on consumer behavior towards Influencer Marketing (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014), and on how to identify effective Influencers (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). More specifically, most researchers have focused on analyzing the consumers' attitude towards endorsers' characteristics on Purchase Intention, or the endorser-product fit on Purchase Intention (Makwana, Sharma, & Phatak, 2018).

What has emerged is that consumers trust peers more than they trust corporations and are likely to use information provided by fellow consumers before they make a purchase decision (Lee & Koo, 2012); for this reason, Influencers are more likely to be seen as credible and trustworthy than a paid advertisement or company-branded content (Abidin, 2016). Influencer Marketing is considered the most effective way to motivate consumers because it leverages the power of authentic, meaningful content created by consumers for consumers and, unlike traditional advertising, it is trusted and valuable rather than interruptive and contrived (TapInfluence, 2015). In fact, Influencers are seen

as a more profitable resource than the use of mass media as they can directly reach the company's target audience (Baker & Hart, 2007), and are able to timely affect other people's intentions and actions in a more confidential way through direct and interactive communication (Kannan & Li, 2017). Content produced by Influencers is considered to have more organic, authentic, and direct contact with potential customers than brand-generated ads (Talavera, 2015) and, for this reason, they positively affect purchase behaviors (Alhabash, McAlister, Lou, & Hagerstrom, 2015). Influencer Marketing has proven to be effective in pursuing different goals: foster brand awareness, reach new audiences, generate sales, improve brand advocacy, drive lead generation, expand share of voice, manage reputation, and improve customer satisfaction (Bailis, 2020). Among the most widely explored variables Influencer Marketing has been proven to be effective on, it is possible to find Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.

Brand Attitude (BA) can be thought of as "an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of a specific brand or product in the market" (Kotler & Armstrong, 1996) or as an evaluation of a brand or how a brand is perceived and what consumers think about it (Spears & Singh, 2004). A 2012 research distinguished Social Media from Traditional Media and found that both have a positive impact on Brand Attitude through Brand Awareness and Brand Image (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). This is something fundamental for companies designing their Marketing Communication strategies, and it is even more important when they are planning to include Influencers. Past research has, in fact, shown that the chosen endorser can have a direct influence on how the brand is seen or the attitude people have towards the brand (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). In particular, Brand Attitude seems to be linked to the credibility of the endorsed, and so his trustworthiness and expertise (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). Also source attractiveness and product match-up have proven to be positively linked to Brand Attitude (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017); attractive celebrities or domain experts, in fact, are the key Influencers employed by marketers to build a consumer-brand relationship (Trivedi, 2018). Attitudes play a fundamental role in affecting people's behaviors. Brand Attitude is an established mediator in the relationship between advertising stimuli and Purchase Intentions; thus, the study of BA is important in marketing to predict consumers' Purchase Intention (Trivedi & Sama, 2020).

Purchase Intention (PI) is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004) and can be seen as "the consumer's propensity of buying the brand in the future" (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). It is considered a predictor of consumers' actual behaviors (Younus, Rasheed, & Zia, 2015) and subsequent purchases (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007); for this reason, PI is of great interest for companies as it reveals whether the Marketing Communication is effective or not (Bird & Ehrenberg, 1966).

Academic research has shown Purchase Intention to be influenced by several factors such as the knowledge of the product being sponsored, an attractive packaging and design, the product's quality and price, but also celebrity and Influencer endorsement and peers' opinions (Younus, Rasheed, & Zia, 2015). Referring to Social Media, the recommendations of Opinion Leaders and Influencers have a positive effect on Purchase Intention. The perceived realness of these non-traditional stars and the deep connectedness result in higher Purchase Intention of the products they endorse because consumers personally identify with them and try to imitate them (Tran & Strutton, 2014). Leveraging endorsers makes it possible to influence Purchase Intention by transferring consumers' attitudes towards the endorser on the product being sponsored (Chi, Yeh, & Huang, 2009). Finally, the informational value of the generated content, the Influencer's reliability and attractiveness, and his similarity to followers, positively influence users' trust in the Influencer's posts, thus enhancing Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A key question for both marketing managers and Influencers is how Social Media posts can be best framed to generate positive user reactions (Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017). Studies on communication effectiveness on Social Media have mainly focused on the essential characteristics of a post. A 2014 research suggested that the richness of the content, such as including images and videos, raises the impact of the post in terms of likes, and significantly influences the number of comments (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014); also the message length has proven to affect performance measures such as the click-through rate (Baltas, 2003).

