

The effect of influencer marketing on the buying behavior of young consumers

A study of how the purchase intention of young consumer is affected by brands within the fashion and beauty industries.

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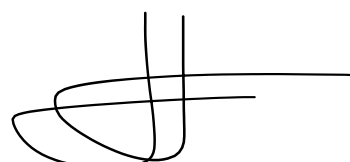
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We hope you will enjoy reading this Thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Background: In marketing today, influencer marketing has become a very efficient tool for companies within the beauty and fashion industry. With the utilization of social media and social media influencers, it become easy for brands to promote products and reach large audiences. Today's teenagers and young adults are part of a very digital-oriented generation and are fond of social networks. Therefore, they are the primary target of companies using this strategy.

Aim: The aim of the study is to research how companies within the beauty and fashion industry use influencers and social media to influence consumers and especially the adolescent and young adults. But also, to determine what are the impacts of this influence on the behavior and especially the purchasing behavior of the consumers.

Research questions:

RQ1: How do the **influencers** within **the fashion and beauty industries** **influence** using social media?

RQ2: How the influencer marketing strategy **impacts teenagers and young adults'** **behavior and purchasing behavior?**

Method: A qualitative research including three interviews of influencer in the fashion and beauty industry, two interviews of brand within the fashion and beauty industry and seven interviews of followers following the influencers previously mentioned. The study used three perspectives, as all the parts are linked together and in order to have more reliable findings thanks to the triangulation of data.

Findings: Brands, thanks to social networks and influencers, have a real power of influence on young generations of consumers. Consumers identify and create links with influencers, which drives them to follow influencers recommendations. This relationship impacts young consumers on different level. Indeed, followers tend to purchase what the persons they idealize use or wear, being the influencers in this case. Thus, even if partnerships are a strategy used a lot by brands, it is not the only one. Today, brands are aware of the behavior of consumers, and they know that their sales will improve if an influencer post any type of content with their products and especially if they are not paid to do it. In fact, followers have more trust toward what is said by an influencer when there is no paid collaboration involved. That's why on top of partnership, where the influencer perceives a remuneration, brands also send them gifted products in the hope that the influencer will use them.

Key Words: Influencer marketing, Influencers, Social media marketing, Consumer behavior.

Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Meeting points and problem statement.....	3
1.3 State of the art.....	5
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)	7
2.1.1 Platforms and focus on Instagram	7
2.1.2 Interaction	8
2.1.3 Information and diffusion	9
2.1.4 Digital/electronic word-of-mouth (E.W.O.M.).....	9
2.2. Influencer Marketing.....	10
2.2.1 Principles of influence	11
2.2.2 SMI.....	12
2.2.3 Size of the influencer.....	13
2.2.4 The credibility of the influencer	14
2.2.5 Transparency of paid collaboration	14
2.2.6 Para-social relationship with SMI.....	15
2.2.7 Downsides of SMI	16
2.3 Customer Purchase Behavior	17
2.3.1 - Consumer buying decision process.....	17
2.3.2 Consumer involvement	18
3. METHODOLOGY.....	20
3.1 Research Philosophy	20
3.1.1 Ontology	20
3.1.2 Epistemology	20
3.1.3 Philosophical foundation.....	21
3.2 Research Methodology	21
3.2.1 Research approach	21
3.2.2 Research methods.....	22
3.2.3 Research Design	23
3.2.4 Research Strategy.....	23
3.3 Research methods.....	24
3.3.1 Sampling techniques	24
3.3.2 Data Collection	26
3.3.3 Semi-Structured interviews.....	27
3.3.4 Data analysis.....	29
3.3.5 Trustworthiness of the research	31
3.3.6 Ethical considerations	32
4. EMPIRICAL STUDY.....	33
4.1 Social media marketing	33
4.1.1 Platforms	33
4.1.2 Interactions	34
4.1.3 Information and diffusion (WOM)	35
4.2 Principles of Influencer marketing	35
4.2.1 Influence.....	35
4.2.2 SMI size and profile	36

4.2.3 The role of the influencer’s agency	36
4.2.4 Partnerships	37
4.2.5 Monetary benefit	39
4.2.6 Para-social relationship	40
4.2.7 Impact of the influencers on the followers	41
4.3 Influencer marketing value.....	42
4.3.1 Trustworthiness.....	43
4.3.2 Attractiveness.....	43
4.3.3 Expertise	44
4.3.4 Credibility	44
4.4 Customer purchase behavior	45
4.4.1 Purchase intention	45
4.4.2 Purchase decision.....	46
4.4.3 Post-Purchase.....	47
5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	48
5.1 Social Media Marketing.....	48
5.1.1 Platforms	48
5.1.2 Interaction	48
5.1.3 Information, diffusion and eWOM	49
5.2 Influencer Marketing.....	49
5.2.1 Principles of Influence	49
5.2.2 SMI/Size and profile	50
5.2.3 The credibility of influencer	51
5.2.4 Agency and transparency of paid collaboration	52
5.2.5 Para-Social relationship.....	52
5.2.6 Downsides of SMI	53
5.3 Customer Behavior.....	54
5.3.1 Buying decision process	54
5.2.2 Relevance of the purchases	56
6. CONCLUSION	59
6.1 Research summary.....	59
6.2 Limitations of the study.....	61
6.3 Contribution and suggestion for future research	61
REFERENCES.....	63
Website references.....	70
APPENDICES	70
Appendix 1. Interview Questions for Followers.....	71
Appendix 2. Interview Question for Influencers	72
Appendix 3. Interview Question for Brands	73
Appendix 4. Example of an email sent by an agency to recruit an influencer.....	74
Appendix 5. Example of an email sent by an agency to an influencer for a partnership proposal.....	74
Appendix 6. Example of a brand demand for partnership with an influencer	75
Appendix 7. Example of a partnership brief sent by a brand to an influencer.....	76

List of figures and tables

Figure 1. Most popular verticals on Instagram worldwide 2015-2017	p.12
Figure 2. The Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII)	p.19
Figure 3. Case study in the fashion and beauty industry	p.23
Figure 4 Follower 1' PII	p.56
Figure 5. Follower 2' PII	p.57
Figure 6. Follower 4' PII	p.57
Table 1. Description of the followers	p.25
Table 2. Description of the influencers	p.26
Table 3. Description of the companies	p.26
Table 4. Description of the interviews	p.29

1. INTRODUCTION

We are today, and for several years now, in the era of digitalization. The world is in motion, in constant evolution. Digitalization is present everywhere, in most of the industries and in our daily lives. Through phones, computers, software, social media and household appliances for example, our generation, also called generation Z and defined as a “group of people who were born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s” (Merriam-webster.com, 2019), is very connected and the next generation, generation Alpha defined as being “composed of individuals who were born at the crossover of Generation Z and the new age” (Tootell, Freeman and Freeman, 2014, p.83) will be even more connected. Indeed, young people, children, teenagers and young adults issued from this generation have been immersed in this digital era since they were born and use it daily. In fact, the generation Z was born within the beginning of the internet and the generation Alpha, which started in 2010, saw the launch of iPad and Instagram. Both generations witnessed an era of rapid advanced technologies (Arora and Jha, 2020). As Jha (2020) says, the generation Alpha “had already influenced the trend of marketing, technology, and priorities of their millennial parent”, and companies had understood this and had integrated it into their strategies to be even more competitive.

This is the reason why, in marketing, in recent years, a popular strategy for companies is influencer marketing. It allows, thanks to social networks and influencers, to reach a larger audience, to increase sales but also to gain visibility.

1.1 Background

Marketing is about people finding ways to deliver exceptional value by fulfilling the needs and wants of other people (Ferrell, 2021). For this purpose, different types of strategy have emerged over the years such as Digital Marketing, Green Marketing or Guerilla Marketing (Wind and Mahajan, 2001). Digital marketing can be defined as implementation of digital technologies, which are used to create channels to reach potential recipients, in order to achieve the enterprise’s goals, through more effective fulfillment of the consumer needs (Sawicki, 2016). One of the channels created is influencer marketing. According to the Association of National Advertisers (2022),

influencer marketing focuses on leveraging individuals who have influence over potential buyers and orienting marketing activities around these individuals to drive a brand message to the larger market. Given their potential to reach large audiences, influencers incite companies to include them as a relatively new marketing communication tool, referred to as influencer marketing (De Jans, Van de Sompel, De Veirman and Hudders, 2020).

A lot of research has been done to determine exactly what influencer marketing is, why companies are using it more and more and what it brings them (Backaler and Shankman, 2018; Coll, 2019; Genú, 2019; Levin, 2019). Influencer marketing is described as a new effective and cost-efficient marketing tool as it is not perceived by customers as advertising (Ye, Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman, 2021). It is today a key component of the firm's digital marketing strategies (Abidin, 2015) used to promote brands and reach very engaged audiences.

This strategy could be compared as an evolved word-of-mouth marketing as it works thanks to experience sharing, user-generated content and spreading via blogs and social media (Ye et al., 2021). This user-generated content gains importance in the digital world because it offers genuine and honest insight into the value of a product or service, and people are more likely to trust and follow these recommendations compared to brand-generated communications (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

The main influencer marketing's tools are social media in general (Instagram, facebook, Twitter and youtube) and social media influencers. Social media influencers are users of social media who are being followed by a significant number of other users (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Harrigan, Daly, Coussement, Lee, Soutar and Evers, 2021). As they share a part of their lives with relevant content, they provide the impression that the followers know them. Users develop admiration, para-social interaction; which refers to the relations people have with media figures (Horton and Wohl, 1956); perceived similarity, sense of belonging, intimacy and psychological closeness which play an important role here (Ye et al., 2021) This makes the influencers more trustworthy by users. As they reach large audiences, and thanks to their popularity companies and brands use them to promote products or services. Followers are increasingly attached to the influencers and the influencer communities (Ki, Cuevas,

Chong and Lim, 2020). This attachment helps influencers to achieve marketing and business success of branding and selling.

More and more, marketing experts state that the technologies used in promotion and communication activities are evolving rapidly, leading to changes in markets and changes in customer behavior (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, Jacobson, Jain, Karjaluoto, Kefi, Krishen, Kumar, Rahman, Raman, Rauschnabel, Rowley, Salo, Tran, and Wang, 2020). All the changes specific to the digital area are a matter of concern to any organization because they can act as either opportunities or threats, with important consequences in terms of economic and social results. Social media influencers have an important impact on consumers' buying behavior, with a greater tendency to acquire what is marketed. Factors that increase confidence in social media influencers are whether the consumer feels connected, honesty and that social media influencer markets products and/or services within its area of expertise (Singh, 2021).

As previously explained, influencer marketing allows brands and companies to promote their product through tools such as influencers and social networks. Many industries are using this growing marketing strategy such as sports, technology, food and travel (Ingrassia, Bellia, Giurdanella, Columba and Chironi, 2022; Ye et al., 2021).

However, influencer marketing presents new opportunities to the beauty and fashion industry (Paço and Oliveira, 2017). Consumers are particularly bound to follow influencers in product categories that deal with fashion and beauty (Nafees, Stoddard, Cook and Nikolov, 2021). Indeed, beauty and fashion influencers are very numerous and arouse great interest in followers. It is therefore the beauty industry that we are going to look at and all that it encompasses, as it is of great importance to many consumers. Fashion is defined as “the process of social diffusion by which a new style is adopted by some group of consumers” (Sudha and Sheena, 2017, p.18). Fashion influences many aspects of our lives; it has both economic and social value and provides individuals with a tool to express themselves and create an identity. It is therefore important to understand the process of customer decision making within the fashion industry.

1.2 Meeting points and problem statement

However, research has raised questions about the effects that influencer marketing would have on network users (Farivar, Wang and Turel, 2022; Kwiatek, Baltezarević and

PapaKonstantinidis, 2021). There is a real lack of ethical framework around social media and their influencers. It is easy to think that influencers have an impact on the consumer buying decision behavior as they create a feeling of trust with the followers (Ye et al., 2021) This relation encourages the followers to take their attitudes and beliefs and this makes it difficult for consumers to discern commercial content from noncommercial content (Evans, Phua, Lim and Jun, 2017). Moreover, this attachment may result in followers' excessive use and problematic engagement with them (Farivar et al., 2022). Another concern is that social media design and content can induce addiction (Farivar et al., 2022) associated with mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and depression which lead to reduced wellbeing.

Although research has provided some answers, there are still gaps to be filled. Indeed, literature on influencer marketing related to impacts on consumer behavior mostly focused on general use of social media (Naranjo-Zolotov, Turel, Oliveira and Lascano, 2021) but the role of the specific activities like following influencers has not been explored further. As followers are predominantly included in the young age groups, the people around 19-24 years old are more prone to follow influencers (Hein, 2017). We would like to explore the role of the influencers related to behavior and especially for teenagers and young adults, part of the generation Z, between the age of 10 and 24 (Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne and Patton, 2018), who are easily persuaded because of their cognitive abilities and advertising literacy not fully mature (Ye et al., 2021) while exploring the two points of view of those who influence and those who are influenced.

In the light of this research gap, throughout this thesis, we will try to investigate and provide answers to the following questions:

RQ1: How do the **influencers** within **the fashion and beauty industries** **influence** using social media?

RQ2: How the influencer marketing strategy **impacts teenagers and young adults' behavior and purchase behavior?**

1.3 State of the art

There are already few research articles trying to explain the phenomenon of influencer marketing and what problems can arise regarding consumer behavior, as academic research is recently catching up. Five main research themes were discovered in the area of influence marketing: (1) Persuasiveness of influencer marketing, (2) Stakeholder's perspective on influencer marketing, (3) Influencer marketing for specific product, categories and sectors, (4) Identification, selection and activation of influencers and (5) Ethical Issues and Disclosure Effects in Influencer Marketing (Ye et al., 2021).

The themes that focus the most on the problem we identify are the following: Persuasiveness of influencer marketing and Ethical Issues and Disclosure Effects in Influencer Marketing.

In the first theme, Persuasiveness of Influencer Marketing, researchers try to explain the effectiveness of influencer marketing and what are the key success factors (Ye et al., 2021). Those key factors can be summarized in three categories such as influencers characteristics, content characteristics and customers characteristics. The research on the subject has provided some evidence that influencer characteristics, such as social and physical attractiveness, can affect the formation of para-social relationships (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Sokolova and Kefi, 2019) and that followers' relationship to influencer is the key to the effectiveness of social media influencer (Hu, Min, Han, and Liu, 2020; Hwang and Zhang, 2018). Research in an increasing body of literature highlights other factors that nourish this relationship such as perceived similarity and wishful identification, admiration, emotional attachment to influencers, and perceived popularity of influencers (De Jans et al., 2020; Ladhari, Massa, and Skandrani, 2020; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2019; Shan, Chen, and Lin, 2019).

