

**Users' perception of Influencers credibility on Instagram and their purchase intention  
regarding product recommendations by Influencers**

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## **Abstract**

Influencers on social media is a new phenomenon that has gained popularity in recent years. Despite the increasing popularity of influencer marketing on Instagram, research has been limited. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the credibility of Instagram influencers from the perspective of followers, and see whether the dimensions of source credibility outlined by Ohanian (1990) has a positive impact on users to follow influencers on this platform.

The research first presents and compares the research and theories to date regarding the use of celebrities in advertisement and influencer marketing. Then it attempts to investigate the credibility of Instagram influencers in the eyes of male and female users, and evaluates the differences in both genders on the criteria that they decide to follow influencers. This study also evaluates purchase intention of Instagram users based on the product advertisements by influencers to see whether dimensions of source credibility positively impact users' intent to purchase.

For the purpose of this study, a survey of 250 participants was conducted using Amazon MTurk. The results show that about 77 percent of the participants spend more than at least half an hour a day on Instagram and more than half of the participants indicated that their purchase intention is impacted by influencers on this platform.

The key findings of this study provide further understanding of the influencers phenomenon on Instagram and give marketers valuable insight in the process of decision-making when running influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram. It provides marketers with more information on how to match up influencers and potential consumers.

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## **1. Introduction**

With increasing use of social media among consumers, marketers are paying more attention to social media channels to promote their products or services. The rise of social media has given voice to a new type of celebrity known as influencers. Digital influencers are individuals who achieve their fame through social media networks. The potential large audience of influencers on social media has attracted businesses to engage in paid collaboration with them for advertising purposes. Previously, many studies have been done on the celebrity endorsement process. But since Instagram influencers is a very new phenomenon, little research has been carried out to evaluate perceptions of social media users toward them. This study aims to investigate perceived image of Instagram influencers through the lens of source credibility theory, and explore whether product endorsement by influencers could positively impact purchase intentions of followers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Celebrity endorsement as a marketing tool

Using celebrities as spokespersons is a common marketing technique due to their immense potential influence (Schlecht, 2003). Celebrities have the potential not only to create and maintain attention because of their fame, but also to achieve high recognition rates for messages from a marketing communication (marcom) perspective (Erdogan, 2008).

There are several definitions for celebrity endorsers in the literature. According to McCracken (1989) celebrity endorsers are individuals who use their fame on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (McCracken, 1989), and often have unique characteristics such as attractiveness and trustworthiness (Gupta, Kishor, & Verma, 2017), extraordinary lifestyle or a set of special skills (Schlecht, 2003). Celebrity endorsers are people who are “known by the public for [their] achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed” (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Stafford et al. (2003) defined celebrity endorser as “a famous person who uses public recognition to recommend or co-present with a product in an ad” (Stafford, Spears, & Hsu, 2003).

Opinion leaders are individuals with a broad set of personal relationships who have a key influential role and are considered to be both a source and a guide (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014) and enjoy public recognition by a significant share of a certain group of people (Schlecht, 2003).

Opinion leadership determines to what degree a person is considered to be a model for others and to what extent the messages broadcast by him/her could be persuasive (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). According to Kiss and Bichler, influential people “have multiple interests, they tend to be early adopters in markets, they are trusted by others, and have a large social network” (Kiss & Bichler, 2008).

Celebrities are a type of opinion leader as they are “individuals who are likely to influence other persons in their immediate environment” (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Opinion leaders are not necessary leaders in the usual sense as they are neither a head of a formal organization nor public

figures such as journalists, critics or media characters whose influence is exercised indirectly through media or authority structures. The influence of opinion leaders is direct and is caused by their informal position as people who are greatly “informed, respected or simply connected” (Watts & Dodds, 2007). On the other hand, Desarbo and Harshman (1985) believe that the impact of opinion leaders is both direct and indirect, as they “influence the audience directly through the message they deliver” and “indirectly through how they are perceived by the audience”. The latter is called the source effect (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985).

Celebrity endorsers invite people to purchase the product, and have an enormous power in advertisement due to their perceived credibility and unique position that results in intention to buy (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). They have the potential to transform an unknown product or service to a well-known one by their persuasion power and producing positive connections through advertisements (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Many distinctive characteristics have been attributed to celebrities. One of the characteristics of opinion leaders according to the diffusion of innovation model is that they are the early adopters when an innovation in products or services is introduced, and therefore are influential in broadcasting messages to other adopters (Rogers, 1962), as opinion leadership may be an indication of innovativeness (Chan & Misra, 1990). That is why opinion leaders usually score higher in innovativeness, defined as “being on the lookout for what is new and unconventional” (Casaló et al., 2018). Erdogan et al. (2001) state that celebrities bring attention to ads with the help of their likeability and attractiveness (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001).

According to Chan and Misra (1990), a celebrity’s willingness to publicly individuate her or himself is a necessary, though not sufficient, feature of an effective opinion leader and individuation counts as a dimension to recognize opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are generally more knowledgeable and more involved with the product that they are endorsing (Riecken & Yavas, 1986). Opinion leadership has an important role in new product adoption and spreading of related information, and is an essential factor in marcom strategy (Casaló et al., 2018).

Advertising through a celebrity not only adds value to a brand name, product or service offering (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), but could also be helpful in establishing brand equity (Keller,

2005). The value is transferred by a celebrity endorser through promoting the brand and creating awareness for the brand by endorser attributes such as credibility, attractiveness and image congruence (Jamil & Hassan, 2018).

Using celebrities in advertisement could result in a positive impact on consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intention because famous people achieve a greater degree of attention and recall (Schlecht, 2003). Product endorsers do not necessarily need to be celebrities, as some non-famous individuals could differentiate between themselves and others by becoming an opinion leader through greater knowledge and interest in a specific product or topic (Chan & Misra, 1990).

While some research shows that more positive attitudes toward advertising and higher buying intention is produced in the case of endorsement by celebrities (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983) (Atkin & Block, 1983), Mehta (1994) demonstrated that there is no significant difference in attitudes toward advertisement, brand and buying intention between product endorsement by celebrity and non-celebrity endorsers (Mehta, 1994). In the case of non-celebrity endorsement, receivers pay more attention to the brand and its characteristics, whereas in the celebrity endorsement case, they focus on the celebrity in advertising (Erdogan, 2008).

Despite all the potential advantages that celebrity endorsement brings about, marketers should also be wary of the costs and risks as endorsement strategy could be a double-edged sword. Table 2.1 lists some of the potential benefits and risks associated with celebrity endorsement strategy (Erdogan, 2008).

Benefits	Risks
Increased attention	Overshadow the brand
Improved brand image	Public controversy in case the celebrity loses credibility
Product introduction	Overexposure when celebrity's image ties in many brands
Rebranding and brand repositioning	Image change and loss of public recognition
Overcoming global market challenges	Costly

*Table 2.1 Pros and Cons of Celebrity Endorsement for Brands (Erdogan, 2008)*

**2.2 Marketing on the Web**

The advancement of technology has transformed the way businesses interact with customers and promote their products or services. The World Wide Web has created a totally different situation for marketing strategies compared to traditional media (Hoffman & Novak, 1997). There have been considerable changes in the world of advertising in the past decade (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2018), and especially the transition to Web 2.0 has caused significant changes to online marketing strategies based on individual opinions (Segev, Avigdor, & Avigdor, 2018). In the age of fast connectivity, people have easy access to high-speed Internet through their smart devices at any place and any time (Ackaradejruangsri, 2015).

As online advertisements are considered to be more informative and trustworthy compared to traditional advertisements (Tsang, Ho, & Liang, 2004), and also positively affect attitudes toward brands and purchase intentions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018), marketers are looking to increase consumers' trust by instilling trust in advertisement (Konstantopoulou, Rizomyliotis, Konstantoulaki, & Badahdah, 2019). Businesses want customers to trust and believe their information (Li & Miniard, 2006), as consumers' mindset toward e-commerce is formed on the basis of trust (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). While consumers usually have a passive experience with traditional media like television, they show more active behavior including experiential (for example netsurfing) and goal-oriented (for example online shopping) when they are engaging with online media (Hoffman & Novak, 1997).

In today's competitive market, it is of vital importance for businesses to design marketing strategies that create competitive advantages to their products and services (Gupta et al., 2017). Because digital and social media is growing fast in terms of usage and advertising spending, the advertising agencies have felt the need to design innovative strategies (Childers et al., 2018). Marketing in the 21st century is more about providing product experience for customers than simply broadcasting messages about the product (Daniel, Crawford Jackson, & Westerman, 2018). Since a central objective of advertising is the persuasion of consumers and actively attempting to change their attitude toward brands (Schlecht, 2003), it could be argued that advertisement is an art of persuasion with the primary goal of creating awareness about what is being offered and ultimately, persuading consumers to purchase products (Jamil & Hassan, 2018).

Capabilities that consumers possess in the online world and the challenges that this new online environment set in place presents a competency issue that is different from the physical world. So in the evolution in the marketing strategies from traditional to online advertisement, businesses should try to include consumers in the marketing process (Hoffman & Novak, 1997), as advertising performs as a mechanism of meaning by bringing consumer needs and the depiction of "the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement" (Erdogan, 2008).

While McLuhan states that in traditional media "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964), it could also be argued that in the Web "the medium is the market" (Hoffman & Novak, 1997). Marketers have developed more interest in learning about, organizing and managing online communities in the digital world (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004), as it appears that personal interactions could provide a greater reward for a complying customer than mass media (Chan & Misra, 1990).

### **2.3 Rise of Social Networking Sites**

Social media is one of the newest effective communication means (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018), and it is anticipated that marketing agencies will spend as much as 21% of their budgets

on marketing in social media by 2019 (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Social media is a kind of web page that allows users to create their profile, modify it, exchange ideas with other users and share content (Zeljko, Jakovic, & Strugar, 2018), and could be defined as a place for the communication of information between individuals, groups and institutions (Parkasan, Edosomwan, Kouane, Watson, & Seymour, 2011).

Social media has presented both consumers and businesses with new modes of communication that lets all users share more information (Krishen, Berezan, Agarwal, & Kachroo, 2016). A huge number of consumers are in social media to make connections, search for information, post their thoughts and share opinions, so it is by no means surprising that organizations want to be there too with their potential customers (Ackaradejruangsri, 2015). Businesses must first understand not only their potential clients, but also the new environment in which they are active in order to maintain a successful marketing strategy (Hoffman & Novak, 1997). They should focus their social media strategies on participation, sharing, and collaboration with consumers, and not only on advertising (Chung, Andreev, Benyoucef, Duane, & O'Reilly, 2018).

Social media lets users meet with strangers and become friends with them to fulfill their desire to be a member of a social interaction (D. M. Boyd & Ellison, 2007), as many individuals have been turning to social networking sites to build virtual relationships (Chiu, Cheng, Huang, & Chen, 2013). A competent marketer should try to build new models for marketing on the Web based on this heterogeneous and convoluted virtual community (Hoffman & Novak, 1997).

Social networking sites have constantly transformed the way people and organizations “discover, connect, interact, and share information” since they have come into existence (Ackaradejruangsri, 2015) as inside this interactive online world, individuals passionately engage in the process of network navigation (Hoffman & Novak, 1997).

Social media is now considered to be one of the most important media for online advertisements, as the number of users in online social network sites has been increasing tremendously (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). The majority of people in the world are using social media and it was estimated to overtake traditional media in the U.S. in 2018 (S. T. Smith, Kao, Shah, Simek, & Rubin, 2018). In 2008, spending on online advertising exceeded print media for the first time and has continued

to rise (Childers et al., 2018). Consumers also continue to spend more time on social networking sites. As of January 2019, out of 4.388 billion internet users in the world, 3.484 billion were active social media users. That shows a 9% increase comparing to 2018 (Hootsuite, 2019).

Advanced information technologies and Internet-based social networking applications have strengthened social networking sites (Liu et al., 2015) and it has become a main priority for businesses' growth (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). The massive growth of social networking sites in the world is based on "their essential features of universal access, immediacy, and power to communicate with and influence others" (Smith et al., 2018).

There are many differences between traditional media such as newspapers and television and social media. Information on social media is inexpensive and reachable for everyone to publish, while it takes noticeable resources to broadcast information on traditional media (Zeljko et al., 2018). Individuals are more and more spending time on social media to gather information on which to base their decisions (Casaló et al., 2018). Social media is a virtual society that allows consumers to communicate with not only real-life friends, but also strangers who share their interests (Tang & Koh, 2017). Almost all user-generated content websites are a form of social media that provide tools for consumers to connect and communicate with each other (Zeljko et al., 2018).

The spread of social networking sites among users drives businesses to use social media as an advertising platform (Lee & Hong, 2016). Advertising in social media is a new trend of advertisement that lowers consumer's persuasion knowledge, according to Boerman, van Reijmersdal, & Neijens (2012). Persuasion knowledge is the knowledge and beliefs that consumers have toward issues related to advertising, such as the methods marketers use to coax them, to the degree that consumers consider these tactics efficient and appropriate but also know how to deal with these persuasion techniques and goals (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). It is argued that individuals' attitudes towards advertisements on social media is a fundamental factor of its effectiveness (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Because of the effective and cost-efficient nature of advertising on social networking sites (Hwang & Zhang, 2018), marketers have turned their attention toward this medium. Advertising

in social media is more effective than traditional advertising channels due to huge growth in the number of users (Nelson-Field, Riebe, & Sharp, 2013) and is also much cheaper (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Advertising on social networking sites can be targeted effectively with regard to consumers' online behavior and preferences, so it is an environment full of opportunities for brands to build relationships with audiences in their own personal space (Luna-Nevarez & Torres, 2015).

The increasing popularity of social networking sites has transformed the way customers and businesses interact with each other (Liu et al., 2015). For example, instead of brands simply talking directly to customers, now consumers talk to each other through social media channels about brands so social media now has become an integral part of marketing tactics (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Traditional advertising strategies do not reap the same rewards as before and "the reality now is that social media is a consumer-run land" (Childers et al., 2018).

## **2.4 From traditional celebrities to social media influencers**

The advancement of Web 2.0 has taken traditional marketing tactics to the next level and has brought a new form of brand building and audience targeting via a practice commonly known as influencer marketing (Segev et al., 2018). The rise of social media has given voice to a new type of celebrity known as micro-celebrities (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018) or other types of digital celebrity groups such as bloggers and Insta-celebrities (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

Social media influencers are a new type of "independent third party endorsers" who could influence audience's attitudes via blogs, tweets and other social networking platforms (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Social media influencers are individuals with the potential to engage the intended audience and sell products or services to them. (Childers et al., 2018). These people have a considerable impact on decisions by the public regarding what products they buy, what services they use and what initiatives they are supporting (Zeljko et al., 2018).

Unlike more traditional celebrities such as film stars, musicians, sporting icons, TV personalities, writers and others (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), digital influencers are individuals who achieve

their fame through online blogging, vlogging or social media networks (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Digital influencers would have not become famous if social media did not exist (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018) as it gives the opportunity to regular users and encourages them to become influencers (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). In the past decade, many young women have started using social media to pursue “microcelebrity personas” as a career (Abidin, 2016).

Social media influencers are regular people who post videos or pictures of themselves taken with their mobile cameras and have become the modern celebrities (Mudge & Shaheen, 2017). The increased adoption of social media by consumers around the world has caused more and more individuals to become influencers (Gräve & Greff, 2018), as ordinary Internet users gather a large following on social networking sites by presenting their personal lives (Abidin, 2016). These online influencers have an impact on the people of certain communities having similar interests (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014) and robust social connections are formed between Influencers and their followers (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

In fact, being a regular user like anyone else on social media is one of the most popular and presumed advantages of digital influencers (Gräve, 2017). Their opinions are considered very influential as a third party to the corporations or brands being promoted (Daniel et al., 2018) and they are not affiliated with a specific brand (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). Thus, with influencer marketing, businesses achieve audience quality that cannot be obtained with traditional media (Childers et al., 2018) because influencers are closer and more accessible to social media users in online societies (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). It is appealing for followers to be able to directly engage in communication with celebrities on Instagram and follow their daily lives, even though they are aware that a celebrity’s profile on social media “may be an untruthful reflection of their real life” (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018).

The perceived social influence of influencers is obtained through the number of their followers, as the more followers an individual has, the greater their perceived social influence (Jin & Phua, 2014). The degree to which followers form an intimate relationship with influencers determines how they are influenced by the latter’s advertisement on social media (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

Therefore an intimate relationship has an impact on influencers' popularity to be perceived as an opinion leader (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found through interviews with Instagram users that number of followers is a representation of a person's credibility (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Also, the results of data from Casaló et al.'s (2018) research collected from more than 800 Instagram users suggest that originality and uniqueness are essential if a user is to be considered an opinion leader on Instagram (Casaló et al., 2018).

Among social networking sites, Instagram as a visual content sharing platform has become the center of attention for influencer marketing (Segev et al., 2018), although micro-celebrities also exist on Youtube, Twitter and other types of social platforms (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018) and the relevant platforms for their activity comprise all large social networking sites (Gräve & Greff, 2018).

Instagram influencers are people who have a large online presence and can impact followers using Instagram (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). Generally, people consider influencers as users whose Instagram profiles have a following base of over 30,000 subscribers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018) (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In another categorization of social media influencers regarding the number of their followers, individuals with 10 million plus followers are called mega-influencers, experts with 10,000 to 10 million followers are labeled as macro-influencers, and people with an average follower base of 500 to 10,000 are perceived to be micro-influencers (Childers et al., 2018).

The most popular influencers have audiences of several million people on social media platforms which is on a par with well-established celebrities from entertainment or sports industry (Gräve, 2017) which allows them to influence a large number of people with their messages (Gräve & Greff, 2018). However, unlike traditional celebrities who are public icons with large-scale followings, social media influencers are usually famous among a niche group of people (Marwick, 2013). Non-traditional celebrities who gain their fame through their profile on Instagram are also called 'Instafamous' (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018).

The potential large audiences of influencers on social media has attracted businesses to engage in paid collaboration with them for advertising purposes (Gräve & Greff, 2018), which in turn enables influencers to earn money by integrating sponsored posts into their social media posts (Abidin, 2016).

Influencer Marketing has become a popular marketing strategy among advertisers, as it was a \$3 billion industry in 2017 and is expected to grow to more than double in 2019 to become a \$6.5 billion industry (Influencer MarketingHub, 2019). In 2018, \$1.6 billion was funneled into sponsored posts on Instagram alone (Rimmer, 2018). Still, the results of a study by Childers et al. (2018) show that this billion-dollar industry is in the earliest stages of online media and is a largely uncharted territory that needs a shift in advertising agencies for effective implementation (Childers et al., 2018).

Influencers on social media are one of a number of profitable marketing strategies (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006) and very effective and cost-saving advertising models (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Influencers have been seen as a more efficient way to build a brand regarding audience reception and ROI (Segev et al., 2018) by marketers.

Social media influencers are generally “novel information contributors” with the ability to shape the behavior and attitudes of followers (Liu et al., 2015) through blogs, tweets and the use of other social media (Freberg et al., 2011). Opinion leadership has an impact on consumer behavioral intentions of both the influencer (as she/he has the intention to engage in the account and recommend the product) and the followers (as they have the intention to follow advice posted) (Casaló et al., 2018).

Individuals who are perceived as opinion leaders by their peers can truly influence them (Casaló et al., 2018), as when consumers trust influencers, they welcome recommendations which could reshape their buying decisions (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019).

Influencers’ status as opinion leaders could influence consumer behavioral intentions and attitudes (C. S. Park, 2013) (Godey et al., 2016). Through their product advertisements posted on social media they are able to persuade their followers to possess the same products, therefore

influencing consumers' purchase and word of mouth (WoM) intentions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Opinion leaders are perceived by other users to have good taste regarding buying decisions (Casaló et al., 2018). The powerful relationships between influencers and followers persuade the latter's need to buy what the former promotes (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

One popular behavior among influencers on Instagram is posting selfies, as well-known individuals in social media must "put on a performance through various displays of self" (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018). By posting selfies, influencers reap personal benefits both monetary and self-actualizing (Abidin, 2016), as their selfies document "what many young people dream of having and the lifestyle they dream of living" (Marwick, 2015). Selfie-based marketing has become so pervasive that "it has inspired 'best of' ads that feature selfies" (Abidin, 2016).

While traditional celebrities are still popular personalities on social media and continue their role as opinion leader as people who communicate to an unknown mass audience (Gräve, 2017), it is important to differentiate between the "guy next door influencer" and mainstream-celebrity influencers from the marketing point of view (Gräve & Greff, 2018).

It is argued that online influencers are more powerful than mainstream ones in terms of influencing customers online (Wiley, 2014), as their product reviews are more influential because they look more authentic and accessible (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Generally, social media influencers are more "accessible, convincing, more intimate, and simpler" than traditional celebrities due to the fact that they share personal details of their lives with users and engage with them almost instantly (Zeljko et al., 2018).

Digital influencers not only have a broader reach among their followers through online channels (Lyons & Henderson, 2005), it is also relatively easier to approach opinion leaders now as social media has facilitated access to them (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). Social media influencers also extend their reach as followers share their content through WoM, while traditional media do not offer this opportunity (Childers et al., 2018). Users consider non-traditional celebrities to be more credible as they can more easily relate to them, which makes digital influencers more powerful than traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

There are many differences between celebrities and influencers in terms of characteristics of advertisements. Some of these differences are listed in Table 2.2.

<b>Advertising through influencers</b>	<b>Advertising through celebrities</b>
Strong affinity	Low affinity
Low investment	High investment
Small influence range	Large influence range
Short-time effect	Long-time effect
Great influence on consumers' purchase decisions	Less influence on consumers' purchase decisions
Gaining of large income	Less income effect

*Table 2.2 Comparing the characteristics of advertisements by digital and traditional celebrities (Hwang & Zhang, 2018)*

When deciding on whether to use traditional celebrities or social media influencers for promotional purposes, the results of a study by Gräve (2017) proves that celebrities could be more effective when broad and heterogeneous audiences with different levels of familiarity are targeted, as this is especially the case for TV advertising. On the other hand, influencers could be more effective when the targeted audience is very familiar with the endorser, as in the case of social media, people consciously decide to follow an influencer's activity and they are perceived to be part of the community (Gräve, 2017).

Social media influencers that are recognized as opinion leaders play an intermediary role in communication of messages as they interpret media information that they receive and then pass it to other people, thus increasing the influence of the message (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). This is a representation of 'two-step flow' classic theory first introduced by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) who stated that opinion leaders take information from the mass media and spread it directly to other members of public through word of mouth communication (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948).

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) further developed the concept, arguing that the reaction that the public shows to messages in the mass media are mediated by communication with members of

their social environment and therefore, their buying decision is a result of these influences (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In short, the two-step model states that interpersonal communication is “more powerful in affecting attitudes of individuals compared to mass media” (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). Influence is transmitted from news media to opinion leaders (first step) and then from opinion leaders to the society (second step) (Childers et al., 2018).

According to the ‘two-step flow’ model, a small number of opinion leaders perform the role of intermediary between the mass media and the majority of the community (Watts & Dodds, 2007), by mediating the transmission of information (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). In turn, people who follow social media influencers transmit the information to non-followers as a two-step flow via word of mouth (Daniel et al., 2018). From the marketing perspective, influencers as early adopters can play a key role in promotion of new products, therefore becoming a new force in the two-step flow of communication (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014)

Social media influencers are not limited to just one industry, as they are active in different fields such as healthy eating, fashion, beauty, interior design, and motherhood (Van Norel, Kommers, Van Hoof, & Verhoeven, 2014). Instead of having to possess skills in their fields, all they need is to achieve a large followership on social media (D. Boyd & Marwick, 2011).

There is a parasocial relationship between celebrities in social media and their followers that helps in understanding the behaviors of users (Kim, 2005), as followers must have a strong interest in the life of their favorite celebrities in order to be influenced by their promotions (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018).

Influencers who have been successful in attracting ‘homegrown audiences’ are more likely to be seen as attractive and likeable by online users and are perceived as authentic and expert (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). However, as influencers become more familiar to the users, they will lose their likeability because the perceived similarity between them and followers lasts only as long as the endorsers are unfamiliar (Norton, Frost, & Ariely, 2007).

When influencers promote a brand, there is less chance for consumers to easily recognize their commercial intent (Hwang & Zhang, 2018) as digital celebrities’ commercial contents are posted

in combination with content about their daily lives that does not activate consumers' persuasion knowledge (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017) because their posts are very similar to organic user-generated content (Farace, van Laer, Ruyter, & de Wetzels, 2015), and the placement of ads blends seamlessly with nonpaid content (Childers et al., 2018). Persuasion knowledge theory claims that a consumer's persuasion coping knowledge helps them to recognize persuasion attempts and perform coping tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

When advertising through influencers, there is a win-win situation for both brands and opinion leaders in terms of prestige. When an influencer disseminates positive message about a brand, it is an indicator of the brand being tested and approved. On the other hand, it is also a source of pride for the influencer for being celebrated as a brand ambassador (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

The relationship formed between influencers and followers is a virtual online social relationship, (Hwang & Zhang, 2018) as belonging to a virtual community could have emotional and evaluative significance (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989). Many followers of influencers feel that they have a personal relationship with the influencers, which makes the content more meaningful (Childers et al., 2018).

The interactions of online leaders can be carried both online and offline (Casaló et al., 2018), and in fact social media influencers are most effective with their audience when their exposure is both online and offline (Daniel et al., 2018). Effective influencers not only can sustain their online status in a user trust network, but also can have impact on their followers' acceptance of recommendations, product choices, and purchase decisions in specific domains (Liu et al., 2015).