In describing how consumers' can be persuaded, academics often differentiate between two different approaches to message appeal. The first approach focuses on the emphasis of factual information (Puto & Wells, 1984) and leverages the use of a rational appeal (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999); the second approach focuses on emotions and leverages the feelings and emotions that are experienced while using or owning a product (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). A rational approach seems to be the most effective with utilitarian products, whereas emotions might be more effective with value-expressive products (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Unfortunately, only a little research has been produced on the topic and no studies have explored the effectiveness of leveraging Social Norms in the post framing.

The last, and probably most important, element of Marketing Communication is the product being sponsored. Products can be divided into different categories in accordance with several dimensions; for example, they can be durable or non-durable, leisure or utilitarian, search or experience, consumer or industrial, new or existing. These categorizations are fundamental as each type of product has an appropriate marketing-mix strategy (Murphy & Enis, 1986). Products belonging to distinct categories, in fact, present differences in the way consumers approach the purchasing

decision process (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). The distinction considered in this study is the one between durable and non-durable goods.

Both durable and non-durable goods are considered tangible goods, but they differ in the level of durability. *Durable goods* can, in fact, be defined as "tangible goods that normally survive many uses", while *non-durable goods* are "tangible goods that are normally consumed in one or a few uses" (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Durables are used repeatedly, and they tend to be higher in price than non-durables; the potential negative consequences of making an incorrect purchase decision may therefore be large for durable goods (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007). In contrast, non-durable goods are usually lower in price and are typically consumed over much shorter time periods; so, mistakes are easily corrected at the subsequent purchase occasion (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007).

The differences in durability and price level make so that purchase decisions for durable goods are seen as more important to consumers than those for non-durables; thus, the former are often characterized by having high degrees of involvement (Antil, 1984). These differences lead to different decision-making processes as they are responsible for variation in the amount of pre-purchase information searched, the attributes evaluated, and the length of the decision process (Molander, 1998). Consumers are likely to spend more time gathering information and evaluating alternatives when they consider purchasing high-involvement durable goods than when they consider purchasing low-involvement non-durable goods (Morwitz, Steckel, & Gupta, 2007).

These differences in the decision-making process between durable and non-durable goods make it crucial for marketers to establish harmony among products and communication tools (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Different marketing tools can have different effects on the purchase decisions related to products belonging to these categories, and marketers should understand these differences to effectively leverage tools and strategies. For what concerns endorsement, a 2018 study has shown that a significant effect of celebrity endorsement on consumers' buying behaviors exists for both durable and non-durable goods; however, the difference in magnitude has not been explored (Makwana, Sharma, & Phatak, 2018). Moreover, the efficacy of each endorser type has been found to vary with the product being sponsored (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). To the best of our knowledge, no research has been carried out yet to explore the difference between high-involvement durable goods and low-involvement non-durable goods in the context of Influencer Marketing.

Strictly related to low-involvement buying decisions, it is important to mention *Impulse Purchasing*. This is a purchase decision that occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful, and persistent urge to buy something immediately (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Stern identified nine product-related factors that might be influential in conceptualizing impulse

purchasing; among these, the low price of the product and its short life (Stern, 1962). This suggests more expensive products and those requiring more time and effort, so a condition of high-involvement purchase, such as durable goods, are less likely to be bought on impulse (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998).

While the relationship between Influencer Marketing effectiveness and product categories has not been explored yet, a few studies have been conducted on the relationship between Influencer Marketing and impulse purchase. In a 2016 research, for example, Instagram usage has been proven to act as a stimulus for impulse purchasing (Xiang, Zheng, Lee, & Zhao, 2016). Moreover, a 2018 study indicated that Social Media Marketing can easily increase the level of impulsive behavior in purchasing, considering that the chances that are presented by Social Media, such as liking, commenting, and reviewing, can help consumers in deciding whether to make the purchase decision (Al-Zyoud, 2018). A 2020 research has shown that, in a Social Media context, Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on people to conduct impulse buying behavior (Wang & Gao, 2020).