Articles on social media influencers have mainly focused on the positive aspect (Kwiatek et al., 2021; Bu, Parkinson and Thaichon, 2022; Hwang, and Zhang, 2018) of influencers and explored factors that can enhance influencer effectiveness as described above. Only few studies are questioning the ethical issues and disclosure effects in influencer marketing. Those studies mainly highlight how children and adolescents are sensitive to influencer marketing as they don't have the same discernment as adults (Van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, Hudders, Vanwesenbeeck, Cauberghe and van Berlo, 2020) and therefore,

have great difficulty recognizing that they are exposed to commercial content (Hudders, De Pauw, Cauberghe, Panic, Zarouali and Rozendaal, 2017). But one literature gap is how this age group of the population is affected by influencer marketing, besides commercial content, with social media addiction for example (Farivar et al., 2022). The literature on social media addiction mostly focused on general use of social media (Naranjo-Zolotov et al., 2021), and the role of specific activities such as following influencers in causing problematic behaviors has been largely ignored.

Finally, most of the research is from either the customer or the company's point of view. It could also be interesting to have the Influencer's perspective on how they perceive their influence on their follower's behavior.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, the goal is to explain deeper the main concepts of influencer marketing as well as the models and concepts related to social media marketing and customer behavior.

2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social media marketing is a powerful form of internet marketing used by companies to promote products and services on social media platforms and web pages (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). This prolific tool allows companies to market their products while building a brand image and increasing consumer loyalty (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012; Venciute, 2018). Social media marketing is a revolution within the marketing strategy. Indeed, it allows; in a simple, cost-effective and efficient way; companies to develop direct and indirect contact with existing and new consumers (Venciute, 2018).

It consists of many virtual places such as Instagram, Youtube, Twitter or blogs also. Thanks to it, companies can connect and interact with the stakeholders and the audience (Tuten and Solomon, 2018). Furthermore, it allows consumers to connect online with communities which share the same values, needs and wants (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). The companies can establish connection and communication with many individual and thanks to personalization, increase the engagement and the loyalty of consumers (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018).

2.1.1 Platforms and focus on Instagram

Companies, in social media marketing, communicate and interact with consumers thanks to marketing and advertising activities in different social media platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Instagram. These platforms are used by different types of people. Facebook is known as the basic platform for everyone and on the other hand, Youtube, Twitter and instagram are popular with a younger generation (Duggan and Smith, 2013). In recent years, Instagram has gained a lot of popularity. Indeed, thanks to the sharing of very visual content, this network gets high levels of user engagement resulting in daily use (Duggan and Smith, 2013).

Instagram is based on the sharing of photos and videos by users for their community. Indeed, on Instagram, users subscribe to other accounts and vice versa, these are the followers (Billiot, 2015). Engagement on Instagram translates into likes, comments, shares and save posts of content by followers. Users can also use hashtags under their posts, which boosts visibility and engagement depending on the popularity of it (ibid).

The online environment of social networks allows users to share and interact within rich interest-based communities. Interactions are made by liking, commenting and sharing their content (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). This phenomenon is also applied in influencer marketing. This strategy is based on the use of influencers on networks and on mostly electronic word-of-mouth in order to diffuse information and connect followers with brands (Pophal, 2016). Influencer marketing is very present on Instagram as the platform is very visual and allows influencers to share content and engage with the followers (Jaakonmäki, Müller and Vom Brocke, 2017). We will dig deeper in the influencer marketing later in this chapter.

2.1.2 Interaction

Thanks to the communications established between companies and consumers within social media, interactions between them are more personal in comparison to more traditional ways of marketing and advertising such as TV advertising for example (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018). Therefore, social media provides companies with an efficient channel to learn from customers and to then, easily meet their preferences (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012).

Thanks to the understanding of the consumers gained by the companies with social media, it is easy for them to target their products and services to the correspondent customer groups with the same interest (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). However, the interactions are not only between companies and customers. The social media environment allows all the individuals and other organizations to interact by sharing experiences, building relationships, exploring online communities (Shamsudeen and Ganeshbabu, 2018; Venciute, 2018).

2.1.3 Information and diffusion

The goal of social networks is to share and interconnect with friends, family and new people. It is easy for all the users to share, publish and create content (Venciute, 2018). Information is spread very efficiently and quickly. Social media has removed the geographical and temporal barrier. Today, people all around the world can connect around various interests (Holt, 2016).

This new way of communication has become an asset for companies that can now maintain contact with current consumers but also reach potential new consumers by diffusing information on a global level without much effort (Saravanakumar and SugathaLaskshmi, 2012; Venciute, 2018).

However, companies are aware of the speed of diffusion of messages on the networks and are therefore careful with their advertising activities (Saravanakumar and SugathaLaskshmi, 2020). Companies must avoid the dissemination of negative messages and therefore anticipate consumers' response to advertising (ibid).

2.1.4 Digital/electronic word-of-mouth (E.W.O.M.)

In marketing one of the concepts very useful and very popular is word-of-mouth. It is “an informal way of exchanging information from person to person, none of whom is a marketer” (Blythe, 2013, p.22). Regarding social media marketing, this concept is still present but more digital, it is called “digital word of mouth” (Kwiatek et al., 2021). There are similarities with the word-of-mouth used in general marketing. Generally, it is used to promote products and services thanks to communication between the brands and the consumers as well as between consumers themselves. For the digital word-of-mouth, the communication about products and services is done through channels which are not controlled by the companies such as social media (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris and Piercy, 2017). With this concept, influencers speak of products and services offered by brands in exchange of a payment (Bakker, 2018). They give their opinion to the followers which are potential future consumers. The goal here is to spread an idea, an opinion, a brand image to as many followers as possible in order to involve them and encourage them to buy.

2.2. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is known as a new discipline used by companies to promote products and services of their brand. It is a form of brand communication and advertising which is different thanks to a more direct and effective way to reach an audience compared to normal advertising (Bakker, 2018).

Three perspectives of the influencer marketing (ibid):

- **Brand owner perspective**

This digital form of communication allows the brand owners to accomplish communication goals (Brown and Hayes, 2008). It helps to develop the consumer engagement, promote brand image, brand attitudes and create traffic to reach more and more audiences. This can be applied to social media as well. The brand managers have an important role to play in the selection of the influencer(s) with a good brand-fit and target audience-fit.

- **Influencer perspective**

Regarding influencers, according to their popularity, they are granted several paid partnerships with brands. The number of followers is therefore an important criterion when they are chosen, because the more the influencers are known, the bigger the audience they will reach and the more partnerships they will get. However, it is important that they choose partnerships and brands with which they share commonalities so as not to compromise their credibility and trustworthiness with their followers.

- **Consumer perspective**

In the decision-making phase of a consumer there are five decision participants: the Initiator, the Influencer, the Decider, the Buyer and the User, which can be the same or a different person. The influencers play a role here as they must encourage the purchase and on the other hand the users try to recognize the fact that influencer marketing is paid advertising (Hein, 2017). However, they consider credibility and trust as reference criteria when it comes to following an influencer.

Influencer marketing is therefore a tool and a means of creating value for both brands and influencers. Their objective is to correlate their perspectives in order to go in the direction of the consumers who are the final target. This new discipline and mode of communication between the company or brand and the consumers used different models and concepts which will be defined and explained below.

2.2.1 Principles of influence

Influence and persuasion are two aspects of the marketing strategies. These aspects are then used in influencer marketing. Cialdini (2007) developed six principles which help to understand how engaged people are. These six principles are the following:

- **Reciprocity:** this aspect corresponds to the feeling of being indebted to someone when we receive for example a gift or something for free. Here, if the influencer allows followers to win gifts or provides them with a service, the followers will feel indebted and will want to return the favor to the influencer.
- **Consistency:** this one comes with engagement. Individuals want to remain consistent and true to their word. Commitment is therefore greater if they have actively participated in the decision.
- **Social proof:** this one mean that there is a real need of knowing what everyone else around is doing. This gives people a feeling of security and allows them to confirm their actions.
- **Authority:** this one mean that people are more likely to trust experts and authorities than themselves no matter they are legitimate or not.
- **Scarcity:** this one refers to our need for freedom. For a purchase decision, a product takes value when we know that it will not be available indefinitely, which leads to a decrease in our freedom of decision.
- **Liking:** this one refers to the fact that people are more likely to favor others if they are similar, or if they find them attractive (Cialdini, 1998).

All these principles can help to understand what the effects of influencer on consumers are and how brands use this to adapt their influencer marketing strategy.

2.2.2 SMI

Social media influencers are people who use social networks to build a career and share content about their lives. SMI are not like celebrities with a lot of followers, they became famous by themselves through social networks like Instagram or thanks to a blog (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). The consumer likes them and follows them because of this. They seem more socially connected and closer to them (Lin, Bruning and Swarna, 2018). All influencers are not the same. They each share content about different topics and don't reach the same audience in terms of people and of size (e.g., below). On Instagram, the most popular topics are beauty and fashion (see figures below). Young people, and especially women, follow SMIs to know more about beauty trends, techniques and beauty brands (Annalect Finland, 2017). This popularity created expectations regarding the appearance of influencers, brands and consumers. Today the ideals of beauty are mostly controlled by Instagram trends, created by influencers and brands for consumers (Harper, 2019).

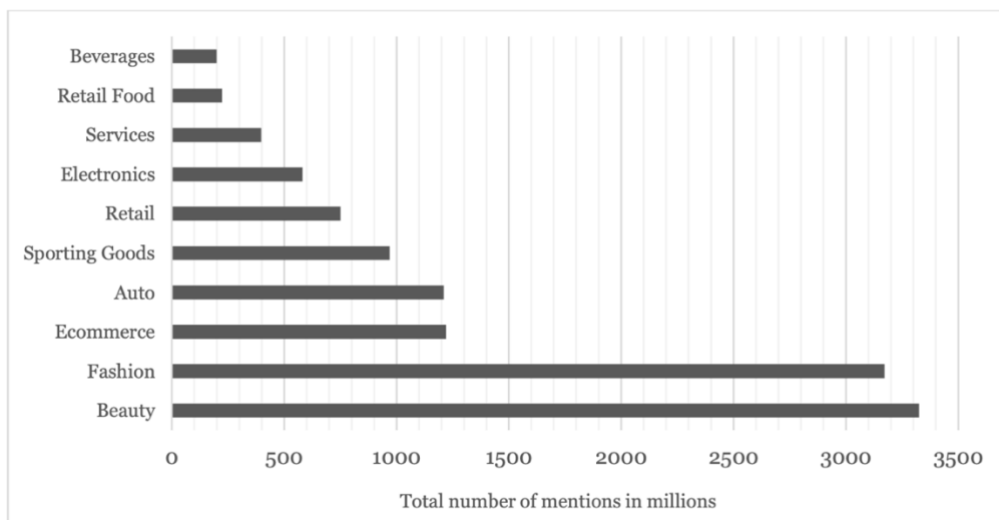


Figure 1 - Most popular verticals on Instagram worldwide 2015-2017, total number of mentions in millions (Statista, 2018)

2.2.3 Size of the influencer

Influencers don't have the same audience and don't reach the same number of people. According to Conick (2018), influencers can be divided in three different categories regarding their number of followers:

- **Micro Influencer:** Influencers with a number of followers between 50 and 25,000.
- **Mid Influencer:** Influencers with a number of followers between 25,001 and 100,000
- **Macro Influencer:** Influencers with a number of follower higher than 100,000.

The number of followers can be a translation of the extent of an influencer's network (De Veirman, et al., 2017). The larger the audience, the greater is the number of people interested in the account and what is posted on (ibid). This is interesting for companies because for them, the more followers the influencer has, the more qualified the influencer is (Conick, 2018). For consumers, influencers with a high number of followers are synonymous with popularity (De Veirman et al., 2017). Thanks to this "popularity" printed in the consumer's mind, this is easier for them to follow and consider influencer's opinions and recommendations (Cialdini, 2007). With many followers, the marketing messages and electronic word-of-mouth are spread very quickly (De Veirman et al., 2017).

However, an influencer with a high number of followers doesn't mean a good fit for the brands nor that he is believable for his audience (Conick, 2018; Moore, Yang and Kim, 2018). It does also not translate into engagement of the followers which is characterized by likes, comments and shares (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Conik (2018) and Hall (2016) explained that often the engagement is higher with micro influencer than macro influencer and therefore with the brands. According to Hall (2016), 82% of the people would follow the recommendations of micro influencers. Moreover, the number of followers, even if it is an important factor, does not mean that there is commitment and interaction from the followers and therefore, an impact for the brands (Hall, 2016). This is also the case for the popularity of influencers. This does not prove that the influencer is an opinion leader. All of this plays an important role in consumer attitudes and behavior (De veirman et al., 2017).

2.2.4 The credibility of the influencer

Companies must be careful when choosing which influencers, they want to work with and should consider the impact those influencers will have for the brands.

Lou and Yuan (2018), in their Social Media Influencer Value model, mentioned the influencer credibility as an important factor regarding the persuasiveness in the process of promoting products, services or brands. The credibility of them is defined by how they are perceived by the users of the social networks. Three factors were identified as having an influence on their credibility, namely the expertise, trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis and Kelley, 1970) and the attractiveness (McGuire, 1985). The more an influencer presents these characteristics, the more influence he will have on the users of social networks.

This model helped us determine if the followers perceive the influencers, they follow on social media as being credible and if this credibility is important for the brands when choosing the influencers, they want to work with.

2.2.5 Transparency of paid collaboration

Partnership can be made between influencers and brands via agencies or not. Nowadays, all the paid partnerships are controlled and under legal regulations (Pophal, 2016). Indeed, on Instagram, all the paid partnerships must be revealed to the users and followers of the influencers (Conik, 2018). This was instigated to protect the consumers from confusing marketing messages and to explain clearly the purpose of the content related. However, even if consumers are aware of the purpose of the contents they see on influencers profile, that doesn't mean that influencers don't do it just for the money. Indeed, according to Hall (2016), consumers can't be sure that influencers who made partnerships trust and use the product they are promoting. Moreover, Evans explained that when consumers see a post where it's clearly stated that it is a partnership with "Sponsored" or "paid advertisement", this negatively affects consumers' attitude or behavior. On the other hand, when it is not that explicit such as an indication like "SP" (sponsored), consumers are not really impacted.

