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**The Role of Digital Influencers on Consumers' Purchase Intention in Fashion**

Marina Alexandra Silva Gomes

*Master* in Management,

Supervisor:
Assistant Professor Susana Henriques Marques, Marketing, Operations and
General Management Department,
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October, 2020

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**BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

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*I dedicate this work to my grandfather and to my parents, who are always there for me.*

# Acknowledgements

# Resumo

Nesta era digital existe um interesse crescente pelos influenciadores digitais, que transmitem aos seguidores opiniões sobre marcas e produtos. Considerando que a investigação sobre o papel dos influenciadores digitais nas estratégias de marketing é escassa, este estudo pretende avaliar o papel dos influenciadores digitais na intenção de compra na moda. A revisão da literatura permitiu identificar variáveis chave associadas aos influenciadores digitais.

Uma combinação de métodos foi selecionada. Foram efetuadas entrevistas com influenciadoras digitais, para aprofundar os seus pontos de vista. Foi realizado um questionário online, dirigido a consumidores que seguem influenciadores digitais na moda, para testar as seis hipóteses propostas, baseadas na revisão da literatura. Obtiveram-se 345 respostas. Analisaram-se os dados quantitativos através do IBM SPSS.

Os resultados indicam que, entre as características dos influenciadores digitais consideradas, a *para-social interaction* e a qualidade do conteúdo influenciam positivamente a intenção de compra na moda. Verifica-se também um impacto positivo da atitude dos consumidores relativamente aos conteúdos patrocinados, sendo esta a variável que mais contribuiu para explicar a intenção de compra de um produto recomendado. As influenciadoras digitais entrevistadas consideram a relação e interação com os seguidores, a transparência, consistência e criatividade as características mais importantes para que um influenciador digital seja eficaz.

Este estudo realça as características dos influenciadores digitais que potenciam o seu papel na intenção de compra, consequentemente, enriquece a investigação sobre este tema e fornece recomendações futuras. Pode, igualmente, ajudar as marcas de moda que colaboram com influenciadores digitais, a definir melhor as estratégias nas redes sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** Influenciadores digitais, redes sociais, marketing de influência, intenção de compra, indústria da moda.

**JEL *Classification System*:**
M31: Marketing
M37: Advertising

# Abstract

In this digital Era, there has been an increasing interest in digital influencers, who convey their opinions to followers regarding brands and products. Considering that research on digital influencers' role in marketing strategies is scarce, this study aims at assessing the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion. The literature review allowed to identify key variables associated with digital influencers.

A combination of methods was selected. Interviews with digital influencers were accomplished in order to deeply understand their perspectives. An online questionnaire addressing consumers who follow fashion digital influencers was conducted in order to test six hypotheses, which were proposed based on the literature review. A total of 345 responses was obtained. The quantitative data was analysed through IBM SPSS.

Results indicate that, amongst the considered digital influencers' characteristics, para-social interaction and content quality positively influence purchase intention in fashion. Moreover, consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts positively impacts purchase intention and it was demonstrated that this variable contributed the most to explain purchase intention of a recommended product. Regarding the interviewees' opinion, the most important characteristics to achieve effectiveness are the connection and interaction with their followers, transparency, consistency and creativity demonstrated by digital influencers.

This study highlights the digital influencers' characteristics, which enhance their role on purchase intention, thus enriching the research on this theme and providing further investigation recommendations. It can also help fashion brands to better define social media strategies, when collaborating with digital influencers.


**Keywords:** Digital influencers, social media, influencer marketing, purchase intention, fashion industry.


**JEL Classification System:**
M31: Marketing
M37: Advertising

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# Glossary of Acronyms

eWOM:  Electronic Word-of-Mouth

PSI:      Para-social Interaction

WOM:    Word-of-Mouth

# CHAPTER 1
# **Introduction**

As technology is always evolving, consumers have access to numerous information, therefore, they are more demanding and informed (Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013). The arise of Web 2.0, which refers to a platform where users can collaboratively create and modify content and applications, provided opportunities for consumers to produce their own content. Based on the conceptual and technological foundations of Web 2.0, social media emerged (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media enables consumers to share their self-created and cocreated content with others in a global way, empowering them. The strength and the amount of social connections in an individual's network can increase his/her capability to influence others (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). Consumers can share their opinions and their product reviews through blogs, discussion forums as well as social networking sites (Cheung & Lee, 2012).

In fact, social media not only has brought new opportunities for consumers to obtain and disseminate information but it also has provided new and more efficient ways for brands to advertise their products and services (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020). For instance, marketers can advertise their products in Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, in order to drive digital engagement (Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). Advertising in social media is very relevant, as consumers can search for new ways to interact with brands and with other consumers. Therefore, consumers may engage in electronic Word-of-Mouth, which means that consumers can offer or search for informal advice regarding products through social networking sites (Chu & Kim, 2011). These authors highlighted that social media contacts are often part of consumers' existing networks and thus the opinions and recommendations of people who are closer to consumers may be perceived to be more authentic and credible. Moreover, consumers seem to be more interested in a product when they obtain information from online discussions, rather than when they obtain information provided by marketers (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

Consumers can influence each other by sharing information through casual conversations and they search for and provide opinions (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). This characteristic of consumer behaviour is named Word-of-Mouth as well as opinion leadership-opinion seeking (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Chan & Misra (1990) already realised that the diffusion of information through Word-of-Mouth distinguished opinion leaders from others, through their

knowledge and interest in a specific product. In social media environments, some regular users became noticed assuming the role of digital influencers, as they produce distinctive content and have a large number of followers (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Accordingly, Lin, Bruning, & Swarna (2018) referred that social media facilitates the diffusion of the content stated by opinion leaders, such as brand ambassadors and influencers.

Since consumers are likely to trust in individuals who are close to them, brands can take advantage of new communication ways and one of them can include the digital influencers role as messages' mediators. According to the two-step-flow theory, Katz and Lazarsfeld postulated that opinion leaders clarify the obtained media information and then diffuse it to others, enhancing its influence (*as cited in* Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Thus, mass media messages may not have a direct impact on the public. The mentioned theory referred to offline opinion leaders. Digital influencers can be considered similar to offline opinion leaders, as they can mediate messages' dissemination and influence digital communities. Furthermore, in the Digital Era, information can be rapidly diffused with a possible viral impact (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014).

In the previous century, Katz (1957) already associated influence with the values, the competence, and the strategic social location of the influential person. Based on the idea that this concept follows the changes in society, in the modern days, it involves online contexts and new marketing tools. Therefore, and according to Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, (2018), influencer marketing refers to collaborations between brands and digital influencers in order to promote brands. As mentioned by these authors, influencer marketing based on social media includes different levels of brands' influence. When brands' influence is low, marketers can send free products hoping that digital influencers will post some information about those products. On the contrary, when brands' influence is high, marketers remunerate digital influencers in return for one or several posts. In this situation, there is a formal agreement. Consequently, as digital influencers are essentially motivated to produce content about their personal interests, it is fundamental to study the impact of these commercial opportunities and sponsored content on influencers' perceived authenticity.

Considering that in recent years there is an increasing interest in digital influencers by brands, it is crucial to study this phenomenon so that a deeper understanding of the influencer marketing theme can be achieved. Therefore, the main theme of this dissertation refers to the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion. The considered industry is fashion as in Portugal this area is one of the areas that most frequently relies on the role of influencers in digital channels to spread the word and disseminate brands and products information amongst consumers, so as to achieve a significant and positive impact on consumer behaviour.

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## 1.1    Research Problem and Objectives

The study of the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion industry is due to the increasing importance of this phenomenon in the Marketing area. The active use of social media leads brands to take advantage of several platforms to promote their products. Among social media marketing strategies, brands are progressively addressing digital influencers considering their role of online opinion leaders.

Digital influencers, by communicating brands' messages and promoting products amongst their followers, are expected to generate positive outcomes for brands. However, research on this recent phenomenon is scarce. Although there are some studies that address the theme of digital influencers, there are several topics that need to be further explored. Hence, it is fundamental to study the role of digital influencers on purchase intention, by identifying key characteristics which go beyond the number of followers. Additionally, it could be useful to compare Millennials (people born between 1981 until 1995) and Generation Z (people born after 1995) in relation to their perceptions about digital influencers characteristics and purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Moreover, it is very relevant to study the effects of sponsored posts due to its increasing popularity regarding digital influencers (Y.Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

This study addresses the research gap by investigating the role of digital influencers on consumers' purchase intention in fashion. This research intends to contribute to add knowledge on the theme of influencer marketing and on the understanding of its concepts, mainly in the Portuguese context and in the industry of fashion. Moreover, this study is also beneficial for brands, as it can help fashion brands to select the most suitable digital influencers, creating profitable relationships with them as well as to define better strategies regarding social media and electronic Word-of-Mouth, when collaborating with digital influencers. Thus, the general research question associated with this dissertation is the following: how can digital influencers impact consumers' purchase intention in fashion? Bearing in mind that the aim of this dissertation is to assess the role of digital influencers on consumers' purchase intention in fashion industry, the following objectives were defined:

- Verify which characteristics associated with digital influencers have a positive impact on purchase intention of a recommended fashion product;

- Verify if the attitude towards sponsored posts has a positive impact on purchase intention of a recommended fashion product;

- Identify which variables influence the most consumers' purchase intention of a fashion product recommended by digital influencers;

- Understand how digital influencers develop a partnership with brands;

- Clarify which characteristics make a digital influencer effective;

- Understand how digital influencers interact with their followers;

- Realise if digital influencers motivate followers to buy.

Considering the methodology, the questionnaire addressed to consumers who follow/search for digital influencers was the selected method in order to accomplish the first three objectives, and individual interviews with digital influencers were the selected method in order to achieve the last four objectives. Therefore, a combination of methods was chosen in order to accomplish the aim of this dissertation.

## 1.2    Research Structure

This dissertation comprises six main chapters. The first chapter introduces the main theme of this research and the circumstances that resulted in the current contexts, providing an overview in regard to social media marketing and to influencer marketing. This research problem and these research objectives are also included.

The second chapter refers to the literature review, which encompasses a theoretical framework of several topics, such as consumer behaviour, the evolution of social media and electronic Word-of-Mouth, influencer marketing and the rise of digital influencers as well as the fashion industry. This chapter includes several concepts, previous studies results and relationships between variables. Thus, this theoretical background is the basis for this research, supporting the proposed hypotheses of this study.

The third chapter comprises the conceptual model of this study, showing the relationships between the selected variables. It also contains the proposed hypotheses and some past research results in order to support the hypotheses.

The fourth chapter includes the description of the selected methodology, explaining how the research was accomplished, how the data was obtained and the sampling process.

Subsequently, the fifth chapter encompasses the analyses of the assembled data, the hypotheses test, and the respective results as well as a discussion of the results.

Finally, the sixth chapter includes this research final conclusions, some limitations, and the main contributions of this study and recommendations for future studies in regard to this theme.

CHAPTER 2

# Literature Review

Influencer marketing in the digital era is a recent strategy, however, the theoretical basis of influence has been analysed in several past studies and this theme has evolved in social media context, resulting in more recent studies regarding this approach. Hence, the first topic of this research is consumer behaviour, followed by the origins and the growth of social media as well as word of mouth evolution to electronic Word-of-Mouth. Subsequently, influencer marketing and digital influencers' rise and their characteristics are considered. Finally, as the area of this study is the fashion industry, this topic is also analysed in this chapter. The mentioned topics are fundamental to this study and are based on a variety of references.

## 2.1 Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is the "study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires" (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006, p.6). Successful marketing depends on understanding consumers' buying behaviour, so that the appropriate products can always be promoted among the right customers (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

### 2.1.1 Types of Buying Decision Behaviour

Kotler and Armstrong (2012) described four types of buying decision behaviour. The first one, the complex buying behaviour, is characterised by a high involvement in a purchase and a high degree of differences between brands, for example, when the product is expensive and rarely acquired. This type of decisions encompasses a substantial search for information and the consumer will develop strong beliefs about the product, making his/her decision based on an accurate evaluation of the brands' characteristics (Solomon *et al.*, 2006). The dissonance-reducing buying behaviour also comprises a high involvement in an expensive or rare purchase; however, the degree of differences between brands is low, consequently, consumers buying decision is fast and can be based on a good price or on convenience (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). The habitual buying behaviour refers to situations when consumers have a low involvement in a purchase and there are few differences between brands. In this case, as the purchases are regular, consumers do not spend much time searching for information and comparing brands. Thus, the decision is simpler and based on brand familiarity. The variety-

seeking buying behaviour encompasses a low involvement but a high degree of differences between brands and hence the brand switching is very frequent (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012).

### 2.1.2   Buying Decision-making Perspectives

According to the rational buying decision-making perspective, consumers go through several steps such as the assimilation of much information possible about a product and the evaluation of good and bad features of the product alternatives in order to accomplish an adequate decision (Solomon *et al.*, 2006). This perspective has been questioned, as consumers' choices are not always pondered and there are several situations that do not include a decision-making process (Mowen and Minor, 2003; Solomon *et al.*, 2006).

In the experiential perspective, consumers are strongly involved in a purchase decision, however, they do not choose the product in a rational way, they buy the product based on emotion and affection (Solomon *et al.*, 2006). In other words, they choose the alternative which causes the most positive feelings, therefore, they do not go through a decision process (Mowen and Minor, 2003). These authors suggested that impulsive purchases are also based on a strong affection towards the products. Rook (1987) described impulsive purchases as situations when a consumer feels an abrupt, strong and compelling need to purchase a product instantly. This author stated that not all unplanned purchases are impulsive ones, as impulsive purchasing encompasses an instant reaction to a stimulus. The high levels of enthusiasm that are related to impulse buying differentiate it from more tranquil and rational consumer decision making.

The behavioural influence perspective refers to purchase decisions with low involvement, which are influenced by environmental aspects (Solomon *et al.*, 2006). These can include the store design and luminosity as well as product arrangement (Mowen and Minor, 2003).

### 2.1.3   Buying Decision Process

One of the most relevant consumer decision-making models was first introduced in 1968 (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1993). As stated by these authors, the buying decision process includes five steps, as shown in figure 2.1.
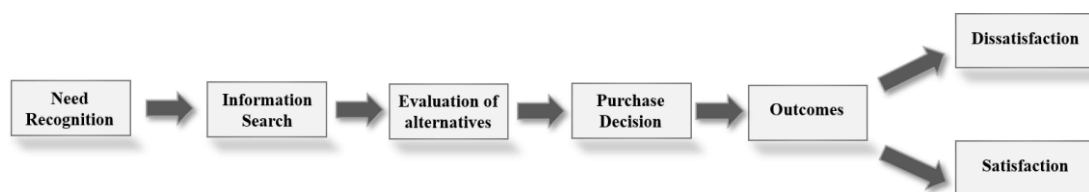


Figure 2.1: Buying Decision Process. Adapted from Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1993) and Kotler and Armstrong (2012).

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This framework of reference is based on the principle that consumers pass through defined stages in order to make purchase decisions, which emphasises a rational perspective (Ashman, Solomon, & Wolny, 2015). Moreover, the process may vary with the degree of purchasing involvement. In other words, consumers can precisely follow each step or they can skip several steps and, in this case, they do not spend much time and effort in making a decision (Engel, *et al.*, 1993). As mentioned by these authors, this process begins with need recognition, which is the acknowledgement of a problem or a need. According to Solomon *et al.* (2006), the problem recognition arises when there is a notable discrepancy between a consumer's current state (consumer's actual situation) and a consumer's ideal state (consumer's wished situation). These authors distinguished need recognition from opportunity recognition. The first one happens when the quality of the consumer's current state decreases, for example, when the characteristics of a product do not fulfil consumer's expectations. In contrast, the opportunity recognition occurs when the consumer's ideal state increases. The consumer's ideal state can be influenced by several factors, such as culture and lifestyle trends (Mowen and Minor, 2003).

After consumers have identified a problem, they start searching for information about their specific need, through internal and external sources (Engel *et al.*, 1993). Internal search occurs when consumers retrieve products' information from their memory. In contrast, consumers can collect products' information from external sources when they need to obtain more information about the available products. These sources include personal and commercial sources and their influence differs according to the product and according to the consumer. Nonetheless, the most effective information seems to be obtained from personal sources (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2012). In cases when the involvement in a purchase is low, consumers do not spend much time searching for information (Engel *et al.*, 1993). On the contrary, and according to Schiffman & Wisenblit (2015), when a consumer has a high degree of involvement in a purchase, he/she will precisely search for information as well as evaluate brands. A difference between pre-purchase search and ongoing search was also observed by Solomon *et al.* (2006). The first one occurs when a consumer acknowledges a particular need and, consequently, searches for information. In contrast, the ongoing search is characterised by a continuous search for information so that consumers can follow market trends.

The following stage involves consumers' evaluation of the alternative brands in the evoked set based on the collected information. The evoked set consists on the most relevant alternatives within a specific product category during a consumer's decision process. Hence, it is fundamental for marketers to guarantee that their products belong to consumers' evoked set (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Mowen and Minor (2003) also referred that, in this stage,

consumers will develop beliefs, attitudes and intentions about the relevant alternatives. While a belief is a consumer's thought about a product based on his/her knowledge or opinion, an attitude refers to a consumer's product evaluations and feelings he/she has regarding a product (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Spears & Singh (2004) described attitudes towards the brand as a continuous brief assessment of the brand that probably generates behaviour. Behaviour intentions include the behaviour expectations about the purchase, use or disposal of a product (Mowen and Minor 2003). Purchase intention is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 56). Thus, this concept is imperative for consumer behaviour research.

The purchase decision phase refers to the brand that the consumer will buy, which is usually the preferred brand (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2012). However, in the authors' perspective, there are two factors that may influence the customer actual choice of the brand, such as the attitudes of others and unexpected situational factors. The first one occurs under the circumstances that a friend or a relative has a negative opinion about the brand, as a result, the consumer may change his/her choice. Moreover, the second factor corresponds to unexpected events, for instance, the alternative brand may decrease the price of the product. Consequently, the preferences of the consumer and the purchase intention he/she has in the evaluation stage may not be translated into the actual purchase decision.

As stated by Engel *et al.* (1993), after acquiring the product, the consumer will be satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchase. Consumers are satisfied when the performance of the product meets their expectations. A satisfied consumer is more predisposed to buy the product again (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). In contrast, and according to these authors, when the performance of the product is lower than consumers' expectations, they will be dissatisfied and consequently they search for more suitable product alternatives.

As mentioned by Ashman *et al.* (2015), this model continues to be a great means for analysing the shopping environment, helping to understand consumers' buying decision process.