From what has been said so far, it clearly appears that Influencer Marketing is a powerful tool in influencing consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, but some unresolved gaps emerged. Among the most crucial ones there is the fact that the role of the product being sponsored onto the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing has not been explored yet. Most of the studies aimed at investigating Influencers' effectiveness, in fact, considered an indistinct class of products or some specific categories such as fashion (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) or food (Folkvord, Roes, & Bevelander, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies investigating how the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing varies among different product categories, and, for this reason, examining various product categories has been indicated as one of the main future research direction in the content attributes and consumer outcomes area (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, & Thrassou, 2021). Moreover, analyzing the literature concerning content attributes and consumer outcomes, it emerges that the effect of leveraging Social Norms in the post's framing has not been explored yet. In recent years Social Norms are being employed for commercial purposes and some companies are implementing Social Norms Marketing to stimulate purchase behaviors (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007) but, despite researchers are exploring this field, the use of Social Norms as a marketing tool to frame the Influencers' posts have not been tested.

Objective of the research: conceptual model and hypotheses

The main goal of this study is to deeper explore the Influencer Marketing phenomenon. This work constitutes a research representing a first step in fulfilling one of the main gaps that emerged in the existing literature regarding the impact of content attributes on consumer attitudes: examining the different impact and effectiveness of Influencer Marketing for different product categories.

From the literature, it also emerged that the use of Social Norms in framing a post has not been explored yet. This study also wants to constitute a preliminary study to explore how using Social Norms in framing a post can moderate the effectiveness of the message delivered by the Influencer. To fill the overmentioned gaps, this research has measured the difference in the effectiveness of an Influencer Advertising post when the product sponsored is a durable or a non-durable good, and when the post's caption is framed using or not using Social Norms; the use of Social Norms in the post framing, in particular, is considered as a moderating variable. To test this difference in the effectiveness, the Influencer's post has been compared to a Social Media Advertising post shared through the profile of the company producing the good sponsored. The effectiveness has been measured through the impact of the Influencer's post on consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. Thus, the Research Question this thesis aims at answering is:

Nowadays, many companies rely on Social Networks, particularly Instagram, to attract consumers and shape their attitudes and behaviors; to pursue these goals, marketing managers are increasingly leveraging Influencers Marketing. The number of Influencers' posts on Instagram is growing day by day, ranging over different types of products, from food, to low-cost t-shirts to high-end sport cars.

Is there any difference in the way Influencer Marketing affects consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention depending on the category the product sponsored belongs to? In particular, has the effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention a statistically different magnitude for durable and non-durable goods? Moreover, given the importance the post framing has in shaping consumers' responses, has the use of Social Norms in framing the post a moderating effect on this relation?
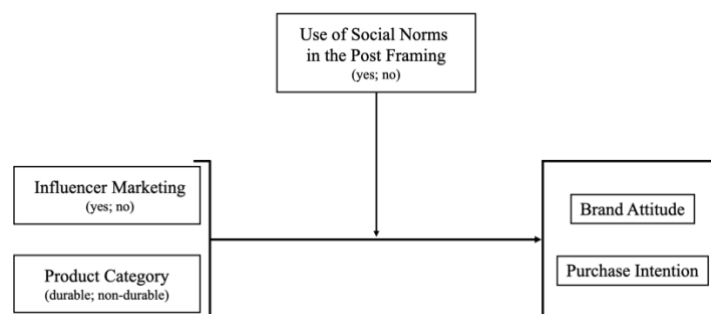

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model

It comes that the Independent Variables considered in the model are the presence of *Influencer Marketing* and the *Product Category* the sponsored good belongs to. These have been manipulated in order to understand if their interaction has a statistically significant effect on the Dependent Variables, *Brand Attitude* and *Purchase Intention*, thus exploring whether or not the effect of Influencer Marketing on the Dependent Variables varies according to the durable or non-durable nature of the product sponsored. The *Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing* has been used as a

moderator, as it is expected to enhance the main effect of Influencer Marketing on the Dependent Variables for both durable and non-durable goods. Thus, the first hypotheses are:

H1: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

H2: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

H3: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

H4: *Influencer Marketing has a positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

Then, the existence of a statistically significant difference in the effectiveness of Influencer Marketing on both Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for durable and non-durable goods is tested. What is expected is that Influencer Marketing has a stronger effect on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for non-durable goods than for durables.

H5: *Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.*

H6: *Influencer Marketing has a stronger positive effect on consumers' Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good.*

Then, the moderating effect of the use of Social Norms in the post framing is tested.