2.2.6 Para-social relationship with SMI

A para-social relationship is a one-way relationship, where a person has the illusion of an intimacy with a famous, imaginary person that he or she does not really know. These relationships are an extension of real social behavior (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019; Yuksel and Labrecque, 2016). Relations between consumers and influencers are often para-social relationships (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019; Gong and Xu, 2014; Hwang and Zhang, 2018). This type of relation impacts consumers cognitively, effectively and behaviourally by influencing their opinions, interests, moods, emotions or their construction of relations (Yuksel and Labrecque, 2016).

In general, consumers follow influencers they can relate with (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). The consumers often start to build a relationship with them, but this para-social relationship between an influencer and a consumer is not a real one. However, this relation is not totally one-sided as the followers can interact with influencers by liking, commenting, sharing their posts and sending personal messages (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). But it is impossible to talk about two-sided relations because influencers are not able to interact with all their followers and even more if they are numerous (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). By sharing contents related to their daily life, honest opinion, or statement, influencers feed this relationship and amplify this feeling of intimacy for the followers (Chung and Cho, 2017).

Moreover, the larger the community of influencers, the more difficult or impossible the two-way relationship becomes (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). By offering easy-to-use communication and sharing tools, Instagram participates in the development of these relationships between influencers and consumers. Influencers, through stories and their posts, encourage followers to engage in interactions with them (Chung and Cho, 2017).

Within these relations, attractiveness does not always play a role (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). However, it can have an influence sometimes. Indeed, consumers are used to comparing themselves with influencers they relate with (Greenwood, Pietromonaco and Long, 2008). Influencers emphasize this idea of comparison by providing in their content a copy-my-style or copy-my-makeup. The behavior of consumers is then influenced by their self-esteem. Indeed, consumers with a high self-esteem or self-confidence are more capable of taking a step back from this relationship and finding counter arguments

(Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). All of this has an impact on the influencer's influence on consumers and their behavior.

2.2.7 Downsides of SMI

There are downsides regarding the utilization of influencer marketing. First, the fact that paid collaboration must be transparent for the consumers negatively impacts the authenticity of the perceived message (Moore et al., 2018). Moreover, consumers are looking for authenticity when following influencers but when realizing the paid nature of the contents, can feel manipulated by the influencers and the brand and lose trust which will impact the brands and influencers image (Evans et al., 2017; Pophal, 2016).

Moreover, all the excitement around beauty and fashion promoted by influencers leads to discussion related to distorted beauty ideals, the increase of cosmetic surgery or even mental health issues (Greenwood et al., 2008; Perloff, 2014). Indeed, brands are not known for their ability to create real expectations and image of physical appearance and especially for the women (Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard, 2006). This can lead to anxiety and ill-being regarding the physical appearance of the women and all the consumers in general (Greenwood et al., 2008). Social norms are constantly exposed in the media and even if nowadays more actions against the "beauty ideal" are taken, it will take time to observe changes. This idea is influenced by advertising and by the brand behind it (Solomon et al., 2006). Indeed, brands create and change this ideal of beauty as they want since the creation of the marketing. Consumers and especially women tried to reach this ideal of beauty by changing their weight, clothes and make-up (Solomon et al., 2006).

Social media accentuate this as they don't present a realistic world concerning these topics. Users of social media are comparing themselves all the time between them which translates into a negative self-evaluation (Wasylikiw and Williamson, 2013). Instagram also encourages this as it is a media centered on visual content. Some social media influencers, by posting contents, incite the consumers to compare themselves and feed this idea of the ideal of beauty. Indeed, today it is hard for consumers to know which content or influencer is authentic or not and if they are manipulated (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Fardouly, Willburger and Vartarian, 2018).

2.3 Customer Purchase Behavior

Understanding consumers behavior is a key for a successful marketing strategy. Consumer behavior can be understood as "The decision process and physical activity individuals engage in when evaluating, acquiring, using, or disposing of goods and services," (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993, p.553). According to Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft and Singh (2010), "identifying particular personality characteristics explain variations in buying, using, and disposing of customer behaviors" (p.285).

According to Hoffman and Turley (2002), the customer can have two types of behavior. The approach behavior or the avoidance behavior. The result in the customer attitude can be described as the following:

1. A desire to stay or leave.
2. A desire to further explore and interact or a tendency to ignore it.
3. A desire to communicate with others or to ignore.
4. Feelings of satisfaction or disappointment with the service experience.

2.3.1 - Consumer buying decision process

Customer attitudes are formed through experience and learning, and these attitudes can affect the behavior of the customers' buying habits (Jawahar and Tamizhjothi, 2013). The consumer buying decision process starts with the decision-making processes in which the consumer decides to buy the goods or services in exchange of money in the market before, during and after the purchase of goods or services (Qazzafi, 2019).

The consumer buying decision process is made of five stages: Problem recognition, Information search, Evaluations of alternatives, Purchase decision and post-purchase behavior (ibid).

In the first stage, Problem recognition, there is a need for the company to understand the needs of the customer and to satisfy it (ibid). Once the need is identified, the company must create a marketing strategy to share it with the consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2016; Kotler et al., 2017).

The second stage of the consumer buying decision process is Information search. During this stage, the customer will search for information via several sources such as personal sources, commercial sources, public sources and experimental sources (Kotler et al., 2017).

In the third stage, the Evaluation of alternatives, the customer will rank the products, from best to worst. with the information he found during the second stage and will then evaluate them.

During the fourth stage, Purchase decision, the customer will decide what product they will purchase from their evaluation and where to purchase it. The purchase decision is also influenced by the surrounding environment (Qazzafi, 2019).

Finally, in the last stage, which is post-purchase behavior, the customer will be either satisfied or dissatisfied with the product they purchased. If the consumer's expectation does not meet with the product, then the consumer will be dissatisfied (Kotler et al., 2017). This theory will be important to analyze what are the adolescent and young adult's behavior when purchasing a product promoted by an influencer.

2.3.2 Consumer involvement

Literature provides several scales to measure the consumer involvement with products (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Laurent and Kapferer, 1985; McQuarrie and Munson, 1987; Jain and Srinivasan, 1990). Despite the various mentioned studies, there is no peaceful agreement in marketing literature about which scale would be more appropriate to measure consumer involvement with products and services promoted by influencers.

In our thesis, we decided to use the revised published measure of involvement by Zaichkowsky (1985), as it continues to be used successfully by researchers looking to capture and categorize motivations to explain differences in individual consumer behavior (Peck and Johnson, 2011). This bipolar adjective scale helps capture the involvement of the customer for products while meeting the standards for internal reliability, reliability over time, content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

The definition of involvement most found in literature is proposed by Zaichkowsky (1985): "Perceived object relevance based on needs, values and interests inherent to the

person”.

This framework will be used to analyze the products promoted by influencers and to determine if they are indeed relevant for consumers.

<u>To me (object to be judged) is:</u>		
Important	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unimportant
Relevant	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Irrelevant
Means a lot to me	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Means nothing to me
Valuable	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Worthless
Interesting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Boring
Exciting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unexciting
Appealing	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unappealing
Fascinating	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Mundane
Involving	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Uninvolving
Needed	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Not needed

Figure 2 - The Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII) by Zaichkowsky, 1985.

p.341

3. METHODOLOGY

In this methodological section, we will explain our study choices and the reasons that led us to them. We seek to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do the influencers within the fashion and beauty industries influence using social media?

RQ2: How the influencers marketing strategy impacts teenagers and young adults' behavior and purchasing behavior?

Our goal is to conduct a study that will allow us to answer these questions. Here, our objective is to approach our study through different points of view, namely, those of the influencers as well as those of the companies using them but also of those who follow them. This will help us to compare their opinions, to explain the link that unites them but also to understand the effects that they could have on each other.

3.1 Research Philosophy

3.1.1 Ontology

A constructivist ontology perspective was employed in this research as a framework for analysis. Constructivist ontology considers meaning as generated by individuals (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) and is assimilated to subjectivism (Cupchik, 2001). Constructionism is defined as categories socially constructed which are made real by the actions and understandings of humans (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019).

3.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is fostered by ontology. As we decided to consider a constructivist ontology, we will use an interpretive epistemology in this research. Interpretive epistemology involves qualitative data as a process between theory and empirical phenomenon, and thus results in the production of “reflexive narratives, not explanatory models or theoretical propositions” (Mantere and Ketokivi, 2013, p.75). This will allow us to gain knowledge.

3.1.3 Philosophical foundation

The philosophical foundation of this research is interpretivism philosophy as we integrate human interest into our study. Indeed, interpretive research assumes that access to reality, given or socially constructed, is only through social constructions (Myers, 2009). Accordingly, this philosophy emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. According to Dudovskiy (2009), it is important to “appreciate differences between people” (p.1) in interpretivist approach and to focus on meaning by using different approaches to reflect multiple aspects of the issues. In this research, we highlighted the different aspects by interviewing groups of people that have different approaches and perspectives of the issue.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Research approach

Regarding the research approach, 2 types can be used independently or in combination, the deductive approach and the inductive approach (Sekaran, 2003). The *deductive* research approach is based on the use of existing theories that allow the data to be tested in order to formulate one or more research questions and their objectives. This approach is mainly used in scientific research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) and this approach best represents the relationship between theory and research according to Bell et al., (2019). Thanks to the theoretical knowledge related to the field of study that the researchers possess, they create one or several hypotheses which will be translated into operational terms and related to concepts or models within an analysis (Bell et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2009).

On the other hand, the *inductive* approach consists first in collecting data through observations or experiments in order to answer a problem (Saunders et al., 2009). The goal here is to understand the nature of the problem and with the data obtained to develop a theoretical framework and use it as an outcome of the research (ibid). It is also to create empirical generalization and to formulate valid general results that require as much data as possible (Bell et al., 2019).

Normally and according to Saunders et al., (2009), if the research area presents a lot of literature which allow to define a theoretical framework and hypotheses, it is more logical

to use the deductive approach. On the contrary, if the area is new and there is not a lot of literatures, the inductive approach is better in this case.

In our case, there is a lot of research regarding influencer marketing but there is also a lack of information regarding the effect of it and particularly focusing on the youth generation within the fashion and beauty market. Moreover, there is little research that focuses not only on social network users but also on influencers themselves. In our study we undertake the inductive approach, as case study with a qualitative research strategy tends to use this approach to the relationship between theory and research.

3.2.2 Research methods

There are two research methods respectively called quantitative method and qualitative method used to collect, process and analyze data (Bell et al., 2019). What differentiates these two methods are the way they collect data and the way they analyze it (Saunders et al., 2009).

Regarding the quantitative method, it uses numerical data and is presented in the form of numbers and statistics (Bell et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2009). This method is used when the data can be measured or analyzed in numbers.

On the other hand, the qualitative method uses non numerical data and is mostly presented in words (Bell et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2009). This method is used when the goal is to go deeper in the research and when it is impossible to measure or use numbers to translate information (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, it is used to have a better “understanding of human behavior and functions” (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

Regarding our study we chose to do a qualitative study. In fact, regarding our area and our field of study with influencer marketing within the beauty and fashion industry the goal here is to go deeper in the subject and understand the consumer behavior related to it. As Cupchik (2001) says, “Qualitative methods provide in-depth reports of underlying processes and can help frame hypotheses that test specific functional relationships” (p.11). Here, we want to understand the relationship between the influencers used by the companies and their followers to put in light potential effects it can have on consumer behavior.

3.2.3 Research Design

A case study design was used in this thesis. The case study is the fashion and beauty industry, and within this case, three entities are considering: fashion/lifestyle influencers, brands using those influencers as a marketing strategy and users of social media following fashion/lifestyle influencers. This design enables to examine relationships between different variables as well as understanding broader issues or allowing generalization to be challenged (Bell et al., 2019). The variables in this study are the use of influencers as a marketing strategy on one hand, and consumer behavior on the other hand.

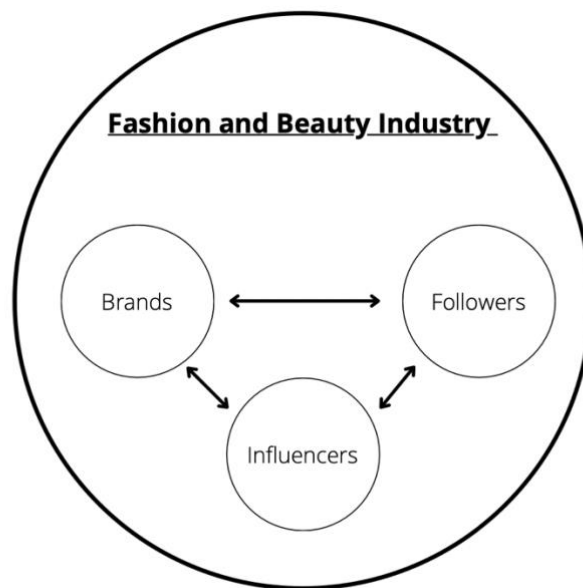


Figure 3 - Case study in the fashion and beauty industry

3.2.4 Research Strategy

Qualitative research gives the opportunity to genuinely reveal the perspectives of the interviewed people and there is a much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view (Bell et al., 2019), which is interesting for this research as our aim was to understand how influencers can have an impact on their followers' consuming behavior. This implies that it is the perspectives and knowledge of people we interview that is required to understand the influencer/follower relationship and how this relationship impacts the consumers behavior.

The interviews are given to heterogeneous people. As our goal is to have the point of view of the user of the networks/followers but also of the influencer, we interviewed 7 followers in order to learn more about their vision of the influencers, and what they bring to them. We also interviewed 3 influencers to learn what constitutes their role and what they think of their relationship with their followers and with the companies they work with and if they have an opinion about their own influence on the social networks.

Finally, we interviewed 2 companies in the fashion and beauty industries to better understand how they work with influencers and what it brings them. During these interviews, the focus is on the main goal of the influencer marketing regarding each point of views (Company, influencer, consumer) and on the behavioral impact of this strategy on the teenagers and young adults.

Most of the interviews were conducted face to face in a working room. However, some of them were conducted online via zoom for convenience and to eliminate border issues. Interviews were conducted in teams of two, with one person in charge of the question and the other in charge of taking notes and thinking about other issues that might come up during the discussion. All respondents were asked for their permission to be recorded and a verbal agreement was done to validate or not their attention to be anonymous.