Appel *et al.* (2020) recently stated that social media interconnects with many facets of consumers lives and thus consumer's decision-making process can be influenced by social media. Ashman *et al.* (2015) also referred that consumers can produce and share information about products and search for opinions, reviews and ratings in social networks in order to help them make better decisions. Consumers are more informed; hence, they are less persuaded by organisations and this leads to an apparently more transparent market environment. According to these authors, the continuous online interaction acts on the several stages of the decision-

making process. The problem recognition can be aroused by the social shopping environment, for instance, social media users' recommendations, and brand sponsored posts. At the information search stage, consumers can look for products' ratings and reviews, as they are likely to believe that non-professional sources of information, such as friends, are more trustworthy. Consumers can reduce the number of considered alternatives by exchanging opinions online with friends, searching for products online, wearing or testing the product in-store and sharing the photos on social media, so that they can receive a social score. After purchasing a product, consumers can show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction through online reviews, which can be considered by other consumers (Ashman *et al*. 2015).

### 2.1.4    Factors that Influence Consumer Buying Behaviour

As specified by Kotler and Armstrong (2012) and Kotler and Keller (2012), cultural, social, personal and psychological factors highly influence consumers' buying decisions. Most of the times, it is not possible for marketers to control these factors, but they must consider them.

According to these authors, culture refers to the values and manners learned from family and other relevant institutions; thus, it is a vital element of a consumer's behaviour. Culture may differ from country to country and it also includes subcultures, which correspond to groups of people that share common values, based on similar life experiences.

Social factors encompass reference groups which are real or imaginary individuals or groups that have strong impact on a person's objectives and behaviours, (Park & Lessig, 1977). A group to which an individual is part of is designated a membership group, and in this type of group members are aware of its influence (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). These authors mentioned that consumers can also be influenced by reference groups they are not part of but whose values and behaviours consumers adopt (a symbolic group). Reference groups give people the opportunity to experience lifestyles and behaviours, help to generate values and attitudes, and cause pressure for compliance with group norms (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Park & Lessig (1977) identified three ways that reference groups can use to influence consumers: the informational influence, which corresponds to people who search for information from reliable sources, for instance experts; the utilitarian influence, which means that a consumer purchase decision is influenced by the likes and dislikes of people with whom he or she has social contact; and the value-expressive influence, which refers to consumers who purchase a specific brand in order to let others know the person they are or the person they would like to be, so that the image others get becomes a better one. Hence, reference groups are important to marketing, as advertisers can use them in order to encourage consumers to acquire products

(Bearden & Etzel, 1982). In addition to this, family can be considered the most relevant reference group as it teaches children to develop consumption skills and thus it can exert a very strong influence on consumer buying behaviour (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). As stated by Kotler and Keller (2012), roles and status which consumers possess in each group are also important in this context, as they can purchase products which demonstrate and communicate their roles as well as their current or wished status.

Another factor that influences consumer behaviour refers to personal characteristics, which involve age, occupation and economic conditions, personality, and lifestyle. Lifestyle refers to a person's way of living considering, for example, his/her interests and perspectives (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2012).

Psychological factors also influence consumers' buying behaviour. They include motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). When consumers are motivated, they will behave, based on their perceptions of the circumstances. Perception is described as a process of choosing, classifying, and understanding the information in order to build a significant perspective of the world. As referred by these authors, there are several perceptual processes: the selective attention occurs when consumers select the most important information they need; the selective distortion refers to consumers that understand information in a way that will justify their previous beliefs; the selective retention happens when consumers recall good characteristics about a brand they prefer and overlook good characteristics about rival brands. Learning is defined as alterations in a person's behaviour resulting from experience. During this process, individuals develop beliefs and attitudes, which impact their buying behaviour (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012).

## 2.2 Social Media

Before providing a proper definition of social media, it is important to mention two related concepts, namely Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), the notion of Web 2.0 appeared for the first time in 2004 in order to define a new means in which software developers and end users began to use the World Wide Web, which means that Web 2.0 is a platform where the content and applications are produced and continuously changed by all users in a collaborative way. Whereas Web 2.0 signifies the conceptual and technological basis of social media, User Generated Content can be defined as the several media ways that are widely available and produced by end-users. Although User Generated Content existed before the Web 2.0, technological advancements strengthened this concept.

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In this context, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p. 61) defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Consistent with this definition, Appel *et al.* (2020) described social media as digital environments, where people can receive and send vast amounts of digital content and features of their lives. It is always evolving, as a result of main platforms' innovation and consumers' new uses of social media. The core purposes of social media use are the communication with known and unknown people who share the same interests, access and create digital content.

The developments of the Internet and social media technologies have empowered consumers, as it is easier for consumers to access massive information, for example product features, prices and reviews, which facilitates their buying decisions and decreases information unevenness between marketers and consumers (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, since Web 2.0 and social media have empowered consumers to produce content and disseminate it, they can express their opinions through the creation of websites, blogs, videos and reviews, increasing the possibility of influencing others (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). Accordingly, Hajli (2014) mentioned that there are several relevant areas that have arisen from social media, such as reviews and social commerce, which allow consumers to interact, create content and influence others.

The term social media, as it is used today, possibly began with "Open diary", a social networking site that joined online diary writers into a unique community. The term "blog" was first used at that time (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). As referred by these authors, blogs are defined as personal web pages which have a variety of content about a particular area. They are generally managed by one person; however, they allow interaction with others through comments. Before the rise of social media there were closed communities that shared the same interests and could network on online platforms, for instance, CompuServe, AOL, and The WELL (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). In the 1990s, web platforms, for instance Yahoo!, enabled chances for content creation and its diffusion, opening the closed communities and in the 2000s, other social platforms, for example Friendster, were introduced (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). The continuous advancements of the Internet led to the creation of social networking sites, for instance, MySpace and Facebook (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). More recently, social media platforms, where text is replaced by images and videos, have emerged, namely, Instagram (Appel *et al.* 2020).

In this context, it is central to understand the notion of virtual communities, as these social communities can have a strong influence on members' knowledge and opinions about products

(Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). The more a member is involved in a virtual community, collecting numerous information, the more probably he/she can be influenced by the community, more specifically at the information search stage (de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009). These authors distinguished virtual communities from traditional communities. Regarding traditional communities, membership may be forced by, for example, place of birth, and residence. In contrast, individuals join virtual communities because they choose to and thus this type of community is characterised by low entry and exit barriers (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; de Valck *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, content is actively created by community participants, and this process leads to a capital of knowledge, extending its value to all the participants (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). These authors clarified that the majority of virtual communities is structured around a shared interest, in which members create and use common conventions and norms as well as show engagement with shared objectives.

In relation to the definition of social media, it is also relevant to distinguish the several types of social media. Zhu & Chen (2015) developed a social media typology based on two characteristics, the nature of connection and the messages' level of customisation. The nature of connection can be profile-based, if its main focus is the individual member or it can be content-based, if the main focus refers to the contents posted. Regarding the level of customisation of the messages, a customised message is projected to address a particular person or a small group and a broadcasted message is planned to address the general public.
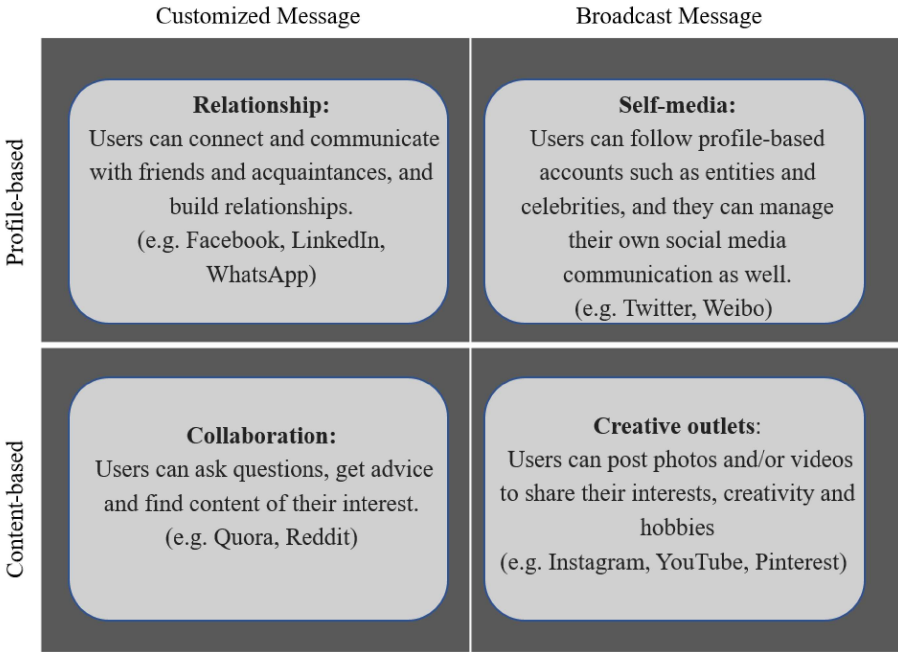


Figure 2.2: Social Media Types. Adapted from Zhu & Chen (2015).

### 2.2.1    Social Media Marketing

The development of social media has had a great impact on the ways brands communicate with consumers. In fact, marketers are investing more and more in this channel, as consumers' use of these platforms continues to grow (Appel *et al.* 2020).

In 2018 there were 5.3 million Portuguese users of social media (Marktest, 2018). In addition to this, Instagram is the second more known social media channel by Portuguese people, in which 60% of social media users mention to have an account on this channel, a percentage which increased to 91% regarding younger people, in a sample of 861 respondents (Marktest, 2018).

There are doubts regarding the strategic use of social media in order to generate positive brand-related results, for example, it can be difficult for marketers to target consumers who interact more with branded social media content and consequently show the most wanted social media behaviours, such as the advocacy (VanMeter, Syrdal, Powell-Mantel, Grisaffe, & Nesson, 2018)

VanMeter *et al.*, (2018) postulated that social media behaviours are different regarding their importance to the brand. Thus, these authors suggested that token behaviours can be related to more superficial actions, such as liking a social media page; in contrast, meaningful behaviours may demand more effort on an action, namely, sharing a brand's post and buying products promoted on social media.

Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Lacobucci (2010) defined brand attachment as the strength of the cognitive and emotional relationship between the brand and the individual, while brand attitude refers to the individual's opinions about the brand. These authors mentioned that, although both can have important impacts on consumer behaviour (e.g. purchase of the brand, repeat the purchase and the recommendation of the brand), brand attachment seems to be the key determinant to predict the intention to get involved in more powerful and difficult behaviours as well as in actual purchase behaviours in order to sustain the relationship with the brand.

Based on the mentioned research, VanMeter *et al.* (2018) investigated the role of social media attitude and attachment on predicting token and meaningful behaviours, and realised that while both features can be associated with token behaviours, only attachment seems to influence meaningful behaviours on social media. These authors also confirmed that consumers who are more attached to a brand and more attached to social media, are more likely to be brand advocates. Consequently, it is fundamental to promote consumer engagement in social media channels, for a successful branding strategy (Scheinbaum, 2016; VanMeter *et al.*, 2018).

As stated by Scheinbaum (2016) digital engagement, in the consumers' perspective, is an online behaviour which is characterised by consumer's thoughts, emotional connection, interaction, and actions (likes, comments, and shares) with a brand or its community members in a social media context. Furthermore, Van Doorn *et al.* (2010) described customer engagement behaviours as actions in relation to a brand or a company, which include, for instance, purchases, WOM, blogging and writing reviews.

Advertisers can also take advantage of social media so that digital engagement can be achieved (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018). Social media advertising engagement is defined, by these authors, as the amount of experiences that individuals have while being exposed to social media advertising on a certain channel. Voorveld *et al.* (2018) suggested that each social media platform can provide an exclusive context for advertising due to each one's differences. For example, these authors' results revealed that Facebook is often used to communicate and exchange experiences, and to be rapidly informed; YouTube is regularly used for entertainment and relaxation purposes; and Instagram is frequently used as a free time activity as well as to be immediately up-to-date, and to be entertained. Moreover, it was also suggested that consumers may perceive advertising more negatively on YouTube, followed by Facebook and they consider that advertising is more entertaining on Instagram. As a consequence, advertisers should adapt the ad content to the social media platform or select a platform that is aligned with the objective and the message of the ad in order to take advantage from social media (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018).

## 2.3    Electronic Word of Mouth

Traditional Word-of-Mouth (WOM) comprises "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" (Westbrook, 1987, p.261). In the previous century, Arndt (1967) had already realised that the consumers' possibility of purchase could be amplified with positive WOM. On the contrary, exposure to negative WOM could diminish that possibility. Godes & Mayzlin (2004) emphasised the importance of interpersonal communication (WOM) because of its credibility. Keller (2007) also highlighted that WOM power can arise from the relationship between consumers based on trust, mainly the ones that happen in conversations between family and friends. Companies seem to recognise the importance of WOM as a possible driver of consumer behaviour (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004) and brands' growth (Keller, 2007).

The referred concept has evolved with consumers' regular use of the Internet. Consumers can share their opinions and experiences regarding products and brands with many people via the Internet, which means getting involved in electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) communication (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Consumers can use several tools in order to post their opinions and reviews, such as blogs, review websites, discussion forums, and social media sites (Cheung & Lee, 2012).

Cheung & Lee (2012) distinguished eWOM from traditional WOM: eWOM communications are characterised by a high probability of reaching a great number of individuals and a large speed of diffusion. They are also imperishable, accessible and measurable, comparing to traditional WOM. However, it can be more difficult for individuals to assess the credibility of the communicator.

Consumers' eWOM intention can be related to the sense of belonging to a group. Consequently, members can share their opinions for the benefit of the group instead of aiming at a personal reward. Consumers can also contribute with their knowledge and experiences because they enjoy helping others with their purchase decisions, preventing them of having negative experiences. Consumers' eWOM intention can also be related to reputation. Consequently, consumers may intend to be regarded as experts by a huge number of individuals (Cheung & Lee, 2012).

Consumers have been interacting with brands and other consumers via social media, which empowers effective interactive eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). Social media has become an important tool to search for product information, enabling and accelerating eWOM. A significant feature of social media is that social media contacts are often members of individuals' existing networks, such as friends and family, and may seem as being more reliable and credible than unknown people (Chu & Kim, 2011). In this context, these authors' study revealed that the higher social media users trust their contacts, the higher the probability of triggering eWOM behaviours.

Accordingly, Bickart & Schindler (2001) suggested that product information on online forums had greater credibility and relevance, rather than the information created by marketers, since product information shared on online forums is perceived to be trustworthy, as it is created by consumers. These authors' study showed that consumers who collected information about a product from online forums could be more interested in that product, rather than when they collected information from marketers. Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski (2006) also referred that eWOM communications appeared to be credible sources of information by consumers.

These authors' findings indicated that eWOM could positively influence consumers' opinion about the value of the company's products.

Moreover, Bao & Chang (2014) emphasised the relevance of using eWOM in marketing campaigns so that great product sales can be achieved. These authors analysed online user reviews in order to identify three types of key eWOM disseminators: communicative, buzz-generating and trustworthy opinion leaders. Bao & Chang (2014) realised that all these disseminators can improve product sales, because of their product experience and knowledge.

Erkan & Evans (2016) investigated the influence of eWOM on social media and confirmed that consumers who adopt eWOM information are expected to have purchase intentions. Consumers are more likely to adopt eWOM information when it reveals to be useful (credible and with good quality).

## 2.4    Influencer Marketing and Digital Influencers

Previous research indicated that social media advertising, such as blogs, is more effective than traditional digital media advertising, for instance online magazines (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). The growing use of social media has enlarged the effects of consumers' recommendations and experiences (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Social media enables regular consumers to create differentiative content and offers them visibility. In this context, a new kind of influencer has appeared: the digital influencer (Khamis *et al.*, 2017). Digital influencers can be described as content producers who have a great number of followers (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). They are defined as "a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011, p.90).

Digital influencers are also referred to as micro-celebrities (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019; Khamis *et al.*, 2017) and instafamous (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jin *et al.*, 2019). The concept of instafamous is very relevant, because users can post their photographs on Instagram, thus it is a great tool to generate eWOM (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017) and to spread new fashion trends, because of its intrinsically visual nature (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-sánchez, 2018). In fact, as stated by De Veirman *et al.* (2017), products and brands can be visually presented in photos and identified in captions. Additionally, digital influencers can be perceived as trusted experts in one or several areas. Therefore, brands have been developing partnerships with digital influencers in order to promote their products and create a positive image amongst

influencers' high number of followers. This new strategy is named influencer marketing (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017).

Brands are expected to invest up to $15 billion on influencer marketing by 2022 (Schomer, 2019). In that Business Insider Intelligence study, it is also mentioned that the majority of brands (79%) prefer to use Instagram for influencer marketing campaigns.

Taking into account that in the previous century, Katz (1957) already related influence to the values, competence and knowledge of the influential person as well as to the strategic social location, referring to the influential person's contacts (within a group or external to it). In the Digital Era, specifically focusing on social media contexts, influence is defined as "a function of reach, the degree of the person's embeddedness in the social network, and persuasiveness, linked to the relevance of the content the person creates online." (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013, p.258).

Digital influencers, as opinion leaders, can be very relevant sources of advice for other consumers (Casaló *et al.*, 2018). Opinion leaders share information through WOM communication, differentiating themselves regarding opinion seekers, as they are likely to have a higher knowledge, involvement, and interest in knowing more about a product (Chan & Misra, 1990). Offline opinion leadership and WOM communications encompass face-to-face information shared between friends, family, and acquaintances (Lin *et al.*, 2018). Thus, offline opinion leaders can exert a direct influence on others and they seem to be deeply informed and respected people. Social media has changed the interaction between individuals and offers opportunities for online opinion leaders to be brand ambassadors and influencers as well as to communicate with their followers (Lin *et al.*, 2018). Although online opinion leaders may wield less influence on a specific consumer who they interact with, they are likely to have a large range of influence, as they can reach many potential customers. Lin *et al.* (2018) referred that online opinion leaders can provide useful information about a product and/or increase their followers' product attachment. For instance, Instagram is an adequate social media platform to promote the experiential value of a product through an image. In contrast, a blog is suitable to provide useful and detailed information about a product.

Accordingly, Magno (2017) and Uzunoğlu & Kip (2014) mentioned that bloggers can be considered digital opinion leaders bearing in mind the two-step-flow theory. Regarding this theory, Katz & Lazarsfeld postulated that messages conveyed by mass media are monitored by opinion leaders who decipher messages and mediate the spread of information through many interactions (*as cited in* Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014).

Consistent with the two-step flow communication theory, bloggers can be considered digital influencers, as they can be intermediaries in the diffusion of messages, having the ability

to influence the communities in the digital context (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Additionally, Magno (2017) emphasised that the bloggers' activity of filtering the received information before sharing it with readers is very relevant, since consumers might be overwhelmed by a huge amount of information and might not have the time or the skills to choose what is relevant for them.

Uzunoğlu & Kip (2014) studied the role of bloggers on brand communication, using in-depth interviews with seventeen brands and digital agencies. Regarding blogging definitions, all the participants recognised that bloggers are content creators on digital platforms. They also categorised bloggers as influencers and non-influencers. The first category refers to the bloggers who have more readers and the capacity to influence the behaviour of others, because of their expertise in a specific area. Therefore, the participants of the mentioned study realised the importance of engaging with bloggers, the digital influencers, in order to build and maintain a credible presence on the online communities. In addition to this, Li & Du (2011) emphasised that for companies to take advantage of WOM, they have to identify popular blogs and their authors, who are opinion leaders, as they can convey product information, give recommendations and personal opinions as well as complement professional expertise to help brands promoting their products.