## **2.5 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM)**

The potential for individuals to change their online identity in the online world could lead to relative anonymity of people in this medium (Hoffman & Novak, 1997), which could facilitate negative word of mouth (WoM) among consumers. Word of mouth is a means of spreading information (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019) and a casual communication activity between consumers regarding the services, products or features of providers that they exchange among

each other (Kiss & Bichler, 2008) that will continue to increase in volume with interactions and activity on online media channels (Childers et al., 2018).

Similarly, electronic word of mouth (eWoM) is any kind of statement or opinion (positive or negative) by current, former or potential clients about a brand or its products or services, which is expressed to a large number of people on the Internet (Jin & Phua, 2014). In other words, eWoM could be considered as any product information communicated by potential clients on the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

People tend to communicate with each other about new trends, share information and give opinions which emphasizes the role of social communication in the online medium (Casaló et al., 2018). eWoM could be more extensive than traditional WoM, as non-textual communication such as liking or retweeting and other forms of comments could also be considered eWoM (Wolny & Mueller, 2004).

WoM has an important role in shaping attitudes, in purchase decision making, and also in reducing the risk associated with purchase decisions (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). It is also considered a trustworthy source of information, as 83% of consumers in the U.S. trust recommendations from their peers over advertising (McCaskill, 2015), which greatly exceeds any other form of marketing such as advertising or branded communication (Liu et al., 2015). A lot of consumers find those types of information that they find on social media channels through other users more reliable than businesses themselves (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). Word of Mouth has a crucial role in presenting product information through the user's perspective and is a vital source of information for potential customers (D. H. Park & Kim, 2008).

So with all the advantages that WoM marketing brings about, it is no wonder that marketers are trying to utilize this technique in the best way possible, as consumers are more likely to engage in shopping online if they trust e-commerce based on eWoM (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). One of the techniques that marketers use is sponsored advertisements in social networking sites that could connect businesses directly to consumers (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015), as the rapid growth and popularity of social media have significantly transformed the way individuals develop

relationships and share information, including a change in the interaction between customers and businesses (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

Advertisements on social networking sites can boost positive perceptions and encourage social media users with positive perceptions and attitudes toward advertised brands and products to carry out eWoM (Lee & Hong, 2016), therefore it is an influential advertising tool in the online environment as a platform to build social relationships and interest-focused societies (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Digital marketing results in more WoM-based actions and has a higher response rate than traditional marketing, therefore it has a greater impact (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2008). WoM promotion of more relevant information on the digital environment for potential customers could reduce the asymmetry of information that was obvious on traditional marketing and therefore achieves more effective market transparency (Park & Kim, 2008).

## **2.6 Using influential people in promoting WoM**

Traditionally, marketers have been very keen on using famous and popular people for advertising intentions. The endorsement technique has become increasingly popular and an established method in marketing in recent decades (Gräve, 2017) because of the positive impact that it has on purchase intention of customers (Stafford K.M., 2003). Businesses use celebrity endorsement as an advertising tactic in launching new products or services, changing the perception of brands or strengthening brand images (Eren-Erdogmus, Lak, & Çiçek, 2016), as product endorsers usually contribute to an advertisement's persuasiveness for many customers (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 2005).

It is proved by both theory and practice that using superstars in product promotions results in a lot of publicity and attention from the society (Schlecht, 2003), as celebrity endorsement is a well-known method in boosting the performance of advertisements (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). Endorsing products by celebrities is by no means a new practice in marketing, as it was seen in the case of Queen Victoria with Cadbury's Cocoa in the late nineteenth century (Erdogan, 2008).

Billions of dollars is spent every year on celebrity endorsement contracts (Schlecht, 2003) and it is argued that it has become a fundamental strategy to support the product by a reputable and credible personality in a competitive marketing environment (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). Today, it is estimated that 20% of advertisement in the U.S, 17% in the UK and more than 48% in Japan feature celebrity endorsements (Gräve, 2017).

In order to succeed in a competitive market, businesses need to connect with people who are at the heart of conversation and reach the decision makers who are influential in others' decisions, as these influential individuals are well-connected and have connections to a considerably large number of groups (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). That is the main reason behind the popularity of celebrity endorsement because advertisers believe that a message conveyed by a famous individual achieves a greater degree of awareness and remembrance for some customers (Ohanian, 1991).

Celebrity endorsement is not only used to create positive impact in the minds of the customers (Gupta et al., 2017), but also is one potential solution if a business' image has been defamed (Erdogan, 2008). When businesses use a celebrity, expert or person of influence to convey a message, the sponsorship of the message might not always be understood explicitly (Mudge & Shaheen, 2017). Research has shown that advertisement through celebrity endorsement leads to a greater degree of appeal, attention or remembrance and probably purchase in comparison to advertisement without celebrities and subsequently, results in a significant positive impact on financial return for the businesses (Gupta et al., 2017).

Rise of social media in the past decade has added new dimensions in utilisation of influential people by companies, as the introduction of this new online media has resulted in using social media influencers to advertise brands and boost business sales and performance (Kenneth B. Yap, Budi Soetarto, & Jillian C. Sweeney, 2013). Social media gives the opportunity to businesses to be noticed by potentially millions of consumers who follow certain influencers (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). Marketers are aware of online celebrities' advertising power and effectiveness that makes them influential models of advertising in social networking sites (Hwang

& Zhang, 2018), so businesses continuously use digital celebrities for product endorsement (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018).

For example, the increasing power of online bloggers to directly influence their connected network is being utilized as a new communication channel for businesses (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014), as Brands are trying to find to exploit their impact and influence to generate interest, drive action, create goodwill, establish expertise and create conversation with their online audience (Gardner, 2005).

Influencers are a minority of people who have impact on a significant number of their peers and therefore are important to the formation of public opinion (Watts & Dodds, 2007), so marketing through influencers includes identifying these individuals with a large following on social networking sites and consequently using them as a venue to advertise to consumers in an indirect way (Mudge & Shaheen, 2017). It is indirect because promoting brands' messages through influencers helps to reach the message to users who do not receive the brand message directly from the brand (Zeljko et al., 2018). Businesses try to build a more direct relationship with consumers through collaboration with influencers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018).

Companies are not only interested in an individual on social media being an influencer currently, but also whether the person will manage to maintain his or her power in the future (Liu et al., 2015). Corporations are especially hiring influencers on social media for young target audiences (Gräve, 2017). The similarity of influencers and their followers make them a very suitable choice for advertising purposes, as traditionally consumers have been selected as product endorsers in testimonial advertising due to their similarity to target groups (Ohanian, 1990). 67% of marketers in 2017 found more impactful outcomes through using influencers in their advertising campaigns and agreed that this form of advertising simplified the reach of highly targeted audiences (Childers et al., 2018).

Diffusion of message by online celebrities has a positive impact on electronic word of mouth, as the result of one study shows that positive tweets from celebrities with many followers on Twitter could promote customers' purchase intentions and results in more effective eWoM (Jin & Phua, 2014). Also, another study found that a parasocial relationship between online

celebrities and their followers on social media can positively affect purchase intention and eWoM of the followers (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Endorsements by online celebrities are credible sources in producing a positive eWoM related to specific products and services (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Chu and Choi (2011) proposed three ingredients of electronic WoM on social networking sites which consists of opinion leaders, opinion seekers and pass-along behavior or sharing the messages between people. Opinion leaders on social media include traditional celebrities and digital influencers, opinion seekers are the people who follow them and are looking for information (Casaló et al., 2018), and pass-along behavior might increase the power of electronic word of mouth on social media (Chu & Choi, 2011).

Social networking sites have opened a new channel for eWoM as conveying a message through social media influencers could reach to millions of people, and in turn, potential clients (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). Broadcasting a message through social media influencers is an eWoM advertising technique because their followers perceive this interaction as a word-of-mouth communication (Daniel et al., 2018).

Marketing through influencers represents the importance of word of mouth to both advertisers and customers in decision making activity (Childers et al., 2018). Businesses are increasingly making efforts to take advantage of the effect of influencers on social media for sales and advertising purposes (Liu et al., 2015) as word of mouth has a great impact on consumer opinions and purchase decisions (Kiss & Bichler, 2008).

Apart from the extensive reach that influencers provide, they are perceived to be effective sources of electronic word of mouth because they have high credibility and trustworthiness among their followers (Gräve & Greff, 2018). Electronic word of mouth is more trusted among online users in comparison with other types of corporate messages because these messages “directly communicate what are perceived to be consumers’ own experiences” (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). For this reason, effective influencers in social media can significantly affect customers’ buying decisions through trust among users in eWoM and so identifying these

influential people with respect to user trust connections has become very important (Liu et al., 2015).

The ability to effectively identify opinion leaders in social networking sites has become extremely important to businesses in eWoM marketing as messages could spread faster and be promoted better through recommendations by influencers to their followers and peers (Liu et al., 2015), as customers are much more likely to show a positive attitude toward messages that come from a trusted source rather than an advertiser's sponsored post (Childers et al., 2018). Corporations offer consumers an opportunity to believe in their information by establishing trust through eWoM advertising (Shaemi & Saneian, 2014).

## **2.7 Instagram as a medium for influencer marketing**

Instagram is a popular social media app and the fastest-growing social media platform (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018) that as of March 2019, has +1 billion monthly active users. More than 500 million Instagram users use the platform every day (Instagram, 2019). Only Facebook and Youtube of the social networks have more people logging in (Clarke Todd, 2019). The growth of Instagram continues (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) and the majority of its users around the globe are young people (Clarke Todd, 2019), as these people are increasingly using smartphones for surfing the Web for leisure activities while desktop usage has become mostly limited to more formal environments of school and work (Abidin, 2016).

Instagram is the most used social networking site by influencers in the fashion industry (Casaló et al., 2018) and has been broadly used by opinion leaders in different industries to “curate taste displays, publish advertorials, and wrestle for followers” (Abidin, 2016). While attempting to influence consumers' purchase intentions with the use of online advertising, fashion and beauty websites have become less and less effective because customers are aware of the companies' intention to persuade by promoting the brand's positive image (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019), Instagram is experiencing a constant growth in number of active users related to the fashion industry and fashion brands have generally more followers than other types of brands (Casaló et

al., 2018). As a result, promoting brand on Instagram could be more effective than traditional online advertising.

Influencers are using Instagram to publish and share information and imagery instead of a personal photo archive (Abidin, 2016) due to a sense of immediacy that is generated and also its creation of communities (Casaló et al., 2018). Unlike personal blogs and websites that help to build a powerful network identity, social media channels like Instagram help spread messages quicker (Zeljko et al., 2018), and therefore corporations use it for marketing goals to reach wider audiences (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018). Users refer to online reviews on Instagram to lessen the perceived risk when making a purchase decision with regard to their trust in opinion leaders, as electronic word of mouth firmly links to buying behavior on the basis of trust (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Consumers show different behaviors on Instagram compared to other social networking platforms since they take more actions (Casaló et al., 2018). The engagement rate is higher in comparison with other social networking sites (Locowise & Ahmed, 2017) as social interaction is one of the key elements for Instagram usage (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018). As a result, Instagram not only could provide brands with the opportunity to impact users' choices and rapidly circulate knowledge and perceptions in regard with new products and services, but also engage them, collaborate with and advance customer relationships actively (Dholakia et al., 2004) as the essence for the interpersonal route of influence is human interaction, and the opinion leader is a key factor (Chan & Misra, 1990).

Because visual information enhances the influence of written content, (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018) Instagram as a social media service which allows users to share their life images with other users has attracted a growing interest among marketers (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), as especially photos shared by more influential people are viewed by more people than images shared by less influential users (Segev et al., 2018). Because opinion leaders have more public recognition (McCracken, 1989), celebrities' profiles are at the top of the list of most-followed pages on Instagram (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Users spend more time on Instagram than other similar social media sites which highlights its importance to businesses (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Moreover, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that generally no negative reviews regarding brands are posted by users on Instagram in order for them to keep a positive image of themselves among the Instagram community (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), so it is perceived to be a positive type of media.

Instagram is an aesthetically stylized platform for publishing photos (Abidin, 2016) so in comparison with other social media channels, presents businesses with the opportunity to share “aesthetically pleasing, creative and charming content, focusing exclusively on visuals, and to showcase their products in an appealing way” (Casaló et al., 2018).

Advertising through influencers on Instagram is perceived to be a very effective form of advertising (Casaló et al., 2018). In 2017, marketers spent \$800 million USD on influencer marketing on Instagram and are predicted to increase their spending to \$2.38 billion by 2020 (Mediakix, 2019).

## **2.8 Importance of the right influencer and the right content in broadcasting message**

Choosing the right message to disseminate through influencers is crucial, as consumers are exposed to between 3,000 to 5,000 advertisements daily (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Therefore, it is important for the endorsers to post the right content to be able to influence consumers, as research has shown that certain types of content are more likely to spread word of mouth than others among consumers (Zhang, Moe, & Schweidel, 2017).

In any endorsement advertising through spokespersons, it is important to create a message that causes the desired relationship between the two parties (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). While the effectiveness of a message is dependent on “similarity, familiarity and liking for an endorser” (Erdogan, 2008), the nature of the content created by influencers gives the appearance of authenticity, which is less powerful in traditional advertising (Childers et al., 2018). Especially in the visual context of Instagram, creativity and uniqueness are two vital factors to make the content more appealing (LYFE Marketing, 2018).

The originality of content shared by influencers on Instagram has a direct impact on the follower's perception that the author of the post is an opinion leader (Casaló et al., 2018). Moreover, advertisers believe that the character of a communicator has a significant impact on the persuasiveness of the message (Ohanian, 1990).

Casaló et al. (2018) argue that originality of content on Instagram reflects the degree of novelty that some users gain through performing specific actions which are considered as unusual and creative. Uniqueness is a state in which a user feels individuated from other users and involves behavior that makes others pay attention (Casaló et al., 2018). Attractiveness, quality and composition of pictures on Instagram are also key factors for users to decide whether or not to follow influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Businesses have only limited control on the content broadcasted by influencers (Gräve & Greff, 2018), as influencers now create and spread their own content, although marketers still have some creative control to assure that the influencers post the right message (Childers et al., 2018). Rebroadcasting a message also depends on a message's fit with a user (Zhang et al., 2017), as characteristics of the content could influence the consumer's perceptions (Casaló et al., 2018).

Zhang et al. (2017) found that tailoring a message to the interests of influencers can generate a great deal of word of mouth among users (Zhang et al., 2017). This is in line with the theory of 'Product Match-up Hypothesis' that messages communicated by celebrity image and the product message should be in harmony for the advertisement to be effective (Kamins, 1990). This theory states that product endorsers are more effective when there is a "fit" between the endorser and the product (Till & Busler, 2000).

When the character of the celebrity is carefully matched with the character of the product and audience characteristics, the advertisement could be much more effective (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). Audiences are willing to identify the product with the source and therefore the agreement of source with product is crucial (Kamins & Gupta, 1994), as consumers will be more attracted to the product when they believe that the product endorsed by a celebrity is in fact being used by the celebrity (Jamil & Hassan, 2018).

Selecting the right influencers as product endorsers is dependent on more factors than just a person being famous, as a significant number of failures proves the opposite (Schlecht, 2003). However, despite all the extensive research on opinion leadership, developing a profile of an opinion leader is still a challenging task (Chan & Misra, 1990). It is a recurring and difficult problem in advertising practice (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985).

Considering the risk associated with choosing an inappropriate opinion leader and the large sums of money involved in celebrity endorsement, marketers need to pay careful attention to product endorser selection (Ohanian, 1991). An ineffective spokesperson may detract from the overall effectiveness of the product's advertising campaign (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). Thus, marketers should carefully consider what type of celebrity could be the most effective in appealing to their intended target audience (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Businesses are keen on working with celebrities whose characteristics match with the products and target audiences and who also have not endorsed products previously (Erdogan, 2008), as social influence occurs within a specific context (Smith et al., 2018). The reason that marketers are more inclined toward celebrities who have not been involved in product endorsements previously is that if a spokesperson's image ties in with different brands, the relationship between he/she and a specific brand is not distinctive and therefore impact and identity with each product might diminish (Mowen & Brown, 1981).

Not only is the fit between the message content and the audience's interest an important driver of rebroadcasting behavior among followers (Zhang et al., 2017), but also higher congruence between the contents of an influencer's account and the audience's thoughts and personality results in greater psychological intimacy between the consumer and the opinion leader (Casaló et al., 2018).

Brand's name (brand name and specific attributes) and the Celebrity's image (relevant characteristics) are determinants of congruence between a brand and a spokesperson (Misra & Beatty, 1990). If a celebrity's image does not logically relate to products, using her/him in the endorsement process is an unnecessary risk (Watkins, 1989) and unnecessary expenditure (Jamil & Hassan, 2018).

Congruity between celebrities and products is expected by consumers too, therefore both practitioners and audience are asking for a degree of match between spokespersons and brands (Erdogan, 2008). The perception of the advertisement and also the purchase intention of a product is greater if consumers believe that there is some degree of fit between their own self-image and that of the endorser (Casaló et al., 2018).

Jamil & Hassan (2018) believe that the association between brand and celebrity is the most important element to generate positive feedback as it is the evidence that the product is actually used or consumed by the spokesperson (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). When using bloggers for endorsement purposes, it is important to choose bloggers whose content matches with the brand because it increases the intimacy of brand communication (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

A characteristic that is traditionally used as a match-up factor between spokesperson and brand image is physical attractiveness of the endorser (Kahle & Homer, 1985). For example, attractive influencers could be more effective endorsers for products whose main usage is to enhance attractiveness, which results in greater brand attitude and buying intentions (Till & Busler, 2000). However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of endorsers varies by product (Friedman & Friedman, 1979) as the influence of spokesperson varies by the product being advertised (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989).

Lack of relationship between spokesperson and brand could cause an audience to think that the celebrity has been paid to promote the brand (Erdogan, 2008). Consumers are more influenced by celebrity when in their opinion, she or he has real attachment to the product rather than materialistic benefit (Jamil & Hassan, 2018).

When a spokesperson does not have a certain attachment with the product, it could lead to 'vampire effect', meaning that people will remember the celebrity and not the product or service (Evans, 1988). In that case, the audience will focus their attention on the spokesperson (Rossiter & Percy, 1987) while the product should be the star of the show (Cooper, 1984).

An important factor that determines how easily an endorser could be associated with a brand is "belongingness, relatedness, fit, or similarity" (Till & Busler, 2000). Erdogan (2008) defines

similarity as “a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message, familiarity as knowledge of the source through exposure, and likability as affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behaviour” (Erdogan, 2008).

Apart from the brand-endorser match-up, the fit between content and user is of great importance when using social media influencers as endorsers and marketers should tailor the content to the follower's desires (Zhang et al., 2017). This practice could cause consumers to actively follow the content rather than trying to avoid advertising content (Childers et al., 2018).

## **2.9 Difference in attitude of female and male Internet users**

It is important to businesses to assess the effectiveness of their advertisement, hence among different market segmentation variables, gender has always been used as a main segmentation factor (Palanisamy, 2004). Persuasive appeal is the reason that gender is traditionally used for audience segmentation, as unique interests of the females and males' social roles leads their judgments (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991) and stereotypes have an important role in human judgment (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Gender as a segmentation factor of audience is easily identifiable and provides segments large enough to generate profit for businesses (Palanisamy, 2004).

Previous research shows significant differences between male and female users in their online activity (Palanisamy, 2004). For example, women are more likely to elaborate on message signals that require a limited amount of attention (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991). Females use Internet more for communication (Deaux & Lewis, 1984) and are likelier to upload pictures on social media (Sasson & Mesch, 2016).

Men are generally more likely to be involved in risky online activities than women (Sasson & Mesch, 2016). Female users also perceive higher levels of risk when shopping online comparing to male users (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004).

There are also differences in perceived credibility of web page information from the viewpoint of females and males. Previous studies point to men being more generous in their credibility

assessment, as they rate both message credibility and website credibility higher than women (Flanagin & Metzger, 2003).

As many marketers focus mainly on only female or male audiences (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004), understanding how women and men are different in their engagement with influencers could help businesses to tailor their social media strategies to the consumers being targeted.

### **3. Source Credibility**

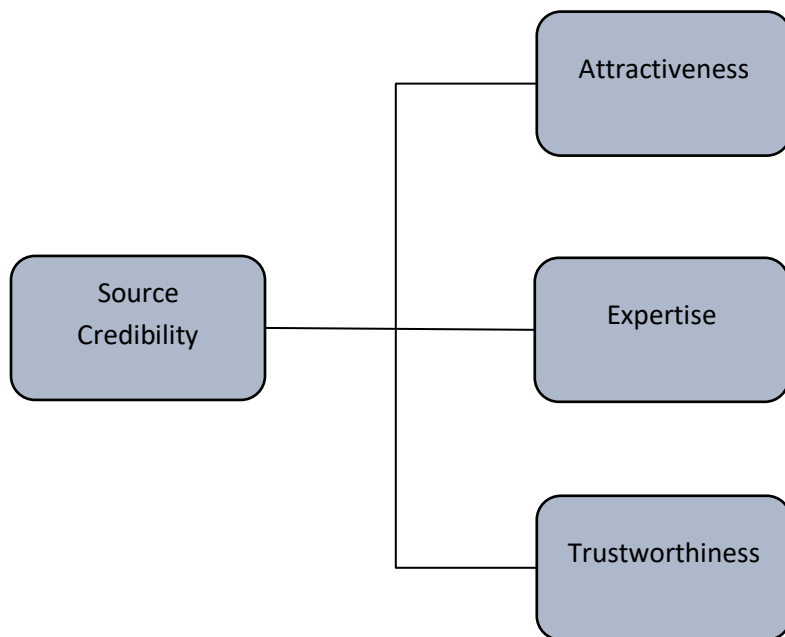
#### **3.1 Credibility of spokesperson and the impact on purchase intention of audience**

The credibility of an endorser is an important factor in influencing the behavior of the audience, and advertisers have known for a long time that highly credible sources could enhance the persuasiveness of the message (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). The term 'source credibility' is commonly used to indicate positive attributes of a communicator that has an impact on the receiver's acceptance of a message (Ohanian, 1990).

The literature suggests different perspectives for what defines source credibility. Therefore, understanding and defining source credibility is usually confusing because there are so many variables that appear in the literature (Ohanian, 1990).

Hovland et al. (1953), one of the initial research studies on source credibility, lists expertness, trustworthiness and likability as the main dimensions of source credibility. McCroskey (1966) argues that authoritativeness and character are two main dimensions of credibility (McCroskey, 1966). On the other hand, Whitehead (1968) suggests objectivity as a sign of high credibility, meaning that a highly credible source should be open-minded, objective and impartial (Whitehead Jr, 1968). Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1969) consider safety, qualification, and dynamism as three dimensions that are used by the audience in evaluating message sources (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969).

In any case, credibility is perceived as a multidimensional concept that is connected to different communication sources (Eisend, 2006). Ohanian (1990) states that all definitions of source credibility encompass some combination of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness, and these three dimensions form the perceived credibility of the communicator in the eyes of audience (Ohanian, 1990). Gupta et al. (2017) have also added factors of popularity and relevance to the three aforementioned factors (Gupta et al., 2017). Figure 3.1 shows three main factors of source credibility based on the research by Ohanian (1990).



*Figure 3.1 Three dimensions of source credibility (Ohanian, 1990)*

The credibility of the endorser has a crucial role in persuading the target audience of the attractiveness of the brand (Schlecht, 2003). Highly credible opinion leaders are more successful in influencing a number of audience behaviors including change, message recall, and behavioral response (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). When the receivers of a message have a higher perception of an endorser's credibility, they form more positive attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016) and therefore consumers' purchase intention will also be higher (Newell, Goldsmith, & Lafferty, 2000). A highly credible endorser brings out more change in the audience's behavior than a less credible source (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985).

In general, the credibility of an opinion leader has a positive impact on the endorsed brand (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Despite the positive attitude changes that a highly credible source brings out in the audience, highly credible endorsers are not always more effective than less credible sources. For example, when the audience has already formed a favorable attitude toward the message, a less credible source can generate greater persuasion than a highly credible one (Ohanian, 1990). Thus, the initial perception of a message receiver is an important determinant of influence, as a spokesperson who lacks credibility can be more influential than a high credibility source in case individuals have already formed a positive predisposition toward the ad (Erdogan, 2008).

When an influencer on Instagram admits that he/she was paid for posting a brand-based content, it might lead to negative impact on the followers' attitude and their intention of word of mouth because the credibility of the source is decreased (Casaló et al., 2018). It is important to note that credibility of the endorser is not a way to hide the fact that she/he was paid to promote the product, since most consumers are already aware that opinion leaders are paid to state positive things about products (Friestad & Wright, 1994). However, when the celebrity possesses some unquestioned credibility and trust from consumers, this persuasion knowledge might not be applied (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016).

Perception of an individual could lead to either a positive or negative halo around that person which can result in an obscurity of their individual characteristics. This is referred to as the 'Halo Effect' in psychology (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Based on the Halo effect, a person who performs well on one dimension (for example, physical attractiveness) is perceived to be good on others too (Schlecht, 2003). Therefore, Halo effect and source credibility are closely related to each other as both are formed on characteristics e.g. attractiveness and trust, which are used to assess the credibility of the source (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Credibility of source image should be defined based on the perceptions of the message receiver, not based on objective characteristics of the source (Berlo et al., 1969) because the attributions that audiences make when exposed to endorsed messages are an important driver of endorser effectiveness (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Therefore, it is logical to believe that credibility of a

source is a subjective matter, but despite individual preferences, a high degree of agreement exists among individuals (Erdogan, 2008). Generally, when a parasocial relationship occurs between followers and social media influencers, followers consider influencers as highly credible sources of information and therefore, perceive their advertisements as credible purchase information (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Because credibility is related to information, it can be described as a communication concept (Eisend, 2006).