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Sampling techniques

The sampling of a study is “the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population” (Merriam-webster.com, 2018).

The sampling strategy used in this research is purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2002), this technique is widely used in qualitative research as it enables to identify and select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. In this sampling strategy, individuals or groups of individuals knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest are identified (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Bernard (2018) and Spradley (1979) also note the importance of the availability

and the willingness to participate when identifying individuals. Their ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive and reflective manner (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan and Hoagwood, 2015).

The population of a study is defined by Aaker (2010) as all elements and characteristics that are the subject of the study.

For the qualitative study, the population targeted is beauty/lifestyle influencers, users of social media, between the age of 11 and 24 years old, who follow beauty/lifestyle influencers and community managers for brands in the beauty/lifestyle field.

This will allow us to have three different perspectives and to then compare them. We don't have any prerequisite regarding the gender, the age or the number of followers of the influencers.

TABLE 1 – Description of the followers

Follower	Sex	Age	Follow beauty/lifestyle influencer(s)	Social network used to follow influencers
Follower 1	Female	21	Yes	Instagram/Tiktok
Follower 2	Female	20	Yes	Instagram
Follower 3	Male	22	Yes	Instagram/Youtube
Follower 4	Female	22	Yes	Instagram
Follower 5	Female	21	Not anymore	Instagram
Follower 6	Female	14	Yes	Instagram
Follower 7	Female	13	Yes	Instagram

TABLE 2 - Description of the influencers

Influencers	Field	Social media	Number of followers (On the 13th of May)
Influencer 1	Fashion and beauty	Instagram/Tiktok	Macro Influencer 466 000/733 600
Influencer 2	Fashion and beauty	Tiktok/Instagram	Macro Influencer 231 400/10 600
Influencer 3	Fashion and beauty	Instagram/Tiktok	Mid Influencer 63 600/10 800

TABLE 3- Description of the companies

Company	Field	Use Influencer marketing
Company 1	Fashion and beauty	Yes
Company 2	Fashion and Beauty	Yes

3.3.2 Data Collection

This thesis relies on primary data. The information was collected through semi-structured interviews, which are interviews where follow-up questions to something said by the interviewees can be asked but from interviewee to interviewee, all the questions are asked and similar wording is used (Bell et al., 2019). This data collection method was selected since it enabled in-depth and first-hand information from the case study (Bell et al., 2019).

Furthermore, we considered it to be aligned to the inductive method chosen and the most appropriate way to gain information related to relationship and behavior, as these are very much subjective and proper to each individual. We were also given some documents (Briefs, Emails and Messages) received or sent by the interviewee to have a better understanding of subjects they mentioned during the interview.

3.3.3 Semi-Structured interviews

We conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews, mainly face to face but also through Zoom (See table 4). Some of the meetings were conducted via Zoom, either because it was a request of the interviewee or because of the distance. The interviews were conducted between May 4 - May 16, 2022.

The interviews were constructed in a semi-structured form, with open and close questions, to ensure that the interviewee would feel free discussing the topic they considered important (Bell et al., 2019). This also allowed us to further follow the inductive reasoning. During the interviews, the questions were asked in the same order as Bell et al., (2019) suggests it is important to avoid important variation in the replies. We asked permission to record the interview in the beginning which then allowed us to transcripts the interview and avoid any loss of information. We also reminded the interviewee about the anonymity of their answer to make sure they would converse freely with us and feel comfortable discussing the questions. The interviews were conducted in English and in French.

We created three different types of interview questions guidelines. One was directed to the influencers; one was directed to the followers, and one was directed toward the company we interviewed.

Interview questions directed towards followers:

The interview questions directed toward followers (see Appendix 1) consisted of 41 questions, divided under topics to give a clearer understanding of what the questions were related to. The questions were derived from our theoretical background. The first questions of the interview were related to the followers, asking them to describe themselves and their habits on social media for us to confirm the respondent was a user of social media, and part of the population we sampled. The second part of the interview was related to influencers in general to determine if they follow some of them on the network and if so, why they do so. The third set of questions was meant to deal with the relationship between influencers and follower/customer purchase intentions in depth. Finally, the last questions of the interview helped us have a better insight on what people think about influencers, determining positive and negative aspects.

Interview questions directed towards influencers:

The interview questions directed toward influencers (See Appendix 2) consisted of 28 questions, also divided under topics to give a clearer understanding of what the questions were related to. The questions were derived from our theoretical background as well as for the follower questions. The first set of questions were related to their presence on social media, asking them for how long they have been influential on the network, what social media they use the most and what is the content they post daily related to for example. This allowed us to confirm the respondent was a Beauty/Lifestyle influencer on social media, and so, part of the population we sampled. The second part of the interview was centered towards partnership and the work they produce for brands. Those questions were asked to understand in depth the way they choose or not to work with a brand and so, their purpose when posting on social media. Finally, the third topic was related to their relationship with the people that follow them as well as how they perceived the influence, they have on them.

Interview questions directed towards companies:

The interview questions directed toward the companies (See Appendix 3) consisted of 24 questions, divided under topics to give a clearer understanding of what the questions were related to. The first three questions asked the respondent to present the company, its role in it and if they were working with influencers or not. This allowed us to make sure the company was part of the population we sampled by being in the beauty/lifestyle field and working with influencers as a marketing strategy. The second part of the interview was related to the partnership they have with influencers and how they put it in place. Questions like “How do you decide who to collaborate with or not?” or “How do you determine the visibility of the message endorser, being the influencer in this case?” were asked. Finally, the third and last part included questions related to the relationship between influencers and followers/customers, and in what way it is beneficial for the brand.

Throughout the interviews, follow-up questions were asked depending on the answers of the respondent. Questions took more or less time depending on the respondent, according to their point of view and implication on the topic. The interviews were carried by one of the authors or both and lasted between 12:24 and 38:45.

TABLE 4 - Description of the interviews

Interview	Date of interview	Type of the interview	Length of the interview
Follower 1	4th May 2022	Face to face	13:20
Follower 2	4th May 2022	Face to face	12:33
Follower 3	4th May 2022	Face to face	36:34
Follower 4	9th May 2022	Face to face	12:24
Follower 5	10th May 2022	Face to face	25:05
Follower 6	12th May 2022	Zoom	15:36
Follower 7	12th May 2022	Zoom	13:31
Influencer 1	11th May 2022	Zoom	38:45
Influencer 2	11th May 2022	Zoom	31:03
Influencer 3	13th May 2022	Zoom	34:36
Company 1	11th May 2022	Zoom	29:18
Company 2	16th May 2022	Zoom	24:13

3.3.4 Data analysis

First of all, all our interviews were transcribed to form text-based data for the analysis which represents in total 50 pages of transcribed text. The interviews were conducted in English or in French depending on the interviewee. The data coding was done in English.

According to Chenail (2012) the qualitative data analysis process consists of transforming data into information and information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom. The use of qualitative data allows one to gain insight and construct explanations and/or theory (Ghuri and Grønhaug, 2005). As explained before (e.g., research approach) and according to Saunders et al., (2009), two different approaches to quantitative analysis

exist: deductive or inductive. These approaches help to seek out the amount of data collected during the study. The deductive approach consists of using existing theories in order to design the research and its process. On the other hand, the inductive approach consists of using the data to build a theory (Saunders et al., 2009). As a lot of literatures exists for our subject, we decided to choose the deductive approach.

According to Saunders et al., (2009), the process of analysis regarding a qualitative method consists of 4 steps: *data reduction*, *data display*, *drawing & verifying conclusion*.

Data reduction consists of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstraction and transforming the data from the interviews' transcripts (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). The data is summarizing and simplifying, and it is also possible to just focus on some parts of it. The goal of this step is to transform the collected data and to concentrate it in order to highlight the main lines of it. In our study we reduced the data by first creating a color code for each topic. We, then, highlighted the data of each transcript according to this color code. This allowed us to select the data and to have a general idea of the subject to discuss in our empirical findings.

Data display consists of organizing and assembling the collected data to put it in a schematic summary or visual displays. According to Saunders et al., (2009) two main groups of data display can be used: matrices and networks. Matrices and tables allow to organize raw text issues of the interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The network on the other hand allows to indicate relationships through boxes and nodes linked together. They contain short descriptions or key points from the data (Saunders et al., 2009). In our study, we displayed the data in different tables according to the topics they were related to. Thus, each table gathered data related to a specific theme with the details of which respondent issued those data, in order to have a summary of our empirical findings. This enabled us to recognize relationships and patterns in the data.

Drawing and verifying conclusions consist of stepping back to understand what the data mean, how it can be related to the theories and how it can answer the research questions. Verifying is the process of revisiting the data as many times as necessary to verify the emergent conclusions. In order to have a better overview of our findings and to make sure the data were enabling us to answer our research questions, we made sure to often take a

second look at our transcripts. By doing so, we verified that we did not miss any important data that we could have used. We also added and removed a few theories of our theoretical chapter according to our empirical findings, in order to have a coherent analysis and discussion to answer our research questions.

3.3.5 Trustworthiness of the research

According to Bell et al., (2019), trustworthiness is defined as “a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research”. Wallendorf and Belk (1989) suggest five aspects of trustworthiness being Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Confirmability and Integrity. These aspects are important in order to achieve a high quality throughout the research process as the researcher in qualitative research is interpretivist and therefore is never completely objective (Farrelly, 2013).

Credibility

This aspect concerns whether the constructions of the studied reality are adequate and believable (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). It is how the results are presented and tend to be true to the collected data. Our methodology chapter has described how the data were collected and analyzed in order to have believable findings. To ensure the respondent validation (Bell et al., 2019), those findings have been sent to them. Sometimes, the relationship between the authors and the interviewees could have influenced the collected data.

Transferability

This aspect concerns whether the results can be transferred to other contexts, persons, settings or time (Saunders et al., 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) also add another parameter with the applicability to other populations or samples. Throughout this research, we tried to emphasize the research context in order to enhance the transferability.

Dependability

Dependability means the way the interpretation was constructed in a way that avoids instability of a social phenomenon (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). This question is if the result would or not be the same in case the study was replicated. Because influencer

marketing is a strategy that has recently emerged and is likely to change within the next few years, the results would probably differ.

Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the ability to trace researcher's interpretations by following the data (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). All interpretations in this research were made from the collected data and has been described in the data analysis section. Nonetheless the authors of this research acknowledge that the analysis of the data collected are subject to a subjective interpretation.

Integrity

This aspect concerns the extent to which the interpretation was unimpaired by lies, evasions, misinformation, or misrepresentations by informants (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). All the respondents were informed about the study and its goal. All respondents are kept anonymous in order to protect their privacy. To make sure the respondent feels comfortable discussing the subject openly and sharing honest opinions, the interview setting was private.

3.3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration refers to the way researchers treat people on whom they conduct the research (Bell et al., 2019) as “the goal of ethics is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences from research activities” (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p.28). According to Bell et al., (2019), all parties in research should present ethical behavior.

In this study, ethical issues concern interviews, which are based on personal opinions. Interviews affect the people interviewed as they must evoke their feelings and thoughts, especially when the interviews are in-depth, aiming for rich understanding of the person and the issue (Patton, 2015). Participants have been given information about the study to make an informed decision about whether they wanted to be part of it (Bell et al., 2019). This study followed Cooper and Schindler (2011) guideline recommendations about explaining the study to the participants as well as obtaining their informed consent knowing that open information and communication with the participants is key to act within the right frames of ethics (Crane, 1997).

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section is dedicated to present the findings of our qualitative study. The empirical material consists of primary data sources from the semi-structured interview and transcript. Here are the general ideas and opinions that emerged from our different interviews with the followers, the influencers and the brands. In order to dissociate the different points of view and opinions of the interviewees, followers are indicated by an F, the influencers by an I and the brand by a B.

4.1 Social media marketing

This part is about which social networks are used by followers and influencers and how influence works on these networks. Here we asked respondents about their network usage habits, their interactions with each other, their opinion on the relationship between followers and influencers and its impact (e.g., Appendix 1 and 2, interview questions).

4.1.1 Platforms

For influencers, the platforms on which they are most active and work the most are Instagram and TikTok. However, even if TikTok is the best platform to gain a maximum of followers at the beginning, Instagram requires less rigor and work on the content posted. Indeed, TikTok requires a greater effort as it is necessary to follow trends and make original videos if they want to reach a big audience (I1, I2, I3), *“I feel like TikTok requires more work. You always have to have new ideas and sometimes if I don't feel well or if I'm not in the mood I don't have the energy”* (I3). The followers, as far as they are concerned, are used to follow the influencers mostly on Instagram (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7). Regarding their use of these platforms, the followers are used to spending two to three hours on it (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7). However, most of them explain that their use of social networks would be lower without the presence of influencers (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7), *“No, I think I will not go as much as I do now because I will have less pictures on my feed”* (F2).

4.1.2 Interactions

Respondents were asked about their social network interaction habits. Out of the two to three hours spent on social networks, as explained above, most of the followers told us they spend about half of the time watching content posted by influencers (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7). Regarding their interactions with the influencers, all the followers interviewed do not give any feedback to influencers (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7). Some of them think that it is unnecessary because they won't even see their messages as they probably receive a lot of them, *"I feel like if I'm going to give my opinion, there are so many people that the influencers won't care"* (F1). Few followers write to influencers for fun, not about a specific product they promoted on their social media (F1, F2, F3). They all interact with influencers when they ask questions on their story (with a poll to answer for example) because they either want to see what the opinion of other people is, *"I usually press the button mostly because I want to see what other people think"* (F3) or because they just want to help the influencer (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7). One respondent specified that they only interact with his favorite influencers, *"Yes for surveys, I answer sometimes if I like the influencer"* (F6).

Moreover, the influencers interviewed explain that maintaining a relationship with their audience is a huge job and developing a close one is even harder, *"It's super complicated. You have to spend a lot of time on the networks, reply to messages and comments and do lives"* (I2). They mostly interact with their audience thanks to their stories or posts on Instagram (I1, I2, I3). They try to answer to the most of the followers' messages, but it is not easy as they are a lot and it's sometimes redundant (I1, I2, I3), *"I try to answer to DMs, but sometimes it's annoying because you get asked the same questions many times and you have to answer the same thing over and over"* (I3).