More recently, Jiménez-castillo & Sánchez-fernández (2019) analysed the impact of digital influencers on their role as online opinion leaders. These authors highlighted the influential power exerted by digital influencers (if they are a source of consistent information). In their study, this role not only led to engagement with digital influencers, but also to engagement with the promoted brands, incorporating these brands into their self-concept. Self-concept is defined as the beliefs an individual has regarding his or her attributes as well as how the individual assesses these qualities (Solomon *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, Jiménez-castillo & Sánchez-fernández (2019) confirmed that the greater the influence, the greater the followers' value expectations about the recommended brands and the greater their purchase intention can be achieved. Thus, this conclusion reveals the influential power of digital influencers may have in moulding followers' perceptions and behaviours about promoted brands.

In this context, it is fundamental to identify the most relevant digital influencers to communicate brands' messages (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). As stated by these authors, the number of followers should not be the only criterion used to select digital influencers. This criterion is used because a large number of followers may lead to a higher reach of the message. Accordingly, Jin & Phua (2014) investigated the impact of celebrities' number of followers on brand-related outcomes and these authors' study demonstrated that a celebrity who has a high

number of followers on Twitter seems to be perceived as more credible than a celebrity who has a low number of followers and consumers are more likely to build an online relationship with a more popular influencer. The findings of the research accomplished by De Veirman *et al.* (2017) indicated that a great number of followers can positively affect attitudes towards the influencer (the influencer's likeability) mostly due to higher perceptions of popularity. However, a large number of followers cannot consistently signify true influence. Hence, marketers should bear in mind other aspects for selecting the most adequate influencers.

### 2.4.1  Credibility

Existing research on influencer marketing has addressed the source credibility theory in order to explain its role on consumer behaviour (e.g. Djafarova & Rushworth 2017). Source credibility refers to the communicator's favourable characteristics which influence the receiver's acceptance of the message (Ohanian, 1990). This author considered trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness as the source credibility dimensions in order to study celebrity endorsement effectiveness. According to Ohanian (1990) trustworthiness refers to the receiver's degree of confidence in the speaker and in the message and expertise is associated with the speaker's experience and knowledge.

Sokolova & Kefi (2020) related the characteristics of a speaker (a digital influencer) to the social influence processes of compliance, identification, and internalisation, conceptualised by Kelman (1958). In the case of credibility, it can be related to the internalisation process (Sokolova & Kefi 2020). This process occurs when the individual is highly persuaded due to the content of the influential person's message to adopt an induced behaviour, as the idea conveyed in the message is congruent with the individual's own beliefs (Kelman, 1958).

In addition to this, the research conducted by Chin Lung Hsu, Lin, & Chiang (2013) indicated that blog readers' trusting belief in the blogger can positively influence their intention to purchase online. Since bloggers' recommendations are considered an informal communication channel in relation to traditional advertisement, and bearing in mind that blog readers may constantly interact on the blog, they become familiar with the blogger and with his or her content. Consequently, trust is more likely to be developed. Therefore, Chin Lung Hsu *et al.* (2013) suggested that bloggers' eWOM possibly results in a sales rise.

Existing research has also compared celebrities' credibility with digital influencers' credibility (e.g. Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). These authors confirmed that consumers may feel that digital influencers are more trustworthy and similar to them than celebrities in traditional media. These variables (trustworthiness and similarity) were important

to explain the success of digital influencers' endorsements in persuading consumers in the mentioned study. Consumers are also more likely to purchase a product endorsed by a digital influencer rather than by a celebrity.

The research carried out by Jin *et al*. (2019) also demonstrated that consumers seemed to consider digital influencers as more trustworthy than celebrities in traditional media and the influencers' posts could lead to more positive brand attitudes than the celebrities' posts. Moreover, the participants in that study had the opinion that digital influencers are more socially present than traditional celebrities and thus they continuously interact with consumers. In addition to this, digital influencers' posts might cause more envy feelings than posts made by celebrities.

Interviews with female Instagram users showed that they think that celebrities are trustworthy, however non-traditional celebrities (digital influencers) are considered to be more credible and relatable than traditional celebrities, for instance, actors, musicians, sport and television personalities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Thus, digital influencers have more impact on those young female consumers' buying behaviour. They search for reviews on Instagram in order to reduce risks associated with purchases, as they trust digital influencers and believe that reviews are created from their expertise. Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) also confirmed that most of the participants in their study had purchased a product that had become known to them exclusively through a celebrity whom they trusted on Instagram.

Considering expertise, Ki & Kim's (2019) study showed that the more consumers realise that digital influencers' Instagram content shows professional knowledge, the more they probably accept digital influencers as opinion leaders. Comparing the three features: expertise, information and interaction, the first one seems to be the strongest feature for consumers to consider digital influencers as opinion leaders. Consequently, consumers' desire to imitate digital influencers can increase. This will possibly result in social media Word-of-Mouth, namely liking, following, or sharing digital influencers' content as well as in intentions to purchase digital influencers' promoted products and brands (Ki & Kim, 2019).

According to a recent qualitative study, female active Instagram users highlighted digital influencers' attractiveness and competence as well as their inspiring content as being very important characteristics to make them follow digital influencers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). In addition to this, digital influencers have to actively interact with these female users, so that trust can be developed. However, some participants in that study mentioned that they do not trust micro-celebrities because they are remunerated by endorsing a product. Thus, they

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consider digital influencers' recommendations in the beginning of the information search stage, nevertheless, they complement their search with product reviews from other online sources.

The participants in Djafarova & Rushworth's (2017) study also emphasised that the attractiveness, the quality and the composition of the images are relevant to decide to follow or not to follow a digital influencer.

Furthermore, the study accomplished by Casaló *et al.* (2018) indicated that instead of the quantity and quality of Instagram posts, the originality and uniqueness appear to be fundamental factors in developing opinion leadership on this platform. Consequently, the consumer's intention to interact and to recommend the Instagram account to other consumers is likely to increase.

Additionally, Magno's (2017) findings revealed that blogs' high quality content can result in a strong engagement with the blog, and in a great intention to purchase the products recommended by bloggers. This author also suggested that the blogger should also create an emotional link with readers, so that followers can trust and comply with the blogger's recommendations.

### 2.4.2 Para-social Interaction

Para-social interaction (PSI) can be related to influencers, as social media users can develop this type of relationship with digital influencers, when they subscribe their channels and keep following their posts (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The theory of PSI refers to an illusory, one-sided face-to-face relationship between spectators and performers in mass media, for instance, radio and television, which are controlled by the performer (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Consumers interact with personas, such as celebrities, as if they were present and involved in a mutual relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Labrecque, 2014).

Sokolova & Kefi (2020), in their research on digital influencers, related PSI to the identification process, which according to Kelman (1958) arises when the individual accepts influence as he/she intends to build a satisfying relationship.

Although there is an actual interaction between the two parts through comments and messages about the influencer's content, influencers who have a large number of followers cannot reply to all the comments and messages, and this might not lead to a strong commitment. Consequently, digital influencers can be similar to celebrities in traditional media and a mutual relationship between an influencer and a follower might be more illusory than real (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Lee & Watkins (2016) also mentioned that celebrities' fans can feel that they know celebrities due to their exposure in the media, suggesting that YouTube influencers have

similarities to television personalities. Hence, past research used PSI to study the relationships between digital influencers and their followers. For instance, Lee & Watkins (2016) confirmed that para-social interaction between YouTube vloggers and their followers can have a positive influence on luxury fashion brand perceptions (brand value, brand-user-imagery fit, and brand luxury) as well as on purchase intentions, because PSI between vloggers and their followers can enhance their desire to have luxury products. Thus, this relationship is likely to lead to positive outcomes for luxury brands.

Chia Lin Hsu (2020) also studied PSI between YouTube vloggers and their viewers, and realised that PSI can have a positive impact on viewers' sense of belonging to a social group, on viewers flow experience, which refers to a feeling of absorption as well as on an urge to purchase. This conclusion emphasises the fundamental role of PSI in influencing consumers.

Furthermore, K. Hwang & Zhang's (2018) findings revealed that PSI relationships between digital influencers and their followers can have a strong impact on followers' purchasing and WOM intentions. As followers may consider digital influencers as if they were their friends, they are likely to believe that digital influencer's endorsements are trustworthy. These results corroborated Colliander & Dahlén's (2011) study, as these authors suggested that blog readers can be constantly exposed to bloggers' personal life details and to their interactions with users, which leads to a relationship development. Blog readers can consider the blogger a friend, generating a great PSI with bloggers. As a consequence, blog readers can expect bloggers to be authentic about their relationships with brands and that they will only write about brands they genuinely prefer, which may lead to the blog readers' high purchase intentions (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011).

Similarly, Sokolova & Kefi (2020) confirmed that purchase intention can also be determined by para-social interaction, adding that the impact of PSI is, to some extent, stronger than credibility for Generation Z. It seems that the more the followers become attached or addicted to the influencer, the more their intention to purchase becomes imperative.

### 2.4.3   Similarity

Considering PSI, Lee & Watkins (2016) suggested that when a person identifies similarities between their beliefs and the ones media personalities convey, it is more probable that this person will continue the interaction on a systematic basis. The concept of similarity is also referred to as homophily. Homophily corresponds to the way how individuals who interact are similar regarding several features, such as beliefs, values and social status (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Rogers & Bhowmik 1970). Homophily was found to be related to the identification and PSI

regarding television characters (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Based on this conclusion, Lee & Watkins (2016) investigated the role of homophily on PSI between followers and YouTube influencers, and it was demonstrated that homophily can have a strong influence on PSI. Consequently, a digital influencer who resembles his/her followers is more likely to establish a PSI relationship.

Magno's (2017) study also indicated that the bloggers' influence on their readers' engagement with the blog seems to be dependent on the similarity between the blogger and the reader, and this perceived similarity may result in a great purchase intention in relation to the products recommended by the blogger.

Additionally, Casaló *et al.* (2018) suggested that when the Instagram influencer's content is aligned with the consumer's personality, values and interests, the consumer's intention to follow the digital influencer's fashion advice tend to increase.


### 2.4.4 Sponsored Content

Influencer marketing is a growing trend in promotional strategies and digital influencers can take advantage to attain personal rewards by cooperating with brands. Nevertheless, digital influencers' followers seem to appreciate their intrinsic motivations to create content about a specific topic and noncommercial approach. Consequently, collaborations between brands and digital influencers may generate risks regarding digital influencers' authenticity (Audrezet *et al.*, 2018).

Brands can simply send free products expecting digital influencers to publish some information about these products or they can monetarily compensate digital influencers in return for a post promoting a product. In this case, as it is a sponsored post, brand's influence is high (Audrezet *et al.*, 2018). In contrast, a non-sponsored digital influencer's product post has low brand influence, as it is considered genuine advice. Hence, this type of post is similar to traditional online consumer reviews (Stubb & Colliander, 2019).

Consumers' attitudes towards sponsored recommendation posts are fundamental to assess the effectiveness of advertising (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014). These authors realised that when consumers have high brand awareness regarding the recommended product, they are expected to develop positive attitudes towards the sponsored recommendation. This implies that they will be more likely to believe the content of the post. Therefore, the intention to purchase the recommended product may increase.

Sponsored blogging is a relevant category of influencer marketing, as bloggers can help create WOM about a brand through their sponsored posts (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019). These authors suggested that influencer marketing has two purposes: to increase brand

awareness and to enhance trial/purchase. On the second situation, the persuasion intent is clearer. Hughes *et al.* (2019) highlighted that the hedonic value of a sponsored post's content, which refers to the pleasure, emotions, and entertainment a consumer acknowledges from reading the post, may lead to more blog post comments. This effect seems to be stronger for trial campaigns. In the case of awareness campaigns, bloggers' high expertise can have an important impact on fostering engagement in blogs.

As required by regulations, influencers have to disclose that a post is sponsored. This fact helps followers realise they are being persuaded, which may decrease their purchasing and WOM intentions (K. Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Nevertheless, these authors' findings demonstrated that PSI might ease the negative impact of the persuasion awareness.

Stubb & Colliander (2019) emphasised that when consumers are exposed to an impartiality disclosure referring that the product review is not sponsored, they are less likely to perceive it as advertising, when compared to sponsored posts or posts without sponsorship information. Moreover, the study accomplished by Y. Hwang & Jeong (2016) showed that source credibility perceptions and message reactions may be adverse when digital influencers disclose that their post is sponsored. Nevertheless, there are digital influencers who add a note saying that the opinions expressed are their own. These authors' research also demonstrated that this practice can reduce the negative effect of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility perceptions and on message attitudes, especially for consumers who have a great disbelief in relation to product review posts.

According to Audrezet *et al.* (2018) digital influencers can manage their authenticity by expressing passion in creating and sharing posts and by being intrinsically motivated to choose a certain product. They should accept collaborations with brands that ensure mutual respect and creative freedom and with brands that fit their personal interests, image and content. Digital influencers should also provide fact-based and reliable information about products as well as unbiased opinions. This transparent authenticity might be an opportunity to build reliable relationships.

As stated by D. Y. Kim & Kim (2020), disclosing that a message is sponsored may lead consumers to perceive the post as advertising and to process it as persuasion awareness. Nevertheless, these authors' results indicated that when an influencer posts a product which is congruent with him/her, it can positively impact product attitude, by leading consumers to deduce affective motive of the influencer for the product. In other words, the congruence between the influencer and the product can be fundamental for consumers to perceive the marketing message as personal recommendations.

### 2.4.5 Congruence with the Product

Kamins & Gupta (1994) studied the match-up hypothesis. In their study, a great congruence between the celebrity and the endorsed product led to higher perceptions of the celebrity's credibility and to positive attitudes towards the product.

McCormick (2016) also validated that hypothesis, mentioning that when there was a great congruency between unfamiliar celebrities and the product's image, attitudes regarding the advertisement and the brand tended to be positive. Choi & Rifon (2012) also confirmed that the congruency between the product and the celebrity can have a positive impact on attitude towards the ad. Furthermore, when a consumer realises that a celebrity endorser's image is congruent with his or her self-image, the consumer is likely to have a positive attitude towards the ad and to have a favourable purchase intention.

As compared to celebrities, influencers may be more easily considered to be credible information sources when the endorsed product fits their interests (Schouten *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the fit between the product and the endorser can also be of high relevance for influencers. Schouten *et al.* (2020) confirmed that, in one of their studies, a great fit between the endorser and the product positively affected trust and expertise, however, it was not observed evidence that the fit is more important for digital influencers than for celebrities.

In addition to this, De Veirman *et al.* (2017) realised that the perceptions of a products' uniqueness appear to be lower when the product is promoted by an influencer with a high number of followers, rather than when it is promoted by an influencer with a modest number of followers. Thus, marketers should bear in mind the type of product they intend to promote, when selecting an influencer.

## 2.5 Fashion Industry

The area of fashion has been very relevant in consumer research (O'Cass, 2004). Fashion products are caracterised by a high involvement, which relates to expensive, seldom purchased or high risk carried products, and that are related to personal identity (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). O'Cass (2004) also mentioned that fashion products have a constant and cyclic feature, thus consumers are frequently involved in the fashion style of the moment and there are consumers who care very much about their clothing. Involvement is described as the extent to which a consumer is attached to fashion and associated activities (O'Cass, 2004). The more fashion seems to be an important part of consumers' life, the greater the involvement in fashion products. This author realised that female and younger people were more engaged in fashion

products. Furthermore, O'Cass (2004) also confirmed that materialism, (which includes the usefulness of products and their propensity to assure status, and success) can have a significant impact on consumers' involvement in fashion products. Fashion involvement may lead to a deeper knowledge about fashion products and to a higher expertise, which is likely to result in a consumers' greater confidence in making the right choices about fashion.

In the fashion industry, the companies that generated the greatest economic profit in 2018 were Nike (2980 million dollars), Inditex (2910 million dollars), LVMH (2316 million dollars), TJX Companies (1669 million dollars), Kering (1513 million dollars), and Hermès (1311 million dollars), showing the strength of sportswear brands as well as luxury brands (Amed *et al.*, 2019). More recently, in 2020 with the pandemic situation fashion industry-leaders revealed pessimism and concern due to the uncertainty and shops closure during a period of time. The average market capitalization of fashion and luxury companies decreased almost 40 percent between January and March (Amed *et al.*, 2020). In that McKinsey & Company study, it is highlighted that fashion industry is specifically vulnerable due to its discretionary nature; thus, companies have to start developing recovering strategies.

In 2020, Inditex Group sales declined 44% in the first quarter, and 31% in the second quarter, considering that 87% of Inditex Group's stores were still closed in May. In the first half of the year online sales grew abruptly: 74% year on year. For the first time, one million orders were registered in 24 hours (Inditex, 2020).

The Fashion & Leather Goods business group of LVMH revenue also decreased 24% in the first half of 2020 while many stores were closed (LVMH, 2020).

### 2.5.1 Fashion and Social Media

Social media has provided new ways to enlarge individuals' fashion preferences, as it enables consumers to share their fashion styles and engage with other consumers and brands. Fashion involvement and brand involvement seem to be fundamental drivers for eWOM engagement in this area (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

Kulmala, Mesiranta, & Tuominen (2013) investigated two types of eWOM in fashion blogs. Amplified eWOM requires a marketer's direct influence. In contrast, organic eWOM does not involve a marketer's direct influence. Organic topics include, for instance, the bloggers' personal style as it shows readers hints about the global style of the blog. Bloggers frequently show an outfit worn on a specific day (outfit of the day) in order to demonstrate their personal style, mentioning products' details, such as the name of the brand, where products were purchased, and the price, as readers may want to imitate the style or choose an appealing

product to wear (Kulmala *et al.*, 2013). Another organic topic is bloggers' advice and their experiences: bloggers' experiences can influence readers' product choices. For instance, if a blogger does not recommend and does not buy a particular product, several readers may also decide not to purchase the product, acting in accordance with that fashion digital influencer. In contrast, fashion bloggers can regurlarly cooperate with brands, thus, amplified topics include, for example, products offered by brands, which can be combined with the outfit of the day, information about brands, such as their new products, discounts and events, that bloggers share with their audience (Kulmala *et al.*, 2013).

Since companies are interacting with consumers through social media, investigating the outcomes of several communication strategies in social media is of high relevance for companies. Furthermore, photos are becoming a very popular trend in social media usage (Colliander & Marder, 2018). Consequently, Instagram can be particularly important for fashion brands. Fashion brands can post photos of their products on Instagram using two types of image style, namely snapshot aesthetics, which refer to photos that convey typical situations and are very similar to the ones that can be taken by an usual consumer, or the traditional studio aesthetics (Colliander & Marder, 2018). These authors studied the impact of the two types of photography style on consumer behaviour and it was demonstrated that the use of pictures with a snapshot aesthetic by a fashion brand may lead to greater levels of source credibility as well as to higher intentions to suggest the Instagram account to other consumers, rather than when photos with a traditional studio aesthetic are used.