H7: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

H8: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a durable good.*

H9: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

H10: *The Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing positively moderates the effect Influencer Marketing has on Purchase Intention when the product being sponsored is a non-durable good.*

Methodology

Considering the objectives of this research, a positivist philosophy approach has been embraced, based on the formulation of assumptions that can be tested to assess a universal rule and represents the best way to explore social and human behaviors (Kumar, 2010). Moreover, this study embraces a *deductive approach* since it aims at validating the assumptions done and drawing conclusions that can be generalized thanks to the statistical analysis of the gathered data. Consequently, a *quantitative methodology* has been chosen to carry out this study; in fact, it can be considered more accurate and reliable than a qualitative methodology as it provides statistical findings useful to

support the study, and allows generalizing results from the sample to the population of interest through retrieving and analyzing data from a broad sample (Malhotra, 2020). Specifically, an *experimental design* has been adopted, and primary data have been collected via an *online survey*.

To test the hypotheses, the study has used a 2 (Influencer Marketing: yes; no) x 2 (Product Category: durable good, non-durable good) x 2 (Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing: yes; no) *between-subjects experimental design*. By manipulating the two Independent Variables and the Moderating Variables, eight experimental conditions have been obtained:

Condition	Influencer Marketing	Product Category	Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing
1A	yes	durable	yes
1B	yes	durable	no
2A	no	durable	yes
2B	no	durable	no
3A	yes	non-durable	yes
3B	yes	non-durable	no
4A	no	non-durable	yes
4B	no	non-durable	no

Table 1 - Conditions

Instagram is the most used Social Network by marketing managers to carry out an Influencer Marketing campaign (Starri, 2021), and the preferred platform for Influencers to share their messages with the audience (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). For this reason, Instagram has been chosen as the general context for this research.

The manipulation has taken place randomly assigning respondents to one of the eight conditions mentioned above, represented by eight different Instagram posts. These posts differ for three factors representing the three manipulated variables: the profile sharing the post, the product sponsored, and the framing of the post.

Respondents assigned to the conditions 1A, 1B, 3A, and 3B, characterized by the presence of Influencer Marketing, have been shown a post shared by an Influencer. The Influencer chosen is Chiara Ferragni, a well-known Italian Influencer with almost 24 million followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2021). On the contrary, respondents assigned to the conditions 2A, 2B, 4A, and 4B, characterized by the absence of Influencer Marketing, have been shown a post shared by the company producing the good sponsored in the post. To avoid confusion, in all the shown posts, the commercial purpose has been disclosed.

For what concerns the sponsored good, respondents assigned to the conditions 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B have seen a post sponsoring a durable good, specifically a car, a BMW X3. Respondents assigned

to the conditions 3A, 3B, 4A, and 4B, on the other side, have been shown a post sponsoring a non-durable good, a Mozzarella Santa Lucia, produced by Galbani, a famous Italian brand of milk-derived products. These brands have been chosen because they are among the brands Chiara Ferragni collaborates with. All the posts used in this study are existent posts. In order to use real posts, it has been necessary to find companies Chiara Ferragni had collaborated with and had shared sponsoring posts for, and that also had used their own profiles to advertise their products.