### **3.2 Source credibility: Attractiveness**

Research studies in the field of social science have found that the physical attractiveness of a spokesperson has an impact on the perception of that individual by other people (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989). When looking for endorsers, marketers should pay attention to the attractiveness of the spokesperson to create effective messages (Schlecht, 2003).

Attractiveness is defined in terms of how likeable or physically attractive the celebrity is to the audience (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). Similarly, source attractiveness refers to “physical appearance, personality, likeability, and similarity” of the spokesperson to the message receiver, therefore to the perceived social value of the spokesperson (Schlecht, 2003). The Source Attractiveness model suggests that the attractiveness of an endorser is determined by “familiarity, likability and similarity” of the endorser (Gräve, 2017).

Although perception of attractiveness is subjective based on the opinions of individuals, these principles are formed via “Gestalt” laws of person perception, meaning that if a large number of audience members rate a spokesperson as low or high in attractiveness, so the endorser is perceived to be the rated level of attractiveness (Erdogan, 2008). The initial impression of the attractiveness of an individual affects how that individual is viewed as a whole (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

To quote Aristotle’s “Beauty is greater recommendation than any letter of introduction” (Ohanian, 1990), most communities highly rate individuals based on their physical attractiveness (Ohanian, 1991). Therefore, using attractive individuals in advertising is a common practice among marketers (Schlecht, 2003). There is a general tendency among the audience to attribute

more positive characteristics to physically attractive individuals opposed to physically less attractive individuals (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989). Physical attractiveness is an informational signal involving effects that are “subtle, pervasive, and inescapable”, therefore using an attractive endorser is preferred over an average looking endorser (Patzner, 1985). By choosing attractive celebrity endorsers, advertisers benefit from effects of both celebrity status and physical appeal to audience (Singer, 1983). People tend to believe that good looking individuals are smarter, which is again reflection of Halo effect. People who rank high on one dimension are perceived to be good on other dimensions too (Erdogan, 2008).

Attractive spokespersons are generally considered to be more persuasive (Miller, 1970). As noted previously, attractive endorsers are especially more successful in terms of changing attitudes when they are used to advertise brands that boost an individual’s attractiveness (Schlecht, 2003). As an example, when a user on social media sees a shampoo advertisement that features a familiar and likeable celebrity, he/she spontaneously gets this perception that the attractive celebrity uses that shampoo to enhance her/his look. Even though the user might not feel interested in learning more about the shampoo’s features, she/he will take note of the brand the next time she/he is looking through shampoos at the pharmacy (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). This is consistent with the idea that an attractive model’s appearance in an ad could induce consumers to think that use of a brand promoted by a celebrity increases attractiveness as it did for the celebrity (Erdogan, 2008).

Attractiveness or likeability is associated with how attractive the celebrity is to the audience, which is related to the celebrity’s personality (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). While Erdogan (2008) argues that attractiveness is more than just physical attractiveness and involves some other virtuous characteristics e.g. intellectual skills, personality properties, lifestyles, or athletic prowess (Erdogan, 2008), Ohanian (1990) defines attractiveness both in terms of facial and physical attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990).

Physical attractiveness is defined in terms of model attractiveness (being attractive or unattractive) (Baker & Churchill Jr, 1977), being chic (Mills & Aronson, 1965), sexy illustrations (Steadman, 1969) and sociable, sexually warm and responsive (Maddux & Rogers, 1980). In his

model of source credibility, Ohanian (1990) lists five attributes as scales to define attractiveness of a spokesperson: being attractive, being classy, being handsome or beautiful, being elegant and being sexy (Ohanian, 1990). Ohanian's model is considered a classic and was used to develop the structure of the survey conducted as part of this thesis.

While the concept of match between the endorser and the product has been developed as the match-up hypothesis theory (Lafferty et al., 2005), early research on endorser effectiveness demonstrated that regardless of what product category the spokespersons are endorsing, physically attractive endorsers tend to be more persuasive (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016).

It is found that male and female audiences might respond differently toward attractive female models (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989). While some research shows female models induce more positive attitudes than attractive male models for both female and male audiences (Debevec & Kernan, 1984), other research found that both male and female audiences have greater intention to purchase from same-gender endorsers (Caballero, Lumpkin, & Madden, 1989).

As physical attractiveness increases a person's popularity (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989), it could influence a number of behaviors in an audience. Therefore, the attractiveness of a spokesperson is being used by marketers as a tool to transform attitudes (Menon, Boone, & Rogers, 2001). Physically attractive spokespersons are more efficient in influencing consumers' attitudes and beliefs than unattractive communicators (Schlecht, 2003). A spokesperson's physical attractiveness positively influences an audience's overall liking of an advertisement (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989), enhances attitude toward advertising and brands (Erdogan, 2008), captures attention (Jamil & Hassan, 2018), enhances positive attitude change (Ohanian, 1990) and has a positive effect on affective evaluations of an ad (Till & Busler, 2000).

Despite all the positive attitude changes that physically attractive endorsers could prompt in consumers, the literature review shows that there is disagreement between researchers as to whether attractive celebrities could create purchase intentions, as some studies showed that attractive spokespersons endorsers are not able to affect purchase intentions while other studies found that they can influence purchase intentions (Erdogan, 2008).

Ohanian (1991) and Baker and Churchill Jr (1977) argue that attractiveness has a minimal impact on purchase intention of consumers, but some other research studies suggest that physically attractive endorsers can strongly influence customers' purchase intentions (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989) (Friedman, Termini, & Washington, 1976) (Jamil & Hassan, 2018) (Patzer, 1983) (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

### **3.3 Source credibility: Expertise**

A common idea in persuasion theory is that expert sources have more ability to be persuasive than sources with less expertise (Lafferty et al., 2005). Expertise is defined as the degree to which a spokesperson is a source of accurate claims (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Expertise is derived from an opinion leader's knowledge of the subject (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016) and could include the knowledge, experience and skills of the endorser (Gupta et al., 2017). Expertise is a dimension of credibility which is also referred to by other terms such as authoritativeness, competence, expertness or qualification (Ohanian, 1990).

Opinion leaders who are greatly knowledgeable in a specific topic are better able to make valid points about that product class (Chan & Misra, 1990), because the knowledge that he/she possesses gives him/her credibility to support the claims made in the advertisements (Ohanian, 1991).

Generally, opinion leaders are perceived to have more knowledge in a specific field (Casaló et al., 2018). Thus, it is not really important whether a product endorser is an expert regarding the product, but whether the target audience perceives the endorser as an expert (Erdogan, 2008).

Expertise is the probability that the endorser has practical knowledge of what he/she is claiming (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). Since opinion leaders are perceived to have more knowledge of a certain product class, audiences tend to be more involved with them and also make recommendations to others to follow them (Casaló et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be concluded that the communicator's expertise has a positive impact on word of mouth. A product endorser with great knowledge and expertise has more power of recommendation compared to endorsers

with less skills (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). Followers of an influencers with high expertise could recommend him/her to others with the same needs and desires (Casaló et al., 2018).

According to the match-up hypothesis, the right fit between an endorser and the product is an important factor in influencing consumers (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Expertise of the celebrity is a clear determinant of fit between the celebrity and the endorsed product (Lafferty et al., 2005). Comparing two dimensions of source credibility, Till & Busler (2000) argue that expertise is more appropriate than attractiveness for matching products with spokespersons (Till & Busler, 2000).

A significant interaction between the celebrity's expertise and innovativeness of consumers exists. When a spokesperson is perceived to be an expert, purchase intention for a non-innovator audience is more positive but buying intention for an innovator audience is not dependant on the expertise of endorser (Lafferty et al., 2005). The behavior of spokespersons is an important factor in determining the rate of adoption of an innovation in a system (Watts & Dodds, 2007).

Among all three dimensions of source credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness), Ohanian (1991) states that only expertise has a significant impact on purchase intentions of consumers. Matching products with a celebrity who possesses expertise can raise brand attitudes (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Moreover, expert sources are more persuasive (Aaker & Myers, 1975), influence perceptions of the product's quality (Erdogan, 2008), produce higher recall of product information (Speck, Schumann, & Thompson, 1988), and are more trustworthy or believable (Hung, Chan, & Tse, 2011). Literature review shows that the source's expertise positively affects attitude change (Lafferty et al., 2005).

Ohanian (1990) lists the following scales to determine expertise of a spokesperson as a dimension of source credibility: being expert, being experienced, being knowledgeable, being qualified and being skilled.

### **3.4 Source credibility: Trustworthiness**

In order to develop an effective relationship with consumers, it is important for organizations to collaborate with influencers who have the trust of their audience (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness is defined as the amount of confidence that the consumer puts in the source for providing information in an objective and honest approach (Ohanian, 1991) and how much they can ascertain that the communicator’s messages are valid (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016).

Familiarity could prove to be an important factor in trustworthiness as the majority of people consider a good friend trustworthy on most subjects (Ohanian, 1991), and trust their friends more than strangers or sales people (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985).

Ohanian (1990) considers being dependable, honest, reliable, sincere and trustworthy as five factors to measure the trustworthiness dimension in the source credibility theory. Therefore, with the previously mentioned scales for attractiveness and expertise dimensions, the theoretical model that she suggests is depicted in Figure 3.2.

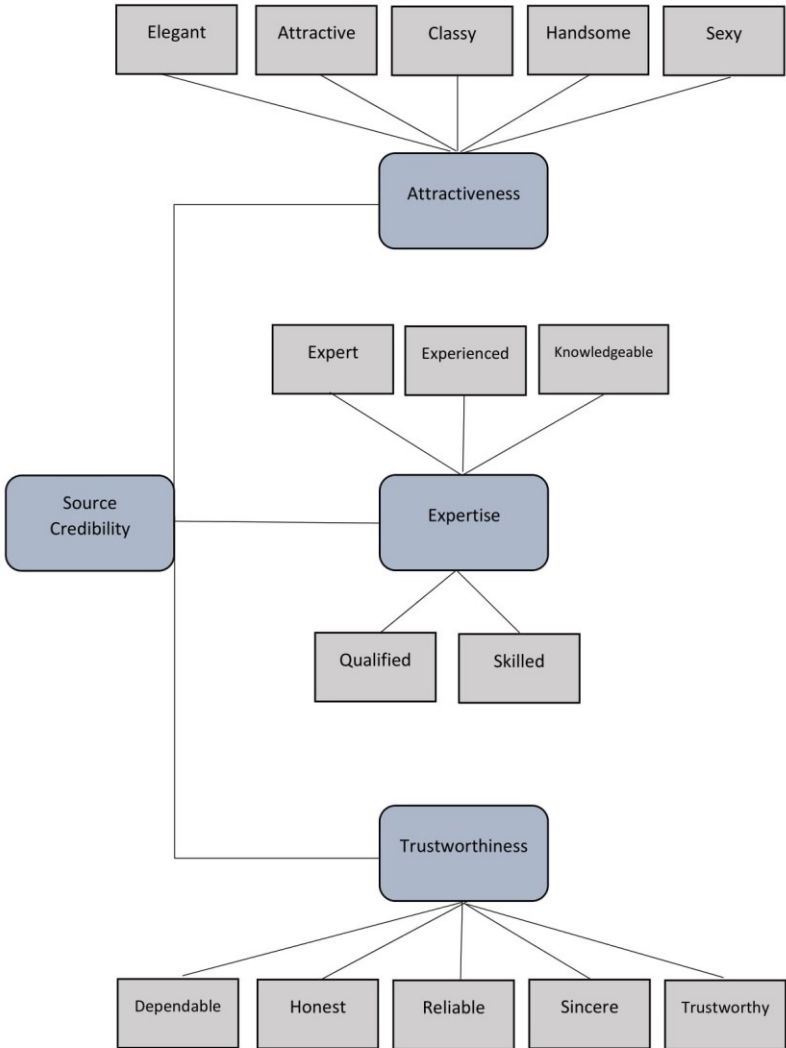


Figure 3.2 Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990)

Trustworthiness refers to the “honesty, integrity and believability” of the spokesperson (Erdogan et al., 2001) and is considered as a major source of power for the endorser (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). It is a perceptual feeling and depends on the target audience (Gupta et al., 2017).

The similarity of a spokesperson and the audience matters a lot to increase his/her trustworthiness, as people generally trust individuals who are similar to them (Erdogan, 2008). For example, when the endorser is of the same ethnic group as the audience, the amount of trust in him/her put by the audience is considerably higher than an endorser with other ethnic statuses (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). Moreover, repeated exposure could also lead to producing similar feelings of relationship enhancement, therefore making social media influencers a trustworthy source of information (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

If the endorsed products turn out to be invalid, a negative attitude toward both the brand and the endorser is formed by consumers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In the case of negative feelings toward a brand, a trustworthy endorser could use his/her good image to reduce that negative perception toward the brand, although he/she may lose some of his/her trusted status in this process (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985). If an endorser loses image among audience, consumers might form a negative attitude toward the messages and products that he/she represents (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016), irrespective of his/her other qualities (Smith, 1973).

Consumers naturally perceive celebrities as trustworthy information sources (Jamil & Hassan, 2018), as celebrities are generally liked by people and therefore will be trusted (Ohanian, 1990). Therefore, marketers are advised to select endorsers who are well liked among an audience as likeability is the most important factor of trust (Erdogan, 2008). Trustworthiness is an important determinant of source credibility (Erdogan, 2008), and an endorser who is perceived to be both an expert and trustworthy results in the most opinion change (Ohanian, 1990).

While Ohanian (1991) argues that the audience do not consider a spokesperson who is paid handsomely to promote a product as a trustworthy source of information, the results of a study by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) show that the audience believes that a celebrity does not abuse his/her status of power and reputation to damage his/her reputation by sending insincere

messages, despite the fact that they are aware that celebrities are approached by businesses to endorse products.

When advertisements inspire trust in the endorser, it could lead to attitude changes in consumers as a result of the persuasive role of endorser attributes (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Consumers establish a positive attitude toward the brand if they perceive the statements of a spokesperson on Instagram to be valid (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). A trustworthy endorser could facilitate the decision-making process (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019) and affect loyalty and assurance of the audience (Li & Miniard, 2006). An opinionated message or statement could be more effective in generating attitude change if the spokesperson is considered to be trustworthy (Ohanian, 1990).

Despite numerous behavioral changes that a trustworthy endorser could produce, the impact of an endorser's trustworthiness on the purchase intentions of consumers is unclear, as some studies show that trusted influencers could potentially lead to consumers making purchase decisions (Liu et al., 2015), and some others argue that the source's trustworthiness is not an important determinant in the purchase intentions of consumers (Ohanian, 1991)

### **3.5 Criticisms of Source Credibility theory**

Despite the wide-spread acceptance of the source credibility model in the celebrity endorsement process, a number of limitations for this theory have been mentioned in the literature as to why this model might not be able to explain endorsement's most fundamental features (McCracken, 1989). McCracken (1989) argues that according to the source model, any celebrity could be considered as a persuasive source for any type of message as long as the credibility conditions are met. The persuasiveness in the source model is totally reliant on the celebrity and not the product, therefore preventing us from recognizing matches and mismatches.

Desarbo and Harshman (1985) believe that neither the source credibility nor the congruity between the source and the product provide a heuristic view for correct source selection for three reasons:

- They do not provide an appropriate method to cope with the multidimensionality of source effects
- There is a lack of quantified empirical basis for the proposed dimensions
- They ignore relevant celebrity-product overtone interactions

McCracken (1989) states that the source model does not allow for a distinction between celebrities in an appropriate way. The model tells about degree of credibility but does not provide adequate explanation about kinds of credibility, while the celebrity sphere is more complicated than a collection of simply credible individuals.

## 4. Conceptual Framework and The Research Questions

### 4.1 Conceptual framework

It is widely believed that credibility of source could play an important role in success of celebrity endorsement. Attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of celebrity as three dimensions of the source credibility model lead to numerous behavioral changes in audience, although it is not clear whether these attitude changes include purchase intentions.

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the impact of the credibility of Instagram influencers as a modern type of celebrity, and to find out whether the perceived credibility of influencers could lead to purchase intention of followers.

The conceptual framework for the present study is depicted in the figure 4.1. The conceptual framework is formed based on the Ohanian's source credibility theory (Ohanian, 1990). Instead of focusing on mainstream celebrities (movie actors, musicians, athletes, etc.), this paper centers around Instagram influencers to assess their perceived credibility based on the three dimensions of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness by male and female Instagram users. This research also aims to understand how the three dimensions of source credibility impact purchase intentions of Instagram users.

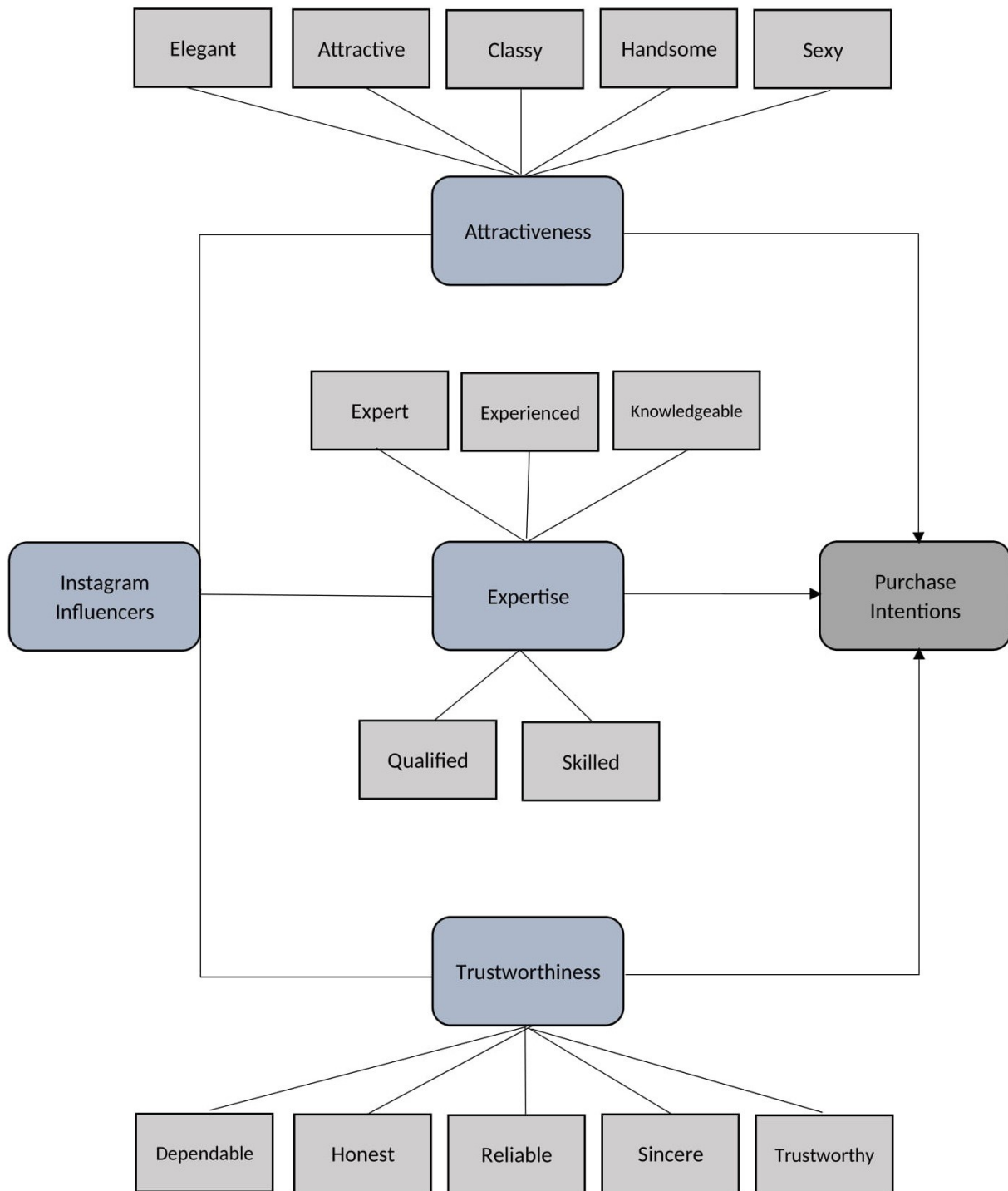


Figure 4.1 Conceptual framework

## 4.2 Research questions

This research is going to answer the following questions:

**RQ 1.** Does the attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of Instagram influencers have a positive impact on the tendency of Instagram users to follow them?

**RQ 2.** Is there a difference in perception of male and female Instagram users on how they follow influencers?

**RQ 3.** Which dimension of credibility (attractiveness / expertise / trustworthiness) of Instagram influencers has a higher impact on purchase intention of followers?

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Research approach**

To develop the research questions and collect the data an existing theory was adopted, thus a positivistic approach was taken for the conduct of the research. In the philosophy of positivism, the researcher adopts the philosophical stance of the natural scientist (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) and factual knowledge obtained through observation is used.

There are generally two approaches to do scientific research: deductive and inductive research. While in the deductive approach the researcher subjects the development of a theory to a rigorous test, an inductive approach uses observed data to build theory (Saunders et al., 2009). The present study adopts a deductive approach since it is using new empirical data to test concepts known from a previously built theory, as a deductive research tests out theories through empirical observation (Lancaster, 2007).

### **5.2 Survey structure and design**

The method for data collection for this research is a survey in the form of a structured and self-administered questionnaire. According to Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey (2008), surveys are a social scientific method for collecting quantifiable data regarding a specific group of people by asking them some questions about their individual behavior, knowledge and perceptions (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008). Therefore it was considered an appropriate type of data collection for the current study.

In accordance with the guidelines by Adams et al. (2007) in survey design, the questions for the survey were kept short, clear and unambiguous (Adams, Khan, Raeside, & White, 2007).

The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions in total in various forms including closed-ended, open-ended and multiple choice questions. The first two questions were used as screening questions to make sure that only people who were Instagram users and followed at least one influencer on Instagram could take part in the survey. Because people might have different

definitions of the term 'influencer' in mind, a definition was provided in the survey as individuals who create content on Instagram, have a large number of followers and achieve their fame through social media networks.

The next question was to determine the perception of respondents toward credibility of influencers that they follow on Instagram based on three dimensions of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness. The scales for this question were adopted from Ohanian's research (1990) about source credibility theory. The scales to measure for the credibility are being elegant, attractive, classy, handsome, sexy, expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, skilled, dependable, honest, reliable, sincere and trustworthy.

To reduce the bias, the questions for 15 scales regarding the three dimensions of credibility were posted in random order in the questionnaire. The questions were posted as rating questions and a Likert five-point rating scale was used. In Likert-style rating scale, the respondents are asked how strongly they agree or disagree with a series of statements (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Adams et al. (2007), Likert scales questions are easy to answer and analyze and odd numbered scales is the recommendation to use.

A rating question in Likert scale was asked to assess purchase intentions of respondents.

The last part of the questionnaire was dedicated to questions about behavior of respondents on Instagram to get a proper view of how they use this social media platform, and also demographic questions regarding respondents' background as it allows to see analysis of potential differences between responses of people within different age groups, gender, education and income level.

An open-ended question was asked to provide the participants with the opportunity to express their opinion about the influencers on Instagram, to see how they view this phenomenon in general.

### **5.3 Pilot survey**

A pilot test was carried out to test the design of the survey, as "it is important that all surveys are tested before the actual survey is conducted" (Adams et al., 2007). According to Saunders et al.

(2019), apart from the design of the questions and the structure of the questionnaire, the validity and reliability of the data and the response rate mainly depend on the rigor of the pilot testing. A pilot survey is also an important tool to ensure that participants can understand or answer questions and instructions with no problem (Fink, 2015).

Because of the above-mentioned reasons, a pilot test was run and distributed to 15 respondents which included mainly the researcher's friends who were active members of Instagram, to test the "wording of the questionnaire, sequence and layout of the questionnaire and analysis procedures" (Adams et al., 2007), and also to make sure that the survey was not too time consuming for the respondents to answer.

The responses for the pilot test showed that the questions were easy to understand, the layout of the questionnaire was easy to follow, and it took mostly between 4 to 7 minutes for the respondents to complete the survey.

For the data analysis purpose, the pilot test revealed that most of the respondents (60 percent) selected the middle option on a five point Likert scale question for the purchase intention that made it difficult to get meaningful data out of this question, so the author found it necessary to make some modifications to this question.

The original wording of the purchase question in the pilot survey and the responses are depicted in the Appendix A.

For the final survey, the purchase question was modified and the words for the Likert scale ratings were completely removed to ensure that respondents' answers were not affected by the wording of the scales, as "if the meaning of scale points is ambiguous, then both reliability and validity of measurement may be compromised" (Krosnick & Presser, 2010).

## **5.4 Sampling**

The population for the current research consists of Instagram users in Canada and the United States who are at least 18 years old and follow at least one influencer on Instagram. A self-selection non-probability convenience method was chosen as the sampling technique to select

the population. Adams et al. (2007) defines sampling as “the process or technique of selecting a suitable sample for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population”.

In non-probability sampling, the chance and probability of selecting a population element is unknown (Adams et al., 2007). Non-probability samples that are unrestricted and the participants are selected haphazardly on the basis that they are easiest to obtain (Saunders et al., 2009) are called convenience samples, which are generally the least expensive and also the easiest method of sampling to conduct (Adams et al., 2007).

Self-selection sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method in which the case, usually an individual, is allowed to identify their desire to be part of the sample (Saunders et al., 2009).

## **5.5 Data collection**

The questionnaire was posted online through the Survey Monkey platform due to its secure and encrypted data storage in Canada, plus the ease of distribution among the online target group of Instagram users. Moreover, as Keyton (2006) points out, online surveys are usually the most cost-effective means of survey research (Keyton, 2006).