Luxury fashion brands can also take advantage of social media, by communicating effectively and creating long term relationships with consumers (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012). In light of this two-way communication provided by social media, brands and consumers can collaborate in order to develop new products and business models. Luxury brands, for instance, Gucci and Burberry started using social media in 2009. A. J. Kim & Ko (2012) identified five dimensions of fashion luxury brands' social media marketing activities, namely: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and WOM. All five dimensions appear to have a positive impact on all customer equity drivers, specifically, value equity, relationship equity, and brand equity. Social media marketing activities of fashion luxury brands can improve value equity, as they offer consumers new value, that traditional marketing activities seldom do. Social media allows a genuine and a friendly communication between consumers and brands, and this fact can positively impact relationship equity and brand equity. Furthermore, value equity and brand equity positively influence purchase intention (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012). Godey *et al.* (2016) also confirmed that social media marketing activities of luxury fashion brands can have a positive

impact on brand equity, namely on its two core dimensions: brand awareness and brand image. In addition to this, social media marketing activities can positively influence brand loyalty, brand preferences, and the willingness to pay a premium price (Godey *et al.*, 2016).

Online fashion communities can also play a very important role regarding eWOM, as consumers share their values and feelings and interact with other consumers and these communications are independent of brand communications (Parrott, Danbury, & Kanthavanich, 2015). These authors examined brand advocacy behaviour within luxury fashion brands online communities. The selected communities were not enabled by any commercial organisation. Participants in that study showed high levels of engagement and involvement as well as brand love. In their opinion, luxury fashion accessories could improve their image, associating these products with their self-concept. They also revealed that they preferred to buy more than only one brand, because they intended to express several styles. Parrott *et al.*, (2015) observed several brand advocacy behaviours, such as brand recommendations. Brand advocates seem to be often loyal to a group of brands in order to have more enjoyable brand experiences and share them with others. Active brand advocates can also establish an effective long-term relationship with the brands.

### 2.5.2 Fashion and Influencer Marketing

Regarding fashion opinion leadership, Bertrandias & Goldsmith (2006) stated that women tend to assume the role of fashion opinion leaders more frequently than men. Consumer need for uniqueness appears to be positively related to fashion opinion leadership (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Opinion leaders can choose original and new products, which are more likely to be appealing for consumers. As a consequence, fashion opinion leaders' influence on consumers might be explained by their original product choices (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006) as well as the possibility of consumers considering opinion leaders as sources of information and advice about fashion products (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Opinion seekers can avoid expressing their uniqueness because their objective is to reduce purchases' risk, therefore, they tend to align with others' behaviours (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). Goldsmith & Clark (2008) also suggested that opinion leadership and seeking behaviours may be positively related to the desire for status.

In this context, there are several influencer marketing studies focused on the fashion industry (e.g. Casaló *et al.*, 2018) and on luxury fashion (e.g. Jin, *et al.* 2019; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Some studies regarding the fashion industry have higher female participation than male,

because most frequently women have more interest in fashion (Esteban-Santos, García Medina, Carey, & Bellido-Pérez, 2018).

It is important to understand consumers' motivations to follow fashion influencers. The main purpose of the research accomplished by Esteban-Santos *et al.*, (2018) was to study fashion digital influencers impact on Spanish Millennials' buying behaviour. The main referred motivations to follow fashion influencers were entertainment, and information and efficiency seeking.

According to the mentioned study, fashion digital influencers' recommendations can be considered credible and authentic and credibility may depend on digital influencers' trustworthiness and expertise, on the level of PSI developed with the digital influencer as well as on the message credibility. These authors' findings demonstrated that digital influencers' impact on consumer behaviour can depend on consumers' assessment of digital influencers' credibility. As a consequence, it might be imperative that influencers share credible information in order to increase their purchase intention regarding fashion products. Esteban-Santos *et al.* (2018) confirmed that sponsored posts may have a negative impact on credibility and on purchase intention.

Considering influencer marketing and the fashion industry, it is important to mention that female participants in a global survey about influencer marketing showed preference for following digital influencers in the areas of beauty, entertainment and fashion (Rakuten Marketing, 2019). They also indicated Instagram as their favourite social media platform to follow influencers. In contrast, male participants showed preference for following digital influencers in the areas of gaming, technology, and entertainment. It was also emphasised that consumers discover new influencers through recommendations from social media platforms, friends and family as well as through contests and giveaways. The majority of participants have learnt about new products through digital influencers as well as purchased a recommended product.

Bearing in mind the recent trend of influencers in fashion industry, it is important to refer that in Portugal, the fashion and beauty digital influencer Alice Trewinnard was considered one of the most relevant influencers regarding empathy (Marktest, 2019). Recently, the study of the top 1000 Portuguese influencers with more engagement on Instagram showed that several digital influencers in the area of fashion generated relevant engagement (Brinfer, 2020). In the mentioned study, engagement corresponds to the sum of likes and comments on an influencers' Instagram account between fourteenth January and twelfth February.

Table 2.1: Fashion Digital Influencers with more Engagement. Adapted from Brinfer (2020).

| Digital influencer | Position | Engagement | Number of followers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mafalda Sampaio | 10th | 1 264 016 | 454 334 |
| Helena Coelho | 20th | 857 713 | 342 422 |
| Bárbara Corby | 50th | 423 262 | 237 417 |
| Adri da Silva | 55th | 389 020 | 220 103 |

CHAPTER 3

# Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

This chapter aims at showing the conceptual model created in order to facilitate the understanding of the selected variables and the relationships between them. Based on the literature review, six hypotheses were proposed and are included in this chapter.

## 3.1   Conceptual Model

After developing the literature review described above, and bearing in mind the aim of this research, which is to assess the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion, key variables, which can sustain this study, were identified.

Purchase intention, the selected dependent variable, is very popular and crucial both for marketing literature and for management (Spears & Singh, 2004). According to these authors, purchase intention comprises a person's conscious plan to attempt to purchase a brand. Hence, this variable is very important for consumer behaviour research.

Past studies described several characteristics associated with digital influencers, for instance, their credibility (e.g. Schouten *et al.*, 2020), the PSI the audience develops with digital influencers (e.g. Chia Lin Hsu, 2020), and the similarity to digital influencers felt by the audience (e.g. Magno, 2017), which may have a positive impact on purchase intention. Some of these characteristics have also been mentioned in celebrities' studies (e.g. Choi & Rifon, 2012). Since both celebrities and digital influencers endorse brands and products, these characteristics can also be applied to digital influencers.

Moreover, sponsorship is very relevant for marketing communication effectiveness (Lu *et al.*, 2014). Digital influencers regularly share their recommendations about products and brands through social media posts and many of them are sponsored by brands (Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Consequently, consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts may have a great role on purchase intention.

Therefore, the independent variables that may be more relevant for this study, and according to the research carried out, are the following ones: trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, and attitude towards sponsored posts.

Considering the aim of this dissertation and the literature review, the following conceptual model was created, in order to portray all the variables and the relationships between them.
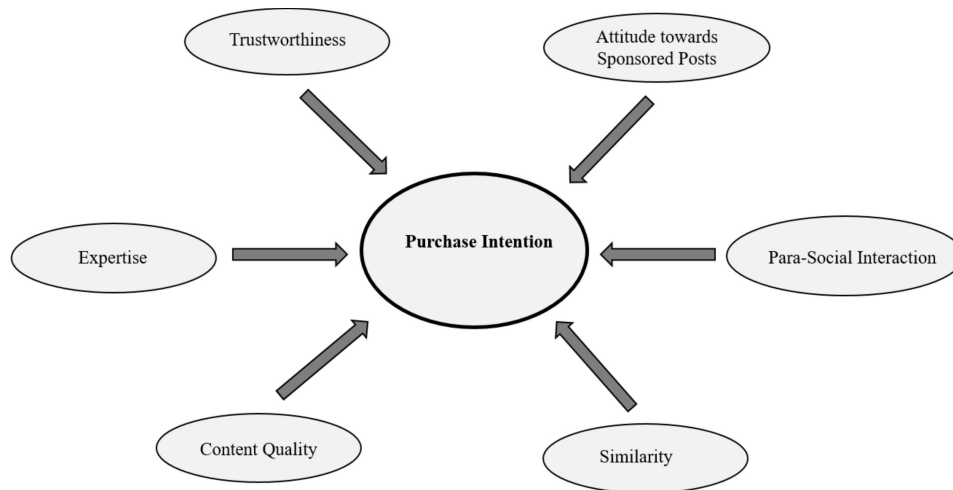
Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model.

Author's own creation.

## 3.2 Hypotheses

Based on the developed literature review and on the conceptual model, the hypotheses presented below were formulated.

Past research indicated that credibility can positively impact individuals' acceptance of the messages. For instance, Bickart & Schindler (2001) demonstrated that product information created by consumers on online forums is likely to arouse more interest than the information generated by companies. Consumers can be more interested in the information they collect from other consumers because they may be perceived as being more credible, as they seem to have no commercial intention. Additionally, Erkan & Evans (2016) studied the influence of eWOM on social media and confirmed that credibility and the quality of information appear to be key determinants for consumers to adopt eWOM information.

Considering celebrities, Ohanian (1990) had already identified positive perceptions of the source credibility as resulting in receivers' acceptance of the message. More recently and regarding digital influencers, Sokolova & Kefi (2020) confirmed that purchase intention may be determined by digital influencers' credibility. Esteban-Santos *et al.* (2018) also emphasised that the assesment led by consumers about fashion digital infuencers' credibility can be positively related to consumers' attitudes and purchase intention. In these studies both trustworthiness and expertise were considered to be important characteristics in order to assess influencers' credibility.

Trustworthiness, which is related to the reliability of the communicator, is very relevant for persuation and attitude change research (Ohanian 1990). Moreover, consumers seem to

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perceive digital influencers as trustworthy (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jin *et al.*, 2019). Brands appear to consider that digital influencers' capability of persuading consumers is mostly explained by the trust influencers arouse (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Chin Lung Hsu *et al.* (2013) stated that trust is developed because digital influencers' recommendations are considered an informal communication channel. Therefore, if consumers consider digital influencers as trustworthy, their purchase intention may increase.

Bearing in mind these studies, hyphothesis 1 aims at testing if digital influencers' trustworthiness is positively related to consumers' purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

H1: Trustworthiness is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

Expertise, which corresponds to the communicator's professional knowledge and experience (Ohanian 1990), is a very relevant variable, since it has been considered in several celebrities and digital influencers studies (e.g. Esteban-Santos *et al.*, 2018; Schouten *et al.*, 2020). In addition to this, Ki & Kim (2019) confirmed that expertise can have a positive impact on consumers' attitudes, which may result in a great purchase intention, through their desire to imitate digital influencers. Therefore, hypothesis 2 has the purpose of testing if digital influencers' expertise is positively related to consumers' purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

H2: Expertise is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

A message is considered to be credible when its content is accurate, authentic, and believable (Appelman & Sundar, 2016). Erkan & Evans (2016) realised that eWOM information quality can be positively related to the information usefulness, which in turn can lead to the adoption of the eWOM information as well as to purchase intention. Esteban-Santos *et al.* (2018) considered that credibility also depends on the message credibility dimension. In this context, Magno (2017) emphasised the importance of the content quality, in this case, the content quality of blogs. This author's findings indicated that when the perception that digital influencers' content about products has high quality, it is likely to lead to a strong engagement with blogs as well as to a great purchase intention of the recommended products. Considering these studies, hypothesis 3 will measure if the quality of the content provided by digital influencers is positively related to consumers' purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

H3: Content quality is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

As it was mentioned before, similarity, or homophily, refers to the similarities between individuals, concerning beliefs, values, and other aspects (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Considering the perception of similarities between digital influencers and followers, Lee & Watkins (2016) and Chia Lin Hsu (2020) confirmed that similarity can have a great influence on PSI. These authors mentioned that PSI between followers and digital influencers can be developed though shared characteristics.

Magno's (2017) study also showed that the similarity between a blogger and the reader can positively influence blog readers' engagement, and the purchase intention of the recommended products. Moreover, the study accomplished by Casaló *et al*. (2018) indicated that the greater the congruence between digital influencers' content and the consumers' values, the greater the possibility to follow digital influencers' suggestions. Hence, hypothesis 4 will test if the similarity between digital influencers and consumers is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

H4: Similarity is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

The concept of PSI appeared in mass communication literature and it is described as an illusory, one-sided relationship between consumers and media personalities, such as celebrities (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Labrecque, 2014). Consumers can follow digital influencers' channels. Consequently, they can be exposed to digital influencers' personal life details, resulting in an apparent intimacy, which may lead consumers to consider digital influencers as their friends, creating a PSI (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). Past research has shown that PSI may generate positive outcomes for brands. For instance, Labrecque (2014) confirmed that PSI can lead to great loyalty intentions and willingness to share information with the brand. Furthermore, PSI can positively influence brand perceptions (Lee & Watkins, 2016), WOM intention (K. Hwang & Zhang, 2018), and purchase intention (K. Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Considering these studies, hypothesis 5 aims at testing if PSI is positively related to consumers' purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

H5: Para-social interaction is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

Many digital influencers' posts about products and brands are sponsored (Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Digital influencers have to disclose that a post is sponsored, which may lead to negative perceptions of source credibility and to negative message reactions (Y. Hwang &

Jeong, 2016). However, according to these authors, when digital influencers add a note referring that the opinions expressed are their own, the negative impact of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility perceptions and on message attitudes may diminish. Furthermore, K. Hwang & Zhang (2018) realised that PSI can lessen the negative impact of followers' persuasion awareness. Consequently, it is very important to study consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts in order to understand its impact on purchase intention. Consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts is described as a psychological approach in relation to the credibility of a sponsored post (Lu *et al.*, 2014). According to these authors, if individuals trust a sponsored post content, this means that the attitude towards it is positive, which can positively influence their purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 6 intends to test if attitude towards sponsored posts is positively related to consumers' purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

H6: Attitude towards sponsored posts is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

CHAPTER 4

# Methodology

This chapter aims at describing the employed methodology in order to accomplish the objectives of this research. Firstly, the qualitative methodology will be explained. After that, the quantitative methodology will be characterised: the method used to collect the data and the sampling process will be described.

## 4.1    Research Design

In this context, it is relevant to mention this research design. Research design can be generally classified as exploratory or conclusive (Malhotra, Nunan & Birks, 2017). The exploratory research helps to understand a marketing phenomenon, which is difficult to measure. In contrast, a conclusive research has the purpose of measuring a defined marketing phenomenon. This type of research can be a descriptive or a causal one. A descriptive research intends to describe market and consumer characteristics. It is structured, as the hypotheses were previously defined (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). This study is based on a descriptive and explorative research design, since it intends to describe and measure the impact of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion as well as to provide insights in regard to influencer marketing, since it is a recent phenomenon. Considering the methodology, a combination of methods was selected, thus this research involves a quantitative method, namely an online questionnaire and a qualitative method, more specifically, individual interviews. Quantitative methods are fundamental for descriptive research designs and qualitative methods are relevant for exploratory research designs and they can also complement the quantitative methods (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017).

## 4.2    Qualitative Research

Regarding the qualitative research, individual interviews were selected to collect the data in order to obtain useful information about the interviewees' opinions and experiences, in this case, Portuguese digital influencers in the area of fashion and related areas were addressed. The individual interviews were composed by previously defined essential questions; however, the interviewees were free to talk about their opinions on the topic. These interviews can be very helpful to clarify several aspects of the research and to deeply understand the perceptions of digital influencers about their influence on consumers, in a direct and open way. More

specifically, the interviews can help to understand the digital influencers' points of view in relation to these contents: how they started; their motives to develop partnerships with brands and how this process works; the important characteristics to be a good digital influencer; how their interaction with their followers is as well as if they motivate their followers to look for more information about a product/ brand and to buy it. Hence, this method was selected in order to accomplish the following objectives: understand how digital influencers develop a partnership with brands; clarify which characteristics make a digital influencer effective; understand how digital influencers interact with their followers; and to realise if digital influencers motivate followers to buy.

The interviewees were intentionally selected bearing in mind the study developed by Brinfer (2020) in order to identify the Portuguese digital influencers in the area of fashion and related areas, such as beauty and lifestyle, who generated more engagement on Instagram. The favourite fashion digital influencers referred by this research questionnaire's respondents were also considered. The Instagram platform was very useful to select the digital influencers. A total of 37 female and one male digital influencers were initially contacted by email and Instagram direct inviting them to participate in this study. In this first contact the theme of this research and the number of questions were mentioned as well as the fact that they could choose the most suitable way to give the interview. A total of five interviews were accomplished between sixteenth July and twenty-second September, 2020. In this process, e-mail was the means chosen by all the interviewees. The interviews were held in Portuguese, subsequently, they were translated into English. The digital influencers who participated in this study were Ana Gomes, Anita da Costa, Catarina Cabrera, Margarida Marques de Almeida, and Maria Guedes.

## 4.3    Quantitative Research

Considering the quantitative research, the online questionnaire method was chosen to collect data, as this technique allows to obtain a great number and diversity of responses, however, it is dependent on the respondents' availability and motivation (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). The data provided by the questionnaire is essential to assess the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion. Hence, it is intended to investigate the validity of the mentioned hypotheses of this study, through the questionnaire. The obtained data can also contribute to answer the following research question: Are there any differences regarding the variables trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, attitude towards sponsored posts and purchase intention between Generation Z and Millennials? This research question is exploratory in

nature, as the researcher does not have predetermined notions of possible answers nor the possibility to define statements of relationships. However, since it is a recent theme, it is very relevant to explore if there are any differences between the referred generations in order to contribute to shed light on this theme.

The online questionnaire was created on Google Forms platform, since it is a free and user friendly tool. The link of the questionnaire was shared through social media platforms, namely WhatsApp, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram Direct. When people were invited to answer the questionnaire, they were informed about its aim and that it was anonymous. Since the target population is Portuguese, the questionnaire was created in this language. Answers were received between eighteenth May and nineteenth July, 2020.

### 4.3.1 Population and Sample

A population is the combination of all the elements that share the same features and that include the universe which addresses the marketing research problem (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). According to these authors, the information about the population characteristics can be reached by using a sample, which corresponds to a subgroup of the population chosen for the participation in a study.

The sampling process requires a definition of the target population. Since the main theme of this dissertation is the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in the fashion industry, the target population refers to Portuguese consumers who follow/search for one or more digital influencers and more precisely fashion digital influencers. Thus, it is also vital for the investigation that consumers actively use social media. As the total of the population is not possible to analyse, a non-probability sampling method was used, namely the convenience sampling, as the sample was primarily selected by the researcher based on the researcher's accessibility (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). The snowball sampling was also used, because some participants were asked to share the questionnaire with their friends and acquaintances who could also belong to the target population.