The captions of the posts shown have been modified to manipulate the variable Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing. The captions of the posts shown to respondents assigned to the conditions 1A, 2A, 3A, and 4A have been formulated leveraging Social Norms, while the others have excluded this element. In creating the captions, the style of the profiles sharing the posts has been considered and respected. The stimuli corresponding to the eight conditions are:
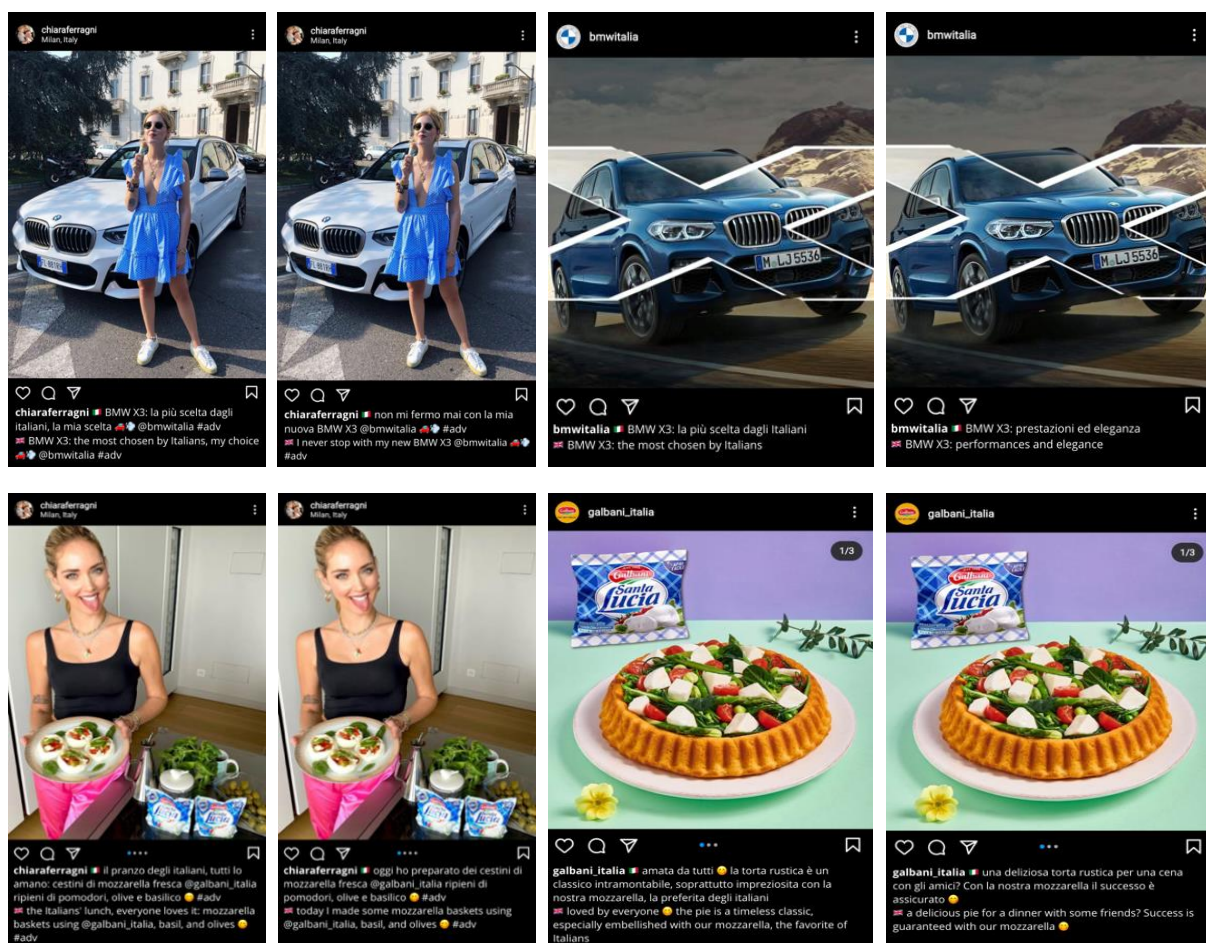

Figure 2 - Stimuli

The survey has been developed on Qualtrics and has been distributed through an anonymous link sent by personal messages to potential respondents, via WhatsApp and Telegram, and shared on Social Networks, specifically Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. This has allowed to reach a vast number of people in a short time. A *nonprobability sampling technique* has been employed to select respondents. The sampling technique is basically a *convenience sampling method*, also presenting

some elements of a *snowball sampling method* as participants have been asked to spread the questionnaire via word of mouth.

Between May the 15th and May the 23rd, 754 responses to the survey have been collected. Only responses given by Italian people belonging to the age range 18-45 years have been analyzed; these people, in fact, constitute the sample of this research as they are active on Social Networks, have a high attitude to follow Influencers, and have purchasing power, ability, and willingness. Basically, they represent the 81.5% of the Instagram's advertising audience (Kemp, 2020).

The survey developed for this study comprises 23 questions divided into 15 blocks, with an average compilation time of 4 minutes. The choice of only using *closed-ended questions* has been based on the advantages related to this type of question, namely the ease of response for the participants, the speed with which they can conduct the survey, and the relative ease of analysis.