Regarding companies, social media helps them to have quick interactions with consumers. Indeed, it can be done thanks to influencers or directly by sharing contents related to their brands on their own profile. It is an easier way to stay in direct contact with consumers which can give feedback, likes and comments posts. Thanks to the engagement companies can learn more about the preferences of their customers and then adapt the offers (B1, B2), *"In a way our social networks like Instagram are used to post brand news and to get direct engagement from consumers who will then comment and*

like the posts. This allows us to get a little insight into what they think and expect from the brand. It's also a way to spread the information” (B2).

4.1.3 Information and diffusion (WOM)

Regarding the content posted on social networks by influencers, it depends on the influencer in question. In our case, the interviewed influencers were all fashion, beauty and lifestyle oriented. They post on Instagram about their life, the clothes they wear, the products they use or their travels in the form of photos, videos and stories (I1, I2, I3), *“I often post my outfit, what I do during the day, what I eat, the really basic stuff or my trips” (I1), “mainly aesthetic pictures, products that I like, selfies or outfits” (I3).*

The followers see their posts and interact with them by liking, commenting or by sharing their posts. The diffusion is made thanks to the followers, in fact, they are often talking with friends about their favorite influencers and sometimes they share the influencers’ posts in their story (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7), *“I sometimes send profile that I like to some friends for them to see” (F1), “If I think an influencer is super cool, i would talk about it with my friends” (F4), “If I see a product on an influencer story and I if I liked it I will talk about it to everyone” (F2).*

4.2 Principles of Influencer marketing

This section is about influencer marketing in general. Respondents were asked here about the idea they have of the world of influence and influencers in general. The goal here is to understand and learn more about how influencer marketing works. Topics such as the size and types of influencers, the work of influencer agencies, partnerships and compensation were discussed (e.g., Appendix 2, interview questions)

4.2.1 Influence

We asked the influencers what the word “influence” means for them. In general, they explain that it is the fact they influence their audience to follow what they did and to influence their decisions. *“You have to influence people's decisions, what they buy or what they use to consider yourself an influencer” (I3).* This includes wearing the same clothes, buying the same products, going to the same place... To summarize, to try to be

like them and to follow what they do (I1, I2, I3). The companies are well aware of this: *“We use influencers because they are hugely idealized by followers. The followers want to look like them as much as possible”* (B1) and the influencers too: *“When I share on my social networks, I know that it will influence the consumers who follow me to either look like me or try to follow what I do”* (I1). Influencers feel like their followers do not realize that or the extent of the impact influencers have on them: *“The people who follow me are not necessarily aware that they are influenced on a daily basis”* (I1).

4.2.2 SMI size and profile

Throughout all the interviews different sizes and profiles of influencers have been highlighted, especially by the followers and the companies, which also distinguish different types of influence. The first distinction brought up is regarding the size of the influencer. In fact, Follower 5 made a contrast between *“bigger influencer”* and *“smaller influencer”* during the interview when talking about the relationship between follower and influencer. Follower 5 described two different types of relation according to the two sizes mentioned. Indeed, for them, bigger influencers feel less close to their audience than smaller one. The second characteristic of differentiation of influencer highlighted is the profile of the influencer. Some followers mentioned *“TV reality influencers”* (F2, F6) as being less trustworthy and only interested in making money. Brand 1 made the same distinction but using the words *“low-end influencers”* and *“qualitative influencers”*. Brands also state that the size and the profile of influencer can be an important factor when choosing who to work with, but it is not a major factor because the number of followers is not necessarily synonymous with engagement or credibility regarding followers (B1, B2).

4.2.3 The role of the influencer’s agency

Some of the influencers interviewed are or were in an influencer agency (I1, I3). It’s usually the agencies who canvass influencers to join them (Appendix 4). *“The best way to get into an agency is when you are a hit on social networks because that is where you will have the most collaboration and exclusivity and the agency will bring you much more importance”* (I1). The main role of an influencer agency is to find partnership and communicate with brands (I1, I2, I3).

Sometimes, agencies solicit influencers, not necessarily to sign in with them, but just for a partnership (Appendix 5). Agencies also have contacts which can help influencers to grow on social media (I2, I3). They provide influencers with creative and aesthetic advice to improve their social media (I1, I2). *“Your agency will help you professionalize your social networks and will support you on all your platforms”* (I1). To do so, agencies take 30% of the remuneration from each partnership, but according to Influencer 1, *“it’s worth the cost when you look at the support and opportunities you have”*.

4.2.4 Partnerships

The partnerships are a great option for companies as it is *“cheap and effective”* (B2). Followers on the contrary are not fond of them: *“I am skeptical when it comes to partnership because I feel like I’m falling into a trap, and I don’t necessarily trust the product”* (F5). Some influencers even qualify them as being *“fake”* (I2) because *“it’s impossible to know if the influencer is honest about it except for the clothing”* (I2). In fact, it’s very hard to determine if the influencers actually use the products they promote.

In the first part of our interviews with the followers, we asked them their opinion about the partnership shared in the influencer’s stories. Some of them answered that they just watch them out of curiosity, just to see what the product they promote is (F1, F2, F3). On the contrary, other followers skip the video because they are not interested and they don’t believe what influencers say when they promote products (F4, F6, F7). For those who watch the product promoted, they usually either buy it if they like the product or if they need it (F1), or they do their own research about it (F2). Regarding the purchase of the products promoted, some of the followers already bought them and others did not. The followers who bought products from a partnership were not satisfied or they didn’t think it was necessary afterward. *“You have expectations because the influencer uses it but the product i bought was not of the best quality”* (F1), *“I don’t think I used the product for very long. At first, I felt like it was a good deal, but it was not a need”* (F4). We asked the followers if they would tend to buy a product already seen in a partnership if they had several alternatives and most of them answered affirmatively to that question: *“I would probably go with the one that has a partnership with someone i like”* (F3). So even though they don’t necessarily buy products when they see a partnership, it still influences them in the long run.

The influencers interviewed receive approximately two to three partnership proposals (Appendix 6) per week (I1, I2, I3) but generally accept one to two per month (I1). We asked them to describe how they chose the brand they want to work with. The main criteria for some of the influencers is for the brand to be credible, well-known and have a bit more prestige (I1, I2, I3) and for others is to *“like the products they have and would buy them if it was not a partnership”* (I3). Brands also must have a good image and a good presence on social media (I1, I2, I3). When deciding which brand, they want to work with, they take in consideration the image they want to convey on social networks: *“You have to be very careful with the brand you decide to work with and don’t do it if it doesn’t fit you or your style”* (I3).

The process is similar for companies when they select the influencers they want to partner with. They will prefer to take influencers with fewer subscribers, for example, but which gives off something more luxurious and cleaner than the others (B1). They aim for quality and choose influencers making content related to what they offer (B2). That’s why most long-term brands do not prefer to work with influencers from reality TV because it could harm their brand image. Finally, they look at the comment/like/follower ratio when they contact influencers to determine if they have a real community and to try to assess the impact of the partnership (B1, B2). *“They always want to see your insights; in which country your followers are from or which age group and gender is also really important for them”* (I3).

Once the brand and the influencer signed the contract for the partnership, the influencer receives a brief (Appendix 7) which explains in detail what they have to say when they present the product (I1, I2, I3). This allows the brand to keep control of what the influencer will say about the product. Most of the time, it is not even mandatory for them to use the product before they promote it (B1). However, punctuality is very important for the brands: *“It’s really important to do it on the day they want you to because otherwise they won’t work with you again”* (I3).

This marketing strategy benefits both the brand and the influencer, even though it might not be beneficial for the followers. On one hand, partnerships *“help to develop brand awareness because they have the right to use your image”* (I2, I3). It pushes the brand and brings it visibility even though the impact on sales remains uncertain (B1, B2). Another benefit of using influencers is that brand *“could never be as authentic as you*

could be with your followers” (I3). On the other hand, the benefit of partnerships for influencers is that it brings them visibility and facilitates content creation (I2). An example of visibility brought by the partnership is the following: “It was a social media collaboration that got me started” (I1). The monetary benefit will be approached in the next subsection.

Another type of partnership that exists is “gifting”. It is described as *“companies that send you products without paying you and without you having to talk about them. You are free to talk about their product whether you like it or not” (I2). It is a good strategy as it can be perceived in a better way by the followers as the influencers are not paid to talk about those products. It is also a good strategy for the brands because they don’t have to pay the influencers and most of the time, they always talk about the product sent to them: “I feel a little obligated to share what I receive on the networks because otherwise it’s not cool for the brand” (I1).*

4.2.5 Monetary benefit

“Being an influencer is a profession which pays a lot” (I2). Influencers’ main source of revenue is the partnership with brands which are discussed above (I1, I2, I3). But according to Influencer 3, to make money out of social media, it’s important to have an audience who shares the same interests as you, otherwise brands would not want to work with them.

During the interviews, we ask the influencers if the brand and the quality of the products they promote are more important than the compensation they receive, in order to establish whether they care about what they promote. The answer to this question was quite of one mind, being that the brand and the quality of the products they have to promote and the money they receive to do so have to be well balanced as those partnerships can affect their image (I1, I2, I3). *“If I have a deal with a brand who sells good quality clothes it would be ok for me to be paid less because you get really expensive stuff for the partnership” (I3), “What you take into consideration when you choose the brand with which you work is above all its credibility and its reputation because it will have an impact on your account and it must correspond to your profile” (I1). On the contrary,*

“there are many influencers who would do any product placement if the remuneration were substantial” (I2).

The followers are aware of the monetary benefits that are perceived by the influencers, and it makes them question the honesty of these partnerships. *“I tend to stay away from everything that is partnered because then I think it’s paid for” (F4).* Most of the followers also believe that people become influencers for the money (F1, F5, F6, F7). Another follower brought up the value that money can have when people want to become an influencer. *“Money can help someone become an influencer because you can have a better style and afford those bigger brands” (F5).*

4.2.6 Para-social relationship

We asked our interviewees what represents to them the relation they have with either the followers for the influencers or the influencers for the followers and how they would define this relationship. All the influencers explained that it is very important to have a good relationship with their audience if they want to have engagement which translates into likes, comments, reposts and therefore new followers (I1, I2, I3). They must *“create a relation” (I1)* which allows the followers to *“think you are their friend” (I2).* Therefore, influencers need followers, but they both have a different view of this relationship. Indeed, Influencers 1 stated that *“it’s complicated to be friendly on a social network relationship, I would say that I am simply close to my community”.* On the other hand the followers seem to see this relation more like an amical one regarding the influencers, *“I feel like they see me quite as a friend more than an influencer” (I3).* They relate a lot to their favorite influencers and tend also to do the same things, buy the same products, and have the same life, *“I like his style, lifestyle and everything. That’s why I follow him” (F1), “I was like OK when I’m in my 20s this is going to be my lifestyle or this is what an awesome life looks like in California” (F5), “they can relate to me” (I2).* For influencers, this behavior is justified by the desire of followers to be like them, *“There are many very simple people who take us for their example” (I1).* However, although according to the influencers this relationship is important for some followers, for others it is not so important. Indeed, some followers can compare themselves from time to time to the people they follow but do not go as far as to identify with them and try to replicate their

life (F2, F3), *“Yes, sometimes but it is more like comparing myself and not identifying myself”* (F2).

4.2.7 Impact of the influencers on the followers

The interviewees were asked about the potential impact that this influence could have on their followers. From the point of view of the influencers, their influence has an impact on the people who follow them, however this impact has two facets as it can be positive and negative (I1, I2, I3). For them, this impact is present since the moment they show and share a different life from their followers, *“I started making an impact on people and people started contacting me, sending me messages and I started making views because my lifestyle was different”* (I2). However, the influencers interviewed told us that they try not to have a negative impact on their community by only posting things that are in line with their values (I1, I2, I3).

In addition, a few influencers addressed topics such as plastic surgery or risky behaviors such as smoking. *Influencer 1* does not show or talk about their plastic surgery or smoking on the networks because they consider that it will encourage some of their followers to do so, *“Same thing with surgery, I did my lips and foxy eyes but I would never show it, even on Instagram”, “unconsciously a 14 year old who will admire you, without you knowing it, because out of 250k subscribers there is definitely one person who will take you as an example”* (I2). On the contrary, *influencer 3* thinks that being transparent about surgery allows people to understand that influencers are not like that naturally and allows them to complex less about the beauty of some person, *“Some girls pretend that they’re natural when they have their lips and hair done for example. And it can make people insecure”* (I3), *“Being honest is so important because it gives people the opportunity to deal with their own issues and realize they’re not alone”* (I3), *“I feel like Kylie Jenner had a huge impact on a whole generation of young women. Bella Hadid also had a huge impact with the foxy eyes”* (I3).

As explained before, there are two sides of the influencers impact on communities. Regarding the good impact of it, some of the followers explained that, depending on the influencers, some are very positive and creative people which helps and inspires them (F1, F2, F4, F6), *“If I think they’re doing something creative then I might try to do something similar”* (F4), *“It can make me feel better”* (F6). Similarly, the influencers

explained that they sometimes help their communities with mental health issues, *“A week ago i wrote on Instagram that i started to go to the gym a lot because it helps with my mental health and makes me feel good and people were like “thanks for the recommendation” (I3).*

On the other hand, the followers interviewed are mostly aware of the negative impact this influence can have. Indeed, they feel like the influencers are not totally transparent and often show only what they want to (F1, F2, F4, 6, F7), *“They only show you what they want you to see and not what real life is like” (F1).* This makes followers feel bad or insecure about themselves as they compare their lives to them (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7), *“I was comparing my life to theirs and it was making me more upset, so I unfollowed all of the influencers” (F5), “Sometimes you see yourself comparing your appearance or life and you don’t see the same things. So, you’re gonna start wondering “why not me? It can really make you feel insecure sometimes” (F1).* The influencers interviewed seem to agree with this opinion, *“It’s not good to always show yourself too beautiful, too perfect. There are people who can get depressed telling themselves that they are not good enough” (I1).* This is why they try not to have this negative impact, but they explained that even if they tend to be as honest as possible with their audience, other influencers are not honest at all (I1, I2, I3), *“There are people out there who are not honest and do everything to have brand deals” (I3).* Some influencers had a huge impact on their audience and didn’t even think about it and what would be the consequences on a lot of young people, *“Kim Kardashian, who in order to fit into her MET Gala dress, went on a drastic diet where she lost 7kg in 1 week. And you can be sure that there are at least 10,000 women who have stopped eating to lose weight because they saw that Kim Kardashian had done it and it worked” (I2).*

4.3 Influencer marketing value

The goal here was to ask followers about the value of influencers in terms of trust, credibility, expertise and attractiveness to them. In the same way, the influencers were questioned in order to have their own opinion of their value. For the brands we wanted to know if these factors were important regarding their choice of influencers to work with (e.g., Appendix 3, interview questions).