### 4.3.2 Questionnaire Structure

The first section of the questionnaire included an introduction, explaining that the answers were anonymous and that the objective of the survey was to understand which factors associated to digital influencers may influence consumer behaviour in the area of fashion. This section also had a multiple-choice question regarding the social media use frequency in order to understand if respondents actively use social media. Section two also comprised multiple choice questions

in order to characterise respondents regarding their social media use. Section three encompassed a definition of the concept of digital influencers and a multiple-choice question aimed at knowing if respondents follow/search for digital influencers. In the affirmative case, they would be directed to section four, which included questions about the number of digital influencers they follow/search for and in which areas. Section five comprised a multiple-choice question with the purpose of knowing if respondents follow/search for fashion digital influencers. In the affirmative case, they would be directed to section six. This section included a short answer question asking participants to mention the name of their favourite fashion digital influencer. They also answered several multiple-choice questions in relation to fashion digital influencers. Section seven encompassed questions related to the research' variables, namely trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, attitude towards sponsored posts, and purchase intention. A five-point Likert scale was used in all these questions (1- Strongly disagree; 2- Somewhat disagree; 3- Neither agree or disagree; 4- Somewhat agree; 5- Strongly agree) in order to measure respondents' opinions about their favourite fashion digital influencer. The Likert scale has been commonly used and it is easy for participants to understand this scale (Malhotra *et al.*, 2017). Finally, section eight comprised demographic questions. The questionnaire can be analysed in Appendix A.

Considering the items used in the questionnaire, it is fundamental to refer that they were based on and adapted from previous studies. Some adjustments in the items were made so that they could be applied to this research context. More specifically, it was fundamental to adapt the items to other social media channels as well as to the fashion industry. Furthermore, they were translated into Portuguese since the questionnaire was in Portuguese language. The following table shows the constructs, the adapted items as well as their sources.

Table 4.1: Constructs, Items and Sources.

| Constructs: | Items: | Adapted from: |
|---|---|---|
| Trustworthiness | • I find this digital influencer trustworthy.<br>• I think this digital influencer cares about his/ her followers. | Sokolova & Kefi (2020) |
| Expertise | • I find this digital influencer expert in his/her domain.<br>• I find this digital influencer efficient in his/her job. | Sokolova & Kefi (2020) |
| Content Quality | • The information provided by this digital influencer in social media is accurate.<br>• The information and suggestions published by this digital influencer in social media are reliable. | Magno (2017) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated.<br>• This digital influencer provides high-quality information in social media. | |
| Similarity | • This digital influencer shares my values.<br>• This digital influencer has a lot in common with me.<br>• This digital influencer behaves like me.<br>• This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine.<br>• I think he/she could be a friend of mine.<br>• This digital influencer treats people like I do. | Lee & Watkins (2016) |
| PSI | • I look forward to watching this digital influencer on his/her social media channels.<br>• When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading his/her posts, I feel as if I am part of his/her group.<br>• I think this digital influencer is like an old friend<br>• I would like to meet this digital influencer in person<br>• This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.<br>• When this digital influencer shows me how she/he feels about the products/brands, it helps me make up my own mind about the products/brands. | Lee & Watkins (2016) |
| Attitude towards Sponsored Posts | • I think that sponsored posts made by this digital influencer tell the truth.<br>• I can learn the real product information from sponsored posts.<br>• After reading/seeing a sponsored post, I have been accurately informed about the product information. | Lu, Chang, & Chang (2014) |
| Purchase Intention | • I would purchase the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer in the future.<br>• I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer.<br>• I would follow brand recommendations from this digital influencer.<br>• I would encourage people close to me to buy the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer. | Sokolova & Kefi (2020); Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández (2019) |

Author's own creation.

CHAPTER 5

# Data Analysis and Results

This chapter aims at analysing the obtained data in both quantitative and qualitative methods and discussing the results. Firstly, the data provided by the accomplished interviews will be studied. Subsequently, the data collected from the questionnaire will be examined, for example the sample characterisation and descriptive statistics will be included as well as an analysis of the results of this research hypotheses. Finally, the results will be discussed.

## 5.1 Qualitative Study

Some interviews were accomplished in order to understand the digital influencers' points of view in relation to their impact on consumers.

A total of five interviews were carried out between sixteenth July and twenty-second September, 2020. The individual interviews were composed by previously defined open questions. The interviewed digital influencers in the areas of fashion, beauty and lifestyle were Ana Gomes, Anita da Costa, Catarina Cabrera, Margarida Marques de Almeida, and Maria Guedes. The interviews can be analysed in detail in Appendix B. Subsequently, the data obtained from the interviews will be examined.

1- You are a very known Digital Influencer. How did it all begin?

The majority of the interviewees started when they created a blog. For instance, the blog "Stylista" founded by Maria Guedes as a complement of the book "Tanta Roupa e Nada para Vestir" as well as the blog "Style It Up" founded by Margarida Marques de Almeida and Cátia, as a means to give tips about fashion, were launched in 2009. People got interested in the blog "Style It Up" and thus, at the present time, the founders share contents not only about fashion, but also about beauty and lifestyle. Additionally, Margarida Marques de Almeida has recently created her own fashion brand.

Anita da Costa highlighted that when she reached ten thousand followers on Instagram she realised that people were interested in her contents and hence she also created a blog. Catarina Cabrera referred that when she reached 3500 followers on Instagram, a scrunchies brand (hair bands) contacted her through an Instagram direct message asking her if in return for 2 or 3 hair bands she would make a post showing the products and identifying the brand. Other brands, related to necklaces and hair bands, also started to contact her. Therefore, this influencer wrote

her email and informed that she was collaborating with brands on her Instagram account, subsequently, she has grown both regarding followers and partnerships.

Nowadays, Anita da Costa and Maria Guedes are focused on Instagram, as Anita da Costa mentioned, there is a great difference in numbers between the blog and Instagram. As Ana Gomes stated, "at the right time things started to grow and I started to be considered an influential person in the digital world."

2- Which reasons lead you to accept a paid partnership with a brand? And how does the product promotion process function?

All the interviewed digital influencers referred that they need to identify themselves with the brand, in order to accept a paid partnership with a brand. Moreover, Anita da Costa and Margarida Marques de Almeida emphasised that the product/service must be or start to become part of their lives, in order to make sense to promote it. Catarina Cabrera added that she only considers accepting a partnership if it is a product that she really uses and if it is based on her principles and after that, it depends on the budget. Margarida Marques de Almeida also mentioned that if she had to promote a product which she does not identify herself with, it would distort her job and it would not be positive both for the influencer and for the brand. Furthermore, Ana Gomes has already rejected some proposals as they were not congruent with her lifestyle, otherwise she would be influencing consumers to purchase brands she does not entirely consider interesting. Anita Costa highlighted that she regularly knows the products before promoting them, however in the case of a trip, she only knows the hotel when she arrives. There was a situation when she realised that she did not like the hotel so much, but she had to promote it as there was a formal agreement. Consequently, she promoted the best about the place, nevertheless, she did not recommend it.

In relation to the promotion process, Maria Guedes referred that it occurs in a natural way and it involves posting contents about her relationship with the product. Margarida Marques de Almeida added that brands contact her, so that she can evaluate her interest in the product/service. In the positive case, a partnership is initiated.

3- In your opinion, what characteristics must a good Digital Influencer have? Does it go beyond having many followers?

According to all the participants in these interviews, the number of followers is not the most important. Additionally, Anita da Costa mentioned that the number of followers is frequently related to fame and not necessarily to a good or a bad job. Ana Gomes also referred that one can have thousands of followers but not convey any message and not interact with them, and

the interactivity is an advantage that digital influencers possess in relation to other forms of advertising.

Margarida Marques de Almeida supported this point of view, by mentioning that the most important is to connect with the audience as well as to be consistent with what is being communicated. This digital influencer also stated that transparency towards the audience is fundamental, so that followers believe in what is being communicated. Accordingly, Anita da Costa referred that a good influencer is an honest and a creative person, who tells good stories, with or without brands. According to Catarina Cabrera, the most important digital influencer's characteristic is to be genuine, and showing that he/she is different from others. For Maria Guedes, a good influencer is someone with a peculiar taste and lifestyle. In this influencer' opinion, digital influencers with less followers are more effective in their jobs due to their niche positioning and to their authenticity.

4- How do you describe your interaction with your followers?

All the interviewed digital influencers actively interact with their followers, for example in a public way, by answering the comments and in a private way, by exchanging messages, as stated by Margarida Marques de Almeida. This influencer also emphasised that it is fundamental that the communication becomes bilateral. Moreover, Maria Guedes mentioned that followers mostly interact with Instagram stories through direct messages and described this interaction as relaxing and kind, with several ideas being exchanged.

Anita da Costa highlighted that she does not have a type of interaction that makes followers feel as being part of her life, and this is a way to protect her, as her aim is only to inspire people and thus all that is part of her private life appears when she desires and mostly in images.

Catarina Cabrera receives daily messages asking for advice and even help with personal problems, as she usually posts about self-esteem, bullying, anxiety and depression, and self-love, and their followers consider those topics different from usual ones, which are addressed in social media. Thus, this influencer mentioned that her followers can find comfort in some of her posts.

5- Do you feel that you motivate your followers to look for more information about a product/ brand and that you encourage them to buy it?

The great majority of the interviewees feel that they motivate their followers to search for more information about a product/brand and that they encourage them to buy it. As referred by Ana Gomes, she usually receives photos from her followers showing that they bought the product. Furthermore, Maria Guedes regularly has this kind of feedback from the brands, adding that the disclosed products of the brands that will be in her markets and the products that she daily

uses/wears have a higher demand. This does not occur when the promotions are excessively commercialised. Margarida Marques de Almeida also shares this point of view, emphasising that when the communication is consistent and it is part of the influencer's lifestyle, it will create the audience's interest. Catarina Cabrera highlighted that she likes what she uses or does and if her followers identify themselves with the product/service, it is the way that they can also buy and enjoy it. Anita da Costa also added that, in regard to the brands, she gives the product a story, making it part of her life and in relation to her followers, she offers daily inspiration on several topics.

## 5.2    Quantitative Study

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed through IBM SPSS Statistics 26. A total of 345 responses was collected. Bearing in mind the filtered questions, 258 respondents follow/search for digital influencers, including 206 respondents who follow/search for fashion digital influencers. These 206 respondents were considered in the sample characterisation analysis. This analysis encompasses several topics such as sociodemographic characteristics, behaviours towards social media, behaviours towards digital influencers and the opinions about fashion digital influencers. The reliability and the Pearson correlation analyses as well as the hypotheses testing will also be further described in this chapter.

### 5.2.1    Sociodemographic Characterisation

Considering the sociodemographic characterisation of the filtered sample, the great majority of respondents are female (96.1%); out of 206 answers, 8 were submitted by male respondents (3.9%), as shown in figure 5.1. In regard to age group, most respondents belong to the 18-24 age group (51.5%); followed by the 25-31 group (27.2%); 9.7% of the respondents are under the age of 18; 3.4% of them belong to the 32-39 age group; 3.4% corresponds to the 40-45 and 3.4% to the 46-52 age groups. 1.5% of the respondents are more than 52 years old (figure 5.2).
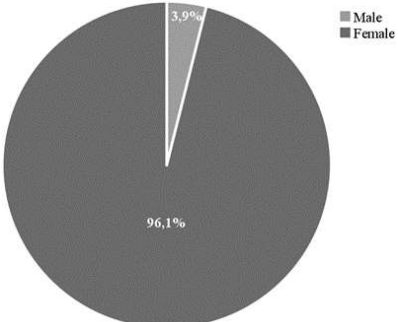


Figure 5.1: Sample distribution by gender. Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.
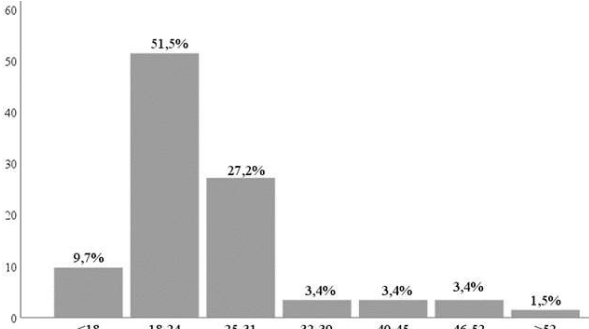
Figure 5.2: Sample distribution by age group. Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Regarding professional status, most respondents are students (48.5%) and 78 respondents are employed (37.9%), while 20 are both studying and working (9.7%); and 8 respondents are unemployed (3.9%), as demonstrated in figure 5.3.
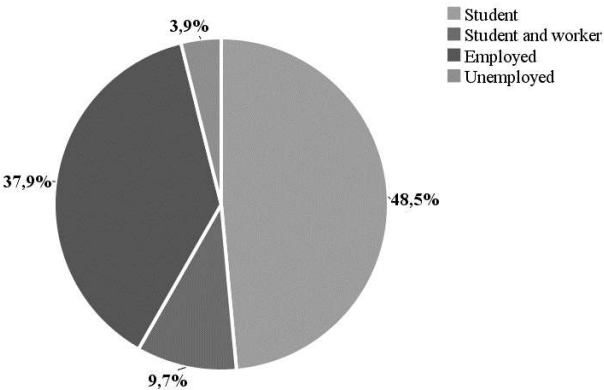


Figure 5.3: Sample distribution by professional status.
Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

### 5.2.2 Behaviours towards Social Media

The filtered sample (206 respondents) was also characterised regarding their behaviours towards social media. In relation to the frequency of social media use, the vast majority of the respondents (95.6%) selected "More than 2 times a day", while only 4 respondents use social media "once a day" (1.9%), 4 use it "more than 3 times a week" (1.9%) and only 1 referred "once a week" (0.5%), as indicated in figure 5.4.

Moreover, Instagram is the social media channel most referred as favourite (195 responses), followed by YouTube (131 responses) and Facebook (94 responses). In this question, more than one option could be selected, thus, a total amount of 625 responses was given (figure 5.5).
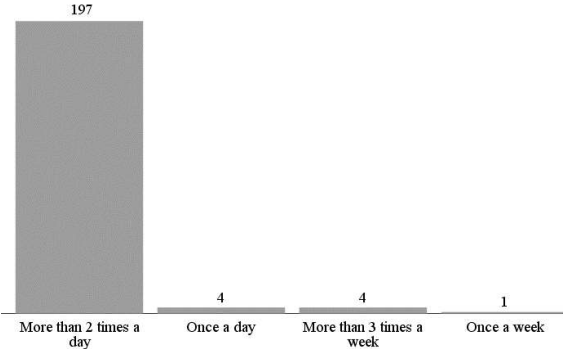


Figure 5.4: Frequency of social media use.
Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.
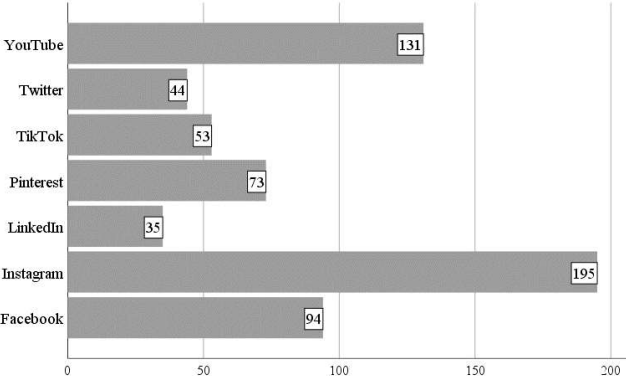
Figure 5.5: Favourite social media channels.
Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

The majority of respondents (96.1%) confirmed that they use social media to search for information about products and brands and only 8 respondents answered negatively (3.9%). Furthermore, 92.2% of the filtered sample mentioned that they use social media to search for information about fashion. In contrast, 7.8% answered negatively.

### 5.2.3   Behaviours towards Digital Influencers

When being asked about the number of digital influencers respondents follow/search for, the majority (34.5%) referred 6 to 10 digital influencers, followed by 62 respondents who mentioned they follow/search for more than 15 digital influencers (30.1%). 45 respondents follow/search for 2 to 5 (21.8%) and 11.7% of the filtered sample indicated they follow/search for 11 to 15 digital influencers. The less referred option was "Only 1" with 4 responses (1.9%).

Regarding the favourite areas which motivate respondents to follow a digital influencer, the primarily mentioned one is "fashion" (178 responses), followed by "beauty" (157 responses), "fitness" (111 responses), "cooking" (102 responses) and "tourism" (98 responses). The option "other preferences" was indicated in 21 responses. In this question, more than one option could be chosen, hence, a total amount of 667 responses was given.

In regard to the number of fashion digital influencers followed/searched for, most of the respondents (57.3%) mentioned they follow/search for 2 to 5; 33.5% of the sample indicated "more than 5", whereas 19 respondents (9.2%) referred "only one" (figure 5.6).
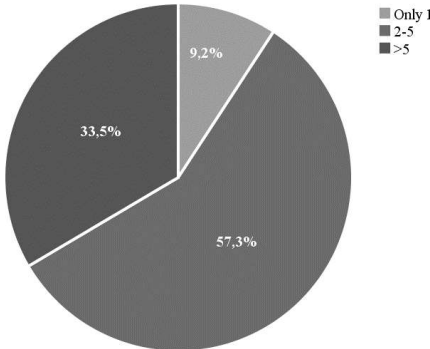


Figure 5.6: Number of fashion digital influencers followed/searched for.
Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

When being asked if they have ever known a fashion product/brand exclusively through a digital influencer, 87.9% of the sample answered positively (181 responses) and only 12.1 % answered negatively (25 responses), as shown in figure 5.7.
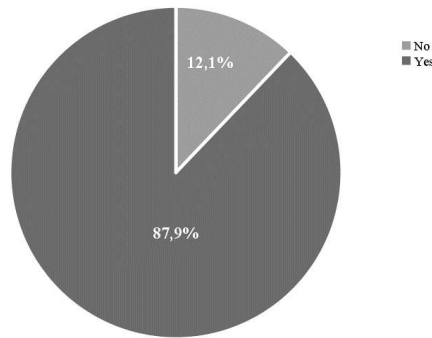
Figure 5.7: Fashion product/brand exclusively known through a digital influencer.

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Concerning the recommendation sources which help respondents to choose a fashion product, the majority of responses refer to digital influencers (184 responses), followed by friends (160 responses) and family (92 responses). Magazines were referred in 43 responses and other sources were mentioned in 11 responses (figure 5.8). In this question, more than one option could be selected, hence, a total amount of 490 responses was given.
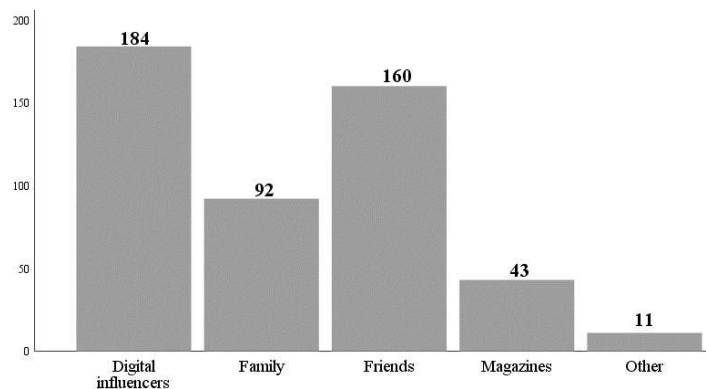


Figure 5.8: Recommendation sources in order to choose a fashion product.