The respondents for the present study were recruited through Amazon’s crowdsourcing platform called Mechanical Turk which is “much more diverse than a typical student sample” (Sheehan, 2018). Each respondent was rewarded \$0.10 USD for their contribution to the research.

Data quality is a crucial factor in an online data collection method, and assessing data reliability (the extent to which the data collection techniques or analysis procedures will lead to consistent and repeatable findings) and validity (examination of any other possible causal relationship or unknown elements that impact the results, i.e., whether the findings of the study are truly about what they appear to be about) is essential to gather theoretically sound data (Saunders et al., 2009) (Sheehan, 2018).

Previous research shows that Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform can produce data as reliable as more traditional survey collection methods (Lovett, Bajaba, Lovett, & Simmering, 2018) and

also provides cost efficiencies over other online panel services and data can be collected very quickly (Sheehan, 2018).

Compared to other convenience samples usually used, MTurk cases are generally more representative of the general population and habitual responding is considered to be a minor concern (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). Moreover, relative to other high-quality Internet surveys, Amazon's MTurk does not present a wildly distorted view of the population (Sheehan, 2018). Therefore, it can be concluded that the responses from Amazon's Mechanical Turk produce data that is sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this survey.

In a comparison study of Amazon's MTurk with two other popular online survey platforms (Qualtrics and Lightspeed) and also two typical student sample groups, respondents from Mechanical Turk performed better than the other methods on the manipulation check and attention checks, and contributed longer answers to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. The researchers concluded that MTurk sample is of "equal to or better quality than both of the student samples and clearly of better quality than both of the other two professional panel samples" (Qualtrics and Lightspeed) examined (Kees, Berry, Burton, & Sheehan, 2017). Hence, the data collected from Amazon Mechanical Turk possess a good degree of validity as "data validity can also be assessed by examining how samples perform on manipulation and attention checks" (Sheehan, 2018).

After the URL for the survey was posted on the Amazon MTurk, self-selected participants were able to complete the questionnaire anonymously and contribute to the research. A consent form approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Ottawa was posted at the beginning of the survey, and no personal information of the respondents (e.g. name, email or IP address) was collected.

Apart from the first two screening questions to ensure that only the right target group completed the survey, the participants had no obligation to answer any other questions of the questionnaire if they were not interested.

## 6. Results and Data Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the data collected through the questionnaire and discusses an overview of the empirical data. Descriptive statistics is used to present the findings by emphasizing the use of diagrams to understand the data.

In total, 267 persons took part in the survey. 15 people chose 'No' for either one or both of the screening questions, so they were not qualified to answer the rest of the questions and were excluded from the data. 2 people did not answer any of the questions in the questionnaire even though they had selected 'Yes' for the screening questions and were qualified to complete the survey, therefore they were excluded from the data as well. 250 was the total number of the remaining responses to analyze. Also, 5 people did not answer the question about their gender, so they were removed only from the analysis of data that was gender related.

## 6.1 Socio – demographic characteristics

More than half of the respondents (about 54%) were between the age of 25 to 34 years old, while about 21% were between 35 to 44 years old, about 14% were between 18 to 24 and the rest were above 45 years old. Regarding the gender of the respondents, about 64 percent of the respondents (156 people) were female and 36 percent (89 people) were male.

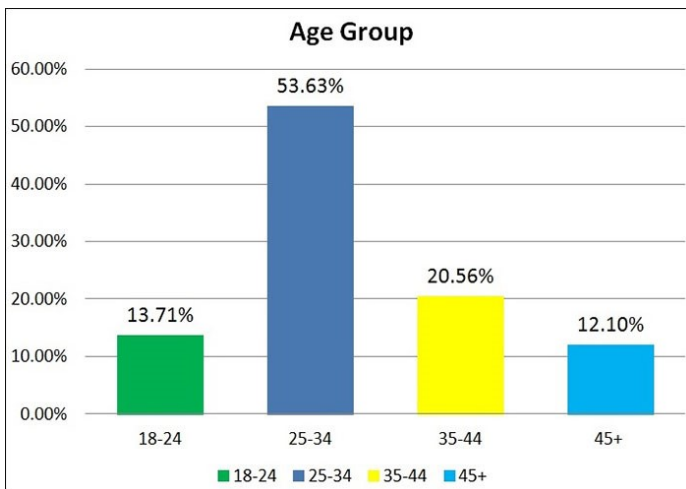


Figure 6.2 Age group of the respondents

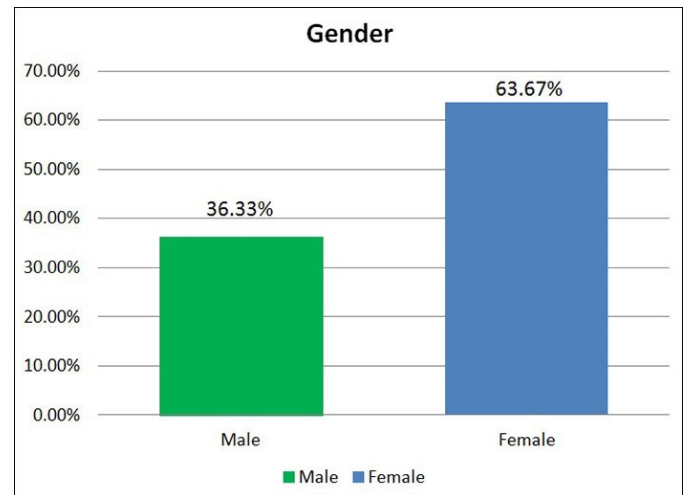


Figure 6.1 Gender of the respondents

Table 3 presents cross tabulation data of respondents in age and gender categorical groups, which shows similar distribution of female and male respondents in each age group.

Age	Gender	
	Female	Male
18 – 24 years	13.55%	13.48%
25 – 34 years	52.26%	56.18%
35 – 44 years	21.29%	20.22%
+45 years	12.90%	10.11%

Table 6.1 Cross tabulation of respondents in age and gender

In terms of education, about 45 percent of the respondents had a bachelor’s degree, while about 20 percent had a college degree, about 17 percent had a master’s degree and about 17 percent had high school degree or equivalent. There were more male respondents with bachelor’s degree than females, while there were more female respondents in most of the other education categories.

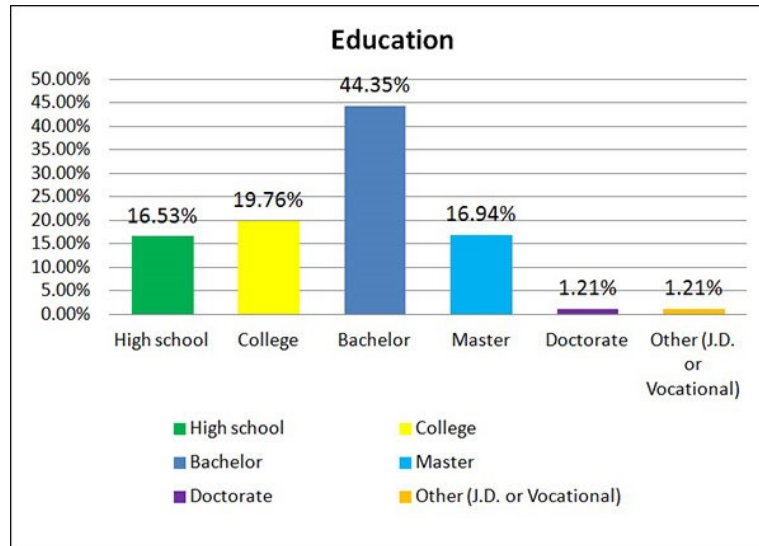


Figure 6.3 Education of the respondents

Education	Gender	
	Female	Male
High school	17.42%	14.61%
College	20.65%	19.10%
Bachelor	39.35%	52.81%
Master	20.00%	11.24%
Doctorate	0.65%	2.25%
Other (J.D. or Vocational)	1.94%	0%

Table 6.2 Cross tabulation of respondents in education and gender

The household income in a year for about 38 percent of the respondents was in the range of 15 to 50 thousand dollars, while approximately 35 percent of the respondents had between 50 to 100 thousand dollars annual household income.

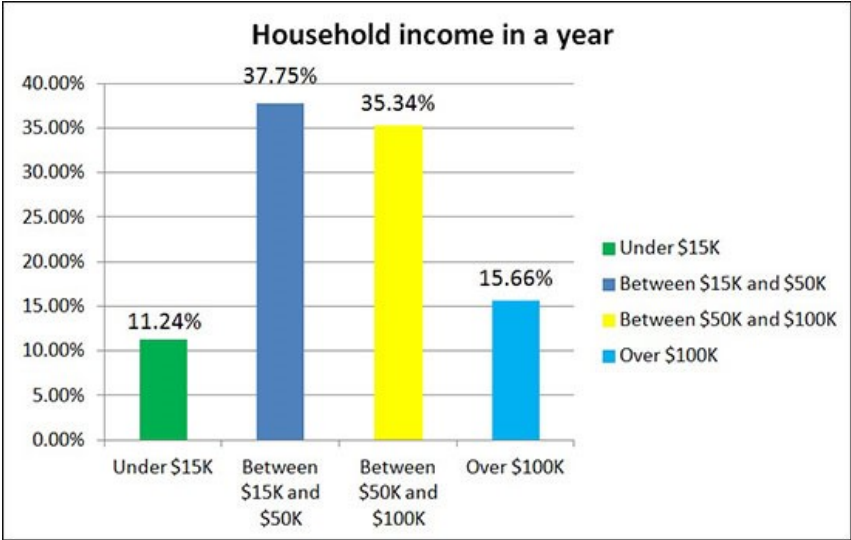


Figure 6.4 Annual household income of the respondents

The cross tabulation of gender and annual household income does not show any noticeable difference between male and female respondents in that area.

Household income in a year	Gender	
	Female	Male
Under \$15K	11.54%	10.11%
Between \$15K and \$50K	35.90%	40.45%
Between \$50K and \$100K	36.54%	34.83%
Over \$100K	16.03%	14.61%

Table 6.3 Cross tabulation of respondents in annual household income and gender

More than half of the respondents were employed full time at the time when the survey was conducted.

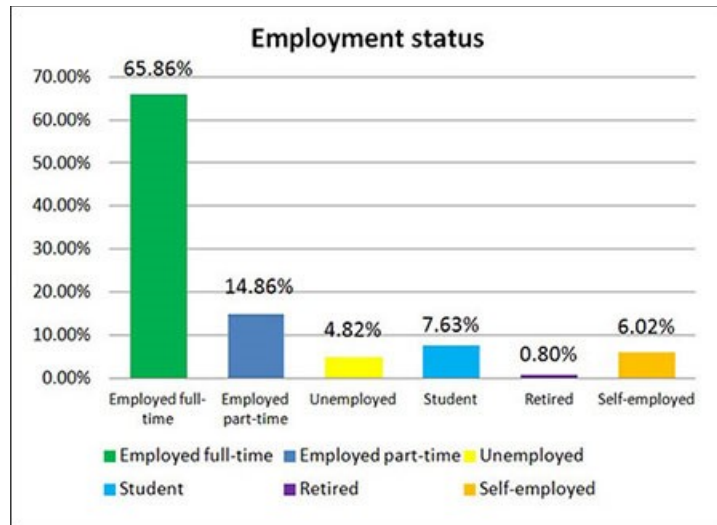


Figure 6.5 Employment status of the respondents

When comparing males and females, it can be seen that more male respondents had a full-time job while more female respondents were employed part time. In other employment status categories, there was a similar distribution of both male and female respondents.

Employment status	Gender	
	Female	Male
Employed full-time	62.82%	71.91%
Employed part-time	16.67%	11.24%
Unemployed	5.13%	3.37%
Student	7.69%	7.87%
Retired	1.28%	0%
Self-employed	6.41%	5.62%

Table 6.4 Cross tabulation of respondents in employment status and gender

## Behavior on social media (Instagram)

The data about the approximate time respondents approximately spend on Instagram each day shows that about 39 percent spend between half an hour to one hour, about 27 percent spend between one to two hours, about 23 percent spend less than 30 minutes, and about 10 percent spend more than two hours a day on Instagram.

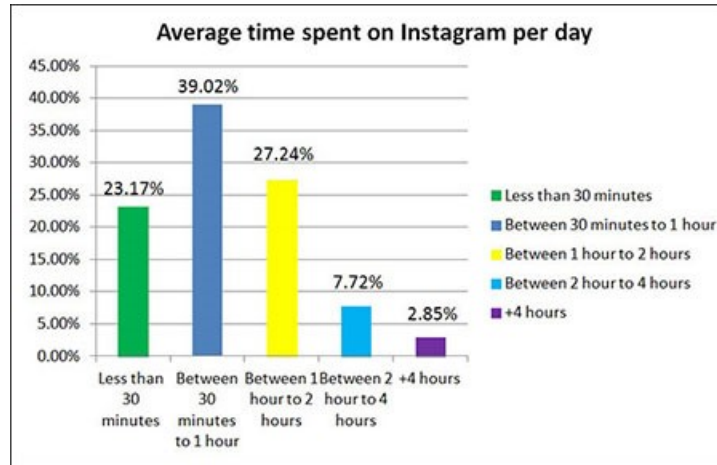


Figure 6.6 Average time spent on Instagram per day by the respondents

When comparing males to females, it can be seen that each gender spends different times on Instagram, although the pattern in the difference is not consistent.

Average time spent on Instagram per day	Gender	
	Female	Male
Less than 30 minutes	20.51%	27.91%
Between 30 minutes to 1 hour	42.31%	32.56%
Between 1 to 2 hours	26.28%	29.07%
Between 2 to 4 hours	8.33%	6.98%
More than 4 hours	2.56%	3.49%

Table 6.5 Cross tabulation of respondents in time spent on Instagram and gender

A multiple choice question was asked about what type of Influencers the respondents would prefer to follow on Instagram, and they had the option to choose among a wide range of influencer types. Fashion and Beauty appears to be the most popular category of Instagram influencers among users, followed by entertainment and fun, food, travel and tourism, and art and creativity.

The complete responses about the influencer types which respondents would prefer to follow on Instagram can be seen in figure 6.7.

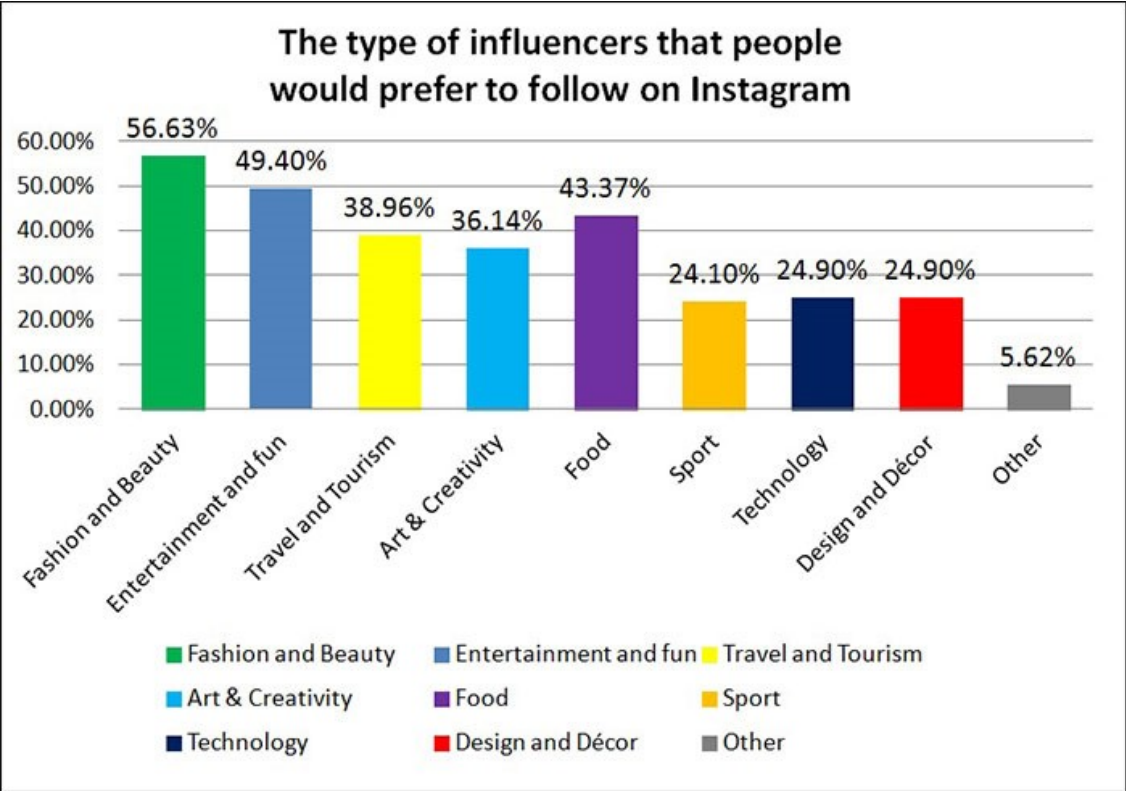


Figure 6.7 The type of influencers that respondents would prefer to follow on Instagram

The respondents who selected ‘Other’ as their answer for this question mentioned Spiritual, fitness, health and wellness, business, models, royal families, animals, tattoo models, and politics and news as their choice of influencer to follow.

When comparing males and females, a noticeable difference can be seen in behavior of gender-specific users on the type of influencer they would prefer to follow on Instagram, as the percentage of female respondents who are interested in fashion and beauty influencers is almost double the percentage of male respondents. Similarly, the percentage of females who are interested in design and decor influencers is about six times more than males. On the other hand, men are almost 3.5 times more interested to follow athletic influencers and 3 times more interested to follow influencers in the topic of technology than women.

Table 6.6 shows cross tabulation of male and female responses regarding the type of influencers that each gender would prefer to follow on Instagram.

The type of influencers that people would prefer to follow on Instagram	Gender	
	Female	Male
Fashion and beauty	69.87%	33.71%
Entertainment and fun	46.79%	53.93%
Travel and tourism	38.46%	39.33%
Art and creativity	36.54%	33.71%
Food	50.00%	32.58%
Sport	12.82%	44.94%
Technology	14.74%	41.57%
Design and decor	35.26%	6.74%
Other	7.05%	3.37%

*Table 6.6 Cross tabulation of respondents in influencer type and gender*

## 6.2 Perception of Instagram influencers's credibility

There was a series of rating scale questions to assess the participants' attitude toward credibility of their influencer of choice on Instagram. For this purpose, the respondents were asked 15 questions related to the three dimension of source credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) by using 5 adjectives in each measurement.

### 6.2.1 Reliability Test

In order to measure the internal consistency between different items of credibility, the Cronbach's alpha test was run. Internal consistency refers to "the extent to which items on the test or instrument are measuring the same thing" (Bolarinwa, 2015). According to Bryman and Cramer (2002), internal reliability is especially important when multiple-item scales are used (Bryman & Cramer, 2002), which is the case for the 5-point Likert scale in the questionnaire for the present study. The results for the Cronbach's alpha test are presented in table 6.7.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Attractiveness	0.831	5
Trustworthiness	0.899	5
Expertise	0.898	5
Source Credibility	0.908	15

Table 6.7 Reliability test analysis

In interpreting the reliability test, the higher alpha means the more the items measure the same underlying concept (University of Virginia Library, 2015). As a rule of thumb, alpha > .9 is considered excellent and alpha > .8 is considered good (George & Mallery, 2003). Therefore, it can be concluded from table 6.7 that all dimensions of credibility are internally reliable.

### 6.2.2 Perception of respondents toward attractiveness of influencers

To evaluate respondents' perception toward attractiveness of influencers, five adjectives were used including elegant, attractive, classy, handsome and sexy.

To measure each adjective, the respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement to the following statement on a five-rating scale: I follow this influencer because he/she is [adjective].

### Elegant

For the statement regarding being elegant, 40 percent of respondents were in agreement, 17 percent were in strong agreement, 13 percent were in disagreement and only 4 percent were in strong disagreement. The remaining 25 percent were neither in agreement nor disagreement.

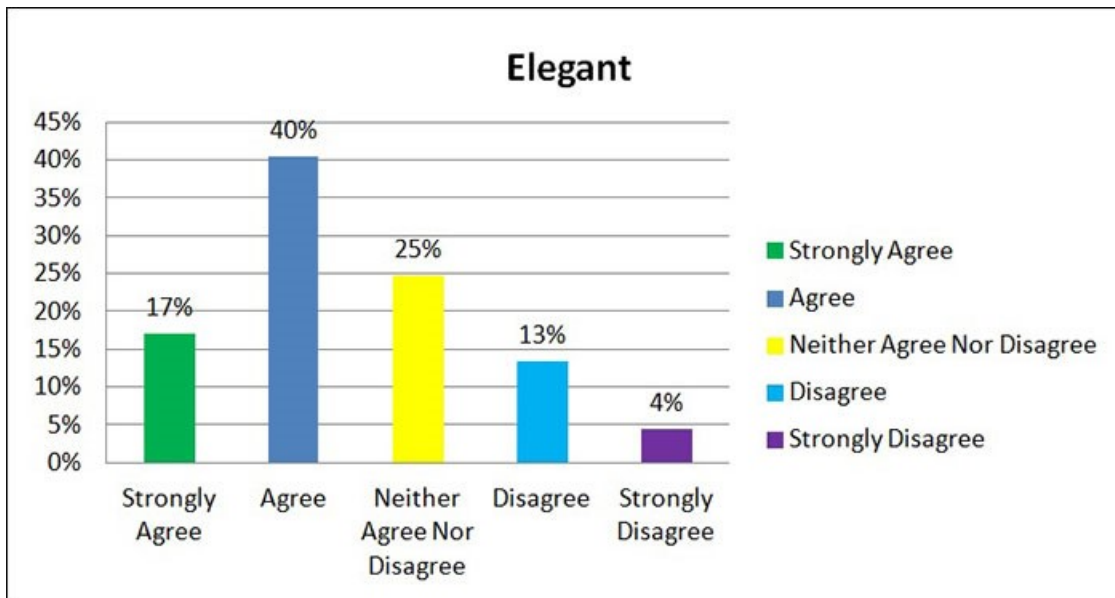


Figure 6.8 Respondents' attitude toward 'Elegant' scale

When breaking down the data into gender-specific answers, more tendency toward disagreement can be seen in female participants' answers.

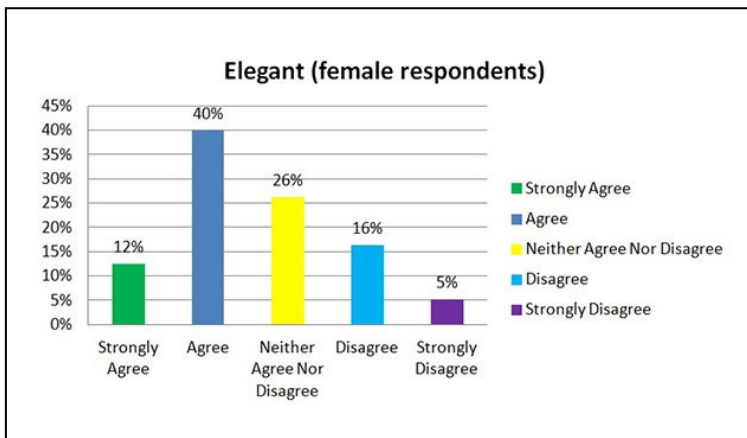


Figure 6.9 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Elegant' scale

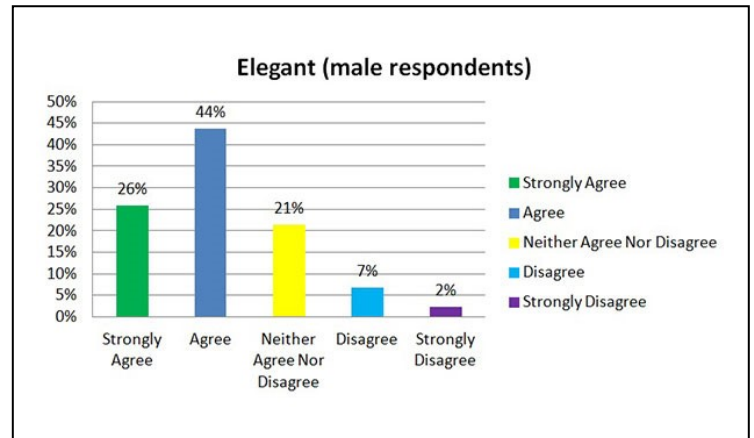


Figure 6.10 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Elegant' scale

## Attractive

For the attractive scale, 43 percent agreed and 21 percent strongly agreed with the statement, 13 percent disagreed and 4 percent were disagreed, and 19 percent were undecided.