4.3.1 Trustworthiness

The followers of the influencers have both trust and mistrust towards them. On one hand, some followers trust influencer's stories, contents, and the image they share on social media. They easily connect to the influencers and feel like they know them. These perceptions create trustworthiness (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7). On the other hand, some viewers or followers do not trust all influencers in general. These followers perceive that the influencers are sharing their stories and experiences only for money and creating a fake image as they are filtering a lot of their posts to give an attractive representation of an idyllic life which may not be true (F3, F5). This is also the case for influencers issued from tv shows, the viewers think that these influencers are not trustworthy people as they are doing it only for earning money or fame, without being considerate right-or-wrong and the impact it can have on communities (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7).

However, the influencer self-reflection is that they are 100% trustworthy, "I consider myself to be trustworthy and not recommend a product that I don't really like or use" (I3). They try to be the most honest in the best possible way in what they are sharing with their audience by posting only the things that they agree with. They tend to avoid tempering and try to give an image of themselves closer to their reality (I1, I2, I3).

Regarding the brands interviewed, the trustworthiness is an important factor to be considered when choosing the influencers, they are working with as they will be a direct messenger of the company, (B1, B2) "*We are very careful when choosing the influencers, we work with. Of course, the popularity of the influencer is a determining factor, but it is even more important that this influencer is someone who can be trusted by his audience*" (B2).

4.3.2 Attractiveness

Concerning the attractiveness of the influencers, followers find them attractive in general. Influencers tend to smile, they wear nice and expensive clothes, and they represent themselves in charming and glamorous ways (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7). Some answers to the question "Do you find this person attractive?" were: "*He is good looking. He does a lot of sports. He has a nice smile, takes care of himself and has nice outfits.*" (F1) or also

“Yes she is pretty, she is smiling, she is funny and natural” (F3). Likewise, the influencers know that they must put an attractive image because it is their asset. Both confidence and attractiveness help to gain an audience because the followers aspire to be the same as the influencers (I1, I2, I3). Regarding the brands interviewed, they don’t choose randomly the influencers they want to work with. They want people with a good image on the social networks and they are also aware that someone attractive will have more visibility than another (B1, B2), *“The attractiveness of a person plays a role, but it's still quite subjective and a brand is not going to base itself only on that. I would say that we have standards, and that the most important thing is the image they give to their followers”* (B2).

4.3.3 Expertise

While expressing their opinions about the expertise of their favorite influencers on social media, the followers have mixed feelings. Their respective answers show that on one hand, younger followers (13 and 14 yo) believe that specialized influencers have experience in their field (F6, F7). For example, expertise in fashion for beauty and fashion influencers. On the other hand, older followers (from 21 to 24 yo) believe that influencers only have expertise and experience in being performant on social media, because they have been doing it for several years (F1, F2), *“I think he has to have a minimum of knowledge about stuff he does”* (F1). This opinion is shared by influencers, as they don’t believe they have any expertise in a specific field except to know how to reach people on social media and make money out of it (I1, I2, I3). On the contrary, some followers do not think that influencers have any specific knowledge, or expertise in fashion or beauty (F3, F4, F5), as they answered, *“I probably don’t think so”* (F4) to the question stated in the first sentence of this subsection. For brands, the expertise of an influencer is not a necessary factor, it can be an advantage but generally they try to choose someone who is used to talking about a certain content like fashion for example and who is related to the products they sell (B1, B2), *“I choose influencers that will make content that is related to what I am proposing, at a minimum”* (I2).

4.3.4 Credibility

For the followers, the influencers they are following are credible when they talk about personal subjects like body image, mental health or something particular that they are

used to share. For example, when it is about products or brands regarding fashion and beauty, the followers feel like the influencers know what they are talking about and this makes them credible for the audience (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7). On the other hand, sometimes they say things that do not seem relevant for some of the followers *“When it’s about a brand or a product, yes, but sometimes she says some stupid things”* (F2) or they don't publish the same kind of stuff anymore *“I would but sometimes she’ll go a long period of time without posting anything in depth”* (F4) and in these cases they appear less credible (F2, F4). Regarding the brands that work with influencers, the credibility of them is an important factor when choosing the influencers, they will work with (B1, B2), *“Yes I take into account the credibility of the influencer when hiring them”* (B1). This factor is based on the image that the influencers send back to their audience as well as the content they share, therefore it is important to choose an influencer with a good image and related to the brand because in the other case, they will lose credibility. (B1, B2). The influencers also think that they are used by the brands for this reason, *“I feel like they choose you as an influencer because they could never be as authentic as you could be with your followers”* (I3).

4.4 Customer purchase behavior

In this part of the study, interviewees were asked about their purchase behavior in relation to influencers. The goal here was to learn more about the potential impact of influencers on the different stages of the consumer's purchasing process which are: purchase intention, purchase decision and post-purchase (e.g., Appendix 3, interview questions).

4.4.1 Purchase intention

Influencers have an impact on the purchase intention of their followers. In fact most of the followers interviewed explained that even if they didn't have a need at the beginning nor the intentions to buy something, they feel like when watching the influencers posting about a product they, at the same time, put the idea on you head that you want and you need it (F1, F2, F4, F6, F7), *“Even though I don't buy directly what they promote, if you see them constantly (because most influencers promote the same stuff) it is going to stick in your mind and you’ll be like “Oh i need this product because everyone has it”* (F1). They also think that even if they didn't want to buy, influencers often offer promo codes

that change their initial intentions and encourage them to potentially buy the product(s) they were promoting (F1, F2), *“Yes, because for example if I want to buy a swimsuit and I saw one on an Instagram story or post of an influencer I will go see it, and sometimes there is a discount code”* (F2). Similarly, the influencers agree with this and are convinced that they have an impact on the purchase intention of their followers, *“Yes there is obviously an impact”* (I2). Indeed, their posts are seen by many people and even if there is no partnership with brands, the majority of the comments are often based on requests for references concerning clothes or beauty products in order to buy the same and look like them (I1, I2, I3), *“I did a tiktok that got 1M views just for my jacket. I wasn't paid but the top comments were about where my jacket came from”* (I2), *“Yes, if for example I wear a pair of shoes or a jacket it will influence my community to potentially buy the same thing because people are constantly consuming”* (I1). This is also explained by the fact that the followers want to be like the influencers so they tend to buy the same things, *“People will buy the things you promote or wear because they want to look like you. For example, some people might think that if they buy the lipstick I use, they will have the same lips as me”* (I3). The companies also join this opinion, and this is also one of the reasons why they use influencers, because they bring them visibility and impact the followers' purchase intentions (B1, B2), *“I use influencers because they have a lot of visibility, and all my clients are on social networks. So that's where you have to be if you want to sell. You have to be present where the user is present”* (B1).

4.4.2 Purchase decision

Regarding the purchase decision of the followers, the line between intention and decision is thin. Some followers had bought a product issued by an influencer's recommendation (F1, F2). On the other hand, even though followers didn't bought a product just on the recommendation of an influencer, before making a purchase, some people go to see if their favorite influencers have bought it or use it (F2, F4, F6), *“Yes, and I like to look on Instagram on the brand feed, I look at the comments and sometimes I look to see if influencers already buy it”* (F2). We also asked the interviewed followers about their buying decision habits. First, the majority of them search for information before buying a product (F1, F2, F3, F6, F7). They either look at the reviews (F1, F2, F3, F6), *“Sometimes I look at the reviews and if there is the 5 stars thing and people are kind of satisfied then I'll probably end up buying it”* (F1), the Instagram of the brand (F2) or

videos of influencers on YouTube (F3, F4) *“I usually go on YouTube if there is a product, maybe shoes or shaving equipment, to see if there are any reviews”* (F3). Once they have search for the information, they select the product they want to buy based on the price (F1, F2, F6), the quality and comfort (F2), the characteristics of the product (F6, F7) or the look of the product (F3, F4). We then asked them if they would tend to buy a product seen used by an influencer over random products found online and most of the followers answered positively (F1, F2, F3, F4, F7). Finally, regarding the place where they would purchase the product, they would rather go to the store (F1, F2, F3, F4, F6, F7), *“I want to see it in person first, especially if it’s makeup”* (F4).

4.4.3 post-Purchase

During the interviews, we asked the followers who did purchase a product based on an influencer recommendation their feelings about it once they received and used it. We first asked them if they have ever been disappointed with a product derived from a partnership. The majority of them answered positively (F1, F2), saying that the product was of *“bad quality”* (F2). We then asked them if they thought they needed the product before they saw it, if it was a necessary purchase. They all answered negatively (F1, F2, F4), *“No, it was not a need. I don't think I used it for very long”* (F4).

Finally, we asked them to fill out Zaichkowsky’s Personal Involvement Inventory scale while keeping in mind one product they bought because it was promoted by an influencer. The general opinion is that the product was not relevant. We will dig deeper on the subject in the next chapter.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we will confront our findings with the theory of previous research stated in chapter 2. The analysis and discussion are following the same order as our empirical findings presented in the previous chapter and will provide answers to our research questions.

5.1 Social Media Marketing

5.1.1 Platforms

Today, there are many platforms for sharing and interacting between people but the most popular is Instagram. Indeed, this social network allows influencers to post visual contents which pleases users enormously and generates engagement as Duggan and Smith (2013) had explained. For followers, this craze for sharing photos and videos of their favorite personality influences their use of social networks. Indeed, followers think that their use of social networks and especially Instagram would be lower if influencers did not exist. This shows us that Influencers have an impact on the use that followers make of social networks.

5.1.2 Interaction

Thanks to social media, the interactions between consumers, brands and followers are easier and quicker (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). In our case the followers interact with followers and brands by liking, commenting and sharing their contents with other people. Influencers try to involve a lot of their followers even if they don't directly interact with them as they are numerous. By involving them they create engagement which is what brands want. Indeed, if the consumers are engaged it allows brands to learn about them and adapt their response and offers (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012).

By interacting with influencers, the followers also interact with brands and help to spread marketing messages as well as encourage others to do the same thing.

5.1.3 Information, diffusion and eWOM

Information is spread very quickly thanks to social media as there are no geographical or temporal barriers (Holt, 2016). When influencers post content on Instagram, the followers can interact with them and share the content with others. The followers help to diffuse the marketing message posted by influencers and brands. It is an electronic version of the word-of-mouth; people share the content to others which then share also the content. The goal here is to spread an idea, an opinion, a brand image to as many as possible in order to involve them as well and to encourage them to buy. Thanks to social media the influencers and the brands obtain more visibility and reach their goal in terms of sales or engagement.

Social media marketing is a very powerful tool. By connecting a lot of people while removing geographical and temporal barriers, social networks like Instagram play an important role for brands and influencers. Indeed, thanks to a single platform, like Instagram, companies can interact and engage consumers. Influencers share content on the network and create commitment from their followers. By sharing, liking and commenting on the posted content, followers spread marketing information and give visibility to brands. Finally, we can say that brands, thanks to influencers, use social media and the interactions created as a tool to promote ideas, products and services.

5.2 Influencer Marketing

5.2.1 Principles of Influence

The principles of influence are based on 6 factors by Cialdini (2017). These factors are used in influencer marketing and help to understand what the effects of influencer on consumers are. We asked the influencers interviewed to give a definition of the influence for them. They all agree to say that the influence consists of impacting the normal behavior of their followers by inciting them to do the same things and buy the same products. Looking at the 6 principles of influence, a person is more or less influential when they combine several or all the principles. Concerning the interviewed influencers, they use the majority of the principles. Indeed, influencers by sharing content, recommendations, promo codes and by engaging their followers to answer their stories or with contests for example, create in their audience this feeling of being indebted which

corresponds to the principle of reciprocity and consistency. Moreover, regarding the principle of social proof, thanks to their popularity on the networks and their large number of followers, influencers gain credibility and are people with expertise for their followers. Concerning the scarcity principle, when influencers share offers on the networks, they are often limited in time or in quantity, this increases their influence on the followers' buying behavior. Finally, the majority of followers follow people they can identify with, and regarding the last principle which is "liking" they are therefore more likely to favor them.

5.2.2 SMI/Size and profile

Regarding the social media influencers, we saw that there are different types of influencers regarding their size, their profile and the contents they share. All the influencers interviewed were oriented on fashion and beauty. One of them is a mid-influencer (25,001-100,000 followers) and the rest of them are macro influencers (more than 100,000 followers). The greater the number of subscribers, the more popular the influencer is considered to be and the more credible he or she becomes to his or her audience and to future followers (Cialdini, 2016). However, this popularity does not necessarily translate into follower engagement or simply into the influencer's credibility. The interviewed followers make a distinction between big influencers and smaller ones and think that a smaller influencer would be closer to his community than a bigger influencer who would not necessarily have the time to interact with everyone.

Brands are aware of this and therefore do not rely entirely on the number of followers to choose who to work with.

The size of the influencer is therefore an important factor, it would have an influence on the followers who will tend to believe that an influencer with a lot of followers is necessarily synonymous with an important person who shares good content. Brands also know that by choosing an influencer with a large follower base, the visibility will be more important. However, they are careful about the engagement of followers and the credibility of influencers.

Our findings also put in light that two types of influencers can be dissociated. Indeed, the followers interviewed explained that the TV show influencers are not trustworthy and do this only for the money even if they have a lot of followers. This shows us that even if the size of an influencer means popularity that does not translate into real quality.

5.2.3 The credibility of influencer

Influencer marketing is a powerful tool for brands and can have an important impact. But if brands want of this impact to be beneficial for them, they have to choose carefully the influencers they want to work with. In this subsection is discussed how the influencers are perceived by the follower according to four factors, in order to determine whether the credibility of the influencer has an impact on the brands the influencers work with.