In the first block of the questionnaire, an introduction page is shown briefly explaining the research topic and asking people to participate in the study; also the instruction to follow have been displayed. The blocks from the second to the ninth contain the Instagram posts corresponding to the study's conditions. The tenth and eleventh blocks assume the function of *manipulation check* on the two Independent Variables. Respondents have been asked whether the Instagram post shown was shared by an Influencer or the company producing the good, and whether the product sponsored was a durable or a non-durable good. Blocks 12 and 13 are addressed to measure the two Dependent Variables. The first contains a question on Brand Attitude, and an *attention check* consisting of an instructed-response question; the second contains a question on Purchase Intention. To answer all the questions in these two blocks, respondents have been asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement to some sentences using a 7-points Likert scale. To minimize measurement errors, it has been preferred to use items belonging to scales already validated and present in the literature. The scales employed to capture Brand Attitude (Mitchell & Olson, 1981) and Purchase Intention (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2013) are composed of three items and are adapted from the literature to better fit this study's context. In block 14 demographic questions are contained. Finally, participants have been thanked for their time and their contribution to this study.

Before starting the execution of the statistical analysis aimed at verifying the proposed hypotheses, a data preparation phase has been carried out. The first step has been treating missing and unsatisfactory responses; the *casewise deletion method* has been chosen in which subjects with any missing values are discarded; then information gathered from respondents not fitting the sample and not fulfilling the attention check have been deleted. At the end of this phase of data cleaning, the number of responses in the dataset was 476; this is the sample on which the analysis has been conducted. The second step has consisted in carrying out the manipulation check to determine the

effectiveness of the manipulation. This has been done through a Chi-Square test on frequencies conducted on the crosstabulations comparing the conditions subjects were assigned to and their perception of the Influencer's presence and the product category. Finally, the validity of the scales used has been tested through a Factor Analysis, and their reliability through a Cronbach's Alpha analysis. The manipulation of the Independent Variables has proven to be successfully conducted, and the scales used for BA and PI have shown to be both valid and reliable.

Once that the preliminary analysis phase was concluded, it has been possible to move on to test the hypotheses. To do so, one-way, and two-way ANOVA analyses of variance have been employed, setting a significance level of 95% ($p = 0.05$). These tests have been used to verify the difference in the mean of the two metric Dependent Variables (Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention) among the different combinations of factors, namely the categorical Independent Variables (namely the Presence of influencer Marketing and the Product Category the sponsored good belongs to) and the moderator (the Use of Social Norms in the Post Framing).

Results and general discussion

The findings show that posts shared by an Influencer on Instagram evoke higher scores for Purchase Intention and Brand Attitude than posts shared by the company producing the sponsored good. Influencer Marketing has proven effective in enhancing consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention for both durable and non-durable goods, thus confirming hypotheses from one to four. The mean values of both the dependent variables are, in fact, significantly higher for people assigned to conditions involving Influencer Marketing.

By the way, the magnitude of this positive effect has been shown to differ between the two product categories. The effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention, in fact, has proven to significatively interact with the product category the sponsored good belongs to in impacting the two Dependent Variables. Specifically, the effect Influencer Marketing has on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention is stronger when the sponsored product is a non-durable good than when it is a durable good, thus confirming the fifth and sixth hypotheses.

On the other side, the Use of Social Norms in the post framing has not shown a significant effect on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention; also, its interaction with Influencer Marketing has not proven to be significant. For this reason, the Moderating effect of the Use of Social Norms in the post framing cannot be claimed, thus rejecting the hypotheses from seven to ten.

The results obtained can be summarized as follows:

H1; confirmed: The ANOVA test ($F(1,244) = 27.929, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude for durable goods. Instagram posts shared by an Influencer have reported higher values of BA ($M = 5.887, SD = 1.046$) than those shared by the company ($M = 5.140, SD = 1.134$) and this difference is statistically significant.

H2; confirmed: The ANOVA test ($F(1,244) = 24.860, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention for durable goods. Instagram posts shared by an Influencer have reported higher values of PI ($M = 5.321,\ SD = 1.067$) than those shared by the company ($M = 4.550,\ SD = 1.292$) and this difference is statistically significant.

H3; confirmed: The ANOVA test ($F(1,228) = 372.102, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Brand Attitude for non-durable goods. Instagram posts shared by an Infleuncer have reported higher values of BA ($M = 6.132,\ SD = 1.007$) than those shared by the company ($M = 3.333,\ SD = 1.187$); this difference is statistically significant.

H4; confirmed: The ANOVA test ($F(1,228) = 333.812, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) has shown a significant effect of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention for non-durable goods. Instagram posts shared by an Influencer have reported higher values of PI ($M = 5.672,\ SD = 1.032$) than those shared by the company ($M = 3.044,\ SD = 1.148$); this difference is statistically significant.