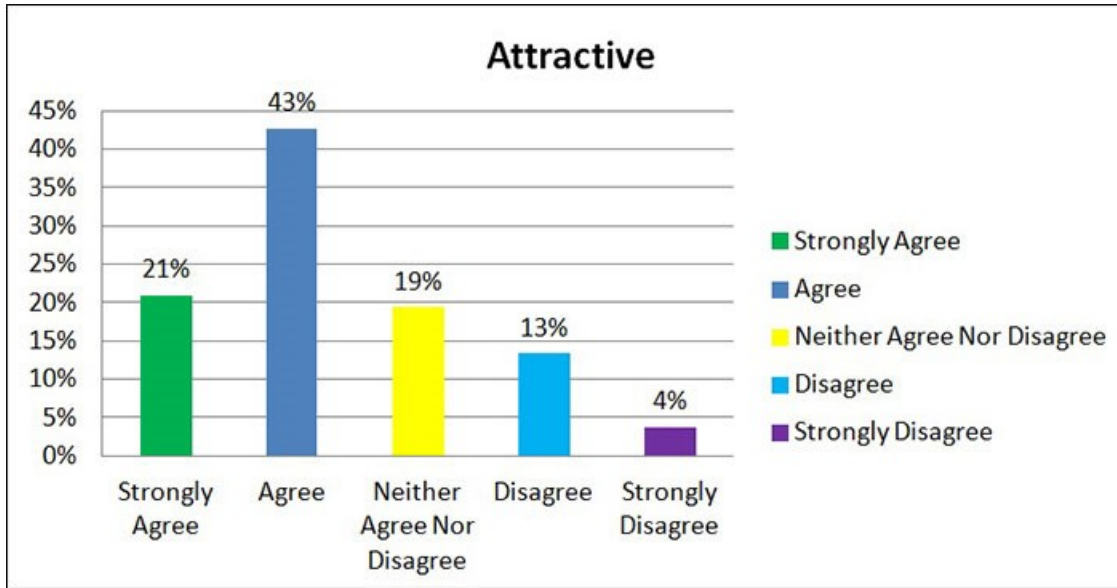


Figure 6.11 Respondents' attitude toward 'Attractive' scale

The level of agreement in men was stronger and a higher percentage of women disagreed with this statement.

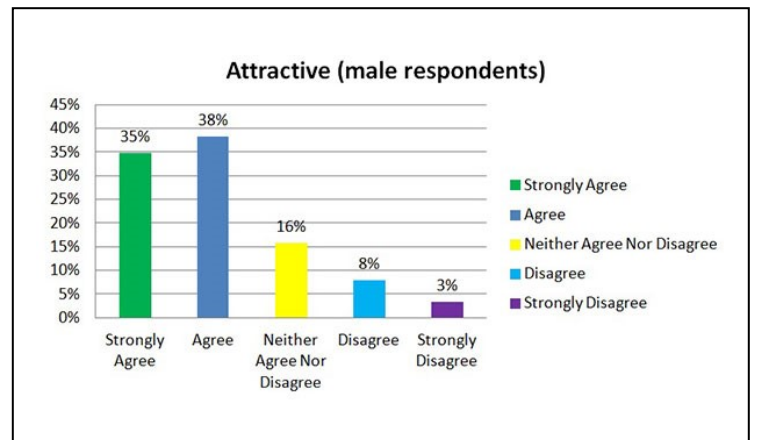
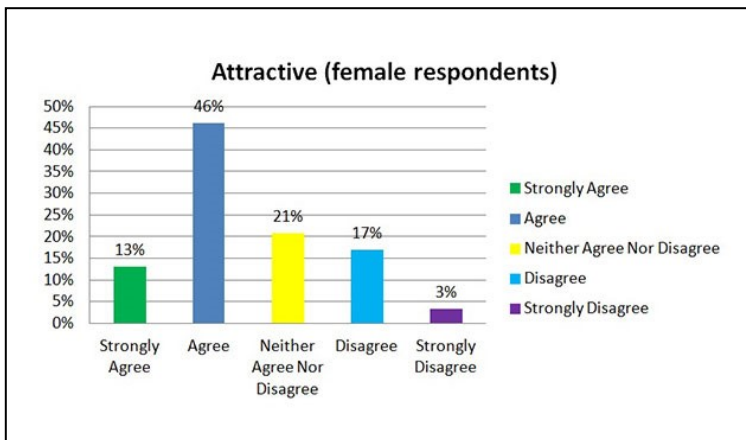


Figure 6.12 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Attractive' scale

Figure 6.13 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Attractive' scale

## Classy

41 percent of the participants agreed that they follow influencers because they are classy and 12 percent strongly agreed with this statement, while 15 percent disagreed and 4 percent strongly disagreed. 29 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

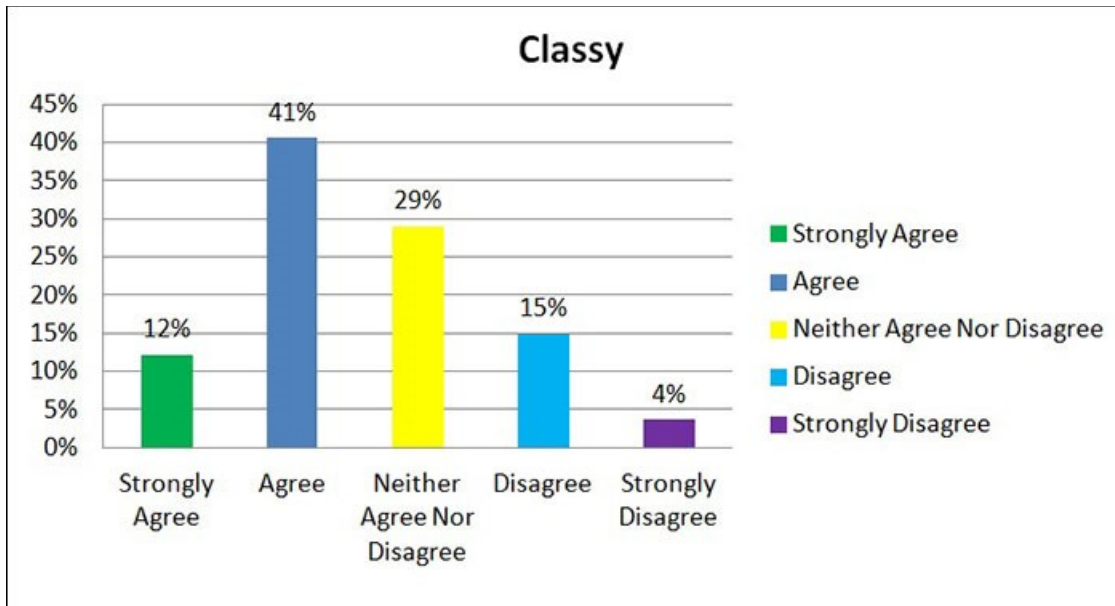


Figure 6.14 Respondents' attitude toward 'Classy' scale

There was almost the same percentage of men and women on both sides of agreement and disagreement regarding the influencer being classy, but the difference was that men had a stronger agreement to this statement.

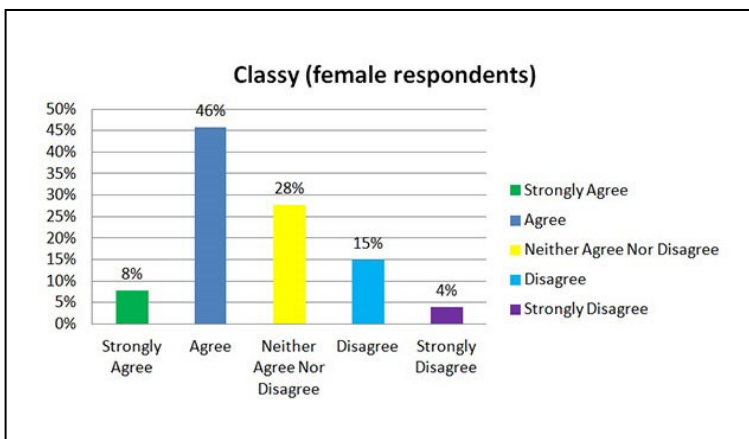


Figure 6.16 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Classy' scale

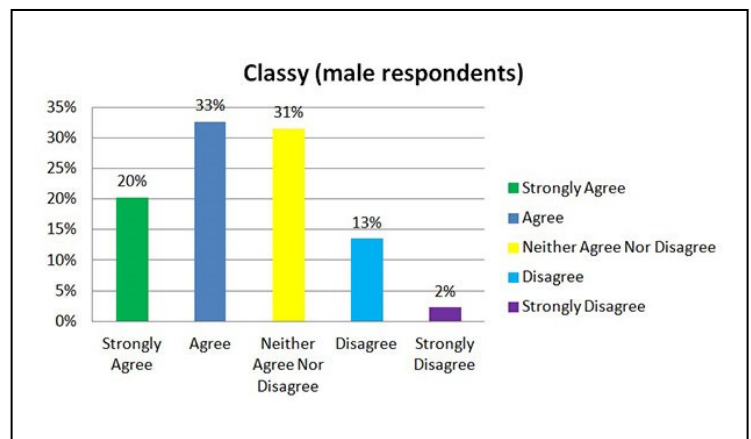


Figure 6.15 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Classy' scale

## Handsome

38 percent of the respondents agreed that they follow influencers because they are handsome and 23 percent strongly agreed, while only 10 and 6 percent disagreed and strongly disagreed.

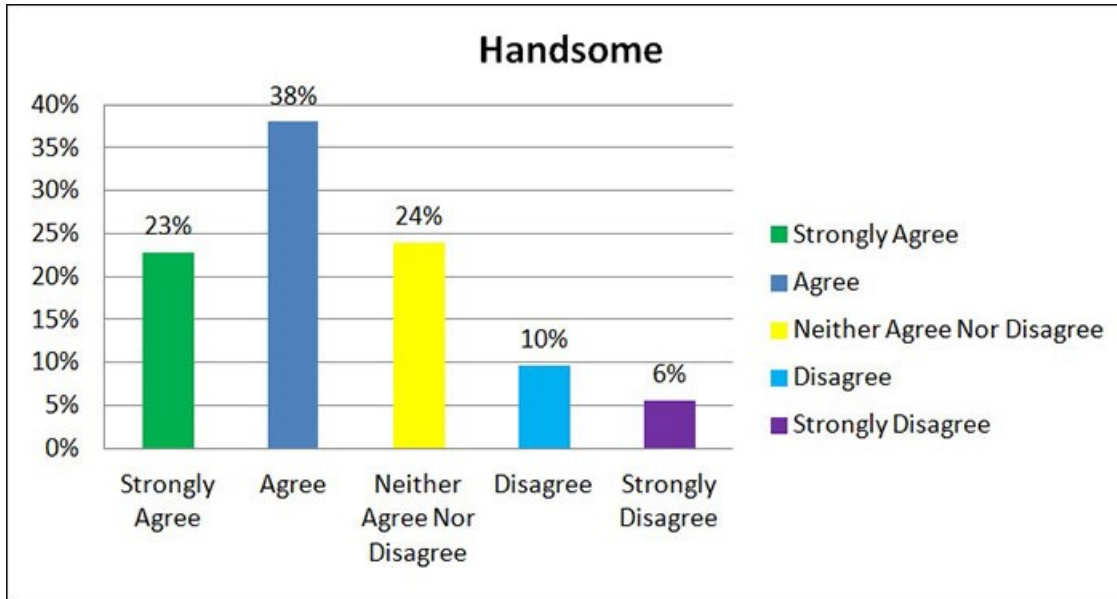


Figure 6.17 Respondents' attitude toward 'Handsome' scale

There was a clearly a higher percentage of men who were in agreement with the statement regarding being handsome, while females were in less agreement with that.

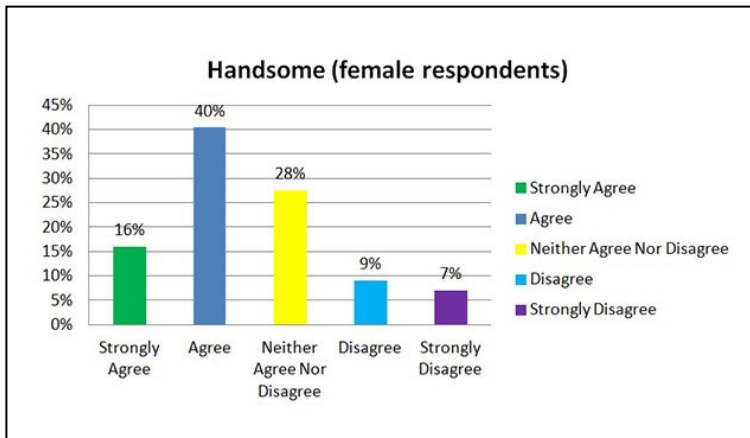


Figure 6.18 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Handsome' scale

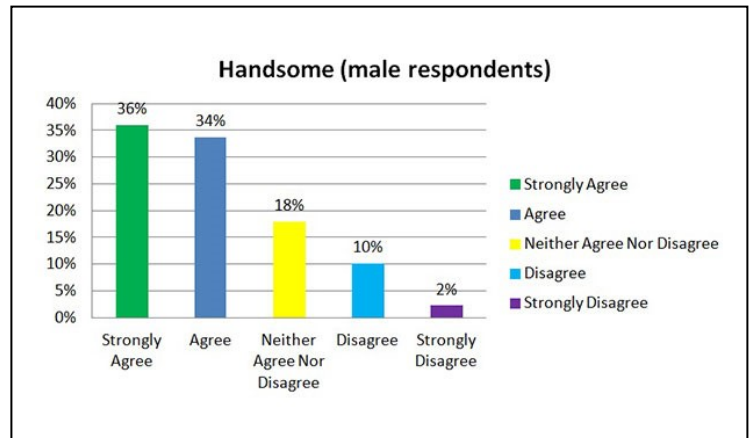


Figure 6.19 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Handsome' scale

## Sexy

Compared to other adjectives related to attractiveness of influencers, fewer participants agreed that they follow influencers because of them being sexy. Nonetheless, the percentage of people who agreed with this statement was still more than people who disagreed, as 49 percent agreed and strongly agreed, and 27 percent disagreed and strongly disagreed.

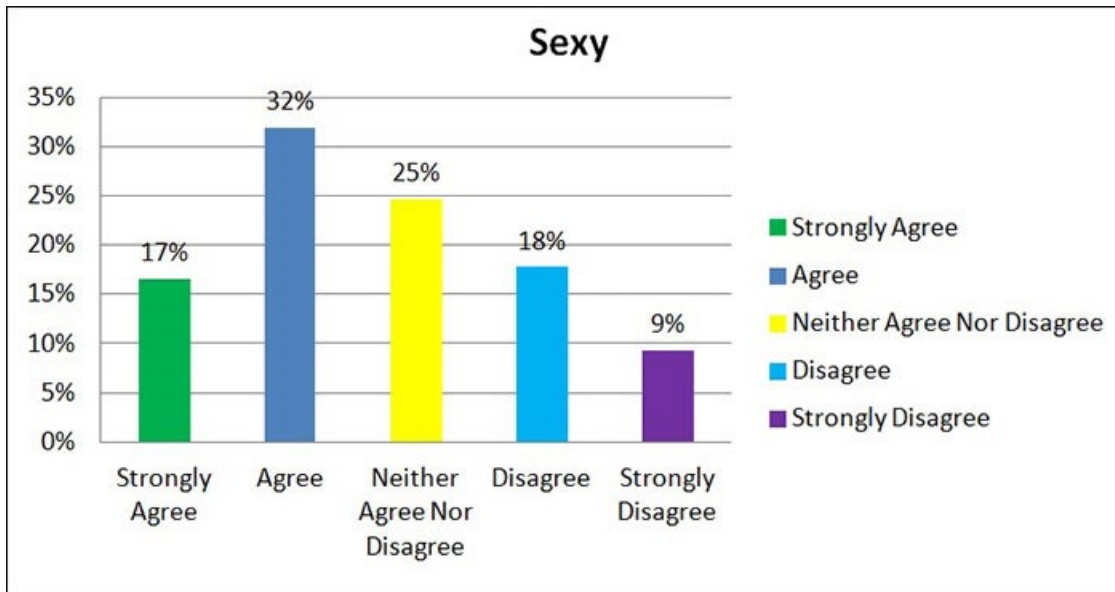


Figure 6.20 Respondents' attitude toward 'Sexy' scale

A considerable percentage of women disagreed with the statement, as 32% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. In contrast, only 15% of men were in disagreement with that and 67 percent stated that they agree or strongly agree that they follow influencers because they are sexy.

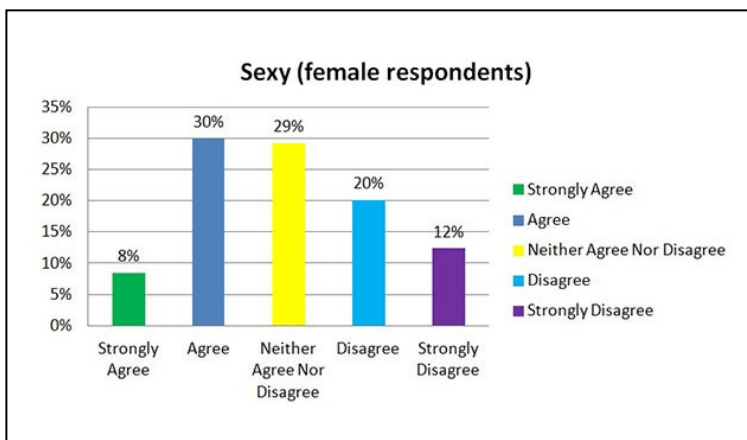


Figure 6.21 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Sexy' scale

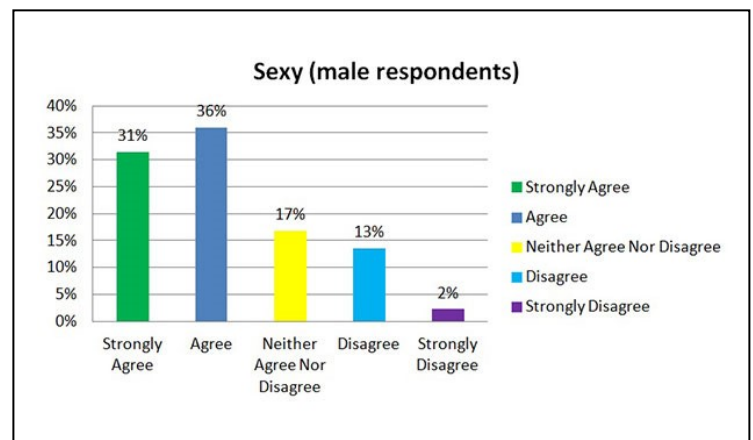


Figure 6.22 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Sexy' scale

After looking at the data for each scale of attractiveness, a table was created to depict the median, the mean and the standard deviation for each scale. Mean is the sum of the numbers divided by the number of numbers, median is the middle number when the numbers are arranged in order of size (Adams et al., 2007) which has the advantage that it is not affected by extreme values in the distribution, and the standard deviation is extent to which values differ from the mean (Saunders et al., 2009).

The summary of responses for each scale of attractiveness for total number of responses can be seen in table 6.8.

Scale	Total number of responses	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Elegant	247	17%	40%	25%	13%	4%	4	3.52	1.06
Attractive	248	21%	43%	19%	13%	4%	4	3.64	1.06
Classy	249	12%	41%	29%	15%	4%	4	3.43	1.00
Handsome	250	23%	38%	24%	10%	6%	4	3.63	1.10
Sexy	248	17%	32%	25%	18%	9%	3	3.29	1.20

*Table 6.8 Respondents' attitude toward attractiveness of influencers*

A similar procedure was followed to show the summary of the gender-specific data, and the results for female and male responses can be seen in tables 6.9 and 6.10.

Scale	Total number of responses (females)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Elegant	153	12%	40%	26%	16%	5%	4	3.38	1.06
Attractive	154	13%	46%	21%	17%	3%	4	3.49	1.02
Classy	155	8%	28%	28%	15%	4%	4	3.39	0.96
Handsome	156	16%	28%	28%	9%	7%	4	3.49	1.08
Sexy	154	8%	29%	29%	20%	12%	3	3.02	1.15

*Table 6.9 Female respondents' attitude toward attractiveness of influencers*

Scale	Total number of responses (males)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Elegant	89	26%	44%	21%	7%	2%	4	3.84	0.96
Attractive	89	35%	38%	16%	8%	3%	4	3.93	1.06
Classy	89	20%	33%	31%	13%	2%	4	3.55	1.03
Handsome	89	36%	34%	18%	10%	2%	4	3.91	1.07
Sexy	89	31%	36%	17%	13%	2%	4	3.81	1.09

*Table 6.10 Male respondents' attitude toward attractiveness of influencers*

### **6.2.3 Perception of respondents toward expertise of influencers**

Five adjectives including expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified and skilled were used as measurement scales to evaluate respondents' perception toward Instagram influencers in terms of expertise.

## Expert

16 percent strongly agreed and 39 percent agreed that they follow influencers because they are expert, 28 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, only 2 percent strongly disagreed and 14 percent disagreed.

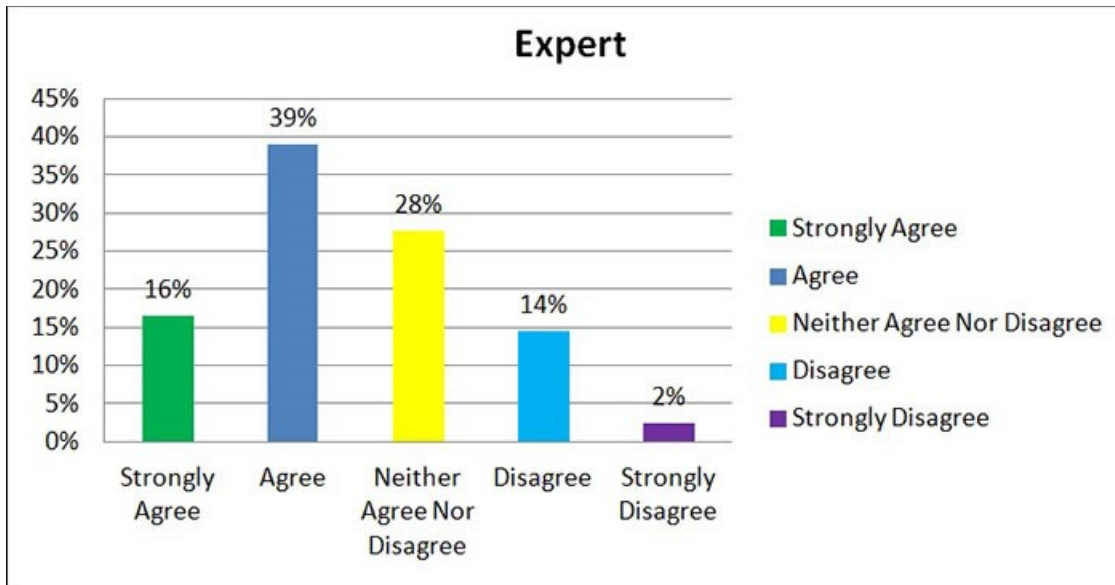


Figure 6.23 Respondents' attitude toward 'Expert' scale

There were more men disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with the statement that they follow influencers because they are expert, as in total 22 percent of men disagreed with this statement, while in comparison, 13 percent of females disagreed with that.

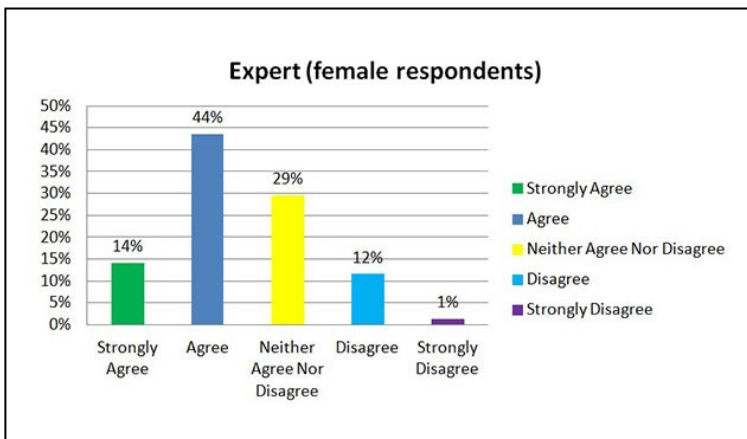


Figure 6.24 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Expert' scale

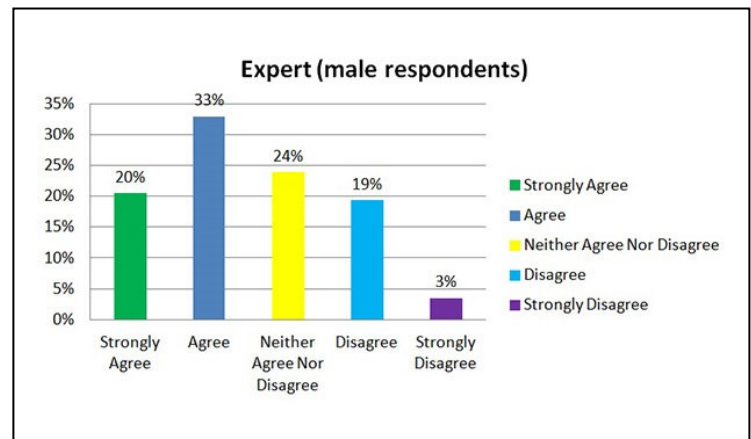


Figure 6.25 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Expert' scale

## Experienced

In regard to the statement of 'I follow influencers because they are experienced', 49 percent of the respondents agreed and 19 percent strongly agreed, while only 8 and 2 percent respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed.