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked if they had ever purchased fashion products recommended by digital influencers, 149 answered positively (72.3%) and 57 negatively (27.7%), as demonstrated in figure 5.9.
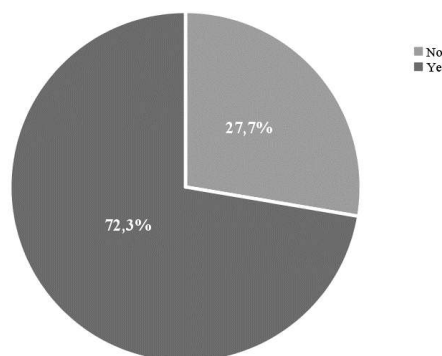


Figure 5.9: Purchased fashion products recommended by digital influencers.

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

In relation to the question if respondents would buy a fashion product even if it was not recommended by one of their favourite digital influencers, most of the respondents (68.4%) answered positively (141 responses) and 31.6 % answered negatively (65 responses), as indicated in figure 5.10.
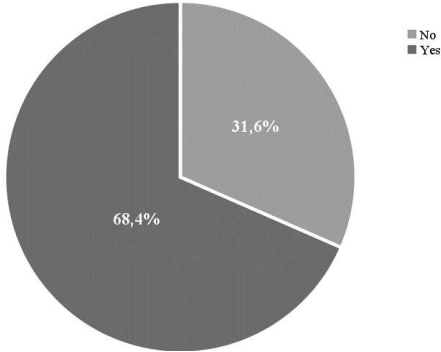


Figure 5.10: Buying a fashion product without digital influencers recommendation.
Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

### 5.2.4 Descriptive Analysis of the Variables

The respondents' opinions about their favourite fashion digital influencer regarding the variables trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, attitude towards sponsored posts and purchase intention were also analysed. In these questions, a five-point Likert scale was used.

Regarding trustworthiness, the majority of respondents strongly agree with these statements: "I find this digital influencer trustworthy."; "I think this digital influencer cares about his/ her followers." (respectively 46.6% and 45.6%); followed by 44.2% and 42.2% of the respondents, who somewhat agree with the mentioned statements, as indicated in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Descriptive Analysis of Trustworthiness

|  | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I find this digital influencer trustworthy. | 0.0% | 2.9% | 6.3% | 44.2% | 46.6% | 100% |
| I think this digital influencer cares about his/ her followers. | 0.5% | 1.5% | 10.2% | 42.2% | 45.6% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Considering expertise, most of the respondents (48.5%) somewhat agree with the statement "I find this digital influencer expert in his/her domain." and 57.3% of the respondents strongly

agree with the statement "I find this digital influencer efficient in his/her job.", as demonstrated in table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Descriptive Analysis of Expertise

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I find this digital influencer expert in his/her domain. | 1.9% | 3.9% | 18.4% | 48.5% | 27.2% | 100% |
| I find this digital influencer efficient in his/her job. | 0.5% | 1.0% | 7.8% | 33.5% | 57.3% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

In regard to content quality, most of the respondents somewhat agree with the statements "The information provided by this digital influencer in social media is accurate." (corresponding to 48.1%); "The information and suggestions published by this digital influencer in social media are reliable." (50.5%) and "This digital influencer provides high-quality information in social media." (45.1%). The majority of respondents (68.4%) strongly agree with the statement "The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated.", as shown in table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Descriptive Analysis of Content Quality

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The information provided by this digital influencer in social media is accurate. | 1.5% | 6.3% | 19.9% | 48.1% | 24.3% | 100% |
| The information and suggestions published by this digital influencer in social media are reliable. | 0.5% | 3.4% | 7.3% | 50.5% | 38.3% | 100% |
| The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated. | 1.0% | 1.0% | 1.9% | 27.7% | 68.4% | 100% |
| This digital influencer provides high-quality information in social media. | 0.5% | 2.4% | 10.2% | 45.1% | 41.7% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

In relation to similarity, most of the respondents neither agree or disagree with these statements: "This digital influencer behaves like me." (corresponding to 36.9%); "I think he/she could be a friend of mine." (35.4%) and "This digital influencer treats people like I do." (44.2%). The majority of respondents somewhat agree with the statements "This digital influencer shares my values." (41.7%); "This digital influencer has a lot in common with me." (39.3%) and "This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine." (42.7%), as indicated in table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Descriptive Analysis of Similarity

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This digital influencer shares my values. | 4.9% | 5.3% | 36.9% | 41.7% | 11.2% | 100% |
| This digital influencer has a lot in common with me. | 4.4% | 13.6% | 30.1% | 39.3% | 12.6% | 100% |
| This digital influencer behaves like me. | 7.8% | 23.3% | 36.9% | 26.7% | 5.3% | 100% |
| This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine. | 3.4% | 7.8% | 32% | 42.7% | 14.1% | 100% |
| I think he/she could be a friend of mine. | 3.4% | 8.3% | 35.4% | 32.5% | 20.4% | 100% |
| This digital influencer treats people like I do. | 3.4% | 5.3% | 44.2% | 35.0% | 12.1% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Considering PSI, most of the respondents neither agree or disagree with these statements: "When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading his/her posts, I feel as if I am part of his/her group." (28.6%); "I think this digital influencer is like an old friend." (27.7%); "This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends." (32%). The majority of the respondents somewhat agree with the statements "I look forward to watching this digital influencer on his/her social media channels." (31.1%) and "When this digital influencer shows me how she/he feels about the products/brands, it helps me make up my own mind about the products/brands." (46.1%). Furthermore, 34% of the respondents strongly agree with the sentence "I would like to meet this digital influencer in person.", as shown in table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Descriptive Analysis of PSI

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I look forward to watching this digital influencer on his/her social media channels. | 6.8% | 11.2% | 30.6% | 31.1% | 20.4% | 100% |
| When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading his/her posts, I feel as if I am part of his/her group. | 12.6% | 17.5% | 28.6% | 26.2% | 15% | 100% |
| I think this digital influencer is like an old friend. | 22.3% | 21.8% | 27.7% | 20.4% | 7.8% | 100% |
| I would like to meet this digital influencer in person. | 7.8% | 9.2% | 25.7% | 23.3% | 34% | 100% |
| This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends. | 9.7% | 10.7% | 32% | 26.2% | 21.4% | 100% |
| When this digital influencer shows me how she/he feels about the products/brands, it helps me make up my own mind about the products/brands. | 2.9% | 4.4% | 15.5% | 46.1% | 31.1% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Regarding the attitude towards sponsored posts, the majority of respondents somewhat agree with the statements "I think that sponsored posts made by this digital influencer tell the truth." (46.1%); "I can learn the real product information from sponsored posts." (43.2%); and "After reading/seeing a sponsored post, I have been accurately informed about the product information." (31.1%) as demonstrated in table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Descriptive Analysis of Attitude Towards Sponsored Posts

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I think that sponsored posts made by this digital influencer tell the truth. | 2.4% | 8.3% | 16% | 46.1% | 27.2% | 100% |
| I can learn the real product information from sponsored posts. | 2.9% | 14.1% | 17.5% | 43.2% | 22.3% | 100% |
| After reading/seeing a sponsored post, I have been accurately informed about the product information. | 9.7% | 14.1% | 25.7% | 31.1% | 19.4% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

In relation to purchase intention, the great majority of respondents somewhat agree with these statements: "I would encourage people close to me to buy the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer." (36.9%); "I would purchase the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer in the future." (51.5%); "I would follow brand recommendations from this digital influencer." (53.9%) and "I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer." (54.4%) as shown in table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Descriptive Analysis of Purchase Intention

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would purchase the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer in the future. | 1% | 2.9% | 22.3% | 51.5% | 22.3% | 100% |
| I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer. | 1% | 2.4% | 19.4% | 54.4% | 22.8% | 100% |
| I would follow brand recommendations from this digital influencer. | 0.5% | 3.9% | 19.9% | 53.9% | 21.8% | 100% |
| I would encourage people close to me to buy the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer. | 5.3% | 12.1% | 26.7% | 36.9% | 18.9% | 100% |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

To summarise, most of the respondents agreed with the majority of the statements regarding the mentioned variables. Moreover, as shown in table 5.8, the means of the variables trustworthiness, content quality, and expertise show values above four, which indicate that, on average, respondents agree with the sentences. The means of the variables purchase intention, attitude towards sponsored posts, similarity, and PSI show lower values, however they are above three.

Table 5.8: Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

| Variable | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Trustworthiness | 4.3277 | 0.64631 |
| Expertise | 4.2063 | 0.69487 |
| Content quality | 4.2427 | 0.62903 |
| Similarity | 3.4191 | 0.78790 |
| PSI | 3.3892 | 0.96735 |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | 3.6392 | 0.96148 |
| Purchase intention | 3.8289 | 0.75355 |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

### 5.2.5  Comparison between Generation Z and Millennials

In relation to the differences that might exist between Generation Z and Millennials, an independent t-test was conducted in order to answer the following research question: Are there any differences regarding the variables trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, attitude towards sponsored posts and purchase intention between Generation Z and Millennials? Generation Z includes this questionnaire respondents born after 1995 and Millennials encompass respondents born between 1981 until 1995.

Regarding the assumptions of this method, and according to the Central Limit Theorem, that states that when the sample is large (usually N>30), the distribution of the sample mean is normal (Marôco, 2018), the normal distribution assumption was verified since the sample dimension is sufficiently large in the Generation Z group (N=126) and in the Millennials group (N=63). The homogeneity of variances assumption was verified through Levene's Test (Appendix C), as *p-values* are above of the significance level (α) of 0.05.

The differences between means were considered statistically significant when the test *p-value* was less than or equal to 0.05. Hence, the means of the variables trustworthiness, expertise, similarity, PSI, and attitude towards sponsored posts of Generation Z are not

significantly different from those of Millennials, since the *p-values* are above 0.05, as shown in table 5.9.

There is only a significant difference between the mean of the variable content quality for Generation Z and the mean of the variable content quality for Millennials, as demonstrated in table 5.9. Subsequently, in this study, fashion digital influencers' content quality was higher for Generation Z (*M*=4.30; *SD*=0.56) than for Millennials (*M*=4.09; *SD*=0.71), as shown in table 5.10.

There is not a significant difference in purchase intention between Generation Z and Millennials, as indicated in table 5.9. In other words, in this study, the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product did not vary depending on the Generation.

Table 5.9: Independent T-test Results.

| Variables | Results: |
|---|---|
| Trustworthiness | $t(187)= 1.725; p=0.086.$ |
| Expertise | $t(187)= 0.955; p=0.341.$ |
| Content Quality | $t(187)= 2.205; p=0.029.$ |
| Similarity | $t(187)= 1.716; p=0.088.$ |
| PSI | $t(187)= 1.222; p=0.223.$ |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | $t(187)= 1.507; p=0.134.$ |
| Purchase intention | $t(187)= 1.650; p=0.101.$ |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Table 5.10: Descriptive Statistics- Generation Z and Millennials

| Variables | Generation | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trustworthiness | Generation Z | 126 | 4.3730 | 0.63855 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 4.2063 | 0.59997 |
| Expertise | Generation Z | 126 | 4.2063 | 0.73286 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 4.1032 | 0.62964 |
| Content quality | Generation Z | 126 | 4.3016 | 0.56153 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 4.0913 | 0.71884 |
| Similarity | Generation Z | 126 | 3.4788 | 0.76565 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 3.2725 | 0.80562 |
| PSI | Generation Z | 126 | 3.4537 | 0.92584 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 3.2751 | 0.98745 |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | Generation Z | 126 | 3.7090 | 0.99865 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 3.4815 | 0.93666 |
| Purchase intention | Generation Z | 126 | 3.8909 | 0.78454 |
| | Millennials | 63 | 3.6984 | 0.69439 |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

### 5.2.6 Reliability Analysis

A reliability analysis was carried out on the scales of trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, attitude towards sponsored posts, and purchase intention, using Cronbach's alpha, which is a generally used reliability coefficient in order to measure the internal consistency of scales comprising several items (Peterson, 1994).

Considering the results demonstrated in table 5.11, the Cronbach's alpha values of the scales of content quality, similarity, PSI, attitude towards sponsored posts, and purchase intention are higher than the recommended value of 0.7 (Peterson, 1994) and thus the scales are reliable.

Regarding the Cronbach's alpha values of the scales trustworthiness and expertise, they are lower than 0.7. Since this coefficient depends on the scales' number of items (Peterson, 1994), these results can be explained by the fact that the mentioned scales have only two items. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.6. Hence, these scales are considered to be acceptable.

Table 5.11: Cronbach's Alpha.

| Scales | Number of items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Trustworthiness | 2 | 0.688 |
| Expertise | 2 | 0.643 |
| Content Quality | 4 | 0.817 |
| Similarity | 6 | 0.896 |
| PSI | 6 | 0.904 |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | 3 | 0.853 |
| Purchase intention | 4 | 0.883 |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

### 5.2.7 Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation (Appendix D) was accomplished in order to measure the strength of the association between the quantitative variables trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, and attitude towards sponsored posts and purchase intention.

The results with *p-values* equal to or less than 0.05 were considered to be statistically significant. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there are significant moderated positive associations between trustworthiness and purchase intention with $r(204)=0.32, p<0.01$; between expertise and purchase intention with $r(204)=0.29, p<0.01$; between content quality

and purchase intention with $r(204)=0.46$, $p<0.01$; and between similarity and purchase intention with $r(204)= 0.43$, $p<0.01$. Furthermore, there are significant strong positive associations between PSI and purchase intention with $r(204)= 0.58$, $p<0.01$ and between attitude towards sponsored posts and purchase intention with $r(204)= 0.59$, $p<0.01$.

Consequently, these results suggest that, for this sample, attitude towards sponsored posts appears to have the strongest positive association with purchase intention, followed by PSI. In contrast, expertise seems to be the variable that has a lower positive association with purchase intention.

### 5.2.8 Hypotheses Testing

A multiple linear regression was accomplished with *enter* variable selection in order to evaluate if the variables of trustworthiness, expertise, content quality, similarity, PSI, and attitude towards sponsored posts influence the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product and to identify which independent variables influence the most the dependent variable.

Firstly, it was imperative to analyse the normal distribution as well as the model assumptions. In regard to the normal distribution, it is important to bear in mind the Central Limit Theorem, which mentions that when the sample is sufficiently large (regularly N>30), the distribution of the sample mean is approximated to the normal distribution (Marôco, 2018). Accordingly, the normal distribution assumption was supported since the sample dimension is sufficiently large (N=206). Considering the normal distribution of the residuals, this assumption was verified through the Normal Probability Plot (Appendix E), which shows that the residuals are mostly distributed over the main diagonal. Regarding the homogeneity of residuals assumption, this assumption was confirmed through the scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted value (Appendix E), which shows that the residuals are mostly distributed randomly around zero. The independence of residuals assumption was validated though Durbin-Watson statistic ($d$=1.9) (Appendix E). As this value is close to 2, it was concluded that the residuals are not correlated with each other and thus the residuals are independent (Marôco, 2018). In relation to the multicollinearity, the values of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and of the Tolerance were analysed in order to verify the multicollinearity assumption. Since the VIF values are lower than 10 and Tolerance values are greater than 0.1 (Appendix E), according to Marôco (2018) there is not multicollinearity, therefore, this assumption was substantiated.

A level of significance (α) of 0.05 was considered for all the accomplished analyses. Consequently, the results with *p-values* equal to or less than 0.05 were considered to be statistically significant.

Considering the multiple linear regression results, it was confirmed that the adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted $R^2$) value equals 0.453 (table 5.12), which means that 45.3% of the total variance in purchase intention is explained by the independent variables that are in the adjusted linear regression model.

Table 5.12: Model Summary

| Model Summary | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| 1 | 0.685[a] | 0.469 | 0.453 | 0.55753 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Trustworthiness, Expertise, Content quality, Similarity, PSI, Attitude towards sponsored posts
b. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

In relation to the validity of the model and as demonstrated by ANOVA test (table 5.13), the model is statistically significant ($F(6,199)=29.248$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, there is at least one of the independent variables that explains the model.

Table 5.13: Model Validity

| ANOVA[a] | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 54.549 | 6 | 9.091 | 29.248 | 0.000[b] |
| | Residual | 61.857 | 199 | 0.311 | | |
| | Total | 116.406 | 205 | | | |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Trustworthiness, Expertise, Content quality, Similarity, PSI, Attitude towards sponsored posts
b. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

In regard to the influence that each independent variable may have on purchase intention and considering this study, it was verified that trustworthiness ($\beta$=-0.06; $t$=-0.871; $p$=0.385), expertise ($\beta$=-0.075; $t$=-1.115; $p$=0.266), and similarity ($\beta$=0.043; $t$=0.605; $p$=0.546) do not

significantly influence purchase intention as their *p-values* are above the defined level of significance of 0.05, as indicated in table 5.14. Although the Pearson correlation results suggested that each of those variables, individually, had a significant positive association with purchase intention, when each of those variables was considered together with other variables they seemed to have a different behaviour. In this case, they are not statistically significant. Consequently, in this study, digital influencers' trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity do not influence the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. Therefore, in this study, H1, H2 as well as H4 are not validated. In contrast and considering table 5.14, content quality significantly influences purchase intention, ($\beta$=0.156; *t*=2.075; *p*=0.039). This impact is positive (B=0.187), which means that with a unit increase in digital influencers' content quality, the purchase intention of a fashion product also increases by 0.187 units. This result also reinforces Pearson correlation results and hence, in this study, H3 is verified. Moreover, para-social interaction has a significant relationship with purchase intention, ($\beta$=0.349; *t*=4.729; *p*<0.01). This relationship is positive (B=0.272) and thus with a unit increase in PSI, the purchase intention increases by 0.272 units. In other words, when PSI established between the individual and the digital influencer grows, the intention to purchase a fashion product also increases. This result also supports Pearson correlation results and consequently, in this study, H5 is validated. Attitude towards sponsored posts also has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention ($\beta$=0.366; *t*=5.332; *p*<0.01). Since this impact is positive (B=0.287), with a unit increase in attitude towards sponsored posts, purchase intention increases by 0.287 units. This means that as the attitude towards sponsored posts becomes more positive, the purchase intention also increases. This result corroborates Pearson correlation results and thus, in this study, H6 is substantiated.

Regarding the variables that have a stronger impact on purchase intention and when analysing the Standardized coefficients/Beta, it is possible to conclude that the variable that contributes the most to explain purchase intention refers to the attitude towards sponsored posts ($\beta$=0.366), followed by PSI ($\beta$=0.349).