H5; confirmed: These is model fit ($F(3,472) = 150.595, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). 39.4% of the variance in Brand Attitude is explained by Influencer Marketing ($F(1,472) = 306.633, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), while 11.2% is explained by the Product Category $F(1,472) = 59.507, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). The interaction effect of Influencer Marketing and Product Category is significant ($F(1,472) = 102.784, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), too. For non-durable goods, BA is significantly higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 6.132,\ SD = 1.007$) than when there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 3.333,\ SD = 1.187$). For durable goods, BA is higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.887,\ SD = 1.046$) than when there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.140,\ SD = 1.134$). This difference is bigger for non-durable goods.

H6; confirmed: There is model fit ($F(3,472) = 117.245, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). 35.3% of the variance in Purchase Intention is explained by Influencer Marketing ($F(1,472) = 257.687, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), while 5.9% is explained by the Product Category ($F(1,472) = 29.723, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). The interaction effect of Influencer Marketing and Product Category is significant ($F(1,472) = 76.968, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), too. For non-durable goods, PI is significantly higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.672,\ SD = 1.032$) than when there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 3.044,\ SD = 1.147$). For durable goods, PI is higher in the presence of Influencer Marketing ($M = 5.321,\ SD = 1.067$) than when there is no Influencer Marketing ($M = 4.550,\ SD = 1.292$). This difference is bigger for non-durable goods.

H7; rejected: There is model fit ($F(3,242) = 9.791, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). For durable goods, it has not been revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,242) = 0.007, p = 0.935 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction of Influencer Marketing and Use of Social Norms ($F(1,242) = 1.433, p = 0.232 > \alpha = 0.05$) on Brand Attitude.

H8; rejected: There is model fit ($F(3,242) = 8.899, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). For durable goods, it has not been revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,242) =$

$0.425, p = 0.515 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction of Influencer Marketing and Use of Social Norms ($F(1,242) = 1.179, p = 0.279 > \alpha = 0.05$) on Purchase Intention.

H9; rejected: There is model fit ($F(3,226) = 124.767, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). For non-durable goods, it has not been revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,226) = 0.912, p = 0.341 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction of Influencer Marketing and Use of Social Norms ($F(1,226) = 1.205, p = 0.274 > \alpha = 0.05$) on Brand Attitude.

H10; rejected: There is model fit ($F(3,226) = 110.826, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). For non-durable goods, it has not been revealed a significant effect for either the Use of Social Norms ($F(1,226) = 0.525, p = 0.469 > \alpha = 0.05$) nor the interaction of Influencer Marketing and Use of Social Norms ($F(1,226) = 0.132, p = 0.716 > \alpha = 0.05$) on Purchase Intention.

Conclusion, implications, and future research

Considering how fast this phenomenon is evolving, to implement Marketing Communication strategies leveraging Social Networks and involving Influencers, companies need some guidelines; academic research is crucial to fulfilling this role. Previous research has considered an indistinct class of products, but companies produce and sell specific goods with distinct characteristics. Thus, it is crucial to approach the problem from the perspective of the product being sponsored. This research represents the first step in this direction. From the results obtained, it emerged that leveraging Influencer Marketing is effective to enhance consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention both when the product sponsored is a durable and a non-durable good. By the way, this effectiveness has proven to be higher for non-durable goods. This means that, while Influencer Marketing is an effective tool for companies producing goods belonging to both the categories, it is especially beneficial for firms producing non-durable goods. The main recommendation emerged is to consider Influencer Marketing as a fundamental part of a Marketing Communication strategy, particularly for companies producing non-durable goods.

These findings provide helpful insights to marketing managers but, most importantly, they pave the way for investigating the Influencer Marketing phenomenon from a new perspective. Following the path indicated by this study, future research could explore other product categories. For example, Influencer Marketing effectiveness for utilitarian and leisure goods, or for luxury and non-luxury goods, experience and search goods, or new and existing goods could be investigated. Moreover, a conceptual model involving the features characterizing these product categories could be built to investigate which of those have a mediating effect on the main relationship. This could be helpful in identifying the specific product characteristics that can lead to a difference in the Influencer Marketing effectiveness and could generate useful and immediately applicable managerial insights.