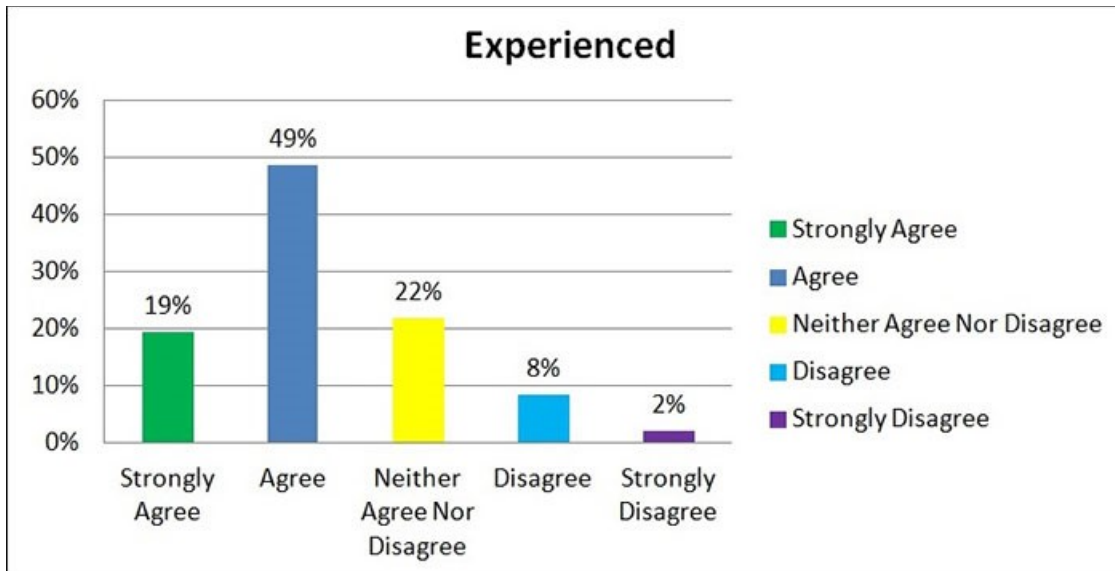


Figure 6.26 Respondents' attitude toward 'Experienced' scale

Female respondents had a bit more tendency to agree with the fact that they follow influencers because of them being experienced comparing to males, although there was not a considerable difference in men and women's answers to this question.

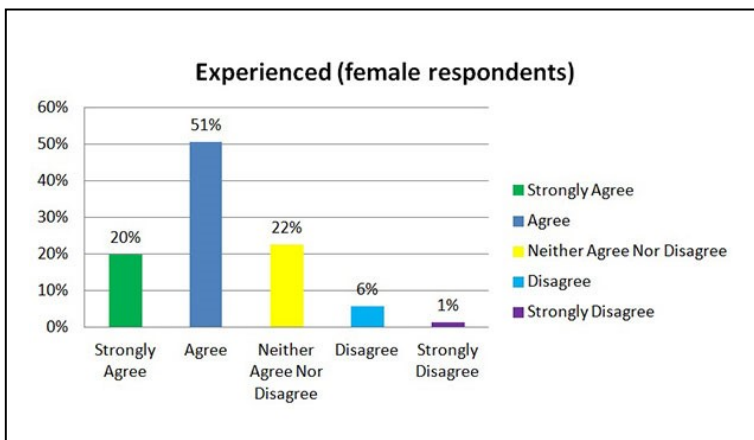


Figure 6.28 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Experienced' scale

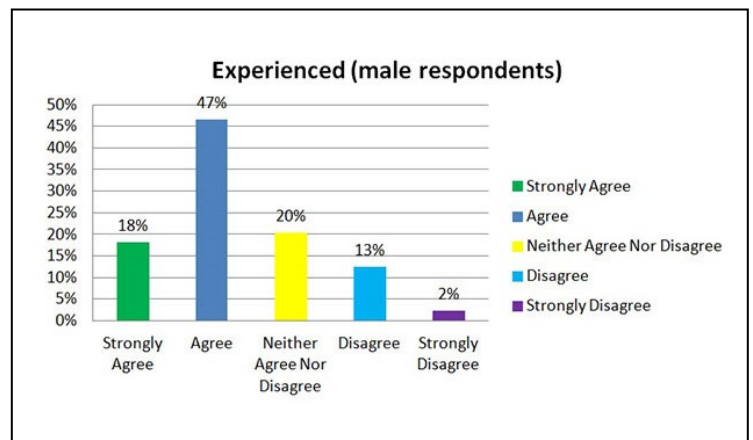


Figure 6.27 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Experienced' scale

## Knowledgeable

For the 'knowledgeable' statement, 48 and 18 percent of respondents said that they agree and strongly agree with the statement. On the other hand, only 8 and 2 percent disagreed and strongly disagreed.

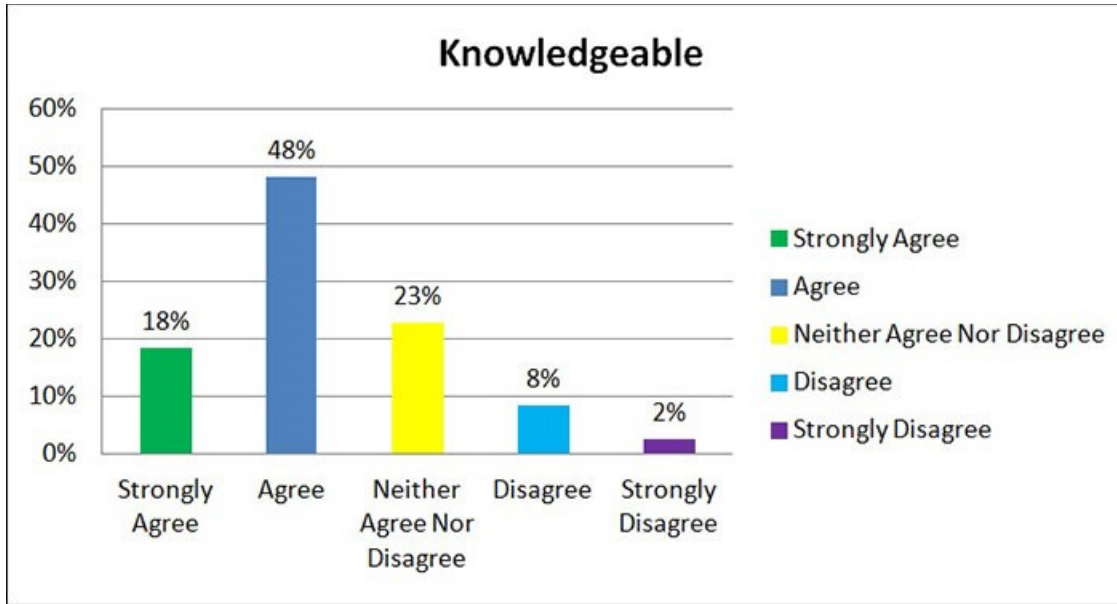


Figure 6.29 Respondents' attitude toward 'Knowledgeable' scale

There was a noticeable difference between men and women in agreement with the knowledgeable statement, as 54 percent of women agreed with that statement while only 36 percent of men agreed.

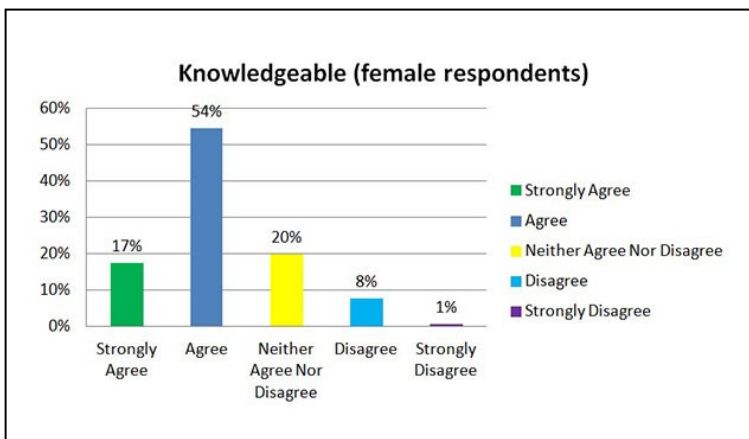


Figure 6.31 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Knowledgeable' scale

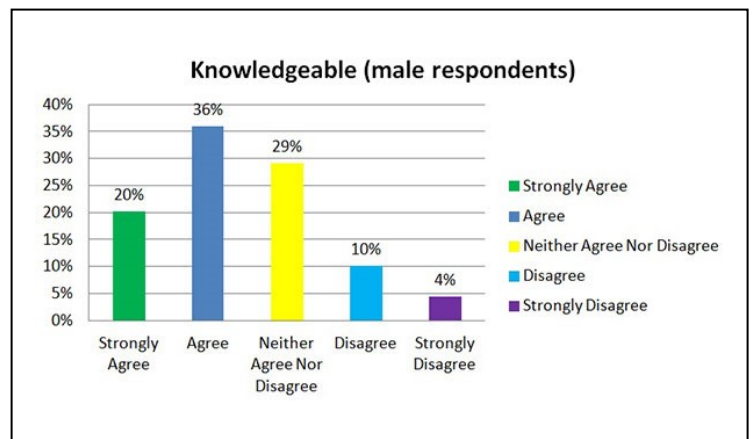


Figure 6.30 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Knowledgeable' scale

## Qualified

For the 'Qualified' statement, 60 percent of participants agreed and strongly agreed, 17 percent disagreed and strongly disagreed and 22 percent were neutral about the question.

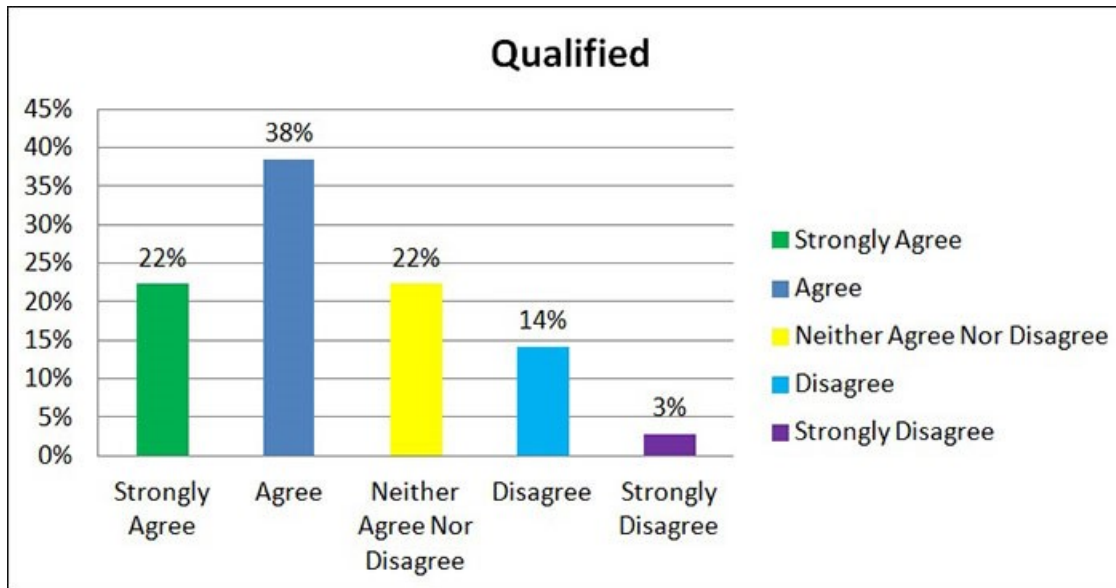


Figure 6.32 Respondents' attitude toward 'Qualified' scale

No noticeable difference can be observed in females and males' perception toward their influencer of choice being qualified, though a minor tendency toward more agreement can be seen in females' responses.

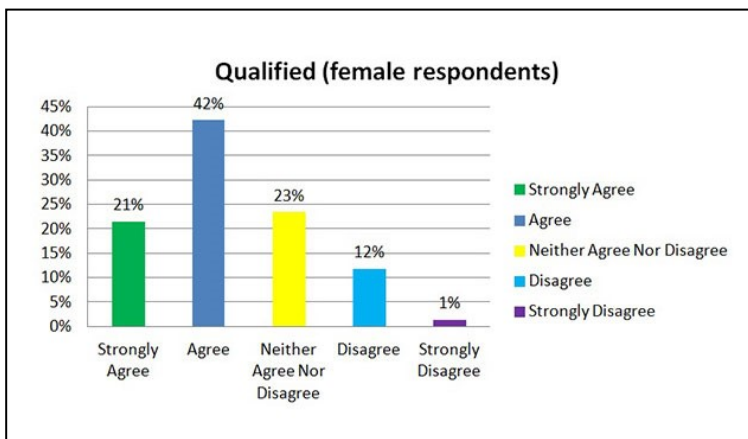


Figure 6.33 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Qualified' scale

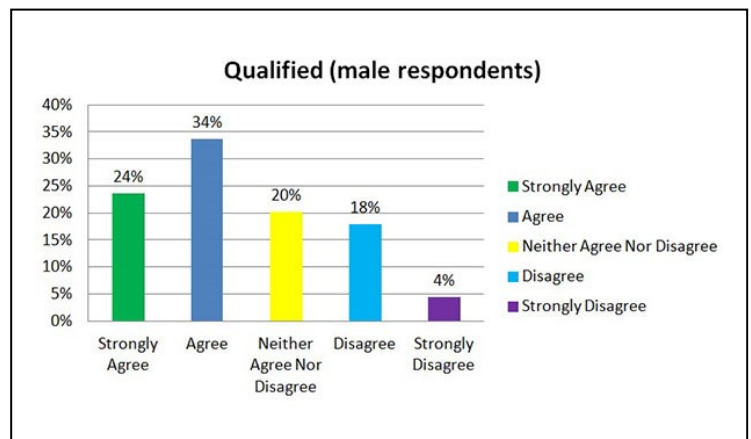


Figure 6.34 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Qualified' scale

## Skilled

67 percent of the respondents were in agreement and strong agreement with the statement of following influencers because they are skilled, 11 percent were in disagreement side and 22 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with this.

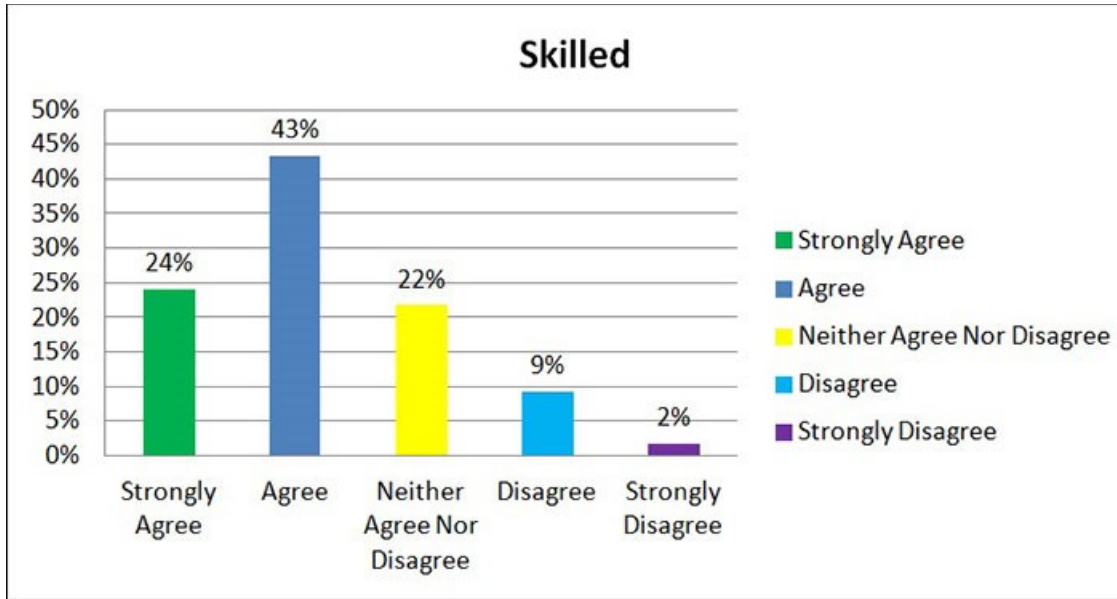


Figure 6.35 Respondents' attitude toward 'Skilled' scale

In terms of gender-specific answers to the 'skilled' statement, while 72 percent of women were on the agreement side (agree and strongly side), while 59 percent of men agreed with this statement, which is a noticeable difference.

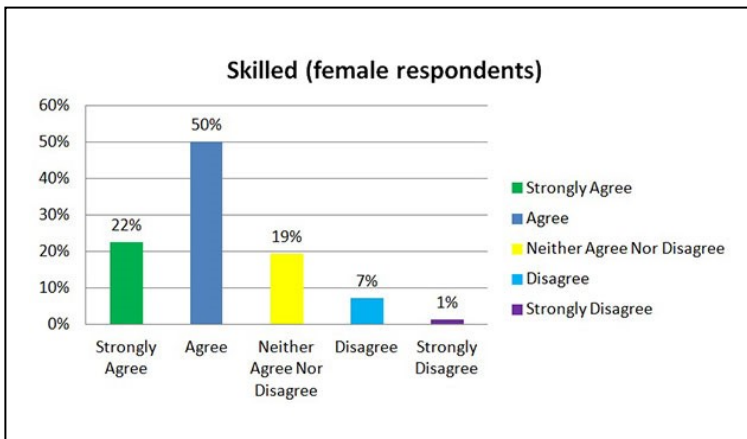


Figure 6.37 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Skilled' scale

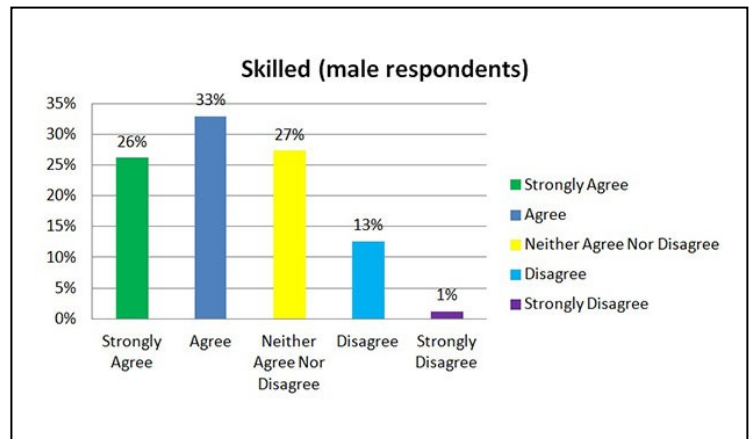


Figure 6.36 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Skilled' scale

In the following three tables, the summary of participants' responses (both in total and gender-specific) to the five scales of expertise dimension is displayed.

Scale	Total number of responses	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Expert	249	16%	39%	28%	14%	2%	4	3.53	1.01
Experienced	249	19%	49%	22%	8%	2%	4	3.75	0.93
Knowledgeable	250	18%	48%	23%	8%	2%	4	3.72	0.94
Qualified	247	22%	38%	22%	14%	3%	4	3.63	1.06
Skilled	249	24%	43%	22%	9%	2%	4	3.79	0.96

*Table 6.11 Respondents' attitude toward expertise of influencers*

Scale	Total number of responses (females)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Expert	156	14%	44%	29%	12%	1%	4	3.58	0.91
Experienced	156	20%	51%	22%	6%	1%	4	3.82	0.86
Knowledgeable	156	17%	54%	20%	8%	1%	4	3.80	0.84
Qualified	154	21%	42%	23%	12%	1%	4	3.71	0.97
Skilled	156	22%	50%	19%	7%	1%	4	3.85	0.89

*Table 6.12 Female respondents' attitude toward expertise of influencers*

Scale	Total number of responses (males)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Expert	88	20%	33%	24%	19%	3%	4	3.48	1.12
Experienced	88	18%	47%	20%	13%	2%	4	3.66	0.99
Knowledgeable	89	20%	36%	29%	10%	4%	4	3.57	1.06
Qualified	89	24%	34%	20%	18%	4%	4	3.54	1.16
Skilled	88	26%	33%	27%	13%	1%	4	3.70	1.02

*Table 6.13 Male respondents' attitude toward expertise of influencers*

#### **6.2.4 Perception of respondents toward trustworthiness of influencers**

To understand how the respondents perceive trustworthiness of influencers on Instagram, a series of statement was put in the questionnaire and the respondents were asked to say how agree they are with that statement. The statement was “I follow this influencer because he/she is \_\_\_” and the blank space was replaced with five adjectives including dependable, honest, reliable, sincere and trustworthy as five different scales to measure trustworthiness.

## Dependable

In regard to being dependable, 12 percent strongly agreed and 43 percent agreed with the statement, and 16 and 2 percent respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed. The rest were neutral about this statement.

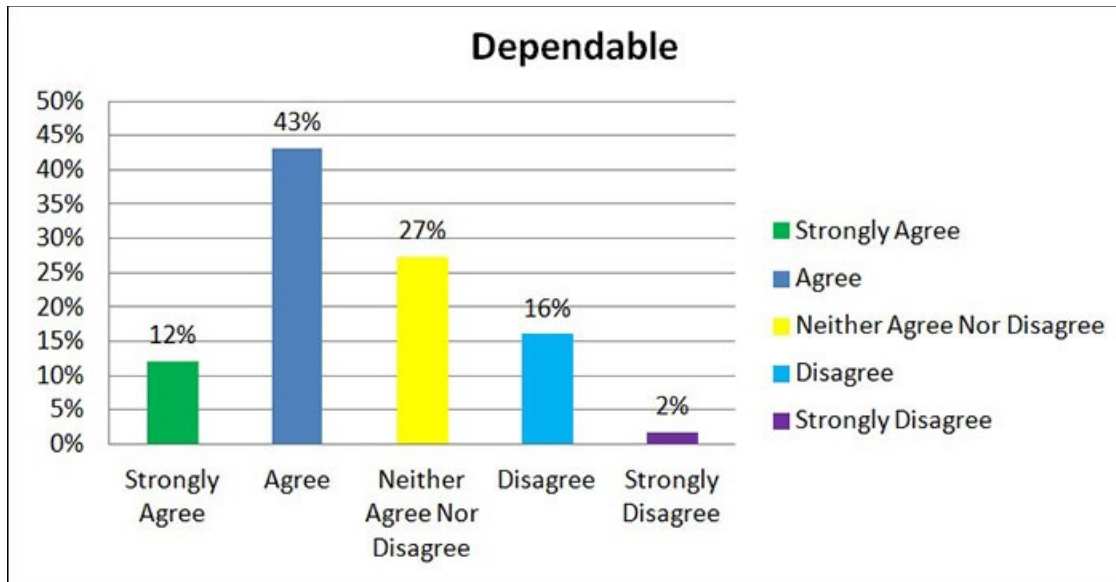


Figure 6.38 Respondents' attitude toward 'Dependable' scale

The percentage of men and women who agreed and strongly agreed that they follow influencers because of their dependability is very similar, as 54 percent of men and 57 percent of women were on the agreement side of the chart.

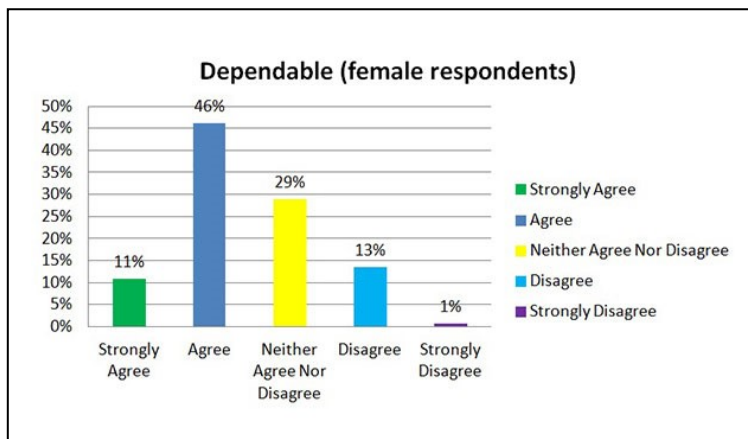


Figure 6.40 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Dependable' scale

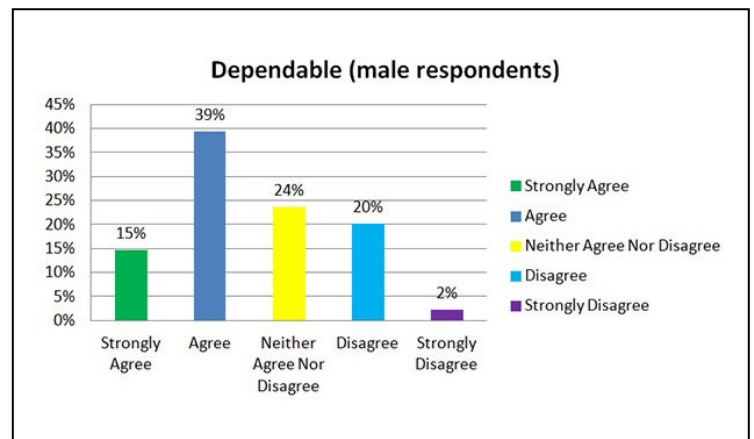


Figure 6.39 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Dependable' scale

## Honest

19 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 38 percent agreed with the 'honest' statement, 29 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 10 percent disagreed and 3 percent strongly disagreed.