Lou and Yuan (2018), in the SMIV model, discussed three factors to define the amount of persuasiveness influencers have on their followers, namely the expertise of the influencers, their trustworthiness and their attractiveness. Regarding their expertise, our findings demonstrate that in general, younger followers are more inclined to believe what influencers will say or show on their social media as they qualify them as being expert in a specific field. This can be explained by the fact that young people are more gullible. On the contrary, older followers do not consider influencers to be experts in any field. Those data enable us to conclude that whether or not influencers have expertise doesn't impact the choice of the followers to follow or interact with them, and this is why expertise is not a necessary characteristic for a brand when choosing influencers, they want to work with. They rather take into consideration the type of content the influencer shares on social media in order to work with influencers related to the product they want them to promote. The second factor that impacts the credibility of influencers is their trustworthiness. Our findings demonstrate that followers have both trust and mistrust toward influencers, depending on the background of those latter. Accordingly, the influencers interviews consider themselves as being 100% trustworthy but admit that some influencers do not care of the impact they can have on communities. This is the reason why brands carefully review this factor as influencers become a direct messenger of the company when they start working together. The third and final factor used to determine the amount of persuasiveness of influencers is the attractiveness. Our findings demonstrate that followers find the influencers they follow attractive and sometimes even follow them because of this attractiveness. Once again, the brands are well aware of that and take this factor into account when selecting influencers.

To conclude on the credibility of the influencer, it is a really important factor for brands. They are very careful about the image that influencers reflect, the content they share as

well as their authenticity because the credibility of the influencer will have an impact on the credibility of the brand when they start working together.

5.2.4 Agency and transparency of paid collaboration

In this subsection, we focused on the analysis of the influencer's agency as well as the paid collaboration.

Firstly, our findings demonstrate that agencies provide influencers with tools to grow on social media as well as creative and aesthetic advice for their content. This shows clearly that influencers usually have a lot of people working with them to improve their social media and to give that illusion of perfection. In other words, followers think that they follow one person, being the influencer, when really their account is the result of the work of several people. This questions the authenticity and spontaneity of influencers.

Secondly, our findings show that when influencers promote a product through a partnership, it is hard to determine whether the influencers really like the product or have even used it before talking about it. This process, once again, questions the sincerity and honesty of the influencers when they present partnered products to their followers.

5.2.5 Para-Social relationship Influencers/Followers

In the theoretical part we explained what a para-social relationship is. According to Sokolova and Kefi (2019), this one-way relationship is based on the illusion of intimacy for one of the parts. The relations between influencers and followers are often para-social ones and this have a cognitive, affective and behavioral impact on them. Influencers explained to us that their relationship with followers is important, as it is the quality of this relationship that generates follower's engagement afterwards. However, although influencers try to respond and interact as best, they can with their followers, it is difficult to do so with everyone and even more so if they are very numerous. Therefore, it is impossible here to talk about a two-way relationship (Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). Influencers cannot describe this relationship as a friendly one but just expresses the fact that they are close to them. It is important for influencers that followers feel close to them and have this feeling of intimacy, of friendship because it allows influencers to have credibility and therefore influence on them.

Most followers follow influencers to whom they feel similar in their way of dressing, of living and then develop this relationship with them. The latter identify or compare themselves to the influencers and have a need to try to reproduce their actions, to buy the same things. Influencers therefore have an impact on followers. Indeed, through social networks such as Instagram, they share content with users and thus create this social relationship with them, generating a change in behavior among followers.

5.2.6 Downsides of SMI

Although influencer marketing brings many benefits to brands and influencers, it is important to question the impact this strategy has on network users and consumers. The utilization of this strategy within fashion and beauty industries are at the center of controversial topics (Greenwood et al., 2008; Perloff, 2014). Regarding our findings the influencers were very clear and affirmed that this influence has an impact on followers and consumers. There is some good impact on communities but many of them are negatives. The influencers interviewed tried to not have a negative impact, but they stated that today, many influencers don't even think about the repercussions of their actions and content posted on social media. And this is the case for very big influencers which have a huge impact on people.

Regarding the positive impact, what stands out the most is the fact that influencers can be a source of positive inspiration for their community. On the other hand, they are a spokesperson and can therefore address serious issues and propagate positive ideas, as is the case with the "body positive". However, when it comes to controversial topics such as surgery, the question would be whether to talk about it or not. For some of our influencers, talking about it is not an option, it is the last one trying to have a positive impact, showing it would influence followers to do the same (I1, I2). Conversely, for other influencers, being honest in all aspects with their audience would avoid creating complexes related to the physicality of their followers (I3).

Regarding the negative impact, the influencers have an impact on the mental health, the self-perception and the purchase behavior of followers. Indeed, brands and influencers create and feed an ideal of beauty that network users tend to want to reach no matter what means they use (Solomon et al., 2006). They tend to want to resemble them and to mimic the different aspects of their lives, and their purchasing behavior is greatly influenced by

this idea disseminated by certain influencers and brands. By comparing themselves and trying to reach a fictive ideal of beauty, followers end up developing insecurities, frustration, complexes or jealousy (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, I1, I2, I3). They evaluate themselves negatively and their mental health becomes impacted (Wasylikiw and Williamson, 2013).

In conclusion, influencer marketing is based on different principles used by brands and influencers to achieve their goals. Brands and social networkers work together to promote products or services. Influencers build their own career on social networks like Instagram by creating and sharing content. When their audience is big enough, they start working with brands in partnership. However, while audience size plays a role, influencers are chosen by brands based on other criteria such as credibility which includes trust, attractiveness and expertise. By sharing content on social networks, influencers develop a relationship with their followers. The latter feel close to the influencers and end up developing a para-social relationship that pushes followers to identify and compare themselves to those they follow. This relationship allows influencers to have a hold on them and influence their purchasing decisions or their personality. Although this influence has some positive points, it also has many negative impacts on followers and consumers especially since not all influencers are trustworthy and honest.

5.3 Customer Behavior

5.3.1 Buying decision process

The consumer buying decision process starts with the decision-making processes in which the consumer decides to buy the goods or services. In this subsection, we differentiated the buying decision process when it is about a product issued from a partnership and when it is a random product, meaning a product not promoted by an influencer.

According to Hoffman and Turley (2002), the customer can have two types of behavior during the buying decision process. He can either have an approach behavior or an avoidance behavior. To determine which of the two behaviors the followers usually have when being confronted to a partnership, we asked them about their attitude when it happens. Hoffman and Turley (2002) identified four steps, each including two opposite

behaviors. The first one is the desire to stay or leave. As seen in the empirical findings, followers tend to avoid any partnered content which is reflected in their attitude by desire to leave. The second opposite behaviors are a desire to further explore and interact or a tendency to ignore the partnership. Once again, the findings show that the followers usually ignore the partnership. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that they adopt this attitude mainly when watching the partnership. Indeed, our findings demonstrate that even though they don't interact with the influencers and don't buy the product, the partnered product sticks in their mind and influences them for future purchase. The third opposite behaviors during the buying decision process are the desire to communicate with others or to ignore it. When it is about a partnership, our empirical data shows that the followers tend to ignore it once again, as they don't communicate with others about the partnership. Finally, to determine if they have an approach or an avoidance behavior, it is important to know if they have a feeling of satisfaction or a feeling of disappointment with the products issued from a partnership. As stated in the previous chapter, only few of the followers have bought a product issued from a partnership and they were not satisfied, nor they think it was a necessary purchase.

All those findings compared to Hoffman and Turley's (2002) buying decision process theory demonstrate that the followers have a behavior that we could qualify as being avoidant when it comes to partnership from an influencer. Thus, we could think that the influencers do not impact the purchasing behavior of their followers which is not true.

In fact, even though followers have an avoidance behavior towards partnership, they are still impacted by the influencers during their regular buying decision process. Qazzafi (2019) defined this process as including five stages: Problem recognition, Information search, Evaluations of alternatives, Purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. The impact of the influencers occurs firstly in the first stage of the buying decision process, the problem recognition. Indeed, our empirical findings illustrate that influencers create a need among their followers when they are using a product because the followers identify with those influencers and want to look like them. Influencers also have an impact in the second stage of the buying decision process where customers must search for information about the product they want to buy. Indeed, in the information search phase, our empirical findings show that customers mainly search for information on social media, and in particular the video platform YouTube. On this platform, customers are looking at

reviews posted by influencers they follow to see what type of product they use. Thus, influencers have an impact on the purchasing decision of users of social media. Moreover, our findings also demonstrate that customers tend to buy products seen used by an influencer during the purchase decision phase. This illustrates that influencers influence followers daily, without necessarily promoting anything specific. Those findings emphasize the involvement of influencers in the purchasing decision of consumers even when the desired product is not the result of a partnership.

5.2.2 Relevance of the purchases

To determine whether the purchases made when following influencers recommendations are relevant for the consumer, we used The Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) by Zaichkowsky. This bipolar adjective scale was presented during our interviews to the followers, for them to characterize one product purchased because an influencer promoted it. The results are the following:

<u>To me (object to be judged) is:</u>		
Important	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unimportant
Relevant	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Irrelevant
Means a lot to me	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Means nothing to me
Valuable	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Worthless
Interesting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Boring
Exciting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unexciting
Appealing	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unappealing
Fascinating	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Mundane
Involving	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Uninvolving
Needed	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Not needed

Figure 4 - Follower 1' PII

To me (object to be judged) is:		
Important	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unimportant
Relevant	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Irrelevant
Means a lot to me	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Means nothing to me
Valuable	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Worthless
Interesting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Boring
Exciting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unexciting
Appealing	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unappealing
Fascinating	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Mundane
Involving	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Uninvolving
Needed	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Not needed

Figure 5 - Follower 2' PII

To me (object to be judged) is:		
Important	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unimportant
Relevant	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Irrelevant
Means a lot to me	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Means nothing to me
Valuable	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Worthless
Interesting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Boring
Exciting	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unexciting
Appealing	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Unappealing
Fascinating	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Mundane
Involving	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Uninvolving
Needed	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7	Not needed

Figure 6 - Follower 4' PII

For the analysis, we focus on the following adjectives: Important/Unimportant; Relevant/Irrelevant; Means a lot to me/Means nothing to me; Valuable/Worthless; Needed/Not Needed. According to the data collected through this scale, we can conclude that the purchase was not important, not relevant, not needed, did not mean a lot to the consumer and was quite worthless. This theory confirms our empirical findings, where followers stated that they have been disappointed with the purchase of a product derived from a partnership.

In conclusion, the influencer marketing strategy has an impact on teenagers and young adults' purchase behavior. They impact them via social media by either promoting

products or just by showing what they wear or use. Indeed, as followers idealize and take example on influencers, they tend to buy the same things as them in order to look like them and in some cases, in the hope to also have the same life as them. This impact influencers have on followers, and thus consumers, translates by the consumer buying what is promoted by the influencers, whether they need it or find it relevant. Consumers also tend to purchase what influencers wear or use and this is a phenomenon whose brands are aware of. This is the reason why they send products to influencers, without having any collaboration with them, because they know that there is a chance that the influencers will use the products and if they do so, it will influence followers to do the same and thus have a positive impact on the sales of the brand.

Overall, influencers strongly encourage teenagers and young adults to purchase in their everyday life. This category of consumer is influenced a lot, especially via social networks, however this influence is not always beneficial regarding their purchase behavior. That is to say that they don't always need the products the influencers influence them to buy which, from a consumer perspective, seem like a rather negative impact on their purchasing behavior. Nevertheless, from the brands and influencers perspective, this impact can be qualified as beneficial. Indeed, influencer marketing is a really good marketing strategy for brands given that it brings them a lot of customers and thus, a lot of sales. Using influencers can also help brands to improve their brand image when using influencers that reflect a clean and class image on social media. By doing so, brands can reach a new generation of consumers as well as targeting different types of consumers. Finally, the benefit of impacting the purchase intentions of teenagers and young adult's behavior for influencers is simply that it brings them brand deals which translate into money but also visibility. This gained visibility will then incite even more brands to work with them which will later translate into more and more money.

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis began with a review of existing literature on influencer marketing, social media marketing, customer purchase behavior and related topics. A theoretical framework was established as well as a method used for the research. To conduct our qualitative study, interviews were done with influencers, brands and followers of influencers. We believe we have provided an interesting critic around the topic of influencer marketing, its use by brands and its impact on consumer behavior and buying behavior. We believe our research is relevant as influencer marketing and the use of social networks and influencers by brands has definitely an impact on consumers and even more in today's generation, where the use of social networks has become daily and even central.

6.1 Research summary

With our research, we wanted to study whether the use of influence by brands and influencers, has a real impact on the behavior of young consumers. We wanted to study the points of view of the brands that use influencers for marketing purposes, the influencers who are directly connected to the consumers and finally the consumers themselves. With the use and the analysis of the collected data during the different interviews, the purpose of this thesis was to provide insight on how the brands and influencers use social media to influence people and then to highlight the possible effects of this influence on the purchasing behavior of consumers, but also on their general behavior and lifestyle, and to study whether these three actors, and especially consumers, are aware of the extent of this influence.

To meet the purpose of the research, the following research question were formed:

RQ1: How do the influencers within the fashion and beauty industries influence using social media?

According to this research, social networks are used by influencers to create and share content with their audience. Social networks such as Instagram remove geographical and time barriers and therefore reach people from all over the world. This audience grows as the influencer gains popularity by breaking away from a normal lifestyle and by sharing

photos and videos of their day-to-day life. This includes, for beauty and fashion influencers, how they dress, where they travel, what they eat or what their beauty routine is. Followers subscribe because they find similarities in the content posted by influencers with their lifestyle or the lifestyle they would like to have. They then develop a sense of intimacy with the influencers, or in other words, a para-social relationship. Because they relate to the influencers, they perceive them as trustworthy, credible and for the most part, attractive. Finally, by maintaining this relationship on social networks with followers, by sharing with them a part of their life, influencers gain credibility and increase their power of influence on their community.

Brands are aware of the huge influence that influencers have on their followers, especially on the younger ones. They use influencers to promote their products through partnerships. This technique allows them to move away from the normal advertising methods that often leave consumers reluctant to buy. Brands can target consumers when choosing which influencers to work with as they do not have the same contents and audiences. In addition, they know that influencer communities work because of the trusting relationship between them and the followers, which ensures that marketing advertising is much better received by consumers than it would normally be.

RQ2: How influencer marketing strategy impacts teenagers and young adults' behavior and purchase one?

When it comes to the impacts of using influencer marketing on consumers, there are many, which are either positive or negative.

Firstly, influencers have an impact on the purchasing decisions of their followers. Influencers share content with them such as product recommendations in partnerships, but also their personal purchases related to fashion and beauty. Followers tend to identify with influencers and therefore seek to imitate them. To do so, they will buy the same products or use their coupon codes for certain brands. Clothing, make-up and even cosmetic surgery, followers aspire to look like their favorite influencers and the beauty ideal they diffuse.