Table 5.14: Multiple Linear Regression Coefficients.

| Coefficients[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
| Model 1 | B | Std error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| Constant | 1,571 | 0.310 | | 5.074 | 0.000 |
| Trustworthiness | -0.070 | 0.080 | -0.060 | -0.871 | 0.385 |
| Expertise | -0.081 | 0.073 | -0.075 | -1.115 | 0.266 |
| Content quality | 0.187 | 0.090 | 0.156 | 2.075 | 0.039 |
| Similarity | 0.041 | 0.069 | 0.043 | 0.605 | 0.546 |
| PSI | 0.272 | 0.058 | 0.349 | 4.729 | 0.000 |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | 0.287 | 0.054 | 0.366 | 5.332 | 0.000 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention | | | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Table 5.15: Summary of Research Hypotheses Validity.

| Research hypotheses | Conclusion in this study |
|---|---|
| H1: Trustworthiness is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. | Not Validated |
| H2: Expertise is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. | Not Validated |
| H3: Content quality is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. | Validated |
| H4: Similarity is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. | Not Validated |
| H5: Para-social interaction is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. | Validated |
| H6: Attitude towards sponsored posts is positively related to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. | Validated |

Author's own creation.

## 5.3    Discussion of the Results

It is fundamental to provide a discussion of the results in regard to the quantitative study as well as to the qualitative study, in order to interpret and clarify the results.

Considering the results of the quantitative study, and more precisely the characteristics associated with digital influencers which have a positive impact on the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product, a significant positive relationship between PSI and purchase intention was found as well as between content quality and purchase intention.

Hence, in this study, para-social interaction between digital influencers and their followers positively influences purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. More specifically, this result suggests that consumers' purchase intention of a recommended fashion product is likely to occur if followers regard a digital influencer as their close friend and if they feel they are part of that digital influencer group. The results of this study are consistent with findings of past research, for example K. Hwang & Zhang (2018) and Lee & Watkins (2016). According to Lee & Watkins' (2016) study, PSI between YouTube vloggers and their viewers can positively influence the purchase intention in luxury fashion. Accordingly, Sokolova & Kefi's (2020) study demonstrated that PSI between digital influencers and their followers can have a positive effect on purchase intention in beauty and fashion, suggesting that consumers who are attached, or even addicted to a digital influencer may have a great purchase intention. In addition to this, in this study, PSI was the second variable which contributed the most to explain purchase intention, which emphasises the need to develop PSI between digital influencers and followers.

Furthermore, in this study, the content quality posted by digital influencers in social media has a significant and positive relationship with purchase intention in fashion. In other words, if consumers believe that the content provided by a digital influencer is accurate, reliable and updated, this can generate purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. This result corroborates the findings of the study accomplished by Magno (2017), which showed that the blogger's content quality can positively impact the purchase intention of the products suggested by the blogger. They also reinforce the research carried out by Erkan & Evans (2016), which indicated that the quality of eWOM information in social media appears to be a key factor in influencing consumers' purchase intention. In addition to this, and in relation to the exploratory research question about Generation Z and Millennials, this study' results indicated that fashion digital influencers' content quality was higher for Generation Z than for Millennials. Thus, this result may be relevant to bear in mind when digital influencers are creating their content.

Contrarily to the study accomplished by Chin Lung Hsu *et al.* (2013), which showed that trustworthiness can positively impact purchase intention, in this study, this variable was not found to have significant influence on the purchase intention. This result suggests that, although followers may trust a digital influencer, this characteristic may not cause purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

In the same way, the relationship between expertise and purchase intention was not statistically supported and hence this study does not reinforce the study of Ki & Kim (2019). This result can indicate that, despite fashion digital influencers may be perceived as experts in this area, this characteristic may not lead to the purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

Unlike the findings of the research conducted by Magno (2017), who confirmed that similarity can have a significant and positive effect on purchase intention, in this study, the relationship between similarity and purchase intention did not find statistical support. This result seems to point out that, consumers may feel they are similar to a digital influencer regarding values and behaviours, however this characteristic may not lead to purchase intention of a recommended fashion product.

In relation to the attitude towards sponsored posts, a significant positive relationship between this variable and purchase intention was verified. In other words, when consumers have a positive attitude towards a digital influencer's sponsored posts, believing that those posts are truthful and accurate, consumers are likely to develop a purchase intention regarding recommended fashion products. This result corroborates the findings of the study accomplished by Lu *et al.* (2014), which indicated that when consumers have a positive attitude towards sponsored recommendation posts, this can lead to purchase intention. Moreover, Y. Hwang & Jeong (2016) realised that sponsorship disclosure can have a negative impact on the source credibility and on message attitudes, nevertheless, when digital influencers add a note mentioning that the opinions expressed are their own, this negative impact can be reduced, as consumers believe that the posts are honest. Therefore, this past study results also suggest the importance of providing honest sponsored content. In addition to this, in this study, attitude towards sponsored posts was the variable that contributed the most to explain purchase intention.

In order to complement the quantitative results discussion, it is also important to highlight several relevant topics in digital influencers' points of view that were mentioned in the accomplished interviews. For instance, in the interviewed digital influencers' opinion, the number of followers does not signify that he/she does an effective job and thus the most

important characteristics refer to the connection between digital influencers and their audience, the consistency with what is being communicated, transparency and creativity. This perspective suggests that it is fundamental for these digital influencers to create a connection with followers based on consistency and transparency and creativity, in order to be effective in their job. Furthermore, all the interviewees referred that they interact with their followers through comments and messages and one interviewee mentioned that her interaction with their followers is not intended to make them feel as being part of her life, emphasising that her personal life is protected and that her job is to inspire consumers. Moreover, Catarina Cabrera receives several messages asking for advice and help with personal problems, because she frequently posts about self-esteem, bullying, anxiety and depression, and their followers consider those topics different from usual ones, finding comfort in them.

In regard to the sponsored content, it is relevant to understand how digital influencers establish a partnership with brands in order to shed light on this topic, which is strongly connected to digital influencers. All the interviewed digital influencers mentioned that they need to identify themselves with the brand and with the product in order to accept a partnership with a brand. The proposals have also to be congruent with influencers' lifestyle. Additionally, Maria Guedes emphasised that too much commercialised promotions are not effective. Considering the promotion process, Margarida Marques de Almeida stated that brands contact her, so that she can assess her interest in the product. The digital influencer Maria Guedes also referred that this process encompasses posting contents about her relationship with that product. Anita da Costa added that she often knows the products before promoting them.

Their points of view suggest that collaborating with brands they like and identifying themselves with them is imperative. According to Audrezet *et al.* (2018), the fit between fashion brands/products and digital influencers seems to be very important, as followers may expect digital influencers to demonstrate their own lifestyle and if they show clothes or accessories that are not congruent with their style, this might be perceived as deceptive content. The importance of the congruency between the product and the digital influencer was also emphasised by past research, for example D. Y. Kim & Kim (2020) confirmed that when a digital influencer posts a product which is congruent with him/her, this can have a positive effect on product attitude.

To summarise, the interviewed digital influencers' perspectives can complement the quantitative results, as these fashion, beauty and lifestyle influencers highlighted that it is fundamental to create a connection with the audience and to communicate in a consistent, transparent, and honest way in order to be good at their job. Regarding the quantitative study,

significant and positive relationships between attitude towards sponsored posts and purchase intention were found; as well as between PSI and purchase intention; and between content quality and purchase intention.

In fact, the majority of the interviewees feel that they motivate their followers to search for more information about a product/brand and that they encourage them to buy it.

CHAPTER 6

# Conclusions

This chapter aims at describing the main conclusions of this study. The contributions of this study will also be explained as well as its limitations. Subsequently, recommendations for future research will also be suggested.

## 6.1 Main Conclusions

This research aimed at assessing the role of digital influencers on consumers' purchase intention in fashion. Hence, several objectives were defined and key variables were identified based on the literature review. For instance, several concepts regarding the characteristics of endorsement effectiveness were adapted to digital influencers, such as source credibility (Ohanian, 1990), homophily (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Rogers & Bhowmik 1970) and para-social interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The variable attitude towards sponsored posts was also included due to the importance of sponsored content in influencer marketing based on social media.

A quantitative method was selected, namely a questionnaire addressed to consumers who follow/search for fashion digital influencers. A total of 206 respondents follow/search for fashion digital influencers and were considered in the sample characterisation and in the six hypotheses testing analyses. In order to analyse the data and test the hypotheses, IBM SPSS 26 was used.

A qualitative method was also applied, particularly interviews with digital influencers in the areas of fashion, beauty and lifestyle. These interviews were fundamental to deeply understand digital influencers' perspectives regarding this theme. Therefore, this combination of methods enabled data collection from digital influencers and from consumers who follow digital influencers.

Based on the quantitative analysis, the results indicated that, in this study, digital influencers' trustworthiness, expertise and similarity do not significantly influence purchase intention. In contrast, para-social interaction between digital influencers and their followers has a positive impact on purchase intention of a recommended fashion product, corroborating the studies accomplished by K. Hwang & Zhang, (2018); Lee & Watkins (2016); and Sokolova &

Kefi (2020). In other words, if consumers perceive a digital influencer as their close friend and if they feel they are part of his/her group, this can generate purchase intention in fashion. Moreover, in this study, the content quality posted by digital influencers in social media positively influences purchase intention of a recommended fashion product, reinforcing the past studies conducted by Erkan & Evans (2016) and Magno (2017). This means that if consumers rely on the content posted by a digital influencer (believing that it is accurate and updated), this can lead to purchase intention in fashion. Additionally, and considering the exploratory research question about Generation Z and Millennials, the results suggested that fashion digital influencers' content quality seems to be higher for Generation Z than for Millennials.

Consequently, these results suggest that, in this study, the mentioned characteristics are fundamental so that digital influencers can have a positive impact on purchase intention.

Furthermore, in the interviewed digital influencers' opinion, it is imperative to create a connection with their followers as well as to be consistent, transparent and creative in order to be successful in their job. Thus, in their perspective, the number of followers is not the most important characteristic and does not translate into true influence. They also give importance to the interaction with their audience, mentioning that they actively interact with their followers through comments and messages. The great majority of the interviewees also feel that they motivate their followers to search for more information about a product/brand and that they encourage them to purchase it.

In relation to sponsored content, it is very important to analyse consumers' attitude towards sponsored posts as well as to understand how digital influencers develop a partnership with brands, since sponsored content is a regularly used marketing tool and it is highly associated with digital influencers. Concerning the quantitative results, they showed that attitude towards sponsored posts has a positive impact on purchase intention, supporting the study of Lu *et al.* (2014). This result suggested that if consumers have a positive attitude towards a digital influencer's sponsored posts, this can lead to purchase intention in fashion. Additionally, this variable was found to influence the most purchase intention.

Moreover, the interviewed digital influencers highlighted that they need to identify themselves with the brand and the product has to be congruent with their lifestyle, so that they can accept a partnership with a brand.

To conclude, this study has obtained significant data and thus its contributions will be further discussed as well as its limitations and recommendations for future research.

## 6.2 Theoretical Contributions of the Study

Past research regarding digital influencers is scarce, since it is a recent theme. Although past research emphasises the importance and interest in digital influencers, a broad investigation is necessary (Jiménez-castillo & Sánchez-fernández, 2019).

This study addresses this research gap, by assessing the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in fashion industry. One of the main contributions refers to the digital influencers' characteristics, which were found to have a significant and positive impact on purchase intention. More precisely, PSI and content quality have a positive effect on purchase intention of a recommended fashion product. In addition to this, PSI was demonstrated to be the second variable that contributed the most to explain purchase intention. This concept was adapted from the theory associated with mass media personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and in this study, PSI maintains its significance in a modern context characterised by recent social media and influencer marketing strategies. Additionally, the results of the exploratory research question indicated that fashion digital influencers' content quality was higher for Generation Z than for Millennials. This result can complement the research about this characteristic.

Moreover, the variable attitude towards sponsored posts was also included in this research, since sponsored content is increasingly applied by brands and thus it is crucial to investigate how consumers perceive this type of content. This variable was demonstrated to be significantly and positively related to purchase intention and, in this study, it was the one that influenced the most purchase intention in fashion.

Furthermore, the accomplished interviews with digital influencers contributed to understand their opinions regarding the most important characteristics to be good at their job and they underlined the connection with their followers, their transparency, consistency and creativity. They also mentioned that they need to identify themselves with the brand/product in order to accept a partnership.

All these findings contribute to shed light on influencer marketing theme, enriching the investigation about the role of digital influencers on purchase intention.

## 6.3 Managerial Contributions of the Study

This study can inspire changes in social media marketing and eWOM strategies, when resorting to digital influencers. Accordingly, fashion brands can select the most suitable digital influencers based on the level of PSI established between the digital influencer and the target audience. This choice can also be based on the content quality provided by digital influencers.

Thus, this study provides significant digital influencers characteristics that go beyond the number of followers. In fact, according to the interviewed digital influencers, the number of followers is not the most important and it does not result in true influence. In addition to this, when developing partnerships with digital influencers, fashion brands can bear in mind that allowing digital influencers to produce creative content, and ensuring that the product brands want to promote is congruent with digital influencers' lifestyle can lead to successful partnerships.

This research can help digital influencers to clarify the characteristics they should develop, so that their fashion recommendations can be successful and their relationships with their followers can be strengthened.

## 6.4    Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Due to a lack of resources, the main limitation of this study was the use of a non-probability sample, namely the convenience sample, which implies that the results obtained cannot be statistically generalised to the population. Additionally, it is not possible to ensure that respondents fully understand the questions through an online questionnaire. Moreover, only the Portuguese respondents who follow/search for fashion digital influencers were considered, and they were mainly female. Hence, it is suggested that future research use larger samples in order to represent more appropriately the population.

Regarding future research, more studies are needed about topics related to digital influencers, for instance it is suggested to further explore differences between Generation Z and Millennials regarding their perspectives about digital influencers, as they seem to be the most interested ones in digital influencers and thus this could help to better target the mentioned generations. Clarifying what leads consumers to follow and to keep engaging with digital influencers might also enrich the literature on this theme. Finally, as this study considered the fashion industry, future research might investigate the variables that were used in this study in order to verify if they influence purchase intention in other industries.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A- Questionnaire

**Digital influencers and Consumer Behaviour**

This questionnaire is part of my Dissertation to finish my Master in Management in Iscte- Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. The aim of this questionnaire is to better understand the factors, associated with Digital Influencers, which might have an impact on consumer behaviour considering the area of Fashion. All the answers are anonymous and will be used only for academic purposes. Thank you for your collaboration.

*Required

1.1. How often do you use Social Media? *

*Mark only one option.*

☐ More than 2 times a day

☐ Once a day

☐ More than 3 times a week Once a week

☐ Less than once a week

☐ Never    *Skip to question 5.1*

Part I: Social media use

1.2. What are your favourite social media channels? *

*Tick all that apply.*



☐ Facebook    ☐ Instagram    ☐ LinkedIn

☐ Pinterest    ☐ TikTok    ☐ Twitter

☐ YouTube

1.3. Do you use any of these social media channels to search for information about products and brands?*

*Mark only one option.*

☐  Yes

☐  No


1.4. Do you use any of these social media channels to search for information about fashion? *

*Mark only one option.*

☐  Yes

☐  No


Part II (A): Digital influencers

Digital influencer is a person who creates content about one or several areas, namely, fashion, beauty, tourism, fitness, cooking, through their social media channels, for instance blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and other. This person has a high number of followers and uses these channels to endorse products and brands.

2.1. Do you follow or search for any digital influencers in any area? *

*Mark only one option.*

☐  Yes

☐  No    *Skip to question 5.1*


Parte II (B): Digital influencers

2.2. How many digital influencers do you follow/search for? *

*Mark only one option.*

☐  Only 1

☐  2-5

☐  6-10

☐  11-15

☐  >15


2.3. What are your favourite areas when you follow or search for digital influencers? *

*Tick all that apply.*

☐  Beauty

☐  Cooking

☐  Fashion

☐  Fitness

☐  Tourism

☐  Other_____

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Part III (A): Fashion digital influencers

3.1. How many fashion digital influencers do you follow/search for? *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ None  *Skip to question 5.1*
- ☐ Only 1
- ☐ 2-5
- ☐ >5

Part III (B): Fashion digital influencers

3.2 Who are your favourite digital influencers? If you only have a favourite one mention his/her name.*

_____

3.3. Have you ever known about a fashion product/brand exclusively through a digital influencer? *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3.4. Which recommendation sources help you to choose a fashion product? *

*Tick all that apply.*

- ☐ Digital influencers
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Other_____

3.5. Have you ever purchased fashion products recommended by digital influencers? *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ *Yes*
- ☐ *No*

3.6. Would you buy a fashion product even if it was not recommended by one of your favourite digital influencers? *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ *Yes*
- ☐ *No*

Part IV: Opinion about fashion digital influencers

*4.1.* Considering your favourite fashion digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences: *

*Mark only one option per row*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2)Somewhat disagree | 3)Neither agree or disagree | 4)Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I find this digital influencer trustworthy. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| I think this digital influencer cares about his/ her followers. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

*4.2.* Considering your favourite fashion digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences: *

*Mark only one option per row*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2)Somewhat disagree | 3)Neither agree or disagree | 4)Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I find this digital influencer expert in his/her domain. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| I find this digital influencer efficient in his/her job. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

*4.3.* Considering your favourite fashion digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences: *

*Mark only one option per row*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2)Somewhat disagree | 3)Neither agree or disagree | 4)Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The information provided by this digital influencer in social media is accurate. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| The information and suggestions published by this digital influencer in social media are reliable. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2)Somewhat disagree | 3)Neither agree or disagree | 4)Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This digital influencer provides high-quality information in social media. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

*4.4.* Considering your favourite fashion digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences: *

*Mark only one option per row*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2)Somewhat disagree | 3)Neither agree or disagree | 4)Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This digital influencer shares my values. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| This digital influencer has a lot in common with me. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| This digital influencer behaves like me. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| I think he/she could be a friend of mine. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| This digital influencer treats people like I do. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

*4.5.* Considering your favourite fashion digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences: *

*Mark only one option per row.*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2)Somewhat disagree | 3)Neither agree or disagree | 4)Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I look forward to watching this digital influencer on his/her social media channels. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading his/her posts, I feel as if I am part of his/her group. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| I think this digital influencer is like an old friend. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would like to meet this digital influencer in person. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| When this digital influencer shows me how she/he feels about the products/brands, it helps me make up my own mind about the products/brands. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

*4.6.* Considering that there are posts which are sponsored by fashion brands made by digital influencers, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences, considering your favourite fashion digital influencer: *

*Mark only one option per row*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2) Somewhat disagree | 3) Neither agree or disagree | 4) Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I think that sponsored posts made by this digital influencer tell the truth. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| I can learn the real product information from sponsored posts. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |
| After reading/seeing a sponsored post, I have been accurately informed about the product information. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

*4.7.* Considering your favourite fashion digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences: *