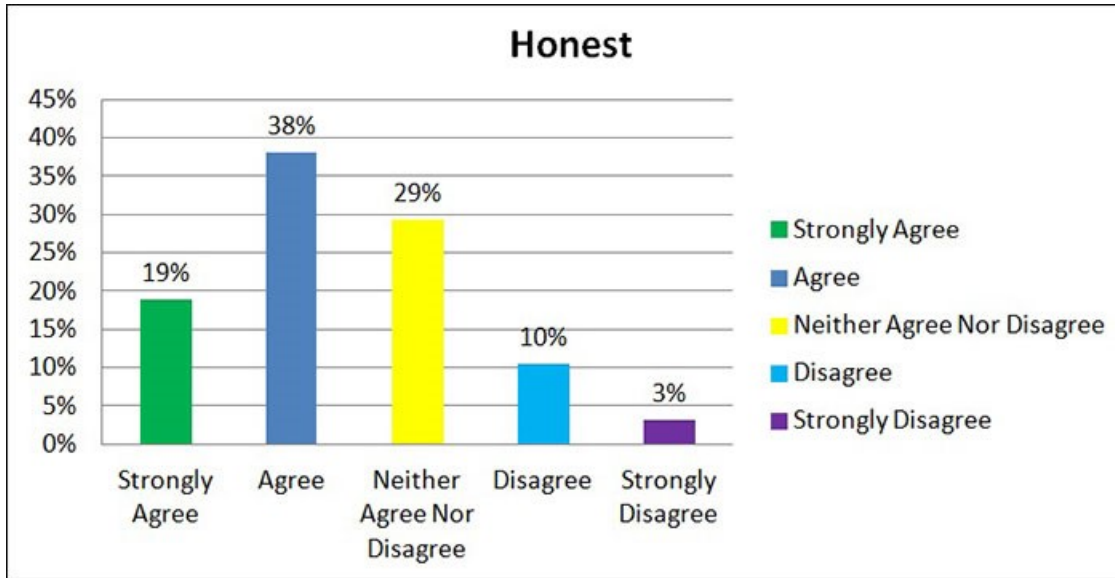


Figure 6.41 Respondents' attitude toward 'Honest' scale

While 22 percent of men were in disagreement side about, only 8 percent of women disagreed or strongly disagreed with the fact that they follow influencers because of their honesty. Similarly, a higher percentage women agreed with this fact than men.

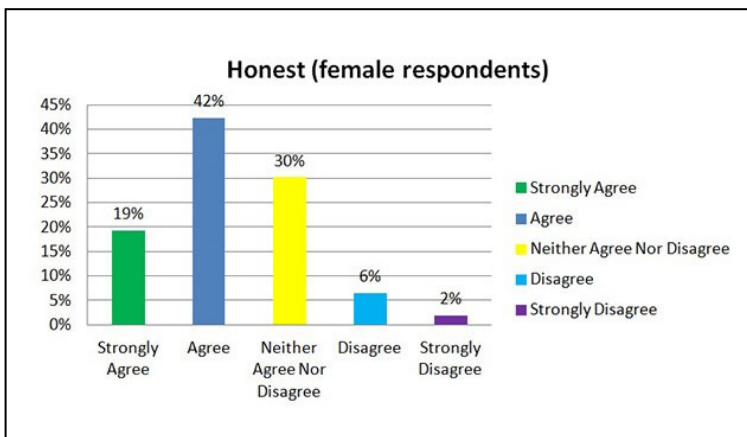


Figure 6.42 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Honest' scale

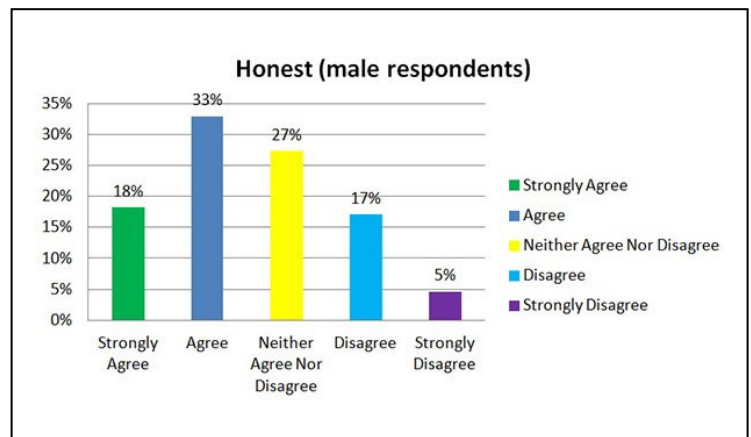


Figure 6.43 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Honest' scale

## Reliable

Overall, 68 percent of participants either agreed or disagreed that they follow influencers because they are reliable, while 16 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

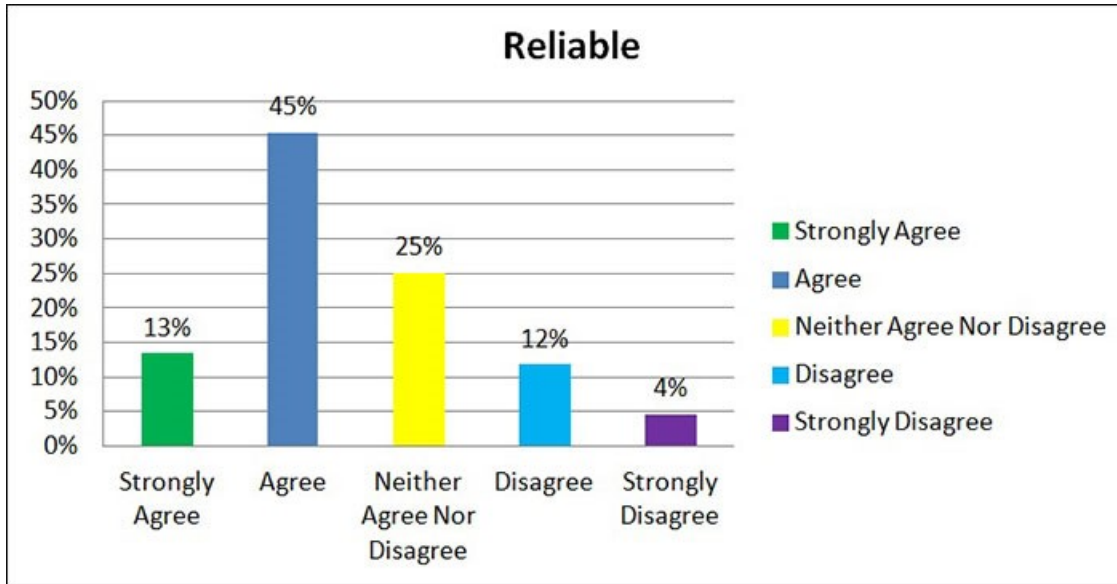


Figure 6.44 Respondents' attitude toward 'Reliable' scale

More women agreed with 'reliable' statement than men, while the percentage of women who disagreed was noticeably less than men.

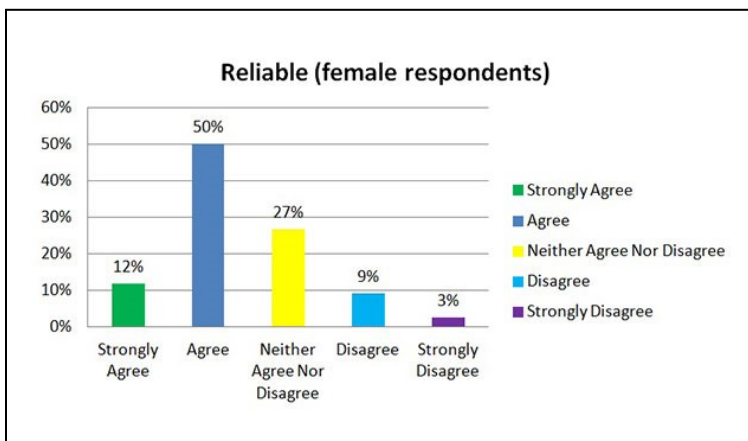


Figure 6.46 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Reliable' scale

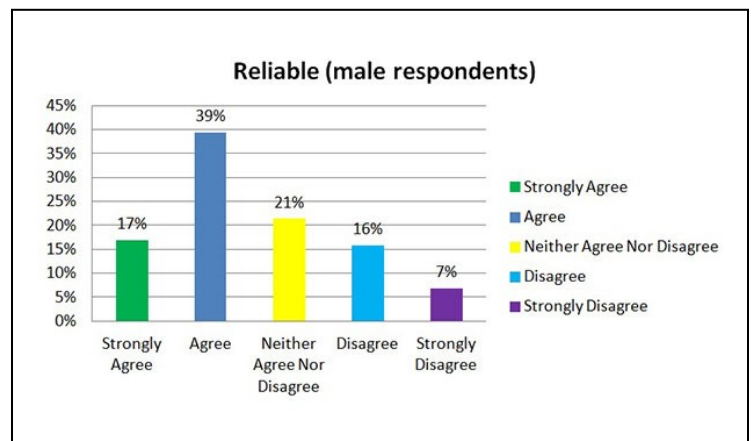


Figure 6.45 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Reliable' scale

## Sincere

Similar to other scales of trustworthiness, more respondents said that they either agree or strongly agree that they follow influencers on Instagram because of them being sincere.

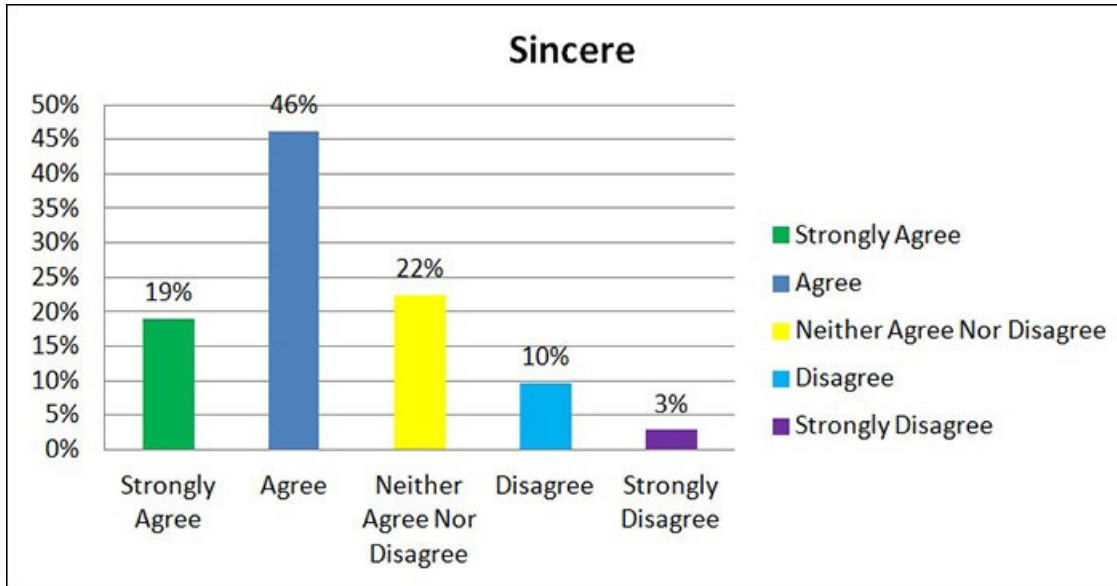


Figure 6.47 Respondents' attitude toward 'Sincere' scale

There was a higher share of female respondents on the agreement side than men that said they follow influencers because of their sincerity.

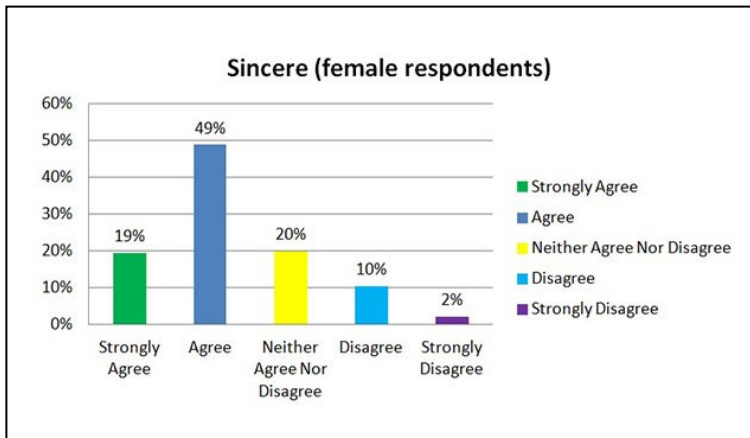


Figure 6.49 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Sincere' scale

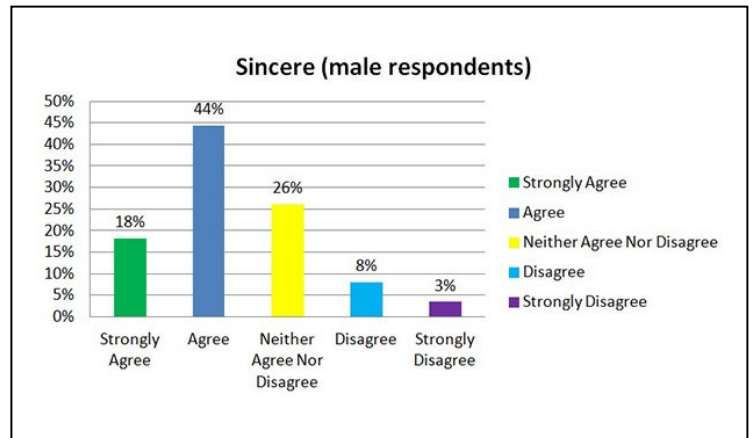


Figure 6.48 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Sincere' scale

## Trustworthy

While 45 and 14 percent of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they follow influencers because they are trustworthy, 12 and 2 percent disagreed and strongly disagreed.

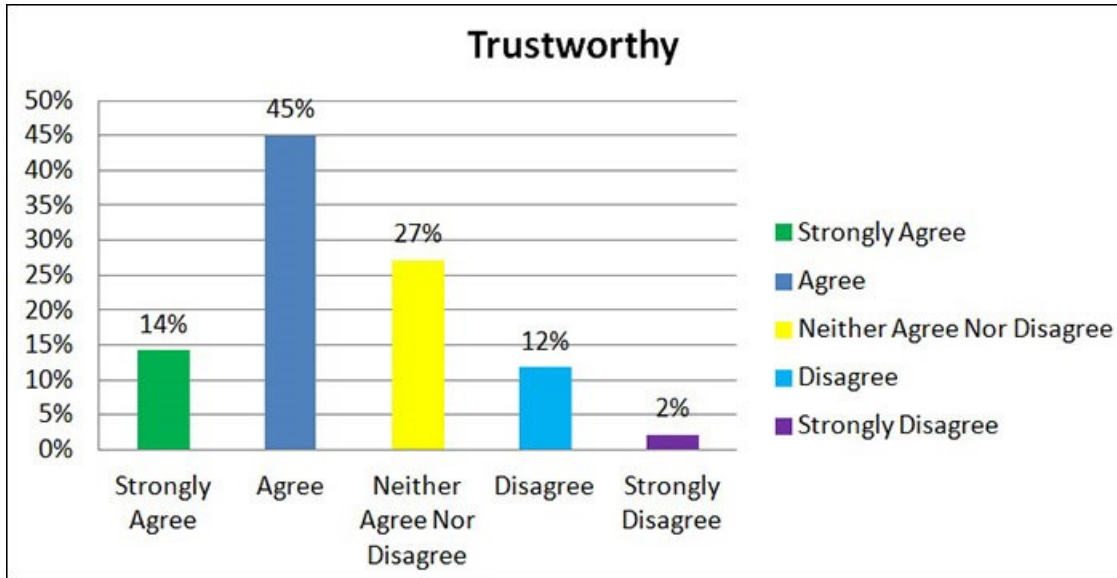


Figure 6.50 Respondents' attitude toward 'Trustworthy' scale

More women than men (51% comparing to 37%) said that they agree that they follow influencers because they are trustworthy.

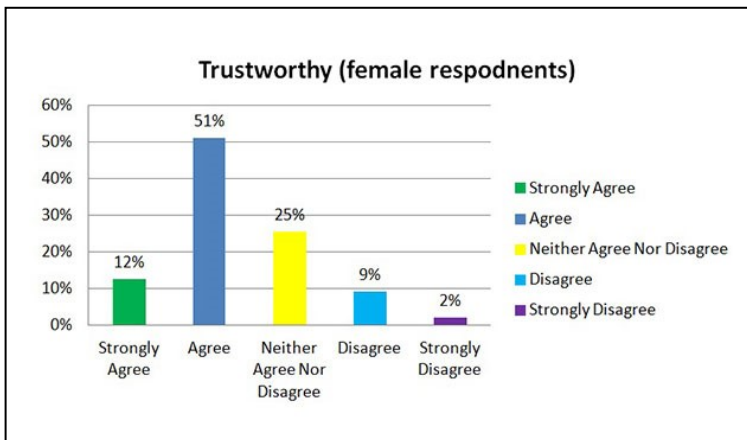


Figure 6.51 Female respondents' attitude toward 'Trustworthy' scale

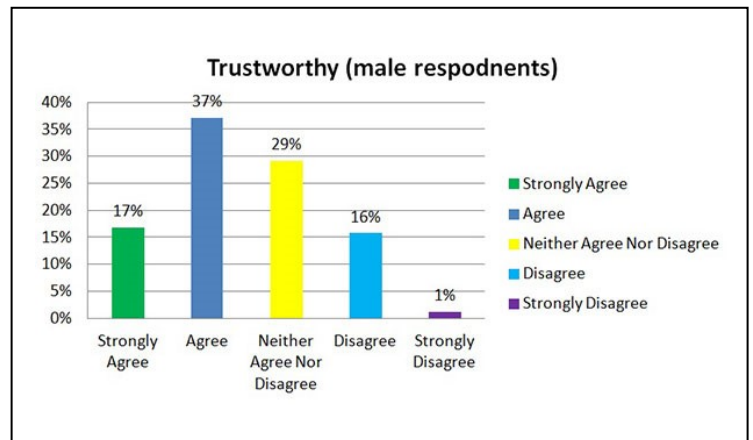


Figure 6.52 Male respondents' attitude toward 'Trustworthy' scale

The summary of responses for total responses in five scales of trustworthiness is shown in table 6.14.

Scale	Total number of responses	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependable	250	12%	43%	27%	16%	2%	4	3.48	0.95
Honest	249	19%	38%	29%	10%	3%	4	3.59	1.01
Reliable	247	13%	45%	25%	12%	4%	4	3.51	1.01
Sincere	249	19%	46%	22%	10%	3%	4	3.69	0.98
Trustworthy	247	14%	45%	27%	12%	2%	4	3.57	0.94

*Table 6.14 Respondents' attitude toward trustworthiness of influencers*

The following tables present the summary of responses about trustworthiness for each gender separately.

Scale	Total number of responses (females)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependable	156	11%	46%	29%	13%	1%	4	3.53	0.88
Honest	156	19%	42%	30%	6%	2%	4	3.71	0.91
Reliable	154	12%	50%	27%	9%	3%	4	3.59	0.90
Sincere	156	19%	49%	20%	10%	2%	4	3.73	0.95
Trustworthy	153	12%	51%	25%	9%	2%	4	3.63	0.88

*Table 6.15 Female respondents' attitude toward trustworthiness of influencers*

Scale	Total number of responses (males)	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependable	89	15%	39%	24%	20%	2%	4	3.44	1.04
Honest	88	18%	33%	27%	17%	5%	4	3.43	1.11
Reliable	89	17%	39%	21%	16%	7%	4	3.44	1.14
Sincere	88	18%	44%	26%	8%	3%	4	3.66	0.98
Trustworthy	89	17%	37%	29%	16%	1%	4	3.53	0.98

*Table 6.16 Male respondents' attitude toward trustworthiness of influencers*

### 6.2.5 Comparing the perception of users toward influencers in two different categories

Based on the answers of the respondents to question 6 in the questionnaire, which asked them what type of influencer they would prefer to follow on Instagram, the researcher decided to compare the responses for two different categories to see if there are differences between perceptions of users toward different types of influencers. For this reason, two categories of 'Fashion & Beauty' and 'Technology' were selected due to the different nature that they possess. Overall, 111 respondents (84% female and 15% male) selected Fashion & Beauty as one of the categories which they prefer to follow influencers without selecting the option for Technology category. On the other hand, 32 participants (22% female and 75% male) selected Technology as one of their interested categories without selecting Fashion in their answers.

The summary of responses for the respondents who follow an influencer in either Fashion or Technology topic is listed in tables 6.17 and 6.18.

Scale	Total number of responses	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean
Elegant	109	19%	48%	15%	16%	3%	4	3.65
Attractive	110	21%	50%	15%	13%	2%	4	3.75
Classy	110	13%	50%	22%	14%	2%	4	3.58
Handsome	111	23%	41%	23%	10%	5%	4	3.67
Sexy	111	14%	29%	31%	17%	10%	3	3.19
Expert	111	16%	40%	30%	14%	1%	4	3.57
Experienced	111	20%	48%	23%	8%	2%	4	3.76
Knowledgeable	111	22%	48%	20%	10%	1%	4	3.79
Qualified	109	24%	40%	24%	12%	0%	4	3.76
Skilled	110	25%	40%	24%	10%	1%	4	3.79
Dependable	111	12%	50%	26%	13%	0%	4	3.60
Honest	111	19%	41%	26%	14%	0%	4	3.66
Reliable	111	13%	46%	29%	11%	2%	4	3.57
Sincere	111	21%	49%	19%	11%	1%	4	3.77
Trustworthy	109	15%	52%	22%	11%	0%	4	3.71

Table 6.17 Perception of users toward credibility of Fashion & Beauty influencers

Scale	Total number of responses	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Median	Mean
Elegant	31	16%	42%	29%	10%	3%	4	3.58
Attractive	32	25%	41%	22%	9%	3%	4	3.75
Classy	32	16%	31%	31%	16%	6%	3	3.34
Handsome	32	22%	44%	25%	3%	6%	4	3.72
Sexy	32	13%	47%	16%	16%	9%	4	3.38
Expert	32	22%	38%	19%	22%	0%	4	3.59
Experienced	32	28%	50%	16%	6%	0%	4	4.00
Knowledgeable	32	28%	44%	22%	6%	0%	4	3.94
Qualified	32	22%	34%	19%	25%	0%	4	3.53
Skilled	32	28%	38%	22%	13%	0%	4	3.81
Dependable	32	16%	44%	25%	16%	0%	4	3.59
Honest	32	19%	44%	28%	6%	3%	4	3.69
Reliable	31	16%	55%	13%	16%	0%	4	3.71
Sincere	32	16%	47%	28%	9%	0%	4	3.69
Trustworthy	32	22%	41%	25%	13%	0%	4	3.72

*Table 6.18 Perception of users toward credibility of Technology influencers*

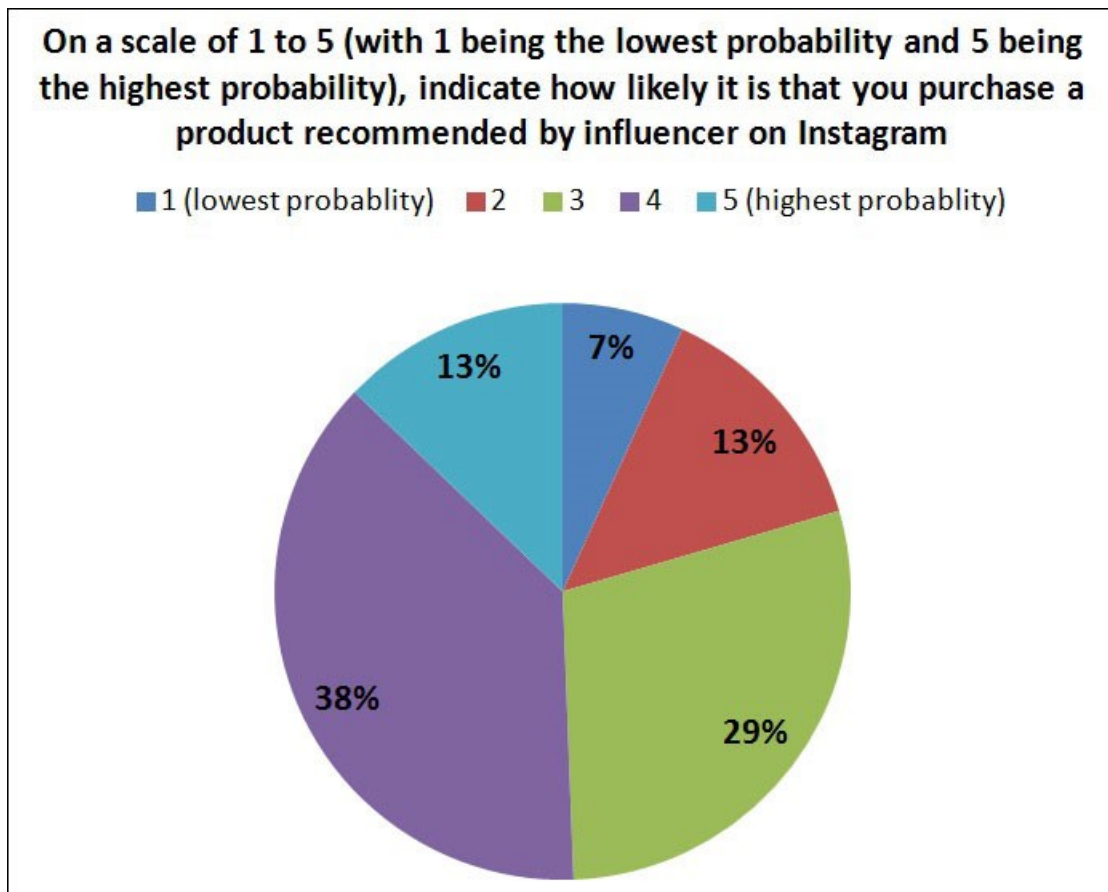
Based on the tables, no noticeable difference can be seen in responses of people who follow fashion influencers and people who follow influencers in the area of technology. This might be due to the fact that 84 percent of people who follow fashion influencers without following technology influencers in this study are females, and the data in table 6.9 shows that generally female respondents have less interest in following influencers for their attractiveness comparing to the two other dimensions of credibility.

### **6.3 Respondents' purchase intention based on the product recommendation by influencers**

The respondents were asked to indicate how likely it is for them to purchase a product recommended by an influencer that they follow on Instagram on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the lowest probability and 5 being the highest probability). They were prompted to answer the

question based on the same influencer that they had answered the questions regarding attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness in the previous section.