However, this relationship impacts other aspects of their behavior in cognitive and emotional ways. Indeed, although influencers try to limit the negative impacts, they mostly convey an ideal of beauty that their audience will try to achieve. Some followers

are only inspired by influencers, but others identify and compare themselves with them a lot and therefore develop frustration, complexes and physical or mental issues.

6.2 Limitations of the study

In this subsection are mentioned the limitations of our research which might be helpful to consider for possible future research in the same field. To start with, the influence is subjective, and has always a different impact depending on each individual and their experience and opinion. So, it needs to be acknowledged that our findings regarding the influence that influencers can have on followers could be different if other individuals would have been questioned. This thesis is also subject to subjectivity and the opinion of the authors can have influenced some analysis. The authors tried to handle the limited rationality by including three perspectives, namely the influencers perspective, the follower's perspective and the brands perspective. We also interviewed several people in each category in order to increase the generalizability of our research.

Secondly, it is important to consider some limitations regarding the observational study. In fact, the exact same research questions could have a different answer if studied a year earlier or a year later as influencer marketing is a new marketing strategy and is in constant evolution. Moreover, our study focused on beauty and lifestyle influencers and their followers, and our findings could be different if done in another field or if other influencers have been targeted. Indeed, some influencers might be trustworthy when others are not and it's something very hard to determine. Furthermore, our study was mainly conducted on French individuals which limited our result from a cultural point of view as it is another factor of variation.

6.3 Contribution and suggestion for future research

An interesting area for further research could be an in-depth study of the impact of influencers and social media on the new generations, not only in the marketing field but also in the psychological field. Indeed, throughout our study and especially the interviews we conducted, a lot of questions were raised concerning the negative impact influencers have on teenagers using social media. As influencers mainly show the best part of their daily life and generally embellish it, their followers can feel frustrated. The filters, photo

editing and plastic surgery of some influencers is not helping them either, as most of the time they are not even transparent about it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Questions for Followers

- How old are you?
 - Which social networks do you use the most?
 - Do you follow any influencers on the networks?
 - Do you remember when you started looking at influencer postings in social media? What caught your interest?
 - How has your following of influencers changed over the years?
 - Can you describe what makes them interesting?
 - Can you name an influencer that you follow daily?
 - Do you trust this person? If yes, why?
 - Do you think that this person has any expertise? If yes, in what field?
 - Do you find this person attractive?
 - Do you consider this person credible?
 - Do you think SMIs present themselves in a realistic way?
 - Do you identify yourself to this person?
 - Without influencers, do you think your use of networks would be the same?
 - How much time do you think you spend on the networks per day?
 - And how much time do you spend watching influencers?
-
- Do you consider that influencers and social media have an impact on your purchase intentions?
 - When you encounter a partnership, for example an instagram story, do you watch the full video or do you skip it?
 - Do you explore the partnership more if you're interested in the product, interact with the influencer or do you ignore it?
 - Do you talk to your surroundings about it or ignore it?
 - Do you usually feel satisfied if you buy products based on influencers recommendations?
 - When you want to buy something to fulfill a need you have, do you search for information about products? If yes, where and how?
 - Once you search for information, how do you select the product you are going to buy if you have several alternatives?
 - If you have several alternatives, for example there are four products, and one of the products you already saw in a partnership with an influencer that you follow, are you going to tend to buy this product?
 - When you decide on one product, how do you decide where you will purchase it?
 - Once you have used the product you purchased, how do you decide if you are satisfied or dissatisfied?
-
- Have you ever purchased a product or service based on an influencer's recommendation?
 - In hindsight, do you think it was necessary? Did you need it before you saw it recommended by an influencer?
 - Have you ever been disappointed with a product you purchased after an influencer's recommendation?

Keep in mind this product when answering the following questions:

		To me (object to be judged) is:	
RPII	Important	_____	Unimportant
	Relevant	_____	Irrelevant
	Means a lot to me	_____	Means nothing to me
	Valuable	_____	Worthless
	Interesting	_____	Boring
	Exciting	_____	Unexciting
	Appealing	_____	Unappealing
	Fascinating	_____	Mundane
	Involving	_____	Uninvolving
	Needed	_____	Not needed
PII	Of concern to me	_____	Of no concern to me
	Useful	_____	Useless
	Fundamental	_____	Trivial
	Beneficial	_____	Not beneficial
	Matters to me	_____	Does not matter
	Significant	_____	Insignificant
	Vital	_____	Superfluous
	Essential	_____	Nonessential
	Desirable	_____	Undesirable
	Wanted	_____	Unwanted

- Do you give feedback to influencers?
 - Do you advocate for them?
 - Do you help them?
 - What is your tolerance regarding them?
 - Do you interact with them?
 - Do you share their profile?
-
- What impact do you think influencers have on you? positive to negative
 - Have you ever compared yourself to an influencer in any way?
 - How does it make you feel? Give examples?
 - Have you ever felt frustrated?
 - Would you like to be an influencer? Why or why not?
 - What do you think about being an influencer?

Appendix 2. Interview Question for Influencers

- How long have you been an influencer?
- What do you usually post about?
- Do you work with an agent?
- If yes, what is the role of your agent?
- On what social media are you working the most?
- Do you consider yourself as being trustworthy, why?
- Do you consider yourself as being expert in a field? why?
- Do you consider yourself as being attractive? why?
- What does the term “influence” mean for you?
- Do you consider being influential in any way?

- What is your principal source of revenue as an influencer?
- How often do you work with brands through partnership?
- Have you ever promoted a brand without being paid for it?
- How is the collaboration usually established or begun?
- How do you decide who to collaborate with or not?
- What do you take into consideration when choosing the brand you are going to work with?
- How do you know or receive the instructions from the company what to deliver?
- How do you develop brand awareness for your partnership when posting on social media about it?
- Is the brand and the quality of the products you promote more important than the compensation you receive for working with them?
- How do you develop relationships with your audience?
- How would you qualify this relationship?
- Do you think that influencers really have an impact on their followers?
- If yes, how would you qualify this impact?
- To what extent do you think that influencers impact their followers' behavior?
- In what way do you think you have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions?
- Why do you think certain people are willing to purchase what is advertised by influencers?
- Can you think of any side effects of the popularity of a certain person on social media? (Regarding those persons but also their followers)
- Do you think influencer marketing is a long-term strategy?

Appendix 3. Interview Question for Brands

Can you briefly describe your company?

What is your role within the company?

For how long are you doing that?

Have you ever heard of influencer marketing as a strategy?

Do you work with influencers?

What does it bring you?

How is the collaboration usually established or begun?

How do you decide who to collaborate with or not?

How do you send, explain the instructions to the influencers what to deliver?

When you work with influencers, how do you control the perceived value of the content shared regarding your brand?

Do you take into account the influencer credibility when working with them? If yes, what factor do you consider when determining their credibility?

How do you evaluate the amount of influence the influencer will have on the users of the social network?

What is the most important factor of effectiveness regarding the promotion of a product?

How do you develop brand awareness?

In what way influencers and social media have an impact on consumers purchase intentions?

What are the advantages to using influencers?

What are the inconvenient?

How would you qualify the relation between influencers and followers?

Do you think that influencers really have an impact on their followers?

If yes, how would you qualify this impact?

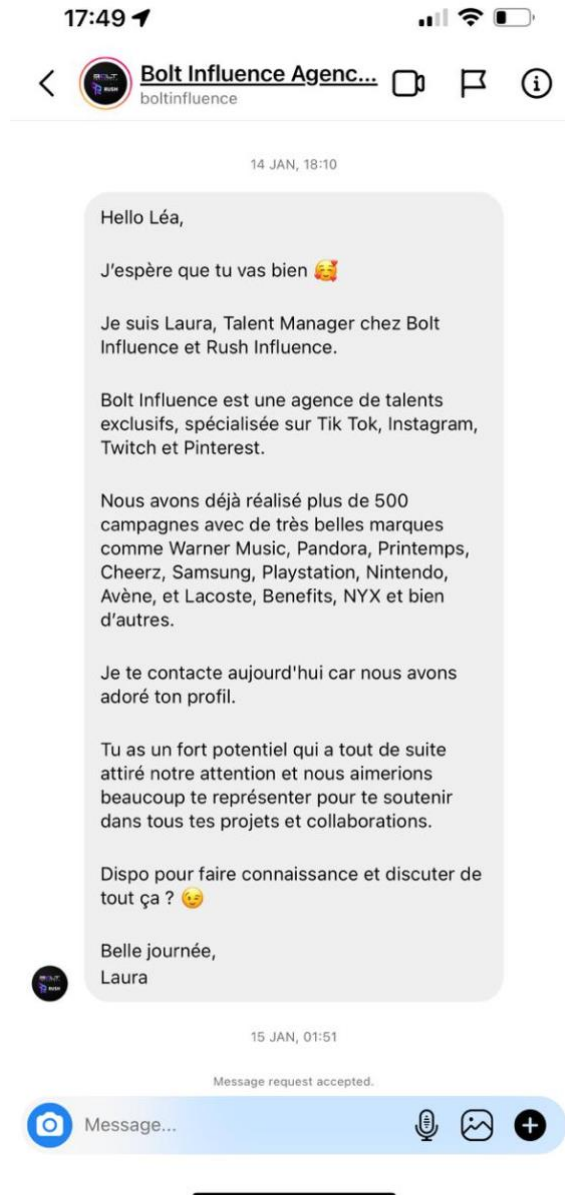
Why do you think certain people are willing to purchase what is advertised by influencers?

Can you think of any side effects of the popularity of a certain person on social media? (Regarding those persons but also their followers)

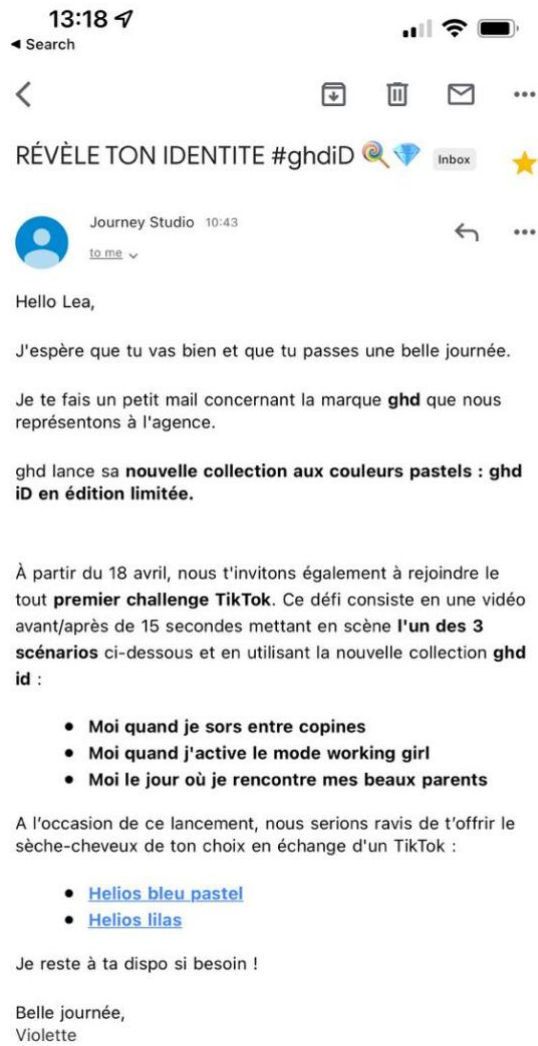
Do you think influencers marketing is a long-term strategy?

What do you think digital marketing will look like in 5, 10 and 20 years?

Appendix 4. Example of an email sent by an agency to recruit an influencer



Appendix 5. Example of an email sent by an agency to an influencer for a partnership proposal



Appendix 6. Example of a brand demand for partnership with an influencer

Hi dear

This is Mia from [Bella Barnett](#). We love your TikTok and Instagram style very much, are you interested in collaboration with us?

Bella Barnett is a women's online boutique known for selling high-end designer-inspired clothing at an affordable price. You can learn more on [Instagram @bellabarnett.official](#), and [TikTok @bellabarnett.official](#)

We are so happy and looking for permanent try on haul videos with you and also looking forward to a monthly deal for further collaborations.

If you are interested in collaboration, please send me your rate card for reference.

We love to afford you with fashion inspiration, Bella Barnett will never let you down — and it certainly won't disappoint your fashion-forward friends & followers.

Hopefully we could work together for mutual benefit.

And there are some best sellers in our website, you can click on and have a look.

<https://www.bellabarnett.com/collections/best-sellers>

Looking forward to your reply! Thank you very much!

Best

Appendix 7. Example of a partnership brief sent by a brand to an influencer

- Present the brand: Pinelle is an innovative brand that has become a **new trend**. It is a French brand which knows a huge success. First French brand to have developed a product that **eliminates all split ends**.
- **Show the product and the box** then present it before use, explain that it is a brush that eliminates all the split ends **without cutting the hair**. Explain that it is a very high-quality product and very easy to use. It should be applied to dry hair at least once a week to maintain the results.
- To make customers want to use it by showing that it is the product that will **change their beauty routine**: "Girls, I finally found a product with which I can have hair that has a texture like when I leave my hairdresser without paying so much, I am too happy my hair is soft and I could remove all my broken hair! ".

- **First**, explain that this is a product that **cuts only damaged hair**.
- Use the fork cutter on several of your strands by gliding it like a straightener **from the roots to the ends of your hair**.
- Film the use of it **without a filter** on your hair and explain that **it should only be used on dry hair**.
- If you can't film the demonstration, film yourself explaining the direct effect of the product.
- Once the demonstration is done, **show the results of the hair eliminated in the transparent part** and then say **that the results are incredible**, the difference is flagrant, and insist on the beauty of your hair **immediately** after using the product.
- Insist on the fact that the product **does not damage the hair and does not cut it**, it simply **eliminates all the forks detected by the brush**.

- **Once the presentation is done, make a before and after which must be obvious** (see examples on the site), insist on the exclusive offer available of -30% on all the site with the promo code **HAIR** and say that it is one of the best purchases to make with this sick promotion.
- **Simulate a purchase on the PINELLE website** and present the discount as being incredible with a starting price of AED480.90 then AED336.63 after the discount thanks to the **HAIR** code.
- **Put the link of the site swipe up on each story** with written sentences such as *-30% on the whole website on PINELLE with my code **HAIR**'.
- Finish the story with a before and after picture and a recap sentence so that it can be screened by customers for future purchases *-30% off ALL THE WEBSITE for 24 hours with the code **HAIR**'.