*Mark only one option per row*

| | 1) Strongly disagree | 2) Somewhat disagree | 3) Neither agree or disagree | 4) Somewhat agree | 5) Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would purchase the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer in the future. | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ | ⬭ |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| I would follow brand recommendations from this digital influencer. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| I would encourage people close to me to buy the fashion products promoted by this digital influencer. | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

Part V: Demographics

5.1. Gender *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Rather not say

5.2. Age *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ <18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-31
- ☐ 32-39
- ☐ 40-45
- ☐ 46-52
- ☐ >52

5.3. Professional status *

*Mark only one option.*

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Student and worker
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired

**Appendix B- Interviews with Digital Influencers**

| | |
|---|---|
| The interviews aim at understanding digital influencers points of view regarding their impact on consumers as a contribution to my Master Dissertation in Iscte. | |
| Interviewee: | **Ana Gomes** |
| 1 – You are a very known Digital Influencer. How did it all begin? | "I have created a blog a few years ago, while I was doing a post-graduation course, then I started to spend time studying the topics I liked and writing about them. It all happened in a natural way! :) At the right time things started to grow and I started to be considered an influential person in the digital world." |
| 2- Which reasons lead you to accept a paid partnership with a brand? And how does the product promotion process function? | "I need to identify myself with the brand and with the communication intended to promote the product. I have already refused some proposals throughout the years because they do not match my way of being or what I want to show the world – which means they would involve influencing people to purchase brands that I do not consider 100% interesting." |
| 3- In your opinion, what characteristics must a good Digital Influencer have? Does it go beyond having many followers? | "Yes, of course, it goes beyond that! One can have thousands of followers but not convey any message! And more… one can have thousands of followers but not interact with them. In that case it works like on other advertising platforms that do not have the interactive advantage which digital influencers possess." |
| 4- How do you describe your interaction with your followers? | "I answer all the messages which include any doubt, question or comment requiring an interaction :) I really like that people trust me and trust the message I want to convey." |
| 5- Do you feel that you motivate your followers to look for more information about a product/ | "Yes! I frequently receive photos from my followers showing that they have bought the product or have found it somewhere." |

| | |
|---|---|
| brand and that you encourage them to buy it? | |
| Thank you for your collaboration. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| The interviews aim at understanding digital influencers points of view regarding their impact on consumers as a contribution to my Master Dissertation in Iscte. | |
| Interviewee: | **Anita da Costa** |
| 1 – You are a very known Digital Influencer. How did it all begin? | "When I reached 10k followers on Instagram I realised that people were actually interested in my contents. So, I decided to create a blog and make it all more professional. I invested in a camera and decided to start writing. Eventually, I put the blog a bit aside, as there was a smashing difference in numbers between the blog and Instagram." |
| 2- Which reasons lead you to accept a paid partnership with a brand? And how does the product promotion process function? | "I need to identify myself with the brand. At least! It must also be something that makes sense to promote! For example, I would never promote an architecture firm if I wasn't having a house built. Of course, there were times when I was promoting services/ products that I previously thought to be better and eventually I realised they were not so good as I thought. Generally, I already know the products before I promote them, but if it is a trip, for example, as it has already happened to me, only when I arrive there, I have the chance to get to know the hotel and the place. It has already happened to me that, having everything settled, only when I arrive at the place I realise I do not like it so much. I would not book that hotel, but as there is an agreement, I do not have a different option as to promote it. That is what I have done, I promoted the best about the place, but I only did what was |

| | needed and at any moment I have recommended it. I did not express a good or a bad opinion about it." |
|---|---|
| 3- In your opinion, what characteristics must a good Digital Influencer have? Does it go beyond having many followers? | "Honesty, creativity and a good appearance. It certainly goes beyond having many followers. The number of followers is normally related to fame and not necessarily to a good or bad job. Celebrities have a huge number of followers and this is not because they are good influencers, of course, some get to be good, but the number is there whether they are good or bad. A good influencer is a creative person who tells good stories, with or without brands." |
| 4- How do you describe your interaction with your followers? | "Moderate but active. I think I can get the best of the two worlds. My followers do not expect or demand anything from me. I do not have a type of interaction that makes them feel as being part of my life, and this, in my opinion, ends up protecting me. My aim is only to inspire and to bring something good to people's daily life. I want to show them a new product, a new destiny, a new restaurant or a purse or even inspire them to get out of bed and go out for a run. And all that is part of my private life appears when I want, and mostly in images, that, as we all know, are only images and stories that tell very little." |
| 5- Do you feel that you motivate your followers to look for more information about a product/ brand and that you encourage them to buy it? | "Yes, I do! That is my job! But I think that I give them more than that. To the brands I give the product a story, I make it part of life, and that makes it more attractive to the ones who buy it. To my followers I offer stories and daily inspiration in many topics (I hope so)." |
| Thank you for your collaboration. ||

| | |
|---|---|
| The interviews aim at understanding digital influencers points of view regarding their impact on consumers as a contribution to my Master Dissertation in Iscte. | |
| Interviewee: | **Catarina Cabrera** |
| 1 – You are a very known Digital Influencer. How did it all begin? | "It happened when I had 3500 followers, a scrunchies brand (hair bands) contacted me through an Instagram direct message asking me if in return for 2 or 3 hair bands I would make a post showing the products and identifying the brand. I immediately said yes, I never thought I could receive things in return for posts. Other Portuguese brands must have noticed that and they also started sending me direct messages. Of course, all the pages had 300 followers at most and everything was related to necklaces and hair bands, but it was a start. So, I wrote my e-mail in the biography and I also wrote that I was collaborating with brands, since then I have grown more and more, both regarding followers and partnerships". |
| 2- Which reasons lead you to accept a paid partnership with a brand? And how does the product promotion process function? | "Firstly, I only think about accepting or not accepting a partnership, if I like the brand and if I identify myself with the brand, which means, if it is a product that I really use and if it is based on my principles. After that, it depends on the budget, if it is low or acceptable depending on what they ask me." |
| 3- In your opinion, what characteristics must a good Digital Influencer have? Does it go beyond having many followers? | "I think that, at this point, having many followers is not the most important. Many people have already many followers. I would say that the most important is the engagement and reach that a person can achieve with his/her posts. For me, the most important digital influencer's characteristic is to be genuine and not following the herd. Each person is the way he/she is and it is good to show that we are |

| | |
|---|---|
| | different from each other, each one in his/her own way." |
| 4- How do you describe your interaction with your followers? | "I think it is sufficiently good. Lately, I have not been interacting too much, because I have been a little bit off, but before, and even today, I think my followers like to see what I post. Before, I did not even think about it, but now I can understand from the diverse messages that I receive every day asking for advice and even for help with personal problems… This happens because I usually post about self-esteem, bullying, anxiety and depression, self-love, among many other topics. People consider these topics different from usual ones, as they are not frequently addressed in social media, thus I would say that it is the way they find comfort in some of my posts and they end up identifying themselves with those posts." |
| 5- Do you feel that you motivate your followers to look for more information about a product/ brand and that you encourage them to buy it? | "I would not say that I encourage them to buy ... I simply say that I like what I use or do and if people identify themselves with the product/service, it is the way that they can also buy the service / product and enjoy it." |
| Thank you for your collaboration. ||

| | |
|---|---|
| The interviews aim at understanding digital influencers points of view regarding their impact on consumers as a contribution to my Master Dissertation in Iscte. ||
| Interviewee: | **Margarida Marques de Almeida** |
| 1 – You are a very known Digital Influencer. How did it all begin? | "I started to set up a consulting image company in 2009, then I created a blog, together with Cátia to give the customers tips on image consulting, the aim was to provide them some information. A few time after that, more people got interested in the tips on the blog and it acquired a different |

| | |
|---|---|
| | dimension. The blog exists since the end of 2009 and we started to share meaningful content for us, not only about fashion but also about beauty and lifestyle. Nowadays, apart from the blog I also develop social media strategy and management for some brands and in March 2020 I have created my own fashion brand- Oh, Monday! and it all happens simultaneously with my job as a blogger". |
| 2- Which reasons lead you to accept a paid partnership with a brand? And how does the product promotion process function? | "In order to share sponsored content, I need to identify myself with the product/service, and it must be or start to become part of my life, that is the only way it makes sense. If I do not identify myself with the product, it does not make sense to promote it, because it completely distorts my job. It is not positive either for me nor for the brand. Brands contact me, so that I can assess my interest in the product/service and in case it makes sense for me, we start the partnership." |
| 3- In your opinion, what characteristics must a good Digital Influencer have? Does it go beyond having many followers? | "Nowadays, the number of followers is not the most important. In fact, it never was. The most important is the connection with the audience and the consistency with what is being communicated is necessary- it does not make sense to say that X computer is the best, when the one I use is Y. Transparency towards the audience is also essential, if it does not exist, people will not believe in what is being communicated." |
| 4- How do you describe your interaction with your followers? | "I am constantly interacting with my followers, either in a public way, answering the comments, or in a private way, exchanging messages. It is fundamental that communication becomes bilateral, no one likes when he/she interacts with a page and then he/she does not get any feedback." |

| 5- Do you feel that you motivate your followers to look for more information about a product/ brand and that you encourage them to buy it? | "I am sure that when communication is consistent and it is part of the communicator's lifestyle, it will generate the audience's interest. So, I think it is very important that we communicate only what we truly like and what we identify with". |
|---|---|
| Thank you for your collaboration. | |

| The interviews aim at understanding digital influencers points of view regarding their impact on consumers as a contribution to my Master Dissertation in Iscte. | |
|---|---|
| Interviewee: | **Maria Guedes** |
| 1 – You are a very known Digital Influencer. How did it all begin? | "The blog Stylista was lauched in 2009, as an interact complement to my book *Tanta Roupa e Nada para Vestir*. Today, my media is Instagram but, in the past, it was only Facebook and the blog." |
| 2- Which reasons lead you to accept a paid partnership with a brand? And how does the product promotion process function? | "I usually accept a partnership if it is a brand/product/service I already buy; if it is something that I use/wear in my daily life (and if I like it); if so, I will be pleased to start a partnership. It happens in a very natural/relevant way and I like that. The promotion process usually consists in posting x contents about my relationship with that product." |
| 3- In your opinion, what characteristics must a good Digital Influencer have? Does it go beyond having many followers? | "A good influencer is someone with a peculiar taste, work and lifestyle, who talks only about what he/she properly chooses and because he/she has (more or less) followers who identify themselves with that lifestyle, he/she can build an interesting exchange and create a sense of community. In general, influencers with less followers- because of their niche positioning and due to their authenticity- are more effective in their job". |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4- How do you describe your interaction with your followers? | "There is a lot of interaction with my Instagram stories-via direct messages- and lots of ideas being exchanged, talking and laughter; it is a relaxed and kind interaction. In posts, perhaps because they are more contemplative- the interaction is obviously less". |
| 5- Do you feel that you motivate your followers to look for more information about a product/ brand and that you encourage them to buy it? | Yes, definitely. I usually get this kind of feedback from the brands. When I am promoting the brands that will be part of my markets, the disclosed products are the ones, that actually end up having a high demand. The same happens with other products (the ones I like and use/wear daily and would promote anyway), but it does not happen with all of them. Promotions that are too much commercialised do not generate the same type of affinity. |
| Thank you for your collaboration. | |

## Appendix C- Independent T-Test

| Independent Samples Test | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Trustworthiness | Equal variances assumed | .033 | .856 | 1.725 | 187 | .086 | .16667 | .09660 | -.02389 | .35723 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.762 | 131.238 | .080 | .16667 | .09460 | -.02048 | .35381 |
| Expertise | Equal variances assumed | 2.528 | .114 | .955 | 187 | .341 | .10317 | .10806 | -.11000 | .31635 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.004 | 142.102 | .317 | .10317 | .10274 | -.09992 | .30627 |

| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Content quality | Equal variances assumed | 3.147 | .078 | 2.205 | 187 | .029 | .21032 | .09538 | .02216 | .39848 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2.033 | 100.944 | .045 | .21032 | .10346 | .00507 | .41556 |
| Similarity | Equal variances assumed | .187 | .666 | 1.716 | 187 | .088 | .20635 | .12022 | -.03082 | .44351 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.687 | 118.644 | .094 | .20635 | .12229 | -.03580 | .44850 |
| PSI | Equal variances assumed | .791 | .375 | 1.222 | 187 | .223 | .17857 | .14608 | -.10961 | .46675 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.196 | 117.247 | .234 | .17857 | .14926 | -.11703 | .47418 |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | Equal variances assumed | .403 | .526 | 1.507 | 187 | .134 | .22751 | .15099 | -.07035 | .52538 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.539 | 131.445 | .126 | .22751 | .14779 | -.06484 | .51986 |
| Purchase intention | Equal variances assumed | 1.699 | .194 | 1.650 | 187 | .101 | .19246 | .11663 | -.03762 | .42254 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.719 | 138.430 | .088 | .19246 | .11198 | -.02894 | .41386 |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

## Appendix D- Pearson Correlation

| Pearson Correlation between Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Trustworthiness | Purchase intention |
| Trustworthiness | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.320** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| Purchase intention | Pearson Correlation | 0.320** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

| Pearson Correlation between Expertise and Purchase Intention | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Purchase intention | Expertise |
| Purchase intention | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.287** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| Expertise | Pearson Correlation | 0.287** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

| Pearson Correlation between Content Quality and Purchase Intention | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Purchase intention | Content quality |
| Purchase intention | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.460** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| Content Quality | Pearson Correlation | 0.460** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

| Pearson Correlation between Similarity and Purchase Intention | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Purchase intention | Similarity |
| Purchase intention | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.433** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| Similarity | Pearson Correlation | 0.433** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

| Pearson Correlation between PSI and Purchase Intention | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Purchase intention | PSI |
| Purchase intention | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.576** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| PSI | Pearson Correlation | 0.576** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

| Pearson Correlation between Attitude Towards Sponsored Posts and Purchase Intention | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Purchase intention | Attitude towards sponsored posts |
| Purchase intention | Pearson Correlation | 1 | 0.594** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| Attitude toward sponsored posts | Pearson Correlation | 0.594** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | |
| | N | 206 | 206 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.


**Appendix E- Multiple Linear Regression Assumptions**

| Independence of residuals assumption | |
|---|---|
| Durbin-Watson | 1.914 |
| Dependent Variable: Purchase intention | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

| | Assumption regarding Multicollinearity: Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|
| Model | Tolerance | VIF |
| Constant | | |
| Trustworthiness | 0.566 | 1.767 |
| Expertise | 0.588 | 1.700 |
| Content quality | 0.472 | 2.118 |
| Similarity | 0.520 | 1.922 |
| PSI | 0.489 | 2.044 |
| Attitude towards sponsored posts | 0.566 | 1.767 |
| Dependent Variable: Purchase intention | | |

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: Purchase intention
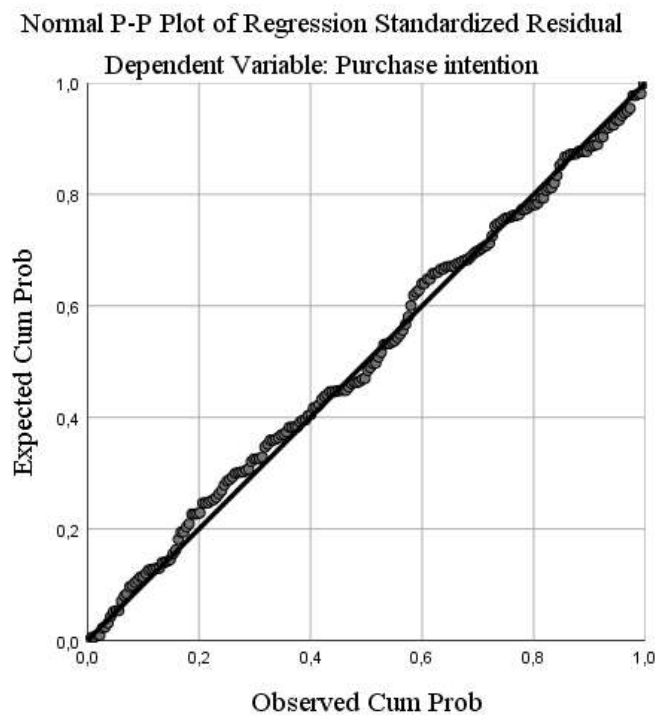
Normal Probability Plot

Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.

Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Purchase intention
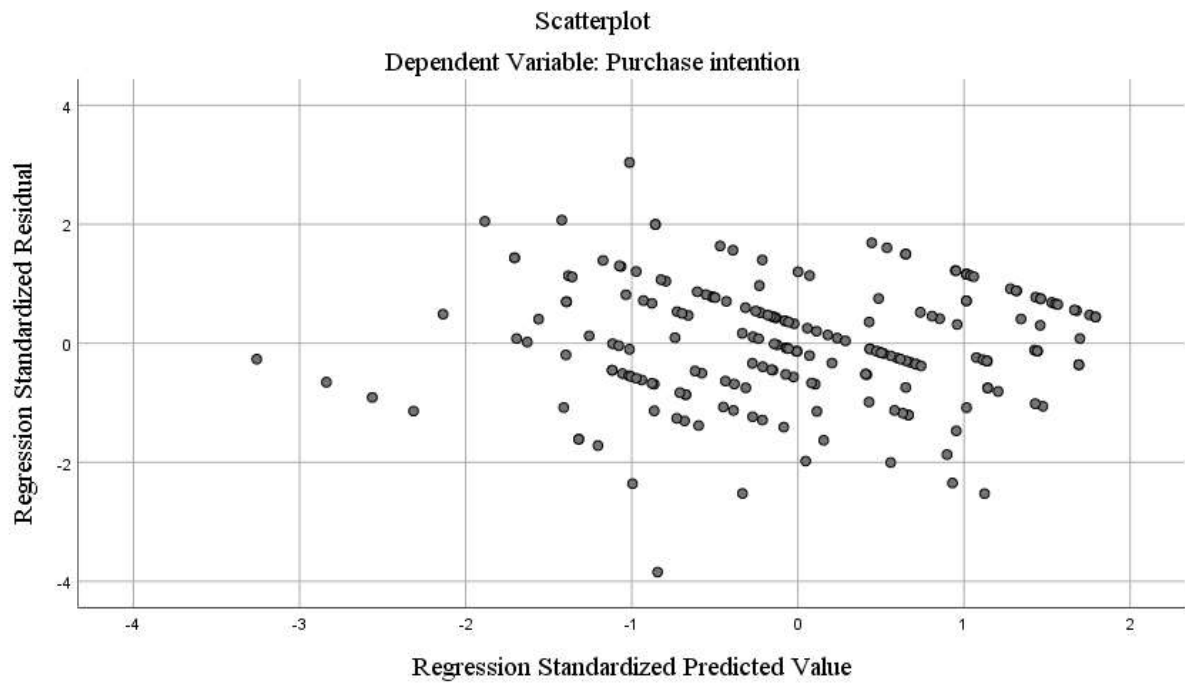
Assumption regarding the Homogeneity of Residuals
Author's own creation based on SPSS outputs.