249 respondents in total answered the question regarding the purchase intention in the questionnaire. 32 people selected the option number 5 (the highest probability), 94 people selected option number 4, 72 people selected option number 3, 34 people selected option number 2 and only 17 people selected option number 1 which meant the lowest probability to purchase.



*Figure 6.53 Respondents' purchase intention based on the product recommendation by influencers*

So in total, more than half of the respondents (51%) indicated a high probability to purchase a product recommended by their influencer of choice, 20% indicated low probability and 29% were in the middle.

In order to figure out how each dimension of source credibility relates to purchase intention of participants, the responses of people who had selected option number 5 (the highest probability) were separated to compare with their answers regarding the credibility of influencers. As it can be seen in table 6.19, the respondents who selected option number 5 for the purchase intention question had a higher mean for their answers regarding Expertise and Trustworthiness scales than Attractiveness scales.

Source credibility dimension	Scale	Mean
Attractiveness	Elegant	4.03
	Attractive	3.74
	Classy	3.97
	Handsome	3.81
	Sexy	3.61
Expertise	Expert	4.41
	Experienced	4.69
	Knowledgeable	4.50
	Qualified	4.50
	Skilled	4.69
Trustworthiness	Dependable	4.22
	Honest	4.63
	Reliable	4.31
	Sincere	4.38
	Trustworthy	4.41

Table 6.19 Analysis of the respondents who selected number 5 (the highest probability) in purchase intention

Then the responses of people who had selected options number 5 and 4 (the two highest probabilities among the answers) were separated to compare their respective answers for 15 scales of credibility. Again, the mean for expertise and trustworthiness was higher than the mean for attractiveness.

Source credibility dimension	Scale	Mean
Attractiveness	Elegant	3.63
	Attractive	3.72
	Classy	3.47
	Handsome	3.78
	Sexy	3.26
Expertise	Expert	3.91
	Experienced	3.97
	Knowledgeable	3.91
	Qualified	4.09
	Skilled	4.00
Trustworthiness	Dependable	3.81
	Honest	3.75
	Reliable	3.75
	Sincere	3.78
	Trustworthy	3.81

*Table 6.20 Analysis of the respondents who selected number 4 & 5 (the two highest probabilities) in purchase intention question*

When the responses of participants who had selected 1 (the lowest probability) were separated to analyze their answers to the questions regarding the credibility of influencers, the mean for attractiveness scales was higher than the mean for expertise and trustworthiness.

Source credibility dimension	Scale	Mean
Attractiveness	Elegant	3.06
	Attractive	3.65
	Classy	2.82
	Handsome	3.47
	Sexy	3.24
Expertise	Expert	2.47
	Experienced	3.00
	Knowledgeable	3.06
	Qualified	2.71
	Skilled	2.88
Trustworthiness	Dependable	2.47
	Honest	3.00
	Reliable	2.59
	Sincere	3.00
	Trustworthy	2.65

*Table 6.21 Analysis of the respondents who selected number 1 (the lowest probability) in purchase intention question*

And when the responses for people who had selected options number 1 and 2 (the two ratings for the lowest probabilities in purchase intention) were separated, again the mean for attractiveness scales was higher than the other two dimensions of credibility.

Source credibility dimension	Scale	Mean
Attractiveness	Elegant	3.06
	Attractive	3.65
	Classy	2.82
	Handsome	3.47
	Sexy	3.24
Expertise	Expert	2.47
	Experienced	3.00
	Knowledgeable	3.06
	Qualified	2.71
	Skilled	2.88
Trustworthiness	Dependable	2.47
	Honest	3.00
	Reliable	2.59
	Sincere	3.00
	Trustworthy	2.65

Table 6.22 Analysis of the respondents who selected number 1 & 2 (the two lowest probabilities) in purchase intention question

#### 6.4 Other insights by the respondents

An open-ended question was included in the survey to let the respondents share any insight and comment that they might have regarding influencers on Instagram, as open questions allow participants to give answers in their own way (Saunders et al., 2009). In total, 27 participants responded to the open-ended questions. The responses were categorized into seven concepts.

Being able to trust influencers is important to users, as one respondent pointed out to the lack of ad disclosure by influencers and how some of them try to “intentionally deceive the reader into believing that they are recommending something because they genuinely like it, not because they were just paid to do so”. A few of the respondents (who interestingly were all male) said that they follow influencers just because they look attractive and pretty. One respondent said that she only buys products based on the recommendations of influencers if she follows them on YouTube and Twitter, which might point out to the fact that influencer marketing on some social media platforms might work better for product advertisement than others.

The research by Ohanian (1990) lists attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness as the three main dimensions of source credibility, and some of the answers to the open-ended question regarding Instagram influencers points out to these three attributes. The complete answers to the open-ended question are listed in Appendix B.

## 7. Discussion

This section discusses the findings in chapter 6 and their implications in regarding to the research questions. The research questions for this study are as followings:

**RQ 1.** Does the attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of Instagram influencers have a positive impact on the tendency of Instagram users to follow them?

**RQ 2.** Is there a difference in perception of male and female Instagram users on how they follow influencers?

**RQ 3.** Which dimension of credibility (attractiveness / expertise / trustworthiness) of Instagram influencers has a higher impact on purchase intention of followers?

### 7.1 Perception of the respondents toward credibility of Influencers on Instagram

The first research question for the current study is whether the three dimensions of source credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) have a positive impact on Instagram users to follow influencers on this platform. According to Ohanian (1990), the term 'source credibility' refers to positive attributes of a communicator which has an impact on the receiver's acceptance of a message.

After analyzing the responses to all the 15 scales of these three dimensions on Likert 5-point rating questions, it could be seen that the median for all of them is 4, apart from the scale for 'Sexy' which is 3. Moreover, the mean for all the 15 scales is above 3.0, with being skilled the highest (3.79) and being sexy the lowest (3.29). When categorizing each five related scales into one dimension of source credibility, the mean for Attractiveness is 3.50, the mean for Expertise is 3.68 and the mean for Trustworthiness is 3.57. Therefore, it can be concluded that all three dimensions of source credibility have a moderate positive impact on Instagram users to follow influencers on this platform, and expertise of influencers has the highest impact between the three.

The findings of this research are in line with Ohanian (1990) who argued attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness are three dimensions of source credibility to measure the credibility of a spokesperson. Therefore, the same dimensions could be applied in order to measure the perceived credibility of Instagram influencers in the eyes of users as well.

## **7.2 Difference in perception of men and women toward credibility of Influencers**

The responses for male and female participants were separated into two different categories in order to see how the two genders differ in their perception of influencers and how they decide to follow them on Instagram. When comparing the answers by both genders, an interesting trend in gender-specific perception toward credibility can be seen. Here again, the median for 15 scales of credibility for women's responses is 4 except 'sexy' which is 3, and the median for men's responses is 4 for all the scales.

Women scored higher for scales related to expertise and trustworthiness, as these two dimensions had a higher mean comparing to attractiveness. The mean for being skilled (related to expertise dimension) was the highest (3.85) and the mean for being sexy (related to attractiveness dimension) was the lowest (3.02). Overall, for female participants' responses, the mean for expertise dimension was 3.75, the mean for trustworthiness was 3.64 and the mean for attractiveness was 3.35. Also, this tells us why the mean for trustworthiness and expertise for overall responses of both men and women in section 7.1 is higher than attractiveness, since 64 percent of respondents for this study were females.

On the other hand, analyzing the responses for male participants show that the mean for scales related to attractiveness was higher than the other two dimensions. The mean for 'attractive' (3.93) and 'handsome' (3.91), which are both related to Attractiveness, were the highest among all 15 scales. Overall, for male participants' responses, the mean for attractiveness is 3.81, the mean for expertise is 3.59 and the mean for trustworthiness is 3.50.

Due to higher number of females in the study (~64%), there is possible skew in the data. It should also be kept in mind that 'handsome' as one of the five scales related to attractiveness is an

adjective that is generally used to describe men, so that might have had an effect on the answers of respondents.

The second research question for the present study is whether there is a difference in perception of male and female Instagram users on how they follow influencers. Comparing males and females' responses show that men have more inclination to follow influencers on Instagram due to their attractiveness, while women mostly prefer to follow influencers because of their expertise and trustworthiness. The answers to the open-ended question in the survey support this, as three male respondents claimed that they follow influencers because they are attractive or pretty.

### **7.3 The impact of source credibility on purchase intention of Instagram users**

To answer the third research question which is how attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of influencers impact the purchase intention of followers, the responses for each rating of the Likert scale question regarding purchase intention in the survey was analyzed separately, to compare the responses for each rating with the responses for source credibility questions. In total, 51 percent of the respondents indicated a high probability to purchase a product recommended by Instagram influencers. This might reflect a tendency among the participants to respond positively as a result of social desirability bias.

When the responses of people who selected option 5 (the highest probability) in the purchase intention question were separated, it can be seen that the mean for attractiveness was 3.83, the mean for expertise was 4.56 and the mean for trustworthiness was 4.39. When the responses of people who selected option 4 in the purchase intention question were analyzed separately, the mean for attractiveness was 3.61, the mean for expertise was 3.89 and the mean for trustworthiness was 3.77. Then, the responses for options 5 and 4 (the two highest probabilities in purchase intention) were grouped together, and the mean for attractiveness was 3.57, the mean for expertise was 3.97 and the mean for trustworthiness was 3.78.

This shows that expertise of the influencers has the highest positive impact on purchase intention of Instagram users, followed by trustworthiness and then attractiveness of influencers.

Therefore, when looking at the responses of participants who chose the highest ratings in the purchase question, it could be concluded that all three dimensions of source credibility have an impact on purchase intention of Instagram users based on the product recommendations of influencers because the mean for all the three were above the middle point. These findings are inconsistent with Ohanian's (1991) research in which, she argues only spokesperson's expertise has positive impact on purchase intention of audience, and attractiveness and trustworthiness do not have such impact. This supports Kahle & Homer's (1985) findings that an attractive spokesperson creates more purchase intention compared to an unattractive spokesperson. Petroschius & Crocker (1989) also notes a main effect of physical attractiveness on an audience's attitude toward intent to purchase, and Pornpitakpan (2004) found both attractiveness and trustworthiness positively relate to purchase intention.

It is also not surprising that trustworthiness of influencers has an impact on purchase intentions of users, as Instagram influencers are considered to be a source of electronic word of mouth (Daniel et al., 2018) because of the high credibility and trustworthiness that they possess (Gräve & Greff, 2018) and eWoM has a great impact on purchase decisions of customers (Kiss & Bichler, 2008) on the basis of trust (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019).

Since society has changed a lot with the rise of Internet and social media, and influencers on social media is a pretty new concept that has only gained popularity in recent years, it could be argued that Ohanian's findings about the impact of a spokesperson's credibility on the purchase intention of the audience might not necessarily be valid in regard to Instagram influencers. There are a number of differences between influencers and traditional celebrities in their characteristics, as Hwang & Zhang (2018) claim that there is a stronger affinity between influencers and social media users and they also have great influence on consumer's purchase decisions.

Meanwhile, the current study shows that people who follow influencers based on their attractiveness have the lowest purchase intention toward the product advertisements by

influencers on Instagram, while people who follow influencers based on their expertise and trustworthiness show a higher purchase intention when the influencers advertise a product. Therefore, while all the three dimensions have an impact on purchase intention of users, the impact of attractiveness is lower comparing to the other two dimensions.

#### **7.4 Practical implications for marketers**

The results of the study show that a large number of users spend more than half an hour per day on Instagram. Therefore, Instagram could be a very important platform for businesses to promote their products and services and develop relationships with their customers.

The findings of the study show that more than 50 percent of the participants prefer to follow Instagram influencers in the area of fashion and beauty. Instagram has become an aesthetically stylized site for commercial exchange (Abidin, 2016) as it is the most used social networking site by influencers in the fashion industry (Casaló et al., 2018). So, this especially provides marketers in fashion and beauty industries with an opportunity to utilize the aesthetic aspect of Instagram and attract more customers by “posting aesthetically pleasing, creative and charming content” (Casaló et al., 2018).

Moreover, more than 50 percent of participants are inclined to purchase a product that is recommended by the influencers they follow on Instagram. This highlights the notable effect that influencers have on purchasing habits of users, and how important this could be for businesses to take advantage of influencers’ role.

The research findings help companies to have a more insightful decision-making process when advertising their products/services through influencers, because they should carefully consider what type of influencer could be the most effective in appealing to their intended target audience (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Depending on the target audience for a product being women or men, marketers have better understanding of whether they should focus on attractiveness, expertise or trustworthiness of influencers to satisfy their audience’ interests, as men are more inclined to follow influencers based on their attractiveness and women care more about expertise and trustworthiness of influencers. In addition, men and women have different

interests in categories of influencers, as women are more interested in following fashion and beauty influencers, while men are more interested in following influencers in the area of technology and sport.

Choosing the right influencer to work with is important because based on the Match-up Hypothesis, when the character of the celebrity is carefully matched with the character of the product and audience characteristics, the advertisement could be much more effective (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985).

## 8. Limitations and Further Research

The research offers some useful insights on the phenomenon of influencer marketing and the perception of users toward Instagram influencers, but like any other research, there are limitations. A non-probability sampling method was used for data collection, which brings some limitations. According to Saunders et al. (2009), a non-probability sample does not allow the extent of the problem to be determined. Also, the likelihood of the sample being representative in convenience sample type is very low (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, control over samples in self-selection method is low (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher did not have control over the size of age groups, gender or educational background of the participants. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the results to the whole population of Instagram users. Further probabilistic study with a larger sample is suggested.

Another limitation of the current research is social desirability bias by the survey respondents, which “in an effort to conform to societal norms, may present themselves in a favorable light, regardless of their true feelings or actual behavior” (Randall & Fernandes, 2013). The standard deviation for the answers related to the source credibility question in the survey points to limited variation, which as a sign of social response bias, participants tend to answer the same way to the survey questions.

A similar study could be carried out in other areas of the world to compare how people from different cultures perceive credibility of influencers, as the respondents from this study were all living in North America. Especially because the similarity of spokesperson with the audience matters a lot to increase his/her trustworthiness, as people generally trust individuals who are similar to them (Erdogan, 2008).

Moreover, the focus of the current study was on Instagram users, while users might have different attitudes in other social media platforms.

Because influencers are active in different areas and users might have different interests in following influencers based on their active area, it is suggested for future research to focus on specific topics to see whether there is any difference between users who follow different types

of influencers (e.g. fashion vs. food influencers), as the current study was unable to yield meaningful results regarding this due to its sampling method.

Fake followers are a serious issue when it comes to the influencers on Instagram. Therefore, conducting a study to analyze the impact of fake followers on the credibility of influencers could be a major area for further research.

Interviewing marketers to get their perception toward influencers and how they decide to choose influencers for advertising their products could also be another area for further research.

## 9. Conclusion

In research dedicated to Instagram is limited (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This study provides further insights into this social media platform. The research compares traditional celebrities to modern ones to see whether the same credibility criteria still applies to digital influencers.

This research attempted to evaluate credibility of influencers on Instagram based on the perception of users. The previous research argued that credibility of traditional celebrities is perceived through attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of the source (Ohanian, 1990). Previously, many studies investigated the source credibility theory regarding traditional celebrities. But to the best of our knowledge, no major study has been conducted to test this theory with respect to Instagram influencers.

A survey with 250 participants was conducted, and the results show that all the three dimensions of source credibility have a positive impact on users to follow influencers on Instagram. Therefore, the same scales to measure credibility of traditional celebrities are still valid for digital celebrities.

The findings show that men and women have different attitudes in following influencers on Instagram, as while men follow influencers slightly more due to their attractiveness, women prefer to follow them based on their expertise and trustworthiness.

Respondents were asked how likely it is they buy a product on the basis of recommendation by influencers, and the results show that expertise of influencers has the highest positive impact on purchase intention of users, following by expertise of influencers. Users who follow an influencer simply because of their attractiveness are less likely to purchase a product when the influencer advertises a product or service.

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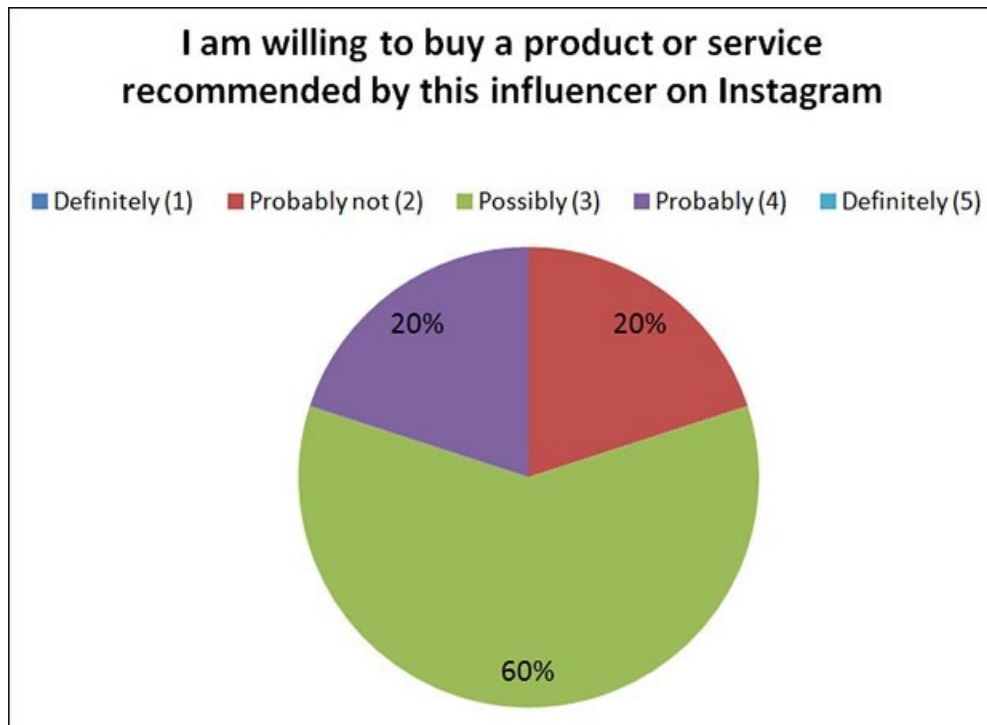
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## Appendices

### Appendix A. The initial question regarding the purchase intention in the pilot survey and the results

Please on a scale of 1 (Definitely not) to 5 (Definitely), indicate how likely it is that you purchase a product advertised or promoted by the influencer on Instagram:

Definitely (1)    Probably not (2)    Possibly (3)    Probably (4)    Definitely (5)



## Appendix B. The full list of complete answers to the open-ended question in the survey

<b>Question: Do you have any other insights regarding Influencer advertising on Instagram that you would be willing to share?</b>
It helps me understand products and ideas before I go out and spend the time or money on them.
Unless the person is promoting makeup, there is no need to look attractive. They just need to be knowledgeable about the products.
You begin to feel like they're a friend and trust them
I only buy if i follow them on YouTube and twitter and trust them and the product has good reviews
I simply follow attractive female influencers because I find them attractive.
Yes . There are some influencers that i have followed only because they were attractive. But there are also some that i follow that are attractive and actually give good info and are knowledgeable in their field but its more rare to find them.
I mainly follow influencers because they look pretty and sometimes for the memes they share
all influencers are hoping for big company collabs to increase followers and monetization
All of the bachelor contestants all are influencers now. They all sponsor the same products and will typically promote those items all on the same day.
Influencers are an interesting topic, mostly the influencers I follow are fitness related and I find that most fitness influencers do try and sell you things.
I don't like to follow influencers who push many products.
I follow influencers on Instagram because I think their lives are interesting, but I would rarely purchase something just because they recommended it. I think they often fail to disclose sponsorships or otherwise intentionally deceive the reader into believing that they are recommending something because they genuinely like it, not because they were just paid to do so.
Influencers are mostly used in my opinion to bring attention to a particular brand, people should still do their research on the brand. If the brand is actually themselves than its different but the product is unrecognizable as well.
I like it when influencers disclose that it is an ad. Also, if the product feels like something they actually use as opposed to just a product they are being paid to shill.
If the ads are more creative I consider them. Meme ads.
I follow a few influencers, but I do it because I think they are funny and ridiculous. I do not buy products they advertise.
I mostly follow influencers because they're ridiculous and make me laugh
I follow him because hes funny and interesting.
The influencers I follow..the main reason I follow them is because they are humorous.
I have been following her for years. I've learned so many makeup tips.

I try and buy things that I need and have a purpose for me, not relying on ads or influencers. I follow influencers that show things that I care about.
I like influencers who are down to earth and modest people.
She used to be on a reality show but uses her clout to bring attention to important social/political/environmental causes on the social media platform.
I take inspiration from them
I love the way they set trends as well
I only follow well-known influencers that have products that I like
Certain ones do well within a certain niche

## Appendix C. Questionnaire



uOttawa

### Implied Consent Text

**Title of the study:** Users' perception of Influencers' credibility on Instagram and their purchase intention regarding Influencers' product recommendations

### Principal Investigator (Student):

Hamid Pashaei  
Master's Student  
Faculty of Engineering  
University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, ON

### Supervisor

Dr. Heather Morrison  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ottawa  
55 Laurier Ave. East  
Ottawa, ON

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Hamid Pashaei, who is being supervised by Dr. Heather Morrison. The survey is conducted for Master research.

**Participation:** If you wish to participate in this study, please complete the attached survey. Your decision to complete and return this survey will be interpreted as an indication of your consent to participate. The survey should take you approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

**Purpose of the Study:** From this research we wish to learn how users' attitude toward Influencer on Instagram shape, how they react to product suggestions by influencers, and how male and female users differ in their attitude toward following influences on Instagram.

**Benefits:** The study has many benefits including getting more insights on people's attitude toward influencers on social media and if there are gender specific differences in people's behavior in social media.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** The information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people who will have access to the research data are the researcher and his supervisor. Your answers to open-ended questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications but neither you nor your organization will be identified.

In order to minimize the risk of security breaches and to help ensure your confidentiality we recommend that you use standard safety measures such as signing out of your account, closing your browser and locking your screen or device when you are no longer using them / when you have completed the study."

Results will be published in pooled (aggregate) format. Anonymity is guaranteed since you are not being asked to provide your name or any personal information

**Conservation of data:** The survey will be kept in the password-protected laptop of the principal researcher. The data for the current survey will be retained for 5 years.

**Compensation:** You will receive 0.10 USD for agreeing to take part in the survey. You will only be paid after you complete the survey and receive a unique code at the end of the questionnaire.

**Voluntary Participation:** You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. Completion and return of the questionnaire by you implies consent. You can withdraw from the survey at any time. If you withdraw after submitting the questionnaire, it will not be possible to remove the data since the survey is conducted anonymously.

**Information about the Study Results:** The research findings will not be available to the participants individually, but if they wish, they could contact the researcher at the University of Ottawa through email to ask about the findings.

If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researcher or his/her supervisor at the numbers mentioned herein.

If you have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5387 or [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca). Please refer to the ethics certificate #H-09-19-4864

Please save or print this form for your records.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## Intro

\* 1. Do you have an account on Instagram?

Yes

No

\* 2. Do you follow influencers on Instagram?

Yes

No

**Note: Influencers are individuals who create content on Instagram, have a large number of followers and achieve their fame through social media networks.**

**3. Think of a specific influencer on Instagram that you follow.**

**Then please on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (strongly Agree), indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I follow this influencer because he/she is attractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is dependable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is elegant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is skilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is classy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is qualified	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is handsome or beautiful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is sexy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I follow this influencer because he/she is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I follow this influencer because he/she is experienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4. Please on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the lowest probability and 5 being the highest probability), indicate how likely it is that you purchase a product recommended by this influencer on Instagram:**

	1	2	3	4	5
I am willing to buy a product or service recommended by this influencer on Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**5. Do you have any other insights regarding Influencer advertising on Instagram that you would be willing to share?**

## Demographics

### 6. What type of influencers would you prefer to follow on Instagram?

Select all that apply.

- Fashion and Beauty
- Entertainment and fun
- Travel and Tourism
- Art & Creativity
- Food
- Sport
- Technology
- Design and Decor
- Other (please specify)

### 7. How much time in average do you spend on Instagram per day?

- Less than 30 minutes
- Between 30 minutes to 1 hour
- Between 1 hour to 2 hours
- Between 2 hour to 4 hours
- +4 hours

### 8. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- There is not an option that applies to me. I identify as:

**9. How old are you?**

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

**10. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

- Elementary school to some high school without diploma
- High school degree or equivalent
- College degree
- Bachelor degree (e.g. BA, BS)
- Master degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)
- Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)
- Other (please specify)

**11. What is your current employment status?**

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired
- Self-employed

**12. What is your household income in a year?**

- Under \$15,000
- Between \$15,000 and \$50,000
- Between \$50,000 and \$100,000
- Over \$100,000

## Appendix D. Certificate of Ethics Approval by University of Ottawa

11/10/2019

**Université d'Ottawa**

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

### CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

<b>Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number</b>	H-09-19-4864
<b>Titre du projet / Project Title</b>	Users' perception of Influencers' credibility on Instagram and their purchase intention regarding Influencers' product recommendations
<b>Type de projet / Project Type</b>	Thèse de maîtrise / Master's thesis
<b>Statut du projet / Project Status</b>	Approuvé / Approved
<b>Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>	11/10/2019
<b>Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>	10/10/2020

### Équipe de recherche / Research Team

<b>Chercheur / Researcher</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role</b>
Hamid PASHAEI DIZAJI	École de science informatique et de génie électrique / School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Heather MORRISON	École des sciences de l'information / School of Information Studies	Superviseur / Supervisor

### Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154 Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • [ethique@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethique@uOttawa.ca) / [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca)  
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# Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

# University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Germain ZONGO

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board**

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